WORKPLACE
A JOURNAL FOR ACADEMIC LABOR
ISSN 1715-0094

#37
2026

Dunn, A., Friedman, E., Brezicha, K., & Kornbluh, M. (2026). White supremacy culture and teachers' pedagogical choices after the 2021 U.S. Capitol insurrection. *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor*, 37, 108-124. https//doi.org/10.14288/workplace.v37i1.187057

WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE AND TEACHERS' PEDAGOGICAL CHOICES AFTER THE 2021 U.S. CAPITOL INSURRECTION

ALYSSA DUNN
UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT

ELLIE FRIEDMAN
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

KRISTINA BREZICHA
NEUMANN UNIVERSITY

MARIAH KORNBLUH
UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

ABSTRACT

Within hours of the attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, teachers were "floundering," trying to figure out if and how they would discuss what happened with their students the next day. Through the lenses of Days After Pedagogy and white supremacy culture, we examine the following research questions: (1) How, if at all, did teachers pedagogically address January 6, 2021 in their classrooms? (2) What language did they use to describe their choices? We utilized an open-ended online questionnaire to learn about teachers' experiences around the U.S. and analyzed their responses through Critical Discourse Analysis. Findings illustrate that educators' beliefs about the purposes of schooling, teachers' roles and responsibilities, and students' abilities and skills manifest in teachers' discourse about their pedagogical choices in critical moments on days after, as they did after the Capitol Insurrection. These beliefs are often rooted in the characteristics of white supremacy culture and represent a critical facet of teachers' work in contentious times.

Keywords: days after pedagogy, white supremacy, teachers' work, teacher beliefs

"White supremacy is not a shark; it is the water." *–Kyle Guante Tran Myhre (2014)*

Within hours of the attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, school days around the country had ended and teachers were "floundering," trying to figure out if and how they would discuss what happened with their students the next day. Some knew they wanted to but weren't sure how. Others weren't sure about if they should or not, but the decision ended up being made for them when they received explicit direction late that night from their school or district administrators. Still others went to sleep that night not knowing what the next day would look like, in terms of what they would and would not be allowed or encouraged to discuss.

Take, for example, educators in Washington, D.C.. They received an email from their principal on the night of January 6. Principal Laina Cox

> called on every single teacher to talk about the insurrection in class. She wanted every middle schooler at Capital City Public Charter School in Washington D.C. to remember who was standing in front of them, and what they learned, on Jan. 7, the day after the attack. "I require my teachers to be truth tellers," Cox said. "We aren't able to process as people. We have to process as those people who are standing in front of children." (Fittes, 2021)

Such direct messaging was rare, however, and many teachers were left to make their own decisions and plans. On the day after and the days that followed, teachers took a variety of approaches, much of which was shaped by their school contexts and personal ideological beliefs (Dunn, 2021). Teachers have always had—and continue to have–the most direct contact with students each day and are in the best position to address current events and significant moments with their students.

Beyond those few whose stories were featured in the news media, how did teachers in the U.S. respond to January 6th in the days after? In this paper, we examine the following research questions: (1) How, if at all, did teachers pedagogically address January 6, 2021 in their classrooms? (2) What language did they use to describe their choices?

We do so through the critical lens of a theory of white supremacy culture, explained below. We argue that educators' beliefs about the purposes of schooling, teachers' roles and responsibilities, and students' abilities and skills manifest in teachers' discourse about their pedagogical choices in critical moments on days after, as they did on January 7, 2021 and beyond. These beliefs are often rooted in the characteristics of white supremacy culture (see Table 1). They also reveal implications for teachers' work in contentious times.

LITERATURE REVIEW

At its heart, this is a study of teachers' work in a critical sociopolitical timepoint: the end of the Trump presidency, the ongoing rise of alt-right extremism, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The confluence of these critical incidents meant teachers faced challenging working conditions for many reasons, not the least of which was that public discourse often focused on teachers who were disciplined or fired for teaching toward justice and equity amidst an onslaught of anti-DEI legislation (Friedman & Tager, 2022). Educators had to contend with educational gag orders, or "legislative restrictions on the freedom to learn and teach that have swept the country since January 2021" (Friedman & Tager, 2022) at the same time as concerns for their and their students' health continued into the second year since COVID-19 emerged. It is within this ecosystem of complicated political and social struggles that the U.S. Capitol Insurrection occurred and thus became a significant moment in teachers' work.

We draw from existing scholarship on the critical moments that shape teachers' stories, especially in contentious times. In particular, this study is an extension of research on Days After Pedagogy (DAP), an asset-based pedagogy that centers perspectives of equity and justice in the days after major events, traumas, and tragedies at the local, state, national, or international level (Dunn, 2021). Based on interviews with educators from around the U.S., Dunn learned about the pedagogical moves and choices that teachers make following moments like elections, natural disasters, school shootings, social movements, and incidents of racial violence. Across geographic regions, content areas, and grade levels, teachers who engage in DAP: center students' and their humanity; take risks toward justice; adapt and remain flexible with their teaching; strive to be sociopolitically aware; practice vulnerability; resist silence in the face

of oppression; and refuse neutrality. As a result, educators reclaim voice and agency for themselves and students teach toward transformation.

