

Dædalus

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Fall 2024

The Global Quest for Educational Equity

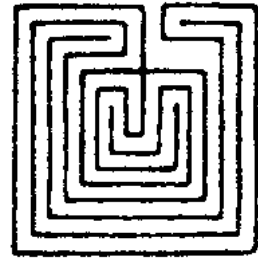


James A. Banks,
guest editor

with Carola Suárez-Orozco
Marcelo Suárez-Orozco · Leo Lucassen
Suzanne Romaine · Sarah Dryden-Peterson
Gloria Ladson-Billings · Özlem Sensoy
Greg Noble · Megan Watkins · Crain Soudien
Audrey Osler · Viola B. Georgi
Fernando M. Reimers · Festus E. Obiakor
Jason Cong Lin · Reva Joshee
Erin Murphy-Graham · Bassel Akar
Angela M. Banks



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Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

“The Global Quest for Educational Equity”

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James A. Banks, Guest Editor

Phyllis S. Bendell, Editor in Chief

Peter Walton, Senior Editor

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Inside front cover: (top) Professor Fernando Reimers talking with a group of students of SEK International School Santa Isabel in Madrid, Spain, March 2024. © by Fernando Reimers.

(bottom) Professor Suzanne Romaine doing field research on the spread and nativization of Tok Pisin (an English-based pidgin) spoken in Papua New Guinea, 1987. Here she is interviewing two young boys sitting outside one of the classrooms of a small community school in a rural area of Madang Province. © by Suzanne Romaine.

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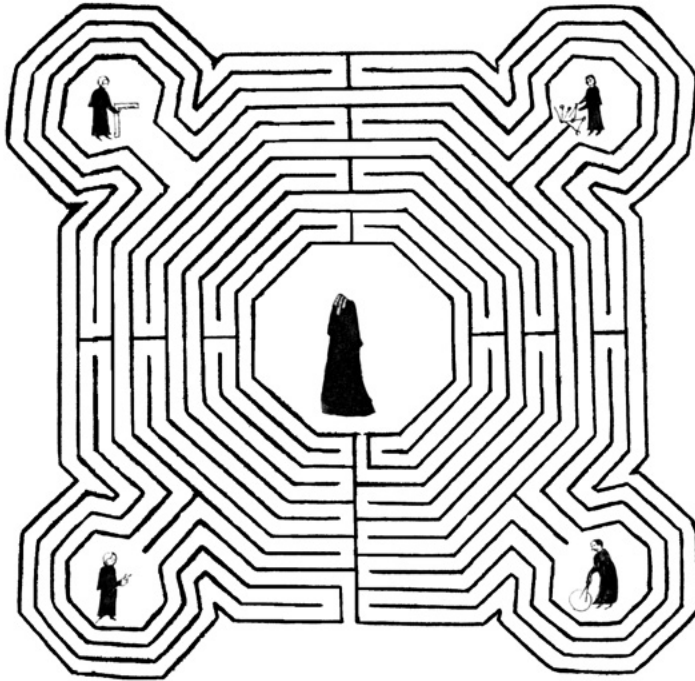
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The pavement labyrinth once in the nave of Reims Cathedral (1240), in a drawing, with figures of the architects, by Jacques Cellier (c. 1550–1620)

Dædalus was founded in 1955 and established as a quarterly in 1958. Its namesake was renowned in ancient Greece as an inventor, scientist, and unriddler of riddles. The journal's emblem, a labyrinth seen from above, symbolizes the aspiration of its founders to "lift each of us above his cell in the labyrinth of learning in order that he may see the entire structure as if from above, where each separate part loses its comfortable separateness."

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Introduction: The Global Quest for Educational Equity

James A. Banks

The number of international migrants living in a country other than their country of birth reached approximately 272 million in 2019, an increase of 51 million since 2010.¹ Children make up half of the more than 36.5 million people who are refugees.² The growth in the number of migrants and refugees worldwide has made it especially challenging for nations to establish state elementary and secondary schools that provide educational equity for diverse groups of students.³ The quests by migrants and other marginalized groups for an education that will prepare them to participate in the nations in which they reside is up against pernicious nationalism that has emerged in many countries, including the United States, England, Hungary, and China. Nationalism has mobilized angry populist groups, stimulated the rise of authoritarianism, targeted migrants and ethnic groups of color, and was among the factors that led to the passage of the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom that resulted in it leaving the European Union.

This issue of *Daedalus* describes theory, research, policies, and practices that scholars in nations around the world are developing and using to increase educational equity for diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, gender, and religious groups of students in elementary and secondary schools. Equity exists when diverse and marginalized students can achieve equally to mainstream pupils in their societies and nation-states. This means that some groups, such as Caribbean-heritage students in the United Kingdom, Aboriginal students in Australia, Indigenous students in Mexico, and refugee students in Germany, will often need distinctive educational interventions to attain the same achievement levels as mainstream students. The essays in this volume describe how interventions such as providing culturally responsive teaching, infusing diverse cultural content into the curriculum, and providing instruction in students' home languages can enable students from diverse groups to attain educational equity.

Because there are few scholars who are experts on both education and diversity in two or more nations and who can therefore make cross-cultural comparisons, this issue of *Daedalus* uses a case-study approach, which allows for in-depth

and multifaced analyses of the complex educational issues that the nations discussed in this volume are experiencing. The nations selected are facing significant challenges educating diverse groups and also have initiated noteworthy reforms. One noteworthy example is China, which Jason Cong Lin discusses in his essay “The Quest for Educational Equity in Schools in Mainland China & Hong Kong.”⁴ China has fifty-five official ethnic minority groups, and the term *migrant group* in mainland China primarily refers to Chinese people who migrate domestically. Migrants from rural regions are denied educational equity when they migrate to cities such as Beijing and Shanghai and cannot access the cities’ high-quality schools, unless they can change their agricultural house registration. Many of these groups are cultural, linguistic, and religious minorities.

The contributors to this volume have diverse disciplinary backgrounds, including in sociology, linguistics, anthropology, psychology, history, legal studies, and education. They are from myriad nations, have diverse ideological perspectives, represent various ethnic, racial, and gender groups, and are at different stages of their academic careers.

The massive waves of migrants and refugees arriving in nations around the world are influencing educational equity and making it difficult to actualize. Schools and teachers in most nations do not have the knowledge, resources, inclinations, and structures to meet the academic needs of migrant and refugee students. As Carola Suárez-Orozco and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco point out in their essay “Globalization, Immigrant-Origin Students & the Quest for Educational Equity,” globalization is a major cause of the vast migrations that are taking place within and across nations.⁵ Environmental disasters, war and terror, and the quest for economic opportunities are among the interrelated and complex factors driving internal and international migrations.

Immigrant and refugee children are significantly diversifying the nations in which they live. Immigrant-origin children are the fastest-growing student population in the United States. Although immigrant youth are enriching their new nations with their languages and cultural traditions, most experience problems in school because of difficulties learning the language of their new nations, negative attitudes toward their home languages and cultures, and stereotypes and misconceptions that are often perpetuated by politicians, the media, and society writ large. In her essay, Angela M. Banks calls these negative attitudes and perceptions immigrant “threat narratives.”⁶ To foster the academic achievement of immigrant youth, Carola Suárez-Orozco and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco recommend an “equitable whole child approach” within a transformative setting, in which immigrant youth will have positive relationships with teachers, with each other, and with other students.⁷ Further, they will also feel valued, and their resiliency, languages, and cultures will be recognized and reinforced.

In his essay “Migrants & Minorities into Citizens: Education & Membership Regimes Since the Early Modern Period,” Leo Lucassen provides a historical overview of how different nations have provided or denied access to education for immigrant and minority groups over five centuries.⁸ Lucassen’s historical analysis reveals that through the centuries, most nations have pursued a nationalist policy of assimilation that did not provide opportunities for students from immigrant and minority groups to learn both their home language and the national language, which Suzanne Romaine calls a “first language–based multilingual approach.”⁹ An extreme example is the experience of the Uyghurs, a Turkic-speaking, predominantly Muslim ethnic group in China who are forced to assimilate linguistically as well as politically, culturally, and religiously.

Lucassen describes how assimilationist nationalism was manifested in various parts of the world after World War II, including in Europe, the Americas, and Oceania. Most of the examples of bilingual education that Lucassen describes were developed by immigrant groups themselves, such as Germans in the United States, who created their own public schools in the 1800s, and Japanese immigrants during the 1920s through the 1930s, who established Japanese schools in Brazil, Peru, and Mexico. These Japanese schools were founded with the support of the national government of Japan.

Nationalist-assimilationist policies in Japan prevented Koreans from being taught their home language in elementary and high schools. France, because of its French-only policy and centralized Republican ideal, prohibited the use of foreign languages in elementary schools. In the 1950s, nations such as England and the Netherlands initiated bilingual education programs for immigrants from their former colonies. Policymakers assumed that these immigrants would eventually return to their homelands. Some of these programs continued through the 1970s and early 1980s.

Students acquiring competency in the national language of their new nations is a major challenge for immigrant and refugee groups, and for schools; it is an important reason these students do not experience educational equity. In her essay “Language Equality & Schooling: Global Challenges & Unmet Promises,” Suzanne Romaine maintains that language is a key factor in student academic success and that most languages are excluded from schools and society writ large. Schools will perpetuate inequalities, Romaine claims, if they continue to rely primarily on international languages for instruction rather than use local vernaculars. Romaine argues strongly that first language–based multilingual education is essential to attain educational equity for students who speak nondominant-community languages.

Learning academic subjects in a language they do not understand, asserts Romaine, poses a double burden on students who are being taught in a language they do not know: they must learn a new language as well as unfamiliar content knowl-

edge. She cites research indicating that the more competent they are in their native language, the easier it is for students to learn a second language.¹⁰

In addition to making a compelling case for teaching students in their first language, Romaine details why there is a need to educate girls in nations around the world. Romaine, as well as Erin Murphy-Graham in her essay, argues that the education of girls is one of the best ways to break the poverty cycles that persist across generations.¹¹

An important consequence of globalization and its effects, including climate change and environmental disasters, wars, and the widening gap between the rich and the poor, is the growing numbers of refugees settling in nations around the world. In her essay “Refugee Education: Aligning Access, Learning & Opportunity,” Sarah Dryden-Peterson describes the education challenges experienced by refugee students.¹² Perhaps contrary to popular beliefs, most refugees live in low- and middle-income nations near their home countries, not in high-income countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, or Germany. The residency of refugees in these nations tends to be long, from ten to twenty-five years. However, most refugees do not become citizens of those nations, and refugee youths are less likely than other children to go to school or to finish their primary education.

Dryden-Peterson argues that it is essential for educators to address the problems and needs of refugee youth and to provide them access to education to actualize educational equity in a global context. She details ways in which their access, learning, and opportunities can be aligned. Dryden-Peterson argues that because high-income nations like the United States and Canada are often the genesis of problems such as environmental destruction and economic exploitation that force refugees to flee their native lands, these nations should assume a greater responsibility for assisting refugees – both in their native countries and in the nations in which they settle.

The United States, Canada, Australia, and South Africa are European settler colonial nations.¹³ They consequently share significant characteristics, including enormous racial, cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity, and the self-image of being an immigrant nation. South Africa is host to more immigrants than any other nation in Africa, most of whom come from neighboring countries. The assimilationist ideology that has dominated in these four and in other Western nations has allowed most white ethnic groups to achieve a substantial degree of cultural and structural assimilation into their societies. However, even when they are highly culturally assimilated, marginalized ethnic and racial groups may still experience significant levels of structural exclusion. The structural exclusion of African Americans led to the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, which echoed throughout the world. It also gave rise to the multicultural education movement, which sought to reform schools, colleges, and universities so that

students from diverse groups will experience educational equity.¹⁴ The pursuit of racial justice in U.S. education soon inspired the development of multicultural education movements in other nations.¹⁵ Canada developed a multicultural education policy in 1971; Australia in 1978.

An important tenet of multicultural education in the United States is that teachers should change their instruction to be responsive to the cultural characteristics of students from diverse racial, ethnic, linguistic, and social-class groups. I refer to this cultural adaptation of instruction as *equity pedagogy*, Geneva Gay calls it *culturally responsive pedagogy*, and Gloria Ladson-Billings describes it as *culturally relevant instruction*. Django Paris has mediated this concept and terms it *culturally sustaining pedagogy*.¹⁶ In her essay “How Pedagogy Makes the Difference in U.S. Schools,” Ladson-Billings describes three components of culturally relevant pedagogy: 1) student learning, 2) cultural competency, and 3) sociopolitical consciousness.¹⁷ Student learning, she maintains, should be broadly conceptualized and not limited to performance on standardized assessment tests. Students demonstrate literacy and knowledge about diverse cultures when they exemplify cultural competency. Sociopolitical or critical consciousness assists students in finding answers to problems in their daily lives.

In 1971, Canada became the first nation to adopt a multiculturalism education policy. Özlem Sensoy, in her essay “Overcoming Historical Factors that Block the Quest for Educational Equity in Canadian Schools,” maintains that Canada’s adoption of the policy reflects its aspiration to be an inclusive multicultural nation.¹⁸ She details historical and contemporary challenges that Canada faces in making this ideal a reality, including a legacy of colonialism, racialized migrant labor that has been and continues to be integral to the nation’s infrastructure, and a national identity comprising institutionalized notions of gentleness and peacefulness. Sensoy argues that the poignant legacy of the Indian boarding schools and the erasure of Indigenous cultures wrought by their harsh discrimination seriously challenge Canada’s self-conception and aspiration to epitomize multiculturalism. Another historical legacy inconsistent with Canada’s notion of multiculturalism, Sensoy maintains, is the eugenics movement, which continues to influence standardized testing and the ability tracking in schools that disproportionately negatively affects students of color. Sensoy ends her essay by describing progress Canada has made to increase educational equity in its schools and the tasks that remain.

In their essay “The Quest for Educational Equity in Schools in Multicultural Australia,” Greg Noble and Megan Watkins provide a comprehensive overview of the historical development and status of multicultural education in Australia.¹⁹ They describe the White Australia Policy enacted in 1901 and ended in 1972, which was designed to limit the immigration of people from non-white nations. Migration to Australia has changed substantially within the last three decades. Most of

the immigrants to Australia today come from India and China, with significant numbers of refugees from Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. The implementation of multicultural education varies greatly in Australia because each state controls its own school system. Consequently, as in other nations, diversity and multicultural education are complex and nuanced in Australia. However, Noble and Watkins describe how its complexity is often masked by celebratory, superficial, and stereotypic teaching and programs about diversity in schools.

Historically, South Africa has had one of the most racially stratified education systems in the world. Crain Soudien, in his essay “The Quest for Educational Equity in Schools in South Africa,” describes the substantial educational reforms that have taken place in South Africa since it became a democracy in 1994, and how race, class, and gender inequalities have significantly decreased.²⁰ Many factors, however, have reduced the scale of reform in South Africa and have deepened its challenges. On many indices, Soudien points out, South Africa is still “the most unequal country in the world.”²¹ The rise of the Black South African middle class has increased social-class inequality within the Black population. Many school and educational opportunities now available to middle-class Blacks are not accessible to Blacks who are poor. Many upper-status schools that were formerly white have become Black because of white flight. Soudien concludes that racial stratification has been replaced by class stratification with racial, cultural, and linguistic markers. He states that a two-tiered system exists, “One for the rich and another for the poor. Schools during apartheid were structured fundamentally in racial and ethnic terms. They are now essentially racial and class projects.”²²

Historically, most nations in Europe have been characterized by ethnic and religious diversity. However, since 1945, many of the Western and Northern nations in Europe, such as the United Kingdom, France, and the Netherlands, have experienced immigration from their former colonies and from less wealthy nations in Southern and Eastern Europe. In her essay “The Long Struggle for Educational Equity in Britain: 1944–2023,” Audrey Osler describes how the highly class-stratified and unequal education system was revealed and challenged when migrants of color from Britain’s colonized nations in the Caribbean region arrived in the 1940s and 1950s.²³ Migrants from Britain’s former colonies in South Asia also arrived during this period. Racist stereotypes, institutionalized racism, discredited theories of intelligence, and draconian policies often resulted in migrant children being placed into nonacademic tracks in school. In 1971, Bernard Coard, a Black author, published the widely read and influential *How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Sub-Normal in the British School System*.²⁴ Osler chronicles policies, legislation, and developments that increased educational equity in Britain since then, but also the challenges that remain, such as ethnic and racial disparities in educational achievement.

The Turkish migrants who began arriving in Germany after 1961 came under a guest worker program designed to enable Germany to meet its labor needs after World War II. Both the migrants and the German government assumed that the Turkish migrants would return home after their work in Germany ended, but many did not. These early Turkish migrants to Germany were the first wave of what would become a large Turkish community in Germany. In her essay “Migration & the Quest for Educational Equity in Germany,” Viola B. Georgi uses “superdiversity” to describe the rich ethnic diversity in Germany today, a term she borrows from Steven Vertovec.²⁵ Fifteen percent of Germany’s population had a foreign nationality in 2022. Germany is now the world’s number two destination for immigrants, after the United States. However, the diversity of the population of Germany is not reflected in the school curriculum because, as Georgi describes, most teachers and administrators do not incorporate diversity into their curricula or teaching strategies. Migrant groups are marginalized in schools and society writ large. Students from migrant families are disproportionately poor, which negatively affects their experience in German schools. Schools in Germany are highly stratified through a system that groups and segregates students based on their educational attainments at an early age. Students of color and students who are Muslim, Sinti, and Roma are especially victimized by the early and rigid academic tracking in German schools. Georgi describes initiatives to increase educational equity in German schools, as well as the structural discrimination and inequalities that continue.

The European colonization of Mexico and Nigeria still casts a long shadow on these nations. Class stratification and income inequality are powerful factors that contribute to persistent educational inequality in both Mexico and Nigeria. In his essay “The Quest for Educational Equity in Mexico,” Fernando M. Reimers describes how the Mexican public education system has taken steps to decrease the high levels of poverty and educational inequality in Mexico.²⁶ Mexico’s constitution provides for a compulsory and free basic and secondary education for all youth. However, there is a wide gap between the provision stated in the constitution and education in practice. Upper-class students are three times more likely to finish upper-secondary school than low-income students. Indigenous students finish upper-secondary school at about half the rate of non-Indigenous students. Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) studies indicate that students in Mexico score lower than students in the other OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) nations. However, the PISA scores of Mexican students are comparable to those of students in other Latin American nations such as Chile, Uruguay, Colombia, Peru, and Argentina. The ministry of education created “Indigenous schools” to help ameliorate the serious language and other educational problems experienced by Indigenous students who live in rural areas. Reimers contends that a mix of system-wide and targeted

efforts implemented at scale for a sufficient period are needed to institutionalize educational equity in Mexico.

In his essay “Multicultural Education in Nigeria,” Festus E. Obiakor notes that most of the problems in Nigeria originated in British colonial rule and domination, whose goal was to “divide and conquer Nigerians.”²⁷ Although he provides a searing critique of British colonialism in Nigeria, Obiakor maintains that after almost sixty-five years of independence, Nigerians must self-reflect and identify domestic issues that cause its persistent poverty, tension among tribal, class, and religious groups, and severe educational inequality. Obiakor details serious problems in Nigeria that require decisive and immediate action by its political and educational leaders: Nigeria has the largest population of youth in the world who are out of school; it is experiencing a serious brain drain because many talented young people migrate to Western and neighboring African nations; and Nigeria is wrestling with pervasive and intractable regional, tribal, and religious conflicts. The educational and structural exclusion of people with disabilities is also a serious problem in Nigeria. Obiakor argues that because Nigeria is the most populous Black nation in the world, it has the potential to serve as a beacon of hope and possibility, attracting Black people from across the African diaspora to migrate there. Obiakor envisions and describes educational reform that can increase educational equity in Nigeria, which includes transforming education by implementing the major components and dimensions of multicultural education.

Cross-cutting themes in the essays about China and Hong Kong and India include deep educational inequality that is rooted in social-class inequality and the denial of full citizenship rights to migrant, marginalized, and refugee groups. In his essay, Jason Cong Lin describes how mainland China and Hong Kong are similar and different in how they try to actualize educational equality. Although both China and Hong Kong have a public commitment to diversity and multiculturalism, each prioritizes Chinese culture, languages, and values. Schools in China are guided by a strong nationalist ideology that promotes its political interests. The push for chauvinistic nationalism has increased since Xi Jinping, who emphasizes unity over diversity, became president in 2012. Because of the elite education system in Hong Kong, private schooling is extensive. Students are sorted into ability groups at an early age, which increases educational inequality, especially for minority students. In both China and Hong Kong, ethnic minorities are frequently stereotyped, and the languages spoken by minorities are often associated with poverty and backwardness in educational materials. In China, when ethnic groups who live in rural areas migrate to cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, they are often denied citizenship status and consequently access to state schools. Cong Lin describes ways in which China and Hong Kong could continue to reform their schools to increase educational equity for marginalized students.

Reva Joshee, in her essay “Educational Equity in Schools in India: Perils & Possibilities,” describes how educational policy in India is defined by the ruling party’s agenda of Hindutva, or Hindu nationalism.²⁸ This policy has led to a re-writing of history that draws upon Hindu knowledge systems and traditions and glorifies a mythological version of the Hindu past. This focus on Hindu nationalism alienates other major groups in India, such as Muslims, Christians, and Dalits, formerly referred to as untouchables or outcastes. Hindu nationalism is especially inconsistent with the linguistic, religious, and social-class characteristics of India, which is the most diverse nation in the world. Hindu nationalism was fundamental to the government’s National Curriculum Framework of 2000. The next framework, issued in 2023, is rooted in Hindu ideals as well as equity, diversity, and pluralism. It continues the Indianization of the curriculum found in the 2000 framework but affirms the importance of diversity. Joshee regrets that secularism, egalitarianism, and social justice are not envisioned in the 2023 framework, and hopes there is a way to return to a “secular and pluralist India.”²⁹

The final essays in this issue of *Dædalus* focus in turn on gender equity, the education of students in conflict-affected nations, and constructing effective civic education for all students. The themes across these essays include structural exclusion, disparities in educational attainment, and the resilience and diligence these students possess, which is frequently neither recognized nor encouraged.

In her essay “From Girls’ Education to Gender-Transformative Education: Lessons from Different Nations,” Erin Murphy-Graham argues compellingly that providing girls access to education is a first step but is not sufficient to actualize gender equity, because gender inequality is deeply embedded in the economic, political, social, and cultural structures of societies and nations.³⁰ Solving the gender gap in education requires deep structural reforms in societies and nations. Significant progress has been made in the last three decades in reducing gender gaps in schooling in nations around the world. More girls are enrolling in secondary schools than ever before. However, major gaps still remain in both primary and secondary schools. While many nations have gender parity in primary schools, sizeable gender gaps exist in primary schools in many low- and middle-income nations located in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. Gender gaps affect boys as well as girls, and many boys in nations around the world experience gender inequality. In 130 countries, boys are more likely than girls to repeat primary grades; they are more likely than girls to lack a secondary education in 73 nations. Girls outnumber and outperform boys in nations in Latin America, North America, Australia, and the United Kingdom. Consequently, it is essential, Murphy-Graham argues, to conceptualize gender equity in ways that consider educational equality for both boys and girls.

Bassel Aker, in his essay “Disrupted Institutional Pathways for Educational Equity in Conflict-Affected Nations,” affirms the promise of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that every child has a right to a free primary education and opportunities for a secondary or vocational education.³¹ He describes the barriers, crises, and political nuances and complexities that often prevent children who live in conflict-affected nations and regions such as Lebanon, Iraqi Kurdistan, and Morocco from attaining access to schools and an equitable education. Students in areas embedded in conflicts and crises often experience physical, emotional, and structural violence in schools. Factors that prevent students from attaining an equitable education include early marriage and pregnancy, paid labor, recruitment into armed groups, or lack of access to schools. Strikes by teachers that resulted in long school closures have also negatively affected the education of youths in conflict-affected nations. These strikes have persisted because authoritarian governing agencies have refused to deal effectively with the grievances of teachers and to provide them with adequate and timely salary payments. The settlement of refugees in conflict-affected nations has reduced their ability to provide an equitable education for all students. The arrival of Syrian refugees in Lebanon has resulted in it having the highest numbers of refugees per capita in the world.

In the essay that closes this volume, “Constructing Effective Civic Education for Noncitizen Students,” Angela M. Banks, using the United States and Malaysia as case studies, explains why it is essential for nations to provide access to schools and a robust and effective civic education for all youth, including unauthorized migrant students.³² Banks compares civic education for unauthorized migrant youth in the United States and Malaysia because they have parallel problems but different policies regarding school access. Banks maintains that unauthorized migrant children need access to schools and citizenship education because many of them are (or will become) long-term residents of the nations in which they live and because they view themselves as integral members of their resident nations. Schooling and civic education will enable them to become more effective and productive members of these nations. Malaysia and the United States, Banks argues, both have “an immigrant labor paradox” because they rely on immigrant labor for economic growth yet view foreign laborers as a political threat to their societies’ immigrant threat narratives, which have contributed to limited access to school for immigrant children.³³ Banks describes why schools in Malaysia and the United States should implement a transformative and social action approach to civic education for all students, including unauthorized immigrant youth.

The essays in this volume explore several themes and concepts related to the quest for educational equity across nations. I will highlight six. Social class and income inequality is one of the most cogent explanations for why many students from marginalized racial, ethnic, and cultural groups do not

attain a high-quality education or experience educational equity. Students with low socioeconomic status, such as African Americans in the United States, Indigenous groups in Mexico, Turkish students in Germany, and children of Caribbean heritage in the United Kingdom, are often placed in nonacademic tracks at an early age. This practice reinforces and perpetuates stereotypes and negative attitudes that teachers may hold about these students. The immigrant threat narratives that exist in immigrant-receiving nations contribute to the negative experience immigrant students have in school, as Banks as well as Carola Suárez-Orozco and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco describe in their essays.

Culturally responsive pedagogy has been implemented in schools in some nations, and especially in the United States. This pedagogical approach enables teachers to develop the knowledge and skills to create and implement teaching strategies consistent with the home and community cultures of students from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups. The developing research on culturally responsive pedagogy indicates that it can increase the academic achievement and social development of students who are marginalized in school.³⁴

When culturally responsive teaching is paired with second-language teaching, which uses children's first language in initial instruction, children who come to school not speaking the national language achieve more. In her essay, Romaine cites research indicating that children can master a second language much more effectively when they first become adept in their home language.³⁵ They can also better master content knowledge if they are not required simultaneously to learn a second language.

The essays also describe how the strong push for assimilationism and chauvinist nationalism is influencing the education of diverse racial, ethnic, migrant, and refugee groups across nations. In Canada and the United Kingdom, this push for nationalism is called "social cohesion."³⁶ In the United States, it has resulted in conservative groups inaccurately labeling teaching about race and diversity as the teaching of "critical race theory."³⁷ In China, schools are required to promote strong nationalist ideology and policies. In Lebanon, which has eighteen official religious groups and numerous political parties, the government requires schools to become a vehicle for social cohesion.³⁸ The rise of nationalism, assimilation, and authoritarianism is threatening democracy in many nations, including in the United States, as indicated by the attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, that sought to deny the results of the 2020 presidential election. Democracies are fragile and require continual renewal to survive.³⁹

Another theme across this issue of *Dædalus* is gender inequality and its complicated and nuanced characteristics. Girls in low-income developing nations in Africa and Latin America continue to experience significant inequality. However, the academic achievement of girls often exceeds those of boys in high-income nations such as the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom.

Finally, most of the essays in this issue of *Dædalus* describe the detrimental and enduring effects of COVID-19 on the academic achievement of students. The pandemic has negatively influenced the education of low-income students more than middle- and upper-class students for many different reasons, including insufficient internet access for low-income students, as well as family obligations and responsibilities that many of them had to take on because their parents were absent during the day. In her essay, Ladson-Billings argues that the effects of COVID-19 provide educators an opportunity to envision education and to construct transformative approaches to teaching. What we have learned from COVID-19, she argues, can provide educators with new ways to envision and construct reforms that make schools more democratic and just, especially for marginalized ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups.

I hope this issue of *Dædalus* will be used by academics, researchers, administrators, and curriculum leaders to foster discussions about policies and practices used around the world to provide educational equity at the elementary and secondary school levels for students from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, gender, and religious groups. Migrants, refugees, and other marginalized groups of students are voicing and demonstrating the need for an education that enables them to maintain aspects of their cultures and languages while acquiring the knowledge, skills, and values needed to fully participate in the mainstream culture of their nation-state. Educators around the world are searching for policies, practices, and guidance that will enable them to respond effectively and equitably to the educational needs of an increasingly diverse student population. My hope is that this collection offers a place to start.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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Globalization, Immigrant-Origin Students & the Quest for Educational Equity

Carola Suárez-Orozco & Marcelo Suárez-Orozco

Globalization has come to define the modern world. Originally venerated as a force that would bring humanity to the peak of its flourishing through economic integration and positive cross-cultural exchange, globalization has deepened economic inequities, driven the dangerous degradation of the environment, and destabilized regions over fights for resources. Migration, a natural response to this precarity, has swelled, making the children of immigrants a growing, key demographic in schools across many high- and middle-income countries. The resilience, flexible thinking, and multilingualism of immigrant-origin students make them valuable community members in our globalized world. However, their schools are not always equipped to meet their psychosocial needs. While the current primary focus on language acquisition is an important foundation for supporting these students, an equitable whole-child approach is necessary to address their unique challenges and create an environment in which they can flourish.

Globalization defines an ever more interconnected, miniaturized, and fragile world. It flows from the growing movement of peoples, goods, services, and social practices among countries and regions. Migration is the human face of globalization; it is the sounds, colors, and aromas enveloping major cities today. For the first time in history, all continents are involved in the massive movement of people: as areas of immigration, emigration, transit, and return – and often as all four at once.

Over the last four decades, new information-communication and media technologies, the integration and disintegration of markets, and the movement of people globally have transformed countries and continents the world over. Globalization's three Ms – markets, media, and migration – are the synergetic vectors of change shaping and reshaping the economy and society. New communication and media technologies have enabled the de-territorialization of labor, and, concurrently, the increasing global coordination of markets has stimulated significant new waves of migrant labor – internal and international. Immigrants, in

turn, spur further globalization. As migration scholars David Leblang and Margaret E. Peters write, “migrants are an engine of globalization, especially for countries in the Global South. Migration and migrant networks serve to expand economic markets, distribute information across national borders, and diffuse democratic norms and practices throughout the world, increasing trade and investment flows.”¹ In our research, we have argued that globalization’s new economies, technologies, and demographic changes are significant challenges for education systems the world over. In this essay, we focus on the human face of globalization by examining the journeys of immigrants and their children and the quest for educational equity.

To contextualize these journeys, we must first trace the current arc of globalization over the last four decades: from its initial triumphalist exuberance to the current age of global fragility. In its most recent wave, globalization’s promise rested on the claim that economic integration among nations would bring about unprecedented benefits for both individuals and societies. Its advocates argued that the free market would accelerate the flow of goods, services, and capital across borders, encouraging specialization, competition, and economic growth. The global exchange of ideas, knowledge, and technology across nations would foster innovation and facilitate cultural understanding and interactions among people from different backgrounds. Actors in the emerging global stage would learn about and come to appreciate diverse cultures, traditions, and perspectives. Cross-cultural understandings would promote tolerance, empathy, and mutual respect. In its utopic form, globalization would promote peace and geopolitical stability by fostering socioeconomic interdependence among nations.² Economically connected countries would have a vested interest in maintaining peaceful relations. In sum, globalization would boost wealth creation and further human flourishing by increasing economic and sociocultural exchanges, expanding markets, and creating new opportunities.

By the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century, a “triumphalist globalization” had captured the imagination of its advocates. We saw the dawn of an era of neoliberal euphoria, with the deification of the free market and a deep suspicion and even outright rejection of market controls and regulations paving the way to the “hyperglobalist path.”³ A devotion to the supremacy of the market economy over all other possible arrangements for economic prosperity saw its purest form in the so-called Washington consensus: exuberantly embracing unfettered trade, floating exchange rates, and free markets. At their most inebriated moment, globalization’s viziers saw “the end of history,” when late capitalism at the turn of the century came to represent the summit of all possible human arrangements in the pursuit of wealth, human flourishing, and eudaemonia.⁴

Globalization has had its benefits, but also some unequivocal and entirely negative consequences.⁵ First, globalization’s outsized benefits have gone mostly to

the wealthy and to multinational corporations. Second, globalization has created new unsustainable levels of income and wealth inequality both within and between nations.⁶ Third, high-income countries saw significant job losses in sectors that could not compete with cheaper overseas labor as entire industries and manufacturing sectors disappeared, migrating to countries with lower labor costs, lax regulations, and weak workers' rights. Fourth, globalization has contributed to economic instability, as interconnected markets came to amplify financial crises and contagion.⁷ Fifth, the dominance of globalized media, the ascendancy of consumerism, and the spread of Western ideologies came to erode cultural traditions, challenge local values, and degrade local identities.⁸ Globalization puts traditional societies on a pathway for what sociologist Anthony Giddens has termed detraditionalization. He claims that "tradition provides a framework for action that can go largely unquestioned. . . . Tradition gives stability, and the ability to construct a self-identity against a stable background."⁹ Globalization, however, erodes norms "as local cultures and traditions are exposed to new cultures and ideas, which often means that traditional ways of acting come to be questioned. As a result of globalization, societies and cultures go through a process of detraditionalization, where day-to-day life becomes less and less informed by tradition."¹⁰ Sixth, globalization stimulated increased resource consumption, leading to pollution and environmental degradation. The devouring of natural resources, the destruction of ancient forests, and the loss of biodiversity have accelerated over the last four decades of globalization.¹¹ Transporting goods over long distances contributes to carbon emissions, while lax regulations in some countries have led to environmentally harmful practices.¹² The global competition for precious minerals, metals, and other resources has fueled war and terror.¹³ These challenges are accelerating forced migrations and displacement, as families are compelled to leave their homes due to environmental disasters, war and terror, conflicts, and lack of economic opportunities.¹⁴

Moreover, by 2020, globalization delivered with stunning momentum the COVID-19 virus from one corner of China to the entire world. Thus, in two generations – roughly from the mid-1980s to the 2020s – the arc of globalization has gone from triumphalist exuberance to the age of global fragility. Economist Danni Rodrik sums up globalization's wrong turn:

Globalization is in trouble. A populist backlash, personified by U.S. President Donald Trump, is in full swing. A simmering trade war between China and the United States could easily boil over. Countries across Europe are shutting their borders to immigrants. Even globalization's biggest boosters now concede that it has produced lopsided benefits and that something will have to change. Today's woes have their roots in the 1990s, when policymakers set the world on its current, hyperglobalist path, requiring domestic economies to be put in the service of the world economy instead of

the other way around. In trade, the transformation was signaled by the creation of the World Trade Organization in 1995. The WTO not only made it harder for countries to shield themselves from international competition but also reached into policy areas that international trade rules had not previously touched: agriculture, services, intellectual property, industrial policy, and health and sanitary regulations.¹⁵

The rise of the globalization regime ushered in the ascendancy of migration on a planetary scale. International migration grew significantly since the turn of the millennium, reaching 281 million in 2022 after a previous high of 220 million in 2010 and 175 million in 2000. The largest international migration corridors are in Asia, Europe, and the Americas. By the 2020s, the largest number of international migrants (well over fifty million) resided in the United States of America, followed by Germany (approximately sixteen million), Saudi Arabia (almost fourteen million), the Russian Federation (approximately twelve million), and the United Kingdom of Great Britain, Wales, and Northern Ireland (over nine million). India is the largest country of origin of international migrants (with approximately eighteen million emigrants), followed by Mexico (twelve million). Today, women make up slightly less than half of all international migrants.¹⁶

Global migration has generated pushback. Claims against the new immigrants have centered on job displacement, social integration, cultural assimilation, crime and national security, and the strain on public resources and services needed for new immigrants and their children. As the great migration of the global era saw large numbers of migrants from Latin America, Asia, and Africa – the vast majority being people of color – old atavistic fears took hold in the countries most affected by migration. Racist animus fueled by nativistic and supremacist politicians has propagated, exemplified by Donald Trump with like-minded politicians in Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Hungary, Italy, Poland and elsewhere. The United Kingdom exited the European Union, so-called Brexit, largely on an anti-immigrant platform. Thus, far from inaugurating an era of cultural understanding and *convivencia*, globalization came to ignite new fears and prejudices.

While the enormous potential of human capital and intercultural exchanges reflects the exuberance of globalization, the friction of anti-immigrant animus and deepening inequities reflect its underbelly. Globally, in nearly all high-income countries, immigration has become a significant focus of media, political, and policy debates, though the children of immigration are rarely part of this conversation. As the labor migration of yesteryear begat new patterns of family reunification and as immigrants formed families in their new land, students of immigrant origin have rapidly changed the makeup of schools across many countries. Thus, within the school walls, the dynamics of the twin tensions of globalization play out daily.

Who are our immigrant-origin students?¹⁷ They include both first-generation and second-generation youth. (The first generation are foreign-born, and the second generation are youth with at least one parent who is foreign-born.) Both groups have immigrant parents who were motivated to migrate for a variety of reasons.¹⁸ Migration, although sometimes driven by individual choices, is often influenced by socioeconomic, historical, and political factors, as well as networks of relationships between sending and receiving countries, particularly when it occurs on a large scale across borders. Notably, the decision to migrate is never the child's – though children must navigate their development within a disoriented family in a new land.

In the United States, immigrant-origin children make up the fastest-growing student population: 26 percent of all children and one-third of young adults have at least one immigrant parent.¹⁹ While it is difficult to establish precisely comparable percentages in other immigrant-receiving nations, a good proxy can be drawn from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA collects data on fifteen-year-olds from OECD nations and enumerates “immigrant background” (having a parent born in a country other than where the PISA test was taken) among its demographic variables. In 2022, across the eighty-one OECD nations, the share of fifteen-year-old students with an immigrant background averaged 13 percent. In twenty-one OECD countries, the share of immigrant students was higher than 15 percent, and in eleven countries, it was higher than 25 percent. In Germany, 35 percent of fifteen-year-olds were classified as having an immigrant background. Similarly, 20 percent of fifteen-year-olds in the United Kingdom and 29 percent in Australia were classified as having an immigrant background.²⁰ As such, immigrant-origin children and youth are now, and will continue to be, a diverse and demographically important segment of many high-income nations' populations.

Immigrants and their children are contributing to the rapid racial and ethnic diversification of the high-income countries they call home.²¹ Over the last half-century in the United States, the influx of immigrants from Asia and Latin America has significantly transformed the country's demographic profile. Similarly, in Europe, substantial immigration from Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe has led to increased racial and ethnic diversity. Australia has experienced substantial immigration from Asia, particularly China, India, and the Philippines, leading to its racial diversification. Canada has as well.

Immigrants also contribute to the cultural diversification of their societies.²² Immigrants bring their native languages to their adopted countries; in the United States, there are now an estimated 350 languages spoken in homes across the country, many brought by immigrants and maintained through familial and community ties.²³ Immigrants are also breathing new religiosity into their communities. In North America and Europe, immigrants are contributing to a significant growth in religious pluralism, with surges in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam oc-

curing in societies that had previously been both predominantly Judeo-Christian and increasingly secular.²⁴

Children in immigrant families come with a diverse range of skills and resources, and their experiences differ significantly based on the specific combination of these resources and their contexts of reception.²⁵ Some are refugees (or asylum seekers) escaping political, religious, and social strife or environmental catastrophes. Others are motivated by the promise of better jobs, while still others frame their migration as an opportunity to provide better education for their children. Most are documented migrants, though millions are undocumented. Some join well-established communities with robust social supports, others settle in under-resourced high-poverty neighborhoods, and still others move from one migrant setting to another. Some receive excellent schooling in their countries of origin, while others leave educational systems that are in shambles. Some are the children of educated professionals, others have illiterate parents.

Both first- and second-generation students share the experience of having immigrant parents and are less likely than nonimmigrant students to speak the language of the new country at home or share the cultural practices taken for granted in schools. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that the first and second generations face distinct experiences.²⁶ The first generation makes the transition to the new land within their own lifetime. Depending upon their age of arrival, navigating the losses of relationships, memories, and linguistic and cultural ties to their sending country and adjusting to their host society are among their personal challenges. For the first generation, key challenges often include adapting to a new culture and overcoming the traumas related to migration, particularly for refugees and asylum seekers. In contrast, the second generation more commonly faces the challenge of developing a complex ethnic-racial identity. For the second generation, the attachments to the sending country may be more abstract and are often filtered through parental/caregiver narratives.

Notably, “contexts of reception” (as coined by sociologists Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut) play an important role in adaptation and integration. Contexts of reception encompass the social policies, prevailing societal attitudes, and economic conditions in the host country.²⁷ When these contexts are welcoming and inclusive, offering equitable access to resources and opportunities, immigrant youth are more likely to experience positive adaptation (including academic success, robust identity formation, and social integration). Conversely, if the contexts are characterized by hostility, discrimination, and structural barriers, the adaptation process can be adversely affected, leading to marginalization, identity struggles, and socioeconomic challenges. These contexts not only influence immediate adaptation, but also have long-term implications on the life trajectories of the immigrant-origin youth, ultimately affecting their ability to contribute to and participate in their new societies.

Despite these diversities of cultural origins, circumstances for migration, and contexts of reception, there is an array of shared experiences that can influence immigrant-origin students' educational trajectories across contexts. In the face of adversity, immigrant-origin students demonstrate a repertoire of strengths and resiliencies that are often underrecognized. Key among these attributes is the embodiment of immigrant family – the enduring belief in a future that surpasses present circumstances – that emerges as a driving force in their pursuit of education and better life outcomes.²⁸ This disposition is further enhanced by immigrants' dual frame of reference – endowing them with the perspective to make sense of experiences in the context of both their countries of origin and their adopted countries – fueling flexibility and positive attitudes toward education.²⁹

The robust ethic of familial support common in immigrant communities is the core of multiple strengths. This familial emphasis engenders a culture of shared responsibility and collective ambition, forming a vital pillar of resilience in the face of adversity.³⁰ Families provide emotional support and facilitate community connections that help children navigate the stresses associated with adjusting to their new cultural environments. Moreover, immigrant families often nurture high educational aspirations in their children.³¹ Last, well-maintained home languages and traditions provide a sense of cultural continuity and identity coherence that can buffer against acculturative stress.³² And multilingual capabilities, far from being a deficit, are a considerable advantage for both the immigrant-origin students themselves and their larger communities within today's interconnected world of commerce and industry.³³ Their ability to navigate multiple languages cultivates cognitive flexibility, fosters empathy, and facilitates cross-cultural communication – attributes that contribute significantly to resilience. In short, fortified by hope, dual perspectives, a familial ethic of care, and multilingualism, immigrant-origin students display personal and familial resiliencies that serve to partially inoculate them to the tremendous challenges they too often encounter in their educational journeys.

Understanding the challenges that immigrant-origin students face is vital for developing effective strategies to support their educational transitions and success. Most first-generation students confront initial challenges related to language acquisition as they enter the K–12 educational system. These challenges can significantly impact self-confidence, accurate educational assessments, and academic pathways.³⁴ Educational systems tend to prioritize funding for interventions around teaching the academic language of instruction to newcomers and students who are nonnative speakers. And newcomer students typically report being preoccupied with learning the language of their new land.³⁵ While students often quickly learn what language-development scholar Jim Cummins has termed “basic interpersonal communication skills,” it takes many more years to achieve

what he calls “cognitive academic language proficiency” comparable to that of native-born peers.³⁶ Complicating matters, these students frequently struggle to access quality second-language programs due to underresourced schools and a dearth of adequately trained or supported educators.³⁷ Standardized assessments, typically developed and normed for native-born speakers, pose additional challenges for these students; scores may not accurately reflect their academic understanding or skills, resulting in inappropriate instructional planning, misplacements, and gatekeeping.³⁸ Further, the stress and stigma associated with the prolonged new academic language acquisition process can undermine self-esteem, motivation, and school engagement.³⁹

First-generation immigrant students with limited or interrupted formal education constitute a growing segment of students in host language programs of instruction. Interruptions in schooling may occur for a variety of reasons, including displacements due to conflict or natural disasters, as well as complications in the migration journey; in some cases, students may have missed a few years, and in others, they may have never attended formal schooling at all.⁴⁰ These interruptions pose substantial challenges to educational adjustment, attainment, and performance, often resulting in lower grades, increased risk of dropping out, and reduced likelihood of pursuing higher education.⁴¹ Additionally, interrupted schooling can exacerbate acculturative stress by making it more challenging for youth to adapt to new educational systems and norms, potentially leading to feelings of isolation and hindering social integration.⁴² These educational interruptions may also compound existing mental health vulnerabilities.⁴³

Immigrant-origin children – especially first generation and, within that group, asylum seekers, refugees, and unaccompanied youth – often experience traumatic events before, during, and after their migrations. Prior to migration, they may experience violence, war, persecution, or severe poverty in their home countries.⁴⁴ During the migratory journey, they may encounter life-threatening situations, physical and emotional abuse, or separation from family members. After arrival, these children may confront further challenges, such as acculturative stress, discrimination, and difficulties adjusting to a new educational system, language, and culture.⁴⁵ Additionally, these traumatic experiences may be compounded by the challenges of navigating complex immigration systems and potential legal insecurities flowing from their status.⁴⁶ These multifaceted traumas can have profound impacts on the well-being and educational adjustment of immigrant-origin children. Further, while second-generation children may not experience firsthand immigration-related trauma, they – like first-generation children – may experience the effects of intergenerational trauma given the extreme stresses and anguish their parents and caregivers endured.⁴⁷

Many first-generation students are separated from their parents and caregivers as part of the migratory experience, posing significant socioemotional and

adaptive challenges. From a psychological perspective, separations can cause significant distress, anxiety, and depression, which may impede a child's cognitive and socioemotional development.⁴⁸ These emotional disturbances can negatively impact academic performance, concentration, and school attendance.⁴⁹ The absence of parents or primary caregivers can also disrupt the child's access to essential resources such as tutoring, emotional support, and help with navigating educational systems, thereby further complicating the educational adjustment.⁵⁰

Undocumented students and students in mixed-status families face unique and substantial challenges that impact their academic progress and psychological well-being.⁵¹ These include fear of deportation and associated family separations, discrimination, limited access to resources, and financial constraints. Additionally, they are confronted with virulent xenophobia, often resulting in a sense of marginalization and social exclusion.⁵² Access to resources is likewise constrained due to their (personal or familial) legal status, and they may lack opportunities for financial aid, limiting their possibilities for higher education and career development.⁵³

For immigrant-origin students in the K–12 system, the educational system in the United States is fraught with systemic and contextual challenges. Racial and economic segregation continue to plague our school systems, leading to highly uneven learning opportunities.⁵⁴ Many schools remain largely unprepared to effectively serve the unique needs of these students, particularly in terms of addressing their socioemotional needs.⁵⁵ The educational sector's narrow focus on language acquisition – often driven by funding streams, data collection, and teacher education programs – may overlook crucial elements of the student experience, such as social-emotional learning and trauma-informed care.⁵⁶

Additionally, many teacher education programs lack robust training about immigrant-origin children or immigration issues, causing a disconnect between the principles of culturally sustaining pedagogy and actual instructional practices.⁵⁷ This can result in educators who are ill-equipped to understand, respond to, or support the complex cultural, linguistic, and socioemotional needs of their immigrant-origin students.⁵⁸

Moreover, the absence of comprehensive and disaggregated data collection in school climate assessments – by factors such as generation, race/ethnicity, language, and religion – limits the ability to understand and address the varied experiences of immigrant-origin students in diverse classrooms.⁵⁹ This is further complicated by an increasingly hostile sociopolitical climate toward immigration, marked by some states turning away from diversity, equity, and inclusion lenses in education.⁶⁰

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these contexts of reception and the vulnerabilities of international migrants.⁶¹ New data suggest that COVID-19 ac-

celerated cascading anti-immigrant sentiments, making migrants vulnerable to hate crimes and social exclusion. Millions of Asian immigrants became targets of xenophobic violence and denigration as the former president of the United States and others framed the COVID-19 pandemic using vulgar terms like “the Chinese virus” and “kung flu.” According to FBI data, U.S. hate crimes against Asian Americans rose about 76 percent in 2020 amid the pandemic.⁶²

Following the emergency phase of the pandemic, job-related stresses posed a distinct threat: a thin supply of teachers, especially among faculty of color.⁶³ Further, exceptionally high learning losses were reported in school districts serving immigrant-origin students and students of color.⁶⁴ This situation has made it even more difficult for immigrant-origin children to access equitable education and achieve academic success.

However, the educational challenges that immigrant-origin students face are not unique to the United States. Similar concerns permeate school systems in other post-industrial countries. In Canada, for instance, schools often struggle to adequately meet the diverse linguistic and cultural needs of students, despite the country’s long-standing commitment to multiculturalism and inclusion.⁶⁵ Similarly, in Germany, Sweden, and Australia, a strong focus on language acquisition can overshadow the broader social-emotional needs of students; teacher education programs rarely include training about immigration-related issues or culturally responsive pedagogy, nor are trauma-informed care supports provided.⁶⁶ The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified these preexisting disparities across these nations as well, often resulting in higher learning losses among immigrant-origin students and students of color than their white/nonimmigrant peers.⁶⁷ Moreover, much like the United States, these countries have faced a sociopolitical climate increasingly hostile to immigration, which further complicates the educational experiences of immigrant-origin students.⁶⁸

As such, immigrant-origin children globally face a strong undertow. Given the high proportions of students of immigrant origin, providing them with adequate and equitable educational opportunities is not simply ethical and just, but also an economic and societal imperative. Without a sharp educational focus, immigrant-origin students are more likely to experience academic underachievement, higher dropout rates, and a decreased likelihood of pursuing higher education, as well as miss opportunities for higher remuneration in the labor market.⁶⁹ As education is a significant driver of socioeconomic mobility, immigrant-origin students who do not receive equitable educational opportunities are at a higher risk of experiencing long-term economic disadvantages.⁷⁰ This not only affects each individual’s economic mobility but also impacts the broader society by underdeveloping the potential contributions of all its members. Because immigrant-origin students are a significant and growing part of the future workforce, underinvesting in their education will lead to a less skilled workforce, with wide-reaching implications for

the economic competitiveness and innovation potential of society. Last, as many countries face aging populations, immigrant-origin students represent an important demographic critical for sustaining economic growth; failing to invest in their education is a missed opportunity to address these challenges.⁷¹

Beyond economic arguments, there are socioemotional and social cohesion arguments for providing equitable, welcoming, and inclusive education to immigrant-origin students. When students do not see their cultural backgrounds represented and valued in their education, it can impact their self-esteem and sense of belonging, leading to alienation and identity conflicts.⁷² If inadequately supported, immigrant-origin students may struggle to integrate fully into society, with potential implications for broader social divisions and a lack of social cohesion. Conversely, providing these supports has the potential to lead not just to higher levels of personal well-being, but also to greater intercultural understanding.⁷³

How, then, should host societies shoulder their responsibility in the quest to provide equitable educational opportunities for their youngest members? What educational policies and practices across postindustrial nations are required to better serve this significant and growing sector of the student population? Most data, practice, and funding for immigrant-origin students in education have focused on the domain of language learning.⁷⁴ While language acquisition is clearly linked to both cognitive and academic development, a narrow focus on language development has tended to neglect many of the other critical domains of a whole-child approach.⁷⁵

A whole-child approach is child-centered and considers several domains of child development. These include the classic foci of schooling: the *academic* (attainment of core literacy, math, science, and social science skills and knowledge) and *cognitive* (related to attention, perception, and memory) domains. However, the whole-child approach also encompasses the *mental* (a state of well-being to cope with the stresses of life and attain potential), *social-emotional* (skills and mindsets related to self-regulation, stress management, social interactions, and resilience), and *physical* (such as wellness, nutrition, and sleep) domains. Last, it recognizes the central role of *identity* (including personal, cultural, racial, and ethnic identities) and *belonging*. Each of these domains of development are interrelated and must be addressed for children to thrive.⁷⁶

A guiding principle of an *equitable whole-child approach* specifies providing care within *transformative settings*.⁷⁷ Such settings begin with a focus on developing positive relationships between educators and students, between students, and between educators and caregivers. This is essential to establish a safe class and school setting where all students from every cultural, ethnic, and racial background feel like they belong. Learning experiences necessarily should be rich, meaningful, engaging, and inquiry and problem-solving based; students should see themselves

reflected in the curriculum while learning perspectives across cultures and history.⁷⁸ As neuroscience now makes clear, however, academic development does not stand alone. As such, schools should incorporate both structures and practices that support students in the social-emotional learning of habits, skills, mindsets around self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-calming; task planning and implementation; perspective and empathy taking; and positive interpersonal relations and conflict resolution.⁷⁹

A transformative whole child-oriented setting that aims to provide equitable care and educational services begins with supports provided in a *tiered manner*.⁸⁰ Tier 1 – Universal Supports are provided across all classrooms to all students, prioritizing relationships, a climate of cultural safety and belonging, and enriched learning environments, while incorporating social-emotional skills. Tier 2 – Integrated Supplemental Supports are provided as extra supports are needed, including, for example, tutoring, after-school programs, counseling, and social work supports. Tier 3 – Intensive Personalized Supports should be provided on a timely basis for students identified with greater needs, including special education services, health and mental health services, and family assistance, among others. This is good practice for all students.

Various structural practices have value for immigrant-origin students at the school level.⁸¹ One such practice involves extending opportunities for learning across both the school day and the school year – allowing students to catch up following interrupted learning and family and work responsibilities. Community partnerships also have the potential to extend the reach of schools in dramatic ways, as community members and organizations are often trusted by caregivers and can provide services that schools are simply unable to deliver.⁸² Advisory periods are integral to establishing a community of relationships in which students and educators can connect in essential ways. Further, educators must be provided with ample professional development and coaching to be equipped to give necessary support to their students.

Long-standing research and practice have established many productive instructional approaches essential for immigrant-origin students to reach their potential. For example, for students to learn optimally, they should be allowed to use their own home language(s) as well as the language of instruction as they engage in learning – a practice known as *translanguaging*.⁸³ Students should be grouped together in purposeful ways – either heterogeneously or homogeneously – depending on the task, as intentional grouping can provide students with peer support and help ensure students are working within their zone of proximal development.⁸⁴ Principles of universal design for learning provide flexible options and differentiated instruction to ensure greater access to learning across a range of learners. Students with limited or interrupted formal instruction need extra support to make up for gaps in classroom experience. Such support can include additional in-

struction and an intentional focus on literacy, providing differentiation and scaffolding for language and content learning. Last, checking for understanding and attainment of learning goals should occur throughout the year. It should be incorporated holistically across all domains of development using various strategies, including portfolios (a collection of student work that demonstrates their efforts, progress, and achievements across various areas of the curriculum over time).

The quality of the school climate has implications for school belonging, academic achievement, and healthy developmental outcomes.⁸⁵ Evidence, however, suggests that students from marginalized immigrant backgrounds experience worse school climates than their white and more privileged peers, reporting more bullying, less interpersonal safety, and less connection with their teachers.⁸⁶

Further, xenophobic and exclusionary attitudes and policies have increased over the past decade and have trickled into school settings.⁸⁷ To better promote healthy school climates for all students, we must begin by accurately understanding how students are experiencing their schools. Thus, schools should comprehensively assess school climates by intentionally soliciting perspectives directly from all students, including their students of immigrant origin. This process should seek to understand the role of students' distinct social identities in shaping their school experience through both close- and open-ended response options. This should include a careful examination and response to reports of bullying and discrimination, recognizing that students, faculty, and staff all can act as bullies. The quality of interpersonal relationships is fundamental for the school climate. Positive student-teacher and peer relationships are protective buffers that promote a positive school climate and must be intentionally cultivated. Thus, establishing school and class norms that include intergroup respect and antibullying, as well as advisory groups, may enhance relationships.⁸⁸

A whole-child approach attends to well-being and social-emotional development for all students to reach their potential. This is especially essential for immigrant-origin students, given that immigration involves managing losses of relationships and family separations, negotiating acculturation and hybrid identities, and forging pathways to belonging, among many other complex facets.

Many immigrants have experienced a variety of traumas. A trauma-informed lens of practice attending to social, emotional, and mental health domains is essential for learning and thriving.⁸⁹ A whole-student approach takes a resilience- and asset-based perspective and a trauma-informed approach while explicitly providing instruction around transformative social-emotional skill supports.⁹⁰ It also requires centering culturally responsive learning communities where students see themselves reflected in the curriculum and where they see that their caregivers are welcomed and respected.⁹¹

As a last recommendation, we focus on teacher preparation programs. A foundational premise of culturally responsive and culturally sustaining practice is a

baseline understanding of the experiences and assets of the students and families being served.⁹² However, there is a large gap between most educational preparation programs and the realities of the lives of immigrant students attending schools across high-income countries. In 2002, teacher education scholar A. Lin Goodwin scanned the research literature to examine how teacher preparation addressed immigrant children.⁹³ She identified a significant gap beyond addressing second-language acquisition. Fifteen years later, she reexamined the field to consider whether educators were better “prepared to work with immigrant children.”⁹⁴ Lamentably, she found minimal progress. We wholeheartedly concur with education policy researcher Carolyn Sattin-Bajaj and colleagues’ call to action: “It is time for teacher education to realize its mandate to prepare teachers for the students of today and tomorrow, and this means embracing the centrality of immigration in a growing share of students’, families’ and, increasingly, in educators’ lives.”⁹⁵

Immigrant-origin children face considerable challenges as they navigate complex currents in new countries, particularly during their transitions. At the same time, it is essential to acknowledge, appreciate, and build upon newcomers’ resilience, hope, and work ethic. Concurrently, we must endeavor to lessen and reverse the powerful undertow of xenophobic disparagement threatening to drown the children of immigrants and refugees in anomic withdrawal from the new society. Unless we do, we risk them never reaching their potential, sinking into despair, or being driven to the underground economy or long-distance nationalism. Providing the kinds of ecologies of care outlined above will go a long way toward helping these children and youth thrive and become contributing members to their new global societies, serving our collective future well.⁹⁶

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Migrants & Minorities into Citizens: Education & Membership Regimes Since the Early Modern Period

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Schools are one of the institutions that determine the possibilities to participate in society. Therefore, access to education is crucial to the settlement process of immigrants, minorities, and their offspring. Newcomers who join a community have always faced different membership regimes, long before the emergence of the nation-state in the nineteenth century. Such regimes determine whether, to what extent, and under what conditions children of migrants and minorities have access to schools. They also determine whether schools are segregated along religious, racial, or socio-economic lines. These conditions are not limited to international migrants, but may also apply to internal migrants, such as low-income Chinese people who have moved from the countryside to large cities since the early 1980s and have limited access to (more expensive) urban schools. In this essay, I compare different parts of the world over the past five centuries to understand how politics allow or restrict access to education, and to what extent schools function as gateways to full participation in societies for children of migrants and minorities.

How children of immigrants and minorities (either Native peoples or descendants of erstwhile migrants) fare in the educational system is a much researched and debated topic. But most studies and observations are limited to specific case studies, mostly contemporary, and lack a comparative perspective in terms of both time and space.¹ To attain a deeper insight into the mechanisms that cause inclusion and exclusion, a global historical overview that compares different parts of the world over the past five centuries is useful. I attempt to map this huge field to identify the conditions very different polities and their membership regimes require to allow open access to education. I also describe the extent to which schools function as gateways to full participation in societies for children of migrants and minorities. I start with a brief overview of the early modern period, and then concentrate on the era of the nation-state in the last two centuries.

To better understand the relation between human capital building and immigration, the Middle Ages are a good point to start. In territorial states, city-states,

empires and their colonial conquests, through churches, monasteries, and guilds, many kinds of educational and training possibilities were offered to children and adults, which often included but were not limited to literacy. The invention of printing techniques with single letters in China and Korea in the eleventh century and in Europe (Gutenberg) four hundred years later was a revolutionary breakthrough that enabled the wide distribution of books (in Europe, the Bible), illustrations, and maps. Economic historians have shown that book consumption in Europe increased more than tenfold in the early modern period. In England and the Dutch Republic, both economic front-runners in the early modern period, literacy and numeracy rates among males increased from 10 percent of the population to 60 percent between 1500 and 1800.²

In England, this development was driven by the fast expansion of grammar schools during what has been identified as the second phase of the “educational revolution,” which began around the middle of the seventeenth century. This expansion was most probably caused by the demand for literate employees in the service sector (especially trade and finances) in port cities like London, Liverpool, and Amsterdam. Yet it was not a linear process. In Great Britain around 1850, when manufacturing eclipsed the service sector at the height of the Industrial Revolution, the massive demand for unskilled manual labor (including ten thousand Irish labor migrants) led to a decline in the demand for formal education, which explains why only 50 percent of the male population aged five to fourteen was enrolled in schools at that time. This was much higher than in contemporary China (20 percent to 25 percent) but considerably lower than Prussia (73 percent) and the Netherlands (around 80 percent).³

In Western Europe during the early modern period, building human capital through guilds and schools did not discriminate between children of migrants and natives (those with parents born in the receiving country), although the farther east one got from the Dutch North Sea, coast institutions like guilds tended to become more restrictive.⁴ Due to the high urban death rates, immigration to cities, from whatever origin, was a ubiquitous and necessary phenomenon, and as far as migrants (especially Jews) were discriminated against, it was on the basis of religion, not so much ethnicity.⁵

In overseas colonies, the relations between European (invading) immigrants and Native groups were often reversed. The Americas, where the Native population was decimated by diseases brought and spread by European invaders and by structural violence caused by divide-and-rule tactics, were considered by settlers as an ideal *terra nullius* for the mass production of sugar, tobacco, coffee, rice, indigo, and later cotton, concentrated on large plantations, by enslaved workers taken forcibly from Africa.⁶ Only in the nineteenth century, when the Americas became destinations for mass European settlement, did African migrants become outnumbered by European settlers.

Native populations who survived the contagious diseases and lethal violence of the Europeans, and who partly mixed with immigrants from both Asia and Africa, were largely marginalized, enslaved, and, in Spanish America, exploited through the *encomienda* (forced labor) system. They were not entirely excluded from education, however. In Spanish-occupied Mexico, the conquistadores, apart from plundering the country's silver and other riches, tried to impose Catholicism alongside their Spanish culture, which they considered superior. After the fall of the city-state Tenochtitlan in modern-day Mexico in 1528, King Carlos I immediately ordered that the sons of the Native elite be put under the direct supervision of Spanish priests, whose task was to Christianize them through formal education, hoping that when they returned to their communities, they would spread Catholicism and core Spanish values. This forced attempt at cultural transformation by Franciscans and Jesuits in their urban schools (*colegios*), who were also active in other parts of the world (especially Asia), would remain the official "civilization" policy for centuries.

However, many former students identified with the cause of their own marginalized and discriminated ethnic group, and embraced the *colegios* as centers for a countercolonial opposition, which is distantly reminiscent of the role universities in Paris and London played in furthering anticolonial opposition among students from colonies in Asia and Africa during the interbella period.⁷

The aim of King Carlos I to culturally homogenize the populations of his overseas conquests was inseparable from the forced conversion and expulsion of Jews and Muslims at home and the obsession with pure pedigrees (*limpieza de sangre*). This legislation, enacted at the end of the fifteenth century (immediately after the end of the Reconquista) and aimed at excluding people who descended from Jews or Muslims, was then applied to Indigenous populations in the Americas through the creation of a caste system.⁸ This fear of hybridity and urge for ethnic and religious homogeneity foreshadow the assimilatory and ethnocentric nature of the nation-state, with a central role for schools and education.

Historian Eugen Weber captures this transition well in his seminal book *Peasants into Frenchmen*, in which he describes how the French centralized nation-state that emerged during the French Revolution used education to forge linguistic, cultural, and political uniformity in a country that was characterized by a great variety of local and regional differences well into the nineteenth century.⁹ Schools, alongside garrisons, were a crucial institution to instill the idea of a common uniform nation, whose citizens spoke the same language, adhered to the same political system and constitution, and identified with the nation through symbols like the national flag and the anthem.¹⁰

Apart from institutions like the army and the labor market, schools are key because children learn the national language, culture, and history at school, on

which their identification with the nation-state where they were born is forged. The same is true for children of (international and internal) migrants and minorities, whose different languages and cultures are often regarded as a barrier or a threat to the desired cultural and ethnic homogeneity of the country where they and their parents live.

As in sixteenth-century Mexico, from the nineteenth century onward, a number of nation-states and multiethnic empires applied this assimilationist ideal not only to immigrants but also to minorities. Examples include the internal colonizations of frontier areas in multiethnic empires such as China and Russia.¹¹ Other multicultural empires like the Habsburg and the Ottoman Empires were much more tolerant and accepted and accommodated linguistic and religious differences. At the end of the nineteenth century and immediately after World War I, they dissolved into nation-states and embraced the ideal of ethnic and linguistic homogeneity, which led to population exchanges, widespread ethnic cleansing, and even genocide (such as the Armenian genocide).¹²

An extreme example of forced homogenization of minorities is the current Chinese policy toward the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, who are not only forced to assimilate linguistically, but also politically, culturally, and religiously. Apart from language and dietary customs, forsaking Islam is regarded as a necessary step to fully becoming Chinese. Although the mistreatment of Uyghurs by the Chinese state is extreme, it is part of a more general policy to eradicate minority cultures that deviate from the Han majority (93 percent). Not surprisingly, this is a central goal of the education system. For example, ethnic Korean schools in the autonomous Korean prefecture Yanbian, which offered bilingual education since the 1960s, have recently come under increasing pressure to assimilate to monolingual instruction in Chinese, stimulated by fears purported to be about national security.¹³ In November 2022, the National People's Congress called for Mandarin-promotion aimed at "managing ethnic affairs, enhancing national unity and safeguarding national security."¹⁴

This programmatic assimilation was accompanied by the simultaneous pressure caused by the mass internal rural-urban migration since the 1980s to the rapidly growing cities in East and Central China, which included all kinds of minorities.¹⁵ The era when Chairman Mao declared that "we must sincerely and actively help the minority nationalities to develop their economy and culture" is by now a distant memory.¹⁶ Loyalty of minority groups, like the Koreans, is no longer sufficient; becoming Chinese has become the new dogma. This fixation with cultural homogeneity is a much wider phenomenon, as the policies toward Romanian speakers in Hungary, Muslims in India, and Rohingya in Myanmar strikingly indicate.

Education as an assimilationist instrument in (former) settler colonies of European states (Western offshoots), especially in the Americas, can be considered

a combination of the two variants described above. Both the Indigenous populations and immigrants beyond the dominant groups (English, Spanish, Portuguese – heroically portrayed as the original settler colonists) became objects of assimilatory policies in which education in the majority language of the original European settlers was considered crucial for the viability of the new state.

Alongside the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century, schools developed as key institutions for integrating both migrants and the native born into the majority language and culture.¹⁷ In most nations, this left little room for bilingual education, except for a few countries like Canada, where the Francophone minority were allowed to retain the French language. In most other countries, the regional, linguistic, and cultural minorities were forced to conform to the majority culture (for example, inhabitants of peripheral areas of Japan like Okinawa and the Ryukyu islands had to assimilate the dominant behavior in more populous areas).¹⁸ Such policies were often rooted in racist superiority within majority groups, ranging from descendants of Northwest Europeans in the United States to Turkic-speaking Muslims in Türkiye and the Han in China.

