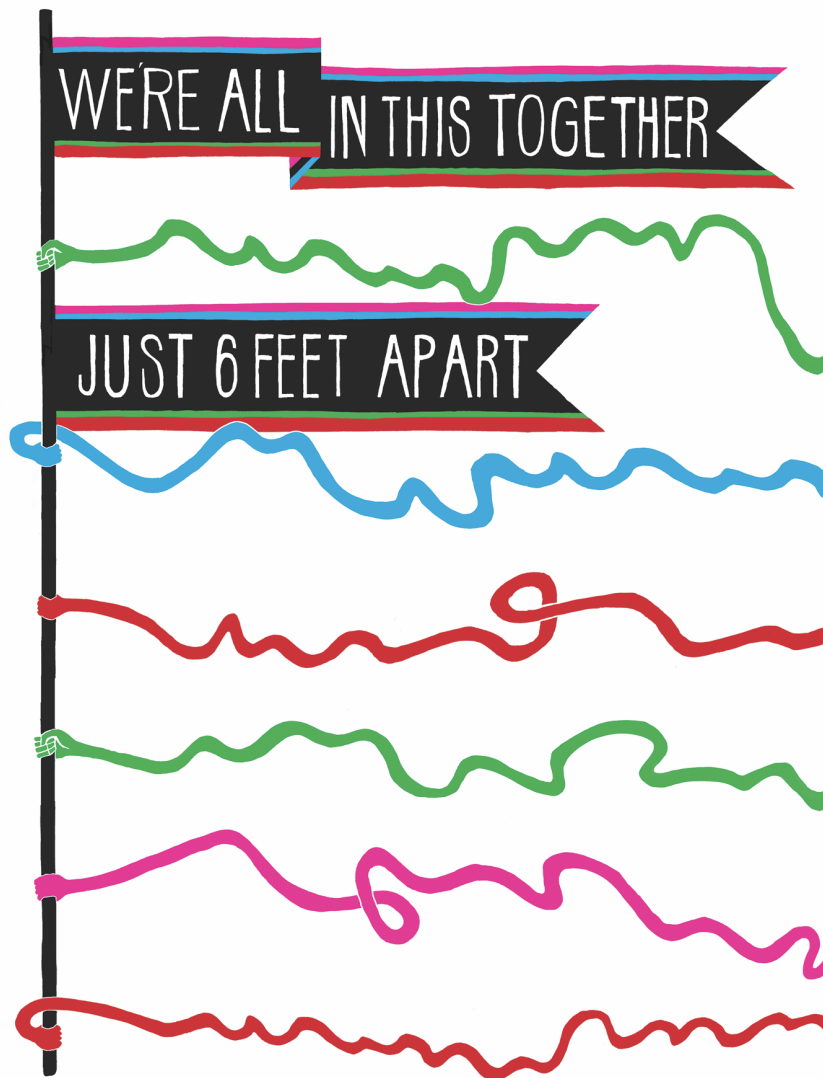# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Other Worlds and Educations Are Possible:
Lessons from Teaching and Learning During Covid-19

by Neil Meyer and Jocelyn Wills

JOSH MACPHEE, CARE PACKAGE #3, JUSTSEEDS COLLABORATION

Just as COVID-19 is particularly dangerous to populations with preexisting conditions, the virus ferociously swept across the world because of preexisting social conditions: the precarity of work; the unaffordability of housing; the depth of racial, ethnic, and class divides; a profoundly unequal global economy; and the failure of many governments worldwide to rise to the challenges.

- Thomas J. Segrue, *The Long Year: A 2020 Reader* (2022), 1.

Readers of *Radical Teacher* know well both the preexisting social conditions Thomas Segrue identified in his introduction to *The Long Year* as well as how much Covid-19 has exposed and exacerbated the ways in which settler colonialism, militarism, racism, neoliberalism, and the politics of austerity have corrupted education and failed all but the favored few. At the same time, while #NoReturnToNormal inspired many students, staff, and faculty members to rethink their futures and the roles they want to play in the creation of a better, more equitable, and sustainable world, many worry that the "not going back to normal" window has already begun to close. But as David Graeber reminded us, prior to his untimely death in September 2020, collectively we cannot allow that to happen, particularly when we consider the mass death and social disruptions that the pandemic caused, including the ways in which Covid orphans and their surviving caregivers must now navigate an increasingly uncertain future, teens find themselves forced to take on greater caregiving roles in their families, and mental health issues abound across generations.

Moreover, because Covid further accelerated 50-year trends, more people have finally begun to recognize the synergies between pandemics, climate change, wealth *and* income inequality, technological divides, authoritarian trends, racist violence, and police brutality. Triggered by Covid and the events that have followed, long-time and more recent activists have also created intersectional communities calling for widespread changes to protect those made most vulnerable by the capitalist obsession with expansion and exploitation without end. (Smith, 2022; Penner, 2022; Louis, 2022; Victor, 2021; Graeber, 2021; Forde, 2021; and Uwan, 2020)

Happily for all of us, the authors whose essays appear in this volume provide lessons from the pandemic that can help us to focus on what we need to do in and beyond the classroom in the days and years ahead. Together, they also point to the need for re-imagined communities of care, where multiple constituents can participate in and listen to the educational needs of students and their family members, rank-and-file staff members, and faculty both full-time and contingent. The authors in this special issue share their strategies to deal realistically with the psychological consequences of the pandemic, on students, teachers, staff, and administrators. Their experiences reveal the importance of listening—really listening—to students, and the ways in which young people have experienced the pandemic, loss and responsibility, front-line work, "no going back," and

their own versions of the "great resignation." Indeed, increased numbers of students and members of Generation Z know that they have received an unjust inheritance, and will continue to demand more meaningful learning opportunities, active listening on the part of the institutions they engage, more work-life balance and self-care time, a greater emphasis on passion over dead-end make-work, more resources for mental and physical health, and programs that allow them safely to express their emotions and identities. Those of us involved in the larger academic project ignore their voices and concerns at our own peril. (Smith, 2022)

Best practices in online learning require both rigorous training for instructors as well as substantial orientation sessions and support for students; the pandemic allowed for neither. It will take years to untangle the consequences of this shift. Centralized administrative dictates forced students (and instructors) to sign up for sometimes unvetted and unproven learning platforms, in over-crowded Zoom spaces, where everyone involved experienced new forms of surveillance and the consequences of increased screen time. At the same time, online environments also exacerbated already unsustainable wage-decline and cost-of-living crises (made evident when faculty asked students to turn on their cameras), childcare issues, digital divides, dictates that faculty and staff "lean-in" as technological fixers and psychologists without any training, and the realities of students being hyper-connected yet isolated and disengaged. These are just some of psychological challenges and jolts the Zoom-era provided in an environment where we still know far too little about the consequences of increased surveillance and life online. We do, however, have many tools to guide us in the days ahead, including Sherry Turkle's important work on the power of talk (and active, empathetic listening) in the digital age, and Cathy O'Neil's cautionary tales about big data and online surveillance, both of which have increased inequalities and continue to threaten democracies around the world. Technologies cannot solve our economic, political, social, and cultural problems; and we ignore these realities at our own peril as well. (Gray, 2022; Turkle, 2015; O'Neil, 2016)

> *Technologies cannot solve our economic, political, social, and cultural problems; and we ignore these realities at our own peril as well.*

Emergency online instruction also broke down social barriers between work and home. So many early discussions (and battles!) about camera policies raised questions about what it means to be "present" in the classroom, what it means to give instructors and students windows into one another's homes and learning spaces, what it means to collapse work-life boundaries. Over time, students from low-income households, seeking to help their struggling families, learned that they could work extra shifts while seeking off-camera, online education. Academic performance suffered as a result and in ways that have reshaped in-person learning as well. Thus, we need to have larger conversations

about how to re-engage students about the importance of an education (as opposed to "the degree" that promises them little more than a lifetime of drudgery in precarious work). Students have also reminded radical as well as conservative teachers that unconscionable digital divides and racial as well as economic inequalities exist beyond what many academics could previously imagine, inequalities that continues to privilege the few at the expense of the many. (Marcus, 2021; Smith, 2022; and Louis, 2022)

All of these daunting problems threaten to plough us under, but as our authors describe, one really important and positive insight has come out of online learning: it forced more faculty members and administrators to see the complexity of their students' lives. And this too is something engaged faculty need to keep high on the agenda, something that requires constant attention. We need to see the complexities of our students' lives, to hear their voices, to understand their pain and what they have endured, and to help them create the lives of purpose they desperately want in the days ahead. Only then can we hope to reimagine a more generous, equitable, and sustainable educational environment, particularly for the most vulnerable among us. Only then can we push for the kinds of policies our students and larger societies need to thrive as participants in communities with meaning and purpose. And such listening will allow us to deal realistically with declining enrollments, not by hiring more layers of administrators, but by improving faculty-to-student ratios, and creating communities of support for more public funding for education and infrastructural improvements, smaller class sizes, and better mental health services, to name but a few.

