Research Article

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Pandemic Education: Dissensus, Achievement, Enclosure

Abstract: Alongside a crisis of public health, COVID-19 has also engendered a crisis of social reproduction in the domain of public education. Drawing on conversations and collaborations with K-12 education advocates in the Phoenix metropolitan area, this essay deploys an activist methodology to identify political struggles and turn the ethnographic lens onto the publics and political economies that shape them. After situating contemporary Phoenix schooling in the regional history of the southwest-turned-sunbelt, I examine emerging features of pandemic education in 2020: *managed dissensus*, *caretaking achievement*, and *education technology enclosures*. I retool the concept of "managed dissensus" to argue that, in polarizing debates about the pandemic, conservative politics shifted from consent to coercion in order to maintain priorities of privatizing education and "reopening" the economy. Further, as districts pursued virtual schooling, I show how an institutional project of caretaking achievement produced new patterns of alienation, disengagement, and punishment among teachers and students. Third, I consider how technology created unequal enclosures of parents and students in new gendered, racialized, and ableist regimes of education. As the pandemic continues into 2021, anthropologists should continue to examine public education and social reproduction as sites where state power, racism, and colonialism are expressed and transformed.

Keywords: hegemony, care, racism and colonialism, dispossession

As COVID-19 cases grew in Arizona, I began hearing from parents, students, and teachers I had come to know over the last two years of research with progressive education advocates in suburban and urban school districts across the Phoenix valley. When schools closed in March, relatively few parents could work from home and manage their children's education. Some left the workforce to support their children or were laid off from shuttering industries. Still others were essential workers, including single parents, drawn into increasingly risky and stressful working conditions. Parents of students who qualified for specialized services found their districts unable to provide them unless their children went to school in-person, increasing families' risks of exposure. Overwhelmingly, the work of figuring out what to do fell to mothers as an extension of gendered domestic responsibilities that have long subsidized the American labor force.

Virtual teaching brought its own problems, as teachers were called on to shoulder more responsibilities through patchy technology platforms quickly set up to deliver instruction. School staff suddenly found themselves rushing to deliver meals, social services, and curriculum. Students, in turn, were expected to habituate themselves to virtual learning, while wireless access and device use became an increasingly significant site of inequality.

At the state level, the governance of pandemic education strained the legitimacy of Arizona's conservatives, who have overseen decades of public education austerity and privatization. A far-right movement within this coalition pushed to reopen both schools and the economy, while progressive education advocates organized for a public health-oriented expansion of state support for housing, education, and employment relief. In addition to a public health

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crisis, then, the pandemic created a crisis of social reproduction for the Phoenix metropolitan area's school-aged youth and their families that threatened to exacerbate existing racialized, gendered, and class-based inequalities of public education.

Capitalist wage labor requires a parallel system of social reproduction that trains and sustains its labor force, from the everyday to the intergenerational. However, capitalism's drive to subsume social life to the demands of accumulation frequently leads to interventions in previously uncapitalized areas of social reproduction. For Nancy Fraser, this dynamic generates cyclical crises in prevailing modes of social reproduction (2017). When such crises become acute, they precipitate boundary struggles in which "social actors struggle over the boundaries delimiting economy from society, production from reproduction, and work from family" (Fraser, 2017, p. 25). Contemporary education serves crucial social reproductive functions. It is a site of credentialling for entry into labor markets, a provider of cultural enrichment programs and social services, and a social space of childcare while parents work outside the home. It is also the site of latent crisis and protracted boundary struggle. For decades, American public education has been the target of neoconservative and neoliberal coalitions looking to privatize schooling and entrench conservative racial politics. Progressive movements have pushed back with calls to increase state support for education as a fundamental right, alongside calls to address racism, ableism, and heteronormativity in school funding, accessibility, curriculum, pedagogy, and discipline. As schools faced the public health challenges of COVID-19, and progressive and conservative mobilizations brought into sharp relief different visions of the future of public education, this latent crisis became a central terrain of political contestation in Arizona.

Examining pandemic education in Phoenix, the nation's fifth largest city, provides unique insights into boundary struggles, institutional care, and education technology in the United States. Phoenix's geography and demographics—a sprawling and unevenly developed city adjacent to large suburbs and Indigenous reservations—manifests American racial and colonial inequalities. At the state level, it is governed by a conservative coalition endogenous to the sunbelt that has come to power nationally. Despite this, progressive education advocates have achieved political victories. Teachers and their supporters participated in the 2018 national wave of Red For Ed strikes that forced the state to increase public education funding. That same year, they also passed a ballot proposition blocking the expansion of privatizing school vouchers. Importantly, Phoenix is also a hub of education technology, through the efforts of Arizona State University, the University of Phoenix, and an increasing number of virtual K-12 schools.

In this essay, I deploy an activist ethnographic methodology building on long-term collaborations with progressive education advocates (e.g. Hale, 2006; Craven & Davis, 2013). Their experiences and mobilizations illuminate the conditions that inform struggles over education and social reproduction. After contextualizing schooling in the history of Phoenix, I unpack the emergent politics of pandemic education during 2020. I retool the concept of "managed dissensus" used by Stuart Hall and his colleagues to describe the shift from consent to coercion to manage the breakdown of the alliance between labor, capital, and the state in 1970s Britain (Hall et al., 1978, p. 238).[1] During the pandemic, conservatives used state power to target schools with coercive leverage and abandonment in order to overcome progressive dissent. The consequences reverberated through schools shifting to virtual education, where districts' attempts to continue education emphasized care and achievement, but created new patterns of teacher and student alienation, disengagement, and punishment. As the pandemic continued, the turn toward technology transformed the spatial and infrastructural relations of schooling and enclosed families in new gendered, racialized, and ableist regimes of education.

