Nurturing Is Not Enough: A Case Study on Social Justice, Caring, and Discipline

Darrick Smith[1] and Christine J. Yeh[1]

Abstract

We explore the dynamics of nurturing, caring, and enabling in a social justice school and how a problematic context of educational enabling can develop when notions of nurturing are not balanced with consistent disciplinary consequences. In-depth interviews were conducted with eight school staff, teachers, and a student at a social justice urban school. Observational data and institutional documents were also analyzed, and three main themes emerged revealing the tension between nurturing and enabling: (a) sentimentalist standards, (b) perceptions of authority as oppressive, and (c) contradictions in social justice values. We discuss implications for school policy, multicultural education, and school leadership.

The important role of caring and nurturing in education has been understood as foundational in building relationships, trust, and a learning community in school settings (Noddings, 2013). The idea of the "warm" and "caring" educator is common in a pedagogical discourse that spans throughout teacher education programs, highlighting the need for empathy and seeing the student as a whole person. Progressive approaches in urban education emphasize the transformative and liberating space that can be enhanced through the expression of caring and love in the classroom (Borrero, 2011).

Statement of Purpose

However, we distinguish between humanizing educational practices and misguided representations of the teacher as hero or savior (Duncan-Andrade & Morell, 2008). Even representations in the media show marginalized communities of color being "rescued" by primarily White educators who make significant sacrifices to "save" them from their own communities. These educational and societal scripts not only portray some of the necessary components of nurturing, but they also highlight some of the hypocrisies embedded in multicultural educational practices that rely too heavily on caring as a sole component of equity. In our exploratory study, we examine how one school tried to navigate the tensions between nurturing students and setting high expectations for them. We then interrogate the policies, practices, assumptions, and behaviors influencing a broader *educational enabler* culture.

As educators navigate anti-racist, anti-oppressive approaches, their social justice identities, and the need for school safety, they may find themselves enacting practices that take nurturing too far and contradict their goal for a thriving and healthy school environment. Even individuals and institutions with the best of intentions may inadvertently and unexpectedly *enable* students of color in ways that undermine their cultural empowerment, positive identities, and academic development. In fact, during this era of educational reform, many small schools have created community partnerships with the purpose of pursuing a social justice agenda. Yet, many of these attempts at social justice have actually influenced and created dynamics in educator and student relationships that contribute to what we refer to as an *educational enabler* culture. We define and discuss the *educational enabler* culture, not as a critique of social justice as a fundamental principle in education, but rather as a strong affirmation of it. We pay particular attention to the manifestation of "good" intentions into practice and the ways in which oversimplified ideas of social justice education (as saving or overnurturing students) can translate into problematic contradictions in schools.

[1]University of San Francisco, CA, USA

Corresponding Author:
Darrick Smith, Associate Professor, Department of Leadership Studies, School of Education, University of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA. 94117, USA.
Email: dsmith13@usfca.edu

Review of the Literature

As educators and advocates, we strongly support nurturing and caring for students, but in our work in urban schools we have experienced multiple contexts where overnurturing and a lack of systemic discipline evolve into a context of educational enabling. These acts by the *educational enabler* are justified by a belief that students' capacities are interrupted by the psychological and developmental impact of poverty and trauma. We define the *educational enabler* culture as (a) a foundational, ideological framework that manifests in practices that instill a collective sense of codependency between students and the adults who serve them, and (b) the normalization and rationalization of low behavioral and academic expectations of students from historically marginalized communities. Our focus on the *educational enabler* culture extends the social justice in education literature in its focus on systemic, institutional, and cultural influences that create and sustain a perspective of students as dependent on their educators. Previously discussed notions of the educator or teacher as "caring" (Goldstein & Lake, 2000), as the "hero" (Duncan-Andrade & Morell, 2007), or as a "warm demander" (Bondy & Ross, 2008) focus more specifically on individualistic characteristics and actions of well-meaning educators and not on systemic practices.

In response to reported "achievement gaps" in U.S. urban schools, graduate education programs have emphasized the development of teachers, administrators, and support staff to confront educational inequities through an emphasis on "social justice." This notion of social justice education is rooted in providing a nurturing environment in which cultural inclusion, anti-oppressive practices, and critical analysis embody the core of the educational experience (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007; Enns & Sinacore, 2005; Ginwright & James, 2002; Hackman, 2005; Medina, Morrone, & Anderson, 2005). However, how educators express "caring" and how they interpret their relationships with students must be interrogated. Although research has associated teacher "caring" and academic success and self-efficacy (see Lewis et al., 2012), we believe that nurturing and caring can be confused with a "savior" mentality that perpetuates a culture of *educational enabling*.

