

The Day After: An Ethnodrama About Teachers' Decision-Making Amid Silencing School Policies

Qualitative Inquiry

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Abstract

This ethnodrama, based on hundreds of interviews with educators around the United States, takes readers into a school on the day after a national tragedy. Grounded in the theory of Days After Pedagogy, the characters portray the nuances and complexities of educators' decision-making on days after, especially when working amid silencing school policies. A post-script includes theory, methods, and implications.

Keywords

ethnodrama, qualitative research and education, qualitative research, methodologies, social justice

Script

Cast

MAYA TURNER: Black woman in her twenties, middle school English teacher

MAN/MR. JOYNER: White man in his fifties, middle school principal

PATRICK RIGGERIO: White man in his forties, middle school math teacher

KATIE O'DONOVAN: White woman in her thirties, middle school social studies teacher

TAMARA NEWSOME: Black woman in her late forties, middle school English teacher

JESS ROSA: Latinx woman in her early thirties, middle school music teacher

DANIEL HARRIS: Black man in his late fifties, middle school science teacher

CAMILLE: Black thirteen-year-old girl

LUCY: Asian thirteen-year-old girl

MEI: Asian thirteen-year-old girl

Scene I: The Day of

The stage is completely dark, with a black backdrop and single microphone at stage left. Just as the spotlight comes on to illuminate the microphone, an iPhone message alert “dings” and a white man, late 50s, dressed in a suit and tie, walks to the mic.

MAN: Dear Staff. You've likely heard what happened earlier today or you are just finding out. You may have questions about what to do tomorrow when your students arrive, and I wanted to provide some clarity on the school's stance.

At stage right, back, a soft light comes on, revealing an adult woman [MAYA] sitting at a desk and looking at a laptop screen. Her face is illuminated by the glow of the computer. She pauses for a beat, then puts her head in her hands. The stage light goes out and only the computer remains glowing.

MAN: As a reminder, teachers are not to engage in any political speech in their classrooms.

At center back, another soft light comes on, this time revealing an adult man [PATRICK] standing still. He mimes lunging, as if preparing for a run, grabbing his ankle to stretch. Then he pulls a phone out of his running shorts and stares at it for a moment. After a brief pause, he sits on the ground, knees up and rests his elbows on his knees. He puts his head

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down, heaving a big sigh. The stage light goes out and only the phone screen remains glowing.

MAN: It is our job to remain neutral at all times and be entirely unbiased. We should present facts, not opinions.

At stage right, front, a third soft light comes on, this time revealing an adult woman [KATIE] standing at a counter, as if in a kitchen. She is quietly packing a child's lunchbox with snacks and a water bottle. All of a sudden, she stands straight up and turns to the side. We see a small television screen illuminated on the counter next to her. She feels around the counter, frantically looking for and finally, after several beats, finding a remote. She presses a button as if to adjust the volume and leans closer to the screen. She puts one hand over her mouth. The stage light goes out and only the television screen remains glowing.

MAN: Tomorrow, you should continue to follow the standards, benchmarks, and guidelines as planned. Should your students have questions, you can direct them to speak with their families after school. Sincerely, Mr. Joyner

Mr. Joyner walks off stage left, dress shoe heels clicking on the stage as he walks quickly and "with a purpose." The stage remains quiet with just the three glowing lights from the laptop, phone, and television for a beat. Then the soft spotlights come on again and we see all three characters simultaneously adjusting their clothes, standing up, taking a deep breath, brushing away tears, and nodding curtly. They are steeling themselves for what is ahead. They are ready, or trying to be. Lights out.

Interlude

The curtain rises and there is a giant black chalkboard on stage, front and center.

[Music] starts playing and headlines flash across the board, each one in a different position and font. They become layered over each other as the music continues to play. The headlines appear faster and faster and the music gets louder and louder. It is a cacophony of words and sounds.

*Massacre Shatters School in Colorado
U.S. Attacked
U.S. Strikes Iraq
Help Us, Please: Katrina's Toll, Likely Thousands
An American Tragedy: Trayvon Killer Arrested, Charged Not Guilty!
Massacres Spreading in Rwanda
America Makes History
Obama Wins
I Can't Breathe*

*Historic Ruling for Gay Rights: We Do
Love Wins
Got Him! U.S. Kills Bin Laden
Health care Overhaul Becomes the Law of the Land
26 Killed in Grade School Massacre
Our Hearts Are Broken: 10 Minutes of Horror
Stunning Trump Win
Immigration Order Sows Chaos
Deportations to Begin
Please, I Can't Breathe
Assault on Democracy, Mob Storms U.S. Capitol
Horror in Uvalde
They were Funny, Smart, and Loved*

Scene 2: The Copy Room, The Day After

Lights up and in the background is the sound of a photocopier spitting out copies. Maya, a young Black woman, early 20s, is leaning against a table and miming putting worksheets into the copier. She has a lanyard around her neck with an ID badge attached. The photocopier makes catching and whirring sounds, as if paper is stuck. Maya sighs, bends down, and pretends to open and close a copier drawer. You hear the sound of it slamming.

MAYA: Damnit.

A figure appears behind Maya. It is Tamara, a Black woman in her late 40s. She watches Maya quietly.

MAYA: (while shuffling papers and miming pressing buttons, heaving a big sigh) For God's sake. (bangs on the table)

TAMARA: (from behind) Everything okay, Maya?

MAYA: This stupid thing is broken again. Today, of all days.

TAMARA: Something feels right about that. Everything's broken now.

MAYA: (rueful laugh) Yeah, tell me about it. I'm feeling pretty broken, too.

TAMARA: (putting her hand on Maya's shoulder and tapping her own ID badge on the pretend copier) Me too, hun, me too.

The copier beeps encouragingly and then the sound of papers dispensing correctly again. Maya sighs and leans back against the table, looking at Tamara.

MAYA: Did you watch the video?