When we limit ourselves to immigrants in nation-states since the nineteenth century, we see that it took quite a while before the nation-state developed in such a way that it could successfully implement assimilationist education policies.¹⁹ A good example is German immigrants in the United States. Until World War I, instruction in German (and also Scandinavian languages) was part of the curriculum in the Midwest, especially in cities with substantial foreign populations, such as Cincinnati and Milwaukee. Germans and Scandinavians settled in the northern part of the Midwest in great numbers in the 1850s, where Germans had already established their own public schools in 1837 (followed by Ohio two years later).²⁰ Although divided along class, political, and religious lines, bilingual education was preferred by most German migrants. In 1855, in Cincinnati, five thousand children were taught bilingually: “the two most beautiful languages are brought together; the mother, the German, and the daughter.”²¹ German public schools were meant to smooth the transition into American society for German students, but were also preferred by German parents who considered German education superior. The prevailing idea was, as the superintendent in Marathon County expressed around 1850, “children would first learn to express their thoughts in their mother tongue.”²² In many Midwest German schools, even American history was taught in the German language. At the height of German schooling in the 1880s, there were more than three hundred German-English schools in the Midwest.²³

At the end of the century, a more nativist climate marked the beginning of the end of bilingual education. With the ongoing integration of second- and third-generation German Americans, the demand for German schools gradually declined. Moreover, it is important to note that the declining interest among de-

scendants of immigrants in the original language of their ancestors is a general phenomenon in societies that provide (relative) open access to their educational systems.

As German language education withered in the United States, Japanese schools in Brazil, Peru, and Mexico were on the rise. The main reason was the strong support of the Japanese state to establish schools for the children of the two hundred thousand Japanese migrant workers who settled there from the end of the nineteenth century onward, and which reached its zenith between 1925 and 1937. Although meant as temporary agricultural workers for coffee plantations and sugarcane fields, it soon became clear that the overwhelming majority of these *Nikkeijin* (or Japanese emigrants, of whom around one hundred seventy-five thousand settled in Brazil) were there to stay. From the 1920s onward, dozens of Japanese schools were established. The Japanese state advised their emigrants to assimilate, but at the same time encouraged them to foster ethnic solidarity and join Japanese associations. It was these locally rooted migrant organizations that established a large number of Japanese schools, with instructors hired in Japan.²⁴ One of the first was the primary school that opened in Lima in 1920. By the 1930s, the school had about one thousand students who were taught in both Spanish and Japanese. Conversely, the more than one hundred thousand male Chinese coolies who worked mostly at coastal cotton and sugar plantations and dug guano in Peru between 1849 and 1874, many of whom intermarried and partly integrated into the Spanish-speaking environment, experienced no interference from the Chinese state in the realm of schooling.²⁵

This colony model – in which migrants were granted a fair degree of autonomy within nation-states that allowed them to establish their own villages and strengthen ethnic bonds – did not apply to Japanese immigrants. Especially in agricultural areas, this settlement mode was quite common in Latin American countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Chile, Bolivia, and Paraguay, where Germans, Swiss, Dutch, and Italians also followed this path and created their own institutions, including schools.²⁶

Apart from this specific opportunity structure in Latin American nation-states, during the first half of the twentieth century, states also stimulated the strengthening of ethnic bonds by considering emigrants as their own citizens. This expansionist nationalism reached a climax after World War I, as many countries such as Japan and Italy embraced fascism.²⁷

Whereas most Italian migrants in Argentina (1.8 million in 1922) rejected Mussolini's "nation outside of the nation" politics and developed a counternarrative, others were lured by the fascist ideology and supported Italian elementary schools meant to instill Italian identity in the next generation.²⁸ At the same time, Italian schools had to be careful not to offend Argentine authorities. In the end, the project was not very successful and only reached a very small portion of children of

Italian immigrants. Although a much larger percentage of Japanese children went to Japanese schools, the rising nationalism in Brazil and Peru in the 1930s crushed these initiatives. In Brazil, where many Japanese people lived, the ultranationalist Estado Novo regime of Getúlio Vargas (1937–1945) in 1938 ordered all 476 Japanese schools (294 of which were elementary schools) to close their doors.²⁹

In Japan, similar nationalist-assimilationist policies made it very difficult for the Korean minority (approximately three hundred thousand in 1930) to be taught their own language at elementary and high schools. In regions with many Korean children, the state created a segregated system with lower-quality schools for Koreans and only allowed bilingual education through private Korean schools. After the war, this assimilationist approach prevailed, and in 1955, a compromise was reached that allowed the General Association of Koreans in Japan (*Chongryon*) to establish their own schools, but without any financing by the Japanese nation-state.³⁰

Before World War I, with large numbers of Italian immigrants in France, Polish-speaking Germans from Silesia in the Ruhr area and France, and Irish in Great Britain, the movement for bilingual schools was much weaker in Western Europe than in the Americas. And those migrants who tried to retain their language and culture, like the Polish minority in western parts of Germany and in French industrial areas, were confronted with strong pressure to assimilate. Local initiatives were nipped in the bud by the rigid Germanization policies under Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* against the Catholic minority in the German Reich, which included the Polish-speaking minority within its borders. The School Supervision Law of 1872, which curtailed the influence of the clergy in the classroom, frustrated the instruction of Polish-speaking children.³¹ The following year, a decree made German the exclusive language in schools. Massive protests against these language politics by Polish parents in the Ruhr area in 1906–1907 did not change things. Moreover, Polish private schools lost their accreditation, and classes with too many Polish speakers in state schools were split up.³² In France, whose officials were dedicated to a French-only and highly centralized Republican ideal, foreign languages were completely banned from elementary schools. This policy underlined the militant secularist and assimilationist French ideal. As a result, thousands of Italian and Polish children were immediately immersed in the French language and political culture.³³

After World War II, assimilationist nationalism remained the core ideology guiding the education of migrant children in Europe, the Americas, Oceania, and in most other parts of the world. Thus, leaders in the Dutch government in the 1950s – convinced that the country was overpopulated – encouraged thousands of Dutch to emigrate to countries such as Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Canada, where they were immediately immersed in English, a

policy that many of them endorsed. Ethnically mixed postcolonial immigrants who migrated to the colonial “metropole” during the 1950s were subjected to rigid standards of assimilation as well.³⁴

At the same time, there was a multicultural undercurrent that would challenge the dominance of assimilationist policies. With the establishment of the United Nations and UNESCO in 1945, the seeds of a global human rights revolution were planted. Within two decades, they created a new opportunity structure for minority rights, including bilingual education for internal minorities and immigrants. The rapid process of decolonization after World War II produced a fundamental critique of European superiority characterized by racism and political and economic domination. The Asian-African Bandung conference in 1955, where leaders of newly independent nations gathered as a counterweight against Europe and its offshoots in the Americas, Oceania, and South Africa, played a pivotal role.³⁵ With the domino-like wave of decolonization in Africa and the Caribbean around 1960, this antiracist and anti-imperialist critique became an important current in the United Nations, where representatives from formerly colonized countries raised their now independent voices.³⁶ The globalization of human rights also influenced ideas about the bilingual instruction of the children of immigrants while developing a fundamental critique of the dominant practices that endorsed assimilation.

Although European countries experienced substantial immigration and ethnic diversity before World War II, the acknowledgment of this multicultural reality developed slowly, as demonstrated by the assimilationist policies affecting post-war migrants from former colonies and labor migrants from Southern Europe and the fringes of the continent (Türkiye and North Africa).³⁷ At first, bilingual education was developed for the purpose of immigrants’ eventual return to their countries of origin. In the Netherlands, this started with separate language classes in the mother tongue for Moluccan soldiers and their families who entered the country in 1951 and were expected to return to the Maluku Islands. This policy continued with children of Moroccan and Turkish guest workers in the 1970s and early 1980s. With the realization that most former guest workers would settle in the country, the “education in one’s own language” (mostly limited to four hours per week) was not abolished, only changed, as psychologists and linguists argued that learning a new language through the mother tongue worked much better cognitively and created a positive self-image.³⁸

The Council for the European Communities passed an important directive in July 1977 that the education of children of migrant workers within the European Economic Community (EEC) “take appropriate measures to promote, in coordination with normal education, teaching of the mother tongue and culture of the country of origin.”³⁹ This idea was based on the famous 1953 UNESCO report on the use of vernacular language in education, which stated that “it is axiomatic that

the best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue.”⁴⁰ Although frequently contested, it developed into a “linguistic human right” and influenced the education of migrant children in many parts of the world.⁴¹

The 1977 EEC directive was not legally binding. But several countries in Northern Europe, such as Sweden and the Netherlands, partially implemented it. There were, however, major problems. Apart from finances, and countries like France who held on to their Republican Francophone ideals, it was not always clear what “mother language” meant. For example, Moroccan children in the Netherlands and Belgium were taught in Arabic, although most came from the mountainous Rif region where Tamazight was spoken. Furthermore, to really learn one’s mother language, a few hours of instruction each week was not sufficient. And finally, devoting time in the curriculum to the language of one’s parents, especially from lower-class backgrounds, could put children at a disadvantage by isolating them and consigning them to an “underclass” status.⁴² The result was that such policies for language instruction were mostly symbolic. In the 1990s, they were largely abolished.

In the United States between the 1960s and 1980s, the heydays of optimism about multiculturalism went along with a shift to cultural pluralism marked by the publication of sociologist Nathan Glazer and politician Daniel P. Moynihan’s landmark book *Beyond the Melting Pot*.⁴³ That work celebrated ethnic diversity and critiqued the homogenizing force of programmatic assimilationism. Its focus on diversity and multiculturalism dovetailed nicely with the radical position and demands of Black activists who favored strategic essentialism that provided people in Black communities with connections to Indigenous African communities, as well as strength in numbers among African people who live in the diaspora. This strategy rejected the socialization of Black children to white middle-class values. This “federalist inflection,” as historian Rita Chin labeled it, opposed the ideal of integration, and favored bilingual education, with the languages of migrants not being inferior to English.⁴⁴

This federalist approach did not really take root in Western Europe. From the 1990s onward, the discussion about immigrants at schools in Western Europe shifted from the mother tongue to broader contexts of integration, such as the quality of schools, the spatial concentration of immigrant children across neighborhoods, neighborhood effects, and the impact of differences in vocational and academic tracking systems. Especially in countries where the choice for secondary education is made when the child is older, this appears to benefit migrant children, as well as native-born children from lower-class backgrounds. By contrast, systems that force families to choose secondary schools earlier tend to streamline migrant children into lower educational tracks.⁴⁵

But in general, wider access to the postwar educational system and the norm of nondiscrimination – especially in Western Europe, North America, and Oceania –

has benefited children of migrants. Although their parents have lower human capital on average, many of these migrants are more ambitious and stimulate their children to reach higher. This explains why, for example, children of low-skilled “guest workers” from Türkiye and Morocco who live in the Netherlands (but also elsewhere) seem to do better at school when compared to their native-born peers with similar socioeconomic backgrounds – especially girls, underlining the importance of gendered patterns.⁴⁶

At the same time, there are barriers caused by deeply rooted institutional racism, especially toward African Americans, Romani in Eastern Europe, and (tribal) Adivasis in India, many of whom are heavily segregated. Furthermore, institutional racism also affects Algerian children in France and Black children in the United Kingdom.⁴⁷ It is therefore not surprising that the focus on the nature of neighborhoods and the quality of public schools has a longer tradition in North America, which affects especially African Americans, many of whose ancestors migrated from the deep South to urban centers in the North and the West during the Great Migration that started during World War I and accelerated after World War II.⁴⁸ In cities such as Chicago and New York, many African Americans ended up in segregated neighborhoods, where they were confronted with systemic racism and inequality.⁴⁹ This racist-driven practice of segregation also put Irish, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian, among others, at a disadvantage starting in the 1850s, and even earlier for Mexican and Native American children.⁵⁰ In the end, however, the discrimination of immigrants and non-white Americans was different than the “internal colonialism” that stemmed from chattel slavery, which still haunts the descendants of once-enslaved Africans in the United States, despite the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s and the emergence of a growing Black middle-class.⁵¹

Without underestimating the importance of the multicultural turn, this has only partly changed the process of intergenerational integration during which descendants of migrants are becoming similar. Beyond its programmatic aspects, the history of migration and integration in many receiving countries is an asymmetrical *and* interactive process of constantly remaking the mainstream, albeit with a central role for the dominant language of receiving countries.⁵² Although a number of (new) sending countries like Türkiye and Morocco followed the example of Japan and Italy before World War II, trying to hold on to emigrants as “their” citizens abroad for nationalist and financial reasons, this practice will not prevent ongoing efforts in receiving countries to claim the newcomers through assimilation.

If we want to understand how the education systems of receiving countries provide access to the children (and oftentimes grandchildren) of immigrants, the mistreatment of disadvantaged nonmigrant groups, based on ethnicity and/or class, needs to be addressed as well. This regards first the Native populations in various continents that were confronted from the late fifteenth century

onward with European migrants from Spain and Portugal to Great Britain. Those who survived the germs, viruses, and violence that traveled along with these invaders, especially in the Americas and Oceania, were often excluded from mainstream society, including educational systems that were created for settlers from countries like Portugal, Spain, Great Britain, and France, to mention the most important. A second category hit by the curse of exclusion and segregation was the more than ten million enslaved Africans and their offspring in the Americas. As far as they were allowed to enter the educational system after the abolition of slavery, they had to make do with heavily underfinanced schools and limited access to higher education. Moreover, most schools were in poor and isolated neighborhoods, with favelas in countries such as Brazil as eye-catching examples.⁵³

In Europe, somewhat similar exclusionary mechanisms blocked the social mobility of impoverished Jewish minorities (often Ashkenazim) in isolated ghettos and “shtetls” before World War II, as well as Romani people, especially in Eastern Europe, even now. Poor and segregated Yiddish Jews in nineteenth-century Russia did better, but we should realize that the educational levels of Jews in Eastern Europe were far lower than in contemporary Western Europe, and that the gap closed very slowly before World War II. This calls into question genetic and traditional cultural explanations (reverence for reading books and studying the Talmud) for Jewish educational achievement.⁵⁴ Much more important was their low social position and the intensity of antisemitism and limited institutional access, especially to mainstream schools in Eastern Europe.

Moreover, literacy among Russian Jews was much less universal than many have long assumed. The older cohorts in the 1897 Russian census reported rates below 50 percent, and the great majority of women over thirty years of age were illiterate. Literacy rates were even lower in the Polish parts of the Russian Empire. Only from the closing decades of the nineteenth century was there a marked increase.⁵⁵ This toning down reassessment of Jewish literacy does not alter the fact that the situation for children from Romani families, especially in Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, the current Czech Republic, and Slovakia, was – and still is – much worse.⁵⁶ In Romanian Wallachia and Moldavia, where most Romani people live (approximately 2.5 million currently), *țigarii*, as they were called, had a slave status until the 1850s; after the abolition of slavery in 1856, their status only gradually improved.⁵⁷

As with African Americans in the United States, Romani people in Eastern European countries suffered from discrimination, social marginalization, and segregation. Although the postwar communist states gave them limited possibilities for social mobility, their position after the fall of the Iron Curtain has not improved. Unlike the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the Roma rights movement in Eastern Europe has experienced limited achievements, despite pressure from international NGOs and the European Union.⁵⁸ As a result, the education for

most Roma children today is segregated, with Roma schools in dilapidated ghettos or in separate classes in mainstream schools. Moreover, many of their parents do not trust schools, which they regard as state institutions that transmit values that conflict with those of their family. What they learn in school would have little relevance for their communities, and they fear for the loss of their own culture. Finally, traditional gender patterns in Roma families frustrate the chances of girls to undergo further education and training.⁵⁹

Blocked access to education is not limited to stigmatized ethnic, religious, or racial minorities in American or Eastern European ghettos and Latin American favelas or South African townships, which still suffer from the effects of the apartheid-driven Bantu Education Act of 1953.⁶⁰ Class background also matters a great deal. In Europe, there is ample evidence that one's occupation and earning capacity are linked to residential segregation. Working-class neighborhoods in European countries and elsewhere had to make do with overcrowding (and still are), less funding, and problems with attracting good teachers to their public schools, especially in countries with large income and wealth inequalities.⁶¹ As sociologist Paul Willis has argued, there is also a clear ideological dimension, as many schools in working-class areas function as channels to unskilled and lower-skilled occupations in the labor market.⁶²

Apart from class distinctions, cultural and religious stigmas did not disappear overnight. Jews who emigrated to the United States experienced discrimination, and were confronted with admission quotas that limited entry long after the Holocaust, which reduced their entrance into elite American and Canadian universities such as Yale, Princeton, Harvard, and McGill until the early 1960s.⁶³

Finally, colonial education remains a broad field that still needs to be explored more systematically and comparatively, particularly the education structures that privileged European (and Japanese) colonizers over the Native populations. These systems applied a mix of "race," religion, and class distinctions to legitimize educational segregation.⁶⁴ At the same time, they left room for private initiatives of relatively well-to-do Asian immigrants, especially those from China, to set up their own elite schools (the first one in Batavia in 1901), which not only gave access to high-quality education but also strengthened Chinese ethnicity and ties to national identity.⁶⁵

This global historical overview of the relation between migration and educational systems shows that schools have functioned as key socializing institutions, and still do, in very different ways for children and young adults.⁶⁶ When nation-states developed public school systems for their populations in the nineteenth century, it took a while before compulsory education was generally imposed. This allowed most children of migrants and minorities to take part, but also limited access for some and channeled many into low-quality vo-

cational tracks. During the twentieth century, especially in welfare states after World War II (such as European nations, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, China, Soviet Russia), the idea of equality made it possible that lower-class people from whatever origin could enter higher education and experience upward social mobility. In nation-states where this ideal was less dominant or not implemented (such as South Africa, India, Brazil, partly the United States), access to higher education was much more restricted. Schools mirrored the prevailing membership regimes that reproduced the social, economic, and racial inequalities of the time.

A second important thread concerns the assimilationist ideology that constitutes the ideational and programmatic core of nation-states throughout the world in the last two centuries. Schools were considered the most important institutions to homogenize the population in terms of language and culture. This explains state officials' aversion to bilingual education in countries like Japan, Brazil, the United States, and France. Even ideological shifts, such as the multicultural turn after World War II (which allowed, for example, exams in heritage languages such as Urdu or Bengali in England and some mother tongue education in other European countries), did not fundamentally change this emphasis on linguistic conformity.⁶⁷ It should be stressed, though, that the prevalence of national language instruction was and is supported by the Native and native-born population. Whether it concerns Indigenous elites at the *colegios* in sixteenth-century Mexico, or postcolonial students at universities in Paris and London in the twentieth century, minorities and immigrants valued these institutions as a channel for upward social mobility and a means to further political (anticolonial) awareness. Even now, many immigrant (or minority) parents want their children to learn the majority language because it gives their children more chances in the societies where they settled. These parents do not reject bilingual education per se, but stress that it should be a vehicle for becoming part of the mainstream.

I have shown that when it comes to migrants and education, we should take a broad, crosscultural, international, and intersectional view. By *broad*, I mean we should throw our comparative net, in the spirit of sociologist Charles Tilly, as wide as possible in terms of geography and politics; and by *intersectional*, I mean we must consider systemic similarities within marginalized groups, whether it concerns internal aspects of marginalized identities (such as religious bias) or more overt material aspects (such as being a member of the working class). Only then can we identify and understand more general underlying mechanisms that explain how and why schools can allow or block upward social mobility and equality.

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Language Equality & Schooling: Global Challenges & Unmet Promises

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In this essay, I examine unmet promises and global challenges for achieving language equality in schooling, with special focus on one of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, SDG-4, which aims to ensure equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all. Language of instruction is a key determinant of student success, but there is limited recognition of the vital role language plays as an intervening variable. Most languages continue to be excluded from education and 60 percent of out-of-school children live in regions where their own languages are not used at school. Inequities arising from unjust language policies combine to trap the poorest in a cluster of disadvantages persisting across generations. Underinvesting in education jeopardizes a range of social benefits. A well-educated population will increase the overall economic prosperity of a nation. I call for first language-based multilingual education as a pathway to schooling equality and sustainable development.

Education is both the lynchpin of sustainable development and a fundamental human right guaranteed in numerous international covenants and declarations, but it is not equally accessible to all. The Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action adopted at the 2015 World Education Forum recognized inclusion and equity in and through education as the cornerstone of a transformative education agenda to be implemented in the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030.¹ The fourth goal (SDG-4) pledges to ensure equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all. Countries committed to “making the necessary changes in education policies” are required to address exclusion, marginalization, and inequities. To ensure that no one is left behind, they promised that “no education target should be considered met unless met for all.”²

However, we are already more than halfway to the 2030 deadline, and approximately 244 million children and youth worldwide between the ages of six and eighteen were still missing out on school in 2021. This includes 67 million children of primary school age (about six to eleven years old), 57 million adolescents of lower-secondary school age (about twelve to fourteen years old), and 121 million youth of upper-secondary school age (about fifteen to seventeen years old). Being in school, however, is not the same as learning. Over 600 million children and

adolescents worldwide did not attain minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics due to the poor quality of schooling, even though two-thirds of them were in school.³ Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic compromised the quality of education for *all* learners across *all* countries and magnified existing challenges.

In this essay, I examine unmet promises and global challenges for achieving language equality in schooling. Although virtually everyone acknowledges clear links between good education and a broad range of benefits impacting poverty, health, and gender inequality, limited recognition of the seminal role language plays as an intervening variable prevents these advantages from reaching the most marginalized.⁴ With over seven thousand one hundred languages worldwide but only about two hundred countries, there are about thirty-five times as many languages as countries. Bilingualism or multilingualism is present in practically every nation, whether officially recognized or not. Nevertheless, national policies remain radically out of line with the realities of multilingualism in today's globalized world. Most countries operate as monolingual either *de facto* (unofficially) or *de jure* (through legislation) in recognizing only one language for use in education, administration, and public-facing communications. Most languages are thus excluded from education and other higher domains of public life. Policies pursued within national boundaries elevate some languages (and their speakers) to the majority position, while others are relegated to minority status. When a multilingual country uses one or more languages exclusively in public schools, as well as in the administration of government services and activities, it makes a distinction based on language. In showing a preference for some language(s), whether designated as official or national or not, the state's decision benefits those for whom the chosen language(s) is a primary language, to the detriment or disadvantage of others who either have no or lower proficiency and are denied the benefit of using and identifying with their primary language.

Failure to take language into account means that the goal of education for all embodied in SDG-4 (and in the earlier Education for All agenda from 1990 to 2015) translates into schooling only for some. The poorest speak most of the world's languages, but have the lowest rates of access to dominant languages at school. Nearly 90 percent of those lacking education in their own language live in economically less developed countries, and 60 percent of out-of-school children live in regions where their own languages are not used in the classroom.⁵ The result is lost generations of children in the poorest countries whose life chances are irreparably damaged by failure to protect their right to quality education. Enrolling the poorest students will not solve the problem without changing the language of instruction. Policies that discriminate against the languages of the marginalized poor severely compromise the power of education to improve their lives. Unless we change education policy and practice, language minorities will continue to constitute the majority of those still living in poverty beyond 2030. Speaking a minority language in effect creates

economic, social, and health risks because ethnolinguistic minorities constitute a large proportion of the bottom 20 percent still living in extreme poverty and suffering from poor health, lack of education, and deteriorating environments.

Language is the missing link in the global debate on equality and inclusion. Language and education inequalities intersect with socioeconomic status, sex, gender, location, religion, ethnicity, and migration, and accumulate through life and compound over time. As long as education relies mainly on international languages at the expense of local vernaculars, education will reproduce rather than reduce these inequalities, making sustainable and equitable development difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. I argue first language–based multilingual education (L1-based MLE) could be a pathway to schooling equality and sustainable development.

Language diversity is a critical but overlooked variable in understanding *who* got left behind by the unfinished business and unkept promises of the UN’s eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that expired in 2015, and were later replaced by the SDGs.⁶ The related Education for All (EFA) agenda also ended that same year, after being superseded by the new Education 2030 Framework for Action, but most countries failed to meet the EFA goals.⁷ The outcome of both agendas illustrates that globally it is the poor who miss out on school. A vicious circle of intersecting disadvantages pushes language minorities into what economist Paul Collier called the “bottom billion” left behind by development.⁸ The overwhelming majority of the poor live in two regions – Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa – comprising about 80 percent of the global total of people living in extreme poverty. These same poorest regions, not coincidentally, also have the highest number of out-of-school children and lowest literacy rates. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest out-of-school population and is the only region where this number is still growing; it increased by twenty million to ninety-eight million between 2009 and 2021. One in five primary school–age students are still not in school. Out-of-school rates for adolescents and youth have stagnated since 2010 at 33 percent and 48 percent, respectively.⁹

Despite the push toward universal primary education in both the MDGs and the EFA, only 52 percent of countries achieved this goal by the 2015 deadline.¹⁰ Achieving the even more ambitious SDG-4 goal of universal secondary completion remains challenging for North America and Europe, let alone for lower-income countries. Just before COVID-19 struck, over half of young people were completing secondary school globally. Nevertheless, half of those attending school did not meet minimum proficiency in reading.¹¹ In North America and Europe, 96 percent of students achieve the minimum benchmark for reading by grade 4, but in sub-Saharan Africa, fewer than 40 percent do. In Central, South, and West Asia and North Africa, fewer than 50 percent do. This points to a critical shortfall in a key learning indicator called “learning poverty,” introduced by the World Bank and

UNESCO in 2019 as a measure reflecting the number of children unable to read and understand a simple text by age ten.¹² With “business as usual” progress, it would take a century or more for many low-income countries to reach current means set by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in international assessments like the Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems, Program for International Student Assessment, and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study. Some countries would never catch up.

There is a substantial geographic overlap between poverty, educational disadvantage, and language diversity. Table 1 shows the ten countries with the highest numbers of out-of-school youth between ages six and eighteen alongside the number of languages spoken and mean years of schooling. Altogether, these countries host 60 percent of the 244 million out-of-school children, including some of the world’s most linguistically diverse countries such as India, Nigeria, and Indonesia. In Nigeria, Africa’s most populous and ethnolinguistically diverse country, the out-of-school rate has increased among adolescents and youth of secondary school age by 61 percent (from 6.3 to 10.1 million) over the past twenty years. Among primary school–age children, it has increased by 50 percent (from 6.4 to 9.7 million) since 2010. Were more accurate data available, the figures would probably be much worse for countries like Chad (112 languages), Central African Republic (66 languages), Equatorial Guinea (12 languages), Eritrea (9 languages), and South Sudan (62 languages), where estimates suggest that more than 50 percent of primary school–age children are out of school.¹³ In 2019, for instance, 79 percent of the poorest, 60 percent of girls, and 61 percent of rural children in Chad were out of primary school.¹⁴ These countries would add 261 languages, increasing the total to 2,863, or 40 percent of the world’s languages.

Mean years of schooling is one of three basic dimensions (along with life expectancy and income) in the United Nations’ Human Development Index (HDI), a composite measure of average achievement used to rank countries. These ten countries show a range from 3.2 (Ethiopia) to 8.6 (Indonesia). However, disaggregated national data obscure systematic patterns of discrimination and marginalization for some groups based on sex, wealth, location, and other characteristics that intersect with language. This is true especially for the poorest, for girls, for ethnolinguistic minorities, and for those in rural areas. Indigenous peoples, who make up less than 6 percent of the global population but about 19 percent of the extreme poor and speak up to 60 percent of the world’s languages (many at risk of extinction) are also particularly vulnerable.¹⁵

Gender parity in education has long been regarded as a crucial indicator of overall gender equality. Nevertheless, gender disparities are still among the most entrenched inequalities. The fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG-5) aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls,

Table 1
 Ten Countries with Highest Numbers of Out-of-School Children
 (Six to Eighteen Years of Age)

Country	Out-of-School Students (millions)	Languages Spoken	Mean Years of Schooling
India	56.4	424	6.7
Pakistan	20.7	69	4.5
Nigeria	19.7	520	7.2
Ethiopia	10.3	87	3.2
China	10.5	281	7.6
Indonesia	6.9	704	8.6
Tanzania	6.9	201	6.4
Bangladesh	6.0	36	7.4
Democratic Republic of Congo	5.8	210	7.0
Sudan	5.0	70	3.8
Total	148.2 (60.7 percent of world total)	2,602 (36 percent of world total)	6

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, “New Estimation Confirms Out-of-School Population Is Growing in Sub-Saharan Africa,” Fact Sheet No. 62/Policy Paper 48 (UNESCO, 2022), 6; David M. Eberhard, Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig, eds., *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 26th ed. (SIL International, 2023), <http://www.ethnologue.com>; and Pedro Conceição, *Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping Our Future in a Transforming World* (United Nations Development Program, 2022), Table 1, 272–275.

building on targets beginning with the MDGs and EFA. There are also very strong interlinkages between SDG-5 and the other SDGs, especially SDG-4. SDG target 4.5 pledges to “eliminate gender disparities in education.” Despite considerable progress over the past twenty-five years in getting more girls enrolled in school, gender discrimination remains a pervasive problem and a threat to inclusive education. Perhaps the starkest example is Afghanistan, the only country in the world where girls are banned from going to school beyond primary level. Since returning to power in August 2021, the Taliban has imposed a series of increasingly restrictive decrees on girls’ education.

Globally, nine million primary school–age children (75 percent of the world-wide total) who may never set foot in school are girls, with over four million in sub-Saharan Africa. Fifty million sub-Saharan African girls between six and eigh-

teen years of age account for more than the total number of out-of-school girls of any other region. Women still account for almost two-thirds (515 million) of adults unable to read, a legacy of inequalities and restricted educational opportunities beginning in childhood. If all children entering school after 2000 had achieved basic literacy, adult illiteracy rates would have fallen. Instead, the share of women among illiterate adults has remained unchanged for twenty years and the cycle of intergenerational transmission of education inequality and poverty continues.¹⁶

Between 1995 and 2018, we collectively moved in the direction of gender parity in education, with the worldwide percentage of countries achieving this goal rising from 56 percent to 65 percent in primary schools, from 45 percent to 51 percent in lower-secondary schools, and from 13 percent to 24 percent in upper-secondary education. Progress has, however, been uneven across regions, especially among low-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Only 2 percent of the poorest rural females in low-income countries complete upper-secondary school.¹⁷ Gender disparity in primary school attendance among poor and rural children in low- and middle-income countries is higher than average, mostly at girls' expense. Various local conditions such as lack of sanitation facilities, potential for sexual abuse or even kidnapping, early pregnancy and marriage, and domestic chores keep girls out of school and/or lead them to drop out.

Minority girls in particular face numerous disadvantages, both as a group and subgroup of the disadvantaged. Nearly three-quarters of out-of-school girls belong to ethnic, religious, linguistic, or other minorities.¹⁸ Speaking a minority language and living in a rural area further compound female marginalization. In India, the country with the most out-of-school children, the so-called Scheduled Tribes (or Adivasis, the Indigenous people) are among the most economically disadvantaged and marginalized, encompassing over seven hundred ethnic groups speaking nearly four hundred languages in the seven northeastern states and the so-called central tribal belt from Rajasthan to West Bengal.¹⁹ These Indigenous peoples make up 8.6 percent of India's population, but represent more than 21 percent of out-of-school girls.

Increasing linguistic and cultural diversity arising from migration creates challenges for schooling equality in many countries. The International Organization for Migration regards language as one of the most central aspects for migrants' inclusion by both the receiving society and migrants themselves.²⁰ Among the most disadvantaged, however, are refugees such as the Rohingya Muslim minority who fled from Myanmar to neighboring Bangladesh, where they now number nearly one million (about half of them children) in refugee camps in Cox's Bazar District. This is the biggest and most dangerous cluster of refugee camps in the world, with frequent floods, fires, and gang wars. Bangladesh is a poor country with

its own numerous linguistic minorities. Over four hundred thousand school-aged Rohingya children urgently need education; in 2019, at least one-third were not in any kind of school program. The Rohingya language lacks a widely accepted written standard and Rohingya people have low levels of literacy. In Myanmar, before arriving in Bangladesh, Rohingya people faced virulent education discrimination: Myanmar restricted primary and secondary education for Rohingya people and banned them from universities. Meanwhile, Bangladesh denies Rohingya people access to the national education system. Rohingya are also not allowed to use the Bangladesh national curriculum, use Bangla (Bangladesh's national language) as a language of instruction, or provide any written material in Bangla. Their only option is unaccredited informal education services provided by international, nongovernment, and private organizations, some of which offer the Myanmar curriculum.

These policies leave the Rohingya people caught in a dilemma. The longer they stay in Bangladesh, the greater their need for Bangla and less for Myanmar (also referred to as Burmese) unless they return. Most do not want to return until their safety is guaranteed, which is unlikely following the military coup in 2021. This is another example of a perfect storm in which language inequalities tied to socioeconomic status, location, religion, ethnicity, and language accumulate through life and compound over time. In Myanmar, Rohingya people lack legal status and citizenship, while in Bangladesh, they are also marginalized, not recognized as refugees, and denied integration into society.²¹

Secretary-General of the United Nations António Guterres called the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on schooling a “generational catastrophe.”²² Even before the onset of the most serious crisis ever to hit world education systems all at once, progress in reducing the out-of-school population had slowed. School closures impacted nearly 1.6 billion learners from pre-primary to secondary education in at least 194 countries, leaving education systems reeling from its effects worldwide.²³ This unprecedented disruption exacerbated substantial pre-existing inequalities, both between and within countries. Those most vulnerable and marginalized before COVID-19 (that is, girls, the poorest, the disabled, those living in rural areas, refugees and migrants, and those speaking languages other than those used in formal education) face increased exclusion and learning loss compared to their more advantaged peers. An additional eleven million girls and young women may never return to school.²⁴ Speakers of minority languages were also disproportionately affected because emergency education provision tends to be provided only in major national or international languages. The massive shift to remote learning also underlined inequities in access and the need for linguistic diversity in the digital domain.²⁵ The lack of multilingualism in cyberspace poses significant barriers to digital inclusion. Wide gender disparities in information and communication technologies also remain.

It is still too soon to know the long-term effects of COVID-19 on global education and other development goals. Official SDG statistics still largely reflect the pre-pandemic situation. Although extreme wealth has been rising for many years, extreme poverty was also falling. The arrival of COVID-19 reversed this trajectory, marking the first increase in extreme poverty in over two decades. Indeed, HDI has declined two years in a row for the first time since calculation began thirty-two years ago. This not only erased gains from the preceding five years, but also reversed much of the progress toward the SDGs.²⁶ It seems extremely unlikely that we will be able to achieve the first SDG – end poverty in all its forms everywhere – by 2030. The share of children living in learning poverty in low- and middle-income countries was already over 57 percent before 2020, and will probably rise sharply, potentially up to 70 percent. In poor countries, the level was already over 80 percent; in sub-Saharan Africa, it was 86 percent. As a result of school closures, this generation now risks losing USD 17 trillion in lifetime earnings, equivalent to 14 percent of today’s global gross domestic product.²⁷

Providing quality education to the poorest children requires teaching them through the language they understand best. Nevertheless, this commonsense principle is still the exception rather than the rule worldwide. For decades, UNESCO has been at the forefront of advocating first-language education, but estimates suggest that at least 40 percent of children worldwide still lack access to education in their own languages.²⁸ Literacy provides an indispensable foundation for lifelong learning, and is therefore key to sustainable development. SDG indicator 4.6.1 aims to “ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.”²⁹ Learning to read through an unfamiliar language imposes a double burden because learners must acquire the new language and content simultaneously. Children can more easily acquire literacy in languages they already know. L1-based programs can produce competent readers in two to three years, rather than the five or more years typical of many second-language programs. In countries where children average five or fewer years of school, such as Pakistan (4.5 years), Ethiopia (3.2 years), and Sudan (3.8 years), and the poorest average even fewer, L1-based programs represent the only option for the majority of nondominant-language speakers attending school to achieve even modest levels of literacy. In Guinea, only 26 percent of girls whose home language was not the same as that used at school reached the minimum proficiency in reading by the end of their years in primary school in 2019.³⁰

Research shows that the more developed children’s literacy skills are in their first languages, the more prepared they will be to acquire second languages successfully. After only three years of L1-based schooling, children are not ready to learn through a language they do not understand. Many are still learning the alphabet in grade 3, so the first two grades are in practice lost years for learning the

content of the curriculum. Early exit models of L1-based instruction that transition to English or other international languages in grade 3 do not give students enough time to develop literacy skills in their own language that can later be transferred to learning other languages. In addition, many textbooks are written for fluent native speakers and are not adapted to the special needs of those learning English or other dominant languages as second languages. To be maximally effective, L1-based MLE must be high in quality and adequately resourced with well-trained teachers and materials.

Educating children in languages they do not understand results in poor outcomes. Consider Africa, the linguistically richest but economically poorest region on earth, with one-third of the world's languages and nearly one-third of its population in extreme poverty, surviving on less than USD 1.90 per day. With the exception of Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Tanzania, no country in sub-Saharan Africa provides the entire span of primary schooling in a local language, let alone children's first languages. None offers secondary schooling or higher education in an indigenous language. While multilingualism prevails, colonial languages still persist.³¹ Twenty-seven of the thirty-one countries with the lowest HDI are in sub-Saharan Africa.³² Here students receive on average only 4.9 years of schooling, representing a range of values from six to seven years in Tanzania, Lesotho, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Nigeria, and fewer than three years in Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Mali, Niger, and Senegal. With the exception of Lesotho and Mali, all of these countries also show gender disparities, with girls receiving fewer years of education than boys.

Education scholar Birgit Brock-Utne regards language of instruction in Africa as the most important and least appreciated education issue.³³ Across a continent with very high repetition and drop-out rates and fewer than 50 percent of African pupils remaining to the end of primary school, more than five decades of instruction through English (or other European languages like French and Portuguese) has done and can do little for most students: 80 percent to 90 percent of the population still has not learned European languages. Even in South Africa, where English has been a school subject for more than one hundred years and is widely spoken in larger society, proficiency is still very low among the poorest, predominantly Black populations speaking African languages.³⁴ Countries that do not provide access to L1 education experience the lowest levels of literacy and educational attainment worldwide.³⁵ Income inequality is also significantly higher in countries using colonial languages as the medium of instruction.³⁶ Data from UNESCO indicate that use of an international language of instruction instead of local languages is "associated with higher inequality in the distribution of learning outcomes and lower performance of learners from the poorest households."³⁷

The effectiveness of L1-based programs represents only half the story of remedying deficiencies in delivering quality education to linguistically diverse popula-

tions. The other half is the continued failure of English to achieve the promises and hopes held out for it as a language of opportunity. The global rush to adopt English as a medium of education at increasingly earlier ages virtually guarantees that most children in the poorest countries, especially in Africa and South Asia, will be left behind.³⁸ Even in multilingual countries in the Global South currently implementing some form of multilingual education, early exit is the most common choice.³⁹ Although even a few years can give some students an advantage, programs most likely to facilitate successful transition to learning in a second language in secondary school require a minimum of six years of instruction through the first language.⁴⁰ In sub-Saharan Africa, with school conditions far from optimal, as many as eight years of instruction in African languages may be needed. English falls short of being the promised gateway to the global knowledge economy in countries where few know English and the chances of acquiring it at school are limited due to inadequate resources and teaching. Switching to English as the sole language of instruction will not guarantee the supposed benefits of participation in the global economy for the majority of students from impoverished rural communities. Submersion models plunging children into a second language with no instruction or support in their first language are a recipe for persistent, if not permanent, underdevelopment. They will continue to produce a large underclass of almost 90 percent who will finish below the mean, with insufficient skills for most work but manual labor.⁴¹

Investing in the development of local languages in the context of high-quality, well-resourced L1-based MLE lays the foundation for sound economic policy for promoting long-term sustainable development. At first glance, it might seem easier and more cost-effective to immerse children as early as possible in the national and/or international languages they will eventually need for accessing wider opportunities and participating in national life beyond their communities, especially when school provides the only context for learning them. The added expense of moving from monolingual to multilingual education is much less than commonly believed. Where evaluations exist, they suggest additional costs of 3 percent to 4 percent above that of monolingual schooling. This estimate does not take into account that poverty is also expensive in terms of human costs and lost resources. Using more of children's first language in school is likely to lead to more effective learning of additional languages and to reduced repetition and dropout rates, resulting in significant cost savings to education budgets. Political scientist David Laitin and economist Rajesh Ramachandran estimate that if a country like Zambia adopted Mambwe instead of English as its official language, its Human Development Index ranking would move up forty-four positions to reach a level of development similar to that of Paraguay. In 1994, Ethiopia introduced first-language instruction, which has had a positive effect at all levels of schooling, leading to a 12 percent increase in the number of students completing six years or more of schooling.⁴²

Just and socially inclusive language policies will generate economic benefits. One year of schooling increases earnings by 10 percent on average. In sub-Saharan Africa, returns are highest on average (12.5 percent) and even more for girls (nearly 14 percent).⁴³ Educating girls and women is one of the best investments a country can make to break the intergenerational poverty cycle. Indeed, developing countries can gain the largest economic and social advantages. Where income and school levels are lower, girls and women potentially reap greater benefits, especially from completing secondary education. Conversely, failure to educate girls can lead to substantial losses between USD 15 trillion and USD 30 trillion in national productivity and wealth.⁴⁴

Misguided policies preventing multilingual education from reaching the most linguistically diverse populations have never realized a positive return on investment in educational, social, or economic terms despite significant financial resources funneled into them. Low proficiency in the language of instruction is associated with poor attendance, lower learning outcomes, higher dropout risk, and lower transition rates to higher grades.⁴⁵ Countries tolerating high levels of educational and gender inequality ultimately pay a high price. Failing to educate large numbers of young people results in unemployment, lost earnings, hopelessness, and instability. Being out of school has repercussions through the lifetime of individuals and across generations, as educational disadvantage is transferred from parents to children.

I have focused primarily on inequities tied to language in developing countries in the Global South, but poor school achievement of speakers of languages other than the official and national languages recognized for instruction is well documented in virtually all nations.⁴⁶ Full exercise of the right to education depends on the right to language. Failure to recognize language and language diversity as an equity issue during both the formulation and implementation of the SDGs (and the expired MDGs and EFA) has disproportionate effects on vulnerable populations, key stakeholders for successful achievement of these agendas. Although countries recommitted to achieving progress by 2025 and 2030 on seven SDG-4 benchmarking indicators (early childhood education attendance, out-of-school rates, completion rates, gender gaps in completion rates, minimum proficiency rates in reading and mathematics, trained teachers, and public education expenditure), SDG-4 will not be achieved by 2030 even if countries meet their benchmarks.⁴⁷ Priority should be given to SDG indicator 4.5.2, which is “the percentage of students in primary education whose first or home language is the language of instruction.”⁴⁸ Simply allocating more resources to education without ensuring that they are equitably spent will not suffice. Reaching the most marginalized will also cost more. We need to prioritize poor countries and earmark funds for multilingual education.

Overall, aid to education has been declining and is far too low to meet SDG targets. Donors do not give enough; nor do they allocate funds to those needing them most. Estimates of the gap between what developed countries provide now and what is needed by 2030 are as high as USD 97 billion a year. Educational policy scholar Stephen Klees considers this an underestimate because it does not include all SDG-4 targets, nor does it consider the amount needed for other SDGs.⁴⁹ Indeed, he concludes that all the SDGs are already failures due to the unwillingness of the international community and national governments to finance them. While fulfilling all SDGs would require between 1 percent and 4 percent of global GDP, this will not happen without a drastic alteration of neoliberal capitalism. This echoes my previous call for radical rethinking of the SDGs and prevailing models of development. Relying on economic growth to eliminate poverty is environmentally unsustainable. Increasing the share of the benefits of global growth to the world's poorest would require dramatically curtailing the consumption of the rich. Instead, inequality is increasing at exponential rates.⁵⁰

Meanwhile, there is no critical information concerning potential impacts of different educational policies and choices upon children, community welfare, and national development, and therefore, popular myths about multilingualism being divisive, expensive, and detrimental to economic development prevail. Many countries continue to make poor policy choices through ignorance, misguided political ideologies, poor governance, corruption, and military conflict. In 2019, for instance, Rwanda, an extraordinarily linguistically homogeneous country by African standards, where nearly all speak Kinyarwanda, the national language, changed its language policy abruptly for the third time in eleven years. Until 2008, schools used Kinyarwanda for instruction during the first three primary years before switching to French, the former colonial language. Then the government implemented a sudden change to English as the sole medium of instruction, leaving schools with fewer than four months to prepare. Only forty-seven hundred (15 percent) of the country's thirty-one thousand primary school teachers and six hundred (5 percent) of its twelve thousand secondary school teachers had been trained in English. At the time, French and English were spoken by only an estimated 8 percent and 4 percent of the population, respectively. By 2011, when it was clear that children and teachers were struggling, schools were allowed to return to Kinyarwanda for the first three years. In 2019, however, the ministry of education decided to introduce English as a language of instruction from grade 1 in all schools rather than continuing Kinyarwanda as the main language of instruction at least through the primary school years, with English gradually phased in as a subject, which would make far more sense in both the short and long term. The new policy has already had a detrimental effect, with a drop in school enrollment rates at both primary and secondary levels. The completion rate for primary school declined sharply six years after the language change when the first cohort

affected by the new policy should have finished primary school.⁵¹ The quality of schooling has also suffered, with 85 percent of students ranked “below comprehension” in reading at the end of grade 3.⁵²

In India, education for Indigenous, tribal, and other minority children operates in contradiction to both India’s constitution and its 2020 national education policy. Article 350-A of the constitution exhorts states to provide instruction through the mother tongue for primary education, but article 351 recognizes only twenty-two languages for official use.⁵³ The national education policy affirms a commitment to using children’s home languages and mother tongues as the medium of instruction preferably until grade 8 and beyond. In practice, however, a gap between policy and practice deprives most Indigenous, tribal, and other minority children of education in their own languages.⁵⁴ The actual number of languages used for teaching/learning, medium of instruction, or school subjects has declined over the years. In higher education, even regional majority languages are only minimally present; tribal languages are completely absent. University and technical education are almost exclusively in English.⁵⁵

Large military budgets and defense spending in both rich and poor countries also divert money that could have been more wisely spent on education. International military spending dwarfs the amount of development assistance for education. One-fifth of Pakistan’s military budget would suffice to finance universal primary education.⁵⁶ Nigeria is Africa’s richest country. A greater investment in education could yield a higher return for peace and stability than equivalent military spending. More than half of Nigerian girls in the less developed and conflict-ridden northeast and northwest of the country are not in school. The northeast region (in particular Borno State) is one of the poorest, with nearly 75 percent (or just over 1.4 million) out-of-school children. Boko Haram (usually translated as “Western education is forbidden”) is the main driver of attacks against education. A UNICEF-supported intervention providing first-language instruction to over nine thousand students across grades 4 to 6 achieved impressive results in both reading and mathematics in only three months. The baseline of 14 percent of children in grades 4 to 6 able to read a paragraph of four lines in Hausa, the largest minority language, increased by 31 percentage points to 45 percent.⁵⁷ Programs such as these need to be scaled up across Nigeria and the African continent.

There may be grounds for optimism, both regionally and internationally. In 2022, Nigeria approved a new national language policy providing for first-language instruction throughout the six years of primary school. Given the country’s size and ethnolinguistic diversity, implementation will be challenging, but could benefit millions of children and the country as a whole. Similarly, Botswana’s ministry of basic education promised to introduce eleven new local languages for instruction (in addition to English and Setswana) in January 2022, but still has not yet implemented the policy. Unlike Nigeria’s policy, however, Botswana’s is an early exit

model, providing only three years from pre-primary level until grade 2. Meanwhile, a recent World Bank policy paper recommended actively championing and leading the way on good language-of-instruction policies because they promote human capital accumulation and are therefore of acute concern to national policymakers and development partners.⁵⁸ As the largest funder of education in the developing world, the World Bank could prioritize allocation of resources for L1-based MLE and put pressure on ministries of education to adopt sound language policies.

In 2015, countries pledged to make changes in education policies to address exclusion, marginalization, and inequities as part of a transformative education agenda to be implemented in the United Nations' SDGs. Despite encouraging developments in some countries, education in many parts of the world still operates in ways that contradict best practices recognized more than seventy years ago by UNESCO, supported by a substantial body of research on the benefits of L1-based MLE. I have provided empirical evidence in support of a significant geographic overlap between poverty, educational disadvantage, and language diversity. There can be no true development without linguistic development. Use of local languages is inseparable from participatory development. Exclusionary policies, no matter how well funded, will not work. The continuation of educational policies favoring international languages at the expense of local ones is part of the development fiasco. The social and economic costs of inequities in differential access to good-quality education are high indeed, with the heaviest burden falling on the poorest, girls, ethnolinguistic minorities, and those living in rural areas. Achieving equality and inclusion will not be possible so long as development agendas continue to ignore language of instruction.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Refugee Education: Aligning Access, Learning & Opportunity

Sarah Dryden-Peterson

Access, learning, and opportunity are usually conceptualized in a sequential and linear way: with access to school comes learning and with learning comes opportunity. But for most refugee students – and for most marginalized students globally – this model simply does not hold. In settings where students’ mobility and their social, economic, and political rights have massive restrictions, access to school does not translate into learning, and learning does not translate into opportunities. Creating education that enables refugee young people to feel a sense of belonging and prepares them to help build more peaceful and equitable futures requires us to address these misalignments, which are rooted across the ecosystem, from macro-level geopolitical arrangements to micro-level interactions in classrooms. I pose three questions as central in understanding these misalignments: Who is allowed to be where and for how long? Who is responsible for refugee education? And who can feel a sense of belonging? Answering these questions informs how we might work, through policy and practice, toward alignment.

Wadad reflected on her approach to life, developed while living as a Syrian refugee in Beirut, Lebanon.¹ “I really love to sit alone,” she said. “To think of many things, about the future, about what will happen. At the same time, I tell myself: maybe there’s no tomorrow. I live the details of each day and try to make the best of it. I try to live day by day, but I also strive a lot for the future, a lot.”

In 2019, when she described her approach, Wadad was a seventeen-year-old student in grade 9 in a public school in Lebanon. She had arrived in Beirut when she was thirteen, having fled a suburb of Damascus, Syria, where she grew up. Her school there was “just normal,” and she described living in “an area where there wasn’t a lot of things happening.” One day, a bomb fell in the school compound, and everything changed. Wadad said she knew “that we couldn’t stay there [in Syria],” but she also expected she would return to her school the following semester. “The plan,” she said, “was for us to go back [to Syria].”

Five years later, Wadad found herself constantly embedded in the dissonance between her reality of long-term displacement in Lebanon and the plan she had

five years before, which is the one she still has now: to return to her home in Syria. Wadad now prefers not to think about the geography of her future, explaining she has come to realize how powerless it makes her feel to dwell on what she cannot control. She explained with some resignation, “It doesn’t make a difference where [my future] happens, but I prefer a place where I’m most comfortable in my job, my family... a place where I have people I love, not a place where I’m alone.” What Wadad has not given up, and is adamant that she will never give up, is a focus on this future. Yet maintaining this focus has been a constant challenge for Wadad and her Syrian classmates. They have found much of their education instead centered on what Wadad described as the “details of each day,” of just getting by in the present.²

Wadad is one of now more than 43.4 million people globally who live as refugees, half of whom are children.³ A refugee is someone who has fled across a border with a well-founded fear of persecution. Those counted in these numbers – and often more visible – are those to whom host governments give legal status after deciding on the legitimacy of persecution claims. Millions more live as asylum-seekers, often spending years in limbo without legal status, and others are counted in categories created to fit domestic and global political purposes, including Palestinians outside the five-country mandate of UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) and “other people in need of international protection,” which includes all displaced Venezuelans. In addition, 68.3 million are internally displaced within their countries of citizenship.

The number of refugees, those displaced outside their country of citizenship, is growing; in the past decade, the number of refugees has tripled.⁴ The number of refugees globally is the equivalent of all the residents in Canada or California or Tokyo. Yet most refugees do not live in these places. Confined by policies and walls erected by high-income countries, 69 percent of refugees live in countries that neighbor their conflict-affected home countries, and 75 percent live in low- and middle-income countries.⁵ These sites of exile have fewer resources for social services and already-overstretched education systems. In 2017, when Wadad was fifteen years old, 25 percent of the population in Lebanon were refugees compared to less than 0.1 percent in the United States.⁶ In 2019, the United States admitted only 1,198 refugees from Afghanistan, while almost 1.5 million Afghan refugees continued to live in Pakistan, many for more than twenty years.⁷ This long-term displacement is a central dimension of refugee education.

Refugees today live in exile between ten and twenty-five years on average, three times as long as in the early 1990s.⁸ This length of displacement means exile is the one and only chance most refugee children have for education. Abroon, who lived in Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, thought he would quickly return to Soma-

lia after he fled home with his family as a young child. But twenty-one years later, he was still in Kenya.⁹ Raphael, an NGO staff member in Kakuma camp, also in Kenya, said: “We can’t keep talking about emergency . . . if people have been here for twenty years. . . . So when you design things that are emergency in approach and in context, then you are not addressing my needs as I grow up.”¹⁰ The expectation of short-term displacement is met by the reality of long-term displacement for individual refugees, like Abroon, and for agency staff, like Raphael, who make education policies.

Not all refugee children have access to school, as Wadad and Abroon did. Globally, only 68 percent of school-aged refugees are enrolled at primary levels and 37 percent at secondary levels.¹¹ Even when they do have access to schools, they often have little access to school learning. In Kakuma camp in Kenya, we find that literacy among children in early primary school is among the lowest in the world.¹² In classrooms, refugee children are often excluded through use of languages they do not understand, curricula that does not represent them or actively discriminates against them, and fraught relationships with teachers and peers.¹³ Their opportunities are also frequently truncated. In almost all countries where refugees live, they are noncitizens and likely will never be citizens. Lack of citizenship curtails their access to school and to post-schooling opportunities, with limited rights to work, access capital, and maintain long-term legal status.¹⁴ Overall, refugee children are less likely to go to school. They are less likely to finish school. They are less likely to learn in school. And they are less likely to feel like they can contribute to their communities.¹⁵

We cannot succeed in the global quest for educational equity if we do not address the needs of refugees. So what would it take to ensure that all refugee young people have access to learning that enables them to feel a sense of belonging and prepares them to help build more peaceful and equitable futures? Each day, in classrooms around the world, teachers of refugees act in response to this question. One of these teachers is Ahmed, a Syrian refugee who teaches Syrian refugee students in Beirut.¹⁶

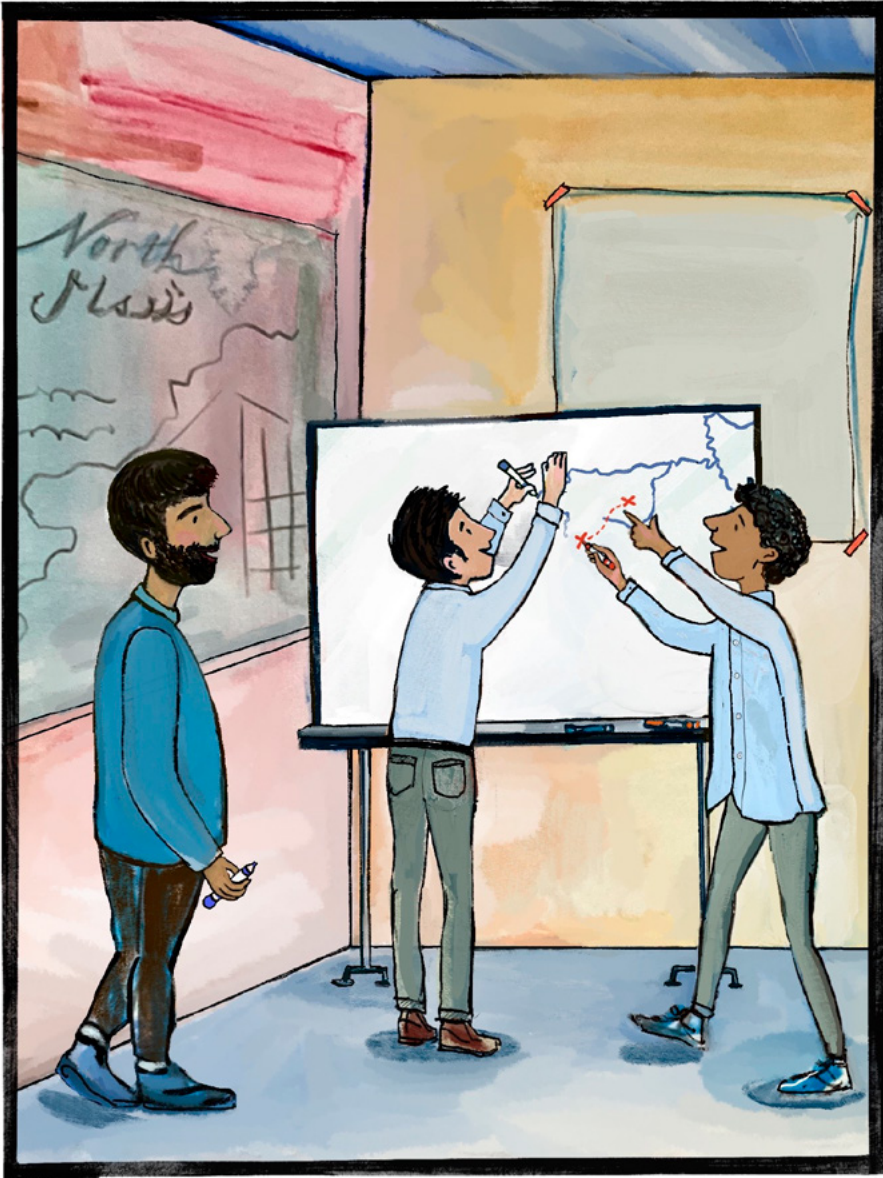
Ahmed is a grade 9 civics teacher. His approach involved beginning with what students knew and experienced, and extending that in two directions: supporting them as they navigated their lives in the present in Lebanon and, in more limited ways, helping them envision and work toward the ways they want things to be in the future. In one class, Ahmed was helping students learn a map of the Middle East. He knew his students would be tested on this material in their imminent high-stakes Brevet examination – which they were required to pass in order to continue into grade 10 – and he was explicit and intent on their need to learn this so that they might succeed. Ahmed invited the students to locate any place they knew on the blank map he had drawn on the board. One girl approached and la-

beled Syria on the map. Others followed, labeling countries and bodies of water. One student held back, uncertain she wanted to go to the board. Ahmed encouraged her, and the faces of peers, eager and open, also gently prompted her. She did get up and go to the board, making it so that everyone in the class had participated. “Bravo,” said Ahmed when she completed the task. To the class he said, “She was saying she did not know anything. She turned out to know everything.”

Students were no strangers to being treated as if they were clueless and unaware of their experiences of everyday exclusions as refugees in Lebanon, and Ahmed often talked in metaphors that were about immediate classroom moments and also addressed larger themes in his students’ educational experiences. As the class focused on the details of making the map on the board, Ahmed zoomed out to the larger purposes of the exercise, reminding students to think about “identifying one location with respect to another location.” While talking about the physical contours of borders, states, and compass directions, this concrete task resonated with much more expansive ways of how he thought about supporting students in their learning as they constantly navigate multiple locations and their relationships to them.

Ahmed was clear that this navigation involved a good deal of compromise in his teaching, an intentional balancing act. As a Syrian refugee himself, he wanted his students to learn about the daily constraints they faced within Lebanon’s exclusionary social, economic, and political structures. Yet, as their teacher, he also had to teach the lessons prescribed by the Lebanese curriculum, which the students needed to follow to pass the Brevet exam. Ahmed needed to navigate tensions between the kinds of learning he – as their civics teacher *and* as a Syrian refugee – wanted students to do about membership and participation; the lessons prescribed by the Lebanese curriculum they followed; and the daily social, political, and economic constraints on their roles as civic actors. He described the challenges of teaching the Lebanese history curriculum, for example: “All the students here know only Lebanese history and not Syrian history. . . . We have a common history but it is told from the point of view of Lebanon.” Despite being a school of Syrian teachers and Syrian students, the Lebanese curriculum they followed and the students’ success on the Brevet exam was their immediate gateway to future education. Ahmed was pragmatic and steadfast in his teaching about this: “At the end of the day, it is a school textbook, and the goal of it is for the students to get good grades. Nothing else. . . . The history is false. But we have to study it to get good grades.” In other moments, Ahmed tried to make materials relevant to students, by bringing in lived experiences from outside the textbook, to create space for students to explore disconnects between the formal school curriculum and their experiences outside school. When teaching Lebanese laws, for example, Ahmed explained, “I make it clear that this is a law that exists but is unfortunately not applied. As simple as that.”

Figure 1
Mr. Ahmed Teaches Civics in Beirut, Lebanon



Source: Artwork by Wilhelmina Peragine. See Sarah Dryden-Peterson and Hania Mariën, *Pedagogies of Belonging: Educators Building Welcoming Communities in Settings of Conflict and Migration* (Refugee REACH, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2023). © 2023 by Sarah Dryden-Peterson and Hania Mariën. Published under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International license. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>.

In his teaching, Ahmed tried to mend misalignments among access to school in Lebanon, learning in the Lebanese national education system that could be both certified and meaningful, and opportunities for livelihoods and participation in the present and future. Access, learning, and opportunity in global education research and practice are usually conceptualized in a sequential and linear way: with access to school comes learning and with learning comes opportunity. For most refugee students – as for most marginalized students globally – this model simply does not hold. In the settings where their mobility and their social, economic, and political rights have massive restrictions, access to school does not translate into learning and learning does not translate into opportunities. Creating the kinds of education that *do* enable all refugees to access learning that allows them to feel a sense of belonging and prepares them to help build more peaceful and equitable futures requires us to understand these misalignments and work to better align them through policy and practice.

Misalignments among access, learning, and opportunity are rooted across the ecosystem, from macro-level geopolitical arrangements to micro-level interactions in classrooms. Yet they are also rooted in policy and practice that ignore the connections across these ecosystems, in particular, the structural causes of forced migration such as environmental destruction, economic exploitation and devastation, and discrimination and racism.¹⁷ Three questions are central in understanding these misalignments and how we might connect the ecosystems to work toward alignment: Who is allowed to be where and for how long? Who is responsible for refugee education? And who can feel a sense of belonging?

Who is allowed to be where and for how long?¹⁸ The confinement of refugees to neighboring host countries and low- and middle-income countries is not an accident of geography. Migration policies make it challenging to obtain legal status in a high-income country, except for the 1 percent of refugees globally who have access to resettlement.¹⁹ For those who do arrive, often via dangerous routes, asylum processes are highly opaque, hard to navigate, and discriminatory. It is, as anthropologist Catherine Lowe Besteman has argued, “differential access to mobility on the basis of origin.”²⁰ Ukrainians, for example, have been able to access residency permits and establish claims to asylum in Europe, a radical departure from policies applied to other refugees, including Syrians, Iraqis, and Afghans who often remain stranded at borders and denied entry to European countries.²¹

Several high-income countries have explicitly engaged in outsourcing refugee hosting to reduce entry of refugees to their own countries, what some call “transactional forced migration.”²² The 2015 EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan stipulated that all Syrians arriving in Greece would be sent back to Turkey; in return, the European Union would pay Turkey EUR 6 billion to support refugee assistance,

guarantee visa-free travel in Europe for Turkish citizens, and agree to re-engage negotiations on Turkey's EU membership.²³ The 2022 U.K.-Rwanda Agreement included involuntary deportation of asylum-seekers from the United Kingdom to Rwanda. Political scientists Fiona B. Adamson and Kelly M. Greenhill argue that this kind of deal is not unique, that "the exchange of cash and the promise of additional side-payments for a distant country's acceptance of 'unwanted' populations bears a striking resemblance to earlier schemes that aimed to resolve thorny political problems by proposing to transfer populations to far-flung locations."²⁴

These confinements and limitations on refugees' movement effectively constrain the kinds of access refugees have to education. In most cases, refugees live in places where access to school is not universal, and the quality of education is unequal because some students and schools do not receive sufficient resources. In Kenya, refugees live in districts with some of the highest levels of poverty and the lowest levels of access to school.²⁵ An NGO staff member in Egypt explained that "there is no benefit" to including Syrian refugees in a system already struggling to implement quality education.²⁶ In South Sudan, a UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) staff member explained that schools are "barely functional" and act in "haphazard" ways while trying to include refugees.²⁷ In Lebanon, where Wadad is in school, Lebanese citizens choose private schools whenever they have the option, not the public schools refugees have access to.²⁸ Like in most countries, poor children, including refugees, have access to poor schools.²⁹

Restrictions on and the unpredictability of who is allowed to move where – and who is allowed to stay where – shape misalignments between refugee children's access to school and their learning and opportunities. Khawla, one of Ahmed's students in Beirut, had a specific goal of being a surgeon who provides free medical care to people in need.³⁰ After researching the requirements for this training in Lebanon, Khawla wrote out a detailed series of steps covering the next twelve years of her life that would allow her to accomplish this goal. But each step was accompanied by a set of factors over which she had no control. Would refugees be allowed to continue to go to school in Lebanon? Would she be allowed to work in Lebanon if she did become a surgeon?³¹ She had top grades, the kind that, according to the logics of exam systems, would facilitate her further study and enable her to reach medical school. But what Khawla heard from her teachers when she began primary school in Lebanon shook her trust in whether these opportunities would be open to her. She explained that she began to think, "Maybe they're right, maybe we are coming to Lebanon, it's not our country, we can't study here, we can't work here, we can't stay here. Maybe they're right. We are occupying their country." Khawla and other refugee young people know they are at the mercy of cyclical and conflicting logics: educational policies that allowed them to study, but social and economic policies and politics that did not allow them to participate.

A second and related question informs understanding of the misalignments among access, learning, and opportunity: who is responsible for refugee education? Globally, responsibility for education is presumed to lie with governments, even if, in some cases, governments are unable or unwilling to take on this responsibility. Responsibility is financial in terms of paying for education, and substantive in terms of what and how children learn, which is evident in decisions about curriculum, school structures, and teacher training, typically made by governments (at varying levels, depending on the context). This responsibility that governments take on is usually connected, in belief or in fact, to presumed returns that will benefit the state.³² These returns can take many and boundless forms: economic, social, political, civic, and in terms of happiness and well-being.

In refugee education, assumptions about who is responsible for provision of and decision-making about education are called into question, with implications for alignment among access, learning, and opportunity.³³ Until a decade ago, most refugees had access to schooling only in separate schools reserved for them, isolated from national education systems, with the intention of providing temporary schooling with short-term goals.³⁴ The geography of refugees enabled this through their containment in refugee camps. At the time, global NGOs and UN agencies took responsibility for refugee education, acting much like a “pseudo-state” within the refugee camps.³⁵

In 2012, a radical shift in global UNHCR policy changed how refugees accessed education, with implications for responsibility. This new approach included refugees in national education systems, which was meant to provide the kind of educational stability and quality that was needed in long-term displacement. However, in a fourteen-country study, Elizabeth Adelman, Michelle J. Bellino, Vidur Chopra, and I found multiple models of inclusion of refugees in national education systems. These models ranged from no inclusion, where refugees have no legal status and no right to education, such as in Malaysia and Bangladesh; to geographic and temporal segregation, where refugees had access to host country curriculum, certification, and teachers, but in separate places, as in camps in Kenya; or at separate times of the day, as in second shifts in Lebanon. In a small number of places, typically in cities like Kampala and Cairo, refugees and nationals attended school together. We found these models reflected different purposes of education for refugees, particularly whether policymakers imagined those futures to be in the host country, in the home country, or somewhere else entirely.³⁶

These different models also reflect divergent conceptions of how responsible the host state is, or seeks to be, for refugee education. The 2018 Global Compact on Refugees advocated “responsibility sharing” to support new approaches to inclusion of refugees in national systems, as in education, meaning that high-income countries would contribute to the costs of social services for refugees no matter where they live.³⁷ Many donors have not met these funding commitments, forcing

already overstretched hosting countries to examine the extent to which they can, or should, support refugee education.³⁸ An NGO staff member in Rwanda described how “the big responsibility is on the government.”³⁹ Approaches to refugee inclusion exhibit varying degrees of what responsibility entails, in terms of access to school, learning, and/or opportunities. Without a shared global responsibility, refugee education in most places has involved minimal realization of the right to education through access to school, but – lacking the necessary additional resources and commitments – limited quality of learning or long-term opportunities.

