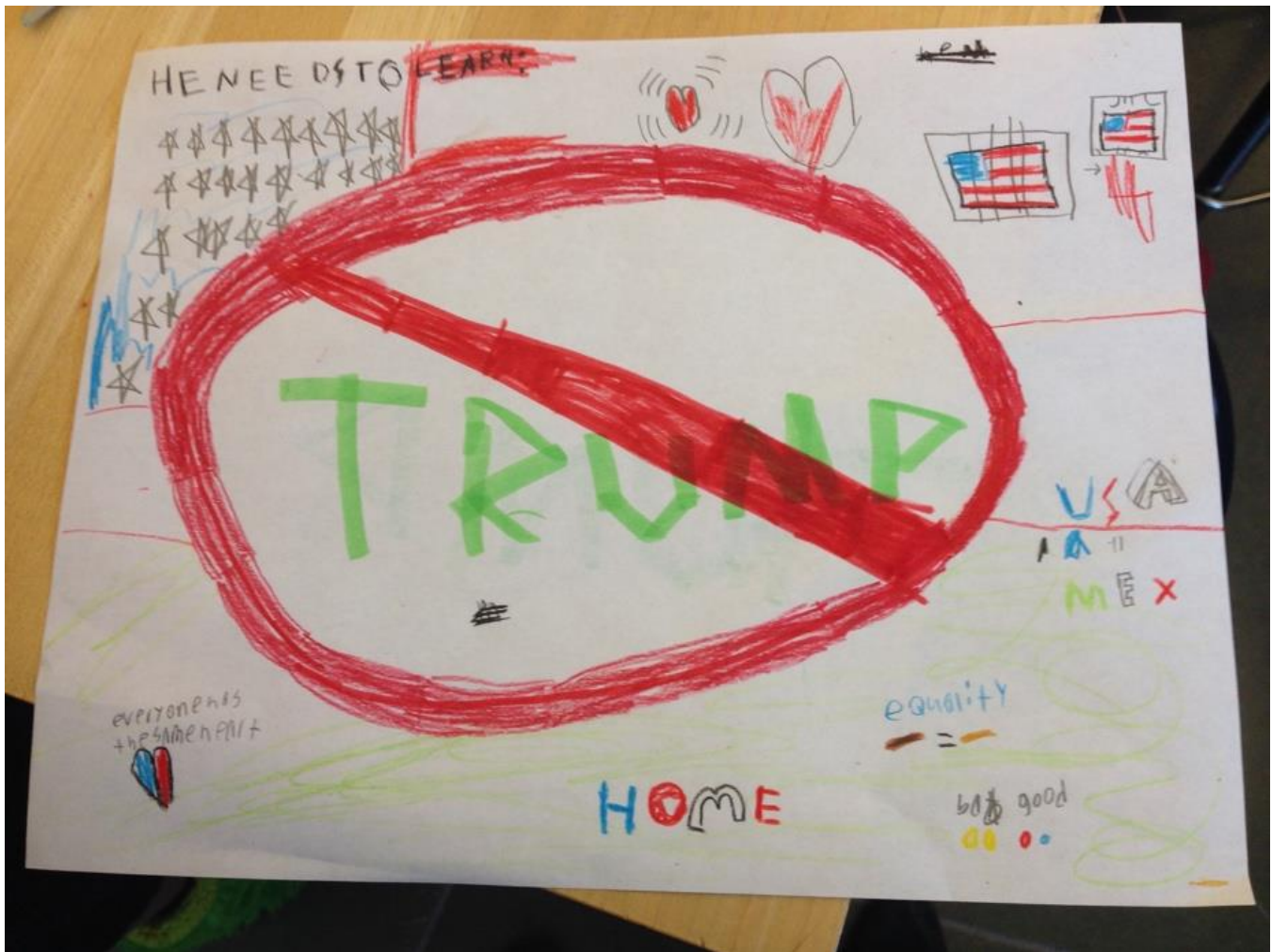


RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

On Belonging: Children Respond to Trump through Play and Imagination

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CHILD'S PROTEST SIGN, COURTESY AUTHORS

