



## The Role of Public Education in Place-Remaking: From a Retrospective Walk Through my Hometown to a Call to Action

Katie Headrick Taylor

To cite this article: Katie Headrick Taylor (2018): The Role of Public Education in Place-Remaking: From a Retrospective Walk Through my Hometown to a Call to Action, *Cognition and Instruction*, DOI: [10.1080/07370008.2018.1460844](https://doi.org/10.1080/07370008.2018.1460844)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07370008.2018.1460844>



Published online: 24 May 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 67



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



# The Role of Public Education in Place-Remaking: From a Retrospective Walk Through my Hometown to a Call to Action

Katie Headrick Taylor 

College of Education, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington

## ABSTRACT

This essay examines the role of public education in the process of place-remaking that relies on a false separation between teaching and issues of race, politics, and power. I construct a historical case study of my hometown that presents a counter narrative, presented by students, of race and legacy in the context of a public school and the surrounding community. Building upon a walk-as-method approach, I illustrate the confluence of historical, racialized narratives that are discoverable at the scale of the city but invisible within the walls of the school. I conclude with an in-progress professional code of ethical teaching and research practice for the learning sciences. These commitments are intended to support and protect students (and all young people in our communities) from bearing sole responsibility for critical stances based on their identities and histories-in-place.

## KEYWORDS

Informal Learning;  
Educational Institutions and  
Reform; Social Context

## Introduction

A former school for freed slaves is interred in my high school, yet Confederate flags were painted on the cafeteria walls. “Lil’ Colonel” acted as the school mascot. My 1997 yearbook was splashed with intimations of White, southern pride. The marching band played “Dixie.” A head count totaled eight Black people and 243 White people in my graduating class of 1999.

It is no accident that some White people still revere symbols of the Confederacy. My high school functioned as a breeding ground for the expression of White nationalism in southern public spaces. But, at least in this place, it wasn’t always so. My public education immersed me in a malevolent process of place-remaking—from a place of activism for racial equality to a place besmirched by racist symbolism—a process that happened between the years preceding the Civil War and the current state of frenzied obsession with emblems of the Confederacy. I discovered this story of place-remaking in my mid-thirties on a recent walk through a public park I had not visited since my youth. Reconciling my own story—growing-up White in a predominantly White place, attending predominantly White schools—with what I discovered in the park on that June day, reveals how place-remaking depends on an intentional and false separation between educating young people in the present and histories of race, politics, and power.

I cannot help but wonder if knowing these histories might have prevented a string of heartbreaking, racist, and White supremacist events involving my school. Could learning and owning these local histories have prevented complaints being filed to the Office of Civil Rights in 1997 against Maryville High School? Could students learning about these buried stories have saved us from years of racist discourse and shame over a school symbol? Could some guided, historical exploration of our hometown belie Maryville’s reputation for being White and proud? On a personal note, would I have stayed in my

hometown, choosing to raise my family in a place that I now know has a noble history of fighting for racial equality, social justice, and human rights?

Trying to answer these questions may be futile. Just knowing a different past is not enough for some to consider more equitable possibilities for the present and future. But for others, excavating the past could prevent future mistakes and repeating acts of complacency where there should have been outrage. Herein stands my attempt to understand why my public education was complicit in maintaining the myth of the Confederacy (Vandiver, 1961), and what I plan to do about it.

## Walking as method

Poet Antonio Machado wrote, “We make the road by walking.” Paulo Freire and Myles Horton (1990; p. 3) coauthored a book with this title, based on conversations they had 50 miles away from my hometown at the Highlander Research and Education Center in New Market, Tennessee. On June 26, 2017, I made a new road by walking one I had walked so many times before. It was utterly fresh, its rawness bringing tears to my eyes.

Under the direction of Rogers Hall and Kevin Leander, I was brought-up in the traditions of Goffman (1983), Kendon (1990), and others to understand the act of walking as a form of research, an embodied way to observe and learn (Marin, 2013). Walking opens up new insights on almost any phenomena of interest, but especially if your interest is the city itself (e.g., Wolfe, 2017). Walking in the city and across the land can be a form of privilege, protest, or oppression (e.g., Ingold, 2011; Solnit, 2001). Based on Freirian perspectives, walking through the East Tennessee hills at the Highlander Center teaches visitors to “read the world and the word” toward various forms of social action (Freire & Horton, 1990; p. 34).

Walking is also risky, not merely in the sprained ankle or bike collision sense. But as a method of inquiry, walking might provide jolts of reappraisal with/in the land that swirl the researcher through layers of historical sedimentation she was previously too busy to see. As Patricia Limerick (1988), a historian of the American landscape, wrote, “One walks with some caution in these historic regions; land that appears solid may be honeycombed, and one would not like to plunge unexpectedly into the legacy of Western history” (p. 18).

These perspectives on walking are foundational to teaching and learning designs I have co-created with educators and community members (both younger and older); we have used mobility through the city as the process and content of learning about the historical sedimentation of spatial injustices (e.g., Rubel, Hall-Wieckert, & Lim, 2017; Taylor, 2013; Taylor, 2017; Taylor & Hall, 2013). Over the years, these new youth-trodden pathways through Nashville, Seattle, Chicago, and New York have kicked-up insights on “mobility deserts” (Taylor & Hall, 2013; p. 72), urban diasporas (Taylor, 2013), and technological displacements (Taylor & Silvis, 2017). Young people shared these findings with other community members. This work has been one effort among many in the learning sciences to call-out political problems and suggest potential solutions within (hyper)local contexts (The Politics of Learning Writing Collective, 2017).