Inclusion has marked a major opportunity for addressing certain core dimensions of refugees’ educational marginalization: namely, their access to school. Yet what remains are persistent dilemmas connected to learning and opportunity that closely mirror the experiences of other marginalized children globally, such as alienation from curriculum, exclusion and discrimination in relationships with teachers and peers, and misalignments between the promises of getting educated and limited opportunities for equitable social, civic, economic, and political participation. To align access, learning, and opportunity, we must address the third central question: who can feel a sense of belonging?

When a refugee must flee, the goal is almost never to leave home. The reality, as poet Warsan Shire writes, is that “you only leave home / when home won’t let you stay.”⁴⁰ We must identify and work on the underlying causes of conflict that force people to flee and on the collective and transnational action needed to make home places one can stay, as related to, among others, environmental destruction, economic exploitation and devastation, and discrimination and racism. At the same time, when people do flee, they must create new lives; this is also collective and transnational work. One of the key places this process happens is in schools, and teachers and students together must figure out how to answer this question of who can feel a sense of belonging.

One day in 2019, two of Wadad’s classmates arrived at school for the afternoon shift to find a poster they had made ripped up and torn to pieces on the floor.⁴¹ The students, Munir and Mira, tried to talk to their teacher about what had happened. By way of explanation, the teacher said that the Lebanese students in the morning shift felt like Munir, Mira, and their friends were “intruders on the school.” Then the principal told the class that maybe the Lebanese students did this to the poster because, after all, it is “their school first.” Upset as he was, Munir was resigned in some ways to this second-class status. As Mira said, it did make some sense: “They’re Lebanese and their school is Lebanese. For sure, for sure, for sure, there’s no country that favors others over their own citizens, right? In Syria, we also have our own school and it’s not theirs.” Munir explained how this felt to him like a trade-off: “It’s like they’re giving [the school] to us so we can learn,” but “not to be established.” While he felt this way, he most often found these conversations

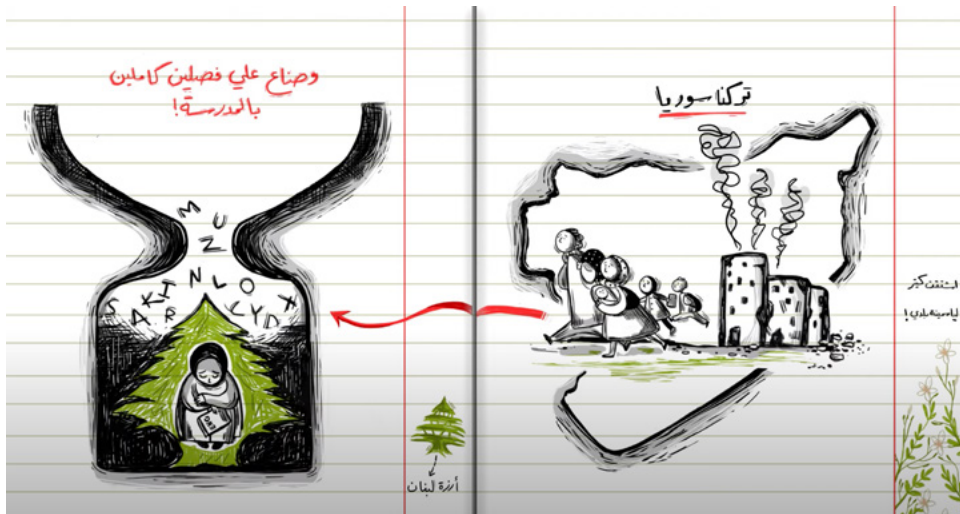
closed for discussion, with his teachers saying in response things like, “Don’t interfere with politics. We’re here to study not to talk about these issues.”

In a short, animated film created from our research (see a still in Figure 2), Vidur Chopra, Joumana Talhouk, Carmen Geha, and I show Munir and Mira’s experiences of exclusion, of trade-offs, and of being silenced, all making them feel that they do not belong. We also show the ways in which teachers often feel powerless in the face of these situations: beholden to the curriculum and examination systems of the state, living within political environments of xenophobia, and often working without pay for months at a time. At the same time, we learn from students about how their teachers *do* help them begin to realign their access to school in a second shift – which makes them feel “behind” and intentionally kept separate – with learning and opportunities that are meaningful in the present and for the future.

Teachers support a sense of belonging through their work to help align students’ access to school with both learning and opportunity. They do this through ways of teaching and ways of building relationships, what we call pedagogies of belonging, rooted in predictability, adaptability, and future-building.⁴² Predictability includes “the safety created through knowing, understanding, and trusting.”⁴³ For young people who have experienced massive disruption, often without notice, as Wadad did when she suddenly had to flee her home, the knowledge that some elements of their lives remain the same each day is comforting. This need for predictability is greater still for young people who fear they could lose their legal status or right to education at any time and once again be forced to flee. In Jordan, for example, Hiba Salem and I learned from students how much they value the predictability of knowing they will find their teacher in the classroom each day, that their teacher will listen to them, and that their teacher will make sure they learn in ways that will support them to succeed in the education systems they find themselves in.⁴⁴ Students describe the predictability of academic learning also as key: they need these skills to persist in school and to create the kinds of livelihoods they envision for their futures.

Adaptability involves teaching and learning to meet both short-term and long-term goals, especially as conditions and needs shift. As Ahmed did for his Syrian students in Beirut, teachers of refugees across contexts adapt curricula they must teach as mandated by the governments that employ them, that students must learn to pass high-stakes exams and to proceed in their education. This adaptation is often a process of making the curriculum more relevant for students, linking their access to the curriculum to meaningful learning. At times, these are large adaptations, as in shifting the language of instruction from English to Arabic, as Ahmed did at his school.⁴⁵ At times, the shifts are smaller, such as acknowledgment of the dissonance between what is taught and what the students have experienced. In one civics lesson, a teacher was emphasizing, as the curriculum does, that students should “become part of society, to have greater importance and not just be on the margins.” One student

Figure 2

Still from *We See You: What Syrian Students Wish Their Teachers Knew*

The Arabic text at the top of the drawings reads: “We left Syria. I could not enroll in school for two terms!” Source: Artwork by Sawsan Nourallah. See Sarah Dryden-Peterson, Vidur Chopra, Joumana Talhouk, and Carmen Geha, *We See You: What Syrian Students Wish Their Teachers Knew* (Refugee REACH Initiative, 2021), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXsj13A5Abc>. © 2021 by Sarah Dryden-Peterson, Vidur Chopra, Joumana Talhouk, and Carmen Geha. Published under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International license. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>.

valued the way this teacher at the same time acknowledged the limited role Syrian young people have as agents of change in Lebanon; the teacher went on to say, “In the end, nothing of what’s in this lesson exists. We wish it does. . . . It’s true you’re learning things that don’t exist but you might be the reason they exist in the future. You might do things related to politics . . . and you can change and do the things you studied about.”⁴⁶

Future-building “involves imagining, and planning for, multiple possible futures – here, there, and/or somewhere else entirely.”⁴⁷ Refugee students are constantly faced with, and planning for, this unknowable future.⁴⁸ Students value that what they do every day in school is not only about the access to school, to being there each day, but to the learning and opportunities that they hope and expect will follow from that commitment. Given that refugee young people cannot anticipate where their futures will be, this kind of learning requires building capacities to apply what they learn across place and time, and not having to choose between the present and the future. They should not have to decide between, on

one hand, the kinds of learning that are deemed worthy within the education they have access to at the present in one specific geography and, on the other hand, the opportunities they then might trade away for a different future.

The time is right for a collective and multilevel approach to refugee education that addresses the misalignments among access, learning, and opportunity. This requires more expansive and interconnected responses to the three questions of who is allowed to be where and for how long; who is responsible for refugee education; and who belongs. The daily work of figuring out how to ensure that all refugee young people feel a sense of belonging falls to teachers and students in schools. Yet we – in governments at all levels, in financial institutions, in universities, in civil society organizations, as parents, as school leaders, as activists, as engaged members of our local and global communities – have roles to play. We can learn from these teachers and students about what they do and how, as in some of the examples presented in this essay; we can expand opportunities for teachers and students to learn from each other about these practices and how they might be adapted across contexts; and we can support, institutionally and systemically, professional development of teachers around these practices, including attention to their financial and social well-being.⁴⁹

Yet teachers and students cannot and should not do this work alone. Every day they experience the consequences of the structural causes of forced migration: the environmental destruction, the economic exploitation and devastation, and the discrimination and racism that compel people to move in search of new homes and continue to surround them as they try to build new lives. To ensure that all students have access to learning and belonging that enables them to help build more peaceful and equitable futures requires us to address these causes and their consequences, including new visions of who is responsible for refugee education and who is allowed to be where and for how long. High-income countries, like the United States, often fuel environmental destruction, economic exploitation, and racism linked to the conflicts that refugees flee. They – we – need to shoulder more of the responsibility for refugee education, both financially in the regions where most refugees live and through migration policies not based on containment but on more equitable opportunities for mobility. It is in the interests of all of us to act now to create access to learning that does enable refugee young people to feel a sense of belonging and prepares them to help build more peaceful and equitable futures – these are the futures in which all of us will share.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This essay represents collaborative research and thinking that have spanned time and place. My thanks to the students and teachers who participated, including Wadad, Ahmed, Abroon, Khawla, Munir, Mira, and hundreds of others; my hope is always that you recognize your experiences and what you wanted to say to larger audiences. My thanks to research collaborators in this work, whose inspiration and generosity are the foundation of how I conceive of collaboration: Elizabeth Adelman, Michelle J. Bellino, Shelby Carvalho, Vidur Chopra, Negin Dahya, Bibi-Zuhra Faizi, Carmen Geha, Cindy Horst, Hania Mariën, Celia Reddick, Hiba Salem, and Joumana Talhouk. For wise and discerning suggestions, my thanks to three anonymous reviewers, my fellow authors in this issue of *Dædalus*, and James A. Banks.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ All names of research participants are pseudonyms.
- ² Wadad was a participant in a study across three schools that asked Syrian students about their experiences with education in Lebanon. This study was collaborative with Vidur Chopra, Joumana Talhouk, and Carmen Geha. I have also written about Wadad's experiences in Sarah Dryden-Peterson, "Pedagogies of Belonging: Lessons from Refugee Education for Times of Uncertainty," in *The COVID Generation, Children and Youth in and After the Pandemic (Workshop Proceedings 28 February – 1 March 2022)*, ed. Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco (Editrice Vaticana, 2023).
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- ¹⁷ I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer’s suggestion to make this point explicit.
- ¹⁸ See Dryden-Peterson, “Sanctuary,” in *Right Where We Belong*, 23–49.
- ¹⁹ UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement* 2022.
- ²⁰ Catherine Lowe Besteman, *Militarized Global Apartheid* (Duke University Press, 2020), 18.
- ²¹ Lara Jakes, “For Ukraine’s Refugees, Europe Opens Doors That Were Shut to Others,” *The New York Times*, February 26, 2022.
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- ²⁶ Interview by Elizabeth Adelman, August 20, 2014, Cairo, Egypt. This interview was conducted for a collaborative project.
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- ³⁰ Khawla was a participant in a study across three schools that asked Syrian students about their experiences of education in Lebanon. This study was collaborative with Vidur Chopra, Joumana Talhouk, and Carmen Geha. I have also written about Kawla’s expe-

periences in Dryden-Peterson, *Right Where We Belong*. Several sentences about Khawla here are taken verbatim from this book (see pages 106–107), according to the Harvard University Press author guidelines.

- ³¹ In Lebanon, refugees have been restricted from practicing certain professions.
- ³² Ben W. Ansell, *From the Ballot to the Blackboard: The Redistributive Political Economy of Education* (Cambridge University Press, 2010); and Stephen Kosack, *The Education of Nations: How the Political Organization of the Poor, Not Democracy, Led Governments to Invest in Mass Education* (Oxford University Press, 2012).
- ³³ See also Shelby Carvalho and Sarah Dryden-Peterson, “Political Economy of Refugees: How Responsibility Shapes the Politics of Education,” *World Development* 173 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2023.106394>.
- ³⁴ For more on the history of refugee education, see Sarah Dryden-Peterson, “Refugee Education: The Crossroads of Globalization,” *Educational Researcher* 45 (9) (2016).
- ³⁵ Tony Waters and Kim Leblanc, “Refugees and Education: Mass Public Schooling without a Nation-State,” *Comparative Education Review* 49 (2) (2005).
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- ³⁹ Interview by Vidur Chopra, July 18, 2014, Kigeme, Rwanda. This interview was conducted for a collaborative project.
- ⁴⁰ Warsan Shire, “Home,” Amnesty International Ireland, <https://www.amnesty.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/home-by-warsan-shire.pdf> (accessed October 2, 2024).
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- ⁴³ Sarah Dryden-Peterson, “Pedagogies of Uncertainty as Pedagogies of Belonging,” *Comparative Education Review* 65 (2) (2021): 356–374.

- ⁴⁴ Hiba Salem and Sarah Dryden-Peterson, "Protection in Refugee Education: Teachers' Socio-Political Practices in Classrooms in Jordan," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 54 (1) (2023): 75–95, <https://doi.org/10.1111/aeq.12436>. See also portraits of two teachers, Ms. Susan and Mr. Faisal, in Dryden-Peterson and Mariën, *Pedagogies of Belonging*.
- ⁴⁵ Chopra, Talhouk, Dryden-Peterson, and Geha, "Creating Educational Borderlands."
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How Pedagogy Makes the Difference in U.S. Schools

Gloria Ladson-Billings

Emerging from the modern U.S. civil rights era, scholars have promoted ethnic and multicultural studies as strategies for improving the educational performance of students who have traditionally been marginalized in classrooms nationwide. Among the most marginalized are students who have experienced historic discrimination because of their racial, ethnic, linguistic, and immigrant status. The student population of United States comprises diverse groups. Marginalization and school failure are highest among African American, Latine, Indigenous, and some Asian students. In this essay, I speak to the necessity of more than curricular changes and explore the more than thirty years of research that addresses the demand to employ pedagogical philosophies and strategies that meet the needs of marginalized students. I conclude by describing the impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning in underserved communities.

As far back as the 1930s, scholars recognized the need to address the curriculum distortions, omissions, and misinformation that rendered invisible students who were outside of the so-called mainstream. Historian Carter G. Woodson argued that the school curriculum has an impact on students. In his words,

The same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro [*sic*] by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples.¹

One of the first parts of the school that activists and civil rights champions attacked was what they called the “Eurocentric curriculum.” Even a cursory examination of the U.S. curriculum in the 1960s revealed an erasure of peoples other than mainstream and middle-class whites. Indigenous peoples were rendered invisible after the infamous Trail of Tears, the forced removal of the peoples of the Cherokee, Muskogee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole nations from their lands east of the Mississippi River to present-day Oklahoma in 1838 and 1939.

Black people only made appearances as powerless, voiceless, and enslaved people. People of East Asian descent were described briefly in the context of their arrival to the U.S. west coast through Angel Island in the 1910s, and as the “Yellow Peril” when Japanese Americans were rounded up and interred during World War II. There was virtually no mention of Latine peoples except to discuss the Battle of the Alamo and the Bracero Program that brought them across the U.S. border during the labor shortages that developed during and after World War II.²

One of the school-based results of the civil rights era was a broadening of curriculum offerings with the development of programs in Afro-American or Black studies, Chicano studies, Native American or American Indian studies, and Asian American studies. The inclusion of these ethnic studies courses represented hard-fought battles in state and local school districts over curricula. For the most part, these courses were included as electives at the secondary level and sometimes as standalone units of study in both elementary and secondary schools. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, we began to see multi-ethnic and multicultural course offerings that represented a more integrated approach to the curriculum and to combat the trivializing of course content about diverse groups.

Pioneers in the work of multicultural education include scholars such as James A. Banks, Carl A. Grant, Geneva Gay, and Carlos E. Cortes, who published important foundational works about the content that was regularly omitted from most school courses in history, social studies, and literature.³ Despite a growing number of titles and a seeming demand for multicultural content, this shift was not sufficient to help teachers who were prepared in conventional teacher education programs to weave new topics into their standard curriculum or to teach in ways different from how they taught the mainstream curriculum. Education scholar Larry Cuban argued that the students who struggled with conventional courses in U.S. history continued to struggle in ethnic studies courses that were taught in the same way.⁴ Despite the change in curriculum content, students were still expected to read textbooks, listen to lectures, take tests, and write essays and reports.

In the early 1990s, Banks conceptualized what he termed, “the 5 dimensions of multicultural education” to combat the common misconception that multicultural education was something solely appropriate for social studies, English, art, and music classes, but had nothing to do with areas such as mathematics and the sciences.⁵ This perception emanated from the idea that multicultural education was merely about content integration: adding content about diverse others into the dominant narrative. Banks went on to explore notions of knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, fostering an empowering school culture and social structure, and equity pedagogy.

Knowledge construction asks teachers to consider how the information they taught was built. For example, why is it that U.S. high school students can easily name the nations of Europe but struggle to recall more than a handful of African

nations? All nations appear on a world map, but because the curriculum usually depicts Africa as a continent consumed by war, famine, and disease, students rarely consider the individual African nations and their various struggles for independence. Students are often unaware that the maps they use are drawn in ways that depict the United States as located squarely in the middle, even when that requires cartographers to split the nation of China. That rendering depicts the political nature of mapmaking and underscores beliefs about national superiority. The most frequent map projection found in U.S. geography and history textbooks exaggerates the Northern hemisphere, making Greenland inordinately large so that the United States also appears larger in relation to the continents of South America and Africa. The fact that the earth is a sphere means it is impossible to accurately represent it on a flat surface. The Mercator projection was created in the 1500s by cartographer Gerardus Mercator. Although it is widely used because it preserves the shape and directionality of landmasses, it represents Greenland and Africa as approximately the same size. In truth, Africa is about fourteen times the size of Greenland. Indeed, Africa is larger than the United States, Canada, and China combined.⁶ How we construct the knowledge students learn shapes their understandings and worldviews. Ideas such as the Frontier Thesis, Manifest Destiny, and the Monroe Doctrine are constructed, not “naturally occurring” phenomena. The idea that learners might contest what was previously offered as truth is a part of what multicultural education offers.

Prejudice reduction is the idea that learning about a broad range of facts, concepts, and theoretical perspectives can reduce previously held notions of superiority and inferiority about certain groups. For example, students learning about astronomer and naturalist Benjamin Banneker’s mathematics skills, or Shirley Jackson, the Black woman theoretical physicist and former head of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, may move away from stereotypes about who can engage in high-level science and mathematics. I have written elsewhere about a sixth-grade classroom where students using an outdated textbook read statements like “the peoples of Nigeria are primitive.”⁷ Determined to combat this inaccuracy and stereotype, the teacher shared a set of slides of modern-day Lagos, Nigeria, where students saw high-rise buildings, roads jammed with the latest automobiles, and life remarkably like what they experience in U.S. cities.

Another of Banks’s dimensions is an empowering school culture. This dimension speaks to the need for multicultural education to transcend individual classrooms. He argued that having only a couple of teachers focus on multicultural education in their classrooms did little to change the messages that schools send about students who have been traditionally marginalized. For example, schools that never acknowledge the import of women, people of color, or immigrants through their assemblies and programs, school lunches, and hiring in strategic positions (that is, beyond janitors and cafeteria workers) keep the racial, ethnic, and

linguistic hierarchies in place and render the content changes in classrooms less powerful. Students are cognizant of which students are chosen for special honors such as gifted or advanced placement classes, as well as those regularly assigned to discretionary special education programs and who are regularly suspended and expelled from school. In schools that do not foster an empowering school culture, students come to believe that there is something inherent in their racial, ethnic, or linguistic identity that suggests they are worthy (or not worthy) of school-based benefits and privileges.

Finally, Banks's dimensions include what he terms equity pedagogy. In his article with Cherry McGee Banks, they define equity pedagogy as "teaching strategies and classroom environments that help students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively and help create and perpetuate a just, humane, and democratic society."⁸ As multicultural education emerged, much of the energy went into correcting curriculum errors and distortions, as well as infusing the school content with broader information from perspectives beyond what was previously available. Curriculum developers and educators paid limited attention to the way we taught students, and how our pedagogical practices might disadvantage the students who were struggling with the older, more Eurocentric curriculum. It is this feature of multicultural education in K–12 schools that I will explore in the remainder of this essay.

I have been researching and writing about what I have termed *culturally relevant pedagogy* for more than thirty years.⁹ The genesis for this inquiry came from my observation that, although teachers had access to increasingly diverse curriculum materials such as textbooks, trade books, curriculum units, classroom posters, and decorations, the students from marginalized racial and ethnic groups were continuing to struggle to achieve academic success. These materials were not changing the ways teachers approached teaching. Students as young as eight years old (that is, third graders) often experience lecturing as a dominant form of instruction. Teachers are "telling" students information rather than having them inquire, discuss, and grapple with ideas and concepts.

Despite what was seen in the 1960s and 1970s, curriculum- and instruction-revolution classrooms in the United States remain remarkably similar.¹⁰ According to educator Martin Haberman, many teachers, especially those who work in schools serving the most marginalized students, practice what he termed "the pedagogy of poverty."¹¹ This teaching consists of a steady routine of "giving information, asking questions, giving directions, making assignments, monitoring seatwork, reviewing assignments, giving tests, reviewing tests, assigning homework, reviewing homework, settling disputes, punishing noncompliance, marking papers, and giving grades."¹²

The objective of this form of teaching is not to stimulate thinking or produce active learners. Instead, its emphasis is on maintaining order and policing students' bodies. Unfortunately, far too many teachers are rewarded for implementing this strict control. They regularly hear that they are "good teachers" because their students are not out of order. In schools serving poor children of color or those whose first language is not English, this sense of order is prized over academic achievement or student learning, cultural competence, or critical consciousness that might allow students to question an inequitable classroom and social order.

Culturally relevant pedagogy is designed to ensure that students demonstrate academic knowledge, skills, and abilities or, more pointedly, learning, cultural competence, and sociopolitical or critical consciousness.¹³ Culturally relevant pedagogy treats these three elements (student learning, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness) as equal components of good teaching. Imagine each aspect as angles or sides of an equilateral triangle: no one side is greater than another, and without all three, there is no triangle.

Student learning is the "coin of the realm" in school-based instruction. We expect students to learn from a relationship with an experienced teacher in conjunction with other learners. Unfortunately, for too many students in the United States, "learning" has been reduced to performance on a yearly standardized achievement test. Often, poorly resourced schools in urban and rural areas produce low achievement test scores related to a variety of variables over which the students and their teachers may have little or no control: inexperienced teachers, inadequate facilities, inferior curriculum materials, poor leadership, high concentrations of poverty linked to housing policies that produce segregation, and the inability of parents and caregivers to fully engage with classrooms and schools. Thus, culturally relevant pedagogy focuses less on the external standards set by achievement tests and more on the growth of students over the course of a year. For example, a student might arrive in a fifth-grade class reading at a second-grade level. However, through the diligent and sometimes extraordinary work of the teacher, the student ends the year reading at the fourth-grade level. According to state-mandated tests, that student is still performing below level. However, the student has demonstrated two years of growth over the span of one academic year. It is difficult to argue that the student did not learn.

Learning in a culturally relevant pedagogy framework is more inclusive and comprehensive than test scores. For example, culturally relevant teachers are looking for not only academic growth, but also instances of developmental, social, and cultural growth among students. Seeing a student become more diligent when completing assignments, or in the organization of their personal items – backpack, notebook, and desk – might signal developmental growth that will be useful as the student progresses through subsequent grades. A student who learns to self-regulate his anger and uses words instead of physical aggression is another

example of learning that a culturally relevant teacher looks for. Seeing a student persist after they began the year easily frustrated with difficult tasks is another example of growth that matters to a culturally relevant teacher. These individual markers are combined with external measures like test scores.

Culturally relevant pedagogy allows for a variety of evaluative measures. Students might create digital records of what they have accomplished and present a video, an electronic poster, or a multimedia presentation. Culturally relevant teachers will encourage students to use a wide range of subject areas to demonstrate their knowledge. Students might give a hip-hop presentation of a science concept or an artistic rendering of a mathematical idea. The culturally relevant teacher recognizes the strengths of neurodiversity and does not expect all students to display what they have learned in the same ways. The pedagogical knowledge to allow for this amount of variation is extensive. Teachers who are only able to teach what is in a textbook or curriculum guide may not have the depth of content knowledge to recognize subject matter mastery that is displayed in ways other than the paper and pencil exhibitions of tests, essays, and reports.

Generally, there is little argument over the need to ensure that students master subject matter knowledge, skills, and concepts. However, culturally relevant pedagogy also requires teachers who can help students develop cultural competence.¹⁴ For decades, schools have treated the notion of culture as a static concept, making cultural competence the most misunderstood component of culturally relevant pedagogy. Most teacher education programs teach little or nothing about culture.¹⁵ Teacher education is an area of study that relies heavily on the social science discipline of psychology and, to a lesser extent, sociology; candidates take coursework in educational psychology, child and/or adolescent development, and sociology of education. Few programs require or offer a course in educational anthropology.

Despite conversations about “multicultural education” or “diversity,” teacher education candidates are not exposed to a systematic study of culture and its role in teaching and learning. The diversity courses students may be required to take often include discussions about “the other.” Rarely in the teacher preparation sequence of courses are students required to explore how their own culture influences how they think about students, families, and communities. Consequently, most teacher education candidates continue to view and center their own experiences and perspectives as “correct” or “normal.” Education scholar Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz argues that teachers who desire to be effective in teaching students from cultural backgrounds different from their own must do an archaeology of the self to understand why they believe the ways they think, act, and operate are the right ways to think, act, and operate.¹⁶ By decentering oneself, it becomes possible to see that other perspectives and ways of thinking and being can be legiti-

mate and make sense in the lives and experiences of others. This decentering can help teachers understand the importance of context. The field of anthropology often seeks to “make the familiar strange.”¹⁷ In 1956, anthropologist Horace Miner published the classic essay “Body Ritual Among the Nacirema,” which describes seemingly barbaric and painful rituals among a group of people he identifies as the “Nacirema.”¹⁸ It is not until readers discover that “Nacirema” is “American” spelled backwards do they realize that Miner is describing dental practices among most people in the United States. Miner made the familiar strange.

The work of helping students develop cultural competence is not about teaching Black students static notions about Black culture or Latine students a homogeneous set of concepts and ideas about Latine culture. Instead, cultural competence is about recognizing that students arrive in classrooms with a set of cultural practices that reflect aspects of both a larger racial, ethnic, or linguistic culture, and a local culture found in the neighborhoods and communities in which they live.¹⁹ In addition to those cultural practices, the work of the culturally relevant teacher is to help students remain grounded in their home cultures while acquiring fluency and flexibility in at least one additional culture. For students who experience marginalization in the classroom, that additional culture is most likely what schools regard as mainstream culture. This approach also includes helping students who are members of the cultural mainstream acquire fluency in a culture beyond their own. In an ideal world, all students should leave PK–12 schooling multiculturally competent because they will be entering a culturally and linguistically global culture and will need to function well in it. Minimally, all students should leave school bi-cultural, well-grounded in the language, history, culture, customs, and traditions of their own culture and fluent in at least one other. This is what we mean by cultural competence.

An example of fostering cultural competence might be a music educator teaching students about the term “classical.” A culturally relevant teacher recognizes that all cultures have traditions of classical music. Thus, it is important not to assume that “classical” is reserved for music and musicians from Europe. There is American classical music derived from African American music known as jazz. There is Chinese classical music. There is Mexican classical music. There is African classical music. Broadening the notion of classical is one example of helping students develop cultural fluency or competency. Another example might be helping students understand that all cultures have traditions of storytelling. Sharing literature across cultures can help students see and value the similarities and uniqueness found in storytelling cultures within and across nations.

The third component of the culturally relevant pedagogy equilateral triangle is perhaps the most ignored. This is the component identified as sociopolitical or critical consciousness. This is the aspect of school-based teaching and learning that answers students’ often expressed question, “So what?” Students ask, “Why

do we have to learn this?” Too often, teachers respond with pat answers such as “One day you’re going to need this!” It does not take long for students to recognize the fallacy of this response. Most students know that they will probably not use the Pythagorean theorem outside of a geometry classroom or they will not find a workplace that will require them to conjugate French verbs. The socio-political or critical consciousness that culturally relevant teachers seek to foster is one that helps students find answers to problems they grapple with. The geometry lesson might be especially important if students’ families are buying a carpet and want to make sure they are not overbuying. In a critical mathematics class in Chicago, I witnessed a teacher help students understand why having a command of the concept of compound interest was important in their everyday lives.²⁰ When students saw how paying higher interest rates impacted the cost of housing in their community versus what their upper middle-income peers were paying in a suburban community, they were incensed at the inequity. They wanted to know more about how to calculate interest so they could make better decisions about their own spending.

In another publication, I described a social studies classroom in which a student was upset about his school’s “hat rule.”²¹ The hat rule stated that no students could wear a hat inside the building. The student, an African American male, arrived in the classroom visibly upset and his teacher asked what was wrong. “This school is racist!” he declared. “Why do you say that?” his teacher asked. The student relayed his observation that only Black boys were stopped and sanctioned for wearing a hat in the building. The teacher challenged him to produce evidence of his claim. When it was clear that the student only had anecdotes from himself and his friends, the teacher helped the class design a survey and data collection strategy to determine the validity of his claim. By dividing the class into fourths, there was a small team dispersed to survey each year – freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. The students collected demographic data from each student they surveyed and asked: “Have you ever been stopped for wearing a hat in the building? If yes, what happened after you were stopped?” Once the students compiled the data, they were able to affirm the student’s initial observation. Black male students were heavily surveilled and sanctioned for wearing hats in the building. The students produced a report they shared with the school principal and the principal confronted the school staff saying, “Either we will have a hat rule, or we will not have a hat rule. What we won’t have is a hat rule for certain students!” The teacher who helped the students design the study pointed out that learning mathematics, English, and social studies helped them to undertake the work that allowed them to solve a problem they identified.

In today’s political climate, many teachers are afraid to take on what they see as highly charged topics and ideas related to race, diversity, and equity. Increasingly, states and local school districts are prohibiting teachers from focusing on equity

issues related to race, class, gender, and sexuality. Instead of arguing that instruction related to diversity, equity, and inclusion helps make stronger and more active democratic citizens, some teachers are self-censoring because they are told teaching related to diversity, equity, and inclusion is indoctrination. The misinformation, distortions, and omissions of the past are making their way back into many classrooms. From the fractious fight over the African American studies advanced placement course to the banning of scores of children's and young adult books, we see a suppression of knowledge and information students need to be the kind of active and engaged citizens who can make important decisions in a democratic society.²²

Taken together, student learning, cultural competence, and sociopolitical or critical consciousness provide a vision of culturally relevant pedagogy aimed at decreasing the educational disparities that students experience in schools. However, unless we recommit to two important promises that we have made to the nation's students decades ago, we will continue to struggle to narrow the outcome inequities that plague the United States. We have yet to live up to the mandate of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to desegregate our schools and the promise of *Serrano v. Priest* to equitably fund our schools.²³ All our concerns about teaching students in a fair, equitable, culturally relevant way came into sharp focus with the devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

By the beginning of 2020, it had become clear that the mysterious virus that first appeared in Wuhan, China, was spreading across Asia and into Europe. World health agencies recognized that we were amid a pandemic.²⁴ Unlike the situation with the Ebola virus in Africa, this pandemic would not be contained or confined to one continent. By late January or early February, the first COVID-19 cases were detected in Seattle, and later another in Chicago. In one area of New York City, there was a COVID-19 outbreak in a synagogue that forced the quarantining of that section of the city. However, the quarantine did not stop the spread. By early March, schools, churches, and workplaces were shutting down. Individuals were donning face masks and other protective coverings. Hospital emergency rooms were filling up, health care workers were scrambling for ventilators, and people were dying. In addition to the health destruction that COVID-19 wrought, the pandemic laid bare the economic, social, and educational disparities that characterize life in the United States. For the first time, many in the mainstream began to see what those on the margins have been experiencing for centuries: joblessness and underemployment, lack of access to health care, substandard or no housing, and inadequate and unequal schooling.

This pandemic revealed that students in the United States who reside on society's margins were victimized by other social issues – systemic racism, economic vulnerability, and impending environmental catastrophe.²⁵ Despite the doom and

gloom that COVID-19 created, there was a bit of a silver lining, as explained in novelist Arundhati Roy's powerful essay "The Pandemic Is a Portal":

Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.²⁶

Roy's perspective suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic might be something more than a tragedy. It could also be an opportunity. As I have written elsewhere, the pandemic gave us an opportunity for a hard reset, a chance to start over. While most establishment educators and school administrators were clamoring for "getting back to normal," I have cautioned against "getting back to normal."²⁷ Returning to normal would mean that the same students who were failing before the pandemic would continue to fail. Students who were regularly suspended, expelled, and arbitrarily assigned to special education would end up in those same places. Returning to normal offers students on the margin no opportunity to improve and expand.

Instead of going back to what we have always done, what if we rethought what we do? Instead of assigning students to remediation that never truly remediates, we could move toward acceleration. The logic of remediation suggests that a student who is already behind will benefit from being placed in a classroom situation where she is made to slow down even more. How does slowing down help a student to catch up? Instead, the perspective of accelerating learning is that we should do our best to move students faster and farther. This is not a new concept. Economist and founder of the Accelerated Schools Project Henry Levin has been advocating this approach for decades.²⁸

We could also reset how we think about cultural competence in this post-pandemic moment. From 1989 to the early 2000s, I considered cultural competence from the standpoint of adult manifestations of culture and cultural practices: history, language, customs, and traditions. Somewhere around 2004, I began exploring how youth culture might be an important vehicle for helping students develop cultural competence.²⁹ COVID-19 presented us with important opportunities for incorporating youth culture. In addition, there are at least four things we have learned from our COVID-19 experience.

First, we learned that relationships matter. Our students demonstrated that what they missed most when schools closed and they were participating in virtual classes was the face-to-face interactions with peers and caring adults. In elementary schools throughout the United States, teachers, administrators, and staff organized caravans that drove through neighborhoods to greet children and their

families. Communities cherished those moments. In today's classrooms, adults must take advantage of students' need for relationships. Culturally relevant pedagogical approaches seek deeper student-to-student and teacher-to-student relationships because interpersonal relationships are crucial to student success. We need to organize schools around these relationships. The mental health challenges COVID-19 presented for our students have been substantial. At least 204,000 children and teens in the United States lost parents or in-house caregivers because of COVID-19.³⁰ Our students need more access to adults who can assist teachers, counselors, social workers, and school psychologists. This may mean making changes to staffing ratios to ensure that students (and their families) do not slip through the cracks.

Second, the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us that time is fungible. The insistence that school-based learning only takes place from about 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Monday through Friday was challenged by the emergency precautions taken in 2020 and 2021. Educators in schools doing virtual/remote teaching and asynchronous learning soon realized that it was possible (and sometimes desirable) to assemble students at atypical hours. High school students were very amenable to meeting at times outside of conventional school hours, particularly those students who were working to help support their families. COVID-19 also helped us reconsider whether credit-hours is the best way to evaluate student academic progress. Perhaps we are now ready for systems with more focus on competency. We should seriously consider developing evaluation systems that allow students to demonstrate mastery of knowledge, skills, and abilities rather than merely counting how many hours students spend seated in a classroom.

Third, COVID-19 taught us that technology must move to the center of the teaching-learning experience. Before the pandemic, many schools had technology on the periphery of their classrooms. Educators consulted IT personnel when their wi-fi connections or email did not work. COVID-19 helped us understand that we could and should have more robust use of technology. Today, most classrooms can digitally record and archive lessons, and this may mean that student absences can become a thing of the past. Teachers and their students can create classroom webpages allowing students to log on and catch up on whatever they missed. These videos can also serve as an opportunity for students to review concepts and information they may not have understood in real time. The lessons we learned from teaching during the earliest years of the pandemic should bring technology into substantive conversations about curriculum and instruction, not just technical tasks. Educators should use technology to improve their management strategies for grading and other recordkeeping. They should also use technology as a communication device. Texting parents and caregivers, creating parent portals, and posting important information online are vehicles for giving students, parents, and caregivers ready access to what is transpiring in schools and classrooms.

Fourth, COVID-19 has revealed that schools are an important site of support for students' and their families' personal needs. When schools closed in the United States during emergency protocols, one of the first responses of schools was to provide food for students and their families. The amount of food insecurity among our students is startling. Far too many public-school students are dependent on schools to provide ten meals per week: breakfast and lunch, Monday through Friday. Schools were required to provide mobile devices and wi-fi for many students. In cold weather climates, schools also must provide warm weather clothing: hats, gloves, scarfs, coats, and boots. These COVID-19 revelations can provide us with new ways to think about the work of the school in a democratic society aiming to become more egalitarian and just.

Culturally relevant pedagogy or equity pedagogy is an essential aspect of multicultural education. We know that curriculum developers and textbook publishers have been producing multicultural content for decades, but content cannot teach itself. As I examined the teachers who have been effective in teaching African American students, I noticed that curriculum was not the key element of their practice.³¹ Yes, these teachers would love to have up-to-date curriculum that more accurately depicts the diversity that exists in the United States. But they were unafraid of critiquing poorly written and outdated materials and supplementing content with knowledge and information they sought out. They understood how important it was to give all students access to information and the ability to gain skills.

I conclude with two examples of how culturally relevant pedagogy can be key to student success. One example is in an elementary classroom and the other is in a college biology class. In the sixth-grade classroom, the teacher was following Henry Levin's notion of accelerated learning. Her school was poorly funded, serving predominately low- to moderate-income Black students. Instead of following the prescribed mathematics curriculum, she decided she wanted her students to get a head start on learning algebra. She scrounged some algebra-1 textbooks from her school district's curriculum stacks and found that she had enough of one set of books for every two students. She paired the students to share the books and found that the pairing was important in forcing them to cooperate and share information. One of her students was designated a special-needs student, but the teacher insisted on having him participate with the rest of the class for the mathematics lessons. One day, he was struggling to solve a problem and the teacher sat beside him and his partner. "Hey guys," she shouted, "we have a problem. Who can help?" Immediately, four or five students rushed over to their classmate and asked him to articulate what he thought the problem was. The students kept probing him and, before long, he was able to talk himself through the problem and into the correct solution. Several actions the teacher took made this outcome

possible. First, she demonstrated confidence in the student to be able to do this work. Next, she indicated that *we* had a problem – not the student. Then, she allowed other students to assist. Because of the way she typically taught the class, the helping students knew it was not their role to tell the student the answer or even what he might be doing wrong. Their ability to ask the right questions allowed the student to see that he could do the work and that he belonged in that class. Nothing about the content of the class was inherently multicultural. However, the pedagogical strategies were.

In a second example, I was contacted by an African American college freshman who was interested in becoming a medical doctor. Although she was doing well in most of her classes, she was struggling in a large lecture biology class that was a prerequisite for getting on the premed track. She came to me distraught and declared her dream of becoming a doctor was over. I sent out a call to some of my graduate students in the sciences who often serve as teaching assistants in introductory level courses in biology, chemistry, and physics to see if one of them could help. I received an email response that said, “It’s not the student, it’s the way they teach that course. Give me her email and I will meet with her.” Within three to four weeks, after meeting regularly with my graduate student, the freshman posted a remarkable turnaround and completed the course with a grade of B+. She has subsequently been working in the health sciences now for several years. Again, there was nothing inherently “multicultural” about the biology course. The problem the student experienced was linked to the pedagogy.

With more than thirty years of research on the issue of culturally relevant pedagogy, I am convinced that we can produce better educational outcomes when we pay closer attention to the pedagogies we employ in classrooms serving students who have traditionally been marginalized and underserved in our nation’s schools. Culturally relevant pedagogy can be the difference that “difference” makes.

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ENDNOTES

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- ³¹ Ladson-Billings, *The Dreamkeepers*.

Overcoming Historical Factors that Block the Quest for Educational Equity in Canadian Schools

Özlem Sensoy

Remedying school inequities in Canada requires actively confronting the challenges connected to Canada's national identity and history. These challenges uphold historically rooted, ongoing inequities that are tied together by three themes: the legacy of colonialism and the displacement and resource acquisition that provided (and continues to provide) wealth for the ruling elite; enslaved and under/unpaid racialized/migrant labor that built and continues to uphold the infrastructure of the nation-state; and the discourses of Canadian identity centered on the perceived "nice and polite" Canadian and the peaceful multicultural mosaic of its vast land. Any effort to fully understand and address educational projects for change in Canada must engage with these three themes central to Canada's identity.

In the mid-1990s, the Molson Canadian beer company introduced their *I Am Canadian* campaign. In addition to the "I am Canadian" slogan, this long-standing campaign featured the "I am Canadian rant," a popular ad launched in 2000. Delivered by Average Joe Canadian (or "Joe Canada" as he was known), personified by Canadian actor Jeff Douglas, and U.S. director Kevin Donovan, the rant is approximately one minute in length. It begins with Average Joe Canadian stepping onto a concert stage, set against a background of screens displaying images of the waving maple leaf on the Canadian flag. A young white man seemingly in his late twenties or early thirties, Joe is wearing faded blue jeans, a grey T-shirt, and a flannel grey plaid button-down shirt over it. His work boots echo through the theater as he steps across the stage and approaches the microphone. His boyishly messy straight brown hair falls onto his brow toward his blue eyes (which we are made to notice through close-ups of his face). He begins his rant softly and tentatively over the microphone's gently screeching feedback, but quickly picks up tempo and volume as he ends the rant at a climax with the declaration: "I. Am. Canadian!" The text of the rant in full is as follows, and the performance can easily be found online:¹

*Hey, I'm not a lumberjack, or a fur trader...
I don't live in an igloo or eat blubber, or own a dogsled...
and I don't know Jimmy, Sally or Suzy from Canada,
although I'm certain they're really really nice.*

*I have a Prime Minister, not a president.
I speak English and French, not American.
And I pronounce it "about," not "a boot."*

*I can proudly sew my country's flag on my backpack.
I believe in peace keeping, not policing,
diversity, not assimilation,
and that the beaver is a truly proud and noble animal.
A toque is a hat, a chesterfield is a couch,
and it is pronounced "zed" not "zee," "zed"!!!!*

*Canada is the second largest landmass!
The first nation of hockey!
and the best part of North America*

*My name is Joe!!
And I am Canadian!!!²*

The "I Am Canadian" campaign was not only incredibly popular but won multiple national and international awards. It even infiltrated popular culture, with many parodies of the rant by prominent Canadian actors such as William Shatner (known in the Star Trek universe as Captain Kirk) and Simu Liu (best known for his role as Marvel superhero Shang-Chi). You would be hard-pressed to find a Canadian who has not seen or heard of Average Joe Canadian.

To say that this campaign both illuminates and ignites a dialogue and debate about Canadian identity and nationalism, and the role that corporations like Molson play in defining them, seems obvious enough.³ As professor of communications Shuling Huang has pointed out, in a globalized world, nation-branding has been integrated with nation-building.⁴ And by doing a lot of nation-branding work, popular culture has regularly played a key role in the global identity-development and -management of the nation-state. Beer campaigns have been a familiar part of national identity-building projects for a long time – not just Molson's "I Am Canadian" campaign. Budweiser's 9/11 tribute ad that aired just once during the 2011 Super Bowl is another well-known example. Whether discussing the branding messages themselves (that is, of Canadians as peacekeepers and hockey lovers), or the critiques and parodies responding to those messages, between the lines an entire recentering of an unspoken "average" Canada emerges. The average is a collection of points landing us in a middle that seems reasonably tempered, lukewarm,

and unoffensive, even while it is asserting itself. While this average Canada might have specific points of identity like *beavers*, *blubber*, and *boots*, these points gather to a nexus presented to be equally accessible to and deployable by all Canadians; this identity-building is what socioculturalists would call the *constructing* of average Canada (and an average Canadian).

The Average Joe Canada campaign is a widely circulated pop cultural text that functions as an overt public pedagogy about Canada and Canadians, a text that has inspired many others after it. It can be consumed at face value and loved or loathed. It is also a target for cultural critique for its themes of normalized white settler colonialism and patriarchal innocence.⁵ But what is more relevant for the discussion here is not merely the *re/presentative* work done (or disrupted) by texts such as Average Joe and his rant, but their *re/productive* functions. These generative functions, which often lie beyond the text itself and live in an intertextual space, further the well-documented historical and present-day inequities in Canadian society and its institutions, including its schools. In other words, these texts keep a set of characters, vocabulary, and scripts about Canada alive and, by doing so, function as links holding the problematic inequities of Canada's past directly in hand with the problematic inequities today. To understand the inequities of mainstream Canada as illustrated by the Average Joe Canada example, especially those that influence education, I want to explore not simply the *nouns* of Canadian inequity (what we *are*), but the *verbs* (what we *do*). It is in the ongoing actions, the working, generating, producing, and reproducing, the average-*ing* of the national identity, that Canada's most stubborn equity-seeking habits are linked to and embedded in its history.

So how does the average-*ing* of Joe relate to the pursuit of educational equity in Canada? Like other nation-states established as settler colonies and built on stolen lands with under/unpaid or enslaved labor, issues of educational equity today are intimately connected to this past. Thus, to understand and address our ongoing challenges for greater equity, Canadian scholars studying equity in schooling in Canada have focused our attention on three core themes: first, the legacy of colonialism and resulting normalization of white Christian settler identity as "Canadian"; second, the erasure and criminalization of enslaved and under/unpaid racialized/migrant labor that built and continues to uphold the infrastructure of the nation-state; and third, the naturalized discourses of Canadian identity tied to the gentle Canadian and the peaceful multicultural mosaic of its vast land. One cannot fully understand nor address effective educational projects for change in Canada without engaging with these three themes centrally connected to Canada's national story.⁶ They are not simply topics to be covered by the formal curriculum. They are a part of the stories we tell about Canada (that is, colonialism, migrant labor, and nice multiculturalism are the infrastructure of practices holding inequities in place), without which Canada's national identity would not exist. As such,

any proposed remedies to inequities are shaped by the policies, stories, and narratives that created those inequities.

In his classic tome *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986*, historian John Milloy recounts the early period of the establishment of the nation-state in 1867, during which Victorian-era politicians began an active campaign to address the “Indian problem” in Canada.⁷ These proud Canadians believed it was their moral duty to bring Christianity and civilization to the Indigenous communities of the lands they were settling. The task of civilization took patriotic fervor, as Milloy writes, “In the case of Father Lacombe, Oblate missionary to the Blackfoot, for example, the ‘poor redman’s [sic] redemption physically and morally’ was ‘the dream of my days and nights.’”⁸ Assimilation of Indigenous peoples became Canada’s official mission during the first term of Canada’s first prime minister Sir John A. MacDonald. He informed parliament of the national goal “to do away with the tribal system and assimilate the Indian [sic] people in all respects with the inhabitants of the Dominion, as speedily as they are fit to change.”⁹ In the coming decades, these benevolent Christians, guided by their faith, power, and sense of moral authority, created and enforced a systematic project of assimilation and civilization that can accurately be described as genocide.

Operating in Upper and Lower Canada (prior to confederacy) and then throughout the country, residential schools were run by Anglican, Methodist, and Catholic missionaries.¹⁰ There were day schools (industrial schools) and boarding schools. The earliest known residential schools opened in 1831, and the last was closed in 1996. Over 150,000 Indigenous children went through the residential school system, with mandatory attendance starting at age eight.¹¹ Children were often forcibly taken from their home communities, their hair cut, their clothes changed, given new Christian names, and forbidden to speak their home languages or observe their spiritual ceremonies and traditions. The formal curriculum at the schools was the bare minimum, focused mostly on reading and writing in English or French and on manual labor skills. By the 1930s, the goal of education was described simply as “Christian citizenship” achieved through “mingling with Canadians.”¹²

The harsh punishments in residential schools combined with long periods of isolation from their families, recorded in historical accounts as well as in oral testimonies, have had an irreparable impact on Indigenous communities, and on Canada as a whole. Thousands of children died while in school and, with recordkeeping woefully inadequate, the extent of the crimes of the schools, the churches, and political leaders involved remains unknown but continues to be revealed. For example, unmarked graves are still being discovered through ground-penetrating LiDAR (light detection and ranging) technology used on the grounds

of former residential schools. As recently as January 2023, an estimated two thousand graves were discovered on the Qu'Appelle Indian Residential School site on the Star Blanket Cree Nation in Saskatchewan.¹³ Also in January 2023, 171 suspected graves were discovered by the Wauzhushk Onigum Nation at St. Mary's Indian Residential School in Ontario.¹⁴ In February 2023, seventeen suspected graves were found, with dozens more suspected, at the Alberni Indian Residential School by the Tseshaht First Nation in British Columbia.¹⁵ In April 2023, forty suspected graves were found by the Shíshálh Nation at the St. Augustine's Indian Residential School site in British Columbia, with more graves suspected.¹⁶ In June 2023, Sucker Creek First Nation reported that eighty-eight suspected graves were discovered at St. Bruno's Indian Residential School in northern Alberta.¹⁷

Some living residential school survivors still recount the atrocities they experienced and witnessed. In the face of this profoundly sobering history, and in response to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was formed in 2008. The work of the commission, which concluded in 2015, was to document the full history of the era of residential schooling in Canada. In 2008, the prime minister, on behalf of the government of Canada, offered a formal apology for the residential school system. Resulting from the challenging political, cultural, geographical, and bureaucratic landscape within which the commission did its work, some outcomes had profound impacts on equity initiatives in schools across Canada. First among these impacts, the commission documented residential school survivor testimonies and established a database of publicly available resources hosted by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) at the University of Manitoba. The NCTR website features information (such as information about the National Advisory Committee on Residential Schools Missing Children and Unmarked Burials) for survivors and also community members who are directly living with the ongoing effects of the residential schools era.¹⁸ The NCTR also hosts curricular resources and pedagogical support offerings, such as workshops for educators to teach about the era of residential schools in an informed way. While educators have access to the archives at any time, there is a call to focus on this work during the last week of September, marked by the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, a federal statutory day on September 30, established in 2021.

Second among the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's major contributions to advancing equity in schooling is its Calls to Action, comprising ninety-four recommendations resulting from the commission's gathering of testimony and study.¹⁹ The power of the calls is in their specificity and precision across a multitude of Canadian institutions (from schooling to health care to the criminal justice system).²⁰ They offer specific recommendations that many schools (across K–12 and higher education) have begun to act on. Calls 62–65 focus specifically on schooling, for example:

We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators to:

Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.

Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.

Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.

Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.

The Calls to Action have reverberated throughout the Canadian education landscape, although they are not without challenges. For example, in the context of teacher education, the challenges are not just about the difficulties of disseminating knowledge about colonialism, but also involve examining how teacher education programs (and universities in general) have been ideologically structured. As Aboriginal education scholar Lyn Daniels and colleagues explain:

For those working in the field of teacher education who have begun the complex process of (re)positioning themselves in relation to the Calls to Action issued in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015), it has become clear that they present much more than just an informational problem. . . . For the most part, the philosophies and knowledge systems that undergird [most mainstream teacher education programs operating in Canada] are not capable of providing meaningful guidance on how to respond to the challenges of Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. If teacher education programs in Canada continue to rely on existing dominant knowledge systems and governing structures to respond to the Calls to Action, they will fail to address them with the spirit and intent with which they were issued. There will be no cultural changes to teacher education programs unless they undergo significant structural changes that will allow Indigenous and Canadian people and peoples to walk alongside each other as equals. This idea of change also applies to universities more broadly.²¹

This need for a "culture change" points to the deeper, structural matters related to the "how we do" Canada and the work involved in addressing those depths. In other words, a simple knowledge transfer about colonialism is insufficient without also restricting the existing knowledge systems built by that very colonialism, which appear and act as neutral ways of knowing. Regardless of these challenges, deeper shifts identified by advocates and the Calls to Action serve as an important service to educators seeking to advance equity in schooling.

While the facts and historical details of the residential school era continue to be discovered, studied, and taught, the impacts on schooling and the legacies of this period persist in Canadian schools. Stories of the residential school era must continue to form a part of both the school curriculum and infrastructure critiques in Canada, but they are not the only stories about Canada's national identity in Canadian schooling today. In fact, aspects of these stories were central to the development of the residential school system and continue to influence Indigenous students as well as a wider network of racialized students of immigrant and settler ancestry. These stories include mythologies of *the benevolent helper* and *the civilizing work of schooling*.

Education scholars in Canada, as in other nations, have studied the “benevolent helper” story as it is manifested in school settings. Closely connected to the white savior character type in film and television – usually white women who selflessly work to save Indigenous, Black, and Peoples of Color (IBPOC) and youth from their culture, community, and the limiting life they are perceived as having – benevolent helpers enter the school environment as white savior teachers.²² These hero-savior characters draw on the same moral duty and relentless pursuit of the saving mission as Sir John A. MacDonald and the government ministers and agents of earlier Christian civilizing missions. Their spunk and the clarity of their purposes are not dissimilar to that personified by Average Joe Canadian. There is certainty in this vision, an almost innocent likeability. This likeability and spunk can serve to sanitize the problematic ideological infrastructure that shapes and imposes the benevolent helper's desire to “help,” to “make better,” and to “civilize” those kids who are seen to be in need.

Most representations of these hero teachers (almost always white women) align with Canada's own national story of the benevolent hero. That is, Canada, much like the white savior teacher and Average Joe, is *really, really, nice*. Yet lesser known of Canada's history is its role in the transatlantic slave trade between the 1600s and 1833, when the Slavery Abolition Act was passed in the United Kingdom and by extension in its colonies.²³ While the historical facts about slavery in Canada can (with effort) be located, studied, and taught, the racist ideologies and sanctioned knowledge that helped justify it still circulate and impact the lives of Black youth in Canada.²⁴ Among these sanctioned racist knowledges was eugenics, which thrived in Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The eugenics movement not only resulted in policies that ranged from forced sterilization to segregated schooling, but also served as the ideological framework for how intelligence is characterized, how schools measure and test it, as well as other foundational school practices (such as curricular tracking and ability assessment methods) built from the eugenics framework.²⁵

The troubling history of eugenics in Canada and its ongoing effects were recognized in the work of the Canadian senate's Standing Committee on Human

Rights between 2019 and 2022. The executive summary of the committee's report reads, in part:

Canada has a long history of forced and coerced sterilization. For much of the 20th century, laws and government policies explicitly sought to reduce births in First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, Black communities, and among people with intersecting vulnerabilities relating to poverty, race and disability. Though these explicit eugenic laws and policies have been repealed, the racist and discriminatory attitudes that gave rise to them are still present in Canadian society, and forced and coerced sterilization still occurs.²⁶

Eugenics ideologies and their resultant practices – from forced sterilization to the determination of what constitutes intelligence and who has it – have tentacles reaching into the Canadian school landscape and equity initiatives to the present day. For example, the frameworks of what constitutes intelligence, and how educators name and assess it, shaped early assessments of intelligence and determinations of which forms of schooling are available to which groups.²⁷ Masquerading as neutral and scientific, standardized testing became all the rage in schooling across the spectrum.²⁸

While much of the presumed neutrality of these practices have been well critiqued, the foundational ideas of inferior and superior intelligence continue to map onto racialized students. In a review of international research on special education and race, education scholars North Cooc and Elisheba W. Kiru report that disparities in special education representation resulting from historical inequities continue to impact Indigenous and racial minority students in Canada.²⁹ In Toronto, Canada's most racially diverse city, anecdotal evidence aligns with their findings. While the province of Ontario (which serves as the governmental authority for the province's school districts, including those in Toronto) does not collect race-based data on special education referral in particular, students of Aboriginal, Black, Latino, and Somali ancestry are more likely to drop out and are more likely to be placed in learning disability categories.³⁰

What these trends reveal is that Canadian IBPOC students today still have to function in school against the sanitized deficit frameworks of eugenics applied to the assessments of their intelligence and abilities.³¹ Further, through these patterns, they become the objects of "teacher benevolence." Teachers' savior behaviors might take the form of lower expectations for academic success and reduced referral to advanced placement and academic opportunities for IBPOC students. They may also emerge in the formal curriculum of Canada's history, either via omission of the role of racialized Canadians in the founding and building of the nation-state, or simply by highlighting the unfortunate evils (almost always of the past, now corrected) and creating otherwise tokenistic singular curricular representations of minoritized peoples and histories. The benevolent savior discourse

can also emerge in the elevation of either nonminoritized people as authorities on all subjects under study (including the experiences and histories of the minoritized) or people from minoritized groups who have gained access to the systems of power due to acclimation, choice, or other traits that “normalize” (and often also tokenize) them within slow- or no-shifting systems of power, and who are labeled as the one “good,” unoffensive, and palatable representative among their group.

While no teacher would claim themselves as performing the role of the hero-savior on purpose, the behaviors of the “good white teacher” in the classroom are well theorized.³² Examples include the prevalence of a deficit discourse about IBPOC students, the overreliance on “unfortunates” when tackling systemic societal oppressions in the nation’s history, and the foregrounding of nonminoritized peoples and those fluent in the culture of power and authority as holding the necessary expertise and knowledge about the culture of authority to lead change.³³ These are all familiar issues in teacher preparation and wider learning environments at many K–12 and higher education spaces in Canadian schooling.³⁴ As education scholars Ardavan Eizadirad, Zuhra Abawi, and Andrew B. Campbell have pointed out, it is often white women administrators and school district leaders who determine the methods and contexts of antiracism education workshops and supports. Often, these in-vogue equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) events function as little more than a form of institutional image control.³⁵ As Eizadirad, Abawi, and Campbell put it, “diversity and equality work are about generating the right image and correcting the wrong one. Anti-racism in education is used as a framing device that allows for the racial order to remain intact by delinking anti-racism from its historical roots in anti-colonial, abolitionist, and anti-capitalist struggles.”³⁶

To engage with mainstreamed diversity and equity work in school settings, the politics and practices of image control and how the “right” image is corrected for within these institutional spaces (through actions we call “anti-racism education” or “diversity and equity work”) must also be taken into account. Just as the institutional responses to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission can become tangled in the optics and image control of schools, universities, and governments working to “signal” their endorsement of and actions on the Calls to Action, the same pattern can occur in other educational endeavors (such as antiracism or EDI education) that lean on policy mandates or institutional need to demonstrate compliance, progress, or a progressive climate. While the path and policy pressure to walk it can be clear, the means to do so remain in the usual hands. In other words, we sustain the vocabulary, scripts, and language we have had to this point. As Daniels and colleagues state above, developing knowledge and fluency with *other* tools takes time and patience.

Connecting the dots, eugenic ideology was, at its peak, advanced by *progressive* voices in Canada. For example, Emily Murphy, the well-known white leader of the women’s suffrage movement in Canada, was among the strongest advocates for

eugenics and believed that the highest calling of (white) women and motherhood was to protect fertility from “defective” stock.³⁷ Thus, as Canadians, we must confront the contradictions of policies and practices (like residential schooling and eugenics) that were seen by moral authority figures and progressives (teachers, government officials, clergy, and activists like Emily Murphy) as being, on the one hand, *well-meaning white protective goodness and moral authority wanting to bring about a better Canada and Canadian* and, on the other hand, revealed in time as being brought to life by *racist and discriminatory attitudes*. If we see that moral authority and goodness themselves are also culturally situated and not neutral, the work to draw on the best instincts among us to advance society and education for all must continually be problematized and leadership toward its goals must be shared.

Canada is known for, among other things, being the first modern state to adopt a national policy of multiculturalism (in 1971), which led to the Canadian Multiculturalism Act in 1985.³⁸ In many significant ways, the Act serves as a cornerstone of Canadian values, representing the nation-state’s aspiration and commitment to an inclusive and diverse citizenry. In its preamble, the Act recognizes “the multicultural heritage of Canada” and “the rights of aboriginal peoples,” names English and French as the official languages of the nation, recognizes the ethnic, racial, religious, and linguistic diversity of Canadians, and affirms the government’s commitments to human rights and preserving equal access and opportunity for all its citizens.

Critics of the Act often point to its failure to meet the well-documented and unaddressed challenges of the Act’s commitments: for example, the reluctance to name colonialism, which is part and parcel of the two official languages of the nation. As sociolinguists Eve Haque and Donna Patrick explain, Canada has used language policies to both control national unity and manage racial difference through language hierarchies.³⁹ In many ways, the naming, centering, and codifying of English and French as the official languages of the nation-state further the elevation of those languages as superior to other “less civilized” Indigenous (and other) languages. This is, of course, closely aligned with the discourses that fueled the initial period of residential schooling and “civilizing” missions in the nation.⁴⁰ Thus, among the many aspects of Canada’s Multiculturalism Act that remain less well known are its precursors, including the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1963–1970), which gave rise to the Official Languages Act of 1969 and were followed by the policy of multiculturalism in 1971.⁴¹ What this lineage reveals is that the management of, or a resolution to, the tensions between the two “founding” colonizing nations (England and France) needed to be resolved and constitutionally equalized and entrenched. Thus, it is not without merit to argue that it was French-Canadian recognition that drove the initial impetus to constitutionalizing biculturalism and bilingualism (and eventually, multiculturalism).

Indigenous and other linguistic, racial, and cultural minority groups have pushed back against these omissions. Yet while the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms of 1982 resulted in the constitutional recognition of the founding French and English as well as Indigenous languages, it also further elevated and entrenched (only) French and English speaker rights by mandating they receive government services and education in their own languages, while giving no such recognition in federal law to Indigenous (nor other) language rights.⁴²

While focused and funded language revitalization projects can and do exist, the elevation of colonial languages in the structuring of access to publicly funded resources such as education and knowledge impacts communities of immigrant settlers and newer Canadians as well. Canada's three largest immigration hubs (Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver) receive most of the nation's immigrant newcomers, and those who are tracked into express entry as skilled labor under the Federal Skilled Worker program must demonstrate proficiency in either English or French.⁴³ This ensures that immigrants, especially those who are racialized (for example, of South Asian, African, and East Asian ancestries), are also put atop the hierarchy of their group.

In the 2021 census, of Canada's 36.3 million population, eight million – almost one-quarter – were immigrants, with 1.3 million immigrating since 2016, more than half of them admitted under an economic category (privileging those immigrants who can contribute to the economy through finances or skilled labor).⁴⁴ Unlike immigrants who are voluntary migrants, refugee claimants belong to persecuted and minoritized communities. While Canada is among the top immigrant-receiving nation-states (through its extremely selective language and economic criteria), the criteria for refugee claimants are defined under international law. In 2022, 140,621 individuals were granted asylum in Canada.⁴⁵ For scale, at the end of 2022, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported that there were 108.4 million forcibly displaced people worldwide (43.3 million of them children), with nearly half of them from Syria, Ukraine, or Afghanistan. The top three refugee-receiving countries internationally are Türkiye (3.6 million), Iran (3.4 million), and Colombia (2.5 million) – nations not commonly included in lists of industrialized Western nation-states. In fact, 76 percent of the world's refugees (arguably the most vulnerable, equity-deserving peoples globally) are hosted in low- and middle-income countries.⁴⁶ While the 140,621 people who were accepted as refugees to Canada are no doubt thankful to have been accepted, its wealth alongside the public story Canada tells about its ideals demand that it do more to enact those ideals in the global community.

Despite these very real challenges, anchored in historical dynamics with far-reaching outcomes, Canada has made strides to improve representations of diversity and access as well as increase equitable outcomes for

students in Canadian schools. Teacher education in Canada has, in many respects, centered matters of social justice and problematized a diversity-without-inclusion framework; and it has made decolonization, racial equity, gender, and sexuality inclusion central to school success and core dispositions for students as future citizens in a pluralistic democracy.⁴⁷ Many teacher education programs across Canada have specific foci not just on subject matter topics (such as language arts or mathematics) but also on Indigenous education, antiracism education, sexual orientation and gender-identity education, and teacher education on less-examined matters of diversity, such as disableism.⁴⁸ There have been Afrocentric schools in Toronto for decades, centering experiences of Black students and Black histories in Canada.⁴⁹ While these programs are not without their critics and challenges, they are examples of hard-won shifts in public schooling.

In much the same way that Average Joe Canadian became image control for a nation that craves a point of distinction, identity, and belonging, antiracism work that is rooted in the anticolonial, abolitionist, and anticapitalist struggles that gave rise to it must disrupt (or at least name and mark) the narrative impulse of the nation-state to co-opt, absorb, define, and teach it. This tension continues to shape equity efforts in schools today. It is the ongoing advocacy of teachers, unions, and families that has helped nudge the needle on what we should and must expect from public schooling to foster a healthy pluralistic democracy in Canada.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Molson Canadian, “I Am Canadian: The Rant,” YouTube, March 2000, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WMxGVfko9IU>.
- ² Joe Canadian text retrieved from Cool Canuck Site Award, https://www.coolcanuckaward.ca/joe_canadian.htm (accessed September 26, 2024).
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- ⁵ Jackson, “Globalization, Corporate Nationalism and Masculinity in Canada”; and Sharlee Cranston-Reimer, “Being Canada: Joe’s Rant, Nationalism, Whiteness, and the Illusion of Neutrality Then and Now,” in *The Spaces and Places of Canadian Popular Culture*, ed. Victoria Kannen and Neil Shyminsky (Canadian Scholars, 2019), 36–43.
- ⁶ It is important to note that these naturalized “kind and gentle Canada” discourses are not without fracture internally in Canada, especially when it comes to the history of “founding” French/English identity tensions. These tensions are ongoing and compounded by both newer racialized settler immigrant politics, as well as the internal, complex politics of Indigenous nations, self-governance, and sovereignty of Indigenous nations in the context of the colonial state.
- ⁷ John S. Millroy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986* (University of Manitoba Press, 1999).
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰ Prior to the confederacy of Canada in 1867, the territories of Canada were referred to as Upper Canada (to denote the western territories settled by Anglophones, what would be Ontario) and Lower Canada (denoting the eastern territories settled by Francophones, what would be Quebec).
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The Quest for Educational Equity in Schools in Multicultural Australia

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Australia's migration history has produced one of the most ethnically diverse nations in the world, but this has presented challenges for educational equity. The introduction of multiculturalism in the 1970s coincided with an increasing focus on structural inequities in education. In this essay, we examine the context of changing educational policies and programs over the last half century, arguing that there has not been a steady process of reform involving measures redressing various inequalities but a period of policy turbulence. We consider the impact of the competing logics of multiculturalism – incorporation, recognition, civility – upon educational policy and practice to argue that, together with the consequences of neoliberal reforms, the equitable delivery of multiculturalism in schools has proved challenging. We conclude that multicultural education must refocus on the critical capacities that teachers and students alike need to understand the cultural complexities of a globalized world.