Along with our colleagues near and far, we know how much many of us have compulsively dwelled upon what has happened to our students and colleagues, and to us, during the pandemic. And we welcome this opportunity to think and act more deeply about the future of lifelong learning. We hope the essays in this special issue will prompt us to create the scaffolding we need for that future, one committed to liberation in and beyond the classroom, one that allows us to continue to check in, on our students, our colleagues, ourselves. Again, this will require greater emphasis on building communities of solidarity and intersectionality, of creating environments that highlight the need to learn from multiple voices, particularly the most vulnerable but also those with experiences and successes we ourselves currently lack. (See, for example, Tooze, 2020; and https://socialprogress.org, the latter of which posits new measures of what constitutes healthy societies, not based upon GPD but rather on our abilities to meet basic human needs. As you will see, the United States in particular, has much to learn from the experiences of other nation-states.)

The essays in this special issue of *Radical Teacher* expose and attempt to address the preexisting conditions Segrue and others have identified. Indeed, one of the profound ironies of the "pandemic era" is how a once-in-a-lifetime health crisis exposed and exacerbated many of the challenges and inequalities that have plagued education for decades. As you read through the essays, you will find new challenges and insights that have emerged from the pandemic, but also long-standing battles about the rights of students and workers, the effects of austerity budgeting,

and the need for much greater collective collaboration and more educational, workplace, and political solidarity.

White supremacy, and the multiple inequalities that flow from it, stands as one of the most egregious preexisting social conditions we need to address, not only in the United States but beyond its borders. Amid the lockdowns of 2020, more people had no choice but to see the dire and ongoing problem of racism, as people young and old streamed out of their covid cocoons to join the Black Lives Matter movement and to protest the murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and others. Shermaine Jones's "Breath-taking Pedagogy: Self-care & Ethical Pedagogy in the Climate of Anti-Blackness and COVID-19" addresses the pandemic's racial reckoning within the university context through a close reading of Toni Morrison's *Sula*, the reconsideration of white supremacist monuments, and the context of the ongoing "fragility of Black life." Allowing time in her pedagogy for deep breathing and reflection, Jones learned to give students more educational agency and room for creativity. In sharing her experiences, Jones articulates how much our pedagogies need to change to reflect the complexities that students bring to the project of learning. Jones also asks us to consider how much students, particularly first-generation students of color and members of the working poor need to feel respected so that they can receive the intellectual odysseys they deserve. That involves, Jones argues, "letting go," and being mindful about the need to take time to breathe, to reflect, to create spaces and exercises in self-care. Providing such opportunities to students, Jones allowed students to express themselves in new but no less rigorous ways, all in spaces that create room for both healing and hope.

Jones describes "an ethical teaching practice that privileges equity, empathy, and self-care," which we also see modeled in shea wesley martin's and Henry "Cody" Miller's "The Category Is 'Pandemic Queer': Reading, Connecting, and Reimagining Literacy with LGBTQ+ Youth in the Age of COVID-19." martin and Miller imagined equity, empathy, and self-care through the creation of an online reading group that focused on LGBTQ+ young adult literature. Beyond the usual conventions of teaching literature to this population, martin's and Miller's pedagogy "embraced the messy and nuanced nature that accompanies a queer and trans existence." The authors describe their national book discussion group as one that, "despite being marketed as a literacy education space…would prioritize care, affirmation, and holding space for the full presence of the LGBTQ+ youth who showed up on Zoom each time we met." Their mindful, online affirming learning space reflects the ways in which Jones created spaces for her students to "breathe" in a world that cares little about their survival. Together, they cared for each other and taught their teachers much about the precarity as well as joy of their lives during the pandemic, freely sharing more than martin and Miller originally dared to hope.

Bijoyeta Das's work reflects a different kind of mindful teaching. In "Teaching Covid 19 to Journalism Students," Das explores the scourge of misinformation that has become a dominant concern of the mainstream media, and how news reporting has affected the ways in which people (mis)understood—and continue to (mis)understand—the

pandemic. As a professor of journalism, Das had to, like our previous contributors, listen to student voices in the midst of a pandemic in order to reimagine teaching and reporting in ethical ways. But she also had to rethink what it means to teach journalism about and within a pandemic where a culture of disinformation always looms. The insights gained from this piece serve to remind us that whitewashing history and current events has brought us to the cliff where we now find ourselves, and that we need to rise above the false equivalencies of narratives that have created so much damage around the world. Indeed, Das's students have provided a blueprint for dealing with our historical and contemporary realities so that we have a better chance to create a more humane, equitable, and sustainable future.

It is impossible to understand the consequences of the pandemic on education without foregrounding its disparate impacts on working class, LGBTQ+, and BIPOC student populations. One area of education that has received less attention centers on the co-curricular, after-school, and supplemental education programs integral to many students' lives and especially important for marginalized communities, where many front-line workers live. In "The Community School Initiative in Toronto: Mitigating Opportunity Gaps in the Jane and Finch Community in the Wake of COVID-19," Ardavan Eizadirad, Sally Abudiab, and Brice Baartman present us with one such program. Their work with marginalized communities allowed them to rethink the importance of focusing on student opportunity gaps rather than achievement ones, and the ways in which disadvantaged, racialized, low-income families helped to expose multiple inequalities during the pandemic. That focus also exposed how much teachers, whether K-12 or in higher education, need to reach beyond the classroom, to learn about what family members within the community need and want from education. Listening emerged again as central to the creation of a better future for the multiple constituents that educational environments serve and draw upon, while their emphasis on "unequal by design" allows us to reimagine a post-Covid world that can and must become more equitable and inclusive "by design." That means working with the wider community to create wrap-around services for students and communities alike. Their work also exposes, once again, the fallacies of color-blindness and the myths of a meritocratic, capitalist world order, not only in the United States but also in Canada and other places where class and racial divides as well as austerity reign. Reinforcing the essays that precede theirs, Eizadirad, Abudiab, and Baartman make another cogent argument for centering community voices, not only as a pedagogical strategy but also to build trust and solidarity.

Our final two essays address solidarities beyond the classroom, allowing us opportunities to think structurally about radical and organized change in opposition to the "new normal." Rhiannon M. Maton's "'What We Want is the Same Thing You Want': Educator Union Organizing for the 'Common Good' during Covid-19" analyzes the ways several prominent educator unions worked with their larger communities to address the challenges and needs of reopening schools amid the pandemic. Employing lessons from unions that worked with community partners, including during the 2016 Chicago Teachers' Strike, Maton argues that

"such unions pointed to the ways in which community health concerns are bound up with the learning and working conditions of schools, and thus linked the health and well-being of children, families, and communities with that of educators." By seeking a just and healthy return to school as part of a larger project of organized labor and the communities in which it resides, Maton's essay offers us ways to think about how unions and community organizations can work together by finding common concerns, and organizing for the common good, on which to build greater solidarities and public debate about the future of education no matter the uncertainties ahead.

Finally, this issue closes with "Agents of Change: Modeling Two-Year College English Teacher's Change Resilience and Saturation during COVID and (we hope) Beyond" by Emily K. Suh, Brett M. Griffiths, Lizbett Tinoco, Patrick Sullivan, and Sarah Snyder. The authors use the data from a broad survey of English instructors to open a window into the challenges *and* opportunities and possibilities that emerged from teaching in the early days of the pandemic. Employing that data, the authors argue that some of the changes made and lessons learned afford a "thoughtspace" and energizing environment "for radical teachers to adapt their curriculum and connect better with students" and each other, to take seriously the role of ongoing mentoring and care no matter where the pandemic leads.