On a summer day in 2017, I was to plunge unexpectedly into the honeycombed terrain of my hometown. I needed a break from sitting at my computer and wondered what new information a walk of the downtown area might afford. I decided to stroll through Bicentennial Greenbelt Park,<sup>1</sup> a centrally located stretch of park contiguous with the public library, downtown, and other local amenities. Upon reaching the southeast edge of the park, I noticed a large, curved, stone memorial. This stone tabletop revealed a timeline, starting with 1795<sup>2</sup> and organized horizontally: Maryville history was on top; national history

<sup>1</sup> Bicentennial Greenbelt Park was built with local and federal funds and dedicated in 1976 for the state’s bicentennial.

<sup>2</sup> The treatment of temporality and history quickly positions the timeline as White settler, colonialist-centric. The “Pre-1795” panel reads, “The Cherokees, largest and most important single Indian tribe in the southeast U.S., originally occupied the mountain areas now incorporated in the states of North and South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee. Their settled, advanced culture, observed by Desoto in 1540, was based on agriculture.” The panel goes on to describe antagonistic relations between native inhabitants and settlers. The name *Tennessee* is a transliteration of the Cherokee town, *Tanasi*. In the 1830s, US infantries forced Cherokee people to “removal camps,” ten (of 11) of which were in Tennessee. Thus, the narrative I tell is situated within an older history of White settlers stealing and occupying Indigenous lands.

in the middle, and global history on the bottom. The very bottom horizontal axis was the name of the US President that corresponded to 4- or 8-year chunks.

I took in a long view of this long curved tabletop and then began to read from the first reported year. As I walked and read, I snapped photos of the most impressive and shocking slices of information (e.g., Wolfe, 2017). Almost all of these photos were of the years before, during, and immediately following the Civil War. As it turned out, even though I grew up in this place (as did my White parents), married a local, and attended the public schools, I knew almost nothing of the history I was reading on that muggy June day.

After walking, reading, and taking photos, I returned to my computer and did further research on missing or perplexing details. Newspaper articles, dissertations, and book excerpts filled some gaps. In the words of Joy Williamson-Lott and Nancy Beadie (2016), I constructed a historical case of my hometown to:

Disrupt commonly held historical beliefs about education by presenting counter narratives through particular cases, examine the educational development of a particular place and/or to interrogate the regional distinctiveness of educational development, or give students a sense of the dialectical nature of structure and agency that informs all aspects of educational provision. (p. 115)

I conducted focused interviews (Merton, 2008) with school board members, other prominent leaders in the town, and several former classmates, now scattered across the country. I revisited past conversations I had with local leaders over several years of going back to my hometown for summer breaks, holidays, and major family events; I began thinking of these conversations in a new light. I found myself doing much of the same work my youth study participants had been doing in their own cities. Now here I was, affirming learning and teaching designs back in the place of my own youth.

### What I learned on my walk<sup>3</sup>

Before and during the Civil War, my hometown was a sanctuary for abolitionists. Too rocky and mountainous for plantations, locals operated small farms. The geography and pervasive politics drove out pro-Confederate families; they moved out of Maryville to more sympathetic (to them) climes in Middle<sup>4</sup> and West Tennessee.

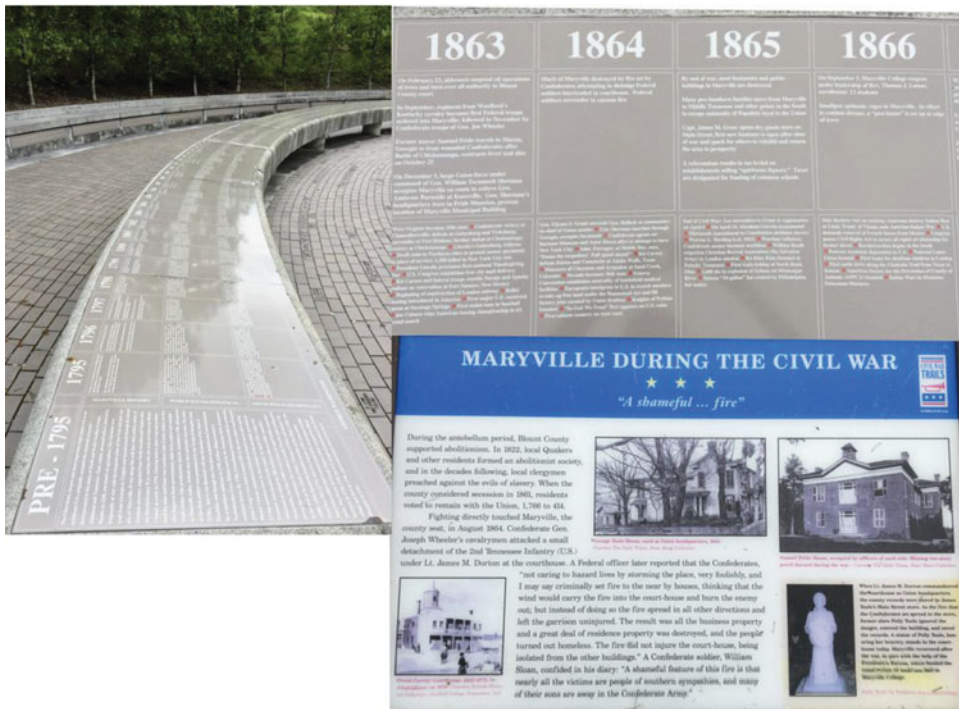
The majority of war-aged men fought for the Union, as was generally the case for the entire region of Eastern Tennessee. When a vote came up for secession from the union, only 24% of the county's residents were in favor. (The total vote was 1,766 to 414.) Eastern counties prepared to form their own state, rather than secede from the Union with the rest of Tennessee (Birdseye & Dunn, 1997).

