The Power of Teaching in the Struggle for Justice

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1. How is teaching powerful?
Video: Is there a teacher who had a significant impact on you?
Understanding the power of the work of teaching and its role in equity

What is it to do the “work of teaching”?  

What does it mean to foreground the “power” of that work and why does it matter?  

What are continuing challenges in trying to understand that work, and why should we care?
What is it to do the “work of teaching”?
Teaching: So common, and yet so complex
It’s common

72.5 million teachers worldwide

15 million teachers

1 million teachers

756,900 teachers

410,000 teachers

8.7 million teachers

4 million teachers

866,600 teachers
The scale of the teaching profession

- Teachers
- Retail salespersons
- Cashiers
- Fast food workers
- Registered nurses
- Customer service reps
- Laborers
- Janitors and cleaners
- Walters and waitresses
- Engineers
- Lawyers
- Social workers
- Physicians
- Plumbers, pipefitters, steamfitters
- Pilots and flight engineers
It’s “complex”

What fraction of each rectangle below is shaded gray?

What do you pay attention to?
What is “complex” here?
Video: Antar, Gabrielle, and Gabi

Antar: I think it's not a fraction because all of the parts are not equally the same shape.
What is meant by “complex”?
What does Antar mean by “it’s not a fraction”?
Should I put another example up or keep working on this figure?

What is the mathematical point of this?

Shall we stay in whole group or turn and talk in smaller groups?

Should Antar stay at the board while Gabi presents?

Should I explain or keep the children talking together?

Where shall I stand?

Who shall I call on?

How shall I try to position Antar and Gabi?

How shall I try to position Antar and Gabi?

Are those two students over on the side following this discussion?

Is this a good moment to give Gabi the “sticky” line?

How is Antar feeling about his contribution?

How can I get other students to build on what Antar and Gabi have said?

Shall I put another example up or keep working on this figure?

What shall I say or ask next?

How is Antar feeling about his contribution?
What do I mean by the “work of teaching”?
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• In part, this is the ongoing inquiry.

• It rests on trying to understand what is involved for teachers in their interactions with learners in contexts, in broad sociopolitical environments.

• It is fundamentally both a theoretical and practical question.
What do I mean by the “work of teaching”? 

• In part, this is the ongoing inquiry.

• It rests on trying to understand what is involved for teachers in their interactions with learners in contexts, in broad sociopolitical environments.

• It is fundamentally both a theoretical and practical question.

1. How to understand the power of teaching to perpetuate or to disrupt injustice, racism, oppression.

2. How to leverage its possibilities for a different world.
What does it mean to foreground the “power” of the work of teaching and why does this matter?
The commonness and complexity of teaching have powerful consequences for patterns of racism and oppression in society.
1. Teaching and learning are constructed interactively and are interpretive.
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2. They take place within broad historical and socio-political environments.
How do macro level factors interact with everyday practices?
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The relationships between—
**Macro-level structures** (in environments)
(e.g., institutional racism, history of intelligence as the property of white people, anti-Black “scientific” racism; legacies of violence against Black and Indigenous people)
How do macro level factors interact with everyday practices?

The relationships between—

**Macro-level structures** (in environments)
(e.g., institutional racism, history of intelligence as the property of white people, anti-Black “scientific” racism; legacies of violence against Black and Indigenous people)

and

**Micro-level interpersonal interactions** (in everyday life and in classrooms)
(e.g., teachers’ judgments of students, who is seen as “smart,” disproportional punishment and assignment to special ed and gifted programs)
How do macro level factors interact with everyday practices?

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Notice that the arrows run both ways.

The environments in which we are all steeped shape what we take for granted and do, but learning these as normal further reinforces their persistence in society.
1. **Teaching is powerful.** When it is done with care and judgment, students can thrive—learn content, develop positive identities, learn to value others and work collectively.

2. Teaching also involves **enormous discretion.**

3. How that discretion is exercised can either reinforce racialized and oppressive patterns of social, personal, and epistemic injustice and harm, or it can **disrupt these patterns.**
Teaching requires a dynamic application of knowledge in context, combined with knowledge about students, learning, and equity.
Fractions as numbers:
The instructional goal for student understanding

3.NF.2.a
Represent a fraction $1/b$ on a number line diagram by defining the interval from 0 to 1 as the whole and partitioning it into $b$ equal parts. Recognize that each part has size $1/b$ and that the endpoint of the part based at 0 locates the number $1/b$ on the number line.
What number does the orange arrow point to? Explain how you figured it out.
Viewing focus

What do you see about each girl’s mathematical knowledge and skill?
Video: Aniyah and Toni

This video and additional supporting materials are available online here.
Discuss

What do you see about each girl’s mathematical knowledge and skill?
What would happen next?

What are the possible results?
In the next moment, what is likely to happen?
In the next moment, what is likely to happen?

NORMALIZED NEXT MOVES
• “Can someone help Aniyah out and show what we call the whole on the number line?”

