

Agential Schooling

“Where Dreams Come To Die”

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“SHIT, SCHOOL IS WHERE DREAMS COME TO DIE,” a statement from Samantha, a Latinx female student, who was joking with her classmates before the start of their 9th grade Ethnic Studies class at the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year. I paused in that moment, thinking how Samantha’s statement was often true for many students, particularly students of color. Samantha’s joke, an agent, started a four-year project of wondering and wandering with a high school Ethnic Studies program. Long after Samantha’s statement about schooling, I continued to ponder the question: why is it that schools are often places of domination where dreams come to die? Even with all of the progressive and radical interventions (e.g., Ethnic Studies, multicultural studies, Black Studies, democratic educational endeavors, youth participatory action research, etc.), schooling is still a driving force in many schools around the nation.

Schooling is a term often mobilized to illustrate how schools are spaces used for social regulation and reproduction, while also reinforcing problematic forms of racial, gendered, and classed domination (Anyon, 1981; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Patel, 2016; Vaught, 2017). Schooling has been envisioned as effects or outcomes of economic structures via Marxist analysis, racial domination via critical race theory, and complicated entanglements between individuals, discourses, and institutions via poststructuralism. While they have been helpful to our understanding, such scholarship has not treated schooling as a nonhuman agent, or as being. That is, much of the focus has been on actions of individuals rather than the entanglement and co-constitution of the various actors operating in schools. Beyond the presence of humans, there are nonhuman and discursive actors that need to be accounted for within schooling spaces. It is not just human actors, but also nonhuman agents that are entangled with and co-constituting phenomena.

This piece, a posthumanist analysis of schooling that is a component of a larger four-year entanglement, puts forward a complex accounting of schooling that decenters the human and acknowledges those agents—schooling discourses, clipboards, policies, handouts, etc.—that often go unacknowledged in purely humanist framings. This is a shift away from dualism and linearity to a repositioning of educational phenomena as entanglements of multiplicities, situatedness (e.g., politics, power, material flows, etc.), becomings, and the more-than-human world. A posthumanist framing of schooling, what I label *agential schooling*, accounts for schooling as an agent rather

than solely positioning it as an outcome or effect. In what follows, I discuss literature on schooling, focused on a brief accounting of effects. I then discuss the context and methodology used within the four-year project. I transition to articulating the apparatuses that support agential schooling, then move to discuss two examples further accounting for the multiplicities entangled within an agential schooling framing. I end with a diffractive analysis of the two intra-active phenomena.

Schooling – A Brief Accounting of Effects

Schooling is a form of domination that has been historically accounted for in relation to racial, economic, and gendered dynamics. These are not the only forms of domination present within schools, but they are driving forces in our society and schools. What follows is a brief accounting of the literature on these forms of domination within schools.

Race

The United States is a settler colonial nation, something rarely acknowledged in schools; schools often provide narratives of the U.S. as a linear progression towards the development of a just society (Patel, 2019; Salvio & Taubman, 2020). The erasure of the violence of settler colonialism and reframing of the national narrative as a liberal progression illustrates how schools often center Eurocentric onto-epistemologies that dehumanize, delegitimize, and erase people of color. There is a racial contract “between those categorized as white over the nonwhites, who are thus the objects rather than the subject of the agreement” (Mills, 1999, p. 12). Whites are privileged, and people of color are exploited for their lands, bodies, and resources and denied access to opportunities (Mills, 1999). Leonardo (2013) coined the term, “educational racial contract,” expanding upon the racial contract, illustrating racial oppression in schools where “minority children lie outside of this learning paradigm because all the dehumanizing machinations of schools have failed to bring them in line. They have not shed their subperson status, thus better to define them as substudents” (p. 608). Curricular violences often frame Black individuals as one-dimensional (e.g., slaves) or in deficit framings (Neal & Dunn, 2021). Schools are “spaces ... which function to terrorize students of color” (Love, 2019, p. 13). Within schools, students of color are often dehumanized, overly policed, and depicted as deviant.