Local institutions actively fought slavery. Church congregations, Black and White, organized political rallies, conversations, and schools at which freed slaves attended to learn how to be teachers. (See Williamson-Lott, Darling-Hammond, & Hyler, 2012, for more historical examples of this throughout the south.) The current site of Maryville High School was the original location of the local Freedmen's Normal Institute, funded mostly by the Quakers. That school trained dozens of freed slaves to pursue careers in public education. One of the Quaker Meeting Houses in the area helped operate *Cudjo's Cave*, a stop along the intricate Underground Railroad system. Maryville College—a liberal arts college one mile from Maryville High School and founded by a well-known abolitionist and Presbyterian minister—educated Black and White seminary students together before the Civil War. The culminating efforts of these institutions led a scholar to proclaim Maryville one of the “great anti-slavery centers of the nation” (Parker, 1975; p. 82).

In this climate, it is not surprising that Black women and men protected the city and willfully contributed to its development. When Confederate troops tried to burn down the Maryville courthouse where Union soldiers were hiding, a recently freed slave, Polly Toole, risked her life to salvage the town's historical records from the blaze. A white marble statue honors her in the courthouse lobby (see Figure 1).

<sup>3</sup> In this section, I learned all of these events from the historical markers encountered on my walk, unless otherwise noted with a scholarly citation.

<sup>4</sup> Middle Tennessee would later become the birthplace of the KKK (Lewis & Serbu, 1999).



**Figure 1.** These images are of some of my photos of the timeline in Bicentennial Park.

Four years after the Civil War ended, Maryville elected the nation's second Black mayor to run the affairs of the town. W. B. Scott had been a newspaperman, after learning the printing press trade in Knoxville, and published *The Maryville Republican*, "The official newspaper for Blount County" (Brown, 1982; p. 52). He then served as Maryville's civic leader.

Let me iterate that almost all of this history was brand new to me. Additionally, every former classmate I have spoken with since, Black and White, was shocked (and hurt) to learn of this history from me some 20 years later. How did we not know?



**Figure 2.** A photo from my 1999 yearbook, the caption reads, "All decked out in their red and black, the Maryville High School students eagerly await the opening kick-off for the Alcoa game." Faces have been blurred.



## A great american rivalry

As for me, I was a self-absorbed, White teenager during my most formative years spent in this place, obsessing over the things that privileged teenagers get to obsess over. But I also traversed and inhabited borderlands that allowed me to see racial inequities and spatial injustices (e.g., Marcuse, 2009) that other White folks did not.<sup>5</sup> In the early '90s, my daily round took me across the tracks to the "Black Section" where I attended middle school: as a teen, little made sense to me about a county's spatial arrangement that seemed almost exclusively based on race. My own Whiteness permitted me to freely move in and out of these borderlands, seeing but not experiencing racism. At this point, my growing sense of White supremacy in my hometown was just that, a sense; I had neither the worldview nor the words to articulate the problem. These feelings of unease were driven home when I started high school and Confederate battle flags were splashed on lunch trays, cafeteria, and gymnasium walls, and waved at football games.<sup>6</sup>

There was something especially peculiar about this flag business in light of our most heated sports rivalry with the Alcoa Tornadoes, our geographically closest school system. (As the crow flies, Alcoa HS [AHS] is 2.8 miles north of Maryville HS [MHS].) The football rivalry was so legendary that, in 2012, ESPN televised the annual MHS-AHS face-off as part of its "Great American Rivalry" series. Why is this important for the historical case I am constructing? Alcoa was known as the "Black School" amongst the most brash in Maryville.<sup>7</sup>

For generations, during *Alcoa Week*, the week of school at Maryville proceeding Friday night's football game, the Confederate flag made appearances all over Alcoa. The flag marked Rebel territory, albeit briefly. In the cover of night, Maryville students swam the flag to the center of Alcoa's *Duck Pond* and anchored it there. The next day, some heroic (or unlucky) Alcoa student would swim out to the pond's center and remove the flag. Elementary and some high school students watched from the pond's perimeter and cheered. Also in darkness, Maryville students painted the flag on the Alcoa High School Bridge. Alcoa students expeditiously spray-painted over the flag with a punchy "Beat Maryville" slogan the following day. Alcoa students' most explicit retaliation for such acts was to wear or carry shredded Confederate flags to Maryville football games (See Figure 2 for an image of the Maryville stands). For the majority of White Maryville and Alcoa students, families, and teachers, this annual elaborate theater was harmless teenage play: kids being kids. For most Black Maryville and Alcoa students, families, and teachers, this theater was yet another sinister manifestation of not-so-subtle symbolic politics White people passed through the generations.

