Our World, Our Fight:

Teaching Advocacy and Activism as a Pivotal Practice for Talented Youth

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Abstract

Teaching advocacy and activism is a pivotal practice for talented youth. Advocacy is broadly defined as championing a cause, from self-advocacy and community/local issues to sociopolitical and global awareness contexts. Activism is the shared struggle for the "inalienable right of all people to human be—to be liberated from any project of violence that treats... persons...less than fully human" (Valdez et al., 2018, p. 247). This chapter first builds background in the three characteristics of pivotal practices: authentic, cognitive, and holistic. Each of these characteristics has a Pivotal Practice in Play section, providing the reader with an exemplar of grassroots activism or advocacy using relevant examples that readers can connect with from history, collective peace movements, Dolores Huerta, and Ella Baker. Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion and a present-day case study about this pivotal practice through an intersectional lens, and how teaching advocacy and activism impacts and is impacted by identity and agency.

Keywords: advocacy, activism, agency, equity, identity, intersectionality, case studies, authentic, holistic, cognitive, grassroots, funds of knowledge

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Introduction

Advocacy is broadly defined as making a case for a particular cause. Much like the Social

Studies curriculum telescopes from the neighborhood, community, and town, to state, country,

and international realms, advocacy exists on a continuum from self-advocacy, community, and

local issues, to sociopolitical, humanitarian, and global awareness contexts. Transitioning from

advocacy–championing a cause–to activism, this chapter uses Valdez et al.'s (2018) definition of

activism as a framework. Key to this definition is a *struggle for* rather *than resistance against,*

working towards equity and humanity rather than pushing back on singular laws, policies, or

government officials. Also inherent in the *struggle* word choice is the end goal, what is attained

through the struggle towards a shared purpose is the ability to feel human, or in Valdez et al.'s

words, *human be*. Activism is the shared struggle for the "inalienable right of all people to

human be—to be liberated from any project of violence that treats persons as property, persons

as things, persons as disposable, or persons as in any other way less than fully human" (Valdez

et al., 2018, p. 247). This chapter discusses the pivotal practice of the intentional teaching of

advocacy and activism to talented youth.

Editors Nyberg and Manzone (2023) outline characteristics of pivotal practices for

talented youth that distinguish these instructional tools from strategies. Pivotal practices are

authentic, cognitive, and holistic. Authentic practices are sustained over time by emphasizing

pedagogical knowledge across disciplines and instructional contexts and promoting problem-

solving. Cognitive practices incorporate students' metacognitive development and promote

inquiry, critical thinking, and creative thinking (Nyberg & Manzone, 2023). Holistic practices incorporate students' funds of knowledge and social and emotional learning and promote individuality and agency in talented learners.

An essential principle of equity literacy—what helps to create impact in equity efforts while minimizing performative gestures—is intentionally centering and prioritizing the needs of historically marginalized youth and communities (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015). Teaching advocacy and activism embodies each aspect of a pivotal practice, while also following the equity principle of centering and prioritizing liberation: *human be.* To assist with this evolving process, throughout this chapter, we aim to assist educators proposing to begin or continue their advocacy practices for talented students and social activism. We say evolving because issues, events, and modalities are changing, and may require varying solutions to accommodate the times. Our objective is to help with authentic discourse, active analysis, and solution-building with our talented students and their families.

In this chapter, we first engage in background building, guiding the reader in understanding and enacting evidenced-based teaching that centers equity, advocacy, and activism with students. Pivotal Practice in Play sections provide the reader with an exemplar of grassroots activism using three characteristics of pivotal practices: authentic, cognitive, and holistic. In using case studies from grassroots activism, we can teach using relevant examples that students can connect with from history (Dolores Huerta and Ella Baker) to collective peace movements over time and a present-day case study. We include considerations from a sociohistorical and sociopolitical lens, to engage in critical thinking and discourse to nuance

pivotal practices from an intersectional lens. As authors with similar interests and academic

backgrounds but different life experiences, we frequently engaged in discussion throughout the

writing of this chapter. We offered each other critical feedback, shared new perspectives,

questioned one another, and pushed each other's thinking. In the spirit of the growth, we

shared by engaging in this active listening and critical discourse, and at the conclusion of the

chapter, posed a few essential questions. These can be used for personal reflection, as potential

journaling prompts, or as group discussion starters for educator activists.

<center>**Advocacy and Activism as a Pivotal Practice**</center>

Pivotal practices incorporate students' authentic, cognitive, and holistic selves, and their

full identities as talented youth. Using Nyberg & Manzone's (2023) list of characteristics of

pivotal practices, the next sections explore how teaching advocacy and activism moves beyond

strategies into pivotal practices for talented youth. Throughout this section we will use an

example of this pivotal practice, teaching grassroots activism, for each defining characteristic of

pivotal practice: authentic, cognitive, and holistic.

The *Authentic* Characteristic in Pivotal Practices: Advocacy and Activism

Sustained, Interdisciplinary, and Connected to (while Extending) the Content Standards

Teaching advocacy and activism as a pivotal practice can be sustained over time

throughout the school year, as well as telescoped throughout the educational experience from

K–16. There are powerful interdisciplinary connections, particularly with regard to social justice

and global awareness activism across disciplines. For example, the use of Statistics and Social

Studies together to create justifiable arguments for racial justice in a local teacher's prison

sentence. In another example, teachers can use a Next Generation Science Standards cross-cutting concept such as stability and change and Social Studies case law to advocate for climate change. Basing these examples on national content standards complements, reinforces, and extends the content for talented youth.

Promoting Problem-Solving

With inter- and cross-disciplinary approaches, teaching advocacy and activism authentically and intentionally incorporates problem-solving. Activism and advocacy are natural fits for problem-solving, using divergent and then convergent thinking to plan, or using the traditional Osborn Parnes Creative Problem Solving (CPS) model.