The range of concerns and ideas discussed in this issue represent a beginning sample of the work we will have to engage in while learning and teaching in the midst of a rolling pandemic. Visions of "herd immunity" and a post-COVID "new normal" are the product of magical thinking more than epidemiological reality. One of the more pernicious forces we will have to contend with is the desire to live "normally," which for many means living without any mitigation (or even acknowledgement) of the spread or severity of COVID-19. A few sobering news items at the end of August of this year reveal the lethal contradictions of this drive towards a perverse normalcy. First, the *New York Times* and other outlets reported on the historic drop in life expectancy in the United States, which has fallen nearly three years since the pandemic began. Meanwhile, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reports both that more colleges are foregoing vaccine mandates and that the mental health crisis affecting college-aged students is causing a high number of students to consider dropping out. (Rabin, 2022; Adedoyin, 2022; Diep, 2022)

Taken together, these sources reveal a grim picture of a nation that refuses to learn from the pandemic but that has also normalized outsized levels of death and harm. Our teaching and activism will have to push against the right-wing nihilism that undergirds this push for a "new normal." We believe the essays collected here offer ways to think about and enact that work and we look forward to more teaching and activism that continues to push for "other educations" that center the rights of those made most vulnerable by neoliberalism and the politics of austerity, the precarity of work, the unaffordability of housing and other social goods, racial, ethnic, class, and digital divides, and the profoundly unequal global economy that capitalist dreams launched. As the authors in this issue remind us, other worlds are possible, including other kinds of educational

environments, ones that deal with the realities of the worlds we have created and now inhabit. Now is the time to fight for a better future, one free from the constraints of unequal and unsustainable environments.

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RADICAL TEACHER

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Breath-taking Pedagogy:
Self-care & Ethical Pedagogy in the Climate of Anti-
Blackness and COVID-19

by Shermaine M. Jones
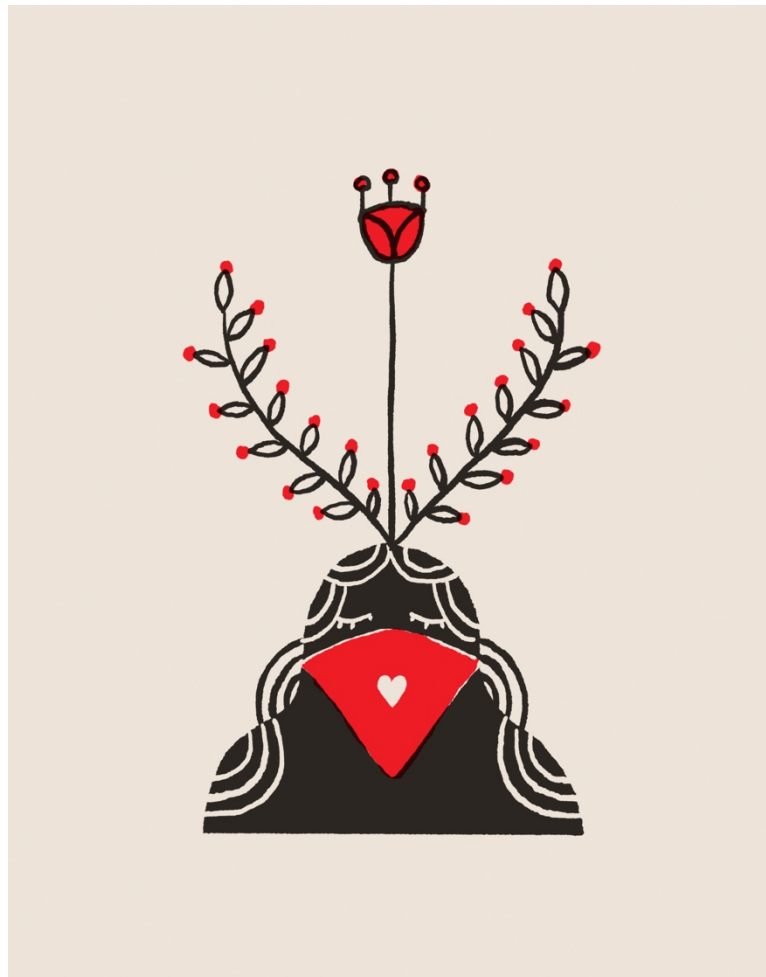
LANDON SHEELY, CARE PACKAGE #3, JUSTSEEDS COLLABORATION

I've been thinking about what it takes, in the midst of the singularity, the virulent antiblackness everywhere and always remotivated, to keep breath in the Black body.

- Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*

The Precarity of Black Breath

Black breath and life are marked by a state of precarity. The constant threat to Black life manifests in myriad ways that are both embodied and environmental: the stress of racism accumulates in the body, causing and/or exacerbating racial health disparities; institutionally racist practices restrict economic, housing, and educational opportunities, keeping Black people disproportionally impoverished, imprisoned, and imperiled; the (mis) reading of Black bodies as trespassing and threatening in public spaces leads to fatal confrontations with the police or (white) vigilante citizens; the failed state and federal responses to "natural disasters" like Hurricane Katrina unduly impact and devastate Black communities. These examples of premature Black death and the frequent categorization of Black people as "at risk" for any number of diseases, disasters, and discomforts underscore the fragility of Black life.

In 2020, as the mysterious airborne illness spread at alarming rates, news media and popular discourse framed COVID-19 as a great equalizer, presuming indiscriminate impact. Yet, as COVID-19 ravaged Black communities, leaving its most harshly affected victims gasping for air on ventilators, "I Can't Breathe" gained a new poignancy. "'I can't breathe,' Eric Garner's last words before his murder at the hands of the NYPD, continue to haunt as hospitals fill up with bodies, an incommensurate number of Black bodies, denied air" (Kennedy, 287). The statistics are sobering. Examining data on mortality rates by race/ethnicity across 45 states, Maritza Vasquez Reyes observes, "These data, while showing an alarming death rate for all races, demonstrate how minorities are hit harder and how, among minority groups, the African American population in many states bears the brunt of the pandemic's health impact" (300). The mortality rate for COVID-19 among Black people is more than twice that of whites. While rates of morbidity and mortality have shifted throughout the pandemic and varied across the states, they have continued to reflect ongoing racial disproportion. Black people are at higher risk of contracting and dying from COVID-19 due to the historical legacy of discriminatory practices within health care, longstanding health care access and utilization disparities, higher rates of preexisting chronic medical conditions, and, because Black people are more likely to be essential workers, elevated occupational risk. Differential access to clean air, quality housing, health care, and other factors that impact well-being leave Black people vulnerable to what Saidiya Hartman describes as "skewed life chances" (6).

Amidst the darkness of the isolation and anxiety of the pandemic, there was a racial reckoning. The sense of insecurity about the future that COVID-19 created combined with a "fierce urgency of now" as Black Lives Matter activists galvanized nationally and internationally, channeling the (out)rage over the horrific murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd into protests against police brutality, white vigilante violence, and disregard for Black life and humanity. On a local level, students and community members in Richmond, Virginia marshaled this fervor and momentum to insist on the removal of the Confederate monuments on Monument Avenue—symbols of white supremacy and antagonism.

As a Black literary scholar working and living at the intersection of these urgent matters, I felt a sense of despondency and disillusionment about the kind of work I could and should be doing and what its impact would be. Racial fatigue weighed heavily on my mind and spirit. I questioned, how does literature help us to better understand the concerns of our moment and imagine a more equitable future? What does ethical and engaged pedagogy look like in this moment? "Breath-taking Pedagogy" examines my concerns and anxieties while navigating these coinciding threats to Black breath and the ways this experience informed a radical shift in my approach to teaching and public scholarship. Specifically, I detail how I have tried to reconcile my role and contribution through community engaged scholarship that demonstrates the transformative potential of literature and through an ethical teaching practice that privileges equity, empathy, and self-care.

Moreover, the experience of living during a pandemic gave me a fresh perspective on the material for my Black Women Writers course. Specifically, I read Toni Morrison's *Sula* with a new attunement to its references to the Tuberculosis epidemic. Eva's description of the bleakness and despair of 1895 as "[n]iggers was dying like flies" (68) underscores how the threat of death permeated Black life, as Black people died at alarmingly higher rates than their white counterparts with similar symptoms. This text provided an opportunity for me to pose deeply relevant and urgent questions about how race continues to inform healthcare-seeking behavior, treatment, and outcomes. Through these reflections, I theorize an ethical practice of teaching that centers "Black breath" and intentional "breath-taking" in a time of COVID-19 and anti-Blackness.