Central to Australia's self-image is the idea that it is an egalitarian, democratic, and inclusive society.¹ A core element of that self-image is the popular claim that "Australia is the most successful multicultural society in the world."² It is no wonder then that policies of multicultural education have become increasingly central to goals of educational and social equity in Australia. Yet multicultural education and other policy interventions targeting disadvantage are historically recent interventions.³ Considering Australia's past – premised on exclusionary immigration practices and the dispossession of the land's original inhabitants – as well as its present – in which neoliberal policies have reshaped educational systems and understandings of equity – the relations between multiculturalism, equity, and schooling are complex and contradictory.

We examine the place of multicultural education in the quest for educational equity in the context of Australia's ethnic diversity.⁴ We consider first the broader social contexts of the emergence of multiculturalism in a settler-colonial nation before discussing the educational contexts of Australia's schooling systems. We then explore the responses to ethnic diversity in Australia, with a particular focus on the state of New South Wales (NSW), both in terms of broader policies and

programs and the specific school and classroom challenges that arise from the increasingly “superdiverse” nature of Australian society. We argue that the celebratory nature of multicultural education often serves to mask these complexities and ignores the critical, intellectual understandings students and teachers now require.

As one of the few nations that have embraced multiculturalism as government policy at national, state, and local levels, Australia has an extensive and complex migration history derived from its British roots and its location in the Asia-Pacific region. Over one-quarter of its population of twenty-seven million was born overseas, while more than half has a parent that was born overseas, representing more than three hundred ancestries and over four hundred languages.⁵ Historically, Australia’s migration has been dominated by arrivals from the United Kingdom and New Zealand. Since World War II, however, Australia’s program expanded to include more people from across Europe, the Middle East, and beyond. In the last thirty years, migration programs have changed dramatically, such that India and China are now the largest sources of migrants, altering the ethnic and linguistic composition of the nation. This has been compounded by the influx of refugee and asylum seeker populations from Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia.

This transformation is a recent phenomenon. With their foundation as a destination for British convicts, and then as a key element in British colonial ambitions, the original Australian colonies had been largely the preserve of white settlers. With the economic boom in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the ensuing influx of Chinese migrants and Pacific Islander labor, the colonies began introducing restrictive, race-based immigration laws. When Australia was federated in 1901, the Immigration Restriction Bill was one of the first pieces of legislation in the new Commonwealth of Australia. Now referred to as the White Australia Policy, these restrictions remained until after World War II, and were only slowly dismantled in the following decades until the policy was formally ended by Prime Minister Gough Whitlam’s Labor government in 1972.⁶

The historical transformation from racially exclusive and assimilationist immigration programs to policies that embrace multiculturalism and ethnic pluralism is complex, but it was both dramatic and partial. As many scholars have argued, though it followed in the wake of the Canadian experience, multiculturalism was a “compromise” policy formation designed to placate increasingly vocal ethnic organizations and to allay the fears of dominant cultural groups whilst also addressing different social and economic imperatives.⁷ The move to multiculturalism was driven more by economic and demographic needs, with successive governments being captive to a “populate or perish” mentality and a fear that migrants would not stay. This resulted in the need to increasingly widen the pool of source nations for the migration program, contributing to the growth of ethnic community or-

ganizations that were beginning to experience some degree of electoral sway.⁸ Although initiated by the Labor government in the early 1970s, multiculturalism was formalized by the succeeding conservative coalition Fraser government, informed by several important reports. The 1977 report by the Australian Ethnic Affairs Council, *Australia as a Multicultural Society*, and the 1978 Galbally Report on migrant programs and services entrenched what became the key components in policies: the (often competing) emphases on social cohesion, equal access, and the right to maintain cultural identity.⁹

There have been many voices of opposition and moments of crisis during the life of Australia's multiculturalism, including two long periods of conservative government that stepped away from endorsing, or even using the word, multiculturalism.¹⁰ Politically, multiculturalism has always been contested, subject to frequent renegotiation, portrayed as both a threat to the nation's identity and social cohesion and its savior.¹¹ Yet, over fifty years, there has been large and widespread popular support for both Australia's diversified immigration program and policies of multiculturalism, a level of support that continues today.¹²

One aspect of this contestation is the degree of confusion over what multiculturalism means. This is partly because of the ongoing tension between multiculturalism as a simple description of ethnic diversity and the prescriptive policies that embody an agenda of change and a vision of Australian society different from traditional perceptions. It is also partly because multiculturalism is not one thing but an ensemble of policies and practices that entail different "logics" of equity – of incorporation (acquiring the skills to participate in Australian society), recognition (the "rights" of cultural maintenance), and civility (learning how to live in a shared social space).¹³ These logics were present from the beginning, but whatever balance existed was arguably unsettled by the rise of what is often referred to as "identity politics" (largely middle class), alongside the increasing presence of right-wing nationalism in Australian political life in the 1990s.¹⁴ We'll return to the consequences of what this means for education, but we wish to emphasize here that conceptual confusion, in addition to the emergence of neoliberal economic and social policies since the 1980s, contributes to a high level of turbulence in policy and practice around issues of diversity.

Whitlam's reforming government introduced a range of other policies and programs aimed at addressing social disadvantage regarding gender, rural communities, and Indigenous Australians. While these are not our focus, it is important that we note the uncomfortable relation between multiculturalism and Indigenous affairs and parallel issues around culture and disadvantage.¹⁵ Aboriginal activists have long argued that the first peoples should not be collapsed into policies addressing migrant-derived diversity.¹⁶ Despite the overlapping concerns around issues of recognition, ethnically based inequalities, and racism,

the history of the original inhabitants of the land – who have occupied the continent for sixty thousand years – positions them differently within Australian society. This is reflected in different, if parallel, institutional histories. Now numbering approximately one million, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders represent 3.8 percent of Australia’s population, most of whom live in cities and towns (15 percent live in remote communities).¹⁷ For most of the period since European settlement, policies targeting Indigenous inhabitants were defined by dispossession, eradication, “protection,” and assimilation. In 1967, when a national referendum decided that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples would be counted as part of the Australian population, giving the national government (rather than state governments) the major power to make laws regarding Indigenous Australians, an Office of Aboriginal Affairs was established. In 1972, under Whitlam, the office was extended into a government department. The 1970s were, as with multiculturalism, the decade when policies of assimilation gave way to an emphasis on recognition and cultural maintenance in Indigenous affairs.¹⁸ Since then, policies have been reshaped in terms of questions of recognition, self-determination, land rights, and treaty. The reasons for the failure of the recent referendum to institutionalize in the Constitution an Aboriginal Voice to Parliament are hotly debated, but it reflects at least a lack of agreement over the means to address Indigenous marginalization in Australia.¹⁹ Despite the many differences – and the specificity of the experiences of Aboriginal Australians – Indigenous-affairs and multicultural policies share a degree of policy complexity. Indigenous-affairs policies have also been constantly torn between competing discourses of equity – between the desire to pursue social and economic equality and the path of self-determination. The first implies an emphasis on integration and the second foregrounds the right to inhabit different social worlds.²⁰

A common issue in these two domains is the tendency to ignore the cultural complexity that has resulted from the dynamics of globalization, reshaping institutions, relations, and practices.²¹ A consequence of this complexity is that Australia is increasingly defined by the phenomenon of superdiversity, which refers not simply to the diversification of sizable ethnracial populations, but to the dynamic interplay of social factors, such as mixed marriage and cultural intermixing. These processes affect long-time, migrant, and Indigenous Australians alike and challenge the common assumptions about the homogenized nature of ethnically or racially defined communities.²² These domains are both prone to forms of essentialism that don’t correspond to the realities of social life and therefore pose significant challenges for classroom practice and teacher training. It is the task of a *critical* multiculturalism to unpack and contextualize such essentialisms.²³

The challenges of managing the consequences of ethnic diversity are central to the goals of schooling, but these goals are not always straightforward. Typically, education is seen as providing a mechanism for greater social

equality, not just through enhancing access but also in improving the outcomes of students from an array of disadvantaged backgrounds. Yet it is also a mechanism of social and economic reproduction, including the reproduction of relations of power, through the unequal distribution of knowledge, skills, opportunities, and qualifications. For some commentators, the goal of equity has been implicit in Australia since the acts of the 1870s that introduced free, compulsory, and secular education, though these changes had more to do with the economic, social, and political imperatives of governing.²⁴ The same could be said of the introduction of mass public secondary schooling after World War II, even as equity issues became more prominent in educational discourse.²⁵ This contradiction underlies the ongoing tension in what educational equity means – whether it is about resourcing, outcomes, standards of competence, equality of opportunity, inclusive curriculum, or excellence.²⁶ These are important practical debates for public education, because disadvantaged students of various orders of disadvantage are disproportionately located in government schools.²⁷

This is especially so for students of minority backgrounds. Schools have become a key means of recognizing and including students of all ethnic backgrounds, and yet they do so through limited, problematic means. The ethnic and racial diversity of schools varies enormously, of course.²⁸ Subsequently, some schools don't always see multiculturalism as a pressing matter for them.²⁹ Yet the task of equipping students with the knowledge they need to make sense of the cultural complexity of a globalized world should be central to the goals of equity.

Despite the importance of equity discourses, the goals of educational equity are still a long way from being achieved. Australia's education system, once rated among the world's best, has been sliding down international rankings of student outcomes for several decades, with effects experienced unevenly.³⁰ In this context, we have seen gaps in school achievement, literacy, and completion rates widen between the highest and lowest achievers, which maps onto social divisions between rich and poor, white and Black, urban and rural, and different ethnic groups.³¹ A central challenge in addressing these divisions is the tension between competing levels of governmental organization of educational systems.

In Australia, schooling – indeed, education generally – is primarily a matter of state government jurisdiction regulated by state government laws.³² This was largely due to the states' origins as separate colonies, with different histories of settlement and economic development. With the creation of the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901 – whose constitution was an act of the British Parliament – education remained a state power. Effectively, each state has its own school system with variations between them.³³ This has not stopped the national government from being involved in education matters, producing a somewhat disjointed, “concurrent” federalism.³⁴ Governing became increasingly centralized and

systematized during the twentieth century, primarily through the national government's increasing control of taxation and therefore the funding of state budgets.³⁵ The reformist Whitlam government of the 1970s, crucial to the foundation of modern policies on multiculturalism and other areas of social justice, reframed educational policy in terms of a national quest for equality of opportunity, and saw education as a principal means by which forms of social and economic disadvantage could be ameliorated.³⁶ This government saw the creation of the Disadvantaged Schools Program (focusing on schools from poorer areas), the development of English as a second language programs, and the establishment of Community Languages Schools.³⁷ It also introduced programs for girls and for rural and Indigenous education.³⁸

But this degree of intervention has caused tensions between national and state governments in terms of the directions of schooling, especially when different political parties control different levels of government. An example of such tension has been the Australian Government's stuttering attempts since 2006 to introduce a national curriculum. This has been embroiled in constant revision as state governments and state teaching organizations have resisted the attempt by a series of Liberal-National Party governments to introduce a conservative curriculum. Caught up in the "culture wars" of recent decades, with competing narratives of the nation's past, identity, and values, its implementation was watered down and uneven across the states.³⁹ This national curriculum attempted to introduce the idea of intercultural understanding as one of the key skills schools should foster, but was at odds with the prevailing language of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism was also caught between two levels of government in Australia, with departments and policies established in both systems (as was the case with Indigenous affairs), which has consequences for educational policy.

In addition to the conflict between levels of government, there is also tension between the two systems of government and nongovernment schooling. From the early days of the colonies, there existed government institutions for the children of convicts and free settlers, private schools for elites, and Native Institutions for the Indigenous. The increasing systematization of state education systems did not remove these differences. Today, nongovernment components of schooling include highly privileged schools (known as Great Public Schools), Catholic systemic schools (largely for the Catholic working class), and an increasing number of independent schools (many of which are faith-based). As part of the Whitlam government's emphasis on equal opportunity, the increase in national funding was partly aimed at the Catholic system and its working-class and migrant populations.⁴⁰ One of the ironies of this decision was that nongovernment schools could access public funding, which contributed to the subsequent growth of independent schools.⁴¹

Despite the intentions of successive national governments to produce more equitable funding arrangements over the last decade or so, these earlier chang-

es enshrined public funding for private schools, often at the expense of public schools and disadvantaged students.⁴² As a consequence, the proportion of students attending government schools has declined significantly since the 1970s, including a drop of 5 percent in the last two decades, to 64.5 percent of all students, much lower than the average of 80 percent among OECD countries.⁴³

The growth of private schooling is part of a larger process of the neoliberal marketization of education. While equity was typically framed in terms of access and opportunity (rather than equality of outcomes, which was often the focus of academic research), this approach reframed equity in terms of choice. The neoliberal promise of greater choice and freedom in the educational marketplace, however, produces significant tensions around teacher and parent responsibility and increasingly punitive regimes of accountability.⁴⁴

While the number of nongovernment schools has increased significantly, there has also been growth in high-achievement programs that have further complicated relations between ethnicity and educational inequalities. Notably, there have been new programs for high-achieving students – such as opportunity classes, gifted and talented programs, and selective high schools (especially in New South Wales) – and the proliferation of commercial tutoring services. This growth has been enmeshed with the opening of educational markets, both locally and internationally, and the targeting of particular groups of students, often those from overseas or of migrant origin.⁴⁵ While ethnicity was once deemed a marker of disadvantage, new cohorts of migrants, especially from South and East Asia, arrive with significant amounts of educational capital. Though there are still students of various ethnic backgrounds who experience educational disadvantage – such as migrant communities from the Middle East and Pacific Islands, and students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds – other students from Chinese and Indian backgrounds have come to dominate those programs for high achievers.⁴⁶

This turbulence is consequently seen in the juxtaposition of competing goals and programs in education. The language of access, equity, cultural recognition, and community harmony jostles with that of the market and accountability. Further complications emerge given the varying emphases of Australia's state- and territory-based education systems that draw on the national curriculum to differing degrees, attentive to the specificities of school communities within their own jurisdictions. Across Australia, the different equity logics of multiculturalism – incorporation, recognition, and civility – while all present, inform policies and practices in different ways. Most of these policies refer to multicultural education by name, focusing on migrant-derived diversity in schools or, as in the case of Queensland, subsume this within a policy of inclusive education that addresses the needs of various equity groups: students from culturally and linguistically di-

verse backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, those from LGBTQIA+ communities, and students with disabilities.⁴⁷

A key element of multicultural education is the English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) programs provided in each state and territory.⁴⁸ Support in English language and literacy has long been the mainstay of multicultural education in Australia, a perceived need in terms of educational access and equity in an Anglophone nation.⁴⁹ We frame such programs of multicultural education as representative of a logic of incorporation, not in the sense of older notions of assimilation and integration, but as state support for acquiring the requisite skills for participation within Australian schools and society more broadly. Such programs sit alongside an array of others around settlement assistance and transition to school for recent migrants and refugees and their families in public schools.⁵⁰

While the reach and effectiveness of EAL/D support is a matter of some debate, examined more closely in the context of the NSW education system, languages other than English receive far less government support. Despite the richness of Australia's linguistic diversity, including hundreds of languages and dialects spoken among the many diasporas together with over two hundred fifty Indigenous languages, language loss is a significant issue.⁵¹ This is a function of various factors. Processes of colonization and dispossession have led to the demise or restricted use of many Indigenous languages, and migrants face various hurdles in relation to their children's maintenance of their mother tongue, often competing with English, which is prioritized above other languages.⁵² Languages other than English are generally studied for academic purposes in secondary school, though with increasingly declining numbers, and bilingual education in various migrant languages is something of a rarity in Australian schools, especially within the public system.⁵³ The diversity of languages in use in Australia makes decisions to introduce language instruction extremely difficult.

As a result, maintenance of mother-tongue languages among migrants generally falls to community-language schools that operate outside school hours, are staffed by community members, and are funded by grants from state governments and migrant communities themselves, with some charging nominal fees. The benefits of mother tongue maintenance are well documented, not only psychological benefits and maintaining familial ties with older generations, including those remaining in the country of origin, but also the educational benefits of proficiency in a student's first language, especially if it involves not only speaking but reading and writing, as these skills provide a strong basis for learning additional languages.⁵⁴ Such language maintenance, along with the retention of homeland customs and faith-based practices, is a tenet of multiculturalism, indicative of a logic of recognition. But in terms of practices of multicultural education in schools, there

is often a tension between these differing logics of recognition and incorporation, such as between ensuring EAL/D learners' timely acquisition of English language and literacy and the retention and development of their mother tongue. As indicated, multiculturalism is not simply descriptive of the ethnic pluralism of Australia's population but pertains to the forms of governance that manage this diversity of which schools play a pivotal role. As with the nation as a whole, schools are faced with what education scholar Brian Bullivant, in the early years of Australian multiculturalism, termed the "pluralist dilemma," balancing the rights of ethnic minorities and those of the nation as a broader collective.⁵⁵

While recognition is important in terms of various scales and modes of belonging in school, the broader community, and the nation, there is conflict and ambiguity around what recognition involves. What is it that schools are "recognizing"? Many policies related to multicultural education still operate with quite reduced notions of ethnicity or "culture" as being discrete and singular, and they lack conceptual clarity in how to approach these concepts. For example, one of the three elements of the national curriculum's treatment of intercultural understanding is "recognising culture and developing respect." While there are references to cultural variability and the dynamism of cultural practice at points in the learning continuum, spanning the early years of school through to the later years of high school, this complexity is usually factored into the later stages of schooling after students have already formulated more bounded notions of culture. Moreover, the very meaning of culture is itself not interrogated, leaving much to teachers' own interpretation of a field of knowledge they may have little or no expertise in.⁵⁶

Given these limitations, a persistent essentialism tends to prevail in practices of multicultural education in schools, evident in curriculum and events, such as the ubiquitous multicultural day, when stereotypical representations of the "cultures" of students and their families are benignly celebrated. With an emphasis on ethnic difference and little acknowledgment of cultural complexity or affinity, such activities, while well-intentioned, engage in forms of misrecognition, othering students in contrast to an assumed Anglo mainstream. In contexts of superdiversity, complexity is now characteristic of many school communities and warrants more insightful examination within classrooms. Students need the skills for critically unpacking the cultural complexity of the world, looking at how culture involves far more than ethnicity or race, intersecting with various influences, such as class, gender, religion, sexuality, and age, that may prove more significant in students' lives and educational outcomes. This is not to say that ethnic heritage is not important – it is, especially in terms of informing differing perspectives that challenge the dominance of an Anglocentric view. But the complexities of what recognition entails is too often neglected, pigeonholing students in terms of cultural types that run counter to educational equity.

What we term a logic of civility is also related to the imperative of recognition. As is evident from the national curriculum, “recognising culture” is coupled with “developing respect.” Such an ethics toward difference was deemed essential in multicultural policy for embracing not only considerable demographic change from large-scale migration after World War II, but for reimagining the nation in light of this, distancing itself from Australia’s white colonial roots. Schools and multicultural education have been pivotal on this topic. While multicultural education was initially focused on policies attuned to a logic of incorporation, such as in equipping the children of migrants with English language skills, it now involves a much wider remit, including programs of intercultural understanding and community harmony with an orientation that is not merely inward-looking in terms of individual school communities, but has a broader perspective that considers such issues on a national and global scale. This broader remit is not always understood by schools, especially those with limited ethnic diversity or, as they are termed in Australia, low language background other than English (LBOTE), the main marker of migrant-derived diversity in Australian schools. For some, multicultural education is still more a matter for schools with a concentration of students with an LBOTE, despite mandated policies to the contrary. Yet promoting civility is not straightforward. If it does little more than provide a gloss of acceptance of ethnic, racial, and cultural difference predicated on essentialized and stereotypical ideas of ethnic difference, such forms of unreflective civility can mask issues of racism and discrimination.

These may not be perceived as problems within schools but are certainly prevalent within the broader community and are the responsibility of schools and curricula to address. The celebration of Harmony Day is one example. Introduced by the conservative government of Prime Minister John Howard in 1999 on the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, it operates in Australian schools more as a bland celebration of the nation’s diversity and the acceptance of others. Schools encourage students to wear orange to mark the occasion rather than to use it as an opportunity to draw attention to racism and how best to combat it. Such diluted messages filter through to schools in policies such as Western Australia’s *Shaping the Future Multicultural Plan*, which has a single reference to racism while foregrounding celebration in the form of multicultural events in its policy priority of “harmonious and inclusive communities.”⁵⁷

Together with these differing logics of incorporation, recognition, and civility, multicultural education, as with educational and social policy broadly, has been influenced by neoliberal forms of governance. As a result, the quest for equity, driven by an agenda of social justice, has been sidelined in favor of economic rationality. This is evident in the changes to programs of multicultural education in NSW over the last decade or so. NSW is Australia’s oldest and largest state in terms of population and arguably the most culturally diverse. It has responsibility for

over 1.2 million school students (over 30 percent of the nations' 4.1 million students), of which 63 percent are in government schools.⁵⁸ In terms of students in its public schools, one in three has an LBOTE, one in four requires EAL/D support, and one in sixty-nine has a refugee background.⁵⁹ This diversity is not uniformly spread, with far greater concentrations of LBOTE students in urban centers. In Sydney, for example, some schools record numbers representing over 95 percent of their student population compared to others that are far less culturally and linguistically diverse with numbers below 10 percent. Multicultural education in the state is guided by two policies, one specifically focused on multicultural education and the other around anti-racism, both of which draw on the differing logics already discussed.

Policies, however, are not necessarily a good indication of practice, and their implementation varies in schools.⁶⁰ One key exception is NSW's anti-racism policy's requirement for schools to appoint "anti-racism contact officers," or ARCOs, from among their staff. Tasked with working with principals to address incidents of racism, these officers receive departmental training and guidance in their role. Such centrally mandated positions tend to result in a high degree of compliance, but this contrasts with the devolution of government responsibility in other areas of multicultural education. A decade of conservative state government from 2012 to 2023, and its embrace of neoliberalism, has seen a dismantling of long-established support structures around multicultural education. This is most evident in the loss of the EAL/D/multicultural education consultancy comprising specialized departmental staff providing guidance, support, and professional learning to schools across the state. Instead, through a devolved funding model termed "Local Schools, Local Decisions," representative of a broader adoption of public sector neoliberal reform, schools were ostensibly given greater autonomy over their own finances, staffing, and professional learning. What resulted was the loss of considerable corporate knowledge and expertise around EAL/D pedagogy and multicultural education and a rudderless approach to policy implementation.⁶¹

The misguided nature of relinquishing much of this centralized support became evident in 2015 when the national government increased its intake of refugees from Syria and Iraq. The NSW government rapidly appointed temporary consultants to support the government response, filling the void, if only short-term, left by the demise of the EAL/D/multicultural education consultancy, which in the past had supported refugees and their families. This responsibility has now largely fallen to schools. To some extent, the failure of Local Schools, Local Decisions has been acknowledged through a new funding model and some reinstatement of centralized support, hastened by a change of state government in 2023. But the policy's residual effects are still being felt, especially in terms of EAL/D support in schools. With principals still retaining considerable control over who fills their allocation of EAL/D positions, many who take up this employment (much of which

is on a fractional basis) lack the required expertise; convenience and budgetary constraints take precedence over quality teaching and specialized support.⁶²

Coupled with years of inadequate funding and surging numbers of students requiring support, the state of EAL/D provision in NSW schools is indeed dire, a form of neglect the state's teachers' union has termed "tantamount to institutional racism."⁶³ This situation is exacerbated by escalating industrial issues of teacher pay and staffing shortages affecting teacher retention and the quality of public education because many students, not only EAL/D learners, are taught by those without the required subject expertise.⁶⁴ This is a greater issue in schools that are difficult to staff and that have student populations that are both high LBOTE and low socioeconomic status, thereby affecting those of greatest need and jeopardizing goals of educational equity.

To maintain practitioner quality in the state, teachers across both public and private systems must adhere to professional standards determined by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, administered within the state by the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA). The standard around professional knowledge most relevant to multicultural education requires teachers entering the profession to "Demonstrate knowledge of teaching strategies that are responsive to the learning strengths and needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds," with a focus on mentoring and leadership as teachers progress in their career. While this is ostensibly an improvement, there is no unpacking of what this professional knowledge involves, the details of which are left to initial teacher education and in-service professional learning, with much of the latter regulated by NESA. To remain accredited, teachers in NSW are required to undertake one hundred hours of professional learning every five years, but the nature of this professional learning is often critiqued as being instrumental, geared toward meeting departmental targets around topics like literacy and numeracy.⁶⁵ Such measures designed to improve teachers' professional practice now operate more as a mechanism of accountability, curbing practitioner autonomy and raising questions as to what constitutes teacher professional knowledge. Similar measures are also afoot within initial teacher education, with the national government now prescribing core curriculum for all preparatory teaching degree programs, with content around "the brain and learning" sitting alongside what is termed "responsive teaching" for various equity groups. There seems to be little appreciation, however, of the disciplinary disjuncture between what is proposed and what is offered. The documents indicate a bias toward the universalizing approach of cognitive psychology and cursory treatment of the cultural specificity of a more sociologically informed perspective.⁶⁶

This policy shift entails too many issues to consider in this essay, though the questions it raises are important, especially about knowledge that pertains to

multicultural education (and for Indigenous education). Requiring teachers to be “culturally responsive” seems a positive move, but without an accompanying critical interrogation of what is meant by “culture,” it seems doomed to simply reproduce the essentialist assumptions associated with the reductive forms of cultural recognition already discussed. These concerns have long been voiced by international education scholars such as Courtney Cazden and Ellen Leggett, who proposed such an approach in the 1970s, and Gloria Ladson-Billings, in response to applications of culturally relevant pedagogy.⁶⁷ More recent variants such as educational scholar Django Paris’s culturally sustaining pedagogy also seem susceptible to such troubling interpretations.⁶⁸ As education scholar Mardi Schmeichel has written, “For educators concerned with promoting equity, it is taken for granted that culturally relevant teaching is ‘good’ teaching.”⁶⁹ This is similarly the view within the Australian context, no doubt prompting policymakers to adopt the approach as core curriculum in the initial training of teachers.⁷⁰ Even in a recent report titled *Toward an Australian Culturally Responsive Pedagogy*, which raises concerns about the potential superficiality of the approach, its tendencies toward cultural essentialism, and difficulties in accounting for the impact of superdiversity, it is still endorsed as fundamentally good pedagogy.⁷¹

Teachers require a set of conceptual resources in their professional toolkit to assist them to critically examine issues of culture, ethnicity, and race, attentive to the impact of globalization and hybridizing forms of identification – central to the task of a *critical* multicultural education. Programs that involve teachers in the development of such critical perspectives and a language to explore these complexities have proved successful in moving teachers away from a “pragmatic” mode of teacher professionalism toward a more reflexive approach to the task of teaching that brings intellectual complexity to their classroom practice.⁷² Of course, any approach a teacher adopts is reliant upon the knowledge they possess. In a world of constant change and cultural flux, this entails a certain intellectual agility informed by a broad sociological understanding. Without this, practitioners make assumptions about “good teaching” rather than assessing the suitability of an approach for their own particular contexts.

This overview of issues around multicultural education has suggested that the pursuit of educational equity in Australia’s schooling systems is faced with several challenges. Together with reconciling what are often competing logics of multiculturalism – incorporation, recognition, and civility – there is a need to counter the insidious impact of neoliberalism that erodes the social and educational infrastructures so essential in making sure all students have access to quality education, free of forms of discrimination at various levels that can impede their progress. Quality education is also dependent on quality teaching; practitioners must be appropriately prepared for the complexities of contemporary schooling. As education scholars Ninetta Santoro and Aileen Kennedy explain, there is

now a “professional imperative” for teachers to acquire the requisite knowledge and skills “to better respond to cultural and linguistic diversity.”⁷³ This response, however, must avoid the reductive essentialism that often characterizes practices of multicultural education in schools. Rather, a transformative multicultural education is needed, with teachers and students attuned to the cultural complexities of a globalizing world, effectively navigating the difficult terrain of this rapid diversification.⁷⁴

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The Quest for Educational Equity in Schools in South Africa

Crain Soudien

The quest for educational equity in South Africa takes its impetus from the country's transition to democracy in 1994. The country faced the challenge of overcoming deep systemic inequality – both racial and class-based – caused by three hundred fifty years of colonialism and apartheid. The African National Congress undertook a process to equalize the educational system and expand opportunities for students. Significant progress has been made in addressing issues of race, class, and gender in the thirty years since 1994, but a combination of factors has both reproduced and amplified old inequalities and disparities, particularly those of space and race, and introduced intense new socioeconomic inequalities overlain with challenging cultural and linguistic markers, such as the dominance of English and the loss of indigenous language capacity. Two elements have been pivotal: stubborn legacy effects of apartheid such as poverty in a context of a weakening economy; and complex and contradictory arrangements made at the transition in 1994 that have left privilege, predominantly but no longer only white, largely intact. The COVID-19 pandemic sharpened these inequalities.

Much has been achieved in mitigating South Africa's race, class, and gender inequalities since the country became a democracy in 1994. Most of the worst racial disfigurements that gave apartheid its brutal character have been removed. Where schooling was structured on deeply unequal racial lines, the country now has a single nonracial education system. Policy measures have been instituted and have increased opportunity for many previously disadvantaged people. These reforms notwithstanding, a combination of factors has not only impeded the process of change, but, in critical ways, has deepened the country's challenges. These factors have 1) both reproduced and amplified old inequalities and disparities, particularly those of space and race, and 2) introduced new socioeconomic inequalities overlain with challenging cultural and linguistic markers, such as the dominance of English and the loss of indigenous language capacity.

The emergence and presence of new social dynamics are dramatically reordering the wider society and the field of education in particular. The tightly coupled

relationship between race and class, which had historically determined the primary experience of education for all South Africans, described by theorist Neville Alexander as a caste-like phenomenon, has been loosened.¹ While stubborn legacy effects of apartheid, such as racially based poverty, persist, the most critical new development has been the rise of a sizeable Black middle class.² This new middle class, precarious in its hold on its newfound privilege, has moved into positions of influence and power.³ It has taken its children into historically white schools and, by doing so, contributed significantly to the process of these schools' deracialization. Inequality, as a consequence, looks and is experienced in different ways.

In this essay, I analyze policy documents to develop an intersectional perspective. My approach seeks to hold in iterative juxtaposition the structural factors of race, class, and gender, but keeps their discursive valences in close view. To understand these valences, the work of sociologist Patricia Hill Collins is useful.⁴ She talks of sites of power as being saturated. Saturation is, I argue, the rhizomatic penetration of structure's justifications of itself – race, class, and gender in the main – into the everyday as commonsense. Saturation produces widespread “sensibility.” Inequality has its starting points, often but not always in structural drivers. It requires, however, discursive legitimations. Race and gender, for example, are produced as structural realities. They cut into society as categorical lines of difference. But, as an established body of literature has shown, these differences are almost definitively *not* physical.⁵ They subsist on belief. Power permeates social space simultaneously, structurally, and discursively. To show how these dynamics come to give the struggle for equity in South Africa its distinct character, I offer a brief explication of the nature of inequality in South Africa. From there, I move to the substance of the essay: the complex and contradictory arrangements made in and for education at the transition in 1994, and the difficulties that have confronted the democratic government. I draw from my research projects and the full range of administrative and policy materials that are publicly available. Official documents such as laws and regulations are important here, but records of public consultations are too. I also examine the extensive sociological and political literature that has been generated around the process of education reform in South Africa.

South Africa is the most unequal country in the world.⁶ Economics journalist Martin Hesse has noted that “almost a quarter (23%) of adult South Africans rely mainly on government grants for income and another third (32.1%) do not receive any income in cash.”⁷

Many scholars attempting to explain how this inequality is experienced locate the character of poverty and inequality in the economy.⁸ Less frequently articulated is the relationship between the economic, the political, and the social. Building on the work of South African commentator Poobalan Govender, actuaries and data analysts Nilen Kambaran, Nicolene Patchett, and Andrew Ruddle, and so-

cial scientists such as Francis Nymanjoh, Gerard Hagg, Vasu Reddy, and Ingrid Woolard, this essay acknowledges the primacy of the economic.⁹ Nymanjoh and Hagg argue, however, that “inequality goes far beyond access to services or opportunities for employment and includes, *inter alia*, the sociopsychological state of inequality and poverty, the way people experience inequality and its impact on their everyday life.”¹⁰ As I argue throughout this essay, racism is central.¹¹ Economists Francis Wilson and Vaun Cornell make four points about the state of South Africa in the first decade of the new millennium:¹²

1. Poverty is widespread and severe. In 2008, over half the population lived below the poverty datum line of R 515 per capita per month.
2. Poverty levels fell marginally between 1993 and 2008, from 55 percent to 54 percent of the population.
3. The South African Gini coefficient, the international statistical measure of inequality in a community, was 0.70, the highest in the world.
4. Inequality appeared to be on the increase after 1994, largely due to widening inequality within previously disadvantaged groups. Horizontal inequality between the putative “races” remains large. Vertical inequality within racially defined groups, however, has emerged as an important social driver.

These conditions have continued into the current period. The World Bank explains that “at the end of 2022, there were still close to half a million fewer jobs than at the end of 2019, with women and youth persistently more impacted. Inequality remains the highest in the world, and poverty was an estimated 63% in 2022 based on the upper-middle-income country poverty line.”¹³ Referring to the country’s 2018 consumption expenditure Gini coefficient of 0.67, the World Bank’s report also says that “inequality in wealth is even higher [than in previous years], and intergenerational mobility is low, meaning inequalities are passed down from generation to generation with little change over time.”¹⁴

An important change in these dynamics, as indicated earlier, has been the rise of the African middle class. As finance journalist Nessa Moodley explains, using a household monthly income of R 22,000 (approximately USD 1,220 in August 2024) as the benchmark, this class now includes 3.4 million people in a population of approximately 48 million African people.¹⁵ It had fewer than 250,000 people in 1993 when the population of people classified as African numbered 31,088,600.¹⁶ Relatively small as this middle class is, its rise has contributed significantly to the growth of inequality in South Africa. In a trend already evident in 2001, economists Murray Leibbrandt, Ingrid Woolard, and Christopher Woolard found that “the Gini coefficients for each population group [continued to rise] ... [but] are highest for the African group.”¹⁷ These trends continued after 2015. A study conducted by Hiroyuki Hino, Murray Leibbrandt, Ratjomose Machema, Muna Shifa, and myself con-

firmed the shift toward greater vertical inequality: “While there is still a staggeringly high between-group share [of income], [there was] an increasing importance of within-race group inequalities in understanding inequality in South Africa.”¹⁸ Harvey describes the differentiation within the Black community in the following way: “what both BEE (black employment equity) and affirmative action did was to vastly expand the social and class divide in the Black community to the extent that inter-racial divides [between white and Black] are dwarfed by the intraracial class divisions that opened up from the late 1990s within the Black population.”¹⁹

It is important to understand what inequality in education looked like when South Africa became a democracy in 1994. While schools, even *within* the country’s separate racialized communities, were not homogenous, inequality and discrimination were structurally built into the system. The apartheid constitution of 1983 was determinative, and effectively divided the system into sixteen subsystems based on apartheid’s racial categories of “white,” “coloured,” “Indian,” and “African,” with the last further divided into ten ethnic or “homeland” subcategories.²⁰ The Department of National Education held the system in place with the overarching power to determine the general policy for the country in terms of salaries, conditions of service, professional requirements for teachers, and norms and standards for syllabi.²¹

Schooling for children classified as African was inferior. Teachers were under-qualified. Classes were crowded with half of all African schools in the country running double sessions – mornings and afternoons – right up until the 1970s.²² Children, moreover, were not only forced to learn through the medium of English or Afrikaans, but the quality of what they learned was ideologically ordered to produce subservient subjects ready for the labor market.²³ A major debate about this experience pivoted on whether schooling was for class domination or racial repression.²⁴ It did both. Black children had their perceived inferiority drilled into them. As educationists J. M. Du Preez and Hanneke Du Preez explained: “Black teachers and pupils rely heavily on the school textbook. They view the textbook as a source of knowledge to be mastered or even memorised for the examinations. The textbooks, however, are written by whites[,] consequently the contents reflect the symbolic system of the whites.... The textbooks [have] very little relevance for the black child.”²⁵

While some degree of autonomy was granted to the subsystems, the finance function was managed centrally, determining how budgets were allocated. In 1994, this produced the following per capita expenditure figures: R 2,110 (USD 620) for African children outside the homelands, R 1,524 (USD 448) for African children in nonindependent homelands, R 4,772 (USD 1,403) for white children, R 4,423 (USD 1,300) for Indian children, and R 3,601 (USD 1,058) for colored children. This meant that the government spent over three times more on white

schools than on Black schools even though white learners only made up 17 percent of the learner population.²⁶ Pupil-teacher ratios in 1994 stood at 37:1 for African children in urban areas, 40:1 for African children in the former homelands, and 22:1 for white children.²⁷ Schools serving African learners did not have the means to spend their finances on school infrastructure and the maintenance of the existing buildings and, as a result, lacked the most basic facilities such as space, toilets, laboratories, libraries, and playgrounds. School safety itself was compromised. This was decidedly not the experience of children who were classified as white.

In describing the reform process initiated by the new government in 1994, it is important to acknowledge the significant changes in the education system that were already underway before 1994. The National Party government had abolished what was called petty apartheid. It opened up schools racially in 1985. The democratic government made concerted efforts to accelerate these changes and to transform (and reform) the inequalities it had inherited from apartheid. It embarked on an extensive legislative overhaul after 1994 and devoted considerable attention and resources to dealing with the internal stabilization of the system, such as the *Implementation Plan for Tirisano*.²⁸ The then minister of education, Kader Asmal, was aware of the scale of the challenge: “the plans reflect,” he said, “what we can realistically expect to achieve in the time we have set ourselves.”²⁹ At least twelve significant steps were taken by the new government.³⁰ Among the five most critical for equity were:

1. *The merger of the sixteen racialized education departments into a single national education department.* This was the first step of the democratic government in 1994.
2. *The promulgation of the Constitution and the South African Schools Act (SASA).*³¹ The Constitution articulated the principles of equality before the law: “Everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law.”³² The SASA constituted the schooling system administratively as a single nonracial and equitable system. Importantly, it made schooling compulsory up to grade 9 and authorized the establishment of school governing bodies through which parents had the majority say for their schools’ admission and language policies.
3. *The development of norms and standards to redress imbalances inherited from apartheid.*³³ They reset imbalances in teacher-pupil ratios between schools that were formerly segregated for white students and Black students, and further specified what school infrastructure a school should have. The Norms and Standards for School Funding stipulated that 60 percent of education expenditure had to be allocated to the poorest 40 percent of schools within each province.³⁴

4. *The provision of fee-free schools.* While a key provision in the SASA and the Norms and Standards regulations granted parents the right to price and charge school fees (through school governing bodies), the government realized that this would exacerbate inequalities. The state introduced a school classification system that graded schools into five socioeconomic quintiles, from most poor (quintile 1) to least poor (quintile 5), based on the income levels of the communities in which the schools were set.³⁵ Quintile 1–3 schools were relieved from the burden of collecting fees from parents and were awarded higher per capita subsidies.
5. *The revision of the curriculum.* The apartheid curriculum, which had focused on rote learning for Black children, was replaced by Curriculum 2005 and its 2012 update, the Revised National Curricular Statements. A new qualifications framework was also put in place to provide learning pathways for young people. In tandem, mechanisms were established to improve the quality of the teacher corps for all children.

Considerable political and ideological challenges accompanied these interventions. The African National Congress and the civil society organizations supporting it, such as teachers' unions like the South African Democratic Teachers' Union, in combination or by themselves, impeded or weakened the reform process through insufficient funding or by overlooking corruption in important administrative measures.³⁶ The introduction of these measures, however, significantly improved access. Gross enrollment ratios reached 100 percent in 2001 in the compulsory phase of schooling.³⁷ Important progress was registered in meeting the goal of ensuring access to education. In 2015, more than six hundred thousand children were enrolled in grade R (a reception year before grade 1) and approximately 1.2 million in grade 1. Significantly, as Table 1 reflects, with the fee-exemption policy, the government was acknowledging disparities in the country's income and wealth profiles and recognizing that the majority of its children's education required additional resources and support to make up for the damage that apartheid had caused. More than 60 percent of the country's children were in no-fee schools by 2012.³⁸ And by 2016, the levels of annual per capita subvention for quintiles 1–3 were significantly higher than those for children in the schools of the wealthy. Important equitable steps were made in bringing them toward the minimal standards defined in terms of the Norms and Standards prescripts.

Other important interventions included the establishment of the National School Nutrition Program in 1994 as one of the first one-hundred-days projects of the new president, Nelson Mandela, and the scholar transport program.³⁹ The School Nutrition Program currently provides daily meals to more than nine million children in over two thousand public schools, while the transport program

Table 1

Government Funding per Learner by Socioeconomic Quintile

Quintile or Threshold	2016	2017
Quintile 1	R 1,177	R 1,242
Quintile 2	R 1,177	R 1,242
Quintile 3	R 1,177	R 1,242
Quintile 4	R 590	R 622
Quintile 5	R 204	R 215
No-fee threshold	R 1,177	R 1,242

Source : Angelina Matsie Motshekga, Minister of Basic Education, *Amended National Norms and Standards for School Funding*, Government Gazette No. 40065 (Department of Basic Education, Republic of South Africa, 2016), 5.

was shuttling over fifty thousand learners at no cost throughout the country and subsidizing the travel costs of a further fifty thousand scholars by 2012. Further support to low-income learners came in the form of Child Support Grants for children up to age fifteen in families earning household incomes up to R 27,600 (USD 3,406), revised means testing, and removal of urban and rural threshold differences. In 2015, there were 11,703,165 children receiving a Child Support Grant.⁴⁰

There were several positives outcomes of these interventions. The expenditure per capita between the lowest and highest quintiles was not simply equalized – it was distributed equitably. In 2017, the poorest children received almost R 1,000 more per capita than their most wealthy counterparts. In the process of opening schools, critical gender parity was achieved.⁴¹ Between 1996 and 2016, the number of people aged fifteen years and older who completed grade 12 increased from 3.7 million in 1996 to 11.6 million in 2016.⁴² In addition, there was a significant improvement in pupils’ results on the school-exit Senior Certificate Examination. Where overall pass rates stood at 58 percent in 1994 and 47.4 percent in 1997, by 2003, they had improved to 73.3 percent.⁴³

In undertaking these programmatic interventions, the government legally met the constitutional mandate set out in the constitution’s bill of rights in section 9 and section 29 (1) (a), the latter of which stipulated that “Everyone has the right to a basic education, including adult basic education.”⁴⁴ This stipulation was ratified by a constitutional court that ruled it was the state’s duty to provide basic education to all citizens.⁴⁵

Significant as the government's program of reform has been, the question remains whether it made a significant impact on inequality. The education system continues to be characterized by egregious inequality.⁴⁶ It is now widely recognized that the principal driver of this inequality is the policy reform that granted parents, through their control of school governing bodies, the power to control their schools' admission and fee-generating policies.⁴⁷ This power, I argue, is being played out in two ways: a push from below through the new middle-class moving its children into schools that had not been, by law, previously available to them, and a push from above with elites playing what sociologists Rob Gruijters and Benjamin Elbers and economic development researcher Vijay Reddy describe as a "hoarding" exercise in keeping their privileges to themselves.⁴⁸

The *push from below* is, in its essence, a social reaction to the emerging class system in South Africa. The social demography of the system has fundamentally changed from apartheid times. All schools now have significant proportions of children who would have been classified Black, African, colored, and Indian in terms of apartheid's classifications, but many schools are inaccessible to the country's poor.

The study I conducted for the Department of Education in 2003 produced the racially defined distribution of learners shown in Table 2. By 2003, close to half of all children in historically white schools, former House of Assembly, were not white. The important work of Gruijters, Elbers, and Reddy shows that, almost twenty years later, these trends have intensified.⁴⁹ Working with the Department of Basic Education's 2021 annual survey, they found that children classified as African under the apartheid classification regulations now constituted the majority in all schools in the country (see Table 3).

Racially diverse as schools have become – in some respects, they no longer reflect their historical beginnings, since many formerly white schools are now entirely Black – class distinctions still feature prominently in the makeup of schools. Interesting manifestations of this include children classified as African becoming the majority in all the formerly racialized subsystems – except for former colored schools, where children classified as colored remain in the clear majority. Those schools share many of the historic inadequacies of schools catering for children deemed to be African. This suggests class choices being made by African parents who do not see these schools as being better than the schools with which they were historically associated during apartheid. At the same time, at the upper end of the privileged spectrum, middle-ranking (in terms of prestige) former white schools have seen white flight. Many of those schools are now entirely Black. As geographer Mark Hunter describes in *Race for Education*, white children from modest working-class backgrounds are seeking places in more prestigious white schools.⁵⁰ As a result, as Gruijters, Elbers, and Reddy make clear, children classified as white still predominate in elite former white public schools, occupying 62 percent of the places available.⁵¹

Table 2

Learner Distribution by Racial Group at Historically Segregated Schools in Gauteng Province, 2003

School Designation	Ex-DET (African)	Ex-HOA (White)	Ex-HOR (Colored)	Ex-HOD (Indian)	Total
Black	828,666	138,516	37,718	35,295	1,040,195
White	16	241,784	9	31	241,840
Colored	2,793	20,399	48,380	2,287	73,859
Indian	231	14,177	156	17,399	31,963

Source : Christina E. N. Amsterdam, Mokubung Nkomo, and Everard Weber, “School Desegregation Trends in Gauteng Province,” *Africa Education Review* 9 (1) (2012): 27–46.

Table 3

Learner Distribution by Racial Group at Historically Segregated Schools, 2021

School Designation	Ex-DET (African)	Ex-HOA (White)	Ex-HOR (Colored)	Ex-HOD (Indian)
Black	98.8%	54.4%	33.2%	73%
White	0.5%	29.4%	0.2%	0.5%
Colored	0.5%	12.5%	66.3%	3.2%
Indian	0.2%	3.6%	0.3%	23.3%

Source : Rob Gruijters, Benjamin Elbers, and Vijay Reddy, “Opportunity Hoarding and Elite Reproduction: School Segregation in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” *Social Forces* 103 (1) (2024): 21.

Black middle-class parents clearly want their children in what they perceive to be better schools. While the data on household expenditure on education is scanty, indications are that the cost of schooling is high for all parents. In 2000, a survey conducted by South Africa’s National Treasury found that “although the poorest fifth of all households pay low fees of around R 50 per year in absolute terms, this constitutes a high proportion of household income. The very poorest spend, on average, 2% of income on school fees, while the figure for middle- and high-income groups is around 1%.”⁵² The Trends in International Mathemat-

ics and Science Study provides clearer actual expenditure profiles, with the bottom 10 percent of income earners spending 1.5 percent of their income on education compared to 3.3 percent for parents in the top 10 percent.⁵³ The University of Cape Town's Institute of Strategic Marketing, which has been tracking Black middle-class growth, found that spending on education was a priority for this new class, with 65 percent of them having their children in former white or private schools.⁵⁴ By 2013, more than half of this new Black middle class was sending its children to private schools, which had grown by 2022 to just under one-tenth of all of schools in South Africa (2,282 of the total of 24,871 schools).⁵⁵ With more than half of the quintile 4 and 5 schools now being majority Black, this group of parents is willing to devote between R 30,000 and R 60,000 (between USD 1,881 and 3,762) each year to keep their children in the top end of the public school system and between R 100,000 and R 200,000 (between USD 5,553 and USD 11,107) in the private school system, where they are now also in the majority.⁵⁶

The *push from above* is more political. These politics take their impetus from the country's foundational educational "equalizing" piece of legislation: the South African Schools Act. SASA provided that a "governing body of a public school must take all reasonable measures within its means to supplement the resources provided by the State in order to improve the quality of education provided by the school to all learners at the school."⁵⁷ This power had been accorded essentially to keep the middle class in the public school system.⁵⁸ The result was that schools in economically privileged areas, almost all of them white, charged high fees, while those in poorer areas, could not. The government became aware of this problem in 2007 and introduced the quintile system, which exempted poorer schools from charging fees and, as described above, put in place a subsidy per capita framework that significantly shifted funding on an equitable basis from the rich to the poor.

Devised as South Africa's primary equalizing instrument in preserving parents' rights to determine their schools' fee levels, the quintile system allowed wealthier parents to raise levels of quality provision in their schools beyond those that existed during apartheid. Schools in quintiles 4 and 5 were able to charge fees that turned them into quasi-private institutions. While their levels of state subvention were significantly reduced – they received R 389 per learner in 2008, compared to the sum of R 738 allocated to learners in quintile 1 – the collection of school fees produced a per capita annual expenditure of R 4,022 on their children.⁵⁹ This produced per capita expenditure disparities that were even greater than those experienced under apartheid.⁶⁰ Currently, 75 percent of all learners in the system are in no-fee schools, many of which carry the legacy disadvantages of being largely Black and poor, and 25 percent are in privileged schools, largely formerly white, serving the expanded postapartheid and no-longer-only-white middle class.⁶¹

The government has recently proposed a set of amendments to SASA to curtail parental authority over admissions and language policy.⁶² Its justification for this

curtailment is to act, as it says, in “the best interests of the child, with emphasis on equality as provided for in Section 9 of the *Constitution* and equity.”⁶³ Important as these proposed amendments are, the draft legislation continues to protect parental rights to improve the quality of education provided by the school. Parents have and will continue to use this protection to determine the fee structures of their schools and thereby make available to their children the best teachers, facilities, and other educational affordances they can provide and, importantly, control who is admitted into the school. They do so by taking control of school governing bodies (SGBs).

As the chair of a Ministerial Review Committee, I conducted a 2003 study of the historical racial group makeup of SGBs. The study found that while many former white schools had become majority Black, they were still largely governed by white parents.⁶⁴ Most SGBs were also dominated by the elite within most communities. In seventeen case studies we included in the study, “it remain[ed] the case, that middle-class or emerging middle-class people tend to be dominant, if not in the majority.... Very evident in the 17 schools were university lecturers, educators... lawyers and a scattering of other professional occupations.”⁶⁵ Writing some years later on how SGBs are functioning in affluent schools, education scholar Jan Heystek argued that white parents continue to dominate the membership and running of school governing bodies.⁶⁶ Table 4 provides an indication of how SGBs are constituted in schools in terms of their historical racialized departmental designations. Note the overrepresentation of white parents in the SGBs of former House of Assembly (that is, formerly white) schools. While Black learners constituted up to 30 percent of the learner profile in 2003, their parents made up only 11 percent of their SGBs’ membership.

It is, however, not only race that is at play in the composition of the SGBs. Class factors play an important role in the ability of parents to participate in these governing bodies. The major scholarly studies of parental profiles in SGBs suggest there is much greater middle-class representation in SGBs than there is representation from poorer parents.⁶⁷ Ruijters, Elbers, and Reddy argue that this development constitutes “elite capture” of schools.⁶⁸ The elites, a coming together of white families with generational wealth and Black families new to the status, use the SGBs to hoard opportunity. Ruijters, Elbers, and Reddy say that what is taking place here does not require political power.⁶⁹ It may be so, but I would suggest that it operates off deliberate political and social attitudes of superiority – both those of race and class. Their intent is to keep Black and, more pointedly, poor children out of the country’s privileged schools. This attitude was evident in a 2011 court case brought by a Johannesburg primary school, Rivonia Primary, a former white school that challenged, drawing on Section 5 (5) of SASA, which secures the power of parents to determine their schools’ admission policy, a decision of the South Gauteng High Court that the Gauteng Department of Education could compel the

Table 4
Racial Group Distribution in School Governing Bodies of Historically Segregated Schools

School Governing Bodies	Ex-DET (African)	Ex-HOA (White)	Ex-HOR (Colored)	Ex-HOD (Indian)	Total
Black	96%	11%	8%	72%	60%
White	2%	79%	3%	0.2%	24%
Colored	1%	6%	81%	1.2%	8%
Indian	0.4%	4%	1%	27%	7%
Other	0.15%	0%	5.75%	0%	0.6%

School Governing Bodies include parents, educators, support staff, and learners. Source: Department of Education, *Review of School Governance: South African Public Schools, Report of the Ministerial Review Committee on School Governance* (Department of Education, Republic of South Africa, 2004), 60.

school to admit a Black child. Successive appeals and counterappeals ultimately led to the school being compelled to admit the child, but the point is that the parents resisted the process intensely.⁷⁰

As a result of these pushes from below and above, the country now has a two-tiered system: one for the rich and another for the poor. Schools during apartheid were structured fundamentally in racial and ethnic terms. They are now essentially racial and class projects. The differences in the quality of education provided in formerly Black and formerly white schools are stark. In a recent contribution on the democratization of education in South Africa, referencing an Amnesty International report on school inequality in South Africa, I explained that “at the beginning of the 2019 school year there were nearly 4,000 schools still using pit latrines, 20,071 had no laboratories, 18,019 had no libraries, class sizes experienced among the poorest 60% of the school population grew from 41 to 48 learners between 2011 and 2016 while those for the wealthiest grew from 33 to 35.”⁷¹

The inequality in resourcing expresses itself clearly in the very different learning performances of rich and poor students. Illustrating these differences are the results of successive Trends in International Mathematics and Science Studies (TIMSS). The 2015 TIMSS found that 75 percent of grade 9 learners in no-fee schools could not attain scores above 400 points, the international midpoint for the test, compared to 60 percent of their counterparts in privileged schools who scored above 475, the intermediate benchmark or better, and 14 percent who achieved the

high international mark of 625 points.⁷² In the 2019 TIMSS, there was a 75-point gap between learners from disadvantaged and privileged backgrounds.⁷³

How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted inequality in the system? It is important to acknowledge that the South African government was aware of how unequally the pandemic landed on the South African schooling system, and how carefully it needed to respond to the vulnerability of the poor. It observed in 2022, for example, that “since its outbreak two years ago, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted education systems globally, affecting the most vulnerable learners the hardest. It has increased inequalities and exacerbated a pre-existing education crisis.”⁷⁴ It acknowledged the large inequalities that existed across schools and grades, and particularly the reality that at the height of the pandemic in 2020, historically disadvantaged schools had lost approximately 70 percent of contact time in 2020 while more privileged schools had been able to keep this challenge down to an absolute minimum. In response, it drastically trimmed the curriculum and mobilized important educational nongovernmental organizations to put in place stabilization, remedial, and catch-up initiatives. These initiatives deliberately targeted learners and parents in no-fee schools. Their schools were provided with emergency relief resources, water and sanitation, and the sustaining of the school-feeding program, but also educational affordances such as expensive digital equipment.⁷⁵

Well-intentioned as these plans were, there was little evidence in the publicly available material on how the Department of Basic Education (DBE) intended to realize its objectives. The result was to leave the undercapacitated sections of the system all to themselves. While the advantaged sections were able to take up and work with what the DBE intended, the poorer were not. Strikingly, in appraising levels of learning in the system, the DBE’s annual report stated that there had been a marked increase in underperformance among learners in 2020:

there was an increase in the number of schools that achieved below 65 percent passes (in the number of students sitting for the Grade 12 National Senior Certificate examination) which is a benchmark for underperformance as stipulated in Circular D2 of 2017. The number of underperforming schools increased from 1363 in the 2019 National Senior Certificate examinations to 5367 in 2020.⁷⁶

The highest number of underperforming schools came from provinces with the highest number of schools serving the poor and those with large proportions of rural schools: that is, the Eastern Cape, Kwazulu-Natal, and Limpopo provinces. The DBE did not attribute this collapse to the pandemic, but there was little doubt that it had played an important role. The impact, more directly attributed, was seen too in the 2021 Progress in International Literacy Study results for grade 4 South African learners.⁷⁷ The results showed a systemwide collapse of reading

attainment. Only 11 percent of learners in South Africa attained the low international benchmark of between 400 and 474 points (the ability to locate and retrieve explicit information); 6 percent attained the intermediate benchmark between 475 and 549 points (the ability to interpret and identify reasons for events in text); 2 percent attained the high benchmark between 550 and 624 points (the ability to make intricate connections between events); and 1 percent attained the advanced benchmark of 625 and above (the ability to integrate ideas). Markedly, 81 percent scored well below the lowest benchmark to produce an average score for the country of 288 points, more than 40 points below the score of 320 attained in 2016.⁷⁸ The result is that COVID-19 has compounded the inequalities of an already deeply unequal system.

After thirty years of democracy, South Africa is in a distinctly different place from where it had been during apartheid. While the specter of race, performed and felt in a range of ways, from the crude to the subtle, continues to haunt the country, the factor of class has changed to configure discrimination and inequality in significantly more complex terms. The combined effect of these developments, in a context of weakening global economic conditions, has been to keep privilege/disadvantage and superiority/inferiority as the distinguishing marks of South Africa's social character, but to do so in distinctly new forms. Privilege remains racial but now also has clearer class features. How the country will better live up to its commitment to produce greater equality is more easily said than done. We need more than rhetoric. South Africa has to understand the new conditions in which it finds itself, and to develop practical policies that can be implemented in ways that hold the administrators of the system – both officials and parents – accountable.

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- ¹ No Sizwe, *One Azania, One Nation: The National Question in South Africa* (Zed Press, 1979).
- ² See Roger Southall, *The New Black Middle Class in South Africa* (Jacana Media, 2016); Tendai Chikweche, James Lappeman, and Paul Egan, "Revisiting Middle-Class Consumers in Africa: A Cross-Country City Based Investigation Outlining Implications for International Marketers," *Journal of International Marketing* 29 (4) (2021): 79–94, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069031X211028589>; and Neesa Moodley, "SA's Maturing Black Middle Class Weathers the Storm of COVID," *Daily Maverick*, October 7, 2022.
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The Long Struggle for Educational Equity in Britain: 1944–2023

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In this essay, I take the long view in reviewing initiatives for educational equity in Britain, examining both official initiatives and grassroots struggles for equitable educational outcomes over the past eighty years. I frame education policies in the context of other social policies from the immediate post–World War II era, notably the provision of universal health care, welfare, and the changing legal frameworks relating to equalities and immigration over the period. I address the contributions of minoritized communities in the struggle for educational equity, the impact of twentieth-century women’s movements, and more recent student-led initiatives to secure the availability, accessibility, adaptability, and acceptability of education. I identify all these as “acts of citizenship,” whereby communities constitute themselves as citizens and struggle for human rights.

The realization of an educational system that meets the needs of all children and young people across Britain remains elusive, despite repeated attempts to reform schooling and a succession of community-led pressures across the decades to ensure equitable schooling and educational justice for all.¹ Explanations for why this is the case are complex and relate as much to wider societal developments as to the success of specific education policies or struggles for justice. To reflect on the fight for educational equity in Britain over the period since World War II, I position grassroots activism alongside broader social and political developments, the legal structure, and policy initiatives at local and national levels. I do so by drawing on the 4 As framework of the right to education developed by Katerina Tomaševski, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, which examines education’s availability, accessibility, adaptability, and acceptability.²

During World War II, popular pressure across the United Kingdom for more progressive social policies grew, leading to the return of a Labour government in the 1945 general election.³ There was an effort to reform and extend education, making schooling accessible to a broader school population than in the past, including the development of a state-funded system of secondary schools designed to address the perceived needs of students from diverse social backgrounds. The

immediate challenge for educational equity in this era centered on the needs of working-class students, who had, before the war, generally remained in elementary school until they reached the age of fourteen and had limited access to schooling beyond this age.

As it progressed through parliament, the 1944 Education Act for England and Wales was presented as the greatest measure of reform since mass schooling was introduced in 1870. This characterization was a very effective piece of political propaganda because the 1944 Act maintained an elite system of schooling.⁴ It continued to provide the statutory basis for education for nearly five decades, with some of its provisions lasting into the twenty-first century. The Act effectively allowed for the development of secondary education, enabling the creation of two new types of secondary schools (secondary modern and technical) for children over the age of eleven, alongside the existing grammar schools. Students took an examination at age eleven, determining the type of schooling they would attend, and for most, the access route to higher education was firmly closed at that age. Although the 1944 Act raised the age when students left school from fourteen to fifteen years (with further provision to rise to sixteen), only a minority of students had access to academic learning beyond the age of eleven, either by winning a grammar-school place or, if from a wealthy family, by attending an independent (fee-paying) school.

A dual system of education continued between church and state, whereby churches (Anglican and Catholic) maintained a role in the governance of schools they had historically run in cooperation with local authorities (school boards). The new legal framework introduced religious instruction and a daily act of worship in *all* schools, due to a compromise agreement that reduced ecclesiastical influence in the governance of schools founded by church authorities. This created long-term tensions between clerical interests and those of the teaching profession, secular parents, and, indeed, the right of students to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.⁵ In these respects, the 1944 Education Act proved to be a rather conservative measure when set alongside other social reforms of the era. It did little to democratize education and hindered the universal access to more inclusive schools that had become the dream of progressive educators.

The 1944 Act not only protected the conservative interests of the Christian churches but maintained tight control over access to academic education for working-class students through the grammar schools. Plans to democratize education, conceived in the prewar period and discussed by progressive policymakers and teachers' unions during the war, had included proposals to bring an end to the parallel-provision system that enables independent schools to operate alongside state schools, and to incorporate independent schools into a national framework of state schools available to all. Conservative education minister Rab Butler deftly steered the new education legislation through parliament, managing to shelve all such radical proposals.

The 1944 Act ensured the availability of secondary education to all students up to fifteen years of age, but despite its claims, did little to ensure equitable access to secondary schooling or higher education. Policymakers falsely asserted the adaptability of the new system with its technical and secondary modern schools. In truth, the adaptations were based on the problematic characterization of young children according to intelligence tests that drew on discredited eugenics-based theories of intelligence.⁶ The 1944 Act effectively confirmed an established pattern of access to higher education based on social class and gender biases that privileged middle-class boys. At a young age, most working-class students were set on a path that prepared them for early employment.

By the 1960s, a small number of working-class students, predominantly boys, were entering what remained an elitist university sector alongside their more privileged peers. Throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, sociocultural and economic constraints meant that even when working-class girls did access a grammar school education, they were more likely than boys to enter the workplace after completing their secondary education, and less likely to continue on to university.⁷ When girls of all social classes elected to follow a path into higher education, they frequently took up places at teacher training colleges since teaching was considered a career compatible with motherhood.⁸ In the 1950s and 1960s, these institutions did not award degree-level qualifications. The early-twentieth-century women's movements focused on the struggle for universal suffrage, and women in the United Kingdom finally secured an equal right, with men, to vote from the age of twenty-one under the 1928 Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act. While expanding opportunities for women's political participation may have inspired girls to extend their educational and career horizons, full recognition of women's rights in education remained elusive. As education scholar Rosemary Deem notes, "Only in the 1960s and 1970s with the growth of a significantly sized Women's Liberation Movement in Britain, and the progress of legislation relating to the equal treatment of males and females in public life, have sexual divisions in education come to be perceived as a problem of considerable significance."⁹ The suffrage movement, international commitments to human rights, and popular pressures for more progressive social policies in the immediate aftermath of World War II increased awareness of the possibilities for both girls and working-class students.

But it was not until the implementation of domestic legislation in the 1970s relating to equal opportunities in public life, such as the Equal Pay Act of 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975, that further steps toward educational equity were made. Women's struggles for equality in the 1960s and parallel struggles for racial justice needed the backing of legislation to ensure their longer-term success. The accessibility of an academic secondary education remained elusive for the majority: girls and working-class students, especially those from racialized communities, were excluded by selection processes championed as fair but were

by their very nature exclusionary. Yet the small number of working-class students who did secure access to an elite grammar school education allowed the illusion of a meritocracy to be maintained throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

I turn now to other social and economic initiatives that interacted with and impacted efforts to realize educational equity. The mid-twentieth-century reform of education in England and Wales (and parallel initiatives in Scotland and Northern Ireland) took place alongside the implementation of other significant social policies. These other social policies, introduced in the immediate postwar era, were probably more significant in enabling educational equity and accessibility in the longer term. The Beveridge Report, published in 1944, set out the architecture for a welfare state based on the concept of universalism. All citizens would contribute to social insurance that would cover them for a range of social risks. The three pillars of the welfare state were to be universal insurance, universal health care, and a public commitment to full employment.¹⁰

With public opinion favorable to the Beveridge Report and a new universal health care system that was free at the point of access, both the Labour and Conservative Parties promised comprehensive medical care and social insurance as a key feature of their 1945 election campaigns. The Labour government that came to power that year continued the work of the wartime Conservative-led coalition to set up the National Health Service (NHS).¹¹ A progressive welfare state with universal access to social and employment support and NHS health care was critical in ensuring the accessibility of education for children born in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. These generations of children were largely spared the deprivations and acute hardship of the prewar years, and consequent improvements in both maternal and child health care, including childhood vaccination programs, helped lower child mortality rates dramatically and enhanced children's school attendance and opportunities to learn.¹² The provision of universal health care through the NHS underpinned and enabled the effective implementation of initiatives for educational equity in the latter part of the century.

The development of universal health care and moves to expand secondary education coincided with the arrival of new migrants. India became an independent state in 1947, and while Britain still had a significant empire when Queen Elizabeth II's reign began five years later, a number of these territories were engaged in independence struggles. Following World War II, the United Kingdom needed immigrants from its colonies and former colonies to address a labor shortage across various sectors. The arrival of migrants of color in Britain and the need to educate their children in the schools of the metropolis exposed huge disparities and led to further struggles for educational equity.

The 1948 British Nationality Act clarified the status of residents of Britain's overseas territories, introducing the status of "citizen of the U.K. and col-

onies" (CUKC), and retaining the term "British subject" for all citizens of Commonwealth countries: namely, those from the United Kingdom, from longer-established independent former colonies (such as Australia and South Africa), and from newly independent former colonies and existent colonies. British subjects were not subject to immigration controls.

The 1948 arrival in London of the *S.S. Empire Windrush* marked the symbolic beginning of immigration from the Caribbean region in the postwar era; among the migrants were a number who had served in the British armed forces during the war.¹³ In 1949, the Ministries of Health and Labour, with the Colonial Office, the General Nursing Council, and the Royal College of Nursing, began a massive recruitment drive throughout the Caribbean region to hire staff for the newly established NHS, a move that was key to its success but that had a negative impact on the places the new recruits were drawn from. The 1950s and 1960s featured the migration of adults (colonial-born British subjects and Irish citizens), followed by that of child migrants from these countries and from South Asia.

The 1944 Education Act not only managed and controlled working-class access to academic learning but was also soon applied to immigrant students from existent and former colonies. Prevailing stereotypes, discriminatory attitudes, and the predominant theories of intelligence on which selection to academic streaming were based, and on which the British Empire had operated (allowing for the exploitation of both the natural resources and labor in these colonial territories to support Britain's industrialization), meant that access to a grammar school education was frequently denied both to immigrant students and the children of immigrants.