TAMARA: What?! No! Don't tell me you did!

MAYA: I mean, I didn't want to, but I did.

TAMARA: (exasperated) Why?! Why would you do that to yourself?!

MAYA: Because the kids will have watched it, right? They're gonna be asking about it in (pauses, looks at her phone screen) 15 minutes. You know they will.

TAMARA: (resigned) I know, I know. . . You figured out what you're going to say yet?

MAYA: I was hoping you'd tell me what to do. I'm still new at this.

TAMARA: You're going to get a lot of practice. Unfortunately.

MAYA: Add this to the list of things they don't teach you in your teacher prep program. Let's spend another class talking about Piaget and Vgotsky, but God forbid we talk about police brutality and racial violence.

TAMARA: Heck, even if they did teach you, did you see Mr. Joyner's email last night?

MAYA: Yeah, I saw it. Do you think people are going to listen to him? Like actually NOT talk about it with the kids? What are we supposed to say when they ask about it? Does he really want us to lie?

PATRICK: Depends on if you think staying silent is lying.

Tamara and Maya turn around and see Patrick, a white man in his 40s, has entered the copy room. He mimes getting mail from a mail box and then reaches down to a box under the table and pulls out a big bag of math manipulatives.

PATRICK: I know what I think. I think that there's no fucking way the kids are going to be able to focus on anything today anyway, so why are we pretending they'll be able to?

MAYA: So what are you going to do?

PATRICK: (holds up bag) I'm going to put these things on the desks and then close the door and then ask them what they want to do today. Same thing I do every time this happens.

TAMARA: And then what?

PATRICK: Good question. I'm still learning this group so I don't know what they'll want to do. (shrugs)

TAMARA: Yeah, this is a terrible thing for the second week of school.

PATRICK: You remember that one year when there was a school shooting during the first week of school? Or the big hurricane?

TAMARA: (nodding) And then Michael Brown.

PATRICK: Yep. (sighs) We've been at this a long time, Tamara.

MAYA: Do you ever get used to it? How do you know when you should do something and when you shouldn't? Like how do you know when an event is big enough or important enough to talk about? Or how—

Maya's questions are interrupted by a voice over the intercom. It is the same voice from the previous scene. Mr.

Joyner, the principal, is speaking over the intercom. It crackles a bit and then:

MR. JOYNER: Attention teachers, good morning. This is a reminder to check your email before your students arrive. Please remember to check your email before your students arrive. There is an important message in there from me for those of you who didn't get it last night. I know that today might be a hard day (coughs awkwardly, stalling) for some of you, so I hope you have a good day. Thank you.

Tamara and Maya look at each other and roll their eyes.

TAMARA: (putting her arm around Maya) Come on, we've still got 15 minutes. Let's go get some of that awful coffee and figure out a plan for today.

Tamara starts to walk with Maya and Patrick off stage left. The copier makes the broken noises again, and Maya looks back. She pauses for a moment, listening to the paper stuck in the drawer again. She tosses the pile of worksheets in a recycling bin and walks out.

Interlude

Tamara stands alone on the stage under the spotlight. The black chalkboard is behind her. [Music] plays and several headlines (same as from the first interlude) flash on the screen behind her. They are slower this time.

Massacre Shatters School in Colorado
U.S. Attacked
U.S. Strikes Iraq
Help Us, Please: Katrina's Toll, Likely Thousands
An American Tragedy: Trayvon Killer Arrested, Charged Not Guilty!
Massacres Spreading in Rwanda
America Makes History
Obama Wins

TAMARA: You know, I've been doing this for. . . (counts on her fingers for a beat). . . going on 28 years now. I started here right out of college, so young and so hopeful. I had no idea what I was getting into. But I love it, of course I do. Why else would I still be here if I didn't? No pension is worth this much stress, let me tell you that right now. (laughs) And in those 28 years, do you know how many principals I've seen come through this building? This building that is falling down around me more and more every year? Take a guess. You'll never guess. (pauses) FIFTEEN! FIFTEEN! Fifteen principals in 28 years. Can you believe that? I think the longest one lasted for 3 years before they transferred him somewhere else. Of

course they did because he was someone who actually got it. He understood what we needed and what the kids needed and how to push back against all those policies they keep making without knowing a damn thing about what happens in the classroom. So he was the longest. The shortest was six weeks. (whistles) Phew. She was a trip, that one. She tried to install even more metal detectors after the first week. And then she tried to say it was to keep the kids safe. I mean, come on lady. They already felt like they were going into prison everyday. That's a great way to make kids want to learn, right? That was the year of 9/11. We had been in school for one week. One week. And then the world just. . . collapsed. Maya said it this morning. They don't prepare you for things like that. How could they? And this lady (shakes head and rolls eyes, clicking tongue), she tried to tell us not to talk about it with the kids. 'It'll just make them more worried,' she said. "School is for learning. Carry on as planned," she said. What was she thinking?! I was teaching seventh grade that year. Of *course* they knew what was going on. Of *course* they had questions. Half of my students were Muslim that year, too. I was so worried about them. (pauses) It's still emotional to talk about. It's one of the days I remember most in all of my years of teaching, that day, September 12. It was my first day after.

Scene 3: The Teachers' Lounge

Lights up and at center stage there is a small brown table with office chairs scattered around it. There is a pile of papers in the middle of the table and several outdated magazines. At stage right, there is a small side table with an old coffee pot on it. It's making percolating noises. Also on the table are a few paper cups in a stack and a small container with sugar packets. A white woman in her 30s, the woman from scene 1 who was packing the kids' school lunches, is standing in front of the coffee pot, watching it. She looks up when Patrick, Maya, and Tamara walk in.

KATIE: Hey.

PATRICK: Hey, how's it going?

KATIE: I mean. . .

PATRICK: Yeah. . . Same.

KATIE: (turning to Tamara) I don't have any good words, Tamara. I'm sorry. Again.