Furthermore, when it comes to racial domination, schools have been positioned as sites of suffering (Dumas, 2014), anti-Blackness (Dumas, 2016), spirit murder (Love, 2016), dehumanization (Irizarry & Brown, 2014), deculturalization (Spring, 2016), and dispossession (Vaught, 2017). We must remember we live in the afterlife of slavery (see Hartman, 2007) and reside within a larger climate/weather of anti-Blackness (Sharpe, 2016). This climate/weather is especially prevalent in the current educational discourse around anti-CRT legislation, which can be seen throughout the United States.

Gender

Other key aspects of regulation are forms of gender and sexual oppression in schools. Youth are constantly “bullied, harassed, and victimized in schools as a result of their perceived

sexual identity or gender expression” (Abreu et al., 2016, p. 325). Students of color are also punished disproportionately. For example, Black girls in every state in the United States “are more than twice as likely to be suspended from school as White girls” (Love, 2019, p. 5). Schools reinscribe patriarchal, racial, gendered, and sexual oppression. There are other forms of oppression that are important to consider when thinking about schooling but are outside of the scope of this project (e.g., ableism, the deculturalization of immigrant youth beyond Latinx students, etc.).

Sexism manifests within schools via entanglements between adults and students, student-to-student, popular media, or familial engagements that influence students’ academic dispossessions (Leaper & Spears, 2014). Teachers can play a role as some may hold hostile views of students. For example, African American girls are often stereotyped as “aggressive, loud, rude, sexual ... violent, and crime prone” (Lopez & Nuño, 2016, p. 30). Girls of color labeled as “at-risk” often are “viewed by educators and schools as misfits, dangerous or unwanted bodies” (Hines-Datiri, 2017, p. 33). Students of color are more likely than their white counterparts to be identified as having a learning disability (Stearns & Glennie, 2006). These stereotypes lead to detrimental learning outcomes for students of color.

Biased educators, school practices, policies, and policing oppress girls of color (Hines-Datiri, 2017). Girls of color are suspended at higher rates (Hines-Datiri, 2017), over identified in special education (Wun, 2016), and frequently punished for “subjectivity defined behaviors” (Murphy et al., 2013, p. 586); Black girls are often viewed as disruptive or defiant (Morris, 2016). Gender bias reinforces white, hetero-patriarchal ways of being.

Economic

Beyond racial domination and patriarchal ways of knowing and being, exploitative capitalism also influences schools. Jean Anyon (1981) illustrated the connection between social class and school knowledge. Working class students are not taught their histories but often positioned as deficits; middle-class students are taught to consume, reproducing capitalist ideologies of production and consumption, and professional/elite schools teach their students the history of the elite (Anyon, 1981; Bertrand, 2019). Anyon’s work demonstrated that one’s social position heavily influences their school experience. Bowles and Gintis (1976) articulated the idea that schooling works in service of capitalist economic reproduction; they asserted, “that major aspects of educational organization replicate the relationships of dominance and subordinancy in the economic sphere” (p. 125). Key components of twentieth century industrial capitalism, “efficiency, productivity, standardization, interchangeability ... discipline, attention, scheduling, conformity, hierarchical administration, the separation of knowing and doing ... were discovered and crafted in the workplace and then transported to society ... institutionalized in schools” (Zuboff, 2019, p. 411). For example, just as workers often lack control over their labor and feel a sense of alienation due to this, so too do students lack control over the curriculum and content in school. Schools with large populations of working-class students and students of color are often overcrowded and have more unqualified teachers compared to their affluent white counterparts (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2004). Neoliberal “technoscientific authority” and “data driven instruction” undermine local communities and their abilities to “shape and govern the education of their children” (Henderson & Hursh, 2014, p. 177). These moves limit and subvert democratic education.

Agential schooling builds upon, and is in conversation with, discussions of schooling like those exploring Marxist framings of schooling as working in service of capitalist exploitation/economic reproduction (Bowles & Gintis, 1976), gender domination (Leaper & Spears, 2014), and those examining schooling and racialization as demonstrated by Spring's (2016) deculturalization, Valenzuela's (1999) subtractive schooling, and Vaught's (2017) dispossession. While they have been helpful to our understanding, such scholarship has not treated schooling as a nonhuman agent. The posthumanist accounting shared here makes two distinct cuts that expand and build upon earlier scholarship. First, it positions schooling as an agent, as protean, rather than as an effect or outcome that is mostly driven by human actors. This framing expands our analytical apparatuses by accounting for agents that often go unacknowledged in traditional humanist qualitative research. Second, there is an expanded analysis of agents (e.g., inclusions of nonhuman and discursive actors) and how those agents come to be entangled and co-constitutive.

