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Justice, Engagement, and
Humanizing Approaches to
Teaching and Teacher Education

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Necessary Disruptions: Examining Justice, Engagement, and Humanizing Approaches to Teaching and Teacher Education

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Abstract

This essay offers an examination into the high-leverage practice, *explaining and modeling content, practices, and strategies.* It takes into consideration what it means for teachers, teacher educators, and educational researchers working with young people in schools and communities to engage in *necessary disruptions in teaching and teacher education.* Conceptually, the idea of necessary disruptions is guided by larger meanings of educational justice, engagement, and humanization. As argued here, necessary disruptions in teaching and teacher education should encourage us to think about: how we teach, what we teach, why we teach, and who we teach, especially as we work alongside students in classrooms, honor student-led activism in communities, and attend to ongoing racial unrest throughout society. What, then, are some strategies we can employ to better affirm the lives and literacies of young people inside schools? What do young people say about justice, engagement, and humanity? How might these things help us to better model content, explain practices, and use certain strategies in teaching and teacher education as we engage in necessary disruptions?

NECESSARY DISRUPTIONS: EXAMINING JUSTICE, ENGAGEMENT, AND HUMANIZING APPROACHES TO TEACHING AND TEACHER EDUCATION

High-leverage practice: Explaining and modeling content, practices, and strategies

In this essay, I focus on the high-leverage practice, *explaining and modeling content, practices, and strategies*, in order to think about and offer a critical stance for engaging in what I refer to as *necessary disruptions in teaching and teacher education.* That is, I think through what I see as four important components of teaching, generally, and of teaching as acts of necessary disruptions, specifically:

1. **How we teach:** Our pedagogical choices, dispositions, and stances; our ways of interacting with others, creating loving learning environments and engaging learning experiences; our interactions in and across the world, and with multiple other people, in relation to teaching, learning, thinking, and acting; and our utilization of language and linguistic practices grounded in humanity, inclusiveness, and equity (this is reflective of engagement);
2. **What we teach:** Our purposeful selection of texts, artifacts, popular and hip-hop culture, and historical and contemporary moments; the multiple different and intersecting ways of being in the world; the intentionality of knowing that various historical, cultural, and intellectual traditions that are often marginalized or made invisible must be a part of what we teach (this is reflective of humanizing approaches);
3. **Why we teach:** The reasons for entering into learning environments and becoming educators; the desire to work with, support, and learn alongside others; and the commitment we must have to participate in the eradication of educational inequities and social inequalities (this is reflective of justice); and,
4. **Who we teach:** Importantly, we must know, name, and care deeply about who we teach—students (children, youth, and adults)—and where we teach them (in schools, communities, in the larger world). Just as it is necessary to know that we teach human beings, it is also crucial that we know that they, in turn, are always teaching us. Thus, who we teach is explicitly connected to who teaches us and what we learn with/from each other (this is reflective of reciprocal teaching and learning).

These four components—how we teach, what we teach, why we teach, and who we teach—require those of us with investments in teaching and teacher education to engage with students inside and outside of classrooms. In other words, these components provide reason for how and why we come to work with students, their families, and their extended networks (and how they come to work with us) within and across spatial-temporal conditions (e.g., in classrooms, communities, familial settings, and online and distance learning contexts). They also provide the foundation for how we can engage in reciprocal learning relationships with students as we collectively (students and teachers) explain, model, demonstrate, listen, observe, think about, question, do, and remake learning. In so doing, teaching and learning involve engagements among students, teachers, and their larger sociopolitical-familial-community networks within the otherwise disconnected spaces of classrooms (inside schools) and communities (in and across the world). Teaching and learning also involve creating the types of learning environments that are inclusive, collaborative, caring, critical, and that embody high-leverage practices.

This is where the high-leverage practice of *explaining and modeling content, practices, and strategies* becomes so important. I believe this practice involves the following things:

- Making content, academic practices, and strategies explicit to ourselves and to our students;
- Explaining, modeling, and demonstrating ideas in relation to engaged learning and doing;
- Listening, observing, and thinking with others to question learning and how and by whom knowledge is produced and exchanged;
- Determining ways to make learning relevant and sustaining;
- Using strategic examples that foreground imaginative thinking, creativity, and the value of establishing meaningful connections across content and contexts, people and pedagogies;
- Having conversations that lead to varied and various forms of learning collaborations;

- Creating spaces for creativity and experimentation with ideas and with groups of people;
- Imagining, writing about, and making space for what might appear to be impossible in teaching and learning, and working to reimagine learning as deeply caring and innovative;
- Co-constructing knowledge and focusing on the usability of languages for/in learning; and
- Understanding the necessity of making *thinking* visible as a component of doing (action).

