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Do Palestinian Lives Matter in Teacher Education?

Centering an Anti-Zionist Commitment in (Early Childhood) Teacher Education

Lilly Padia

Erikson Institute

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Abstract

Many self-proclaimed “social justice” teacher educators remained silent on Palestine prior to, during and following October 7th, 2023, citing ‘not knowing enough about the conflict’ to absolve themselves of the responsibility of addressing the genocide—and the ongoing settler colonial apartheid state. In teacher education, this compulsory Zionism is particularly troubling, especially for teacher education programs and faculty who claim to follow the foundations of critical race theory and culturally sustaining pedagogies. This tension begs the question: Do Palestinian Lives Matter in Teacher Education? I explore instances of compulsory Zionism in teacher education institutions and introduce teacher candidates’ quotes to demonstrate why this compulsory Zionism is harmful to us all. Building on FaithCrit (the intersections of Faith and Critical Race Theory in Education) to conduct an autoethnographic analysis, I introduce a teaching framework I call ‘Pedagogical Integrity’ to demonstrate how teacher educators can implement anti-Zionist turns in teacher education—and why it is imperative that we must engage them.



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Introduction

Nelson Flores asked, ‘Do Black Lives Matter in Bilingual Education?’ (2016) to highlight anti-Black racism within bilingual education. Many self-proclaimed “social justice” teacher educators remained silent on Palestine prior to, during and following October 7th, 2023, citing ‘not knowing enough about the conflict’ to absolve themselves of the responsibility of addressing the genocide—and the ongoing settler colonial apartheid state (Al-Haq, 2022). In teacher education, this compulsory Zionism (Deeb & Winegar, 2016) is particularly troubling, especially for teacher education programs and faculty who claim to follow the foundations of critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 2021) and culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2017). This phenomenon in teaching is not new; in 2013, a teacher got fired for inviting Ziad Abbas, a Palestinian educator-activist, to speak as part of a school unit on social justice and human rights. “They were teaching about social justice and human rights. They thought they were very radical. She didn’t realize the minute it comes to Palestine it’s a different issue” (Sokolower & Abbas, 2013). Teacher education programs carry the responsibility of impacting the political imagination of the next generation of teachers—and, thus, of children. This tension between justice work and the silencing of teaching about Palestine begs attention to the question: *Do Palestinian Lives Matter in Teacher Education?*

In this paper, I present literature on how resistance to Zionism has shown up in teacher education and higher education at large, as well as the limitations and absences of anti-Zionism in many teacher education spaces. I introduce the context for my own work – a social-justice, intersectionality-based early childhood teacher education program – as well as the methods that I utilize to analyze both my own teacher educator experience and the structural dynamics of the program and curriculum. I introduce the framework of FaithCrit (Malone & Lachaud, 2022) to ground my own commitment to anti-Zionist teacher education. I explore instances of compulsory Zionism in teacher education institutions and introduce teacher candidates’ quotes to demonstrate why this compulsory Zionism is harmful to us all. Finally, I introduce a teaching framework I call “pedagogical integrity,” which is informed by humanizing pedagogies (Bartolomé, 1994) to demonstrate how teacher educators can implement anti-Zionist turns in teacher education—and why it is imperative that we must engage them.

Literature Review

There is a rich history and legacy of justice-oriented scholars in the United States resisting Zionism in their scholarship and activism (e.g. James Baldwin, Alice Walker, Howard Zinn, Jimmy Carter, Angela Davis, and many, many others). Palestinian scholars have long paved the way for refuting Zionism in the academy, and continue to do so loudly and clearly (see Edward Said, Rashid Khalidi, Walid Khalidi, Thea Abu El-Haj, Hanadi Shatara, the Palestinian Feminist Collective, Sawsan Jaber, to name just a select few). In teacher education, the connections between Palestine, the ideology and actions of Zionism, and the dynamics of teaching and learning in the US have been less common. In academia, scholars in fields like anthropology, sociology, decolonial or postcolonial theory, and history have reckoned with Zionism more often than those in education. In this current political climate, since the beginning of the genocide in Gaza, some scholars in these fields have centered discourse on Palestine—often at risk to their professional careers and personal livelihoods, recognizing the cost of their jobs as nothing in comparison to the cost of silence and genocide to humanity (Fúnez-Florez, 2024). Fields like anthropology have similarly reckoned with the topic for years (Finkelstein, 2022; Deeb & Winegar, 2016; Farah, 2018). Scholars in these fields in higher education reckon with the politics of teaching in ways that

can be useful for teacher educators to take up. Finkelstein is one anthropologist who offered the following call to teachers in higher education:

We cannot look away. ...now is the time to become louder in our classrooms. Now is the time to tell this story to our students. Now is the time to write Palestine into our syllabi. Our students deserve the opportunity to unlearn what they have carried with them to college, the baggage of “both sides” that so many of them are desperate to unlearn. (2022).

Anti-Zionism shows up in many community organizing groups’ statements and philosophies. While many argue that teaching and organizing are inextricably linked, the language and visible stances are not so explicit in many teacher education spaces. One working definition of anti-Zionism comes from the Jewish activist group Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP). They say,

‘Anti-Zionism’ is a loose term referring to criticism of the current policies of the Israeli state, and/or moral, ethical, or religious criticism of the idea of a Jewish nation-state....Criticism of Zionism is not to be conflated with antisemitism. States such as Israel and the United States are openly criticized in public life, and their political beliefs and policies are subject to critical debate, in accord with our basic First Amendment rights (Jewish Voice for Peace, 2024, “Our Approach to Zionism”).