Hemmings (2006) suggests that overcaring teachers can often leave students feeling disrespected and disengaged. Specifically, when teachers oversympathize students' hardships, students may believe these same teachers do not see their academic capacities. This tension creates a climate of low expectations for students from marginalized communities (Landsman, 2004). Such a dynamic is different from the notion of the "bad teacher" (Kumashiro, 2012) as these teachers envision their role as caring and supportive teachers. These teachers also do not necessarily hold overtly problematic ideas on race or class, but instead may embrace a colonizing notion of nurturing students.

Many social justice approaches in multicultural education assert that school discipline policies need to be less strict when working with communities of color in the United States. Explanations for the disproportionately high discipline rates among students of color tend to focus the blame on students' individual characteristics (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Payne & Welch, 2010; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002), such as their lack of engagement with pedagogy, lack of "academic" preparation, and mental health concerns (e.g., Nelson, Benner, Lane, & Smith, 2004). However, others have understood disproportionate discipline rates in terms of cultural differences between students and school staff that lead to disconnect and miscommunication around educational expectations and norms (Patterson, Hale, & Stessman, 2008). The critical role of teacher expectations on students' achievement cannot be underestimated (Agirdag, Van Avermaet, & Van Houtte, 2013). Moreover, the lack of clear and consistent behavioral and academic objectives in schools contributes to vague discipline strategies and low expectations. These dynamics—along with desires to "help" or "save" students—influence an *educational enabler* environment in educational contexts.

Coinciding with the challenges of defining and contextualizing social justice education is the reality that educators often do not share the lived experiences of, or come from the same communities as, their students (Aveling, 2006; Bales & Saffold, 2011; Boser, 2011). Such demographic realities should encourage examination of the counternarratives (Milner, 2008a) and contradictions that affect a social justice agenda. As many teachers are from privileged, outsider, and majority positions, they may approach social justice education from a place of helping or saving the "underprivileged." Dominant colonial narratives embedded in graduate education programs may also reinforce this approach to "equity" education.

A Small School for Social Justice

The "Small Equity School" (SES) is a high school in an urban city in the San Francisco Bay Area, known for diversity and its strong history of political involvement. The school was created in 2003 on the campus of a large public university and has since moved to its current setting in a diverse working-class community. This particular school was founded on a theme of "social justice" and prides itself on its culturally relevant pedagogical framework that is reinforced by its faculty and staff. However, the school also had numerous concerns related to the schools' climate and student behavior. Namely, the school was dealing with challenges related to habitual tardiness, student defiance, contradictory consequences for student defiance, and teaching down to students.

Based on these initial observations and concerns, we sought to (a) explore the dynamics embedded in an educational

institutional culture that led to the current challenges in school culture and student behavior, and (b) explain the manifestations of the social justice ethic of the school as observable structures and practices in a school setting that may contribute to the school culture. The current research presents an in-depth case study of a small school with a social justice emphasis on its origins and current school framework.

Method

Multiple data sources were used to understand the transformation of SES as they integrated a social justice mission over a 3-year period. We utilize an explanatory case study (Berg, Lune, & Lune, 2004) and a retrospective qualitative research approach (Flick, 2009) to investigate the school culture and attendant practices that challenge the institution as a whole. To explore relationship dynamics, communication, and meaning, a phenomenological approach (Seidman, 2012) was employed to extract the richness of the experience of the staff and students. We also rooted our research in social anthropology (Berg et al., 2004) and used an inductive analysis of the data to allow participants' stories to illuminate underlying themes embedded in the cultural transformation at the school site.

The student body at SES comprises about 280 students in Grades 9 to 12. In terms of racial diversity, approximately 53% are Latino/a, 27% are African American, 11% are Asian American, 3% are Pacific Islander, 1% is Native American/American Indian, 3% are White American, and 1% is multiracial. SES has the second highest proportion of students of color of any high school in the district. More than 85% of the students qualify as low income.

SES comprises 23 teachers and 25 support staff and is diverse in terms of age, gender, and sexual orientation. Three fourths ($n = 36$) of the faculty and staff are people of color, and most have earned their credentials and/or master's degrees from highly reputable education programs. Five of the 23 teachers have their National Board certification. Most of the support staff have earned advanced degrees in their respective fields.

Study Participants

The sample included eight individuals from SES, including three staff members (College Readiness Counselor, Co-Director, Wellness Center Director) and four Teachers/Advisors and a Graduating Senior. In terms of gender, two were male and six were female. The mean age of the sample was 30 years (range = 18-41 years). All of the participants lived in urban neighborhoods in the San Francisco Bay Area. Three participants identified as Asian American (Japanese/Chinese American, biracial South Asian American, South Asian), two as African American, two as White European American, and one as Latina. In terms of

educational background, six of the school personnel had a master's degree, two were enrolled in doctoral programs in education fields, and one was a high school student. Below we describe our participants in more detail.