Ethical Considerations & Interventions in the Transition to Online Learning

I had only recently returned to teaching from maternity leave when the threat of COVID-19 caused my university (Virginia Commonwealth University) to institute remote learning for the remainder of the Spring 2020 semester. At the start of the pandemic, I was offering two classes: Black Women Writers, with 30 students, and (with the assistance of a graduate student) African American Literature: Beginnings Through the Harlem Renaissance, which enrolled 47 students. With very little notice or preparation, we were expected to offer the same rigorous instruction and engaged pedagogy in an online format. I had never taught online before, and certainly not under these conditions.

The pedagogical alterations I made in the wake of the pandemic and racial turmoil reflect my efforts to create space for intentional "breath–taking" at a time of great anxiety, both about COVID-19's threat to respiratory

function as well as about the resonance of "I Can't Breathe" as a cry of racial protest. "'I Can't Breathe' captured the sense of a psychic chokehold … the condition of affective asphyxia, that characterizes black life lived in the precarious state between life and death" (Jones 38). Specifically, COVID-19 forced me to radically transform my approach to teaching ethically, especially with regard to my expectations for student participation, productivity, and performance. Working at an institution like VCU, where my diverse student population consists of parents, caretakers, essential workers, students with limited Internet access or home environments that make them reluctant to be on camera, meant really questioning how to encourage student engagement without requiring students to be on camera. Preparing for remote learning, I surveyed my students regarding potential impediments the new format might pose to their learning. These concerns included, but were not limited to: living conditions; financial constraints; and restrictions to Internet access that might impact their educational experience, participation, and performance. Responses revealed that some students had moved back to rural places with unreliable Internet access; others had returned home to NYC, the epicenter of the virus at the time, to care for ill family members. Additionally, students with school-aged children were expected to homeschool while completing their assignments. Understanding the unique challenges my students faced was essential in preparing an equitable learning environment for the remainder of the semester.

> *…COVID-19 forced me to radically transform my approach to teaching ethically, especially with regard to my expectations for student participation, productivity, and performance.*

Considering the many challenges my students faced transitioning to online learning, I chose not to meet via Zoom but rather to assign and collect work asynchronously via Blackboard. I relied heavily on the discussion board to promote continued engagement and dynamic discussion without rigid time constraints. This reflected a commitment to "intentional breath-taking," allowing students more agency ("breathing room") in direct opposition to the pressure of rigid time constraints, a pressure that can stifle breathing. I informed students that my objective was to continue the thoughtful and rigorous engagement with the readings, themes, and concerns of the course as well as to provide meaningful opportunities for them to demonstrate their knowledge. I assured them of continued instructional support through detailed reading guides for the novels which highlighted specific passages, made connections between texts, posed additional questions for reflection, and recommended additional resources for continued engagement. I also recorded mini-lectures contextualizing readings, and posted PowerPoint presentations and video links providing definitions, biographies, interviews, and other supporting resources. This multifaceted and multimodal approach also created a diversity of

opportunities for breathing room by opening up space to learn, with students having a lot of agency in terms of how much to engage, what to engage, and when to engage.

Blackboard became the primary resource for engagement and submission of assignments. Rather than the usual open-ended discussion where students reflected on the readings, I posed specific questions and prompts that often included short assignments. For example, I asked students to watch a TED Talk defining intersectionality and then apply the theory to close read a passage. To encourage students to continue to engage each other online, I divided the class into two groups: Group A was responsible for engaging 2-3 of the questions or prompts, while Group B was responsible for responding to Group A's original posts, and then the roles would alternate. Everyone was responsible for reading all of the threads and I also participated by responding directly to students' posts. I provided students with a rubric for engaging with the material and with each other in a meaningful way. The dynamic learning environment students and I co-created encouraged students to: make connections between texts in the course and current/historical events; make connections between the text and other art forms like photography, drama, film, etc.; and engage a theoretical framework in their analysis of readings.

In Fall 2020, as students adjusted to remote learning, I moved to a model featuring one asynchronous and one synchronous meeting weekly, which permitted me to continue to support student engagement by offering flexibility and multiple modes of participation. Still, the ethical question of requiring students to be on camera remained. Though staring into a screen of empty black boxes labeled with names feels alienating as an instructor, I felt uncomfortable making cameras mandatory in my online courses because of the ways that this requirement reproduces certain forms of privilege as well as shame. While I encouraged students to participate and be on camera if they felt comfortable, I ultimately did not require it. Margaret Finders and Joaquin Muñoz provide instructive insights on how insistence on camera presence can be culturally insensitive as well as characteristic of racist, sexist, and classist expectations of presentation and professionalism. They assert, "Consciously or unconsciously, the need to have cameras on -- while considered by many instructors as pedagogically sound -- is actually indicative of an attitude toward teaching that positions students as docile bodies in need of constant surveillance" (n.pg). They encourage instructors to scrutinize our desire to monitor students visually to ensure their attentive listening and active engagement. Moreover, they urge instructors to consider the classed, raced, and gendered expectations implicit in this expectation. Instead they suggest, "We have multiple ways as instructors to create structures for students to demonstrate their learning. Rather than force old practices of face-to-face interactions into virtual spaces, each of us needs to understand the discomfort and demands that our students encounter when forced to turn cameras on" (n.pg). My appreciation of the unique lives of my students, as well as my own experience as a first-generation college student from a working-class immigrant background, influenced my decision about camera use in the virtual

classroom. As a college student, I would have felt immense anxiety about having to be on camera in my one-bedroom apartment in the Bronx amongst my largely privileged Dartmouth classmates. As a result, I consciously resisted requiring on-camera presence for my undergraduate students, who were navigating both the unprecedented difficulties of the pandemic and an unexpected turn to virtual instruction.

As an alternative to insisting on being on camera, I asked students who did not choose to be on camera to use a profile picture—be it of themselves, a pet, or a favorite author—to offer some personality and a means of connection without intruding in their homes or shaming them into appearing on camera. Some students felt more comfortable being on camera during the smaller group breakout sessions, which I used regularly to facilitate vibrant discussions.

Creative Projects: Student Agency & Innovative Approaches to Student Assessment

I also confronted how to assess student learning in ways that are meaningful and feasible. I wanted students to be able to examine the key concerns of the course outside of the traditional expectations of exams and essays. I wanted them to be able to see themselves in the work and also to be able to use these projects to introduce and continue conversations about race, class, gender, sexuality, and privilege with their loved ones and communities. I wanted to encourage their autonomy and innovation. These reflections led me to implement creative assignments that allowed students to demonstrate their mastery of course content in a format that they desired. My courses often attract students from a range of majors who are seeking to engage deeply with Black literature, often for the first time in their coursework. I employ an interdisciplinary approach in my pedagogy, so I encourage students to mine their respective disciplinary training, artistic abilities, and personal interests in choosing how to present their work. Student projects included podcasts, poetry, paintings, photography, and more.

Students' identities and positionalities informed their approaches to the creative projects. They demonstrated a willingness to lean into discomfort and interrogate central themes of the course in deeply meaningful and innovative ways that required great vulnerability. Students produced self-portraits interrogating race, identity, and double consciousness; podcasts exploring transgenerational trauma; and spoken word pieces examining the fraught nature of Black citizenship. In one particularly memorable case, a visual art major painted his interpretation of the final scene of Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*, in which Helga languished in bed under the weight and despair of another pregnancy. The student's attention to detail, especially the forlorn look in Helga's eyes, made this a masterful depiction of his understanding of Larsen's critique of the toll of motherhood on Helga Crane's personhood. Another student, a musician, collaborated with two other artists to record a rendition of a ragtime piece to explore the significance of music and

aesthetics in James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. In the poem cited here, my student Khalil R. Houston explores themes of racial terror, asphyxiation, and breath:

"Grandpa's Neck"

Grandpa told me about this.

That there was a time when men could swing from their necks

       Rather dead or alive, you swung.

You remained there.

  Hoping for breath

Hoping for a chance for your feet to touch ground

   It never came.

You just swung, until the rope became still

   While God's men watched you transform into black angel

Grandpa says,

    That in the eyes of the rope, black angels don't have wings.

That a rope proved, that wings are only tied arms.

We didn't have wings, he said

    We could only dream of flying away to save our necks

We only swung, and prayed that our wives remember more, than just our necks.

That a broken neck doesn't mean, we weren't strong.

