

RADICAL TEACHER

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Refusing to be Complicit in our Prison Nation: Teachers Rethinking Mandated Reporting

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NYC ACTION IN SOLIDARITY WITH FERGUSON, MO, 2014 (IMAGE: THE ALL-NITE IMAGES)

Picture this: It is February, snowy outside, and a chilly 25 degrees Fahrenheit. Ariel shows up to her 2nd grade class dressed in a T-shirt, a thin jacket, a skirt, no socks, and some wildly colored rain boots.

Context #1: This is a tuition-based Waldorf or Montessori school and creativity is prized. Almost all the students are from affluent homes and live in relatively well-appointed and homogeneous neighborhoods and households. The parents who attend each school meeting overwhelmingly support attachment parenting, an approach to child-rearing that centers a child's creativity and autonomy and includes practices such as co-sleeping that support the bond between child and parent.

Context #2: This public school is described by the district as "at risk" and is in a neighborhood that experiences systemic disinvestment: few afterschool programs for young people, dwindling social services, high unemployment, and unmaintained parks and other public spaces. This community does possess other forms of public investment: policing and surveillance. The school staff has a high turnover, and many of the new teachers don't live in the neighborhood.

Race and class, built into these descriptions of context and geography, make the galaxy of difference to how schools engage with Ariel and her rain boots. When affluent white children are underdressed for the weather, an initial assumption is often to attribute that difference to creativity, or freedom of expression. *That child is an innovator! She marches to her own drum!* Or, when a child reports sleeping in a family bed, it is attachment parenting, a legitimate and defensible way for a parent to raise their child. Yet, when poor and/or non-white parents engage in these practices, they are neglecting their child. *No socks in the cold weather?! That child is being abused.* Sharing a bed is *co-sleeping* and is a potentially criminalizable activity in many states.

Many of us might not think twice about reporting Ariel to child social services. *We care!* How can it be a bad thing to express concern about a child's well being? However, this small act of reporting can trigger a landslide. Child Protective Services has neither protected children, nor addressed the systemic factors that make children more vulnerable. Instead, as scholar and activist Dorothy Roberts chronicles in her blistering, *Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare* (2002), the nation's child welfare systems dismantle Black families, demonize Black mothers, and place Black children in the "pipeline" for prison.

Adults harm children, including their own. Children harm each other. While the everyday crushing violence of poverty and the toll it exacts on young people rarely makes headlines, the public, the media, and policymakers gravitate towards the few cases that involve extreme abuse and sometimes even death. The lives, and preventable deaths, of a small number of young people are unquestionably important. We must work to end

interpersonal violence, including how adults harm the children in their lives. Any death is too many, and we believe our communities are capable of building antiviolence movements that can eliminate child abuse. However, this violence should not be used to legitimate and expand a carceral state that fails to either prevent or end violence against children. And, as this essay illustrates, these systems fall woefully short in helping educators negotiate the overwhelming majority of situations that we face, such as Ariel in her rain boots, that rely on judgment or discretion.

Ensuring that *Black Lives Matter* in education requires seismic shifts including shrinking the footprint of policing in hallways and communities, excavating the ongoing practices and policies that reproduce heterogendered white supremacy in schools, and much more. However, what is too often erased in these movements is the key way the profession of teaching facilitates forms of racialized and heterogendered surveillance and criminalization. Teachers are mandated reporters who are required by law to report young people that they have reason to believe experience neglect and abuse. While on paper this charge looks neutral, as caregivers, mothers, educators and scholars we write this essay to examine the impacts of mandated reporting. To teach to ensure that all Black Lives Matter requires a refusal to be complicit in the mechanisms which contribute to the destruction of too many families and communities.

Teacher/Mandated Reporter/Cop

Many teachers know that they are legally obligated to report. *Mandated Reporter* laws require people who have interactions with children (or other vulnerable or protected populations) to report reasonable suspicions of neglect or abuse. *By law I must report if I suspect a child is being harmed!* As mandated reporters, educational personnel report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect at essentially *the same rate* as law enforcement.

