



## Educators Must Be Activists: Advocating for Muslim Students

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**Abstract:** As educators interested in supporting linguistically and culturally diverse learners, we have had to view our roles in different ways since the presidential campaign and the election of Trump. In this article, two teacher educators and two in-service ESL teachers in the U.S. reflect on our various experiences working with Muslim students and preparing teachers to support Muslim students in the current socio-political context. We discuss these experiences with the goal of suggesting some priorities in teacher education. Ultimately, to prepare teachers to be effective teachers for Muslim students requires them to go beyond being culturally responsive to becoming advocates and activists. This advocacy and activism necessitates a push against the cultural norms of Whiteness that dominate U.S. teacher education.

**Keywords:** *Linguistically and culturally diverse learners; Teacher advocacy, Muslim students, Social justice teaching*

*The day of President Trump's inauguration, I projected a live video of the ceremony for five minutes before lunch. I told my students, "This is it." I watched my students watch the video; it gave me a really out of body feeling to have them look through me to the screen. Sometimes, when something really important is happening, you know at that very moment that it will forever be important. I was sickeningly aware of my privilege, and their bravery, and how very, very important it is for us to all be in a classroom together. This feeling has lingered, for me, ever since.*  
(Lauren Thoma)

*Being just an educator is not enough; at this time, educators must be activists.* (Megan Evangeliste)

### Introduction

In our work, we (Terri and Laura) use vignettes and case studies of educators grappling with the challenges of supporting Muslim students and their families in these troubling times. Many of our ideas come from our experiences in the field as educators, researchers, and teacher educators. While the seeds for this work were planted several years before we could have even imagined that Trump would become president, we regretfully acknowledge the urgency of its message today. For this paper, we invited two of our former students (preservice teachers) who are now classroom teachers (Megan and Lauren) as co-authors to share the realities of their daily lives working with predominantly Muslim refugee and immigrant

students. We often rely on research to drive our practice as teacher educators, but in fact, a lot of what we do comes from listening to practicing teachers about their daily lives and experiences in the classroom – the complexities of their daily work.

Both Megan and Lauren are English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers who work with predominantly refugee students in two public schools in different Midwestern cities in the US. Lauren teaches in a “new to country” ESL program within a public high school where the majority of her students are Muslim and many are Somali immigrants. Megan teaches in a K-5 school with a large population of ESL students from a variety of different backgrounds and is also the Family and Community Engagement Coordinator. They are exemplars because they embody the very best that we hope for in our preparation of social justice-oriented and culturally relevant educators. As ESL teachers, they both see their roles as going beyond helping their students acquire the English language, but also to advocate for them both in and out of the school.

In our roles as teacher educators (Terri and Laura), we have invested in preparing culturally relevant teachers ready to advocate successfully for their students. We bring our personal and professional identities and experiences into our interpretation of teaching stories. As members of diverse families and communities, we have both personally or had family who experienced what is to be the “Other” in school – and we have both experienced certain privileges that enabled us to be successful in our education and profession. We are, however, passionate about the education of all students, and are particularly concerned about the

success of Muslim children in the current socio-political climate.

Teaching stories are powerful tools in understanding how teachers’ personal and professional identities intersect in school (see e.g. Bell, 2002; Burman, 2003; Watson, 2007). Many scholars have documented practical applications for teachers’ storytelling, especially in concert with self-reflexive analysis. We understand storytelling as narrative constructions of identity through which teachers conceptualize diversity (Rodriguez & Polat, 2012; Laughter, 2010) and imagine themselves enacting practices intended to promote achievement for all students (Rodriguez, 2011; Rodriguez & Hallman, 2013; Burman, 2003; Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013 ).

In our discussion of these teaching stories, we note effective elements of social justice teaching practice so that we might learn from them in ways that inform teacher education. We believe in the power of teachers to make a difference in children’s lives. We also want to encourage teacher educators and classroom teachers to talk, tell stories, and learn from each other as they navigate the complexities of teaching Muslim refugee students. In the remainder of the paper, we share Laura and Megan’s teaching stories alongside commentary. We organize our conversations around social justice teaching themes. We intend to promote important dialogue given the continuing need to better understand how new teachers enact the practices espoused in their teacher education programs (see e.g. Sleeter, 2001).