Methodological Entanglements

As stated, this posthumanist entanglement is a component of a larger project that explored four years of embedded work within an Ethnic Studies high school program. I examined schooling through a posthumanist lens to better understand the intra-actions between humans, nonhumans, and discourses in a public high school. Intra-action refers to the way that the agents—human, nonhuman, and discursive—are co-constitutive (Barad, 2007). A posthumanist framing of schooling—agential schooling—demonstrates how schooling is protean and shifts as we seek to understand and challenge it. To shed light on this issue of examining agential schooling, the following research question is taken up: What are the apparatuses supporting schooling, and how does schooling operate as a nonhuman agent in a public high school, Vantage High (pseudonym)?

I utilized a case study of one high school, Vantage High, to study agential schooling. This western Massachusetts high school had 1,500 students; roughly 80% of the student population is Latinx (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2018). Within the four years of research, I worked with and studied an Ethnic Studies youth participatory action research (YPAR) professional learning community, a 9th grade Ethnic Studies course, an 11th grade Ethnic Studies course, and afterschool YPAR programming across three years. For this project, my data is primarily pulled from the 11th grade classroom, B7, which included 15 students, one teacher, myself as the researcher/participant, and a plethora of nonhuman and discursive agents.

Using ethnographic methods, I pulled from Hong's (2011) layered ethnography, being attentive to my relationships with the agents (human, nonhuman, and discursive), while also paying attention to what happened in the various spaces. Critical ethnography emphasizes a particular attuning to how power and domination operates (Madison, 2011). Engaging posthumanism as a mode of inquiry afforded me the possibility to decenter the human and account for the agency of the more-than-human world (Ross, 2021). As Barad (2007) asserts, "the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through their intra-action" (p. 33). Furthermore, Jackson and Mazzei (2012) indicated that "discourse and matter are understood to be mutually constituted in the production of knowing" (p. 115). As Rosiek (2019) notes, intra-action "is not primarily a means of discovering the nature of objects, but is a process of entanglement in which two agents are mutually co-constituted" (p. 79). Agential realism afforded me the possibility to account for intra-actions, non-human agency, and the more-than-human world.

I utilized diffraction to explore patterns of interference and read material through one another. Diffraction stresses “reading insights through rather than against each other to make evident the always-already entanglement of specific ideas” (Barad, 2017, p. 64). Differences matter, and in particular, entanglements (both a focus on those included and those excluded) come to matter when there are intra-actions; “diffraction is a matter of differential entanglements ... reconfiguring connections” (Barad, 2007, p. 381). Dixon-Román (2017) furthers this by asserting that diffraction “focuses on the nature or effect of relational and connected differences” (p. 69). The intra-actions and differential entanglements create something new.

This work illustrates the methodological interplay/entangling of ethnographic methods (e.g., participation observations and fieldwork), interviews, and Baradian (2007) agential realism. Barad’s intra-action is utilized to account for the entanglement and co-constitutive role of humans (e.g., students, teachers, researcher, administrators, etc.), nonhumans (clipboards, desks, handouts, etc.), and discursive agents (e.g., schooling, policies, racism, etc.). Diffraction allowed for reading insights through one another rather than against each other, helping to explore how difference was produced via patterns of interference.

Apparatuses Supporting Agential Schooling

Within the larger four-year entanglement, I analyzed how various apparatuses—policy, curriculum, hierarchical relations, adultism, prescriptive entanglements, discipline, and punishment—supported agential schooling. Apparatus, here, references an agent that works in service and supports another agent. For example, educational policies have often worked in service of perpetuating social regulation (see Dumas, 2016; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

First, the curriculum. There are variations of curriculum based upon ideas surrounding what is intended to be taught, what is actually taught, the learning that occurred, and the hidden curriculum (the implicit lessons produced) (Rosiek & Kinslow, 2016). The hidden curriculum is one of schooling’s most effective modes of domination as it obscures domination, normalizing oppression (Wozolek, 2020).

