Critical Education

Critical Geography and Teaching Against Neoliberal Racial Capitalism in New York City Elementary Schools

Debbie Sonu, Karen Zaino and Robert J. Helfenbein

Volume 16, Number 1, 2025

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1116742ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.14288/ce.v16i1.186957

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

Institute for Critical Education Studies / UBC

ISSN

1920-4175 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Sonu, D., Zaino, K. & Helfenbein, R. (2025). Critical Geography and Teaching Against Neoliberal Racial Capitalism in New York City Elementary Schools. *Critical Education*, *16*(1), 80–103. https://doi.org/10.14288/ce.v16i1.186957

Article abstract

What might an anti-capitalist education look like? To address this question, we examine the curricular visions of 56 elementary school teachers in New York City, who were asked to design one lesson on the issue of social class and economic inequality. Grounded in neoliberal racial capitalism and critical geography, our analysis finds that teachers who emphasize specific places -- whether schools, city environments, the national context, or global landscapes – are better able to orient their teaching toward explicitly critical and systemic analyses of economic inequality and its constitutive links to race, gender, and other socio-political hierarchies. Their lessons demonstrate how teaching can disrupt the neoliberal over-reliance on the individual consumer typically found in financial literacy schemes. A presentation of their lessons, seldom found in the existing literature, is followed by a discussion of what a multi-scalar approach to economic inequality can offer to the field of research, teacher education, and teaching.

Critical Education

Volume 16 Number 1 February 1, 2025 ISSN 1920-4175

Critical Geography and Teaching Against Neoliberal Racial Capitalism in New York City Elementary Schools

Debbie Sonu
Hunter College, City University of New York

Karen Zaino
Miami University of Ohio

Robert J. Helfenbein
Mercer University

Sonu, D., Zaino, K., Helfenbein, R. J. (2025). Critical geography and teaching against neoliberal racial capitalism in New York City elementary schools. *Critical Education, 16*(1), 80-103. https://doi.org/10.14288/ce.v16i1.186957

Abstract

What might an anti-capitalist education look like? To address this question, we examine the curricular visions of 56 elementary school teachers in New York City, who were asked to design one lesson on the issue of social class and economic inequality. Grounded in neoliberal racial capitalism and critical geography, our analysis finds that teachers who emphasize specific places -- whether schools, city environments, the national context, or global landscapes – are better able to orient their teaching toward explicitly critical and systemic analyses of economic inequality and its constitutive links to race, gender, and other socio-political hierarchies. Their lessons demonstrate how teaching can disrupt the neoliberal over-reliance on the individual consumer typically found in financial literacy schemes. A presentation of their lessons, seldom found in the existing literature, is followed by a discussion of what a multi-scalar approach to economic inequality can offer to the field of research, teacher education, and teaching.

The effects of neoliberal school cultures on teaching and learning are well-documented in the academic literature. For decades, scholarship has shown how privatization, market-based competition, and a focus on accountability and the individual leads to policies and practices that exacerbate class division and favor the wealthiest percentile (Au, 2018; Lipman, 2015). For scholars in the field of critical geography, these are spatially selective strategies that demarcate the containment of class production and exact uneven flows of capitalist development (Brenner, 2004). Schools, as institutions of the state, serve an important role not only in the territorialization of urban spaces, but also as a site for analyzing the transformation of social relations that occur within, around, and through its material and cultural practices. As found, teachers are particularly adept at articulating how economic inequality circulates in their work. They share deeply felt examples of school zoning, resource allocation, and the impacts of socio-economic segregation. They witness firsthand teasing and ridicule amongst students, the disadvantages built into ability-leveled tracking structures, and the real-life struggles over access for working class students and families (Sonu & Zaino, 2023; White et al., 2013). In this paper, we present how 56 New York City elementary school teachers (grades 1-5, children ages 6-11) mobilized a study of spatial arrangements and analysis when asked to design curriculum in response to the economic inequalities that they and their young students face in their daily lives.

While analyses on how neoliberalism transforms school policy and practice is ongoing, research into how teachers are addressing economic inequality is disproportionately few (Pérez-Expósito & Servín-Arcos, 2022). Most often relegated to the secondary or high school years, economics education has only recently undergone a critical introspection into its neoclassical underpinnings, its strategic circumvention of race and coloniality, and the oversimplified prioritization of the consumer as a rational and individual decision-maker (Arthur, 2012; Shanks, 2020). Often at the expense of critical approaches to systemic inequality (Agnello & Lucey, 2008; Lucey & Henning, 2021), such traditional uptakes are reinforced by the explosion of financial literacy curriculum into schools since the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008 (see Council for Economics Education, 2021). Now adopted by 40 of the 50 states in the United States, much of what is disseminated comes directly from federal reserve banks or partnerships between state governments and national and international financial and credit organizations (Lucey & Henning, 2021; Meszaros & Evans, 2010). In a critical discourse analysis of 43 state standards in financial literacy, Agatha Soroko (2020) found that deficit perspectives on poverty were laden with gendered and raced innuendos often masked by the language of choice, empowerment, and value-neutrality. Increasingly in schools, the notion of the social, its problems and possibilities, is being rapidly replaced by a focus on the individual, its possessions and profitabilities.

In the face of neoliberal reformers who render human activity as economic calculation and in challenge to the banks and credit institutions that self-proclaim themselves educators, we take up the question: what does an anti-capitalist education look like? While elementary school teachers and students are seldom considered in the discourse on economics teaching (Swalwell, 2021), this study found that elementary school teachers do indeed see class inequality as a pervasive issue in their work as teachers. Moreover, when asked how they hoped to teach about economic inequality, more teachers than in any other category in our study expressed clear interest in a critical approach to teaching social class that included investigating laws and policies, critiquing capitalistic and meritocratic structures, and digging into the truths about how economics functions as a dividing mechanism in the United States (Sonu, 2023).

This article focuses on a subset of this data (N=47) where elementary school teachers were asked to design one lesson that examined economic inequality and issues of social class with the young children in their classrooms. Here we draw from critical geography, guided by Doreen Massey's concept of space as 'stretched-out' social relations (1994, p. 22; 2005), to examine how teachers utilized multiple and specific scales of space -- including schools, city environments, the national context, or global landscapes -- to orient their teaching toward explicitly critical and systemic analyses of economic inequality and its constitutive links to race, gender, and other socio-political hierarchies. By attending to the question of scale in curricular design, we argue that teachers who used place-attuned sites of study (Gruenewald, 2008; Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017) were more apt to disrupt over-reliance on the individual consumer and were better able to put into historical context the machinations of racial capitalism as an ongoing entanglement with the contemporary moment. This paper presents the seldom documented curricular efforts of elementary school teachers who plan to examine economic inequality through their teaching and argues that attention to space can potentially push analysis from a rational decision-making mode of understanding towards critical approaches and analyses.

In what follows, we present our work at the theoretical intersection of neoliberal economic policy, racial capitalism, and critical geography; review literature on the teaching of economic inequality and social class in elementary schools; then share a description of our survey methodology and teacher participants. Afterwards, we share the lesson plans teachers designed as steps toward an anti-capitalist education, then offer implications for how the field of economics teaching, critical geography, and teacher education can further the work of school districts and teachers in this area of immediate importance.