Prevailing attitudes meant that both child migrants and U.K.-born children of migrants were frequently channeled into nonacademic streams during the 1950s and 1960s. The division of students into three categories, envisaged by the 1944 Education Act and based on a discredited theory of eugenics encompassing racial hierarchies, was easily extended to the newcomers. Just as migrant adults were often recruited to take on specific manual work but excluded from professional positions, so children were allocated to schools according to both race and class. The expectation was that they were better suited to manual and lower-paid employment. Those arriving with qualifications from British overseas territories, who had followed a U.K.-styled education, were often obliged to take on work for which they were overqualified: they were effectively redesignated as working class. For those who were highly skilled, their qualifications (generally obtained under a British-style education system) were frequently either unrecognized or judged in need of an upgrade before they could practice their profession in the United Kingdom.¹⁴

Children of immigrants were not expected to be upwardly mobile but to accept education and training for lateral positions. Just as a marriage bar preventing

the employment of married women in the teaching profession was not fully lifted until 1944, so British-born citizens with a foreign-born parent were barred from a career in the U.K. civil service other than in the lowest grades until the 1980s, ostensibly because of concerns about security and allegiance. In the late 1970s, when I completed university, although I had had various civil service vacation jobs, I found a civil service career was not open to me: I was ruled out on the grounds that one of my parents was foreign-born.¹⁵

In designating three different types of students, the 1944 Education Act served to maintain existing class hierarchies that could accommodate migrants into the mix without challenging the racist stereotyping perpetuated during colonialization. Education legislation conformed to a theory of eugenics based on a hierarchy of both race and class. It became commonsense to send children to schools that would match their specific fixed talents and abilities. It was straightforward to apply these practices first to working-class children and then extend them to migrant children. By framing education in this way, it was possible for schools to perpetuate inequalities and accept social and racial hierarchies as inevitable. Although eugenics was increasingly recognized as racist from the 1930s, after eugenics-based policies were adopted by the Nazis to perpetuate genocide, practices that labeled children at a young age and allocated them to specific schools continued, impacting directly on their future employment and life chances.¹⁶ It seems that policymakers were able to disconnect their education framework from its eugenics roots and present it as neutral and natural.

The children of new migrants from the Caribbean, Pakistan, and India faced inequitable treatment at school, with school authorities regularly identifying an educational deficit. Children of Caribbean heritage found themselves grossly overrepresented in special streams and special schools, known as schools for the “educationally subnormal.” Policy documents of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s identified both South Asian– and Caribbean-heritage children as having a language deficit that hindered their learning. Children from these communities who later went on to be teachers themselves confirmed that teachers were quick to judge them based on their language, religion, or even hairstyle, uncritically absorbing and reproducing stereotypes from the popular culture of the era.¹⁷

Politicians and policymakers saw it as a question of numbers. The very existence of children of color was seen as a hindrance to White children’s learning. They claimed that where such students of color made up more than one-third of the total, poor results were inevitable.¹⁸ Effectively, schools and education authorities were denying their professional responsibilities toward students of Caribbean and South Asian heritage.

The 1960s was an age of mass communications. By 1960, approximately 75 percent of U.K. households owned a TV.¹⁹ They had access to TV news that updated them both on independence struggles and on the struggle for civil rights in the

United States. In 1960, the United Nations General Assembly passed the *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*, which asserted that “the subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights,” and “all peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”²⁰

It was community activists who took the initiative and sought to intervene on behalf of children and work for educational equity in the United Kingdom, focusing first on access to mainstream education. Just as the U.S. civil rights struggles of the 1950s were inspired by earlier anticolonial struggles, the struggle for educational equity by Black parents in Britain in the late 1960s and into the 1970s drew on the U.S. struggles for civil rights by African American citizens and their allies. A turning point was the 1971 publication of the book *How the West Indian Child Is Made Educationally Sub-Normal in the British School System: The Scandal of the Black Child in Schools in Britain*.²¹ Its author, Grenadian scholar and teacher Bernard Coard, demonstrated how Caribbean-heritage children were being systematically excluded from mainstream schooling, labeled “sub-normal,” and sent to special schools.²²

Coard kickstarted a movement within Black communities wherein parents learned to be vigilant. They could not rely on schools to guarantee the best educational outcomes for their children. A parallel system of supplementary schools operating on Saturdays or in the evening staffed by Black volunteers committed to the education of Black children was established in cities such as London and Birmingham.²³ Parents were offered support in monitoring their children’s progress and to ensure their needs were met. Other supplementary schools and classes were established and run by South Asian organizations, generally focusing on the teaching of heritage languages, with supplementary schooling remaining popular among many parents from these communities until the 1990s, and replicated among other migrant groups.²⁴ By the late 1970s, parents and community activists were not just working for the accessibility of education but also for its adaptability; they recognized that children’s right to education meant that teaching and curricula needed to be culturally responsive.²⁵

The efforts of the voluntary teachers and organizers of these and other schools that were set up to support the learning and home cultures of students of South Asian backgrounds may be understood as “acts of citizenship,” whereby communities of color constituting themselves as citizens engaged in struggles for the human rights of their children.²⁶ Specifically, members of the community were acting to ensure equitable access to education and eventual access to higher education, recognition of schooling in keeping with parental wishes, and access to the arts and cultural life through education.²⁷

Coard’s work placed equitable treatment at the heart of education. Local education authorities began to recognize their responsibility toward education for

all, regardless of ethnicity and migration status, and took their tentative first steps toward the development of multicultural education. Multicultural education focused initially on building culturally appropriate learning materials. These were the first official efforts to ensure the adaptability of education.

Following the election of a Labour government in 1964, children were no longer required to take an examination at the age of eleven to determine which sort of school they should be sent to, although grammar schools and other processes of selection continued in many local authorities. Local education authorities were required to submit plans for the reorganization of secondary schools along comprehensive lines: that is, without separating children on the grounds of ability or attainment. Some Conservative-controlled local authorities were slow to implement these plans, and some grammar schools continued operating alongside more inclusive comprehensive schools.²⁸ Some remain to this day, disadvantaging most students who do not have access to the grammar schools. Organizations such as the Campaign for State Education (CASE), founded in 1960, engage in activities such as political lobbying, research, and involvement at a local level to ensure that education is democratically accountable.²⁹ These activities, continuing over decades and largely dependent on voluntary activity, can again be seen as acts of citizenship, often taking place at a grassroots level.

The 1970s saw the introduction of new legal provisions that bolstered efforts to achieve educational equity. The 1970 Equal Pay Act was the first piece of legislation to enshrine the right to pay equality between women and men, under which a woman could claim equal pay to a man for work that was the same or broadly similar, rated as equivalent under a job evaluation scheme, or of equal value, that is, requiring the same level of effort, skill, knowledge, or responsibility. Though far from a watertight guarantee of justice in a gender-segregated labor market, it marked a symbolic step forward. Equal pay set a positive climate for girls and women to pursue education and training, and so arguably marked a step toward educational equity.

Five years later, the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act was passed. According to legal scholar Anne Morris: “The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 was immensely significant for a whole generation of women who needed no longer to accept that sexism was just the way of the world. They could point to the Sex Discrimination Act and challenge the discrimination they faced.”³⁰ With a legal remedy when they encountered sexism in school, girls and young women in education were empowered by this progress toward securing their rights. The Sex Discrimination Act was quickly followed by the 1976 Race Relations Act, which built on earlier race equality legislation (1965 and 1968), and extended the law to cover education, as well as expanding the definition of discriminatory actions to include indirect discrimination.³¹ Individuals gained the right to take discrimination complaints directly

to civil courts or industrial tribunals, and the new Commission for Racial Equality was given responsibility to enforce legislation and conduct research to inform government policy, including in the field of education. Legislation to prevent disability discrimination was slow to follow. It was not until 1995 that the Disability Discrimination Act came into being, following UNESCO's 1994 Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education.³² It proclaimed that

those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-centered pedagogy capable of meeting these needs, [and] regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all....[Inclusive schools] improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system.³³

The 2010 Equalities Act consolidated earlier equalities legislation and enshrined its provisions, recognizing that for individuals and communities working for justice, these threads of social justice addressing various characteristics and aspects of identity (including gender, race, disability, and sexuality) are closely intertwined and interconnected. These legal developments were made possible by the hard work of activists who campaigned for justice in society and education over many decades. Their struggle, which continues today, may be understood as a series of "acts of citizenship" cumulating in legal and societal change.

Education remained the responsibility of local government until the end of the 1980s, and various progressive initiatives, notably in multicultural education, were fostered in local government during long periods of Conservative rule in central government.³⁴ From the late 1970s, local authorities responsible for education at the municipal or county level began to establish training and support for teachers in multicultural education. While some such initiatives were ad hoc and short-lived, they signaled momentum. The emphasis was frequently on teaching English as a second or additional language but increasing attention was given to books and teaching aids. These materials addressed questions of gender and sexuality as well as social, cultural, and religious diversity.

By the 1980s, more progressive local education authorities (namely, school boards) were introducing initiatives to reform curricula and provide opportunities for all, focusing first and foremost on students of color. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) played a leading role in this work.³⁵ From 1979, the Conservative government, under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, grew increasingly hostile toward multicultural education and particularly toward the ILEA, which it saw as profligate.³⁶

The publication of two parliamentary reports in the 1980s also had a significant effect in shifting policy in education toward greater equity. In the absence of any legislation to this effect, both were welcomed by education activists and

stakeholders. First, *West Indian Children in Our Schools*, published in 1981, was a direct response to a 1977 Parliamentary Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration report on West Indian student attainment.³⁷ It noted “widespread concern about the poor performance of West Indian children in schools” but stopped short of mentioning racism. It was followed in 1985 by *Education for All*, informally named the Swann Report after Lord Michael Swann, which extended the brief of the initial committee of inquiry to address the education of all children from ethnic minorities.³⁸ It concluded that the main problems were low teacher expectations and racial prejudice among White teachers and society writ large. While “racial prejudice” was acknowledged, there was again no explicit discussion of racism as a structural barrier to educational success. Although sections of the national press were hostile to multicultural education and had attacked the work of the Development Programme on Racial Equality in the London Borough of Brent as that of “race spies in the classroom,” the Swann Report effectively confirmed the need for such work.³⁹

While the majority of support staff working on multicultural education in various municipalities continued to focus on language education, there were smaller units of advisory teachers (for example, in the City of Birmingham) directly developing strategies to identify and address institutional racism. They worked to enable the development of culturally appropriate learning materials (“multicultural development unit”) and meet the needs of specific groups that schools were failing to support (such as with the Afro-Caribbean teaching unit). These initiatives existed alongside larger previously established teams of specialist educators who worked to support teachers in addressing the needs of developing bilingual students. The Swann Report received a mixed response from teachers and teachers’ unions. Among those already engaged in race equality work, it was generally seen as helpful and its message somewhat measured; others clearly felt threatened by it.

In 1986, a Manchester schoolboy, thirteen-year-old Ahmed Iqbal Ullah, died after being stabbed by a fellow student in the playground of Burnage High School. The findings of the inquiry into Ahmed’s death were published with the title *Murder in the Playground: Report of the Macdonald Inquiry into Racism and Racial Violence in Manchester Schools*.⁴⁰ The report confirmed a culture of violence and racial tensions in which the attack occurred, but noted that the way the school authorities responded to the murder inflamed these tensions, and so the repercussions were felt for a long time. The Burnage Report, as it was known, noted that in the aftermath of riots in Manchester’s Moss Side in 1981, a report to the city’s education committee recommended that all schools and colleges produce policies on racism. Although it provided some examples, it did not define racism or provide guidelines on how this should be done, or how antiracist strategies should be implemented and monitored. Not all Manchester teachers shared the commitment of the city’s leaders. Others, such as at Burnage High School, shared the commit-

ment but went about things in a way that proved to be counterproductive. The Burnage Report outlined how efforts to introduce antiracist strategies need to engage both teachers and students in the process, and be cognizant of past efforts to address school violence.⁴¹ The clumsy way the school had labeled its students and passed judgment on them had accentuated a divide between those deemed responsible for racism and those judged its victims. The findings of the Burnage Report were characterized by right-wing sections of the press as proof that schools' antiracist policies had failed, which resulted in further confusion between the ideals of antiracism and a widespread blame culture.⁴²

Throughout the 1980s, there were tensions in schools across England relating to the way schools addressed racist behavior among students and handled (or ignored) the need for change in the face of unequal educational outcomes between students from different ethnic groups.⁴³ In this decade, a number of local authorities shifted in their level of commitment to addressing issues of educational equity. By this stage, Birmingham in the English Midlands was the largest authority, the ILEA having been split into smaller units. In Birmingham, I observed firsthand the city's director of education, Tim Brighouse, working closely with parents, community groups, and the University of Birmingham (where I was based) to close the attainment gap between the highest- and lowest-attaining students. The local authority provided schools with statistical data and expert advice so that resources could be directed toward addressing underachievement of specific groups. From 1994 to 1996, the city worked in cooperation with a local community organization, ACAFESS, to fund ten doctoral students' educations, which enabled them to engage in part-time research, examining aspects of African Caribbean education.⁴⁴ The researchers, of African Caribbean heritage themselves, focused on topics varying from school-governing bodies to supplementary schooling to student attainment. The doctoral students met once a month on a Saturday morning to share and discuss their findings. As the lead supervisor of these researchers, all of whom were mature students and experienced professionals, I observed how inspired they were to see the director of education attend their meetings to learn from them.

There was minimal support in the 1990s from the Conservative Westminster government to engage with local authorities, teachers' unions, or other stakeholders in advancing educational equity. Much depended on the commitment of local directors of education working in cooperation with their education committees (generally in Labour-controlled cities) who were sympathetic to these goals.

Significantly, the introduction of a national curriculum, with a series of subject-based programs of study, effectively ended opportunities for teacher-led curricula development, which had enabled so many of the locally based initiatives for educational equity. In 1987, the Department of Education and Science (responsible at that time for education in England and Wales) issued a consultation

document for this national curriculum that set out its rationale: a student entitlement to a “broad and balanced curriculum,” setting standards for pupil attainment that it saw as supporting school “accountability,” improving continuity and coherence across the curriculum, and aiding public understanding of the work of schools.⁴⁵ The 1988 Education Reform Act established the framework for the national curriculum: schooling was divided into four key stages, with a testing regime introduced at the end of the second stage, which was for eleven-year-olds at primary school, and at the end of the third stage, which was for fourteen-year-olds at secondary school. Together with national GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) examinations at age sixteen, this ensured that a large amount of teaching was directed toward students who achieved well in the tests, and schools were judged by their test scores. Individual student needs took second place to a school’s reputation, measured by test scores.⁴⁶

In 1993, responsibility for school inspections was transferred from Her Majesty’s inspectors and local authority teams to independent inspection teams coordinated by a new body, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). During its first decade, Ofsted became a feared body because an inspection team’s published judgment of a school (ratings that included *outstanding*, *good*, *requires improvement*, and *inadequate*) determined the future of the school, and potentially that of its principal.⁴⁷ School effectiveness, quality of education, student behavior, and leadership and management were all graded, generally by a weeklong inspection for which vast amounts of paperwork had to be generated by the teaching and leadership teams. School-based work to ensure educational equity generally took second place to the demands of the national curriculum and Ofsted inspections.

Although the 1988 Education Reform Act was introduced under a Conservative government, the election of a Labour government in 1997 saw little real change regarding either the new testing regime or the Ofsted inspection framework. But Labour’s 1999 response to an earlier issue related to policing and racial justice would eventually impact the school inspection framework. In 1993, Stephen Lawrence, an eighteen-year-old Black man, was stabbed to death at a bus stop in southeast London by a group of White youths in an unprovoked, racist attack. Although one of Stephen’s friends witnessed the attack and the police eventually arrested five suspects, only two were charged. It was not until nearly twenty years later that two of those responsible for Stephen’s murder were convicted. The case was kept in the public eye by Stephen’s parents’ struggle for justice. His mother Doreen Lawrence’s long-standing commitment led to the Home Office initiating the 1999 Macpherson Inquiry into the police investigation of Stephen’s murder. Its report was highly critical and diagnosed the Metropolitan Police Service (“the Met”) as “institutionally racist.”⁴⁸ In 2012, a second independent review of the police investigation, the Ellison Review, was also highly critical of how the case was handled.⁴⁹

The government's response to concerns about institutional racism was an action plan that sought to address education as well as policing.⁵⁰ It charged Ofsted with the responsibility to inspect schools for racial equality. Under the leadership of Herman Ouseley, the Commission for Racial Equality solicited research into Ofsted's role in enabling race equality in schools. I made a successful bid for this research, and my colleagues and I examined documentary evidence and interviewed members of the Ofsted leadership. We found that the then chief inspector of schools interpreted the Home Office guidance as requiring no changes or amendments to the inspection regime. No training was provided for school inspectors to match the training and awareness initiatives introduced in the Met and other police forces across the country.⁵¹ Ofsted was obligated to give the research team access, but senior team members barely took our interview seriously, telling me that at Ofsted: "Race equality is not a priority. Our priority is under-achieving white boys." Shockingly, for an administrative body that required schools to produce complex paper trails, Chief Inspector Chris Woodhead, confirming they had done nothing in response to the Home Secretary's action plan, wrote: "We do not rely on paper communication in OFSTED."⁵² Woodhead was required to defend his position in Parliament in October 2000. A few days later, he resigned. It is not apparent that Ofsted made any real changes to enhance race equality under its next leader, Woodhead's former deputy.

An important group of stakeholders in the struggle for educational equity is the students themselves. In 1972, they organized to form the National Union of School Students, but the union was short-lived. Nevertheless, social policies relating to children and childhood have shifted hugely since the 1940s. The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – which applies to all children and youth under eighteen years of age – has been instrumental in shaping public policies relating to children and schooling across the globe.⁵³ Although education has arguably been more resistant to change than health care, it is increasingly recognized in Europe and across the globe that children have the right to be consulted in all decisions affecting them, in education as in other policy areas, in accordance with the Convention's Article 12. Interestingly, this has probably been most significant across the United Kingdom in relation to children with disabilities and those with special educational needs.

Although political theorists have tended to neglect or ignore children and young people and their partial citizenship remains underexplored, this has not prevented them from engaging in struggles for equity, most notably in the Black Lives Matter movement and in highlighting intergenerational justice.⁵⁴ Youth demands for intergenerational justice have been most keenly expressed in relation to environmental issues and especially climate change. The Fridays for Future Movement, initiated by the school strike of Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg

outside the Swedish parliament in 2018, has grown into a global youth movement. Among their concerns has been the relevance of an education that fails to address climate change and the acceptability of schooling. Although some U.K. schools were initially worried about the reputational damage that striking students might cause, many teachers welcomed and supported students in their protests and recognized that Fridays for Future peaceful protests constituted an act of citizenship, as well as an opportunity to apply classroom learning for citizenship and democracy and understand and experience global interdependence in a real and effective way.

Significant economic developments since the turn of the twenty-first century have had an immediate impact on educational equity in the United Kingdom. However, the financial prospects for school leavers are bleak. Following Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic, as *The New Statesman* observed: “Britain is the only G7 economy that has yet to return to its pre-pandemic size. Its workers have endured 15 years of stagnant or falling real wages while its businesses have largely refrained from investing during eight years of political chaos. Students today face an average debt at graduation of more than GBP 45,000 (nearly USD 56,000).”⁵⁵ If this sum seems modest by U.S. standards, it should be remembered that until 2016, students from low-income homes were entitled to maintenance grants, and that before 1998, students from the United Kingdom and European Union could attend U.K. universities tuition-free. The university sector expanded from the 1970s to include significant numbers of working-class students. But in the twenty-first century, anyone without significant financial parental support will find themselves leaving university saddled with debt. Educational inequalities widened in the results for the 2023 A-level examinations. A student’s grades on A-level exams determine whether or not they can follow the course or attend the university of their choice, with courses such as medicine requiring top grades. An A or A* grade was recorded in 47.4 percent of private school entries, more than double the rate of state schools (22 percent), and the gap has been increasing since 2019.⁵⁶ There are also significant and increasing regional inequalities across England. COVID-19 not only exposed health inequalities and an inadequate underfunded NHS; it also highlighted social and educational inequities, with many children required to switch to online learning in cramped housing, reliant initially on a shared smartphone.

The twenty-first century has seen an ongoing struggle between progressive and conservative groups over issues such as gender equity and attempts to decolonize the school curriculum at both primary and secondary levels. Today, the overall examination achievements of girls generally exceed those of their male peers, but there remain ethnic disparities in educational outcomes.⁵⁷ Child poverty continues to be a serious impediment to educational success, a factor that

was highlighted and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Post-lockdowns, many children have disappeared from official view with many failing to return to school. In the post-Brexit era, with wider expressions of exclusive forms of nationalism, there is nevertheless hope for change, with school-aged activists espousing more cosmopolitan perspectives. Student-led school strikes in response to the climate emergency, and other movements in which youth play a leading role, such as the global spread of the Black Lives Matter and Me Too movements, suggest that children in the United Kingdom, across Europe, and worldwide are questioning the relevance of much of the education they are offered; highlighting intergenerational injustice; and contributing to the ongoing struggle for educational equity.

In presenting the long view, it is inevitable that some official initiatives have been covered in an abbreviated way. When addressing the struggles of diverse communities, it is impossible to cover all in depth. Nevertheless, this breadth of coverage allows insight into patterns of struggle across diverse groups and fresh perspectives on the ways acts of citizenship contribute to change. The long view highlights and emphasizes the need for communities to maintain grassroots struggles on a continuous basis. Justice in education is closely connected to justice in health care and depends on addressing the widening gap between the elite and the wider population. Educators, students, and activists working for greater justice in and through education must recommit their efforts to further educational equity, and not depend solely on the achievements and acts of citizenship of past generations.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ This essay focuses primarily on Britain (England, Scotland, and Wales), but not Northern Ireland, when discussing social policies and community-led struggles for equity. For education policy, my twentieth-century focus is England and Wales. Scotland has had a separate educational legal framework and governance structure throughout the period under consideration. From 1999, governance of education in Wales was devolved to the Welsh Assembly, and so for twenty-first-century education policy, my focus is England alone. Access to education in Britain's existent colonies over the period is outside the scope of this essay, but it is worth noting that educational provision in these territories was rarely, if ever, a priority of the British state. The churches (Anglican and Catholic) took responsibility for the education of an elite group of colonial subjects, who followed a British-style curriculum and took the same school-leaving examinations in anticipation of higher education.
- ² Katarina Tomaševski, *Human Rights Obligations: Making Education Available, Accessible, Acceptable and Adaptable* (Raoul Wallenberg Institute, 2001), <https://dspace.ceid.org.tr/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1/84/ekutuphane4.1.3.2.pdf?sequence=1>.
- ³ Although my primary focus is Britain, I refer to the United Kingdom to include Northern Ireland, when appropriate, as in the development of the National Health Service, and when discussing matters such as immigration law, which is necessarily consistent across the four constituent nations of the United Kingdom.
- ⁴ Brian Simon, "The 1944 Education Act: A Conservative Measure?" *History of Education* 15 (1) (1986): 31–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760860150104>.
- ⁵ This moral right was asserted under the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18. United Nations, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," adopted by the U.N. General Assembly on December 10, 1948, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights#:~:text=Drafted%20by%20representatives%20with%20different,all%20peoples%20and%20all%20nations>. For more on the history of the influence of church and state in schools, see S. J. D. Green, "The 1944 Education Act: A Church-State Perspective," *Parliamentary History* 19 (1) (2000): 148–164, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1750-0206.2000.tb00450.x>.
- ⁶ Clyde Chitty, *Eugenics, Race, and Intelligence in Education* (Bloomsbury, 2007).
- ⁷ Rosemary Deem, *Women and Schooling* (Routledge, 1978).
- ⁸ Kathleen Casey, "Teacher as Mother: Curriculum Theorizing in the Life Histories of Contemporary Women Teachers," *Cambridge Journal of Education* 20 (3): 301–320, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764900200310>.
- ⁹ Deem, *Women and Schooling*, 1.
- ¹⁰ David Benassi, "Father of the Welfare State? Beveridge and the Emergence of the Welfare State," *Sociologica* 4 (3) (2010): 1–20.
- ¹¹ Chris Day, "The Beveridge Report and the Foundations of the Welfare State," National Archives Blog, December 7, 2017, <https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/beveridge-report-foundations-welfare-state>.
- ¹² The British government made childhood vaccination against smallpox compulsory in 1853. From 1940, a vaccination program against diphtheria saw rates decline rapidly from 46,281 cases (2,480 deaths) in 1940 to 37 cases (6 deaths) in 1957. Mehzebin Adam, "The

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- ¹³ Shelene Gomez and Arthur Torrington, “The Windrush Generation and British Citizenship Policy,” in *Immigrant Lives: Intersectionality, Transnationality, and Global Perspectives*, ed. Edward Shizha and Edward Makwarimba (University Press, 2023).
- ¹⁴ Audrey Osler, *The Education and Careers of Black Teachers: Changing Identities, Changing Lives* (Open University Press, 1997).
- ¹⁵ I have not been able to discover from the public record whether this rule extended to individuals who had a parent born in former British territories such as Canada or Australia colonized by White settlers, or whether they were exempt.
- ¹⁶ Chitty, *Eugenics, Race, and Intelligence in Education*.
- ¹⁷ Osler, *The Education and Careers of Black Teachers*; and Sally Tomlinson, *Race and Education: Policy and Politics in Britain* (Open University Press, 2008).
- ¹⁸ Osler, *The Education and Careers of Black Teachers*.
- ¹⁹ Charlotte Goodhart, “Television through the Ages,” Museum of the Home, November 12, 2020, <https://www.museumofthehome.org.uk/explore/stories-of-home/television-through-the-ages/#:~:text=By%20the%201960s%2C%2075%25%20of,contemporary%20culture%20and%20world%20events>.
- ²⁰ United Nations General Assembly, *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*, Article 1 and Article 2 (United Nations, December 14, 1960).
- ²¹ West Indian was a commonly used term in the 1960s and 1970s, now outmoded.
- ²² Bernard Coard, *How the West Indian Child Is Made Educationally Sub-Normal in the British School System* (New Beacon Books, 1971).
- ²³ Cornel Dacosta, *Ideology and Practice within the Black Supplementary School Movement* (PhD diss., University of Surrey, 1987).
- ²⁴ Angeliki Voskou, “Students’ Identity Development in Greek Supplementary Schools in England from 1950s to 2010s,” *International Journal of the History of Education* 59 (1) (2023): 171–190. While the number of students attending supplementary schools has declined, they remain a salient feature for many still attending them today. See YPF Trust, “Quality in Supplementary Education,” <https://www.supplementaryeducation.org.uk> (accessed September 27, 2024).
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- ²⁶ Egin F. Isin, “Theorising Acts of Citizenship,” in *Acts of Citizenship*, ed. Egin F. Isin and Greg M. Neilsen (Zed Books, 2008), 15–43.
- ²⁷ United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 2 and Article 26, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.
- ²⁸ Grammar schools that had had selective admissions policies since 1997 and 1998 were allowed to retain them. The general prohibition against academic selection has been further relaxed by successive Conservative governments since 2016. As of 2022, just 35 local authorities had any grammar schools and 60 percent were situated in just 11 local authorities. Across England, 163 grammar schools are attended by some 188,000

- students. Robert Long, Shadi Denechi, and Alpesh Maisuria, *Grammar Schools in England* (House of Commons Library, 2023), <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN07070/SN07070.pdf>.
- ²⁹ See Campaign for State Education (CASE), <https://www.campaignforstateeducation.org.uk/#:~:text=Ever%20since%20its%20inception%20in,criteria%20only%20partially%20at%20best> (accessed September 27, 2024).
- ³⁰ Anne Morris, “Sex Discrimination Act 1975,” in *Women’s Legal Landmarks Celebrating the History of Women and Law in the U.K. and Ireland*, ed. Erika Rackley and Rosemary Auchmuty (Bloomsbury, 2019).
- ³¹ The 1965 Race Relations Act banned racial discrimination in public places and made the promotion of hatred on grounds of “colour, race, or ethnic or national origins” an offence. The 1968 Act outlawed acts of discrimination within employment, housing, and advertising. See “Race Relations Act of 1965,” U.K. Parliament, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/collections1/race-relations-act-1965/race-relations-act-1965> (accessed September 27, 2024).
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- ³³ UNESCO, Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, Article 2, 1994, viii.
- ³⁴ Between 1970 and 1997, there were just five years when the Conservatives were not in power: 1974–1979, when Labour Prime Ministers Harold Wilson and James Callaghan held office.
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- ³⁸ The Swann Report, *Education for All: Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups* (Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1985).
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- ⁴⁸ William Macpherson, “The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry: Report of an Inquiry by Sir William Macpherson of Cluny. Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for the Home Department by Command of Her Majesty, 1999, Cm. 4262-I” (The Stationery Office), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/277111/4262.pdf.
- ⁴⁹ Mark Ellison QC and Alison Morgan, “Review of Possible Miscarriages of Justice: Impact of Undisclosed Undercover Police Activity on the Safety of Convictions, Report to the Attorney General” (House of Commons, July 16, 2015).
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- ⁵² Ibid., 167–196.
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Migration & the Quest for Educational Equity in Germany

Viola B. Georgi

Germany has undergone a significant transformation from a nation that saw itself as culturally homogeneous to a society characterized by diversity and immigration. The education system, however, continues to struggle to meet the needs of children and young people from diverse backgrounds. This manifests in forms of unequal treatment and discrimination that impede the effective integration and education of students from different ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious groups. This is particularly true for students from nonacademic, low–socioeconomic status backgrounds, as well as for students from immigrant families: categories that frequently overlap. However, there are promising educational interventions and initiatives that address issues of democracy, diversity, and equal opportunity in schools. I provide an overview of select issues in the production and reproduction of inequality in the German school system and in everyday teaching practices, with a focus on including students of immigrant origin.

Issues of educational inequality came back into the public eye in the early 2000s, when the publication of the OECD’s Program for International Student Assessment Study (PISA) shook the education system and Germany’s general belief in the meritocratic principle. The study found that Germany performed poorly and that the educational success of students was closely linked to their socioeconomic background. The results also revealed the educational disparity between young people with and without a “migration background,” a term that has come under criticism because it lumps together people with very different connections to migration.¹

PISA triggered an important public debate on how to explain these worrying empirical results and how to respond to them. A popular argument was to blame students of immigrant origin for the poor performance of the German education system on an international stage. These critics claimed the country’s performance was linked to supposedly weak German language skills of immigrant students, while the poor performance of the education system – which was clearly unable to adapt to the demographic change, for example, for students in need of German as a second language – was hardly questioned.²

As a result, various measures were taken to tackle these problems. National educational standards were introduced, early childhood education was expanded, and the systematic implementation of all-day schools by 2026 was decided upon.³ Subsequent waves of large-scale educational assessments have shown some improvement.⁴ Nevertheless, the link between educational success and the home remains.

Both the COVID-19 pandemic and recent increases in admission of young refugees into Germany (primarily from Syria in 2015 and Ukraine in 2022) have once again exposed and reinforced the already existing inadequacies and inequalities of the German school system. In recent years, the need for the education system to respond to a diverse student body and provide educational opportunities and prospects has therefore become more urgent.

Although recent opinion polls demonstrate a growing consciousness of social inequalities and discrimination in Germany, as well as greater recognition that immigrants and their families are part of German society, schools nonetheless tend to frame diverse classrooms as a problem or challenge.⁵ This often manifests in stereotyping, bias, and forms of discrimination that hinder the effective inclusion and education of students from particular ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups – including refugee students, Muslim students, students of Roma descent, and students of color. However, there are promising initiatives and programs from both government and civil society that address issues of diversity, democracy, and equality in schools. In this essay, I present a few selected examples of these developments, after outlining relevant dimensions of educational inequality against the backdrop of current immigration policy and demographic trends.

Discussing relevant dimensions of educational equity in German schools requires us to look at the demographic, social, and political composition of German society. Considering Germany from a purely demographic perspective, three developments stand out: German citizens are becoming fewer, older, and more diverse. All three demographic developments are linked to immigration and play a decisive role in the stability of the social system, economic growth, and the future architecture of education in Germany.

Over the last sixty years, Germany has changed from a nation that saw itself as culturally homogeneous to a society that recognizes the diversity created by immigration. A vibrant and far-reaching history of immigration has long been visible in the cityscapes, streets, workplaces, kindergartens, and schools, most especially in urban areas. Nevertheless, it was not until the turn of the millennium that Germany began to more broadly accept this multicultural reality. In times of global conflicts and humanitarian crises, Germany has become an important destination country for refugees and asylum-seekers. In 2015, more than one million refugees moved to Germany from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and other countries

where people were forcibly displaced and escaping political oppression, persecution, and war. Since 2021, over one million refugees from Ukraine have moved to Germany.⁶

Germany is home to roughly 84 million inhabitants. According to the Federal Statistical Office in 2022, 23.8 million people in Germany had a migration background, which means that they or at least one of their parents were not German citizens at birth.⁷ This corresponds to a share of almost 29 percent. A slim majority of these (51 percent) were German nationals, while 49 percent were foreign nationals. Considering people with a migration background based on their migration experience, almost two-thirds (64 percent) of them had migrated to Germany themselves, and 36 percent were born in Germany.⁸ Many of them trace their family biographies back to the times when the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) actively recruited foreign labor from, for example, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Tunisia, Vietnam, Hungary, Cuba, and Mozambique. These are the children and grandchildren of the “guestworkers” and “contract workers” (most came between the 1960s and the 1980s) who chose not to return to their home countries, but rather to settle in Germany.⁹ Every fourth person in Germany today has family experiences connected to migration, which usually means being socialized with a variety of cultural practices, languages, and religious traditions.¹⁰ Hence a growing number of German citizens have ancestors who have not always lived in Germany, or who live transnational lives, commuting between different regions and countries.

After the United States, Germany has become the world’s second top destination for migrants.¹¹ Germany has unintentionally become a country of immigration. As such, German society is renegotiating and adjusting to issues of multiple belongings and identities, participation, and equal opportunity within increasingly diverse contexts. Political scientist Naika Foroutan has described Germany as a “post-migrant society.” Based on this analysis, she argues that Germany needs to establish a new national narrative recognizing migration as a common feature of German society in the past, present, and future.¹²

The emerging new self-image of Germany as an immigrant society went hand in hand with migration and integration policy reforms. A new modern citizenship law was introduced in 1999, followed by an immigration law in 2005, which included integration strategies, concepts, and measurements, such as German language, history, and culture classes for newly arrived immigrants. The aging population in Germany has resulted in a shrinking workforce and an increasing demand for social services, health care, and pension benefits. Immigration can help offset the declining workforce as immigrants can fill critical job vacancies. That is why the federal government introduced new immigration acts in 2020 and a reform of the immigration law in 2023 intended to attract skilled immigrants from around the world. The Federal Employment Office presently speaks about the need of attracting four hun-

dred thousand skilled immigrants per year to fill the workforce.¹³ Yet in this context, despite the liberalization for skilled workers, there is also a clear tendency to restrict the right of asylum and to reduce the number of asylum-seekers. Thus, there exists a tension between efforts to satisfy Germany's economic needs and efforts to enforce migration control.

One consequence of this ambivalence in integration policy is the fact that immigrants and their descendants still do not have the same opportunities to participate in relevant areas of society, such as labor, housing, politics, and education.¹⁴ Given the evolving political architecture that is preparing Germany for future immigration needs – while migration for the purposes of labor and asylum are happening every day – it is not surprising that the education system must be readapted and reshaped to meet the needs of migrant children and their families.

Germany's society has become superdiverse. Anthropologist Steven Vertovec coined the term “superdiversity” attempting to capture the interplay of the broadly defined linguistic, religious, ethnic, and cultural resources that characterize late modern societies in a globalized world. These resources include “different immigration statuses and associated entitlements and limitations of rights, different labor market experiences, discrete gender and age profiles, spatial distribution patterns, and mixed local responses of service providers and residents.”¹⁵

Germany has, of course, always been culturally influenced by contributions from various ethnic and linguistic groups. The sixteen German *Länder* are home to a wide range of cultures, traditions, and languages.¹⁶ As for linguistic diversity, German is the official language, but there exist several regional dialects and officially recognized minority languages other than German.¹⁷ Germany shares its borders with nine other countries, and many of those living near the borders tend to speak the language of their neighbors. Furthermore, immigrant communities contribute to the linguistic landscape as many of them speak their native languages alongside German. Multilingualism is the order of the day in Germany.

Due to immigration past and present, Germany has a significant immigrant population. In 2022, 12.3 million people or 15 percent of the population had a foreign nationality. Most foreigners were of European (69 percent) or Asian (21 percent) nationality. The largest proportions were Turkish (12 percent), Ukrainian (10 percent), Syrian (8 percent), Romanian (8 percent), and Polish (7 percent) nationals.¹⁸ Due to the Russian war against Ukraine, there are currently also many refugees from Ukraine living in Germany.

Germany today includes not only the Christian cross, but also the Muslim headscarf, the Jewish kippa, and many other religious symbols and practices. Even though Christianity is the predominant religion, with the majority of the population identifying as Roman Catholic or Protestant, there is also a significant

number of Muslim people. Most recently, there were around 5.5 million people of the Muslim faith living in Germany, making Islam the third largest religious community in Germany.¹⁹ In the years after the Holocaust and the end of World War II, only about fifteen thousand Jewish people settled in Germany. Today, there are more than one hundred Jewish communities with about one hundred and seven thousand members. Many of these Jewish people immigrated to Germany in the 1990s from Russia and the former Soviet Union when a special program for Jewish refugees offered protection in recognition of historical responsibility for Jewish life and to revive Jewish communities in Germany.²⁰ Of course, there are also many followers of other religions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism.²¹

While Germany benefits from its great diversity, there are also challenges in terms of integration and social cohesion. Ensuring equal opportunities, combating discrimination, and promoting inclusive practices and measures are therefore ongoing efforts, accompanied by a heated debate on how to deal with migration, including more restrictive immigration policies, such as tightening asylum rules and enforcing deportations.

Diversity in schools and classrooms appears in differences such as language, ethnicity, religion, competencies, and academic performance. It is important to acknowledge, however, that these differences are not naturally given or “innate,” but can develop or intensify in the course of schooling. These differences are also products of social processes and routines of inclusion and exclusion in schools. Diversity and heterogeneity can thus also be interpreted as products of social and educational inequality.²² It is in this context that we must look at forms of discrimination resulting in experiences of inequality in German schools. I will do this with a particular focus on phenomena connected to immigration, as students of immigrant origin in Germany often face various challenges, including language barriers, cultural differences, and socioeconomic disparities, which can lead to discrimination and unequal treatment in schools.²³ There is empirical evidence that experiences of discrimination in German schools are made on the basis of ethnic origin, gender, disability, religion or belief, age, sexual identity, social origin, or appearance, from the first day of enrollment to the completion of secondary school.²⁴

From a more general perspective, inequalities and discrimination in the German school system can be divided into the following dimensions:

- *Segregation and tracking*: Institutional discrimination manifests itself in inappropriate school career recommendations that teachers and counselors make based on prejudices and assumptions about students’ abilities. It is empirically demonstrated that children of immigrant origin are placed in

lower courses or segregated classes, which can limit their educational opportunities and reinforce inequalities.

- *Unequal distribution of resources*: The distribution of resources for schools is often based on the neighborhoods or communities where the school is located, and not on the needs of students. If schools do not have sufficient resources, this can affect their ability to support students who need such resources.
- *Lack of sensitivity to diversity in schools*: Teachers and school administrators do not adequately address the needs of a diverse student body. There is insufficient understanding of how racism and other forms of (structural) discrimination are reflected in everyday school life, curricula, teaching materials, and practices.
- *Stereotyping and bias*: Stereotyping based on ethnicity, race, or nationality leads to students from immigrant families being unfairly judged and treated differently.
- *Bullying and harassment*: Students of immigrant origin, including those newly arrived and those born in Germany to immigrant parents, become targets of bullying due to ascribed non-German or non-Christian backgrounds. This negatively impacts students' mental and emotional well-being, as well as academic performance.
- *Lack of support services*: There are insufficient support services, including German language support, offices for reporting discrimination, programs for parents, and professional development for teachers. This can exacerbate the challenges faced by children with a so-called migrant background.

Beginning with segregation and tracking, various studies show that the label “migration background” is a negative predictor of school success in the German education system.²⁵ Even if other factors could explain the disadvantage of children and young people from immigrant families, the intersections of families' educational backgrounds, associated socioeconomic situations, and German language skills stand out. The first factor is not specific to immigration, but also affects children from low-income families without a migration background. Irrespective of their country of birth and that of their parents, working-class children achieve a lower level of competency and receive a recommendation to attend a Gymnasium, or state-maintained secondary school that prepares pupils for higher academic education, less often than children from families with higher socioeconomic status. Secondary education in Germany is characterized by the division of pupils into the various educational paths and school types responsible for their respective leaving certificates and qualifications.²⁶

Such disadvantages, which are related to the socioeconomic and educational background of families, are pronounced in Germany. Children and young people

from immigrant families are more often affected by social disadvantage because a significant number of them grow up in families with a lower level of education and socioeconomic status, as poverty tends to be inherited in Germany.²⁷

The transition from primary to secondary school has far-reaching effects on the educational and occupational biographies of adolescents in Germany. The transition represents a critical point for the reproduction of inequality, as the highly stratified German school system separates students according to their educational achievements early on. The type of school a student will attend in Germany is based on academic performance, teacher recommendations, and parent preferences. A peculiarity of the German school system is that the first transition takes place after the fourth grade, or after the sixth grade in Berlin and Brandenburg, which is substantially earlier than in most other countries.²⁸ Students must qualify for different types of public education after elementary school. Their competences in different subjects are assessed when they are between nine and eleven years old. Based on their grades, students receive a recommendation for a certain school type. Most students attend the secondary-school track that their elementary school teachers recommend. While the recommendation is not legally binding, they are skewed in favor of families with a high socioeconomic status. It is at this point of transition in the school system that children from low–socioeconomic status, low–academic achievement, and immigrant families are disadvantaged, not least because newly arrived families in particular lack institutional knowledge of this highly stratified and opaque school system.²⁹ Empirical data show that assuming the same performance, children with such family backgrounds are less likely to be recommended by their teachers to attend a university-bound school track than are children from more privileged families.³⁰

It is important to note that social background not only influences the transition to secondary school, but also significantly impacts students' school careers. Formal access to education should be based on equal opportunities and non-discrimination, and all children should have equal access to school. The early assignment of children to different types of schools in Germany should be examined critically, as *de facto* discrimination becomes visible in particular with regard to 1) the transition to secondary schools, 2) the educational achievements of the mentioned social groups, 3) the intersection of different dimensions of discrimination, and 4) the permeability and flexibility of the school system.

To reduce the disadvantages of children and young people from immigrant and socially disadvantaged families in the transition from primary to secondary school in Germany, the following strategies are relevant. First, the development of student competencies must be better promoted based on individual advancement and quality teaching, which is why good teachers are essential. Good teachers need good training that enables them to navigate a “superdiverse” classroom.

Yet a recent study on teacher training in Germany reveals that teacher training needs to be redesigned to meet the demands of contemporary German society.³¹ At the moment, Germany is experiencing a glaring teacher shortage, which exacerbates these educational inequalities. Students who need special support cannot be provided for accordingly.

Second, progress should be systematically monitored over time and framed with school-based support structures. Third, because parents play an important role in school transition decisions, they need better information and advice from teachers and mentors, who can cater to their specific needs as newcomers are systematically disadvantaged and confronted with a complex school system full of peculiarities.³² Immigrant parents in Germany are generally interested in the educational success of their children across all social milieus.³³ So it is not surprising that the use of mentors to advise parents on how to navigate the German school system and support their children's educational development has proven to be particularly effective.³⁴

Finally, structural changes are required, including expanding comprehensive schools in which students are not separated at an early stage, but rather learn together over a longer period of time. A key demand remains to make educational pathways more flexible so that early educational choices or failures do not become permanent obstacles for students.

It is in this context that de facto segregation needs to be addressed, as it is no longer a marginal phenomenon at German schools. The segregation of students with and without a migration background is particularly visible in urban areas. A study by the Research Unit of the Expert Council on Integration and Migration reveals that in large cities, about 70 percent of migrant children attend an elementary school where migrants represent the majority of the student body. For children without a migration background, the figure is only 17 percent. It is also noteworthy that around 40 percent of all elementary school children with a migration background study in classes with so-called low achievers. Among children without a migration background, the figure is only 5.7 percent. This segregation negatively influences the acquisition of competences and skills of young people from immigrant families, as their academic performance is impaired by their often lower-performing classmates.³⁵

In summary, three factors are primarily responsible for the educational disadvantages of students of immigrant origin: residential segregation in German cities, parental school choice, and unequal access to the academically advanced tracks in Germany's secondary schools. However, there is also empirical evidence that points to the importance of teachers' attitudes toward students from immigrant families and students' experiences of discrimination, which hold negative impacts on their socioemotional, behavioral, relational, and academic adjust-

ments. The effects of direct, indirect, interactional, and structural discrimination on young people have only become a topic of public concern, discussion, and research in Germany in recent years.³⁶

Immigrant students might be evaluated lower because of teachers' prejudices or unconscious stereotypes. This can affect these students' school careers and future opportunities. An experimental study tested whether teachers show bias when grading students' German dictation depending on the name of the student. The result showed that students named Murat (a Turkish name) were graded worse than students named Max (a German name).³⁷ Other empirical studies support this finding and show that students with immigrant backgrounds tend to have lower expectations compared to those without a migration background, and that biased grading is common.³⁸ There are findings, accordingly, that students of Turkish origin in Germany are seen as less achievement-oriented.³⁹ For example, another study showed that teachers expected lower learning progress in German classes for students of Turkish origin, even when their language performance, general cognitive skills, and motivation were similar to those of students without a migration background.⁴⁰ These stereotypes are highly problematic, as they play major roles in both implicit performance expectations and in assessment situations. Research on stereotype threats demonstrates that triggering negative stereotypes in assessment situations can lead to poor performance. This means that students do not achieve the results they should given their knowledge and skills.⁴¹

On the one hand, there is still a lack of diversity-sensitivity in schools in Germany.⁴² On the other hand, significant progress has been made in educational policies. In 2013, the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs published recommendations on intercultural education in German schools, in which intercultural competence is defined as a key skill for young people, a cross-sectional task for educators, and an important goal of school development and quality. In 2015, the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, migrant organizations, and educational media publishers adopted a joint declaration on the "presentation of cultural diversity, integration and migration in educational media," underlining the importance of being critical and sensitive to the representation of cultural, religious, and other differences in textbooks and educational materials.⁴³ Another example of educational policy creating space and capacity for more equity is the recently passed Act to Strengthen Measures to Promote Democracy, Shape Diversity, Prevent Extremism, and Advance Civic Education, which supports projects across Germany that develop and test new ideas and innovative approaches to promoting democracy, shaping diversity, and preventing extremism.⁴⁴

Researchers are examining the development and implementation of various intercultural and diversity-sensitive practices in schools and classrooms.⁴⁵ These efforts are additionally supported by calls for research proposals from the Federal Ministry of Education and Research.⁴⁶ There are also a growing number of stud-

ies that examine structural racism in educational institutions through the lens of critical race theory.⁴⁷ More recently, decolonial and postcolonial ideas have found their way into German educational research, motivating discourse on more radical transformative approaches in education with regard to diversity and inequality.⁴⁸

From a practical perspective, school awards such as “fair@school” as well as school development projects, specific teacher training programs, powerful immigrant parents’ associations, and innovative platforms for educational materials such as the “Migration Lab Germany” make up a vibrant landscape of state-funded programs and civil society initiatives aiming to create an educational environment that responds to Germany’s superdiverse immigration society.⁴⁹ However, looking at some recent studies on curricula and textbooks in German classrooms illustrates the importance of continuously questioning and critically examining these issues within the context of schooling. Research indicates that the reality of the superdiverse German society is not yet adequately represented and reflected in textbooks. In a study I coauthored, we investigated the representation of themes connected to migration in German textbooks. Among other things, we found that global migration is mostly attributed to poverty, integration is seen mainly as something immigrants must achieve, and racism in the host society is entirely ignored. Furthermore, tasks and assignments in textbooks tend to emphasize migrants and their descendants’ differences from Germans without migrant backgrounds, encouraging discrimination against them.⁵⁰ Racist stereotypes are also included in textbooks. A study that examined representations of the African continent, Black people, and people of color in German textbooks showed that curricula and teaching materials are frequently one-sided and associated with negative connotations.⁵¹

Mastering the language of the destination country, which is mostly the language of instruction in school, is key to immigrant students’ educational success.⁵² Many immigrant children arrive in Germany with no or limited German-language proficiency. This hinders students’ abilities to participate fully in classroom activities, understand instructions, and communicate with teachers and peers. As a result, these students may experience academic difficulties and social isolation. Language barriers prevent immigrant children from reaching their fullest educational potentials and can lead to ethnic inequalities at school.⁵³ Mastery of the German language becomes a crucial factor for a successful educational career.

In general, the success of language acquisition depends on three overarching factors: the incentives associated with improved language competencies impacting the motivation, exposure to the language, and learning efficiency.⁵⁴ Besides the effects of individual conditions, access to language acquisition programs for newly arrived children and other opportunities to learn German as a second lan-

guage impact the language acquisition process. Studies indicate that attending preschool supports the language acquisition of immigrant children, particularly those who have limited linguistic exposure outside of institutional contexts.⁵⁵ This is particularly true for refugee children, who temporarily stay in collective housing with their families and have little exposure to German. Although preschool plays an important role, schools have an enormous responsibility for teaching German as a second language and creating a school culture that welcomes and supports multilingualism. Therefore, learning to deal with linguistic diversity in professional contexts must be integrated into teacher training as a cross-sectional task, and should be obligatory across the country. In some, but not all, German states, the qualification to teach German as a second language has already become anchored in teacher training.⁵⁶

In debates about migration and schooling, multilingualism is too often perceived as a problem or even a threat to social cohesion, and an obstacle to the integration of immigrants. This can lead to an unequal distribution of educational opportunities and discrimination.⁵⁷

While multilingualism is a reality in Germany, only a few schools offer resources that do justice to the linguistic diversity in classrooms. In these schools, we find, for example, signs, labels, and student projects in different languages; course offerings to study heritage languages; parents' evenings with translations into other languages; school libraries featuring books in different languages; and family languages skills of students being actively used for learning in the classroom. In short, multilingualism becomes visible and tangible as a valuable resource in these schools. This way forward can be backed by empirical evidence demonstrating that a positive attitude toward multilingual children's fluid linguistic repertoires and the use of translanguaging strategies are highly important for the linguistic, cognitive, and socioemotional development of multilingual students.⁵⁸

Another issue related to dealing with linguistic diversity is that the German education system privileges the European languages traditionally and most frequently taught at school.⁵⁹ English, Spanish, and French are given a higher status than languages spoken by many immigrants, including Turkish, Arabic, Russian, and Polish. Students who speak the latter languages at home seldom have the chance to systematically study them at school. There are, however, a growing number of schools that offer optional heritage language classes for immigrant students. So far, grades obtained in these classes can be used for school careers in only some federal states (such as North Rhine-Westphalia). This recognition of the family languages in the curriculum seems desirable to compensate for linguistic educational inequality.⁶⁰

Some schools insist that only German be spoken in the classrooms, the hallways of the building, and even the schoolyard. Often based on the argument that

such a language policy in schools would support the integration of immigrant students and help improve their German, this position is highly disputed. Such policies discriminate against children communicating in their first languages or in their families' language and hence deny the multilingual reality of students' lives, as well as the findings in multilingualism research.

Education scholar Ingrid Gogolin has coined the term “monolingual habitus” to describe such structural exclusion of other languages in German schools. She criticizes the fact that multilingualism is traditionally cast in a problematic light for students who come from immigrant families and speak different languages at home. Historically, the German education system developed a monolingual self-image in the nineteenth century, anchored in the nation-state. Consequently, all structures, processes, and functional mechanisms of the German school system are automatically presumed to be designed for the German standard and educational language.⁶¹ The interest of the public educational system in linguistic uniformity produces educational disadvantages for children who grow up in multilingual environments, as their German language competences are judged on this basis.⁶²

The schooling of newly arrived students – especially refugee children who have entered German schools in great numbers since 2015 due to the civil war in Syria and 2022 due to the war in Ukraine – represents a major task.⁶³ This applies to the assignment procedure, the assessment of students' academic performances, and the identification of learning, mental, or social disabilities, as refugee children typically face the challenge of starting or continuing their school careers in completely new contexts and languages. The majority of newly arrived students at the secondary level are educated in separate preparatory classes.⁶⁴

Models of schooling for newcomers vary depending on the German states, municipalities, and respective schools. Many municipalities offer so-called preparatory, welcome, or international classes for one or two years before students are transferred to regular classes. This means new students are taught in separate classes (the “parallel model”). They are generally transitional in the sense that they aim at integration into the mainstream class. The curricula in these classes are not standardized across Germany, and many schools solely rely on German language lessons and some subject-oriented teaching.⁶⁵ Overall, findings indicate that attending such preparatory classes can have a negative impact on school success, as the teachers are often not qualified to teach the target group, the students do not interact with others, and the transition to mainstream classes is not professionally supported.⁶⁶ Some schools partially integrate the newly arrived students: they participate in preparatory classes but, for example, also attend physical education, art, and music lessons with other students.

In other municipalities, meanwhile, students of immigrant origin attend the standard classes (learning through immersion) with – or sometimes without –

accompanying language support. The resources of the individual schools determine what can be offered. The partially or completely separate schooling of newly arrived students can lead to educational inequalities and social marginalization because “separate classes install a spatial division between newcomer and other students, segregating them into different classrooms, sometimes even in different buildings.”⁶⁷ A European comparative study criticizes the schooling of refugee students in Germany for not providing them with an equal chance to succeed in school compared to students not of immigration background. This points to the fact that most refugee students who arrive after elementary school go to the vocational school types, while only a small proportion of students not of migration backgrounds attend Haupt- or Realschule (general or “real” school).⁶⁸

As migration and relocation will permanently bring children and young people to Germany who enter the education system without any knowledge of German, it is urgent to develop, evaluate, and establish effective models of schooling that guarantee the best educational chances for the most students. Tailoring educational programs to the respective needs and competences of newly arrived students can only be implemented with more resources for schools. An example of good practice is the social index for schools aiming at distributive justice. This school-specific social index is intended to contribute to a more targeted allocation of certain resources to schools. In this model, schools that are under particular pressures – for example because they have a high number of students who are at risk of poverty, need German language support, or come from refugee families – can receive more funding to support their challenging work.

The state governments in Germany that have already implemented an index – including Hamburg, Bremen, and North Rhine-Westphalia – follow the principle of treating unequal things unequally, because the school social index identifies existing social challenges and supports schools according to their respective needs. The school-specific social index is an important tool to establishing more educational equity and equal opportunities.

According to the results of the OECD study “The Resilience of Students with an Immigrant Background: Factors That Shape Well-Being,” students with a migration background report frequent unequal treatment in school. These experiences have negative effects on their mental and emotional well-being, as well as their academic performance, and thus prevent school and social resilience.⁶⁹

Visible minorities, as well as Muslim people, experience discrimination more frequently in Germany.⁷⁰ These results are also true for adolescents in these groups.⁷¹ It seems that students of color, as well as students with Muslim, Sinti, and Roma backgrounds, are at particular risk of being discriminated against.⁷² Some typical situations include, for example, worksheets for history classes containing discriminatory vocabulary, such as the N-word, or teachers who criticize Muslim girls for wearing headscarves. This is the reason why ADAS, a ground-

breaking civil society initiative, was founded in 2015. ADAS documents and combats discrimination in schools, empowering and supporting those affected by discrimination in a variety of ways, including legally.⁷³

Antidiscrimination projects can contribute to addressing, eliminating, and preventing discrimination at school. An example of a nationwide initiative fighting racism at schools is “School without Racism – School with Courage.” This network, founded in 1995, consists of about four thousand schools across Germany, and addresses racism with a whole-school approach, inviting everybody in the school community to engage. Students in these schools are encouraged to examine racism in its various forms and develop projects to prevent and combat these “isms,” including anti-Semitism and antiziganism (anti-Romani sentiment). Together they seek answers that strengthen belonging and solidarity, aiming to make students from diverse backgrounds feel welcomed, recognized, and respected in the school community.⁷⁴

I have presented some initiatives and interventions aimed at creating more inclusive and equitable educational environments – from education policy to civil society initiatives and school development – but despite these efforts, many challenges remain related to structural discrimination and inequalities in German schools. Regularly monitoring efforts to combat these inequalities is therefore necessary. Finally, it is important to emphasize that individual measures alone are not sufficient to reduce educational inequality in the long term. To achieve a sustainable reduction in educational inequality in Germany, all areas of education must be included and dovetailed with one another.⁷⁵

Reshaping the educational architecture toward greater educational equity in Germany to serve the country’s superdiverse population remains an urgent task. Eventually, most children from immigrant families will stay in Germany and become part of the postmigrant social fabric. The question of their equal participation in education, and in all areas of society, is critical for Germany’s democratic future.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ “Migration background” is a concept developed by the Federal Statistical Office in 2005 to distinguish between people with foreign citizenship and people with links to more recent migration experiences but German citizenship. A person is considered to have a migrant background if they or at least one of their parents did not acquire German citizenship at birth. Since 2005, the Federal Statistical Office has recorded “migration background” in the microcensus with the aim of mapping social change through migration and using the statistical data for political decisions on integration measures. Meanwhile the category “migration background” has been widely used in statistics and research. However, it has also been criticized for its shortcomings and problematic implications as it lumps together very different people with and without migration experience. I will use the category in this essay whenever I refer to studies that work with it.
- ² See Yasemin Karakaşoğlu and Wolfgang Nieke, “Benachteiligung durch kulturelle Zugehörigkeit?” in *Bildungsforschung und Politikberatung. Schule, Hochschule und Berufsbildung an der Schnittstelle von Erziehungswissenschaft und Politik* [Educational Research and Policy Advice. School, Higher Education and Vocational Training at the Interface of Educational Science and Politics], ed. Michael Weegen, Wolfgang Böttcher, Gabriele Bellenberg, and Isabell van Ackeren (Juventa, 2002), 199–218.
- ³ See Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women, and Youth, “Legal Right to Full-Day Care from 2026 Decided,” <https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/aktuelles/alle-meldungen/rechtsanspruch-auf-ganztagsbetreuung-ab-2026-beschlossen-178826> (accessed August 27, 2024).
- ⁴ See Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, “Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators,” September 16, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e4292276-en>.
- ⁵ The 2021 report of the Expert Council on Migration and Integration states that immigration is increasingly perceived as an enrichment, and immigrants are recognized and fundamentally granted the right to participation. See Expert Council on Migration and Integration (Sachverständigenrat Für Integration und Migration [SVR]), *Normalfall Diversität? Wie das Einwanderungsland Deutschland mit Vielfalt umgeht* [Diversity as the Norm? How Germany, a Country of Immigration, Deals with Diversity] (Sachverständigenrat Für Integration und Migration, 2021), https://www.svr-migration.de/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/SVR_Jahresgutachten_2021_barrierefrei-1.pdf. See also Viola B. Georgi and Yasemin Karakaşoğlu, eds., *Allgemeinbildende Schulen in der Migrationsgesellschaft. Diversitätssensible Ansätze und Perspektiven* [General Education Schools in the Migration Society. Diversity-Sensitive Approaches and Perspectives] (Kohlhammer, 2023).
- ⁶ See Statista Research Department, “Ausländer aus Syrien in Deutschland bis 2022” [Foreigners from Syria in Germany until 2022], <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/463384/umfrage/auslaender-aus-syrien-in-deutschland> (accessed August 12, 2023); and Statista Research Department, “Kriegsflüchtlinge aus der Ukraine in Deutschland 2023” [War Refugees from Ukraine in Germany in 2023], <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1294820/umfrage/kriegsfluechtlinge-aus-der-ukraine-in-deutschland> (accessed August 25, 2023).
- ⁷ For an analysis of the term, see Anne-Katrin Will, “The German Statistical Category ‘Migration Background’: Historical Roots, Revisions and Shortcomings,” *Ethnicities* 19 (3) (2019): 535–557, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796819833437>.

- ⁸ See Destatis Databank, “Population: Migration in Times of Demographic Change,” <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Querschnitt/Demografischer-Wandel/Aspekte/demografie-migration.html> (accessed August 27, 2024).
- ⁹ At the time, Germany was still divided into the East and West. The reunification took place in 1990.
- ¹⁰ See Statistisches Bundesamt [Federal Office of Statistics], “Pressemitteilung Nr. 162” [Press Release Number 162], April 12, 2022, https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2022/04/PD22_162_125.html; and Statistisches Bundesamt [Federal Office of Statistics], “Bevölkerungsstand,” [Population Level], <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/Bevoelkerungsstand/aktuell-quartale.html>.
- ¹¹ See United Nations International Organization for Migration (UN IOM), *World Migration Report 2022* (UN IOM, 2022), <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2022>.
- ¹² The prefix “post-” here does not signify the end of migration but describes social negotiation processes that occur in the phase after migration has occurred. See Naika Foroutan, “Need for a New Concept to Describe Germany’s Transformation into a Country of Immigration,” April 21, 2015, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung [Federal Agency for Civic Education], <https://www.bpb.de/themen/migration-integration/kurzdoersiers/205302/need-for-a-new-concept-to-describe-germany-s-transformation-into-a-country-of-immigration>. See also Naika Foroutan, *Die Postmigrantische Gesellschaft: Ein Versprechen der Pluralen Demokratie* [The Post-Migrant Society: A Promise for a Pluralistic Democracy] (transcript Publishing, 2019).
- ¹³ Andrea Grunau, “So will Deutschland Migration Neu Regeln” [How Germany Wants to Re-Regulate Migration], DW (Deutsche Welle), November 29, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/de/migration-wie-deutschland-einwanderung-neu-regeln-will/a-63641441>; Statista Research Department, “Ausländer aus Syrien in Deutschland bis 2022” [Foreigners from Syria in Germany until 2022], May 5, 2023, <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/463384/umfrage/auslaender-aus-syrien-in-deutschland>; and Statista Research Department, “Kriegsflüchtlinge aus der Ukraine in Deutschland 2023” [War Refugees from Ukraine in Germany in 2023].
- ¹⁴ Vera Hanewinkel and Jochen Oltmer, “Migration to Germany: Current Challenges and Future Developments,” at Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung [German Federal Agency for Civic Education], January 12, 2018, <https://www.bpb.de/themen/migration-integration/laenderprofile/english-version-country-profiles/262814/migration-to-germany-current-challenges-and-future-developments>.
- ¹⁵ Steven Vertovec, “Super-Diversity and its Implications,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30 (6) (2007): 1024–1054.
- ¹⁶ The federalist principle with sixteen Länder (counties) is an acknowledgment of the regional structure that has evolved through Germany’s history. It shall support the division of power, guarantee diversity, competition, and community-based politics.
- ¹⁷ Germany has four officially recognized national minorities: the Danes, the Frisians, the German Sinti and Roma, and the Sorbs. They receive special protection and specific funding from the federal and state governments. Bundesministerium des Innern [Federal Ministry of the Interior], “National Minorities, Minority and Regional Languages in Germany,” 3rd ed., August 2015, <https://www.bmi.bund.de/ShareDocs/downloads>

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- ¹⁸ See Statista Research Department, <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Querschnitt/Demografischer-Wandel/Aspekte/demografie-migration.html> (accessed August 28, 2024).
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- ²⁰ Yfaat Weiss and Lena Gorelik, “Die russisch-jüdische Zuwanderung” [The Russian-Jewish Immigration], in *Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart* [History of Jews in Germany from 1945 to the Present Day], ed. Michael Brenner (C. H. Beck, 2012), 379–418.
- ²¹ Sarah Kanning, “Glaube und Frieden” [Faith and Peace], August 14, 2019, Deutschland.de, <https://www.deutschland.de/de/topic/leben/religionen-in-deutschland-zahlen-und-fakten>.
- ²² Katharina Walgenbach, *Heterogenität – Intersektionalität – Diversity in der Erziehungswissenschaft* [Heterogeneity–Intersectionality–Diversity in Educational Science] (Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2017), 29.
- ²³ See Deutsches Jugendinstitut [German Youth Institute], *DJI-Kinder- und Jugendmigrationsreport 2020: Datenanalyse zur Situation junger Menschen in Deutschland* [DJI Child and Youth Migration Report 2020: Data Analysis on the Situation of Young People in Germany] (wbv Publikation, 2020).
- ²⁴ See Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes [Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency], *Diskriminierung an Schulen Erkennen und Vermeiden. Praxisleitfaden Zum Abbau von Diskriminierung in der Schule* [Recognizing and Avoiding Discrimination in Schools. Practical Guide to Reducing Discrimination in Schools], 4th ed. (Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes [Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency], 2019), https://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/publikationen/Leitfaeden/leitfaden_diskriminierung_an_schulen_erkennen_u_vermeiden.pdf.
- ²⁵ See, for example, Andreas Hadjar, Judith Lupatsch, and Elisabeth Grünewald-Huber, “Bildungsverlierer/-innen, Schulfremdung und Schulerfolg” [Educational Losers, School Alienation and School Success], in *Bildungsverlierer: Neue Ungleichheiten* [Educational Losers: New Inequalities], ed. Gudrun Quenzel and Klaus Hurrelmann (VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010), 223–244; and Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung [Authors’ Group Education Reporting], *Bildung in Deutschland 2016* [Education in Germany 2016] (W. Bertelsmann Verlag, 2016), <https://www.bildungsbericht.de/de/bildungsberichte-seit-2006/bildungsbericht-2016/pdf-bildungsbericht-2016/bildungsbericht-2016>.
- ²⁶ See European Commission, “National Education Systems: Germany,” April 19, 2023, <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/germany/overview>.
- ²⁷ See Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung [Authors’ Group Education Reporting], *Bildung in Deutschland* [Education in Germany] (wbv media, 2018), <https://www.bildungsbericht.de/de/bildungsberichte-seit-2006/bildungsbericht-2018>.
- ²⁸ The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung–BMBF) is responsible for the overall German education system. However,

each Federal state (*Bundesland*) has its own Ministry of Education that sets its own education program, schools, and standards. This means that the schooling system varies across Germany.

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- ³⁰ Hanna Dumont, Kai Maaz, Marko Neumann, and Michael Becker, “Soziale Ungleichheiten beim Übergang von der Grundschule in die Sekundarstufe I: Theorie, Forschungsstand, Interventions- und Fördermöglichkeiten” [Social Inequalities in the Transition From Elementary School to Lower Secondary Level: Theory, State of Research, Intervention and Support Options], in *Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft, Sonderheft 17 Herkunft und Bildungserfolg von der Frühen Kindheit bis ins Erwachsenenalter: Forschungsstand und Interventionsmöglichkeiten aus Interdisziplinärer Perspektive* [Journal of Educational Science, Special Issue 17, Origin and Educational Success From Early Childhood to Adulthood: State of Research and Intervention Options From an Interdisciplinary Perspective] 24 (2014): 141–165.
- ³¹ See Aysun Doğmuş, Yasemin Karakaşoğlu, Paul Mecheril, and Saphira Shure, “Die Lehrerinnen und Lehrerbildung der Migrationsgesellschaft im Spiegel von Modulbeschreibungen: Eine Qualitativ-Interpretative Analyse” [Teacher Training in the Migration Society as Reflected in Module Descriptions: A Qualitative-Interpretive Analysis], in *Praktiken und Orientierungen in der Lehrerbildung. Potentiale und Grenzen der Professionalisierung* [Practices and Orientations in Teacher Training. Potentials and Limits of Professionalization], ed. Tobias Leonhard, Julia Košinár, and Christian Reintjes (Verlag Julius Klinkhardt, 2018), 120–138.
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- ³³ See Heiner Barz, Katrin Barth, Meral Cerci-Thoms, et al., *Große Vielfalt, Weniger Chancen: Eine Studie über die Bildungserfahrungen und Bildungsziele von Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund in Deutschland* [Greater Diversity, Fewer Opportunities. A Study About the Educational Experiences and Educational Goals of People with a Migration Background in Germany] (Stiftung Mercator [Mercator Foundation], 2015), https://www.stiftung-mercator.de/media/downloads/3_Publikationen/Barz_Heiner_et_al_Grosse_Vielfalt_weniger_Chancen_Abschlusspublikation.pdf.
- ³⁴ Frank Gesemann, Iris Nentwig-Gesemann, Alexander Seidel, and Bastian Walther, eds., *Engagement für Integration und Teilhabe in der Einwanderungsgesellschaft* [Commitment to Integration and Participation in the Immigration Society] (Springer VS, 2020).
- ³⁵ SVR, “School Segregation in Germany: The Extent, the Effects and Recommended Actions for Better Educational Opportunities,” https://www.svr-migration.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/School-Segregation-in-Germany-2013_Summary.pdf (accessed August 28, 2024).