In the CPS model, the first step or phase is mess-finding, or objective-finding, when the learners work together to figure out their "why" and determine the goal of the endeavor. The second phase of this structured process is fact-finding. In this step, problem-solvers attempt to paint as full of a picture as possible by gathering information from a variety of sources. In the following step, problem-finding, youth look at the information and problem from a variety of perspectives, digging deeper to clarify the problem. Often, the first problem, determined in step one, is not the root of the issue; this is uncovered after data is collected and analyzed. Phase four is idea-finding. Learners work together using brainstorming strategies, concept or affinity mapping, and other divergent thinking and idea-generation techniques to come up with many varied potential solutions for the problem. This is followed by solution-finding. Phase five applies convergent thinking, discussing evaluation criteria and then selecting options that represent the best out of the list generated in phase four. Finally, a plan is created in the

action-finding phase. This plan of action takes the best option from phase five, with the learners creating an implementation plan including responsible parties, action steps, a timeline, materials needed, a budget, and so on.

Pivotal Practice in Play: Teaching Grassroots Activism is Authentic

Exemplar: World Peace

Though there is some tongue-in-cheek notoriety around world peace being the most common response on the pageant circuit, the peace movement is an exemplar of grassroots activism spanning from the 10th century to today (Jasper, 2022). Teaching grassroots activism is authentic; it is sustained, interdisciplinary, and connected while extending the content standards, and it promotes problem-solving.

The peace movement is a natural example of grassroots activism for authentic practice beginning with its sustained and interdisciplinary nature. "The Peace and Truce of God were widely promoted by some leaders in the church and it is considered to be one of the first documented instances of a grassroots peace movement" (Jasper, 2022, para 40). Peace of God was an effort made by local clergy and later a proclamation by the medieval Catholic church to protect non-combatants from the surrounding violence of the time. Attempting to limit the days of the week that combatants could engage in fighting, local churches (in the mid-11th century) and later the church at large (late-11th century) enacted the Truce of God.

While the earliest grassroots peace movements started in religious realms, later movements engaged disciplines such as philosophy and history (e.g., the writings of Immanuel Kant, Jean-Jacques-Rousseau, Olaudah Equiano, Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, Sophie

Bosede Oluwole). Civic movements and activists include campaigns to ban landmines and abolish nuclear weapons (Jasper, 2022) such as those led by Alfonso García Robles, and grassroots efforts made through art: the music of Joan Baez and the sculpture of Pedro Reyes (Guyette, 2020). A final example is grassroots peace movements led by women peacebuilders, providing collective engagement in conflict resolution, as in the example of the Ubuntu Peace Hut initiative of Liberia (Calléja, 2021). Peace movements are interdisciplinary, exist in content standards, and have continued throughout the centuries and today.

The introduction to his TED Talk begins, "John Hunter puts all the problems of the world on a 4'x5' plywood board -- and lets his 4th-graders solve them" (https://www.ted.com/talks/john_hunter_teaching_with_the_world_peace_game?language=en). World Peace lends itself quite naturally to the creative problem-solving method described in the above section. John Hunter has already developed a method, called the World Peace Game, https://worldpeacegame.org/. Rather than beginning with an existing model of studying world peace, teaching grassroots activism can begin by studying an individual. Many students are already familiar with the story of Malala Yousafzai. A quick google search using "social studies standards Malala" returned about 182,000 hits. The results on just the first page (six sites) had lessons for both middle school and high school. The topics included developing student agency, teaching about children's rights, social responsibility, and making a difference. Most lessons were also interdisciplinary, with both Social Studies and ELA standards, and one also included media literacy standards.

The *Cognitive* Characteristic in Pivotal Practices: Advocacy and Activism

Incorporating Students' Metacognitive Development

Metacognition-—the act of sensing and adapting one's thoughts and learning processes—is a cognitive psychological concept that is prevalent at early ages in high-ability youth. Flexibility and complexity are evident in students' thinking, and classrooms that encourage metacognitive development utilize inquiry-driven pedagogies and center the learners in the teaching process (Barfurth et al., 2009).

Teaching activism and advocacy follows a structure of five basic steps, which can take place across grades and educational contexts, K-16. First, provide a space and place for the argument or cause. Next define appropriate terms, including advocacy and activism. Third: Fight-this includes multiple aspects of advocacy, e.g., educate (self or others), lobby, organize, research, create policy or legislature, train, litigate, campaign, inform the electorate, evaluate, and collaborate. Fourth, bring in outside resources, perspectives, speakers, and viewpoints. Consider someone who is a non-traditional advocate. Finally, encourage active speaking and listening in all varieties (Schellenberg, 2015). These steps provide opportunities not just for cognitive development in advocacy and activism, but metacognitive development as well.

Promoting Inquiry, Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking

Banks' (1988) multicultural curriculum reform model and the subsequent Blooms-Banks Matrix (Ford, 2013) is a framework for inquiry, critical, and creative thinking. Banks' model has four levels (with my—Novak's—signature helpful hints to remember each level): contributions (3Hs: wear hats, eat hot dogs, and celebrate holidays), ethnic additive (2Ws: teach WWII, but you also talk about Windtalkers), transformative (3Ps: share new perspectives, discuss others'

priorities, and learn about platitudes), and decision-making with social action (3Ds: gather data, decide, and then do).

