

Liberating Curriculum: A Pedagogy of Publicness that Counters Dominant Culture

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Abstract

This paper explores critical public pedagogy in relation to narratives and teaching about mass incarceration in the United States. This paper uses Gert Biesta's theorization about creating pedagogy in the interest of publicness to understand conceptions of public discourse and pedagogy in the interest of publicness. I explore the Liberation Arts Project (a Black-led art program founded by currently incarcerated people) as an example of counter pedagogy that calls for society to imagine a better, more inclusive and caring world despite historical tendencies to ignore social traumas that co-occur alongside racialized control and discipline.

This paper investigates the relationship between two concepts: the ability to participate in education in public places, and mass incarceration in the United States. In doing so I seek to understand what a pedagogy of publicness might look like in a world where concern and care for a collective society is rapidly declining (Giroux, 2017, 2020). At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals groaned as their world became small, and society ignored the intricacies of a smaller public—the prison cell, the smallest functioning societal unit. The larger public does not receive mainstream education about prison abolition or the dehumanizing conditions of prisons, largely due to the politicization of discourse in the public sphere about crime rates, law and order, and individuals' abilities to be resilient against life's hardships. While it is "commonsense" (or the prevailing discourse) that incarcerated individuals lost their freedom because of their own actions, research shows that rates of incarceration in the United States disproportionately affect Black US Americans at an alarming rate; these numbers reveal systemic racism (Davis and Rodríguez, 2000; Rodríguez, 2010). For example, forms of racialized control are recycled to fit current social contexts; Alexander (2020) explains that the racial caste system in the US has not yet moved beyond slavery and Jim Crow eras because the goal of denying full citizenship to Black people still stands. Additional aspects of mass incarceration still disparately affect Black communities, such as sentencing (length of time in prison) and removing rights of those past and presently incarcerated. The United States Sentencing Commission (2017) found, for example, that sentence time imposed on Black men is on average 19.1 percent longer than sentences given to white men for similar circumstances. Using that statistical average of 19.1 percent, if a white man was convicted, he may be sentenced to seven years in prison while a Black man is sentenced to eight years and four months, which also means that Black men are kept from participating in society alongside their family and friends for a longer amount of time.

The Liberation Arts Project (LAP) expanded our imaginations of where and how public pedagogy happens by elaborating on what a public is as well as giving a new sense of who has the ability to educate. The LAP is a Black-led collective run by current inmates in Washington state that aims to cultivate community in experimental ways through various teaching platforms. The LAP, led by Lawrence Jenkins, a Black man who was incarcerated at the beginning of his young adulthood in Washington state, demonstrated a new way to be within community. LAP partnered with Alma Mater, a community group in the Tacoma area that assisted in showcasing and selling LAP's artwork. All of the proceeds from the sale of artwork went back to the incarcerated artist to support legal fees. The artwork was created by current inmates in Washington state, and even though the gallery was online, there was much to be felt and learned by the art and artist stories. The art gallery was free and easy to access, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Patrons were also able to make an appointment to safely view the gallery in-person during the gallery's showing during late 2020.

LAP's teachings are counter to dominant discourse. LAP's curriculum is situated among two main categories of public pedagogy research, the confluence of "dominant cultural discourses" and "public intellectualism and social activism" (Sandlin, O'Malley, and Burdick, 2011, p. 338). LAP's narrative explains to learners that mass incarceration is not new, and will endure if we do not concern ourselves with the collective wellbeing of society. This "*we*" is all of us—we all participate in and learn behavior from social organizations about discipline, and the prison regime is a widespread and "invasive arrangement of social power, state violence, and human domination" (Rodríguez, 2010, p. 8).

The paper is organized into three parts. First, I explore the connection between public pedagogy and mass incarceration. In this section I discuss pedagogies related to the historical/ongoing trauma of mass incarceration alongside three conceptualizations of the present state of society: post-apocalypse, mid-apocalypse, and counter-apocalypse. I use the term