This is not, however, a complete list. What also needs to be included in this list and in the high-leverage practice of *explaining and modeling content, practices, and strategies* are the following, among other, things:

- Creating welcoming, innovative spaces for inquiry and play;
- Making explicit connections to teaching and learning that emphasize globalization, identities, innovation, and interdisciplinarity;
- Examining and proposing solutions to injustices and inequities in education;
- Teaching as examinations and interrogations into sociopolitical, sociocultural, economic, and educational contexts that perpetuate oppression, hatred, and violence;
- Proposing ways and learning how to teach as a practice of solidarity, a commitment to love, and as an act of freedom, liberation, and transformation;
- Modeling and engaging in learning as a Project in Humanization (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2015; San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017) that centers listening as a learning strategy that is deeply and personally connected to care, love, and human interconnectedness;
- Centering representation and voice in teaching, teacher education, and learning;
- Refusing to make invisible and/or to erase the histories, legacies, and traditions of People of Color and Communities of Color from what we know about teaching and learning, especially as located within multiple, often highly hostile and hateful contexts;
- Situating realities (e.g., Black Lives Matter, #NoDAPL, #FlintWaterCrisis, #EqualPay for Women, Occupy Movement, Chicago Teachers' Strike, West Virginia Teachers' Strike) as important moments and necessary opportunities for learning and equality. Such realities heighten the significant role of *explaining and modeling content, practices, and strategies* within school and community contexts, regionally, nationally, and globally; and
- Rejecting, without apologies or guilt, all efforts that seek to undermine human compassion, care, and love—and that, for instance, would allow the unforgiving and despicable separation of children from their families. In this rejection, we must name such efforts as vile, oppressive, dehumanizing, racist, classist attempts to (re)assert and/or (re)strengthen hatred through white supremacist, patriarchal discourses.

Yet, what do any of these things mean when it comes to engagements—involving teaching and learning—inside classrooms and also within the larger sociopolitical world? In the remainder of this essay, I will further unpack my idea of "necessary disruptions" by offering nonlinear thoughts on justice, engagement, and humanizing approaches to teaching and teacher education. To begin, I first locate the need to talk about the high-leverage practice of *explaining and modeling content, practices, and strategies* by turning my gaze onto recent events on college campuses and in communities that require us to attend to connections among teaching, learning, and justice (e.g., student protests and racial unrest). What might such unrests and uprisings mean for how we teach, what we teach, why we teach, who we teach, and who, in turn, teaches us? What can we learn from these instances in relation to the ways in which we come to model content, explain practices, and/or use certain strategies in teaching and teacher education?

Then, I offer some understandings of justice, engagement, and humanization that inform how I see and center student protests and racial unrest insofar as how I approach and engage in teaching and learning. This move takes me to my guiding research questions in relation to participating in necessary disruptions in teaching and teacher education. These are: How are young people being affirmed in schools? Do we know how to recognize their agencies and critical capacities? What do young people say about justice, engagement, and humanity? These very questions encourage me to consider some of the ways this work maps onto the role(s) played by necessary disruptions in teaching and teacher education.

To begin, I turn attention to spaces and places outside of classrooms—those spaces and places that are on college campuses and in communities—and the brave people who are already engaging in necessary disruptions. After each example, I offer questions for thought that I believe are important for us to think about (for ourselves and in community with others) as we do the important work of teaching and learning in these highly contentious political times.

Beyond Classrooms: Looking at Necessary Disruptions on College Campuses and in Communities

Figure 1. "Student rally at MLK Jr Park" by Fibonacci Blue is licensed under CC by 2.0.

On May 1, 2015, six hundred students from various educational spaces in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, marched from their classrooms to the local Martin Luther King, Jr. Park in support of Black Lives Matter activists and activities (for more information, refer to the following: https://www.mprnews.org/story/2015/05/01/black-lives-matter). These students sought a way to resist and to express their feelings about the ongoing, unjust killings of unarmed Black people by the police, including Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and, among many others, Freddie Gray in Baltimore, Maryland. Their demonstrations and attempts to raise awareness about the brutality of Black bodies and Black lives are examples of what I refer to as "necessary disruptions."

Questions for thought: Is it even possible for us to create welcoming, innovative spaces for inquiry and play inside classrooms in light of systemic racism and institutionalized oppression? How do we go about engaging in such creations and productions? What can it look like if we purposefully make connections to teaching and learning that include examinations into sanctioned and public forms of

violence, marginalized identities, and youth activists and activism? What would such learning environments look like? And, what would such teaching look like within them—teaching that centers on, and seeks educational solutions to, the sociopolitical, sociocultural, and economic contexts of oppression and violence? What would we teach as texts? How would we encourage and support our students to be teachers, knowledge generators, and ethnographers?

Figure 2. "Protest of Youth for Western Civilization" by Moliverg (Public Domain Image).

On April 23, 2009, approximately one hundred students decided to organize in protest to white supremacist activities occurring on the college campus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. There was also a protest by various campus organizations and students against politician Tom Tancredo, the group named Youth for Western Civilization, as well as the former congressman of the state of Virginia, Virgil Goode. Although reported as a peaceful event, there were approximately six student activists who were arrested (Karlan, 2009; see http://www.fightbacknews.org/2009/04/students-protest-virgil-goode-and-youth-for-western-civilization.htm). This protest is another example of what I refer to as "necessary disruptions," disruptions that interrupt racism and other forms of oppression in order to insist on the value of, and the need to always move toward, equality, freedom, and transformation.

Questions for thought: How might we propose new ways to interrupt hate? Do we understand the significance of young people's agency, perspectives, and lives just as much as we understand our own agency, perspectives, and lives? How does this understanding materialize inside of teaching and learning, and within our very interactions with students and in communities? In what ways can we begin to deeply understand teaching as a practice of solidarity and a commitment to love? What does it look like to model teaching and learning as humanizing acts within classrooms and across the world? And, what are some of our hesitations with doing this work, with being fully committed to this type of teaching and learning?

