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COMBATING SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS:
FEDERAL EDUCATION POLICY MUST AIM
AT A DIFFERENT TARGET

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Abstract

A decent education is a basic human right. The provision of free, compulsory education in the US attests to a national commitment to this right. However, the current school system is plagued by inequities, including spending less money on schools serving predominantly poor and non-White populations, subjecting students of color to harsher punishments, putting non-White students in special education tracks at higher rates, and neglecting students who are not fluent in English. These inequities are taken for granted within the school system, making the inevitable outcome, achievement gaps between White and non-White students, seem natural and inevitable. Bourdieu calls this process of making arbitrary differences seem natural “symbolic violence.” Two recent federal interventions, No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, have the potential to provide tools for combating this symbolic violence. However, each is designed around flawed premises which inhibit that potential, which we explore in the context of teacher education.

Education as a Human Right

A decent education is a basic human right. As of July 2010, UNESCO described the outcomes of a decent education on its Education for All web site:

Every child has the right to education. A good education enables a child to learn and to grow, developing their gifts and potential. Going to school helps a child to learn how to learn and how to relate to other children. It provides children with the tools for learning, such as reading, writing and manipulating numbers. School introduces children to the richness of the wider world and gives them the chance, later on, to obtain work and make a contribution to society.

John Dewey connected the right to decent education to the preservation of democracy: “What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must

the community want for all its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon it destroys our democracy” (Dewey 1902, 3).

Diane Ravitch, an educational historian who served in both the George H.W. Bush administration and the Clinton administration, lays out a vision of what a decent education which supports democracy could look like:

We must make sure that our schools have a strong, coherent, explicit curriculum that is grounded in the liberal arts and sciences, with plenty of opportunity for children to engage in activities and projects that make learning lively. We must ensure that students gain the knowledge they need to understand political debates, scientific phenomena, and the world they live in. We must be sure they are prepared for the responsibilities of democratic citizenship in a complex society. We must take care that our teachers are well educated, not just well trained. We must be sure that schools have the authority to maintain both standards of learning and standards of behavior (2010, 13-14).

We concur with Ravitch’s vision, and add to it our own requirements. We call for education characterized by a culture of respect and kindness for all members of the school community; high expectations for students with diverse needs, abilities and interests, and high expectations for the professionals who serve them; and the support and teaching students need to meet these high expectations.

That education is both compulsory and free in the United States attests to the U.S. commitment to the right to an education. Two recent federal policies, No Child Left Behind (2002) and Race to the Top (2009), suggest that Americans believe not only in the right to an education, but to a decent education. These policies as they are currently designed, however, are unable to provide a decent education for all children in the U.S. public school system. In this article, we argue that the U.S. public school system fails to meet the criteria for a decent education for all, instead serving as a vehicle for what Pierre Bourdieu calls symbolic violence.

Symbolic Violence and the U.S. Public School System

Pierre Bourdieu uses the term “symbolic violence” to explain how particular groups can retain dominance in a society without resorting to physical violence. Symbolic violence is “the power to impose...instruments of knowledge and expression...of social reality, which are arbitrary but not recognized as such” (1979, 80). Bourdieu says that when most members of a society accept its norms as “natural,” rather than arbitrary, then they also accept (in his term, “misrecognize”) the outcomes of these norms as natural, even when the outcomes go against their own interests. These norms are encoded into what Bourdieu calls “symbolic systems,” which is to say, systems of

“communication and knowledge” which “ensure that one class dominates another (symbolic violence)” (1999, 167) by structuring systems of power such that the domination seems natural or inevitable. The heart of the matter is the way in which symbolic power manages to mask this process; in Bourdieu’s system, one class can dominate another class without the use of physical violence because structures of symbolic violence convince the dominated that their domination is natural. This is done through what Bourdieu calls pedagogy: “‘Pedagogy’ refers to the power to impose meanings that maintain and reinforce the reigning social, economic, and political arrangements as legitimate when in fact they are entirely arbitrary” (Worsham 2001, 238). And as educators, we must somehow reconcile this conception of “pedagogy” with the one that most dominates our work, “pedagogy” as the practice of teaching, of the application of instructional methods in order to convey information and skill. Thus, what we teach and how we teach it can either work to confirm the power and arbitrary nature of the various structures or challenge its authority and legitimacy. We strive to do the latter.