Theoretical Framework

Racial Capitalism in its Neoliberal Form

Scholars have convincingly demonstrated that capitalism has been raced from its inception (Robinson, 1983). Racism, as "the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability" (Gilmore, 2007, p. 28), provides the organizing logic of inequality that legitimizes what David Harvey (2017) terms *accumulation by dispossession*. The rendering of space as uninhabited or uninhabitable provides the justification and reasoning for the ongoing extraction of labor, time, and land, most often along racial lines (McKittrick, 2013). Neoliberalism, then, contains characteristics neither distinct nor recent, but rather continues an intensification of "the *longue durée* of the co-constitution of patriarchal racial capitalism and liberal democracy" (Aho, 2017, para. 3) across time and space. Typified by a series of economic policies promoting the unfettered accumulation of capital through deregulation and privatization (Brown, 2019), these policies contribute to what Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007) calls *organized abandonment,* that is, the state's ongoing withdrawal of political, economic, and social support and infrastructure from the public, a dynamic that some of the teachers in this study sought to examine. Organized abandonment produces vulnerability through public health crises such as asthma rates and the recent uneven impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; through housing insecurity and homelessness rates; and through access (or lack thereof) to essential infrastructures such as transportation, food, and jobs.

In educational scholarship, researchers have demonstrated how neoliberal discourse, policy, and practice have directed educational contexts to "[produce] docile subjects who are

tightly governed and who, at the same time, define themselves as free" (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 249). Often associated with accountability (Ambrosio, 2013), neoliberal education seeks to reduce students, teachers, schools, and communities to roles in commodity exchanges -- whether as consumers or as themselves sources from which to extract wealth (Sonu, 2018). The violence of this extraction is keenly observed at the policy level, as accountability measures and the supposed crises of underachievement serve as legitimizing narratives for public school takeovers, closures, and voucher schemes, all under the guise of *school choice* mostly targeted at historically disenfranchised communities (Lipman, 2011; 2017). The ongoing emphasis on individual responsibility in the face of high-stakes accountability pressures schools, including elementary schools, to focus on the skills and attributes narrowly associated with achievement. This is often at the expense of extracurriculars such as recess and art (Choi, 2016) but also less-tested subjects such as social studies, the only content area where standards for economics are located. At the same time, communities continue to engage in acts of resistance across a range of strategies, including protests, hunger-strikes, and testing opt-outs, among others, demonstrating the ongoing struggle for educational self-determination (Lipman, 2018). In a way, the lessons presented here represent yet another subversive move against the push for market solutions as well as the removal of criticality through high-stakes accountability and curriculum audit.

Critical Geography: A Spatial Analysis of Capital

Critical geography -- a radical subset of geographic analysis and theorizing -- begins with the understanding that space, place, power, and identity are all entangled in co-constitutive ways and further suggests that limiting the analysis of social spaces to a single scale obscures sets of relations, forces, and trajectories, as well as the machinations of power within and across each (Helfenbein, 2006; 2021). As an early scholar of critical geography, Doreen Massey (1994; 2005), evolving from roots in Marxism and feminism, was instrumental in bringing a spatial turn to cultural studies and critical social theory. Her work insisted upon the inclusion of the spatial to any examination on the ways capitalism is lived, made, and imagined. On this, she offers:

> Spatial development can only be seen as part of the overall development of capitalism. However, it is also true that many of the emerging contradictions of the economic system both take on a specifically spatial form and are exacerbated by the existence of the spatial dimension. To this extent, consideration of 'the spatial element' is essential to all effective economic analysis. (Massey, 1973, pp. 38–39)

Further, she later suggests in her seminal text *Space, Place, and Gender* that:

> The geography of social structure is a geography of class relations, not just a map of social classes; just as the geography of the economy should be a map of economic relations stretched over space, and not just, for instance, a map of different types of jobs. Most generally, 'the spatial' is constituted by the interlocking of 'stretched-out' social relations. (Massey, 1994, p. 22)

Massey's insistence on a spatial component to the analyses of capitalism is built upon the work of other critical geographers (see Harvey 2005; Lefebvre 1991; Soja 2010) but also specifically in the work of critical scholars in education (Ford 2017; Middleton 2014). For example, Sue Middleton (2014) suggests that a Lefebvrean approach to theorizing in education "must be multilayered…[as] the spatial, the historical, the conceptual and the experiential are studied as one: from the point of view of their fusion of everyday experience" (p. 177). As Henri

Lefebvre (1991), a philosopher and sociologist, posited, space is simultaneously perceived, conceived, and lived. How teachers, learners, parents, and communities all come to varied understandings about place follow scalar textures both in what they enable and what they constrain. Critical geographers, then, insist on a distinction between the terms space and place (although colloquially often interchangeable). Place is understood as "the transformation of space through investments; it is space filled with meaning for those who spend time in it…space, constructed through discursive, interpretive, lived, and imagined practices becomes place' (Helfenbein, 2021, p. 112). Following Lefebvre, people interact and interpret the spatial in diverse but important ways and social analysis that ignores these dynamics can miss critical aspects of how these social relations are lived and understood.

Teaching Economic Inequality in Elementary School

In New York City, the Scope and Sequence Standards for Social Studies Grades K-8 (NYCDOE, 2014) prominently features economics as one of six social studies themes in the elementary years. For example, kindergarteners should be able to identify examples of scarcity, describe goods and services, and explain what money is and how it is used in society. In first grade, these descriptions hook into how scarcity affects the choices that families make, and the relationship between consumers and producers to specific goods and services. These foundations build into second grade with standards on local and global production, as well as the role of banks, borrowing, and the role of taxes. Within a study on world communities, third graders should then be able to understand economic exchange as it moves across the globe, and in fourth grade be able to distinguish between the various types of resources (human capital, physical capital, and natural resources), examine the role of corporations and labor unions, and explain unemployment and tax revenue. Finally, in fifth grade, case studies of countries in the Western Hemisphere draw on history to explain the difference between barter versus currency-based economies; the role of job specialization and trade in the past and contemporary time; as well as an understanding of inflation, income, and economic growth and how government decisions affect nation-state economies.

Despite the clear inclusion of economics in the elementary years, what is strikingly missing is an overarching emphasis on systems of stratification; the role of gender, race, ethnicity, education, class, age, and religion; and the social and political inequalities and access to justice and human rights that is the fulcrum of economics teaching in the middle and secondary years (NYCDOE, 2014, p. 2; Rogers & Westheimer, 2017, Ross, 2018). While a critical economics education ought to teach about the real causes and potential solutions to financial problems, the forces that shape opportunities, and the role of the government in mitigating or exacerbating societal inequities (Harrison, et al., 2017; Sober, 2017; Stanford, 2010), the teaching of economics in elementary school is still at low levels of critical engagement and disconnected from the social world (Meszaros & Evans, 2010). Additionally, since many elementary school teachers do not enter the profession with a background in economics (Lucey & Henning, 2021), some scholars claim that teachers can easily fall back onto the dominant capitalist belief that poverty results from dispositional deficiencies that assume race- and gender-based deficit theories about economically marginalized groups (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015; Pinto & Chan, 2010). For children, the circulation of such harmful and misplaced logic begins as early as age 3 when children begin to distinguish class differences (Hazelbacker et al., 2017; Mistry et al., 2017). Studies in child psychology show that middle-income children, by age 8, hold stereotypes that wealthier peers are hard-working, intelligent, and responsible, but low-wealth peers lack these qualities, perpetuating discriminatory

impressions that poor people are lazier, prone to criminality, and uninterested in school (Bullock, 2006; Woods et al., 2005).

Despite social class being "perhaps the single most important variable in society" (Ross, 2018, p. 250), elementary school curriculum that supports the teaching of economics and social class is also often difficult to locate. Some exceptions include first-grade lessons on basic wants and needs which attempt to teach about scarcity yet often fall short of examining the forces that create such conditions (Swalwell, 2021); using children's drawings of houses or instituting a class business to discuss access and materialism (Howard et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2008), or drawing from children's literature, such as *Sí, Se Puede!/Yes We Can!* (Cohn, 2005) or *Click Clack Moo: Cows That Type* (Cronin, 2000) to examine themes of social class and labor (Chafel et al., 2007). *The Water Walker* (Robertson, 2019) shares the story of an Ojibwe water protector, and *Those Shoes* (Boelts, 2009) emphasizes the virtues of family and care over material possession.