Donald Trump's words and actions have emboldened a new generation of racist, sexist, and xenophobic individuals to speak out without fear of being ostracized by the larger society, and to commit horrific acts of violence against people whose skin, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or ability does not align with the dominant group. His proposed policies attack the rights of nearly every group that is not white, male, Christian, and wealthy, and we have seen these attitudes and actions embodied in our schools as well. While the campaign and election of Donald Trump has led to dangerous levels of discriminatory language, actions, and policies in our society, systems of oppression and structures of privilege were not created during the campaign, but were granted a renewed legitimacy in its wake. Our ability to stratify and segregate, to conquer and to oppress, is inherent to the very fabric of our country; it is a part of our collective historical identity. Although the stakes have greatly increased since the election, divisive rhetoric and prejudicial policies are not something new to American society, nor are they new to the children enrolled in the public schools that are tasked with preparing them to be full participants in this society.

Despite this, in our combined 30 years of teaching in early childhood and elementary classrooms, afterschool programs, and university-based teacher education courses leading up until the 2016 election, we have encountered educators, caregivers, administrators, and policymakers who did not feel it was necessary or appropriate to discuss issues of equity and identity with students in primary schools. This stance was informed by a number of assumptions, including, for example, the mistaken belief that we had already "solved" racism as well as the belief that attending to issues of equity is beyond the purpose of public education, which should concentrate on the transmission and acquisition of academic skills. The assumption that has proved most pervasive in relegating critical discussions of power and privilege to the secondary domain, and the one that we centrally respond to in this paper, is the belief that children are largely unaware of issues of equity. Following from this, if we were to introduce these topics into the early childhood or elementary classroom, some argue that we would effectively be burdening our students with material that is neither developmentally appropriate or relevant to their lives.

In this article, we trace this assumption to the framing of children as innocent and our perceived societal need to preserve and protect that innocence. If we are to attend to issues of inequity that young students are contending with, we need to develop a view of children that does not position them as passive recipients of knowledge, but active constructors of it. We draw from childhood studies, feminist theories, and queer theories in contending that children are not only affected by inequalities in our larger society, but are actively working to make sense of them. We argue that one of the primary tasks of childhood is making sense of the often unspoken norms, hierarchies, and structures that characterize the adult world they have come to inhabit. In this regard, our argument goes beyond the contention that children are simply capable of

attending to issues of equity. Although we agree that they are absolutely capable, we take the argument a step further in asserting that children *already are* contending with issues of equity, relative to their local community and context. To ignore this fact is to do a disservice to both the students themselves and to our larger society. As educators, we believe that we should be listening for, taking seriously, and attending to issues of equity that children are contending with, which will vary greatly depending on the local community and context. This positioning of children as agentic, empowered, full beings in their own right is a radical approach to teaching, as early childhood and elementary education traditionally positions children as recipients of knowledge, rather than as active constructors of it.

Although equity-oriented teaching has taken on a sense of urgency during this presidential term, we hold that its application extends beyond this immediate political moment, as examinations of power, privilege, and identity are central to a comprehensive public school experience.

Although equity-oriented teaching has taken on a sense of urgency during this presidential term, we hold that its application extends beyond this immediate political moment, as examinations of power, privilege, and identity are central to a comprehensive public school experience. Our approach to equity-oriented teaching is radical in both its positioning of investigations of power as central to the learning process, and its focus on transformative action. Specifically, how we organize our teaching facilitates and advocates for the transformation of institutional practices over adaptation to them. It is our duty as educators to respond honestly to the issues all of our students are contending with, including our youngest ones. In this article, we aim to illuminate the critical role of play in exploring issues of equity with young children. We provide examples of how we designed for play-based explorations of privilege and power in a low-income afterschool program with majority Latino students in the months before, during, and after the election of Donald Trump. In examining the play that resulted, we describe how the children explored themes of identity and belonging as a means of interrogating, interrupting, and responding to Trump's characterizations of Mexicans in particular.

Introducing the Players and the Play

EPIC is an afterschool literacy, arts, and technology design club co-facilitated by the University of Colorado at Boulder's School of Education and Alicia Sanchez International Elementary School. In its eighth year, the club meets three days a week and offers free afterschool programming for children ages 7 to 11. The club is dedicated to (1) improving the academic, social, and emotional learning opportunities for the elementary

students, a significant percentage of whom are racial and ethnic minorities living in poverty; and (2) preparing a majority middle-class, white female population of pre-service teachers, with limited experience working with historically marginalized communities effectively (Cole & the Distributed Literacy Consortium, 2006; Freeman & Jurow, in press). Pre-service teachers participate in the club as a requirement of a university course in which they are enrolled on theories of learning.