## What changed?

How did Maryville go from a progressive haven of Blacks and Whites fighting against racial and social injustice to a place where, as a high school principal once said, flying a Confederate flag meant you were a racist and/or a Maryvillian?

In constructing my historical case of Maryville, I found that economic forces drove much of the racial-spatial injustice existing today. In the early 20th century, the Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA)

<sup>5</sup> I lived in Alcoa and everyone in my family attended and graduated from Alcoa Schools before me (both of my parents and siblings, all White). I, too, attended Alcoa Schools until the eighth grade. My middle school sat in the heart of the Black community (it has since been relocated), and my family was not beyond throwing shade at Maryville Schools for being elitist. Still, I transferred from Alcoa to Maryville my final year of middle school on account of more robust performing arts programs. My mother used part of her paycheck from teaching at Alcoa Elementary School to pay the annual \$900 tuition fee for me to attend Maryville High School.

Upon enrolling at Maryville, I was a traitor to many people on both sides, including family members and Black and White friends from Alcoa. My first day of school at Maryville, the guidance counselor told me I would not succeed in the highest tracked classes because of "where I was coming from" (words my parents will never forget). Potential friends I courted at school refused to come over to my house because of where I lived. When I attended my first Alcoa-Maryville football game as a Rebel, my Alcoa friends greeted me on the sidelines as a chimera—a she-monster built from incongruous yet recognizable parts. But growing-up, living in the vitriolic theater between Maryville and Alcoa, this was exactly the welcome I expected.

<sup>6</sup> I specify the use of the battle flag, or the *Southern Cross*, because the Confederacy waved many banners, but the battle flag has come to represent White supremacy and the terrorism of minoritized people.

<sup>7</sup> This perception was statistically inaccurate. Alcoa Schools have maintained a student population that is approximately a third African American students, two-thirds White students. Alcoa High School has always been about the half the size of Maryville.

began construction on a factory and housing for its workers in what was then North Maryville. Houses were clustered into communities, named and segregated by race. The most modest homes were for Black employees, actively recruited from the Deep South to work in the intensely hot and inhospitable pot rooms. The community in which these families lived was called Walnut Hill. Children living in Walnut Hill first attended school in the upstairs of a commercial building. In 1926, Black students had a proper school in which to study called Hall School, but had to travel 15 miles away to Knoxville if they wanted to study past the 10th grade (Miller, 2017).

In 1919, North Maryville became its own incorporated city called Alcoa, encompassing Walnut Hill, and the White communities manufactured by the company. On paper, this meant that Maryville and Alcoa's public education systems, and other functions of municipalities, were officially separated (Duggan & Williams, 2011). In practice and perception, this separation catalyzed a long-standing dynamic between white affluent Maryville and "Black working-class" Alcoa (see Footnote 7).

Fast forward to the 1940s. Based on interviews, I found that MHS was known in the sports circuit as the *Red Elephants*,<sup>8</sup> not the Rebels. Around this time the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association (TSSAA) slapped the school with recruiting violations for inviting promising athletes (read big and strong farm boys) from the county to play on their football team. After that penalty, Maryville had the reputation for being a bunch of rebels, bucking regulations. Then, in the '60s, Maryville *Rebels* (by this time an official moniker) started bringing Confederate battle flags to football games, coinciding with ongoing racial desegregation in the schools. It took until the 1990s for this climate of White dominance to be disrupted in Maryville.

In 1997, a Black physician from Knoxville attended a MHS football game. His takeaway from that experience—seeing huge Confederate battle flags waving at him from across the field in the opposing team's stands—was of being at a Klan rally. He filed a complaint with the Office of Civil Rights who promptly contacted the MHS superintendent and school board. The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) would be doing an official investigation of Maryville High School's use of discriminatory symbols, the letter said. The chair of the school board responded with a letter back to OCR requesting a grace period for MHS to conduct an internal investigation on the role of the flag in official school functions. There was a flag audit of sorts and also a public hearing scheduled for community input on what to do about the flag.

The public hearing occurred in 1999—my senior year—in our saggy and dank auditorium. The room was packed. School board members had police escorts. Motorcycle gangs covered in Confederate paraphernalia drove in from the surrounding hills. Many attendees wore pins on their lapels that donned the stars and bars with a vote-to-keep-it (the flag) message.

It was in this scene that our class president—a tall, soft-spoken Black student, voted "Most Dependable" in our senior superlative poll—spoke to the humiliation of having to walk, talk, study, and play sports everyday at his school under the most recognized banner of racism. He channeled the dread and shame he felt each year come Alcoa football game time when he played against his cousin, only after running through a tunnel of his team's supporters waving Confederate battle flags. With unimaginable grace, aware of the netless tightrope he walked, he acknowledged the relevancy of our school's "heritage not hate"<sup>9</sup> stance while arguing for a new empathetic stance toward all students. Our class president, along with several other Black students and their families, reminded the room that very real and painful experiences exist (and have for a long time) of the Confederate flag. As Ta-Nehisi Coates (2017) wrote, "There is nothing 'mere' about symbols."