Figure 3. DACA Protest at Trump Tower by Rhododendrites licensed under CC-BY SA 4.0

On the heels of the Trump administration's rescission, or repeal, of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) in 2017, protesters gathered outside of Trump Towers in New York City. They sought a way to publicly and visibly respond to Trump's ongoing attempt to eliminate the Obama-era policy that allowed temporary protection against the deportation of young, undocumented immigrants. Although the program has not (yet) ended and while there is not a published timeline for its proposed gradual ending, many colleges and universities have been working to provide assistance, such as identifying plans for permanency, and lobbying for legislation that would permanently protect students in ways that the current DACA legislation does not.

Questions for thought: What are some specific ways for teaching, learning, and teacher education to be grounded in, and guided by, histories of struggle and legacies of excellence from People of Color, Communities of Color, and from other marginalized peoples? How can we teach about current-day realities (e.g., Black Lives Matter, #NoDAPL, #FlintWaterCrisis, etc.) as connected to past realities (e.g., enslavement, denial of voting rights, segregated communities and schools, etc.)? How can our teaching be responsive to events happening in the world, and in what ways can our teaching provide a necessary response, or disruption, to oppression, racism, discrimination, injustice, and inequity?

Figure 4. Student lie-in at the White House to protest gun laws by Laurie Shaull licensed under CC by 2.0

On February 19, 2018, Teens for Gun Reform held a lie-in outside of the White House. They sought a way to protest gun laws and call for gun reform after the February 14, 2018 shooting at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Their protests, among many other similar events by young people, inspired a national discussion about safety in educational spaces. Young people asserting their agency for meaningful change and reform represents "necessary disruptions"—disruptions to who, traditionally, gets a voice and a space in making decisions about safety and humanity (and who does not), who gets represented in public discourse about justice and for whom and for what larger reasons (and who does not), and why the inclusion of multiple perspectives in such conversations and decision-making is necessary to efforts toward justice, equity, equality, and freedom.

Questions for thought: What would it look like if we gather together and establish a sustainable teaching and learning agenda that rejects hate and foregrounds love, justice, and freedom? How might such an agenda speak explicitly against/in rejection of oppressive, dehumanizing, and white supremacist, racist discourses? In what ways might this agenda also teach about, and enact the overall purposes of, Black Lives Mattering by intentionally emphasizing race, justice, decoloniality, and human rights? What is the expansive nature of this work inside of classrooms and across the world, and how can teaching and teacher education revolutionize how we come to think about justice as organizing and acting?

Other Examples:

The above examples are just a few of the many other necessary disruptions that have occurred and that continue to occur beyond classrooms, on college campuses, and in communities. Other examples of this work include:

- Students protesting at Ithaca College because of the administration's "handling" of racial incidents on campus. Because of the protests, the Dean of Ithaca College proposed to hire a new Chief Diversity Officer. While this might be a beginning step in addressing a larger issue of racism on a college campus, simply hiring a Chief Diversity Officer is not enough in and of itself. We must all have a commitment to this work and must dedicate our teaching and learning, among other things, to justice and freedom in education.

- The many, repeated racists incidences that have occurred on the campus of the University of Michigan. These included the postings of racist fliers, anti-Latinx and pro-Trump graffiti on campus landmarks, and among others, racial slurs written on the doors of dormitories.
- The group, "Concerned Student 1950," and their supporters locked arms and spoke about their concerns over the racism they have witnessed and confronted as students on the University of Missouri campus. They also issued a list of demands they wanted the campus administration to attend to, such as: increasing the number of Black faculty and staff on campus and requesting the resignation of University of Missouri President Timothy Wolfe, who, on November 9, 2015, resigned.
- University of Virginia President Teresa Sullivan indicated that she was "deeply saddened and disturbed by the hateful behavior displayed by torch-bearing protesters that marched on our grounds this evening." She went on to "condemn the unprovoked assault on members of our community, including university personnel who were attempting to maintain order…The violence displayed on the grounds is intolerable and is entirely inconsistent with the university's values." Her statement came after public demonstrations of hate, violence, and division occurred in Charlottesville in August 2017.
- A march at Boston College that included approximately 350 students was held as a result of the administration's lack of response to anti-LGBTQIA slurs, especially after the discovery of a sign displaying derogatory references toward LGBTQIA students. The march resulted from students' feelings of marginalization, disenfranchisement, and silencing on campus when it comes to negative discourses about their sexuality.

There is an urgency to engage in necessary disruptions. This is particularly the case when we take note of the many other examples of hatred, violence, and injustice occurring in the world, from the unnecessary deaths of Freddie Gray, Eric Garner, and the countless young people in our classrooms and communities, including 18-year old Tyler Clemente who jumped to his death after being bullied for being gay, to one in every two Muslim Americans who have reported being religiously and/or racially persecuted in the last year. From the many people who are raped on college campuses, but are not fully protected even after reporting rape, to the physical and emotional assault of a high school student sitting in a classroom in my home state of South Carolina, there is an urgency (a painful and serious urgency) to place explicit attention on the injustices and oppressions that are happening in the world. These realities are our realities, and they require us all to work without question to frame diversity, equity, and justice as central to our work. This is especially but not exclusively the case when it comes to humanizing approaches to teaching and teacher education.