1 Sunbelt Schooling

Contemporary struggles over education in Phoenix emerged from a regional history of racial and settler colonial state formation. Animated by Manifest Destiny, the southwest is where the U.S. finalized its continental empire through the

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1 In their update to Gramsci, Hall and his colleagues elaborate on hegemony as a condition in which a particular class successfully frames its interests as universal, with popular will and public opinion becoming key legitimating forces in the wake of late-capitalist democratization and mass-mediation (1978, p. 216). They assert that hegemons manage crises of dissent and popular mobilization by shifting to coercion—through law or police—which unmasks their use of the state to legitimize their investment in particular modes of capitalist domination and exploitation (1978, p. 217).

double theft of land from Indigenous nations and Mexican American citizens. Arizona's growth as a territorial resource frontier in the late 19th century was managed by Anglo elites, who created a racialized labor market and civil society in which they could exploit Mexican, Indigenous, Black, and Japanese communities.[2] Schooling was foundational to Arizona's capitalist development, and in this section, I use sunbelt schooling to refer to the accumulated history of racial and colonial practices of education in the southwest-turned-sunbelt.

Arguments for Arizona's statehood, achieved in 1912, were partially based on claims of having a well-educated Anglo civil society, within which Mexican Americans and Indigenous nations would have little power (Meeks, 2007, p. 37). Public education was established through the state constitution to cultivate Anglos as worthy of self-governance and federal representation. As a result, public education was suffused with Anglo norms of propriety, heteronormativity, valuable labor, and citizenship. Federal schools for Indigenous children sought to eliminate Indigenous political orders, languages, kin structures, genders and sexualities, and relations to land. Public schools serving Black, Asian, and Mexican students were sites of language exclusion, inequitable segregation, and racial IQ testing, which reproduced civic exclusion and economic exploitation. Anglo dominance over education extended the colonial and racial enclosures and dispossessions of reservations, segregated housing and labor, redlining, policing, restrictive migration, and the US-Mexico border. Federal and public schools facilitated and secured Arizona's political economic formation through the conquest of land, extraction of resources, exploitation of labor, and political recognition.

Dozens of urban and suburban school districts, and the Phoenix Indian School, were created to keep pace with Phoenix's development from the late-19th to mid-20th century. Immediately, they became sites of struggle. Before and during the expansion of federal responsibility for the welfare of citizens through the New Deal, parent and youth activists organized movements for Black civil rights (Whitaker, 2005), Indigenous self-determination (Amerman, 2010), and Chicano cultural and linguistic inclusion in schools (Echevarría, 2014), contributing to the rise of a more inclusive racial liberalism in schooling, but not a displacement of white dominance.

The sunbelt region, and new modes of schooling, emerged in the 1950s with the flight of capital from industrial cities of the North and Eastern seaboard to the industrializing South and Southwest. In Phoenix, a cadre of conservative "boosters" sought to modernize the city by attracting manufacturers eager to escape union strongholds. They set themselves in opposition to the regulatory liberalism of the New Deal and developed proto-neoliberal policies: right-to-work legislation, tax concessions, and market deregulation (Shermer, 2013). Their strategy grew Phoenix from 65,000 to 440,000 residents, the majority of whom were white and worked in burgeoning military and technology industries. The desire to attract and cultivate white middle-class families drove state and city investment in suburban schools, suburb-serving public amenities and services, an emphasis on STEM education, and a "free market" curriculum denouncing communism (Shermer, 2013, p. 305).

In the 1960s, federal investments in urban renewal of public housing and low-income neighborhoods fomented a conservative revolt. Across the sunbelt, far-right groups formed "Keep America Committees," labeled urban renewal a socialist plot, and willfully challenged neoconservatives who supported public housing and federal urban renewal—including Barry Goldwater (VanderMeer, 2013). Forestalling urban renewal further encouraged white flight to segregated suburbs. As a result, a reactionary far-right gained a foothold in Arizona state politics, joining neoconservatives in a coalition that foreshadowed the rise of neoliberalism and neoconservatism through the electoral victories of Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan.

Both the Reagan and first George Bush presidential administrations called for education reforms that would dismantle regulatory liberalism's investments in public goods and services. In response, Arizona's governor established a task force, which published the report *Reform, Restructuring, Rededication* as a blueprint for statewide education reform (Governor's Task Force on Educational Reform, 1991). Taking aim at schools, the introduction stated: "Not only in Arizona, but across this nation, we have been failing our children" (1991, p. 2) This crisis was presented as a failure to create moral and productive citizens amidst rising rates of poverty, non-white immigration, and single-parent families, as well as anxiety that the U.S was unprepared for the emerging global financial and information economy. To offer solutions, it quoted education reformer Chester Finn:

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2 The self-identification of elite Anglo-Saxon Protestant settlers as "Anglo" was a racial project to differentiate themselves from Jewish and Mexican elites, Indigenous nations, as well as Black, Asian, Hispanic, and European ethnic communities. These distinctions were significant up to the 1930s. At this point, Anglo began to encompass working-class ethnic Euro-Americans and became interchangeable with "white," while whiteness still excluded and marginalized Black, Indigenous, Mexican, and Asian Arizonans (Meeks, 2007, p. 162).