Unsurprisingly, due to White privilege and supremacy, others (all White) spoke on behalf of the flag. Even though the town and region were historically pro-union,<sup>10</sup> one highly respected school figure stood and spoke in the memory of his ancestors who had died fighting for the south.

<sup>8</sup> I cannot find where this name came from, nor any linkages to political parties or racist symbolism.

<sup>9</sup> Again, the Class President learned that the history of Maryville was contradictory to this stance almost 20 years later when I reached out to him.

<sup>10</sup> According to a Civil War Memorial at the Blount County Courthouse, of the 41 soldiers from the county who died fighting in the war, five were Confederate soldiers.

Perhaps the most surprising moment<sup>11</sup> of the public hearing came when the president of the student council rose to her feet and spoke authoritatively into the microphone. This 17-year-old White woman told the room that her intent upon arriving tonight had been to argue for maintaining the flag as an official school symbol. However, after hearing the testimonies of some of her dearest friends and respected classmates, she changed her mind; her recommendation was to get rid of the flag entirely and form a student committee to design a new school banner. After the meeting, she was harassed in the parking lot by KKK members for her efforts; she knew she had done something right, having attracted their rage.<sup>12</sup>

## So what happened?

Within the year, and in all official capacities, the Confederate flag was removed from MHS: no more lunch trays, no more murals, and no more yearbook foldouts splashed with flags. Still, students (and alum) found creative ways to make the flag visible at sporting events. Confederate flag capes became a popular choice among some students when the school board banned flagpoles from games on account of them posing a safety threat.

Today, driving around town, and the surrounding county, produces an alarmingly high rate of flag sightings, often flying from the beds of pickup trucks. For me, the flag stands for hate, racism, and fear, but also for a process of place-remaking that relied on a false separation between teaching and issues of race, politics, and power (e.g., Bang, Warren, Roseberry, & Medin, 2012; Esmonde & Booker, 2016; Philip, 2011). This form of racialized place-remaking depended on a still deeper history of Indigenous erasure from place/land; stealing and forcibly removing Indigenous people from their homes set the stage for the Black-White binary at play in this account of a settler colonial project (e.g., Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; see footnote 2).

I still have to believe that the changes made to the school's building and its ancillary events<sup>13</sup> are a hard-fought success. Several brave students and some community leaders should be lauded on that count. The risks of many Black students and a (very) few White students—their reputations, their friendships, their safety—were not in vain; considerable progress has been made since those days.

I have reflected on this story several times since graduating from high school. To the extent with which I am able, I have thought about what it took to speak up against such a strong and vehement opposition; Black students comprised only 5% of the student population. I have reflected on how I could have been more involved—what could I have done differently, what should I have said? I have considered how knowing this history still would not have been enough for some to act justly, but how *not knowing* did not prohibit a small few from just actions. I have thought about the idiosyncrasies of people in the south who, as a friend said, “are wonderful people in some ways but if they have a dominant trait it’s being stubborn and stiff-necked if an outsider tries to tell [them] to do something.” I have ruminated on the role of sports as a public stage on which these social issues play out, the political stances of athletes, coaches, and fans currently rattling the highest office in the country. But now that my walk through the park has given me a historical context within which to situate this story, I have a different thought: where were our educators?

## Where were you, teachers?

MHS teachers have a long-standing reputation for being some of the best educators in the state. They pushed and challenged me, sometimes to the brink of mental exhaustion. I learned how to be a scholar there, an identity that has persisted to my profession. And it is in this profession that I study, design, and write about the ways in which public school teachers, specifically high school teachers, can connect their

<sup>11</sup> I use “most surprising” here, not to center the efforts of the White student council president or diminish those of our Black class president, but to highlight that everyone in the school (except her) thought she was going to defend the flag before she spoke.

<sup>12</sup> All of the information presented in this section about the public meeting was obtained through interviews with former classmates and school board members.

<sup>13</sup> Attendees at this year’s Alcoa-Marvillie football game, hosted at Alcoa, reported no Confederate flag sightings, only the Maryville flag that was designed after the official ban.



students to locally relevant issues (e.g., Taylor & Silvis, 2017). In other words, how can content areas, be it science, social studies, or language courses, be situated in live community problems (e.g., Tate, 1995) so that student learning is consequential for their daily lives (Jurow & Shea, 2015)?

So, it is at this intersection—between my educational history and my educational interests in the present—where I am hung up on my current reflection of our Confederate flag debacle at MHS. What were the live community problems and perspectives that were circulating at the time that our teachers could have helped us navigate? How could we, as students, guided by our teachers, have been more educated on social histories and strife that presented itself almost daily in those years? How could the curriculum help us White kids see and address how we were consciously and unconsciously responsible for dehumanizing our Black classmates? Not knowing our history meant that those who would have acted differently with new information remained inert, and those who would not have acted differently persisted under the cover of a fallacious backstory.

