

Editors' Introduction

We are living in a tumultuous and uncertain time, with protests sweeping across nations as people decry injustices and corruption within institutions and governments. The world over people are fighting to be heard and to expose asymmetries of power and capital, mobilizing through new media channels that challenge mass media's hold over our ideological imagination and allow new networked connections to be forged. To us, these protests sharply illustrate how we must constantly redefine and renegotiate our understandings of diversity and equity in a shifting modern landscape in order to ensure that we do not privilege particular voices at the expense of others or erase differences rather than celebrate them.

The three articles featured in Volume 2, Issue 2 of the *Berkeley Review of Education* further our discussion of diversity and equity by challenging often unquestioned theories, practices, and constructs in education. These critical analyses ask our readers to expand their conceptualizations of literacy, seek data-driven evidence for our assumptions regarding the success of charter schools in educating minority youth, and reconceptualize the pervasive use of the label "West" when contrasting dominant literacy practices to those traditionally less recognized. There are both theoretical and practical implications for this research, including the ways in which we think about and teach literacy practices and the justifications we provide for policies meant to remedy the historical disenfranchisement of minority youth in education.

In the first article of this issue, "Artifactual Critical Literacy: A New Perspective for Literacy Education," Kate Pahl and Jennifer Rowsell offer a powerful theoretical construct for literacy studies, artifactual critical literacy, that brings attention to our mundane, everyday realities as sites of meaning making. The authors highlight how a critical focus on our embedded cultural practices—including which stories get told and through which media—calls attention to the power imbalances that result in some voices being privileged over others. By explicating the theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical entailments of this framework, Pahl and Rowsell demonstrate the power of this construct for understanding not just how identities get built up or "sedimented" in texts (Rowsell & Pahl, 2007), but also in objects and other material practices. Artifactual critical literacy provides a methodology for understanding lived complexities by focusing on the ways that meaning making is always entangled with cultural objects. This theory helps us address issues of diversity and equity by interrogating the power relationships instantiated in our material practices and highlighting stories connected to material artifacts that might not be valued otherwise.

In "Is Choice a Panacea? An Analysis of Black Secondary Student Attrition from KIPP, Other Privately Operated Charters, and Urban Districts," Julian Vasquez Heilig, Amy Williams, Linda McNeil, and Christopher Lee challenge widespread assumptions about the experiences of African American students in privately operated charter schools such as the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP). The authors begin with a brief history of education reforms in Texas, including accountability and school-choice policies. They point to several lessons that can be learned from the effects of these policies on students of color. Building on recent work that has disaggregated KIPP's data on student attrition,

the authors provide descriptive analyses of Black dropouts and leavers from Texas schools. They find high rates of attrition and segregation among Black students who attend KIPP schools compared to those who attend traditional public schools. Student attrition is a key issue in the national discussion about charter schools because non-random exit from schools makes it hard to evaluate the effectiveness of organizations such as KIPP. Finally, the authors raise questions about the extent to which dropout rates for Black students should be considered in evaluating the effectiveness of charter schools and make several policy recommendations for providing more equitable education opportunities to students of color in Texas. The article provides a first look at the experiences of African Americans in Texas charter schools and outlines how further research could explore the reasons for higher attrition rates in some of these schools.

Finally, Usree Bhattacharya's "The 'West' in Literacy" challenges the pervasiveness of the constructed notion of "West" in literacy scholarship. Her critique points out that the term is not adequately complicated, and she details a scrutiny of the term and its historically-loaded implications, identifying the overuse of the notion of the "West" as used in juxtaposition to the "other" or "non-West." This binary includes or excludes countries and cultures with no fixed definition of what the "West" truly constitutes. Bhattacharya analyzes a history of literacy scholarship that assumes an understanding of "Western" practices and through doing so problematizes the very use of the notion. She identifies the privileging of alphabetic literacy practices in scholarship and educational practice as an instrument played historically in the colonizing of peoples. Bhattacharya argues that research needs to move from taking an oppositional stance between "West" and "non-West," and instead critically examine the connection between "West" and practices that replicate power and privilege. This furthering of the theoretical framework of literacy studies pushes for researchers and educators to go beyond accepted constructs and instead delve into more specific and individual accounts of literacy practices.

Each of these articles challenges readers to reconceptualize conversations around educational theory and practice and go beyond what Bhattacharya refers to as "fossilized constructs" (p. 192). Just as contemporary social movements ask us to think beyond what we know, these authors offer new ways to engage in dialogue about how we hope to use educational practice to address larger structural issues of equity for students.

We hope that this issue is particularly relevant to readers in this time of political and economic protests and calls for social change. Although the practices of academics and the texts of academic journals can at times feel estranged from political action in city squares or the revolution of social media, these articles can inspire action for equity and diversity in similarly progressive ways. The three articles gathered here call for changes in current educational, political, and scholarly practice by shifting and developing both academic discourse and practice. Through sharing them with our community, discussing them with stakeholders, and building upon their themes through further research, policy making, and practice, we can work in tandem with all people committed to equity and diversity.

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The *Berkeley Review of Education* invites submissions that continue the conversations started by the authors in this issue as well as those that might help start other dialogues. We seek original empirical and theoretical contributions from a broad range of disciplines including, but not limited to, anthropology, cultural studies, disability studies, ethnic studies, family studies, gender and sexuality studies, information studies, linguistics, politics, psychology, sociology, and women's studies. We invite articles that address issues of equity and diversity in education that take place both inside and outside of the classroom. We especially encourage scholars and practitioners from multiple disciplines and international contexts to add their voices.

The Editors

References

- Rowell, J., & Pahl, K. (2007) Sedimented identities in texts: Instances of practice. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 42, 388-401.