apocalypse to refer to the complete destruction of the world in its current form. Counter-apocalyptic pedagogy is an unveiling and an exhibition of social catastrophe. It acts as a counter to apocalyptic dominant narratives, because our society is still contending with and reinforcing the same strategies of white supremacy. However, its methods shift to fit time and place. On the other hand, post-apocalyptic pedagogy works with the ideas of an apocalypse (ending) to claim that society is past racism and our world is new or reborn from its past sins. The mid-apocalypse is a divestment from education that exposes collective social failures (Swyngedouw, 2010). The various formations of apocalypse in this article represent the differing ways people in society contend with atrocities like mass incarceration, neglectful prison conditions, and stripping opportunities away from those who are (and were) incarcerated. The second section explores how the LAP created pedagogy in the interest of (Beista 2014). I use the online gallery from LAP to operationalize Beista's theory. In the final section, I discuss how pedagogy in the interest of publicness is used to challenge hegemonic and socially marginalizing curriculum by making pedagogy that is context-dependent and aware of how dominant discourses control and restrict counter public pedagogy.

Three Iterations of Apocalyptic Pedagogies

Post-, mid-, and counter-apocalyptic pedagogies each adhere to a specific set of politicized morals and ideals (Burdick and Sandlin, 2020; Swyngedouw, 2010). For example, post-apocalyptic pedagogies teach that society has resolved social oppression and is absolved of historical social traumas of the past, such as slavery, Jim Crow, and convict leasing laws. Thus, post-apocalyptic pedagogies explain that mass incarceration is not a "real" phenomenon nor an outcome of systemic violence against Black communities; rather, it argues that if you are incarcerated it is because of individual decisions that have no relation to systemic marginalization. Another ideation of society in terms of social catastrophes is the mid-apocalypse. Mid-apocalyptic pedagogies are marked by processes of neoliberalism. For example, mid-apocalyptic pedagogies accept that mass incarceration is upsetting, and yet, by adhering to longstanding social and economic orders, mid-apocalyptic pedagogies do not disrupt the status quo. Thus, in the mid-apocalypse we live among ongoing marginalization, but do nothing to stop it. And, finally, counter apocalyptic pedagogies interrupt post and mid-apocalyptic teachings. Here, the apocalypse is defined as an unveiling (Berger, 1999; Swyngedouw, 2010). While post-apocalyptic pedagogies position society as past the social trauma and mid-apocalyptic pedagogies view social trauma as part of normal and natural life, counter apocalyptic pedagogies explain that there is more to the narrative of systemic racialized violence to uncover and that the dehumanization of Black and Brown people is not part of the natural order (Burdick and Sandlin, 2020). Counter apocalyptic pedagogies argue that racism and marginalization are human-made oppression that we can undo.

The LAP pedagogies seek to counter dominant discourses. They are thus counter apocalyptic pedagogies because they posit that racialized control over Black bodies has not yet ended. LAP pedagogies posit that society cannot be apocalyptic (understanding, uncovering, and undoing systemic marginalization) if we have not acknowledged and addressed systemic harm. Society has not "realized" or remedied largescale oppression. Thus, the LAP online art gallery exposed the ongoing historical trauma of mass incarceration that prevents society from moving into a moment of post-apocalyptic bliss or from deeming oppression as natural (mid-apocalypse). The Liberation Arts Project's (LAP) mission is:

LAP helps incarcerated individuals reconstruct their lives and create pathways that lead towards a positive future. Freedom and successful reentry are at the forefront of LAP's agenda. They align activities, projects, and opportunities with rehabilitation, personal transformation, and extraordinary circumstances that are recognized when it comes time for

incarcerated individuals to be considered for custody level promotion, early release, housing, education, and employment post-release. LAP facilitates restorative justice by working with prison administration, organizations, institutions, agencies, and most importantly COMMUNITY to help reintegrate artists. (Alma Mater, n.d., p. 2)

A common conception of publics are idealized places where anyone can put down their soapbox to stimulate critical discourse, and yet, the reality is that publics are wrought with neoliberal ideologies that shut out prisoners, allowing society to live under a veil of false enlightenment (Giroux, 2004).