The demographics of the elementary students who attend the afterschool club reflect that of the general school population, with the exception that a growing percentage of Mexican-identifying students have opted into the club as it has continued to operate. Approximately 66% of the school's student population identify as Latinx, and over 80% of the students who attend our club do. Additionally, many of the students whom we serve are first or second generation immigrants. Although almost all of the student participants are fluent English speakers, many also speak Spanish with various degrees of fluency. Approximately 74% of students live in households experiencing high-poverty, making the population of the school unique from the school district it is a part of, which is largely affluent, white, and high-achieving as measured by standardized tests.

The first author is a white Ph.D. candidate whose teaching background is in urban early childhood education. She now works in teacher education at the university level, and works with the second author in designing, facilitating, and researching equity-oriented learning for both children and pre-service teachers at the afterschool program described in this article. She is the primary project designer and on-site coordinator. The second author is an Indian-American professor of Education and the Director of the EPIC afterschool club and teacher education program. As the Director, she is responsible for designing a university-school partnership that is mutually beneficial for all stakeholders, including the elementary students. She has designed curriculum units to support equity-oriented learning at the club and conducted research on children's and pre-service teachers' learning through club activities.

Engaging Inequities and Imagining More Equitable Futures through Play

In an effort to support culturally relevant and meaningful learning and teaching, we privilege play as a central means for engaging issues of equity at EPIC. Play is the language children speak to make sense of their world, and to begin to develop answers to questions about their role in it (Davies, 2003; Gallas, 1998; Lindqvist, 1995, 2001; Paley, 2010, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978). When children are faced with a tension in their social order, or an upsetting event that they need to process, they turn to play as a way to work through problems and imagine new possibilities for themselves. We view play as a form of improvised storytelling, in which children develop characters, take on identities and roles, and experiment with multiple storylines and endings (Galman, 2017; Paley, 1984; Wohlwend, 2012, 2009). Children's play includes

both recurring and improvised elements that allow them to create imaginary worlds in which "new metaphors, new forms of social relations, and new patterns of power and desire are explored" (Davies, 2003, p. 167). At EPIC, we encourage children to play through familiar media narratives so that they can embody and feel the constraints of stereotypical characters, actions, and plot lines and improvise ways to play around these obstacles (Ferholt, 2009, 2010; Wohlwend, 2013). In this regard, play is not a means of escaping reality; rather, it is a means of making sense of it.

Our positioning of play as a form of equity-oriented learning has roots in an agentic framing of who children are, and what childhood is.

Our positioning of play as a form of equity-oriented learning has roots in an agentic framing of who children are, and what childhood is. The conception of children as human *beings* rather than human *becomings* is a fairly recent development (Corsaro, 2005; James, 2009). Prior to this, the predominant view was that children were worthy of study insofar as they were able to provide insight into adult life and specifically, the transition into adulthood (Christensen & James, 2008; Piaget, 1969; Woodhead, 2009; Woodhead & Faulkner 2008). Despite a shift in the academic theorization of childhood, the dominant paradigm is still hugely influential in popular understanding and in practice (Casteñeda, 2010; James, 1993; Stockton, 2009).

One of the primary tasks of childhood is making sense of, problematizing, deconstructing, and reinventing the social norms and constructs of the adult world that children have come to inhabit, including the construction of their own existence as children. We theorize this process largely through *interpretive reproduction*, a term developed by Corsaro (2005) to capture both the innovative and creative aspects of children in society, as well as the idea that children are not simply internalizing society and culture, but are actively contributing to cultural production and change. Interpretive reproduction provides a means of theorizing children's social development as neither linear nor as an exact copy of existing structures, but rather, as a process of reproduction that includes children's contention with ambiguities, tensions, and difficulties, as well as their resolutions, reconstructions, and reinterpretations of existing norms and ways of being. In our analysis of how children's play mediates their equity-oriented explorations, we look at how interpretive reproduction is enacted through children's storytelling that is occurring inside the playworlds and structures we have designed.