TAMARA: I know.

KATIE: I don't know how you send your son and daughter out of the house everyday.

TAMARA: Me either honestly.

Maya is lingering quietly behind the three others, fiddling with her phone.

TAMARA: (gestures to her) You know Maya, right? She's the new one on the English team with me. Maya, this is Katie, the team leader for social studies.

KATIE: (sticking her hand out and shaking Maya's hand) Hi Maya. It's nice to meet you. I'm sorry we haven't gotten a chance to talk much. It's just so busy at the beginning of the year.

MAYA: Oh it's cool, no worries. It's a busy time.

PATRICK: Katie would actually be a good one to talk about those questions you were just asking.

KATIE: What questions were those?

The group proceeds to pour coffee from the now-filled pot into paper cups as they continue the conversation. Once they have their cup, they take a seat at the table.

PATRICK: You know, easy things like you can answer in fifteen minutes (laughs ruefully) like how you decide when to talk about current events in your classes and what types of things you do. (turns again to Maya) Katie is the chair of our DEI committee.

MAYA: Oh! I didn't even know there was one. I don't remember hearing about that at orientation this year.

KATIE: (drinks from cup and makes a disgusted face at the bad tasting coffee, adds more sugar from the packets on the table) We kind of fly under the radar as much as possible, to be honest. It's more like word of mouth so that no one gets angry at what we're doing. We have to be better about that, about speaking up to people outside of the group. I'll add you to the email list for meetings if you want.

MAYA: That would be great. Maybe we could talk about what do on days like today. I'm still not sure what I can and can't say to my students.

KATIE: What do you want to say to them?

Maya casts a furtive glance at Tamara. Tamara notices and nods, confirming it is okay for Maya to be honest. Maya takes a deep breath. Lights dim on this part of the stage and we see Maya gesturing as if continuing the conversation.

Lights go up on stage left. Mr. Joyner is standing facing backstage. A young 30-something Latinx woman bustles in from offstage, looking down at her phone and throwing her backpack over her shoulder. She runs right into Mr. Joyner.

JESS: Oh! (stepping back and adjusting her backpack, stammering) I'm so sorry,

Mr. Joyner! I didn't see you there.

MR. JOYNER: (stepping back and narrowing his eyes at her) I see that, Ms. Rosa.

JESS: Sorry, just in a bit of a hurry this morning.

MR. JOYNER: I can see that, too, Ms. Rosa. Your reporting time was (checks his watch) 4 minutes ago.

JESS: Sorry again. It's been a bit of a hectic day getting the kids off to school and, you know, with the news and all. . . (trails off)

MR. JOYNER: Did you see my email?

JESS: (still flustered) Ummm, no, I haven't had a chance to check my email yet today.

MR. JOYNER: Make sure you check that before your homeroom today, Ms. Rosa. Especially since last time we had those complaints about your music lesson.

JESS: (standing up straighter, worry in her voice) What do you mean?

MR. JOYNER: Last time when you did that lesson about the music of protests, remember that?

JESS: Well, yeah, but those complaints weren't from any students or their families. (more confidence and frustration in her voice now) That was just those random people at the school board meeting who only knew about it because the students tweeted about it because they really liked it.

MR. JOYNER: Exactly. So we're not going to have to worry about that again, Ms. Rosa. You'll see in my email that I remind you that we're not to talk about anything political in our classes.

JESS: (taking a deep breath) Mr. Joyner, with all due respect, how is it political to talk about protests against children being killed at school? That's not about politics. That's about humanity.

MR. JOYNER: We don't have time to get into this now, Ms. Rosa. We've already talked about this and my position hasn't changed in the last year. Nor has the district's. So I suggest you report to your morning duty and read my email and then go on with your planned lesson for today. We're done here.

Mr. Joyner walks off stage left, leaving a bewildered and angry Jess in his wake. She shakes her head and walks hurriedly to center stage, to the teacher's lounge. Lights go back up on the table with Maya, Patrick, Tamara, and Katie seated at the chairs. They are in the middle of a conversation.

KATIE: It's so hard because we know what we should do but then the district always has these ridiculous (gestures air quotes) "statements" and "policies" about it. And it's so stupid because it's like, don't bring it up with the kids, don't talk to them about it. But they're already talking about it. They're talking about it in the hallways; they're talking about it in the cafeteria. God knows they're talking about it on social media.

The group looks up as Jess bustles in. She flops down in a chair and tosses her backpack on the floor.

JESS: (looking at Maya) So I don't really know you, so don't judge me for what I'm about to say but, holy shit. That guy is so freakin' out of touch! What the hell is wrong with him?!

Maya's eyes get wide, and the other three all nod in agreement. It's clear who Jess is talking about.

JESS: He just talked *again* about my lesson from last year. I'm just so pissed because it was, like, the best week we'd ever had, even though it was super traumatizing at the beginning. But they channeled all of that into this beautiful work and they were so proud of themselves, and then it all went to shit when that parent spoke at the board meeting.

MAYA: (worry in her voice) Oh no, what happened?

JESS: Just what I said. It was after Parkland and our students were so scared. *Again*. So we talked about how we could channel that anger and that fear into something to make change. (voice catching) And it was totally their idea, to see how music could change the world. We did these awesome reviews of protest music from a bunch of different eras, and even different countries, and then they wrote their own songs and presented it to other teachers' classes. It was just beautiful.

TAMARA: It really was. My students loved it so much. And then, you remember Jess, then we even did protest poetry to go along with it? *Jess nods*.

KATIE: But then it became this big thing. Some of the kids shared their songs on social media, and some parent got really mad. They don't even send their kids here, of course, but they still talked at the school board meeting, about indoctrination-this and politick-ing-that. It didn't make any sense.

MAYA: That's really shocking to me. I'd feel like it would actually be easier to teach about school shootings than days like today where you'd be teaching about Black Lives Matter and police violence. Like what's the other side of school shootings? Suddenly all lives *don't* matter?