Historical strategies of oppression are reprocessed into contemporary techniques of discipline and control (Foucault, 1979). For example, since the inception of the United States, it was a goal to maintain that Black and Brown people were not fully human with full rights to citizenship (Davis and Rodríguez, 2000). One way to uphold this goal temporarily is to label Blackness as dangerous, angry, unproductive, and bad (Brown, 2021; Browne, 2015). Societal organizations, like schools, governments, and workplaces are committed to racialized systems that reinforce oppression (Ray, 2019). In the era of colorblindness in the US and War on Crime, calling Black people criminals and barring them from society through mass incarceration help maintain the system (Berger, 2013). Presently, many of the legal rules and social implications from the dominant discourse of law and order are evidenced by the disparate rates of exclusionary discipline Black and Brown students face (Annamma, 2016). Black communities are also heavily surveilled by law enforcement (Powell and Coles, 2020; Rodríguez, 2010). Racial disparities are deeply embedded into laws, institutions, and normed social attitudes regarding who society chooses to discipline and for how long (Davis and Rodríguez, 2000; Foucault, 1979). Thus, institutions within US society are able to produce and re-invent structures and rules that hurt Black people and Black communities (Browne, 2015; Wamsley, 2019).

Post-apocalyptic Pedagogies

“Apocalypse without the promise of redemption” (Swyngedouw, 2010, p. 218)

What a “true” post-apocalypse looks like is up for theoretical debate (Swyngedouw, 2010); however, the ideation of an apocalyptic perspective requires viewing our world as a “paradise or wasteland” (Berger, 1999, p. 6). The post-apocalypse chooses the paradise—denying, resolving, and disregarding historical traumas with the goal preserving old and established cultural social orders. For example, social reconstruction in the US after the civil rights era did not remedy power relations or sincerely address historical trauma, as whiteness re-invents ways to maintain dominance (Rodríguez, 2020). Accordingly, people sermonize societal goals of stagnation, status quo, and apathy as if the progression of society is already at its best (Giroux, 2004, 2010). Burdick and Sandlin (2020) diverge from Berger’s (1999) interpretation of our world being post-apocalyptic and argue that historical trauma is current and the atrocities arising from that oppression manifest in various crises. The mid-apocalypse is defined as processes that can lead to the end but keep society in a space of torment because we fail to improve social conditions (Burdick and Sandlin, 2020).

Without a total rehaul of US society including the way we learn about racialized control (Rodríguez, 2010) it is difficult to imagine what life looks like post-apocalypse. Thus, devastating effects of mass incarceration go ignored as prisons are hidden away from public locations and discourse, and those incarcerated have little access to publics or public pedagogies (Rodríguez, 2010). The end of the world that enslaves and dehumanizes people has not happened yet because mechanisms of control and discipline shift alongside time (Browne, 2015). Perhaps with experimental ways of educating and learning, society could move into

a post-apocalyptic world, assuming that unknown world is equitable and just (Davis and Rodríguez, 2000). However, the educational change that would come after historical violence against racially marginalized groups must be addressed and remedied (Warren, 2021; Woodson, 2020).

Mid-apocalyptic Pedagogies

“It is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism” (Jameson, 2003, p. 73)

The mid-apocalyptic space is aware and accustomed to racist and classist oppression. The mid-apocalypse is defined as “a space that announces the end not as an event, but a process, one that cannot be adequately articulated via such causal language as beginning or end” (Burdick and Sandlin, 2020). Ritzenhoff and Krewani (2019) explain that ideations of a Biblical apocalypse found in the book of Revelations serve as a last judgment for society because of the fall of humankind. Likewise, the Western-dominant way of understanding the ultimate end discloses that every person is for themselves, as the fates of the world and individuals within it are predestined as doomed (Ritzenhoff and Krewani, 2019). The social messages of “the end” are neoliberal in nature because a collective society already has no hope. Interpretations like “every person for themselves”, then, teach ideologies of individualization, privatization, and nonchalance for collective wellbeing. The mid-apocalypse is the space where mass incarceration continues unchallenged.

The ability to ignore oppression, marginalization, and discrimination has neoliberal roots and is an intentional form of pedagogy. Living post-apocalypse is an intentional way of being that also informs how publics interact with marginalized knowledge. Conceptions of a post-apocalypse perpetuate the status quo, or as Malewski and Jaramillo (2011) and Mueller (2017) explained, an epistemology of ignorance. An epistemology of ignorance is a deliberate “process of knowing designed to produce not knowing” (Mueller, 2017, p. 1). The reason many people actively adhere to ignorance is dependent on a belief of keeping the current state of affairs because this (e.g., social orders) is the “one right way” (Malewski and Jaramillo, 2011, p. 3). The strict confounds of “right” are due to the manifestations of power (e.g., power to compel, power to resist, power to maintain) functioning in real-world ways that restrain society’s ability to care for different ways of being (Foucault, 1978).