> Our attitude, toward resources, precedents, plans, and activities needs to become flexible and experimental rather than dogmatic and controlling... When it comes to results, however, our stance should be doctrinaire and unbending. We will insist on them; we will reward them; and, when we do not get them, we will change the arrangements that are failing to produce them (Governor's Task Force on Educational Reform, 1991, p. 2).

The report's recommendations followed this pattern of experimentation and intervention: create programs for "at-risk" students, raise graduation requirements, decentralize responsibility to school districts, allow students to enroll in any district or private school and fund schools based on enrollment, license "innovative" charter schools not subject to state bureaucracy, and close or take over schools that are "failing" their students.

The report brought together neoconservative and neoliberal governing rationalities (Brown, 2006). While seemingly opposed, laissez-faire approaches that seek to reduce the presence of the state in social life and neoconservative interventions to cultivate moral citizens converge on issues of personal responsibility, heteronormative family formation, and rejection of the regulatory welfare state in favor of free market competition (Cooper, 2017). The laissez-faire rationality of neoliberalism was applied to schools to introduce market logics of competition and reduce the state's responsibility to support schools and students. Simultaneous neoconservative interventions sought to define and cultivate personal responsibility through the promotion of "moral individualism," the nuclear family, and national culture that are supposed to support the individual outside the remit of state support. Over the next decade, versions of the report's policy recommendations were passed in Arizona, sometimes with bipartisan support.

This led to racial realignments of public education and new dispossessions of students from public education (Fine & Ruglis, 2009). The figure of the "at-risk" student reanimated mid-century concerns about school dropouts and juvenile delinquents, who policymakers associated with a racialized "urban crisis" of unemployment, criminality, and radical social movements (Meyerhoff, 2019). Like the "dropout," the definition of "at-risk" targeted Native, Black, and Latinx youth, as well as youth from impoverished and single-parent households, through the individualizing lens of academic achievement, rather than the structural conditions that created unequal and oppressive schools. Unlike the dropout, however, the figure of the at-risk student framed youth through their potential impacts on the national economy linked to a set of metrics—earnings, criminality, family formation, consumption, property ownership, and debt.

The creation of the category "at-risk" signaled the economization of sunbelt schooling, tying student and school achievement to anticipated macroeconomic gains and losses (Murphy, 2018). As elsewhere, economization relied on the use of audits, surveillance, and defined thresholds of value to bring social life into calculations of economic growth and productivity; but, because of its narrow focus on macroeconomics, economization displaced other epistemologies of value, knowledge, or violence (Murphy, 2018, p. 89). The economization of at-risk students allowed education reformers to locate failure at the level of individual and school responsibility and did not elicit further state investment in education or social reproduction more broadly. Instead, the state expanded "alternative schools" exempt from state standards and oversight. In Arizona, these schools produced incredibly low graduation rates (Altavana & Price, 2019), and established a system that dispossessed "at-risk" students from the civic and economic benefits of public education.

Reforms that marketized enrollment opened a new frontier of privatized education. Open enrollment laws allowed students to attend any school, and funded districts and charters based on per-pupil enrollment, leading to competition for students as units of funding. As punitive accountability was imposed through high-stakes testing and performance-based pay, Arizona's schools were subjected to a regressive funding structure that removed money from high-poverty schools and districts. Wealthier districts and brand-new charter schools recruited students from historically segregated and impoverished schools, further draining them. Legislation also allowed for the use of tax credits for private school tuition, providing public funding for religious education by diverting money that would have otherwise gone to public schools. Charter school operators, meanwhile, received increased state funding which they could use in profiteering land speculation, contracts, and payouts.[3] The 2009 Recession amplified inequalities when the state allowed public education funding to fall by a third, leading to a shortfall of almost $5 billion in less than a decade (Leachman, Masterson, & Figeuroa, 2017), and placing Arizona at or near the bottom of several national metrics of public education funding.

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3 Charters can bypass state procurement and conflict of interest laws, allowing them to set up private boards including charter founders, their family members, and their friends and award themselves lucrative contracts to manage schools, construct and maintain facilities, and purchase land (Arizonans for Charter School Accountability, 2018).

Economization and marketization dovetailed with neoconservative racial politics. Reactionary xenophobia propelled a statewide ban on bilingual education in schools, defining many Spanish-speaking students as "English Language Learners" and forcing them into segregated classes with limited resources and curriculum that required instruction only in English. An additional result was the further restriction of Indigenous language programs in public schools across the state. School-based police programs were expanded as Arizona's incarceration rate grew to one of the highest in the nation, targeting Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people. Alongside the militarization of the southern border, the state banned a Mexican American Studies program for promoting "unamerican" views, despite its success with increasing student achievement.[4]

The outcome of this history is a sedimented regime of sunbelt schooling that coproduces the region's political economy, within which activists and advocates continue to struggle over relations of social reproduction. Activist lawsuits eventually overturned the Mexican American Studies ban. In 2018 the Red For Ed and Save Our Schools movements mobilized the largest teacher strike in Arizona history and won major victories. Unprecedented voter turnout later that year led to increases in education funding through progressive taxation and restrictions on private education vouchers. Advocacy coalitions have also fought to remove police from school campuses, institute community-driven equity councils and policies, and prevent school discrimination on the basis of race, sexuality, gender, disability, and citizenship. As elsewhere, sunbelt schooling created contradictory dynamics in public education. On the one hand, schools are defined by racial and colonial logics whereby certain students are cared for and cultivated and others are punished and pushed out. Yet they are also sites of struggle for state support, Chicano culture and language, Black liberation, and Indigenous sovereignty.