In earlier scholarship about teaching after the 2016 election, Dunn and co-authors (Dunn, 2021; Dunn, Sondel, & Baggett, 2019) argue that students experienced political trauma in the wake of Trump's election. Earlier work also demonstrates that "children and youth… can experience trauma in response to bias-motivated violence even when their exposure is indirect" (Williams et al., 2021; Pfefferbaum et al., 2005). The Oklahoma City bombing, 9/11, the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombing, and viral videos of Black people murdered by police are just a few examples of incidents that have been shown to lead youth to experience post-traumatic stress (Pfefferbaum et al., 2005). In the case of Trump's election, teachers who supported students through trauma attended to students' emotions, emphasized civic education alongside trauma-responsive supports, and nurtured a sense of student activism and agency. This pedagogy of political trauma–similar to Days After Pedagogy–rejects neutrality. Similarly, Gellar (2020a), writing about if and how teachers should disclose their personal political beliefs to their students, argues that educators must "understand that enacting neutrality sends a political, status-quo-reinforcing message to students" (p. 40). In her research during and after the Trump election, Gellar found that

> teachers appeared to use the idea of professional neutrality as a shield; when faced with intolerance in the classroom, they could fall back on the idea that "teachers are supposed to be neutral" and avoid taking sides. While doing so might protect them from having to reveal something of themselves, it could also leave young people without an adult to defend them from incidents of racism, misogyny, or transphobia. (p. 198)

While much has been written about social studies educators' approaches to civic education around elections and other moments in the political process (Avery et al., 2013; Clark et al., 2021; Hess, 2009; Hess & McAvoy, 2014; Journell, 2017; Journell, 2022), "how teachers do and should operate during exigent political events like the Trump presidency is not clear and is need of critical study" (Anderson & Zyhowski, 2018, p. 110). Here, the authors argue that the Trump presidency–and its impact on classroom spaces–is worthy of unique study within *and* beyond social studies. One such element is Trump's explicit endorsement of far-right and extremist violence from his supporters, including the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017 and the Capitol Insurrection in 2021.

While little research has been done about teachers' and youth responses to these violent events, Williams et al.'s (2021) paper is worth highlighting here. They conducted interviews with seventh graders local to Charlottesville in the wake of the violence, hate speech, and murder at an alt-right rally. Their analysis of students' emotional responses and engagement with the event found that students:

> were susceptible to the vicarious effects of the bias-motivated violence perpetrated by the alt-Right. About half of the students expressed some kind of emotional impact; however, there was a great deal of heterogeneity in the range of emotional responses – some students felt little impact while others expressed fear and vigilance even several months after it happened… Students who expressed sadness, disillusionment, or sympathy, and those who were dismissive and annoyed were predominantly White; students who felt short- or longer-term fear and vulnerability were all students of color.

This leads one to wonder what these students' teachers were doing at this time. Did they address the rally in their classes? Did they disclose their own feelings about it? Did they work toward justice and equity by supporting students of color experiencing this trauma?

Though, to date, there is no empirical work on the impact of the Capitol Insurrection on educators or youth (and our study seeks to fill this gap), two educational essays explore the importance of this moment for future classrooms. Explaining that her students "weren't surprised on January 6th" because of the type of critical history she had previously taught, social studies educator Butler-Arnold (2021) exhorts, "The events on January 6th demonstrate that we cannot continue telling our students that what happened 'is not us,' because my forefathers who were brought here in 1619 would be the first to say that this has been a part of the America they knew too well. Yet we must comfort students by letting them know they have a role to play in preventing us from remaining in this state (p. 10). Similarly, Grant and Grant (2022) call on educators to teach about January 6 and its aftermath: "As educators, how do we teach to prevent future insurrections? We contend that January 6th and its legacy needs to be taught in schools. Students,

soon to be voter eligible among "a self-governing people" should study what led up to the assault on the Capitol and the accounting and consequences that followed" (p. 114).

In his review of literature on teachers' work across international contexts, Hatch (1999) found that the majority of existing scholarship focused on: (1) characteristics of teachers' work; (2) teachers' working conditions; and (3) teachers' coping and adaptation strategies. This study similarly aligns with the field by considering the sociopolitical context of January 6 as a primary working condition in which teachers were embedded. Further, white supremacy culture–discussed in the following section–is both a characteristic of teachers' work (as an individual) and a component of their working conditions (as a systemic structure).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

> "White Supremacy is this nation's oldest pyramid scheme. Even those who have lost everything to the scheme are still hanging in there, waiting for their turn to cash out" (Oluo, 2016).

We approach our analysis of teachers' responses through the theory of white supremacy culture. In particular, we chose this theory because of the presence of white supremacy culture in schools, but also because of the overt white supremacist rhetoric of the Capitol Insurrection itself. Okun (2021) defines white supremacy culture as "the widespread ideology baked into the beliefs, values, norms, and standards of our groups (many if not most of them), our communities, our towns, our states, our nation, teaching us both overtly and covertly that whiteness holds value, whiteness is value." Okun and other scholars who write about white supremacy (Diamond, 2018; Gillborn, 2013; Love, 2019; Oluo, 2016; Picower, 2009) emphasize that white supremacy is not solely about individual racist actions, such as racist slurs or jokes. Rather, white supremacy is also seen in how institutional and systemic violence against people of color is perpetuated and reinforced, such as in "all aspects of our national life – health, education, employment, incarceration, policing, the law, the environment, immigration, agriculture, food, housing" (Okun, 2021). Referencing the poetic epigraph that begins this paper, Okun (2021) continues:

> Because white supremacy culture is the water we swim in, we inevitably internalize the messages about what this culture believes, values, and considers normal. We absorb these messages as individuals and as a collective. As a result, white supremacy culture shapes how we think and act, how we make decisions and behave. As a result, white supremacy culture reminds us over and over again, sometimes out loud, sometimes in a whisper, that white is right and that there is a right kind of white.

Oluo (2016) writes that, "If you live in this system of white supremacy, you are either fighting the system or you are complicit. There is no neutrality to be had towards systems of injustice, it is not something you can just opt out of." White supremacy culture has various characteristics to which we are all socialized, so much so that even identifying these normalized phenomena in our own institutions requires deep self-reflection and intentionality. These characteristics are explained in more depth in Table 1 below, including brief definitions and examples.