JESS: (gesturing in assent) Yes! That's what I was saying! Now don't get me wrong, I teach about all those other things, too, but you'd think, if there was one thing that everyone could agree on as something we *need* to talk about the day after it happens, it would be school violence.

PATRICK: For me, I used to be like that, like where I didn't want to talk to students about *any* of it, you know. It wasn't because I didn't think I should, but it was just so much. Especially on those days after school shootings. I'm not a therapist. I'm not equipped for the emotional reactions that students might have. There was a lot of fear about messing up, about not knowing exactly what to say to make it better.

TAMARA: Why'd you think you had to make it better?
 PATRICK: Well yeah, that's the thing. You don't have to make it better, right? You just have to listen and help process. You don't need to be a therapist, not exactly. Hell, you don't even need to know all the details of what happened in any given incident.

JESS: We never know it all.

PATRICK: Right. But I didn't know that, not when I started anyway. And there was no one else to talk to. I felt like I was the only one trying to figure it out.

TAMARA: I was here, Patrick. (laughs) I've always been here.

PATRICK: You were. You *are*. I wasn't alone, even though I thought I was.

The "door" opens and another teacher walks into the room and heads straight for the coffee pot. Daniel is a Black man in his late fifties.

DANIEL: Hey guys.

The other teachers all say hi, hello, what's up, as Daniel pours himself a cup of coffee, and continue the conversation as he adds creamer and sugar to his cup.

JESS: I felt like that when I started, too. Like I was a total outsider and I had to do everything on my own. I was afraid to even talk about elections or Black Lives Matter or Me Too, or even climate change, with other teachers, let alone with my students.

TAMARA: What do you think, Daniel?

DANIEL: (turning to the group and sighing) I think we've talked about this before, Tamara. I've got kids at home and I gotta bring home a paycheck. I'm not going to get into it.

JESS: But that's on purpose, don't you think? It's on purpose that we're all made to think we could get fired for even mentioning it, or to feel like we have to do it all alone, that we don't have a community. Because it's easier to make decisions that way and not have to be questioned about it. If you feel like you're the only one, you don't want to make trouble.

DANIEL: Yeah, like I said, I'm not getting into it. We shouldn't even be talking like this. Y'all have a good day. (exits)

All are quiet for a moment after he leaves.

KATIE: Alright, well that was depressing and now he bell's about to ring. Maya, what do you need for today?

MAYA: I honestly don't even know. I know that I want to talk about it with my students. I do have first period planning, thankfully, so as long as I'm not assigned to sub in another class, I have a little bit of time to figure it out.

KATIE: Oh, perfect! I have first period planning, too. Why don't we meet after homeroom and talk about what you can do? I have some resources that I can share with you.

MAYA: Really?! Oh my gosh, thank you! That would be so great.

TAMARA: I teach first period or else I'd be here with you, too, Maya. You know you're not alone in this. I think I'm going to do the activity that I did after the election a couple of years ago, you know the one about what they think, what they feel, and what they want to know? It's kind of like a modified KWL chart, but for after traumatic events. They really responded well to that because it gave them time to think and process silently and then in small groups.

JESS: They're really lucky to have you, Tamara. I'm glad they can talk about it with you.

TAMARA: Me too. And I gotta remember to take care of myself, too. It's a lot since it impacts me too, directly, as a Black woman and a Black mother to Black children. This isn't just something in the news; this is my *life*. And it's our students' lives, so we have to open up these conversations for them. If not us, then who? And you know, they also tell me that they're glad when other teachers talk about it, too, teachers who aren't Black. It helps them know who they can trust—and who they can't. It helps me, too. That way I'm not the only one having these conversations about race and white supremacy.

Bell rings. Mr. Joyner's voice echoes over the intercom again.

MR. JOYNER: Teachers, please report to your classrooms or duty stations. And remember to check your email before you engage with any students this morning. Have a nice day.

All laugh at the absurdity of yet another reminder to check their email.

PATRICK: Oh for fucks sake, enough with the email, man!

JESS: (laughing and then sighing, with resignation) Gotta laugh to keep from crying.

Scene 3: A Hallway

On stage are two makeshift doorways with a set of lockers between them. At one doorway, Maya stands, leaning against the doorway and fiddling with the ID badge around her neck. At the other doorway is Daniel. He has a clipboard in his hands. Audio of students talking and lockers slamming plays overhead. "Pull up those pants," we hear an adult voice say. "Let's get moving," another voice says. "A hoodie again, Mr. Smith? You know better," we hear in

Mr. Joyner's voice. Three girls—Camille, Lucy, and Mei—walk to the row of lockers between Maya and Daniel. They are wearing backpacks and start putting books in their lockers as they talk with each other.

MEI: Did you watch it?

LUCY: Yeah.

CAMILLE: Yeah.

MEI: Me too. I mean, obviously. It was everywhere. Like there was no way to *not* see it.

CAMILLE: I didn't tell my mom I watched it though. Did you?

LUCY: Oh god no! (giggles). They'd be so pissed.

Maya leans closer to the conversation. She is clearly listening to the girls talk.

MEI: So whattya think? Who's gonna mention it?

CAMILLE: (rolling her eyes) I'm betting. . . no one.

LUCY: No one?! I think at least one.

MEI: (shrugging) I was gonna say everybody.

CAMILLE: Mei, Mei, Mei. You're so naive. (giggles, joking but also not)

MEI: I am not! It's just that they have to do it *some* time, right? We're in eighth grade now. It's different. We're older.

CAMILLE: I guess. I do think age and (makes air quotes gesture) "maturity" has a lot to do with what they think we can handle.

LUCY: My parents, too. They don't even mention it. If I didn't have TikTok, I'd be soooo clueless.

Bell rings.

DANIEL: (yells into the hallway) Alright, folks, head to homeroom please. Don't belate.