2 Managed Dissensus

When Arizona's conservative governor issued the two-week closure of schools in March 2020, he released a joint statement on forthcoming school guidelines with the state's progressive Superintendent of Public Instruction. They said, in part: "Today's announcement is intended to give parents and educators as much certainty as possible so they can plan and make decisions." Certainty was hard to find, however: who would take care of children while parents worked? How would youth receive social services usually distributed through schools? How would grades, attendance, and graduation be determined?

As cases and deaths climbed, the governor followed other states and declared a public health emergency that restricted service at bars, restaurants, and public venues. In response, a series of far-right mobilizations emerged with the goal of "reopening" the economy. Their unmasked demonstrations took place at the state capitol and along city thoroughfares, waving signs disavowing the pandemic and declaring that their freedom was intertwined with the right to work and consume. Similar protests across the nation used racially coded narratives of valorized "producers" and "patriots," contrasted with condemnation of labor and public health activists for increased state support as "parasites" and even "terrorists" (HoSang & Lowndes, 2019). Three elected county sheriffs refused to enforce the state of emergency, and far right legislators accused the governor of tyranny. In contrast, Black- and Latinx-led uprisings in the wake of the police murder of George Floyd were met with police violence and political prosecutions. State responses revealed racial calculations of who can be targeted for violence and incarceration, and whose lives matter when it comes to policing and the pandemic.

As fall approached, debates over school re-openings became increasingly polarized. Neoconservative think tanks like the Goldwater Institute amplified calls for the expansion of school vouchers, couched in the language of parents' rights and market competition. The Arizona Chamber of Commerce and Industry pushed for schools to reopen so that parents could return to the workforce, as well as COVID-19 liability protection for schools and businesses. Many of these arguments were couched in the discourse of "learning loss," a fear that students, particularly Black, Latinx, and Indigenous youth, were falling behind.

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4 Cabrera, Milem, Jaquette, and Marx (2014) used district administrative data to show that participation in the Mexican American Studies program significantly correlated with the likelihood of passing state standardized tests and graduating high school.

They were flanked by far-right parents and activists, who, since 2018, have been fighting against racial equity programs and comprehensive sex education in east valley suburbs. Vocally protesting at school district offices and the state capitol, they claimed that mandatory mask wearing, temperature checks, and socially distanced classrooms were violations of parental sovereignty. In their view, the school was becoming a prison.[5] Conservative politicians, beholden to the far right as an electoral constituency, supported or refused to disavow their grievances, adding pressure to reopen schools in ways that catered to narrowly conceived notions of individual rights rather than public health.

Aggressive conservative pushes provoked progressive mobilization. A broad advocacy coalition of parents, students, teachers, school board members, and nonprofits built on the successes of past teacher strikes, ballot initiatives, and grassroots activism to demand the state expand its responsibility and support for education. They adopted social movement vernaculars of "essential workers" and state abandonment to frame students and school staff as casualties of austerity, racism, and colonialism. Amid the summer waves of heat, layoffs, evictions, uprisings, and COVID-19 that wracked Phoenix, advocates put together press conferences, petitions, viral videos, and motor marches to the capital that demanded the state keep schools closed and fully funded until it was safe to reopen them.

With fall approaching, the governor could not manage these increasingly antagonistic mobilizations. In response to the far right, the governor began reversing the "closure" of Arizona's economy. But as average cases per day increased from 500 to 3,000 and the threat of a teacher strike grew, he delayed school start dates and released federal emergency funding to support schools. While these policy choices appeared to capitulate to progressives and signal the end of conservative legitimacy, they maintained conservative economic and education priorities. To incentivize returns to in-person learning, the state would fund virtual learning at only 95% of in-person levels.[6] That funding was further tied to a requirement that schools prioritize learning by offering the same number of instruction days as they did the previous year and reinstate high-stakes benchmark testing of students. In addition, funding mandated schools provide in-person options for students ambiguously defined as having "nowhere else to go."[7] Finally, the governor delegated in-person reopening decisions to school districts and charters, devolving responsibility to local boards with few resources and vulnerable to local far-right pressure. It was not that the state had no money: the governor refused to use to state's $1 billion "rainy day" fund for economic emergencies.[8]

Key to conservative success was a growing moral panic around "learning loss" re-circulated by local and national news media. As schools remained closed, pundits and politicians grew increasingly concerned that students would "fall behind," especially children from working-class Black, Indigenous, and Latinx communities. As Hall and his colleagues note, moral panics are the manifestation of a crisis in public consciousness (1978, p. 221). Geographer Cindi Katz further argues that "childhood," a liminal stage defined by becoming, is closely integrated into political memory and fantasy, and therefore constantly mobilized through moral panics about the near future (2008). In this case, the crisis of the material conditions of social reproduction was expressed through competing progressive and conservative visions of education. Since the Spring, progressives emphasized classed, racial, and colonial dynamics of state abandonment and violence, including not just education but also housing, policing, and employment. They called for increased state support for youth and families, safe returns to school, and the reversal of education austerity.

