

Title: **The Safetyfication of Curriculum as an Example of Bureaucratic Governance**

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This presentation takes up what Author 1 terms the “safetyfication” of education. Safetyfication refers to the process through which the notion of ‘safety’ has acquired an omnipresent status in education in the Anglophone world as a result of an amalgam of claims that range from disciplinary calls to social justice demands. In this paper-presentation, the authors will analyze attempts to make the curriculum safer – or free from sociopolitical risk – under Author 2’s political analysis of bureaucracy as a form of governance (2018; 2023). The main argument made is that this form of governance operates inadvertently, through the safetyfication of education. The presentation will be developed in two strands:

1) Author 1’s ethnographic study conducted in four secondary schools in New Zealand involving the ways that these schools promote ‘safety.’ The data shows how pressures to ‘keep students ‘safe’ in the neoliberal context of school competition discourage teachers from engaging in conflict (e.g., the teaching of controversial issues) and, instead, rely on conflict-avoidant norms and procedures that embraces a culture of overregulation (e.g., expert derivation approach, “opt in/opt out” procedures for coursework, and non-discriminatory language rules). This culture dissuades teachers from thinking through a problem or situation and from questioning *who* creates these rules or *why* these regulations are in place. As the data shows, this culture contributes to the diffusion of responsibility and “personal judgment” (Arendt, 2003, p. 24) under bureaucracy as a form of governance, which Arendt (1969) aptly calls “Rule by Nobody” (p. 38).

2) A critical, document-based analysis of the ways in which the discourse of safety is being taken up at the tertiary level. Different from public schools that rely on citizen taxpayers to fund K12 education, the neoliberal university has turned increasingly to (often exorbitant) student tuition fees to keep the “American ‘multiversity’” (Kerr as cited in Roberts, 1963) afloat. We observe a combination of “consumerism and safetyism” (Lukianoff and Haidt, 2018, p. 199) at work in both cases. The university, which has been going through a managerial revolution for decades (Author 2, 2016), has become increasingly risk-adverse as illustrated by demands placed on faculty to take and retake ethics and compliance training modules, carve out “safe zones” for students, provide trigger warnings for the curriculum, and (over)advise students on their four year academic plan of study.

The themes examined in this paper concern: A) the overregulation of what is acceptable behavior and language; B) ‘Cover Your Ass’ culture; C) Unquestioning of the “who” and the “why” of rules and procedures; D) “The client is always right” attitude. We argue that the consequences of safetyfication encourages a culture of conflict/discomfort avoidance which disperses individual responsibility unto systems, undermines political freedom, and disavows ethical consciousness, ultimately dehumanizing the teaching profession and the educational experience.

References

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Lukianoff, G. and Haidt, J. (2018). *The coddling of the American mind: How good intentions and bad ideas are setting up a generation for failure*. Penguin Press.

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