Response

A Matter of Class

Kathleen A. Murphey

In the introduction to this volume, Eileen Tamura, Caroline Eick, and Roland Sintos Coloma state that their essays "are followed by responses by educational historians, some of whom have delved into theory in their historical works, while others have not." I would describe myself as someone who has questioned the role of theory since I first began studying educational history several decades ago, who has attempted to use theory, and who, thus, warmly welcomes this discussion.

I see contradictions in what I'm researching and how I am doing it, contradictions that arise from my graduate training, the developments in historiography since then, and influences on my way of thinking from my colleagues in teacher education. This discussion about theory and history of education that Tamura introduces, and that Eick and Coloma explicate in their studies, helps me reflect on my own journey in attempting to use theory in history. They give me inspiration to rethink my approach to the history of education.

Like Tamura, I was in a School of Education, which has recently become a College of Education and Public Policy, caught between colleagues engaged in and excited about new theories and research methodologies, who pay lip-service to the importance of history of education, but are not drawn to it. It's not at the forefront of their methodological or theoretical underpinnings. Historical methods are not clear to them in terms that speak to their understanding of educational research.

I have students in a master's level "History of American Education" course who do local educational research projects, projects that are not considered research by some of my colleagues, because they aren't action research projects, explicitly tied to changing educational practices in schools. Thus, I'm put on the defensive to defend history of education to colleagues who do not see it as "transformative." At the same time the state of Indiana and NCATE see no measurable impact on P-12 student test scores due to their teachers' knowledge of history of education. Within teacher education, history of education is being pushed to the margins as not essential to the major yardstick of educational

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achievement, that is, mandated high-stakes tests. In Indiana the state has overhauled teacher certification and renewal requirements, and, thereby, virtually eliminated both history and philosophy of education from the teacher education curriculum by not requiring them. The new policies for preparing teachers also open doors for deregulating and privatizing teacher certification, thus, potentially easing it out of its current location in schools of education.

History of education could and should inform debates about these educational policy issues that currently divide educators, the public, and policy makers. A clear understanding of the role of theory in historical studies of education would make the discussion all the richer, and, I believe, find a wider audience among all educators, as well as the public and policy makers. From my perspective, history of education is more important than ever, but schools of education are turning away from it, as state and federal policies are simultaneously turning away from higher education as a necessary route to teacher preparation. As Tamura suggests, a discussion about theory and the history of education should help us relate better to teacher educators who are not historians; it should also help us relate better to one another, so we can work together to ensure history of education a lasting presence in the teacher education curriculum.

Key to my own understanding of the role of theory in research is my graduate training and ensuing academic history. When I went to graduate school in the 1970s, I was attracted to the revisionist school of writing educational history, especially Michael B. Katz' work,[1] as well as the work of political economists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis.[2] Their views, heavily influenced by neo-Marxism, made sense to me at the time and seemed to express the way I naturally viewed the political, economic, and historical worlds. Many challenged the interpretations of Katz and interpretations of other revisionists as well.[3] I didn't view these

[1]Michael B. Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Massachusetts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968; New York: Teachers College Press, 2001); Michael B. Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy, and Schools: the Illusion of Educational Change in America* (New York: Praeger Press, 1974); and Michael B. Katz, "The Origins of Public Education: A Reassessment," in *The Social History of American Education*, eds. B. Edward McClellan and William J. Reese (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 91–117, Katz' presidential address to the History of Education Society in 1976. A revised version of this address appeared in Michael B. Katz, *Reconstructing American Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

[2]Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

[3]For example, Carl F. Kaestle and Maris A. Vinovskis, *Education and Social Change in Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Maris Vinovskis, *The Origins of Public High Schools: A Reexamination of the Beverly High School Controversy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985). Diane Ravitch brought the criticism to a

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challenges to the revisionist framework as atheoretical, but as having a different theory, one in the more liberal tradition, one that became increasingly neo-conservative, in contrast to what grew to be called the revisionist/radical/Marxist tradition. While I would have named them all different traditions, or different interpretive lenses, they can also be considered as being based on theories, though not explicitly articulated. As Tamura states, "Theory may thus be there, if only in the background of the study."