These pervasive ideals of individualization hinder people from socially dreaming of a world where we take care of each other (Giroux, 2020). Commonly, neoliberal discourses encourage people to only care about the wellbeing of themselves and their immediate family—making the struggles of others and marginalized communities seemingly removed from their care and concern (Esposito and Perez, 2014; Giroux, 2020). Pervasive neoliberal teachings also forego any societal failure and instead tell society that incarcerated people are solely to blame for their situation (Wacquant, 2009). The dominant teachings that intertwine social class, productivity, and crime into a curriculum of disinterest in a cooperative society renders the critical inquiry and knowledge from incarcerated people as invalid.

Mid-apocalyptic discourse declares that we all have equal ability, access, and agency. Even in ignorance, society is trained regarding what to absorb because our “sites of socialization have become pedagogical sites” (Rich, 2011, p. 4). This means that whether we are in-person or virtual, our frequented spaces of meaningful interaction provide a strict milieu of cultural norms, ideologies, and truths (Burdick and Sandlin, 2013; Giroux, 2010). As these dominant ways of knowing gain traction and become solidified over time, everyday talk permeates public life (Sandlin, O’Malley, and Burdick, 2011). We are either compelled to believe dominant discourses and status quo as truth, or we become inspired by critical public

discourses to resist and carve out spaces that welcome unique epistemic standpoints (Warren, 2021; Woodson, 2020). The ways to be “right” also extend to concepts of policing, crime, and prisons or jails. Society learns stereotypes of who typically commits crime and we choose to discipline them in various ways from a young age (Annamma, 2019). Inside and outside of schools, poor Black and Brown people are treated as surplus population due to our society’s decision to adhere to neoliberal teachings that reject and criminalize the welfare state that offers stability and safety to underserved communities (Rehmann, 2015; Wacquant, 2009). The LAP enacted public pedagogies that brought attention to the trauma that most of society ignores and hides away from mainstream news and discourse. These pedagogies are counter-apocalyptic.

Counter-apocalyptic Pedagogies

“In other words, what might happen to the disoriented teaching act if it were re-oriented against the assumptive necessity, integrity, and taken-for-grantedness of prisons, policing, and the normalized state violence they reproduce?” (Rodríguez, 2010, p. 9)

Creating counter pedagogies in the name of pedagogies in the interest of publicness requires creativity, imagination, and experimentation (Biesta, 2014). Thus, despite political will to ignore and perpetuate harm, pedagogies in the interest of publicness from LAP provide a glimpse into what a changed society might look like. In the LAP art show, attendees learn to appreciate people who are incarcerated and those who are incarcerated learn that they can be appreciated and accepted by a public from which they have been banished. The LAP artists infused education *of the public* (Biesta, 2014) with democracy and social justice; this led the viewers of their art to become interested in pursuing these topics further. Publicness is thus generated when the artists and their viewers embarked on the educative journey together.

LAP pedagogies told the realities of mass incarceration and in doing so encouraged a “critical awareness” (Biesta, 2014, p. 32) in viewers. Critical narratives reveal how society blindly and intentionally participates in traditions and institutions that perpetuate racist mis-treatment and violence. These narratives explain that our world is in the middle of multiple ongoing social crises that have racist historical roots and a contemporary foothold on the way we discipline. LAP and other educative collectives such as the Prison Creative Arts Project in Michigan and Humanities Behind Bars in Virginia, dispute mainstream discourses that sensitize society to dehumanizing methods of social control.

An Example of Publics in the Interest of Publicness

LAP’s online art gallery was created in the interest of publicness because it is public, shows alternative ways of being, and experimental (Biesta, 2014). The online art gallery was intentionally concerned with the “public quality of human togetherness” (p. 34), as the gallery showed how the viewers and artists could appreciate each other’s contributions and co-exist through their art. All of the proceeds from the art show go directly back to the inmates. The inmates are not exploited for their buzzworthy story, but instead their voices are amplified. The stories about the art are diverse, unique, and unexpected. The art gallery is also sustainable during COVID-19 as it provides economic resources to inmates who have been forgotten and silenced during this time, while providing online space to learn and keep people safe from COVID-19. The entire online gallery at Alma Mater is online: <https://www.almamater-tacoma.com/liberation-arts-exhibit>.