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- ³⁹ See B. Kahraman and Günther Knoblich, "Stechen statt Sprechen: Valenz und Aktivierbarkeit von Stereotypen über Türken" [Stabbing Instead of Speaking: Valence and Activation of Stereotypes about Turks], *Zeitschrift für Sozialpsychologie* [Journal of Social Psychology] 31 (1) (2000): 31–43.
- ⁴⁰ Georg Lorenz, *Selbsterfüllende Prophezeiungen in der Schule. Leistungserwartungen von Lehrkräften und Kompetenzen von Kindern mit Zuwanderungshintergrund* [Self-Fulfilling Prophecies in School. Performance Expectations of Teachers and Skills of Children with an Immigrant Background] (Springer VS, 2018); and Georg Lorenz, Sarah Gentrup, Cornelia Kristen, et al., "Stereotype bei Lehrkräften? Eine Untersuchung Systematisch Verzerrter Lehrererwartungen" [Stereotypes Among Teachers? An Investigation Into Systematically Distorted Teacher Expectations], *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* [Cologne Journal of Sociology and Social Psychology] 68 (1) (2016): 89–111.
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- ⁴³ See "Interkulturelle Bildung" [Intercultural Education], Kultuzminister Konferenz [Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs], <https://www.kmk.org/themen/allgemeinbildende-schulen/weitere-unterrichtsinhalte-und-themen/interkulturelle-bildung.html> (accessed August 28, 2024).
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- ⁷¹ See Statista Research Department, “Wahrnehmung von Diskriminierung nach Migrationshintergrund” [Perception of Discrimination Based on Migrant Background], <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/158691/umfrage/wahrnehmung-von-diskriminierung-bei-jugendlichen-nach-migrationshintergrund> (accessed August 20, 2023).
- ⁷² See NaDiRa-Bericht, *Rassismus und seine Symptome: Bericht des Nationalen Diskriminierungs- und Rassismusmonitors* [Racism and Its Symptoms: National Discrimination and Racism Monitor Report] (NaDiRa-Bericht, 2023), https://www.rassismusmonitor.de/fileadmin/user_upload/NaDiRa/Rassismus_Symptome/Rassismus_und_seine_Symptome.pdf.
- ⁷³ ADAS (Anlaufstelle für Diskriminierungsschutz an Schulen) [Contact Point for Protection Against Discrimination in Schools], <https://adas-berlin.de> (accessed August 28, 2024).
- ⁷⁴ See Schule ohne Rassismus – Schule mit Courage [School without Racism, School with Courage], <https://www.schule-ohne-rassismus.org> (accessed August 28, 2024). The network has been criticized more recently for suggesting that there is a school without racism. The argument is that racism is always present in schools, and even if the school community fights it, schools can never get rid of it. However, schools can become critical and sensitive to racism. See Annette Kuhn, “Es gibt keine Schule ohne Rassismus” [There Is No School without Racism], February 20, 2021, Deutsches Schulportal, <https://deutsches-schulportal.de/schulkultur/es-gibt-keine-schule-ohne-rassismus>.
- ⁷⁵ Kai Maaz, “Ansätze zur Verminderung von Bildungsungleichheiten” [Approaches to Reducing Educational Inequalities], Online Dossier Bildung Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung [Online Dossier Education by Federal Agency for Political Education], <https://www.bpb.de/themen/bildung/dossier-bildung/322534/ansaeetze-zur-verminderung-von-bildungsungleichheiten> (accessed August 15, 2023).

The Quest for Educational Equity in Mexico

Fernando M. Reimers

I examine the dynamics of implementing at-scale reforms to provide meaningful educational opportunities to disadvantaged students in Mexico. To effectively reduce social inequality and exclusion, education policies need a mix of system-wide and targeted efforts that are implemented at scale and sustained long enough to become institutionalized. The resiliency of those policies requires an elusive balance between system-wide and targeted efforts, alignment between federal and state initiatives, and supportive politics. However, the politics of implementing system-wide reforms are more contentious than those involving targeted efforts because they disrupt entrenched interests, making such efforts harder to sustain. Targeted policies, while easier to implement, reinforce the segregation of students into different educational tracks of varying quality.

The Mexican public education system has, since it was created a century ago, advanced policies that challenge high levels of inequality and poverty. Such efforts became more salient as Mexico joined the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 and after the democratic transition that took place in 2000. These forces shaped policies with inclusive intent over remarkably long periods, even as some administrations made modifications to these policy initiatives and claimed them as their own. While considerable financial resources were devoted to these policies, implementation was deficient because of the challenges of simultaneously meeting three essential conditions: 1) complementarity and coherence between system-wide and targeted programs, 2) alignment between federal and state priorities and sufficient levels of capacity across states and localities to support the demands of those policies, and 3) supportive politics. The results of these equity-oriented policies fell short of the aspirations of the reformers, and they were insufficient to transform the structure of economic and social opportunity in Mexico.

The economic transformation resulting from the greater integration of Mexico into the global economy, beginning in the mid-1990s with the incorporation of Mexico into NAFTA and followed by the political transition toward more competitive politics in 2000, incentivized policy elites to prioritize education. Education-

al development had stagnated in Mexico because of the debt crisis of the 1980s and the consequent economic adjustment and contraction in education spending. As Mexico joined NAFTA, President Salinas de Gortari and then President Ernesto Zedillo made education a higher priority in the national agenda.¹ Their education reforms and others that followed over successive administrations incorporated the goal of advancing educational opportunity for children from marginalized backgrounds, most notably by expanding the duration of compulsory education from six to twelve years, plus three years of preschool, which improved education quality and provided assistance for poor families.

While a series of multiparty agreements supported these reforms, the capture of significant elements of educational governance by the Mexican teachers' union (in particular, teacher selection, preparation, and career advancement), the use of programs to advance partisan goals, the lack of alignment between federal and state authorities when led by opposing political parties, and different levels of institutional capacity across states shaped their implementation. After providing a brief historical and institutional context, I examine some of the education policies and programs spanning more than three decades and six presidential administrations.

Mexico is the tenth most populous country in the world, with 42 percent of the population under the age of twenty-five.² Given this demographic structure, schools and higher education institutions can shape individual opportunity and social institutions in very short order. While the law that established primary education as free and compulsory in Mexico was passed as early as 1888, the Mexican revolution of 1910 provided the impetus for the expansion of education. It enshrined the right in article 3 of the constitution of 1917 and committed significant federal spending to education upon the creation of the Ministry of Education in 1921, with the aim of centralizing and coordinating efforts to advance education.³ The strong role of the executive branch of government in educational governance and finance made education a very appealing instrument to serve partisan politics. For instance, the national teachers' union, the *Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación*, was created in 1943 by the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), the ruling party in Mexico for seventy-one years, from the party's founding in 1929 until the turn of the twenty-first century. The teachers' union has exerted extraordinary control in educational governance, controlling teacher appointments, teacher education, and paths for career advancement, among other elements. In exchange, for seven decades, the union played an important role in mobilizing electors during election seasons and in guarding polling stations and counting the votes, helping to assure the political hegemony of the PRI.

The first secretary of education of Mexico, José Vasconcelos spearheaded efforts to expand access to primary education, public libraries, and literacy. In 1936, President Lázaro Cárdenas established the Department of Indigenous Affairs, which cre-

ated the first schools for Indigenous children in rural areas. Building on this work, the Ministry of Education developed a specialized strand of schools, called “Indigenous schools,” tasked with the complex goal of educating Indigenous students in rural areas. In 1946, Congress amended the constitution, making six years of education compulsory and free; and in 1959, following a reform to the General Law of Education in 1957, the Ministry of Education established a national program of free school textbooks, which spurred the development of a new set of textbooks, aligned to the national curriculum, to be distributed to all students in primary schools.⁴ In 1971, President Luis Echeverría established the National Council of Educational Development (CONAFE), an autonomous agency tasked with the expansion of access to education in rural and marginalized regions of Mexico, mostly small communities that lacked rural or Indigenous schools. Indigenous schools, the national textbooks, and these various programs continue to this day.

During the 1980s, because of the government’s structural-adjustment programs to face the debt crisis, education spending receded, slowing down efforts to advance educational equity. But beginning in the 1990s, successive policies expanded the duration of compulsory schooling: from six to nine years in 1992, adding three years of preschool in 2002, and from nine to twelve years in 2012.

The enduring focus of these policy initiatives on equity has gradually advanced educational opportunity in Mexico. Since its creation, the Mexican education system has pursued efforts to include marginalized students through a mix of *system-wide policies* designed to serve all students in making the system more inclusive, such as expanding enrollments and providing textbooks, as well as *targeted policies and programs*, such as the creation of a directorate of Indigenous schools, the community-based schools sponsored by CONAFE, the full-day schools, the polytechnical universities, and the intercultural universities.

Today, Mexico relies on a complex set of educational institutions to educate a large student population. At the precollegiate level, as of 2021–2022, the education system includes 34,413,485 students, of which, 29,461,792 are in public institutions; 24,113,780 students are enrolled in basic education, 4,861,091 in upper-secondary education, and 4,004,680 in tertiary education.⁵ These students are taught by 1.2 million teachers in 225,000 institutions. The education system is organized in three levels: basic education (comprising three years of preschool, six years of primary school, and three years of lower-secondary education), upper-secondary education, and tertiary education. Basic education and upper-secondary education are compulsory and free, as mandated by the constitution, although there are no enforcement mechanisms compelling parents to send their children to school or to force students to attend.

At the basic-education level, there are three different types of schools: general schools (in urban and rural areas), Indigenous schools (run by the directorate of Indigenous education, not by Indigenous communities), and community schools

(operated by CONAFE). Twenty-one thousand Indigenous schools enroll eight hundred thousand students, out of an estimated 1.2 million Indigenous students, who also attend general schools. Indigenous groups in Mexico speak sixty-eight different languages, some of which are used for instruction in Indigenous schools. In those schools, there is no dual bilingual education (in which students would learn all subjects in both languages). At best, Indigenous languages are taught as a subject for three hours a week; but because many of the teachers assigned to those schools are unable to speak Indigenous languages, they typically don't even do that. The poor training of teachers in Indigenous schools and nonexistent coordinated bilingual education contribute to the low educational outcomes of those schools. A large percentage of Indigenous students attends either regular rural schools or urban schools, which offer no language support. One of the shortcomings of these various subsystems of the Mexican education system has been the lack of flexibility to adjust to demographic flows, such as the large migration of Indigenous communities to urban areas.

Basic education is a shared responsibility of the thirty-two states and the federal government, and there are significant variations across states and local governments in resources and capacity to fund and support educational initiatives. The federal government, which had full responsibility for schools until a constitutional reform decentralized education services in 1992, supports states through a series of programs that transfer resources and set national education policy on issues such as curriculum, teacher appointment processes, and mandatory textbooks. Since state secretaries of education are appointed by state governors and the federal secretary of education is appointed by the president, there is greater alignment between state and federal policy when there is party affinity across the federal and state governments.

Who is marginalized in Mexico? Social and economic exclusion in Mexico is shaped by various intersecting dimensions of identity, among which social class is salient. Ethnicity and location of residence also play a role in social exclusion, and those living in small communities in rural areas in certain states – mostly in the south – are the most marginalized. Indigenous populations and those who are displaced in search of economic opportunity are also marginalized. Intersectionality across various dimensions aggravates marginalization: for instance, Indigenous groups who are poor and live in rural areas in the poorest states are more marginalized, and among them, women are marginalized further.

While the incidence of poverty has declined over the years, it has done so slowly over the last decade, only to increase post outbreak of COVID-19. In 2016, 43.2 percent of the population was considered poor; this figure declined to 41.9 percent in 2018 and increased to 43.9 percent in 2020. Poverty incidence varies con-

siderably by state, from over 60 percent in the southern states of Chiapas (75.5 percent), Guerrero (66.4 percent), and Oaxaca (61.7 percent), to under 30 percent in the central and northern states of Jalisco (31.4 percent), Nuevo Leon (24.3 percent), Coahuila (25.6 percent), Chihuahua (25.3 percent), Baja California (22.5 percent), and Baja California Sur (27.6 percent). Among OECD countries, Mexico has the third-highest level of income inequality, and while it declined during the 1990s until the mid-2000s, it has since stagnated.⁶

Nine out of ten Indigenous people, who represent 12 percent of the population, live in higher or very high marginalization, and eight out of ten live in poverty.⁷ While 79 percent of the population lives in cities with more than one million people, 21 percent lives in remote and small communities of less than 2,500; the geographic dispersion of this population makes it more difficult to implement effective programs.⁸

Educational reform was spearheaded by the integration of Mexico into NAFTA during the presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–1994). President Salinas launched a program that modernized basic education, reformed the curriculum, and established a new generation of school textbooks. The creation of technological and polytechnical universities complemented these system-wide reforms by offering preparation in technical fields linked with the economic needs of the various regions of Mexico. These universities, which still exist, have been aligned to the export-oriented industries most directly impacted by NAFTA. The administration of President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012–2018) introduced dual programs of study that provided flexible pathways to continue higher education studies. Over 80 percent of the students served by these institutions are first-generation college students. Other targeted programs begun during the Salinas administration included compensatory programs to support education in the poorest southern states.

President Ernesto Zedillo (1994–2000), who had been secretary of education during the Salinas administration, continued these efforts, further emphasizing civic education and a review of the history curriculum. His administration enhanced efforts to evaluate the quality of education, joining the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which evaluates students' knowledge and skills. In 1997, Mexico launched PROGRESA, a program that provided economic incentives (cash transfers) to families, conditional on enrolling their children in school and following up with health checkups; the program lasted for nearly two decades until it was terminated in December 2018. The Zedillo administration also began a program to expand the duration of the school day. Much of the expansion in enrollments in the preceding decades had relied on using the same school building for multiple shifts of students, which shortened the duration of students' school day to about four hours of instruction. The program of

full-day schools sought to increase learning time to about eight hours of instruction; it continued in the three subsequent presidential administrations, and its reach increased tenfold to more than twenty-five thousand schools during the Peña Nieto administration. An impact evaluation of the program found that it had significantly improved student learning while also reducing grade repetition and dropout rates, particularly for low-income students and for those in schools serving high percentages of low-income students.⁹ The program of full-day schools was discontinued, however, during the administration of President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador.

The election of President Vicente Fox (2000–2006) in July of 2000 marked the first political transition of power to a party other than the PRI. President Fox maintained the priority of advancing transparency and accountability in education and created an autonomous institute for educational evaluation, the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education. This institute coordinated several evaluations of student knowledge and skills, including participation in PISA, and mandated that the reports of such studies be publicly available. The emphasis during Fox’s administration was on system-wide improvement of the quality of education and expansion of access (including allocation of funding through school-based management programs and the implementation of large-scale technology in education initiatives), along with the continuation of two targeted programs, the PROGRESA cash-transfer and CONAFE compensatory programs. During the Fox administration, a constitutional reform in 2002 decreed three years of preschool education compulsory, which considerably expanded access to preschool in the following years.

In its 2001 development plan, the government proposed that Indigenous education should be approached as intercultural and bilingual education. Intercultural universities were established (and continue) in some regions of the country, but overall, this recommendation has not been implemented beyond teaching Indigenous languages a few hours a week in Indigenous schools.

During Felipe Calderón’s presidency (2006–2012), education remained a priority. System-wide initiatives to foster equity included a comprehensive curriculum reform and the expansion of access to high school. Targeted initiatives included the expansion of the conditional cash transfer program and the implementation of a national nursery school program to support female workers. Other efforts of system-wide improvement focused on strengthening the quality of education, enhancing learning environments and infrastructure in basic education, promoting the use of technology in education to support digital literacy, extending the use of educational assessment to increase accountability, and supporting bilingual education, especially the learning of English.

Calderón’s successor, President Peña Nieto pursued a series of structural reforms, including education. A constitutional amendment incorporated *quality*

education for all as a constitutional right, setting equity as a national priority, and led to system-wide initiatives as well as several targeted programs to support educational opportunities for marginalized students.¹⁰ Equity was identified as a core element of quality education in the general education law.¹¹

The range of Peña Nieto's system-wide reforms included the redesign of the curriculum to foster twenty-first-century skills, values, and socioemotional development. It also prioritized the improvement of learning environments, defining minimum norms for the operation of schools (so schools serving marginalized children would meet minimum conditions to support learning), expanding the program of full-time schools, and establishing a school-improvement service. It revamped teacher, principal, and supervisor career tracks, defining required competencies and standards and outlining a career structure that included evaluation of competencies necessary to join and advance in the profession. It provided constitutional autonomy to the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education and tasked it with the evaluation of both the system and teachers. Finally, the reform funded improvements to school infrastructure.¹² Among the system-wide policies to advance inclusion were the expansion in enrollment in early-childhood care and education as well as upper-secondary education in 2012. The reform also expanded the number of schools offering a full school day of six to eight hours, beginning in 2013, with the objective to eventually extend this modality to all students.

Among the targeted programs to support inclusion were the conditional cash transfer programs, renamed as PROSPERA, and the CONAFE community school programs that offered scholarships to high school graduates who teach for at least a year to enroll in higher-education programs. The reforms also increased support to Indigenous schools, reaching about half of the twenty-one thousand Indigenous schools in the country. Other targeted programs to support inclusion included investments in infrastructure for the most dilapidated schools (*Escuelas al CIEN*) and dropout-prevention programs, including the Movement against School Dropout (*Movimiento contra el Abandono Escolar*), which provides information to students and families, participatory planning, and community outreach.

An assessment of the status of the right to education conducted at the end of the Peña Nieto administration by the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Policy, an autonomous public agency created to evaluate the impact of government programs, identified five priorities for advancement: 1) improve the physical infrastructure of schools; 2) expand early-childhood education, increase the number of institutions of upper-secondary education, and promote access for and retention of students at risk; 3) reduce inequalities in access to education among different groups and equalize the quality of education across types of schools; 4) improve student learning; and 5) improve teachers' initial education, their continuous professional development, and the effectiveness of instructional practices.¹³ This assessment concluded that important progress had been achieved in the preceding five years,

especially in terms of access to education and creation of schools, while highlighting the elusiveness of the constitutional mandate of ensuring an excellent education with equity for all. In particular, the report concludes that the education system reproduces inequalities in tracking the most disadvantaged groups – Indigenous and migrant students, students learning at community centers, and students learning via tele-education – in separate education streams.¹⁴

The administration of President Lopez Obrador (2018–2024) discontinued some education reforms initiated by his predecessor, dismantling the process of teacher appointments and promotions based on assessments of knowledge and skills, and transforming the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education into a government agency without constitutional autonomy. The administration also diminished the emphasis on system-wide policies of inclusion in favor of targeted programs without a clear target population. Lopez Obrador’s administration launched seventeen “priority programs” to foster social inclusion, most of which were to be implemented by the Ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development, Education, and Welfare. An analysis of the seventeen programs by the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Policy concluded that only six of them clearly identified the results they sought to achieve and the target populations these programs were meant to serve.¹⁵ Three programs to be implemented by the Ministry of Education were the creation of one hundred new “Universities for Well-Being,” the Benito Juarez Universal Scholarship for Students of Upper-Secondary Education, and Youth Writing Their Future. The goal of the Universities for Well-Being is to create one hundred institutions of higher education in communities where upper-secondary education is offered but there are no institutions of higher education nearby. The Benito Juarez scholarship program for students of upper-secondary education awards 875 pesos per month (approximately USD 51) to students enrolled in this level. Youth Writing Their Future is another scholarship program for students aged eighteen to twenty-nine, enabling them to continue their studies in higher education or technical training, consisting of 2,575 pesos per month (approximately USD 150).¹⁶

The various policies to support educational inclusion implemented over the past three-plus decades have produced several achievements – notably, the expansion in access to education and the extension of compulsory education – that have elevated the levels of educational attainment of the population. On average, the Mexican population has ten years of schooling, an increase from 8.6 years of schooling in 2010.¹⁷ At the age of three, 39 percent of students are enrolled in preschool, 78 percent are enrolled in preschool at the age of four, and 73 percent are enrolled at the age of five.¹⁸ Between the ages of six and eleven, 96 percent of students are enrolled in school and 97 percent of students who begin primary school complete it.¹⁹ Between the ages of twelve and fifteen, 84 percent

of kids are enrolled in secondary education, and between ages sixteen and seventeen, 61 percent are enrolled in an upper-secondary school.²⁰

Even though these policies expand access, equity disparities remain, particularly in access to upper-secondary education. In 2019, 64 percent of the Indigenous population between the ages of fifteen and seventeen were enrolled in school, compared with 76 percent among their non-Indigenous peers. Among those living in highly marginalized cities, 65 percent were enrolled, compared with 77 percent among those living in cities with low marginalization. Among school-age youths working more than twenty hours a week, only 29 percent were enrolled, compared with 91 percent among students working less than twenty hours per week.²¹

Important challenges to equal educational opportunity remain. Results from the National Program for Learning Assessment (PLANEA) in language and math show that 40 percent of students have only a basic mastery of language and another 34 percent are below this basic level; in math, 65 percent are below the basic level. For both subjects, most of the higher performing students attend private schools.²² Students of Indigenous parents score systematically below non-Indigenous students, and this gap is twice as large in community centers.

Results from PLANEA show systematic and large differences in students' performance by marginalization. At the end of lower-secondary school, students with an Indigenous background score lower on average than non-Indigenous classmates in math, and the proportion of students who are below the basic level on PLANEA is much higher in smaller and more marginalized localities (62 percent compared with 34 percent in nonmarginalized areas).

Completion of upper-secondary education is highly inequitable. Non-Indigenous students are twice as likely to finish upper-secondary education as Indigenous students.²³ And students from wealthier backgrounds are three times more likely to finish upper-secondary education than their less privileged peers.²⁴ Though this does represent an improvement since 2000, when wealthier students were five and a half times more likely to finish.

The cross-national PISA survey of knowledge and skills administered by the OECD shows that the low levels of knowledge of fifteen-year-olds in Mexico have not improved since 2000, the first year of the assessment, although it should be noted that during this period, the percentage of fifteen-year-olds in secondary education increased from 50 percent in 2003 to 63 percent in 2018 and 64 percent in 2022.²⁵ On average, students in Mexico score lower in the evaluation than students in other OECD countries, though not significantly different from students in other Latin American countries participating in the assessment (such as Chile, Uruguay, Costa Rica, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, and Argentina). In 2018, 35 percent of the students in Mexico did not achieve a minimum level of proficiency in reading, math, and science. By 2022, this figure had increased to 38 percent. Those students are disproportionately poor. While socioeconomic background is significantly

related to student performance in the assessment, the gap between the most advantaged and least advantaged students is comparable to the gap for all countries in the OECD, and the gap has decreased in Mexico over the last two decades.²⁶ Student achievement levels dropped significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Math scores declined fourteen points (or an effect size of about 0.14). Reading scores declined by five points, science scores by nine points. These declines were comparable to the OECD average declines of fifteen points in math, ten points in reading, and two points in science.²⁷ The strength of the relationship between student performance in math and socioeconomic background was lower in Mexico (10.4 percent) than both the United States (14 percent) and the OECD average (15.5 percent). And the percentage of the most disadvantaged students attaining in the top 25 percent of scores was similar in Mexico (11.8 percent) to the United States (10.6 percent) and the OECD average (10.2 percent), indicating comparable levels of education resiliency. The average gap in math between advantaged and disadvantaged students was lower in Mexico (fifty-eight points) than in the United States (one hundred and two points) or the average for the OECD (ninety-three points). It should be noted, however, that in Mexico, only 64 percent of fifteen-year-olds are enrolled at the grade level at which PISA is administered, whereas 86 percent are in the United States.²⁸

In Mexico, as in the rest of the world, the COVID-19 pandemic tested the resiliency of education systems to sustain educational opportunity in challenging conditions. In-person instruction was suspended to contain the spread of the virus, and the federal government relied on a mix of online instructional resources and educational television to support education at home. The federal government's strategy to support the continuity of learning during the pandemic, known as "learning at home," included the production and broadcast of television and radio programs, the distribution of printed materials in regions with limited access to digital media, the distribution of digital resources via websites, and a national call center to support students, teachers, and parents.²⁹

State and local government initiatives supplemented these efforts by launching radio education programs, prioritizing school attendance, and distributing education resources to vulnerable groups.³⁰ The pandemic influenced educational opportunity through multiple channels, not just through the suspension of in-person instruction. Vulnerable families were more impacted, and this undermined their ability to support the education of their children. A study of how teachers supported educational opportunity during the pandemic identified six challenges: 1) deficient quality of instructional materials deployed in the learning-from-home system, 2) lack of access to reliable technology, 3) deficient skills to teach remotely, 4) lack of parental involvement to support students at home, 5) limited views of the role of educational technology to support learning, and

6) preexisting socioeconomic inequalities amplified the impact of the pandemic on learning opportunities.³¹

The low effectiveness of remote-education modalities used during the protracted period of suspension of in-person instruction caused many children to disengage from school and some to drop out. At the preschool level (ages three to five), net enrollment rates dropped from 71.4 percent in 2019–2020 to 63.3 percent in 2021–2022, at the primary level they dropped from 98.3 percent to 96.3 percent, at the lower-secondary level they increased from 83.8 percent to 83.9 percent, and at the upper-secondary level they dropped from 63.2 percent to 60.7 percent.³² Students experienced significant learning loss, which was greater among marginalized students, though the loss experienced was, on average, consistent with that of other OECD countries.³³

Despite more than three decades of equity-oriented policies, equal educational opportunity for all remains elusive in Mexico. Much progress has been achieved in expanding access to education and in increasing the number of years of schooling of the population, but levels of student knowledge and skills remain low relative to other countries in the OECD and relative to the intended goals of the Mexican curriculum. Important gaps also remain in access to upper-secondary education, in student knowledge and skills, among marginalized students and their more privileged counterparts, and between public and private schools. But these gaps are not exclusively the result of what educational institutions do. Poverty and inequality shape opportunities to learn through multiple channels, including the support students have at home and the conditions in which they live.

The policies to support inclusion have been of two types. The first are those that seek system-level transformation to expand inclusion: for instance, declaring a quality and equitable education a constitutional right, making three years of preschool and of upper-secondary education compulsory and free, and efforts to improve the quality of education. The second type of efforts include targeted policies, such as conditional cash transfer programs, programs of Indigenous education, and community-based programs. Both types of policy have demonstrated great resiliency over time, suggesting that educational inclusion and equity have become an important priority across party lines. Mexico's increasing reliance on the use of evidence to analyze public policies supports the continuity and continuous improvement of such policies. The creation of the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Policy has provided steady support in the form of analysis and data to inform policymaking. But despite the resiliency of the equity-oriented efforts, there have been occasional setbacks, such as the elimination of the autonomy of the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education and the elimination of knowledge and skill assessments from teacher career tracks.

The more resilient policies include system-wide approaches, such as high levels of spending in education, extension of compulsory education, creating and distributing new textbooks, augmenting the ambitions of the curriculum, and efforts to assess student knowledge. Though there have also been disruptions to the autonomy of the agency in charge of student and teacher performance assessments.

Policies comprising special efforts to reach disadvantaged groups have also been resilient; these have included Indigenous schools, community-based education centers for small rural communities, technological universities, and scholarship programs. Less resilient have been programs that extended the duration of the school day, programs to increase the autonomy of schools, and reforms related to the careers and preparation of teachers.

A key differentiator between the most and least resilient efforts was whether there were synergies among the three sets of forces described earlier: 1) complementarity between system-wide and targeted efforts, 2) alignment between national and state-level strategies and state and local institutional capacity, and 3) politics. The most enduring reforms benefited from the enabling environment for implementation that such synergies created. For instance, the expansion in compulsory education was complementary with the scholarship programs that supported the poorest students to enroll in those additional years of education. Both reforms were within existing levels of institutional capacity and were political wins, creating gains for many groups, without obvious losses for any. The gains included more jobs for teachers, scholarships for constituents of local politicians, and construction projects for supporters. In contrast, reforms that did not benefit from such synergies were more fragile, such as reforms to teacher appointments or teacher education that challenged the teachers' union's hold on those processes. The extension of the school day created new demands (on teachers and budgets) without commensurate gains to interest groups.

But what made policies enduring sometimes rendered them ineffective. For example, Indigenous education and community programs survived at the expense of allowing the teachers' union and local politicians to appoint poorly prepared candidates to teaching positions, resulting in lower quality of instruction. Programs that sought system-wide transformation received more scrutiny than targeted programs such as Indigenous education and community schools. Recent reports of the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Policy indicate that the "subsystems" into which vulnerable students are tracked are the reason for their lower educational opportunities because they receive lower funding, materials, technical support, and human resources, all of which increase educational inequality.³⁴

The stratification of poor and Indigenous students in tracks, different levels of institutional capacity, and the capture of elements of the education system by the teachers' union account for the gap between policy intent and implementa-

tion. Considerable variation in states' levels of institutional capacity and resources shape how policy is implemented across Mexico. In addition, when state and national offices are controlled by different political parties, there are fewer incentives to work together to implement education policies.

The implementation challenges to equity-oriented education policies in Mexico reflect forces that have been identified elsewhere. A study of the politics of education reform found that access-oriented policies benefit from more political support because they distribute gains to many groups and costs to few, whereas quality-oriented policies enjoy less political support because they impose costs on key groups.³⁵ A study of education reforms in the United States concluded that most of them have failed to reach scale, except for the expansion of schooling and the incorporation of extracurricular subjects in high school, which did not require deep changes in practice and worked within existing organization and culture. Other exceptions were “niche reforms” that were able to change the “grammar of schooling” for smaller subsystems or networks of schools, rather than the entire system, such as the adoption of advanced placement courses, the international baccalaureate, and the Montessori education philosophy.³⁶

Mexico's efforts to advance equal educational opportunity have shown remarkable continuity since the 1990s. To the many children who today achieve higher levels of schooling than their parents, there can be little doubt that the education system offers them better chances to build their future than the other institutions in their lives. As the gap between policy intent and implementation closes, Mexico's efforts will come closer to creating equal opportunity for all.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ It is debatable whether the integration of Mexico in NAFTA alone created sufficient incentives to improve education quality, since much of the economic development strategy involved the creation of industry based on lower wages, relative to other partners in the economic zone. However, during the same period, the Economic Commission for Latin America proposed an agenda for economic and social development in Latin America that would rely more on high value-added industries based on knowledge. These policy ideas influenced the education and social development strategies of countries in Latin America. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and UNESCO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, *Education and Knowledge: Basic Pillars of Changing Production Patterns with Social Equity* (United Nations, 1992).
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Multicultural Education in Nigeria

Festus E. Obiakor

Nigeria is the most populous Black nation in the world and richest nation in Africa. It has multiple tribes, cultures, languages, religions, and values. It gained its independence from British colonial rule on October 1, 1960. Even with independence, colonialism has had aftereffects that have exacerbated sociocultural maladies such as tribalism, religious fanaticism, massive corruption, military coups, and devastating conflicts (like the 1967–1970 Biafra-Nigeria War, which took millions of lives). While education is a powerful tool in socioeconomic and political developments, it has not been philosophically changed to respond to the cultural, linguistic, and religious diversities of Nigeria’s citizenry. Can an adequate educational foundation be instituted without valuing the multicultural strengths of Nigeria? Can Nigeria’s progress be advanced without paradigm and power shifts in the education of all students? Can Nigerians’ freedoms be equalized without respect for all tribes? Nigeria must foster multicultural education to advance itself at all levels.

Works on the barbarism of slavery and colonialism have tended to emphasize the draining of human and natural resources from Black people in and out of Africa, and rightly so.¹ But while the slave “masters” and colonialists must take their share of the blame, it is time African scholars started interrogating ourselves and looking deeper into the scary happenings of post-colonial eras.² If we assume, as we should, that Africans are as intelligent as (or even more intelligent than) the enslavers and colonialists, then we can no longer condone the exoneration of African peoples and their leaders from the barbaric ways that they have treated or continue to treat their fellow citizens just because they belong to different regions, tribes, and religions. It is imperative that we examine the intricacies and nuances of democracy. Recognizing basic human values and how we respond to differences is crucial in promoting multicultural understanding and education.³ Failing to appreciate the deeper benefits of multicultural valuing and education has been very costly to African nations like Nigeria.

Nigeria should be a country in a hurry; but it is not. It gained its independence from England on October 1, 1960, almost sixty-five years ago. Colonial rule brought the paternalistic tools of supremacy, domination, and victimization. In addition, it created some perennial problems that permeated and continue to haunt Nigeria’s national developments in education, economics, politics, religion,

and society at large. Since independence, there have been five military coups in Nigeria, and each coup had falsely promised to save the country from corruption and demise. Between 1966 and 1999, dictatorial military governments forcefully ruled Nigeria, save for a brief civilian return to democracy of the Second Republic from 1979–1983. Instead of saving Nigeria, military governments lavishly rewarded themselves while brutalizing their people and mismanaging and destroying the country. Sadly, some of these military leaders (such as Generals Olusegun Obasanjo and Muhammadu Buhari) returned to rule the country during the civilian democratic era, thus perpetuating Nigeria's persistent problems.

With all its human and natural resources, Nigeria is the richest nation in Africa and most populous Black nation in the world. It has more than 225 million people living in thirty-six states, in addition to Abuja, the capital city. Its magnanimous stature in Africa and the world should have built and cemented Nigeria's reputation as an exemplary multicultural "African Giant." Instead, Nigeria has consistently floundered in mediocrity, given the intense hate among regions, tribes, religions, and peoples.⁴ The crux of the matter is that Nigeria has failed as a multicultural nation to value and take advantage of all its people's gifts and talents; and its leaders have not been visionary in managing and taking advantage of its resources.⁵ This devaluing of multicultural education has forced Nigerian citizens to personally export their gifts and talents to more welcoming parts of the world, thereby brain-draining Nigeria and enriching other lands. In this essay, I highlight this critical issue and suggest ways that Nigeria can foster multicultural valuing and education to advance itself at all levels.

Several quagmires have prevented Nigeria from becoming a multicultural nation. The country continues to produce leaders who consistently use their regions, tribes, and religions as weapons while rhetorically talking about national unity. Nigerians are dealing with a rising misery index, driven by the country's worsening sociocultural problems, which in turn fuel other national ills and intensify the deep sense of dissatisfaction. Despite their abundant natural resources, Nigeria and other African nations are struggling with extreme poverty, with an estimated 422 million Africans expected to be living in poverty by 2025. At the same time, the Western world is debating the misery index and its interrelatedness to equality or inequality, or to the benefits or dilemmas of competitive markets.⁶ All the while, the National Bureau of Statistics of Nigeria in 2022 revealed that 130 million Nigerians are already living in poverty: that is, 63 percent of the nation's population.⁷ Given such gloomy data, it is no surprise that Nigerians feel disenfranchised, disadvantaged, disillusioned, and demeaned – leading to widespread disarray and disunity.

Many of Nigeria's problems have stemmed from colonial rule and domination. Typically, building national character was not the intent of the colonial mas-

ters and their political tools, who skillfully played cat and mouse with those they ruled.⁸ Education scholar Udo Bude reaches similar conclusions in his work on “The Adaptation Concept in British Colonial Education.”⁹ And historian Adiele E. Afigbo found that when the colonial masters designed educational programs in their works with Indigenes and, later, nationalists, their goal was to purposely divide and conquer Nigerians and formulate transactional relationships based on their own arbitrary interests.¹⁰ Of course, it was comfortable and easy for the colonial leaders to work with the majority Hausa tribe’s men and women who live homogeneously in the northern parts of Nigeria. Rather than concentrate on their enhancement programs, colonial leaders narrowly focused on the fact that “Hausa people have a homogenized culture and are known for raising cattle, growing crops, and trading.”¹¹ Such homogeneity has served them well in politics, but ironically has limited them from exploring the wonders of the multiculturalism and multidimensionality of Nigeria. However, after almost sixty-five years of independence, it is unproductive to blame all of Nigeria’s dilemmas today on colonialism.

Officially, Nigeria is a secular nation with no official state religion. However, the country has significant religious diversity. Nigeria is home to some of the world’s largest Christian and Muslim populations – with Christians living mostly in the South and Muslims living mostly in the North. In addition, Indigenous religions, including atheistic practices, are most visible among Yoruba and Ibo ethnicities in the South.¹² Unfortunately, religious fundamentalism in Nigeria has had far-reaching and devastating effects. For instance, it is no secret that some religions do not view women as equal to men. And most Indigenous religions embed superstitions, taboos, and assumptions in their practices. Some examples of these beliefs include: twins are evil and must be killed, people with disabilities are cursed by God, and disabilities are retributions for families’ past and current evils.¹³ Generally, these beliefs carry with them some retrogressive voices and actions that are antithetical to societal and multicultural progressive views. One can reasonably argue that these beliefs are not rooted in colonialism and that colonialism actually helped to eradicate some odd inhumane traditions.

Yet based on religious plurality in Nigeria, the question remains why its leaders have failed to use such diversities to build a multicultural nation where all people are valued and appreciated. Rather, some political leaders have harped on religion to build political influence and victimize their fellow citizens who practice other faiths.

Nigeria’s leaders and their actions have rarely reflected national unity, even though they talk about it. For a country that is so naturally favored with different cultures and languages, multicultural efforts have frequently been based solely in rhetoric. In 2020, journalists Peris Walubengo and Adrianna Simwa acknowledged that “Nigeria is a linguistically diverse country. English is the official lan-

guage, and the people speak over 500 ethnic languages.”¹⁴ In addition, “the country has 371 tribes. Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, and Fulani are major tribes in Nigeria, and they have the most influence on the course of the development of the country.”¹⁵ Each tribe prides itself on rigidly protecting its cultural values. This cultural protectionism leads to rigidity that, in turn, creates boundaries that magnify the venom of tribalism, nepotism, religious bigotry, dogmatism, and fanaticism. As a consequence, the country has many unwritten and unproductive rules even as it professes to be multiethnic and multicultural – some Northern leaders and citizens would rather recruit or hire a white expatriate or a Black Muslim from another nation than recruit or hire an Igbo or a Yoruba Christian fellow citizen, even if the Nigerian candidate is more qualified. As it stands, most Nigerians are skeptical of people from regions, states, tribes, and religions other than their own. Even within individual groups, skepticism and distrust are prevalent and make it difficult to formulate policies in nondiscriminatory ways. With such cultural and religious rigidities, multicultural education has become a far-fetched ideal in Nigeria.

Today, Nigeria is experiencing a very dangerous brain drain that has the potential to economically devastate the nation. Nigerians are leaving the country and venturing into the Western world. In fact, Nigerians are even migrating to other less developed African nations for work opportunities. Clearly, people from Nigeria are not valuing each other, and measurable efforts are rarely made to institute and make multicultural education a reality in Nigerian schools, businesses, organizations, communities, states, and the nation itself. This inaction has hurt many Nigerians and has had costly, immeasurable, and negative consequences for the country. Consider the case of an Ibo child called “Sunny”:

Sunny was an Ibo boy born in Sapele, Delta State of Nigeria. The Indigenes of Sapele are the Okpes (also called Urhobos). It was a thriving coastal city with businesspeople from all over Nigeria and West Africa and was a seaport where people exported and imported goods to and from all over the world. Sunny’s father was one of the successful importers. Sapele was also home to the African Timber and Plywood (AT&P) company that at one point was one of the largest timber exporters to the West. Many Ibos like Sunny’s parents had to move from the Eastern region to settle and raise their families in the thriving city of Sapele. The dream of Sunny’s father and mother was for their children to be educated and for their son to go to London to study and come back to practice law in Nigeria. In Sapele, they came with nothing and later built a fifty-two-room house that became a tourist attraction. Due to their hard work, they were able to put Sunny in a very reputable private pre-kindergarten program that gave him an excellent academic head start. Sunny went through academic enrichments, promotions, and accelerations in elementary and secondary schools. Things were going as planned! In Sunny’s Class 3, there was news of a military coup. Then General Johnson

Aguiyi-Ironsi, who led the countercoup, became the head of state. Before long, Ironsi was killed during a retaliatory military coup, and Lt. Colonel Yakubu Gowon was named the new head of state. During the coup, Ibo officers and citizens were killed and slaughtered, especially in the Northern parts of Nigeria. In fact, babies were plucked out of the wombs of pregnant Ibo mothers. The killings were so outrageous that Ibos started coming back home to the Eastern region of Nigeria. Lt. Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the military leader of the Eastern region, started agitating, and then launched the secession of the region under the name Biafra. Gowon commanded the military to invade Biafra, and a three-year war ensued.

Before long, Biafran soldiers invaded the Midwest and schools were closed. As a result, Sunny and his family ran back home to Obodoukwu, the birthplace of his father. As a result, Sunny and his family confronted the perils of war – they were devastated with intense hunger and diseases related to malnutrition, such as kwashiorkor. Schooling and other life-sustaining activities were invisible. Obodoukwu became the location of the Biafra Radio Station; and next to Obodoukwu was a little airport at Uga. Both attracted Nigerian fighter planes and bombs. Ojukwu pleaded with the Western world to stop the pogrom against the Ibos, yet no one cared. With millions of people dead, most from starvation, the Biafra-Nigeria war ended, and the Ibos were told that there was no victor or vanquished. But that was mere rhetoric. As the war ended, Sunny continued his secondary education. After graduation, he went to college in the Rivers State of Nigeria and did his National Youth Service Corps in Ondo State, a state of Yoruba Indigenes. After Sunny's youth corps service, he taught in secondary schools at Anambra and Imo States. Instead of going to England to study law as his parents had wished, he decided to go to the United States to study special education; he earned two master's degrees (one in special education and the other in psychology) and a PhD in special education. After Sunny's terminal degree, he thought about going back home to Nigeria, but still felt traumatized by his experiences as a young Ibo child. Though Ibos are brilliant and talented, Sunny had wondered why Ibos are rarely (if ever) given opportunities to lead the country. In the end, Sunny decided to settle down with his family in the United States and establish himself as an internationally known professor, scholar, and professional. He has educated Americans, enriched the American economy, and advanced American society.¹⁶

It is clear that Sunny, an Ibo, has experienced living among people of different tribes and in more places than an average Nigerian. However, he has also experienced some socioemotional trauma that has haunted him. Sadly, there are many Ibos like Sunny all over the world (including the late novelist Chinua Achebe, novelist Chimamanda Adichie, and the late anthropologist John Ogbu). Nigerian and African leaders who lack vision do not seem to recognize the loss when talented individuals such as Sunny immigrate to other nations. While Sunny's devastating experiences may have fueled his zest and drive to succeed in life, they have

also negatively affected how he feels about Nigeria and its leaders. These experiences further demonstrate why multicultural education seriously matters (and should matter) in Nigeria. In a nation as diverse as Nigeria, valuing and fostering its multicultural society is rarely a serious discourse. It is frequently viewed as a favor by those who think that they control Nigeria because of their tribe, religion, or who they know. Nigeria's ills are systemic, endemic, and long-lasting because of their depth, intensity, and multidimensionality. When it comes to multicultural valuing, abnormality has largely become normalcy in Nigeria, and vice versa.

Education has an important role to play in building a multicultural Nigeria. The Federal Ministry of Education oversees education in the country, while local authorities implement state-controlled policies. The public school system offers kindergarten, primary education, secondary education, and tertiary education. Since the federal government has been unstable without solid philosophical footing, Nigeria has continued to lack unified educational policies that could make integrated and measurable differences in the lives of the citizenry.¹⁷ Without solid foundational policies, necessary and new ideas such as multicultural education, gender education, special education, mental health education, and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education will be seen through a narrow lens.

In Nigeria, regional differences in quality, equity, curriculum, funding, and implementation seem to dominate the systemic process of education.¹⁸ This lack of unified direction has created problems that affect students over the course of their lives.¹⁹ For instance, as great as Nigeria is or pretends to be, it sadly has the largest population of out-of-school youths in the world.²⁰ These youths make up the at-risk and vulnerable populations that are visibly disenfranchised, disadvantaged, disillusioned, and demeaned. It is no wonder that antisocial groups (such as Boko Haram, bandits, kidnappers, Islamic State of West Africa, Fulani herdsmen, and Indigenous People of Biafra) are flourishing in Nigeria. While it is easy to discount all these youths and adults as hooligans and criminals, they are Nigerian citizens who have been failed by the system. In other words, they are crying for some redemptive attention and help, and they deserve well-organized and systemic multicultural educational, counseling, psychological, and service-oriented programs.

Women are critical to the advancement of any community and nation; yet the plight of women in Nigeria is disappointing. Even though they provide about 44 percent of the entire Nigerian labor force and make up about 56 percent of teachers in Nigeria, women account for only 30 percent representation in the political sphere.²¹ A few years ago, Nigeria and the world were shocked when bandits and terrorists in a Northern part of Nigeria kidnapped young girls from their schools. Many of them were abused, molested, raped, and treated as sex slaves, and efforts to rescue them have been opaque and irresolute. No society can ignore the well-being of young girls

and still count itself as a civilized space. Education of all has been proven to be a fundamental human rights issue. As a result, Nigerian girls and women deserve to be educated and encouraged to be future leaders. More than half a century ago, Federal Commissioner of Education Abudu Eke was correct when he noted that Nigeria's national educational objectives are to make the country: 1) a strong and self-reliant nation, 2) a great and dynamic economy, 3) a just and egalitarian society, 4) a free and democratic nation, and 5) a land full of opportunities for all its citizens.²²

What has become of egalitarianism in Nigeria since its independence? Sadly, based on economist Eugene Staley's conclusion more than six decades ago, Nigeria may have taken some steps backward.²³ Consider these examples. Nigeria is still a developing country with a low per capita income; an economy based in peasantry and agriculture with inefficient and poor organization; education offerings that have little relevance to the philosophical and material needs of the people and that result in brain drain; a transitional political system despite multiple decades passing since independence; a society still influenced by its history of colonial rule; and a high mortality rate due to disease. By all measurable standards, Nigeria is not where it should (and could) be when one revisits its initial educational goals and objectives.²⁴ But if the leaders infused multiculturalism into all spectra of Nigerian education and society, the citizenry might begin to appreciate and value the talents and gifts of its fellow citizens, and the economy and political system could grow beyond imagination.

People with disabilities matter: they are human beings who have human rights and deserve to enjoy the quality of life that others take for granted. As data analyst Ode Uduu pointed out in 2022, there are over twenty-five million Nigerians who are excluded from the workplace due to disabilities.²⁵ There have been modest attempts to correct these biases, but their implementation is flawed and their benefits limited. In September 1976, Nigeria took a giant step to institute universal free primary education (UPE) with the aim of eradicating illiteracy and ignorance. However, nearly fifty years since its inception, the UPE continues to suffer from setbacks such as poor organization, poor financing, zero emphasis on rural education and special education, and a lack of specialists and experts among its staff.²⁶ With regard to special education, the Federal Ministry of Education in 2015 renewed its efforts to improve its policies.²⁷ However, educational researchers and scholars such as Ruth Ogbue, Gathogo Mukuria, Maxmary Offor, and myself have identified endemic problems that continue to hamper thorough implementation of special education in Nigeria and other African nations.²⁸ These problems include few teachers and professionals who are trained specialists, few categories of exceptionalities that are catered to, no recognized facilities for preschool children, a lack of reliable funding sources outside of ministry subventions and donations, and no readily available systemic screening and assessment facilities. Based on all this information, one can argue that individuals with disabilities are not genuine-

ly valued as human beings with rights and responsibilities in Nigeria, despite what they bring to the table. People with disabilities, their voices, and their experiences must be included in determining educational policies.²⁹ To maximize their fullest potential as practiced in the Western world, there must be provisions for free and appropriate public education, educational placement in the least restrictive environment instead of indiscriminate inclusion or exclusion, parental involvement, nondiscriminatory assessment and evaluation, individualized educational plans, personnel and professional development, procedural safeguards and due process rights, and consistent programmatic funding.³⁰

A good moral compass is a part of human valuing and multicultural enlightenment. When we do not value people, we do not see or hear them.³¹ Many Nigerian politicians and citizens use their regional, tribal, and religious affiliations to mislead their people. They are consistently dishonest and untrustworthy to their fellow citizens, and sadly, their tribes believe them. For example, during the early years of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, some leaders stated that HIV/AIDS was not real and that it was manufactured by white people to hurt Africans. Yet these same leaders protected themselves and their families from the disease. As a result, many of their fellow citizens fell sick and died. Likewise, during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, many leaders told their citizens that the disease was not real, though they wore their masks and received vaccines that were not made available to their fellow citizens. Some of these leaders take advantage of their tribe and religion to deceive their fellow citizens, engage in massive corruption, and embezzle money shamelessly. It is disheartening that some of these leaders fervently protect their daughters and send them abroad to pursue their education, while at the same time encourage the marriage of underage daughters of ignorant, uneducated, and poor parents under the banner of religion. These kinds of behaviors devalue humanity and fail to authenticate democratic ideals and principles that flourish in multicultural spaces and environments.

It is critically important that Nigeria divorces itself from colonialism and its embodiments. As a democratic nation, it must actively embrace multicultural education, which has the power to promote inclusivity and respect for the civil rights of all people.³² Implementing multicultural education in Nigeria will demonstrate that the country is ready to play and compete with the rest of the developed world. Nigeria's cultural, linguistic, and religious diversities can serve as unifying forces that foster a common bond and help to reduce or eliminate hate. Implementing multicultural programs in public education will nurture the talents that Nigerians have been exporting to other parts of the world, especially Western countries, and help to stop the brain drain.

Making Nigeria a multicultural reality will not be easy. Powerful and brilliant minds will need to come together. For multicultural education to flourish, de-

mocracy and its educational inclinations must similarly flourish. This means that valuing humans as individuals and acknowledging their rights must be central in educational processes. In other words, all human beings are important, each with roles to play for the initiation and maximization of paradigm and power shifts in education, culture, society, religion, politics, and economy. Together, these shifts will create a magnanimous collaborative, consultative, and cooperative networking system that separates itself from animus and hate. About fifty years ago, Frederick Mayer argued for a dynamic education that restructures and formulates a new society: “from kindergarten to graduate school a cosmopolitan perspective should prevail, so that the distance needs become immediate responsibilities.”³³ Democratic ideals support multicultural values that emphasize the importance of individual worth, social responsibility, self-governance, and freedom. Clearly, for multicultural education to work properly in Nigeria, there must be respect for traditional education and values.³⁴ It is important to honor the elders and appreciate their historical contributions while also promoting the cultural heritage of the community at large. We need to avoid creating divided societies with vague ideals that are disconnected from cultural roots and realities.

For multicultural education to succeed in Nigeria, the society requires a new breed of political thinkers and stalwarts. While politics cannot be divorced from education, culture, society, religion, and economics, new paradigms and powers must foster a multicultural, democratic, and progressive society. Put another way, new ways of thinking and doing must be instituted in Nigeria to support widespread multicultural education. It is imperative that:

- Multicultural education starts at birth and is integrated throughout all levels of education.
- Multicultural education classes are compulsory and taught by multicultural researchers, scholars, educators, and specialists.
- Illiteracy and ignorance are eradicated to advance the employability of educated people without bias.
- The whole of national kindergarten, primary, junior high school, secondary, and higher education curricula are revamped to reflect multicultural attributes and values.
- Patriotism and national interest are emphasized in all policies and activities.
- Foreign interference in national policies and activities is stopped to reaffirm national independence.
- Politics ceases to be a lucrative profession for Nigerians, and political manifestos take precedence over tribal or religious affiliations.
- Innovative and “new” leaders are nurtured and given opportunities to serve.

- Military, autocratic, and dyarchic governments are discouraged and avoided. One party and dictatorial governments are discouraged and avoided.
- People in power are held accountable and this accountability is enforced.
- Educational, cultural, societal, religious, and economic policies are not held hostage by politics.
- Funding of all programs (such as multicultural education or parental education programs) is targeted to respond to diagnostic, formative, and summative issues.
- Terrorism, tribalism, nepotism, and kidnapping are investigated without prejudice.
- Corruption and embezzlement of public funds are dissuaded and confronted without prejudice.
- All Nigerians are valued and respected at all times, even when their voices appear heretical.
- All Nigerians respect the country's laws, just as the laws respect them without fears or favors.
- No Nigerian is above or below the law – equal justice is paramount.
- Nigerians with gifts and talents are nurtured, rewarded, and motivated to contribute to their country.
- Nigerian unity is genuinely upheld, irrespective of prejudiced views.

While colonialism has devastated Nigeria and other African nations, it is disingenuous to blame it for all of Nigeria's maladies. It is critical that we Nigerians begin to assume responsibilities for some of these problems. We must value multiculturalism as an avenue for paradigm and power shifts in economics, politics, religion, culture, and language. We must intentionally build harmonious relationships among peoples to uplift society and humanity.³⁵ Nigeria must embody multiculturalism in words and deeds; and Nigerian leaders and the citizenry must see it as the strength of a modern Nigeria. In addition, Nigerian citizens need to understand that failing to value multiculturalism has damaged Nigeria's image as the richest and most populous nation in Africa. Put another way, Nigeria must take advantage of its multicultural strengths and energies and harness the gifts and talents of all its citizens.

Today, Nigerians of different tribes, religions, cultures, languages, abilities, and genders are living and working around the world, producing wealth and stability for different communities and nations. Imagine where Nigeria would be today if it chooses to counter the evils of hateful tribalism; to hear, see, value, and appreciate its citizens without bias; to design strong multicultural programs from

kindergarten to university levels; and to proactively and measurably implement multicultural programs that will advance democratic ideas, schools, businesses, organizations, communities, and states across the nation. Nigeria needs leaders who are African- and Nigerian-centered, who have a bold vision to make Nigeria prosperous. Tribalism has failed Nigeria; religious dogmatism has failed Nigeria; and Nigerian political leaders have failed Nigeria. The only remaining option is to change. If Nigeria refuses to change itself, it will be consumed by change from outside its borders.

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The Quest for Educational Equity in Schools in Mainland China & Hong Kong

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In this essay, I introduce how and why minority groups and educational equity are understood and approached differently in Mainland China and Hong Kong. I describe how in the past few decades, China and Hong Kong have reformed their education systems to increase educational equity and I summarize the progress achieved. I also discuss the cultural, political, and social issues and challenges that contribute to the complexity surrounding educational equity in China and Hong Kong, elaborate on how educational equity remains a tricky issue in schools, and how different factors intersect to affect students' access to educational goods. Finally, I argue that schools in China and Hong Kong should continue both to reform their education systems to enhance the academic achievement and social development of marginalized students and to put more effort into empowering teachers and students to recognize and address the long-standing systemic and institutional obstacles.

Diversity exists in Mainland China (hereafter referred to as “China”) and Hong Kong, but the meaning of *minority groups* varies across these two contexts. According to the latest censuses conducted in 2021, the majority of people (over 91 percent) in both societies share Han Chinese ethnicity.¹ In China, the term *ethnic minorities* refers to the fifty-five recognized ethnic minority groups who have always been in what is now Chinese territory. However, the major ethnic minority groups in Hong Kong include Filipinos, Indonesians, and South Asians, who often experience economic deprivation, educational barriers, and social exclusion.² Similarly, the term *migrant group* in China primarily refers to Chinese people who migrate domestically, while in Hong Kong, it refers to migrants from China and other parts of the world. In China, the dominant spoken and written languages are Mandarin and simplified Chinese characters. Although English and Chinese are two equal official languages in Hong Kong and students are expected to be biliterate (that is, mastering written Chinese and English) and trilingual (speaking fluent Cantonese, Mandarin, and English), Cantonese and traditional Chinese characters remain the norms in education and society writ large. Moreover, although the Chinese government is officially atheist, it recognizes five religions: Buddhism, Catholicism, Daoism, Islam, and

Protestantism. By 2022, the most popular religious groups in Hong Kong were Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Judaism.

Similar to many other societies, educational equity is a buzzword that is ill-defined in China and Hong Kong.³ Establishing an education system that provides students from diverse backgrounds the opportunity to get the support and resources they need to achieve their educational goals has been considered a core value and desirable goal in China and Hong Kong.⁴ However, the understandings of, constructions of, and approaches to educational equity often vary between China and Hong Kong, and even between different periods within each nation.

In China, given its authoritative political system and that most schools (including the top ones) are public institutions run by the government, educational equity is more often pursued through a government-initiated top-down approach that prioritizes political harmony and unity, instead of through a grassroots movement approach that relies on contestations, protests, and activism. In this context, the government discourse of educational equity has generally gone through three stages: 1) from the 1990s to the 2000s, prioritizing “universal access to education among all people,” 2) from 2012 to 2017, focusing on key targeted areas (such as special education) and groups (such as people in poor areas) to guarantee equal access to education, and 3) since 2017, emphasizing that China should pursue a higher level of educational equity: that is, “equity of quality.” But government statements do not ensure that policy will be implemented without distortion or that it is the only legitimate understanding of educational equity in China. The government discourse shows that the conceptualization of educational equity in China has increasingly shifted from equal opportunity and access to equal outcome. This shift is consistent with President Xi Jinping’s effort to return to socialism and his emphasis on “common prosperity.”⁵

Because of its colonial history, Hong Kong has a complex relationship with China. Under the guidance of “one country, two systems,” Hong Kong has enjoyed autonomy in designing its education system. Unlike China, which has a big government and socialist market economy, Hong Kong has minimal government and operates a capitalist market economy. In this context, Hong Kong schools largely provide a strong, elite education system in which excellence in academic performance is highly valued. The self-positioning of Hong Kong as an international financial center and the prevalence of marketization in society reinforce the commodification of educational provisions and push schools to produce elites and adopt business-like practices to cope with competition in the global marketplace. As a result, the education system in Hong Kong relies heavily on private schooling, and the types of both public and private schools are diverse. For example, some

schools are owned and managed by charitable or religious bodies, and some serve specific ethnic minorities. This interaction of elitism and marketization causes educational equity advocates in Hong Kong to pay more attention to abstract equal opportunity (especially alleviating systemic and institutional barriers that impede minority students' education opportunities) than to a fair distribution of educational resources among different types of schools or equal achievement or outcome among diverse students.⁶

Both China and Hong Kong have made progress toward educational equity in the past few decades. According to the United Nations Development Programme's *Human Development Report 2021–22*, China's and Hong Kong's education systems have provided a high-quality education that benefits the whole population.⁷ The expansion of access to schools is an example: all school-age children in China enjoy the right to receive nine years of compulsory education. In urban China, there has been a narrowing of the gender gap in educational opportunity and attainment over time due to economic development, the improvement of parents' educational backgrounds and attitudes toward children's education, and higher expectations of the payoff of schooling.⁸ The results of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment showed that in four developed municipalities and provinces in China (that is, Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang), there is no significant difference between socioeconomically advantaged and disadvantaged students in reading, and girls outperform boys in reading, although the situation in other less-developed provinces could be different.⁹ The results also suggest that students in Hong Kong generally achieved high performance, and that gender, socioeconomic status, and immigrant status do not significantly impact performance.¹⁰ In fact, girls outperformed boys in reading, mathematics, and science, and immigrants outperformed nonimmigrants in reading.¹¹

On another indicator of educational equity – concerning the improvement of the learning environment – studies in relatively poor regions (such as Northwest and Southwest China) indicated that dropout rates have significantly declined and students' school performance has improved because of better school facilities and enhanced human resources in the past decades.¹² The government and schools in Hong Kong have also made great efforts both to remove obstacles that cause minorities to drop out of school and to integrate them into schools and society, such as providing bilingual teaching assistants to non-Chinese speaking students, allocating additional resources to schools admitting non-Chinese speaking students, and abolishing the “designated schools” system, whose high concentration of non-Chinese speaking students promoted racial segregation and reduced their motivation to learn Chinese and move into mainstream society.

A series of interventions to reform education systems in China and Hong Kong over the past few decades contributed to these movements toward educational equity. At the macro level, the Hong Kong government has put forward numerous pieces of legislation to foster educational equity for minority students, including the Sex Discrimination Ordinance (1996), the Family Status Discrimination Ordinance (1997), the Race Discrimination Ordinance (2008), and the Discrimination Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Ordinance 2020.¹³ To ensure the legislation can be effectively implemented, some independent statutory bodies with responsibility for promoting educational equity, such as the Equal Opportunities Commission, have been established to monitor the application of the legislation and provide feedback accordingly.

To improve educational equity between rural and urban areas, between different regions, and between different ethnic groups, the Chinese government initiated the Special Post Teacher Plan in rural areas in Central and Western China (including some ethnic minority areas) in 2006. This policy has focused on reducing the gap in educational quality and enhancing the overall quality of teachers by encouraging and recruiting competent university and college graduates to work in schools in these areas. This project has enhanced educational equity in three ways: 1) by creating more job opportunities for college and university graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds (such as low socioeconomic status and ethnic minority families), 2) by enhancing the teaching capacity in some neglected subjects in these areas, including arts, foreign languages, and information technology, and 3) by benefiting students in these areas through significantly improved school performance.¹⁴

In the name of enhancing educational equity, avoiding unnecessary competition, and reducing the burdens on students, the Chinese government banned for-profit private tutoring in 2019. In 2021, the Chinese government announced the Double Reduction policy to eliminate the demand for private tutoring by improving the public school system. Although the effects of the policy are controversial – elite parents can always find ways to give their children advantages – studies have revealed that it has enhanced educational equity in a few ways.¹⁵ For example, public schools are required to offer free after-school tutorials for students in need; minority students of disadvantaged background can make use of these opportunities to receive extra education and guidance without paying extra fees.

COVID-19 rapidly increased the reliance on technology in education, and having access to reliable technologies and facilities has become central for students. To address the problems of insufficient technologies, facilities, and guidance, the Chinese and Hong Kong governments have issued policies to make public facilities (such as libraries) available to students in need and provide guidance on how to make good use of them. To help minority students, the governments have also encouraged schools to put free-to-use educational resources online, and to regu-

larly open schools for those students who do not have the necessary facilities and guidance to ensure that they can access these educational resources.

At the local policy level, some experimental cases are worth mentioning. In certain Chinese cities (for instance, Hangzhou), local education bureaus have adopted government-purchasing schemes to buy education services from private schools so that all eligible children of migrants can enjoy a free and high-quality compulsory education. Modes of the purchasing schemes include paying tuition fees to private schools for student placements, increasing the public expenditure per student in private schools to meet the standards of public schools, and offering professional development to teachers and augmenting training expenses for private schools to improve the overall quality of education in the private sector. Local education councils also work closely with universities and related institutions and social organizations to strengthen educational equity for all. For example, for ethnic and linguistic minority students, qualified individuals and social institutions are compensated for offering home education services. Meanwhile, routine professional development activities, tailor-made training, and professional development opportunities from universities and teacher training institutions are also provided to meet teachers' needs in effectively educating students from diverse backgrounds. Another experimental intervention in these cities is the creation of shared and quality curricula made free and available to schools in need. This has proved helpful for schools that do not have quality teachers and necessary facilities. By making full use of educational technology, shared curricula are made into video clips to build a video resource database, courseware library, and curriculum resource library.¹⁶ For students with limited access to the internet, the shared curricula were recorded onto CD-ROMs to ensure students could access them anytime and anywhere. Equity within schools in China and Hong Kong increases when teachers adapt their teaching styles to accommodate students' diverse needs and provide the necessary support for learning.

Despite the general environment that favors unity over diversity, some teachers in both China and Hong Kong still find ways to incorporate culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy in their teaching, turning students' diversity and related controversial issues into educational resources that all students can discuss and reflect on.¹⁷ This makes minority students feel seen and supported in class, and thus more willing to learn and participate in activities. Equity in education is also promoted when minority students can see recognized and positive examples of people from their own groups in schools. Some schools in China and Hong Kong have developed school-based curricula that intentionally include positive examples of minority groups. They have also invited recognized figures from minority groups to give lectures and speeches and to interact with minority students. This helps create an inclusive school environment that recognizes students' diverse backgrounds and reveals different possibilities for them.

In addition to what is happening inside classrooms, schools in China and Hong Kong are working to establish good relationships with parents and communities. Minority students' learning greatly benefits from an effective school-home-society relationship, while weak support at home and in society can further impede children from minority backgrounds from achieving higher academic performance. The COVID-19 pandemic intensified these dynamics. Since 2020, the Chinese government has proposed an initiative called School-Family-Community Operation, which highlights active parental involvement and societal support as crucial ways to improve educational equity. Under this initiative, many schools have taken steps to foster parents' participation and help them to support their children in schoolwork. For example, some schools improve communication with parents in disadvantaged homes to help develop home environments conducive to learning. Others directly address parents' worries about girls and students with religious beliefs attending school. And some schools initiate afterschool homework clubs for students with weak home support.

Similar strategies have been adopted in Hong Kong. Some schools in Hong Kong have engaged families in supporting students' online learning at school and home by focusing on the following four approaches: 1) converting existing and accessible resources across sectors in the local community into resources that can more effectively help students with insufficient digital access at home; 2) being flexible to support students' poor learning environment at home, such as opening schools for extra hours for a limited number of disadvantaged students; 3) empowering parents as partners; and 4) establishing emotional and empathetic relationships with parents by understanding and relieving their stress about online learning and worries about their children attending school.¹⁸

Despite some overall improvement, educational equity remains an urgent yet complex issue in schools in China and Hong Kong because several long-standing historical, systemic, and institutional problems remain unaddressed, justified, or denied. It is not possible to explore all these issues in detail here. But we can link the most significant cultural, political, and societal challenges to the related educational inequity in practice, elaborating on how factors such as socioeconomic status, political system, race, ethnicity, gender, and citizenship are interconnected in affecting students' access to educational opportunities.