Designing for Play-Based Explorations of Equity

At EPIC, we design semester-long theme-based units that promote the exploration of issues of equity with which students are actively contending. We invite children to play in fantasy worlds that raise current social injustices that

students have indicated are of concern to them through conversation, writing, art, and play. With each theme, we develop both real-world and fantasy realm entry points and guiding questions that bridge these two domains.

In one unit, we drew on students' expertise in identifying the messages that Disney fairytales and their associated books, movies, toys, and other media products present to us about who we are, what we can do, and who we can be. We sought to encourage students' critical awareness of implicit messages about race, gender, class, language, and other social constructs in books, movies, and in commercial products more broadly, and to see these texts as both pliable and revisable (Davies, 2003; Gallas, 1998; Wohlwend, 2012, 2009). We developed this particular project to help the children make sense of the negative narratives and messages that were circulating during Trump's campaign in the fall of 2016. We had heard the children voice strong emotional reactions and sharp intellectual critiques to Trump's portrayals of their communities and themselves with us - as Mexicans, as immigrants, as girls, as emergent bilinguals, as being or having undocumented family members. As part of how we approach curriculum design, we used the children's reactions as the basis for organizing a personally-meaningful context for play and exploration.

In designing all of our project units, we rely on a set of norms and routines that facilitate playful engagement with real world problems. In order for us to be able to play through issues of injustice in either real world or fantasy realms, we need to establish trust among the players. Towards this end, we incorporate time each day for informal conversations where adults are able to check in with individual children and get to know each other's interests and lives outside of school. Children have learned that this is a time when they can talk about their families and the struggles they may be facing due to a sibling's illness, a parent's loss of a job, or they may share about their friends and their plans for upcoming holidays. No topics are off-limits and all topics are viewed as ways of getting to appreciate the richness of the children's lives. These unscripted conversations are met with care, concern, and respect for the child and their experiences. They also provide the basis for curriculum design and responsiveness. Further, our emphasis on relational trust establishes the groundwork for taking risks, exploring ideas, and generating new ways of approaching problems through play (Gee, 2007).

A key dimension of our approach to curriculum design is that we plan for emergence. When we design project arcs, we have a vision in mind for how we anticipate that the semester will progress. However, these projected arcs are exactly that - a projection. They are flexible and are constantly being renegotiated based on what children are bringing to us. Each week, we reflect on what issues the children are contending with in the real world, what activities or topics they are or are not engaging with in the fantasy realm, and the relationships developing between players, all of which inform how we design for the next week. The responsiveness of our designs is critical for attending to what is consequential to the children and their communities. The guiding questions and learning goals for

each unit serve as a central guiding point, as a semester may end with a very different project than the one originally designed anticipated. The capacity of our curriculum to shift as a result of the children's concerns and questions allows the club to become a space where children can solve meaningful problems together with the support of peers and adult collaborators.

Who Belongs, and Who Gets to Decide?

In the months leading up to Trump's election, issues of identity and belonging were consistent themes in the children's play. In play scenes representing both their current reality and imagined futures, children explored questions such as: Who belongs? Who gets to decide? And, what types of inclusion and exclusion are best for a community? As children of Mexican immigrants who were largely portrayed as a problem for the United States, belonging and deserving to belong in the country were central and consequential issues. In the following, we share two examples that illustrate how the children took up the question of who belongs through collaborative play. The examples underscore how the children engaged with interpretive reproduction in order to make sense of the way they, their families, and their community were being positioned. They were selected because of how they illuminated the children's sustained interest in questions about what it means to belong and organize fair systems of inclusion/exclusion. As we show, the children were also using play to imagine and develop more inclusive and diverse futures.

"U.S. is the home of Mexicans too"