To drive home this point even more, I contend that we must address injustices that are occurring in our world, and we must determine ways to interrupt injustices in order to situate education—in our schools, on our university campuses, in our communities, across the world—within critical, welcoming, engaged, and loving spaces that affirm our humanities in interconnected ways. If we do this, then we can begin to not only envision, but to enact the very ideals and underpinnings of diversity, equity, and justice as fundamental principles in the functioning of our universities—from our student and staff bodies to our faculty and administrative bodies. This situatedness also includes the policies, practices, and procedures that we rely on in the daily functioning of our schools and universities—from how students are admitted and engaged with, how faculty are recruited and retained, to how staff are treated and how administrators and university leaders get selected and supported to do courageous work as necessary disruptions. How do we think about this type of work in education, generally, and in teaching, learning, and teacher education, specifically? As we engage in this type of work, how do we understand the roles played by justice, engagement, and humanization? In the next section, I offer some understandings of these concepts as I continue to think through necessary disruptions in teaching and teacher education.

Understandings of Justice, Engagement, and Humanization

Justice

"And from the freedom days/that blazed outside my mind/I fell in love/I fell in love with Black men White/men Black/women White women/and I/dared myself to say The Palestinians/and I/worried about

unilateral words like Lesbian or Nationalist/and I/tried to speak Spanish when I travelled to Managua…/and I/I lust for justice" (June Jordan, 2007, p. 470)

In the above excerpt, poet-educator-activist June Jordan (1989) unequivocally names her "lust for justice" as a way to engage local and global relations of power whilst recognizing, to use the words of Harb (2014), "positions of privilege that pertain to being a first world subject, albeit one who is persecuted on the basis of gender" (p. 83). Through this lens, Jordan points to important questions about what it means to advocate for justice inside educational spaces, in communities, and around the world. She also questions for whom we are advocating and for what purposes we are engaging in justice-centered advocacy. It is both her argument and stance that in our "lust for justice," there must be a commitment to universal love, a desire for freedom, and an obligation to naming, addressing, and resisting all forms of dehumanization.

Jordan's (1989) sentiments, I believe, are reflected in the work of Bettina Love (2017), who posits that the United States has always had an obsession "with dehumanizing and criminalizing" people, especially "the Black body" and "Black people, regardless of gender" (p. 199). And this is evident in that Black people "are being killed in the streets and spirit-murdered in the classroom" (p. 199). Love argues that classrooms and communities are often structured and experienced as spaces that physically and spiritually harm Black people and, I would contend, that beckon us to neither love ourselves nor anyone else (but June Jordan teaches us otherwise). What, then, does it mean to move toward justice for those who have been, and continue to be, disempowered due to the confluence of systems of oppression? What does it mean to radically pursue justice in teaching and learning in order to create future realities for a more humane and just society? For me, this means that:

- We are always questioning, interrogating, and working against systems of oppression and acts of dehumanization in public and in private;
- We are situating justice at the center of our pedagogies, practices, dispositions, and stances;
- Our teaching and learning are guided by freedom within spaces where education is always already happening and within spaces that are structured to intentionally deny access to education—in classrooms, communities, and around the world;
- We are questioning meanings of justice so as to not reiterate systems of injustice and structures of inequality;
- Our approaches to teaching and learning are intricately connected to our investments in culturally relevant, responsive, affirming, sustaining, and loving practices; and
- We are interrupting and intervening in discourses that dehumanize the legacies, lives, literacies, and loved ones of others (e.g., separation of children from families, as ordered by the 45th administration).

For teaching and teacher education, specifically, and educational research, generally, a justice-centered approach also requires us to investigate the multiple and various ways in which oppression, privilege, and unequal power relations operate to maintain hierarchies, and to reject these hierarchies in advocating for universal human rights and educational justice (Freire, 1970a, 1970b; Kinloch & Dixon, 2017; Stovall, 2006). It also requires that we work to counter achievement gaps and other disparities between white students and students of color (Ladson-Billings, 2006), and between economically wealthy, or affluent, students and poor students (Kinloch, 2010). More explicitly, a justice approach also warrants that we determine ways to combat racial, ethnic, and linguistic misrepresentations and racial segregation in schools and communities. In so doing, we must commit to understanding, researching, and talking about the following realities, among many others:

- Gender inequalities and the marginalization of LGBTQIA+ students;
- The miseducation and maltreatment of students with disabilities;
- Ongoing and increasing disparities with regards to educational resources for different groups; and
- Educational discrimination of Black students, immigrant students, first generation students, students from poor and working-class socioeconomic backgrounds, and students of diverse

religious beliefs and practices.

A justice-centered educational framework, then, encourages and requires us to examine how oppression, privilege, unequal power relations, and the unfair distribution of resources operate to maintain hierarchies. In this examination, we must come to reject these hierarchies in advocating for universal human and educational rights for people (Kinloch & Dixon, 2018; Freire, 1970b; Stovall, 2006). If this is the approach we take, then we must critically question the systems of oppression that directly contribute to the inequitable educational circumstances in which many of our students, particularly Black students and other students of color, find themselves. Moreover, we must examine if, as educators, researchers, and school leaders, our praxis reiterates and maintains educational inequities and oppressions, or centers and moves toward justice and freedom within the very classrooms and communities in which we work and/or live.

Engagement

"English and literacy educators are in a unique position to interrupt the violence, pedagogical injustices, and misrepresentations against Black girls in schools. The tools we have at our disposal (writing, visual arts, spoken word, and other modalities more readily accepted in English and literacy classrooms) provide an outlet to discuss, critique, and dismantle this violence" (Sealey-Ruiz, 2016, p. 294).