Selection Criteria

Staff: Teachers and support staff representing various roles and areas of specialization were intentionally selected to provide different perspectives on the main research questions and a range of experiences and approaches. *Student*: Yvette was selected to be interviewed because she had been at the SES long enough to experience the transition that the school went through. She was at least 18 years of age and had participated in at least one extracurricular activity in their senior year.

Data Collection and Analysis

Multiple data sources were used to provide a range of perspectives on *educational enabling* and to triangulate the data. These included the following: (a) interviews with staff, teachers, and one student; (b) documents (e.g., professional development materials, meeting notes, and disciplinary forms describing student transgressions); and (c) school observations.

The first author conducted year-long observations in classrooms, hallways, the cafeteria, the gym, staff offices, and exterior spaces of the school. During and following these observations, he took notes and wrote reflections about his impressions and emerging themes. He also had numerous informal conversations with staff and teachers that provided information and testimonials about the school context, challenges, and problems from the so-called social justice agenda of the school. These observations informed our interview protocol. The semi-structured interviews spanned across one to three sessions for a total of 2 to 3 hr for each participant. An ethnographic interview method (Heyl, 2001) was employed to extract the particular nuances that accompanied each participant's viewpoint that emerged as a result of their history and identity within the institution. Interview questions were focused on components of school climate and dynamics with students and teachers and staff (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2007). Specifically, participants were asked about their experiences with structural and institutional level changes that have had an impact on how they experienced SES over time. For all of the questions, follow-up probing questions were implemented for participants to expand on their story and their perspective. Sample interview protocol questions include the following: (a) Describe in your own words the level of change that has occurred in the school in recent years that are not academic in nature? (b) How would you describe the school when you first arrived and how would you describe it now? (c) What

makes SES an attribute to this community? (d) What problems do you see manifesting in the school culture at SES? (e) Where do you think these problems come from?

We analyzed the data using a combination of grounded theory and an iterative coding process. Beginning with a few generative questions derived from our research questions, core theoretical concepts were developed to shed light on emerging themes (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). These linked concepts were then compared with the theories presented in the literature pertaining to social justice education, teachers as caring, and school discipline.

Findings

Three core ideological and cultural themes emerged that embody the *educational enabler* culture. The three themes are as follows: (a) the "sentimentalist" standard, (b) authority as oppressive, and (c) contradictions in social justice values.

The "Sentimentalist" Standard

For many teachers who come from privileged communities, it is easy to construct a picture of perpetual victimization and suffering as defining frames for historically targeted communities. For well-meaning, highly motivated teachers, they may be characterized as "sentimentalists" (Kleinfeld, 1975):

> These teachers tend to be extremely warm, kindly people who find it difficult to make demands upon any students. The urban students, taking advantage of the teacher's weakness, tend to defy even their minimal requirements until the teachers react with aggrieved anger. (Kleinfeld, 1975, p. 334)

Many teachers at SES embodied notions of caring that reinforced colonial power structures of the teacher "saving" the marginalized student. The ability to appreciate the difficulty that students are having in life or in an institution is key in developing pedagogical strategies, and in understanding them as human beings (Hargreaves, 1998). However, for teachers, their positionality influences their contextualization of what students are going through as they construct a framework for understanding their lives (Chubbuck, 2010). Ashley (Wellness Center Director) discusses how harm can occur when teachers and staff feel pressure to conform to a model of social justice schooling that necessitates engaging in *educational enabling* practices:

> There's a way if you're seeking certain things in a personal relationship in a wrong kind of way and it creates a type of chaos and dysfunction and harm that I think existed in our school at a much heavier level when I first started. We were a very *enabling* kind of unhealthy school in how we were

using our relationships and our responding reactions to our relationships with students, with families, with each other. There existed a pressure to conform to the *enabling* practices of the staff community that was felt by most staff members. Teachers that did not respond to disciplinary infractions in the collectively normalized manner could be branded in private conversations as "too mean," or not "getting it." With this culture established, students that found themselves confronted with authoritative, disciplinary behavior from a teacher had an ally in the collective, broader staff ethic. So much cultural emphasis was put on this particular idea of caring, that staff, at times, might relate to one another based on the impressions of vocal, displeased students.

Sonya (Teacher and Advisor) elaborated on the influence of student and staff perceptions:

> I think a lot of that also comes from part of a lot of people's experiences and work before they come to the school and what we're reacting to. We're reacting to teachers who don't ever listen to our kids, who believe that their voices are not valuable and what they have to say and what they feel is not relevant or real or whatever. So our staff is going to listen so deeply and so intently that I would agree with everything you're saying because I need to be the adult that is going to validate you and hear you and listen to you.