Three-fifths (62.7 percent) of all reports of alleged child abuse or neglect were made by professionals. The term "professional" means that the person who was the source of the report had contact with the alleged child maltreatment victim as part of their job. The most common professional report sources were legal and law enforcement personnel (18.1 percent), education personnel (17.7 percent), social services staff (11.0 percent). (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016, p. 2)

This legal position means that teachers aren't bystanders and it places them within the "soft" extension of the carceral, or punishing, state.

The establishment of mandated reporting laws, through one lens, is fairly transparent. In 1962, C. Henry Kempe's "The Battered-Child Syndrome" was published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. One of the first studies to name child abuse as a significant and widespread social issue, Kempe's article garnered national attention and galvanized action. Mainstream media coverage of child abuse, according to historian Barbara Nelson, skyrocketed: "between 1950 and 1980 the *Times*

published 652 articles pertaining to [child] abuse” (Nelson, 1984, p. 73). Between 1963 and 1967 all states passed some form of a child abuse reporting law (Nelson, 1984, p. 72). By 1978, after the 1974 passage of federal legislation, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), which required states to pass “provisions or procedures for an individual to report known and suspected instances of child abuse and neglect, including a State law for mandatory reporting by individuals required to report such instances” (Brown & Gallagher, 2014, p. 45), mandated reporting legislation flourished: “forty-eight states required nurses to report, forty-nine required teachers and school officials to report, forty-nine required social workers to report, and forty required law enforcement officers to report” (Brown & Gallagher, 2014, p. 42).

Across the states, teachers’ legal roles under mandated reporter laws are relatively similar. For example, the 1975 Illinois Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act states that teachers must inform authorities if they have a “reasonable cause to believe” a child is being neglected or abused. Over the last three decades these laws have continued to shift: In Illinois, starting in 1986 all teachers must sign a form stating that they understand the repercussions if they fail to comply, and as of 2013, all mandated reporters must be retrained in the law every five years. There are few prosecutions of “failure to report.” In Illinois only a handful of teachers have been charged over the last decade; however, compared to other states, the penalties are steep. “Illinois defines a failure to report as a Class A misdemeanor with a subsequent violation carrying a class 4 felony charge. A class 4 felony in Illinois carries a minimum jail sentence of one year with a maximum of three years” (Brown & Gallagher 2014, p. 63).

Mandated reporting laws are a part of a wider movement that created our nation’s child protection services, a system, legal scholar Martin Guggenheim (2005) argues, that is in part the result of a political compromise and a failure to name and to challenge white supremacy, particularly anti-Black racism. Guggenheim argues that the early 1970s were characterized by a racialized backlash to the limited gains forged through both the 1960s era civil rights movement and the Johnson Administration’s “War on Poverty.” Social movements fought to ensure that key federal social assistance programs were at least nominally open to non-white communities, and new initiatives emerged to target poverty. Yet these programs were quickly under attack precisely because they had been extended to some non-white communities, and particularly to women (Kandaswamy, 2010). While anti-poverty funding had been directly linked to child welfare in 1967 through federal programs like the Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC), by the 1970s, while children still merited support, poor adults, particularly nonwhite adults, did not. Conservatives, Guggenheim writes, effectively argued that “liberal anti-poverty programs had exacerbated the problems of the poor” (Guggenheim, 2005, p. 184).

Unwilling and unable to name and oppose the anti-Black racism at the core of the backlash against government support for social welfare programs, Democratic policymakers retreated. Policing families,

specifically mothers, was possible in order to save children, but ending poverty, supporting childcare, and promoting equality of opportunity, were not. The 1974 federal legislation, Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), separated child protection from anti-poverty programs. With CAPTA, children’s wellbeing was policed, but not supported, and all the structural factors that shape child welfare, including, for example, parent’s income, were rendered invisible. Fighting child abuse merited support from the government, but families in need did not.