CAMILLE: You can get me some hot Cheetos at lunch when I win.

LUCY: Wait, win what?

CAMILLE: Win the bet! I bet that not *one* teacher mentions it all morning. (sticks out her hand toward Lucy and Mei)

Lights out.

Interlude

Katie stands alone on the stage under the spotlight. The black chalkboard is behind her. [Music] plays and several headlines (same as from the first interlude) flash on the screen behind her. They are slower this time.

I Can't Breathe

Historic Ruling for Gay Rights: We Do

Love Wins

Got Him! U.S. Kills Bin Laden

Health care Overhaul Becomes the Law of the Land

26 Killed in Grade School Massacre

Our Hearts Are Broken: 10 Minutes of Horror

KATIE: No one wanted to do it, so I said I would. I'm not sure I'm the best person to be in charge, but I also didn't want the burden to fall on any of my colleagues of color if they didn't want to be the chair, ya know? It's like, *should* a white woman be the head of the diversity, equity, and inclusion staff committee? Maybe not? I go around and around about it all the time. What good is it doing anyway, if new teachers don't even know about us? (sighs) I shouldn't have said that we want to fly under the radar to Maya. As soon as I said it, I was like, "uggghhh, Katie! (throws hands up) What a really white thing to say." But I'm glad Maya asked those questions because maybe this is a way that our committee really could make a difference. Ignoring the things that happen in the world, especially when they're related to racism, that's just making everything worse. If we're not talking about the racist things that happen in the world, then I really feel like the policies are racist, too. What's that quote by Freire? "Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral." But all these emails! My god, the emails. And the *policies* and the *mandates* and the comments in meetings are just absurd. Like last year, that thing with Jess was just a huge, devastating blow to everyone in our school who cares about equity and inclusion. It's so insulting that community members don't trust us as teachers to actually know what we're doing. Do they really think we just walk into a classroom and decide, 'oh, I'm going to talk about a white supremacist rally today? Oh, I'm just going to bring up the most contentious election of all time without planning ahead?' I mean, *come on*. Give us a little credit, even if you won't give us higher salaries. Now, I should say, I didn't always feel like this. I know I didn't because I couldn't sleep that night after Trayvon Martin because I didn't do or say something to my students, my students of color who *also* ate skittles at lunch every day, who also wore hoodies. I was just too nervous and afraid, afraid they wouldn't want to talk with me about it, afraid I'd get in trouble with the administrators. I see now that that fear was really just me protecting my own white self. It was me being fragile and emotional and letting those emotions get in the way of doing what I needed to do. But then there was Michael Brown, and that's when a student just came right out and asked me, "Miss, why aren't you talking to us about what happened yesterday? Do you not care about it?" (shivers, wraps her arms herself) I

remember that so vividly, where he was sitting, what he was wearing. It's one of those things you never forget, at least I hope I won't because it helps keep me motivated even when the day after seems really hard. I would never, ever, *ever* want my students to think I don't care about it, care about them. So, if I get fired, I get fired, (shrugs) but at least I could leave knowing that my students knew I loved them.

Scene 4: A Classroom During Planning Period

Maya and Katie are sitting at two students' desks, with the desks tilted to face each other. There are two more unused desks behind them. They each have a laptop in front of them and a pile of papers.

MAYA: Okay, so I've got all the news sources linked in one document, so they could look them up on their phones if they want to. Would that work?

KATIE: Yeah, I think so. That way you can be sure that all students have the same information to go from for the discussion.

MAYA: And if they *don't* want to talk about it. . . ? (voice trails off, with a question in her voice)

KATIE: Then I don't think they have to talk about it. You could have a few different areas for them to go in the room, or they could even go to the counseling office if they wanted. But they could do some coloring, or some quiet writing, or just do the regular assignment for the day, too. That's something that my students said they appreciated last year, the choice for when and how to engage in a discussion.

MAYA: Yeah that makes sense. (quietly) I'm worried I might cry.

KATIE: That's okay! You're asking them to be vulnerable, so I think it's okay if you're vulnerable, too. You don't have to have all the answers. You can just be human together.

There is a knock overhead and Camille appears on stage left, leaning in as if against a door jamb, peeking into the classroom. Maya and Katie look up.

KATIE: (surprise in her voice) Camille! Hi.

Camille walks over to Katie and stands next to her desk. Katie stands up and hugs her. Camille hugs back.

CAMILLE: (quietly) Hi. I'm supposed to be in science, but I just couldn't be there anymore.

Katie nods and waits for Camille to continue.

CAMILLE: I mean, you know Mr. Harris. He barely said good morning and then handed out the pre-test for the new unit. I tried to focus, but it was a lot. Someone even asked him if that's all we were going to do today, and he was like, "Yeah, what else would we do?"

Katie nods again and turns to Maya.

KATIE: Camille, this is Ms. Turner. She's new this year, teaching English. Ms. Turner, this is Camille. She was in my class last year and she's about to run for President of the Black Student Union.

MAYA: Oh, that's cool. There wasn't one of those when I was in high school.

CAMILLE: (brightening a bit) Yeah! We worked really hard to get it approved last year. But it was worth it. We've got a lot of new members now, too.

KATIE: Camille, Ms. Turner and I were actually just talking about what to do with our classes today. Do you feel like sitting and talking with us?

CAMILLE: (looking over her shoulder) I mean, Mr. Harris is probably going to want me to go back to class.

KATIE: I'll write you a pass if you want to stay.

CAMILLE: (laughs and pulls up a desk from stage right) Ooooh yeah, let's do that.

KATIE: So (pauses for a beat) how are you feeling?

CAMILLE: Angry. . . sad. . . frustrated. . . numb. *Katie and Maya nod.*

CAMILLE: And it's like, why isn't Mr. Harris even saying anything? That just makes me even madder. I don't exactly *want* to talk about it with *him*. I don't know if we can trust him like that. But I want him to at least *acknowledge* it, you know?