Conservatives, however, fixated on crises of students "falling behind" and parents unable to work. They asserted that parents should be free to send their students back to in person learning; schools should be open so that parents could return to jobs; and teachers should accept the risks of teaching. As the governor put it in his state of the state address in January of 2021, during a massive spike in COVID-19 infections and deaths from winter holidays, "we will not be funding empty seats or allowing schools to remain in a perpetual state of closure. Children still need to learn, even in a pandemic" (Ducey, 2021). As the crisis was increasingly defined as one of "learning loss," rather than families and districts being unequally abandoned, conservatives could use the state as a coercive tool to impose policy and funding decisions.

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5 Far right education groups, however, deny the racist and colonial carceral dynamics of schooling; the far-right analogy works by asserting schools are not typically carceral spaces and that their children are inherently innocent, and thereby reproduce racialized differentiations of innocence and criminality.

6 Since low-income urban districts rely more on state funding, this represented a bigger loss to already under-funded districts.

7 The State Department of Education later released guidance that this meant students who qualified for specialized education plans.

8 It was later revealed that the governor used federal emergency money to fund everyday state operations, rather than expand services, creating a budget surplus that was later used as a justification for tax cuts.

Considering a different crisis in 1970s Britain, Hall and his colleagues used the term "managed dissensus" to conceptualize a shift in the mode of hegemony from one anchored in the manufacturing of broad approval to one secured through coercive projects that "served as both key social policy instruments and legitimating frameworks for securing popular consent, on a narrower basis if necessary" (Hall et al., 1978; Singh, 2017, p. 127). Although coercion suggests the use of force, it also denotes the direct imposition of policy amid dissent, a tilt in the operation of the state toward coercive mechanisms already available to it (Hall et al., 1978, p. 217). Learning loss provided an interpretive framework for the crisis as well as the grounds to dismiss progressive demands.

The management of dissent around public education, however, went beyond the use of repressive violence or imposed policies with a narrower basis of consent. It also amplified the material conditions of the crisis in social reproduction, forcing students, parents, and districts into more constrained and precarious conditions, like mandatory testing and grading, decreased funding, and increased vulnerability to far-right pressure. This shift to coercion transformed the political terrain of social reproduction itself, not just maintaining conservative's power but forcibly implementing punitive austerity and accountability. Alongside the reopening of the economy, suppression of abolitionist uprisings, and non-interference with far-right mobilization, the management of dissent revealed conservative aims to privatize social reproduction in the service of capitalist profits and the right to consume, and their willingness to sacrifice portions of the population—impoverished, ill, incarcerated, or houseless—to do so.

3 Caretaking Achievement

Shortly after the shift to virtual learning in Spring 2020, Phoenix Union School District released a video on Twitter, in which the superintendent, a thin man with small glasses and a buzzcut, black sweater, and professional slacks, spoke in front of his office wall with small, framed pictures. Standing still, his hands moved in and out of his pockets to gesture at the camera.

> Hello Phoenix! I'm sure many of you are aware of the song or the saying "Sorry not sorry," and I've been very reflective on those remarkable stories that I've heard all across our district, even across our state and our country, of teachers developing and delivering lessons online, counselors and social workers delivering phone calls and even counseling sessions, food service workers delivering food, liaisons doing home visits, payroll technicians making sure that employees get paid, and the reality is that we are closed, but not closed. And so today I'm issuing a challenge, not just to our educators, a hashtag #ClosedNotClosed challenge. And what I'm asking you to do is take a picture or even a brief video of yourself delivering lessons online, delivering support to our children, delivering food, delivering services, and ultimately, delivering hope, delivering love to our students. Post it online with the hashtag #ClosedNotClosed and let's remind our communities, our kids, and even our country, that we will not give up on our kids even when school is not in session (PXU, 2020).

Hailing Phoenix, as city and school district, the video is an attempt to inspire collective support. The superintendent makes a claim about institutional care that reverberates beyond the physical school, using the video to engender a public through shared attention to an institutional form (Fennel, 2015). Challenging district staff to make visible the acts that sustain students, the campaign entwines material and affective support for learning. The superintendent further connects the local and the national, portraying the district as an inspirational model for resilience. At the center of this is *continuity* in the everyday and institutional role of education: a care-driven approach to overcoming the pandemic.

While the video garnered barely more than 100 "likes," and the hashtag itself inspired relatively little traffic, it revealed how the district imagined education during the pandemic. The hailing of a caring public followed other projects of liberal governance to configure publics of fellow feeling that combat anomie, build new senses of community, and supplement the cultivation of market-based personhood (Fennel, 2015; Muehlebach, 2012). In this case, the mobilization of care to establish a community of care, which also elided the centrality of student achievement to the institutional mission of public education. Viewed in this way, the district approached pandemic education through a project of caretaking achievement. But while the district stressed continuity and commitment, among teachers and students the institutional mandate of care produced unintended and countervailing experiences.