## Pushing Up Against Whiteness

It is well understood that teacher education is marked by an “overwhelming presence of whiteness” (Sleeter, 2001). We use the term *pushing up against whiteness* as an act of counter-storytelling. Counter-storytelling is an essential tool within critical race theory (CRT), an analytic approach aimed toward untangling the complex racial ideologies undergirding teachers’ stories that resists dominant narratives and expresses social critique (Delgado, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Cross (2005) eloquently describes how “new racism” works to reinforce “the same ole’ oppression” in teacher education. New racism is an ideology that “objectifies, dehumanizes, and marginalizes others while ignoring whiteness, power, privilege, and racism” (p. 266). Even more recently, Perry (2017) calls out teacher educators for not only failing to recruit and prepare adequate numbers of teachers of color, but for giving white teachers a “hall pass” on racism. Throughout our careers as teachers and teacher educators, we have witnessed the unassailable sway of whiteness and the power it holds in the education system. In our current work focusing on supporting Muslim students and families, we have come to an even more complicated and nuanced understanding of whiteness and how it operates to racialize Muslim identities (Joshi, 2006). This view expands upon the narrow idea that “race” is physically embodied and associated with particular phenotypical features. Although religion has not traditionally been considered a racial category, we agree with scholars who link the processes of Islamophobia with the racialization of Muslims and claim this form of racism is an essential lens for understanding Muslim experiences (Garner & Selod, 2015).

Both Megan and Lauren teach us about the importance of pushing up against the whiteness prevalent in teacher education. While they identify as white women, they also embody and enact a critical consciousness characteristic of culturally relevant and socially just teachers. For instance, in talking about her awareness of her own privilege, Lauren talks about how she has taken education for granted, but her students have made multiple sacrifices for the same opportunities:

We can’t always change what we bring to class; sometimes circumstances are too large of a ship to turn fast. To my students, circumstances are no excuse to sit back and be idle. As a teacher and lifelong students, it’s obvious that I value education. However, if you asked me to trade my weekend time to attend class, I would give pause. If you asked me to trade my family, my home, my country, my language, my employment, my religion, my identity for a chance at education, there is no way I would consider. My students have considered it, and they choose education.

Similarly, Megan wonders “If I would be able to be as resilient as they?” She talks about students experiencing a heavy cognitive and emotional load every day in their attempt to acclimate to the school environment as they “rise to the standards and rigor of school in a typically short time.”

By recognizing their privilege, they also recognize the danger of educators holding deficit perspectives about diverse students. For instance, Lauren writes that it is important for educators “to exaggerate students’ natural talents and skills” in order to build confidence and pride in their identities and to acknowledge that students come in with rich experiences, perspectives, and passion. She warns us, “Just because some of their assets don’t look like the traditional assets we are taught to identify and told to value, doesn’t mean they

aren't incredible. I believe the biggest danger for any student is a teacher with a deficit perspective.”

From these reflections, we understand that teacher education programs should make great efforts to emphasize teachers' identities and how to evaluate their own privilege and stances as they play out in the contexts of different classrooms. In our own courses, we have assignments that directly target cultural relativity, cultural awareness, and biases, but often we get the impression that preservice teachers may not get the whole picture, or constrain their thinking to specific kinds of diversity, e.g. racial, ethnic, LGBT, etc. It is likely rare that the idea of a racialized religious identity has been addressed by many programs. However, since context changes constantly and the socio-political landscape can shift quickly, it is more important that teachers learn the tools of critical self-reflection. Teacher education programs should do the same. While it is easy to teach only to the competencies prescribed by States and accreditation bodies, we have to be flexible and be able to make quick changes to the curriculum offered to preservice teachers that reflect the most pressing issues of the time. We also have to be willing to educate ourselves and make ourselves uncomfortable, just as we expect from our students.

Another possibility is that teacher education should more actively recruit teachers with positive dispositions. The movement in teacher education recruitment for quite some time has been to recruit teachers that increase the diversity of the teaching force, and we whole-heartedly support these efforts. However, since structural impediments seem to be making these efforts slow in action, we should perhaps also focus on better screening the future teachers we

admit to programs. It may be difficult (although not impossible) to change strongly-held beliefs through coursework in teacher education programs, especially those that are negative towards diverse cultures and non-whiteness. Thus, instead of trying to help preservice teachers that have strongly-held deficit perspectives enact anti-bias pedagogies, it would be better to focus on candidates that are willing to reflect on their own biases and privilege and change them.