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Social movements that sought to raise the visibility of sexual violence also helped to shape child protective services. In the 1960s and 1970s feminists mobilized to make interpersonal violence visible to mainstream audiences, in particular physical and sexual violence. With street mobilizations and new lines of scholarly research, feminists named the state’s complicity in erasing and minimizing (cisgendered) men’s violence against the women and children in their lives. Yet, this demand was quickly absorbed by the state. While grassroots and community organizing coalesced around experiences of harm, the state responded with increased policing and additional punishing laws. In the violence against women movement, “we won the mainstream but lost the movement,” writes sociologist Beth Richie in *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America’s Prison Nation*(2012) – a key text chronicling the shift in the anti-violence movement from organizing to criminalization. While punitive measures, such as mandated reporting laws, may purport to address the harm some children experience, criminalization is not a deterrent, a preventative tool, or a response capable of igniting cultural shifts to reduce violence.

Mandated reporting laws are not universal. In New Zealand, where mandated reporting laws currently do not exist, a team of researchers recently investigated the potential impact of implementing mandatory reporting legislation. An article summarizing the results of this large-scale study published in a 2015 issue of *Children’s Rights* did not recommend mandated reporting as it “would deter secondary students from disclosing abuse to teachers and school counselors. Further, the introduction of mandatory reporting laws might deter students from attending school if they had been obviously physically abused” (p. 491). A publication by the Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education and the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, assessing treatment and intervention programs, *Violence in Families: Assessing*

Prevention and Treatment Programs suggests that it is was implemented “fact free”:

Mandatory reporting requirements were adopted without evidence of their effectiveness; no reliable study has yet demonstrated their positive or negative effects on the health and well-being of children at risk of maltreatment, their parents and caregivers, and service providers. (Chalk & King, 1998, p. 161)

Rather than an open dialogue about the effectiveness of mandated reporting legislation, we continue to move in the opposite direction. In Tennessee the names of those convicted and *suspected* of child abuse or neglect, even if these claims are investigated and found to be unsubstantiated, are made publicly available online by the state (Locker, 2015).

While the 2015 Supreme Court decision in *Ohio v. Clark* outlined that teachers *are not* law enforcement, and therefore a child’s admission of abuse to a teacher is admissible in a court of law (National School Board Association, 2015), mandated reporter laws aim to ensure that teachers do police work: surveillance, regulation, and punishment. Mandated reporting laws might suggest that the problem of child abuse and neglect has been solved, but in reality, these laws do little to help vulnerable families including children, do not reduce or eradicate violence toward children, and fail to create needed public dialogues about the structural contexts that facilitate harm.

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Poverty v. Neglect & Abuse: Who decides?

No one doubts that teachers report suspected cases of neglect or abuse to law enforcement out of care and concern. *I am reporting Ariel because I am worried about her and I care!* But at least 75% of all substantiated cases are for neglect, a category difficult to define (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016, p. 3). And what is the role of poverty, which is the strongest predictor of all assessments of child abuse and neglect? The federal government’s guidelines offer this official definition of child abuse and neglect:

Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; or an act or

failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm. (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013, p. 2)

There are no bright lines around “imminent risk” or “serious harm.” Most significantly, poverty and assessments of neglect are intertwined. Not only can poverty be misidentified as neglect, or a failure to act – *No money to pay for food? You are neglecting your hungry child* – but poverty creates the conditions for neglect – *With no money to pay for food, your child is hungry and experiencing neglect.* In 2013, approximately 20% of all US families lived at the federally recognized poverty level, defined as a family of four living below \$23,624 a year. Black children are four times as likely as white children to live in poverty (Tavernise, 2015). Parsing out what neglect is, and its relationship to poverty, is never race neutral.