This "sentimentalist" approach helped define a sense of inclusion. Jennifer (Teacher and Advisor) further shared her beliefs about the *enabling* dynamic and how she felt pressure to demonstrate that she cared for her students to the point of almost co-parenting one of them:

> I was like what the hell is going on here?! That *enabling*—I found it really troubling. I felt pressured to do some of it. Even just giving our phone number out and having that be an expectation. I was like—excuse me? You want me to give my personal phone number out to students and parents? And they call all the time! . . . Earlier this year I was practically co-parenting with a parent of one of my students. They were calling me regularly to check if the kid was in school. Several parents would call me and say, "such and such didn't come home last night." It's good that parents would feel comfortable involving us in that way, but sometimes I was like—I'm not qualified for this stuff. It's normal for parents to be concerned about their kids, but we get so deeply involved in their lives that we become like another family member. If we are in it for long hall, we can't keep doing this way. It's just too taxing on the teachers to do it for a long time.

Fred (Teacher and Advisor) also commented on how the teachers created and reinforced a lowering of student expectations as a result of this *enabling* dynamic:

> What I thought was starting to happen was a lowering of expectations academically and a kind of like element of

these kids had had a hard reality, they can't do the same things that other kids did and I just fundamentally did not believe in it. But I was being led in this path that kind of reinforced this idea.

Ashley too sees this *educational enabler* dynamic as both misguided and strenuous on staff members. She notes that it stems back to an imbalance in the lives of some of the teachers. The development of the staff work ethic and its collective concept of what commitment looks like further encouraged a "sentimentalist" approach in response to this imbalance:

> And how you find your value in a school like [SES] can sometimes be really destructive and unhealthy. This idea of having to work yourself to the bone to be committed, to be serious about your job and your students and about our work as a social justice school. If you were not staying at school up to 8'o clock every night, if you're not talking and working with students on the weekend, if you don't have the kids come to your house, if you're not going and saving them from every situation that could ever happen. If you're not giving them money when they don't have something, you know, like and when you don't really care, you're not really committed there's this ideal that is somehow created and I don't think it's just at SES. You know because if you think about the teaching staff that were kind of dismissed as valuable and weren't really given a real place in our school, they were the stricter staff in teaching.

Yvette (Graduating Senior) also commented on how this "sentimentalist" approach impinged upon the teachers, leading to *educational enabling*. She states as follows:

> The staff at SES had not developed a clear approach to discipline and student relationships that was both effective in improving school culture or respectable and affirming to the majority of students which behaved well. The emphasis on involvement in students lives and relationships built on building a sense of sympathetic friendship created an environment that was emotionally and—at times—physically unsafe for all.

Ashley commented on the response from one of the teachers after she had conducted training on the needs of students who have experiences with trauma:

> But it was interesting that the teachers started getting confused—"well if I'm talking about compassion how can I be holding these lines? How can I have these boundaries? "And to me I was like, "what?" I was confused a little bit at first. It was like if somebody thinks that when I'm talking about compassion that means I don't want you to be fun AND holding a line with students. But often you know it's really interesting. One of the things that happens to our teaching staff is that students see that we look at everything kind of in these extremes. Because I think we all care so

deeply about doing such a good job and it's kind of this perfectionist approach. You know and we want it to be a certain way.

The teachers' reactions to the psychological complexities in students' lives seemed to embody the "sentimentalist" standard. They are able to feel some pain and some sense of responsibility around a student's ability to perform well and they are unsure of what to do to help the student. This concern is part of a new paradigm of socially just education (Zemblyas & Chubbuck, 2009) and contributes to a sense of powerlessness, low morale, and the school's educational approach (Sue, 2005).

Authority as Oppressive

The "sentimentalist standard" at SES fostered a perception that fulfilling an authoritative role among students would be an act of oppression. Participants asserted their awareness of what students and families "go through" or "have to deal with" as a consequence of being part of a historically targeted community. This awareness of social, political, and economic issues drove most staff discussions regarding expectations of students on both academic and behavioral levels. This dominant discourse contributed to a collective idea of how staff would or would not provide an alternative experience for students. Hence, the staff prioritized conflict-averse interactions with students and families.

Although there was ample time for staff meetings and professional development, the staff did not take the time to analyze the pedagogical or personal incentives for engaging in *educational enabling* or their resistance to having a more authoritative educational approach. Even an examination into the social patterns of discipline development in marginalized communities would have been helpful, but this was not prioritized. Fred commented on the reluctance of teachers to adopt authoritative roles:

> This is something else I felt was problematic. The students weren't encouraged to actually respect us. Even despite the fact that we were elders that they called us by our last-names, only. No "Mr." or "Ms." attached. And that struck a chord with me because that's how the colonial would approach my people in my home country and that's problematic. When I would voice these concerns, I felt like I was just, whatever, like "oh, you're so old fashioned. You're very institutional."