### **Community Embeddedness**

Community involvement is an important facet of teacher preparation. Community is a difficult term to define, though, and means much more than the geographic areas or neighborhoods that might physically surround schools. Rather, we see *community* as a set of habits, practices, beliefs, and social relations created between community members (Calderwood, 2000). Studies document the positive relationship between student outcomes and the presence of strong community partnerships (see e.g. Calderwood, 2000; Kohn, 1996). In order for such partnerships to flourish, schools must develop respectful and mutually beneficial relationships with families and other community members in ways that affirm diversity and distribute power (McLaren, 1998).

Experiences in community settings have often been “used as opportunities for teacher candidates to learn about diversity by interacting directly with people of diverse backgrounds in a variety of settings...” (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016, 497). We know that preservice teachers who experience field placements or service learning that expose them to new life experiences and immerse them into diverse

communities can help them re-evaluate negative perceptions they may have had towards diverse populations (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016; McDonald et al., 2011; Nieto, 2006). It could also help them understand the realities of students' lives and help build relationships in the community itself.

When Terri and Laura asked Megan and Lauren to talk about their daily work and also to share advice for us as teacher educators, both stressed the importance of teachers getting out into the community. For instance, to build relationships with families and better understand their lives, Megan writes:

If preservice teachers really want to understand families, volunteer with a refugee resettlement agency. This involvement will allow preservice teachers to understand families' biculturalism and the hardships that they face acclimating to their new society. Preservice teachers should also become familiar with immigrant and refugee families through volunteering to tutor, going to community events, and spending as much time in the schools as possible.

As examples, Megan points to specific activities that she does, such as organizing a drive for all her students to receive winter coats, shoes, clothing, books, and toys, and inviting children and parents to breakfast and emphasizing how much they welcome them into the community.

Lauren also talks about community building in a slightly different way. She talks about trying to be aware of what is going on in the community; she also recognizes the difficulty of completely keeping engaged with the community. For instance, she says that she may not be able to keep up with important community events since she is not herself a member of that community. She writes "I was on vacation with

my family when the second draft of the travel ban was blocked... As important as it is to take care of myself, it feels artificial to be able to walk away from worrying about difficult things when they are an unavoidable reality for my students." Thus, she tries to keep up with current events that may affect her students, recognizing that in the current climate, things change so fast that it is sometimes a difficult task.

Both Megan and Lauren emphasize the important of community embeddedness and how worthwhile the pursuit of community relationships and understanding is. Teachers can also model relationship building so that their students can better navigate their own relationships in the wider U.S. community. Lauren emphasized the importance of teaching relationship building skills:

...because those can be the spark to building community and pathways of interpersonal learning. Connecting people is what education is all about, for me, and I think it's valuable to explicitly teach its value. Especially considering my Muslim refugee students, and the political world they live in, I think it is important to teach them to connect to others, know their self-worth, and have a bold voice.

All teachers have field placements in schools as part of their certification coursework requirements. However, the push to include real community engagement through service learning or community-engaged learning is growing. These experiences take students beyond the classroom into other parts of the school or out into the community to experience firsthand the parts of students' lives that may help or hinder their success in school. These community-based experiences help personalize learning for students and truly focus on the context, since the context is in fact defined by the community in which students will be

teaching. However, when a nation-wide socio-political phenomenon emerges, programs should take the initiative to ensure that their preservice teachers are getting access to community experiences that will increase awareness of critical issues. In the current context, engaging with the Muslim (and refugee) community may be called for.

Again, in our experience, many programs are trying to make these types of experiences a reality, but often it often ends up being a patchwork done at the individual course (and instructor) level instead of a planned sequence by the whole program. In these cases, a plan at the program level would be important to ensure wide-spread awareness. It could be something as simple as a planned visit to a local mosque with a reflection on the visit to something more in-depth such as tutoring children at an afterschool program located at the mosque.