MAYA: Have your teachers ever acknowledged things like this in the past?

CAMILLE: No, they really haven't. I mean, except for Ms. O'Donovan here. (gestures to Katie) A good example is Breonna Taylor. She was killed in March 2020, right? But I only heard about it in May after George Floyd was killed, when the Black Lives Matter movement really took off. I had heard of Black Lives Matter before, but I didn't know much about it until last summer. It was never mentioned in school. And neither was Ahmaud Arbury, Tamir Rice, or Trayvon Martin.

MAYA: So how did you learn about it then?

CAMILLE: How we learn about *everything*: on Instagram. "Justice for George Floyd" was one of the first posts I remember seeing, along with the video. But in school, we were never told *not* to talk about their deaths, but we were never invited *to* talk about

them either. I really should *not* be learning more on TikTok than in my classes.

MAYA: Why do you think your teachers didn't talk about it?

CAMILLE: Cause they think we're not ready.

KATIE: They think you're still too young, you mean?

CAMILLE: Yeah. But what I don't understand is what we aren't ready *for*. Like we watched the Raid on Capitol Hill, live, but we never have discussions about the killings of Black people. So why are we able to watch the storming of the U.S. Capitol and talk about it later in classes, but we never talk about racially charged issues?

KATIE: Good question.

MAYA: Do you think your teachers are just nervous to do it? Like maybe they don't think they know how?

CAMILLE: Well *we* don't know how either. If they don't teach their students, we *will* find out on our own. And that could be good, or it could be really bad.

MAYA: What do you mean really bad?

CAMILLE: I mean we'd learn on social media. But learning about racism, homophobia, and stuff just from social media can be dangerous. That's what Ms. O'Donovan talked to us about last year, right?

KATIE: I'm glad you remember that.

CAMILLE: Yeah, I do. I think we all remember it. Like there could be false Information or it could be (pauses, takes a deep breath) harmful. Like the video of George Floyd's killing. Or the one from last night. It's graphic. What if you're a kid and you see that? That could be scarring!

MAYA: I mean, yeah, it's scarring for adults, too.

CAMILLE: I dunno. (sighs) Maybe now Black Lives Matter is more widely accepted and teachers—white teachers—are more comfortable teaching about it.

KATIE: Another good point.

CAMILLE: I just feel like we keep waiting for people to realize that we can talk about it. That we want to talk about it. Our teachers. Our parents. But we've been waiting a long time. We've been *ready* a long time, you know?

MAYA: Maybe your teachers aren't ready either.

CAMILLE: But it's *literally* their job to be ready. (pauses) Isn't it? They're the adults. They're always saying that, right? 'I'm the teacher, you're the student. I'm in charge.' Well then. . . *be* in charge! *Be* the adult. Teach us.

Interlude

Maya stands alone on the stage under the spotlight. The black chalkboard is behind her. [Music] plays and several headlines (same as from the first interlude) flash on the screen behind her. They are slower this time.

*Stunning Trump Win
Immigration Order Sows Chaos
Deportations to Begin
Please, I Can't Breathe
Assault on Democracy, Mob Storms U.S. Capitol
Horror in Uvalde
They were Funny, Smart, and Loved*

MAYA: My biggest fear? Probably that someone won't like what I say and then they'll tell their parents. And then their parents will tell the principal. And then the principal will tell the superintendent. And then someone will post about it on social media. And then someone will talk about me at a school board meeting. And then there will be this, like, inquisition. And then I'll be fired. [pauses, deep breath] Okay, so I guess that's more than one fear. But they're all connected, you know? I've only heard about it on social media, until today when they were talking about what happened with Jess last year. I'll always be worried that they will complain about it, especially the white students. Because I can't *not* be a Black teacher when I'm talking about racial violence with them. Like I said, I'd feel safer talking about school shootings than police brutality. Both can be seen as partisan, even if that's not what it's actually about. Our students' lives are being threatened and then taken away [snaps] like that. So how can I ignore that? How can I let my fear get in the way of making sure they have a place to process what's happening in the world? But then there's all these people saying that talking about race and sexuality and Supreme Court decisions and elections and new laws—that's it all [makes air quotes] "indoctrination." Except here's the thing: it's only indoctrination if you don't agree with it. If you agree with it, then it's just. . . school. School the way it *could* be, the way it *should* be.

I've thought about this so much, like every time something else happened and my professor *didn't* talk about it. Every time I was in my student teaching and something happened and my cooperating teachers *didn't* talk about it. I had all these ideas, all these plans. I was going to be different. But now that I'm here, with my own classroom and my own students, it feels. . . different. It's a lot more pressure. That's not to excuse how much silence there was in my past, but I do feel like I understand a bit more about why teachers may have wrestled with the decision of what to do on days after. Ms. Kendall and Ms. Carson were the exceptions though. That was my senior year during the 2016 election, and they were my English and History teachers. They combined classes and talked with us the day after. Some of my classmates were crying. I *felt* like crying but was honestly just too

numb. Ms. Kendall and Ms. Carson were also both really upset and they didn't hide it. They didn't say the thing that so many teachers usually say. *[raises her voice as if imitating someone]* 'You shouldn't know who I voted for, you shouldn't know my politics. I'm not doing my job if you can tell.' (laughs) As if students don't know already! I knew *exactly* which of my teachers cared about things like Black Lives Matter and gay rights. And it wasn't just because they had bumper stickers or rainbow flags. I think those are good symbols so students know who they can trust, but it was more about how they responded to us, how they talked with us, and especially what they did on days after. So yeah, I knew that Ms. Kendall and Ms. Carson were going to be upset. But for them to say it, for them to say, "Look, this hurts me too, and part of the reason it hurts me is because I care about you, and it hurts you." That just really mattered to me. Because they made me feel like *I* mattered. That's how I want my students to remember—they don't have to remember specific lessons or specific books, but when they think back to these days, I just want them to remember that they *mattered*. . . to the world. . . to each other. . . to me.