Several jurisdictions in the United States have tried to address the overlap between poverty and neglect by implementing laws that acknowledge that poverty is not neglect. According to a report by the American Bar Association, “about half of the states have acknowledged that poverty does not equal neglect, by including a poverty exemption in their statutory definition of neglect. The exemptions range from outright exemption for neglect if poverty is a factor, to an exemption for environmental factors beyond the parent’s control” (Dale, 2014). Yet, conversely, some states explicitly assert that a child’s witnessing of domestic abuse is a form of neglect (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016, p. 2. Some officials in the Kansas Department of Children and Family Services don’t think parenting by gay and lesbians is good for children (Lowry, 2015). Courts and social services agencies are also willing to entertain the question: are people with disabilities unfit to parent? (Powell, 2014). What about if a parent dates someone with a criminal record? While a small percentage of substantiated cases do involve indisputable and significant harm, neglect is often a judgment call and in communities where patriarchy and homophobia are valued and naturalized, neglect can be an elastic and convenient category.

The mandate of Child Protective Services (CPS) is to ensure the wellbeing of children. CPS is not structured to eliminate poverty or systemic racial discrimination. But if there is a strong relationship between poverty and neglect, and between non-white communities and poverty, is CPS contributing to masking the problem? Across the US tax dollars support programs that purport to “save children,” but not to support communities and families. Our minimum wage is not a living wage. There is no universal healthcare. Scant resources support access to childcare. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 catastrophically reduced the program, implementing bans for those with drug related convictions, establishing a lifetime limit of five years to access benefits, and more. While there is no money to support families or to combat poverty, in 2012, federal, state, and local sources spent over *\$28.2 billion* on child welfare activities including foster care, adoption, CPS investigations, and case management (DeVooght, Fletcher & Cooper, 2014, p. 1).

With murky boundaries surrounding abuse and neglect, billions of dollars behind systems and institutions

designed to identify and regulate failing families, and shrinking resources available to support the poor and the working poor, allegations of child neglect and abuse particularly from educators, continues, in part because of our good intentions. Teachers want to help: We want to know that the children in our classes are safe when they return to their homes.

Smoke and Fire, or Smoke and Mirrors?

Beyond the legal requirements, many teachers might also feel morally compelled to report. *Even if CPS doesn't find something, we all know that if there is smoke there is fire.*

But is this true? The data suggest otherwise: professionals, including teachers, are more likely to suspect and to report "child abuse and neglect" in low-income families of color. While statistics vary across the nation, the overwhelming majority of reports of child abuse and neglect are found to be unsubstantiated. Or, CPS investigates and finds no evidence of neglect or abuse. In 2014 "CPS agencies received an estimated 3.6 million referrals" and there were 702,000 victims of child abuse and neglect (victim rate was 9.4 victims per 1,000 children in the population) according to the federal government's annual report, *Child Maltreatment 2014* (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016, p. 2). The majority of substantiated cases are for neglect, not physical or sexual abuse: "Three-quarters (75.0%) of victims were neglected, 17.0 percent were physically abused, and 8.3 percent were sexually abused" (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016, p. 2). Non-white children are reported as maltreated at higher rates than white children:

Black, American Indian or Alaskan Native, and multiple-race children have higher rates of reported child maltreatment than do other children. In 2013, black children had a reported maltreatment rate of 14.6 per thousand children, American Indian and Alaskan Native children had a reported maltreatment rate of 12.5, and children of multiple races had a rate of 10.6 per thousand. This compares with 8.5 for Hispanic children, 7.9 per thousand for Pacific Islander children, 8.1 per thousand for white children, and 1.7 for Asian children. (Child Trends Data Bank, 2015a, p. 4)

The picture from this research: teachers suspect and report Black, American Indian or Alaskan Native children as maltreated at significantly higher rates than white children. The majority of all allegations of abuse and neglect are unsubstantiated. When a CPS finds a problem, it is usually neglect, not abuse. (Of course, if an investigation doesn't reveal evidence this doesn't necessarily mean that child is *not* experiencing harm. Yet, this same logic must also suggest that an official finding of neglect and abuse doesn't necessarily always indicate that child *is* being abused or neglected. We can't have it only one-way).

Recognizing neglect is murky. Or, there might very well be "smoke" but the lens and judgment of professionals most likely to report child abuse and neglect are not neutral. Parenting practices are scrutinized through a deeply classed, heterogendered, and racialized lens.