Despite promising community, district efforts produced new forms of alienation. In addition to #ClosedNotClosed, the Phoenix district developed the "Every Student, Every Day" program. I texted Radhika, a teacher and advocate I met through organizing against police in schools, to see how it was working for her. She explained the process to me in an email: teachers were responsible for checking in on students in their homeroom classes, supported by Spanish

translators. Mostly, her cohort of high school teachers checked in once a week with families—in addition to holding virtual classes. The teachers were provided with a script of basic questions about health, food, safety, and family when calling or leaving a voicemail. Afterward, they filled out a digital form to document the responses, but she didn't know how the data was aggregated and used by the district.

Based on what she heard from colleagues, teachers were only reaching about half their students in the large Title 1 school that was almost completely Latinx, Black, and Indigenous—and Spanish translators were in short supply. After answering my question, she also reflected on teaching.

> Oh last thing I'll add lol (for now), re: teachers feeling burdened. I remember some teachers saying they felt like the district was doing a good job checking in on students, but felt like the district wasn't doing that for us, which I would agree with. I know I fell into a pretty deep depression for the first 1-2 months of distance teaching and I'm sure I'm not the only one. It made it really hard to be there for my students.

Up to then, Rhadika and I had both centered impacts on student and displaced increased demands on teachers' affective and technical labor. Rhadika's insight interrupted the narrow concern that we had inadvertently reproduced and revealed the amplified alienation of teachers responsible for caring for them that "every student, every day" elided.

For students, too, caretaking often failed to elicit investment in schooling. Giselle, a recent high school graduate of the district and also part of our coalition to remove police from school campuses, described her last semester as "a mess." For Every Student Every Day, her advisory teacher called once and reached out once by email. On the other hand, the school librarian and one of her teachers sent messages weekly asking if she was OK. Only two teachers out of seven held consistent hours, and only one teacher followed the modified schedule the district provided. Once teachers started holding virtual classes, efforts to connect with students in official and unofficial ways fizzled out "since most kids ghosted them."

Giselle used ghosting, slang for removing oneself from social media contact with no explanation, as an ethnographic assessment of her classmate's behaviors. Usually, it refers to suddenly ending an intimate relation carried out primarily over social media and texts. Ghosting gives the impression of becoming a phantom: they may see traces of you online, but there is no direct communication, and the sudden disappearance is meant to signify disinterest. In this case, however, students were removing themselves from affective investments in schooling during pandemic education. Ghosting was a manifestation of youth agency, taking advantage of the ephemerality of digital presence to avoid virtual schools and teachers. Students who ghosted refused to reciprocate affects of care that hailed them as subjects cultivated by schools, as well as institutional and ethnographic desires to understand the lives of youth (Shange, 2019, p. 120). Instead, the ambiguity of ghosting allowed for a range of possible affective disengagements: loss of interest, interpersonal conflict, rejection of schooling, or something else.

Teachers' practices of care, too, could be dehumanizing. On the west side, Xochitl was in the process of being pushed out of her elementary school, whose students were predominately working-class Latinx youth. Her social justice approach to education, which she learned from the founders of the Mexican American Studies Program in the Tucson Unified School District, included drawing connections between racism and colonialism in education and society more broadly.[9] Her school was beset with many problems: underfunding, high teacher and administrative turnover, lack of restorative justice and community engagement, and heavy testing schedules. Her commitments led her to speak out against the district's school-based police officer after he pepper sprayed a crowd of middle school students to break up a scuffle. The administration grew so hostile that she decided to leave before the end of the year. When the school closed in Spring, she heard from former colleagues that attendance dropped to maybe three students per class. But what really shocked her was their reaction: upset by the decline in participation, teachers began giving their students failing grades for not attending virtual classes or submitting work, despite having options to enact lenient grading and attendance policies.[10] Most disturbingly, they justified their punitive grading based on the expectation that the youth of

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9 The Mexican American Studies program in Tucson was based on Freirian pedagogy and Chicano transnationalism. It was attacked by conservatives through claims that it was communist and anti-white, reviving Cold War redbaiting and Anglo anxiety about the conquest of the southwest.

10 While the state still required tracking student attendance for per pupil funding, it was offset by the promise of an enrollment stabilization grant from the state. Many districts simply did not track attendance or report it to the state (Sabato, 2020). Districts also changed grading policies, with some ensuring that grades could not be lowered while schools were closed (Altavena, 2020).

the school would fail anyway. Xochitl understood this as the "pobrecito problem," the racialized expectation of failure, which was accepted even among educators of color. Teachers internalized expectations that students would fail and fall below thresholds of economized and moral value, which they turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The experiences of teachers and students revealed a tension between supportive care (Valenzuela, 1999) and anonymous care (Stevenson, 2014). "Checking in," primarily conducted by teachers, flowed from deeply felt personal interactions into the aggregated, quantified project of tracking students and engaging them. At the same time, students were expected to reciprocate this effort by participating in these new forms of virtual community and learning. But caretaking achievement did not move smoothly from the bureaucratic to the everyday, adding to the affective stress of the pandemic. Rhadika's alienation shows how the district taxed teachers' mental health to pursue a bureaucratic effort of "making live" through achievement, while phantom students ghosted that same project. Xochitl's colleagues further underscored the racialized expectations they used to justify the withdrawal of care, dispossessing youth already vulnerable to state violence and abandonment during the pandemic.