Even as the poem explores the horror of the legacy of lynching, there are moments of imagined breath-taking, "hoping for breath." Whether in "I Can't Breathe" posters and protest art or in quiet meditations on the work of the breath, breath and breathing were a common theme in the final projects, exemplifying the impact of my intentional focus on breath-taking, pathways for resuscitation, and resisting affective asphyxia on my students. This assignment, like so many others, gives students an opportunity to deeply engage the works of the course outside of the traditional essay or exam, which evaluates comprehension and completion of the readings but does not always invite the kind of deep meditation and engagement that impacts students well beyond the bounds of the course.

In honor and celebration of the thoughtful work my students submit, I offer an opportunity for students to share

their creative projects as a culminating experience for the class. This creates a space of reflection, community, and healing, as many of the projects are so profoundly personal and therapeutic. It is a way for students to observe the various ways they might theoretically and stylistically engage the readings, inquiries, and themes of the course. This has been some of the most transformative work my students have produced. Most significantly, students expressed joy at being able to share their projects with loved ones and friends and thereby continue the discussions of race, class, sexuality, gender, and privilege outside the traditional classroom.

Breath-Taking & Self-Care: Pedagogy and Practice

In an effort to support my students' mental health, I became more intentional about teaching self-care strategies. I questioned how to equip students with self-care practices even as I struggled to cope amidst significant mental strain. Specifically, how do I attend to my students, particularly those students of color who are daily confronted with the vulnerability of their bodies in public spaces, now compounded by their vulnerability to COVID-19 as caretakers and essential workers? I invested class time to talk about ways we can care for ourselves, including therapy resources, journaling, breathing exercises, walks, accountability groups, etc. Moreover, I highlighted how Black women writers like Audre Lorde and Alice Walker challenge us to think about the radical ethic of self-care in the midst of the virulent attack on Black life. I also asked students to consider their engagement with spectacles of violence against Black and Brown bodies. As images and recordings of brutalized Black bodies surface daily, unarmed Black men and women dying at the hands of police in real time, we must confront the ways that we engage with the mundane nature of Black trauma. Sometimes self-care may require refusing to watch the gratuitous circulation and dissemination of Black trauma in news and popular media. I invited students to consider the radical potential of Black joy and how to find spaces for this. This focus reflected my ethical commitment to encouraging students to prioritize their wellness and that of their families and communities as I struggled with my own isolation and anxiety.

Teaching during the pandemic not only made me more attentive to and critical of my pedagogical approaches and expectations, but it also brought fresh awareness to material I had taught repeatedly, like Toni Morrison's *Sula.* Specifically, I pointed our attention to passages about the Tuberculosis epidemic as we attempted to make sense of our own pandemic experience. When Hannah confronts her mother, Eva, about whether or not Eva ever loved her children, Eva responds to this indictment by detailing the horrors of 1895. Eva insists, "1895 was a killer, girl. Things was bad. Niggers was dying like flies" (68). She emphasizes the disproportionate impact of Tuberculosis on the Black community. She describes her desperation to survive and preserve the lives of her children despite their father abandoning the family and poverty greatly limiting life chances and opportunities for Eva and her children. When

Hannah insists there must have been some time for affectionate play, Eva maintains:

> No time. They wasn't no time. Not none. Soon as I got one day done here come a night. With you all coughin' and me watchin' so TB wouldn't take you off and if you was sleepin' quiet I thought, O Lord, they dead and put my hand over your moth *to feel if the breath was comin'* what you talkin' 'bout did I love you girl I stayed alive for you … (69, italics mine)

I asked my students to be attentive to the ways that Morrison meditates on the anxiety over Black breath and how it resonates with the sobering statistics regarding the twin threats to Black breath: COVID-19 and racial terror. We connected it to the varied iterations of "I Can't Breathe," the final words of Eric Garner and so many others slain by police brutality. We traced the ways that "I Can't Breathe" has become the lament of so many Black people feeling the exhaustion and emotional suffocation of racism, as well as a galvanizing cry of protest.

I asked students to consider the ways that Black women writers may offer not only critiques of structural inequalities but also spaces for healing and hope. In a meditation on the various ways in which Black life is imperiled, Morrison writes,

> What was taken by outsiders to be a slackness, slovenliness or even generosity was in fact a full recognition of the legitimacy of forces other than good ones. They did not believe doctors could heal—for them, none ever had done so. They did not believe death was accidental—life might be, but death was deliberate. They did not believe Nature was ever askew—only inconvenient. Plague and drought were as "natural" as springtime. If milk could curdle, God knows that robins could fall. The purpose of evil was to survive it and they determined (without ever knowing they had made up their minds to do it) to survive floods, white people, tuberculosis, famine and ignorance. They knew anger well but not despair … (90)

Documenting the environmental, economic, and structural forces that cause premature Black death, Morrison asserts that "death was deliberate" (90). She notes Black people's distrust of doctors and the medical field in general, their familiarity with death and mourning, and their insistence on living with hope rather than despair despite the constant assault on Black life and humanity. She offers here a Black theology rooted in resilience and determination to salvage and survive. Her listing of floods, famine, and the epidemic of tuberculosis along with white people and ignorance is instructive, as it enumerates what Angela Hume describes as "a long history of environmental subjugation in which nature is contaminated by past acts of racial violence" (108). Natural disasters and epidemics thereby reveal and exacerbate historical systemic racial inequities that leave Black people vulnerable to premature death. Beverly Foulks McGuire observes,

> …Toni Morrison's vision in *Sula*, portray[s] a similar bodily, emotional, and material response to natural disasters … natural disasters underscore the importance of living fully in the wake of such suffering, emphasizing the important role of the emotions (the "feeling") and

the material experience (the "tasting") for those living in the wake of such disasters. (125)

Morrison's meditations offer an opportunity for us to consider what it means to live in the wake of such disaster, death, and despair. Where are the spaces of hope and resilience?

My pedagogical approach and ethics are deeply informed by my positionality as a Black feminist scholar, immigrant, first generation college graduate, and single mother. As a scholar of affect and Black feelings specifically, I have written about the ways that Black emotions have been historically invalidated and policed as a means of denying Black humanity and citizenship. I attend to the emotional lives of my students with care and dignity, but I also ask my students to lean into discomfort and put under analysis their emotional responses to the materials we engage, be it white guilt or Black rage. In particular, our reading of Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* in the midst of the uprising for racial justice and reckoning felt timely and offered a critical lens through which students could examine their own positionality and even their bodily responses to racism and microaggressions.

Alongside *Citizen: An American Lyric*, students read Shannon Sullivan's "Inheriting Racist Disparities in Health: Epigenetics and the Transgenerational Effects of White Racism" in order to interrogate the way that racism inhabits the Black body. Sullivan asserts:

> The effects of white racism include physiological changes for the people who are confronted by it, changes that typically are very damaging to their physical (as well as psychological) health. The sociopolitical phenomenon of white racism can be and often is a physiological, biological phenomenon, in other words. Nonmaterial things that are "outside" the body can get "inside" and help compose it. (193)

Rankine illustrates this phenomenon when she states, "You can't put the past behind you. It's buried in you; it's turned your flesh into its own cupboard" (63). The past takes up residence in the Black body and makes demands for both physiological and psychic space, "cupboards" meant to house and contain. Rankine also details the fatigue and exhaustion of being daily confronted with racism and racial microaggressions. Students of color often express how much they identify with the anecdotes she documents in *Citizen: An American Lyric* as well as the affective dimensions the text explores. All of my students experienced palpable fatigue and weariness as they navigated the pandemic alongside the ubiquitous assault on Black lives, the growing incidence of violence towards Asian Americans on a national level, and the very pressing fight to remove monuments locally.

(Re)Moving Monuments: Community Engaged Scholarship in an Urgent Moment

In September 2020, VCU News invited me to participate in a conversation with three other VCU scholars about what should happen next on Monument Avenue. At the time, the Robert E. Lee Confederate monument had become contested space, a site of activism and Black memorialization of those slain by police and white vigilante violence. This was an opportunity for community engaged scholarship and teaching that gave my work tangible meaning at a time when writing itself seemed like it was not enough. I reproduce my response because I believe it is an example of public scholarship and teaching in an urgent moment:

> In thinking about this question of what should happen on Monument Avenue following the removal of the Confederate statues, I am reminded of a compelling and pedagogically rich moment in a work of poetry that I often teach. In "Citizen: An American Lyric," Claudia Rankine reproduces the hauntingly familiar photograph "Public Lynching," depicting the Aug. 7, 1930, lynching of J. Thomas Shipp and Abram S. Smith by a white mob in Marion, Indiana.