Similarly, within schools and classrooms there are hierarchical relationships between administrators, teachers, and students. Youth are often seen as “either dangerous or vulnerable” (Kirshner, 2015, p. 3) or positioned as property of the state, “citizens-in-the-making or citizens-in-waiting” (Vaught, 2017, p. 113). These hierarchical relationships are built off of adultism, the assumptions that those who are older have more knowledge, skills, and abilities (DeJong & Love, 2015). Younger individuals should abide by and passively accept the information given to them within these hierarchical relations (see Table 1; also see Albright, 2023), what Freire (1970) labeled as banking education.

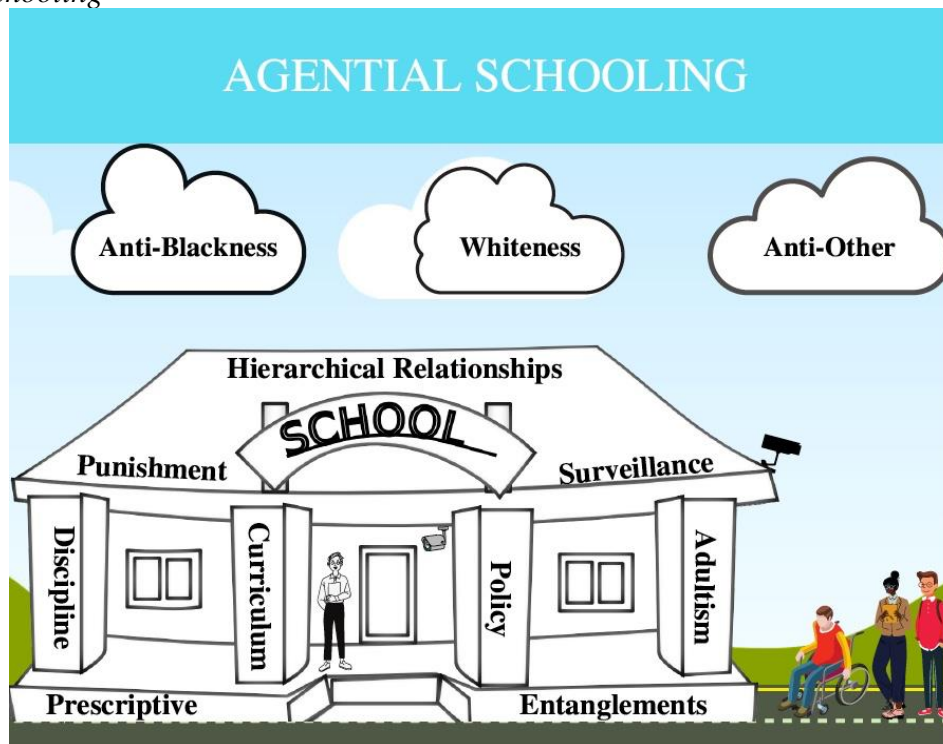
Adding to this, schooling also operates through prescriptive entanglements. For example, many traditional classrooms have prescriptive curricular entanglements with warm-up activities (e.g., do-nows), followed by a variation of “students will be able to” (followed with a verb of analyze, synthesize, etc.), and the class ending with some version of an exit ticket where students demonstrate mastery of the learning objective.

Table 1
Problematic Hierarchical Relationships

The Teacher...	The Student...
Teaches	Is taught
Disciplines	Is disciplined
Has knowledge	Needs knowledge
Talks	Listens
Chooses activities, curriculum, class material, etc.,	Has the illusion of meaningful choice

Many practices within schools are prescriptive, not allowing for the unpredictability of learning (see Patel, 2016, 2019). Students are then rewarded or punished based upon compliance, mastery, etc. For example: Can a student silently listen as a teacher lectures? Can a student follow a specific academic writing structure or follow the formulaic steps of a math problem? Punishment and rewards structures can be internalized; the self becomes the regulator. Foucault (1995) demonstrates that discipline's power resides in hierarchical observations, normalizing judgments, and examinations. These apparatuses emerge and play different roles within different entanglements based upon the large assemblage and intra-actions occurring within the given phenomenon. Figure 1 demonstrates a graphic illustration of the various apparatuses along with the larger climate or weather of anti-Blackness, Whiteness, and anti-Other that operated within Vantage High (see Sharpe, 2016). A further analysis of these apparatuses, an agential cut, is a part of another project outside the scope of this current piece.