Other examples include tracing labor and human rights through an investigation on the making and selling of clothing (Lyman, 2014; McCall, 2017), engaging first graders in an activity on resource allocation (Sonu & Herold, 2023), and a fourth/fifth-grade lesson that linked social class to students' lives, as well as through a social studies unit on immigration and labor policy (Sonu, 2022). When guided to develop curriculum on social class, elementary teachers in one study leaned on art activities and action-oriented projects, with students in these classrooms more inclined to think of class as malleable, rather than inherent (Mistry et al., 2017). Yet, such examples are disproportionately few compared to secondary grades and far from exhaustive in the literature.

Methodology

Funded by the Spencer Foundation, this Racial Equity Research Grant was designed to examine how elementary school teachers locate and make sense of social class division in their work and how they imagine using curriculum and teaching to challenge the neoliberal capitalist drive towards economic inequality, if they so desired. The study was initiated by two of the authors and recruitment followed a broad announcement to university-based teacher education programs and professional organizations in New York City. At the start, 156 teachers expressed interest in the project, and from this pool, we prioritized teachers who were working full-time as the lead teacher in one classroom, taught a range of subject areas that is typical to elementary school teaching, and represented a variety of locations and school structures, including public, charter, and private institutions. In the end, we selected 60 teachers, and 56 submitted lesson plans in the end. With approval from the ethics committee, consent forms were collected online and for the purpose of maintaining anonymity, all participants were asked to choose their own pseudonyms.

The larger project asked teachers to complete an initial survey, attend an online retreat with university faculty in history and education, and to submit an exit survey that included the design of curriculum for their current classrooms. The initial survey included a mix of Likert-scale multiple choice and open-ended questions which asked teachers to report their thoughts on teaching economic inequality, reflect upon their own childhood experiences with social class, and describe classroom moments or incidents they considered class-based (Sonu & Zaino, 2023). Notably, in the initial survey when asked to reflect on how their own classed backgrounds matter to classroom teaching, teachers reported a range of ways their own positionality led to particular stances on teaching, including: critiquing capitalism and meritocratic structures, ensuring inclusion and mitigating class-based discrimination, connecting to working-class families, advocating for

equitable access and resources, and in the least populated category, harboring feelings of hesitation to broach the issue altogether (Sonu, 2023). Yet, when analyzing the actual lesson plans submitted in the exit survey, hints of such criticality were littered throughout many more of their teaching goals and plans.

This article is based on data collected through the exit survey only which asked teachers to think about curricular design and to respond to the following verbatim questions:

- What is the big idea or central aim of your lesson?
- Imagine a 40-minute lesson in a content area of your choice. How do you begin your lesson? What are students doing? What learning activities would you create? How does your lesson end?
- How do you hope your students will change from your lesson?

The exit survey was sent out online with a two-week turn around. Data pertaining to these specific lines of inquiry were pulled out from the larger set and two authors underwent multiple rounds of analysis using the emergent design method of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2008). While we intentionally anchored the project to our interest in the teaching of economic inequality to young children, our analysis of the data underwent a more grounded and emergent process (Schwandt, 2015). The first phase of analysis began with a reorganization of data into grade levels, which we found did not demonstrate the implicit ideologies and meanings undergirding teachers' curricular ideas. We then undertook a second phase of analysis which rethought the data to consider the focus of the lesson, whether that be on identity, community/local contexts, historic/systemic, or global contexts. Using these new categories, we worked separately to thematically assemble the lessons and then reconvened to ensure consistency and discuss new emergences. From this new arrangement, we found interest in thinking about how teachers were using scales of space to illuminate the traces and manifestations of economic inequality and to see if such a framework inherently surfaced systemic inequality and a deeper understanding of past and present entanglements among capitalism, neoliberalism, and the twin pillars of race and coloniality. A third researcher, with expertise in critical geography, was then brought into the project to undergo another level of triangulated analysis before the final themes were decided.

There are some noteworthy limitations to this work. Since our recruitment only included teachers within the five boroughs of New York City, findings may not be easily generalizable to other contexts. However, the intention of this project was not to sum up best practices for teaching economic inequality to young children. Instead, we sought to document the range of curricular imaginations of a teaching population often marginalized in the related scholarship and to open inquiry for further research in the area, especially as economic inequality is an urgent reality faced by so many teachers in the public-school sector. Another limitation included the fuzzy overlaps of our categories, which we wholly accept as part of multi-scalar theories, and perceived misalignments between what teachers claimed as their teaching objectives and the actual activities they planned. We hope that as three separate researchers who conducted multiple rounds of analysis, we were able to ensure the best possible degree of verisimilitude and accuracy. We also understand that the absence of follow-up communication or interviews carries both the risk of misinterpretation and a missed opportunity to hear more about how teachers were translating their aims into lessons. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that in the survey, teachers were asked to share how they imagined teaching economic inequality without an obligation to teach it. Therefore, we were not able to capture student responses or perspectives from the teaching of these

lessons or any of the unforeseen challenges that may emerge from their actual enactment. Another phase of the larger project followed three of the teachers into their elementary school classrooms to observe their actual teaching.

Our Teachers and Students

When teachers (see Table 1 Participant Descriptions) were asked to self-identify their socio-economic background, they represented three general categories: 24 teachers described their upbringing as "working" or "lower middle-class" while 19 cited "middle-class." Eleven teachers identified as having "middle-high" or "upper" class childhoods, and three teachers wrote "unknown." Class categories were sometimes fluid or uncertain, particularly when class status was changed by immigration or sudden loss of parental employment.

Table 1
Teacher Descriptions

Race	White	Latinx	Black	Asian	Multiracial
	38.60%	24.60%	19.30%	14.00%	1.80%
Gender	Female/ woman or cisgender woman	Male or cisgender men			
	87.70%	12.30%			
Class Upbringing	Working	Low/Middle	Middle	Middle/High or Upper	Unknown or N/A
	24.5%	17.5%	33.3%	19.2%	5%
Years Teaching Experience	1-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	20 or more
	45.60%	33.30%	8.80%	10.50%	1.80%
Current Grade Level(s) taught	1	2	3	4	5
	13.60%	18.20%	18.20%	25.80%	24.20%
School type	Public	Private	Charter		
	71.90%	12.30%	15.80%		

When asked to self-identify their racial background, participants responded by using terms such as White/Caucasian (N = 22), Latinx/Hispanic or Mestizo (N = 14), Black/African American (N = 11), or Asian/Asian American (N = 8), with one participant citing "multi-racial," one undisclosed, and another who wrote "New York." Of the total 57 participants, the majority were

teachers of color at 61.4%, a participant pool higher than the city average of 42% teachers of color in the field (New York State Education Department, 2019). When describing participants at the intersections of race and class, the majority of the working/lower-middle class were teachers of color (19 out of 24), while the majority within the upper-middle/high were White (8 out of 11). Middle-class teachers were almost evenly teachers of color (10 out of 21). On teaching experience, 26 participants reported teaching 5 years or less, and 15 had been teaching for more than 10 years. All grade levels (children ages 5–11) were well-represented in this sample: 8 teachers taught first grade; 10 taught second grade; ten taught third grade; 15 taught fourth grade; and 14 taught fifth grade.