We argue that the U.S. school system is marked with various structures that make it seem natural that the powerful remain in power, with the consent of those with less power. Components of this pedagogy of violence include the better funding for schools with larger populations of White children and of affluent children; the segregation of children by race both between schools and within schools; the disproportionate placement of Black boys in special education services; harsher punishments for identical infractions for non-White children; and the weakness of services offered to children who do not arrive at school fluent in English. In the following section, we discuss each of these components in detail, and then conclude with further remarks on how these components make the U.S. public school system’s reproduction of the status quo seem natural, not arbitrary.

Resegregation and unequal resources between schools

White children were 57% of the school-age U.S. population in 2005-06, but the average White child went to a school which was 77% White (Lee and Orfield 2007). Black and Latino children, collectively 37% of the school-age population, on average attended schools where more than half of their classmates were Black and Latino. Thirty-eight percent of Black children and 39% of Latino children attended schools which were more than 90% minority. This resegregation is problematic in terms of our national efforts to build a

multiracial society; it is difficult to live peacefully side by side with people you have never met.

Resegregation is also a problem because different schools attended by different kinds of children receive different resources. As Gary Orfield puts it, “although the U.S. has some of the best public schools in the world, it also has too many far weaker than those found in other advanced countries. Most of these are segregated schools which cannot get and hold highly qualified teachers and administrators, do not offer good preparation for college, and often fail to graduate even half of their students” (Lee and Orfield 2007, 8). In 2005-06, nationwide, there was an average funding gap of \$773 dollars per child (or over \$19,000 for a classroom with 25 children) between high-poverty and low-poverty school districts, and of \$1,122 between high-minority and low-minority districts (Education Trust 2009), an inequity which came about because of the U.S. tradition of local control of schools, and which persists despite the fact that poorer school districts frequently vote in much higher property tax rates than wealthier districts (Kozol 2005). As Grant puts it, “the poor pay more and we continue to blame the victim for the failure of the system to provide the appropriate education in the appropriate environment” (2005, 72).

Separation and unequal treatment within schools

Children have different experiences not only between schools, but within schools. Black boys are more likely than others to be placed in special education (Grant 2005; Obiakor 1994, 1999). When a student has been identified with a learning need that would make him or her eligible for special education services, black students of both genders are more likely to be excluded from classes for students with severe learning disabilities (which are based on the premise that a student has high abilities and only needs help developing learning strategies) and placed in self-contained classes for students with emotional disturbances and intellectual disabilities, *even if the child’s learning challenges are thought to be minimal* (Grant and Grant 2002). Black children, particularly boys, receive harsher and more frequent punishments than other children *in the same schools, for the same infractions* (Harvard Civil Rights Project 2000; Skiba et al. 2002).

English language learners (students for whom English is not a first language) already account for more students in the public schools than students with special education needs and are outpacing overall student population growth at a rate of 6 to 1 (Genesee et al. 2006; Rhodes, Ochoa, and Ortiz 2005). Nearly one-third of students designated at some point in their school career as an English language learner are enrolled below their known grade level (Jamieson, Curry,

and Martinez 2001); the lack of teacher preparation for working with English language learners is consistently cited as a reason for most English language learner underperformance (Haynes 2007; Zehr 2009). A recent study by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that “no more than 20 percent of [teacher education] programs required at least one course entirely focused on English language learners,” even though the majority of programs required coursework for working with students with disabilities (2009, 2). As Zehr (2009) noted, when the GAO pressed administrators of the programs to explain why such courses were not required in spite of an obvious need, they indicated that in the states where the programs were located did not require the courses for teacher certification, they did not feel the need to make it a compulsory component of their programs. Thus, it seems that some teacher education programs are basing their decisions about their curricula more on the mandates imposed by higher powers, rather than the present needs of the students.

