

DISSEMINATING KNOWLEDGE FOR DECOLONIAL ACTIVISM OUTSIDE THE INSTITUTION

My hope is that after my presentation, you feel angry towards a system where the schooling district a student is born could either put them on a track towards university or prison, where a country that proclaims opportunity through class mobility hasn't been able to increase its percentage of low-income students that are able to attend college in the past fifty years. My hope is that this knowledge will propel others to find ways to engage in scholarship that is action-oriented and activism based, so that together we can shift an educational system that is outdated and unjust.

For those of us taking our final steps towards college graduation, there is an enormous sense of pride, achievement and success. Regardless of our backgrounds, we've been taught that a degree holds the key to job security. Many students and their families sacrifice their life savings, work multiple jobs or put themselves in tremendous debt to be able to complete their college education. In an uncertain job market, even a degree may not feel like a guarantee for job stability, and a grad school degree is now necessary in many fields to receive a living wage.

This goes to say that the promise of the United States, where the average working person could achieve the 'American Dream' falls short when it comes to one's level of education achieved, or educational attainment. Since 1970, the average low-income families' college level attainment has only increased by 3 percent, while upper class families' have increased by 30%.

Behind this statistic, lie systematic barriers that prevent students from low-income backgrounds from pursuing or completing a college degree. Contemporary academics have begun to research the limitations low income students face within schooling to find solutions to narrowing the wage gap. Dr.

Erica Meiners, a professor in Chicago who focuses on educational injustice, argues that a big reason deterring low income students from pursuing higher education is the school to prison pipeline, a term that describes how students in lower funded schools have high levels of student incarceration. Through Dr. Meiners research, she found that public school officials tend to penalize low income students of color significantly more than students from higher funded school districts. In addition to this, students face physically deteriorating schools, zero-tolerance discipline policies that are largely subjective, biased assessment materials and a lack of understanding facilitators.

Personally, my work as an elementary school educator working in the south side of Chicago has provided me with an insight on how underfunded CPS schools actually are. In fact, the school I worked in didn't have central air conditioning and the water from the fountains would give our students migraines. Beyond structural problems, teachers were not taught how to solve in-class conflict. One of our students had autism, and when he got overwhelmed or frustrated, the teacher on site was so afraid of him that he corralled him into a corner and had me run to the principal's office to request emergency assistance. This was a 10-year-old boy, no more than 4 feet tall.

The way elementary and high school systems fail to motivate their students or support them through hardship reflects directly onto their desire to stay in a classroom for another four years, not to mention how financially inaccessible colleges already are. Furthermore, the idea that the knowledge obtained in higher education is hierarchically superior is questionable, because the founders of these institutions were exclusively wealthy white males. Education founded by Western colonial groups has often been co opted into a tool for ethnic cleansing, and in the U.S., one of public schooling's earliest uses was to force Native Americans into erasing their own practices to adopt Puritan American culture.

University has been reserved for the upper-class white male demographic for centuries, to such an extent that women and people of color were only allowed to enroll within the last hundred years.

My dream is that one wouldn't have to obtain a degree in order to avoid working minimum wage jobs that are often dangerous, exploitative and provide little financial security. Until society shifts towards job security for all, my solution is to advocate for an emphasis in decolonized education through the system of higher education to extend itself to people who aren't able to access university spaces.

Education has a lot of value in itself, beyond having the opportunity to learn about critical thinking and understand the world through other's research, educational attainment is also related to community empowerment. In countries such as my own, increased literacy rates are directly correlated with a decrease in teenage pregnancy. Once students are given the possibility to pursue their own personal success, whether it be by achieving their dreams or pursuing a career, it allows for them to break familial patterns that without education are propelled by systemic injustice.

Students of the academia, professors, and researchers have varying levels of knowledge within their area of expertise, but they all have a couple things in common which are access to educational resources and a knowledge of pedagogy. We have the tools to teach others, or create materials for the dissemination of knowledge. Before the quarantine, I was organizing with Pilsen Guerrerxs, a movement backed by local non-profit 'The Pilsen Alliance,' to keep women safe in public spaces given the rise of kidnappings of black and brown women on the SouthWest side of Chicago. Within this type of work, it is essential to disseminate knowledge in effective ways that are accessible to several demographics. The members of Pilsen Guerrerxs handed out flyers in Spanish to passersby on the pink line, and we gave English flyers to new business owners in Pilsen.

Although the relationship between academia and public organizing may seem unclear, it is essential, especially in the social sciences. Public academics are scholars who are dedicated to advocating for the general public. Eve Tuck, a professor, researcher and educator, uses her research on Native American communities to create material that empowers the community itself. Academia based research on marginalized communities has usually been a hands-off approach, where white male researchers used social science to make racialized claims on black and brown culture. This research only served to study culture through their own gaze, instead of what decolonized research does which is to study culture hand in hand with the community while producing the research into something that is accessible and useful to the researched demographic.

Tuck does just this by making all of her research publicly accessible through visual flyers and graphs. One of these pictorials explains the way systems such as the New York Public Schooling System propel the school to prison pipeline. Beyond academia, an artist that also uses public artwork to educate and empower her community is Joanna Reign, who puts posters of revolutionary statements up on public walls in majority black and brown neighborhoods in New York City. This form of knowledge dissemination brings her scholarly research on latinx empowerment to the streets, literally.

Although the theory I'm building is contained in a similar academic format as the one I've been so heavily critiquing, I have no doubt that the work I've put in has been disseminated throughout my closest circle of study: two thesis classrooms where I've continued to go off on the injustices of education, and how closely these relate to the U.S. segregation of resources and white supremacy. However, this isn't my language of comfort, in fact this isn't even my first language. I'd like to show that this thesis is an outline of the moral and theoretical guidelines I've processed as my own methodology

and perception of the world, and constantly reevaluating what it means to interact with others from a decolonized standpoint.

Within the varying spaces I inhabit, I plan to spread the critical thought I've learned through this eye opening research. I plan to compile the information gathered in my thesis into an easy to access handout, both in English and in Spanish. I'm also planning on hosting my own public access show on CanTV, thanks to my friend and public artist Dulce Maria, which will talk about the history of Latinxs bilingually and provide important resources for our communities in an engaging way. I'd love to empower the audience of this presentation to conduct similar work of their own, to create groups for critical discussion. A motivator I use in creating reading or discussion groups on theory that don't have one set goal is, "if all these white philosophers became infamous academics for sitting in circles and discussing their own existence for years, why can't I?" Our history is important, our legacy matters and our knowledge will shape the generations to come.