> However, Rankine removes the hanging bodies of the young Black men turning the eye of the viewer away from the spectacle of violence unto the crowd of onlookers pointing to an empty space in the sky. Confronting the spectators, the viewer wonders what made lynching such a mundane occurrence that this photograph could have easily been a depiction of a harmless community social. I believe a similar work of drawing our attention to the empty space in the sky may be an appropriate approach to reimagining Monument Avenue.

> There is power in keeping the *absence* of these Confederate statues *present* on Monument Avenue. In maintaining the empty pedestals that once upheld these monuments of white supremacy, we commemorate the decades long struggle to have them removed. These pedestals, decorated with colorful Black Lives Matter graffiti and other cogent messages that confront and contextualize the history of the statues, must be preserved in their current form as a testament to the fact that these spaces were always contested.

> This time we turn our eyes to a different crowd, not an angry white mob but the thousands of Black and brown people with their white allies who peacefully gathered and protested; the people who reclaimed the space of the Robert E. Lee statue as Marcus-David Peters Circle. Let the remnants of the confrontation remain; that is a story worth venerating.

While this was a short piece and not a publication in a peer-reviewed journal or edited anthology, it centers how a Black woman writer's intervention in past historical trauma and spectacles of violence against the Black body can both inform the way we choose to understand our moment and offer guidance in how we imagine and create the future. My students appreciated my participation in this conversation and expressed how my response informed their thinking on the topic that engrossed so many of their lives.

> The Robert E. Lee statue has since been removed from its pedestal on Monument Avenue, but the November 2021 gubernatorial election of Republican Glenn Youngkin reinvigorated the remnants of white rage and

antagonism. Of particular significance are Youngkin's antagonism towards Critical Race Theory and his targeting Toni Morrison's *Beloved* for censorship under the guise of empowering parents to make decisions on the content of their children's curriculum. Classrooms and curriculums are contested spaces which can silence and stifle Black voices and breath. In theorizing pedagogical approaches and practices for teaching race in our climate of ubiquitous anti-Blackness, insurrection, and global pandemic, I am ever more committed to an ethical and engaged teaching practice that centers the lives and worth of Black people in my classroom.

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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

The Category Is "Pandemic Queer":
Reading, Connecting, and Reimagining Literacy with
LGBTQ+ Youth in the Age of COVID-19

by shea wesley martin and Henry "Cody" Miller

PETE RAILAND, FROM VOICES FROM OUTSIDE: ARTISTS AGAINST THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX PORTFOLIO VIA JUSTSEEDS.ORG

The COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with the ensuing lockdown and political turmoil, ruptured many young people's experiences and well-being, particularly students who face additional marginalization due to systemic oppression. A national survey conducted by the Trevor Project (2021) found that nearly 70% of LGBTQ+ youth noted that their health was "poor" most or all of the time during the COVID-19 pandemic. Factors contributing to this deterioration include LGBTQ+ youth being isolated from the supportive communities formed at school, lacking access to social services provided by schools, and being quarantined with family members who were unsupportive (Cohen, 2021; Valencia, 2020). These fissures in support and resource structures curtailed potentially affirming and integral educational, social, and emotional experiences, particularly for LGBTQ+ youth who thrived in traditional schooling settings. However, it is also important to note that even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, many schools were not idealized institutions for LGBTQ+ youth. K-12 schools, situated in the broader socio-political landscape of the United States, are bastions of homo-, trans-, and queerphobia (Mayo, 2014). Still, many LGBTQ+ young people employed resilience and ingenuity to create affirming and loving social circles, which were thus interrupted by restrictions, trauma, and isolation during the pandemic.

Our (shea and Cody) positionality and experiences afford us a deep understanding of the importance of affirming community and curriculum for LGBTQ+ youth – shea is a Black, queer, nonbinary scholar-educator and Cody is a white, queer, cisgender education professor. Collectively, we have almost two decades of experience teaching in public and charter schools as well as in community settings and higher education. Building on our experiences as secondary English language arts teachers, we constructed a national online book club dedicated to reading, analyzing, and celebrating LGBTQ+ young adult literature with LGBTQ+ youth. While the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on schooling spurred the dreaming up of this community, our urgency for dreaming was the result of several factors including the continued rampant police violence against Black folks, continued murders of Black transwomen across the country, and increased anti-trans rhetoric and legislation from both federal and state lawmakers. We aimed to create an online literacy community for LGBTQ+ youth with the following realties in mind:

1. Increased isolation (and student support needed) due to COVID-19 safety precautions and shifts to online schooling warranting the urgent necessity of safe, affirming, and joy-filled literacy spaces

2. Existing gaps in the availability, prioritization, and discussion of LGBTQ+ texts within traditional secondary ELA curriculum and classrooms necessitating a space centering the LGBTQ+ narratives

3. The continued systemic violence from the state, whether in policy or policing, warranting increased critical engagement with literature to explore aspects of identity, community, and current events (with specific attention to how gender and sexuality interact with other identities and social realities)

These observations and need for change, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, ultimately resulted in Love & LiteraTea (L&L), an online book club for LGBTQ+ youth. In the remainder of this article we detail how we organized and structured the online book club, how we reimagined literacy and literacy learning spaces with youth members, and the hopes we have for the future of literacy education.

Planning and Organizing in a Pandemic

After a summer of planning, we launched the online book club that resulted in over 160 secondary students from across the United States (and some international students) joining us for a year to engage in readings of Abdi Nazemian's *Like a Love Story* (2019), Dean Atta's *Black Flamingo* (2019), Gabby Rivera's *Juliet Takes a Breath* (2016), Mark Oshiro's *Anger is a Gift* (2018), Kacen Callendar's *Felix After Ever* (2020), and Aiden Thomas's *Cemetery Boys* (2020). However, we did not complete all six books (a point we will address later in the article). We selected the young adult titles during our planning sessions. Our selection was guided by our commitment to centering QTPOC (queer, trans, people of color) authors and characters.

We created an application for membership using Google Forms and distributed through our professional learning networks and social media. We stressed that outness not be a prerequisite for joining our group and documented how we would ensure safety, especially for students who were not fully out. "Be in high school" and "identify as LGBTQ+" were the major criteria for joining in the initial cycle of the group; based on multiple requests, we opened the group to 8th graders during the second semester of the academic-year. In the end, we accepted every applicant, which totaled more than 160 students over the course of the year. The applicants ranged in terms of age, sexuality, gender identity, race, and geography. We committed to providing books to all members who needed them at no cost. To obtain funding for this endeavor, we created a Patreon and GoFundMe campaign outlining our goals and needs. Money raised via these avenues was spent on books, technology tools, student raffle prizes, and guest speaker honorariums. We bought all books from a local bookstore owned by a former teacher and shipped them out to members ourselves.

Due to the number of applicants accepted, we created three cohorts: A, B, and C. Cohorts A and B met bimonthly via Zoom for 90 minutes while Cohort C interacted solely through an asynchronous model via Google Classroom due to members' scheduling conflicts. Between each meeting, members read assigned sections of the books in addition to paired texts that we uploaded on each cohort's respective Google Classroom page. A brief overview the 2020-2021 schedule we implemented is below:

Table 1

Schedule for 2020-2021 Cycle

Meetings & Months	Focus
#1-4; October-December	*Out* (2020) directed by Steven Clay Hunter *Like a Love Story* Abdi Nazemian author visit
#5; December	Creative Writing Roundtable and Workshops: Claire Rudy Foster, Kyle Carrero Lopez, and Eve Ettinger
#6-7; January	*Juliet Takes a Breath*
#8; February	"Dear White America" (2014) by Danez Smith "Monica West Is Moving to Omaha, Nebraska" (2017) by Hieu Minh Nguyen
#9; February	"We Could Be Heroes" (2018) by Malinda Lo
#10-11; March	*Black Flamingo* "cuz he's black" (2013) by Javon Johnson
#12; April	"MONTERO (Call Me By Your Name)" (2021) by Lil Nas X "Lil Nas X, Unapologetic Queerness, and The Books I Wish Upon My Past Self" (2021) by Mikkaka Overstreet "Conservatives Are Enraged at Lil Nas X and His 'Satan Shoes'" (2021) by Matthew Dessem
#13-16; April-May	*Anger is a Gift* Mark Oshiro author visit
#17; June	Reflections from the year

Facilitation planning for bimonthly meetings happened over ongoing text conversations, Zoom meetings, and FaceTime check-ins. Never exclusively focused on L&L, we spent a lot of time chatting about the state of the world – politics, pop culture, personal struggles, family, and the shifting educational landscape. As friends, colleagues, and co-facilitators, our conversations were fluid, joyful, and thoughtful. We flowed seamlessly between discussing Supreme Court decisions, Olivia Rodrigo's revitalization of pop-punk, educational theory, and grief. In these planning meetings, we embraced the messy and nuanced nature that accompanies a queer and trans existence – happily holding multiple truths and ideas at once. In many ways, we had the pandemic to thank for our ability to blur the lines between work and play, to bring our whole selves to our community planning meetings.