I open this section on engagement by citing scholar-educator Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz, who writes about the urgency with regards to "interrogating hegemonic systems, English education practices, and educational policy" (p. 294) in order for shifts to occur in how Black girls are talked about in public discourses. Her work aligns with my call for necessary disruptions in teaching and teacher education, generally, and with my uptake of engagement (its meaning and its role in teaching), specifically. If, in fact, educators of English and literacy studies are to "interrupt violence" by utilizing the "tools we have at our disposal," then we also need to determine productive and sustaining ways to engage with one another inside and outside the institutionalized spaces of schooling. Thus, my focus on engagement, writ large, in teaching and teacher education.

Elsewhere, I agree (Kinloch, 2016) that engagement and engaged practices must not re-inscribe individualism, competition, racism, and homophobia. They also should not privilege certain people—for example, those in positions of financial power, those who benefit from white privilege, etc.— over others, including those who have been historically disenfranchised and/or marginalized by structural oppression. Engagement and engaged practices, specifically in teaching and teacher education, should represent:

- Activist-orientations that center teachers, students, and their larger social networks;
- A paradigmatic shift in how we focus on collaboration and not competition that reproduces inequality;
- Dynamic interactions among people in a variety of contexts, including but extending beyond the space of schools;
- Mutuality, respect, knowledge exchange, knowledge production, and interactions with other people; and
- Practices in *explaining and modeling content, practices, and strategies* as relevant to human lives, human conditions, civil and human rights, and human engagements.

I rely on the Carnegie Foundation's definition of community engagement to locate engagement in teaching and teacher education, which they describe as "collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" (New England Resource Center, n.d., para. 11). This uptake of community engagement, in relation to a broader understanding of engagement, emphasizes partnerships in classrooms and communities as well as collaborations around fulfilling shared goals (Kinloch, 2016). In other words, I view engagement in teaching and teacher education as opportunities for different groups of people across different spatial-temporal conditions to:

- Understand the participatory nature of learning and teaching;
- Learn more about the experiences of students inside and beyond school spaces and in ways that focus on who they are as learners within their familial, social, activists, and various other networked communities;
- Disrupt silos among research, teaching, and creative activities to enhance learning as doing;
- Prepare engaged learners who come to think collaboratively and work collectively to address social, political, economic, educational, and other ills in this world;
- Address and propose meaningful solutions to critical societal issues in ways that are innovative and that lead to social justice and necessary educational transformation;
- Contribute to freedom and justice, particularly for minoritized communities and peoples
- Consider how various groups of people (e.g., students, teachers, researchers, families, neighbors, community representatives, members of school districts and local businesses, etc.) engage in problem-posing and problem-solving to address identified concerns.

Overall, I believe engagement signifies reciprocal, collaborative partnerships *with* and *in* classrooms and communities around social, civic, educational, and political issues.

Humanization

"I examine the pedagogical foundations that serve to humanize the educational process and enable both students and teachers to work toward breaking away from their unspoken antagonism and negative beliefs about each other and get on with the business of sharing and creating knowledge" (Lilia I. Bartolome, 1994, p. 176).

According to Bartolome (1994), our pedagogies should be grounded in and guided by humanizing practices, approaches, and strategies that honor "students' background knowledge, culture, and life experiences," and that establish "learning contexts where power is shared by students and teachers" (p. 184). Humanization, as pedagogy and practice, requires educators to value the lived experiences, perspectives, and cultural knowledge young people bring with them into schools (Bartolome, 1994; Freire, 1970b). In this way, then, humanization connects to bell hooks' (1994) argument for emancipatory forms of education, whereby teachers engage with students in ways that consciously decenter authority and create democratic classroom spaces.

Thus, I approach teaching and situate teacher education as "Projects in Humanization" that have commitments to multiple literacies, languages, compassion, equity, justice, and engagement. Humanization becomes understood as conscious attempts by educators and students to move "away from their unspoken antagonism and negative beliefs about each other" (Bartolome, 1994, p. 177) in order for knowledge to be both created and exchanged. As pedagogy and practice, humanization requires us to value experiences, perspectives, and cultural knowledge that young people bring into schools and carry with them within and across multiple communities. Furthermore, it requires that we honor "the complexities of our humanity in relation to other peoples' lived conditions, and in light of what it means to teach, learn and live in the world" (Kinloch, 2015, p. 31; see also Kinloch & Dixon, 2017).

This understanding of humanization connects to my uptake of Projects in Humanization (PiH), a framework that centers shared experiences and desires for racial, linguistic, educational, political, and social justice in schools and communities. Theoretically and methodologically, PiH are enacted through relationships, the process of listening and storying, and through dialogic engagements that occur when we tell and receive stories that can effect change (Kinloch, 2015; San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017). Additionally, PiH places the realities and experiences we have with others as the central foci of human interaction, of teaching, and of research (Brayboy, Gough, Leonard, Roehl, Solyom, 2012; Kovach, 2009). It offers a framework for sharing stories in ways that allow for nonlinearity and the transformation of unjust, inequitable structures. These projects lend themselves to shifting of roles between teacher and student by positioning the teacher as listener, learner, and advocate of and for students, and vice-versa (Kinloch, 2012).