The Blooms-Banks Matrix overlaps this model with Bloom's taxonomy: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Ford, 2013). Teaching advocacy and activism as a pivotal practice focuses on where the highest levels of each model intersect. In Banks' model, level three is transformation through synthesizing various perspectives. This means looking not just at what one society, ethnic, or cultural group understood contributed, or was left with after an event, but how many were impacted, and how the interactions of many influenced outcomes. The highest level (four) is social action, in which students gather and analyze data, evaluating their knowledge, values, and beliefs against this data. They then deliberate on courses of action to take based on all the aforementioned factors and finally decide and act upon that decision. The highest columns of Bloom's taxonomy are analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

This pivotal practice emphasizes the intersection of these transformative and social action levels of the Banks model (rows) with the analysis, synthesis, and evaluation levels of Bloom's (columns). This combination creates a focus on inquiry, and critical, and creative thinking. Advocacy is emphasized in the transformation row and activism in the social activism row. Ford's (2013) website has samples of the Blooms-Banks Matrix.

Pivotal Practice in Play: Teaching Grassroots Activism is Cognitive

Exemplar: Dolores Huerta

Schellenberg (2015) outlined five steps that provide a basic structure for teaching activism and advocacy across grades and educational contexts, K–16. These steps in conjunction with appropriately planned activities that incorporate flexibility and complex thinking, student inquiry, and learner-centered instruction appropriate for high-ability students promote metacognitive development. We will use grassroots activism as the topic.

Create a Space and Place for Activism Work. This may be a physical area of the room where supplies are set up, with a computer, books, research materials, sign-making materials, etc., where students are free to go when they have extra time, in addition to their assigned time during the class period. Beyond the physical area, is the emotional space. Create a learning environment where students can respectfully agree and disagree, argue points and counterpoints with evidence and reason, emphasize calling in versus calling out, and establish norms and/or ground rules regarding lines or boundaries (e.g., hate speech, racism, name calling, use of certain terms).

Define Appropriate Terms.

- *advocacy:* making a case for a particular cause.

- *activism:* the shared struggle for the "inalienable right of all people to human be—to be liberated from any project of violence that treats persons as property, persons as things, persons as disposable, or persons as in any other way less than fully human" (Valdez et al., 2018, p. 247).

- *grassroots:* when people decide to do something about an issue in their community and they come together and voice their opinion or make a request/demand to make a change.

Define historical advocacy and activism and use current case studies that are local to the area. In studying grassroots activism, an exemplar is Dolores Huerta. As an elementary school teacher, and inspired by her mother's community-focused philanthropism, she was moved to act after witnessing the hunger and poverty of her students (Dolores Huerta Foundation, 2021). Dolores Huerta left teaching and gained experience with activism, working with the Stockton Community Service Organization in 1955. She founded the Agricultural Workers Association (AWA) in 1960, which facilitated voter registration and advocated for housing improvements; this later evolved into the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC). In 1962, Dolores Huerta worked with César Chávez to form the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA). Her goal was to help organize workers and help them engage in non-violent protests and/or boycotts to secure living wages, access to clean water, bathroom facilities, reasonable hours and breaks during the day (Jasper, 2022).

Fight. Teach your students to fight the structural and systemic power. This may need to start with revisiting step one, based on the learning environment and the power structure in the room, actively dismantling the power dynamics in the classroom, and ensuring that the space is focused on inquiry and learner-centered. Learning from Dolores Huerta, she listened to the agricultural workers and went to the farms. She saw that the landowners viewed the workers as less than human and that landowners felt that the workers should be grateful to have the work

with whatever pay or conditions that they were given. The landowners were insulted that the workers complained because they felt they could fire the workers and get another group of migrants the next day to do the same job. Part of Dolores Huerta's strategy was bringing the workers together and unifying them with a plan, the second part was bringing their story to the consumers.

Bring in Outside Resources. When bringing in advocates, consider those that have a compelling story to tell that will connect with the students on a personal level. Michael Sam was the first openly gay football player to be drafted into the NFL. Why bring a football player in as a speaker regarding workers' rights? He was drafted as a 7th-round pick in 2014, but where does he play now? After time on three teams in one year, he retired in 2015, sharing that it was for his mental health. What was his time like in the NFL as a Black gay athlete, where discrimination and homophobia are well-known entities? Michael Sam has used his time since retirement as an author, speaker, and advocate.

Encourage Active Speaking and Listening. Students are not a tabula rasa to be filled by the teacher, whether grade K or 16, but their slates started being scripted with ideas from parents, community, peers, families, and the media, and their scholar identity (Whiting, 2009) started its formation as early as Kindergarten. One of the most critical, and at times difficult, skills for talented youth can be actively speaking and listening. Giving full attention to speakers and classmates, asking thoughtful and complex questions, responding to peers with substance and evidence, taking time to process-and potentially having the flexibility to allow one's opinion to be swayed based on reasonable arguments- these are high-level skills. Allow for

time to develop and practice these skills, speaking and listening conferences, and Socratic

dialogue. "¡SÍ se puede!" Yes, we can- with this statement, "Dolores calls us all to action, to pay

attention and to be engaged citizens who make a difference" (Dolores Huerta Foundation, 2021,

para 22).

The *Holistic* Characteristic in Pivotal Practices: Advocacy and Activism

Promoting Individuality and Agency in Learners

Due to the progressive advocacy continuum, teaching advocacy and activism as a pivotal

practice naturally promotes individuality and agency in talented youth. Self-advocacy is defined

as a "dynamic process that enables high-potential students to claim their right to an education

that addresses their unique intellectual, academic, psychosocial, and cultural needs without

endangering their self-esteem or that of others" (Davis, 2021, p. 3). Advocacy itself is

supporting a cause, generally that one deeply believes in, which allows for expressions of

individuality. At its simplest definition, agency "refers to the feeling of control over actions and

their consequences" (Moore, 2016, p.1). Yet students as early as pre-K have felt their agency

stripped away by the inequitable educational system, rather than having their individuality and

agency promoted. By teaching advocacy and activism skills, educators empower talented youth

with the agency to invest their time, energy, and actions into principles and/or movements

from the intrapersonal to the global level.