The revisionist/Marxist theoretical lens was, however, harder to prove, as its detractors often pointed out, because of the difficulty of tying concrete evidence to broad historical movements in the evolving political economy, to changes in the wage-labor system, and to meaningful definitions of social class. Katz acknowledged his theoretical underpinnings; his anti-revisionist critics did not base their work on a specific theory. To my way of thinking, these educational historians connected the dots differently, and they connected different dots. Like his critics, Katz was a rigorous historical researcher who guided his questions, his search for evidence, his framework for connecting the dots, which dots he connected, and his conclusions by theory informed by neo-Marxism. In general, Katz—and Bowles and Gintis—tied changes, developments, and, particularly, reform in schooling to a developing and evolving political economy, that is, to developments in the unfolding stages of capitalism and the wage-labor system. Their critics argued, as they do today, that theory limits historical interpretation by artificially forcing evidence into pre-determined boxes.

In the meantime, Katz, and Bowles and Gintis, have all distanced themselves from neo-Marxism as they used it then, though their academic interests have continued to involve the "underclass," early capitalism, current capitalism,[4] and the maintenance of structural inequality in the United States.[5] I, too, distanced myself from explicit reference to a political economy framework, but researched related themes that grew out of my original concerns. With interests tied to class, race, and gender, I pursued work on the history of teachers as a

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head in *The Revisionists Revised: A Critique of the Radical Attack on the Schools* (New York: Basic Books, 1978).

[4]Michael B. Katz, *Improving Poor People: The Welfare State, the "Underclass," and Urban Schools as History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Michael B. Katz, Michael J. Doucet, and Mark J. Stern, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982, 1999); Michael B Katz and Mark J. Stern, *One Nation Divisible, What America Was and What It Is Becoming* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006).

[5]Samuel Bowles, Herbert Gintis, and Melissa Osborn, eds., *Unequal Chances: Family Background and Economic Success* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

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labor force and their unions, and, more recently, on the complexities of class, race, and gender in desegregation.[6]

While everyone has an interpretive framework for deciding what dots to include and how to connect them, it seemed an unspoken convention that educational historians were not explicit about the lenses they used. I assumed that I should follow that convention.

Faced with a difficult job market when I finished my doctorate, I spent two years, 1983–1985, teaching at teacher training universities in Beijing. When I returned to the United States critical theory had taken hold in schools of education. By then I was teaching social foundations to undergraduates and attempting to delve into critical theory. I included readings on critical theory in my undergraduate social foundations course, along with other theories and philosophies of education; I included educational history in the course, and made a point to explain the different "interpretive lenses" that had been a part of the dynamic debate that I experienced as a graduate student.[7]

For the last eight years I have had a dean, as well as colleagues, who define themselves as critical theorists, postmodernists, postpositivists, or poststructuralists. While I have learned a lot about these views and find them intriguing, there are points where our interpretations differ, mainly those points that have to do with understanding the role of the political economy in the analysis, especially relating micro, individual battles for identity in a hierarchically structured world to the broader political economy.[8] For our work together on current educational policies, the differences didn't matter; in fact, our different approaches were a strength.[9] However, I question whether issues of empowerment

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[6]Kathleen A. Murphey, "Schooling, Teaching, and Change in Nineteenth Century Fort Wayne, Indiana," *Indiana Magazine of History* 64, no. 1 (March 1998): 1–28; Kathleen A. Murphey, "Common School or "One Best System"? Tracking School Reform in Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1853–1875," *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'education* 11, no. 2 (1999): 188–211; and Kathleen A. Murphey and Dawn Runger Martz, "In the Shadow of *Brown*," *Scholarlypartnershipsedu* 2, no. 1 (2007): 5–24, also available at http://opus.ipfw.edu/spe/vol2/iss1

[7]I felt supported in this approach by History of Education Society colleague Joseph W. Newman's text, *America's Teachers: An Introduction to Education* (New York: Longman, 1990; 5th ed., Boston: Pearson/Allyn & Bacon, 2005), which I used in its various editions for many years.

[8]In the meantime critical theory appears to be going in different directions: one embraces postmodernism; one reconsiders Marxism, moves away from postmodernism. See Mike Cole, *Marxism, Postmodernism, and Education* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

[9]Kathleen A. Murphey, "NCATE and the Restructuring of Teacher Educators' Work: A Labor Process Perspective," in *National Teacher Accreditation as Community Dialogue: Transformative Reflections*, eds. Terri Swim, Joe D. Nichols, Kathleen A. Murphey, Glenda Moss, Alice Merz, David D. Lindquist, and Barry B. Kanpol (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2010).