Ashley explained that the resistance to fulfilling authoritative roles was linked to the previous experiences of the teachers and their political framing of their purpose as a collective providing an experience that was an alternative to the traditional models:

You can look at a teacher who is being authoritative in a classroom, is managing the classroom, is setting down reasons, giving consequences all those things. I think a lot people come from this youth development approach in social justice work where you see that as innately harmful to the child. I think that what our staff didn't have was a framework for what it meant or looked like to be an authority figure that didn't represent oppression.

This approach of diluting the authoritative role in adults can be very risky when working with students and contradictory to best practices when working with students with backgrounds involving trauma. It has also been identified as culturally incongruent with various approaches to instructing students from marginalized groups (Akom, 2003; Ware, 2006). Fred and others discussed how this approach led to coddling or *enabling* students who exhibited bad habits, or what Yvette and other students interpreted as "favoritism."

Fred commented on how this school-wide approach led to *increased* student violations and made the school less safe for everyone as students experienced fewer consequences than even they themselves expected. The school assumed that students' misbehavior was a direct result of their suffering and that as an alternative space the school could introduce alternative ways of dealing with the problem that did not mimic oppressive structures in society. This inevitably led to a system in which teachers dedicated time and energy in meetings and in their personal time discussing and dealing with struggling students. The lack of consistent consequences for these students also meant that it was unclear to students and staff as to what disruptive students were getting outside of this increase in attention. As Fred commented,

I felt like that it was an incredibly inequitable situation because we never gave any props to kids that showed up like they were supposed to, and like, that seemed incredibly problematic to me. Like there was a student that constantly betrayed people's trust, assaulted someone in one of the classrooms, steals from his advisor, gets high with one of the teachers, and did all of these blatant violations of our community. We *still* had so many people advocating for him to stay at the school. Which is where I decided that okay, this is a really significant paradigm where within I didn't see anywhere in that system where individual capability and responsibility, or ownership of your actions . . . was actually there.

And you're essentially reinforcing the scenario where [students] can just keep screwing up and I'll keep hugging you. And therein lies that negative reinforcement scenario where I felt like we're actually encouraging the kids to treat adults like shit.

Ashley was also well aware of these scenarios and explained it as connected to the collective *educational enabling* approach and philosophy of the staff:

I think that we're so conscientious of issues around power or oppression in our community as a school for social justice that we would waver in between, you know, this thing of wanting to create a healthy learning environment that had structure and boundaries we know that that's needed you know partial management is needed in all those things but people didn't want to like exert their power over students in a way that they felt was harmful to them or was aligned to any kind of way with oppressive powerful authority figures.

To Yvette, these dynamics were apparent even if they were not easy to articulate in the same way. Her experience as a student who spent her entire 4 years at the school was similar. She was a high-performing student who did not have disciplinary problems and was also an athlete. In her eyes, this atmosphere of giving attention to students who were defiant and disruptive rather than consistent consequences assumed that students were too frail or vulnerable to endure school rules and consequences:

Yeah 'cause I feel like some people don't say it a lot. Let's put it out there, [SES] did [show favoritism to] a lot of people. Kids in school always said, "Oh, that's because Mr. Brown likes you. He gave an extension. That's because everybody likes you that's why he gave you an extension." No, there were times where I was not getting favorized and I always wanted to make sure that I wouldn't.

When asked whether she believed that this issue affected her performance or the performance of other students, Yvette commented,

So, I'm always on top of my stuff. [I felt] that those students most likely would always need somebody there. They feel like they wouldn't be able to do it by their self when they get to college. So it's like you're holding their hand throughout everything and then you finally wanna let go and then and you can't because, you know what I mean? You haven't trained them to let go. And I feel like doing favoritism would-would like . . . for some reason I'm saying it impairs their education because they're not able to do anything on their own.

Yvette provides an example of a close friend:

I find with a lot of other um, older alumni, some of them didn't make it because they were still like, "I still needed somebody to hold on to me." Okay. So I feel like with [one student], like he always had teachers like "You need to do this. To do *this*, you're gonna do THIS." And they were holding his hand for that. Everything! So when it came down to it and thinking about college, he wasn't—he didn't want to do it.

Fred identified this as a problem for the staff and one that the staff could not remedy:

What I saw as a problematic scenario was even very simple institutional practices were absent at SES. That instead of formalized scenarios everything was case-by-case. I appreciated the kind of like, bottom up political hierarchy but simultaneously I felt like it caused a lot of frustration.