In a project on mural arts in the spring of 2016, children explored the purposes of murals, and developed group murals about issues of equity to which they wanted to bring awareness. In the early stages of the process when we were talking about and sketching initial ideas, an artistic, thoughtful, and energetic nine year-old male student named Camden developed two similar drawings. In the first, then-candidate Donald Trump was drawn speaking to a crowd and in the next, then-candidate Hillary Clinton was accepting the presidency (see Figures 1 and 2). There were elements of both fantasy and reality in the drawings in that they depicted a pressing and significant issue of equity that was directly impacting the individual student and his family, but also referenced an imagined future in which Clinton would win the election. In the first image, Donald Trump stands at a podium in a room with three rows of chairs, one window, and a door. His sharp eyebrows are pointed downward and he wears a scowl, with a speech bubble above his head that reads, "I want to be presint (president)." In the rows of seats, a single person stands with a scared look on their face, and responds "No Trump presint (president)." Written underneath the image are the words "Because Donald Trump doesn't have freedom." When Camden presented the image to a group of other children and Emily (the first author), he explained this statement further, saying that Trump does not believe everyone should have freedom,

and that Mexicans should leave (fieldnotes, 3/9/16). In the next image, Clinton appears in the same setting, standing at the same podium. Her eyes are wide and she has a large smile on her face, as does the sole audience member, who is saying, "You are presint." The speech bubble above Clinton says, "Yaha" and the words underneath the image read "Because Hillary is going to give freedom to everybody." In both images, the presidential candidates are drawn at twice the scale as the lone audience member, and are fully clothed, whereas the lone audience member is a fully anonymous, small scale stick figure. The style in which Camden depicted the characters in this imagined scene suggest that the candidates were more powerful than the audience member. Without a body, without a face, the sole audience member is speaking, but without the impression of great weight. This, we might interpret as representing the child's feelings in light of the election process and the uncertainty of their future.



FIGURE 1. CHILD'S DEPICTION OF A CAMPAIGN SPEECH BY THEN-CANDIDATE DONALD TRUMP.



FIGURE 2. CHILD'S DEPICTION OF A PRESIDENTIAL ACCEPTANCE SPEECH BY THEN-CANDIDATE HILLARY CLINTON.

As one of the older and veteran members of the club, Camden had soon inspired a small group of children to act out what they would want to say to Donald Trump if they were in the depicted scene. In the play world created by Camden, the other children were able to act "as if" they could speak back to Trump, which supported them in constructing themselves as agentive and powerful (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). They tried out different approaches as different speakers with different concerns. One seven year-old stated with a generosity of heart, "He needs to learn." His older cousin nodded and then, referencing the potential critical consequences to their lives said that, "he wants to send all us Mexicans back to Mexico." They both began to chant quietly, "No Trump, No Trump."

Referencing other forms of political resistance that the children had studied in addition to murals, Emily remarked that the chant sounded like something one would hear at a protest. This prompted some children to begin making actual signs to carry with them in the real world. One showed four stick figures holding hands with the word "freedom" beside it. Above them, the word "Trump" was written in bright orange marker, with a circle around it and an X going through the middle. In another sign, Trump's name was written in large green capital letters with a red circle around it and a red line across it. Surrounding the central image were American flags, hearts, stars, and words including "home," "equality," "bad," and "good." The image also incorporated phrases that they had used in their play, such as "he needs to learn" and "everyone has the same heart" (see Figure 3). Another group of children began writing a letter with bulleted ideas representing what they would want say to him, including "US is the home of Mexicans too" and "People have the same hart (heart)."



FIGURE 3. CHILD'S PROTEST SIGN.

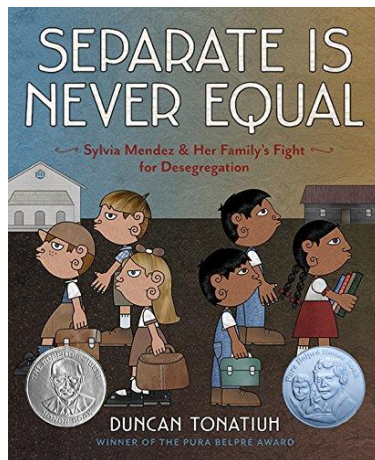
In this example, play was a direct response to a prompt we, as designers and facilitators, developed and helped sustain with the children. It built on previous activities meant to bring in histories and stories of confronting and overcoming oppression as a community. For instance, the children had participated in multiple read-alouds of the award winning children's book *Separate Is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for*

Desegregation (Tonatiuh, 2014), which focused on a young girl named Sylvia and her family's legal battle for desegregation in California schools. The story resonated with the children who realized that they, like Sylvia, were U.S. citizens who were not being treated as equals to other racial groups, namely Whites. We also supported the children in exploring how murals can be created to convey and organize political action. The focus on murals and the book were intentional ways of linking to Mexican cultural practices of resistance and political organizing. It was approximately nine months before the election and the topic of Donald Trump was bubbling up in small group conversations. We knew and were planning for the likelihood of helping the children to articulate and develop their counternarratives or other responses to Trump's racist and xenophobic campaign rhetoric.