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can be related to immediate targets in hierarchically determined structures of power, or whether they need to be tied to broader political and economic structures, as well as to history.

Critical theory, in particular, focuses on diversity in all its complexity and empowerment of the powerless and marginalized; it seeks to make imbalances of power visible and raise consciousness about them. It has always been difficult for theorists to understand the complex relationship of race, class, gender, and other categories of difference to one another. Needless to say, they are all combined in the social fabric of any particular time period. I honor all, but privilege class as the common denominator. Yet, finding meaningful working definitions of social class, especially as it intersects with other domains of difference, as well as methods to document it, remains a difficult, but essential task.

In my view historical studies are necessary for us to understand the constellation of forces, ideological and material, that have perpetuated historically constructed differences. Through my current research on desegregation in Fort Wayne I've discovered that the rich, exciting, ever-growing historical literature on desegregation pivots around the concept of race in illuminating ways. Our understanding of racial discrimination and racial empowerment in all its complexity, through law and in practice, has been immensely expanded. It remains a challenge, however, to integrate this literature, this growing narrative on race, to that on social class, and both to the political, economic context in which they are situated. This integration poses a central challenge to me as I explore the relationship between class and race in my study of desegregation in Fort Wayne.

Given my ongoing discussions with my university colleagues about their views on research and theory, I found Coloma's explanation of the basic questions of Foucault, postmodernists, and poststructuralists very enlightening. His analysis of how and why educational historians from the United States have been isolated from some of these new theoretical directions was convincing and helpful. His theoretical discussion was clear, and his own research project was well articulated; it made Foucault's thought and approach to history *almost* understandable. It helped me to understand myself more clearly, to see ways post-modernism has influenced the way I think about history. It also made me realize the tremendous amount of study he has undertaken to "narrate and analyze the dynamics of race, gender, and education within the contexts of U.S. imperialism and Philippine nationalism in the early twentieth century," particularly as it affected the development of curriculum in the Philippines. A Foucauldian approach seems particularly apt in getting at the roots of what I would call ideology, though it is obviously much more complex than that. In effect, Foucault redefines what "roots" are, and he reconceptualizes power. It's not a

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matter of connecting dots anymore; it's not clear there are dots, or that they could ever be juxtaposed, much less connected.

In wondering how Foucault related to Marxism and historical materialism, I turned to one of Coloma's references, Mark Poster's *Foucault, Marxism, and History*. In it, Poster states that Foucault critiques Marxism and offers an alternative to historical materialism; that is, the mode of production is not key, but the mode of information is.[10] Thus, I conclude that the concepts of colonialism, postcolonialism, and empire that frame Coloma's study, are not political/economic categories, but political/ideological descriptors of power relationships. I look forward to reading other works that Coloma cites, as well as his own completed study. His citations provide a rich opportunity for further study; they demonstrate how much study lies ahead for anyone wanting to understand this philosophically complex, provocative approach.

A number of years ago I wrote a paper on the history of desegregation in Fort Wayne using oral histories as its base. I submitted a proposal for the History of Education Society (HES) annual meeting. I had had a difficult time interpreting what I found, difficult to go from the specificity of the oral histories to an interpretation that grew out of the oral histories. To me it was a problem of going from the specific to the general, from the micro to the macro, from the evidence to a framework, or theory, to interpret it. One of the readers of my proposal suggested that I try on a postcolonial lens. Taking this advice, I used postcolonialism as a metaphor to explain the broader picture of what was happening in Fort Wayne and the struggles over the direction of desegregation, as the economy and demographics of the city kept changing throughout the period that desegregation was being struggled over and, then, implemented. I used colonial and postcolonial categories to describe the different cultural worlds in Fort Wayne and to show how they intersected, to make an argument that desegregation, however successful in the short run, was doomed to failure as it reached its limits at the school corporation's borders, as business and industry and middle class citizens—both black and white—migrated to the suburbs or out of state. Postcolonialism was for me a substitute for an analysis based on political economy, for which the stretch to a theory from the detailed oral histories seemed even more difficult.

