

Teaching Should Be Political : How to talk about race in the classroom

Adapted from *The Atlantic*, December 2020

[There is a] shift in perspective taking place. Hall is not someone who thought she was born to among Black educators—and other teachers, teach (few of us are), and she faced her share of too—working in places that have endured challenges in those early days in the classroom. decades of systemic racism, economic [...] Like so many early-career teachers do, she disinvestment, generational poverty, crime, and sought a sense of control in premade syllabi, violence. Starting out as a 21-year-old curricula, and pedagogy—overrelying on rote transplant from North Carolina, Hall hadn't approaches and heavily weighted exams at the end understood what became steadily clearer to her: of each unit. But by leaning on veteran teachers for The work of teaching, for her and for her guidance, Hall gained self-assurance: She could teenage students, was most meaningful when it deviate from required reading and give students was part of a larger commitment to addressing the freedom to choose texts that engaged them the realities of the historically oppressed and more, she discovered, and still demand rigor. She underresourced communities they were began to see the transformative role she might be growing up in.

able to play, getting students to buy into the To be ushered by Anderson into Hall's current academic work she placed in front of them and, no classroom at Carver Vocational-Technical High less important, helping to change their sense of School is to see drawings of African masks their lives. And then came the Black Lives Matter ornamenting the wooden door, and posters of movement. As a colleague at Carver who came to Maya Angelou's "Phenomenal Woman" and count on Hall's guidance told Anderson, "I go into Langston Hughes's "Harlem" hanging on the the classroom with the mindset: 'How can I give walls. The library is jammed with young-adult my students the skills and the knowledge to novels by Black and Latino writers who know critique society, and then feel empowered enough how to speak directly to readers navigating to do something about it?'" Teachers like her, and difficult lives, often without much support— like Hall, who stayed on in the classroom, resisting and plenty of whom have lost friends to prison the churn so common to their profession, could and tragic death. "West Baltimore can be a aspire to wield real influence. [...] Helping students crushing place to be a Black teen," Anderson see that it is not the Black child who is a criminal, writes. In her classes, Hall calls the boys but the larger society that this child has been born "kings" and the girls "queens." They can count into, eludes tidy teaching scripts. But Hall came to on their teacher not merely to give them grand believe that striving to do that was central to her titles, but to challenge them in ways that build work. [...]

their confidence both as students and as "The obligation of anyone who thinks of himself citizens. as responsible," Baldwin wrote, "is to examine

society and try to change it and to fight it—at stratified status quo not as a “world from which no matter what risk. This is the only hope there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which society has. This is the only way societies they can transform.” At its best, I found as I change.” As an educator, I came to think that no worked with teenagers, critical pedagogy helped mission was more important than this one, or me appreciate that, even as students are engaged in more daunting. And in my early days of the process of learning, they are also engaged in teaching, as much as I wanted to be the sort of the project of unlearning so much of what they educator Baldwin was calling on me to be, part have been taught about society and about of me wondered if I should attempt to keep my themselves. And it is in that unlearning that agency classroom as a sort of island, set apart from the can be reclaimed.

often grim realities beyond it.

I threw the curricular staples at my students, and as

But the more time I spent with my students— they worked at mastering unfamiliar material from almost all of them Black or Latino (many of other centuries, we also tied it to contemporary whom were undocumented or came from issues. [...] We found connections between Henry mixed-status immigrant families), and more David Thoreau and contemporary political than 70 percent of them eligible for free or protests. Richard Wright’s *Native Son* led into a reduced-price lunch—the less possible and discussion of mass incarceration, and of a sense of productive that approach seemed to me, as it powerlessness in a society that feels like it was did to Hall. [...] I had not been trained for this, built to crush you. [...]

but in the course of finding my way in class, The pandemic, the protests, the economic trying to put the books I assigned into downturn—the events of this year have made any conversation with current events, I read notion of the classroom as an oasis moot. They *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, a foundational text have meant that teachers, many of them trapped on of what is called critical pedagogy. Written in screens, are surely feeling overwhelmed and 1968 by the Brazilian philosopher and educator unsupported. At the same time, as I’ve learned by Paulo Freire, and translated into English in talking with teachers across the country, the 1970, it was based on his experience teaching compounding crises have spurred many of them to Brazilians living in poverty, most of them recognize the need to revamp lesson plans, to think adults, how to read and write. Freire in new ways about how to incorporate the debates emphasized that the “struggle for their over inequality that affect their students so directly. liberation” required students to recognize the [...]