In Camden's original drawing as well as in the play and the writing that it inspired, children brought in messages they were receiving about themselves and their communities that they were actively working to make sense of. As children who identified largely as Mexican and American, Trump's campaign speeches and social media posts were spreading the message that these two identities were mutually exclusive. This generated questions of identity and belonging for the students. Who were they if they couldn't be both? To which community did they belong? In falsely presenting these identifications as incompatible with one another, Trump's campaign was directly contradicting the children's lived experiences and denying their very existence as Mexican and American. Not only were these identities presented as incompatible with one another, but they were each ascribed qualities and characteristics that resulted in value-laden caricatures of the good American and the bad Mexican. Mexicans were depicted as villainous, as criminals who were sneaking into a place where they did not belong, so that they could hurt, steal from, and displace white Americans, who were alternatively positioned as innocent and heroic. Entirely ignoring our history as colonizers, policies and physical boundaries such as the proposed Wall were explained as necessary in order to preserve the innocence of Americans and prevent them from falling victim to the deviant behavior of the usurping Mexicans.

The children engaged in interpretive reproduction to respond to these unjust characterizations in their play, and ultimately, to assert their right to belong. In their illustrations, writing, acting, and conversation, they presented the conditions of their current reality. Donald Trump wanted to be president, and in the process of his campaigning, he described the children and their families as interlopers who were trying to hurt good, white Americans. They highlighted this reality in the physical portrayal of Trump as large and imposing, with heavily drawn eyebrows and a scowl, and in their surrounding

conversations, where a repeated refrain was that Trump wants to send us back to Mexico. Yet, the children did not accept the narrative that was given. The children worked together to dissect and disrupt his positioning of them as bad Mexicans. They openly resisted his bid for candidacy through the creation of protest imagery and vocabulary, as well as by calls to educate Trump as to who Mexicans really are. They worked collectively to develop a vision of a hopeful future in which Hillary wins the election. Beyond this win, the children also imagined that Trump could learn "respect" and come to appreciate that "unique is good." In this future, the children would be able to maintain their expansive identities as being from both Mexico and the United States.



SEPARATE IS NEVER EQUAL: SYLVIA MENDEZ AND HER FAMILY'S FIGHT FOR DESEGREGATION BY DUNCAN TONATIUH, HARRY N. ABRAMS (2014).

Determining Essential Goodness at the Border

Like the previous example, the play scene described in this section highlights how children engaged in interpretive reproduction as a means of examining what it means to belong. In the previous example, the play represented reality; they were directly contending with, responding to, and resisting Trump's campaign rhetoric. In this example, the scene is in the fantasy realm, but one that mirrors the issues that the children are contending with during the Trump presidency.

Approximately one year following the election of Donald Trump, we were nearing the end of a project in which the children were designing and building their own cities in response to a perceived social problem or need. A nine year-old male student named Sam with a love of horror stories and a penchant for plaid flannel was standing off to the side of the children gathered on the floor. He was looking towards the empty half of the cafeteria, and declared out loud that it was heaven, and asked if Emily (Author 1) would like to explore it. He walked her through what he saw in his heaven, including clouds and angels, but told her that it could be anything she wanted it to be, adding that "it's most like heaven if you close your eyes." She asked if she could enter if she was still alive, and Sam said yes, but only for six minutes, after which point she would be unable to return to the living world. To make the distinction between worlds clear, he declared that he was going to make a gate, which would be called "Heaven's Gate."

As he began gathering materials and draping blankets over the open space between two cafeteria tables, other children became curious, and came over to ask questions and contribute to the scene. One child asked if everyone could go to heaven, and Sam thoughtfully replied that yes, if you are "essentially good." He continued to explain that you cannot come in if you are "essentially bad," and pointed to a different corner of the room, which he referred to as "the banished lands."