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[10]Mark Poster, *Foucault, Marxism, and History: Mode of Production versus Mode of Information* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), 52. He goes on to say that "This alternative premise does not deny the existence of human beings and things, or their interaction, but it does maintain that the significant objects of investigation for historical materialism are arrangements in which the model of labor does not serve as the impetus of interpretation." Also, "The premise of technologies of power suggests that discourses and practices are intertwined in articulated formations having the domination of one group over another as their primary trait," 52.

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I presented this paper at the HES Annual Meeting. Following the panel presentations, the discussant began by saying, directly to me and before his formal remarks, that I should never have used theory in the paper, that it was a good essay before I began to include theory, and that theory has no place in educational history. Then he began his formal comments of all of our papers. I wasn't sure how to interpret his comments. I later spoke with him and he explained that theory has a place, but not in general presentations like that, and not without knowing more about postcolonial theory. The discussant made me conscious of the different ways historians viewed the use of theory. Because the reader had advised me to use postcolonial theory, I had taken the task to be to apply postcolonial theory appropriately, not to question whether or not to use theory or if I should make theory visible. Thus, the discussant's remarks have led me to do a lot more thinking about the role of theory in educational history. Postcolonialism and Foucault's ideas still intrigue me, but I realize, especially after reading Coloma's paper, how much more study it would take to understand the essence of its challenges to modernist methods of writing history.

Eick presents an effective way of using oral histories and understanding them through theory. Intersectionality is a powerful theory that combines the voices of participants from their multiple roles as they relate to one another during different historical periods. The rich tapestry that Eick is able to create brings the experiences of those then young people to life as they experienced post *Brown v. Board* school reality in Baltimore, as their distance from *Brown* and the changing context of schooling over time impacted their perception of and relationship to their fellow students. She makes visible the understandings of the students based on many-faceted and overlapping "differences," especially class, race, ethnicity, and gender. Since I was also trying to understand how the participants in Fort Wayne's desegregation struggle—students, teachers, and administrators—interpreted the mandate of *Brown*, Eick's paper is important to me.

While Eick's research will be valuable for exploring oral histories in new ways, I am still concerned with the relationship of desegregation to the broader political economy, a relationship that is difficult to document. Nancy Beadie's approach to political economy, though not in the area of desegregation, has interested me as a possible model. In her 2007 HES presidential address she used what seemed to me to be traditional research methods in a meticulous, yet imaginative way that tied her results to the political economy, though it wasn't a Marxist interpretation.[11] She documented the developments and support for

[11]Nancy Beadie, "Education and the Creation of Capital: Or What I have Learned From following the Money," *The History of Education Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (February 2008):

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academies in New York to the changing needs of emerging industrial capitalism and the role of social capital. As she "followed the money," she theorized about the different ways the forces of capitalism mediated the relationship of schooling to the economy and the state. Most importantly, she placed the work of other educational historians, historians of American history, economists, and political economists, under the broad umbrella of the theory she was developing.

The landmark *Brown v. Board* (1954) decision was challenged on June 28, 2007, when the U.S. Supreme Court declared in a 5-4 decision that race-based school assignments, as practiced in two voluntary racial balance plans, were illegal.[12] James D. Anderson's historical research, presented to the Supreme Court before the decision, shows that the Court misread the historical precedents for race-conscious interpretations of the Constitution. Anderson called for understanding "the historical and sociological context in which school desegregation and affirmative action cases arise ...."[13] His call encourages me to seek a theoretical framework for interpreting my study of desegregation in Fort Wayne, a framework that could help examine the deepest roots of the historical and sociological, as well as the political and economic contexts, out of which the desegregation struggle in Fort Wayne arose.

Also instructive to me have been the works of urban/suburban historians like Matthew D. Lassiter, Thomas J. Sugrue, Kevin Michael Kruse, and Kenneth T. Jackson. As they look at suburbanization, they expose the political economy of urban/suburban development and how desegregation outgrew its urban parameters and broke into, or not, the suburbs.[14] They, and especially Lassiter, tie desegregation to broader political/economic developments in the metropolitan community,

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1–29. Beadie builds on this analysis in *Education and the Creation of Capital in the Early American Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[12]*Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District no.1 et al.*, certiorari to the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit No. 05-908. Argued, 4 December 2006—Decided, 28 June 2007, together with No. 05-915, *Meredith, Custodial Parent and Next Friend of McDonald v. Jefferson County (Ky.) Bd. of Ed. et al.*, on certiorari to the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit. 551 U.S., 28 June 2007.