Figure 1
Agential Schooling



In the following section, I provide examples of schooling intra-actions and account for the more-than-human agency of schooling.

Nonhuman Agency: Classrooms, Clipboards, and Administrative Observations

The following two intra-actions illustrate the entanglements of human, nonhuman, and discursive agents and apparatuses and demonstrate the nonhuman agency of schooling I encountered at Vantage High. These two examples, agential cuts, are also diffractively read through one another to further demonstrate schooling's agency.

Reproducing Hierarchical Schooling

Various schooling entanglements emerged within B7. Students in B7 often vocalized their detestation of hierarchical relationships between teachers and students, the lecturing, and lack of collaboration in classrooms. However, when afforded the space to create an exclusively student-driven classroom, they reproduced the problematic components of schooling they rallied against.

Danielle, the teacher, walked into B7 one morning and stated, "Hey, you all remember we are presenting our work this weekend, right?" The students responded, "Yes." Danielle then replied, "Great, you all create the PowerPoint agenda, and I will be back near the end of class so you all can catch me up." Danielle told the students that I was in the room and that I should be treated like a any other member of the learning community; it was up to the students. The only ask of the day was that there would be a PowerPoint agenda created for Saturday's event. Danielle later told me that she did this to see how/what the students would do with the autonomy and no teacher constraining their actions. As soon as Danielle left, the students almost immediately went to reproducing a hierarchical classroom.

Stacey and Luis, two active students in the class and larger Ethnic Studies community in the school, immediately stood up and walked to the front of the classroom and started to ask the students questions about what they wanted to do. There was no conversation about how the class would proceed nor an appointing of Stacey or Luis as leaders. They took this task upon themselves. This action was met with a variety of responses. Maria and Samantha withdrew from the activities and talked amongst themselves for the remainder of the class. In a later conversation, both Maria and Samantha stated that they felt frustrated that Stacey and Luis took control of the class without input from their peers on the process, and because of that they withdrew. Samantha stated, "It was fine that they got up there, because somebody needed to, but she [Stacey] wasn't really trying to include everybody." While Samantha noted there should be some inclusion of everyone's voice, she also stated that someone needed to take control. Here, Samantha relied upon a notion of needing hierarchical relationships within the space. There needed to be a leader. Ben and Joseph pulled away from the class activity and talked amongst themselves about basketball. The remainder of the class stayed in their seats and directed their attention to Stacey and Luis.

Stacey took up the authoritarian teacher role as she asked students questions and then wrote her interpretation of their statements on the whiteboard. Shawn, being a member of Luis and Stacey's usual group, came closer to the board and listened to what Luis and Stacey had to say. He followed their lead and did as was directed. Victoria attempted to speak, but the other members of the class were talking amongst themselves loudly, and she could not be heard. Luis asked the

students to abide by the classroom norms of having one individual speak at a time and being attentive to that person's contribution. The majority of students stopped speaking. A few just lowered their voices.

For the most part, the students engaged in a passive manner. Stacey and Luis guided the class. Two students, Kelly and Juliana, came to the whiteboard and added to the potential agenda. After getting most of the agenda completed, Stacey asked the class a question about how they might divide the talking points. Sofia responded, but Stacey did not understand Sofia's comment and asked her to come to the board to draw out what she was saying. Sofia tensed up, looked around the room, and as her face grew red she stated, "No." During this intra-action there was a tension surrounding speaking publicly in front of the class and also about being "right." However, the students were attempting to engage in a dialogue, but the pressure of schooling reinforced notions of correct and incorrect, mastery, even when they were just discussing ideas of what to do. Sofia later stated that there was too much attention and pressure on her at that moment.