Harry Potter books removed from Catholic school 'on exorcists' advice'

Adapted from *The Guardian*, by Alison Flood, 2 Sep 2019

Local paper the Tennessean reported that the some of the content in hopes of sprucing it up and pastor at St Edward Catholic school, which improving the circulation,” said Hammel, adding teaches children of pre-kindergarten age through that if parents deemed the stories “to be appropriate to 8th grade, had emailed parents about JK we would hope that they would just guide their Rowling’s series to tell them that he had been in sons and daughters to understand the content contact with “several” exorcists who had through the lens of our faith”.

recommended removing the books from the She added: “We really don’t get into censorship in library. such selections other than making sure that what we

“These books present magic as both good and put in our school libraries are age-appropriate evil, which is not true, but in fact a clever materials for our classrooms.” The Harry Potter deception,” Rev Dan Reehil wrote. “The curses books have drawn censure from Christians ever and spells used in the books are actual curses and since the first in the series, Harry Potter and the spells, which when read by a human being risk Philosopher’s Stone, was released in 1997. In 1999, conjuring evil spirits into the presence of the it was the most challenged book in the US, and the person reading the text.” series topped the American Library Association’s

Curses and spells included in the bestselling list of the most frequently challenged books of books, which were published between 1997 and 2000-2009.

2007, include “avada kedavra”, the “killing” Challengers asserted that the books “glorified curse; “crucio”, the torture curse; and “imperio”, magic and the occult, confusing children and which allows the wizards to control others’ leading them to attempt to emulate the spells and actions. curses they read about”, said the ALA. In 2001, the

Rebecca Hammel, superintendent of schools for pastor of Christ Community Church in the Catholic diocese of Nashville, told the Alamogordo, New Mexico oversaw a book burning Tennessean that Reehil had sent the email after of the Potter books,

an inquiry from a parent. She added that “he’s and a local library responded with a dedicated well within his authority to act in that manner”, display, telling the public that “Harry is alive and because “each pastor has canonical authority to well at their library”.

make such decisions for his parish school”. While he was still a cardinal in 2003, the future

According to the paper, the books were on Pope Benedict XVI described the books as “subtle shelves until the end of the previous term, but the seductions which act unnoticed and by this deeply school has just opened a new library from which distort Christianity in the soul before it can grow they were removed. “I know that in the process properly”.

they were going through and kind of weeding out

Hong Kong's National Security Law Creeps Into Education Sector

The Diplomat, October 14, 2020, by Jessie Lau

Hong Kong educators warn of a chilling effect after a teacher was barred from teaching for life after allegedly using materials touching on local independence. In an unprecedented move, education authorities deregistered a teacher at Alliance Primary School accused of spreading pro-independence messages in a case dating back to early last year. The decision was made despite the teacher having been cleared by an internal investigation at the private school. The teacher planned lessons requiring students to spend 50 minutes studying the banned pro-independence Hong Kong National Party – and watch a documentary featuring the party's convener – as well as the city's Societies Ordinance. Students were also told to discuss independence in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Taiwan.

The decision marks the first time a teacher's license has been revoked by the education bureau due to classroom materials, and has exacerbated concerns over education freedom in the semi-autonomous territory following the passing of a controversial national security law in June. While the case took place prior to the new law – which criminalizes advocating for independence and has no retroactive effect, according to authorities – officials say the teacher's actions still violate the Basic Law, Hong Kong's mini-constitution. “The situation has deteriorated very quickly. Most teachers have not foreseen this,” said Raymond Yeung, a 30-year-old educator who taught at an elite secondary school before resigning earlier this year. He was blinded in one eye by an alleged police projectile during last year's protests. “We used to believe we still have protections from the chaotic situation in the political sector. (Now) I think there is a red line, which would be national security. You can see they're trying to use whatever means to impose this. To be frank, I'm afraid too.”

Last week, more than 20,000 teachers, students, and parents took part in an email campaign protesting the decision, calling it “political suppression.” The city's largest teachers' union has also accused officials of carrying out an unfair investigation. Yet Hong Kong's leader Carrie Lam defended the bureau's move, saying the teacher was disqualified following a “thorough probe” and vowing to “weed out the bad apples” from the sector. Chinese state media outfit People's Daily also supported the decision in a commentary last Thursday, slamming the “poison of colonial education” in Hong Kong. Such developments have embroiled the city in a heated public debate over the role of teachers, who have been accused of influencing Hong Kong's recent youth-led pro-democracy protests. The Education Bureau has investigated more than 200 complaints against misconduct of teachers from June last year to August this year, according to state-run media outlet Xinhua.

This week, former city leader C.Y. Leung published personal information on 18 teachers allegedly charged for offenses related to the protests in a Facebook post – including their

names, ages, and respective institutions – arguing that public interest overrides privacy concerns. Earlier this year, a student mounted a legal bid to overturn a ruling that removed a controversial question asking if Japan “did more good than harm to China between 1900 and 1945,” and a music teacher was dismissed for allegedly allowing students to play the protest anthem “Glory to Hong Kong.” The song was banned from schools in the wake of the national security law’s enactment.

Weeks before, Leung took the education exam question asking if Japan “did more good than harm to China between 1900 and 1945,” and a music teacher was dismissed for allegedly allowing students to play the protest anthem “Glory to Hong Kong.” The song was banned from schools in the wake of the national security law’s enactment.

authorities to court for failing to publicize the identities of teachers prosecuted for misconduct. The legal challenge has been criticized by education-sector lawmaker Ip Kin-yuen, who likened it to Cultural Revolution-esque “political persecution” designed to weaponize the law against teachers, Apple Daily reports. Between June 2019 to May this year, 100 primary and secondary school teachers and staff – as well as 10 staffers from tertiary educational institutions – have been arrested in relation to the protests, Education Bureau statistics show. During that period, some 1,700 people under the age of 18 were also arrested.