The online Encyclopedia Britannica defines teacher education as “any of the formal programs that have been established for the preparation of teachers at the elementary and secondary school levels” (2024). I recognize that teacher education happens in myriad ways, from grassroots educator groups and publications to formal university programs that certify and train teachers. For this paper, I focus on teacher education that occurs via higher education institutions. While there is no absence of literature on the importance of centering social justice and issues of power and identity in teaching and teacher education, there is a notable lack of work related to teacher education and educating teachers about Palestine within the academy. Many K-12 educators have engaged with the topic in their classrooms and curriculum, but often as individual people or groups working *despite* rather than *within* the trends of their field (Knopf-Newman, 2011). K-12 educator organizations like Rethinking Schools, The Zinn Education Project, defendinged.org, the New York Collective of Radical Educators (NYCORE), and many others have organized to share resources for PK-12 educators who want to teach about Palestine with their students. Shatara (2022) has uplifted the importance of teaching (about) Palestine in K-12 schooling, and/but it is worth noting that as a Palestinian scholar, she is one of the few voices doing so. Topics like equity, decolonization, justice, and collective liberation abound in teacher education discourse, particularly amongst scholars and teacher educators of color who ground themselves in lineages like that of critical race theory (CRT) (Bell, 1973; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) and culturally responsive, relevant, and sustaining pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 2021; Alim & Paris, 2015). Teacher education programs often name these critical theories and theorists in their missions, visions, and syllabi, yet simultaneously obfuscate and/or deliberately silence any discourse on Palestine. It is worth noting that there is special irony in programs taking up culturally sustaining pedagogies while marginalizing Palestine when Paris, one of the primary theorists of culturally sustaining pedagogies, has been extremely vocal about the importance of Palestinian solidarities and of teacher educators supporting the student movements for Palestinian liberation (e.g. Street Data Pod, 2024). This example further illustrates how formal teacher education at large remains mired in a “social justice except for Palestine” framework.

As this study takes place in an early childhood teacher education (ECTE) context, I now turn the lens to early childhood teacher education. Many ECTE programs, scholars, and organizations tout a commitment to the wellbeing of and justice for all young people. This stance, while directed at cultivating equity, wellness, and justice for all children and communities, often leads to an “all lives matter” orientation that obscures the realities of difference, power, and intersecting identities in the lives and education of young children. This issue is exacerbated by the infantilizing of young children as too innocent to engage with current events and issues of power, and the Eurocentric notion that issues of social justice are ‘inappropriate’ for young children. However, children experience systems of power, oppression, and identity socialization from the moment they are born, and thus are never too young to begin exploring these concepts in their formal learning spaces (Padia & Turner, 2025; Annamma et al., 2013; Clark & Clark, 1947; Tatum, 1997). There are early childhood spaces that challenge this belief and explicitly center Palestine, though they are far from the majority. Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education (RECE) is an organization that includes teachers and teacher educators and has a long history of solidarity with Palestinian liberation work. In 2024, the RECE international conference was planned to be held at Bethlehem University in occupied Palestine. Due to the genocide occurring in Gaza and the escalating violence from the Israeli military in the West Bank, the conference was moved to a university in the United States. The conference organizers highlighted a plenary about Palestine, had a film about children and families in Gaza playing on a loop in a conference room for the duration of the event, installed a space for attendees to write messages of solidarity to Palestinian colleagues who were unable to travel to the conference, and included information about all of these solidarity measures in the welcome materials that everyone received. Akeia “Ki” Gross, founder and primary author of the website and social media handle ‘Woke Kindergarten,’ published a Zine for use with young children entitled ‘Free Palestine: A Visual History Instazine for Kids’ to introduce them to the history of Palestine (2023). Teach Palestine, a project of the Middle East Children’s Alliance, has produced a set of recommended books for preschool and early elementary teachers to use to teach about Palestine with young children. An article published in NAEYC’s journal *Young Children* in 2018 focused on the importance of international collaboration through a study that entailed science inquiry across two sets of teacher educator and teacher teams, one in the West Bank, Palestine, and one in San Francisco, California (Escamilla et al., 2018). While the article did not address politics, power, or the occupation explicitly, it is one example of the centering and inclusion of Palestinian educators and young children as important in the global early childhood teacher education discourse.

The conflation of anti-Zionism and anti-semitism in higher education has long been leveraged as a tool of the Zionist project to silence Israel’s critics (Robinson & Griffin, 2017). The suppression of anti-Zionist teaching in higher education in the US is inextricably linked with Israel’s suppression of Palestinian academic freedom and access to education (Institute for Middle East Understanding, 2014). Universities and institutions of higher education are often beholden to local, state, and national politicians, political interests, and funders with certain political interests. Often funders with a great deal of power and influence encourage university administrators to engage in compulsory Zionism by making statements condemning antisemitism whilst ignoring campus-based violence driven by Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian racism, and sometimes even identifying anti-Zionist faculty members and students as antisemitic for their support of Palestine (Funez-Flores, 2024). At one institution, I helped organize an educational event in 2024 about children and families experiencing mass violence. We were told by an administrator that we could not mention Gaza, nor could we even allude to it. When we asked why, we were told “because the

board said so.” Another instance of Zionist logics permeating teacher education spaces came in the form of a university library; when staff and faculty requested that a teacher education institution acquire and display children’s literature on Palestine, we were told this was only possible if the library ordered and displayed Israeli children’s literature as well. This insistence on “both sides” narratives obscures power and delegitimizes Palestine and Palestinian lives as important in their own right. This compulsory Zionism not only endangers Palestinian and Arab students, but silences teacher educators who attempt to explicitly draw connections between US-based systems of power and violence and those in Palestine. As Najib (2025) writes, “Teaching Palestine and Zionism’s ongoing annihilation of Palestinians is not just an academic duty, but a moral imperative” (29).

Theoretical and Conceptual Frames

As an anti-Zionist educator from a mixed race, interfaith family background, my matrilineal Jewish heritage largely protects me from accusations of anti-Semitism. I root myself in FaithCrit, the intersections of Religio-spirituality and Critical Race Theory in Education (Malone & Lachaud, 2022), which posits

1. FaithCrit acknowledges critical race scholars’ religio-spirituality as a part of identity and praxis.
2. FaithCrit compels critical race scholars to engage in action against injustice.
3. FaithCrit endeavors to disentangle religio-spirituality from white supremacy, prejudice, and oppression.
4. FaithCrit aims to expand the practice of counterstorytelling through religio-spiritual writing styles.
5. FaithCrit encourages critical race scholars to lean into their religio-spirituality as a source of hope (100).