Achievement gaps

These inequitable schooling inputs and treatments are accompanied by unequal schooling outputs: Black and Latino children score lower on achievement tests than White children, poor children score lower than wealthy children. For example, on the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress, the only standardized test which is administered randomly to students in all states, 41% of White 4th graders scored at the proficient and advanced levels in reading, compared with only 17% of Latino students and 14% of Black students (Education Trust 2009). The gap between the average scores of White and Black students has narrowed since the 1998 administration; however, it has narrowed only from 31 points to 27 points. For Latino students, the gap has closed by only 5 points. The situation in 8th grade math is similar. Science has not been a focus of federal policy, and gaps here are wider. Whereas 38% of White 8th graders scored proficient or advanced in science in 2007, only 9% of Latino children and 6% of Black children did so. There is evidence that gaps are growing across years of schooling. A 2003 analysis indicated that whereas Black children started kindergarten about a year behind White children, by twelfth grade the gap had widened to four years (Farkas 2003).

This school system is dividing up resources and punishment in such a way that certain kinds of students (White, affluent) receive more benefits, while other kinds of students (non-White, poor) are neglected and punished. It is not surprising that students with fewer resources and opportunities score lower on achievement tests; however, the lower scores place a veneer of “naturalness”

over the inequities of input. That low levels of school funding and low test scores so often go together is not seen as cause and effect, but as a logic outcome of the premise that those students aren't capable of high achievement extra money spent on their education would be wasted. The more frequent punishment of some kinds of students can teach all students, not just the punished, that those kinds of people are naturally bad or deviant, not deserving of forbearance, not able to remedy their behavior with another chance. The circularity of this arrangement, its arbitrary nature, gets overlooked, “misrecognized” to return to Bourdieu's language, because almost all the people involved in it are accustomed to it; it feels like the way things are, natural inevitable. In short, rather than providing all children with a decent education the education which they deserve by virtue of their common humanity, the current school system is teaching all children the message that some children are inherently better than others: some children are worth more, some children are capable of more, and this is natural and deducible based on how children look and act, the color of their skin, their test scores and the sound of their voices.

Federal Educational Policy

The biggest forces affecting public education in 2010 are the federal legislation called No Child Left Behind (2001, enacted 2002, and due for reauthorization since 2007) and the federal educational grant program called Race to the Top. We begin this section with an overview of these programs. Next we argue that they not only fail to redress the symbolic violence described in the previous section, but add another layer to it: Symbolic violence directed against not only students but teachers. These policies not only continue to reinforce the message that inequities in schooling are the natural result of deficits in low scoring students rather than the outcome of arbitrary power distributions; they distribute blame to teachers as well.

No Child Left Behind

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislates that all states which receive federal funding must administer annual tests matched to state standards. A certain percentage of students (the percent rises each year, eventually reaching 100% in 2013-14) in a number of subgroups must pass these tests in order for the school to make “adequate yearly progress” and avoid sanctions. The subgroups include English language learners, children identified with special needs, Black children, White children, Asian children, Latino children, American Indian children, and children who qualify for free or reduced meals. Schools that

persist in failing to meet these goals are in danger of “corrective action” and then “restructuring,” which can include widespread job losses among the schools’ teachers and administration.

Two of the authors of this paper had the opportunity to observe a small elementary school using No Child Left Behind as a tool to enact changes that the faculty were already committed to bringing about. This school, under the guidance of a principal deeply committed to equity, spent five years studying and improving its own practice. The teachers worked together, formed grade-level teams, pinpointed the exact areas where they and their students needed help, and eventually brought in professional development specialists to provide that help. The school evolved from a place where people were ashamed to work to a happy, proud school full of calm children and focused teachers. In the process the school went from having the lowest test scores in three counties to having its students score as well as other schools in the district with more affluent populations; at their site, *they closed the gap*. This is the potential of No Child Left Behind which we would like to see come to fruition. However, as we detail below, in its current state the legislation is plagued by some myths which stand in the way of this happening on a widespread scale.