Table 1
White Supremacy Characteristics (Okun, 2021) and Examples in Education

Characteristic	Definition (Okun, 2021)	Example in Education
Fear	"White supremacy culture's number one strategy is to make us afraid. When we are afraid, we lose touch with our power and become more easily manipulated by the promise of an illusory safety."	Attacks on LGBTQ+ initiatives and books in classrooms and libraries, driven by the fear of "the other."
One Right Way	"The belief there is one right way to do things. Connected to the belief in an objective 'perfect' that is both attainable and desirable for everyone. Connected to the belief that I am qualified to know what the perfect right way is for myself and others."	Emphasis on standardized testing with singular "right" answers and "objective" responses.

Characteristic	Definition (Okun, 2021)	Example in Education
Either/Or Thinking and The Binary	"Reduces the complexity of life and the nuance of our relationships with each other and all living things into either/or, yes or no, right or wrong in ways that reinforce urgency, one right way perfectionist thinking, and abuse of power."	Anti-transgender bills and debates that restrict bathroom usage of transgender students.
Denial and Defensiveness	"The habit of denying and defending against the ways in which white supremacy and racism are produced and our individual or collective participation in that production."	Public push for anti-CRT bills and laws framed under the guise of making white people feel "guilty" or "uncomfortable"
Right to Comfort, Fear of Conflict, and Power Hoarding	"The internalization that I or we have a right to comfort, which means we cannot tolerate conflict, particularly open conflict."	Administrators telling teachers not to talk about current events because they are too "controversial" or "biased"
Individualism	"Our cultural story that we make it on our own, without help, while pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps, is a toxic denial of our essential interdependence and the reality that we are all in this, literally, together."	Neoliberal policies such as those that support charter schools, voucher programs, and value-added teacher evaluation measures that value competition over collaboration
Progress in More/Quantity over Quality	"The assumption that the goal is always more and bigger with an emphasis on what we can "objectively" measure as more valuable than the quality of our relationships to all living beings."	Expansion of universities into urban neighborhoods that then lead to exclusion of marginalized communities as the university grows seeks to "raise more money, or gain more influence and power for its own sake - all without regard to the organization's mission or especially the people and/or living beings that the organization is in relationship with"
Worship of the Written Word	"Honoring only what is written and even then only what is written to a narrow standard, even when what is written is full of misinformation and lies. An erasure of the wide range of ways we communicate with each other and all living things."	Singular focus on teaching students to be "grammatically correct"
Urgency	"Applying the urgency of racial and social justice to our everyday lives in ways that perpetuate power imbalance and disregard for our need to breathe and pause and reflect."	The public grading of schools on standardized test performance as if that is a valid measure to capture schools' performance, which focuses educators attention on singular measures of academic growth.

METHODOLOGY

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a "form of critical social science" that focuses on the "relationship between discourse and other social elements (power relations, ideologies, institutions, social identities, and so forth)" (Fairclough, 2013, p. 9). That is, what matters in understanding a text is "not just the words-on-the-page but also how those words are used in a particular social context" (Fairclough, 1992). In this way, discourse is a form of 'social practice,' meaning that there is "dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s), which frame it" (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997, p. 258). When looking at these situations and structures, CDA researchers seek to understand "opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language. In other words, CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, constituted, legitimized, and so on, by language use (or in discourse)" (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 10). In this manuscript, the social situation that we are analyzing is teachers' particular responses to teaching after January 6, but also ongoing structures and systems of racism and white supremacy in schools and society. The "language use" we are analyzing is what phrases or concepts they use, what they omit, and their discourse around their role as educators.

Data Sources

This study utilized a qualitative questionnaire that was distributed via email and social media in July 2021. Questions included demographics about teacher's self-identified race, grade level, content area, political orientation of self and community, state, and type of school district, as well as open-ended response questions about how teachers responded, if at all, in the days after January 6, 2021. For example, teachers were asked what influenced them in talking about 1/6 or not, what resources they used to support their pedagogical decision, and what their primary concerns or questions were as they prepared to teach on 1/7 and beyond.

Participants were recruited through several Facebook groups that served primarily educators, including those with a variety of political orientations, such as "Teaching on Days After" (16,000 members at the time) and "Conservative Teachers of America" (5,500 members at the time). Respondents were also encouraged to share the questionnaire with colleagues. In total, 117 teachers engaged in the survey, with a completion rate of 59.8%. Thus, our final data set includes 70 teachers across 23 states. They represent a variety of content areas, grade levels, school/community contexts, and teaching experiences. Some of the teachers completed the survey question of "current position" by including both their grade level and their content area; however, others left this area blank or completed only their grade level (elementary, middle, or high school). Thus, we cannot definitively say what percentage of respondents taught specific grades or subjects. Many revealed their subject in their qualitative responses, however, some of which are discussed specifically below.

Data Analysis

Huckin (1997) offers several suggestions for 'how' to engage in critical discourse analysis. He suggests first reading the text as a whole, then sentence by sentence, and finally, words/phrases. At the sentence level, Huckin suggests that researchers notice

> the agent-patient relations in sentences. If someone is depicted as an agent, who is it? Who is doing what to whom? Many texts will describe things so that certain persons are consistently depicted as initiating actions (and thus exerting power) while others are depicted as being (often passive) recipients of those actions. (p. 83)

This was of particular interest for our study, given the student-teacher relationship that was described in most responses. At the word/phrase analytic level, scholars might consider connotations, metaphors, labels, register (such as the tone of responses, be they formal, informal, etc.), and modality (or the degree of certitude and authority in responses). In our analysis, we followed Huckin's recommended order of analysis, first considering one participant's responses across questionnaire items to be a separate "text." Then we reviewed each sentence for each item, and then finally particular words and phrases within each sentence.

