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looking a trojan horse in the mouth: problematizing philosophy for/with children's hope for social reform through the history of race and education in the us

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abstract

Many P4/WC practitioners and theorists privilege the school as a space for thinking and practicing philosophy for/with children. Despite its coercive nature, thinkers such as Jana Mohr Lone, David Kennedy, and Nancy Vansieleghem argue that P4C is a Trojan horse intended to reform the education system from within. I argue, however, that the Trojan horse argument requires us to internalize an incomplete and historically decontextualized understanding of public schools that in turn can reify histories of white supremacy within our CPIs – a consequence that can be particularly harmful when practicing P4C with minority youth. To accurately adjudicate the value of public school classrooms for P4C – especially for those CPIs whose members are primarily Black, Latinx, Indigenous, or other youth of color – I contextualize the Trojan horse argument in the history of race and education in the United States. Through this historical analysis, I conclude that the reformist position becomes increasingly more untenable and that the material history of race and education in fact supports a pessimistic understanding of P4C in education. I end by reflecting on P4C's need to rethink its privileging of schools as a primary site for philosophical inquiry and caution practitioners against using “social progress” as a justification for how and where they practice their craft. Instead, I encourage them to rethink how and where they practice P4C, based on the local historical and material conditions of the participants.

keywords: philosophy for children; race and racism; critical race theory; philosophy in public schools; educational reform.

olhando os dentes de um cavalo de Tróia: problematizando a esperança de reforma social da filosofia com/para crianças através da história da raça e da educação nos eua

resumo

Muitos praticantes e teóricos da Fp/cC privilegiam a escola como um espaço para pensar e praticar filosofia para/com crianças. Apesar de sua natureza coercitiva, pensadores como Jana Mohr Lone, David Kennedy e Nancy Vansieleghem argumentam que a Filosofia para Crianças é um cavalo de Troia que pretende reformar o sistema educacional de dentro para fora. Acredito, no entanto, que argumento do cavalo de Troia exige que internalizemos um entendimento incompleto e historicamente descontextualizado das escolas públicas que, por sua vez, pode reafirmar histórias de supremacia branca nas nossas Comunidades de Investigação Filosóficas - uma consequência que pode ser particularmente nociva quando praticamos FPC com jovens minorias. Para definir com exatidão a importância das salas de

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aula das escolas públicas para a FPC - especialmente para as CIFs cujos membros são majoritariamente negros, latinos, indígenas ou outros jovens de cor - contextualizo o argumento do cavalo de Troia na história da raça e da educação nos Estados Unidos. Através dessa análise histórica, concluo que a posição reformista se torna cada vez mais insustentável e que a história material da raça e da educação sustenta, de fato, um entendimento pessimista sobre a FPC na educação. Encerro refletindo a necessidade da FPC repensar o privilégio que dá às escolas como lugar primário de investigação filosófica e alertar os seus praticantes contra o uso do "progresso social" como justificativa para como e onde eles praticam seus trabalhos. Em vez disso, os encorajo a repensar como e onde praticam a FPC, baseado nas condições históricas, locais e materiais dos participantes.

palavras-chave: filosofia para crianças; raça e racismo; teoria crítica da raça; filosofia em escolas públicas; reforma educacional.

mirándole los dientes a un caballo de troya: problematizando la esperanza de reforma social de la filosofía para/con niños a través de la historia de la raza y la educación en los ee.uu.

resumen

Muchxs profesionales y teóricxs de la Fp/cN privilegian la escuela como espacio para pensar y practicar la filosofía para/con niñxs. A pesar de su naturaleza coercitiva, pensadorxs como Jana Mohr Lone, David Kennedy y Nancy Vansieleghem sostienen que la FpN es un caballo de Troya cuya intención es reformar el sistema educativo desde dentro. Yo sostengo, sin embargo, que el argumento del caballo de Troya nos exige interiorizar una comprensión incompleta e históricamente descontextualizada de las escuelas públicas que, a su vez, puede reificar historias de supremacía blanca dentro de nuestras CIF, una consecuencia que puede ser especialmente nociva cuando se practica la FpN con jóvenes pertenecientes a minorías. Para juzgar con precisión el valor de las aulas de escuelas públicas para la FpN -especialmente para aquellas CIF cuyos miembros son principalmente negrxs, latinxs, indígenas u otros grupos de jóvenes de color- contextualizo el argumento del caballo de Troya en la historia de la raza y la educación en Estados Unidos. A través de este análisis histórico, concluyo que la posición reformista se hace cada vez más insostenible y que la historia material de la raza y la educación apoya de hecho una consideración pesimista de la FpN en la educación. Finalizo reflexionando sobre la necesidad de que la FpN se replantee su privilegiar la escuela como lugar primario para la investigación filosófica y advierto a lxs profesionales que no utilicen el "progreso social" para justificar cómo y dónde ejercen su oficio. En cambio, les animo a repensar cómo y dónde practican la FpN, basándose en las condiciones históricas y materiales locales de lxs participantes.

palabras clave: filosofía para niños; raza y racismo; teoría crítica de la raza; filosofía en escuelas públicas; reforma educativa.