RESULTS
• Aniyah is excluded and her mathematical contributions are sidelined.
In the next moment, what is likely to happen?

NORMALIZED NEXT MOVES

• “Can someone help Aniyah out and show what we call the whole on the number line?”

• “Great, Aniyah, almost! But remember that the whole is from 0 to 1.”

RESULTS

• Aniyah is excluded and her mathematical contributions are sidelined.

• Aniyah’s answer is signaled to be incorrect and she is positioned as not having contributed to the work.
In the next moment, what is likely to happen?

NORMALIZED NEXT MOVES

• “Can someone help Aniyah out and show what we call the whole on the number line?”

• “Great, Aniyah, almost! But remember that the whole is from 0 to 1.”

• “Thumbs up if you agree with Aniyah; thumbs down if you disagree.”

RESULTS

• Aniyah is excluded and her mathematical contributions are sidelined.

• Aniyah’s answer is signaled to be incorrect and she is positioned as not having contributed to the work.

• Aniyah’s solution is “voted” on by her classmates.
What else is likely?

NORMALIZED NEXT moves RESULTS
What else is likely?

NORMALIZED NEXT MOVES

• “Toni, when you’re ready to participate appropriately by not playing with your hair and laughing, and have a question to ask, I will come back to you.”

RESULTS

• Toni is publicly excluded from the discussion.
What else is likely?

NORMALIZED NEXT MOVES

• “Toni, when you’re ready to participate appropriately by not playing with your hair and laughing, and have a question to ask, I will come back to you.”

• “You need to be a better listener, Toni. Aniyah already explained why she picked one-seventh. Who else has a real question for Aniyah?”

RESULTS

• Toni is publicly excluded from the discussion.

• Toni is judged to not be listening, her question is judged as not good, and she is excluded from the discussion.
What else is likely?

NORMALIZED NEXT MOVES

• “Toni, when you’re ready to participate appropriately by not playing with your hair and laughing, and have a question to ask, I will come back to you.”

• “You need to be a better listener, Toni. Aniyah already explained why she picked one-seventh. Who else has a real question for Aniyah?”

• “In this classroom, we are respectful of one another. When you are ready to be respectful, you can rejoin the discussion, Toni.”

RESULTS

• Toni is publicly excluded from the discussion.

• Toni is judged to not be listening, her question is judged as not good, and she is excluded from the discussion.

• Toni is publicly named and shamed as “disrespectful,” rebuked, and her role in advancing the mathematics is sidelined.
Teacher: You did not lay the stuff on the children.

Dante: You did not.

Teacher: What do you think the answer is? And show us your reasoning by coming up to the board.
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Teaching is dense with “discretionary spaces”
Video: Aniyah and Toni

This video and additional supporting materials are available online here.
Using discretionary spaces with care

- Interpreting Toni as asking a real question that she means.
- Hearing Toni’s question as central to advancing the mathematical content.
- Reinforcing her mathematical identity, not choosing to read her body as disruptive.

- Interpreting Aniyah as competent to answer questions about her ideas.
- Hearing Aniyah’s explanation as central to advancing the mathematical content.
- Reinforcing her mathematical identity, not choosing to read her body as struggling.

- Other children hear Aniyah as getting the discussion going, and Toni as asking an important mathematical question.
- Aniyah and Toni are both positioned as contributing to the discussion.
- Children see a teacher attending to Black girls as mathematical thinkers and contributors to collective work.
14 minutes after where we stopped

TONI AND JENNA

ANIYAH

AND: On an “exit ticket,” 28 of the children were able to correctly identify a different fraction (2/5) on the number line.

I did well on my goal today because my goal was to share my ideas with the class and I did. I went up to the board and share my idea with the class on fractions.
What regularly fills the discretionary spaces in teaching?
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1. Teachers’ experiences in a society filled with racism and oppression.

Lortie (1975), Banks, Grant and Koskela, Moll
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2. Normalized practices in schools that institutionalize dominant values and habits.

Lortie (1975), Banks, Grant and Koskela, Moll
Anyon (1981), Heath, Martin, Tuck
What regularly fills the discretionary spaces in teaching?

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Lortie (1975), Banks, Grant and Koskela, Moll Anyon (1981), Heath, Martin, Tuck

Professional education does not effectively intervene on these.

Professional education and teaching experience often teach these.
What does it take to disrupt the patterns that marginalize and reinforce racism?

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- Taking as axiomatic the brilliance of Black children, and thus Toni and Aniyah

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Knowing and using mathematics in teaching (MKT)

Interpreting Toni as asking a mathematical question that she means
What does it take to disrupt the patterns that marginalize and reinforce racism?

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- Taking as axiomatic the brilliance of Black children, and thus Toni and Aniyah
- ... AND having something different to DO

What does it take to disrupt the patterns that marginalize and reinforce racism?

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- ... AND having something different to DO

In these examples, what was needed?