To Yvette, this dynamic directly affected her experience at the school. She commented on how it was obvious that teachers had real concern for students and what they were going through. Because the curriculum taught students about what Zinn (1984) would call a "People's History" that emphasized the legacies of marginalized groups, students were familiar with the concept of collective action. However, that exposure did not translate into a healthy learning environment. Yvette describes her experience of SES when she first arrived:

The school, when I got there in ninth grade, was crazy. I mean, it was a lot of fights, a lot of arguing, nobody was in class really and um, I don't know. I don't know, everybody seemed to be in their different worlds but there was always this unity when it came to everybody getting active on an issue. Like mainly like protests and things like that. [SES was] unsafe . . . It was a whole lot—in the school before that was going on it was something like um—what was it? A racial war or something? 'Cause I remember talk about how we used to have like the brown and the black like fighting or how the courtyard used to be divided and we used to talk about this in school.

Yvette's comments articulate a cultural dichotomy of a teaching staff who communicated that they clearly cared about their students while demonstrating a willingness to set consistent behavioral expectations. The resistance of teachers and staff to take on authoritative roles seemed to stem from their lack of recognition that students' safety was being threatened. This staff and teacher perception of authority as oppressive and counter to a social justice narrative, in fact, threatened the trust and safety of students.

Contradictions in Social Justice Values

The social justice values present in SES resulted in clear contradictions in how they manifested in *educational enabling* practices. Ashley recognizes the problem of paternalistic notions of caring and how this relates to the social justice ideologies of staff members:

I wanted so desperately to be doing the right thing because I knew that the work that I was doing was critical, it was crucial. It was, like, important in a different kind of way than maybe somebody who goes to an office and sits in front of a desk from 9 to 5 and you know typing on a computer—the sense of urgency around the work is different. You know, when you care about it with every part of who you are and how that type of commitment you are

needed to be excellent at it. You know it can actually be harmful and can lead you be less successful at your job I think.

The emergence of an inauthentic educator and student "connection" contributed in part to a "paradox of appropriation" where the distinctions between student and teacher experiences are erased by the teacher's assumption that they may share the same pain (Spelman, 1995). This "paradox of appropriation" emerged from the relational tension between the feminist and civil rights movement and allows those who claim to understand the struggle of another to also remain at a distance that leaves them unharmed in the ways that their supposed allies or counterparts must endure.

The contradiction emerges because such existential emotional distance can lead to a conversation that includes the "other" but does not internalize the struggle or the accompanying worldview of the other. What results from these and other associated conflicting dynamics is a form of "democratic racism" (Henry & Tator, 2000). At the core of democratic racism is the intent to prevent discriminatory structures. The intent, however, becomes somehow detached from the actual action required, resulting in a replication of oppressive phenomena while espousing to be against it. This espousal is not disingenuous but rather inaccurate—meaning that the intent for social justice schooling is there, but the framework, knowledge, and tutelage for implementing this vision are not.

The hypocrisy that arises is that educators who sensed a tension between their equity agenda and resulting contradictory and oppressive practices may not challenge this incongruence because of the pressure they feel from the perceived cultural capital of certain staff members. Lisa (College Readiness Counselor) discussed this as part of the overall approach of the school that seems very rooted in a culturally "White" perspective:

It's a very white place. It's culturally white. When I first entered, I was like, okay. The problem is that people don't feel secure enough to just straight up go up to someone in their face and say "this how I feel." And that's also very culturally light, right? It's a lot of it passive-aggressive kind of "PC" shit.

It's just the subtleties and being a person in color, you-you pay attention to subtleties. There doesn't need to be a big ass thing like Jim Crow, like blacks right here, whites right here, you know.

Ashley connects this racial dynamic back to establishing authentic relationships:

And then how does that actually translate to into how we treat our students and what we expect of our students and

how we treat their parents and how they felt like—what? You know, like that's not to me one of the results of racism but how it affects people, is that it makes people feel comfortable and then having some twisted idea about what's okay. But it's disturbing to see that because I think that people who have the right intention you know they're not coming from a negative evil hearted place. It's from a lack of awareness around those dynamics.

What results from this "lack of awareness" of existent *enabling* dynamics is a belief system that allows and rationalizes the maintenance of two apparently contradicting sets of values (Henry & Tator, 2000). This contradiction is complex as educators grounded in their justice beliefs struggle with the realization that they are perpetuating the very phenomena to which they are morally opposed. Instead of a safe school environment, what is being created is a space that blurs behavioral boundaries and expectations while fostering a culture of codependency and enabling. This contradiction also impedes students' ability to negotiate home and school identities (e.g., Iddings & Katz, 2007).

Discussion and Implications

We focus specifically on the "culture" of *educational enabling* because in this context, students and staff begin to normalize enabling behaviors as "the way it's done" as part of a social justice mission. The emergent themes come from a place of caring and willingness to make change. Throughout the study, not one participant expressed a lack of regard or sympathy for the plight of the students. When observing the educators at work and reviewing the history and development of the school, the strong emphasis on caring was consistently evident and powerfully centered throughout as an intentionally empathic educational ethic.