The LAP pedagogy focused on those who are “hidden” and facilitated the sharing of their narratives. However, there was an added layer of difficulty in broadcasting their work during COVID-19. Despite being intentionally kept from public pedagogies of news and

politics during incarceration, the artists had reconceptualized what *public* meant by using various online platforms long before 2020 to reach people including potential collaborators. The Liberation Arts Project reveals that:

Prison artists are also faced with the daily challenge of finding the right time, space, and opportunity to create, share, learn, and express. Washington State Department of Corrections does not provide a robust art program willing to offer what Liberation Arts Project offers the prison art community. (p. 1)



Figure 1: Artwork by Edmund Washington

Creator and community coordinator of the LAP, Edmund Washington, whose work is shown in Figure 1, said this about their art and the work of the LAP:

Art is therapeutic in the prison environment. I've seen art bring two individuals with opposing life views and bring them together with a common interest. When it comes to visual art, I excel at pencil, colored pencil, and mixed media. Although any real creative mind will tell you, you'll only go as far as your tools will allow. Once I get ahead of paint, I don't believe it will be long before I break barriers with that either. Once I establish myself as a reputable artist, I have plans much bigger than myself. The multitudes of children without a proper creative outlet to free their minds or to give them a positive environment to grow, will lead to more devastating outlets. Too many creative minds are wasted in low-income areas and I want to give them a platform to reach something beyond mediocrity. Elevation is the goal so education in this realm is necessary. In all honesty, all I have is those who believe in me. If I were to get out tomorrow, art (whether visual or performing) will always be a part of my life. Even if I were to lose my hands, survival is in me, I'll find a way. ("Liberation Arts Exhibit," 2020, p. 2)

This intentional work created a community where those of us not incarcerated or personally touched by mass incarceration learn to appreciate and listen to prison artists—and, experimentally, in the *same* space together, prison artists and the community learn to mutually appreciate and trust each other.

Viewing and purchasing the artwork revealed alternative ways to exist and resist carceral-minded thoughts. In this public, attendees could come to view inmates as artists who contribute to the beauty and learning of the public. Jerrell M. Jackson (work shown in Figure 2), a LAP artist, wrote about their work:

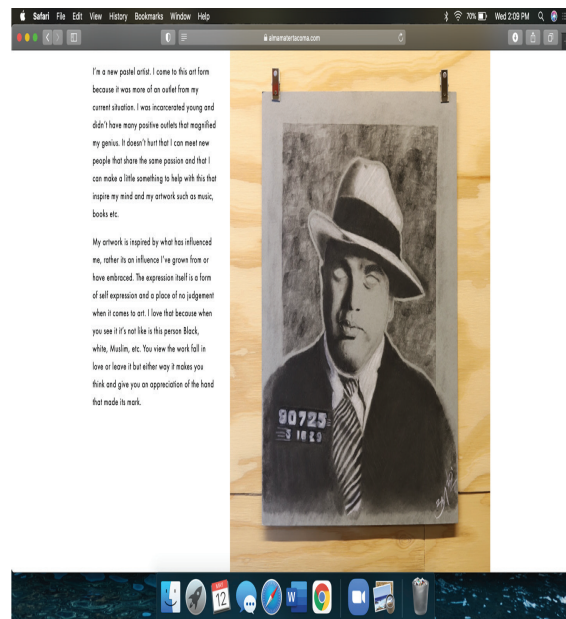


Figure 2: Artwork by Jerrell M. Jackson

[M]y artwork is inspired by what has influenced me, rather it's an influence I've grown from or have embraced. The expression itself is a form of self-expression and a place of no judgement when it comes to art. I love that because when you see it it's not like is this person Black, white, Muslim, etc. You view the work, fall in love or leave it, but either way, it makes you think and gives you an appreciation of the hand that made its mark. ("Liberation Arts Exhibit," 2020)

Biesta's (2014) theories of how pedagogies are enacted provide clear insight into how even places that are oppressive and infused with epistemologies of ignorance (Malewski & Jaramillo, 2011), such as prisons, can still be active sites of knowing. The LAP project reveals the vibrant learning happening within and among sites of incarceration, and shows that ignoring the pedagogies provided by inmates and formerly incarcerated people is an active stance. Subsequently, prisoners' convictions isolate them and place their citizenship into question, making them a subversive choice for an educator. Prisoners gave critical knowledge into their "hidden" world long before 2020 when their pedagogies went viral online, and the public has disvalued their knowledge because of the ability to imprison their bodies and hide their pedagogies (Borrello, Fetherston, and Tutrone, 2020). To provide a theoretical grounding about how public pedagogies work, Biesta offered three ways of enacting pedagogies: for the public, of the public, and the interest of publicness. This paper contextualizes one of the dimensions of Biesta's theoretical work—pedagogy in the interest of publicness—by using the projects of incarcerated people that bring together education and politics in an effort to demonstrate and (hopefully) become a society that pushes back against ignorance.