Incorporating Students' Funds of Knowledge and Social and Emotional Contributions to the

Learning Experience

Understanding what assets each student and family member holds is central to understanding the child, their worldview, and the family's perspective. Recognizing and valuing families' community and cultural capital as wealth, as assets rather than as deficits, is all too often a missing piece in the educational puzzle. The earlier definition of self-advocacy is one specifically written for gifted and talented students that belong to a special population (e.g., historically marginalized, minoritized, underrepresented, and/or under-resourced), further stating, "it is a compilation of culturally responsive and inclusive empowerment strategies that open opportunities for positive academic and life outcomes previously precluded for some students due to stereotyping, systemic biases, and limited access to resources" (Davis, 2021, p. 3). This pivotal practice, teaching authentic advocacy and activism, begins with recognizing and valuing students through incorporating their funds of knowledge into the classroom (Moll et al., 1992).

The funds of knowledge methodology originated as an interdisciplinary research approach between education and anthropology. The researchers sought to collaboratively develop innovative solutions in teaching that involved household and community resources. As a model of student-engaged planning, this research-supported model holds that by understanding the socio-historical context of the households of the students and applying this information to classroom practices from an asset-based mindset, quality of instruction for the students in these households "far exceeds in quality the rote-like instruction these children commonly encounter in schools" (Moll et al., 1992, p. 132). Since the late 1980s when the research began, the funds of knowledge approach has been incorporated into models for home

visits, curriculum planning, and instructional practices (e.g., Washington Office of the

Superintendent of Public Instruction funds of knowledge toolkit:

https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/migrantbilingual/pubdocs/Funds_of_Knowledge_Toolkit.pdf)

Incorporating students' social and emotional contributions to the learning experiences

is like funds of knowledge in that it involves knowing the students and families in depth and

then bringing that knowledge into the classroom and specific lessons. Social and emotional

learning (SEL) can consist of multiple aspects. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and

Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2022) has the CASEL 5-self-awareness, self-management, social

awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The RULER approach (Brackett

et al., 2019) has emotional skills, spelling out the acronym ruler: recognizing, understanding,

labeling, expressing, and regulating emotion.

Advocating for multicultural education as a necessary part of every classroom, the

National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME, 2021) recommends that students and

their life experiences are central to the teaching process and that educators actively prepare

students to be advocates for equity in their spheres of influence. A recent study found that

teachers already using SEL programs wanted to move from competency development programs

to anti-racist programs that centered on humanity (LiberatED, 2022).

Whichever manner students' social and emotional contributions are integrated into the

curriculum, it is essential that it is done within the greater sociopolitical context. Dr. Dena

Simmons' remarks in an interview with EdSurge highlight this need: 'What's the point of

teaching children about conflict resolution skills, if we're not talking about the conflicts that

exist because of racism or white supremacy?' Without that nuance, she says SEL risks turning

into 'white supremacy with a hug''' (Madda, 2019, para 11). When we focus on liberation, SEL is

not just a series of skills or outcomes, but it is also a journey, a process. Simmons indicates

that SEL is similar in this way to both racial justice and healing, with a focus "on the process

along with the desired outcome: a world where all children feel safe to thrive in the comfort of

their own skin…SEL and healing should be the air that we breathe in schools, and so should

racial justice" (Keels & Malley, 2021, para 15-16). Dr. Simmons has resources on the LiberatED

website, an organization she founded: https://linktr.ee/liberated_sel

Pivotal Practice in Play: Teaching Grassroots Activism is Holistic

Exemplar: Ella Baker

Ideally, at the start of the year, we get to know each of our students and families. The

funds of knowledge approach specifically uses home visits as a protocol (Moll et al., 1992), and

many school districts have established home visit procedures, however, information can be

garnered through other means such as phone calls, surveys, back-to-school nights, and so on.

When gathering information, it is always great to have a detailed understanding of the full

family of each of your students, however, what is most relevant are the family members that

live within the house and/or community and/or that the student spends a significant amount of

time with (e.g., if they live 30 minutes away but travel to see them often). This data can be

applied to content throughout the year.

Knowledge is contextual, and ways of knowing are intersectional (Dillard, 2012); care should always be taken not to assume that students and families are willing or able to make presentations, assist in small groups, and/or send family belongings to school with their students. For example, we might interview a family and gather information about:

- Knowledge bases: Areas of understanding that family members living in the house or community possess. These can be areas that you will cover in class (areas that you may call on for support in class) or bonus knowledge (guest speaker). (e.g., class: math concepts, writing; guest: lobbying, laws)

- Skill sets: Skills of the family members living in the house or community (e.g., writing, art, sign making)

- Experiences: General life experiences of the families. Family history or stories. Work experiences of a family living in the house or community. (e.g., participated in Civil Rights activities, voter registration drives, and community engagement activities)

- Activities: Activities that the family enjoys doing together, the adults engage in on their own, the children do on their own outside of school, or the children do at school. (e.g., school board, winemaking, book club)

- Social Networks: General social networks for the family and within the community. What support structures are in place for the family? (e.g., extended family, community organizations)

From the information gathered and the focus of the lesson— grassroots organizing— perhaps we have focused our attention on Ella Baker and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating

Committee (SNCC). Through our interviews, we know that a grandparent of one student teaches at Shaw University, where Ella Baker graduated valedictorian in 1927. We could ask if they have any information that they could share, photographs of memorial markers, buildings where she might have attended classes, photographs of an exhibit in the library, etc. Calling on the funds of knowledge of the students and families does not always have to be a favor, a class visit, a guest lecture, or bringing in goods to share with the class. It is also in the recognition of the value of the families' lived experiences, and the respect shown for the knowledge that our shared community brings.