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By the time I began my senior year at the Philadelphia High School for Girls, my public school education had almost silenced me.
Collins, 2009

The cultural milieu in which deliberation takes place is often one of white supremacy and white ignorance. The school curriculum is an element of this. Dialogical deliberation is thus limited in its scope for examining this milieu given that it is governed by reasonableness. That is not to say [reform] is impossible, but rather that it is highly unlikely.
Chetty, 2018

A foundational element of philosophy for children is the privileged status of schools as a space for philosophical thought and dialogue. There are, of course, other spaces where practitioners have formed Communities of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI)², but schools remain a privileged space of philosophical thinking and dialogue in P4C literature and practice. Since its inception in the 1970s, Philosophy for Children has been strongly associated with the public school system. Both of P4C's founders, Ann Margaret Sharp and Matthew Lipman, claimed that philosophy was essential to the proper functioning of schools and that its natural place of operation was the public school classroom (Sharp, 1986, p. 194; Lipman, 1988, p. 42). Almost 60 years later, most P4C scholars and practitioners follow in Lipman and Sharp's footsteps. For example, in the US, the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC) at Montclair State University claims, "Philosophy for Children is most successful when it becomes part of the culture of a school" (Montclair State University, 2019). Many other programs and organizations such as P4C Hawai'i at the University of Hawai'i Uehiro Academy or the Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization (PLATO) also focus heavily on introducing philosophy into public

² For examples of CPIs outside of school classrooms see Kronsted and Wurtz (2021) and Reed-Sandoval and Chávez Leyva (2016).

school classrooms. In general, we can state that while public schools are not the only space in which P4C operates, they nonetheless constitute a common anchor point that a large majority of P4C scholars and programs rally around.

Yet, as many have pointed out, there are “contrasts between the principles underlying philosophy for children and the predominant features of schooling” (Lone, 2002). Jana Morh Lone (2002) explains that schools are inherently coercive, generally display a lack of trust in children’s epistemic abilities, and are less concerned with genuine thinking and understanding. Meanwhile, on the opposite side of the educational spectrum, P4C attempts to create a more democratic, caring, and critical space of learning through community dialogue and inquiry. Against Lipman’s and Sharp’s affirmation of the school as the most conducive space for philosophy and children to encounter one another, thinkers such as Lone, David Kennedy, and Nancy Vansieleghem identify the risk of instrumentalization that P4C faces when entering schools. Still, this does not mean that they reject schools as a potential space for social transformation and education reform. As we will see, despite schools’ inherently coercive nature, these thinkers nonetheless believe that the benefits of practicing P4C in schools outweigh the potential harms and tensions that arise from those contradictions. For Lone, Kennedy, Vansieleghem, and others, P4C is a Trojan horse intended to reform both the education system and culture from the inside. Thus, they argue, P4C ought to be in schools because, despite its inherent opposition to contemporary schooling, their encounter will make schools and society at large better.

I argue that, however, a partial condition for accepting this conclusion (that P4C ought to be practiced in public school classrooms despite their coercive and hierarchical nature) is what Charles Mills (1997, 2007) called “white ignorance”. Mills defines “white ignorance” as a historically situated cognitive phenomenon whereby individuals or groups internalize false and historically decontextualized beliefs that have normative bearings on the social status of different racial identities in a white-dominant society. In other words, I argue that the Trojan horse argument

requires us to internalize an incomplete and historically decontextualized understanding of public schools that, in turn, can reify histories of white supremacy within our CPIs – a consequence which can be particularly harmful when practicing P4C with minority youth. To accurately adjudicate the value of public school classrooms for P4C – especially for those CPIs whose members are primarily Black, Latinx, Indigenous, or other youth of color – we need to situate the Trojan horse argument in the United States’ history of race and educational reform. As I will show, projects founded on the notion of *school reform for social progress and transformation* are not new to the history of racism and white supremacy. Rather, they find their historical precedent and epistemic basis in the landmark US Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Once we contextualize the reformist position within this racialized history of public schooling, the idea that public classrooms ought to be privileged P4C spaces becomes increasingly difficult to support, especially for CPIs that aim to support and empower minority youths. This is mainly because history – at least the material history of race and education in the US – does not seem to support the Trojan horse argument’s conclusions. Rather, as Derrick Bell would argue, it justifies a racially pessimistic view of P4C’s operations in public school classrooms, that, by seeking to become a standard element of the public-school curriculum, P4C opens itself to being used as a weapon of white supremacy. I end this paper by reflecting on P4C’s need to rethink its privileging of schools as a primary site of philosophical inquiry and caution practitioners against using “social progress” as a justification for how and where they should practice their craft. Instead, I encourage them to rethink how and where they practice P4C based on the local historical and material conditions and needs of the participants.

lipman’s instrumentality problem

To understand the full scope of the Trojan horse position, we first need to understand the shortcomings that beset its emergence. While Lipman and Sharp

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originally tied P4C to the public school system as a means to curb the unreasonable elements of their political community, more contemporary thinkers have criticized this as an “instrumentalization” of P4C for political ends (Long, 2005; Vansieleghem, 2005; Murris, 2009; Biesta, 2011). Nancy Vansieleghem (2005), for example, argues that “the instrumental emphasis of [Lipman’s] Philosophy for Children” suppresses and appropriates “the novelty of the new” that P4C is meant to cultivate (Vansieleghem, 2005, p. 25). In this sense, Lipman and Sharp’s

Philosophy for Children, with its emphasis on critical thinking and autonomy, is nothing more than the reproduction of an existing discourse. The autonomy that the child gains through Philosophy for Children by critical thinking and dialogue is nothing more than the freedom to occupy a pre-constituted place in that discourse ... In this sense, Philosophy for Children cannot be seen as an experience of freedom because every act, every thinking process is determined by a future goal – namely creating autonomous, self-reflective [liberal] citizens (Ibid.).

Gert Biesta (2011) takes this further and argues that traditional P4C is further instrumentalized in the name of a “particular *conception* of the human being” (Biesta, 2011, p. 311). More specifically, Biesta worries that the humanist emphasis of P4C instrumentalizes it for the sake of current exclusionary norms. Western humanism, they posit, establishes “a *norm* of what it means to be human, and in doing so excludes those who do not live up to or are unable to stand up to this norm” (Ibid., p. 312). In upholding a particular liberal understanding of the normal human being – that is, an autonomous, reasonable, and critical individual – P4C “specifies what the child, student or newcomer must become before giving them an opportunity to show who they are and who they will be” (Ibid., p. 312-313).