Throughout the class time, Stacey was asking for students to contribute as Luis was circulating amongst the groups seeking their input. The students eventually started to engage with the process more, and most of them contributed to the task at hand. However, Stacey got frustrated with the students not engaging with the activity and started to be short with the other students. Stacey ultimately sat down and crossed her arms stating that she was done. The rest of the class remained quiet for a minute or two, with everyone looking around. Finally, Luis took up the activity and finished the task before Danielle came back to the classroom.

This specific class session initially left me puzzled. The students reproduced the very thing that they often enthusiastically spoke about resisting. First, there was the hierarchical reproduction of school as Stacey and Luis took on the role of teacher. This was interesting as Stacey and Luis were the most vocal supporters of Ethnic Studies and avidly critiqued hierarchical schooling. However, not all students engaged with this schooling activity. Samantha and Maria never participated in the class's activities. Initially, this could be seen as defiant or withdrawn behavior, or it could be imagined as students resisting a problematic schooling intra-action. Ben and Joseph stated they withdrew simply because they were not that into the activity. However, the rest of the class did not challenge the hierarchical relationship but participated as if Stacey and Luis replaced Danielle.

Beyond the hierarchical relationship, there was also a prescriptive engagement as Stacey and Luis were guiding the conversation while students were responding to those questions. This was not collaborative, but rather directed by Stacey and Luis. With Stacey and Luis standing at the board while the rest of the students were sitting, there was also the intra-action between active and passive, surveilling and surveilled. When given the freedom to disrupt schooling, the students reproduced the very thing they passionately advocated against throughout the year. This moment represents an entanglement of the onto-epistemological knowing in being and being in knowing of schooling. The students intra-acted with the discourse of schooling, the oppressive onto-episteme of schooling, the physical setup of the classroom lending itself towards hierarchy with the desks being oriented towards the whiteboard, the whiteboard, the agenda on the board, and the goal of producing the agenda for the Saturday activity.

Administrators, Clipboards, and Class Observations

An administrator walked into B7. The room shifted. Students sat-up, closed their arms, tightened their legs, and stared at her. I tilted my computer screen to be closer to my chest, even though I know she was not there to observe me. The student directly in front of me, Joseph, sat-up and said, “damn.” Another student, Samantha, feverishly started to tap her foot, crossed her arms, and appeared to be quite agitated. (Fieldnote, 3-4-20)

A second intra-active moment, a school administrator, with her clipboard in hand, visited Danielle’s classroom. This administrator visited the class as students were working in groups discussing the significance of student voice in school. The classroom energy shifted as soon as the administrator walked in with her clipboard. The students sat up, their body language changed, and the space became quieter. Students appeared guarded, some crossed their arms, and others leaned over their work. There was a performance, and as Gabriel asserted, “When you like a teacher, yeah, make them look good in a sense. When they [teachers] are in front of their bosses, we understand that.” Rather than having more open conversations, the students were leaning into their groups. As an observer and researcher, I even sat up and pulled my computer screen closer to my chest. This was my immediate response. The administrator and the clipboard evoked a physical and emotional response. I felt surveilled even though I had no relation to this administrator’s work. As a former teacher, I had been observed multiple times and was aware of teacher observation protocols. This entanglement took me to Foucault’s (1995) notions of surveillance and hierarchical observations while also invoking a memory of my conversation with the 2017-2018 professional learning community where the Ethnic Studies teachers talked about the administrator’s use of the teacher “checklist” when they walked into classrooms with their clipboards. Similarly, it evoked memories of my own teacher observations and the anxiety produced when administrators walked around my classroom with their clipboards.

In this specific intra-action in Danielle’s classroom, the tension was compounded as Samantha claimed, “It was tense because usually she’s [the administrator] the one that only comes in when she’s heard something about somebody ... and when you have already got into altercations with staff, its going to be like, ‘why are you here?’” Samantha further stated, “I think she [the administrator] went into the class with good intentions, but mix that with the fact that she’s already had interactions with the students that weren’t positive. It was just a little weird.” Danielle later acknowledged that it also shifted her disposition, “I felt like I had to perform for her.”