To better understand the student populations served by the teachers in our study, we asked participants to engage in an initial survey in which they answered a range of questions, including inquiries around the racial identities and social classes of their students. Participants were asked to choose from a set list of descriptors that ranged from "mostly students of color" to "a few students of color" and then "mostly low-income/working class" to "mostly wealthy/high income." According to 2022 data published by NYC Public Schools (2022), 85.3% of its 1,047,895 students are Hispanic, Black, or Asian and 72.8% are considered "economically disadvantaged." In comparison (see Table 2 Classroom Descriptions Reported by Teachers), 32 (56.1%) of teachers in our study reported working with mostly students of color, followed by 14 (24.6%) who reported half of their students and 9 (15.8%) taught in classrooms with just a few students of color. In terms of socioeconomic status, almost half the teachers (45.6%) worked with students they considered from "low-income/working class" households, the largest category, followed by 19.3% a mix of low-income and middle class. A combined 17.5% of teachers worked with students from either a mix of middle and high incomes or wealthy backgrounds.

Table 2
Classroom Descriptions Reported by Teachers

Social class	Mostly low-income/working class	26 (45.6%)
	A mix of low-income & middle class	11 (19.3%)
	Balance of all three	8 (14%)
	A mix of middle class & high income	6 (10.5%)
	Mostly wealthy/high income	4 (7.0%)
	Mostly middle-class	2 (3.5%)
Race	Mostly students of color	32 (56.1%)
	Half students of color	14 (24.6%)
	A few students of color	9 (15.8%)

Aligned with reports that show extreme segregation by race and socioeconomic status, close to 90% of low-income students in NYS attend apartheid schools (Cohen & Orfield, 2021), only eight teachers (14%) reported a mix of low-, middle- and high-income levels and only 2 teachers described their students as mostly middle class. Rather than quantitative measures such as household income, we leaned on teachers' own descriptions of socioeconomic class for themselves and their students. While this presents limitations in terms of accuracy, we found teachers' perceptions as a more important factor for how they linked curricular design to the lived experiences of their students. Moreover, though it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a detailed analysis of how perceptions of classroom demographics shaped individual teachers' lesson plans, we share the reported classroom descriptions to demonstrate the range of classrooms for which this critical spatial approach to lessons was utilized.

An Analysis of Lessons

As critical geography sees space, place, power, and identity as co-constitutive and always already entangled, the survey responses provide an opportunity to see how teachers take up a spatial analysis of economic inequality as a potential focus for curriculum. As a matter of both ontology and epistemology, analysis through this lens allowed us to read the lessons for its attention to both modes of production as well as the contours of co-existence in relation to the social and the political. The functions of power structures and the possibilities of resistance, resilience, study, and analysis, are all constrained and enabled within spatial dynamics that require a multi-scalar analysis concerned "with the greatest and least detail of these arrangements of people and resources and land over time" (Gilmore, 2019, p. 227). Here, we present the lessons that teachers designed as four interlocking and overlapping spatial categories: 1) elementary classrooms and schools, 2) local neighborhoods and New York City, 3) the United States and its histories, and 4) world and global communities.

By organizing data into these categories (see Table 3 Sample of Code and Theme Development), we by no means see them as bounded and independent. Instead, we offer each scale as an organizing tool for illuminating the range of ways that teachers engage a spatial lens when considering the political and economic dimensions of how individuals come together and move apart, of how space becomes the product of these interrelations, and of course, an imagination of how future coexistence could be (Massey, 2005).

Table 3
Sample of Code and Theme Development

Scale of Analysis	Description	Exemplary quotes
Individual* **N=9**	Understanding one's own identity; fostering empathy, emphasis on individual conduct and moral obligation	"inclusive of the needs of every individual," "no one should be treated differently," "to be fair and kind," "empathy for one another," "identity categories and what gives them privilege," "how does inequality make you feel?"
Schools/Classrooms **N=10**	Analyzing inequality in and across classrooms and schools, with focus on resources, school choice, access, and segregation	"access to different learning resources and tools," "school in different local neighborhoods," "track food waste," "school funding across two districts," "re-imagine more equitable schools," "cost/benefit of independent schools," "patterns around weekly snacks," history of school, transportation, "idea of a good/great school"
Neighborhoods/New York City **N=13**	Using local neighborhoods and New York City as sites of study, both historical and contemporary analyses	"Lower East Side garment factories," "role of immigrants in economic system," "NYC fossil fuel," "health of people in low-income areas," "settlers of Mannahatta and Lenape," "annual salaries" "wealth distribution," "public transportation," "housing costs" in NYC, Washington Heights, Corona, "ten block radius of our school," "why are people homeless?" "gentrification," "NYC landmarks," "labor unions in NY," "abolitionists," "creating a City of Tomorrow," "rise in Asian hate crimes"

Scale of Analysis	Description	Exemplary quotes
Nation-State/U.S. **N=15**	Using the United States as a basis for historical analysis	"Black Lives Matter," "the case for reparations," "Civil War and Reconstruction," "using census data," "American Revolution and focus on race and class," "food insecurity on Indigenous reservations," "early Dutch explorers (God, Gold, Glory)," "similarities between African Americans and Native American history," "social, economic, and gender classes in colonial America," "the U.S./Mexico border," "Welfare Rights Activists as models of change"
Global/World Communities **N=9**	Focusing on global and world communities, mostly through trade and sustainability	"environmental, economic, and social sustainability," "wealth and quality of life in different areas of the world," "the economy of the rainforest," "experiences of young people around the world," "trade and natural resources," "trade route around the world," "different world culture and their economic systems," "United Nations sustainable development goals"

*These lessons are not included in this paper.

For this paper, we present an analysis of only the lesson plans that directly referenced geographical space (N=47) and removed those that focused on identity, individual decision-making, or a moral sense of responsibility without explicit mention of a material place.

Elementary Classrooms and Schools

While all the lessons in this paper acknowledge how institutions reproduce in part systems of contiguous domination and hierarchy, those in this specific category (N=10) mobilized inequities in and across classrooms and schools as spaces for analysis. These empirical studies showed how encounters, both passages and obstacles among and between certain individuals, are geographically mediated in everyday life (Ahmed, 2000; Simonsen, 2012), with profound influence on our sense of belonging within specific schools and communities. For example, Cruz, a fifth-grade teacher, sought "to analyze data of school funding across two districts, including their own and another in a more affluent neighborhood" in order to explore whether they thought

"students all over the city should get the same resources." She concluded that "while these might not be easy discussions, [students] need to be aware of the disparities." By presenting images of differently resourced schools, Jennifer, another fifth-grade teacher, also planned for students to research websites and articles on "schools found in different local neighborhoods," to practice parsing out facts from opinion, and in the end, create a news report as part of the already existing unit on journalism and bias in the media.

With an emphasis on change and imagination, some teachers drew from the problem-solving and liberatory potential of teaching about economic inequality as a matter of space (see Schmidt, 2011). As "space is the product of interrelations" (Massey, 2005, p. 9), teachers like Christina elicited notions of fairness with her first graders and planned a simulation on how transportation and access shaped varying degrees of opportunity for students. By passing out more materials to those who lived closer to school, she asked the students "to share why they think this is a fair way to determine how much each receives," then led students into identifying "what makes a situation unjust and possible solutions to the issue." Aries, a first-grade teacher, opened her lesson with the question, "what kind of school should kids have?" and led children into an investigation of "different schools in our neighborhood…and how they compare to their ideas about good/great schools. In the end, she hoped "that students start to become more aware of the privileges they have by attending a 'progressive school.'" Third/fourth-grade teacher Gabriela similarly took up the links between access and privilege by "identifying demographic trends of families who enroll their children in independent schools" and determining "the costs and benefits of those decisions." She hoped her lesson "will enable students to think critically about their educational opportunities and resources," and to "consider concrete changes…to make schools more inclusive to people from different socioeconomic statuses."