The problem of instrumentalization is explicitly connected to philosophy for children’s relationship to the education system. As Lipman and Sharp themselves argued, schools are *the* social institutions responsible for the proper development of moral agents in a liberal society. In other words, schools are inherently linked to the dominant power-knowledge relationships that shape the social and political landscape of inquiry. Although schools present themselves as institutions promoting

individual growth and freedom, Michel Foucault (1972) argued that this narrative hides a more fundamental project of control and management that they were built for.

Education may well be, as of right, the instrument whereby every individual, in a society like our own, can gain access to any kind of discourse. But we well know that in its distribution, in what it permits and in what it prevents, it follows the well-trodden battle-lines of social conflict. Every education system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse with the knowledge and power it carries with it. (Foucault, 1972, p. 226-227)

When placed alongside Vansieleghem and Biesta's respective points, we can read Foucault's passage as a warning to practitioners of P4C: philosophy can enter schools because of its instrumental capacity for *controlling and regulating the subjectivity of children*. In other words, schools are an institution through which the larger nexus of power can both dictate what counts as "philosophical" and instrumentalize this understanding of philosophy for its own normative agenda. Doing philosophy in schools subjects philosophical dialogue and thinking to the whims of the dominant political forces. As David Kennedy and Vansieleghem (2011) worry, "philosophy for children may be both an instrument and an effect of a power that generates a totalising vision not only for a child but also for a people and humankind as a whole" (Vansieleghem and Kennedy, 2011, p. 179). When Lipman launches the P4C project through the Deweyan understanding of education, he explicitly chooses schools because they have the power to undermine students' private lives and privilege the broader political society through their disciplinary functions (e.g. Dewey, 2017, p. 19-22) In other words, schools use punishment as a means of forcing students into the predetermined ideals of the society they live in. However, Kennedy, Vansieleghem, and many others, ultimately disagree with the idea that P4C is doomed to be a mere instrument of the broader political ideology. On the contrary, they argue, P4C can also act as "a sort of Trojan horse wheeled into the ideological state apparatus of Western schooling" (Vansieleghem and Kennedy, 2011, p. 179).

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p4c as a grass-roots production of culture

The Trojan horse argument consists of two components that first must be looked at separately to understand their relationship: the community of philosophical inquiry and the school. According to Kennedy, four specific features of the community of philosophical inquiry allow it to subvert the hierarchical and coercive structures of public school classrooms. First, the CPI is a special type of pedagogical space that allows for both institutionalization and reform. As Nadia and David Kennedy (2011) elaborate:

As a dynamic discursive structure, CPI could be described as a non-linear, self-organising communication and argumentation system (Lushyn, 2002; Lushyn & Kennedy, 2000, 2003; Kennedy, 2005) that presents itself as linear, since whatever its emergent and open-ended properties, propositions are offered, claims are argued through standard logical entailment, and the conversation is guided on one level by the classical laws of thought (identity, non-contradiction, and the excluded middle). (Kennedy and Kennedy, 2011, p. 269)

In other words, the CPI is partially brought into being through the traditional rules of thinking and argumentation and in part materialized by the spontaneous, open-ended, and emergent existential situation of each participant. Within the CPI, philosophical dialogue is both determined and undeterminable, structured and yet open-ended, argued, yet never concluded. This is because in the CPI, “the concept re-enters human practice, where it is challenged by context and experience to justify the new understanding of it” (Ibid.). Hence, on the one hand, the CPI presents P4C as an analytical practice in critical thinking and reasoning that can serve the broader goals of education. On the other, it is a praxis that achieves these goals through radically different strategies that existentially empower participants to critically think for themselves and with others. As I discuss below, the CPI specifically 1) reshapes the participants’ relationship to knowledge, 2) emphasizes multiplicity over homogeneity, and 3) is a self-organizing means of inquiry.

Once P4C has made its way inside the school walls, the CPI has three additional features that motivate reform from within. First, the CPI provides an alternative relationship to knowledge. Schools, with their emphasis on

standardization, offer an approach to knowledge that is individualistic, hegemonic, settled, and absolute. However, the CPI offers an approach to knowledge that is “*fallibilist, inquiry-driven, communal, and dialogical* ... knowledge is never fully and finally accomplished, but is the subject of ongoing construction and reconstruction” (Ibid., p. 270). Knowledge is not a divine gift obtained from a higher authority with access to absolute truth. Rather, it is “a social phenomenon—something that we argue, deliberate, and decide to be the case together; we arrive at knowledge through “thinking for ourselves and with others” (Ibid.).

Second, “it operates through the expression and attempted coordination of multiple points of view, multiple styles of thinking, multiple ways of talking, and multiple experiences of the world” (Ibid.). The community of inquiry is not a lecture-based approach to education where the concept is already presented in a final, ideal, unquestionable form. On the contrary, within the boundaries of the CPI, concepts emerge from the very multiplicity of its participants by virtue of their working through the process of conceptualization. It is a bottom-up form of conceptualization that materializes and thinks philosophical concepts (like justice, beauty, or the good) through dynamic dialogue, tensions, frictions, and interferences between multiple points of view. This also points to a radical form of equality between members of the learning community. As Kennedy and Kennedy (2011) further explain:

The goal of the facilitator is to become an equal member of the group herself. Her success is measured by the extent to which her regulative function—distributing turns fairly and showing concern for the argument as a whole rather than just her individual perspective—comes to be shared by every other member of the group. (Ibid., p. 271)

Finally, the CPI promotes “an open, emergent, self-organising system, in that it is ecological, non-linear and irreversible, only partially predictable, and develops through an equilibrative process that steers a course between chaos and stagnation” (Ibid.). The appearance of the CPI is always partially dependent on its own immanent internal motions. While it is in part determined by external elements, the three

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features discussed above give the CPI a creative adaptability to reappropriate anything external as part of itself; thus making possible a radical destruction and re-construction of concepts, ideas, arguments, positions, relationships, and communities.