4 Education Technology Enclosures

When schools shifted to virtual learning, the classroom was reassembled through networks of laptops, web cameras, proprietary software, and wi-fi. Its transformation brought students and parents into new spatial and infrastructural relations that reinforced the uneven racial and colonial development of sunbelt schooling. Following parents' and teachers' experiences with these networks revealed a turn to technological solutions for the crisis of social reproduction during the pandemic. I use education technology enclosure to refer to, in one sense, the envelopment of students in digital disciplinary power, and, on the other hand, the privatizing enclosure of public schools—both with dispossessing effects.

Emily, a single white mother I met through a mutual aid network, sent me a long email about how she and her daughter coped with the frustrating conditions of distanced learning in the Spring.

> She finished 1st grade in May after two months of distance learning. Kimberly is a very social kid and the distance learning was not her cup of tea. She would often become angry and want to give up. Her school offered pre-recorded lessons that were about 6 minutes long per lesson and covered about 4 subjects each day. She did her lessons while at work with me.

Emily's work was running a cafe and connected music venue, which had been decimated by the pandemic. Others shared their stories in Facebook groups for parents wanting to keep kids at home. Amy, a white mother I knew from her district-based racial equity advocacy, and whose unemployment insurance claims were denied as "fraudulent," was also struggling.

> For my 1st grader, his distance learning activities require at least one adult to be his guide/tutor through most of it, which we don't actually have enough time to help him with, because both of us (parents) continue working from home, basically busy 8am-3pm most weekdays. So for my first grader, instead of doing all assignments, we pick a few that seem most important, which tend to be reading & comprehension.

As virtual learning displaced education from the school to the home, distinctions between school, home, and work collapsed. Home spaces became remote workspaces; places of work became classrooms; both crowded into sites of leisure. Guardians were expected to absorb more labor and responsibility, typically falling to mothers as parents, workers, *and* classroom managers. Those who lost work and were denied unemployment benefits were under tremendous financial strain, especially as expanded unemployment insurance and eviction moratoriums came to an end. Still, students were expected to learn in these new spatial and infrastructural contexts.

The desk, once the site of architectural disciplinary power that ordered the position and location of bodies in the classroom (Foucault, 1995), became a virtual assemblage. Software tracked student attendance, and guardians were expected to log in, review, and download assignments. If students could not work independently, they would have to be supervised at home. The enclosure of students in education technology, then, brought virtual surveillance and evaluation into the home and transferred educational labor onto parents and guardians.

In Foucault's theory of political anatomy, the micro-physics of power that emerged in the 19th century, a diffuse set of disciplinary techniques were developed to create "docile bodies" for modern institutions. "Discipline," Foucault noted, "sometimes requires *enclosure*, the specification of a place heterogenous to all others and closed in upon itself. It is the great protected place of disciplinary monotony" (1995, p. 141). Monotony often carries connotations of tediousness and boredom, but more precisely points to a routinized mode of affective attention. Even "creative" learning requires the disciplinary enclosure of students in a mono-tone of curiosity. The requirement for docile bodies within the reassembled classroom relied on the same technique of affective enclosure, and the exclusion of feelings of frustration and exhaustion that mark the temporal and spatial collapse of school, work, and home.

As schools moved into the second year of the pandemic, the reassembled desk continued to take shape through district engagements with education technology. One east valley district located in a wealthier suburb, which drew nearly a quarter of its enrollment from surrounding underfunded districts, developed a "Digital Academy." The virtual school promised five hours of instructional time a day, with dedicated teachers, virtual community space, and 21st century technology and teaching strategies. While families were required to have their own internet connection, the district provided Google Chromebooks supported by Google's cloud-based suite of tools specifically for online education. A sample schedule was provided that included a slate of science, math, English language arts, and project-based inquiry courses, which alternated between unsupervised work and group instruction.

The name "Digital Academy" distinguished itself from the triaging of education that had occurred in Spring 2020, when schools struggled to get devices and homework packets to students during the first wave of the pandemic. The name borrowed from the positive connotations associated with boutique "Traditional Academies" that promise a rigorous college preparation experience, which is further reflected in the use of content similar to in-person accelerated schooling. The designations of student value would also be carried over through the promise to place GATE (Gifted and Talented Educate) students in their own virtual classrooms. The Digital Academy, then, reproduced competition for enrollment, unequal educational opportunities, and the sorting of students through achievement.

Boutique digital academies sharply contrasted the mode of virtual learning that emerged in underfunded districts. Xochitl found another teaching position in a south Phoenix elementary school. In her first onboarding training, the only content covered was how to operate online tests, which glitched at an alarming rate. Later in the semester, her administrator told her to incentivize students to turn their cameras on during class, and that if a student didn't turn in their assignments by certain days, they must be marked absent district-wide, rendering them vulnerable to school discipline and state truancy laws. This punitive measure dramatically impacted Xochitl's English Language Learner students. Testing and attendance became "captivating technologies" that promised solutions to pandemic education but reproduced and extended the reach of dehumanizing racial logics (Benjamin, 2019). In the context of virtual learning, students who did not conform to the district's expectations of attention, attendance, and work were subjected to rearticulated forms of racialized abandonment and discipline.