Scene 5: A Classroom

Maya's back is to the audience as she writes on a moveable white board. As she writes, erases, and rewrites, audio of students changing classes and moving into the classroom plays overhead. She writes large enough for the audience to see: "Do Now: Get out last night's homework and—" She steps to the side and looks at it. She steps back and erases it with big sweeping motions. She rewrites: "Do Now: How are you feeling today? What do you know about what happened last night? What do you want to know or discuss in our community today?"

We hear lockers slamming, desks being dragged across the floor. A bell rings. The stage lights dim and the audio stops. The glowing light from the smartboard remains on. We see Maya adjust her clothes and take a step back. She takes a deep breath, her shoulders rising, and turns around to face the class (the audience). She looks straight out and takes another breath. She is steeling herself for what is ahead. She is ready, or trying to be.

MAYA: (confidently) Good morning.

Lights out.

Post-Script

I come to this research as a former teacher who experienced days after and now, as a teacher educator who seeks to

prepare future educators for how to work toward justice and equity in these critical moments. Over the last 4 years, I have developed a theory of Days After Pedagogy (DAP) as a result of talking with teachers from around the United States about how they make pedagogical decisions on days after, as well as what their pedagogy looks like. In particular, DAP is an asset-based pedagogy that centers perspectives of equity and justice in the days after major events, traumas, and tragedies at the local, state, national, or international level. The key components of DAP are (a) a commitment to justice and equity, (b) student-centered and humanizing interactions and spaces; (c) risk-taking; (d) adaptability and flexibility; (e) sociopolitical awareness; and (f) vulnerability. When teachers engage in this practice, they are also able to: (a) resist silence in the face of oppression; (b) refuse neutrality; (c) reclaim voice and agency for themselves and students; and (d) teach toward transformation. (A fuller exploration of DAP, as well as extended teachers' stories, can be found in [Dunn, 2021].)

What is an ethnodrama? Why is an ethnodrama appropriate for this data?

I am admittedly late in learning about ethnotheatre and ethnodrama. In looking for a creative, arts-based way to represent a large corpus of data about teaching on days after, I found ethnodrama to be the ideal method. Ethnodrama is "a written play script consisting of dramatized, significant selections of narrative collected from interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, journal entries, personal memories/experiences, and/or print and media artifacts" (Saldaña, 2005, p. 2). This script necessarily includes dialogue, which Saldaña (2010) explains, are mostly "'creative non-fiction' or plausibly truthful constructions, based on stories culled from interviews and fieldnotes of social action between multiple participants, similar to the short story or novel-length renderings of narrative inquiry" (p. 65).

When written in the field of education and educational research, ethnodramas elevate "pedagogical, sociological and political issues to heightened prominence" (Saldaña, 2010, p. 62). Quoting renowned artist and activist Augusto Boal, Sweet and Carlson (2018) draw more attention to the possibilities of ethnodrama:

Augusto Boal (1979) writes that theater "is considered to present always a vision of the world in transformation and therefore is inevitably political insofar as it shows the means of carrying out that transformation" (p. xiii). In this quotation, Boal asserts one of his central theses: At its core, performance opens space for new possibilities and uncovers means for creating new sociopolitical realities. (p. 190)

This is particularly relevant to this study, as I examined how teachers' decision-making on days after related to their

teaching contexts. In her ethnodrama about academic resisting the neoliberal university, Petersen (2009) writes that ethnodrama is “a useful way of vivifying the lived experience of policy reform and how it allows us analyse policy issues more generally” (p. 419). I hope the same is true for this piece; that an ethnodrama about teaching on days after vivifies teachers’ lived experiences in comparison to restrictive school policies that dictate what educators can and can’t say and do on days after.

In addition, I chose ethnodrama because of the experiences I have had leading professional development for pre- and in-service educators. In the 6 years leading up to writing this script, I have conducted well over 50 workshops. And in each of these sessions, educators were curious, committed, and engaged; they also had many questions about how to talk with their colleagues about days after and how to decide when to address moments in the classroom. I often explained that, perhaps frustratingly, there was no checklist for Days After Pedagogy. Instead, it was about making sense of a constellation of moments and experiences to decide how to take on the next day after. There is no one “right” way to teach on days after, and it is deeply important for educators to consider their own and their students’ positionalities in the process. In this way, ethnodrama, especially when performed, is a powerful fit because it

embraces the ineffable. It allows audiences to encounter multiple truths and provides space for them to draw their own conclusions about what they have experienced. The performance of data catalyzes the audience’s construction of meaning and encourages their active engagement so that the analysis of data continues well beyond the performance event itself. (Salvatore, 2020, p. 1046)

How was this ethnodrama constructed?

To craft this ethnodrama, I began by reading published ethnodramas and performance ethnographies, both within and outside of education, and watched recorded examples of ethnotheatre. Beyond the work of Saldaña and Salvatore, I also took inspiration from Petersen’s (2009) dramatic critique of the enterprise university; Ward Randolph and Weems’ (2010) script about how two African American women experience racism in higher education institutions; Foote and Bartell’s (2012) examination of mathematics teacher educators’ life stories; Davis’ (2014) work on students’ experiences transitioning into adult education; Sweet and Carlson’s (2018) work on a high school boy’s gender transition; O’Connell and Lynch’s (2020) script about Deaf interpreters’ and translators’ experiences in Ireland; and Creps’ (2020) performance ethnography about her work as a faculty director for arts-based education abroad programs for undergraduate students. I also found great resonance and inspiration

in the recorded ethnotheatre pieces from the Verbatim Performance Lab at New York University’s Steinhart’s Program in Educational Theater (2022).