The research team first cleaned the data from all respondents and put responses into a spreadsheet. Dunn, Brezicha, and Kornbluh met to discuss initial impressions. Dunn then reviewed all responses twice and established preliminary coding categories based on what appeared to be common responses and language. Friedman coded all responses into preliminary categories. Friedman and Dunn subsequently discussed how some of these preliminary categories did or did not align with previous literature and if/how they overlapped with each other. Together, we refined the codes into two major categories (Did and Did Not Respond) and created a visual spectrum of responses. We then analyzed all responses within and across codes for common linguistic features and discursive moves. Throughout this process, all authors kept collaborative memos in Google Drive, responding to each other's noticings and wonderings. These memos helped us connect the emerging themes with existing theories on white supremacy culture, critical whiteness studies, and other critical race theories that underscored the connection between teachers' discursive moves and their racial ideologies about schooling and politics.

Positionality

While each of the authors brings varied teaching experiences in PK-12 schools and higher education, we come together in this work with a deep commitment to equity and justice for teaching and learning. We also understand that our presence in the academy and the way we move through it as white women often reinforces the very things we critique

here as part of white supremacy culture. Indeed, the irony of white supremacy culture is that we critique, for example, the characteristic of "worship of the written word" at the same time as perpetuating it by writing academic articles that can only be accessed through university libraries. We also recognize the privilege that comes with being university faculty and that we are not operating in PK-12 teaching environments as these teachers are/were, environments characterized by a pandemic, during a recession, with heightened fears of losing our jobs. Additionally, though we understand the limitations of qualitative questionnaire responses as merely one form of what happens in classrooms, we also see how educators talk about their teaching as a significant manifestation of their pedagogical and personal beliefs. In this way, while we cannot know for sure how teachers' reports of their classroom practice actually looked in real time, we find tremendous value in deconstructing their ideas in concert with our own reflections on major events like the January 6 U.S. Capitol Attack.

FINDINGS

Teachers' responses to the questionnaire varied widely, both in terms of if and how they addressed what happened at the U.S. Capitol on the days after and the language that they used to describe their pedagogical choices. Overall, respondents received little guidance from administrators (only 7 out of 70 were given explicit directives) and so were left to make their own choices about their approach. For those who chose to discuss the events, they did so because their students brought it up, because they personally wanted to, because it related to their current curriculum, and because it related to their commitments to equity and justice. For those who chose not to discuss the events, they expressed nearly opposite beliefs: they did not think it related to their students or was appropriate to discuss with students, they did not personally want to, it did not relate to their curriculum, and they did not think that talking about "politics" was part of their role. Table 2 illustrates each category, the number of respondents who expressed this sentiment, an example response that illustrates that category, and common phrases or linguistic features in each category. In the sections below, we elaborate upon this table with additional teacher responses and, in so doing, we elucidate how educators' beliefs about the purposes of schooling, teachers' roles and responsibilities, and students' abilities and skills manifest in teachers' pedagogical choices in critical moments on days after.

Table 2:
Findings

Category	n	Example	Common Phrases or Linguistic Features
DID TALK ABOUT IT	50		More likely to use the words "attack," "insurrection," and "terrorism" to describe the events
• Because they were told to	1	"I was mandated to do so."	n/a
• Because students brought it up/showed worry. Addressed briefly and was student-driven.	16	"I decided I didn't want to bring it up out of nowhere to scare them or make it feel political but expected kids to bring it up. It took them longer than I thought but once they brought it up I went with it"	Phrasing related to "concerns," "worries," "anxiety, "uncertainty," and "questions." AND Responses focused on facts and timeline of events AND Phrasing of "common ground," "neutrality," "multiple perspectives," and "unbiased"
• Because they wanted to. Deliberately/ intentionally centered justice and equity	21	"I'm usually pulled by a desire to help my students recognize, consider, and inquire how deeply interwoven racism and white supremacy into the day-to-day of this country. How events have ties to those of	Phrasing related to "concerns," "worries," "anxiety, "uncertainty," and "questions." AND

Category	n	Example	Common Phrases or Linguistic Features
		the past. How individuals and their actions are influenced by institutions, laws, and societal norms that are controlled by those with power."	Responses focused on facts and timeline of events AND Phrasing related to "equity," "justice," "power," "privilege," "racism," and "society"
• Because it related to their current course content or skills	12	"I used the event to discuss societal cohesion. There had been an ongoing thread of thinking about whether or not the United States, as a society, could display the cohesion necessary to address large existential threats."	Phrasing like "connected," "relevant," and "related"
DID NOT TALK ABOUT IT	20		More likely to use the word "protest" to describe the events
• Because admin told them not to o Some agreed with decision o Some did not agree but listened because they were afraid for their jobs	6	"While I wanted to discuss it as many of my students were actively discussing, I was told explicitly by district and building leadership not to discuss the capital attack."	Framing of "us" (educators) versus "them" (administrators)
• Because they did not see it as "relevant" to their curriculum or their students	5	"I teach science. My opinions about politics are not relevant to the curriculum of the class."	Framing of "politics" with a negative register. Framing of "relevance" as connected solely to subject matter rather than students' lives as a whole
• Because they did not believe their students would understand or be interested	2	"Children are by trade too stupid to care about things."	Infantilizing and paternalistic framing of children
• Because they did not think they had time while covering other content	2	"I teach a world history class and we were too behind to give any time to the riot at the Capitol." "I teach kindergarten and learning to read took priority."	Framing of time as a finite resource, as in that they did not have time or were running out of it
• Because they don't talk about "politics" and it's not their job as educators	3	"I steer away from politics, religion, and other controversial topics."	Framing of the event as too "controversial" and "political" to be addressed in a school setting
• Because of virtual learning or other contextual barriers	2	"We were still remote teaching at the time and instructional time did not allow for discussion."	Framing of time as a finite resource, as in that they did not have time or were running out of it

"I am a Believer that Every Day is a Day After:" Teachers Who Did Discuss the Capitol Insurrection

Of the teachers who responded to the questionnaire, only one person was explicitly directed to discuss the U.S. Capitol Attack. This fifth grade social studies educator said he was "mandated to" talk with his students and that the students' primary concern was wanting "to know why it happened."