In focusing on advocacy and activism work, Simmons describes the need to honor students' humanity and follow their voices in social issues, their emotional investment, and not our own potential fears of partiality or partisan politics: "We want to ensure that everyone is safe, but the argument for bipartisanship and neutrality only comes up when we're talking about diversity, equity, and belonging. We've made neutrality a weapon to silence voices at the margins" (Keels & Malley, 2021, para 17). Ella Baker was inspired to work with students in grassroots activism because of the energy they brought to the movement. In 1960, she organized a meeting at Shaw University in North Carolina which grew into the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, Ransby, 2005).

Teachers using this pivotal practice can follow Baker's example of following emotional interests into advocacy, teaching issues of equity, and encouraging students to build upon those interests and newfound knowledge into activism. Ella Baker shared her philosophy of activism with the authors of *Moving the Mountain: Women Working for Social Change.*

You didn't see me on television, you didn't see news stories about me. The kind of role

that I tried to play was to pick up pieces or put together pieces out of which I hoped

organization might come. My theory is, strong people don't need strong leaders.

(Cantarow et al., 1980, p. 53)

She believed in promoting individuality and agency in people at the grassroots level, in

fostering self-efficacy, achievement, and confidence.

Ella Baker was not a teacher, in the sense of a formal career in the K–16 classroom, but

she was an activist-educator for many. She states, "if there is any philosophy, it's that those

who have walked a certain path should know some things, should remember some things that

they can pass on, that others can use to walk the path a little better" (Ransby, 2005, p. 257).

Historian and African American Studies scholar Barbara Ransby (2005) noted Baker's reluctance

to join the teaching profession and pass on her knowledge of activism, despite an offer to join

the university faculty of Bennett College. Ella Baker was not interested in the restrictive societal

role of the teaching profession that was based on class, racial/ethnic, and gender expectations

of the time. In her observations of Baker, Ransby noted:

With the subtle power of her presence, Baker offered a different model of gender

relations and a broader spectrum of gender identities. Her own transgressive female

identity was represented by her uninhibited occupation of predominantly male political

spaces, her refusal to be a conventional teacher, and her rejection of social identification

as someone's wife. Her way of being a Black *[sic]* woman challenged men in SNCC to

rethink manhood and masculinity, just as it gave women in the movement a widened

sense of their own possibilities as doers, thinkers, and powerful social change agents.

(Ransby, 2003, p. 364)

As educators and role models in the teaching of advocacy and activism as a pivotal

practice, it is essential to develop an understanding of the nuances of society, to understand

human being (Valdez et al., 2018). We seek clarity on both the subtle and the stark differences

between equality, equity, and liberation. We must understand that critical thinking and

criticality are not synonyms and that we need to apply both in our K–16 classrooms. And we

need to embrace identity, agency, and intersectionality, in our students, our colleagues, and our

families and communities, as *human be* (Valdez et al., 2018).

Nuancing Pivotal Practices through an Intersectional Lens

As a pivotal practice, we teach advocacy and activism as an authentic, cognitive, and

holistic practice for talented youth. Understanding the talented youths themselves, as

individuals, is a necessary element for educators. As we advance our students' knowledge of

equity, and as we engage in criticality in the classroom, in our spheres of influence as teacher

activists, and in our own personal lives, we must make these connections between the

individual (e.g., identity, agency) and the pivotal practice of advocacy and activism. This section

first discusses this connection, then introduces intersectionality as a tool for advocacy, and

closes with a discussion of collective agency.

Teaching the Bridge between Identity/Agency and Advocacy

In each of my classes, I open with the question: What does liberation mean to you? What

does it mean to your students? What does it mean to the broader community? Each semester, I

(Anderson) observe my students, primarily in-service teachers seeking graduate degrees, grapple with these questions; some for the first time of their careers. In many of our educational spaces and sectors, teachers are often operating within the curricular bounds outlined by their district, state, and national organizations. Rarely are those conversations/bounds geared towards advocacy and activism through pivotal practices to answer *what is education for liberation*? When educators explore broader global, national, and local issues with talented students, extending conceptions of identity, agency, activism, and advocacy is critical. To implement dynamic practices that center agency in advocacy, instilling a lens of criticality is paramount. When we speak of criticality, this entails using critical thinking, critical self-reflection, and critical action as operationalized by Johnston et al. (2013).

As agents of social justice, individuals in educational systems should prime pipelines of criticality through the lens of civic engagement and advocacy. With educators and students acting as conduits of agency and advocacy, it is imperative that we deliberate and reflect on shared initiatives and desires to increase the effectiveness of teaching, learning, and transformation, particularly in times of social unrest. In doing this, we must delineate the differences between identity and agency and the ways our identities influence our speaking and/or advocacy. In our discussion of pathways to *struggle for*, what tools are necessary for high-ability students to fully activate their agency and lean into liberatory practices? How are they analyzing events and points of advocacy?

Valdez et al. (2018) situate the many conundrums and barriers that educators face preparing and engaging in social justice advocacy efforts, particularly educators of color.

Valdez et al. (2018) challenge the field of education to engage in criticality, as it relates to understanding structural and systemic inequalities throughout the US context and globally. In the process of struggling against the systems of oppression that exist in the United States and globally, educators and students must understand how one's identity shapes the extent to which one engages in pivotal practices associated with issues of social justice. Valdez et al. (2018) assert that an individual's social identities have implications for *how we be* in spaces of activism and create narratives around associated actions.

One critical abutment is a person's racial and ethnic identities; this lens provides a psychosocial construct of forming personality as it relates to social context, cultural background, and status within the larger context of society. This position suggests that within advocacy spaces, each (set of) belief(s) one has—in the relative degree to hegemonic social norms and expectations—impacts the engagement and becomes impacted by their agency. Identity development in a cultural context also has striking implications in pivotal practices, especially in the relationship with educators, students, communities, and families. To further extrapolate how the relationship between identity, advocacy, and agency in talented students and their teachers, we must explore intersectionality.