A common excuse heard from White elders is that Maryville's use of the Confederate flag was not invidious, overt racism, but a symptom of existing in a nonreflective, geographically isolated bubble (Woodard, 2011). So, what should teachers' responsibilities be in expanding the boundaries of that geography for students? How might a public education—rather than reifying processes of place-remaking—be an expansive project of engaging with the multiple place-stories of Maryville that disrupt narratives of White supremacy and settler colonialism (Thrush, 2017)? This shift would demonstrate to students that this flag was not symbolic of our football team, but a national and global symbol of anti-Black racism, hate, and displacement. How could educators have organized, using the school board meeting, for instance, to expose the systematic place-remaking that had been happening in our school—in our community—for generations?

Another common perspective has always been that the Confederate flag represents the town's history and sacrifice during the Civil War. So, what should teachers do to belie that myth? At some point, it would have been useful to know that the exact opposite is true. In fact, the city was burned to the ground by the Confederacy, so should we not all be burning this damn flag in effigy, instead of fervently flying it on account of our heritage?

As another argument goes, we can't be a bunch of racists because so many of the (eight) African American students were recognized as class presidents, model athletes (both of the "Most Athletic" superlatives went to two Black students), and musical ingénues. In response, how could teachers and coaches guide students in a conversation around calculated racist policies and practices that Black students negotiate and overcome daily to achieve educational excellence (e.g., Noguera, 2001)? How are these hurdles simply nonexistent for White students, pointing us to countless current and historical examples beyond the walls of our school? How does the erasure of this inequality, even in the face of so much Black excellence, sustain a system in which Black students not excelling academically are labeled *deficient*?

## A call to action for educators

We all know hindsight is 20–20. Many would contend that it is difficult to open-up these thorny issues, especially in a polite, nothing's-wrong-if-you-don't-say-anything-about-it place like the genteel South. But this excuse (yet another) has been a convenient way for White Southerners to maintain the racist status quo, to maintain the myth of the Confederacy. Instead, the words of bell hooks (McLeod, 1998) propel me to speak up against the actions of my teachers, but with compassion for their humanity: "For me, forgiveness and compassion are always linked: How do we hold people accountable for wrongdoing and yet at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed?" (p. 8)

This provocation feels to me especially important for our children's public school educators, most of whom are White, teaching an increasing population of Black and Brown children (e.g., Landsman & Lewis, 2006). How can we (students, parents, community members) hold educators accountable but expect that they will not always get it right? How can we compassionately guide their transformation so that they, too, recognize the humanity in all of their students? Reflecting back on my 1999 high school faculty comprised of one Black teacher and 100 White teachers, coaches, and administrators, the need

for humane action and accountability was dire. So many of us were confused, hurt, and vulnerable in that melee. We didn't know which way was up in the absence of strong, morally right leaders and good information.

Reflecting on this personal journey of collective and calculated place-remaking—in conjunction with momentum in the learning sciences—compelled me to formalize ways in which I have, or plan to, hold myself accountable as a White educator, researcher, designer, mother, and community member. Unfortunately, I cannot go back and be a better ally for my Black classmates and friends from school; I will carry this regret my entire life. But I can learn from my mistakes, my silence, and look to doing better in the future.

I hope you receive this in-progress professional code of ethical teaching and research practice for the learning sciences with an open heart. I intend these commitments to support and protect students (and all young people in our communities) from bearing sole responsibility for critical stances based on their identities (e.g., Polman, 2006). This need feels especially urgent in the current sociopolitical climate where the multiplicities of bodies-in-place and histories of place are being vehemently and rapidly remade. I intend for components of this code to generate comments and additional ideas for our field.

- I commit to calling-out and correcting false notions of history, legacy, and heritage (see Carretero & Alphen's 2014 piece on master narratives).
- I commit to speaking up on behalf of students, with their permission, if the need should arise.
- I commit to unpacking my own White privilege for my undergraduate and graduate students (e.g., Milner, 2010) and children, remaining open to blind spots, and modeling for students and my children to do the same.
- I commit to fostering safe and systematic processes for dialogue and historicizing ongoing social issues (Shreiner, 2014) that necessarily permeate the walls of school and my own home (e.g., Nespor, 1997; Leander, Phillips, & Taylor, 2010).
- I commit to foregrounding issues of historicity, race, power, and privilege in the curriculum I teach and/or design (e.g., Gutierrez & Vossoughi, 2010). What voices are unaccounted for here? Why might that be? How can I/we fix that?
- I commit to guiding local inquiry sessions that uncover histories and contradictions upon which learning-living communities are built (e.g., Heath, 2012).
- I commit to not taking places at face value, but having a willingness to hear, see, and feel the multiple histories and perspectives that have made and continue to exist in that place by moving outside of familiar locations in unfamiliar ways (Taylor, 2017).
- I commit to following the voices, recommendations, and passions of young people in how I teach, design, research (e.g., Kirshner, 2008), and parent. Without them, MHS might still be flying a symbol of White supremacy and the terrorism of minoritized people.