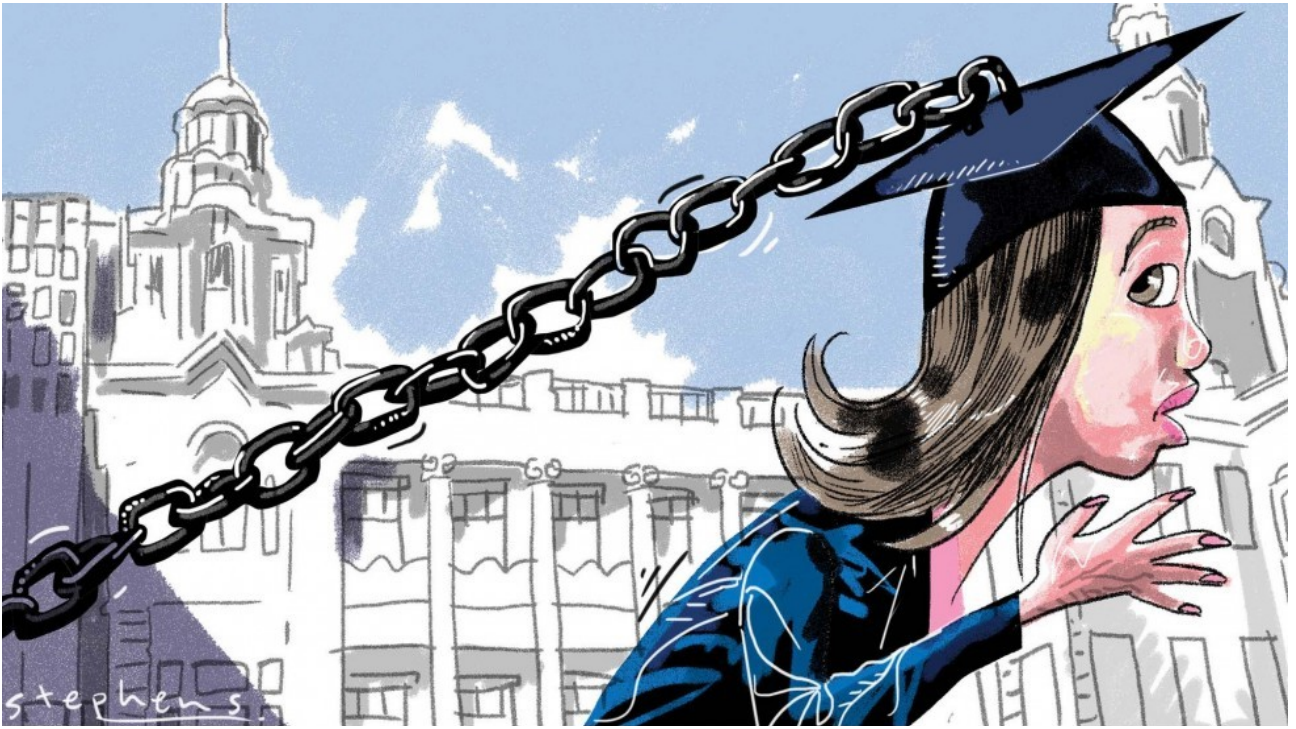
Now, teachers are grappling with censorship and growing increasingly worried about potential attacks from pro-establishment groups and individuals, according to Yeung. The bureau also announced last month it will begin providing ethics training courses for teachers covering national security and rule of law – courses that will be organized with prominent pro-Beijing politician Rita Fan, local news site HK01 reports. Yeung, who previously taught liberal studies, says it will be difficult for students and teachers to have open discussions on political issues in schools moving forward. “I think we can’t really fight the establishment, but we can think more about how to impose another type of education in civil society,” said Yeung, adding that some teachers are considering publicizing free, alternative teaching materials online, publishing books, and organizing union actions with groups that have similar concerns.

Last month, a teenager displaying a profile picture during online classes that showed a flag bearing the slogan “Free Hong Kong, Revolution Now” was suspended from school for a week. “We don’t really know what the limitations are. Until we find the actual boundaries, we can only try to be safer than before.”



Why 'safe spaces' at universities are a threat to free speech, April 2018

The idea of universities being a “safe space” was until recently an issue that was unique to the US. Now the UK has experienced an upswing in incidents in which so-called “safe space” policies have reportedly threatened the right to free speech in British universities. Closely tied to the concept of “no-platforming” – where speakers are denied the opportunity to even speak – several highly publicised safe space cases have come to light, including the ejection of a student from a meeting for raising her hand, the banning of speakers such as feminist Germaine Greer, secularist Maryam Namazie, and equal rights campaigner Peter Tatchell, and the introduction of “safe space marshals” to monitor behaviour at debates. But the concept of a safe space, whereby those with distasteful or offensive views are prevented from speaking at a university, is fundamentally at odds with the rigorous intellectual exchange central to the idea of the academy itself. (World.edu)



Political pressure threatens academic freedom of teachers, October 2017