Manuel, a fifth-grade teacher, planned a lesson that targeted the "segregated norms" that track and privilege gifted students over the general or special education student population. He aimed for students to have an "awakening" and "re-imagine how their school can better serve them." Two teachers, one in second and one in fifth, designed lessons for environmental consciousness and sustainability, both aiming to reduce food waste and single-use plastics at their schools either by "working together as a team" to develop solutions, or by tracking data using the breakfasts and lunches that students consumed and wasted. Uniquely, Isabel, a first-grade teacher, planned to walk students to four church pews in the foyer of their school. These pews were a recent gift to their East Harlem school by the People's Church, renamed after the Young Lords held a 11-day occupation after 13 of their members were beaten and arrested for initiating a community breakfast. She hoped "to nurture a sense of civic responsibility" in her young students, "and the understanding that they have the power to enact change." In short, these lessons were designed to draw student attention to the material conditions of their daily lives in schools, highlighting teacher conceptions of economic inequality as concretely and spatially experienced and implicitly understood by students, even as teachers also aimed to inspire students to explicitly name inequality and consider alternative configurations for these spaces.

Local Neighborhoods and New York City

A significant number of teachers (N=13) planned lessons that centered historical and contemporary experiences of life in New York City. Here, teachers examined the current "realtime" realities of their local neighborhoods, commercial avenues, annual salaries, and commuting routes to demonstrate how the oft-contradictory and dialectical tensions of accumulation and

dispossession (Harvey, 2006) relate to social activity, behavior, and imagination. While Luis, a second-grade teacher, hoped his students would become "more aware and participatory about the diverse businesses that populate the three blocks in their Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood," Amore, another second-grade teacher, used photography to capture observations of "economic disparity in our gentrified neighborhood." About this he writes:

> Our school sits between the East Village and Alphabet City, which can feel like two very different neighborhoods based on which block you're on. I would love my students to notice and recognize the difference between types of resources, stores/businesses, homes/apartments, cleanliness of the streets/parks, cultural institutions, etc.

Circe claimed a similar interest, in this case, "to make connections between population and resource distribution" and to use the homelessness crisis as a means to ask: "Why are people poor?" For her, "many social class-related issues go deeper than specific individuals" and she hoped her students will see that "society is set up to block certain people from resources," that "accessibility is more complex than just an individual having access to them."

The boundaries and borders drawn up by capitalist urbanization and its drive towards accumulation has always been a phenomenon of inequality (Harvey, 2017; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Along these lines, two teachers created math lessons to analyze wealth distribution, annual incomes, and housing costs across the city. Ruth, a fifth-grade teacher, described her rationale for focusing on income as such:

> [Inequality] is not due to individual merit, but rather due to policies and history that gives some people better access to resources, often based on race, gender, immigration status, and other identities…I think it's essential that students critically examine the realities that they see around them every day--by naming and describing them, those realities can become less normalized.

In addition, one first-grade teacher planned to use the book, *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Peña (2015), to discuss modes of transportation, proximity, race, and privilege, while Kelly, a fifth-grade teacher, set up a comparison of asthma rates between low-income neighborhoods and the suburbs by analyzing data, investigating NYC fossil fuel factories, and paying attention to research and city policy. These teachers challenged notions of individual will as the sole driver and instead taught about the contextual forces that shaped their urban-built environments.

As capital accumulation is historically and persistently imbricated on racialized and gendered hierarchies, five teachers, all from grades fourth and fifth, used history as a means for understanding various intersecting forms of inequality in the present. Janna anchored her lesson to a set of questions: "What is the impact of slavery on our economic system today? What role did/do immigrants play in our economic system? How do existing ideas about race and social class affect this?" Using the book, *Brave Girl: Clara and the Shirtwaist Makers' Strike of 1909* by Michelle Markel (2013) to amplify the role of labor strikes and its impact on labor laws today, she connected "the working conditions in the Lower East Side garment factories" to "the present-day experiences of immigrants." With a similar focus on "change-makers," N.A. designed a lesson on abolitionists and labor organizers who fought for equal rights for women, while Regina linked "historical content and their community at large" through a unit on European explorers and the arrival of Dutch settlers to Mannahatta. For her, such exchanges can be examined through questions such as, "What is an equal transfer of goods? How could these exchanges be more equitable?" All the

lessons in this category were designed by teachers who saw spatial configurations, such as the city, as imbued by power asymmetries and used curriculum to reveal how economic inequality stretches beyond the interpersonal and into the conditional realm of systems and structures, policy and practices, including how the past is linked to the present. Teachers utilized math, literature, and history to highlight these configurations, so that students might begin to develop disciplinary-specific strategies through which to analyze their own communities as part of these densely intertwined networks of inequity.

The United States and its Histories

These lessons (N=15) focus on the production of inequality through the instantiation and maintenance of the nation-state. The construction of the imagined community of nation (Anderson, 1983) requires *difference*, "which helps 'the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the difference between what is close to it and what is far away'" (Said as cited in Hall, 2019, p. 232). Accordingly, the lessons that use the U.S. as their primary unit of study variously illuminated the ideological and material production of borders and territories; denaturalized the assignation of symbolic value and material wealth that produces internal and external Others; and uplifted examples of activists who have resisted attempts to categorize groups of people as undeserving or inhuman.

For instance, Tana, a third-grade teacher, described a lesson in which she asked students to imagine they have been shipwrecked on an island and must determine the allocation of resources available. She hoped that this activity would allow students to understand the "human created systems behind the way our world works." Bella asked fifth-grade students to read the poem "Border Kid" by David Bowles to demonstrate the simultaneous arbitrariness -- and real material impacts -- of national borders. Her lesson asked students to write "a poem about their neighborhood and how borders impact their lives." By drawing this parallel between the national border and neighborhood borders, Bella supported students to conduct a multi-scalar analysis and to see borders as both socially constructed and material in impact.

Meanwhile, Nena asked her fourth-grade students to examine colonial encounters between the Dutch and Indigenous peoples and to imagine alternatives to the violence of land theft and genocide. Sam, meanwhile, designed a lesson wherein her fourth and fifth graders used Howard Zinn's (2011) *A Young People's History of the United States* to understand how elites functioned during the Revolutionary War; as she explained, she wanted students to understand that "rich people didn't actually fight in the war; they just wriled [sic] people up to fight it for them." Each of these lessons exemplified a desire to understand the history of the United States, either literally through the study of events or symbolically via simulation, as *contingent.* These lessons followed the imperative described by David Harvey and Allen Scott: "We need to show ... how particular contingencies that on first sight appear as external and arbitrary phenomena are transformed into structured internal elements of the encompassing social logic of capitalism" (as cited in Cox, 2021, p. 8).

Another common thread in nation-based lessons worked to denaturalize the allocation of resources, especially as it was used historically to solidify race. D described a simulation he hoped to use with his fourth graders, in which groups were provided different numbers of pennies to represent "how white immigrants were treated in comparison to how immigrants of color are treated now." Jia designed a lesson in which her fifth-grade students examine census data for racial

categories, tracking how these categories change over time in response to historical conditions and geographic location. This lesson serves as an exemplar of how teachers might denaturalize race, showing it as a constructed category rather than a fixed identity. Similarly, Alexa's lesson asked fourth-grade students to research the salaries associated with their dream jobs in the United States and to consider whether a job's value is reflected in its pay scale. She hoped that "This will also allow students the opportunity to ask questions and wonder why the system works in this way." These teachers provided students with opportunities to understand inequality as produced rather than naturally occurring.