However, this does not fully explain why the CPI should concern itself with schools in the first place. Just because it can reform schools, why should it? Here Kennedy follows Dewey's vision of schools as a site of social transformation – with a twist. Rather than being a space of citizenry – i.e., one that prepares children for the complexity of democratic industrial societies – schools, according to Kennedy's reading of Dewey, are spaces of “multitude” or spaces where adults and children can “come together to produce new forms of life” (Kennedy, 2009, p. 52). As he explains:

In this vision, the school becomes one locus for social transformation, and necessarily – because it is an adult-child collective – transformation in the context of the interaction between children and adults. This lends a new dignity to the possibilities of childhood. It recognizes that childlike ways of knowing and acting are not simply to be replaced with adult ones through education but are expected to inform them as well. (Ibid., p. 53)

Schools are also spaces of multitude because they are “the chief epistemological site of any culture” (Ibid., p. 54). They exist across the spectrum of human diversity as spaces that not only communicate knowledge but also *how knowledge is acquired* (Ibid.). They are also a space where children gain a general understanding of their place as part of a collective that exists outside of the home. Like Dewey and Lipman, Kennedy sees the CPI in school classrooms as a genuine “embryonic society” where adults and children can cooperate as equals in the production of a global culture and global citizenship. The difference, however, is that this culture of people is united through its productive creativity rather than through a shared sovereign will (like the teacher, facilitator, or state). Unlike Lipman and Dewey, Kennedy envisions schools as a space where adults and children come together in a philosophical inquiry to become grassroots influencers of education and culture through the CPI. Rather than seeking to fix the practical shortcomings of Western liberal democracy through P4C, thinkers such as Kennedy, Vansieleghem,

and others argue that, on the contrary, P4C is a transforming force for a more existentially meaningful, productive, and empowering educational experience – one that can “hopefully serve as a voice for change in the school system” (Vitale, 2021, p. 127).

white ignorance in philosophy (for children)

For our purposes here, we are interested in contextualizing the Trojan horse argument within the material and historical conditions in which minority children live. To figure out whether schools are the most appropriate environment for empowering students of color through P4C, we must go beyond the P4C scholarship and turn to critical race theory. There are two principled reasons for this: First, neither Dewey, Kennedy, nor Vansieleghem contextualize their arguments within the specific history of race struggle in the United States. Second, doing so offers a perspective that can critically engage P4Cers’ own racially loaded assumptions and epistemic norms (i.e., it can highlight the potential white ignorance in P4C’s privileging of schools).

We first need to dispel the Deweyan/Lipmanian myth that exposure to philosophy immunizes a person against the irrational, unjust, or morally wrong elements of social or private life. History shows us that philosophy alone is not enough to develop what Lipman calls “critical thinking” – i.e., a cognitive defense mechanism against social dogmas and brainwashing.³ Philosophers and their philosophy – and by this, I mean the Western philosophical canon and professional philosophy in the US – are as much responsible as any other discipline (if not more so) for the normalization of colonialism and racism across the world. Against Lipman’s idealization of philosophical thinking, we can turn to Bill Lawson’s (2013)

³ It is important to note that for Lipman critical thinking is an element of reasonableness which also includes caring and creative thinking. Hence, Lipman presents all three as important elements of reasonableness and P4C. However, although critical thinking might not be sufficient to overcome bias and prejudice, it is necessary. Significantly, critical thinking is the element that deals with dogmas and private interests, both of which are arguably important to being aware of racial biases. (i.e., Lipman, 2003, p. 46-49). Neither caring nor creative thinking highlight those pertinent elements of racism in philosophical discourse. Caring thinking might be an important part of addressing racism in P4C, but to a lesser extent.

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“Philosophical Blacknuss: American Philosophy and the Particular,” which highlights the incongruence between philosophers’ claims to critical thinking and the profession’s own failure to value non-white experiences.

What often shocks new graduate students of color is that those people who are supposed to be rational and reflective about life and life experiences are not particularly welcoming to the life experiences of others. These students realize that these are the people teaching them and recommending them for jobs to other persons who have little regard for black people or the black experience. This is the harsh reality of life in the philosophy game. (Lawson, 2015, p. 89)

Kristie Dotson (2012) tells us that this is because professional philosophy supports a “culture of justification” that “requires the practice of making congruent one’s own ideas, projects and, ... pedagogical choices with some ‘traditional’ conception of philosophical engagement” (Dotson, 2012, p. 6). In other words, Dotson argues that for an idea or paper to be considered “philosophical,” it must fit within the status quo of what is currently considered “philosophical” by the dominant ideological and cultural forces that make up the landscape of professional philosophy. As a result, professional philosophy becomes inhospitable to diverse practitioners and their experiences, since they must first be made intelligible to a primarily white male Anglo-European crowd. While it is clear that philosophy is pedagogically beneficial, Lawson and Dotson both warn us that it is not enough by itself to erase or even mitigate all our epistemic failures and biases. As Lawson puts it, it “is not as if the ability to formulate a complicated argument is a vaccination against racism and sexism. Reason and sound arguments have not dislodged the view of the black experience as having no value” (Lawson, 2013, p. 89).

This gap between claims of “critical thinking” and the devaluing of non-white experience is, unfortunately, reflected in philosophy for children as well. One example, discussed by Darren Chetty (2018), is the Lipmanian concept of “reasonableness” or “rationality tempered by judgment” (Lipman, 2003, p. 11). Drawing inspiration from Charles Mills’ *The Racial Contract* (1997), Chetty argues that “the notion of ‘reasonableness’ that is, for many, at the heart of the Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach ... is constituted within the epistemology of ‘white

ignorance' and operates in such a way that it is unlikely to transgress the boundaries of white ignorance so as to view it from without" (Chetty 2018, p. 1).