Specifically I ground myself in tenets three and four, which focus on extracting and disentangling faith from white supremacy and systems of oppression and uplift counterstorytelling via writing. As a Jewish critical teacher educator and scholar, I ground myself in FaithCrit with the responsibility of unraveling systems of coloniality and domination. Reading my commitment through a lens of FaithCrit illuminates the ways that faith can and should be used in service of true decolonization and collective liberation in education, rather than the perpetration of oppressive ideologies and systems like white supremacy.

Edward Said, the prolific Palestinian scholar who spent much of his career based in New York, wrote about the active realities of imperialism and colonialism when he said,

Neither imperialism nor colonialism is a simple act of accumulation and acquisition. Both are supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people *require* and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination....Out of the imperial experiences, notions about culture were clarified, reinforced, criticized, or rejected (1994, p. 9).

I draw on Said’s framing of ideological formations to highlight the connections between systems and hierarchies of labeling, domination, superiority and inferiority, and power in the US to those in Palestine. Understanding ideological formations through this lens of imperialism and colonialism can support teacher educators and teachers in developing their capacity to identify the

interconnectedness of struggles for liberation across, between, and within nation-state boundaries. I engage my own understanding of FaithCrit to understand specifically how imperialism is interwoven with Zionism; unpacking the ideological formation that links Judaism and Zionism and disentangling the religion of Judaism and Jewish people from the colonial state of Israel is a necessary humanizing step. The disentanglement of this ideological formation, informed by FaithCrit, has been critical in my own journey as a teacher educator committed to justice for all people.

Finally, I introduce what I call “pedagogical integrity,” a framework that builds on humanizing pedagogies (Freire, 2017; Bartolomé, 1994) specifically in service of anti-Zionist teacher education. Pedagogical integrity involves teaching for the humanization of all people and communities. It involves naming and identifying how power operates, which groups of people hold power, have been afforded power via institutions and policies, and which groups have been subjugated by power structures. When I say humanization of all people and communities, I do not mean that teachers must embrace an ‘All Lives Matter’ philosophy, but instead that they must explicitly address power and its role in our lives, our teaching, and our learning. Naseem Rodriguez and Swalwell encourage social studies teachers to identify the master narratives of social studies and then identify and move towards transformative justice social studies (2022). They caution against providing ‘balanced’ views on every issue and encourage teachers to consider how to avoid turning their classrooms into spaces of indoctrination, but similarly should not permit their classrooms to be places where ‘anything goes.’ Bartolomé (1994) built on the Freirean notion of humanizing pedagogies to highlight the importance of teachers’ political clarity. She wrote,

Teachers working toward political clarity understand that they can either maintain the status quo, or they can work to transform the sociocultural reality at the classroom and school level so that the culture at this microlevel does not reflect macro-level inequalities such as asymmetrical power relations that regulate certain cultural groups to a subordinate status (p. 178).

A teacher education approach rooted in pedagogical integrity can address these tensions by helping teacher educators identify their own explicit convictions and personal political clarity. Being transparent about these convictions with teacher candidates in ways that are honest and explanatory rather than authoritarian, and approaching teacher candidates’ ideologies and experiences from a place of curiosity helps the field of teacher education to actively engage in collective learning.

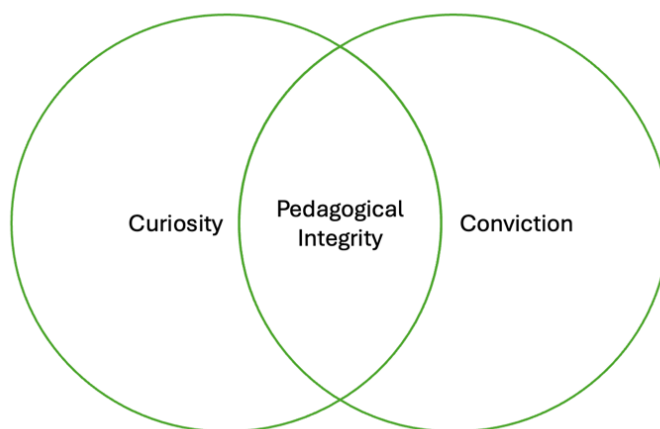


Figure 1. *Pedagogical Integrity.*

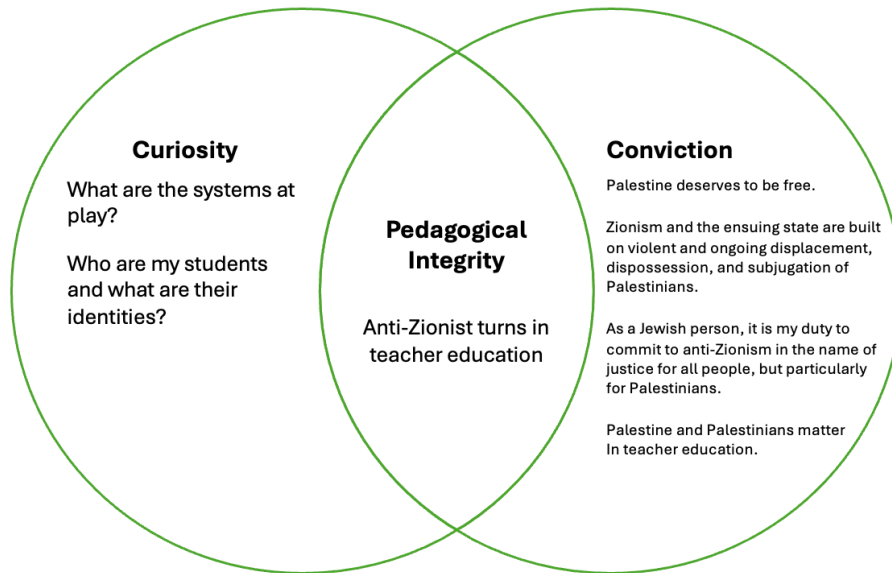


Figure 2. Example of pedagogical integrity with anti-Zionist teaching.