Within my group, Samantha anxiously asserted, “I don’t even know why she is here.” Joseph built upon this statement by shifting his body language and raising his voice as he stated, “She invaded our space and ruined the vibe ... she just tries to get people in trouble.” Samantha and Joseph then continued a dialogue on how she is always just out watching students. The administrator stood throughout her time in the class while the students were seated. I tensed up as the administrator walked towards our group. She stood above us for one to two minutes, which was visibly uncomfortable for the group. Samantha crossed her arms over her chest and Joseph leaned over his writing. As the administrator walked away, Samantha shook her head, and her leg was visibly shaking as she stated, “My anxiety is on max.” Beyond Samantha, Danielle noted, “It made the room uncomfortable and tense. It made it a little hard for me to focus because it made it kind of like we couldn’t fully share our ideas.” As noted, this administrator was constantly writing on her clipboard throughout the class time. The clipboard was an agent and played a role within the intra-action and feelings of being surveilled. As Samantha asserted, “I don’t think anybody

likes to be under pressure.” For Samantha, the clipboard made her feel like she was being surveilled. As Gabriel noted, “it makes you feel like they are observing you and your behavior.” The clipboard had thing-power; “thing-power gestures toward the strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness.” (Bennett, 2010, p. xvi). The clipboard exceeded its status as an object and had agency affecting the students (Bennett, 2010).

The administrator left Danielle the following note, “Great to see the collaboration here with students and community members. Authentic work, hearing almost every student’s voice. Great engagement. Let’s talk more.” While this was a positive space and experience for the administrator, it was quite the opposite for the rest of the people in B7. Samantha was visibly angry for the remainder of the class, and she shut down. The day after the administrator visited the class, Samantha handed me a sheet of paper that stated:

Often times school administrators will come in and observe teachers. There is no doubt that there are some students who have been targeted by administrators during a regular school day. On a day-to-day basis you have students that may just be going through it. Other students just might feel that school just isn’t for them. Whatever the case may be, most students have been in a situation where they’ve felt targeted or picked out; if you’ve ever been in this situation well then koodas to you because its never fun and almost never ends good for the student.

Now when you’re in class trying to focus on schoolwork and not everything else going on in life, and then the same administrator that you were just feeling targeted by is sitting in your class watching you it, can feel really awkward. For some it may even feel like they are only focusing on you.

Samantha was not alone in feeling surveilled. Danielle stated:

I definitely felt something. There was a shift. Their [students’] body language changed instantly. Some students were openly agitated. It felt as if they were feeling, “this is our space, why are you here?”... Now for me, when she came into class, I shifted a little bit. She came in with a clipboard. There’s just the presence of an adult who doesn’t belong to the community, popping into the class unannounced that shifts the dynamic.

I later debriefed this class session with Danielle, and she felt that a component of the heightened anxiety was the administrator’s interactions with students in the hall. As Danielle indicated, “all day long she is caught up in the nitty-gritty of being in the hallway telling kids to take their hats and hoods off she is constantly nagging students without building relationships.” Danielle also noted this issue of the clipboard and how she felt it was associated with being critiqued. The clipboard, along with the administrator, evoked a sense of uneasiness and impacted Danielle’s way of being, along with the other participants in B7.

Entangling Entanglements

Various entanglements and responses to schooling emerge when we read the experiences in B7 through one another. For example, when the administrator entered B7, Danielle and Gabriel, to some extent, perform, playing their perceived roles within the space. Gabriel noted his performance was a tool for making his teacher look good, a resistance tool. Joseph, Samantha, and I all felt anxiety and retreated from the activity. We shut down rather than performing our roles within schooling. For me, this was due to my own experiences of feeling surveilled as a past teacher. For Samantha and Joseph, this was tied to previous experiences with the administrator and oppression of schooling within Vantage.

During this moment, there were a variety of bodies intra-acting. There was what Joseph labeled, a “space invader,” the administrator who came into Danielle’s classroom. This administrator came into the classroom to observe Danielle’s teaching, and she left positive feedback, but for many of the students, that did not feel like her purpose. The students had noted how they felt she was there to surveil them. Danielle stated, “administrators are always walking around the building with clipboards assessing the students and teachers.” For Danielle, the clipboard produced a notion of not only being surveilled, but also assessed. The clipboard played a role in the tension of B7. The clipboard, in conversation with the discourse of schooling and surveillance, illustrated a moment of thing-power. The clipboard was an agent intra-acting with the humans, nonhuman bodies, and discourses. This intra-action illustrates the significant negative impact surveillance can have on the minds and bodies of individuals, while also illustrating the role that various nonhuman agents can play in such intra-actions. I also recognize that the conditions for this thing-power (Bennett, 2010) to come to existence are in relation to schooling’s driving onto-epistemic focus on surveillance, discipline, and compliance, which create the conditions to make this intra-action possible.