A Call for Humanizing Disciplinary Practices

The results of this study indicate that school policy and leadership must implement consistent and clear expectations for students who reflect a vision for equity as well as high standards for behavior and academic performance (Boutte, 2008). The disconnect between educators' *educational enabling* practices and the actual pedagogical and structural needs of the students creates an environment that directly contradicts the espoused social justice ethic of the school. The resulting school environment is one that projects an inherent state of powerlessness and intellectual deficiency onto the students being served and thus cannot be a humanizing space. Instead, what has been created is an *educational enabler* climate that affirms racist and classist notions of human capacity through a collective ethic that attempts to work on behalf of a community that is not fully understood.

It is in this contradiction that we find the hypocrisy of the *educational enabler* culture. The fact that schools do not raise children with clear understandings of right and wrong is a projection that is dehumanizing and ahistorical in relation to working-class capacities and beliefs (Charlesworth, 2000; Lamont & Lamont, 2009; Wilentz, 2004). Educators cannot establish empowering and liberatory school cultures for marginalized communities if their equity practices inculcate dependency and low behavioral or intellectual standards. It is hypocritical to claim an institutional commitment to social justice and yet implement structures and practices that instruct students toward anything other than the highest of intellectual and communal expectations. With this in mind, multicultural educational practices must be centered around a framework focusing on race (Gooden & Dantley, 2012).

At the core of the *educational enabler* culture is a concern for, and desire to help, students, superseded by educators' emotional complacency and guilt. These same educators are not fully prepared to support the positive development of historically targeted youth. This lack of preparedness leads to the construction of unsafe, unhealthy environments in which students are socialized to rely on the empathy of others and maintain low expectations of themselves. Hence, the best interests of "students" are sacrificed for decisions made in the best interest of what the educators feel and believe about students' potential and capacity.

A disruptive movement in teacher education and educational policy is embedded in critical race theory perspectives and is important in interrogating racist and enabling practices in urban schools (Milner, 2008b). Such a movement also allows for multiple perspectives in a social justice vision and for educational leadership (Bogotch, 2000). In various school districts around the country, officials are working to dramatically alter disciplinary policies that are disproportionately affecting communities of color. In California, this includes the elimination of student noncompliance as a suspendable offense, the institutionalization of nonpunitive discipline practices, and the inclusion of social emotional learning in district-wide professional development modules. However, if *educational enabling* continues to emerge from this new context of social justice education, policies that are also generated from this framework could contribute to increased difficulties for schools moving forward in the areas of safety, inclusion, character development, and college and career readiness.

References

Adams, M., Bell, L. A., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (2007). *Teaching for diversity and social justice*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Agirdag, O., Van Avermaet, P., & Van Houtte, M. (2013). School segregation and math achievement: A mixed-method study on the role of self-fulfilling prophecies. *Teachers College Record*, *115*(3), 1-50.

Akom, A. A. (2003). Reexamining resistance as oppositional behavior: The Nation of Islam and the creation of a Black achievement ideology. *Sociology of Education*, *76*, 305-325.

Aveling, N. (2006). "Hacking at our very roots": Rearticulating White racial identity within the context of teacher education. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *9*, 261-274.

Bales, B. L., & Saffold, F. (2011). A new era in the preparation of teachers for urban schools linking multiculturalism, disciplinary-based content, and pedagogy. *Urban Education*, *46*, 953-974.

Berg, B. L., Lune, H., & Lune, H. (2004). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (Vol. 5). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Bogotch, I. E. (2000). *Educational Leadership and Social Justice: Theory into Practice*, 2-14.

Bondy, E., & Ross, D. D. (2008). The teacher as warm demander. *Educational Leadership*, *66*, 54-58.

Borrero, N. (2011). Entering teaching for and with love: Visions of pre-service urban teachers. *Journal of Urban Learning, Teaching, and Research*, *7*, 18-26.

Boser, U. (2011). *Teacher diversity matters: A state-by-state analysis of teachers of color*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.

Boutte, G. S. (2008). Beyond the illusion of diversity: How early childhood teachers can promote social justice. *The Social Studies*, *99*, 165-173.

Charlesworth, S. J. (2000). *A phenomenology of working-class experience*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Chubbuck, S. M. (2010). Individual and structural orientations in socially just teaching: Conceptualization, implementation, and collaborative effort. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *61*, 197-210. doi:10.1177/0022487109359777

Duncan-Andrade, J. M. R., & Morrell, E. (2008). *The art of critical pedagogy: Possibilities for moving from theory to practice in urban schools*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Enns, C. Z. E., & Sinacore, A. L. (2005). *Teaching and social justice: Integrating multicultural and feminist theories in the classroom*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Flick, U. (2009). *An introduction to qualitative research*. New York, NY: SAGE.