Methodology

This paper combines critical autoethnography with qualitative analysis of a graduate education program to uncover how even teacher preparation programs that position themselves within the genealogy of Critical Race Theory (CRT) neglect—and often actively erase—the topic of Palestine—and, by extension, Palestinian children, families, and communities (Shatara, 2022). Using a lens of counterstorytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), I examine student and my own faculty work and interactions related to Palestine from two cohorts in a teacher education program between 2023 and 2024 in a large midwestern city that is home to one of the largest Palestinian diasporas in the world. I unpack the ways that racial identities, knowledges, and realities interacted with the political landscape—namely genocide—in Palestine in a graduate teacher education program. Students from whom data was collected and analyzed consented to analysis of their classroom discussions and artifacts. There were 29 consenting teacher candidates total. Over 90% of the teacher candidates identified as Black and/or Latina and all of the core faculty identified as Black, Latina, and/or multiracial.

Each cohort took twelve courses in their master's program, all of which were designed to address the intersections of early childhood education (ECE), multilingual education, and inclusive education. Specifically, the program began with a seminar that included a semester-long archaeology of self (Sealey-Ruiz, 2020) exploration to help teacher candidates explore how their own identities and experiences with systems of power showed up in their own teaching and learning practices. I used Dedoose qualitative data analysis software to analyze and code student artifacts, researcher memos, field notes, and reflections regarding class discussions, and researcher memos and reflections on personal experiences with anti-Zionism in community and academic spaces.

Elementary and early childhood teacher preparation programs espouse the rhetoric that all children are deserving of all basic rights, yet do not extend the same deservingness to all families and communities (Patel, 2015). I use counterstorytelling to analyze my own experiences as a

multiracial, multiethnic Jewish anti-Zionist educator engaging with the beliefs and ideas shared by cohorts of majority Black and Latina teacher candidates, and to offer *Anti-Zionist Turns* in teacher education. These Anti-Zionist Turns are rooted in values of justice and liberation for all, and explicitly name why and how Palestine and Palestinian lives must be included and centered in Teacher Education curriculum.

Positioning

“Can I ask you a personal question? Are you Jewish?” a coworker who is also Jewish asked me. I have done a lot of vocal advocacy for Palestine in faculty meetings and spaces, but realized that because my last name is Mexican, most people might not know that I am also Jewish. My university bio says that I come from an interfaith, multiracial family (Russian-Jewish, Mexican-American), but it is not something I vocalize often. We proceeded to talk about the importance, for us, of being in Jewish community that is committed to and working towards a Free Palestine. She told me, “My son says he has never felt more Jewish than he does in this moment” [this moment being standing against the genocide in Gaza]. I feel the same way. I never feel more Jewish, more connected to my faith, than I do when I am living my commitment to dismantling the Zionist entity and supporting the people, land, and state of Palestine. FaithCrit (Malone & Lachaud, 2022) aims to disentangle white supremacy from faith and identifies the ways that faith functions to do this uncoupling. For me, the ultimate act of being Jewish is supporting liberation for all people, but especially fighting for people who are being oppressed, murdered, displaced and dehumanized in the name of my people and my faith. I refuse to let Zionists claim ownership over Jewish identity; I fear living in a world where Judaism and Zionism are synonymous, because in my mind and heart, and the minds and hearts of so many Jews in my communities, Zionism is the antithesis of Jewish identity. My aunt and uncle growing up used to hold a Passover seder every year, and in the Haggadah, the guide you read throughout the night, they wrote in and would always say, ‘We are not free until everyone is free. The people of Palestine are not free; we are not free until they are free.’ It is in this lineage that I write, and it is in this lineage that I teach.

I was raised in Oakland, California. I moved to New York for college, and ended up staying there for over fifteen years, teaching and living in the Bronx, NY— where my maternal family immigrated when they first moved to the United States from Belarus and Russia. I now live and teach at the university level in Chicago, Illinois—home to the largest Palestinian diaspora community in the United States. I am the daughter of Russian-Jewish, white and Mexican-American parents. I grew up in a multiracial, interfaith home. I come to this work as a bilingual person (Spanish-English) who grew up speaking mostly English. I come to this work as a former certified bilingual special education teacher in the Bronx, NY. I come to this work as an educator committed to dismantling all systems of oppression; I view disability justice as a global issue, and Palestine as a disability justice issue (Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2024). My hope is that the lessons I have learned and continue to learn can help USian teachers orient towards disability justice for all families—to disrupt the borders and boundaries of capability, intelligence, and worthiness in our schools, our communities, and ourselves. In this particular moment, the question of whose lives are worthy of attention, investment, and urgency is particularly crucial when a mass disabling genocide is being committed in Gaza, Palestine using US tax dollars. The connections between disinvestment in children and communities of color in the US and investment in the imperialist domination and decimation we support in Palestine are inextricably linked.

Chicagoland, where I live and teach, is home to the largest Palestinian community in the United States. When we talk about bilingual education and special education, we cannot solely focus on families and children who use Spanish and English. In my geographic region in particular, this means centering our Palestinian children and families who use both Arabic and English as well. (Note: I say ‘use’ a language instead of ‘speak’ because I work with many children who do not speak to communicate, but are still bilingual and use multiple languages in different ways beyond the spoken word.) The Black and Brown teacher candidates in this study shared examples, which are explored in the Learnings/Findings section, of their experiences teaching and learning alongside Palestinian children and families in this region. Teacher education as a whole has a moral imperative to center and uplift Palestinian lives, and this imperative is all the more urgent, relevant, and necessary in a geographic area that is home to one of the largest Palestinian diasporas.

Learnings/Findings: Do Palestinian Lives Matter in Teacher Education?