Echoing Lawson and Dotson's criticisms, Mills defines white ignorance as a "cognitive handicap" supported by a de-historicized and de-racialized self-consciousness that makes it nearly impossible for white people (and more broadly speaking, people under the influence of whiteness) to critically engage with the world that they have themselves created and/or live in (Mills, 1997; 2007). While people of color cannot escape the weight of white supremacy, white people have created a global order (i.e., an epistemic, moral, and political order) that renders them (and others) intuitively blind to the history of race struggle that conditions their very existence. These de-historicized and de-racialized epistemic, social, and political norms then work to silence the struggles of minority communities by suppressing the deeply racialized and historically specific norms that condition North American everyday life. Similarly, by operating outside of the historical reality of race struggle, the Lipmanian concept of reasonableness is incapable of making sense of racial discourse, since race and racism exist outside the scope of reasonableness (Chetty, 2018). This turns the CPI into a silencing weapon that suppresses the racially loaded questions and concepts that students of color have about themselves, their community, and their world. As a result,

in a classroom where children are engaged in a philosophical inquiry structured by norms of 'reasonableness', the constitution of certain contributions as 'unreasonable' may serve to exclude perspectives offered by pupils from racialised minorities, and in doing so, to mask both and perpetuate racialised structures of domination (Chetty, 2018, p. 12).

Chetty (2014) offers us an example of such perpetuation through an analysis of *Tusk Tusk* (2006) by David McKee – a book often used by P4C practitioners to discuss topics of race and racism through the story of a black and a white elephant who hate each other. However, according to them, *Tusk Tusk* misrepresents issues of race and racism in several ways. First, there "is no declared reason for the black and white elephant to start fighting", which de-historicizes a historically constituted racial

relation (Ibid., 2014, p. 21). Second, the story fails to depict the unequal power structure that defines racism. According to Chetty, “there is a sense that both groups are equally wrong to fight and that the conditions of both black and white elephants are identical” (Ibid.). Finally, it presents the conflict as “*only* being about physical difference” and “seems to suggest miscegenation to be a solution”, both of which radically oversimplify the multi-dimensional elements of systemic racism. In other words, by misrepresenting and oversimplifying the concept of racism, *Tusk Tusk* promotes “white ignorance” as reasonable, all the while making discussions of race and racism grounded in empirical evidence appear unreasonable. They promote a view of “difference as superficial, racism as an irrational response to superficial differences, and tolerance and integration as solutions to racism,” without ever mentioning the historically situated “structural inequality ... and how it positions groups as inferior and superior” (Ibid., p. 22-23).

To be aware of these shortcomings and for Western philosophy (for children) to overcome its own white ignorance, we need to recontextualize Kennedy’s reformist argument within the history of racial struggle in the US. In doing so, we will be in a better position to evaluate whether schools can be reformed through P4C to be a safe and empowering space for students of color.

educational reform and the ruse of racial progress

While acknowledging the risks of instrumentalization that P4C faces when entering the school, we saw that Kennedy nonetheless argues that the successful CPI resists its fundamentally coercive and hierarchical structure. That is, even considering the criticism of instrumentalization, proponents of the Trojan horse view hold that P4C belongs in schools for its reformatory potential. While it retains an ability to be normalized within school curricula, the CPI nonetheless can generate incommensurable tensions in the traditional pedagogical norms of contemporary schooling. Although Kennedy’s argument has merits, I argue that it is supported by a de-historicized color-blind perspective of education and racial progress – which

essentially means that it is theorized from the dominant perspective of whiteness and white ignorance. Once we introduce the topic of race into our discussion of educational reform, Kennedy's argument begins to look more idealistic than grounded in the history of education in the US, as it seems to offer us a CPI that simply cannot deliver on its promises. To put it more succinctly, while Kennedy offers a convincing argument for why P4C offers a nuanced *alternative* (and perhaps more empowering) form of education, I am suspicious of the apparent reformist implications, especially in the context of reforming schools to serve the needs of minority students.

The history of "educational reform" in the US is historically tied to the history of race and racism – with *Brown v. Board of Education* perhaps being one of the most significant examples of this connection. To this day, *Brown v Board* (which includes the original landmark decision as well as the subsequent *Brown II* and *Brown III*) is seen as one of the most noteworthy US Supreme Court decisions for racial justice, and, as a result, the landmark decision has become the legal, academic, and social foundation for understanding and materializing racial integration in the US (Bell, 2004) – one that has even seeped into children's books like *Tusk Tusk*.

According to *Brown v. Board*, inequality was an error of the system that was instigated by superficial actors acting against the common good and every individual's right to life, liberty, and property. Segregation in schools, in other words, was preventing Black Americans from succeeding as equals in the United States. Thus, to remedy this error, the court stated that segregation in schools was unconstitutional due to its violation of the Equal Protection Act. Following the decision, many universities (including Harvard) "urged the creation of a liberal arts curriculum emphasizing the triumph and superiority of Western philosophy and civilization to stave off the racial and anti-colonial dissent of the 1960s and 1970s" (Curry, 2021). *Brown v. Board* thus became the narrative of a great triumph for liberalism and its ability to self-correct and fix the wrongs it had previously engaged in.

However, as critical race theorists have argued, the Court (made up exclusively of white men) made fundamental mistakes in their decision, which would not only undermine this post-Brown sentiment but also result in a lack of the racial progress *Brown* had promised non-white Americans. As Robert Carter, the lead attorney in one of the five cases that made up *Brown v. Board*, explained:

Few in the country, black or white, understood in 1954 that racial segregation was merely a symptom, not the disease; that the real sickness is that our society in all of its manifestations is geared to the maintenance of white superiority. (Carter, 1968, p. 247)

In other words, the courts confused segregation as the root cause of racial inequality when the true culprit was white supremacy. The problem with the “separate but equal” doctrine, in other words, was not segregation but rather the white supremacy that prevented Black communities (and other communities of color) from achieving equality. By making “segregation” rather than “white supremacy” unconstitutional, the courts missed the real issue that *Brown* was meant to highlight.