Back in heaven, an eight year-old female student with a keen eye for detail declared herself the gatekeeper, and began constructing a chain link rope out of paper, a

costume that included a long, shiny green robe, and a staff with a hook on the end so she could open and close the entrance rope. Consequential questions began to emerge about what it means to be essentially good or bad, and who gets to decide. The children thought God should decide, and elected a female pre-service teacher with long, dark hair to be the first to play God, and constructed a robe for her to wear. One energetic seven year-old said he would build a computer system in which your goodness or badness is recorded, and a construction-minded female student interested in technology built a hand scanner to expedite the process of locating your records. All of the children who applied for entry to Heaven used the hand scanner and the computer system deemed them "good." With this evaluation, they received a yellow ticket labeled with the words "Heaven" and "yes" or "no" checkboxes, with an X in the yes box. They were then permitted to go to the gate, where they turned over their ticket to the gatekeeper. One particularly enthusiastic student named José sought to seek out an answer to the question, can you be kicked out of heaven? He shouted nonsense words and ran from group to group, eventually stealing a pretend bottle of holy water, labeled with its imagined Gatorade sponsorship, in order to garner the attention of God and God's assistant Sam. They asked him over to a table and they spoke with eyes closed, where José explained that he just wanted to drink the holy water. God, nodding, said that she knew José was "innocent" and asked him to try not to disrupt the other members of heaven before telling him how much she cared for him and everyone in heaven. For today at least, it was determined that heaven was not a place that you could be removed from. By the end of the afternoon, all but one small group of students had abandoned the towns and cities they had been building to assist in the creation of Heaven's Gate. They were deeply engaged in a collective sensemaking experience, as they built a community and negotiated who belonged and under what conditions.

Although Trump's name was never explicitly stated, the parallels to the proposed border wall, and the characterizations of the Mexicans and Americans on either side, were difficult to ignore.

Although Trump's name was never explicitly stated, the parallels to the proposed border wall, and the characterizations of the Mexicans and Americans on either side, were difficult to ignore. Upon its creation, heaven was immediately designated as a space for individuals who are "essentially good," mirroring the campaign's presentation of white Americans. Like the U.S., it was positioned as a desirable place to be, and as such, it and the people within its borders, needed to be protected from possible infiltration. The gate defined the borders of heaven and a gatekeeper was posted to secure it from unapproved entry. An elaborate technological system was developed to enforce border security and ensure that only people whose documentation verified their essential goodness would be

allowed to enter, mirroring the uncertainty that many of the children's extended family members were facing as immigrants without documentation.

Within minutes of designating heaven as a community for the "essentially good," a place for those who were turned away from heaven for not being "good enough" was created. The "banished lands" were located just outside of the gate to heaven, and its name was significant. It was not labeled simply as hell, which is commonly considered to be the antithesis of heaven, but instead referenced banishment, a process of being removed from and forbidden from returning to a place in which you were formerly welcome. Again, this process of being forcibly removed from, and unable to return to, a place that one considers to be their home, resonated with the children's fears about who belongs in America and what might lead to banishment. What actions or behaviors could result in removal from the community, if any? What does it mean to be a community if your membership is contingent upon continued adherence to preferred norms and ways of being? What would it take to be banished from home?

In their play, the children demonstrated their deep and informed awareness of Mexican and Mexican-Americans' uncertain future in the U.S. The children's play reproduced the situations and constraints they and their families were facing. At the same time, the children's play was also transformative. In their version, everyone was approved for entrance to heaven, determined to be essentially good. While the banished lands existed, they were devoid of any inhabitants. If your paperwork was lost between when you received your approval to enter Heaven and when you presented it at the gate, you could simply return to the computer and hand scanner and repeat the process. Heaven was an inclusive community, and while it remains to be seen if there is anything that can get you banished from heaven, it was clear that the immediate consequence for causing a perceived disruption was not eviction, but a conversation with the chosen leader, God.

Discussion

As educators, it is imperative for us to take seriously the issues with which our students are contending. In the current political moment, when elements of students' identities and experience are at an increased risk of being dismissed by the President himself, this is all the more necessary. Young children should not be exempt from these conversations for the sake of preserving their presumed innocence. Children are acutely aware of their surroundings and are working to make sense of the largely unspoken rules that govern society. When we ignore this reality, it harms children from non-dominant communities the most. They are positioned as being too young to discuss the very injustices they may be experiencing. When we do not provide children space to discuss what they are experiencing or seeing, they are deprived of the opportunity to process their experience, effectively marginalizing them a second time.