I present a few findings from my experience as a teacher educator in a teacher preparation and certification graduate program to highlight the tensions regarding Palestine and Palestinian lives within teacher education. Each example begins with *Pedagogical Vignettes and Autoethnographic Moments*. Each pedagogical vignette and autoethnographic moment is paired with *Anti-Zionist Pedagogical Integrity Curiosities*. These curiosities are offerings for the reader, but also for myself; they emerged from my own curiosities around what is lost in the teacher education classroom when compulsory Zionism is allowed to run unchecked. The vignettes/moments and the anti-Zionist pedagogical integrity curiosities are not meant to capture all of the dynamics of teaching, learning, and advocating for Palestine in teacher education, but to highlight some of the examples of tensions and realities that arise when engaging in the important work of bringing Palestine into the teacher education classroom and field.

Pedagogical Vignettes and Autoethnographic Moments

In October of 2023, following the beginning of Israel’s genocide on Gaza, Wadea Al Fayoume, a six-year-old boy was stabbed 26 times and murdered by his landlord in the suburbs of Chicago. This act of anti-Palestinian racism had direct implications for the communities that the teacher candidates and I lived and taught in, yet institutions of higher education and early childhood teacher education remained largely silent on the event, declining to publish statements condemning this violent murder. In Fall of 2023, following October 7th and the beginning of the genocide on Gaza, I repeatedly brought up Palestine and asked the teachers in my graduate classes—most of whom were Black and/or Latina women—if they had talked about it with their own students, heard students/families talking about it, etc. One Latina teacher candidate shared that she had a Palestinian child in her class whose family was from Gaza. She asked the mother how she and the school could support the child, and the mother replied to please not talk about Gaza, that the child and family were experiencing trauma repeatedly at home and in their community, and the mother wanted the child to experience school as a sanctuary from the trauma and onslaught. In ECE and education in general, we talk a lot about cultivating ‘safe spaces.’ The conversation in recent years has also moved to address ‘brave spaces’ and pedagogies of discomfort (Arao & Clemens, 2013; Boler, 1999). But what is ‘safe’ in the context of trauma, violence, and obfuscation of power? We had an ensuing discussion about how to honor families’ wishes and needs while also crafting spaces for all children to bring their questions, wonderings, and emotions about the world into the classroom. For this teacher candidate, it meant deepening her relationship with that mother and

routinely checking in. It also meant creating spaces for her students in small groups in the class to bring questions, noticings, and wonderings they had about the news, including Gaza, to their peers and their teacher. This created a pathway for the young children and their teacher to engage in the conversation while honoring the Palestinian mother's wishes; only if and when her child brought up Gaza did the teacher talk with them about it. Rather than taking the Palestinian mother's request to mean the teacher candidate should stay silent on Palestine, we workshopped together ways for her to honor the family's wishes and continue supporting that child and their family, center their child's needs, and also provide space to address the genocide in Gaza with other children in the class, ultimately centering the development of engaged young citizens.

It is worth noting that this teacher candidate only shared this anecdote when explicitly asked about Palestine, her own teaching, and her students. Had there not been a facilitated discussion on the topic, it is quite possible that this experience of a Latina teacher navigating discussions of safety, support, and education in the midst of genocidal violence might never have been voiced in the teacher education classroom. While I certainly feared for my job security given the university's silence at large on Palestine, I felt it was important to address our Palestinian students and families who might be impacted during the genocide, and what this meant for us all as educators. Without this facilitated inquiry, her peers would not have had the opportunity to learn from her dilemma, and the question of Palestinian lives in the (early childhood) classroom would continue to be erased. An anti-Zionist stance encourages us to explicitly name not only Palestine, but to bring our Palestinian students and families into our conversations on current events, justice, and culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy.

Anti-Zionist Pedagogical Integrity Curiosities. Who is protected when we are silent? How do you honor the wants and needs of families directly impacted while also honoring that all children and people in the US are implicated and impacted? How do you cultivate spaces of safety outside of the realm of ignoring and silencing? What does it mean to create spaces of safety in schools? In Teacher Education programs?

Pedagogical Vignettes and Autoethnographic Moments

Another student who identified as Black shared that her primary relationship to the genocide in Gaza was her brother being deployed (by the US) to "Israel" (her words), and how afraid she was for his safety. Part of an anti-Zionist turn in teacher education is highlighting and recognizing how Black and brown people are utilized as the tools of empire and the ones so often on the front lines, paying the price for the violence of imperialism (Alley-Young, 2023). Illustrating the interconnectedness between systems of domination and power is important; this is not just an 'over there' problem. This teacher candidate's family situation highlights more explicitly than most the ways that USians—and particularly Black and brown communities—are impacted and implicated by our government's imperialism and rampant, violent commitment to Zionism.

Anti-Zionist Pedagogical Integrity Curiosities. How can we facilitate this conversation at the intersections of multiple interlocking realities: the facts of what is happening in Palestine in conversation with the facts of how Black and brown people get over recruited into arms of the military? Who pays the price for Zionism, literally and figuratively?

Pedagogical Vignettes and Autoethnographic Moments

One day, a student who identified as Latina and multiracial asked to stay on after class to talk to me. She asked me to speak with her in a private Zoom breakout room. I assumed it was to support her in something related to the course, but she told me that she had seen me speaking in support of Palestine at a protest on TikTok, and that it affirmed for her that she was in the right place/program, to see her professors living the values of our program and that she also holds. She also said that she wanted to stay after and talk to me in private because, “I didn’t know if you could get in trouble for that.” Despite me talking about Palestine consistently in class, she was concerned for my job security because of the national climate. It is important to name that she asked to talk to me in private because she was afraid for ME if she said it publicly—publicly meaning amongst other members of her cohort, with whom we had all built rapport over several semesters. This says so much about how our universities and our public imaginations work to police ourselves.