This freeform planning structure was reflected in our design of the community space, a space that welcomed fluidity and elasticity in a defiant resistance of normative literacy practices. Love (2016) argues for ratchet imaginative orientations when working with Black queer youth that embrace "messy …contradictory, fluid, precarious, agentive, and oftentimes intentionally inappropriate, which makes it an ideal methodological perspective for exploring how Black queer youth…form subversive and creative spaces that humanize" (p. 540). We carried this sentiment into our design and dreaming up of L&L – embracing the fluid and prioritizing humanizing literacy practices. Given our positionalities and the diverse racial demographics of L&L, we do not purport that we employed a ratchet lens to our norms and facilitation. However, models of queeruptive learning and research practices provided a roadmap that led us to implement a non-linear queer pedagogical framework grounded in the abundance, complexity, and fluidity often considered synonymous with queerness itself (Darling-Hammond, 2019).

Queering Spaces: Dreaming and Developing Community Collectively

In our dreaming and design of the L&L community framework, we drew heavily from the work of past and present LGBTQ+ educators and organizers, paying close attention to the ethics and pedagogies of QTPOC communities of care, learning, and resistance (Combahee River Collective, 1979; Gossett, 2014; Wortham, 2019). As the existing schooling infrastructure eroded during the pandemic, we looked to the work of folks educating, organizing, and building outside of (and against) institutions. QTPOC collectives like the Brooklyn-based Papi Juice and the bklyn boihood provided modes of how to create joyful spaces of resistance and critique (Wally, 2021; Wortham, 2019). When studying the history of community literacy efforts, we turned to the legacy of freedom-schooling in Black southern communities (Hale, 2011; Sturkey 2010) and community education through the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and 90s (Gossett, 2014). We used the tenets, programming, and goals of these models to inform our dreams of L&L as a space not just for reading and discussing books but also for political education, student organizing, and youth-led dialogue about LGBTQ+ futures.

We wanted L&L to be a continuation of the long lineage of queer and trans efforts to etch space for our existences and dreams in a world that often refuses us what we deserve. In this, it became exceptionally clear that despite being marketed as a literacy education space, L&L would prioritize care, affirmation, and holding space for the full presence of the LGBTQ+ youth who showed up on Zoom each time we met. This prioritization mirrored much of the scholarship we surveyed focused on creating LGBTQ+-affirming spaces in schools and communities (Blackburn, 2003; Boatwright 2019; Brockenbrough, 2016) and reading LGBTQ+ narratives in community (Blackburn & Clark, 2011). shea was inherently drawn to adrienne maree brown's (2017) principles of Emergent Strategy and the flexibility, space, and time they provide to prioritize relationship-

building, dialogue, and care. When paired with a culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010), brown's principles offered a clear goal for gathering: building a care-filled literacy community. Notably, this focus is often antithetical to what is prioritized in secondary English language arts classrooms, fueled by standardized testing, college preparation, and compulsory reading of canonical texts that fail to represent the diversity of the classrooms in which they are taught (Schieble, 2013; Wyse et al., 2012). Thus. in our design of L&L, we audaciously aimed to implement a queer literacy pedagogy (Blackburn & Buckley, 2005; Nemi Neto, 2018) alongside our youth in a community that centered LGBTQ+ stories while also challenging the strict, binary, and fixed ideas of how students (and adults) read, learn, and engage in literary discourse.

Grounding in Care and Consideration

With our desire to create a safe space for LGBTQ+ youth online during the pandemic, we faced a conundrum in design – we wanted to actively co-design and co-create the space with youth but also knew we needed a solid framework that felt safe, affirming, and dependable for those signing into Zoom with strangers. While widely-accepted best practices suggest establishing expectations for students before their arrival and without their input (Lemov, 2010), we rejected that notion in our design. Drawing from our own experiences as teachers, Gay-Straight Alliance advisors, and organizers, we made a list of norms (Image 1) we appreciated in former settings. The norms intentionally centered both self and community care. Some norms such as "show up and show out" prioritized student voice, individuality, and confidence while others such as "share the mic" and "take care" emphasized the importance of equity and well-being. During our first meeting of Cohorts A and B, we worked with L&L youth to get their feedback, ideas, and dreams for our community.

At the beginning of the first meeting, we presented the list of norms as working, incomplete norms for breakout room introductions. Members showed signs of agreement and affirmation via Zoom reactions and the chat feature. Later in the meeting, L&L youth spent time thinking about their ideal community and reflecting on what might make them feel most safe and affirmed in our space. Following their individual reflections, they discussed their ideas in both small and whole-group settings. Themes of pride, love, and respect surfaced along with inside jokes from within our already budding community, memes, and references to pop culture. In our final activity, a Padlet reflection on the norms, members expressed an appreciation for the working norms and made connections to agreements and rules they had used in other affirming settings. Based on their feedback, we continued to use the initial list of norms, always welcoming feedback and shifting as necessary.

Throughout the year, L&L youth in Cohorts A and B made connections between our community's grounding norms and the LGBTQ+ communities in our selected texts. When Gabby Rivera's (2016) Juliet was mentored by Harlowe and Maxine, members said it reminded them of Cody's lessons on political organizing and queer resistance. When we read Dean Atta's *Black Flamingo* (2020)*,* one member connected our "show

up, show out" norm to Michael's journey from Barbie-loving boy to fierce drag queen. Similarly, Moss's chosen family in *Anger is a Gift* (2018) reminded some members of the family they'd built with members of their L&L cohort. In these text-to-community connections, we observed the power not only of reading and discussing LGBTQ+ YA texts, but also of using youth-affirmed norms in the co-creation of a radicallly queer- and trans- inclusive literacy space.

Making Space for Connections and Care

More than books, we allowed the social-emotional needs and desires of community members to guide our trajectory. This prioritization of care and connection over text-based dialogue resulted in a shifting of our intended book discussion schedule. While we planned to read six titles throughout our year, we ended up only reading four books: *Like a Love Story, Juliet Takes a Breath, Black Flamingo,* and *Anger is a Gift.* We supplemented these core novels with short stories, articles, poetry, art, and music videos in order to spur members' cross-textual dialogue and connections between texts and current events. Reducing the number of books not only allowed for deeper analysis and richer textual discussions, but the decision also made space for more student leadership, connections, and creativity. Before each meeting, we designed a simple slide deck to guide our time with members. While content within the deck changed based on books, the format almost always remained the same: welcome, LGBTQ+ current events, small-group member check-ins, mindfulness exercise, textual discussions/activities, and closing. By grounding each meeting in an acknowledgment of current events, members' feelings and needs, and mindfulness, our spaces were rich

Today's Breakout Room Norms

- Show up and show out!
- Take care
- Embrace messiness
- Share the mic
- Own your impact

IMAGE 1: WORKING NORMS FOR FIRST MEETING

in connections between members (and outside guests).

We extended this focus by inviting the authors of our selected titles to join meetings for Q&A and dialogue about their work and experiences. Throughout the year, members were joined by both Abdi Nazemian and Mark Oshiro for Q&A discussions which allowed youth to voice questions, ideas, and even critiques about the books we read. In this connection, we desired to build a bridge between generations of LGBTQ+ readers/writers. Research consistently shows that LGBTQ+ youth benefit when they have easy access to LGBTQ+ affirming spaces and LGBTQ+ adult mentors and teachers. As queer educators, we

recognize two things to be true: (1) the burden of supporting LGBTQ+ students should never fall solely on the shoulders of LGBTQ+ educators and mentors (martin, 2019); and (2) seeing and engaging with LGBTQ+ adults (particularly those invested in reading and writing LGBTQ+ narratives) can positively impact youth (GLSEN, 2020). Through author visits as well as a creative writing workshop with established queer and trans writers, we aimed to facilitate connections where youth were positioned as experts in their own literacy and identity journeys while also building bridges to the ideas and mentorship from adults similarly invested in reading and writing queer stories. When arranging these visits, we were backstage managers – taking care of technology, schedules, and payment; the youth took center stage – guiding the conversations with thoughtful questions and ideas.