Far more respondents, even in the absence of administrative guidance, felt they needed to bring it up with students because their students brought it up to them first. Students showed worry or concern for their safety or others' safety. In many cases, this type of discussion was student-driven and brief. That is, once teachers reassured students that they were safe, they moved on to cover the day's pre-determined content. Respondents in this category used phrases like finding "common ground" while discussing "what happened." This discourse focused on the logistics of the event and emphasized talk as a way to come to a neutral consensus before moving on.

Other educators, however, had more substantive discussions with students, which likely had implications for whom students felt safe to share their concerns with. One high school educator who worked primarily with Students of Color said her students expressed "fear of students and/or adults who might sympathize with the rioters, fear of what was going to happen in the government at that time, anxiety over the pending inauguration- that it might not happen..." Similar concerns were echoed by teachers across grade levels, whose students' questions centered on why the Insurrection happened and what was going to be done afterward. Their discourse focused on "concerns," "worries," anxiety," "uncertainty," and "questions."

Other educators felt the event related to what they were already covering (or planning to cover) in their courses. Most often social studies educators, these teachers noted that they had a duty to discuss January 6th because of their subject's instructional goals. For example, one educator said that "to not discuss would have taught them something about [their] class and [their] school that is not true. [They] confront hard truths and work to understand the events around [them] in order to improve conditions for everyone in [their] community."

TEACHING JANUARY 6TH WITH A COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE AND EQUITY PEDAGOGY

Finally, there were a good number of respondents who discussed the Insurrection because they felt it was a critical justice- and equity-oriented discussion that teachers should have with students, regardless of content area and students' age. One educator's response exemplifies the 21 teachers in this category: "There was no way I would not discuss it." For example, a seventh grade teacher in a primarily Latinx school said "I'm tired of tiptoeing around white fragile feelings." Their responses more closely aligned with concepts and terms used in the literature on critical and justice-oriented pedagogy, adopting phrases such as "justice and care," "role of white supremacy," and "strive to be an Anti-racist and Anti-bias school." These phrases clearly reflected their pedagogical beliefs and values, such as the educator quoted in the this sub-section's title who took up Dunn's (2021) argument that "every day is a day after for some*one*, some*where*, about some*thing*."

Because the educators' choices in this category most closely aligned with the framework of Days After Pedagogy, we explored their responses and discourse in more depth. First, we considered their rationales for why they approached January 6th with an equity-focused lens. Respondents indicated their choices were motivated by: (1) their own morals/ethical commitments, (2) the historical and contemporary "importance" of the event as it related to issues of justice, (3) the racial implications of the event, (4) a need to support and care for students, (5) a commitment to facilitating justice-oriented dialogues or "difficult" conversations, and (5) administrative support and/or a school culture of equity and justice. In Table 3 below, we include each teacher's responses and often multiple components of their rationale.

Beyond why they engaged in Days After Pedagogy, we were also interested in how their discourse aligned with equity and justice discourse. In Table 4 below, we include color-coded participant responses. These colors indicate the type of discourse that teachers used to describe what they did after January 6th. Their discourse included: (1) collective language, (2) active verbs, (3) discourse about discourse, (4) language of care, (5) language of racial literacy, and (6) stance-taking. The table below also defines what each of these categories mean.

Table 3:
Teacher responses about their pedagogical motivations for teaching about the U.S. Capitol Insurrection with an equity-focused lens

Responses	Code
My moral compass	M
Kids were watching it happen during class. There was no choice on the 6th. Follow up was just what I do in my classroom.	--
I teach American History and Constitutional Law. To not discuss would have taught them something about my class and our school that is not true. We confront hard truths and we work to understand the events around us in order to improve conditions for everyone in our community.	H, M, D
I am a believer that every day is a Day After, but as I've dug into the IFEs of talking about these Day After events, I didn't feel right going about business as usual without discussing with students or giving them space and time to process	S, D
I was teaching US government and I thought that this was a really profound moment and my students were justifiably irate that it was allowed to happen because the perpetrators were white. I wanted to give space for them to voice that and analyze more about what was happening.	H, R, S
It was jarring to me personally, so I figured the students might need a space to process it. I also wanted to make sure that the nature of the attack was very clearly established - as a bulwark against misinformation - and it's historical import underlined,	S, H
I really wanted to, because it seemed so important, and the group Teaching on the Days After really empowered me to be able to just talk with the students about what happened. It gave me the resources I needed to feel comfortable standing up for my decision. Not that I needed to, my school is pretty supportive.	H, D
History. I'm usually pulled by a desire to help my students recognize, consider, and inquire how deeply interwoven racism and white supremacy into the day-to-day of this country. How events have ties to those of the past. How individuals and their actions are influenced by institutions, laws, and societal norms that are controlled by those with power.	H
My students needed to understand what was happening in our country and why this is happening NOW. Students needed to process and discuss how they perceived this event.	H, S, D
It is important to educate students to what is going on in their world	H
It was important	H
It just escalated so rapidly and severely, and the racial injustices were inescapably obvious.	R
We feel strongly that we should discuss even difficult subjects and give them the opportunity to ask questions. We strive to be an Anti-racist and Anti-bias school	S, R, D, A
There was no way I would not have discussed it. We were still fully remote, so many students were on Zoom with me while their families had the news on in the background. I actually learned about the attack from overhearing a parent in the background.	D
My wish to connect with students and acknowledge the unprecedented times they are encountering	S, H
Impact on my students and their families.	S, H