This costly mistake would then become the bedrock of contemporary white supremacy in the US. *Brown* became both the marker and engine of racial social progress in a white supremacist United States. On the one hand, *Brown* dictated the scope of non-white children’s education by standardizing white pedagogy as the universal form of instruction. In other words,

The education of African-descended people has been collapsed into a single ideological goal, namely how to mold Blacks into more functional and productive members of American society under the idea of equality established by *Brown v. Board* ... Under this new morality, the education of Blacks becomes a decidedly normative endeavor in which schools compel African-descended people to base their identity around how Blacks should act and what Blacks ought to be as Americans ... This ideology, instead of attending to what Blacks should learn or the knowledge Blacks need to have in order to thrive as *Blacks in America*, forces Blacks to abide by the social motives that aim to create *good Negro citizens*. (Curry, 2008, p. 37)

Brown made schools the engine of progress for Black individuals and other minorities. Integrated non-white children now had the opportunity to grow up with the same education as white children and could thus begin their adult lives as equal

citizens, thanks to a neutral, color-blind, equal (but whitewashed) education. Rather than acknowledging the white supremacist infrastructure of the US social and legal environment and the inherent historical and material inequality of Black and white children, *the Court saw non-white Americans as fundamentally equal but not given the right (white) opportunities*. Thus, if given the same opportunities as white children, minority students will grow up to become equal members of society. Rather than offering Black students an education that taught them how to thrive *as unequal members of the US*, *Brown v. Board* created an educational experience that essentially treated Black children as if they were other equal white children.

On the other hand, *Brown* also became the marker of a successful campaign for racial progress through educational reform. The *Equal Protection Act* had finally taken its final form and created a society on its way to genuine freedom and equality for all. However, Derrick Bell (2004), argued:

Equality by proclamation not only failed to truly reflect the complexity of racial subordination, it also vested the government and the courts with the ultimate moral authority to define African-American freedom. When the *Brown* decision was followed by civil rights laws, mostly motivated by black activism that highlighted the continuing racism that undermined our Cold War battles with the Soviet Union, policymakers and much of white society easily reached the premature conclusion that America was now fair and neutral. (Bell, 2004, p. 186)

With this novel claim to equality came “the trumpets of ‘reverse discrimination’” claiming that big government was now discriminating against whites (Ibid.). In its turn, “the government and the courts began giving priority to the rights of ‘innocent whites’ caught in the remedial web of civil rights laws that, to be effective, had to recognize and correct the priorities of race that some whites had deemed vested and permanent” (Ibid.). The equality and educational reform that *Brown* claimed to have engendered thus became a weapon of racism that instrumentalized the moral discourse of anti-racism for the sake of white supremacy. In other words, the very reforms that *Brown v. Board* advocated came to take center stage in contemporary expressions of racism in public education.

Today, this instrumentalization of anti-racism, equality, and educational reform remains at the epicenter of white supremacy's sustained political and social influence. The most visible example of this is perhaps the wave of anti-Critical Race Theory (CRT) educational bills sweeping the US. which started with President Donald Trump's 2020 "Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping," which prohibited federal agencies and recipients of government funding from teaching "divisive concepts."⁴ These divisive concepts have been connected to CRT (partially thanks to anti-CRT critic and conservative activist Christopher Rufo⁵), in turn making it the center of white conservatives' attacks on policies such as affirmative actions and curriculum/lesson plans that acknowledge the structural inequalities existing in American education. As of August 2023, 750 anti-CRT attempts have been made at the local, state, and/or federal level across all 50 US states, with 22 states adopting anti-CRT legislation or Executive orders (UCLA School of Law CRT Forward, 2023).

Proponents of anti-CRT are riding the wave of equality-backed white supremacy that *Brown* began. As Curry (2021) argues:

the controversy surrounding CRT is not about the verifiability of its claims or the accuracy of attributing social inequities to anti-Black racism. The debate over CRT is at its heart the assertion, through censorship and punishment, that Black people do not – *and should not have* – the ability to indict the historical legacy of white civilization and the virtue of white individuals. (Curry, 2021)

⁴ Divisive concepts are defined as concepts that express "(1) one race or sex is superior to another race or sex; (2) the United States is fundamentally racist or sexist, (3) an individual, by virtue of his or her race or sex, is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously; (4) an individual should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment solely or partly because of his or her race; (5) members of one race or sex cannot and should not attempt to treat others without respect to race or sex; (6) an individual's moral character is necessarily determined by his or her race or sex; (7) an individual, by virtue of his or her race or sex, bears responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex; (8) any individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of his or her race or sex; (9) meritocracy or traits such as hard work ethic are racist or sexist, or were created by a particular race to oppress another race" (Trump, 2020).

⁵ While the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision is still at the center of this narrative, Christopher Rufo interestingly identifies the danger of CRT with another historical example of "racial progress" in the US – the election of President Barack Obama and the supposed leftist takeover of the government identifiable by the codification of "communist" policies like Obamacare.

