

\* This is a pre-copyedited, author-produced version of an article accepted for publication in *E* following peer review. The version of record, Doris A. Santoro, "We're Not Going to Do That Because It's Not Right": Using Pedagogical Responsibility to Reframe the Doublespeak of Fidelity," *E* no. 12 (2016): 263-277, is available online at



---

Yet that responsibility is undermined by demands for fidelity in market-based educational reforms. The dismantling of that responsibility negates the possibility of responsible and responsive pedagogical relations, thus leading to disastrous results for students and teachers alike. Pedagogical responsibility is ceded to curricular products that may offer valuable resources, but that cannot produce intelligent response.

#### FIDELITY IN A CORPORATOCRACY

When used outside of the context of educational reform, fidelity usually signifies faithfulness to a person; adherence to a religion, an ideology, or other allegiance; or truthfulness to the original. Almost always, the term fidelity carries a normative valence; to be unfaithful signals wrongdoing. To be unfaithful indicates that an individual has trampled upon an agreement that was previously set forth or understood implicitly. Infidelity denotes cheating. An infidel has turned away from his or her moral source.

In relation to political authority,

---

Many curriculum developers and educational evaluators advocate the importance of teachers implementing a school district's adopted program with fidelity. A number of reasons pertain for asking teachers to follow the directives set out by a curriculum plan. For the purposes of assessing not only students but the effectiveness of the program, it is important that teachers implement the program consistently in their own classrooms and across the school or district. Furthermore, some districts hope to maintain consistency across schools in order to minimize academic disruptions to highly mobile student populations.

In the context of educational reform, the use of the term fidelity also imbues the curriculum and testing products of corporations not only with political power, but also with moral significance. Lisa Foster defines fidelity as "the extent to which delivery of an intervention adheres to the protocol or program model originally developed."<sup>15</sup> Teachers are expected to follow lesson scripts and curricular maps with fidelity. Computer

---

With the focus on “what works,” teachers are instructed to enact their work with fidelity to

---

informed by daily evidence presented in their own classrooms and schools, rather than being recognized as an attempt to debate the purposes and practices of public schools, are often cast as self-serving and a form of obstructionist resistance rooted in an unwillingness to change their practices. For instance, New York State Commissioner of Education MaryEllen Elia said that it was “unethical” for teachers to support or encourage students to opt-out from standardized testing.<sup>22</sup> Where conversations about what constitutes the moral path in an environment dominated by high-stakes testing could be taking place, instead teachers are cast as moral only if they follow the directives set by others and as immoral if they engage in behaviors or conversations that challenge the directives of their superiors.

Gert Biesta argues that prescriptive, “evidence-based” approaches to education fail on a significant criterion: democracy. He explains that “what counts as ‘effective’ crucially depends on

judgments about their work.<sup>26</sup> The effect is “morally oppressive,” says Noël Smith, and “encourages one to ignore and suppress her morality, her moral impulses, and her moral way of knowing.”<sup>27</sup>

As in any workplace, some teachers may resist policy and curricular changes out of stubbornness or laziness. However, Achinstein and Ogawa argue that some forms of infidelity take the shape of “principled resistance.”<sup>28</sup> This resistance is based on “professional principles”:

29

While teachers may see themselves as engaging in principled resistance, it is difficult to make a convincing case for professional principles in an environment in which teachers' moral ground has been eviscerated or is not recognized. Fidelity of implementation places teachers in a sticky moral web. Some teachers may find that fidelity of implementation harms children academically, socially, or psychologically. They may believe that it harmfully narrows the purposes of public education in a democracy. Nevertheless, teachers' resistance to enact a program with fidelity can mark them as morally deficient because the “scientifically based” program has been positioned as the only moral response to educational inequity. Even though teachers possess and may articulate moral reasons to depart from demands for fidelity, their lack of fidelity renders them morally suspect. Once caught in the web of morally constrained logic where noncompliance signals moral transgression, their moral reasons may not be received or recognized as moral. What resources are available to teachers caught in this maddening situation?

LEARNING W

intimately with the known. As a result, I conduct empirical research that enables me to test out philosophical concepts with teachers and to develop or revise concepts when existing vocabularies are inadequate to capture the experience of daily life in schools.