## Care

It might seem obvious that successful teachers care about their students. However, what “care” means and looks like is not as well understood. A body of research theorizes and attempts to make the ethics of care visible so that novice teachers can emulate these practices (for an extensive review see Rabin, 2008). To clarify what we mean by care, we borrow from Noddings (2002, as cited in Rabin, 2008) who characterizes caring relationships as marked by a particular form of attentiveness called “engrossment” (p. 28) in which teachers are “moved to act on the other’s behalf” (Rabin, 2008, p. 3).

In reading Megan and Lauren’s stories, Terri and Laura were especially struck by the ways in which we

see them as enacting an ethic of care for their students. Megan writes, “I try each day to make my students feel valued because they have knowledge to share with others. Students learn to be good friends to one another, collaborate, and be empathetic towards their friends.” Lauren states that she “can say with full confidence that my students know I care about them.” We agree. She writes:

One day after the first travel ban began, I had a very difficult conversation with my students. I tried to explain the situation, in English that was fit for students who knew a very little bit of English. I showed them a map of the countries included in the banned list, their home in the middle. We discussed the key vocabulary words we were hearing in the news. I did my very best to be professional and not persuasive or show any opinion – it’s not my job to spout my personal politics in a classroom. But still, in the back of my throat, in that knot where you first feel tears well up, I hoped that they would understand the weight of the key vocabulary words I pre-taught. “Executive order” means something the president chooses alone. *Students, this is not something we all want.* “Temporary” means for a short time. *Students, keep hope.* “Terrorist” means someone who wants to hurt other people. *Students, I know you are here because of terrorists in your home countries. You know what this means more than I ever will.* “Protests” means people telling the government they do not agree and want change. *Students, we still have a voice, and must use it.* And then I gave them my advice. Again, I kept a straight face and was careful to not persuade to my beliefs. I advised students to know their rights, and I reviewed them. I advised that they know their current legal status. I told them if anyone asks them questions to stay calm, ask for a lawyer and a translator. I told them it was most safe to stay here and not travel. Finished with my two cents, I asked the students what questions they had. They blinked at me, buzzing with thought, but speechless. Then, one gentleman raised his hand, “Ms. Thoma, do you want us here?” And that was the end of my poise, my

diplomacy, my poker face. That knot in the back of my throat broke and I was sobbing in front of my students. I can say with full confidence that my students know I care about them. They are so uneasy that they are questioning their security, even with me.

Often in our teacher education programs we ourselves have minimal focus on helping our students develop the care needed to support the most vulnerable students. Many programs focus on content and pedagogy and throw “care” into the realm of “dispositions” which is difficult to define. We often try to promote positive dispositions in the professional responsibilities category or through an understanding of child or adolescent psychology, which itself tends to be very clinical. However, part of becoming a caring teacher goes beyond enacting the letter of the law when it comes to our professional responsibilities of ensuring every student succeeds – it involves having personal experience with them, building empathy with them, and truly understanding them as individuals. Preservice teachers can then have a personal stake in whether or not they succeed. Megan and Lauren in their teaching clearly have this personal stake in the lives of their students.

As with an understanding of privilege, some preservice teachers may come into our programs already having a caring attitudes towards children and youth, while some do not. However, we know that it is often easier to understand and thus care for those who are more like ourselves than to develop caring for children and youth from backgrounds we have little experience with or connection to. In many courses, especially those targeting competencies to work with ESL students, we endeavor to arrange activities meant to expose teachers to immigrant communities as well as build empathy with children and youth from those

communities. For instance, one video frequently used in assessment courses follows an undocumented immigrant student in California the day they have to take state-required standardized tests. Some of our preservice teachers have cried when they see this student toil with the heavy language barrier that causes him to struggle (and fail) to demonstrate his strong Math skills; they lambast the administrators and teachers who do not seem to care or can do nothing about the issue. However, some others have made comments about how the student should learn English before being included in content classes, or how the student should not be in the country at all. To us, the latter group demonstrates a fundamental lack of empathy and understanding of the student and his life experiences, which in turns suggests a lack of caring. However, as teacher educators, we assume that preservice teachers who persevere through their programs and are exposed to well-structured activities can develop caring attitudes towards diverse populations.