Anti-CRT bills do this in a myriad of ways, but two are particularly popular. First, the revived idea of racial progress (specifically engendered by President Barack Obama's election) made it possible for anti-CRT proponents to victimize whiteness. Rufo, for example, claims that since everyone is now equal, anti-white leftists have the political platform to suppress white people and white values. CRT is one such attempt to silence white people by vilifying them as inherent oppressors who can never be victims of oppression themselves. In this world of equality, he argues, where both whites and non-whites have power, public schools have started materializing the leftist CRT agenda that vilifies and silences white people (and by extent white values like freedom and true equality) into extinction. As Rufo writes, public "school districts across the country have begun to apply the principles of critical pedagogy in the classroom," where teachers "set an emotional anchor by framing the United States as an oppressive society, separate individual students into the categories of 'oppressor' and 'oppressed,' and direct the group toward prearranged political conclusions" (Rufo, 2023, p. 173). As an example of the vilification of whiteness in public school, Rufo erroneously claimed that the California Department of Education's "Ethnic Studies Curriculum" required students to chant to Aztec gods and encouraged sacrificial counter-genocide against Christians (Rufo, 2021).

Second, this equality-based implementation of "racial progress" twists communities of color's plights into an attempt to gain an unfair position in society. One such example is Florida Governor Ron DeSantis' "anti-woke agenda," which gains much of its strength from the mistakes of *Brown*. In 2022, DeSantis signed House Bill (HB) 7, which made it discriminatory to teach "divisive concepts" and prohibited teaching materials that address and engage with the contemporary systemic inequality in education.⁶ This in turn opened the door to reforming the state's Black history "social studies curriculum." Citing the need for more neutrality and impartial equality in the face of the CRT leftist agenda to vilify white Christians, Florida children are today being taught that slavery was not all that morally

⁶ One example of this was the Florida Department of Education's rejection of 54 of the 132 proposed math textbooks in 2022 due to connections with critical race theory, and socio-emotional learning.

egregious, since it was beneficial to slaves. They specifically encourage teachers to emphasize that “slaves developed skills which, in some instances, could be applied for their personal benefit” (Florida Department of Education, 2023). Through the ideal of racial equality, Governor DeSantis was thus able to push for these pedagogical rectifications to his state’s curriculum in order to provide a supposedly more complete and fairer picture of the history of slavery.

the cake is a lie

What this account shows us is that racially loaded educational reforms have often coincided with a white supremacist agenda; that, on the contrary, rather than engendering change and delivering on its promises, school reform often merely changes how oppression is delivered. In other words, the very idea of a racially progressive educational reform “is not a solution to” the systemic problems that plague the lives and education of students of color, but “a regeneration of the problem in a particularly perverse form” (Bell, 1992, p. 3). It is within this history that Kennedy’s argument for schools fails to consider the CPI’s ability to empower minority students through educational reform.

One may argue, however, that *Brown v. Board* was a top-down reform, as opposed to Kennedy’s approach, which is a bottom-up, grassroots effort to reform education from the inside. The educational reforms brought on by *Brown* failed to engender its promise for racial progress because individuals took advantage of the court’s mistake. However, as Kennedy envisions P4C, it is a bottom-up reform that begins with the members of the community of philosophical inquiry. The CPI is not an attempt at reform through government, but rather through the students themselves. It is more dynamic, more anarchic, and more democratic than what the liberal state can deliver.

While this might be the case outside of state-sponsored disciplinary spaces of surveillance and control like schools, Kennedy’s argument has not met his burden of proof for three reasons. First, any public education reform has to be state-approved.

Hence, even if Kennedy's CPI briefly offers an alternative style of education in minority-majority schools, it will only be allowed to operate within the legal boundaries established and enforced by the state. In many states, these legal boundaries enforce a public education that forbids any criticism of white supremacy or systemic inequality. In these states, the work of race-centered educational reforms is challenging if not impossible to begin – especially for teachers in minority majority-serving institutions, which are usually underfunded and understaffed. The history above shows us that the material conditions in public schools create an unfavorable climate for P4C-led anti-racist institutional reforms to become reality. Importantly, this implies that the CPI's ability to self-organize is always already somewhat compromised, especially in classrooms that serve majority-minority students.

Second, the notion of equality that Kennedy deploys in his argument is reminiscent of the integrative equality the Supreme Court used to settle *Brown v. Board of Education*. Part of what makes Kennedy's CPI reformative is its ability to bring in a multiplicity of equally-integrated perspectives into an otherwise coercive space of inequality and hegemony – i.e. multitude. As they further explain,

Multitude is ... oriented to the sublation of nationalistic identities in the emergence of a sense of global citizenship, a planetary identity that is based on both cultural and personal singularity as well as an insistence on human rights and shared democratic ideals, and which seeks a "common" based neither on totalization nor exclusion. (Kennedy, 2009, p. 58)

Within the context of race and education, we can therefore see Kennedy's argument as a reaffirmation of the US Supreme Court's mistake of confusing equality with the integration of multiple perspectives into a single unified space. This essentially means that while the CPI offers an alternative pedagogy that rejects traditional education, it does not subvert the implicit and explicit institutional racism of the American education system.

Third, due to a shared notion of equality, Kennedy's CPI can easily be co-opted and instrumentalized by white supremacy. It therefore follows from the history of

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race and education in the US that P4C's attempts to empower students of color through educational reform will at best fall short, and at worst become weaponized by white supremacy. Educational reform seems too empty of a goal for P4C practitioners concerned with empowering students of color to succeed in a world that has normalized their failure – even in the face of structural reform.

bell's racial realism and philosophy for children

Given this history, we should rather follow in Bell's footsteps and ask: "are we ignoring a current message with implications for the future which history has already taught us about the past?" (Bell, 1992, p. 5). Bell's question is meant to interrogate the very idea of racial progress; that after all this time and after so many false promises, the narrative of racial progress is a trap meant to silence and distract. Racism, according to him, is a permanent ordinary occurrence of contemporary living. While some may read this as a nihilistic admission of defeat, Bell takes this to be the realistic truth we must accept before we can begin to reconsider what a pro-Black and pro-minorities project may look like. As he writes:

To initiate the reconsideration, I want to set forth this proposition, which will be easier to reject than refute: *Black people will never gain full equality in this country. Even those herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary "peaks of progress," short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance. This is a hard-to-accept fact that all history verifies. We must acknowledge it, not as a sign of submission, but as an act of ultimate defiance.* (Bell, 1992, p. 12)

In other words, it is only once we accept the factual impossibility of racial justice and the settled everyday nature of racial injustice that we can finally begin the task of addressing these issues. Only then, for Bell, will we be in a position to finally hear what history has been trying to teach us. The Trojan horse argument thus fails to offer us a concrete positive pro-minority project because it does not position itself within the history of racism in the US public school system. By not theorizing from within the historical conditions of racism, Kennedy and other supporters of the Trojan horse position ultimately fail to offer a strong enough argument for why we should

privilege schools as the P4C space – especially if our goal is to empower underrepresented groups.