I do believe that we need to place increased attention on better understanding the commitment and deep investment educators make to teaching and to working with students, day in and day out. In so doing, there is the potential for us to also better understand how teaching is an act of humanization, one

that requires us to take responsibility for naming and acknowledging those "histories of colonization, violence and oppression that have long dehumanized the lives and devalued the stories," of students, on the one hand, and of historically marginalized peoples, on the other hand (Kinloch, Burkhard, & Penn, 2017, p. 41). As such, we must recognize the importance of humanization—as pedagogy and practice—in teaching and teacher education, as well as within classroom and community contexts. To do this, I argue for the following things:

- That our pedagogical practices be guided by a justice-centered educational agenda;
- That we learn to listen to and take up the perspectives of educators and students in how we reimagine the possibilities for engaging and necessary disruptions in teaching and teacher education;
- As we do this work, that we reject racism, sexism, homophobia, and other oppressions in ways that center the coalitional nature of education inside classrooms and communities;
- We determine meaningful ways to talk about, teach about, and productively engage with current-day realities and moments (student protests, campus unrest, justice movements and collectives, etc.) which are connected to larger histories of violence that need to be named and eradicated; and
- We advance educational approaches that value equity, justice, humanization, and love.

What do these things (justice, engagement, and humanization) mean, collectively, with respect to necessary disruptions in teaching and teacher education? Also, what are some of the larger connections among justice, engagement, and humanization when it comes to the high-leverage practice of *explaining and modeling content, practices, and strategies* and the relations of these things to what is happening inside our classrooms and within our various communities? These questions lead me to the following areas of scholarly inquiry: research on language, place, race, and culture.

Research on language is important for my line of scholarship because such research examines the multifarious, complex, and intricately personal and political ways language is used in a variety of sociopolitical contexts. I also rely on *Research on place,* particularly research that explores how place and space are moveable, changing, dynamic and, as a result, how place impacts (one way or another, and in multiple, intersecting, and colliding ways) the lives, cultures, and identities of people. Relatedly, *Research on race,* to include studies that examine the gaps that persist between Black people and others in terms of education, educational outcomes, educational inequality, educational resources, academic achievement, opportunity, housing, and among others, economics, is equally significant in scholarship about disruptions in teaching and teacher education. Finally, I also turn to *Research on culture,* especially research that examines cultural relevancy, responsiveness, and sustainability in relation to contexts and cultural, educational, and economic diversities and identities.

The following scholars and their research, among others, frame my investment in, and inquiries into, language, place, race, and culture:

Research on Language
Alim, Ibrahim, & Pennycook (2009)
Blommaert (2008)
Richardson (2003)
Smitherman (2000)

Research on Place
Berry & Stovall (2013)
Gay (2002)
Gilroy (1993)
McCarty & Lee (2014)

Intersections: Language, place, race, culture

Research on Race	**Research on Culture**
Crenshaw (1988)	Collins (2004)
Solórzano & Delgado (2001)	Tuck (2009)
Harper (2009)	Nieto (2005)
Ladson-Billings (2006)	Paris & Alim (2014)
Lee (2007)	Patel (2015)

Thus, justice, engagement, and humanization—as guided by research on language, place, race, and culture, and as situated within not only the desires, but the actions, for racial, linguistic, educational, political, and social justice in schools and communities—underscore the importance I place on necessary disruptions in/to teaching and teacher education. Placing attention on what happens in the world (e.g., student marches, protests, disruptions of hateful discourses) and what happens in schools (e.g., the *how, what, why,* and *who* we are teaching and learning with) is crucial for re-making and reimagining teaching and teacher education.

Participations in Necessary Disruptions

In the remainder of this essay, I think through and offer brief examples of necessary disruptions from one of my own research studies. To do so, I address the following questions in relation to teaching and teacher education:

- *How are young people being affirmed in schools?* As I consider this question, I also think about what our practices, pedagogies, and stances are in relation to our students. I also contemplate if we are working with and listening to young people in humanizing ways.

- *Do we know how to recognize their agencies and critical capacities?* As I consider this question, I also wonder if we understand agency and critical capacity, and if we do so in ways that are relevant to, and sustaining for, our students. Also, I continue to contemplate if we are working with and listening to young people in humanizing ways that are both reflected in and reflective of our practices, pedagogies, and stances.

- *What do young people say about justice, engagement, and humanity?* With this question, I am interested in learning what young people's narratives, or stories, reveal and what educators can learn from them as we work to ensure that our practices, pedagogies, and stances disrupt oppression and inequity in education.

The aforementioned questions point to a larger question at the heart of my work. That is, how does this work—of justice, engagement, and humanization—map onto the role(s) played by necessary disruptions in teaching and teacher education?

To reiterate, I believe it is necessary that we focus on how we teach, what we teach, why we teach, and who we teach inside and outside of classrooms. When we work with students to explain, model, demonstrate, listen, observe, and think aloud, and when we encourage them to engage in these practices—with their peers, with us, and with themselves—then we are all better equipped to explain and model content, practices, and strategies. We are also better prepared and motivated to create learning environments that are inclusive, collaborative, caring, critical, and that embody high-leverage practices that, I hope, will lead to freedom and justice.