Muslim students have unique life experiences that caring teachers should be concerned with. For instance, the girl who gets her hijab pulled off by a bully should be supported by an understanding teacher who does not judge her clothing choices as “strange” or “oppressive”. The boy who sits alone at lunch because a classmate called him a terrorist should provoke a desire to understand his feelings about the incident and what it means to be a Muslim in this day and age. The teenager who is fasting during Ramadan should be given a pass from strenuous physical education activities and from sitting in the cafeteria during lunch because the teacher perhaps tried out a day of fasting to see what it’s like. Courses that promote social justice pedagogy and empathy with

populations different from themselves could raise these kinds of issues in this particular time of Islamophobia that could expose Muslim students to more than the usual stresses of growing up. These again should engage preservice teachers with Muslim students in some way that helps them understand their stories. There are more and more works of literature, narrative blogs and articles, and videos and documentaries that discuss Muslim youth experiences. We should also encourage teachers to engage with the Muslim community in some way, by either getting them out into the community or inviting the community in to our courses.

### **Sociopolitical Consciousness**

Our work draws heavily on theories and practices of culturally relevant pedagogy (see e.g. Ladson-Billings, 2006). Possessing and working to develop one's sociopolitical consciousness is a central element of culturally relevant teaching. In her seminal article concretizing the components of culturally relevant pedagogy for teachers who ask, "Yes, but how do we do it?," Ladson-Billings (2006) names "sociopolitical consciousness" as an essential, but perhaps more difficult, idea to sell to them. She claims that most teachers may hold opinions about sociopolitical issues, but they may not be well-informed about them; further, they are unable to link them to larger societal issues or to their students' lived experiences. Finally, they lack the ability to incorporate these issues into their ongoing teaching (p. 37).

In sharing their stories with Terri and Laura, Megan and Lauren provide exemplars of critically conscious teachers who not only understand current contexts, but link them to their students' experiences and draw upon

them in their daily teaching lives. Megan acknowledges the struggle that students may have with multiple identities of themselves and their families and wants "students to recognize the language and literacy skills that their parents have" so that they have pride in their backgrounds and do not feel pressured to leave that background behind in their pursuit of education in this country. By helping students share the similarities and differences between the home and school cultures with other students, she has created "a culture of learning, mutual respect and support" which she writes "is one of my greatest successes."

Lauren also recognizes how the current climate may affect how students identify themselves, talking about how labels like "refugee" impact students' self-identities. She explains that "Of the students I've taught, only six students have not been Muslim. An unknown number of my students are refugees, because many of them do not know there is a unique name for their life experiences." She also understands the complexities of their experiences: some students do not know their birth date; some are alone without their parents or acting as head of the household; some are wives, mothers, or widows. She writes "It's a strange and poetic dichotomy – in many ways, my students have more life experience than I, but they are reading English at about a second grade level."

Finally, another teaching story that deeply touched us is the following from Megan:

The day after the election, through holding back tears, I asked my students if they knew what had happened, and they all put a thumbs up for "yes." I asked, "How does this make you feel?" They replied, "Sad. Scared." Another student said, "My dad said that he will have to leave to go..."



(Silence.) His friend finished his sentence:  
“...back to his country.”

Both Lauren and Megan understand that students do not learn in a vacuum. They come to school with experiences that are shaped by socio-political contexts. In addition to the Islamophobia prevalent in society today, many Muslim students recently arrived to the U.S. are refugees, adding another layer to their experiences that teachers should understand. Beyond personal and societal clashes that may emerge from their cultural and religious practices, refugees may have endured physical and psychological traumas due to experience with war or persecution. Refugees are often considered semi-voluntary immigrants – they did not necessarily want to leave their countries, but they had no choice in the end. Their situations were difficult before Trump was elected, but after the election and the subsequent failed travel bans, students from Muslim refugee families have particular concerns and fears brought on by the current context. Both Laura’s and Megan’s stories show that they recognize their Muslim refugee students’ unique experiences and try to support them as well as they can.