[13]James D. Anderson, "Race-Conscious Educational Policies versus a "Color-Blind Constitution": A Historical Perspective," *Educational Researcher* 36, no. 5 (June/July 2007): 249–257. For the historical research done by Anderson and other historians involved in the *Parents* and *Meredith* cases, see *Brief of Historians as* Amici Curiae *in Support of Respondents* (2007). The *Brief* can be downloaded at: http://www.scotusblog.com/archives/Historians.pdf

[14]Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Kevin Michael Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue, eds., *The New Suburban History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006); Kevin Michael Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, eds., *Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (Oxford:

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and view those developments as typical of cities both in the South and in the North. Jack Dougherty's recent work on desegregation has led him to look at housing patterns and the role realtors and developers have had in propelling what has often been viewed as white flight.[15] At the annual meeting of the HES in October 2009, a session entitled, "Neighborhoods, Schools, and the National Myth of De Facto Segregation," highlighted new research that builds on an analysis of *de facto* segregation as a myth.[16] Thus, a growing group of historians are finding new dimensions of social class, and connections between race and class, as they look to the political/economic roots of change and, at the same time, deconstruct myths about how racial divisions in schools are perpetuated. This research opens the possibility of building an understanding of desegregation based on political economic theory.

In my desegregation paper, I asked questions that fit somewhat into the postmodernist lens, questions about the identity of Fort Wayne in its class and race consciousness during a time of its peak economic development in the 1970s, before the beginning of deindustrialization in the 1980s. I presented oral histories that I thought "told their own story," that is, the story of desegregation in Fort Wayne from the perspectives of people who participated in the struggle. I wrote a subsequent paper on desegregation in Fort Wayne and presented it, also, at HES. While I didn't use postcolonialism, I ran into the same challenge of integrating oral histories into a broader interpretive framework. I had thought that these voices from the past, each from different positions in relationship to desegregation, would be like the blind men and the elephant, each man sharing his perspective, and together painting a picture of the elephant—here desegregation. The participants voices would, thus, show the many varied interpretations of this controversial policy, that is, how it had lived and continued to live in the minds of the participants. Through their memories I expected to show the legacy of the desegregation process in Fort Wayne, interpretations supported by the public record and developments in

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Oxford University Press, 2009); Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008).

[15]Jack Dougherty, "The Rise of 'Shopping for Schools' in Suburbia," paper presented at the History of Education Society Annual Meeting, Cleveland, OH, 25–28 October 2007.

[16]The papers presented in the session were: Ansley Erickson, Columbia University, "Using Schools to Define Neighborhoods in Nashville, Tennessee"; Andrew Highsmith, University of Michigan, "Magic Lines of Jim Crow: Neighborhood Schools and the Mythology of Northern Racial Innocence in Flint, Michigan"; Karen Benjamin, St. Xavier University, "Suburbanizing Jim Crow: The Impact of School Policy on Residential Segregation." Jack Dougherty, Trinity College, chaired the session; Thomas Sugrue, University of Pennsylvania, was discussant.

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the emerging, deindustrializing economy. Intersectionality theory, which Eick introduces so well, could clearly have helped me with this paper. The first paper was critiqued because I used theory; the second seemed to me unfocused because I did not. Thus, my journey to seek clarification about the use of theory in historical research continued.

The AERA session when Tamura, Eick, and Coloma spoke, was for me the right topic at the right moment in my own intellectual history. They brought up for public debate the very questions that I had been dealing with. I share Tamura's experience with her colleagues, especially the necessity for educational historians to be able to converse with and learn from nonhistorians. I share her interest in trying to explore new theories and be open to them. Eick and Coloma give beautifully articulated examples of using a particular theory to guide one's historical research; they share how they came to use these theories and how the theories challenge traditional social history in new ways. As I see it, these theories allow historians to ask different questions and bring new perspective to old questions. They enrich traditional ways of doing history and they challenge me to reexamine my own theoretical perspectives. I find that I am split in my approach to educational history; the Foucauldian beckons, yet the political economy framework does more so, though perhaps it's time for me to rethink that, too. As I work toward resolving these theoretical questions, I thank Tamura, Eick, and Coloma for initiating this very valuable discussion.

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