After sharing her concern for my job security, she asked, “Can I come with you to a protest?” She shared that she didn’t have anyone in her life she could go to a protest with and she wanted to go with a companion. “Seeing you in that video made me realize that I am in the right place, that my professors live the morals I want to embody too. I sent it to everyone I know, like ‘That’s my professor!’” This pride and sense of being on the right path that she expressed were juxtaposed with her fear of publicly discussing both my and her support for Palestine.

Anti-Zionist Pedagogical Integrity Curiosities. How does silencing, whether implicit or explicit, control our discourse as teacher educators and teacher candidates? Why did this student feel unsafe sharing in front of the whole class? What are the tangible dangers, risks, and ramifications that led her to be so cautious with this conversation? What do we lose when we silence ourselves about Palestine?

Pedagogical Vignettes and Autoethnographic Moments

In April of 2024 I was invited to be part of a prestigious session at one of the most well-attended educational conferences in the United States. The topic of the session was bilingual special education, and I was one of several panelists. In order to lessen any technological mishaps, the chair of the session requested our slides in advance of the presentation. After I sent in my slides, which had a Palestine theme to acknowledge and honor the genocide and scholasticide taking place during the conference, I received a text from the chair telling me that Palestine-themed slides ‘buried’ the content of my presentation because the research took place in the Dominican Republic and that country’s flag was sorely missing from my slide background. I was also asked to move resources on Palestine to the end of the presentation because it detracted from the content of my work. I replied that while I was happy to add the Dominican flag, the resources on Palestine and the slide theme belonged there and were an intentional choice that was integral to my presentation. I kept the Palestine themed slides and added flags from both the Dominican Republic and Haiti, and talked about the relationship between colonization, borders, and violence as relevant and crucial to not just my work, but to all of bilingual special education. I also named my context, highlighting that I am situated as a teacher educator in Chicagoland, with such a large population of Palestinians, and named that Arabic and languages beyond Spanish-English are often marginalized in the conversation of bilingual special education and must be brought to the forefront. All of the panelists, myself included, were discussing research on Spanish-English bilingual special education that day. Putting my work in the DR into conversation with Haiti,

Palestine, and other communities around the world deepened an understanding of colonial and decolonial projects, and the borders of competence, intelligence, and humanity that we construct, police, and uphold within ourselves, our communities, and our schools.

The fear and repression of explicitly naming Palestine and the connection between the settler colonial apartheid state being imposed on Palestine and Palestinians by the state of Israel (Al-Haq, 2022) and US systems of schooling are part of a larger ideology of compulsory Zionism. The claim that Palestine-themed slides detract from the message of research done in another part of the world highlights our lack of awareness of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) and matrices of domination (Collins, 1990). To be sure, the lack of understanding of the interwoven nature of the genocide occurring in Gaza, the settler colonial apartheid occurring in all of Palestine, and the systems of domination and subjugation in the United States harken back to Said's call to recognize imperialism and colonialism as not static acts, but ideological formations. In a personal communication, Hanadi Shatara explained to me how she always 'names the moment' when she speaks with students or gives presentations (Shatara, 2024). Naming the moment (Kumashiro, 2018) helps center us and draw the throughlines between global realities—like the genocide and scholasticide in Palestine—and our personal and professional considerations.

Anti-Zionist Pedagogical Integrity Curiosities. What is the current moment that you are living in? How will you decide what to name and what to render irrelevant? Why was this entire panel focused on Spanish-English bilingual special education research? Who is harmed when we fail to draw the connections across systems of power, identities, and communities?

Anti-Zionist Turns in Teacher Education

I present a series of what I call "Anti-Zionist Turns in Teacher Education." Anti-Zionist Turns are pedagogical stances and moves that teacher educators can employ to recognize the integral nature of Palestinian humanity and presence in socially just teaching and learning, as well as to challenge the colonial logics, violence, and silencing of compulsory Zionism that so often governs teacher education in higher education institutions. I arrived at these turns through my own FaithCrit exploration of how my identity—specifically as a white, multiracial, multiethnic Jewish professor—requires me to be morally and politically clear (Bartolomé, 1994) in my teaching practice. I cannot allow the dominant tropes of whiteness, Zionism, or any other system of coloniality to become normalized in the teaching spaces, syllabi, and discussions I am responsible for. These Anti-Zionist Turns are meant to support educators in incorporating convictions of anti-Zionism into their teaching, to support teacher candidates in drawing connections between systems of power, domination, and coloniality across the globe, as well as to turn towards collective liberation. Indeed, as the slogan most attributed to Fannie Lou Hamer posits, *None of us is free until all of us are free*. The Anti-Zionist Teaching Turns explored in this section are: 1) Name and explain the systems that harm us all, with explicit connections to Palestine, 2) Disrupt the notion that master narratives or colonial logics must be taught first, and center Palestine narratives from the onset, 3) Make your stance legible and clear for students, or "What is your keffiyeh on the dashboard?" and 4) Engage a model of pedagogical integrity, with an understanding that Palestinian lives are inextricably linked to social justice pedagogy.

Anti-Zionist Teaching Turn 1: Name and explain the systems that harm us all, with explicit connections to Palestine

Naming and explaining the systems that harm us ALL is a task that many teacher education programs fancy themselves good at, but when a genocide in Palestine is considered irrelevant for teacher preparation, these programs tell on themselves. By naming, exploring, and deeply interrogating constructs like settler colonialism, apartheid, imperialism, and racial capitalism, we nurture deeply critical and aware educators who have the tools to understand the interconnectedness of all their students' identities, communities, and struggles. An anti-Zionist turn in teacher education means drawing explicit connections between Palestine and what happened and continues to happen in the US with Native Americans, with enslaved Africans, with Jim Crow segregation laws, with Japanese incarceration camps, with citizenship wars, etc. My own Mexican-American family in Southern California always says, "we never crossed the border; the border crossed us." These narratives of shifting borders, shifting rights, shifting imposed or denied citizenship and legitimacy of identity are not unlike the shifts and power dynamics Israel has imposed on Palestinians in Palestine since the Nakba in 1948. Supporting teacher candidates in identifying these threads of connection, these parallels, and these intersections of power on a global scale prepares them to be more effective teachers of younger students. It provides them with the tools to engage their own students with pedagogical integrity—including conviction and curiosity—rather than switching the subject when students raise 'hard' topics or conversations. De Lissovoy proposes a pedagogy of lovingness and an ethics of the global that encompasses this anti-Zionist turn:

An ethical and democratic globality, and the kind of education that would contribute to it, are only possible in the context of a recognition of the relations of power that have shaped history, and in particular the political, cultural, economic, and epistemological processes of domination that have characterized colonialism and Eurocentrism (2010, p. 279).