Teacher educators have to prepare teacher candidates to be ready for many different contexts. This requires teachers to be “life-long” learners of not only pedagogical innovations and new technologies, but also of socio-political effects on students and how to research and analyze unique community contexts. Again, we all emphasize “getting to know your students” in all of our classes, but this often entails knowledge of our students’ preferred learning styles or their academic backgrounds and preparation, or even knowing their hobbies to engage them by making

connections to their learning. Often, however, we fail to understand the whole student, especially those from marginalized groups. Muslims in particular are misunderstood whole-sale by much of society, including the President, the media, and unfortunately many school professionals. Teachers should be ready to follow current events, get out into the community, observe students and ask what they need, and invite critical parties into the school to increase understanding.

Thus, in preservice teacher education, we should get our future teachers to do the same. We can incorporate current events into courses and activities by including case studies or critical media literacy projects. For instance, in one of our courses, we have a “news article of the week” that requires one student each class session to choose a current news article related to the content of the course and lead a critical discussion about how the news affects students, schools, and education. We should also promote community engagement with critical, high-needs populations and have students interview or survey people from these communities. We can also invite guest speakers into our classes or to our universities at large that can speak to important issues of the day. For instance, we have invited Muslim parents to talk to preservice teachers about their experiences in schools, and after the travel ban, the university held a quickly-organized forum on Muslim immigration that invited faculty, students, staff, and community members to come together and discuss how it affected them and the university community. We should model in preservice teacher education what we would like teachers to do in their own schools to develop socio-political consciousness particular to their contexts.

## Social Justice Stance

Within the theories and practices of culturally relevant (see e.g. Ladson-Billings, 2006) and socially just teachers (see e.g. Boyd et al, 2006; McDonald, 2005; Moje, 2007; Ukpodoku, 2007), we recognize that “there is no single framework or pedagogy that is more likely than another to change the world toward justice” and acknowledge that “naming oneself a social justice educator implies that one has taken a stance/position that seeks to ‘notice and name inequities, disrupt hierarchies of power and privilege, and interrupt current practices that reproduce injustices’(CEE, 2009)” (Rodriguez, Bohn-Gettler, Israelson, O’Brien, & Thoma, 2017, p. 206).

Lauren articulates her identity as a social justice teacher, citing her teacher preparation as an important (although not the only) factor in her development of a social justice framework in her classroom. She calls herself a “faithful advocate” who is able to “prioritize the elements of community, communication, and advocacy that are important to developing educated citizens.” We are heartened that Lauren names her study of social justice pedagogy as giving her a purpose “to hold dialog with and between students.” She continues: “From those purposeful dialogs, I’ve learned to listen and to speak up. Of course I learned about the nitty-gritty strategies and best practices of teaching English, and that’s important. However, when people ask me *what* I teach, I change the question to *who* I teach. The English content itself is only a piece of my classroom, and I think my teacher preparation really fueled that perspective.”

Similarly, Megan cites the importance of social activism and advocacy. She writes, “Being just an

educator is not enough; at this time, educators must be activists.” She continues to provide examples of how teachers might accomplish this, focusing on how teachers can do things to support students outside of school: run or push for tutoring programs and education programs for parents; attend community events; or write to legislators about students’ rights. She calls teachers to be prepared to handle “the hate and fear present in society” and to be prepared to explain their personal beliefs about immigration. As she tells us:

In my professional opinion, being an immigrant or refugee has already caused massive upheaval in the lives of the students and their families. The students have experienced trauma, violence, expressions of hate, and fear of the unknown. Should children ever have to sit at school and ask their teacher, “Will the president hurt my family?” The feelings that they’ve experienced through their family’s discussions, being in their communities, and watching television have promoted and validated their feelings of “otherness.”

Along with caring, both Megan’s and Lauren’s experiences show that they are ready to advocate for their Muslim and refugee students. We should prepare all teachers to do the same. For instance, the girl who gets her hijab pulled off by a bully should not only evoke sympathy from an understanding teacher, but that teacher should also work to raise awareness of this issue with all members of the school (staff and students) to help avoid future bullying. The boy who sits alone at lunch because a classmate called him a terrorist should provoke a movement to promote understanding of the religion and those who practice it rather than dealing with it as an isolated incident. Courses that promote social justice pedagogy and empathy with diverse populations different from themselves could, in this particular time of

Islamophobia, raise these kinds of issues that could expose Muslim students to more than the usual stresses of growing up.