Last, some lessons also used as case studies examples of U.S.-based activists who have worked to resist, contest, or dismantle these unjust systems. Teachers showcased their desire to uplift those who contest the terms of sacrifice through the study of Welfare Rights Activists of the 1960s and 1970s and the contemporary Black Lives Matter Movement. Teachers who selected these lessons demonstrated their understanding of class and race as connected. As Sally said, "This big idea [of this lesson] describes the importance of why there should be conversations about social class and economic justice and the Black Lives Matter movement is a good place to start." In each of these lessons focusing on the United States, teachers aimed to support students to understand borders, belonging, and the differential distribution of value as human-created and, as a result, subject to change.

Global and World Communities

The lessons (N=9) that studied economic inequality on a global scale tended to focus on three areas: the global supply chain and the role of consumer responsibility; diversity of resources and economic systems as tied to the multinational background of the students themselves; and efforts to create sustainable and just futures. Five teachers in this category aimed for what Grace, a fifth-grade teacher, summed up as a global understanding of "the consequences of [students'] consumer decisions - to know how a product came to be and where it will go when it has served its purpose." Aligned with this aim, Coco planned to introduce her second graders to the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those that addressed "consumption and production, decent work and economic growth" while Ranger, a third teacher, used maps of Asia to locate the extraction of raw materials for computer parts and clothing. As one teacher noted, "we are interconnected to other people through our societal decision-making and human-made systems," which for two other teachers included an investigation of labor and wage disputes "among a variety of stakeholders in the company Amazon," or like fourth-grade teacher Tyiesha, the brutal realities of child labor and the question: "what does it mean to be free." Tyeisha thought of the book, *Iqbal* by Francesco D'Adamo (2005), and elaborated:

> Students are invited to question the status quo, examine the underlying values and assumptions, and explore their own role in relation to what it means to be free. Students will critique prevailing norms and assumptions to consider whose voices are left out, and how to best affect change.

Lucy, a fifth-grade teacher, tied activist efforts for sustainable futures to the essential question of "fairness." Hoping "students will recognize unfairness on the individual level and injustice at the institutional or systemic level," she, alongside another teacher who was interested in the "economy of the rainforest and its connected network of labor and environmental destruction" demonstrated how examinations on a global scale inherently imply a wider network or system of influences,

forces of economic and ethical concern that span from the everyday lives of students to those elsewhere around the globe.

Here, teachers also drew from the cultural diversity of students to focus on "the web of economic relations" that includes students' family histories and differences across geographical space. For example, Paprika, a third-grade teacher, planned for students to analyze "the difference in life in their family's home countries compared to middle-class America," while Taylor hoped for students to have a deeper understanding of "the difference between the culture they grow up in America and their family's backgrounds." Other teachers noted that immigrant students had a wealth of experiences to share with one another and that those differences could open the possibility for a discussion into economic equality and justice. Here, teachers aimed to concretize for students the global implications of capitalism, so that they might more clearly understand this relatively abstract scale of inequality.

Discussion

Whether teachers analyzed disparate school funding, capitalist urbanization, U.S. colonial history, or global trade routes, each lesson in this paper enabled a glimpse into not only the critical perspectives of elementary school teachers when teaching economic inequality, but the range of spatial analyses they hoped to mobilize with the children in their classrooms. As these elementary school teachers demonstrate, spatial analysis carries the potential to conjure different kinds of questions about the interrelatedness of identity and context, people and place. In contrast to lessons focused on individual identity and consumerism, the use of critical geography, including scale and connectivity, offers a pliable entry into the teaching of economic inequality that, as shown here, inherently includes analysis into the historical and contemporary condition. Teachers in all four categories used spatial scales to examine how social encounters with others are affected by the governing technologies of law, policy, planning, and ideological bias, while at the same time drawing out the dialectical tensions between conflicting communities and interests that constantly produce space itself. Here, the teachers reveal their beliefs that individuals are never contained within the descriptors of identity, but rather emergent from contradictory relations of power, the multitudes of subjective experience, and the always-existing possibilities for change.

As mentioned, spatial scales by no means imply distinct boundaries and borders. In fact, each theme -- schools, city, nation-state, and world -- in and of themselves simultaneously expands and overlaps with the other, offering a conceptual framework that is porous, malleable, and inextricably linked. This allows for an analysis that includes the macro-level in relation to the micro-levels of study. For example, teachers can examine economic inequality through the interlocking structures of funding, tracking, and school access, yet they can also extrapolate out from student experience into the analysis of data across schools and the city, perhaps even within the national and global contexts. Moreover, teachers oftentimes made explicit connections between spatial and racial processes (Neely & Samura, 2011) and drew from tenets of racial capitalism to recognize the complex imbrication of race and economics, even as these might not have been directly stated by some. For example, teachers who mobilized the history and contemporary context of the United States as a unit of study, often worked the intersections of race, class, gender through lesson topics such as Black Lives Matter and the surveillance of Black bodies and space; immigration, capitalism, and the struggle for labor rights; Dutch settler colonialism and Indigenous land theft. In contrast to a focus on one particular identity or social position, these teachers used a relational and intersectional approach that centered both the resemblant and discontinuous

dimensions of lived experience and brought forward economic inequality as tied to hierarchies across a variety of social constructs and markers of marginalization and privilege.

Additionally, teachers in this study also acknowledged that young children and their communities are not only shaped by the geographies they inhabit, but that place-making carries the potential to spur civic engagement, response-ability, and action (Schmidt, 2011). Often cited, Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne (2004) outline three conceptions of the "good" citizen as personally responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented. Yet in taking an implicit critical geography perspective, teachers in this study leaned into the contextual and spatial conditions from which change-makers and activists emerge. Shifting away from citizenship as a kind of identity, teachers here put into motion the dialectical tensions that exist from conflicting relations, giving context to the dire struggles that economic inequality catalyzes, and in effect, relaying to students how citizenship affects a sense of place and vice versa. Aligned with Massey's collapse of "space/politics" (2005, p. 13), teachers created lessons that made visible inequitable relations as the condition for imagining the future. Importantly and in contrast to citizenship as an identity, they acknowledged in their lessons how structural conditions constrain agency, how the powerful mobilize space for profit, and illuminated those who fought for inclusion, plurality, and civic participation.

Implications

Findings from this study lead to several implications for educational researchers, teacher education, and district-level efforts that aim to support teachers in their desire to address economic inequality in their classrooms. As shown, elementary school teachers not only express a strong interest in critical approaches to capitalism, but designed lessons that drew powerfully from interlocking multi-scalar approaches in the examination of immediate and imagined, historical and present-day spaces for analysis. By shifting focus from individualism or citizenship towards context and place, such an approach opens intersectional sites of study in which teachers can link economic inequality with hierarchies of race, gender, immigration, and other forms of social import, as well as interdisciplinary approaches that bring together city and state standards for social studies with skills and resources from adjacent content areas such as math, literature, the humanities, and art.

Contrary to existing scholarship that claims elementary school teachers are insufficiently prepared, ideologically unsophisticated, and children as too young and innocent, this study shows that teachers are very aware of the harmful and violent consequences of economic disenfranchisement and express outright interest in dismantling the very beliefs that reproduce rampant inequality. Perhaps the absence of their voices and perspectives in the literature is less a matter of their disinterest and inability, but rather a clarion call for further research on how teachers working with children can imagine, interpret, and actualize the existing standards on economics education. From an analysis of their lessons, the field seems ripe for more attention to and support for elementary school teachers through professional development that honors their curricular expertise and for teacher education programs to integrate social class and economic justice as a required lens in methods courses. If education is truly considered a vehicle that combats oppression and strives for social justice, then the teaching of children is indispensable to this effort.