Education is still predominantly a white feminized profession, and as research *continues to illustrate* that white teachers are more likely to anticipate academic success from white students than from Black students (Gershenson, Holt & Papageorge, 2016), it is not a stretch to assume that white teachers have trouble reading parenting practices across race. Deeply entrenched feelings and experiences shape all of our ideas of what constitutes "good enough" parenting, and the stakes are high.

Consider the difference: in June of 2014 Debra Harrell couldn't afford childcare and let her nine-year-old daughter play in a nearby park by herself while she was working as a shift manager in a McDonald's in North Augusta, South Carolina (Henderson, 2014). In 2008 Lenore Skenazy left her nine-year-old son in Bloomingdales in Manhattan with a Metrocard, a map, and \$20. Her son arrived home, alone, approximately 45 minutes later (Skenazy, 2008). Debra was arrested and charged with "unlawful neglect of a child." Her daughter was initially removed from her care, Debra spent seventeen days in jail, and McDonald's only reinstated her after pressure from advocacy groups (Henderson, 2014). Lenore wrote a column about letting her son take the train home alone and was lauded as a hero of the "Free Parenting" movement (Skenazy, 2008). Debra, an African-American woman, was trying to keep her minimum wage job, while Lenore, a white Yale-educated journalist, invented the "Take Our Children to the Park & Leave Them There Day" in 2010 to promote children's autonomy.

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Perhaps Debra's child was at risk. But what about Lenore's? What inoculates Lenore from state intervention and surveillance? And, perhaps most compellingly, how will punishing Debra help her, or her child? National media attention was required to ensure that McDonald's, where she had worked successfully for the previous five years, did not fire Debra (Henderson, 2014). With a criminal record, securing employment will be even more precarious for Debra. Without legal employment, Debra's ability to provide adequate housing, food and healthcare diminishes, all both potential further evidence of, or preconditions for, neglect or abuse. And Lenore? Her case is only visible because she wrote about it. Across the United States, at any given moment, families like Lenore's with access to wealth and privilege are able to shield their parenting practices from scrutiny.

What is so wrong with Child Protective Services?

It is better to be safe than sorry. It can't hurt to report Ariel, even if I just feel that something is wrong. Reporting suspected neglect or child abuse, an action many teachers construe as helping and necessary, sets in motion

a pathway for students of color, particularly African-American youth and their families, to be swallowed up by our incarceration nation.

While laws and investigation procedures differ across states, reporting frequently triggers a bureaucratic and rigid process that is immediately beyond the teacher, and the family's, control. When an investigation is opened, every action of a family can come under surveillance. *Investigation* comes from the criminal justice world, and the links are not merely surface. A CPS investigation is not a friendly conversation with family members about what is difficult. Instead of providing a potential pathway to assistance or resources, opening an investigation often subjects that child and their family to intrusive and psychologically difficult interrogations. If CPS is alerted because of Ariel's lack of warm winter clothing, an entire household comes under scrutiny. The family must defend their behavior or environment. Poverty becomes evidence of alleged criminality, abuse, or neglect. Yet, while this investigation is punitive, the family has none of the "rights" even nominally attached to the criminal legal system: the family has no Miranda protection, no right against self-incrimination.

If the investigation does reveal abuse or neglect, engagement with CPS is far from optimal. Numerous research studies, including reports produced by state and federal governments, document that children in protective services, particularly those in foster care, have some of the worst life outcomes: least likely to graduate from high school and most likely to end up incarcerated (Child Trends, 2015). Young people who spend years in care and are bumped across multiple placements, sadly not an anomaly, experience some of the worst life outcomes and are much more likely as adults to be unemployed, homeless, and in prison (Child Trends Databank, 2015b). Seventy-two per cent of youths in the Massachusetts juvenile-justice system had been involved with the state's child welfare system (Citizens for Juvenile Justice, 2015, p. 3). Far from a ticket to college success or to economic mobility, for many young people, CPS facilitates premature death.