Culturally speaking, although China and Hong Kong perceive themselves as multicultural, they remain fundamentally Chinese societies given their prioritization of Chinese culture, languages, values, and views on education. Take the views on education, for example: people in China and Hong Kong have long held a firm belief that education can change one's fate. This is particularly the case for minority students in rural areas who have low family income and regard education as

the only way to achieve social and class mobility and fundamentally change themselves and their families' destinies. This is illustrated by two well-known Chinese proverbs: "knowledge changes fate" and the "carp jumps over the dragon gate." In Chinese culture, all levels of education are connected (for instance, attending a good primary school leads to a good secondary school), and education is considered a precondition for many other opportunities, including a well-paid job, personal well-being, a good marriage, and a high quality of life. As education is promoted as the desirable path that everyone should follow, it creates intense competition and anxiety among all stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, and school leaders, as most of them have no choice but to compete for limited educational resources. In this climate, the communities who do not share this cultural view on education can be left behind. Studies have documented that some non-ethnic Chinese parents in China and Hong Kong do not value schooling like their Chinese counterparts because of their religious beliefs or cultural traditions, which impedes their children from receiving quality education in such competitive societies.¹⁹

The pervasiveness of Chinese culture in China and Hong Kong significantly influences the construction of gender and perpetuates gender inequity. In China, gender disparities in educational opportunity and attainment are largely caused by parental investments and their ideas about the education of females. Influenced by ancestor worship, the tradition of "son preference" – the belief that only sons can carry on the family lineage and provide financial and physical support for their families – and the view that daughters do not need to attain a high level of education because marriage and family, rather than career and attainment, are what they should focus on, parents tend to invest less in the education of girls.²⁰ This gender bias is reflected in an old Chinese saying that "ignorance is women's virtue," and in the highly imbalanced sex ratios at birth under China's one-child policy. Ironically, the policy inadvertently reduced gender inequity in education, as female children from one-child households enjoy better intrahousehold status and receive more educational resources.²¹

In this cultural context, compared with men, the educational opportunities and achievements of women are more likely to be influenced by other factors, including whether they have siblings, their parents' educational level and socioeconomic status, whether they live in rural or urban areas, their current education stage, and their ethnicity.²² For example, persistence of the gender gap in educational opportunity and achievement shows no signs of dissipating in rural China because of the low economic development and prevalent gender biases.²³ Gender inequity is also a more serious issue at the senior secondary level than at the compulsory education level: the share of female graduates from upper-secondary schools in China in 2023, at just under 35 percent, was one of the smallest among OECD countries and partner economies.²⁴ Moreover, ethnic minority female stu-

dents are about 27 percent more likely to report evidence of gender disparities in schools than their Han counterparts in China. And given that ethnic minorities are exempted from the one-child policy, they often have more than two children, and parents tend to send boys to school for education and keep girls at home to do household chores.²⁵ Similarly, although girls in Hong Kong schools generally seem to enjoy almost equal opportunity and, in some cases, even better academic performance than boys, ethnic minority girls have much higher dropout rates (some never go to school), worse school experience, and lower performance than their ethnic Chinese counterparts.²⁶

Chinese culture often sustains the unequal power relationship between the Han/Chinese and non-Han/Chinese groups and strengthens educational inequity between them. As two Chinese societies, China and Hong Kong experience long-standing systemic and institutional issues of integrating minorities who do not look Chinese, speak Chinese languages, embrace Chinese cultures, or enact Chinese lifestyles and values. Because assimilation has been a common practice in both China and Hong Kong, minority groups often do not have other options. In particular, schools often promote Han/Chinese-centric knowledge, skills, and values, while neglecting, downplaying, or misrepresenting minority perspectives.²⁷ Also, learning Mandarin in China and Cantonese in Hong Kong is critical social currency for racial/ethnic minorities if they want to integrate into schools and societies.²⁸ For example, Mandarin and Cantonese are the dominant languages of instruction in schools, and exams are mostly conducted in written Chinese. This reliance on students' fluency in Chinese is likely a barrier to adequately assessing non-Chinese students' academic knowledge. In fact, research shows that the overpromotion of and overreliance on both written and spoken Chinese in schools as a *de facto* assimilation strategy has contributed to the disadvantages and low school performance of ethnic minority students.²⁹

Under certain circumstances, Chinese culture reinforces the social hierarchy, prejudices, and discrimination against minorities, and thus intensifies educational inequity. For example, minority languages are often presented in educational materials in China and Hong Kong as associated with poverty and backwardness, and ethnic minorities are often associated with stereotypical behaviors (like distinctive singing and dancing).³⁰ In those cases in which racial/ethnic minorities are also linguistic and/or religious minorities – if their mother languages are not Cantonese or they are Muslim, for example – educational inequity is compounded by overlapping language hierarchy, racial/ethnic discrimination, and religious prejudices.³¹ As a result, racial, ethnic, and religious minority students often experience lower school performance, higher dropout rates, assimilation, and deculturation.³²

In addition to the easily measured inequalities, the Chinese cultural tradition creates a more hidden yet harder-to-address dilemma (that is, to compete or

not compete in the rat race) for educational equity to be achieved. Specifically, in such a cultural tradition, most students are expected to learn very similar (if not the same) knowledge, skills, and values, and compete through the same exam systems (such as *Gaokao* in China or the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination). But these knowledge, skills, and values represent only a very narrow conception of what is valuable to learn and achieve in schools: students are diverse and need different knowledge, skills, and values to live meaningful and fulfilling lives. The intense (and sometimes meaningless) competition already puts numerous students and teachers in a miserable loop that serves neither their own nor society's goals because they are bounded by the Chinese cultural tradition. A prominent understanding among many parents and educators in China and Hong Kong illustrates this point: if a student cannot even earn through competition an admission ticket to educational resources, then they have already lost at the starting line, and what choices can they actually have later on? This understanding created a trending topic in both public commentary and research in today's China and Hong Kong: *neijuan* (literally, rat race). Minority students facing the dilemma of "to compete or not to compete" in the race come out behind. Students from affluent families always have options to avoid or dismiss the rate race, such as by enrolling in international schools, studying abroad, or even immigrating to other countries, while minority students are often confined by cultural traditions and rarely get the chance to live freely. In this way, minority students can never truly "compete" with students with high socioeconomic status, intensifying educational inequity.

Politics significantly influences schools in China and Hong Kong and poses fundamental challenges to educational equity.³³ Given the one-party system, Chinese schools have always been a political tool for the government to promote its ideology and serve its interests. This is especially true since Xi Jinping became president in 2012. Under his leadership, schools implemented numerous nationalistic policies that reflect his emphasis on unity over diversity. For example, nearly all schools across regions in China are required to use national unified textbooks for three school subjects: history, Chinese language, and morality and the rule of law (in primary and junior-secondary schools) or moral and political education (in senior-secondary schools). This helps the Party maintain political legitimacy and ensure that students learn and believe what the government wants them to.³⁴ The government is also tightening control over international schools in China, especially those enrolling Chinese citizens. Consequently, international schools have become more like public schools, as many courses are required to deliver political messages and foreign curricula are forbidden at the compulsory education level.³⁵ In Hong Kong, since China implemented the National Security Law in 2020, the political intervention in and censorship

of schools have become more frequent and stronger. For example, under political pressure, schools in Hong Kong are required to enhance national security and Chinese identity-related education across different sectors. This attempt to amplify the Chinese aspects of Hong Kong society and identity further intensifies the challenges in effectively educating different marginalized groups, especially the non-ethnic Chinese.

Only by acknowledging and understanding how systems operate and impact diverse students can the public be equipped to tackle barriers to attaining educational equity within and beyond schools. Unfortunately, many systemic and institutional issues in China and Hong Kong, such as Han Chauvinism, ethnic/language hierarchy, racial prejudice and discrimination, gender bias, and lack of religious freedom, are justified or denied by the governments and schools, and thus remain largely invisible to the public and difficult to address. This is partially because, in the current political climate, these issues are defined by the governments as sensitive topics that risk dividing society, jeopardizing political legitimacy, and endangering national security. Following this logic, schools should either not allow teachers and students to discuss them or promote the official and “correct” answers provided by government. However, papering over these issues or treating them as noncontroversial not only does not change the fact that they exist in China and Hong Kong, but also impedes students from comprehensively understanding these issues and learning how to address them. In this sense, the current political climate in China and Hong Kong intensifies educational inequity by covering up or justifying the systemic and institutional issues that impede it.

Worse, although the governments and schools claim to be neutral, they favor the dominant majority in practice. For example, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic minorities are blamed, explicitly or implicitly, for not sharing Chinese culture, not valuing education, not actively mastering the dominant languages, and not sufficiently embracing assimilation.³⁶ Following this logic, it is their choice, not the majority group’s oppression, that led to their marginalization, fewer educational opportunities, and lower socioeconomic status and educational achievements. This way of thinking neglects any systemic reasons behind individual choice, thus reinforcing systemic inequity and injustice.

Further, religious minorities are not allowed to reveal their religions or practice their religious rituals within schools in China, given the Han-dominant understanding that schools should be “religion-neutral.” Some religious communities withhold children (especially girls) from school because schools do not recognize and sometimes directly oppose religious practice, including by teaching atheism, encouraging students to get rid of their “backward” and “superstitious” religious beliefs, and banning Muslim female students from wearing the hijab. In this context, some parents worry that children will lose their religion by attending school and thus they keep them away from school.³⁷ Here, schools are

not religion-neutral but favor the dominant group's understanding of religion. As a result, religious minority students' educational opportunities are reduced, and their educational achievements are undercut by the social, emotional, and mental health issues associated with the de facto secularization and religious discrimination in schools.³⁸

In this conservative context, there is little space for individual schools or teachers to make curricular or pedagogical changes. In China, the challenges that minorities face and their underlying causes are largely overlooked in the current one-size-fits-all national curricula that are not related to minority students' real lives and rely on standardized measures and products to suppress and marginalize students' diverse identities.³⁹ Minority students do not see themselves and their struggles accurately represented in the current curriculum, and are thus less likely to benefit from the curriculum and schools in general. In fact, a significant number of minority students either voluntarily leave or are "forced out" of this education system that fails them, widening the educational gap between the majority and minority students.⁴⁰ At the same time, school leaders and teachers have limited options. To keep their jobs, school leaders avoid taking actions that are not favored by the government, and they thereby become part of the systems that reinforce educational inequity. School leaders then pass these constraints on to teachers, who also worry about losing their jobs if they engage in practices discouraged by the school administrators, in effect limiting teachers' autonomy in fostering educational equity in classrooms. As many recent cases in China and Hong Kong have illustrated, teachers who discuss sensitive issues without promoting the views favored by the governments are punished in various ways, including job termination or even imprisonment.⁴¹ The potential punishments keep teachers from discussing the above topics in the classroom, which are highly relevant and troubling to minority students in their daily lives.⁴² In addition, the teacher training that equips teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and values to recognize minority students' needs, identify systemic and institutional barriers to their educational opportunities and achievements, and address these barriers to improve educational equity for them is lacking. This status quo explains the disparity between school leaders' and teachers' beliefs that they already treat minority students "equally" (that they are color/religion/gender-blind) and how minority students feel.⁴³

At the societal level, China and Hong Kong are two populous and economically disparate societies. Their school systems have been widely recognized as competitive and differentiated. China had over 186 million students receiving education at the primary and secondary school level in 2022.⁴⁴ Given its sizable education system, providing equitable access to high-quality school education for all is a serious challenge.⁴⁵ By comparison, 333,551 students

were enrolled in primary schools and 321,162 in secondary schools in Hong Kong in 2022–2023.⁴⁶ Their differentiated education systems, compared with less selective systems, are more likely to lead to higher levels of inequity because they start to sort students by attainment very early in life. Empirical evidence indicates that sorting students at an early stage can increase inequity, particularly for minority students, because it often prioritizes those who have already gained various advantages in life from their parents. Sorting thus becomes an intergenerational transmission of social capital.⁴⁷

Many historical inequalities and new societal challenges further contribute to the marginalization and disadvantages of minority students in China and Hong Kong. The first historical issue is regional disparity. The urban-rural income ratio gap in China has widened dramatically since it adopted a socialist market economy in 1992, which caused a growing gap in the provision of primary and secondary education between rural and urban areas and in the educational performance and achievement of students from urban and rural backgrounds.⁴⁸ For example, so long as they cannot get rid of their agricultural *hukou* (household registration), rural students have no access to the high-quality schools in urban areas. The regional disparity also significantly reduces educational provision for minorities. Eastern and coastal provinces in China tend to enjoy higher-quality educational resources, more modern equipment, better schools, and more qualified teachers than Western and Southeast China, where racial, ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities traditionally live.

Interschool inequity (such as resource disparity between schools) is another historical issue that reinforces minority groups' disadvantages in schools. Schools in China are, officially or de facto, classified into different categories both at the national and city levels. This differentiation has led to significant disparities among various categories regarding funds, teachers, equipment, and buildings, although gaps also exist among schools within the same category. As most schools in China are managed by the government and are supposed to conform to its positions, schools tend to promote the dominant knowledge, skills, and values endorsed by the government. They also enroll students who are good at following majority-dominant game rules to keep or enhance the ranking and gain more resources. In this context, minority students stand a much lower chance of getting into high-ranking schools unless they are willing to play the majority-dominant game and can play it well.

Migrant status is also a long-standing societal issue that makes the children of migrants more vulnerable and likely to be affected by factors like gender and race. For example, in China, the female children of migrant workers from rural and urban areas face more difficulties than their male counterparts in accessing a decent education in urban areas. Migrant girls are less likely to attend state schools because male births are more often officially registered; therefore, more boys can

provide the required documents (for instance, birth certificate and *hukou*) necessary to enter these schools. Consequently, a majority of girls have to enroll in private and unlicensed migrant schools, and some do not enroll at all.⁴⁹ In Hong Kong, when racial, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural minorities are also children of migrant workers – for example, Filipinos and Indonesians often hold temporary status in Hong Kong as foreign domestic helpers – their school options are strictly limited, which basically equates to low school performance and high dropout rates.⁵⁰

How to deal with refugees and asylum seekers is one relatively new societal challenge in China and Hong Kong. With China rising as a global power, more and more refugees (such as North Korean escapees and refugees from Myanmar) see China as a transit and destination country. However, over the past few decades, the Chinese government has provided little financial support to refugees, and very few provinces have allowed refugee children to attend schools. In 2004, Hong Kong courts changed the legal system to mandate consideration of asylum and torture claims. Since then, Hong Kong has witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of asylum seekers and torture claimants, especially from South Asian countries such as Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh.⁵¹ Similar to China, school options for the children of refugees and asylum seekers in Hong Kong are very limited, thus leading to low school performance and high dropout rates.⁵² The Hong Kong government only provides (often poor-quality) education for them through very limited channels, such as the government's subsidy schemes for ethnic minority students. Given the considerable delays in their access to mainstream schools (depending on the availability of places and chances), young refugees and asylum seekers can at best enroll in schools with a high concentration of non-Chinese speaking students, which can reinforce racial segregation and impede them from achieving high academic performance.⁵³

The COVID-19 pandemic has further worsened educational inequity for minority students. In 2020, as a response to school closures, China initiated the strategic plan of Suspending Classes Without Stopping Learning for online education. School closures and switching to a learning-from-home model negatively and disproportionately impacted the learning opportunities, social and emotional development, and academic achievements of different groups of students. For example, ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities in rural areas have been particularly disadvantaged by the lack of infrastructure for conducting online education in these areas, their unfamiliarity with online learning and teaching, and language issues.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, minority group disadvantages, such as less parental support and involvement, a lower level of parental education, poorer social and emotional skills, and fewer information resources and technological facilities at home, were amplified by school closures during the pandemic.⁵⁵ The pandemic helped make equitable formal education an unrealistic dream for school-age

refugees. In Hong Kong – although numerous online resources and supports are provided by the Education Bureau and education companies like Hong Kong Education City – schools, teachers, students, and parents are still at the exploratory stage of online learning. Many students from low-income, racial/ethnic-minority, and migrant families report that they are particularly unprepared for online learning due to the digital divide, including having little or no experience of learning through virtual classes before the pandemic, and that they are not equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and values to succeed in online learning environments.⁵⁶ Teachers also report that they are less able to identify and support the diverse learning needs of students through online teaching, let alone adjust content and pedagogy to accommodate students' diversity. In this sense, compared with dominant-group students in Hong Kong, minority students have been hurt most by the pandemic.

Although China and Hong Kong have made progress toward educational equity in schools over the past few decades, especially in terms of expanded access to schools and a narrowing of the gender gap in educational opportunity and attainment, educational equity is still a serious challenge in both nations. Long-standing systemic and institutional contributors to inequity remain prevalent and have worsened in the context of China's changing political climate and the COVID-19 pandemic. To better educate students from diverse groups, schools in China and Hong Kong should continue to reform their education systems both to support the academic achievement and social development of marginalized students and to empower teachers and students to recognize and address the systemic and institutional obstacles.

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Educational Equity in Schools in India: Perils & Possibilities

Reva Joshee

India is one of the most diverse nation-states in the world. After gaining independence from Britain in 1947, it adopted a constitution that was based on pluralism, secularism, and egalitarianism. This constitutional vision guided the national education policies until very recently. The current moment in all areas of public policy is being defined by the ruling party's agenda of Hindutva, or Hindu nationalism. In education, the hallmarks of this move have been a rewriting of history to glorify a mythohistoric version of the Hindu past and a call to engage with ancient Indian knowledge systems and traditions. Unfortunately, Hindu nationalism is creating growing rifts between the majority Hindu population and other groups, including Muslims, Christians, and Dalits (formerly known as "untouchables" or "outcastes"). The aim of this essay is to understand what is happening in Indian education and to consider ways to return to an engagement with the constitutional principles of pluralism, secularism, and egalitarianism.

With its twenty-two official languages, over two hundred unofficial languages, significant refugee populations, and social divisions based on caste, class, indigenous status, gender, ability, and religion, India is arguably the most diverse country in the world. The national constitution and successive national education policies from the 1960s through the 1990s reaffirmed the importance of nurturing diversity and creating equity. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the sitting government, led by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), attempted to change course, promoting a vision of India that was based only on its Hindu roots. This so-called saffronization was reflected, for example, in a vision of Indian citizenship based on belonging to the "Hindu family" (Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists), while those who were not of the Hindu family (Muslims, Christians, and Jews), regardless of ancestry, would not be seen as citizens. This vision was reflected in the National Curriculum Framework 2000 (NCF 2000).¹ When the BJP-led government was defeated in 2004, its successor, the Congress Party-led government, immediately established a working group to reconfigure the NCF, leading to the creation of a diversity- and equity-affirming educational approach reminiscent of the original ideals in the constitution. Since

the return of the BJP to power in 2014, the saffronization agenda has once again been at the forefront. In April 2023, a new draft of the NCF was released, proclaiming both a strong rootedness in Hindu ideals and a commitment to equity, diversity, and pluralism. But is it possible for the ideals of Hinduism and equity to coexist? If so, how? And if not, what counter discourses can be marshaled to promote equity, diversity, and pluralism in India?

In April 2023, India was acknowledged as the most populous nation in the world, with a population of 1.428 billion people. According to the 2011 census, there are over 4,000 distinct ethnic groups, 655 religions or persuasions, and over 6,000 mother tongues spoken, of which 22 are official languages.² Most of the population (about 80 percent, or 960 million people) identify as Hindu, while approximately 14 percent (172 million people) identify as Muslim, 2.3 percent (27 million) as Christian, 1.7 percent (20 million) as Sikh, 0.7 percent (8 million) as Buddhist, and 0.37 percent (4.5 million) as Jain. India is one of only two countries in the world with a majority Hindu population, the other being Nepal, and it has the third-largest Muslim population of any country in the world, with Indonesia and Pakistan, respectively, ranking one and two. In 1990, it also became the first country to declare the birthday of the prophet Muhammed a holiday.

India has one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Oxfam data indicate that economic inequality has been rising sharply for the last three decades.³ As a result, the top 10 percent of the population holds 77 percent of the wealth. Economic inequality is tied to other demographic issues, such as caste and gender. The term *caste* is still not well defined but refers to a social hierarchy that has existed in India for thousands of years.⁴ There is still a great deal of residential and occupational segregation based on caste, and highly educated Indians tend to belong to the higher castes while those with little or no education belong to lower castes.⁵ About 30 percent of all Indians identify as belonging to higher-caste groups, and about 68 percent identify as belonging to lower-caste groups. After independence, India established affirmative action programs based on a system of “reservations,” meaning that a certain number of positions in government and seats in higher education institutions are reserved for members of the most disadvantaged lower castes, who were designated as “Scheduled Castes” (including Dalits) and “Scheduled Tribes” (Adivasis) in the Indian constitution in 1950. There is widespread debate over the need for and utility of the reservation system in India, and it is beyond the scope of this essay to comprehensively discuss this issue. However, a study in 2012 showed that increased political representation for lower castes was correlated with increased poverty.⁶

UNICEF India notes that only 25 percent of women in India are in the workforce, 77 percent of whom make their primary income from agriculture, and that only 12.7 percent of landholdings are in the names of women.⁷ UNICEF India also reports that girls are more likely to die in childhood than boys and are more like-

ly to drop out of school. While the government has introduced numerous initiatives ostensibly to address gender equity in and out of education, the literacy rates among women continue to be low, and girls, especially girls from poor families, are less likely to be in school than their male counterparts.

I want to briefly describe three aspects of India's diversity that tend not to get much attention in international conversations on equity in education: children with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, and refugees. A recent report of the government of India states that there are about twenty-seven million people with disabilities in India. Across all categories of disability, about 61 percent of children are in an educational institution, 12 percent have been in one but are not currently, and 27 percent have never been enrolled in school. But if we look specifically at the category of children with cognitive or developmental disabilities, about 50 percent of children with developmental disabilities have never been in school.⁸ Adivasis, or the original peoples of India, make up about 8.2 percent of the population in 2011. There are over two hundred distinct groups of Adivasis, who live in forest or hill areas, often in smaller communities. Their existence in India predates both the Dravidian and Aryan peoples.⁹ Most live below the poverty line and in communities that have little or no access to education or health care.¹⁰ Survival International notes that the current government has particularly targeted Adivasis: for example, a 2019 Supreme Court ruling evicted eight million people from lands destined for either conservation or industrialization projects. At the same time, the government tried to pass legislation that would make it legal for forest rangers to shoot Adivasis.¹¹ Finally, as of January 2022, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that there are more than two hundred fifty thousand refugees and asylum seekers in India, of which about forty-six thousand were registered with UNHCR.¹² These numbers, however, do not consider the refugee communities that have been in India for many years, like Tibetans. Most of the refugee communities, except for Tibetans, have little access to education or health care.

A key challenge for India around equity has been incorporating the vast diversity of cultures, languages, and religions while trying to dismantle traditional hierarchies and animosities. India's policies to address these issues began before it gained independence from Britain. By the 1920s, policies for what we might now call affirmative action were in place to ensure that minority religious groups were included in the administration of government. While these policies were ostensibly meant to ensure harmony among all groups in the colony, it is widely accepted today that they were part of the larger British policy of "divide and rule" that created new divisions or exploited existing ones within Indigenous communities.¹³ This legacy continues to taint some of the current policies, especially those for the Dalits, Adivasis, and Socially Excluded and Discriminated Groups (SEDGs).

Today, and throughout much of the postindependence era, Indian policies addressing diversity and equity quite clearly encompass objectives related to national unity, equality, and the development of a national identity that includes support for diversity. The meaning of these terms has changed over time, but when it was drafted, the constitution was cast in the mold of the classical liberal democracy with what has been called an Indian inflection.¹⁴ It contains a strong commitment to equality, and it seeks to develop an overarching national identity while protecting minority identities. Three important principles from the Indian constitution that have shaped postindependence approaches to education are social justice, secularism, and the need to create a unified national identity.

Social justice was initially seen in terms of creating conditions to achieve economic and social equality for all minoritized groups. Secularism in India, unlike the Western versions of this ideal, meant both that there is no official state religion and that all religions are, at least in theory, equally recognized and valued. In practice, this had been translated into several policies and practices including recognition of a variety of religious holidays as official holidays for everyone, flexible dress codes in schools and other public institutions, and parallel systems of family law based on religious principles. Finally, the focus on national identity came out of the acknowledgment that, at the time of independence, there was no single unified sense of what it meant to be Indian. Instead, people were more attached to ethnic, linguistic, religious, or caste-based identities. The constitution gave due recognition to these identities and, rather than trying to eradicate them, sought to use them as building blocks for a unified national identity. In part, this was accomplished by dividing states along linguistic lines and by recognizing several regional languages as official languages. In this vision, national identity would be built through contact among and between members of the variously constituted social and cultural groups across the country.

The term *saffronization* has been coined to refer to the agenda of recreating India in the image of a Hindu nationalist state. This has been the stated aim of the national volunteer paramilitary organization the Rastriya Swyamsevak Sangh (RSS) since its formation in 1925. The RSS wants India to be founded on the principles of Hindutva, an ideology based in a conservative and revivalist version of Hinduism that equates India with Hindu.¹⁵ To understand the origins and significance of Hindutva, we must take a short detour into the colonial history of India.

Until the nineteenth century, no one in India described their religious affiliation as Hindu. Historically, there were several different communities who “shared a cultural matrix but no single Hindu religion.”¹⁶ Today, great diversity continues to exist within Hinduism based on these older sets of traditions, but there have been some attempts to create more structured and hierarchical versions of the re-

ligion. It was British historians who used the umbrella term “Hindu” to refer to disparate groups who called themselves many different names based on their interpretations of myths, history, and identity. British historians also codified a particular version of Hinduism based largely on their engagement with Brahmins, who were only one group among many. These same historians also divided Indian history into periods based on religion: the ancient Hindu period, the medieval Muslim period, and the modern British (Christian) period. The first two were characterized as being static in nature and as ruled by despots. The third was then necessary to “civilize” India and bring it to the modern world through British and Christian traditions.¹⁷

This enunciation of Indian history in many ways shaped both the Freedom Movement and the rise of Hindutva. Leaders of the Freedom Movement fought against the characterization of India as uncivilized by pointing to the glorious ancient Hindu civilization. They encouraged Indians to reject British customs in favor of those rooted in Hindu and Indian traditions. Eliding myth and history, and drawing selectively on the many traditions that had been subsumed under the Hindu umbrella, leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi championed nonviolence, pluralism, and inner strength created through devotional practice to bring people to the struggle for independence.¹⁸ While Gandhi and his contemporaries used this logic to also make the case for a multifaith version of India that would include Muslims and Christians, other leaders such as V. D. Savarkar built on this colonial historicization to argue for a vision of India that favored Hinduism. Today, many Hindus in India and elsewhere continue to believe in and fight for an inclusive and peaceful version of the faith. Others, however, follow the path of Savarkar and his successors.

Savarkar was the first to develop the notion of Hindutva, arguing that only those for whom India was both the birthplace of their ancestors and the birthplace of their religion could truly be Indian. Thus, while Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs could be Indian by definition, Muslims and Christians could not. Savarkar went on to write about how this vision could be translated to education, gaining inspiration from the paramilitary structure of the Boy Scouts and from work done with youth in Italy and Germany through their respective fascist parties. The RSS began developing its own system of schools in 1952, and as of 2015, had over nineteen thousand schools operating in most regions of India. These schools are based on three principles: 1) militarism and bodily training; 2) inculcating hatred for the enemy (that is, Muslims and Christians); and 3) the glorification of India’s ancient Hindu past.¹⁹ In addition, the RSS education system prescribes differentiated roles for men and women in society, delegating women primarily to the realm of the private domicile, where they should be wives, mothers, and daughters who are subservient to the men in their families.²⁰ While the policies of the BJP government do not replicate this vision of education, they are certainly informed by it.

In 1998, the BJP was the major party in the National Democratic Alliance government. Almost immediately it began to change Indian educational policy, moving away from the constitutional principles of secularism, diversity, and social justice to a vision commensurate with Hindutva. Shortly after the 1998 election, the government appointed a new director for the National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT), J. S. Rajput, who was part of the RSS family. Rajput immediately “asserted that the Post-Independence period has witnessed gradual erosion of essential moral, social, and cultural values,” and that the way forward lay in a strong reconnection with traditional Indian values and thought.²¹ Rajput and other BJP politicians and functionaries proclaimed that the existing education system was nothing but a continuation of the British system and needed to be replaced with education rooted in Indian tradition.

In 1998, the minister of Human Resources Development convened a meeting of ministers of education. At this meeting, he presented a curriculum in use in schools run by the Sangh Parivar (the family of Hindu organizations linked to the RSS) and announced his intention to use this curriculum as a model to “Indianise, nationalize, and spiritualise” the national curriculum of the country.²² Several of the state ministers walked out in protest, yet the national government went forward with its plan. It undertook a review of the National Curriculum ostensibly because it was time; the framework had not been changed since 1988. In 1993, the Yash Pal Commission made various recommendations related to curriculum overload, and the Ministry of Human Resources Development appointed a committee to report on values-based education.

The review was done in relative secrecy with little known about the individuals involved in the process, and in 2000, the new Curriculum Framework (NCFSE 2000) was released. Not surprisingly, the framework took aim at the existing civics and history curricula. Claiming that the existing curriculum placed too much of a burden on students and implying that it was uninteresting and irrelevant, a Ministry of Education press release announced that for the first time in Indian education, the new curriculum would feature a subject called citizenship education. It would help students to “develop a proper understanding of their roles and responsibilities as citizens in a modern democracy.”²³ It also noted that the new history curriculum would “help promote a deeper understanding of the core values that has kept Indian civilisation ticking through the ages. A route to instill pride in India’s background as a great contributor to human progress. It will be a history free of rhetoric, stereotypes and objectionable attributes to any one stream of Indian culture.”²⁴

Textbooks were developed to respond to the edict that “all foreign elements had to be purged from the curriculum.”²⁵ The greatest controversy surrounding the NCFSE 2000 came in relation to the content of history textbooks. All the existing history texts were removed because they were said to incorporate a West-

ern rather than Indian outlook. In their place came textbooks that many “secularist” historians claimed presented a particularly chauvinistic view of history complete with “facts” that had already been discredited or had no basis in historical evidence.²⁶ While there was some debate about the appropriateness of the chauvinist label, the new textbooks did contain inaccuracies.²⁷ For example, that the result of the arrival of Islam in India was the establishment of two nations – one Muslim, one Hindu – where there had previously only been one, the Hindu nation.²⁸ In addition, historical facts were presented as incontrovertible, leaving no room to challenge the misrepresentations of any groups nor to discuss anything in the Hindu tradition that might deserve to be questioned, such as the caste system.

Although the textbooks had a short shelf life nationally – the Congress-led coalition immediately created a new curriculum framework (NCF 2005) and accompanying textbooks after coming into power in 2004 – the BJP-inspired texts remained in use in some states that were governed by the BJP. The texts included content such as:

- In a discussion of democratic practices in a class 8 text, the idea that citizens must cooperate with security agencies and that “social harmony should be pursued even at the expense of individual rights.”²⁹
- In the same text, “we should refrain from negative acts like strikes.”
- A passage in a class 12 text that criticizes the Treaty of Versailles, enumerates Mussolini’s successes, and states, “Hitler made a strong German organization with the help of [the] Nazi Party and attained great honour for this. By favouring German civilians and by opposing Jews and by his new economic policies, he made Germany a prosperous country.”³⁰

Before moving to the current policies, it is important to note that I am not claiming that the educational approach of Congress-led governments has been without flaws. While it is beyond the scope of this essay to provide details, I note that it was largely under Congress-led governments that the state education system was weakened, and private educational organizations began to exploit the concerns of lower- and middle-income families regarding the education of their children.³¹

The current versions of the National Educational Policy (NEP 2020) and National Curriculum Framework (NCF 2023) have both similarities with and differences from the 2000 initiatives. Notably, a key element is still the promotion of the saffronized version of Indian history. However, where NCF 2000 rejected foreign influence and engagement outright, NEP 2020 notes that an education based in traditional Indian values and knowledge will prepare young people to participate in the global economy. Thus, “the BJP draws upon ‘orientalist constructions of India’ to define an authentic global citizen who would not challenge neoliberal globalization but adjusts to it.”³²

Unlike its previous term in office, the BJP did not immediately begin to change the formal education policies when it was elected in 2014. Instead, it embarked on three important initiatives. First, it focused on ensuring that people in senior positions in educational organizations such as universities, the Indian Council for Historical Research, and NCERT were RSS members, or at the very least sympathetic to RSS philosophy.³³ Second, it began to edit existing textbooks, claiming that students were overwhelmed by too much information and the textbooks needed to be pared down. Interestingly, the passages that were removed consistently reinforced the Hindutva worldview: for example, all discussions that mentioned that ancient Indians killed cows or ate beef, any portrayal of Muslim rulers as accepting of other religions or being fair-minded, discussions of Jainism having evolved parallel to Hinduism rather than being an offshoot of Hinduism, and any discussion of how the caste system codified inequality and injustice.³⁴

At the beginning of its second term in office in 2019, the BJP began to work on their formal educational policies. Unlike the 2000 experience, the 2019 process had already been underway for some time, starting with a consultation process that began at the village level. The entire policy process was guided, if not directed, by the RSS educational wing.³⁵ Recall that the RSS educational curriculum is based on Hindutva, patriarchy, and militarism. Specific messages in their texts include:

- “The Varna [caste] system was a precious gift of Aryans to mankind [*sic*].”
- “Catholic priests accumulated wealth through unjust taxes and spent the money on worldly pleasures and immoral behaviour.”
- “Islam teaches only atrocities.”
- “Between 1528 and 1914 some three lakhs and 50,000 [350,000] devotees of Rama laid down their lives to liberate the Rama temple.”³⁶

In addition, in 2017, Dinanath Batra, an RSS ideologue, wrote a letter to NCERT objecting to more than seventy content items in textbooks. He wanted changes in four broad areas: “1) adding bravery and valour to Hindu rulers; 2) correcting the negative portrayals of Hindu culture and history; and 3) correcting the portrayal of Muslim rulers,” as well as 4) removing Urdu and English from Hindi textbooks.³⁷ It is important to highlight these points as we examine the NEP 2020 and the NCF 2023 more closely, because this information provides context within which we can interpret the meaning of the policy texts.

The NEP 2020 was introduced in draft form in 2019. The first page of the document proclaimed that the policy’s purpose was to “create a new system that is aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st century education, including SDG-4 [ensure inclusive and equitable quality education], while building upon India’s traditions and value systems.”³⁸ After the draft document was released, more deletions were made to textbooks, including:

- A discussion on the evolution of print media, women's role in media, and censorship;
- A chapter on the Mongols under Genghis Khan that talked about the religious diversity within the group and highlighted that pluralism was not seen as a threat;
- A chapter on partition in 1947;
- A chapter on democratic rights;
- A chapter on gender, race, and caste;
- Discussions of modern social movements, challenges to democracy, citizenship, secularism, the rise of popular movements, and regional aspirations; and
- In Hindi literature courses, any text that talked about communal harmony, peace, or the Urdu language; and all works written by Kabir, a mystic saint who was critical of both Hinduism and Islam.³⁹

More recently, all words with Farsi or Arabic roots have been replaced by words with Sanskrit roots, even though the former had been in common usage in Hindi for years. Although there are strong statements in NEP 2020 about supporting multilingualism and home languages, this support clearly does not extend to Urdu – one of the twenty-two official languages of India and one of the four official languages of Delhi – which is nonetheless associated with Muslims. Additionally, there have been significant changes to math and science textbooks, including the removal of the periodic table, the Pythagorean theorem, and Darwin's theory of evolution, in favor of knowledge that comes from Vedic traditions. While not all references to the Mughal or British period have been removed, and the textbooks still address democracy and rights to some degree, as one analyst notes, "The promulgation of the New Education Policy in 2020 has set the stage where modern ideas, including modern sciences, have to be filtered through 'traditional knowledge systems' so that only what comports without hoary traditions is retained."⁴⁰

NCF 2023 was released at the end of August 2023. It expands on the vision of NEP 2020, particularly the Indianization of the curriculum. At the same time, it affirms the importance of diversity and inclusion at various points in the text, stating, for instance, that "India's diversity in all its forms must not only be addressed but should also become a resource for learning," and "inclusion and participation of all needs to be the core consideration across the elements of school culture."⁴¹ Thus, while the primary move seems to be toward a Hindutva view of education, the door remains open for educators to teach from a perspective of diversity and inclusion. It is beyond the scope of this essay to do a thorough analysis of NCF 2023, but below, I highlight three key points in relation to diversity.

First, while there are five aims of school education enunciated in NCF 2023, one seems perhaps more equal than the others. The fifth aim is a category called

“cultural and social participation,” which is explained in the following manner: “along with democracy and the economy, culture and society play an important role in the ‘mode of associated living.’ Cultures maintain continuity as well as change over time. The NEP 2020 expect [*sic*] students to have a ‘rootedness and pride’ in India, and its rich, diverse, ancient and modern culture and knowledge systems and traditions.”⁴² While some educators might read this emphasis on Indian traditions and culture as a continuation of the vision defined by the constitution and use this to inform their approach, I would argue that the government is working to ensure that the dominant interpretation would be narrowly defined as Hindu traditions and culture. NCF 2023 is replete with highlighted textboxes that explain aspects of ancient Indian/Hindu thought and culture. The boxes tacitly assert the superiority of Indian thought and traditions. There is nothing comparable for any of the other four proposed aims of education according to NCF 2023.

Second, it is important to examine the idea of inclusion as it appears in the curriculum framework. Inclusion is one of six cross-cutting themes presented in the document. The others are values, information and communication technology, guidance and counseling, environment, and rootedness in India. Sandwiched between a notion of values reflecting the ancient Hindu tradition and a sense of rootedness in India that essentially means accepting the Hindu traditions and knowledge system as inviolable, inclusion takes on a special meaning. In this context, inclusion means being assimilated into the Hindutva version of Indian. In other words, “minorities should subordinate their religious or ethnic identity to the overarching Hindu identity.”⁴³ Further, the NEP 2020 was touted as being “the first education policy that rejects the welfare approach toward educationally excluded sections by empowering and providing equal opportunities for all to participate and succeed.”⁴⁴ It is clear that the notion of participation that accompanies the idea of inclusion is procedural; in other words, if everyone is given an opportunity to participate, everyone is by definition included. This considers neither the quality of participation nor the conditions that might be required to create equality of outcomes. Thus, inclusion should be read as something more like inclusivism, a concept that has been developed by scholars of religious studies to designate “the practice of claiming for, and thus including in, one’s own religion or worldview what belongs in reality to another.”⁴⁵

The third aspect of NCF 2023 that deserves special attention is what is not in the text. As mentioned earlier in this essay, previous educational policies were guided by the principles of the Indian constitution. Central among these were the ideas of secularism and egalitarianism. Secularism is a guiding principle of the previous framework (NCF 2005) and is characterized as a value to be developed, a concept to be taught, and an idea to be debated. The term *secularism* does not appear in either NEP 2020 or NCF 2023. Egalitarianism, which is also presented as a guiding principle of education in NCF 2005, is accompanied by references to plu-

ralism, equality, and social justice. Again, the term *egalitarianism* does not appear in either NEP 2020 or NCF 2023. *Social justice* appears twice, once in a quote from NEP 2020 at the beginning of the section on inclusion and once in reference to the nature of knowledge in reference to environmental education. Quite clearly, secularism, egalitarianism, and the related notion of social justice are not part of the education envisaged by NCF 2023.

Is there any way back to an idea of a secular and pluralist India? And if so, what is the path? I contend that although we cannot go backward, perhaps there is a way forward in the reappropriation of some of the founding myths of the modern Indian nation-state.

I have noted that secularism does not appear in the new education policy documents. Moreover, the BJP has had three major critiques of secularism as it has previously functioned in India: first, that it is a Western concept; second, that it ignores the fact that faith is interwoven with all aspects of the life of many if not most Indians; and third, that it favors Muslims.⁴⁶ This has not stopped the BJP from staking a claim for what it calls “positive secularism.”⁴⁷ It purports to support the ideal of equal respect for all religions but with no safeguards for minority rights. Given that secularism as a concept has never been well-defined in India, perhaps part of the way forward is to engage in guided dialogues about the meaning and possibilities of secularism. By this, I mean facilitated conversations in which people would be encouraged to enter the process with respect and humility, not in the spirit of debate and conversion.

Related conversations could also be facilitated on the ideas of inclusion and inclusivism. Theologian Elaine M. Fisher has argued that the notion of inclusivism might be a way back to the idea of true pluralism within Hindu tradition, and I would add, to Indian pluralism.⁴⁸ Fisher argues that if someone truly believes in the idea that others are part of their traditions, it might open a door to expanding the notion, and I would add, rethinking our taken-for-granted notions of pluralism. Although I am not entirely convinced by Fisher’s argument, I am open to the idea that this might lead to a fruitful dialogue if we enter it with respect and humility.

Finally, political scientist Rochana Bajpai advances a case for covenantal pluralism as a possibility for India’s future.⁴⁹ She begins by noting that even in the current context, a Pew Research Center survey of about thirty thousand Indians across all religions revealed that 91 percent felt free to practice their religion and 84 percent thought “respecting all religions was very important to being truly Indian.”⁵⁰ Bajpai advocates building on the good will that seems to exist to move from the various versions of secular pluralism that have existed in India toward covenantal pluralism, an idea she borrows from philosopher W. Christopher Stewart, theologian Chris Seiple, and political scientist Dennis R. Hoover, an approach to

religious diversity “that goes beyond tolerance and secularism, emphasizing both legal equality and neighbourly solidarity.”⁵¹ In other words, it asks not just for the engagement of the state in enacting laws and policies but also the engagement of citizens in truly working to develop relationships with their fellow citizens across lines of caste, class, gender, religion, disability, and other social categories. She believes that this would require two things: an acceptance by all parties that the right to religious freedom is subject to other constitutional constraints like equality and nondiscrimination, and a robust campaign to support multireligious literacy and the cultivation of humility and respectful engagement. While Bajpai’s focus is mostly on religion, I believe this idea points toward a path to thinking across multiple aspects of diversity.

I am not so naive as to believe that one could present these ideas to the current Modi-BJP government and find any kind of success in moving forward. I am, however, encouraged by the example of some educators and people in social movements in India who continue to work for causes including economic and social justice, communal harmony, gender equity, and the rights of Dalits and Adivasis. I am also encouraged by educational institutions that have presented more egalitarian and inclusive approaches to education. In short, the way forward is to begin these conversations with progressive educators and activists and then to engage young people. If there is a way forward, it lies outside the structures of the state and in the hands of engaged, caring, and compassionate citizens.

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From Girls' Education to Gender-Transformative Education: Lessons from Different Nations

Erin Murphy-Graham

The examination of gender inequality in education around the globe reveals a multifaceted issue deeply intertwined with persistent challenges within education systems and society at large. Over the past three decades, girls' education has often been portrayed as a panacea, touted as the solution to a wide array of societal problems, including issues as diverse as high fertility rates and global warming. This essay explores gender disparities in education, employing case studies from Latin America to elucidate the intricate dynamics of this global phenomenon and to illustrate the potential of gender-transformative approaches. Drawing upon two decades of empirical research and theoretical insights from the capability approach, I discuss the linkages between gender, education, and social transformation.

Examining gender inequality in education globally brings to the surface many of the deeply rooted and persistent problems in education systems and society more broadly. For the last thirty years, girls' education has been presented as the "answer to everything," a cure-all for issues ranging from high fertility rates to global warming.¹ The importance of girls' education first gained attention in economic discussions during the early 1990s, notably by Lawrence Summers. In his speeches and writings, he argued that education for girls and women might offer the highest return on investment available in the developing world. Since that time, girls' education has become a global rallying cry for politicians such as Boris Johnson (who referred to girls' education as the "silver bullet, the magic potion, the panacea . . . that can solve virtually every problem that afflicts humanity") and celebrities like Lady Gaga, Priyanka Chopra Jonas, and Rihanna.² Movie theaters across the globe have shown full-length documentary films about the importance of girls' education, including *Girl Rising* (2013) and *He Named Me Malala* (2015). More recently, girls' education has been touted as a "powerful climate solution" capable of fighting the root drivers of climate change and cutting carbon emissions.³ The importance of girls' education has galvanized action among individuals, organizations, and governments that span a wide range of academic disciplines and political dispositions.

But while some were praising girls' education as a strategy to improve health outcomes, reduce fertility rates, raise income, and improve democracy, feminist scholars such as Nelly Stromquist argued that the gender gap in education was the manifestation of gender inequality in society. Simply expanding educational access for girls and women would not address the underlying causes of their underrepresentation in education.⁴ Getting girls into schools is a necessary first step, but schools often reflect and reinforce harmful social inequalities, including gender norms. An emphasis on empowering girls and women through education and other social interventions (such as small loans, vocational training) began to emerge in the mid-1990s. *Education and empowerment of girls* became and remain buzzwords, with little conceptual clarity as to what kind of education is empowering, in what context, and for what purpose.

Despite over thirty years of sustained advocacy among various stakeholders, including civil society, multilateral organizations, and networks of feminist scholars, significant gender gaps in education remain, particularly in secondary schooling. The promise of girls' education as a panacea has not materialized. Looking strictly at gender parity in education – that an equal number of male and female children are enrolled in school – it would appear that girls' education is a global development success story. But what are girls (and boys) learning in school? How is schooling changing or challenging the social norms that perpetuate inequalities and inequities? The attention to girls' education sparked a deeper examination in the field of international education development and raised fundamental questions about how to transform educational systems to become more appropriate for today's world.⁵

With the caveat that any brief review of international data is insufficient, it is a useful starting point for an exploration of gender and education around the globe. More girls participate in education and at higher levels than ever before. As Figure 1 illustrates, gender disparities continue to exist in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, but many countries have equal participation in schooling at the primary level. Significant historical turning points and international movements that have spurred this progress include the Education for all Movement (launched in 1990 and renewed in 2000) and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women and resulting Beijing Platform for Action. These convenings and subsequent declarations promulgated a set of principles, policy orientations, and actions. Among these were the goals of providing universal access to, and ensuring the completion of, primary education for all girls and boys and eliminating gender disparities in education. The United Nations' most recent international development goals, known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, adopted by UN member states in 2015) include a target (4.1) to, "By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes."⁶

Figure 1

Gender Disparities Disadvantaging Girls in Primary Education
Persist in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia:
Gender Parity Index for Primary Enrollment, 2012–2022



Source: Figure developed by the author using data from UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), based on the most recent data available during the period of 2012 to 2022.

In 2016, the gender review that accompanies UNESCO’s annual *Global Education Monitoring Report* found that by 2014, gender parity was achieved globally, on average, in primary, lower-secondary, and upper-secondary schools.⁷ Key here (as the report points out) is that *parity* can wash away inequalities when comparing across countries or world regions. Parity is a statistical measure that provides a numerical value of female-to-male or girl-to-boy ratios. The problem is that in some countries and regions, girls are underrepresented in education, whereas in others, boys are underrepresented. Calculated as an average, these disadvantages are masked – and we have “global parity.”

By 2022, the language around gender parity had softened somewhat, with UNICEF’s launch of a website with the headline, “most countries have achieved gender parity in primary enrollment, but in many countries, disparities disadvantaging girls persist.”⁸ There are two key concerns associated with using gender parity as an indicator of gender equality. First, it masks both female and male disadvantage in education. As captured by a recent UNESCO global report on boys’ disengagement from education, boys are more likely than girls to repeat primary grades in one hundred thirty countries, and more likely not to have an upper-secondary education in seventy-three countries (the report features in-depth case studies from Fiji, Kuwait, Lesotho, Peru, and the United Arab Emirates).⁹ Second, parity in both educational enrollment (children currently enrolled in school) and attainment (highest grade completed) does not necessarily translate into parity in learning outcomes. In

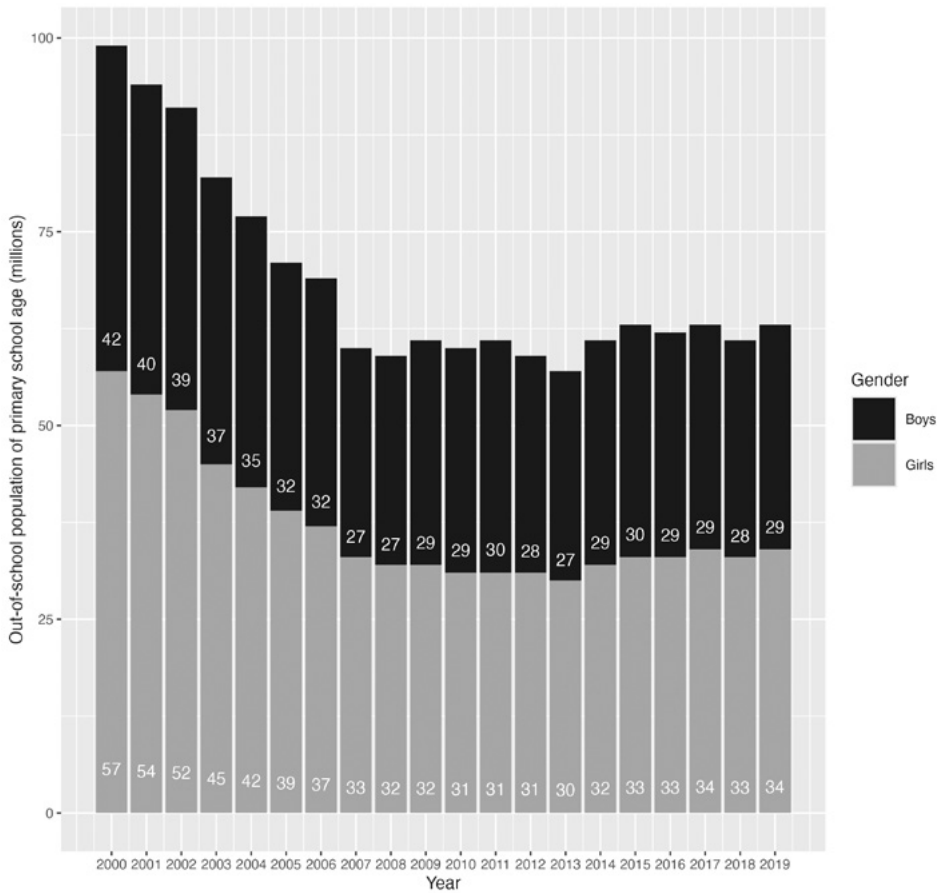
a study measuring gender equality in education from forty-three low- and middle-income countries, the authors explain that in some settings, increases in enrollment may have led to a deterioration in the quality of education and a lower proportion of young people with basic literacy and numeracy skills.¹⁰

In addition to examining the flawed statistic of educational parity in enrollment, common indicators of gender inequality also include the number of children out of school, as well as the number who complete primary, lower-secondary, and upper-secondary education. According to data from the World Bank, the primary school completion rate for girls has reached 90 percent globally, with an equal number of boys and girls completing primary school in most countries. Between 2000 and 2018, the number of out-of-school girls of primary school age decreased globally from fifty-seven million to thirty-two million.¹¹ As of 2023, roughly thirty-two million girls of primary school age were still out of school, compared with twenty-seven million boys. So while a roughly equal number of girls and boys are enrolled in primary school (gender parity), this statistic misses the more than fifty million children that remain out of school, and that more girls are out of school than boys.¹² Figure 2 shows trends in the out-of-school population of primary school-aged children between 2000 and 2019. With regard to primary school completion, in 2013, only 70 percent of children in low-income countries completed primary school, and only 14 percent completed secondary school.¹³ Five years later, in 2018, estimates suggested that just 54.8 percent of children in low-income countries completed primary school. The COVID pandemic only added to the obstacles that children face in completing their primary education.¹⁴

There is general agreement that achieving target 4.1 of the SDGs remains a “distant reality.”¹⁵ Global estimates of the gender gap in out-of-school rates are not informative because they mask regional variation. Additionally, looking at a global average can be misleading because the female advantage in some world regions zeros out the female disadvantage in others. As of 2023, the largest gender gaps disadvantaging girls remained at each level of the education system in sub-Saharan Africa and in Northern Africa and Western Asia. Likewise, in low-income countries, enrollment rates for young women in lower-secondary education were still 5 percentage points below that of young men; at the upper-secondary level, the female disadvantage was 9 percentage points. And most low- and middle-income countries have low overall rates of enrollment and attainment, particularly in the lower- and upper-secondary levels.

What can we take away from this picture? First, gender gaps in education are a misleading indicator of progress. Second, for schools to not reflect or reproduce social inequalities but rather change the underlying roots of students' gendered educational experiences, we need a more substantive understanding and recognition of what gender equality in education could or should entail across different contexts. The statistics help us see the symptoms of a much larger and more

Figure 2
 Out-of-School Population (Millions) among Children of Primary School Age by Gender, 2000–2019



Source: Figure developed by the author using data from the World Bank’s Education Indicators, 2023.

complex disease. Education, particularly gender-transformative education, could be leveraged as a process to heal and repair social systems that reflect patriarchy, colonialism, and racism.¹⁶

In a recent article, Elaine Unterhalter, a world-renowned comparative and international education scholar, reviews four key ideas that have framed the formulation of girls schooling and gender equality in education. Her delineation

tion of these four framings helps conceptualize what gender equality in education should (and should not) entail. She calls these framings “what works,” “what disorganizes,” “what matters,” and “what connects.”¹⁷ As general categories, they are useful tools to help understand the range of perspectives, policies, and interventions that characterize the field of girls' education.

“What works” is the approach consistent with the idea that girls' education is a sound investment that has positive spillover effects in a variety of different domains (health, economic growth, civil society). It seeks to attain parity: an equal number of boys and girls enrolled in and completing school. This approach is concerned with girls' education as something that “works” as an intermediary strategy to promote other desirable outcomes (such as poverty alleviation, improved child health and nutrition), as well as being a desirable outcome in and of itself. From this vantage point, policy and research have focused on interventions that increase the number of girls in school and the duration they stay there. These interventions might include reducing or abolishing school fees and/or providing girls with scholarships, reducing the distance to school, building toilets or latrines, providing school meals, and training teachers to improve their pedagogy. The what-works framing proposes largely technical solutions to address girls' underrepresentation in education. The research methodology to test these approaches involves large-scale, randomized control trials to evaluate the effectiveness of a different combination of intervention characteristics. These research studies have helped us understand a great deal about certain kinds of barriers that girls face in attending school, particularly by providing clear and consistent findings that the costs associated with schooling are a huge deterrent for poor families.¹⁸

A second framing, what Unterhalter calls “what disorganizes,” concerns policies and actors that undermine or distract from what works and what matters – and is related to how girls' education has been identified as a panacea.¹⁹ These are instances where girls' education is co-opted to promote the interests of large corporations and organizations. An illustrative example of this approach, Nike Inc.'s Girl Effect, is documented extensively in Kathryn Moeller's book *The Girl Effect: Capitalism, Feminism, and the Corporate Politics of Development*.²⁰ Corporations such as Nike, Coca Cola, and Unilever have used the narrative guise of girls' education and empowerment to expand their markets, improve their reputations, and grow their workforce. But as Moeller points out, their instrumental logic shifts the burden of development onto girls and women without transforming the structural conditions that produce poverty. Their efforts sidestep the practices of harmful business and working conditions, promoting a logic wherein consumption is the goal of development. In one project Unterhalter tags as “disorganizing,” Coca Cola and the British Department for International Development sponsored a £17 million training program for girls who would ultimately “join the Coca Cola value chain.”²¹ Corporate social-responsibility initiatives such as these have also been

called “gender wash”: corporations clean up their image by using gender, girls’ empowerment, and education as a palatable marketing tool.

Recognizing the contradictions and problematic assumptions of “what disorganizes” in the field of girls’ education is important because it allows for a more profound questioning of “what matters.” A what-matters framing of girls’ education has a long history, as feminists have questioned the logic of “what works” for decades. However, as Unterhalter explains, this approach is supported by international organizations with less status and money, and uses different methods, including qualitative methods, that generate less respect in policy circles and more limited research funding. This makes it difficult to garner evidence that more wholistic, less technocratic approaches “work.”²² A what-matters stance situates girls’ education in a wider, normative context linked to advancing human rights, gender equality, feminist advocacy, and ultimately a different vision of prosperity and well-being. Many writers and activists in this category emphasize girls’ voices and empowerment, the limitations of policy texts, and the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural norms and practices connected with gender inequality across cultural contexts. Additionally, the meanings of “gender” and the questioning of gender binaries, heteronormativity, sexism, and patriarchy are considered from this stance.

Writers from this perspective, including myself, emphasize that girls’ education makes up one element of advancing gender equality. To transform social structures and society at large, processes of change must come from political, economic, social, and cultural domains. Education, no matter how empowering, cannot singularly address all of society’s ills.²³ A framework for human flourishing known as the “capability approach” also undergirds questions of what matters and serves as a lodestar for envisioning a more prosperous and just future. The capability approach, developed initially by philosophers Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, captures aspects of people’s lives such as their education, health, and their political and religious freedoms, and shifts the discourse on education from one emphasizing human capital to one that focuses on human capabilities.²⁴ Informed by the capability approach, many feminist authors have called for educational reforms that reflect a more nuanced and complex theorization of the role of education in promoting social justice.²⁵

Informed by the capability approach, Unterhalter proposes the framing of “what connects” to bring together what matters and what works. A coupling of these perspectives aspires to build bonds between differentially positioned groups. “Connecting” means building “a coordinated, curated, or articulated form of exchange that emphasizes the morally responsive connections and forms of kinship bond between communities engaged with policy, practice, and research on girls’ education, gender equality, and women’s rights.”²⁶ It is not yet clear whether the what-connects framing will have traction as a policy idea or field of practice. It will require

critical thinking, use of evidence, and a simultaneous focus on changing the systems of oppression and exclusion that characterize local and global communities.

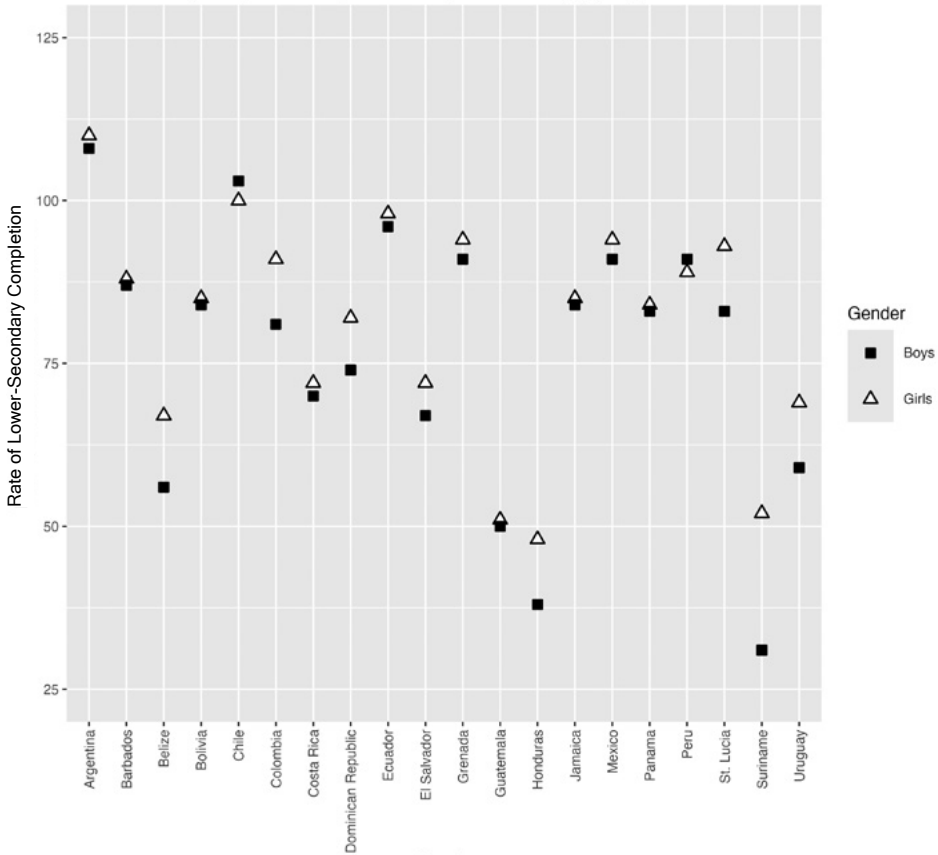
In Latin America, the need for a what-connects approach to gender and education is palpable. Framed differently, one might conclude that gender is not an important educational issue because countries have either reached gender parity or have a female advantage. An analysis of gender and education in Latin America allows us to ask important questions and restate a set of principles.

First, gender is not synonymous with girls and women, as it often appears in policy documents and statements about education in developing-country contexts. Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, expressions, and identities of girls, women, boys, men, and nonbinary or gender diverse people. It is often categorized as male, female, or nonbinary. Gender is social and cultural. However, it is often used incorrectly as a synonym for the biological sex a person is assigned at birth. A simple google search for “gender and education” will result in scores of hits that immediately begin by discussing girls’ underrepresentation in education systems, and the need to promote girls’ education as a strategy to advance gender equality.

But in Latin America (and several other world regions or countries including North America, Australia, and the United Kingdom), girls outnumber and outperform boys. Policy experts in Latin America have called this a reverse gender gap. In Latin America, boys and young men are more likely to drop out of secondary and tertiary education. They have lower rates of enrollment and completion of secondary education than girls, starting at the lower-secondary level. At the university or tertiary level, men have lower enrollment rates than women in all countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. These patterns are referred to as one of the greatest gender-related challenges in the region.²⁷ Studies identify a number of factors at play, including boys prematurely joining the labor market in low-skill jobs, gender norms of masculinity that diminish the importance of education and emphasize that of male physical labor, and features of schooling that lead to low interest or low aspirations.

In addition to a reverse gender gap, overall participation rates in secondary education remain low, despite an increase in the availability of secondary schools over the past two decades. Both boys and girls might initially enroll in lower or upper high school, but a very small percentage go on to complete twelve years of schooling, as illustrated in Figure 3. Dropout from secondary school is a major challenge, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Estimates suggest that the likelihood of completing secondary school in Latin America prior to the pandemic was 52 percent, and just 32 percent post pandemic.²⁸ Latin America had the longest school closures of any region in the world during the pandemic, with schools remaining closed for one and a half years, on average.

Figure 3
Boys' Lower-Secondary School Completion is Lower Than Girls' in Most Latin American and Caribbean Countries (Completion Percent of Relevant Age Group), 2021–2022



Note: Rates can exceed 100 percent due to late or early school entrants and overage children repeating grades. Denominator reflects children at entrance age for the last grade of primary education. Source: Figure developed by the author using data from the World Bank's Education Indicators, 2023 (latest data from 2021–2022).

In addition to (and as a partial explanation for) the very low secondary-school completion rates, Latin America has one of the highest rates of adolescent pregnancy globally. It is the only region of the world where adolescent pregnancies have not decreased. It also has comparatively high rates of early union or marriage (prior to age eighteen). One-in-four young women in Latin America were married

before their eighteenth birthday. In rural areas, these rates tend to be higher, and age younger, with one-in-ten girls marrying before the age of fifteen. There are a number of hypotheses for why this is the case, including 1) conservative mobilization to block gender and sexuality education, 2) regressive policies and abortion bans, and 3) social norms that restrict adolescent dating and sexuality and thereby push girls to have clandestine relationships or elope with their boyfriends.

The experience in Latin America defies the underlying assumption that if more children and youth have access to secondary education, more girls will enroll, and society will reap the benefits of girls' education. It also illustrates that a gender-girls' perspective is problematic because addressing the reasons why girls are out of school will not automatically improve boys' situation as well. While access to secondary schooling has expanded, dropout rates are soaring. The reasons for dropout are different for boys and girls, but a sense of disillusionment with the education system is widespread. It is only through the kinds of questions and research methods that connect a what-works with a what-matters perspective that we can gain a deeper understanding of what is happening in Latin America and what is needed to support systematic change.

Over the last two decades, I have been engaged in research partnerships that explore questions related to how education can empower youth and challenge harmful gender norms in Latin America. Much of my research has been in Honduras, a country that has faced challenges typical of many countries in the region, including stagnant and uneven economic growth, natural disasters, political corruption and instability, increased violence due to narco-trafficking and gang activity, and mass migration to the United States. Together with colleagues and students at the University of California, Berkeley, the Honduran National Pedagogical University, Wellesley College, and the Honduran civil society organization Asociación Bayan, I have conducted research to better understand how education can empower youth and what "quality" education means in rural contexts. We have also explored the process by which girls decide to enter into early marriage, and the extent to which they demonstrate agency in that process. And we have examined, using both qualitative and quantitative methods, why youth discontinue their studies, and the intersections between dropout and gender.

Beginning in 2008, our research team began a longitudinal study of rural Honduran youth. At the time of first data collection, research participants were just completing primary school (approximately twelve years old). We stayed in touch with these youth and conducted additional rounds of surveys and interviews one year, two years, and, in 2016, eight years later when they were young adults (approximately twenty years old). The longitudinal, mixed methods nature of our study allowed us to examine intersections between schooling, child marriage, and adolescent pregnancy, as well as decisions around school dropout. We found

that household income in early adolescence predicts school discontinuation, early union, and early childbearing. Additionally, most girls had already discontinued their studies when they entered a union and/or became mothers (meaning that they did not drop out of school *because* they were pregnant or wanted to get married). The most common reasons for leaving school included a lack of financial resources and no longer wanting to be a student. Largely due to social norms and the responsibilities of childcare, only a small percentage of girls returned to school after becoming wives or mothers.

We also explored the data from surveys and in-depth qualitative interviews to determine the pervasiveness of traditional views on gender roles among Honduran youth, and how these norms are related to control of girls' sexuality in rural areas of Honduras. We examined how these social norms converge with the biological, psychosocial, and cognitive changes experienced during adolescence and the social contexts in which adolescent girls' lives are embedded. In Honduras and other countries in the region, formal or legal marriage is rare in rural communities; as such, we employ the term "early union." While not legally binding, these relationships carry the cultural significance of marriage in rural communities, and individuals use the terms husband/wife and the verbs *casarse* (to marry) and *unirse* (to join together/unite) to characterize their roles and relationships.

Our interviews suggested that parents' desire to control girls' sexuality ironically can backfire and influence girls' decision-making to enter a union. In particular, the belief that sex should only occur within the context of a union encourages girls to see marriage as the only way to be involved in a romantic relationship. While girls are expected to adhere to these expectations and live in restrictive environments that control their mobility, their socialization opportunities, and their sexuality, girls are simultaneously going through normal developmental processes of adolescence. More specifically, they are developing a greater sense of autonomy, experiencing an emerging interest in intimacy and sexual relationships, undergoing the physical and emotional changes that come with puberty, and developing sophisticated cognitive abilities connected to decision-making processes. The excessive protectiveness and the parental control of sexuality experienced by girls in rural areas of Honduras clash with the natural developmental changes that occur during adolescence, which ultimately influences their decision to enter early unions. Drawing upon these findings, we provide a rationale for why educational initiatives that explain and normalize the changes that occur during adolescence (particularly around attraction and intimacy) as well as challenge social norms and constructs that promote gender inequality should be a central component of child marriage education programming for adolescents, parents, and community members.

In addition to better understanding how early unions and pregnancy intersect with secondary school dropout, we also wanted to examine other issues related

to gender. We were interested in why students were “no longer interested” in being students, despite having access to secondary school. Through statistical analysis and rich qualitative interview data, we discovered that dropout is patterned by schooling structures, such that more dropout occurs, for all adolescents, at the standard transition points (to lower-secondary school, to upper-secondary school, to tertiary school). We also observed that for both males and females, once a student drops out, they rarely return to school. Drawing from the capability approach, we used the concept of “conversion factors” to help explain our findings. Conversion factors refer to individuals’ ability to convert resources into “valued functionings,” to whether youth can reap the benefits of secondary education. We illustrate that, in the context of where these youth live, they have scarce opportunities to convert the resource of a high school diploma into a valued functioning, including a job. The youth we interviewed questioned whether education would lead to any change in their life trajectories, particularly in a context in which their future roles as wives and mothers (for girls) and breadwinners via agricultural or other manual labor (for boys) was all but certain. In particular, our findings regarding male school discontinuation provide further evidence that boys are distrustful of schooling as a guarantee of future employment and social mobility. The experience of Latin America shows that simply increasing the supply of schooling is not enough to address gender inequality in society.