In our examination of the role of play in exploring issues of equity and justice at EPIC, we examined when

play occurred, and what topics or themes were being explored. We found that while children's play sometimes formed as a direct response to the projects that we had intentionally designed, there were other moments when children's play occurred in spite of our planned activities. For example, the Heaven's Gate play scene emerged when students were supposed to be working on building one part of the city they had designed in response to a perceived social injustice. Instead, Sam began an exploration of what heaven is that other children became intrigued by, and they began abandoning their projects to support his. These moments of resistance were informative, as the children signaled that they had consequential issues to explore, but that they were proposing a different framework for its exploration. In those moments, it was our job as educators to listen to what they were telling us they needed to investigate, and the means by which they needed to do it. While this could be labeled as a form of resistance, our positioning of children as experts on their own lives reframed it as a form of inquiry and communication.

In the semesters leading up to, during, and following the election, children's play centered on explorations of identity, belonging, and what it means to be a deserving member of a community. The journey for each child was unique, where some held strongly to one emotional response throughout the stages of the election, and others cycled through anger, sadness, frustration, and empowerment. Overwhelmingly, the children responded to and resisted Trump's positioning of them in generous and agentic ways, simultaneously rejecting his negative characterizations of them as Mexicans and creating space for teaching him about who they truly were. Contrary to his characterizations of them, the children positioned Trump as capable of change and transformation. He was simply misinformed and "needed to learn," and they expressed their willingness to teach him.

Children used both dramatic play and art as means of responding to Trump's campaign as well as to explore broader questions of what it means to live in a pluralistic society.

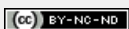
Children used both dramatic play and art as means of responding to Trump's campaign as well as to explore broader questions of what it means to live in a pluralistic society. Drawing provided a means of taking up and responding directly to Trump's characterizations of Mexicans, as well as to voice their support for other candidates, such as Hillary Clinton, whose message they deemed to be more inclusive. The children took a number of actions to respond directly to the messages they were receiving about themselves and their place in the country. These included designing and creating posters that advocated for a particular candidate, responding to a candidate whose views positioned them negatively, and encouraging the adults in their life to vote. Creating these posters acknowledged both their awareness of the issue,

the real implications it held for their lives, and the validity of their cognitive and emotional responses, even as children. At EPIC, drawing primarily served as a means of taking up and responding to real-life issues of inequity and injustice. Dramatic play, on the other hand, provided a way for students to take up the same issues at a distance, through the lens of fantasy. In their dramatic play, children responded to the same themes as those who were making posters, but in a fantasy world. In both drawing and play, children were attending to consequential, equity-oriented, issues, most notably the question of what it means to belong, and who gets to decide. However, in the case of dramatic play, the question of belonging was placed in a new and different context – that of an imagined heaven. This allowed children to experiment with different outcomes without real-life consequences. José could try out different behaviors and ways of being to see what would and would not result in his dismissal from heaven, knowing that when the play began again, he could return and begin again without consequence. His condition was impermanent, in a way that it is not in real life when it comes to enforcement of discriminatory immigration practices. It is important that both of these activities – fantasy or dramatic play and art or, more specifically, drawing – were used in conjunction with one another, as drawing was taken up predominantly as a direct response to injustice by older students, and dramatic play was taken up as a way to investigate injustice in a fantasy realm by our younger students. Play and imagination were distinctive features of both, in that children considered, investigated, experimented with, and advocated for different possible futures.

While our intention in sharing our process of design and reflection is to provide a model others might use when considering how to approach issues of inequity and injustice with young children, we also want to acknowledge the very real constraints that are placed on classroom teachers. We know that we were able to immerse ourselves so thoroughly in children's playworlds and our investigation of them because our afterschool program was a site for both equity-oriented teaching and research. We know that this kind of flexibility is rare, particularly with the emphasis on standardization and accountability in current educational reform movements. Our hope is that even in the most constrained environment where children's time, attention, and behavior are highly regulated, we as educators can look for moments when children's play cannot be quelled, when it resists containment, and provides insight into the issues of equity children are contending with. If we are to resist Trumpism through transformative education, we need to listen to, honor, and create space for children's own language of resistance – play and imagination.

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