Responses	Code
I'm tired of tiptoeing around white fragile feelings.	R
It was a "no brainer" to discuss it.	D
Because it happened and was being discussed in their homes and in communities. Because we were studying elections and voting and social justice.	D, H, R
I teach history in a high school program that focuses on law & social justice. I felt a responsibility to address it.	A, H, M
My admin supported us fully and offered to help us lead discussions if we weren't sure where to start.	A, D

Note: **Code Categories:** M= Morals/Ethical Commitments; H= Historical and Contemporary "Importance"; R= Racial Implications; S= Student Support and Care; D= Commitment to Facilitating Justice-Oriented or "Difficult" Dialogues; A= Administrative Support/School Culture of Equity and Justice

Table 4:

Discourse used in teacher responses about their equity-focused pedagogical moves in the wake of the Capitol Insurrection (Part A: Color coding meanings; Part B: Teacher responses)

Color Coding Meanings	
Collective Language	Use of the collective pronoun "we," with an emphasis on classroom community versus just teacher-directed talk or lessons
Active Verbs	Use of verbs that reflect active learning and student-centered pedagogical strategies, such as "discuss," examine," "analyze," compare and contrast"
Discourse about Discourse	Use of lessons focused on language and texts broadly (to include photos and symbols), especially focused on media coverage and rhetoric
Language of Care	Use of nouns about students' emotions, feelings, and needs
Language of Racial Literacy	Explicit mention of race, racism, or white supremacy with an anti-racist ideology
Stance-Taking	Explicit personal/pedagogical opinion mentioned that rejects of "neutrality" in favor of direct discussion of equity, justice, and race-related implications of the event

Teacher Responses (Coded)
Student feelings, concerns and questions. Comparing speeches from other time periods to trumps.

Teacher Responses (Coded)
While it was happening, (on the West Coast we were in class online while it happened) I redefined what was supposed to be happening with certifying the election. I then defined a coup, a riot, and a protest and let the students discuss which they thought was happening. After the fact, we read first hand accounts, talked about what the Capitol Police are supposed to do, the line between Free Speech and legal action, and talked about PTSD. We also discussed the role of white supremacy in how the insurrectionists were treated during the day of and afterwards.
We focused on the definitions of the terms being used by the media and school community in relation to the event - things like protest, riot, insurrection, treason, etc.
Padlet for reflection (as I was out for a training the day after) and a Peardeck reflection once I returned to process different emotions felt about the event
I addressed it immediately and said that students might have big feelings about it. Then I planned an activity on the 2nd impeachment trial in which we analyzed whether the comparison of Harris and the Democrats' use of "violent rhetoric" to that of Trump and his allies was a false equivalency or was rooted in racism and sexism. The students did research. They each argued one side and then had to switch sides. They said arguing that the rhetoric was comparable really gave them insight into the other side because we're in the Bronx around people who think like us.
Students first watched a news clip about the attack from the BBC. Then they journaled about their impressions and responses. Then we had an open discussion which I facilitated.
We looked at timelines and photos from the event, and talked and asked questions. We identified flags and symbols, and answered questions about their histories.
We were on Zoom. I provided an overview of why Congress had been meeting on January 6th, and we watched part of CNN 10. In breakout rooms/then using the Zoom Whiteboard we discussed the denotation and connotations of words/phrases like 'peaceful transfer of power', coup, right to assemble, protest vs riot. We read over an article on the Wilmington insurrection (1898) and discussed why it took place. Most concluded it was led by whites who believed in white supremacy. We compared the 1898 coup to the actions of the 'redeemers' during Reconstruction. Ended class by asking students to email me using a 3:2:1 format. Three things they are feeling about class today, two questions they have, and one thing that will 'stick' with them. Given that I have them stay on Zoom until I receive the email, I got them from all students in class that day. I responded to each of them.
Journalism students discussed "how" this could be allowed to happen and how the outcome would have been different if the mob of people had been Black.
Why it happened, how it happened, after effects and consequences
a lot of tears of anguish and frustration, especially for students of color. A lot of confusion as to why media uses different adjectives to describe any related to white people.
We looked at maps and timelines first, to get the basics, and then we looked at images and discussed their thoughts/feelings/reactions. We discussed as a whole group, but I also had them respond on paper, as well, in case they wanted to react a little more privately.
We asked the students what they knew. We discussed how elections usually go and we talked about the various limitations of power. We talked about the serious and unprecedented nature of the attack. We talked about what might follow.
We talked about the right and wrong way to disagree with the government; we talked about the fact that the "stolen election" reason behind the attack was a lie, plan and simple. No opinion from me; just the facts that (1) there was zero evidence of widespread voter fraud (2) there was massive evidence of destruction of this historic building, assaults on the people working there, and damage to the sense of what it means to be an American.

Teacher Responses (Coded)
Students had a choice to discuss in pairs/groups, discuss with teacher facilitator group, or opt into a practice/lesson unrelated to the events
We discussed the event and the implications. I was interviewed by the News Journal in Delaware for what we did.
I co-teach 7th gr social studies. Our classroom was 100% Latino. I'm Latina my co-teacher was a white male. Our school was closed due to Covid so classes were virtually taught. He absolutely ignored what took place. I invited all who wanted to discuss January 6th to join me in my Google Classroom. The students had questions. The entire school ignored what took place January 6th. The teachers are majority white. Our school is majority students of color.
We used images from a Washington Post photo essay as a framework to discuss what happened, what questions students had, and what different events and philosophies had led to the insurrection.
What was being confirmed. What breach was made. What they said was their reasons (did not think outcome was valid) Feeling/questions/ assurances of care.
We looked at a couple of examples of headlines and how their language varied: riot, siege, terrorist attack. We watched a PBS News Hour video about the attack and explained the idea of "sedition." And then students analyzed a news article about the event (I chose 5 articles from credible sources and they picked one to read).
We used the resources provided by scholastic to discuss the what and the why it was important. I tried leaving trump out of the discussion and letting students drive the conversation. I taught third grade last year. Some mentioned seeing a lot of MAGA hats and Trump flags and how angry they looked. Many drew comparisons to the BLM marches and how each group was treated. We discussed that one was for protesting equal rights while the other was an attack on democracy.