Race to the Top

Race to the Top (RTTT), a competitive grant program managed by the U.S. Department of Education, was funded as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. It makes \$4.35 billion available to be allocated to winning states, with allocations based on the size of the winning states’ school populations. At least 50% of a state’s grant must be distributed through the existing Title I system, which directs funds to schools with the highest population of needy students (McNeil 2009). RTTT is voluntary and competitive; according to the U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, when states apply for RTTT funds, it “is not about getting in the game, this is about winning.... There will be a lot more losers than winners” (McNeil 2009, 23). To date, eleven states and the District of Columbia have received RTTT funds.

State applications are awarded points for developing state-wide reforms around four central themes: raising academic standards and student performance, collecting and using data to improve instruction, improving teacher and principal effectiveness, and turning around the schools with the lowest performance (U.S. Department of Education 2009). More specifically, states are rewarded for a variety of factors including: ensuring that the best, most experienced teachers are evenly distributed across school districts;

implementing merit pay for teachers and principals based on student test score growth; facilitating the establishment of charter schools; allowing alternative paths to teacher certification, besides the traditional teacher education routes; adopting common national standards; and using a particular set of “turn-around” strategies, including adopting a new instructional program, removing the principal, bringing in a charter management company, and closing the school. RTTT is assumed to be the model for the priorities that the Obama administration will push to see included when No Child Left Behind is reauthorized, a process that is expected to begin in the near future (Klein 2010).

Federal policy has the potential to provide tools for combating the symbolic violence inherent in the current U.S. school system. However, NCLB and RTTT as they are currently enacted are designed around flawed premises, as we lay out below. Because of these flaws, the programs, rather than supporting the public school system to deconstruct symbolic violence directed at students, are instead resulting in a second tier of symbolic violence, one that holds teachers solely accountable for the under-performance in the U.S. public school system. Thus, in focusing on the actions of individual teachers, they are directing attention away from system-wide causes of under-performance, namely, inequitable resource allocation and patterns of inequitable treatment of students according to race, ethnicity and economic status.

Premise: Teachers can be punished into teaching better

The central premise of No Child Left Behind is the idea that teachers and school administrators can be punished into becoming more effective. The underlying assumption, thus, is that teachers are not currently teaching to the best of their ability, but could begin to do so given sufficient punishment, including taking away school funding and, eventually, firing teachers outright. Orfield and Lee provide evidence that this approach is not working on a systematic level:

Most states and the federal government have adopted policies that have the effect of punishing schools and school staffs for unequal results in segregated schools, which tend to have concentrations of impoverished low-achieving students along with inexperienced and sometimes unqualified teachers. The punishment and the narrowing of the curriculum that accompanies excessive test pressure have not been effective and there is evidence that it has made qualified teachers even more eager to leave these schools. (2007, 10)

The idea that a failing school can get better by receiving less financial assistance and more pressure makes no sense; schools with greater problems need greater assistance, not punishment.

Premise: Teachers can reconcile conflicting federal legislative philosophies

No Child Left Behind is philosophically incongruent with other existing legislative mandates impacting students in schools. The federal education law outlining requirements for special education—currently known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (but referred to as IDEA)—requires that all students receiving special education support have an “Individualized Education Program” (IEP). The IEP is to outline the child’s particular strengths and areas of challenge, as well as learning and possibly behavioral goals that are “individualized” for that student. NCLB, however, expects that all students are evaluated against the same set of standards. While NCLB may have provisions for testing accommodations and alternative test formats for students with disabilities, the tests are not necessarily aligned with the learning goals outlined in the IEP, but rather broad learning standards that may not be the focus of that student’s learning goals. Incongruities such as this make NCLB difficult or impossible to implement, which, in turn, leads to fear rather than confidence and commitment on the part of teachers.

Premise: Teachers can defy the predictions of research and solve problems researchers have not solved

Some components of both No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top run counter to research findings. For instance, researchers and theoreticians of second language learning have long stipulated that English language learners require, in a best-case scenario, five to seven years to develop the academic proficiency in English that would equate to success on the NCLB-linked standardized tests (Cummins 1983, 1996; Krashen and Terrell 1983). NCLB, however, gives these children only three years before requiring them to pass the same standardized tests as their peers who speak English as their first language (Rhodes, Ochoa, and Ortiz 2005). If a sufficient percentage of the English language learners do not pass the tests each year, teachers are once again in danger of losing their jobs.