Understanding Intersectionality as a Tool for Advocacy

As we interrogate the scope and continuum of advocacy, it is of great importance that educators understand the role of intersectionality. Intersectionality is one of the core tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT), and at its foundation, the theory pivots on the belief that beneath every social structure, institution, and construct, racism exists on some level (Delgado &

Stefancic, 2017; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). With a focus on advancing insight(s) into the many

dynamics of oppression that exist even in the intersections of these two key elements, CRT is a

framework that frequently adopts intersectional theories to understand these dynamics (Bhopal

& Preston, 2012). Considering the nuanced complexities of socially constructed identities, and

the intersections and experiences of gifted students, CRT can help to situate these realities

within minoritized groups (e.g., gifted Black girls; Anderson, 2020). Embedded in this notion

that within every social scenario, institution, and construct, there are positions of power and

oppression based on race that can be investigated critically (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Yosso

et al., 2001). Through this lens, racism functions daily as an everyday commonality of American

culture, life, and society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2016; Yosso et al., 2001).

Intersectionality calls for a nuanced understanding of the unique needs, characteristics,

and experiences based on one's social identities (Crenshaw, 1991). Considering this, one's

experience cannot be isolated or disaggregated based on just one identity, due to these

identities playing a critical role in their understanding and position in disparate spaces.

Therefore, depending on the identities of the educator and students, how they understand and

frame advocacy may differ.

Intersectionality has long provided pathways to address the injustices that persist within

many academic and societal domains (Joseph, 2021). Over the years, intersectionality has been

used as a theory to reference and understand the critical insights on ways race, class, gender,

sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate are reciprocally constructing phenomena

that shape complex social inequalities (Collins, 2015). In praxis, Intersectionality Theory is the

belief that the aforementioned social identities converge in distinctive ways, and these identities can only be defined through the intersection of other identities, subsequently expressing how one experiences oppression and marginalization (Crenshaw, 1991; Haynes et al., 2020; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). An individual with multiple intersecting identities in the margins or oppressed groups might be more apt to understand the challenges, barriers, and power associated with their advocacy. This is especially true when minoritized individuals are in predominantly white spaces and institutions (Valdez et al., 2018).

As we understand the dynamics of intersectionality and advocacy, an educator must be mindful of place, class, race, gender, language, and other identities, and with this lens interrogate how their own experiences prime the space/pipeline for advocacy in a micro or macro way. Depending on geographic location, communities may take different positions on issues, and use their agency and advocacy in ways the educator may not understand or be privy to. Therefore, the educator may need to take the position of a learner in the *struggle for* rather than be at the center of the movement/organizing. A critical analysis of power and privilege is paramount for a strong, equitable, and impactful advocacy network or relationship (see Figure 1). There may be a similar dynamic and process for the talented student as well.

Figure 1

Framing Intersectionality in Advocacy Practices through Inextricable Systems (Morgan, 1996)

Privilege

Able-bodied Credentialed Young
Heterosexual
European heritage
White
Male
Male and masculine
Female and feminine

Heterosexism
Ableism
Educationalism
Ageism
Politics of Appearance
Eurocentrism
Classism
Racism
Language Bias
Sexism or Androcentrism
Colorism
Genderism
Anti-semitism
Pro-natalism

Attractive
Upper and upper-middle class
Anglophones
Light, pale
Gentile
Non-Jew
Fertile

Domination ———————————————— Domination

Infertile
Jews
Dark
English as a second language
Working class, poor
Unattractive
Old Nonliterate Persons with disabilities LGBTQ
Gender "deviant"
Female
People of color
Non-European origin

Oppression

Note: Morgan, K. (1996). Used in AWIS' Intersectionality Fact sheet at

https://www.awis.org/intersectionality

Merging Intersectionality and Advocacy

In the US context, we witnessed several calls and initiatives for Black women to engage in political issues and or movements associated with human rights, despite them being overtly oppressed in many sectors: pay, maternal mortality, upward mobility, etc. Hyper-invisibility has called many Black women and girls to speak to critical issues, yet their agency in the social and structural determinants is often overlooked. All of this seems contradictory, and some may consider it a paradox, however, these lived realities for Black women call for both individual and

collective agency for their survival (McArthur, 2016). To counter these types of responses, an educator might ask students what does advocacy and engagement around humanitarianism look like?

In my own work with youth, there have been preconceived ideas about what might be points of interest and engagement, and the students have their own ideas about their own individual and collective agency. This begs us to question- "what does individual liberation mean for our students?" E. Paul Torrance (1976, p.142), a gifted education pioneer, called for educators to shift to futuristic thinking, challenging talented students to "think of what the world could become." According to Torrance (1976), "We need to help them invent alternative futures, evaluate these alternative futures, improve these alternatives, and make the choices about them that will make a difference in the kind of world we shall have." (p. 143) In this chapter, we argue that this type of advocacy through pivotal practices can only occur if we foreground intersectionality. If we fail to include intersectionality in our practices, we will continue to maintain the status quo of inequity in gifted education (Anderson, 2020).

Pivotal Practice in Play: Nuancing Intersectionality through Student Activism

Exemplar: Case of Wake County, NC Removal of School Resource Officers (2020)

Case

Students and advocates filed a complaint with the Civil Rights Division of the United States Department of Justice against Wake County Public School System in North Carolina (WCPSS) and multiple local law enforcement agencies in 2014:

Students, parents, and community members are united in the call to remove all school resource officers (SROs) from Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) schools. Instead of policing students, WCPSS must fully implement a Peacebuilder Program that employs community "Peacebuilders" in every school to build positive relationships with students, implement restorative practices, and peacefully address interpersonal conflicts (Southern Coalition for Social Justice, 2020, p. 3).