An elementary piece of highlighting how all people are harmed by systems of power related to Palestine is to center Palestine voices and narratives (Shatara, 2022). We must not only teach *about* Palestine, but teach the voices and experiences of Palestinians themselves. This does not mean, however, that we should hold Palestinians solely responsible for speaking up about Palestine. Teach about Palestine with firsthand narratives from Palestinians, but do not get caught in the trap of compulsory Zionism that suggests only Palestinians can and should care about Palestine. The freedom of Palestine is integral to the freedom of all people and the abuses and mass murder that Palestinians are suffering (abetted by US tax dollars) should be the concern and responsibility of every caring citizen—and every justice-oriented educator. One example of how I worked to implement this AZ Turn in my own teaching practice came from my Black graduate student whose brother was deployed to fight for the Israeli military on behalf of the United States military. Highlighting how these systems of colonial domination harm not only Palestinians, but Israeli youth who are indoctrinated and drafted into Zionist violence and many poor people of color in the United States who enlist in the military helps illustrate the widespread and interlocking harms of Zionism. Naming and exploring these inextricable links can help teacher candidates and teacher educators alike to challenge the status quo and refuse to accept that "that's just the way it is."

Anti-Zionist Teaching Turn 2: Disrupt the notion that master narratives or colonial logics must be taught first, and center Palestine narratives from the onset

There is an often pervasive notion that before children can develop critique or critical thinking about a topic, they must first understand and be exposed to the mainstream ideology (Kovinthan Levi, 2024). I admit that I am guilty of holding this viewpoint at one time, early on in my teaching career. I thought that in order to support students in developing critical thinking, they first had to understand the (problematic) norms that are widely adhered to, and only once those were clearly understood could we begin to critique and provide counternarratives. This approach is often taken when it comes to the teaching of young children, of newcomer immigrant children, of disabled children, and to children at these various intersections. disrupting the culture of power (Delpit, 1988; Naseem Rodríguez & Swalwell, 2022). We must disrupt the idea that race-evasive learning can exist in teacher education (Chavez-Moreno, 2024), and begin with identifying how categories and systems like racialization harm us all; rather than teaching students that race is a fact and then having them critique race, we can begin by teaching students about melanin and then explain how humans created labels and hierarchies based on what they called ‘race.’ In this vein, we must begin by teaching the truth about the settler-colonial apartheid state that Israel has created and imposed on Palestinians through land seizures, forced displacement, denial of rights and citizenship, and violence.

I had a conversation with a white Jewish student recently who told me “From the River to the Sea” is a call for extermination of all Jews and that I should be afraid of going to a pro-Palestine protest because I was not safe there. I asked this student if he felt unsafe when he heard Native American calls for “Land Back.” I explained to him that it is the same concept; that the request is for the return of the autonomy and liberation of the people who were living on the land before their lives and land were disrupted and destroyed by colonial violence. He quickly switched the subject and would not answer me when I asked if “Land Back” felt like a call to exterminate all non-Native Americans. I imagine this moving of the goal post is because he realized that he did not, in fact, feel that this was a call for extermination. I returned the conversation to my point by assuring him that I had been at many pro-Palestine protests over many years and have always been safe and welcomed—and the most recent protest I attended was a student Gaza solidarity encampment where Jewish students passed around matzah to recognize the protest coinciding with Passover. There is a crucial distinction to be made between Jewish discomfort and safety. For this student, he had a preconceived notion that his discomfort with signs and chants like “from the river to the sea” meant that his personhood and Jewish identity were unwelcomed and threatened. Had he moved past this discomfort, he might have had the opportunity to experience the celebration of Passover at the protest interwoven with calls for Palestinian liberation. Feeling uncomfortable with slogans or ideas is very different from being the target of interpersonal and/or institutionalized violence. The classroom is a perfect space to interrogate these distinctions and to recognize the differences between ideological discomfort and material threats to humanization and existence. Beginning with not only the interconnectedness of our struggles, but with the truth of the violences that have transpired—and the distinction between discomfort and violence—can help teacher educators learn to navigate these conversations with their students with both care, curiosity, and clarity of conviction.

Anti-Zionist Teaching Turn 3: Make your stance legible and clear for students, or "What is your keffiyeh on the dashboard?"

When I was in Palestine in March of 2023, my friend and colleague Samir, a Palestinian from Jerusalem, drove us around in a car that had Jerusalem license plates. This meant that to both the Palestinian and Israeli soldier & settler eyes in the West Bank, we were in a car with Israeli license plates. This meant that we were waved through the many military checkpoints and allowed on roads designated only for Israelis, where Palestinians are prohibited to drive. Samir put a keffiyeh on the dashboard when we were driving in Palestinian neighborhoods in the West Bank to signal to Palestinians that we were safe/(pro)Palestinian. As professors and teacher educators in higher education, we are driving a car with oppressor license plates. Until we prove otherwise to our students, we represent the system and machine of formal education. This is a system that has been shown to actively harm and marginalize many different communities, from the school-to-prison nexus (Annamma, 2017) to labeling students' languages and identities as inferior in the classroom and school (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Cioè-Peña, 2017).