While Dewey is certainly concerned with the broad contours of democracy, he is also interested in the specificity of life in schools. Dewey highlights the intimate connection between philosophy and lived experience:

Drawing on an interview with Jason enables me to highlight philosophical concepts in action and to show how philosophical resources can make a difference in how we interpret teachers' lives and work.<sup>31</sup> The interview enables me to learn how Jason understands his work and gives him the opportunity to provide reasons for the choices he makes as an educator. What such conversations reveal are the intelligent and moral work of teachers who are imperfect and fallible; my point is not to portray Jason as an exemplary moral actor.

My discussion of Jason's resistance will be explored through his criticism of what his district called a "managed" curriculum for English teachers. I will also show that Jason's resistance demonstrates a form of teacher intelligence that is tamped down by "teacher-proof" curricula. Jason encounters a moral double bind: According to his district, he is a good teacher only if he follows the directives in the curriculum. However, he can live with himself as a responsible teacher only if he uses his judgment to diverge from curriculum mandates so that he can see, encourage, and challenge his students.<sup>32</sup>

#### DOING WHAT THE KNOWN DEMANDS OF US

Jason's resistance to the scripted curriculum does not hinge on acts of extraordinary thoughtfulness or heroic activism. In fact, his acts may seem commonsensical to other public school teachers. Given the attacks on teaching and teachers that undermine their intelligent action and moral credibility — in other words, their professionalism — I dwell on Jason's somewhat unremarkable experiences to highlight the everyday intellectual and moral agency of teachers who are expected to enact a commercially produced program with fidelity. What is remarkable in Jason's case is that he has taught for over a decade and has no plans to leave the profession. There are strategic lessons in Jason's story that have enabled him to remain working in high-need public schools.<sup>33</sup>

Jason chose to enter teaching despite its low pay. He pursued the profession with a clear-eyed perspective, knowing that he would need to take on summer landscaping jobs in order to support his family. While a love of literature drew him to teaching, the students have kept him engaged and passionate about the profession. He relishes the challenge and dynamism of figuring

---

<sup>31</sup>

<sup>32</sup>

<sup>33</sup>







---

The demand for fidelity and unthinking acceptance of directives may continue as a phantom form of unquestioning obedience. Jason was startled and concerned that so many of his colleagues operated from a place of fear, even after the managed curriculum had been abandoned by the district:

The disciplinary work of fidelity reverberated even after the actual directive was gone. It had been internalized and was policed by the teachers themselves. Jason viewed his coworkers empathically, but found solidarity in challenging the directives (real and phantom) through his alliances across the district and with the union. "They toed the line," says Jason, "which I don't blame them for, I get that. But I guess I figured that this is a big district and nobody's going to come find me. I can just teach the right way and teach my kids."

Beyond his own classroom, Jason articulated moral concerns about unequal access to a quality curriculum that enables students to explore the richness of literature and discover its significance to their lives. He was disgusted that the only students who received the "managed" curriculum were those in the mainstream and remedial classes while the gifted students who tended to come from the more affluent families were exempted. "These are the kids that needed more engagement," argues Jason, "but they figured they'd invest in buying crap for the needy kids." From Jason's experience in the district, he believed that the administration avoided imposing anything on

In the context of teaching, Dewey calls externally imposed ends a “vice,” a bad habit that is possible to change. Although as with most bad habits, while changing is possible, it is a demanding endeavor.

Intelligence, and the ability to use one's intelligence, is the antidote to slavery and antidemocratic practices. However, intelligence is also the essential ingredient of a moral life. According to Dewey, no rule or list of virtues guarantees moral selfhood. Moral engagement in the world entails that individuals assess their embodied, situated condition and determine how to best align ends with means. This assessment requires that individuals use their own intelligence to draw upon, apply, and adapt the intelligence that has been established by others.

Teachers' resistance to fidelity is an area that deserves further investigation; it has the potential to reveal educators' agency and their articulations of pedagogical responsibility. Just as teachers' moral emotions may be manipulated by political forces, teachers' moral emotions may reveal political forces that warrant further analysis.<sup>36</sup> From Dewey's perspective, continually asking questions about the means, ends and aims of education is the proper use of teachers' intelligence and the only moral stance for those living in a democratic society. The failure to use one's judgment is not simply a failure of intelligence for Dewey, it is a failure to engage morally with the world. The suppression of others' judgment is tyranny.