Mass-incarceration narratives highlight that society is in the middle of an ongoing crisis that has racist historical roots. The LAP artists enacted public pedagogy to bring attention to trauma that most of society ignores and hides away from mainstream news and discourse—this action is mid-apocalyptic pedagogy. Publics do not only provide space for education to happen, but publics also have an educational responsibility that sets the stage for society's collective ideals and actions (Biesta, 2012). Applying a theoretical view of *creating publics in the interest of publicness* (Biesta, 2014) shows how The Liberation Arts Project enacted a new type of public where prisoners and those not incarcerated learned to foster mutual respect. Pedagogies in the interest of publics show society new ways to be together. Biesta's (2014) pedagogies in the interest of publicness argue that not all publics have the same intrinsic qualities. Publicness is enacted by inspiring a quality of collaborative togetherness. Biesta argues that pedagogies in the interest of publicness share

A concern for the public quality of human togetherness and thus for the possibility of actors and events to *become public*. Becoming public is not about a physical relocation from the home to the street or from the *oikos* to the *polis*, but about the achievement of forms of human togetherness—or, as I have put it elsewhere, forms of political *existence*. (p. 33)

For Biesta, public pedagogy is intentional work. Cultivating knowledge in the interest of publicness not only calls for educators to do work but also asks those listening to become activists to envision and enact new social norms of inclusivity (Burdick and Sandlin, 2013; Biesta, 2014).



Figure 3: Artwork by LAP's founder, Lawrence Jenkins

The LAP and similar collectives have power to tell the truthful version about the story of mass incarceration. LJ, or Lawrence Jenkins, founder of LAP, states, “We have to realize our potential, as artists, to preserve history or transform culture. . . There’s no limit to what

we can create” (“Liberation Arts Exhibit,” 2020) (See Figure 3 as an example of Lawrence Jenkins’ artwork). As a way to show an alternative to being in society that currently ignores the realities of mass incarceration, The Liberation Arts Project’s pedagogy also goes against the politics of law and order that is prevalent in the US right now, and teaches that the way we treat and view inmates can be different than the way politics tells us. Isaac Cavil, another LAP artist (work shown in Figure 4), uses charcoal, graphite, and ink to bring politics into the discussion. He states, “This picture is an inspiration for a new comic book idea and video game character, whose goal is to balance an evil world through politics of his sword play” (“Liberation Arts Exhibit,” 2020).



Figure 4: Artwork by Isaac Cavil

The experimentation of a collective society that learns together and establishes new societal norms is what Biesta (2014) frames as Arendtian freedom of action (see Arendt, 1977) that calls us to act in cooperation with those around us to engage with and encourage their ideas while being willing to join their initiatives. Arendtian freedom also connects the political sphere with education because in both Arendt’s and Biesta’s view, freedom is not an individualized commodity, but is instead dependent on the ability of others to act on their own accord and respond freely to others’ concepts in public spaces. A clear example of having freedom sequestered is the case of currently incarcerated people that are fighting for their ability to act alongside the rest of those with access to publics. Generally, prisoners do not have the freedom to perform, but during the pandemic they were able to channel Arendtian action by reconceptualizing publics. Activists and people who care about the incarcerated were able to experience this joint freedom because prisoners demonstrated how society could change to construct a “common world” (Biesta, 2014, p. 30) that acts with qualities of togetherness. The LAP along with similar incarcerated pedagogues pushed back against the notion of a status quo and explored how society *could* be while also *showing* ways to achieve this new ideal. The teachings from inside prison that have made it to online public spaces demonstrate that “it is possible to do things differently; they [incarcerated pedagogues] demonstrate, against the often heard claim from politicians and policy makers that ‘there is no alternative,’ that there is *always* an alternative” (Biesta, 2014, p. 34).