Race to the Top has been especially criticized for its promotion of strategies which are either not supported by research or virtually unresearched; they are, rather, examples of what Diane Ravitch calls “the royal road to learning,” the notion that some savant or organization has found an easy solution to the

problems of American education” (2010, 2). For instance, research on merit pay for teachers, one of the hallmarks of RTTT, is scant and has produced contradictory findings (Viadero 2009). Research on charter schools, which are also heavily promoted in RTTT, is also contradictory. A large-scale study of charter schools released in June 2010, the first large study of charter schools involving random design, found that students admitted by lottery to charter schools performed no better in math, reading, behavior or attendance than students in the same lottery who were not admitted (Gleason et al. 2010). As to the particular turnaround strategies for low-achieving schools which constitute one of RTTT’s four central planks, the American Educational Research Association released a statement: “There has been much less research about the turnaround strategies identified in the proposed regulations than about charter schools, and, consequently, even less is known about conditions required for their success” (Viadero 2009, 6).

Premise: Teachers can close outcome gaps despite input gaps

No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top do not address any kinds of gaps except test score gaps. They overlook resegregation, funding inequities and disciplinary inequities. NCLB requires that all teachers, in all schools, with all kinds of students, bring children to a basic level of proficiency, without providing any extra resources to do so. Further, it does not address the fact that children of color and poor children are more likely to be pulled out of the classroom, due to their over-representation in special education and in in-school and out-of-school suspension. RTTT does demand that states which receive funding must develop a system for ensuring that strong, experienced teachers are distributed equally among all the schools in a district rather than allowing them to be concentrated in schools with more affluent populations. However, existing law already demands that highly qualified teachers be more equitably distributed across states and districts (McNeil 2009), and yet inequities remain (Education Trust 2008).

Premise: Teachers can teach well despite low-quality high-stakes assessments

The quality of the assessments associated with NCLB has the potential to weaken curriculum and instruction. Well-designed assessments (for instance, Advanced Placement exams) drive good curriculum. They reward rich, respectful teaching; students who have been in engaging classrooms focused on critical thinking perform well on tests which emphasize problem-solving, synthesis and analysis. Assessments focused on low-level skills, on the other

hand, encourage narrow teaching. Low-level skills and trivial content can be instilled through repetition and rote memorization. Students can only be prepared for assessments focused on higher-order thinking skills, however, through rich teaching that supports and extends students' ability to think for themselves. Poor assessments do not rule out good teaching; a teacher can ensure that her students have memorized all the basic information they will be tested on and also teach them far more than they will see on the test. Well-designed assessments, however, demand this higher level of teaching.

Premise: Teaching is no longer a career

There is a growing trend in both charter schools and the alternative certification programs touted by Race to the Top to expect teachers to work longer and longer hours. The only charter schools, in fact, which have been shown to outperform local traditional public schools are those which serve the poorest students (Gleason et al. 2010) and, as in the Knowledge is Power Program schools, rely on extended school days, weeks, and years (Tuttle et al. 2010). This, coupled with the transience that is expected in some alternative certification programs (Teach for America, for instance, only asks for a two-year commitment to teaching), is creating a new model for teaching: the burn-out model. Teachers who come through alternative certification programs (which currently are not accredited) are sent into under-performing schools, often after only a few weeks of initial training, but still accorded the same status of "highly-qualified" as new teachers who have taken extensive coursework and graduated from accredited teacher education programs. Thus, students with the highest academic need are assigned teachers with the least experience and training, thereby devaluing the notion of "highly qualified" that has been a part of the NCLB mandate. Some of these teachers are placed in schools with longer school days; some are told to be available to their students by cell phone any time during the day or week. These young teachers have high turn-over rates. More than 50% of Teach for America teachers, for instance, leave their schools after two years; more than 80% after three (Heiling and Jez 2010). This situation, while it is sometimes associated with great gains in student performance, is not a sustainable model for creating lasting change. Just as teachers begin to develop some level of professional competence, they leave the field. Further, teachers have no time to reflect, or to build satisfying lives for themselves that could sustain their teaching.