Gender-transformative education has emerged as a way to frame how, in order to tap its transformative potential, education must go beyond closing gender gaps. Gender-transformative education is now a shared orientation among United Nations agencies, including UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund) and UNGEI (United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative), as well as leading nongovernmental actors such as Plan International, the Population Council, CARE, and Girls not Brides. Gender-transformative education calls for “nothing less than a fundamental reset of how we approach education.”²⁹ A recent joint statement by Plan International, UNGEI, and UNICEF posits that education has transformative potential, but to unlock this potential, change is needed in the way we educate. This approach recognizes that gender norms are extremely challenging to address because they are entrenched in every aspect of society, and education systems reflect and can reinforce these norms. And these norms are also harmful for men and boys. Dismantling patriarchy requires a transformative approach, one that recognizes how gender discrimination often intersects with discrimination based on poverty, race, class, ethnicity, caste, language, migration or displacement status, HIV status, disability, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Gender-transformative education actively seeks ways to address inequalities and reduce harmful gender norms and practices. As the joint statement explains:

Gender transformative education is about inclusive, equitable, quality education (SDG 4, particularly target 4.7) and nurturing an environment for gender justice for children, adolescents and young people in all their diversity (SDG 5, particularly target 5.1). Gender Transformative Education would remove barriers to education and boost progress towards important social shifts, such as the reduction of gender-based violence and early marriage, the promotion of gender equality, and women's and girls' leadership and decision-making roles. . . . Gender transformative education completely transforms education systems by uprooting inequalities. Gender transformative education seeks to utilize all parts of an education system – from policies to pedagogies to community engagement – to transform stereotypes, attitudes, norms and practices by challenging power relations, rethinking gender norms and binaries, and raising critical consciousness about the root causes of inequality and systems of oppression.³⁰

This is the most ambitious approach to gender and education that has been articulated to date. It goes beyond “gender sensitive” and “gender responsive” approaches that do not call for change in the social structures that cause discrimination and inequality. A gender-transformative approach recognizes that education alone cannot shift gender norms and power relations, but that addressing the social structures that cause inequality and discrimination is needed. To do so, a number of actions are identified as essential, including transforming policies and political engagement, pedagogy and the curriculum, the school environment, participation of children and young people, community leadership, stakeholder engagement, and evidence-generation. This approach connects efforts to address gender inequality in education with the broader quest for social justice. To use Unterhalter's framing, it connects what works with what matters.³¹

While ambitious, gender-transformative education is attainable. A recent report on gender-transformative programs to address child, early, and forced marriage and unions in Latin America and the Caribbean includes case studies of five promising practices from the region.³² These five practices were identified through a scoping survey about encouraging approaches in the region, to which one hundred five organizations responded. The cases profiled include in-school gender-transformative sexuality education programs and what is known as safe-space approaches (which are outside of formal school settings). One of the programs profiled in the report, Holistic Education for Youth (HEY!), emerged from our research-practice partnership in Honduras. Despite a resurgence in opposition to comprehensive sexuality education and gender-transformative approaches in the region, the HEY! program offers a glimmer of hope that gender-transformative education is possible.³³

HEY! works in tandem with the Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial (SAT) program, an innovative approach to lower- and upper-secondary school that operates in approximately one hundred twenty rural Honduran communities. Developed in Colombia by FUNDAEC (the Foundation for the Application and Teaching of Sciences), SAT was created in the early 1980s to promote development in the most disadvantaged rural areas of Colombia. In 1996, SAT began as a pilot program in Honduras, and was formally approved by the Honduran government as a formal education program (granting lower- and upper-secondary school degrees) in 2003. SAT has received several accolades, including inclusion as a “global solution” in the United Nations’ Generation Unlimited initiative for youth. The Brookings Institution, through its Millions Learning initiative, also included SAT as an example of innovative, quality education.³⁴ In Honduras, students study in the SAT program for six years, spanning grades 7–12 (lower- and upper-secondary school). In 2016, we launched the HEY! program to enhance the already extensive focus on gender inequality present in the SAT curriculum, providing additional lessons and a podcast for parents that explicitly address the causes and consequences of early marriage and union in Honduras, as well as content about sexual and reproductive health.

The additional content provided by HEY!, coupled with the existing SAT curriculum, make it a promising model of gender-transformative public education for other regions, which we document in our research.³⁵ The conceptual framework of SAT revolves around a few core beliefs: 1) the oneness of humanity, 2) that justice is integral to achieving human progress and is a capacity that must be developed in individuals, communities, and institutions, 3) that gender equality is essential to achieving human prosperity, 4) that knowledge has the power to raise humanity from its present condition, and 5) that social change – the transformation of human society – will not take place unless individuals and social structures evolve to reflect the aforementioned principles. Coupled with these core principles are a number of transformative features of the SAT program that contribute to increased awareness of the need for gender equality in students, and to a shift in how they think about gender relations in their everyday lives. In the SAT program, gender equality is not a one-off lesson, but is rather woven across the curriculum; gender is linked with the larger concept of justice; students engage in reflection, dialogue, and debate; teachers are given the opportunity to reflect critically on their understanding of gender in professional development sessions; and the curriculum emphasizes that gender transformation requires change among individuals and in social structures such as the family.

One example of many from the curriculum helps illustrate how this happens in practice. “Properties,” which is typically the first curricular unit studied by SAT students when they are in seventh grade, aims to “help young people advance in the capabilities that will enable them to describe the world they experience with

increasing clarity.”³⁶ In a lesson on truthfulness, presented as an essential quality or “property” of a human being, the following is provided to students for their reflection and discussion:

There is more to truthfulness than not telling lies. We should, of course, always tell the truth as we know and understand it. But what benefit will come from such truthfulness if what we think to be the truth is, actually, false? Another aspect of truthfulness, then, is the intention and the will to seek the truth with an open mind. For many centuries people believed that the Earth was flat. Later it was proved that they were mistaken. Their belief did not agree with reality; it was an error. If the intention and the will to seek the truth had not existed, humanity would still be thinking that the Earth is flat.

Can you think of a few erroneous ideas that humanity needs to reject today? What about the idea that some race is superior or inferior to another? *That men are superior to women?* That it is acceptable for one group of people to oppress another group? That it is acceptable for a few to possess extreme wealth while many suffer from hunger?³⁷

The lesson is presented in such a way as to challenge SAT students to identify whether the assumption that men are superior to women is in fact a belief that they have been exposed to; whether they accept that such a belief is erroneous, and why; and where gender inequality is linked to other forms of oppression and injustice. Rather than simply list, in the various SAT books (or even an isolated book that might focus solely on gender), why men and women are equal, what the problems facing most women are, and what to do about it, SAT units instead require students to come back to these themes time and again, from different angles, repeatedly challenging students to reflect on what equality looks like in practice in their local reality, and what they can do to promote it. Additionally, SAT’s “tutorial” pedagogy fosters an environment of healthy discussion and dialogue among members of the class.³⁸

Through our research, we have documented how HEY! and SAT use culturally grounded, context-specific scenarios and ask questions at the beginning, middle, and end of each lesson to promote group discussion and invite students to analyze and reflect upon their individual and social realities as well as their roles in promoting social change. We have demonstrated that students who study in SAT also have higher academic achievement in standardized tests in Spanish and mathematics than a statistically equivalent set of peers who study in traditional secondary schools. In sum, our research, spanning two decades, documents innovative features of SAT, including its linkages to building trust, improving civic responsibility, empowering girls and women, and preventing early pregnancy and union. Taken together, these studies provide ample evidence that gender-transformative education is not a pipe dream.

Despite its potential, even gender-transformative education is not a panacea. Every school year, students in SAT drop out to migrate to the United States. Girls struggle to envision a future in which they have opportunities to work outside of their home, and they form unions with their boyfriends. Boys, not certain that their education will lead to improved employment prospects, prematurely begin working in manual labor. Even at its very best, an education system cannot change society without accompanying changes in other sectors, including the economy and politics. Education is potentially the most important long-term strategy to raise up individual and collective capacity for social change. Too often, quick fixes are touted as solutions to problems, solutions that might be important in the short term but are unlikely to result in deep and lasting change. Providing scholarships for girls is one example. While financial support might bring more girls into the education system, it does not address why they are underrepresented in the first place.

For genuine change to unfold, a different vision is needed, one not focused solely on equal numbers of boys and girls attending and graduating from schools. This vision draws on a notion of prosperity and feminism consistent with the work of the late bell hooks (and is also consistent with the capabilities approach).³⁹ This clear but transformative vision of feminism and human flourishing, articulated more than twenty years ago by hooks, should remain at the heart of our efforts to promote gender-transformative education around the globe:

Imagine living in a world where there is no domination, where females and males are not alike or even always equal, but where a vision of mutuality is the ethos shaping our interaction. Imagine living in a world where we can all be who we are, a world of peace and possibility. Feminist revolution alone will not create such a world; we need to end racism, class elitism, imperialism. But it will make it possible to be fully actualized . . . able to create beloved community, to live together, realizing our dreams of freedom and justice.⁴⁰

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Disrupted Institutional Pathways for Educational Equity in Conflict-Affected Nations

Bassel Akar

Areas and systems affected by compounded crises, protracted conflicts, and structural violence often struggle to reform education for social reconstruction. At the forefront, we observe tireless and ambitious ventures among donor agencies, government institutions, and international and local organizations. However, in many of these cases, we also witness deepening political gridlock, stagnation, and marginalization that undermine the progress of an empowering education for citizenship that upholds principles of human rights. Causal factors to these institutional failures are often either overlooked, redacted, or undocumented in research. Evidence from Morocco, Iraqi Kurdistan, and, most of all, Lebanon illustrates the extent to which governance systems in education can either hinder or even prevent equity in education.

Every single child in the world has the right to free primary education and opportunities for secondary or vocational education, a right under Article 28 of the United Nations' legally binding Convention on the Rights of the Child.¹ However, children in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) are highly vulnerable to barriers, crises, and the absence of resources that violate their right to learn and grow in an educational context. Hence, the paradigm of equity in and through education is indispensable when examining factors that marginalize or exclude children from educational provisions. Equity in education discourse underscores the principles of fairness, whereby every child should have an opportunity to participate, and integrity, because every child has potentially significant contributions to make.² Arguing for equitable education through empowerment, social critic Paulo Freire calls for efforts to provide the necessary resources not only to engage but to empower all children through education.³ Resources should be provided that ensure all children can participate in schooling where faculty and staff, such as counselors and teachers, are qualified and competent, and learning is meaningful.⁴

In LMIC affected by crises, schools are often sites of physical, emotional, and structural violence. This can manifest through children not completing primary ed-

education because of early marriage and pregnancy, paid labor, recruitment in armed groups, or the unavailability of any education provision.⁵ Education stakeholders – policymakers, principals, teachers, children, and parents – across these fragile contexts struggle to summon the resilience needed to minimize and recover from the impacts of adversity, such as school closures, climate change, and protracted armed conflict.⁶ Education systems in conflict-affected LMIC also feature institutionalized approaches to policies and practices that sustain propensities to marginalize vulnerable children and undermine their rights to protection, provisions (such as health, education), and participation. Institutional actors consist mainly of government agencies, such as the ministries of education and finance and, arguably, donor organizations. Over time, these institutions establish pathways and interact with political drivers to determine the sustainability of governing policies and practices in education.

In this essay, I analyze institution-based factors that threaten the equity of education provisions for children living in contexts highly vulnerable to crises and conflicts. I argue that authoritarian and exclusive approaches to governance have led to shortcomings or failures of education governance institutions in conflict-affected LMIC, which have largely contributed to the structural marginalization of children and education inequity. I begin by outlining how concepts of social justice and human rights can provide a framework for examining equities and inequities in and through education. I then present three features of institutional governance of education reform and recovery during times of crises that illustrate how responses can sustain or address violations to children’s equitable opportunities to learn. The first examines teacher-led school closures in Iraqi Kurdistan, Morocco, and Lebanon. Evidence is mostly drawn from media reports, as this issue is rarely documented in research studies. The second explores the processes and politics of national education strategies, with a focus on Lebanon. The third analyzes the role of institutional politics of the knowledge economy in the education sector and the availability of and access to quality education.

Social justice and human rights scholarship provide us with principles and dimensions for conceptualizing educational equity for children. Philosopher Nancy Fraser defines justice in its broadest terms as “parity of participation.”⁷ Fraser argues that people can only have equal opportunities to participate in society when three dimensions of justice are addressed: a redistribution of resources, a recognition of equal status, and representation in the political sphere. The utility of conceptualizing justice as equity for participation has extended to education research and discourse that examine causes and consequences of violations of children’s rights, particularly to education. By adding *reconciliation* to redistribution, recognition, and representation, education scholars Mario Novelli, Mieke Lopes Cardozo, and Alan Smith produce a four Rs framework to examine

tensions in education for peacebuilding in conflict-affected areas.⁸ To illustrate, children living in LMIC affected by conflict are highly vulnerable to permanent exclusion from education when remote learning provisions are distributed only to those with resources; when refugee children cannot register because they are not recognized as legal residents; when children with disabilities have no representation in school reform; and when unresolved conservative views prompt principals to remove coloring pencils from classrooms out of fear that classrooms will promote LGBTQIA+ rights. These examples show how the four Rs can be applied to identify threats to and violations of educational equity.

Equity can also feature in commitments to children's rights to education. The late Katarina Tomaševski served as UN special rapporteur on the right to education from 1998 to 2004. Tomaševski examined violations of children's rights to education by observing threats to what she referred to as the four As: the availability, accessibility, adaptability, and acceptability of education, such as structural exclusion and segregation.⁹ When education is available, schools can accommodate all children, including those with disabilities and without legal status. Availability also includes the provision of qualified teachers, essential learning resources, and health and safety measures. When children can access education, they do not encounter barriers such as fees, absence of transportation to school, and identity-based discrimination. Moreover, children with different abilities can experience similar activities and receive similar resources and educator support. Adaptable provisions of education address the needs of children made vulnerable by crises, migration, and sociopolitical changes by supplying them with platforms to voice their experiences and participate in actions for social justice. Finally, education is acceptable when schools and education practitioners provide safety, support recovery, and encourage pedagogies that capitalize and value learners' diverse backgrounds and constructs of knowledge.

In addition to armed conflicts, other crises can also close schools, such as infectious disease outbreaks, the effects of global warming, and labor-related work stoppages – the focus of this section. Teachers' unions in stable democracies and conflict-affected areas often organize demonstrations to protest, typically against insufficient salary and benefits. While strikes in more stable societies often last one to two days, teachers in some conflict-affected LMIC have closed schools for weeks and even months at a time. When teachers protest by not going to school, formal schooling during that period is no longer available. Economic analyses have found that school days lost because of teacher strikes have varying impacts on student learning and employment opportunities. In Argentina, the nearly 1,500 teacher strikes between 1983 and 2014 (an average of 372 days of school closures) were correlated with lower salaries and lower levels of employability of adults who were students during that time.¹⁰

We can observe three trends when exploring how teacher-led school closures make schooling unavailable for children for long periods of time. One trend is the inconsistent distribution of resources to teachers: namely, unscheduled salary payments, reduced salary values, and austerity measures in contractual terms. Eight years after the 2011 political revolution in Morocco, its government withdrew health care and pension benefits from the tenured teachers' contracts, but maintained the original terms for civil servants in other sectors; in response, thousands of teachers refused to go to school.¹¹ Other LMIC governments altered payment schedules in response to macroeconomic changes that weakened or collapsed their economy and, consequently, exhausted their social service sectors. The drop in crude oil prices and limited international support significantly reduced the Iraqi Kurdish government's finances and, after four months of unpaid salaries in 2016, teachers and principals in the region of Sulaymaniyah went on strike.

In the case of Lebanon, its Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) has gradually restructured its contractual terms with teachers, moving away from granting tenure to hiring substitutes. In Lebanon's public education sector, teachers can be contracted as a) tenured, b) contractual (per hour), or c) substitute. Teachers under tenured and contractual agreements are paid directly by MEHE, while money for substitute contracts comes from donor agencies or the school's operational funds. Teachers in the second-shift public schools allocated for Syrian refugee children are under contractual agreements with funds from donor agencies that are processed through MEHE. By 2017, MEHE stopped awarding new tenures. While contractual agreements continued, new teachers were given substitute contracts. In a rapid assessment of education in Lebanon in 2021, only 16 percent of sixty-five teachers interviewed were tenured, and more than half were on contractual agreements.¹²

Conflicts arise with contractual and substitute contracts because MEHE neither covers forced days off (that is, school days that MEHE cancels), provides social security benefits (including health care and pensions), nor secures timely payments. Under contractual and substitute contracts, teachers are normally paid every two months. Since 2019, however, teachers were paid every six or seven months, with substitute and second-shift teachers waiting up to eight months. In addition to working days lost during COVID-19 school closures, Lebanon's economic collapse and hyperinflation devalued their salaries by 90 percent; consequently, a monthly salary equivalent to USD 1,000 per month suddenly was worth less than USD 100. Some teachers I interviewed in 2021 reported having to borrow money for monthly expenses and repay lenders after getting paid six or seven months later.¹³

A second trend is the open-ended declarations of strikes in which public school teachers announce they will not return to school until their demands are met. Teachers and principals in Iraqi Kurdistan have routinely closed schools "until the government responds to our demands to pay our salaries."¹⁴ In Morocco,

teachers' open-ended closure of schools lasted the entire month of April in 2019.¹⁵ In Lebanon, scholar and educator Lena Bahou witnessed teacher strikes that ran for two weeks in 2012 and almost a month in 2013.¹⁶

During the compounded crises in Lebanon that started in 2019, public school teachers closed schools for six weeks starting in January 2021. Most recently, in 2023, public school teachers in Lebanon also closed schools for nearly eight weeks from January 9 until March 5; MEHE reported that 44 of the 1,404 public schools were fully functioning by February. In the second-shift for Syrian refugee children, the teachers protested by neither facilitating online learning when schools closed the first week of March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, nor returning to school when they briefly reopened before the end of that academic year. Research and humanitarian reports in Lebanon describe the long periods of school closures during the 2019–2020 and 2020–2021 scholastic years as “lost learning,” with more than 700,000 children excluded from any provision of education, and the remaining 1.3 million children having limited access to digital technology for distance education.¹⁷ These long-term closures have recently been compounded by the ongoing Israeli airstrikes on southern Lebanon in response to Hezbollah's support of Hamas following the October 7, 2023, attacks. These strikes have either fully or partially closed seventy-two schools during the 2023–2024 academic year, affecting 20,000 children.¹⁸ As the start of the 2024–2025 school year is delayed until November 4, 2024, nearly half of public schools are used as shelters from Israeli airstrikes that have forced nearly 40 percent of students in Lebanon from their homes.¹⁹ School closures for security and safety remain indefinite as the airstrikes continue to spread across Lebanon.

A third trend is the resistance from governing agencies to reconcile teachers' grievances and injustices of misgoverning remuneration. Government authorities avoid negotiating teachers' demands by either offering to pay them incentives to return to school, punishing teachers by reducing pay for the workdays missed, firing teachers, or responding to labor actions using violence. Such resistance and violence are indicative of authoritarian regimes, as in the case of Moroccan leaders' choice to violently quell teacher-led protests during the 2010 Arab uprisings.²⁰ During the month-long strike in 2019, Moroccan officials announced they would fire teachers on grounds of “leaving a job without notice” and directed security forces to use water cannons to disperse teachers' demonstrations.²¹ Kurdish authorities in Iraqi Kurdistan offered a monthly incentive of USD 115 to teachers in rural areas and USD 76 to teachers in urban areas to return to school during their protests in 2017; however, the teachers responded by asserting they would maintain the strikes until salary payments were made.²² Similarly, in Lebanon, by the third week of school closures in January 2023, a MEHE official reported that teachers were offered a “productivity allowance” of USD 100 a month for October, November, and December, and then USD 90 a month starting in February, but

the teachers rejected the proposal. As protests stretched school closures into a second month through February 2023, MEHE announced it developed a dashboard for public school administrators to systematically track which teachers come to school. Such a response from the ministry was more a demonstration of authority over teachers than a negotiation with them.

The mismanagement of resource distribution, including timely salary payments, is a manifestation of failed governance that subsequently has a causal influence on discontinued provisions of education for children. Teacher-led school closures disrupt the availability of education and increase risk factors of dropping out, lost learning, and lower levels of employability. Further, authoritarian governance can directly marginalize children when weeks of teachers' protests that close schools are confronted with punishment. Any initiatives or even intentions to review and reform the public administration of teachers' compensations are overlooked or, arguably, avoided in national education strategies.

Initiatives for reform and recovery are typically triggered by periods of transition out of armed conflict or crises or through funding agreements with international agencies, such as the Global Partnership for Education and Official Development Assistance development grants. As a result, such donor or assistance agencies become influential actors in at least some of the government institutional mechanisms that develop and monitor initiatives for equitable education. But such development and monitoring of national education strategies in Lebanon undermined educational equity by ignoring challenges in governance, privileging measurable short-term reporting metrics over sustained narratives of systemic changes, and through the absence of critical and reflexive evaluations that could have iteratively informed change strategies.

Since the end of the 1975–1990 civil war, the Lebanese MEHE has produced several national education reform strategies. Quality Education for Growth was a national strategy for education reform that included a five-year (2010–2015) education sector development plan (ESDP). The ESDP expanded the five key priorities outlined in an evidence-informed national education strategy (NES) produced by the Lebanese Association of Educational Studies in 2007 (and funded by the World Bank) into ten priority areas, as seen in Table 1.²³ The ten priorities identified and addressed the aims of education in Lebanon for social reconstruction and equitable participation. Under the ESDP, priority area two focused on the prevention of dropping out of school, possibly the greatest risk of social marginalization to highly vulnerable children in low- and middle-income families in Lebanon. Component four aimed to establish a teacher-salary scale and provide professional development and incentives. Priority area six included unlocking the stalemate of producing a revised history education curriculum that was last updated in 1970. The tenth component, on governance, aimed to improve the archiving

Table 1
Process of Specifying Priorities for the Lebanon Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP)

National Education Strategy (2007)	ESDP (2010–2015)
Education available on the basis of equal opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Early childhood education ▸ Improving retention and achievement ▸ Development of infrastructure
Quality education that contributes to building a knowledge society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Professionalization of the teaching workforce ▸ Modernization of school management ▸ Achievement assessment and curriculum development
Education that contributes to social integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Citizenship education
Education that contributes to economic development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Information and Communication Technology (ICT) degree in education ▸ National qualification framework
Governance of education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Institutional development

Source: Lebanese Association for Educational Studies, *National Education Strategy in Lebanon: Vision Document* (Lebanese Association for Educational Studies, 2007), <https://search.shamaa.org/PDF/Reports/LEa14850NESLY2007.pdf>; and Ministry of Education and Higher Education, *Quality Education for Growth* (Beirut: Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2010), https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/lebanon_edsp_2010-2015.pdf.

of documents, establish a MEHE helpdesk, develop accountability and incentives measures for staff, provide training to all administrative personnel, and produce periodic reports on monitoring and evaluation. The ten priorities received grants from donor agencies, including UNICEF (USD 0.66 million per annum), UNDP (USD 2.4 million), UNESCO (USD 3 million), European Union (EUR 13.7 million), and the World Bank (USD 40 million).²⁴

Hardly any information is publicly accessible (or maybe even in existence) about the processes and outcomes of implementing these ten priorities. Primary knowledge of the ESDP currently exists as anecdotal evidence from consultants and schoolteachers who participated in its implementation. Their testimonials described the mismanagement and termination of activities for retention and drop-out. Education practitioners within my network shared their experiences in the citizenship education component. A veiled teacher was subjected to verbal abuse by a representative from the Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD) during a recruitment interview for the citizenship education curricular reform; she was excluded based on religious expression rather than qualification. Also, the teachers and experts who were recruited reported that they were assigned to merely reproduce information. They were neither engaged nor empowered to creatively inform the production of new curricular textbooks. The absence of public reports on the experiences and outcomes of carrying out the priorities' activities undermines and prevents the progress of approaches and policies for inclusive, available, and accessible education. A well-documented and transparently monitored process is an essential component of good governance and accountability. It would also provide essential information to guide subsequent education reform plans. By 2014, however, the five-year ESDP was overtaken by donor- and government-driven emergency responses to the complex politics of the war in Syria that erupted in 2011.

The unprecedented and sudden influx of refugees from Syria into Lebanon quickly positioned Lebanon as having the highest number of refugees per capita in the world.²⁵ As local and international nongovernmental organizations rushed to provide education and health services to the refugees, international donor agencies worked closely with MEHE to produce an education strategy framework that would allow the Lebanese national education system to benefit from humanitarian funds for Syrian refugee children. As a result, MEHE and its international partners published the education strategies *Reaching All Children with Education (RACE I) for 2014–2016*, followed by *RACE II for 2017–2021*.²⁶ The education reform and development initiatives in the RACE I and II strategies emphasized the need to ensure quality schooling for the most vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian children. The reform areas in the RACE strategies were presented under three pillars: access to education, quality of education, and capacity of the education system. While RACE is overseen by the Project Management Unit at MEHE, the implementation of its activities is primarily spearheaded by the Inter-Agency Coordination group, an education-sector coalition that comprises members from UNESCO, UNICEF, and other local and international organizations.

At this nexus of aid and development, however, political drivers overshadowed efforts to implement inclusive and sustainable reform in pedagogy and governance. For instance, as the population of Syrian refugee children rapidly grew in Lebanon, education policies focused more on ensuring access to schools while al-

most downgrading policy initiatives to reform curricula and the quality of learning and teaching.²⁷ The mission of ensuring that Syrian refugee children have access to public education resulted in a second-shift school schedule that segregated refugee Syrian children in afternoon classes. Moreover, indicators of success in RACE II are mostly, if not entirely, based on quantitative values. Measuring “quality education” includes tracking the percentage of children enrolled and who pass their grade level as well as assessing the provisions for “learner-centered pedagogy” by monitoring the percentage of teachers attending MEHE training workshops. For the third pillar on governance, yes/no statement indicators were designed to “signal the strengthened system capacity” of MEHE and CERD through the production of periodic reviews and reports, including those of the RACE indicators.²⁸ Such narrow indicators and nondescriptive measures distract policymakers and education practitioners from generating discourse and innovative approaches for inclusive participation, enhanced accountability, and empowering pedagogies. Further, these indicators facilitate quick reporting to the constituencies of donor governments’ political parties who endorsed the large sums of aid to ensure that refugees are contained in Syria’s neighboring countries.²⁹ As the RACE II period ended in 2021, the public has yet to access information that reports on the processes, outcomes, and challenges of the RACE reform strategies.

The rapid inventory of numbers of teachers and children was maintained as the primary approach to measure success indicators for the current education reform strategy, the Lebanon Five-Year General Education Plan (2021–2025).³⁰ This education reform strategy was produced as MEHE and the Government of Lebanon struggled through COVID-19 school closures, a collapse of the local currency, an economic depression, and the Beirut port explosion on August 4, 2020. Although dated to include 2021, the strategy policy was released in December 2021. This five-year plan maintains the three pillars of the RACE strategies but with further developed program areas informed by a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats analysis. While some aims of the Five-Year General Education Plan target contractual teachers, its reform activities focus more on provisions of professional training than on addressing the long-standing issues related to the financial and contractual models at MEHE. As the MEHE education strategies continue to focus on the growing and unresolved marginalization of children who can neither access nor find quality education, the education system gradually deteriorates: the governance of teacher contracts remains unresolved, the national curriculum reform remains in-progress since 1997, and the years of lost learning are ignored.³¹

Institutional politics of the knowledge economy determine the knowledge production necessary for progress in the education sector, and the educational knowledge for learning and teaching in schools. In this third feature of education governance, examining the politics of the knowledge economy identifies

a) who makes decisions and how these decisions are made, b) who gets to participate and how, and c) to what extent the needs of various actors and the wider community (demand) are aligned with what knowledge is available and how it is produced (supply). Under Fraser's dimension of representation, degrees of exclusive processes of participating in the knowledge economy threaten the social justice of equitable participation. The analyses below on knowledge production and pedagogical knowledge for equitable education are also contextualized within the compounded crises in Lebanon of COVID-19 and the arrival of refugees escaping the Syrian Civil War.

In Lebanon, governing institutions' responses demonstrated political dynamics that threaten the resilience of the education sector. When schools first closed in March 2020 as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a network of aid agencies that had previously focused on efforts to support out-of-school Syrian refugee children – the Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon – mobilized their resources to publish a learning readiness in April 2020. MEHE, however, took a different direction and much longer to respond. MEHE focused more on producing decrees to guide schools on managing attendance and registration than actively managing and overseeing distance learning. According to a study on the resilience of Lebanon's education system when responding to compounded crises, its governing institutions demonstrated capacities that, to a concerning degree, contributed to weakening the resilience of its education system.³²

One and a half years after schools first closed, MEHE responded with a draft strategy on distance education and its five-year general education plan. Not only did MEHE seldomly refer to existing research to support the proposed reform program areas, but the strategies were developed by a small group of individuals and primarily targeted donor agencies for funding support.³³ Furthermore, with the support of teachers, CERD produced lessons on YouTube, which were inaccessible to most people who did not have stable access to electricity, internet, or digital hardware. MEHE also collaborated with agencies such as the Red Cross and UNICEF to prepare information videos and pamphlets on COVID-19 health and safety measures. Again, however, access to this information was limited to those with electricity, internet, digital hardware, *and* the knowledge that such information was available. As a result of the economic collapse, virtually all universities in Lebanon could no longer afford subscriptions to online databases, salary values in U.S. dollars, or conference travel, with exception to those with established endowments.³⁴

In nonformal and formal education, educational knowledge is designed, developed, and engaged within the national curriculum framework. The Lebanese national curriculum was last revised in 1997 as an outcome of the post-civil war reform initiatives. While this curriculum placed new emphasis on a dual Lebanese-Arab national identity for social cohesion, it was still designed for children to reproduce the information provided.³⁵ The reform process excluded input from school-

based stakeholders such as teachers, students, and principals.³⁶ Since then, efforts to revise the knowledge fields in the national curriculum have largely focused on the reduction of curricular content.³⁷ Moreover, curriculum reform initiatives taking place at CERD and MEHE after 2020 have relied on the participation of selected individuals and reports produced by organizations. Indeed, a departure from 2013, when policymakers at MEHE resisted qualitative findings of teachers' and learners' experiences and visions of a new citizenship education curriculum.³⁸

Pedagogical knowledge – the understandings and approaches of learning and teaching – in the Lebanese public education sector lies within the jurisdiction of MEHE, which provides coaching after classroom observations, and the training bureau at CERD. Teachers have described these provisions of continuous professional learning as spaces to listen to what MEHE and CERD envision as best practices, with no intention to draw on the teachers' approaches, professional knowledge, or reflections. Without opportunities for teachers to feed into discourses on innovative pedagogy, they are structurally positioned as passive recipients of directives that only prepare them to act as transmitters of knowledge that, drawing on Freire's banking metaphor, deposit information into children as receptacles.³⁹

The interplay between governing institutions and school-based users of knowledge demonstrates a "disequilibrium in the supply and demand of knowledge."⁴⁰ This imbalance results from key actors at institutional levels working without the input of stakeholders, selecting what pedagogical and content knowledge is essential (or what knowledge is in demand). The same actors then design and distribute the resources that determine children's learning experiences (supply). At the same time, school-based practitioners and learners would have identified their actual needs (demands), which are not only different from but also sometimes in conflict with the knowledge economy curated by governing institutions. As a result, the supplies received from governing institutions create an incongruity when education practitioners draw on existing resources to ensure that vulnerable children have available and accessible provisions of education.

Governance structures and mechanisms have direct and indirect effects on how children and teachers represent their experiences to improve classroom pedagogies. Governing institutions also determine how school-based practitioners receive and access resources not only for learning and teaching, but also for basic living needs vital to providing education services to children. Initiatives to reform governance have focused more on building capacities of human resources to carry out administrative and operational activities more efficiently, such as organizing archives of information, professional development, and creating policies that institutionalize planned initiatives. Rarely do such initiatives address governance processes that have struggled in response to crises that threaten education equity, including fair distribution of resources and ensuring the availability of

education. Under weak governance, new crises not only amplify existing barriers to parity of participation and children's rights to education, but also generate different forms of marginalization. Institutions managing education when driven by authoritarian political philosophy and exclusionary governance can shape policies and practices that undermine equity in education in LMIC affected by conflict.

Innovative approaches to governance reform would require a conflict analysis that maps the relations and responses among governing actors, donor agencies, school-based practitioners, and learners. The analysis should consider changes or stagnation over time and responses to crises that threaten educational equities, such as school closures, structural exclusion of people with disabilities, poor emergency response plans, unsustainable financial models, policy stalemates between political actors and education practitioners, the unavailability of strategy reports, and the exclusive participation of education strategy development. Transforming institutional governance also requires a shift in the power relations between the authorities and the public service providers from one that ensures workers follow all regulations to one that negotiates to secure fair distribution of resources to public workers and the availability of and access to quality education for children.

Other pathways for reform and recovery exist but are also often ignored or, arguably, structurally marginalized. One option is built through the empowerment and innovations of school-based practitioners, such as teachers. Innovation is a critical variable not only for economic growth and participation but also when advancing the knowledge fields of pedagogy and disciplines. Despite the significance of innovation, political actors in education governance within these contexts maintain their positional power as they discourage and prevent the empowerment of teachers as innovators and researchers. Nevertheless, niche networks of teachers and researchers have transpired through inspiration, risk-taking, humility, and organized planning. Testimonials from Lebanon and other conflict-affected areas reveal previously neglected and marginalized pathways that nonetheless can still be influential through integrity and empowerment.

Changes to approaches to learning and teaching have largely been facilitated by teacher-driven organizations in civil society. The Lebanese Centre for Civic Education and the Lebanese Association for History (LAH) are two NGOs that have supported teachers in pioneering pedagogies that engage children in collaborative, deliberative, and dialogic learning activities. The LAH, for example, has also invested in transforming the learning of history from the dominant practice of reciting text into a disciplinary approach that requires learners to critically examine multiple and even conflicting narratives to write conclusions about the past. However, the opportunity to empower teachers to develop pedagogical knowledge is limited to unpublished program evaluation reports or the exceptionally low number of academic studies.

School-level pathways allow practitioners to innovate and exercise agency to ensure equitable opportunities for their students to learn both during crises and more stable times.⁴¹ However, in conflict-affected LMIC, such pathways are typically perceived by governing institutions as commendable but still subject to compliance. Governance practices simultaneously disempower local actors while burdening them with increasing levels of bureaucratic and managerial responsibilities. Sustainable transformations, therefore, require actors in governing institutions – donor agencies, ministries of education – to pioneer accountability measures and a democratized knowledge economy.

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Constructing Effective Civic Education for Noncitizen Students

Angela M. Banks

Primary and secondary education is essential because it not only provides students with critical literacy and numeracy skills, but also, for many students, it begins their civic education. The goals of civic education vary by country, but a consistent goal is to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to be productive members of society. Globally, approximately thirty-six million children are living outside of their country of nationality. With the growing number of migrant children, states are facing two challenges to effective civic education. The first is access to schools, and the second is creating a civic education curriculum that effectively prepares all students to participate in society in ways that align with democratic principles and goals. This essay focuses on unauthorized migrant children's access to public schools and argues for civic education to incorporate the exploration of membership boundaries so that students, citizen and noncitizen alike, can study unauthorized migrants' participation in society within the context of membership status. This exploration offers students the opportunity to consider how to better align unauthorized migrants' lived realities with their legal status – and to better realize democracy's promise.

Globally, thirty-six million children were living outside of their country of nationality in 2020.¹ These children have a variety of immigration statuses, which impact their access to primary and secondary education.² Primary and secondary education is critical not only because it provides students with essential literacy and numeracy skills, but also because it serves as a key environment for civic education. The goals of civic education vary by society, but a consistent goal is to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to be productive members of society. With the growing number of migrant children, states are facing two challenges to effective civic education. The first is access to primary and secondary schools, and the second is creating a civic education curriculum that effectively prepares all students to participate in society in ways that align with democratic principles and goals. This essay explores one of the most vulnerable populations among migrant children: unauthorized migrants.³

To begin, I examine the legal aspects of unauthorized migrant children's access to public primary and secondary schools in Malaysia and the United States.

Both countries have similar challenges related to unauthorized migration yet have different approaches to public primary and secondary school access. I explore what might account for those differences. I also examine the goals of civic education in Malaysia and the United States, as well as strategies for implementing those goals, and discuss the limitations of the current approaches for achieving them. I maintain that effective civic education needs to incorporate exploring the boundaries of membership. This entails providing students with the knowledge and skills needed to identify the existing boundaries of membership, determine how the current boundaries fit with the normative goals of society, and think creatively about alternative membership regimes when a mismatch is identified.⁴

Within international law, free public education is considered a fundamental right. The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights require state parties to “make primary education compulsory and available free to all.”⁵ The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states that the purpose of this right is to “enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.”⁶ The Convention on the Rights of the Child identifies “the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin,” along with “respect for the natural environment” as goals for education.⁷ The United States signed this treaty in 1995 but has not ratified it. Malaysia ratified the treaty in 1995 with reservations. In particular, Malaysia stated that the provision governing compulsory free education would only be applicable in Malaysia if it was “in conformity with the Constitution, national laws and national policies of the Government of Malaysia.”⁸ Malaysia has neither signed nor ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, while the United States signed this agreement in 1977 but has yet to ratify it.⁹ Therefore, the international right to a free public primary education for all is not recognized in Malaysia or in the United States.

Domestic law within the United States and Malaysia differentially recognizes noncitizens’ right to a free primary education. In the United States, the Supreme Court held that the Constitution does not include a fundamental right to education.¹⁰ But it also held that unauthorized migrant children cannot be denied a free primary and secondary public school education.¹¹

In 1973, in *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, concerned parents challenged the use of property taxes to fund public primary and secondary schools in Texas, arguing that it was a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the United States Constitution. This provision of the Constitution states that no state shall

“deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”¹² The Alamo Heights Independent School District received \$26 per student in funding based on property tax revenue while the Englewood Independent School District received \$333 per student based on property tax revenue.¹³ The Alamo Heights district residents were predominantly Mexican American while the residents of the Englewood district were predominately “Anglo.”¹⁴ The Court concluded that education is not a fundamental right “in the sense that it is among the rights and liberties protected by the Constitution.”¹⁵

Despite finding that there is no constitutional right to education, just nine years later, in *Plyler v. Doe*, the Court held that when education is offered by the state, it must conform to the Equal Protection Clause of the United States Constitution. In 1977, a school district in the state of Texas refused to enroll unauthorized migrant schoolchildren unless they paid a \$1,000 tuition fee annually.¹⁶ The Texas Education Code at the time “authorized local school districts to deny enrollment to children not legally admitted to the United States or to charge such children tuition.”¹⁷ The Texas school district’s policy was challenged as a violation of the Equal Protection Clause, and the Court agreed: “If the State is to deny a discrete group of innocent children the free public education that it offers to other children residing within its borders, that denial must be justified by a showing that it furthers some substantial state interest. No such showing was made here.”¹⁸ Therefore, school districts within the United States must provide free primary and secondary education to students without regard to immigration or citizenship status.

In Malaysia, access to publicly funded primary and secondary schools is dependent on one’s ability to produce identity documents.¹⁹ The United Nations special rapporteur on the right to education, Vernor Muñoz Villalobos, noted that “one of the most serious education-related problems in Malaysia is the lack of access to education, at all levels, for children lacking Malaysian citizenship status, including refugee children, asylum-seekers, children of migrant workers, and stateless children, possibly as well street children.”²⁰ The common problem for these children is that they lack identity documentation. Many of these children do not have birth certificates because they are born in “remote areas of the country” and are at risk of “not being registered at birth.”²¹

In the 1990s, policy changes regarding school enrollment introduced “more stringent identity document requirements for school entry, making it difficult for undocumented and noncitizen children to enter public schools.”²² Prior to this time, school heads had a significant amount of discretion and could enroll students on a case-by-case basis.²³ Children need a birth certificate to attend school, but birth registration is a significant impediment for the children of low-wage migrant workers because these migrant workers are legally prohibited from bringing their families with them to Malaysia or from forming new families in Malaysia.²⁴ Migrant workers in low-wage jobs who attempt to register the birth of their chil-

dren in Malaysia risk deportation and other legal penalties. Therefore, a significant number of low-wage migrant workers do not register the births of their children, which precludes the children from accessing public education. Yet even if the children have birth certificates, free access to government-supported primary and secondary schools was limited to citizens in 1995. Noncitizen children could attend but were required to pay an annual fee. In 2019, Malaysia adopted the Zero Reject Policy to enable children lacking identity documents to access public primary and secondary schools, yet only certain children were eligible.²⁵ The policy limited access to noncitizens adopted by Malaysian citizens, children born out of wedlock to a Malaysian citizen father and non-Malaysian citizen mother, and noncitizen children whose parents are noncitizens lawfully admitted to Malaysia for specific purposes.²⁶

In 2002, the Education Act 1996 (Act 550) was amended to make primary education compulsory for all Malaysian citizens between the ages of six and twelve.²⁷ Malaysia does not grant citizenship based on the *jus soli* principle (that is, people are not automatically granted citizenship because they were born in Malaysia). Instead, citizenship is granted to individuals born within Malaysia who have a parent who is a citizen or permanent resident.²⁸ Therefore, the majority of the unauthorized migrant children born in Malaysia do not have access to Malaysian citizenship, and thus are not included in the group of children for whom primary education is compulsory.

Due to the legal barriers unauthorized migrant children face in attending public primary and secondary school, they are “reliant on informal education from alternative or community learning centres supported by civil society organisations, faith-based organisations, private donors, and local communities.”²⁹ However, because of financial restraints that limit access to trained teachers, these learning centers are not an adequate substitute for public schools.³⁰ For example, a 2023 study of educational opportunities for unauthorized migrant children found that many learning centers are not state-endorsed because they are unable to satisfy the licensing requirements.³¹ This exposes the learning centers to the risk of incurring significant fines or being shut down by the Ministry of Education. The learning centers generally rely on volunteer teachers and teachers from the community because of funding limitations.³² The volunteer teachers “were unpaid, unable to commit to regular teaching schedules, nor trained in teaching a fixed syllabus.”³³ Additionally, there was a high turnover of the teachers at the learning centers.³⁴ Because of these constraints, I will focus on the public school system and offer one approach for conceptualizing unauthorized migrants as members that could facilitate their access to public schools.

In Malaysia and in the United States, status as a member or nonmember plays an important role in determining access to education.³⁵ In both societies, unauthorized migrants are generally viewed as nonmembers, yet the willingness

of the law to recognize their long-term presence within society varies. These differential acknowledgments help to explain the dissimilar access that unauthorized migrant children have to schools in Malaysia and the United States.

Malaysia and the United States face an immigrant labor paradox. Both countries have relied on foreign labor for their own economic growth, yet foreign labor has been viewed as an economic, social, and political threat to mainstream society. In Malaysia, this reliance began during Britain's colonial rule, when labor was imported from China and India for the coffee, coconut, and rubber plantations, the tin mines, and the construction of railways, roads, and buildings.³⁶ Foreign labor has continued to be an important source of labor and economic growth. The United States has similarly relied on foreign labor in different forms, from "enslaved people of African descent doing agricultural, domestic, and skilled labor in the American South to Chinese laborers building the transcontinental railroad to Southern and Eastern European workers in factories across the country during the second Industrial Revolution to Mexican laborers staffing the agricultural expansion in the American Southwest."³⁷ In both countries, one of the reasons that foreign labor has been and remains desirable is because of the ability of employers to maximize profits by offering substandard wages and working conditions.

The latest estimates show that there are 11 million unauthorized migrants in the United States and approximately 1.2 million to 3.5 million in Malaysia.³⁸ In the United States, approximately one million unauthorized migrants are under the age of eighteen, and in Malaysia, approximately 472,000 children are noncitizens.³⁹ Unauthorized migrants are the subject of several threat narratives that justify positioning them as nonmembers. These threat narratives typically portray unauthorized migrants as: unfair labor competition because of their willingness to work for lower wages and in less desirable working conditions, individuals who take more from society (in the form of social services) than they contribute through taxes, transmitters of contagious diseases, and perpetrators of violent crime and other social harms.⁴⁰

Public opinion is often shaped by these threat narratives, and the United States and Malaysia have responded with legal measures to minimize the size of the unauthorized migrant population. Historically in the United States, this has led to laws that prohibited the entry of certain migrants, like Chinese laborers and unskilled contract laborers, or laws that created more stringent admissions requirements such as literacy tests.⁴¹ During the Trump presidency (2017 to 2021), responding to public concerns that are rooted in the threat narratives, the United States banned migration from specific countries, limited access to asylum, conducted raids, and separated migrant parents and children in ways that prevented reunification.⁴² Malaysia has similarly passed laws to increase fines and punishment for unauthorized migration, conducted massive raids, deported unauthorized migrants, and entered into bilateral agreements to restructure the labor re-

cruitment process. For example, the Immigration Act was amended in 2002, and the Malaysian government deported almost four hundred thousand Indonesian workers.⁴³ This was not the first time the government used forceable repatriation to respond to unauthorized migration, but “it was the largest single repatriation ever undertaken.”⁴⁴

Both the United States and Malaysia have experienced significant inflection points in public concern about unauthorized migration. These inflection points have occurred in the midst of increased deportations, which signal an untenable number of unauthorized migrants. During one such pivotal moment in the United States, a period of increased deportations along the U.S. Southern border in the 1970s, the state of Texas attempted to limit unauthorized migrant children’s access to public primary and secondary schools. The action was challenged, and the United States Supreme Court concluded that unauthorized migrant children could not be denied a free primary and secondary education. Today, the United States is experiencing another significant inflection point, and the current Texas governor, Greg Abbott, has stated that he thinks Texas “will resurrect that case and challenge this issue again, because the expenses are extraordinary and the times are different.”⁴⁵ Malaysia experienced a significant inflection point in the early 2000s, an increase in the number of deportations of unauthorized Indonesian workers, that led to the enactment of the 2002 Migration Act, which includes a zero-tolerance policy toward unauthorized migrants.⁴⁶ This act provides that unauthorized migrants in Malaysia can be subject to up to five years of imprisonment, fines, or caning. Around the same time, the Education Act 1996 (Act 550) was amended to make primary education compulsory for children ages six to twelve, but only for the children of Malaysian citizens.⁴⁷ Entities within the United States and Malaysia have responded to concerns about unauthorized migration by limiting children’s access to school. Malaysia has been successful because of documentation requirements for enrollment and a legal mandate for compulsory primary education that does not include noncitizen children. The United States prevented Texas from limiting unauthorized migrant children’s access to school. However, Governor Abbott’s willingness to test the Supreme Court’s decision and limit unauthorized migrant children’s access to school presents an ongoing threat.

The United States and Malaysia are both democracies with diverse racial, ethnic, and religious populations. While the United States is a representative democracy and Malaysia is a parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy, both countries contend with building a cohesive and unifying national identity amid significant diversity. Both societies have historically defined national membership based on ethnocultural characteristics, including common racial, ethnic, or religious heritage and culture. Both societies are also formally striving to cement a national identity that is based on shared civic values

and beliefs.⁴⁸ Civic education is one tool for socializing students around a specific national identity that entails values, norms, and practices.

Civic education generally refers to educating students about the knowledge and skills needed for participation and engagement in a democratic society. This includes information about the people who make up society: who they are, what they do, why they do it, and how they do it. In a democratic society, participatory values, norms, and practices answer many of these questions. Yet local norms will also shape a society's approach to national identity and what is deemed necessary for appropriate civic engagement.

Education scholar James A. Banks defined four approaches to multicultural curriculum reform, which seeks to prepare students to be responsible participants in a democratic society. The first approach is the contributions approach, which incorporates specific resources into a curriculum that celebrates the holidays, heroes, and significant events from different racial, ethnic, religious, gender identity, and other groups within the society. The second approach, the additive approach, incorporates cultural content, concepts, themes, and perspectives into the curriculum by and about people from diverse groups. For example, incorporating the Native American perspective about Columbus Day when it is studied in the United States. The transformation approach, the third approach, changes the structure of the curriculum to encourage students to view concepts, issues, themes, and problems from multiple perspectives. For example, a unit on Thanksgiving in the United States would explore the events leading to the holiday from the perspective of the Pilgrims and Native Americans, and would include ideas of settler colonialism.⁴⁹ Finally, the social action approach enables students to participate in projects and activities to "take personal, social, and civic actions related to the concepts, problems, and issues they have studied."⁵⁰ This approach allows students "to know, to care, and to act."⁵¹ The social action approach is the best approach for socializing students to become responsible participants within a democratic society; it is the best way for civic education to effectively achieve its goals.

Democracy values liberty, justice, equality, and the fair treatment of all people, yet the realization of these values for all individuals within a society is often elusive. If students are not given opportunities to explore the gaps between democracy in theory and democracy in action, it will be challenging for them to be responsible participants. Yet the social action approach to civic education is not universally appreciated. As James Baldwin explained in his 1963 essay *A Talk to Teachers*,

The purpose of education, finally, is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decisions, to say to himself this is black or this is white, to decide for himself whether there is a God in heaven or not. To ask questions of the universe, and then learn to live with those questions, is the way he achieves his own identity. But no society is really anxious to have that kind of person around. What so-

cieties really, ideally, want is a citizenry which will simply obey the rules of society. If a society succeeds in this, that society is about to perish. The obligation of anyone who thinks of himself as responsible is to examine society, and try to change it and to fight it – at no matter what risk. This is the only hope society has. This is the only way societies change.⁵²

The social action approach to civic education is an ongoing project in the United States and Malaysia.

Civic education in the United States has significantly transformed since the 1940s and 1950s. The country has striven for a cohesive and unifying national identity. This idea is often conveyed through the phrase *e pluribus unum* (out of many, one), which appears on the currency. Civic education has played a significant role in operationalizing this goal. The earliest efforts, which dominated until the 1970s, used an assimilationist approach, trying to “ensure that one dominant mainstream culture was shared by all.”⁵³ This approach views civic education as a tool for controlling ethnic, cultural, religious, or racial differences. People from minority groups were compelled to forsake their native cultures and languages to achieve complete assimilation. The objective was to foster a society comprising uniform members, in which the presence of migrants and ethnic minorities would not substantially alter the existing cultural framework. During the 1970s, this method largely fell out of favor, primarily because of the ethnic revitalization movements that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. These movements disputed the concept of a uniform national culture and the notion that it was essential for individuals to distance themselves from their ethnic, racial, or national backgrounds to foster deep national allegiances. To that end, multicultural civic education acknowledged the detrimental effects of the assimilationist strategy and concentrated on assisting students from various groups to fully embrace their citizenship without relinquishing significant elements of their ethnic culture. Through a transformative approach, multicultural civic education teaches students to be “social critics who can make thoughtful decisions and implement their decisions in effective personal, social, and civic actions.”⁵⁴ The implementation of social action and transformative approaches to civic education is a work in progress.

In the 1960s, when the United States was experiencing significant social changes related to race and gender, Malaysia was experiencing similar significant social changes. Malaysia gained independence from Britain in 1957 and faced the task of creating national unity in a country that had been under colonial rule and operated with a policy to divide and rule. This policy separated the territory and occupations along ethnic lines. Workers were imported from China and India. Chinese workers were concentrated in urban areas while Indian workers were concentrated on plantations, and the native Malay population resided primarily in rural areas. This geographic divide also mapped onto an economic divide. Indi-

viduals of Chinese descent were viewed as “controlling the economy,” leaving Malays with fewer opportunities for economic advancement. The immigration of significant numbers of foreign workers during colonialization “transformed the country from a relatively homogeneous society to a plural society with different religions and languages.”⁵⁵ Post-independence Malaysia has utilized several different approaches to forge a national identity that respects the diverse languages and cultures of the country’s long-term residents. For example, the Malaysian Federal Constitution of 1957 grants citizenship to non-Malays, and states that it is the king’s responsibility to “safeguard the special position of the Malays and the legitimate interests of other communities.”⁵⁶

But on May 13, 1969, it was unmistakable that the goal of national unity had yet to be achieved. After the Alliance Party, the ruling coalition, narrowly won the general election three days earlier, racial tensions exploded. Opposition parties supported by non-Malay communities had significant electoral success and violence ensued. Hundreds of people died, and the violence made national unity an urgent priority.⁵⁷ The government responded by introducing a declaration of national unity on Merdeka Day (Independence Day) in 1970. *Rukunegara*, the name of the declaration and policy, expresses a commitment to “the achievement of a united nation in which loyalty and dedication to the nation shall over-ride all other loyalties.”⁵⁸ It further states the objective as “achieving a greater unity of all Malaysians, maintaining a democratic way of life, creating a just society where the nation’s wealth could be equally shared, ensuring a liberal approach to Malaysia’s rich and diverse cultural traditions, and building a progressive society.”⁵⁹ Three major principles guide the operationalization of these goals: 1) “the National Culture must be based on the indigenous culture of the region,” 2) “the suitable elements from other cultures can be accepted as part of the National Culture,” and 3) “Islam is an important component in the moulding of the National Culture.”⁶⁰

National plans introduced in 1971 to address economic development and national unity have described education policy as a strategy “to encourage common values and loyalties among all communities and in all regions.”⁶¹ The current approach to civic education was instituted in 2019, and it incorporates civics education in multiple subjects such as English, Malay, moral education, Islamic studies, and history. Civic education has been a tool for achieving national unity through a shared national identity. However, scholars have critiqued the national identity pursued as one that marginalizes the Chinese and Indian communities within Malaysia.⁶²

Political scientist Helen Ting has analyzed lower-secondary history textbooks in Malaysia and found that there has been a significant shift in the coverage of “historical themes related to major ethnic groups.”⁶³ There has been a decrease in the coverage of ethnic Chinese and Indians in textbooks.⁶⁴ She found that between 1989 and 2020, “the greatly reduced number of pages relating to the histor-

ical role of non-Malays in successive editions during this period means that they are rendered almost invisible and assigned to the margins of these narratives.”⁶⁵

Malaysia’s prior approach to civic education, “Civics and Citizenship Education,” was introduced in 2005 as separate courses for primary and secondary students. The objective of this curriculum was for students to “develop an understanding on the diversity between races, fostering patriotism and national integration among the children.”⁶⁶ This was done through content that enabled students to learn their respective ethnic history and culture and that of the other major groups in the country. Education scholar Sing Yee Tan’s examination of the textbooks used for the civic education curriculum has described them as “celebrat[ing] differences in a pluralistic society,” concluding that “students are encouraged to operate successfully in their racial culture and embrace the national identity. . . . The focus of the curriculum is to make students proud of their racial heritage and cultural differences.”⁶⁷ Tan critiques this approach to civic education because students are not provided the opportunity to examine power and social structure, or gain other knowledge and skills necessary for participating in a plural society. Tan also explains that “students will only recognize the cultural ornaments and festivals of the other races,” and not gain a deep enough understanding of various groups to understand concepts, issues, themes, and problems from their perspectives.⁶⁸

The United States and Malaysia have used civic education as a tool for national identity socialization. While both societies are multiracial, multiethnic, and multi-religious, the states have taken different approaches to acknowledging that diversity within civic education. Malaysia has focused on developing a cohesive national identity that increasingly prioritizes Malay cultural aspects in certain subjects, and the United States has emphasized civic engagement within democracy. Neither society has widely adopted a social action approach to civic education, which is a missed opportunity.

Civic education plays an important role in socializing children to acquire the values, norms, and practices essential for participation in society. Children without lawful immigration status do not have access to the civic education offered in public schools in Malaysia, but they do in the United States. The differential approaches to school access reflect different conceptions of unauthorized migrants’ membership within society. In Malaysia, these children are viewed as nonmembers, and consequently are often legally invisible. In the United States, these children experience partial membership. Their long-term residence in the United States and their lack of culpability in arriving or remaining there without authorization are often pointed to as reasons why they should not be treated as total nonmembers. These reasons supported the Supreme Court’s decision in *Plyler*. Yet a federal court judge recently used the term “illegal alien” to

refer to young people in the United States without lawful immigration status and included a lengthy footnote defending his use of the term. The judge explained that *alien* is a term of art to refer to immigrants and that the young people at issue were not in lawful immigration status. He concluded that “*illegal alien* is not an opprobrious epithet: it describes one who is present in a country in violation of the immigration laws (hence ‘illegal’).”⁶⁹ Yet he failed to acknowledge that the term conveys the idea that certain noncitizens (people) are illegal, and people cannot be illegal. Actions can be illegal, but people cannot. His doubling down on calling people illegal dehumanizes the people he is describing and reinforces their status as nonmembers.

When children without lawful immigration status are denied access to civic education in free public primary and secondary schools, they miss out on important socialization opportunities. Even if civic education is not consistently taught from a social action approach, it provides important knowledge about the values, skills, and practices deemed valuable within society. Lack of access to civic education may cause children to incompletely internalize the values, norms, and practices necessary for civic engagement. This may not be problematic if the children deemed nonmembers are transient or remain in the society for short periods of time. Yet, in the United States and Malaysia, individuals deemed nonmembers based on their immigration status are often long-term residents.

In the United States, the unauthorized migrant population is estimated at eleven million individuals.⁷⁰ Sixty-two percent of this population have lived in the United States for at least ten years.⁷¹ Twenty-one percent have lived in the United States for at least twenty years.⁷² In Malaysia, it is estimated that there are somewhere between 1.2 million and 3.5 million unauthorized migrants.⁷³ As in the United States, a significant portion of the unauthorized migrants in Malaysia are unauthorized due to overstaying a visitor visa. Many of these individuals are also long-term residents. A report from the International Labour Organization explains that “more than 70 percent of the undocumented workers are from Indonesia” and approximately “half of the Indonesians who entered Sabah [a state within Malaysia] under a tourist visa between 1996 and February 2003 failed to return home upon the expiry of their visa.”⁷⁴ In both the United States and Malaysia, unauthorized migrants are long-term residents who develop significant familial, community, and economic ties to their country of residence. Children in this category will generally spend the remainder of their lives in their country of residence. Denying unauthorized migrant children access to public education denies them an important source of civic education. When this happens, the state risks having a significant portion of the population lacking the values, norms, and practices required for responsible participation in a democratic society. The U.S. Supreme Court expressed this concern in *Plyler*, stating, “education has a fundamental role in maintaining the fabric of our society. We cannot ignore the signifi-

cant social costs borne by our Nation when select groups are denied the means to absorb the values and skills upon which our social order rests.”⁷⁵ This perspective was influential in the Court holding that denying unauthorized children free access to primary and secondary public schools violated the Equal Protection Clause of the United States Constitution.

Countries confronting the immigrant labor paradox often respond by constructing or reinforcing unauthorized migrant workers’ status as nonmembers without significantly limiting employers’ access to low-wage foreign workers. This approach is unjust and untenable. Denying long-term residents access to basic resources while depending upon their labor for economic prosperity undermines two fundamental democratic principles: equality and the fair treatment of all people. Shifting this approach to unauthorized migrants requires recognizing these individuals as members based on the *jus nexi* principle, which defines membership based on an individual’s connections to society.⁷⁶ The focus is on presence within a community and the personal relationships and participation that link a person to the wider society. The *jus nexi* principle provides a framework for recognizing unauthorized migrants as members of the communities in which they reside, and allows society to formally recognize the social fact of membership that so many unauthorized migrants experience. For example, Uriel is one of “21 immigrant youth . . . [who held] sit-ins in congressional offices on Capitol Hill” in 2010 to support the Dream Act.⁷⁷ He lacks lawful immigration status in the United States, yet identifies as an American. His American identity is based on his education and socialization in the United States. Access to primary and secondary schools fostered an identity as an American rooted in a commitment to democratic values. Uriel explained that “when we fail to speak up, when we fail to criticize, when we fail to stand up for our ideals, and when we fail to improve the lives of those around us; it is a far greater blow to the freedom, the decency, and to the justice which truly represents this nation we call home.”⁷⁸ Uriel’s statement is the desired outcome of the social action approach to civic education. Unauthorized migrant children’s access to this education is necessary to realize the promise of democracy.

Civic education can address this challenge by allowing students to explore the boundaries of membership. Rather than simply presenting the requirements for citizenship, students should be provided with opportunities to “examine who is a citizen, who has access to citizenship, and whether those decisions accurately or fairly reflect the values and norms governing a democratic society.”⁷⁹ Through such explorations, different approaches to membership can be explored, like the *jus nexi* principle. These types of discussions and activities are valuable (even if only citizens and lawfully present noncitizens are in the classroom) because they lay the foundation for citizens to reexamine who are members of the society and what rights, responsibilities, and benefits should extend to members and non-

members. This approach to civic education also allows citizens to reconsider the rights, responsibilities, and benefits of current citizens and whether they “fairly reflect the values and norms governing a democratic society.”⁸⁰

There are two critical components for civic education for noncitizens. The first is access to public schools, where students are exposed to civic education curricula. The second is the content of civic education curricula. To best prepare students for participation within a democratic society, students must have the opportunity to experience transformation and social action approaches to civic education. Both the United States and Malaysia continue to struggle with enacting an inclusive approach to membership. Long-term residents are framed as nonmembers based on their unauthorized immigration status. Legal rights, access to resources, and opportunities to participate in society are all shaped by immigration status. Instituting transformation and social action approaches to civic education would allow students to explore how member/nonmember boundaries are drawn, why they are drawn, and how they are justified. To solidify broader conceptions of membership within a society that actualizes the democratic principles of liberty, justice, equality, and the fair treatment of all people, students need access to transformation- and social action-oriented civic education. This approach would support educators in having students explore issues related to who is in their classrooms and who is not, and would help them begin to uncover why and whether something should be done about it, and if so, what. It is these kinds of explorations that best prepare students to participate in a democratic society in ways that enable that society to realize the promises of democracy more fully.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ “Migration,” UNICEF Data, April 2021, <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/migration>.
- ² The variety of immigration statuses of children living outside of their nationality include refugee status, permanent authorized status, temporary authorized status, and unau-

thorized status. A child’s access to public primary and secondary education can vary depending upon their immigration status.

³ The term “unauthorized migrants” will be used throughout this essay to refer to individuals who are residing within a country without legal authorization. This term is used to focus on the legal status of individuals and how that legal status impacts their access to social resources.

⁴ Angela M. Banks, *Civic Education in the Age of Mass Migration: Implications for Theory and Practice* (Teachers College Press, 2021), 18.

⁵ United Nations General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, General Assembly Resolution 44/25 November 20, 1989, art. 28; and United Nations General Assembly, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, General Assembly Resolution 2200A (XXI), December 16, 1966, art. 13.

⁶ United Nations General Assembly, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, art. 13.

⁷ United Nations General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, art. 29.

⁸ *Ibid.*, footnote 43.

⁹ United Nations General Assembly, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*.

¹⁰ *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, 457 U.S. 202 (1973).

¹¹ *James Plyler, Superintendent, Tyler Independent School District, et al. v. John Doe*, 457 U.S. 202 (1982). I use the phrase “unauthorized migrant children” to refer to children without lawful immigration status. For children in the United States, this is generally the result of entering the United States without inspection or overstaying a nonimmigrant visa. For children in Malaysia, this is generally the result of unauthorized entry into Malaysia, birth within Malaysia to parents who are unauthorized migrants and the birth was not registered in Malaysia, or being a refugee. Adults can be unauthorized migrants based on four circumstances in Malaysia: 1) they entered without authorization or work without authorization in Malaysia; 2) they have authorization to enter but work without authorization; 3) they were authorized to enter and work, but their work authorization has expired, and they continue working; or 4) refugees are unauthorized in Malaysia because Malaysia has not signed the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. Tharani Loganathan, Zhie X. Chan, Fikri Hassan, et al., “Undocumented: An Examination of Legal Identity and Education Provision for Children in Malaysia,” *PLOS ONE* 17 (2) (2022): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0263404>; and Vijayakumari Kanapathy, “Controlling Irregular Migration: The Malaysian Experience,” Working Paper 14 (International Labour Organization, 2008), 3, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_160587.pdf.

¹² U.S. Constitution, Amendment 14.

¹³ *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, 457 U.S. 12–13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 29, 37.

¹⁶ Angela M. Banks, “*Plyler v. Doe*,” in *Encyclopedia of Diversity in Education*, ed. James A. Banks (SAGE Publishing, 2012), 1668–1669.

¹⁷ Ibid., 1668.

¹⁸ *Plyler v. Doe*, 230.

¹⁹ Maheran Makhtar, Khairun Nisa Asari, and Mohd Lotpi Mohd Yusob, "Right to Education for Irregular Migrant Children in Malaysia: A Comparative Analysis," *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities* 23 (S) (2015): 90.

²⁰ United Nations General Assembly, *Promotion and Protection of All Human Rights, Civil, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Including the Right to Development Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Vernor Munoz Villalobos Addendum Mission to Malaysia*, March 20, 2009, 14.

²¹ United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, "Concluding Observations: Malaysia," *Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 44 of The Convention* (CRC/C/MYS/CO/1), June 25, 2007, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G07/426/43/PDF/G0742643.pdf>.

²² Loganathan, Chan, Hassan, et al., "Undocumented," 11.

²³ Ibid.; and Tharani Loganathan, Zhen Ling Ong, Fikri Hassan, et al., "Barriers and Facilitators to Education Access for Marginalised Non-Citizen Children in Malaysia: A Qualitative Study," *PLOS ONE* 18 (6) (2023): 7, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0286793>.

²⁴ Loganathan, Chan, Hassan, et al., "Undocumented," 2.

²⁵ Ibid., 12.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam), *Report on Access to Education in Malaysia* (Suhakam, 2024), <http://www.suhakam.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Research-Report.pdf>.

²⁸ Malaysian Constitution (1957), Part II (1); and Makhtar, Asari, and Mohd Yusob, "Right to Education for Irregular Migrant Children in Malaysia," 90.

²⁹ Loganathan, Ong, Hassan, et al., "Barriers and Facilitators to Education Access for Marginalised Non-Citizen Children in Malaysia," 2.

³⁰ Makhtar, Asari, and Mohd Yusob, "Right to Education for Irregular Migrant Children in Malaysia," 88.

³¹ Loganathan, Ong, Hassan, et al., "Barriers and Facilitators to Education Access for Marginalised Non-Citizen Children in Malaysia."

³² Ibid., 13.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ As mentioned in the introduction, the boundary between member and nonmember is not always consistent across contexts, and an individual may find themselves at times a member and at other times a nonmember. This leads to individuals occupying an in-between membership status.

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- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*
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- ⁵³ Banks, *Civic Education in the Age of Mass Migration*, 3.
- ⁵⁴ James A. Banks, “Civic Education for Noncitizen and Citizen Students: A Conceptual Framework,” in *Humanitarianism and Mass Migration: Confronting the World Crisis*, ed. Marcelo Suarez-Orozco (University of California Press, 2019), 247.

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- ⁷³ United Nations International Organization for Migration, “Malaysia.”
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⁷⁵ *Plyler v. Doe*, 221.

⁷⁶ Ayelet Shachar, *The Birthright Lottery: Citizenship and Global Inequality* (Harvard University Press, 2009); Banks, *Civic Education in the Age of Mass Migration*; and Andre M. Perry, "Toward a Theoretical Framework for Membership: The Case of Undocumented Immigrants and Financial Aid for Postsecondary Education," *The Review of Higher Education* 30 (1) (September 2006): 21–40, <https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2006.0059>.

⁷⁷ "21 Reasons Why We Should Support the Dream Act—LEGAL IMMIGRATION!" *Illegal in America: A San Francisco Blog on Civil Rights Issues*, July 22, 2010, <https://perma.cc/L8B2-M8VV>.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Banks, *Civic Education in the Age of Mass Migration*, 58.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

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(bottom) Contributors to the *Dædalus* issue “The Global Quest for Educational Equity” at the House of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Cambridge, Massachusetts, October 30, 2023. Photo by Peter Walton.



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