Young people in foster care are disproportionately non-white. A long list of blue ribbon commissions and reports, spanning decades, demonstrate that African Americans are grotesquely over-represented in foster care. Nationally, in 2014, "Black children, who made up around 14 percent of all children, accounted for 24 percent of foster children in that year" (Child Trends, 2015, p. 5). These numbers are often deeper at the state level. In California, while African Americans constituted 5.7 % of the state population in 2013, African American children were 24.3 % of the state's total foster care population (Taylor 2013, p. 33). In Michigan, a 2009 report from the Center for the Study of Social Policy found that "African American children represented just slightly less than 18 percent of all children residing in Michigan in 2003, they represented more than half of all of the children in the child protective custody" (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2009, p. 2). A key factor shaping these numbers? "The belief that African American children are better off away from their families and communities was seen in explicit statements by key

policy makers and service providers. It was also reflected in choices made by DHS" (2009, p. ii).

Many non-white young people in CPS are also queer, transgender, non-gender conforming and non-heterosexual and CPS struggles to be gender and sexuality affirming. State systems designed to protect children, foster care and group homes, often require compulsory heterosexuality and are not capable of supporting people who identify as gender non-conforming or transgender. A 2014 report from the Williams Institute found that 19% of all youth (ages 12-21) in "out of home care" or child services in Los Angeles identified as LGBTQ young people of color (Wilson, Cooper, Kastansis & Nezhad, 2014, p. 6). Queer youth are twice as likely as non-queer youth to report experiencing poor treatment in care, and they are more likely to have multiple foster placements and to live in group homes (Wilson, Cooper, Kastansis & Nezhad, 2014). An earlier study, in New York City in 2001, found that state care was disastrous for LGBT young people.

[A] staggering 78 percent of LGBT youth were removed from or ran away from foster care placements because such placements were unwelcoming or even hostile toward their sexual orientation or gender identity. One hundred percent of LGBT youth in ACS group homes reported that they were verbally harassed while at a group home and 70 percent reported that they were victims of physical violence due to their sexual identity. (Feinstein, Greenblatt, Hass, Kohn & Rana, 2001, p. 16)

That CPS both disproportionately regulates non-white and/or queer young people, and the experiences of these young people in CPS are often harmful, mirrors their wider treatment by the criminal justice system, and might be familiar to readers. The over-representation of youth of color and/or queer youth is endemic across all facets of our criminal legal system. For example: despite research that clearly suggests that white people use drugs at the same or higher rates compared to non-white people, white people are often the least likely to be stopped and searched by police, charged when found with drugs, and convicted. If charged and convicted, white people typically receive more lenient charges—possession, not possession with intent to sell— and serve less time in prison. What does that look like on the ground? In Chicago, according to a 2011 investigation by reporters for *The Chicago Reader*, "The ratio of black to white arrests for marijuana possession is 15 to 1" and "the ratio among those who plead or are found guilty is 40 to 1" (Dumke and Joravsky, 2011). Police are not stopping white people and searching them for marijuana. But, if marijuana is found, white people are less likely to be arrested and convicted. If convicted, they are likely to receive more lenient sentences. The state also polices LGBTQ communities, particularly those non-white, who are over-represented in juvenile justice systems (Mogul, Ritchie & Whitlock, 2011; Irvine, 2010). The predominance of transwomen stopped in public places by police and accused of solicitation while engaged in routine activities, "walking while trans," is

confirmed in *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey* (2011) where “29% of respondents reported police harassment or disrespect” (Grant, Mottet & Tanis, 2011, p. 3). Non-heterosexual girls experienced 50 percent more police stops and had twice the risk of arrest and convictions compared to heterosexual girls who engaged in the same behavior (Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2011).

CPS is a part of the wider criminal justice system, a key anchor in our carceral state. Far from a neutral system, CPS disproportionately regulates poor families of color, and the life outcomes of the young people within CPS are dismal. Linking CPS to our criminal justice system helps us recognize these forms of care as coercive and punitive and illustrates places for resistance.