Using collective organization and agency, advocates led by students and their families lodged a complaint highlighting years of discrimination and criminalization of Black students for minor, age-appropriate behavior. In addition, the discrimination showcased the discrimination of students with disabilities for actions associated with their disability.

In 2018, WCPSS entered into a voluntary agreement with the Office of Civil Rights, agreeing to revise discipline policies, expand restorative practices, and reduce unnecessary referrals to law enforcement. The collective gathered data that included student interviews, discriminatory data, and scholarship related to policing and criminalization practices across the US, particularly in Black and Brown schools and communities.

The statement below highlights a statement from one of the students involved in the organizing around SROs:

After the Columbine high school shooting happened, there was a huge push for SROs, but literally in all 50 states, there's not been a single SRO officer to stop school shootings. The main focus of SROs is to stop school shootings, and you're not even doing that. What are you doing? Well, you're antagonizing Black and Latinx students,

you're having racial biases against lower-income *(sic)* students. Nobody asked you to do

that. We pay them to sit there and waste time, space, and money. (Southern Coalition for

Social Justice, 2020, p. 7).

A core component of this organizing and advocacy effort focused on outcomes. The groups

made certain to document that there was no evidence that SROs presence in schools worked.

Instead, the students put forth demands and advocated that state and district administrators

invest the funds allocated from SROs to "Peacebuilders." They included five other demands for

the district to protect and nurture relationships among the teachers, educators, and community

members.

Incorporating Funds of Knowledge

This is an impactful exemplar that utilizes pivotal practices that include intersectionality,

funds of knowledge, critical thinking, and authentic, holistic actions. In this case, students,

educators, parents, and community members utilized their funds of knowledge and collective

agency to provide alternative solutions to school resource officers policing school spaces. With

this, rather than maintaining harmful discriminatory practices for Black and Brown students in

WCPSS, they co-created environments that best serve our youth, and decrease a national

concern of disparate discipline and the school-to-prison pipeline. Here you see individual and

collective agency being enacted through the lens of intersectionality. We imagine that

educators, facilitators, and other advocates guided these talented students to research, engage

in critical thinking, and utilize their knowledge base to resist and divest from false narratives

about their experiences.

In similar situations, we could imagine funds of knowledge from historical accounts as a basis for solidarity and solutions to establish a framework for discourse in the classroom. This is similar to the grassroots efforts of Fannie Lou Hamer, a civil rights activist focused on voting, gender, and working rights. She assembled various groups to organize and engage in discourse, marching, and disruption. She understood the problems in her local community because of her own oppression and racialized gendered experiences (knowledge base). In addition, she also had the skills to marshal creative solutions in her community and national contexts. She understood the global need to rally around issues of equity and equality; she asserted that "No one is free until everyone is free until everyone is free." There are several other grassroots activists that educators can lean on to help their students understand the varying modalities that advocacy can manifest and sustain.

Nuancing Individual vs. Collective Advocacy and Agency

In the throes of civil unrest of 2020, several students regardless of their social identities decided to mobilize their efforts around Black Lives Matter, Covid-19, Voting Rights, and Gender Rights. We witnessed youth galvanize their efforts around disparities in treatment among policing, access to medical care, and equity-associated voting access (Murty & Payne, 2021; Toure et al., 2021). Educators were taxed by the impacts of Covid-19 and remote teaching, and many worried about their own individual and collective agencies as classroom teachers. Grappling with parallel tensions associated with global, national, and local inequities, policies, and disparities, classrooms were encumbered with questions about ways to facilitate conversations and strategies their students were bringing into the space. We observed

educators and students take to digital platforms to engage in activism and advocacy. From this perspective, individuals were able to provoke new ideas and perspectives, which spurred collective efforts and organizing.

With many educators and students grappling with ways their positionality affects their ability to advocate for issues associated with social activism, they may debate the difference between individual and collective advocacy. Through an intersectional lens, we understand that depending on one's positionality (multiple intersecting identities), they might see their participation and agency connected with their activism as either limited or compressed. Intersectionality should be at the core of our pivotal practices because it allows the field to unveil the auspices where oppressive structures uniquely impact members of minoritized groups individually and collectively (Evans-Winters, 2021). Considering the historical origins and nature of gifted education, this perspective is especially important as educators and talented students parse out practices that create equitable practices and forays of advocacy.

An intersectional framework focused on individual and collective agency allows educators to better comprehend the ways schools and institutions reflect and reproduce societal inequality, as well as conceptualize, critically analyze, and generate policies that are more inclusive (Evans-Winters, 2020). Utilizing this framework, with Funds of Knowledge, will assist with providing pathways for students to garner their efforts from a place of agency, rather than passivity. There are several societal issues a student may be interested in tackling at the individual, local, state, and national levels. Using the Funds of Knowledge of talented

students and educators, their families, and communities, we assert that pivotal practices associated with the individual and collective agency should move beyond single narratives.

Students and educators come into spaces with ideas of advocacy and agency, and depending on their social identities, may look to what affects the members of their community. Food Justice pedagogy and programs have been prime examples of how such grassroots efforts center the needs of the community and address larger systemic issues (e.g., food apartheids) (Meek & Tarlau, 2016). These efforts lean on the knowledge of the community and create a sustainable practice that addresses a critical need. Furthermore, many of these efforts have roots in historical collaborative movements, and helping our students lean into those practices is instrumental. However, to do this, the practices require checks and balances to ascertain potential outcomes of authentic, holistic, and critical engagement in capacity building and sustainability.