Discipline, surveillance, compliance, and hierarchical relations emerged differently when there was no administrator or adult teacher in B7. Even without Danielle or the administrator in B7, hierarchical relations and prescriptive entanglements emerged within the space, even as the youth were actively working in opposition to traditional schooling processes and practices. However, depending upon one’s framing, in both instances, participants may be viewed as withdrawn, defiant, etc., or as resisting the violence of the oppressive onto-episteme of schooling. For example, Samantha withdrawing from both activities, as she stated, was not about being a defiant student, but was a resistance to oppression. Within the classroom observation intra-action, surveillance and hierarchical relations played out via the administrator observing Danielle and the youth in the space, while the participants also internally surveilled themselves, either resisting the prescriptive hierarchical entanglement (e.g., Samantha being withdrawn) or participating in the process for a variety of reasons. For example, as Gabriel stated, he performed to make his teacher look good because he knew how observations went. For him, this was about playing a role, performing as a way to resist schooling. For myself, I internally surveilled myself and brought my computer close to me. Like the students, classroom observations and clipboards played a role influencing my ways of knowing and being. On the other hand, when students were in charge of B7, they also internally surveilled themselves and reproduced traditional hierarchical and prescriptive ways of knowing and being in the classroom.

Reading these intra-actions through one another, we see that various nonhuman bodies operate differently according to the differing entanglements. However, each of these intra-actions illustrates how schooling operates as a nonhuman agent influencing the various agents. During

both examples, hierarchical relationships and surveillance—both internal and external—heavily influenced the ways of knowing and being of the participants. Students, when provided the opportunity and freedom to create a learning community of their choice, reproduced the very hierarchical schooling process they often rallied against. An administrative observation meant to provide Danielle feedback produced an outcome counter to that of the administrator’s intention. The administrator saw the space as a positive learning environment, but her entanglement with hierarchical relations, surveillance, discourses of schooling, students, and the clipboard produced a space that did not feel safe for students. Even with the human participants having positive intentions, schooling played a role as an agent influencing these entanglements, reproducing a violent onto-episteme of domination.

Towards Widening our Frames – Agential Schooling

In each of these intra-active entanglements there were human (students, teachers, researcher, administrators), nonhuman (desks, clipboards, agendas, whiteboards), and discursive agents (schooling discourses, surveillance discourses, adultist/hierarchical discourses) at play, co-constituting the various agents and entanglements. Schooling, as the aforementioned intra-actions demonstrate, is not just a passive effect or outcome, but is an agent. Positioning schooling as an agent, via enactments with posthumanism, affords us the possibility to develop more textured and intricate frames of analysis by widening our analytic frames and being able to recognize the thing-power (Bennett, 2010) of agents, like clipboards, to broader explorations of intra-active entanglements between human, nonhuman, and discursive agents (Barad, 2007).

Thinking methodologically about attuning to schooling as a nonhuman agent demands that we expand our analytical frames to not only look at human, or discursive, or nonhuman agents, but also recognize how those agents are entangled and co-constitutive. As researchers, we need to explore questions that take into account the complexity of intra-active phenomena. For example, it is not just about a clipboard as passive or active agent, but also how that clipboard is entangled with discourses (e.g., surveillance, schooling, adultism, etc.) and human (student, teacher, administrator) agents. What emerges from those co-constitutive curricular entanglements? We must attune to how schooling, as an agent, is playing a role in the various entanglements.

In reading these diffractive moments through one another, illustrates how the onto-epistemology of schooling works on the minds and bodies of individuals. The very ways of being and knowing for students, teachers, and administrators are saturated in the problematic and dominating force of agential schooling. Schooling is not just the effects or outcomes of economic structures or racial domination, but rather is an active agent influencing and shaping our ways of knowing and being.

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