What to do?

Mandated reporting laws function to move a wide range of workers in helping professions— social workers, youth advocates, teachers—into playing roles pivotal to maintaining our carceral state, or our wider racialized matrix of prisons, policing and punishment.

Yes, children are harmed, and most often by people who profess to love them. But the systems developed to help function to fail children, their families, and our communities. How to support children, particularly those that experience harm, and not reproduce or reinforce an unjust system?

We need bold critique, imaginative responses, and, for those of us who are working in schools, a willingness to be uncomfortable. This is a messy moment and teachers should not pretend otherwise. To teach as if all *Black Lives Matter* requires rethinking how the profession has naturalized mandated reporting laws along with other facets of policing and criminalization. Optimistically, as mandated reporting laws are relatively new inventions and are not universal, it is easy to imagine ourselves otherwise.

Below we offer suggestions based on the ways many different kinds of teachers and other youth advocates (including ourselves) are building the capacity to challenge mandated reporting laws and help children, and their communities, to flourish. This is not a list of must-dos, nor is it complete, or intended to apply to every context. While much less likely, Ariel might arrive in winter with cigarette burns on her legs, not rain boots, and we have not built systems capable of intervening in this context, yet. We offer these starting ideas as generative possibilities that can build the world we know we need, rather than a prescription for a specific situation. And teachers are already practicing, generating, and sharing, other interventions.

- *Know your working conditions and your rights!* What are your state’s mandated reporting laws and what are the penalties for not reporting?

<https://www.cqa.ct.gov/2012/rpt/2012-R-0058.htm>

- *Organize!* Work with others and groups to address the systemic and institutional issues that place families in precarious conditions. Campaigns like the *Fight for 15!* (<http://fightfor15.org/>) are mobilizing to raise the nation’s minimum wage to \$15 an hour.
- *Get educated!* Communities and groups across the United States are directly reducing our reliance on policing and building transformative justice responses to harm. See, for example, the innovative work of organizations such as Critical Resistance (<http://criticalresistance.org/>) and the Audre Lorde Project/Safe Outside the System (<http://alp.org/community/sos>). Learn about how parents are impacted by the child welfare system by reading the magazine for parents involved in CPS, *RISE Magazine* (<http://www.risemagazine.org/rise-magazine/>) and read works on the history of CPS and its impact on poor and non-white families, particularly mothers, by activists and scholars such as Martin Guggenheim and Dorothy Roberts.
- *Challenge white supremacy!* Follow article #5 from the 1968 Position Statement from the National Association of Black Social Workers, the first position statement from this organization: “We direct white social workers to involve themselves to solving the problem of white racism—America’s number one mental health problem.”
- *Support young people!* If a young person comes to class unkempt, unclean, or tired, there are ways to intervene that make a difference in a young person’s self-esteem and their ability to function. Provide the young person extra time: more time in the bathroom, quiet time in class, and extra time for homework before or after class.
- *Offer resources!* Have food snacks or extra clothes available for young people that need them. Many local grocers and thrift stores (including Whole Foods, Aldis, and Costco) often will provide some free food and clothing if teachers or school social workers write a letter or visit the store and ask. Extra clothes, coats, gloves and nonperishable food can mean the difference between supporting a child and disruption of their entire world.
- *Collectivize!* Find colleagues with similar commitments to justice and brainstorm five more things you can do to support young people and their families in your school (and communities).
- *Check your assumptions!* Talk to the child to find out what is going on. Think about what neglect is (and it is subjective). Remember that many parents are also currently experiencing poverty and trauma. Remember that young people are more likely to experience harm inside of child welfare services.

- *Be up front about your legal constraints!* Inform a child, especially a teenager, about the legal constraints of your position in case they disclose something that might require reporting.
- *No other option?* If there is no other option but to report, meet with the parent. Advise the parent or guardian to report themselves and let them know exactly what you will report. It is better for them to be ahead of it than to be surprised.

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