- A special kind of mathematical nimbleness and being able to see ideas from someone else’s point of view
- An acuity of mathematical listening to hear Antar, Gabi, Aniyah, and Toni
- The mathematical insight to disrupt pervasive patterns of interpreting and responding to Black children
- The mathematical depth to use the discretionary spaces to support mathematics learning
What are continuing challenges in trying to understand that work, and why should we care?
Challenges in studying the work of teaching for equity

- Combining the embodied and relational dimensions with the cognitive and knowledge entailments.
- Building theory and insight while contextualizing the work and centering identities.
- Connecting the dots between macro-structures and micro-interactions.
- Using care to distinguish prescription from detail.
- Representing the work in a usable discourse of practice.
And also . . .
10 key asks
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Of society

1. See and value the power of teaching.
2. Stop taking skillful disruptive equitable teaching for granted.
3. Stop reinforcing conceptions of teachers as individual heroic people who figure this out on their own.
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Of policymakers

4. Require people to demonstrate that they have entry-level capability before they teach children.
5. Support teachers to develop and improve their practice over time.
6. Change the economic model for paying for public education, especially for teaching.
10 key asks

Of society

1. See and value the power of teaching.
2. Stop taking skillful disruptive equitable teaching for granted.
3. Stop reinforcing conceptions of teachers as individual heroic people who figure this out on their own.

Of ourselves as educators

7. Unpack what this sort of teaching entails and have the professional wisdom and agency to stand up for the complexity and learnability of this practice.
8. Radically change how we compose the teaching force to create a diverse resourceful profession.
9. Identify the resources, experiences, and commitments needed to be a successful learner of this complex work.
10. Take responsibility for teaching this complex practice to people who bring the resources to learn to do it.

Of policymakers

4. Require people to demonstrate that they have entry-level capability before they teach children.
5. Support teachers to develop and improve their practice over time.
6. Change the economic model for paying for public education, especially for teaching.
• Developing our approaches to understanding the work of teaching for equity is collective work.

• It demands diversity in who “we” are as scholars and as an educational community.

• This will broaden what we consider evidence, what we think the objects of study are, and what we value: epistemology, ontology, axiology.
Upcoming programs at TeachingWorks
Registration available now
Learn more at teachingworks.org

1
June 5-9, 2023 in Ann Arbor, MI
Virtual Participation Available
Content Methods Laboratory Classes
Examine the teacher education content methods courses under a microscope, while honing your skills at designing practice-based teacher education.
teachingworks.org/methodslabclasses

2
July 24-28, 2023 in Detroit
Virtual Participation Available
Elementary Mathematics Laboratory
Explore the complexity of teaching and investigate and challenge what it means to use skillful teaching to disrupt patterns of injustice.
teachingworks.org/eml

3
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Credits


Credits

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Map of Canada
Retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Political_map_of_Canada.svg

Image on slide 7:
South Africa Provinces Map.

Image on slide 7:
Political Map of India.
Retrieved from https://surveyofindia.gov.in/pages/political-map-of-india

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Image on slide 7:
Map of France.
Retrieved from https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/France/345690

Data on slide 8:

Image on slide 18:
Photo from “Mass Incarceration Is Declining — But Not For Women” by Robert P. Alvarez, Institute for Policy Studies.
Retrieved from https://ips-dc.org/mass-incarceration-is-declining-but-not-for-women/
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Image on slide 18:

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Image on slide 18:
Graphic from “Six policies to reduce economic inequality” by john a. powell, Othering & Belonging Institute. Retrieved from https://belonging.berkeley.edu/six-policies-reduce-economic-inequality
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Image on 18:

Image on slide 18:

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Image on slides 26–28:
Photo from “Why You Need an Experienced Real Estate Agent” by Elizabeth Weintraub, the balance.
Retrieved from https://www.thebalance.com/experienced-real-estate-agents-1798883

Image on slides 26–28:
Photo from “Black doctors earn less than white peers, study reveals” by Stacy M. Brown, The Philadelphia Tribune.

Image on slides 26–28:
“Police.” by Flickr user G20 Voice
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Image on slides 26–28:
Photo from “Want to be a poll worker? Philly says it's responding to ‘unprecedented’ number of applicants” by Ximena Conde, WHYY

Image on slides 26–28:
Photo from “Trump Rioters Storm U.S. Capitol (photos),” Variety

Image on slides 27–28:
Photo from “20 Classroom Interventions for Children with Anxiety Disorders” by Jerry Kennard, Ph.D., HealthCentral.
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Image on slide 28:
Photo from “10 Ways Well-Meaning White Teachers Bring Racism Into Our Schools” by Jamie Utt, everyday feminism.
Retrieved from https://everydayfeminism.com/2015/08/10-ways-well-meaning-white-teachers-bring-racism-into-our-schools/

Image on slide 67:
Map of the World.
Retrieved from https://geology.com/world/world-map.shtml

Image on slide 67:
“A Large Group Of Diverse People Standing Together.”
Retrieved from https://www.vhv.rs/viewpic/hTmTiix_a-large-group-of-diverse-people-standing-together/