Research Example of Justice, Engagement, and Humanization

Revisiting a Vignette on Christina

When I was working as a teacher-researcher and professor in New York City, the principal of Perennial High School invited me to serve as a visiting 12th grade English language arts teacher in a

classroom with approximately 29 students. It was in this context that I met Christina, and in my fieldnotes and elsewhere (Kinloch, 2017), I wrote the following observations:

> Christina stood at four feet five inches tall in mid-size heels. Arms waggling in the air. Eyes offering a stare that could cut through steel. This girl was on fire. She walked as if to say, "I don't care who you are. Move outta the way 'cause I'm coming through." Christina came through, day after day, within my English classroom where I initially met her, and within the out-of-classroom spaces where I came to know her as more than a girl on fire. She was a girl whose fire represented ways of surviving in a world of peers and adults who often misunderstood and dismissed her. "You *taaaalllll,*" were the first words she threw at me. "You, like, so tall I can't even…see all of you." I interrogated her comment not just as a joke about height—granted I am a Black woman who stands at six feet tall—but as a confession about not being fully seen. When I laughed, she exclaimed: "Look, you don't know me. I don't know you. If you want to keep it that way, fine. I'mah let you know straight up, this me. You don't have to want me here, but that's too bad." She did a sharp side turn as if she was cutting corners in a Cadillac, or cutting me for that matter. And I had one of two choices to make: 1) Remain silent and lose face as the English teacher in a class of twenty-nine high school seniors staring at me, or 2) Recognize that Christina was performing a narrative of difference enacted onto her and that she enacted onto others.
>
> I responded, "Nice to meet you, Christina. Guess we'll learn a lot about each other." She replied, "Yeah, right. Whatever, Mizzzzzzz." Before I could respond, she insisted, "By the way, Mizz, you teaching this class, you need to know upfront you ain't making me write. I don't write. We don't write in here. Do you?" Christina walked away and class began, but not before I came to recognize her fire as fierceness and her refusal to name herself as a writer as her attempt to protect herself from my gaze. Christina was a writer, and it was just a matter of time before I came to really see this. (Kinloch, 2017, pp. 25-26)

I open this section with some of my reflections on Christina because they provide me with a way in to thinking about whether or not she felt affirmed within schools (which connects to my first question: *How are young people being affirmed in schools?*). As I came to learn more about Christiana—how her interactions with peers and with me were performances of resistance that protected her from the negative gaze of others—I also became aware of her longstanding feelings of alienation and miscommunication.

In fact, within the space of our classroom, these performances of resistance became more visible. For example, in the aforementioned passage as well as throughout our time together at Perennial, she would remind me that "you ain't making me write. I don't write. We don't write in here." Initially, I wondered about her "true" intentions in claiming that she does not write and would not write within the context of our English class (she did, in fact, submit writings to me for review and to her peers for student exchanges). Years later, sparked by my ongoing analysis of additional data provided to me from Christina, I came to grapple with her insistence, or outright rejection, that she does not write as being linked to larger social, educational, and political issues that largely went unexplored in her educational experiences. On the one hand, she shared with me, "I'm not allowed to be me in school, so, like when you ask me to be…like, be me, you know? I gotta ask why. What does that even mean? What were you trying to ask from me then?"

On the other hand, when I asked her if she felt affirmed in school, or in our English language arts classroom more specifically, she explained, "You gotta know that's like hard. Going through school being someone on the outside that wasn't this person on the inside, at least not all the time." Our exchange continued:

Christina:	Then you ask me about being affirmed. I was like, "no, I'm not doing this."
Valerie:	Why?
Christina:	Well, you was like, "let's read on being affirmed. Let's look at these literatures by people who was Black and Latina." What I couldn't admit was…that was affirming.
Valerie:	It was?
Christina:	Being able to read on people like me, being included in discussions we had. I wasn't ready, but I know why…no one had prepared me for that. See, I wasn't told it was OK to be my inside self. You had modeled that for me.
Valerie:	The texts we studied modeled that for you…and for me, too. For all of us.

Christina: You had modeled that for me. Nobody had ever done that for me. (I connect her comment here to my question #2: *Do we know how to recognize their agencies and critical capacities?* A few years after our time together at Perennial, Christina told me that I recognized her agency and criticality, even in light of what I assumed to be—maybe falsely—her performances of resistance).

My exchange with Christina, which occurred just a few years after our work together at Perennial High School, revealed to me some of her thoughts about disruption. For one, she was a witness to a form of disruption in teaching, as marked by her confession that she was "able to read on people like me." Additionally, her participation in, or reflections about, this disruption helped her to eventually contend, or struggle, with "being someone on the outside that wasn't this person on the inside." While the exchange might not explicitly connect to the high-leverage practice of *explaining and modeling content, practices, and strategies*, I argue that it does, even if only implicitly, as shown by her belief that "You [Valerie] had modeled that for me. Nobody had ever done that for me." With her assertion, I argue that my invitation for Christina and her peers (and, really, for me, too, for that matter) to study and discuss texts "on people like me," provided a window into how she, as well as her peers and I, came to connect with content and how I sought to model practices and strategies for engaged learning. In fact, Christina and her peers also modeled these practices for me in ways that continue to strongly impact my own learning.

In my opening reflections of Christina, I noted that she "was on fire. She walked as if to say, 'I don't care who you are. Move outta the way 'cause I'm coming through.'" Maybe it was something about Christina's reference to not being able to see all of me because I am what she calls "so tall," or maybe it was how she powerfully exclaimed, "I'mah let you know straight up, this me. You don't have to want me here, but that's too bad." Eventually, and throughout our time together, I recognized that Christina was performing a narrative of difference, and that because this narrative was enacted onto her for so many years, she visibly and explicitly enacted it onto others.