Considerations for Individual and Collective Advocacy

In several cases, disasters or events have promoted the uncovering of injustices, and schools have been identified as an opportune setting for students to critique and resist these injustices (Renner, 2009). When situating advocacy as a pivotal practice, we call for students to engage in solidarity around a critical issue using research, action, and with authenticity. In using pivotal practices, we assert that criticality provides a scope to potential vulnerabilities as we engage in advocacy initiatives. Moreover, using criticality and an intersectional lens also helps to spotlight saviorism when engaging in social justice practices associated with an individual and collective agency in the larger community.

Marginalized communities and historically underrepresented students in gifted education are not "voiceless," and they do not need others from dominant groups to speak for them. Instead, educators should actively engage in creating space for their funds of knowledge to be at the nexus, and with this, help to facilitate pathways to garner individual or collective agency. In our work to engage with students around a particular issue, we must rally our students to engage in solidarity, rather than pity or saviorism. As a collective, we actively disrupt notions of saviorism, and instead bring a sense of fidelity and dignity to a societal concern.

In the same vein, as it relates to acts of performative activism, educators and talented students should remain vigilant and participate in critical reflection as they engage in individual and collective practices. Performative activism can provide a veil of solidarity around a particular issue; however, the individual does not engage with genuine intentions on changing a system, practice, or structure (Thimsen, 2022). Performative activism operates at the surface level and aims to increase one's social capital rather than supporting the cause. In these shallow acts of activism, the intended actions cheapen the broader outcomes of an organization, local initiatives, or persuasion (Thimsen, 2022).

A goal of any pivotal practice should entail raising the critical consciousness of the students and educators. Engaging in performative activism diminishes the naming, defining, and movement associated with a pivotal practice. Engaging in authentic advocacy requires that we move beyond the shallow waters of equity, and critically examine ways we are acting in performance, rather than urgency, which is paramount.

As we enact authentic engagement and advocacy around societal issues with talented students, we should consider the pathways local and state administrators participate in and support pivotal practices. State and local administrators should also consider the ways they engage in performance activism, rather than fully disrupt oppressive practices and policies that students, educators, and their families present. In the last Pivotal Practice in Play, the mobilizing efforts of the students and parents to remove SROs from schools were well supported by the community. After resisting the requests of the organizing efforts, district and state-level coordinators were able to compromise and meet the needs of the students, parents, and community, lending to the national conversation of radical pedagogy and care. However, at the time this chapter was written, the district and state administrators rolled back this initiative and voted to install SROs back into the middle and high schools.

Summary

A former partner of mine (Novak) gave me a journal to write down my '3 am, lightning strike ideas'. On the cover is a bird with its body positioned forward, but its head arched back, an egg in its mouth. 'It is an Adinkra symbol for us Ghanaians,' he told me, 'Sankofa. You should not have fear in returning and seeking what you have left behind'. I still use this journal to keep track of my research and writing ideas, and as we crafted this chapter, the meaning of Sankofa, and its implications in the pivotal practice of teaching activism and advocacy to talented youth, struck me:

The sankofa symbolizes the Akan people's quest for knowledge among the Akan with the implication that the quest is based on critical examination, and intelligent and

patient investigation. ...the Akan believe the past serves as a guide for planning the

future. To the Akan, it is this wisdom in learning from the past which ensures a strong

future. The Akans believe that there must be movement and new learning as time

passes. As this forward march proceeds, the knowledge of the past must never be

forgotten. (Berea College, 2022, para 4-5).

Throughout this chapter, we have used stories from the past about grassroots activism as

examples of pivotal practice in play with talented youth. At the core, teaching advocacy and

activism is baked on criticality and investigation through problem-solving and inquiry, learning

from the examples of the past, and repeating the strengths while growing from vulnerabilities.

In teaching advocacy and activism, our students need to know history, and critically examine

the stories they've learned, and potentially go through an unlearning process, to successfully

advocate and engage in activism.

A pivotal practice is distinct from a teaching strategy. Nyberg and Manzone (2023) delve

into this in the introduction, and in this chapter, we conceptualize it in three thematic

characteristic groups: holistic, authentic, and cognitive. This chapter detailed how teaching

advocacy and activism supports learners in these three ways. In individual lessons, these three

constructs can be represented through scaffolding by "(1) highlighting the need for

representing vulnerability and resilience, (2) posing questions that would elicit rich sources of

experiential knowledge, and (3) engaging with the differences across experience from a

learning stance" (Sheth & Salisbury, 2022, p. 115). These questions offer a critical and

intersectional guiding point for teachers.

As we begin to engage in the work of this pivotal practice and engage with our peers in lesson planning and professional learning communities, timing, and the question of when may come to mind. "There is never going to be a right time. There is never going to be a better time. The longer we wait, the more systemic and structural racism is taught to students. The time is now" (Novak, 2022, p. 256). Today is a great day to teach advocacy and activism.

Essential Questions to Consider for Pivotal Practices

- What are the ways you can nuance socio-historical events to facilitate the research process, discourse, and critical thinking of talented students?

- In what ways can you attend to social differences when talented youth raise an issue/concern? What is the role of intersectionality associated with the issue/concern?

- Based on your role (e.g., K-12 teacher, higher education faculty, administrator) and your identity, what holds you back in actively using or supporting this pivotal practice of teaching activism and advocacy? What steps will you take next to work towards overcoming the barrier(s)? Reflect on the two quotes in the *Pivotal Practice in Play: Teaching Grassroots Activism is Holistic* section as you consider these steps (Dena Simmons and Ella Baker).

- What do individual vs. collective agency and advocacy look like in your sphere of influence? What is the strength of individual agency? Individual advocacy? Collective agency? Collective advocacy? It may help to make a graphic similar to the one below and complete it. Be on the lookout for vulnerabilities (e.g., areas that may promote saviorism

or performative activism). Are these easy or challenging to spot? Is it easier for others to

'spotlight' these for you? Reflect on or discuss this process.

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