References

Agnello, M. F., & Lucey, T. (2008). Toward a critical economic literacy: Preparing K—12 learners to be economically literate adults. In D. Lund & P. Carr (Eds.), *Doing democracy: Striving for political literacy and social justice* (pp. 247–265). Peter Lang.

Aho, T. (2017). *Neoliberalism, Racial Capitalism, and Liberal Democracy.* Lateral, 6(1).

Ambrosio, J. (2013). Changing the subject: Neoliberalism and accountability in public education. *Educational Studies*, 49(4), 316-333.

Arthur, C. (2012). Consumers or critical citizens? Financial literacy education and freedom. *Critical Education*, *3*(6), 2–25.

Au, W. (2018). *A Marxist education: Learning to change the world*. Haymarket Books.

Boelts, M. (2009). Those shoes. Candlewick.

Bowles, D. (2021). *They call me Güero: A border kid's poems*. Penguin.

Brenner, N. (2004). New state spaces: Urban governance and the rescaling of statehood. Oxford University Press.

Bullock, H. (2006). *Justifying inequality: A social psychological analysis of beliefs about poverty and the poor* (#06-08; National Poverty Center Working Paper Series). https://npc.umich.edu/publications/working_papers/publication_id/72/

Brown, W. (2019). *In the ruins of neoliberalism: The rise of antidemocratic politics in the West.* Columbia University Press.

Bryan, N. (2017). White teachers' role in sustaining the school-to-prison pipeline: Recommendations for teacher education. *The Urban Review*, 49(2), 326-345.

Charmaz, K. (2008). Constructionism and the grounded theory method. In J. Holstein & J. Gubrium (Eds.), *Handbook of Constructionist Research* (pp. 397–412). Guilford Press.

Chafel, J., Flint, A., Hammel, J., & Pomeroy, K. (2007). Young children, social Issues, and critical literacy: Stories of teachers and researchers. *Young Children*, *62*(1), 73–81.

Choi, J. M. (2016). Neoliberalism and education: The disfiguration of students. From *Neoliberalism, economic radicalism, and the normalization of violence,* 27-35.

Cohen, D., & Orfield, G. (2021). *NYC school segregation report card: Still last, action needed now*. UCLA Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles. https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/nyc-school-segregation-report-card-still-last-action-needed-now/NYC_6-09-final-for-post.pdf

Cohn, D. (2005). Si, se puede!/Yes we can. Cinco Puntos Press.

Council for Economics Education. (2021). *National standards for personal financial education*. Council for Economics Education. https://natljumpstart.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/2021_Natl_Standards_Downloadable_final.pdf

Cox, K. (2021). Massey, Marx, and human geography: Disjunctures and provocations. *Human Geography*, *14*(1), 5–16.

Cronin, D. (2000). Click, clack, moo: Cows that type. Atheneum Books for Young Readers.

D'Adamo, F. (2005). *Iqbal*. Aladdin.

Davies, B., & Bansel, P. (2007). Neoliberalism and education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *20*(3), 247–259. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390701281751

De Lissovoy, N. (2022). *Capitalism, pedagogy, and the politics of being*. Bloomsbury.

de la Peña, M. (2015). *Last stop on Market Street*. G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers.

Dumas, M. J., & Ross, K. M. (2016). "Be real black for me" imagining BlackCrit in education. Urban Education, 51(4), 415-442.

Dumas, M., & Nelson, J. D. (2016). (Re)imagining Black boyhood: Toward a critical framework for educational research. *Harvard Educational Review*, *86*(1), 27–47.

Ford, D. (2017). *Education and the production of space: Political pedagogy, geography, and urban revolution.* New York: Routledge.

Gilmore, R. W. (2007). *Golden gulag: prisons, surplus, crisis, and opposition in globalizing California*. University of California Press.

Gilmore, R. W. (2022). Abolition geography: Essays towards liberation. Verso Books.

Gorski, P. (2011). Unlearning deficit ideology and the scornful gaze: Thoughts on authenticating the class discourse in education. *Counterpoints*, *403*, 152–173. http://www.jstor.org/stable/42981081

Gorski, P. (2016). Poverty and the ideological imperative: A call to unhook from deficit and grit ideology and to strive for structural ideology in teacher education. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, *42*(4), 378–386.

Gorski, P., & Swalwell, K. (2015). Equity literacy for all. Educational Leadership, 72(6), 34–40. http://www.edchange.org/publications/Equity-Literacy-for-All.pdf

Grossberg, L. (2005). *Caught in the crossfire: Kids, politics, and America's future*. Paradigm.

Gruenewald, D. (2008). Place-based education: Grounding culturally responsive teaching in geographical diversity. In D. Gruenewald & G. Smith (Eds.), *Place-Based Education in the Global Age: Local Diversity* (pp. 137–154). Lawrence Erlbaum.

Harrison, A. S., Clark, J. R., & Schug, M. C. (2017). Teaching and measuring the economic way of thinking. In M. B. Henning (Ed.), *Innovations in economic education: Promising practices for teachers and students, K-16* (pp. 103–121). Routledge.

Harvey, D. (2006). *Spaces of global capitalism: Towards a theory of uneven development*. Verso.

Harvey, D. (2017). The 'new' imperialism: accumulation by dispossession. In D. Harvey (Ed.), *Karl Marx* (pp. 213-237). Routledge.

Hayek, F. A. (1944). *The road to serfdom.* University of Chicago Press.

Hazelbaker, T., Griffin, K., Nenadal, L., & Mistry, R. (2018). Early elementary school children's conceptions of neighborhood social stratification and fairness. *Translational Issues in Psychological Science*, *4*(2), 153–164.

Helfenbein, R. (2006). Space, place, and identity in the teaching of history: Using critical geography to teach teachers in the American South. In Segall, A., Heilman, E. & C. Cherryholmes, (Eds.) *Social studies--the next generation: Re-searching in the postmodern* (pp.111-124). Peter Lang.

Helfenbein, R. (2021). *Critical Geographies of Education: Space, Place, and Curriculum Inquiry*. Routledge.

Howard, A., Swalwell, K., & Adler, K. (2018). Making class: Children's perceptions of social class through illustrations. *Teachers College Record*, *120*(7), 1–44.

Hursh, D. (2001). Social studies within the neo-liberal state: The commodification of knowledge and the end of imagination. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, *29*(2), 349–356.

Hursh, D. (2007). Assessing No Child Left Behind and the rise of neoliberal education policies. American educational research journal, 44(3), 493-518.

Lardier Jr, D. T., Herr, K. G., Barrios, V. R., Garcia-Reid, P., & Reid, R. J. (2019). Merit in meritocracy: Uncovering the myth of exceptionality and self-reliance through the voices of urban youth of color. *Education and Urban Society*, 51(4), 474-500.

Lee, R., Ramsey, P. G., & Sweeney, B. (2008). Engaging young children in activities and conversations about race and social class. *Young Children*, *63*(6), 68–76. https://www.jstor.org/stable/42730363

Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The production of space.* Blackwell.

Lipman, P. (2015). Capitalism, race, and the role of schools in social transformation: A response. *Educational Theory*, *65*(3), 341–349.

Lipman, P. (2011). *The new political economy of urban education: Neoliberalism, race, and the right to the city*. Routledge.

Lipman, P. (2017). The landscape of education "reform" in Chicago: Neoliberalism meets a grassroots movement. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 25, 54-54.

Lowe, L. (2015). *The intimacies of four continents*. Duke University Press.