Insofar as justice, engagement, and humanity are concerned (which is my third question, *What do young people say about justice, engagement, and humanity?),* Christina's stories of miscommunication and alienation offer valuable lessons for how educators can ensure that our practices, pedagogies, and stances disrupt oppression and inequity in education. During one of our class sessions, she shared her experiences of not being seen in schools, about struggling to be accepted by peers, and about the hardships that continue to "happen to us Black people in the society, but we can't talk about in school." When I encouraged her to offer an explanation, she stated: "We do that in here…talk on what's wrong in society, see ourselves as, like, [someone whispered the word "responsible'] responsible for making change happen. This don't be happening everywhere. We be reading literatures and we learn stuff." Then, she added, "not thinking in a box, we be looking out for the next person. That's hard for me, but I'm trying to do it."

Here, Christina's confession that she is "trying to do it" points to her effort to work with her peers inside of classrooms that have not fully, if at all, affirmed her agency and self. It also speaks to the need to engage students in examinations into justice and humanity within and beyond the contexts of schools (see the examples under the above section, "Beyond Classrooms: Looking at Necessary Disruptions on College Campuses and in Communities"). More specifically, Christina sees a lack of attention being placed on "our struggles and hardships in the world, like, the way Black people mistreated at every stop," and she goes as far as to name this as "criminal." There is a level of "pain that goes with this…not being encouraged to talk on the crimes happening to us. Why can't we?" Undoubtedly, there is "pain," to use Christina's word, that accompanies the invisibility of "crimes" and/or injustices that are inflicted onto Black people and other People of Color that go unpunished. The pain intensifies when teachers are not employing the high-leverage practice of *explaining and modeling content, practices, and strategies* with and for students (and in relation to a variety of texts, experiences, and moments that are impactful, or have the potential to be impactful, for them). I believe that there is a need, an urgency, to have necessary disruptions in teaching and teacher education that support this high-leverage practice and these critical examinations in multiple ways.

Listening to our students—some of whom do believe that schools are not affirming places and spaces, that schools do not place critical attention on recognizing their critical capacities, and that there is not enough focus placed on justice, engagement, and humanity—is more than important. In so doing, we must do a better job of listening to and inviting into our classrooms students' stories and voices. We must

recognize and make central their perspectives in teaching. Among other things, we must determine ways to engage students in learning by understanding teaching as an avenue into freedom and opportunity, engagement and voice, care and compassion.

Discussion and Conclusions

This essay and the ideas presented here are unfinished and will continue to develop into a larger theory of humanization in relation to teaching as an act of necessary disruption. As I continue to engage in this work and the thinking and collaborating with others that this work requires, I want to offer the following thoughts as ways to continue this discussion. I believe the work of necessary disruptions in examinations into justice, engagement, and humanizing approaches to teaching and teacher education—hence, the title of this essay—asks that we do the following:

- **Listen** to student perspectives, voices, stories, and realities without refuting them as invalid. I believe we need to, must, listen to and for silences. We have to pay attention to students and to their learning. For me, Christina demonstrates that when we listen to students and include texts and experiences that speak to them, then we can move forward with teaching and learning that is engaging, caring, and relevant.

- **Refuse and reject** tendencies to ask students to "take off" their language, culture, and identities in schools and, instead, ask them to be who they are by working with them to create open and inclusive spaces for teaching and learning. Christina teaches me that when we encourage students to be who they are, then opportunities for building relationships with them become more possible. So, too, do opportunities arise for us to have an open mind and an open heart as we consider the pain that many of our students encounter in their daily lives—pain, trauma, and other distresses that often do not get addressed inside of schools.

- **Consider** the meaningful role of Culturally Relevant and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies. As Ladson-Billings (2009) writes, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy "empowers [people] intellectually, socially, emotionally, politically by using cultural referents to impact knowledge, skills & attitudes" (p. 20). And, as Paris (2012) contends, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy fosters and sustains "linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (p. 95). Christina not only "read on people like [her]," she was also "being included in discussions…" Although she admitted, "[she] wasn't ready," she also walked, day after day, into a classroom space that was grounded in relevance and sustainability.

- **Reframe** teaching and learning as "Projects in Humanization" (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2015) that have commitments to multiple literacies, languages, compassion, equity, justice, and engagement. Doing so, as Christina teaches us, not only affirms who students are, but also invites them to "read on being affirmed." They have voice. They have agency. They can explain content and practices. We need to provide them a space and an opportunity to do so.

As we consider the aforementioned ideas, I think it is also necessary to grapple with, and have conversations about, how our work of justice, engagement, and humanization maps onto the role(s) played by necessary disruptions in teaching and teacher education. We can do this by understanding that the high-leverage practice of *explaining and modeling content, practices, and strategies* is not limited to work that happens inside of classrooms and schools, and is not limited to the curriculum or content area we teach. It is equally important for us to always remember who we teach (students) and how they teach us about ourselves and our practices. I believe that we can connect this high-leverage practice to events, moments, and situations that have happened and continue to happen in the world—situations that impact all of us, and particularly our children and young adults within and beyond the space of schools. From examinations into events occurring on college campuses to interrogations into ongoing incidences with racial violence occurring against Black and Brown people, our teaching should reflect our commitment to freedom, justice, and equity. Christina and her peers taught me that. #BlackLivesMatter teaches me that. The brave and courageous college students standing up and

protesting for justice teach me that. Thus, my call for necessary disruptions in teaching and teacher education.

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