I then read ethnodrama methods texts (Saldaña, 2005, 2010; Salvatore, 2020). Following their suggestions, I re-examined the data and decided who and what I wanted to put into conversation. I narrowed my focus to the official statements/policies that are often sent by districts and schools in the hours and days after a national trauma or tragedy in comparison to teachers’ and students’ voices that are often lost in policy debates. I crafted characters based on the more than one hundred teachers that I talked with over the last six years. Some of the characters are very closely aligned with a particular person, their speech patterns, and their personal histories and career trajectories. Others represent an archetype of a teacher’s decision-making on days after: the teacher who wants to do Days After Pedagogy but is nervous because of policies; the teacher wants to do it but doesn’t know how; the veteran teacher whose attitudes changed over time; the teacher who resists actively. These composite characters are crafted to illustrate the many ways that educators respond on days after. Ideally, these characters “establish a sense of community and acknowledge the collective wisdom of those who participated in the interviewing process” (Salvatore, 2020, p. 1077). Similarly, I wanted to contrast the teachers’ attitudes with those of administration. The words of the principal and his written email are verbatim from the data from one district; they do, however, echo a multitude of other district and school documents I have examined over the years.

After writing initial sketches of the main characters, I envisaged a plot structure that would allow them to come into conversation with each other, to “creat[e] realistic scenes from significant events the interviews reveal” (Sweet & Carlson, 2018, p. 191). Thus, we meet our characters on a day after at one middle school, in the moments before and after school begins, as teachers attempt to negotiate their personal feelings with their professional ideals. Drawing upon my own experience working in schools, I also added stage and set directions (broken copy machine, bad coffee in the teachers’ lounge, student coming in during planning period, etc.).

Throughout the writing process, I strove to make the dialogue feel as authentic as possible, following Salvatore’s (2020) suggestions for an “energized approach to data presentation”:

All multi-character scripting constructions rely on the ethnodramatist’s ability to emulate a conversational quality between the voices of the characters in the dialogue, what I refer to as *bounce*. . . The topic of the discussion bounces back and forth between characters, creating the illusion that they are in conversation with one another, sometimes seemingly agreeing or disagreeing with each other about the topic at hand, even though they were interviewed separately. (p. 1060)

Once a draft of the script was ready, I reached

the inevitable point in any scripting process when the only way to make progress is to hear the script spoken by actors to help identify which sections work well and which sections need additional editing and refining (Salvatore, 2020, p. 1078).

I organized a virtual, recorded, read-through with educators. Some attendees—all recognized with gratitude in the Acknowledgements of this piece—had been participants in the original study, while others knew of my work from professional development sessions. All had once been classroom teachers; at the time, they were either teacher educators, teaching artists, practicing PK-12 teachers, or district-wide DEI directors. We read through the script together and then discussed their responses and reactions. This debrief lasted 90 minutes and was organized around several structured questions. I asked them to focus on if the characters and plot felt real-to-life and authentic, if teachers could “feel” themselves in a similar situation, and if the characters’ voices were compelling. I also asked what was missing and what changes might need to be made. We discussed possible outlets for this piece, including publication in academic journals, a licensed script, a podcast, community performances, and more.

At that point, I went back to the data to glean more insights and find quotations to boost the characters who they felt needed more development. I edited the script to reflect the group’s suggestions and sent another revision to the participants for their final reactions.

What are the implications of this work?

Though the time does not often exist for this, I find that most educators genuinely desire an opportunity to dialogue about their decision-making and pedagogy. When I speak with teachers, it is always an emotionally-laden discussion about their own days after, both as students and teachers. Add to that the current sociopolitical context with increasing numbers of educational gag orders (PEN America, 2021) are stifling educators’ speech, and the environment is ripe for new ways to provide educators with a chance to talk with others and be supported in their struggle for equity and justice in the classroom.

This ethnodrama is one way “in” to those discussions. For example, this work could be used in pre-service teacher education as a way to encourage novice teachers to begin thinking about how they would approach future days after. It could also be used in in-service professional development. As one participant in the virtual reading said, “this script allows teachers to see and find themselves in the voices of the characters.” This work could also be used to facilitate development for higher education faculty both within and beyond teacher education, as faculty in all fields are also faced with their own possibilities and challenges of

speaking with their undergraduate or graduate students on days after. My hope is that this script can provide the impetus for longer discussions and a sharing of resources within and beyond PK-12 and university classrooms. Also as suggested by a virtual reading participant, this script could be used in community contexts to help educate the public about teaching and teachers’ decisions, to illustrate the complexity and nuance with which teachers approach their curriculum.

In the spirit of supporting dialogue, and in a nod to the format of a “talk back” in the theater where, after the show ends, the audience has an opportunity to speak with the actors, director, or playwright, I end this manuscript with some guiding questions. This is with the hope that readers may move toward feeling more like participants than observers and feel connected to the authentic experiences of teachers whose voices are shared here:

- In which characters do you see or hear yourself? Your colleagues? Your students?
- How do the interludes function as a way to understand the complexity of teaching on days after and its intersections with teachers’ identities?
- What are the benefits and challenges of days after pedagogy? What might be the possibilities and pitfalls?
- What is the impact of the parallelism in the script—the opening and closing scenes, for example, or the teachers’ versus the students’ discussion of days after?
- What do you see as the balance between making individual decisions on days after versus working with a collective?
- How do you think Maya arrived at her final decision? How will you arrive at yours on future days after?

Author’s Note

In the manuscript, readers will first find a scripted play, based on data from a research project with practicing teachers about their decision-making in the wake of current events and injustices. Following that, a post-script (this manuscript is organized following the models of Foote & Bartell, 2012, and Sweet & Carlson, 2018) describes more about the scholarly grounding for the work, as well as the methodology of crafting an ethnodrama. As you read, you are invited to imagine your own prior “days after”—as a student and a teacher—and consider the implications of both teaching on days after and of ethnodramatic research as a catalyst for social change.

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