Lucey, T., & Henning, M. B. (2021). Toward critically compassionate financial literacy: How elementary preservice teachers view the standards. *Theory and Research in Social Education*, *49*(1), 107–136. https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2020.1859422

Lyman, K. (2002, 2003). Exploring child labor with young students: They can understand a lot more than some people might imagine. *Rethinking Schools*, *17*(2). https://rethinkingschools.org/articles/exploring-child-labor-with-young-students/

Markel, M. (2013). *Brave girl: Clara and the Shirtwaist Makers' Strike of 1909*. Balzer + Bray.

Massey, D. (1973). Towards a critique of industrial location theory. *Antipode*, *5*(3), 33–39. https://doi:10.1111/j.1467-8330.1973.tb00569.x

Massey, D. (1994). *Space, place, and gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Massey, D. (2005). *For space*. London: Sage.

McCall, A. (2017). Teaching children about the global economy: Integrating inquiry with human rights. *The Social Studies*, *108*(4), 136–142. https://doi.org/10.1080/00377996.2017.1343791

McKittrick, K. (2013). Plantation futures. *Small axe: A Caribbean journal of criticism*, 17(3 (42), 1-15.

Melamed, J. (2015). Racial capitalism. *Critical Ethnic Studies*, *1*(1), 76–85. https://doi.org/10.5749/jcritethnstud.1.1.0076

Meszaros, B., & Evans, S. (2010). It's never too early: Why economics education in the elementary classroom. *Social Studies and the Young Learner*, *22*(3), 4–7.

Middleton, S. (2014). *Henri Lefebvre and education: Space, history, theory*. Routledge.

Mignolo, W. D., & Walsh, C. (2018). *On decoloniality: Concepts, analytics, praxis*. Duke University Press.

Mistry, R., Nenadal, L., Hazelbaker, T., Griffin, K., & White, E. (2017). Promoting elementary school-age children's understanding of wealth, poverty, and civic engagement. *American Political Science Association*. https://doi.org/doi:10.1017/S1049096517001329

Neely, B., & Samura, M. (2011). Social geographies of race: connecting race and space. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *34*(11), 1933–1952. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2011.559262

NYC Public Schools. (2022). *DOE Data at a Glance*. https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/reports/doe-data-at-a-glance

Nxumalo, F., & Cedillo, S. (2017). Decolonizing place in early childhood studies: Thinking with Indigenous onto-epistemologies and Black feminist geographies. *Global Studies of Childhood*, *7*(2), 99–112.

NYCDOE. (2014). *New York City K-8 Social Studies Scope and Sequence*. https://www.weteachnyc.org/media2016/filer_public/46/03/46031049-2192-4c3e-845e-f51cf58a5a2e/scope_and_sequence_k-8_v4_web_ada.pdf

Payne, K., Faulkner, A., & Keys Adair, J. (2020). Critical geography in preschool: Evidence of early childhood civic action and ideas about justice. *Teachers College Record*, *122*(7), 1–34. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146812012200

Pérez-Expósito, L., & Servín-Arcos, V. (2021). The inclusion of economic inequality in the social studies curriculum. In W. Journell (Ed.), *Post-pandemic social studies: How COVID-19 has changed the world and how we teach* (pp. 137–150). Teachers College Press.

Pinto, L. E., & Chan, H. (2010). Social justice and financial literacy. *Our Schools, Our Selves*, *19*(2), 61–77.

Robertson, J. (2019). *The water walker* (S. Williams & I. Toulouse, Trans.) Second Story Press.

Robinson, C. (1983). *Black Marxism: The making of the Black radical tradition*. University of North Carolina Press.

Rogers, J., & Westheimer, J. (2017). Teaching about economic inequality in a diverse democracy: Politics, ideology, and difference. *American Political Science Association*, *50*(4), 1049–1055.

Ross, E. W. (2018). Class. In D. Krutka, A. McMahon Whitlock, & M. Helmsing (Eds.), *Keywords in the Social Studies: Concepts and Conversations* (pp. 249–260). Peter Lang.

Schwandt, T. (2015). Emergent Design. In *The SAGE Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry, 4th ed*., pp. 81-108). SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483398969

Selman, K. J. (2017). Imprisoning 'those'kids: Neoliberal logics and the disciplinary alternative school. Youth justice, 17(3), 213-231.

Shanks, N. (2020). "Starting points matter": Humanizing economics pedagogy through new economic paradigms. *Social Studies*, *111*(6), 296–311. https://doi.org/10.1080/00377996.2020.1757600

Simonsen, K. (2012). In quest of a new humanism: Embodiment, experience and phenomenology as critical geography. *Progress in Human Geography*, *37*(1), 10–26.

Sober, T. (2017). Teaching about economics and moneyed interests in twenty-first century democracy. In C. Wright-Maley & T. Davis (Eds.), *Teaching for democracy in an age of economic disparity* (pp. 79–94). Routledge.

Sobti, N., & Welsh, R. O. (2023). Adding color to my tears: Toward a theoretical framework for antiblackness in school discipline. *Educational Researcher,* 52(8), 500-511.

Soja, E. (2010). *Seeking spatial justice*. University of Minnesota Press.

Sonu, D. (2018). The sociality of post-truth: Neoliberal culture and its rationality. *Canadian Social Studies*, *50*(2), 28–32. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1200048.pdf

Sonu, D. (2022). It's time for class: Examining economic inequality in fourth and fifth grade. *Social Studies and the Young Learner*, *35*(2), 3–10.

Sonu, D. (2023). From criticality to shame: Childhood memories of social class and how they matter to elementary school teachers and teaching. *Theory and Research in Social Education*, *51*(4), 503–529. https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2023.2210081

Sonu, D., & Herold, E. (2023). Meeting individual needs: Teaching first graders about resource allocation and equity-versus-equality in an ICT classroom. *Social Studies and the Young Learner*, *36*(1), 3–8.

Sonu, D., & Zaino, K. (2023). Breaking light on economic divide: How elementary school teachers locate class inequality in teaching and schools. *Teachers College Record*, *125*(4), 39–66. https://doi.org/10.1177/01614681231177817

Soroko, A. (2020). Buying into dominant ideas about wealth and poverty: An examination of U.S. and Canadian financial literacy standards. *Teachers College Record*, *122*(3), 1–50. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146812012200301

Stanford, J. (2010). Financial literacy: Getting beyond the markets. *Education Canada*, *50*(4), 21–25.

Swalwell, K. (2021). Noticing and questioning capitalism with elementary students. In T. Lucey (Ed.), *Financialization, financial literacy, and social education* (pp. 42–60). Routledge.

Taubman, P. (2009). *Teaching by numbers: Deconstructing the discourse of standards and accountability in education*. Routledge.

Westheimer, J., & Kahne, J. (2004). What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy. *American Educational Research Journal*, *41*(2), 237–269.

White, E., Mistry, R., & Chow, K. (2013). How do teachers talk about economic inequality? The complexity of teaching at a socioeconomically integrated elementary school. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, *13*(1), 370–394. https://doi.org/10.1111/asap.12024

Woods, T., Kurtz-Costes, B., & Rowley, S. (2005). The development of stereotypes about the rich and poor: Age, race, and family income differences in beliefs. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *34*(5), 437–445. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-005-7261-0

Zinn, H. (2011). A young people's history of the United States. Seven Stories Press.

Authors

Debbie Sonu is Professor of Education in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching at Hunter College, City University of New York and doctoral faculty in the PhD in Urban Education Program at the Graduate Center.

Karen Zaino is an Assistant Teaching Professor in the Department of Teaching, Curriculum, and Educational Inquiry at Miami University of Ohio.

Rob Helfenbein is Professor of Curriculum Studies in the Tift College of Education at Mercer University in Georgia.

Critical Education

criticaleducation.org
ISSN 1920-4175