Summary

Overall, the discourse that teachers used to describe how and why they taught about January 6th reveals beliefs about the purposes of schooling, or that schools should prepare students to care about each other and the world around them. Many respondents used language of "important" and "relevant," even beyond the social studies classroom. Their discourse also illustrates beliefs about teachers' roles and responsibilities, or that educators should be responsive to students' needs, as well as to curriculum. Almost all of their responses stated that students were concerned and wanted to talk about it, that it was their "moral compass" that compelled them to discuss January 6th with fearful and frustrated youth. Finally, their discourse demonstrates that teachers think students are capable of discussing real-world events and dialoguing about "difficult" topics in the classroom. It was clear that their beliefs about pedagogy and children mattered more to them than potential pushback from families or administrators. Their responses also tended to be much longer than those who did not teach about the Insurrection, even when writing about their rationales and beliefs. That is, it would stand to reason that their responses about what they did in the classroom would be longer (because they had something to describe), but, additionally, their rationales behind the choice were explained in more depth and attended in a more nuanced way to the political climate in which teachers operate. Especially meaningful are the responses of three educators who discussed it even when they were explicitly told not to, which speaks to responsive teaching even when their leaders failed to be responsive.

"Politics Don't Belong in the Classroom:" Teachers Who Did Not Discuss the Capitol Insurrection

In contrast, educators who did not discuss January 6th with students held different beliefs about schooling, as reflected in the language they used to explain their pedagogical choices. For example, some were given administrative edicts not to bring it up. Of those who listened, some agreed, writing "we were told not to discuss it" with no other notes or information, reflecting their limited understanding of why a teacher might choose to ignore a directive of silence.

Others did not agree, but they feared for their jobs and adhered to the directive, noting, for example, that "Our principal would write us up for insubordination if we did. If we could have, I definitely would have."

Still others did not think the topic was relevant to their students' lives or the class content. Interestingly, these teachers taught some of the same grade levels and content areas as other educators who said that the topic *was* relevant for that age group and course. Instead, these respondents wrote, for instance, that "it wasn't relevant to the age of my students or the instructional goals" (elementary reading teacher). Additionally, there were teachers who said their students would not understand what had happened. Common phrases they used were "maturity," "innocence," and "developmental level." One elementary educator wrote "children are by trade too stupid to care about things," reflecting a deficit belief in their students' abilities to care about the world around them and directly contradicting decades of research that show that, in fact, children care deeply about the world and learn best when the world and their experiences are brought into the classroom (e.g. Ladson-Billings, 1997; Paris & Alim, 2017).

Again in contrast to teachers who said that this sociopolitical moment was vital for class discussion, educators in this category said that politics were not something they wanted to or should discuss with students. Instead, they argued that, as one elementary educator did, "It's not the teachers [sic] job to talk politics with the kids. That's the parents' job." This Kentucky educator expanded: "It's political. And incredibly skewed by the media... I also did not talk about the 100 days of BLM [Black Lives Matter] riots and 19 lives lost by those. And the hundreds of officer casualties. And the 2 billion dollars of property damage." As one conservative high school teacher in Florida wrote in all capital letters, "NO TEACHER NEEDED TO DISCUSS THIS NONEVENT [sic]."

As with those educators who talked about the Insurrection on days after, the discourse that teachers used to describe why they did *not* teach about 1/6 reveals beliefs about the purposes of schooling, or that schools should focus on curricular matters and standards over world events. Their discourse also illustrates beliefs about teachers' roles and responsibilities, or that educators should not discuss political events because, "politics don't belong in the classroom." Finally, their discourse demonstrates that teachers had thought students were not capable of discussing real-world events and dialoguing about "difficult" topics in the classroom. This discourse reflects public rhetoric about protecting (white) children from discomfort and speaks to a paternalistic view of students as too delicate to handle the information. Overall, teachers who said they did not talk about the Capitol Attack focused more on teachers' roles than students' roles or needs. As a whole, their discourse used a negative register when referencing the place and utility of "politics" in the classroom. Their definition of "relevance" was also limited, framing it as solely connected to a specific subject matter rather to students' lives within and beyond the classroom. Additionally, respondents who did not talk about the Insurrection tended to use more certain and self-assured modalities in their responses, meaning they used language about what teachers "should" do and had fewer qualifiers such as "I think," "I believe," and "could" than those who did teach about the Insurrection. Finally, their responses more closely aligned with the characteristics of White Supremacy Culture, explained more in the next section.

DISCUSSION

When critically examining teachers' responses to January 6, 2021–including if and how they talked about the event with their students–we found evidence of the characteristics of white supremacy culture. This does not mean that all teachers were *intentionally* reinforcing white supremacy in their classrooms, but that, by virtue of working in and being socialized into the white supremacist norms of public schooling, it is often exceedingly difficult to *not* reinforce white supremacy culture.

Even for teachers who did address January 6 in their classrooms, there was still reinforcement of white supremacy culture in some instances. Some responses reinforced the white savior complex by emphasizing the need to "help" students of color, and others continued to emphasize "neutrality" and "common ground" under the guise of students' needs. For example, one educator who self-identified as white and conservative, but who teaches in a predominantly liberal setting in Vermont, wrote that they discussed it with their middle school students in computer class: "It was a discussion of love. I encouraged students to show love and understanding, rather than hate. It was more about getting along with understanding rather than bringing about more division, than it was about the actual event." This emphasis on ensuring "getting along" was echoed in other responses, such as an elementary teacher who told her students that "It's okay to disagree, but it has to be done in a way that makes everyone involved feel safe, calm, and comfortable." These comments reinforce the white supremacy culture characteristic of *Right to Comfort*/*Fear of Conflict*.

