(HOW) CAN TEACHING BE A FORCE FOR JUSTICE?

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OUR NATION, AND OUR FUTURE

How can we educate so that people stop hating and killing one another?

Adapted from Maisha Winn, inspired by Ihab Hassan
THE URGENCY, BY THE NUMBERS

1/3
18%, 48%
40% → 11%
1.5 million
26%
78,000,000
3x
9%
17%
MEET VIRSHAWN, A RISING FIFTH GRADER
THE TWO-CHECKER PROBLEM

What numbers are possible to make on the Minicomputer with exactly two positive checkers?
WHAT IF YOU CAN USE A NEGATIVE CHECKER?

The children found that 7, 11, 13, 14, and 15 were impossible with exactly two checkers.

EXTENSION:
Can you make 7, 11, 13, 14, and 15 if you have a negative checker?
You must use both positive checkers and you can use one negative checker if it is useful.

I think the negative checker is Awesome
Then the purple is a four, the red is a two, and the white is a one, so you couldn't do it without another negative number.

I think the negative checker is awesome.
VIRSHAWN’S EXPERIENCE IN FOURTH GRADE

- He liked to share his ideas in class, and was very clear, and he liked to write
- He was in trouble often
- He was often sent out of the room, to the hall or the principal’s office
- He wasn’t doing well in math
DAY 1 OF THE MINICOMPUTER

Virshawn between
11:19 – 11:25

Paper airplane

Noel (2014, in preparation)
How is Virshawn likely to be read – and what is likely to happen next?
At 11:26, the teacher says, “You know what, Virshawn, I am going to need you to come up here closer where you can see and hear and won’t be distracted.”
Over the next minute, Virshawn is raising his hand to answer questions.
At 11:27, the teacher says, “Virshawn, you get to come up and make a number because you are the closest person to the board.” “You can have two checkers and you can put them wherever you want, and make a number, and then you can call on somebody.”
AT 11:28, VIRSHAWN TAKES THE ROLE OF “TEACHER”
WHAT SHAPES HOW HIS TEACHERS MIGHT PERCEIVE VIRSHAWN?

- Decisions about how to “read” him, and actions following those decisions
- Views about what counts as “engagement” or being “off-task”
- Preferences and practices about “control”
- That he is a Black boy
TEACHER PERCEPTIONS

- Many studies that show effects of racial and gender bias in teachers’ perceptions, interpretations, and interactions with students
- These affect: assignment to special education and gifted/talented programs, discipline (including suspensions and expulsions)
- Transgressions by children of color are more often viewed as intentional and malicious (rather than the result of immature decision-making)
- Children of color disproportionately receive harsher discipline than their white peers
IT STARTS EARLY

- Black preschoolers 3.6 times more likely to be suspended than White children
- 19% of preschool population; 47% of suspensions

Yale study (2016) with 135 teachers
- Videos of Black boy and girl, White boy and girl
- No problematic behavior in either video
- Eye-tracking technology showed that teachers were watching the Black children more
- 42% of the teachers said that the Black boy’s behavior needed attention

Gilliam, Maupin, et al. (2016). Do Early Educators’ Implicit Biases Regarding Sex and Race Relate to Behavior Expectations and Recommendations of Preschool Expulsions and Suspensions? Yale University Child Study Center, New Haven, CT.
(HOW) CAN TEACHING WORK FOR JUSTICE?

INVISIBLE WORK

- Disrupts racist and gendered patterns by:
  - Believing that Black boys are smart; knowing Virshawn’s interest in being a leader
  - Conjecturing that Virshawn is listening
  - Making choices about how to read Virshawn and what not to make an issue of
  - Trusting that Virshawn will take up the invitation to “make a number”
- Uses a routine of giving students the role of teacher to distribute the work
- Chooses a task with multiple entry points (“make a number” – without constraint)

VISIBLE WORK

- Invites Virshawn to “be the teacher” first
- Supports Virshawn to present skillfully at the board (confers about his answer) and moves out of the space
- Orients other children to Virshawn’s idea
- Expects other children to listen and creates routines (e.g., other students revoice)
- Positions Virshawn with agency to “approve” others’ revoicing of his proof
Teaching can be a force for justice.
CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY:
A “PEDAGOGY OF OPPOSITION”

- Academic success
- Cultural competence
- Critical consciousness for change

1. Teachers’ conceptions of knowledge, community, themselves as teachers
2. Teachers’ core beliefs in children’s competence and commitment to each child’s success
3. Teachers’ reciprocal relations with students and their communities

Gloria Ladson-Billings

November 11, 2017
WHAT IS TEACHING?