I invite teacher educators to consider: *What is your keffiyeh on the dashboard?* What are the ways you signal your proverbial and literal solidarity with communities that experience systemic oppression? How do you signal to your students what you stand for? How do you indicate that you are in solidarity with them despite driving a car with oppressor plates? And how do you do the critical work of identifying all systems of power and oppression as interconnected in a way that honors Palestinian lives and realities? For me, this looks like sharing my commitment to anti-Zionist and Palestinian liberation alongside the sharing of my personal identities. It also means naming the moment(s) at the beginning of class sessions and discussions, which must include the ongoing occupation of Palestine as well as the current genocide. Anchoring my own teaching in my concerns and solidarities with decolonial global struggles is one way that I both signal to my students where I stand and also model how local and global realities are connected and relevant in teaching practice. In October 2023, naming and centering the murder of Wadea Al Fayoume in conversations around culturally responsive and sustaining teaching was a necessary naming of the moment, but also keffiyeh on the dashboard. Signaling to our teacher candidate students that we will not shy away from discussing violence is important in nurturing teachers who foster safety, love, and belonging with their own young students.

Anti-Zionist Teaching Turn 4: Engage a model of pedagogical integrity, with an understanding that Palestinian lives are inextricably linked to social justice pedagogy

We return here to a model of pedagogical integrity. One of the most important parts of the pedagogical integrity model within teacher education is the building the tools to identify your convictions and articulate them clearly. This is crucial not just for yourself, but also for your students. Rather than purporting to be blank slates or All-Lives-Matter teachers, an anti-Zionist teaching turn urges us to be transparent with our beliefs, values, and convictions. The aim here is not to convince students to adopt your worldview as the teacher, but to engage in co-learning together to explore each individual's convictions and engage collectively in curiosities. You can use this model to have teacher candidates write their own convictions out, and then help them map out how to engage in curiosity with their own students—what questions they can ask to better

understand their students and their students' own realities and convictions as they teach truth to power.

The point of this turn is not to share 'balanced' views, but to unearth and help teacher candidates understand how power and oppression operate in interconnected ways, support them in their understanding of anti-Zionism in the context of anti-racist, anti-oppressive teaching and learning, and how to teach about systems of power and interconnected struggles for justice to (young) children. As I shared in Figure 2, my own conviction lies with anti-Zionism. I believe it is important to be transparent with my teacher candidates about my stance on this and explain why I hold this ideological commitment. Being rooted in pedagogical integrity means being forthcoming with students, rather than obscuring your own beliefs under the guise of neutrality. As Freire said, "There's no such thing as neutral education. Education either functions as an instrument to bring about conformity or freedom" (2017). My conviction is rooted in humanization for all people, and a desire to see the end of dehumanization for Palestinians. The model of pedagogical integrity is central to an anti-Zionist turn in teacher education because it is predicated on sharing convictions and unpacking curiosities to move closer towards humanizing truths for all people—and all children—together. If a teacher candidate in your classroom disagrees with your conviction about Palestine, you are never going to nurture understanding by avoiding the topic. It is through naming and exploring our convictions and our curiosities that we move together as educators towards collective liberation. One example of this for me was engaging with the Jewish student who felt afraid for his safety when he heard "From the river to the sea." Inviting him to interrogate this fear in relation to indigenous calls for "Land back" rematriation was a FaithCrit-informed AZ Turn because I asked him to challenge the idea and ideology that caused him discomfort, rather than accusing or attacking the individuals or communities of people at a protest. Just as Flores asked us to examine what erasures occur in bilingual education that devalue and marginalize Black lives, we must examine how we participate, both consciously and unconsciously, in the erasure and marginalization of Palestinian lives in teacher education.

Conclusion

As Tuck and Yang (2022) reminded us, *decolonization is not a metaphor*. Too many teacher educator scholars begin their talks with land acknowledgments, larp as fierce defenders of critical race theory and intersectionality, yet crumble and cower under the pressures of Zionist funders and interests, refusing to acknowledge the matrices of domination and coloniality that harm us all when we obscure Palestine within teacher education. Palestine has always been interconnected with the liberation of all oppressed people, but is especially critical in this moment, since the genocide in Gaza began in October of 2023, to explicitly bring Palestine into teacher education. Educators who are committed to justice, anti-coloniality, anti-racism, and radical love, freedom, and collective liberation have a responsibility to make clear the relationship between all of these dynamics and anti-Zionism. These theories are not just buzz words, but guiding lights to material change in the world.

Teacher education professors, administrators, and programs must heed the call of the Palestinian Feminist Collective and follow their lead when they say, "Through an anti-colonial approach, we center the political urgency of the Palestinian struggle" (2023). Teacher educators and teacher candidates committed to justice recognize the urgency of affirming, liberatory teaching and learning for Black and brown children, poor children, immigrant children, disabled children, and all historically marginalized and disenfranchised children and communities. Palestinian children, families, and communities are no exception. We must engage anti-Zionist turns in teacher

education if we are to cultivate sites of true learning, love, and liberation in our classrooms. Teacher education must do the deep, thorough, and necessary work of drawing connections between systems of power and oppression on both local and global landscapes. Having a keffiyeh on the dashboard—in this case, a visible, clearly articulated stance on anti-Zionism—is important, but it is not enough. As teacher educators, we must engage an anti-Zionist commitment in the classroom to nurture a generation of teachers who recognize and teach the interlocking nature of all oppression and all struggles for liberation with our young people. None of us is free until all of us are free. None of us is free until Palestine is free.

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Author

Lilly Padía, PhD, is an assistant professor at Erikson Institute. Her scholarship explores liberation for children, families, and communities through the intersections of disability, language, and race. She collaborates with classroom teachers, children, and family members to create frameworks and curriculum for culturally sustaining bilingual inclusive education. Her scholarship has been published in journals such as *Race Ethnicity and Education*; *Journal of Critical Study of Communication and Disability*; and *Theory Into Practice*. Her new book, *Teaching Beyond Spoken Words: Communicating With Bilingual Nonspeaking Children in the Classroom* was published in 2025 by Teachers College Press.

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