A moderate teacher in California who discussed the event noted that they "let the kids share their thoughts. Discussions seemed to center on this protest vs all of the protests over summer. Most argued that it was not as bad since it didn't impact neighborhoods and such… [Students wondered] why was this perceived to be so much worse than burning down neighborhoods and stores." Other educators also compared January 6th to Black Lives Matter protests in uncritical ways, reinforcing two characteristics of white supremacy culture: *One Right Way* (to protest injustice) and *Denial/Defensiveness*. Some comments also illustrate that not all educators should engage in DAP if their beliefs are racist and would advance white supremacy culture. For example, consider the Kentucky educator whose response was shared above, who said that they "did not talk about the 100 days of BLM riots and 19 lives lost by those. And the hundreds of officer casualties. And the 2 billion dollars of property damage." To be clear, we do not think the teacher should be sharing these racist views with students. These comments show the danger of uncritically engaging in Days After Pedagogy because "not all DAP is created equal" (participant in Dunn, 2021).

For those teachers who chose not to engage in critical Days After Pedagogy, their responses illustrated that they were adhering to standards and content over children's needs. They emphasized "protecting" children, which we read as code for protecting white innocence, and which exacerbates white supremacy culture. Some educators who said they did not have time to discuss the incident relied on the characteristic of *Urgency*, which "makes it harder for us to distinguish what is really urgent from what feels urgent; after a while everything takes on the same sense of urgency, leading to mental, physical, intellectual, and spiritual burnout and exhaustion" (Okun, 2021). Instead of seeing current events as relevant and urgent to discuss, they instead saw their benchmarks and standards as the more urgent matter. Many relied on *Either/Or Thinking* when they insisted that politics were not to be discussed in the classroom, depending on a narrow and binary definition of what "politics" means (either something "is" or "is not" political).

On the whole, the responses from educators who said they did not discuss January 6 showed most evidence of the *Fear* characteristic of white supremacy culture. Teachers were afraid to lose their jobs; they were afraid to say the wrong thing; they were afraid their students weren't old enough or mature enough to understand; they were afraid of getting behind in their curriculum; they were afraid of being "too political." While we recognize the vulnerability of teachers in relation to systems of oppression–especially in the current sociopolitical moment where are there are increasing gag orders on teachers' speech (Friedman & Tager, 2022)--we also recognize the need for both individual and collective resistance to white supremacy culture and argue that part of teachers reclaiming their power and agency is working against structures and systems of oppression. The "safety" that teachers gain from silence and claims of neutrality is, as Okun (2021) explains, "illusory."

Overall, findings from this study illustrate how teachers' varied beliefs about the purposes of schooling, teachers' roles and responsibilities, and students' abilities and skills are revealed through their pedagogical choices in the days after major events. In this case, in the wake of the Capitol Attack, each of these beliefs was also shaped by teachers' socialization into and reinforcement of white supremacy culture.

IMPLICATIONS

This work has implications for future research and teacher professional development and support. First, future research might seek more responses from educators around the U.S. to offer additional insights into pedagogy on days after other major events. Scholars may also follow teachers into their classrooms to see how their beliefs manifest in practice, as well as how students respond to particular pedagogical choices on days after.

This research also demonstrates the need for more clarity and guidance in supporting teachers in the wake of major world events. Many educators were fearful of what these discussions would look like, yet, as Oluo (2016) argues,

> Racial oppression should always be an emotional topic to discuss. It should always be anger-inducing. As long as racism exists to ruin the lives of countless people of color, it should be something that upsets us. But it upsets us because it exists, not because we talk about it.

Only seven respondents received explicit guidance on whether or not to discuss January 6 in their classroom, and only three of those were told to discuss it. Most respondents gathered resources on their own and with colleagues from social media. District and school administrators need to be made more aware of research on the importance of engaging in discussions toward justice and equity on days after and be committed to sharing resources with teachers as these

events happen. Administrators should encourage teachers to engage in these discussions and be prepared to allay teachers' fears about potential pushback from families. In lieu of this, teachers' responses will remain scattered and individualized, and potentially reinforce white supremacy culture. These supportive directives are especially needed in the present moment where the national discourse about bans on classroom books and curriculum that uses "Critical Race Theory" continue to dominate news cycles, making educators more fearful of what to do and how to do it. These bans and the silence that emanates from them in classrooms around the U.S. illustrate how white supremacy is the water, not the shark, as noted in this paper's epigraph. Indeed, on the days after January 6, 2021, the water got even murkier.

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AUTHORS

Alyssa Hadley Dunn is the Director of Teacher Education and Professor at the University of Connecticut. Her research and teaching interests include racial and social justice, educational equity, urban teacher preparation, and the sociocultural and political contexts of teaching and learning.

Ellie Friedman is a first-year English teacher in Michigan whose path was shaped by strong mentorship, meaningful field experiences and early opportunities to engage in education research. She graduated from Michigan State University in 2024 with a degree in Social Relations and Policy.

Kristina Brezicha is an Associate Professor at Neumann University in the Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership. Her research focuses on the relationship between education and democracy.

Mariah Kornbluh is an Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Oregon. Her research focuses on 1) how children and adolescents marginalized or socially excluded surrounding the intersections of race or ethnicity, social class, gender, and other forces develop beliefs, feelings, and actions that challenge systemic inequities (critical consciousness development), and 2) how this critical consciousness empowers marginalized youth to negotiate structural constraints surrounding educational attainment and wellness.