In both settings, education technologies provided further opportunities for privatizing enclosures. School districts had to contract with private vendors for student tracking software, device manufacturers, cloud-based services, curriculum, and virtual testing. The lack of public investment at the national and state level all but guaranteed that districts would be unable to build their own systems. Instead, they were forced to funnel more public money into private education companies, creating new frontiers of privatized content development, data collection, and surveillance.

Online alternative charter schools have gone further by turning the virtual desk into a site of profit. From 2010 to 2018, enrollment for alternative schools for "at-risk" Arizona students grew by nearly 40% to 30,000 students, with 86% enrolled in charter schools (Altavena & Price, 2019). These schools advertise themselves as alternative environments to support "at risk" students and are poised to expand. Primavera, the largest of these alternative charters with an enrollment of almost 20,000 students, already operates entirely online. Investigative reporting found that the school spent about 11% of its budget on instruction, as opposed to the typical district rate of 54% (Harris, 2018). Instead, Privamera funneled 70% of its state funding into an investment portfolio that paid board members. In the same period, Primavera had a dropout rate of 49%, ten times the state average; and average graduation rates at alternative schools (26%) were significantly lower than charters (77%) and public districts (88%). The emergence of this mode of schooling heralds a cycle of accumulation by educational dispossession, in which students are pushed into alternative schools that are run for profit despite predictably adverse outcomes.

Significant numbers of students cannot even make it to the virtual desk. One study estimated that nearly 30% of all Arizona students did not have access to an adequate wireless connection, and nearly 20% have neither adequate

wireless nor a wireless capable device (Chandra et al., 2020). In such cases, youth are preemptively dispossessed of access to any education, and potentially subject to punitive school policies as well as state disciplinary action against truancy.

Parents of children diagnosed with disabilities anticipated further dynamics of marginalization and abandonment. Federal and state entitlements to educational special services won by disability activists, including Individualized Education Plans, were sidelined, and handled in a way that exposed vulnerable students and families to the pandemic. In Arizona, students qualifying for Individual Education Plans are disproportionately Black, Latinx, and Indigenous, stemming from high rates of childhood poverty, stress, and illness distributed across geographies of racial capitalism and settler colonialism (Milem, Salazar, & Bryan, 2016).

But even in wealthier districts, special education funding from the state has been inadequate, creating large program shortfalls. Daria, a white mother in the east valley who had participated in Occupy Phoenix and continued to organize in her district, began working with other parents of children requiring special education services. She emphasized that she and her husband were privileged in that they could work from home—but she was absolutely exhausted. The oldest of their four kids was on the autism spectrum with an acute seizure disorder. Since March, she had found herself taking on educational labor in addition to all other domestic care labor. Now, she needed to figure out how to support her son in the following school year. At an FAQ panel on reopening schools, her district's director of special education programs only spoke for one and a half minutes. Her and the other parents were offered two choices: 100% in-person schooling, or 100% virtual schooling with no accommodations. Daria wanted her high school-aged children to do distance learning, but because the district would only provide special services on campus, she thought she might as well send both. Between the risk of COVID-19, her exhaustion, and her district's rigidity, there were no good choices. To Daria and other mothers, their impossible choice underscored how special education and impoverished students were treated during the pandemic—those that needed the most support received the least. She concluded with a characteristic, "that's going to be a shitshow."

5 Coda: Abandonment and Withdrawal

In the last months of 2020, the President and Secretary of Education also began mobilizing the threat of coercive abandonment, asserting that federal emergency relief for education should require schools to open in person—otherwise funds should be sent directly to parents in the form of student vouchers for homeschooling, private schools, or virtual academies. Neoconservative governing coalitions foreclosed demands for increased state support for social reproduction on a national scale. The abdication of state responsibility to support and protect its population was expanded beyond the racist and colonial abandonment of post-disaster New Orleans, Houston, New York, and Puerto Rico. Amid the pandemic, state neglect reached into suburbs that were once the privileged enclaves of sunbelt development.

The coerced return to schools and reopening of the economy was met by students ghosting, parents challenging, teachers organizing, and board members delaying—all signs of a protracted withdrawal of consent. In public education, "withdrawal" is typically seen as leaving a school or class, and, like failure, negatively charged with projections of personal responsibility. Such a definition obscures the contradictory dynamics of public education that trap youth within dehumanizing modes of schooling—and precarious social reproduction more broadly. Here, collective withdrawals were imbued with anger at state abandonment, galvanizing a broad realization that schools, more than ever, are being set up to fail by privileging the accumulation of capital and racialized dispossession over the preservation of life.

The boundary struggle precipitated by pandemic education continues to inform conservative hegemony, the institutional practices of schools, and the enclosures and dispossession of youth. It reveals the potential of progressive mobilization to challenge sunbelt schooling, but also the influence of the far right coalition with neoliberals and neoconservatives. Despite the new federal administration's massive reinvestment in public schooling, its insistence on "learning loss" programs and standardized testing suggests that, while neoliberal austerity is weakened, caretaking achievement may remain a recalcitrant mode of education governance. Indeed, the management of dissent amplified neoliberal and neoconservative rationalities sedimented in sunbelt schooling. As social scientists continue to track the impacts of COVID-19, we should consider education a key site from which to theorize and organize around emerging formations of social reproduction, care, enclosure, and dispossession.

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