The work of teaching is co-constructed

- . . . in broad socio-political, historical, economic, cultural, community, family environments

- . . . through the interpretations and interactions of teachers, students, and “content”

Cohen, Raudenbush, and Ball (2003), Ball & Forzani (2007)
THE WORK OF JUSTICE LIVES INSIDE THE WORK OF TEACHING

- By understanding one’s identity and role as part of a broader system of oppression that is historical and persistent
- By knowing what “normally” happens and how these patterns reproduce oppression, and by deliberately doing things that counter those patterns
- By seeing and affirming each student—their strengths and their mathematical work
- By opening up “content” and possibilities for students to connect with and do mathematical work

Mann, Willis, Hickman, Ball, Goffney (2017)
MEET ANIYAH AND TONI, ALSO RISING FIFTH GRADERS

ANIYAH

TONI
What number does the orange arrow point to? Explain how you figured it out.
WHAT DO ANIYAH AND TONI KNOW AND WHAT CAN EACH DO?
VIDEO: ANIYAH AND TONI

Teacher: Listen closely and see what you think about her reasoning and her answer.

This video and additional supporting materials are available online here.
WHAT DO MANY “HEAR” IN ANIYAH AND TONI?

ANIYAH
- She has the wrong answer: 1/7

TONI
- She is playing with her hair and trying to get attention
- She is trying to embarrass Aniyah
All this talk about not focusing on children’s deficits—why does this matter so much? Isn’t our job to figure out what children don’t know and help them grow?
All this talk about not focusing on children’s deficits—why does this matter so much? Isn’t our job to figure out what children don’t know and help them grow?

1. Learning occurs through a process of building on prior knowledge and experience.
2. Strong academic identities are a means to developing competence. They are also instructional goals.
3. For children of historically marginalized groups, stereotype threat and other biases interfere with and impede children’s performance.
All this talk about not focusing on children’s deficits—why does this matter so much? Isn’t our job to figure out what children don’t know and help them grow?

So—focusing on children’s strengths is crucial for effective and equitable instruction and for advancing justice.

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WHAT DO ANIYAH AND TONI KNOW AND WHAT CAN EACH DO?

ANIYAH

- Uses the definition for a fraction to explain
  - She identifies the “whole”
  - She makes sure the intervals are equal
  - She counts intervals and not tick marks
  - She knows how to write “one-seventh”
- Produces a mathematically well-structured explanation
- Presents her ideas clearly

TONI

- Listens closely to a classmate’s presentation
- Uses the definition for a fraction to ask
  - How Aniyah decided on 7 parts
- Asks a pointed mathematical question
(HOW) CAN TEACHING WORK FOR JUSTICE?

INVISIBLE WORK
- Purposefully and efficiently reads students’ work while circulating
- Selects a student to present who will push the conceptual understanding forward, and for whom this positioning will be significant
- Disrupts racist and gendered patterns by:
  - Believing that Black girls are smart; knowing Aniyah and Toni and their smartness
  - Trusting the children to think, be engaged, try to learn
  - Making choices about how to read children and what not to make an issue of

VISIBLE WORK
- Supports Aniyah to present skillfully at the board, using representations; encourages Toni to ask her on-point question
- Disrupts marginalizing patterns that focus on “error” and focuses instead on concepts and reasoning
- Expects other children to listen and to ask questions and creates structures that support children to listen to others’ ideas
- Models and names “good questions” as an important mathematical practice
- Strategically names and highlights particular children displaying specific forms of competence
WHAT DOES SUCH A TEACHER, WHO BELIEVES AND HOLDS THESE AIMS, DO?

This is the value of the teacher, who looks at a face and says there’s something behind that and I want to reach that person, I want to influence that person, I want to encourage that person, I want to enrich, I want to call out that person who is behind that face, behind that color, behind that language, behind that tradition, behind that culture. I believe you can do it. I know what was done for me.

Maya Angelou
TEACHING CAN BE A FORCE FOR JUSTICE. . .

. . . if, and only if, we ACT courageously and relentlessly:

- To make the teaching profession diverse and reflective of our nation
- To see, challenge, and disrupt “normalized” ideas and practices
- To work together in creating, developing, and learning to enact practices and policies that change that “normal”
MY TWO ASKS OF YOU…

1. Continue to learn specific ways to disrupt inequity and advance justice through your practice, in and outside of your classroom.

2. Promote the power of professional teaching, in your school, community, and in the public.
THANK YOU!

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Slides will be available on my website

https://deborahloewenbergball.com/

(“Google” Deborah Ball)
Graphic on slides 5–7:

Image on slide 20:
Photo of Gloria Ladson-Billings. Retrieved from
https://ci.education.wisc.edu/ci/people/faculty/ gloria-ladson-billings
Graphic on slides 21 and 22:

Image on slide 33:
“Maya Angelou visits YCP! 2/4/13” by Flickr user York College ISLGP
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