In line with these commitments, I am working on a curricular design to uncover the buried histories of Maryville's past. I plan to collaborate with a local team of stakeholders, including educators, to reimagine my initial, awareness-raising walk for high school students to build and take. We will develop an interactive counter-map (Taylor & Hall, 2013) of downtown Maryville that foregrounds the multiple histories of Indigenous peoples and people of color that built the place I used to call home. Hopefully, young (and older) people in my hometown will make new roads by walking—*countertrails*—built upon those trodden and hidden after many, many years. Maryville youth making countertrails across the city will be one approach to teaching and research that “value[s] the political analysis and visions of young people who defend and further the rights and well-being of Indigenous people, people of color, immigrants, Muslims, women, people who are differently abled, LGBTQ communities, and the earth” (Politics of Learning Writing Collective, 2017; p. 8).

Knowing Maryville's dignified history of fighting for racial and social justice is bittersweet. The contradiction between the past and present is so raw for me, perfectly illustrating the work of place-remaking that has happened here, and in so many other places, over the years. These feelings re-emerge every time another group of White folks raise Cain over the removal of some Confederate symbol from a public space. Of course, there are so many factors responsible for their continued belief in the myth of the Confederacy, so many more than I can even imagine, let alone write about. But having experienced firsthand

how my public education skirted the real issues of racism and White nationalism symbolized by this battle flag, I have to assume many of their (mis)educations helped maintain the myth for them as well.

In the most ideal corners of my mind, I hope that this contradiction will be a hopeful spark for igniting teaching and learning possibilities for Maryville's young people. And I am proud of the young people from Maryville that have fought so hard, over so many years, to at least keep this contradiction in check. Perhaps, after walking these histories of their parents' hometown with me, our children will return to proudly continue the fight along their own countertrails of Maryville.

## Acknowledgments

This article is dedicated to Patrick Thomas for his bravery and grace. The silver lining of this article has been reconnecting with so many wonderful classmates, friends, family, and colleagues. I am grateful for encouragement from and conversations with Nancy Beadie, Maria Glover, Rogers Hall, Mary Lynn Headrick, Shirley Brice Heath, Rich Milner, Bill Penuel, Thomas Philip, Robert Taylor, Patrick Thomas, Leslie Starritt, Barb Stengel, Karen Weickert, Joy Williamson-Lott, and Ken Zeichner. Thank you for your insightful and honest feedback, Ananda Marin and Joe Polman; I am always grateful for your collegiality and support. Also, to Reviewer 1, with generosity and compassion, you helped me make this a much better article and see my own blind spots. Thank you for holding me accountable to my own ideals. We are all works in progress. Finally, thank you to Hillary Rodham Clinton for reminding me that being a woman is not easy, but it's also not an excuse for staying quiet and refusing to tell your story. Otherwise, others will do it for you. I hope this helps others tell theirs.

## ORCID

Katie Headrick Taylor  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4535-6671>

## References

- Bang, M., Warren, B., Roseberry, A. S., & Medin, D. (2012). Desettling expectations in science education. *Human Development*, 55, 302–318. doi:10.1159/000345322
- Birdseye, E., & Dunn, D. (1997). *An Abolitionist in the Appalachian South: Ezekiel Birdseye on Slavery, Capitalism, and Separate Statehood in East Tennessee, 1841–1846*. Knoxville, TN: Univ. of Tennessee Press.
- Brown, K. F. (1982). *The black press of Tennessee: 1865–1980*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Graduate School at Trace.
- Carretero, M., & Van Alphen, F. (2014). Do master narratives change among high school students? A characterization of how national history is represented. *Cognition and Instruction*, 32(3), 290–312. doi:10.1080/07370008.2014.919298
- Coates, T. (2017, January). My president was black. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/01/my-president-was-black/508793/>
- Duggan, D. R., & Williams, G. (2011). *Images of America: Alcoa*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing.
- Esmonde, I., & Booker, A. N. (2016). *Power and privilege in the learning sciences: Critical and sociocultural theories of learning*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Freire, P., & Horton, M. (1990). In B. Bell, J. Gaventa, & J. Peters (Eds.), *We make the road by walking: Conversations on education and social change*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Goffman, E. (1983). The interaction order. *American Sociological Review*, 48, 1–17. doi:10.2307/2095141
- Gutiérrez, K. D., & Vossoughi, S. (2010). Lifting off the ground to return anew: Mediated praxis, transformative learning, and social design experiments. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 61(1–2), 100–117. doi:10.1177/0022487109347877
- Heath, S. B. (2012). *Words at work and play: Three decades in family and community life*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Ingold, T. (2011). *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge, and Description*. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.
- Jurow, S., & Shea, M. (2015). Learning in equity-oriented scale-making projects. *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 24(2), 286–307. doi:10.1080/10508406.2015.1004677
- Kendon, A. (1990). *Conducting interaction: Patterns of behavior in focused encounters*. Cambridge, UK: University Press.
- Kirshner, B. (2008). Guided participation in three youth activism organizations: Facilitation, apprenticeship, and joint work. *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 17(1), 60–101. doi:10.1080/10508400701793190
- Landsman, J., & Lewis, C. W. (2006). *White teachers, diverse classrooms: A guide to building inclusive schools, promoting high expectations, and eliminating racism*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.
- Leander, K. M., Phillips, N. C., & Taylor, K. H. (2010). The changing social spaces of learning: Mapping new mobilities. *Review of research in education*, 34(1), 329–394. doi:10.3102/0091732X09358129
- Lewis, M., & Serbu, J. (1999). Commemorating the Ku Klux Klan. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 40(1), 139–158. doi:10.1111/j.1533-8525.1999.tb02361.x