Ginwright, S., & James, T. (2002). From assets to agents of change: Social justice, organizing, and youth development. *New Directions for Youth Development*, *2002*(96), 27-46.

Goldstein, L. S., & Lake, V. E. (2000). "Love, love, and more love for children": Exploring preservice teachers' understandings of caring. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *16*, 861-872.

Gooden, M. A., & Dantley, M. (2012). Centering race in a framework for leadership preparation. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, *7*, 237-253.

Glasser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The development of grounded theory*. Chicago, IL: Alden.

Hackman, H. W. (2005). Five essential components for social justice education. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *38*, 103-109.

Hargreaves, A. (1998). The emotional practice of teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *14*, 835-854.

Hemmings, A. (2006). Moral order in high school authority Dis/enabling care and (un)scrupulous achievement. In J. L. Pace & A. Hemmings (Eds.), *Classroom authority: Theory, research and practice* (pp. 135-150). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Henry, F., & Tator, C. (2000). The theory and practice of democratic racism in Canada. In M. A. Kalbach & W. E. Kalbach (Eds.), *Perspectives on ethnicity in Canada* (pp. 285-302). Toronto, Ontario: Harcourt Canada.

Heyl, B. S. (2001). Ethnographic interviewing. In *Handbook of ethnography* (pp. 369-383).

Iddings, A. C. D., & Katz, L. (2007). Integrating home and school identities of recent-immigrant Hispanic English language learners through classroom practices. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, *6*, 299-314.

Kleinfeld, J. (1975). Effective teachers of Eskimo and Indian students. *The School Review*, *83*, 301-344.

Kumashiro, K. K. (2012). *Bad teacher!: How blaming teachers distorts the bigger picture*. Chicago: Teachers College Press.

Lamont, M., & Lamont, M. (2009). *The dignity of working men: Morality and the boundaries of race, class, and immigration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Landsman, J. (2004). Confronting the racism of low expectations. *The Journal of Educational Leadership*, *62*, 28-32.

Lewis, J. L., Ream, R. K., Bocian, K. M., Cardullo, R. A., Hammond, K. A., & Fast, L. A. (2012). Con cariño: Teacher caring, math self-efficacy, and math achievement among Hispanic English learners. *Teachers College Record*, *114*(7), 1-42.

Medina, M. A., Morrone, A. S., & Anderson, J. A. (2005). Promoting social justice in an urban secondary teacher education program. *The Clearing House*, *78*, 207-212.

Milner, H. R. (2008a). Critical race theory and interest convergence as analytic tools in teacher education policies and practices. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *59*, 332-346.

Milner, H. R. (2008b). Disrupting deficit notions of difference: Counter-narratives of teachers and community in urban education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *24*, 1573-1598.

Mintrop, H., & Trujillo, T. (2007). The practical relevance of accountability systems for school improvement: A descriptive analysis of California schools. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *29*, 319-352. doi:10.3102/0162373707309219

Nelson, J. R., Benner, G. J., Lane, K., & Smith, B. W. (2004). Academic achievement of K-12 students with emotional and behavioral disorders. *Exceptional Children*, *71*, 59-73.

Noddings, N. (2013). *Caring: A relational approach to ethics and moral education*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Patterson, J. A., Hale, D., & Stessman, M. (2008). Cultural contradictions and school leaving: A case study of an urban high school. *The High School Journal*, *91*(2), 1-15.

Payne, A. A., & Welch, K. (2010). Modeling the effects of racial threat on punitive and restorative school discipline practices. *Criminology*, *48*(4), 1019-1062.

Seidman, I. (2012). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Skiba, R. J., Michael, R. S., Nardo, A. C., & Peterson, R. L. (2002). The color of discipline: Sources of racial and gender disproportionality in school punishment. *The Urban Review*, *34*, 317-342.

Spelman, E. V. (1995). Changing the subject: Studies in the appropriation of pain. In L. Bell & D. Blumenfeld (Eds.), *Overcoming racism and sexism* (pp. 181-196). London: Rowan & Littlefield.

Sue, L. (2005). A sociocultural approach to understanding teacher identity, agency and professional vulnerability in a context of secondary school reform. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *21*, 899-916. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2005.06.003

Ware, F. (2006). Warm demander pedagogy. *Urban Education*, *41*, 427-456. doi:10.1177/0042085906289710

Wilentz, S. (2004). *Chants democratic: New York City and the rise of the American working class, 1788-1850*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Zinn, H. (1984). *The twentieth century: A people's history*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Zembylas, M., & Chubbuck, S. (2009). Emotions and social inequalities: Mobilizing emotions for social justice education. In P. Schutz and M. Zembylas (Eds.), *Advances in teacher emotion research* (pp. 343-363). Boston, MA: Springer.