Premise: Inexperienced teachers can solve complex educational problems

There is a second problem with the alternative certification approach: it seems to rest on the idea that very hard problems like those we outlined can be solved by new, inexperienced teachers with little preparation other than strong course work in their major fields of study. However, the problems we are facing in our schools require knowledge and experience; like the gains brought about by the Civil Rights movement, change will require time and commitment for the long haul.

A New Layer of Symbolic Violence

These premises taken together constitute a new symbolic system, one which directs attention to teachers and away from systemic inequities as an explanation for the failures in our public school system in the United States. No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top create federal structures which require that teachers solve macro-level problems in the education system through heroic efforts in their individual classrooms, including producing equal educational growth with fewer educational resources; producing educational results using approaches or timelines which researchers have not shown to be effective; following conflicting federal mandates; teaching effectively even when success on assessment instruments prescribes the use of ineffective teaching methods; in short, somehow being able to solve problems in their classrooms that researchers and policy-makers don't know how to solve. Furthermore, under RTTT, teachers' performances will be evaluated based on their students' test score growth. This means that teachers who manage to resolve these dilemmas, or at least to do better in an impossible situation than the teacher in the next classroom, will receive extra pay; teachers whose students' growth is stagnant risk getting fired.

Whereas the pre-NCLB, pre-RTTT school system simply directed symbolic violence at under-achieving students, these new federal policies have instituted a new tier of symbolic violence. We have already discussed at length the way the public school system put a veneer of naturalness on systemic inequities through resegregation, unequal resources between school districts, inequitable referrals to special education, inequitable punishments, and lack of support for English language learners. All of these result in troubling gaps in student achievement, gaps which are then understood as reflecting deficits with the low-scoring students rather than problems with the system. Now, with the advent of NCLB and RTTT, not only are students to blame for their own performances despite

inequitable resources and inequitable treatment in schools, but teachers, by not being able to compensate for these systematic inequities through their teaching, are also to blame. Everyone, in short, is to blame except for the people who benefit from the system as it is: those who pay less in taxes because other people's children receive less educational funding than that of their own children; those who experience less competition for good jobs because so many potential competitors never made it to the starting line.

This arbitrary system for inequitably dividing up social benefits and disadvantages is made to seem natural, the fault of unmotivated students and uncaring or poorly prepared teachers. The system reflects, precisely, Bourdieu's definition of symbolic violence: "the work of dissimulation and transfiguration... which makes it possible to transfigure relations of force by getting the violence they objectively contain misrecognized/recognized" (1979, 83). Some students attended underfunded, segregated schools staffed by the least-experienced, least-prepared teachers; some are arbitrarily placed in special education; some are punished more harshly than other students for the same infractions; some are put in classrooms with teachers who are not trained to meet their learning needs. These institutional failures, however, are cast not as an educational injustice but as the fault of those students and their teachers. The students and teachers who experience this symbolic violence are then blamed for its outcomes.

A useful way to analyze the ineffectiveness of NCLB and RTTT is through the framework for inequity proposed by Camara Phyllis Jones (2000). Jones's framework applies to the three levels of racism; however, it is useful in thinking about how any kind of inequity is perpetuated or interrupted. Jones's levels of inequity consist of institutional, personally mediated (person-to-person) and internalized. The symbolic violence in a society takes place at the institutional level; it is encoded in a society's policies and practices. The policies of NCLB and RTTT, however, mostly address the personally mediated level, trying to change the behavior of teachers in classrooms. Rather than ensuring that U.S. society provides its teachers with the tools (financial resources, research-based pedagogical strategies) to combat symbolic violence, current federal policy in fact demands that teachers address symbolic violence while failing to change the very policies that support that violence in the first place.