### **Our Hopes**

As noted in the Introduction, Terri and Laura offer Megan and Lauren's stories alongside our commentary as teacher educators because we think that they embody the very best for which we hope in our preparation of social justice-oriented and culturally relevant educators. They are "woke," we might say, to the realities of the intersections between their students' unique socio-political and cultural identities and their schooling experience in these times. While we, like many, are troubled by the interplay of these contexts and their effects on Muslim students and families, we are inspired by teachers like Megan and Laura, who advocate for them in and out of the school. We next merge our voices to answer the question, "What do you hope for your students?"

### **Megan**

My hope is that the messages the students and their families receive from the local and national community are welcoming and supportive, regardless of the negative messages from politicians being communicated. Oftentimes educators are the first people that the families build relationships with in their new home. Teachers and administrators have to be a positive support system for immigrant and refugee families.

### **Lauren**

I hope that I keep my job. I'm very scared that the opportunity I have to work with such awesome students will end because they won't be allowed to join me in my classroom. It would be difficult to be in a bright, empty classroom waiting for them to come, knowing that they're in a refugee camp, waiting also.

I hope my students have the opportunities they deserve. I hope that they feel like welcome and valued members of our community. The soft side of me hopes that my students find nothing but guiding hands and kind words in the real world – that people are warm to them because that's how they would treat any person. The other side of me hopes that my students have enough grit and enough optimism to make a safe place around them, wherever they go, no matter who they encounter.

### **Laura**

My hope for the future is that Muslim students will not only survive in today's schools, but thrive. I hope that with enough awareness of the issues surrounding Muslim students and advocacy for this vulnerable group that Muslim students can be proud of their identity *and* feel that they can shout about it in the hallways of school instead of feeling that they have to hide it in order to fit in, or at the very least, not be called a terrorist and bullied.

In the short term, however, I hope that we can achieve an environment where all teachers can support Muslim students by examining how culture and language may affect their own perceptions, how the socio-political realities may help or hinder students' academic

success, and finally, how they can create inclusive classrooms to ensure that all children have equal access to education. Teachers should also be able to help students themselves learn how to examine their own identities and relationships and to decide how they want to live their lives.

## **Terri**

I hope that more students can have teachers like Megan and Lauren. Such teachers care and connect with students and communities who may differ from those in which they themselves were raised. They are critically conscious and able to enact socially just pedagogies in ways that change life chances for their students. I hope that they don't quit, lose heart, or get burned out by the many forces that push against them and their students. I hope they are sustained and empowered in their work.

Like Lauren, I hope I don't lose my job as a teacher educator. Given the current political climate and the lean toward privatization of education opportunities, I remain invested in preparing public school teachers who will work to equip K-12 students for democratic citizenship within a multicultural and global society.

## **Conclusion**

Through eliciting and critically examining our teacher stories, we merge our voices and respond to the imperative to improve schooling experiences for Muslim students. We hope that this self-reflexive analysis will further dialogue about not only the importance of social justice teaching as a theory or guiding principle, but as a daily practice, in teacher

education. Since the beginning of the 2016 presidential campaign and the subsequent election of Donald Trump, education advocates have referred to the “Trump Effect” as the negative effect on minority students in schools across the country brought about by the rhetoric of the campaign. In a survey of teachers by the Southern Poverty Law Center, many teachers reported that “students—mainly immigrants, children of immigrants and Muslims—have expressed concerns or fears about what might happen to them or their families after the election” (Costello, 2016, 4). These concerns and fears have perhaps only escalated in the days since Trump has come into office, especially for Muslim students under the (failed) implementation of a “Muslim ban” that sought to restrict travel to the U.S. of people from Muslim-majority countries. In a recent survey, Muslim students have reported discrimination and bullying, and some Muslim families have even made plans to leave the country if necessary (ISPU, 2017). Due to the current context of Islamophobia, bullying, and fear, we as educators need to reflect even more on our own perspectives, practices, and advocacy for Muslim students. By discussing our own reflections about experiences working with Muslim students and preparing future educators to support diverse students in schools, we hope to highlight important ways to support new and future teachers to be able in turn support their Muslim students.



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