Consequently, not all publics have the same goals of collective work, inclusivity, critical awareness, and social justice, however, publicness is a quality that can be produced through intentional acts. Ignoring social issues of welfare, and especially that of mass incarceration, show that the larger society is not ready to contend with historical (and re-occurring) trauma (Alexander, 2020; Eberhardt, 2020; Giroux, 2017). Society covers its blatant biases in exchange for new ways of upholding the destructive racial caste system that facilitates the criminalization of Black and Brown people of all ages (Rodríguez, 2012)—keeping imminent downfall of our world very near.

Discussion and Future Implications

It is possible to challenge the teachings that stem from the post and mid-apocalypse, to hopefully bring society to a real post-apocalypse that is totally different from what we know—equitable. The LAP's pedagogy of publicness unveiled the truth of ongoing disparate cruelty and pain within the mid-apocalyptic space of mass incarceration; this pedagogy inspired “an interest in the public quality of human togetherness” (Biesta, 2014, p. 131).

Mass incarceration is innately set within power relations of our society that treat Black and Brown people as “superfluous as human beings” (Arendt, 1973, as cited in Giroux, 2020, p. 1). Public spaces actively uphold ideologies and practices that neglect people who have been or are currently incarcerated. In acknowledging this critical and marginalized truth, educators, researchers, and activists show how we are living among impending doom caused by the collective failure of a society that operates through racialized formal and informal rules, hierarchies, and traditions (Ray, 2019; Rodríguez, 2012). Notably, apocalyptic pedagogies are not only taught at religious institutions, but post- and mid-apocalyptic messages are widespread throughout public establishments to obscure critical teachings. Collectives like the LAP provide an educative space to humanize people that dominant teachings render as “bad.”

Importantly, LAP created publicness by infusing experimental ways of being in a community as well as inspiring a mutual appreciation of each other to encourage a sense of togetherness. Particularly, the action to generate pedagogy in the interest of publicness must also include responses and engagement on the part of the non-incarcerated. All of society must be concerned with “hidden” publics that are purposefully obscured from us in efforts to ignore the harm inflicted on people we choose to discipline.

Society takes public spaces for granted (Biesta, 2014; Giroux, 2004), however, publics are becoming spaces that only privilege people who “fit” the neoliberal discourses of productivity, social neglect, law and order, and self-interest (Giroux, 2010). Prisoners have always had their own publics and the rest of society did not care to enter their public. For example, in addition to the LAP, other incarcerated people have used various online platforms such as TikTok to create learning spaces that give society the chance to see and engage with the hidden publics of prison cells (Borrello, Fetherston, and Tutrone, 2020). Using TikTok does require a cellphone, which are contraband in prisons, but pedagogues are demonstrating the reality of their lives via connecting on social media. Their narratives carry epistemic authority on the subject of mass incarceration that is often diminished. Graciously, they give those of us who are not incarcerated a chance to engage and advocate alongside them. While this version of pedagogy comes with risks (the use of cellphones), these TikTok “videos are one of the few times the public can see the everyday humanity of prison life, especially through the lens of a younger incarcerated generation. And the need for connection far exceeds the risks taken” (Borrello, Fetherston, and Tutrone, 2020, p. 1). Otherwise, prisoners' opportunities to educate would be further taken away.

Moving forward, public pedagogy scholars must situate our analyses of pedagogy within the multiple crises (or mid-apocalypses) of white supremacy, suppression of marginalized

voices that push back against the “right” way, and against teachings that tell society that we live in a post-racial or equitable world. All of these crises have historical legacies that have been re-shaped into new ways of systemic discipline that preserve a longstanding social order. Work in the field of public pedagogy can use existing theories, such as Biesta’s work, to show how to enact certain pedagogies. In addition, activists and community members must also note how Black and Brown people have been treated in both global and local contexts, in order to best support critical counter pedagogies. Masta (2021) wrote:

the complexity of the concept of race is that while its power to shape the social world is global in reach like the legacy of imperialism and colonialism that birthed it, expressions of racism and processes of racialization have local histories. (p. 1)

Thus, narratives of mass incarceration can look different depending on social and local context. How we engage with and support critical pedagogies to promote abolition will also vary by location. Our goal as researchers, educators, and concerned citizens is supporting and amplifying the conversation that the LAP already teaches—to disrupt the disciplinary boundaries of denial, ignorance, and dehumanization that restrict and control our ability to imagine a different world and way of living together.

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