Reducing the Symbolic Violence in the U.S. Public School System

Despite the difficulties presented by federal educational policy, numerous instances exist of individual schools managing to raise achievement of all kinds

of students using optimistic, humane approaches (Education Trust 2005a, 2005b, 2006). If this is possible at the level of individual schools, we assert that it is possible at the level of the public school system as a whole, and that U.S. legislators have the moral obligation to develop policy which supports these efforts rather than hindering them. Bourdieu described how to bring about change in systems of symbolic violence: "To change the world, one has to change the ways of world-making, that is, the vision of the world and the practical operations by which groups are produced and reproduced" (1989, 23). His analysis suggests that if the "practical operations" which constitute the school system change, then the worldviews of all those who come in contact with that system could change as well. The subordination of certain groups could come to seem less natural, more arbitrary.

There is a substantial body of literature on how to enact this kind of change within a particular classroom, including both rigorous studies of classroom approaches which increase the learning of all students and guidance for how teachers can enact these approaches. What is needed, then, is federal policy which, rather than trying to drive teachers to solve system-wide problems in their individual classrooms, develops systemic solutions which help teachers to teach effectively. As it is, however, if it can be said that Americans believe quality education is a basic right, and this is (at least in part) why No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top have been established, then while the intentions of these programs are clearly spot on, their means are failing, and reprehensibly so. The U.S. is plainly violating what we acknowledge are the basic rights of citizens.

We need new federal policies designed to reduce the inequities embedded in the U.S. public school system, and the symbolic violence that is the logical extension of those inequities. These policies should create structures that make it easier for states, school districts, schools and teachers to dismantle symbolic violence. These policies could, for instance,

1. Rectify input gaps, by a) ensuring that all qualifying children have access to good pre-school programs like Head Start, Even Start, and pre-kindergarten; b) developing a funding system which allocates the most resource (school funding, good professional development, experienced teachers) to schools which serve the neediest children.
2. Call for and support effective integration policies which lead to a more even distribution across schools of both the hardest and the easiest students to educate. One possible model is that being used in Louisville, Kentucky,

which requires that all schools have no less than 15% but no more than 50% of their student body coming from poorer neighborhoods (Aarons 2010).

3. Support the development of equitable, *research-based* policies and strategies that diminish unequal treatment of students, and the training of schools in the use of these strategies. This might include a) effective screening procedures for determining which students get referred to special education and early interventions which keep students from ever needing special education, b) discipline practices within schools which do not result in the over-punishment of certain kinds of students.
4. Policies which help states, school districts, schools and individual teachers implement well-known, well-researched strategies for supporting student learning and provide sufficient time for those strategies to work, rather than pushing educators to jump on the latest reform trend.
5. Call for the development of sound, rich assessment procedures and well-tested approaches to the analysis and use of data. Specify the use of assessment results to determine which school systems and individual schools are in need of assistance rather than to mete out either punishment or rewards.
6. On that note, eliminate both punishments and rewards as incentives to induce teachers to teach better, and instead base policies on the assumption that most teachers would teach better if they knew how. Under that assumption, a reasonable federal approach would be to support the propagation of excellent, research-grounded professional development to help teachers to master effective pedagogical strategies.
7. Finally: Ensure that all federal policy treats teachers as valuable commodities whose skills should be invested in over time, rather than as a disposable resource.

Policies like these would be directed at the appropriate level for federal intervention: The institutional level. They would interrupt (rather than accelerate, as RTTT seems to be doing) the cycle of rushing to embrace one new educational trend before waiting to see if the previous one did any good, and would instead be grounded in the extensive existing knowledge base of what actually works to help students learn. With policies like these, school systems which are eager to raise the achievement of all kinds of students would be given resources and aid in doing so; schools which are currently struggling to close achievement or discipline gaps would be flagged by a rigorous assessment system and would be offered extra resources to help close those gaps. Policies like these could help break the U.S. school system's perpetuation of symbolic

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violence and bring us closer to the shared U.S. value of providing a decent education to all children.

We, the authors of this paper, are the faculty of a small teacher education department. We are products of public schools; we taught in public schools; we teach at a public college; and we send/have sent our children to public schools. Even as we see the school system's power to perpetuate symbolic violence, to make economic and social inequities in this country seem natural, we still believe in the power of the U.S. public school system. If the symbolic violence present in our school system were addressed through more appropriately targeted federal policies, the decent education that we consider a right could be a reality for all our children.

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