Part of P4C's value is its ability to offer disenfranchised students a platform on which to experiment and play with existentially pressing questions about their identities, their place in the world, and the social environment they inhabit (Reed-Sandoval, 2016, 2019; Torrey, 2020). As John Torrey (2020) puts it: "Particularly for underserved and underrepresented minorities that are not given access to this kind of engagement, being exposed to different ways of describing and analyzing one's self and one's relation to the world can be invaluable" (Torrey, 2020, p. 408). However, the racist history of education and schools' white supremacist infrastructure make public classrooms an uninviting space for engaging in these discussions. Rather than giving students of color "alternative ways of processing and describing their world" and giving "them more chances to speak", anti-CRT bills are on the contrary forcing P4C practitioners to silence them in many states (Ibid., p. 409). Furthermore, even without anti-CRT bills silencing minority students' existential inquiries, many of them will silence themselves. Students of color can often, either implicitly and/or explicitly, carry with them this history of abuse and violence – which tends to result in an implicit distrust of schools and authority figures within schools (Yeager et al., 2017). Hence, if our goal is educational reform, it makes sense for P4C to operate in schools. However, if we have given up on such lofty ideals because of their historical implication in the sustained dominance of white supremacy and rather seek to empower minority youth in a white supremacist society, it may be time for P4C to consider utilizing spaces that are not explicitly designed and deployed to support white dominance.

What are we to do in the face of such a reality? How can Bell's racial realism provide a stepping stone for engendering a more empowering CPI? Perhaps we should demand that practitioners justify their choices again, but this time with three new insights. First, and perhaps counterintuitively, actualizing real progress may mean that we give up any notion of "progress" (whether it be racial, educational, or

political, etc.) as a justification for where and how we practice our craft – especially with regard to CPIs that serve minority youths. Progress can only be measured after the fact, and hence, any notion of progress we use to justify our practice before the fact will inadvertently have to resort to idealism. While idealism may not be problematic on its own, it does become an urgent problem once its detachment from empirical reality reaffirms a history of racial harm. As I hope to have shown, it is this very idealism (viewing schools as a space of social progress) that sinks the Trojan horse argument. Due to this idealism, it remains blind to the material history of race and racism in public education. If we agree with Bell that race and racism are permanent and fundamental features of a white supremacist society, then P4C's colorblind attitude towards its justification of schools makes it idealistic (if only because a position that fails to consider how race and racism affect its own philosophical justification must assume racial equality – an assumption that is arguably false and historically decontextualized). We can draw inspiration from Curry's work. Rather than racial progress, and second, we ought to justify where and how we practice P4C *given* that progress has been elusive. Rather than treating or aiming for everyone to be equal, we need to justify how and where we practice P4C in a way that acknowledges the structural inequalities that enter our CPIs (even when we do everything to avoid them). After all, the CPI may be able to change the world, but it will have to do so from within the given historical situated material conditions of said world.

Finally, it also follows that our justifications need to be more localized and consider the specific historical relationships between the spaces we consider and the inquirers' identities. In lieu of treating all children and schools (as well as the combination of children and schools) as ontologically hegemonic – as Lipman, Sharp, Kennedy, Vansieleghem, and Lone all seem to do – we need a justification that considers the historical inequalities of specific identities within specific spaces. In this sense, schools may be a space of progress for certain young people, but not others. The CPI might be open to multitude, or it might have to be segregated. It might aim

to create good citizens or revolutionaries. When our justifications are derived from the historical and material conditions of the local life, they are no longer bounded by the idealism of progress and can take root in the immediate needs and desires of the CPI's members. For example, and as Curry explains,

The reality of racism demands that the education of Blacks be tailored to their particular racial status in America—regardless of how educators feel about the saliency of racism in American society. Blacks can no longer content themselves with the empty notions of racial equality or the ill-maintained hope in the moral suasion of whites as our justifications to acquiesce white racism. (Curry, 2008, p. 37)

In the same light, P4C practitioners need to tailor their justification of how and where they practice P4C to the specific needs and histories of the inquirers within the CPI. Then, P4C would create philosophical conversation and thought from the immediate intersubjective relationships of the CPI's members and their community. Hence, part of our ethical considerations ought to include a reflection on the status of certain subjects in the various spaces in which we want to engender a CPI.

As we grapple with the complexities of P4C's role in our educational landscape, we must heed the wisdom of Bell's racial realism. It compels us to reevaluate our justifications for where and how we practice P4C, urging us to discard the idealistic notions of progress that have dominated our philosophies and practice. Instead, we should ground our justifications in the harsh realities of structural inequalities, acknowledging the historical relationships between specific identities and the spaces they occupy. By doing so, we can break free from the confines of a one-size-fits-all approach and embrace a more localized, nuanced, and empowering perspective. As Curry and Bell remind us, the imperatives of confronting racism demand localized and tailored solutions, not empty promises of equality. Just as P4C adapts to the unique needs and desires of its participants, our justifications should mirror the specific contexts and challenges faced by the communities we serve. In this way, we can foster a more affirming, responsive, and meaningful P4C practice—one that can say “yes to life, even in its strangest and hardest problems” (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 485).

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