- Limerick, P. N. (1988). *The legacy of conquest: The unbroken past of the American West*. New York, NY: WW Norton & Company.
- Lomawaima, K. T., & McCarty, T. L. (2006). *"To Remain an Indian": Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Marcuse, P. (2009). Spatial justice: Derivative but causal of social injustice. *Spatial Justice*, 1, 49–57.
- McLeod, M. (1998, January). There's no place to go but up [Interview with b. hooks and M. Angelou]. *Shambhala Sun*. Retrieved October 17, 2017, from [http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1999&Itemid=244](http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1999&Itemid=244)
- Marin, A. M. (2013). *Learning to attend and observe: Parent-child meaning making in the natural world*. (Dissertation). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University.
- Merton, R. K. (2008). *Focused interview*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Milner IV, H. R. (2010). Race, narrative inquiry, and self-study in curriculum and teacher education. In *Culture, Curriculum, and Identity in Education* (pp. 181–206). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan US.
- Miller, A. B. (2017, July 21). Alcoa Intermediate School teachers receive lesson from city historian David Duggan. *The Daily Times*. Retrieved from [http://www.thedailytimes.com/news/alcoa-intermediate-school-teachers-receive-lesson-from-city-historian-david/article\\_78d0ba6b-747b-53bb-8f68-d1e87b40e43a.html](http://www.thedailytimes.com/news/alcoa-intermediate-school-teachers-receive-lesson-from-city-historian-david/article_78d0ba6b-747b-53bb-8f68-d1e87b40e43a.html)
- Nespor, J. (1997). *Tangled Up in School: Politics, Space, Bodies, and Signs in the Educational Process*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Noguera, P. A. (2001). Racial politics and the elusive quest for excellence and equity in education. *Education and Urban Society*, 34(1), 18–41. doi:10.1177/0013124501341003
- Parker, H. (1975). A School of the Prophets at Maryville. *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, 34(1), 72–90. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/stable/42623501>
- Philip, T. M. (2011). An "ideology in pieces" approach to studying change in teachers' sense-making about race, racism, and racial justice. *Cognition & Instruction*, 29(3), 297–329. doi:10.1080/07370008.2011.583369
- Polman, J. L. (2006). Mastery and appropriation as means to understand the interplay of history learning and identity trajectories. *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 15(2), 221–259. doi:10.1207/s15327809jls1502\_3
- Rubel, L. H., Hall-Wieckert, M., & Lim, V. Y. (2017). Making Space for Place: Mapping Tools and Practices to Teach for Spatial Justice. *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 26(4), 643–687.
- Shreiner, T. L. (2014). Using historical knowledge to reason about contemporary political issues: An expert–novice study. *Cognition and Instruction*, 32(4), 313–352. doi:10.1080/07370008.2014.948680
- Solnit, R. (2001). *Wanderlust: A history of walking*. New York: Penguin.
- Tate, W. F. (1995). Returning to the root: A culturally relevant approach to mathematics pedagogy. *Theory Into Practice*, 34(3), 166–173. doi:10.1080/00405849509543676
- Taylor, K. H. (2013). *Counter-mapping the neighborhood: A social design experiment for spatial justice* (Doctoral dissertation). Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University.
- Taylor, K. H. (2017). Learning Along Lines: Locative Literacies for Reading and Writing the City. *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 26(4), 533–574.
- Taylor, K. H., & Hall, R. (2013). Counter-mapping the neighborhood on bicycles: Mobilizing youth to reimagine the city. *Technology, Knowledge, & Learning*, 18, 65–93. doi:10.1007/s10758-013-9201-5
- Taylor, K. H., & Silvis, D. (2017, July). Mobile City Science: Technology-supported collaborative learning at community scale. *12th International Conference on Computer Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL) 2017, Volume 1*. Philadelphia, PA: International Society of the Learning Sciences.
- The Politics of Learning Writing Collective. (2017). The learning sciences in a new era of U.S. nationalism. *Cognition and Instruction*, 35(2), 91–102.
- Thrush, C. (2017). *Native Seattle: Histories from the crossing-over place*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.
- Vandiver, F. E. (1961). The Confederate myth. *Southwest Review*, 46(3), 199–204.
- Williamson-Lott, J., & Beadie, N. (2016). Forum on teaching: Constructing historical cases. *History of Education Quarterly*, 56, 115–116. doi:10.1111/hoeq.12151
- Williamson-Lott, J. A., Darling-Hammond, L., & Hyler, M. (2012). Education and the quest for African American citizenship: An overview. In H. L. Gates, C. Steele, L. Bobo, M. Dawson, G. Jaynes, L. CroomsRobinson, & L. Darling-Hammond (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of African American Citizenship, 1865–Present* (pp. 581–590). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wolfe, C. R. (2017). *Seeing the Better City: How to Explore, Observe, and Improve Urban Space*. Washington, DC: Island Press.
- Woodard, C. (2011). *American Nations: A History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America*. New York: Penguin Books.