As facilitators, we maintained this "hands-off" approach during most meetings. While our typical classroom practice involves teacher circulation and checking in with students, we refrained from doing so during small-group check-ins and discussions in order to allow members time to process and connect without feelings of surveillance within our digital space. "What if they are off-task?" a colleague asked, concerned about the safety and productivity of student-to-student discussions. In response, we queried, "what does it mean to be off-task when the main goal of our literacy space is to develop one's community through books? If the goal is affirmation and safety through literature, does it matter if youth are following our directions or following a tangent they've started?" What we discovered through this release of control over member engagement was a greater investment in relationships (both inside and outside of meetings) and increased youth leadership.

With an established trust and freedom, youth members took the lead on most whole-group discussions, planned and hosted additional community events such as movie nights and small-group Zoom meet-ups, and maintained L&L's social media presence, posting text-related memes, members' analyses and creative work, and community announcements. Notably, a lack of mandates, curricular deadlines, and administrative demands gave us more leeway when pivoting in our design and facilitation of L&L. The realities of the pandemic and our positioning as an out-of-school literacy space allowed us more flexibility and freedom than are typically afforded to secondary English language arts teachers in traditional schooling settings. In this flexibility and freedom, our community's discussions were marked by depth, richness, and criticality in not only our discussions about our texts but also in their own personal development and connections with each other.

Queering Reading: Intersectional and Anti-Oppressive Literature Analysis

At the core of L&L is a community of readers engaging with books that center and celebrate LGBTQ+ characters and experiences. As former high school English teachers, we know that a text does not exist in isolation. How the text is positioned and taught is equally important as the text itself. We were intentional about structuring conversations about young adult literature through intersectional and anti-oppressive literary pedagogies.

Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan (2015) argue that students need an intersectional approach to analyzing LGBTQ+ characters of color to "take into account the racialized, classed, and gendered ways sexuality is embodied and lived" (p. 89), while Durand (2015) suggests that to engage in an "intersectional analysis of young adult literature is to describe the ways in which identity categories such as race, gender, and sexuality are constructed by the individual characters, by the group or cultural communities to which they belong, and by the institutions with which they interact" (p. 77). Anti-oppressive education seeks to center experience and knowledges that have typically been marginalized within schooling spaces and to support students in understanding how privileging of some and thus marginalizing of others occurs – all with the goal of transforming both schools and society at large (Kumashiro, 2000). With these braided frameworks, we approached LGBTQ+ young adult literature by considering how characters are positioned in society and texts, how historical and contemporary socio-political forces shape such positioning, how characters imagine realities beyond their temporal reality, and how such texts create understandings of real LGBTQ+ histories and contemporary experiences.

As previously noted, our commitment to centering QTPOC authors and characters guided our text selection. During our first cycle, we read four young adult literature titles: Abdi Nazemian's *Like a Love Story* (2019), Dean Atta's *Black Flamingo* (2019), Gabby Rivera's *Juliet Takes a Breath* (2016), and Mark Oshiro's *Anger is a Gift* (2018). *Like a Love Story* follows Reza and his friends Judy and Art as they navigate New York City at the height of the AIDS crisis in the twilight of the 1980s. Reza is an Iranian American cisgender boy who is coming to understand his sexuality, while Judy is a straight cisgender white girl and Art is an openly gay white cisgender boy. *Black Flamingo* documents Michael, a Black Biracial boy, as he grows up and begins to understand his queer identity in London during college. *Juliet Takes a Breath* entails the eponymous character's time taking tutelage under a famous feminist author for the summer. Juliet is a self-proclaimed "Puerto Rican baby dyke" from the Bronx, while her mentor is a white feminist living and working in Portland, Oregon (Rivera, 2016). *Anger is a Gift* is narrated by Moss, whose father was killed by police a year earlier. The book details the aftermath of state-sanctioned violence on Moss's mental health and sense of self as he simultaneously is forced to survive his increasingly policed and underfunded public school. We spent two to three weeks on each title. Members were expected to read assigned selections prior to each meeting in order to engage in conversation and collective analysis.

We structured conversations about the young adult literature titles in a variety of ways. Typically, we began by opening up breakout rooms and asking members to discuss their initial thoughts about the assigned reading: favorite characters, emerging themes, important scenes, interesting quotes, connections with other texts, and other personal reactions. Then, we returned to a whole group conversation in which we unpacked our personal thoughts about the titles. L&L youth typically built off of each other's insight and ideas, with inside jokes about certain characters becoming the

norm over the course of our year-long venture. Following personal responses, we opened up breakout rooms again organized around questions and tasks that required members to engage with the social, cultural, and political elements of the narrative. These activities required L&L youth to take critical approaches to the texts by considering how power and oppression operate within the texts. Members discussed the questions in their group while also working on a multimodal representation of their collective thinking. In doing so, we located knowledge as communal, dialogical, and dynamic. We initially shifted away from "right" answers about literature. L&L youth often used Google Jamboard or Google Slides to document their work.

At our request, members curated images, memes, and gifs to represent their responses to the questions posed. Again, members cultivated inside jokes as the year went on and parts of their presentations took on a jocular tone. When we returned as a whole group, members detailed their thinking and opened up broader conversations amongst all attendees. These member-created digital artifacts grounded our conversations throughout the duration of a title and we frequently returned to them throughout the year to make connections between various titles. A detailed overview of each activity with its paired text is located in the table below:

Table 2

Activities to Support Intersectional and Anti-Oppressive Readings

Title	Activities
Like a Love Story	• Google Jamboard that represents the thoughts, interests, emotions, and experiences of one of the three main characters in the assigned reading. • LGBTQ+ history note cards that explain one event, person, idea or piece of pop culture you believe is vital to LGBTQ+ history using the notecards from *Like a Love Story* as your mentor text.
Juliet Takes a Breath	• Google Jamboard that describes how each major character represents or approaches a version of feminism and addresses who is centered and who is left out in this version of feminism? • Quote response in which students discuss how words like dyke, queer, gay, etc. have a long history in our society and have evolved in what they mean, how they're used, and who can use them; talk about connotations and denotations and how words change over time.
The Black Flamingo	• Small group discussion addressing how Atta uses verse poetry (figurative language, description, metaphor, etc.) to convey the story. • Google Jamboard that describes how Michael interacts with gender and sexuality in a particular section; How the section display Michael's relationship to his truth, his family and friends, and the world • Small group discussion about the importance of reading LGBTQ narratives outisde of the United States • Cross-textual analysis using Javon Johnson's poem "cuz he's black" to consider how the poem is in conversation with Atta's depiction of the police stop; how does the scene shows Michael's understanding of how race intersects with other aspects of his life • Small group discussion of an assigned section to consider form and structure of the book; intersectional identity; relations and development; themes; and connections to other sections
Anger is a Gift	• Google Jamboard that describes how would the relationships among the various characters (adolescent and adults); how characters build community; how characters navigate differences; and how characters resist external oppressive forces • Small group discussion that addresses the ending (final protest, press conference); Moss' development; community; other characters you loved/wish had more; themes; connections to you/world

To illustrate an example, members were asked to consider how the book *Juliet Takes a Breath* uses characters to engage in contemporary discourses about feminism. One group was tasked with the character Lainie, who dates the titular character of *Juliet Takes a Breath* throughout the book. Members used the image of a "girl boss" to discuss how Lainie represents a type of feminism that is allied with white, cisgender, corporate interests at the expense of liberation for people of all gender identities. Similarly, the group used a commonly circulated image from the 2017 Women's March in which a Black activist correctly reminds the mostly white audience that white women were instrumental in electing Donald Trump to the White House. By making these connections, L&L youth put examples of the faulty and fragmented versions of feminism that exist in real life in conversation with the literary characters to deepen their understanding of socio-political discourses around feminism. Members used selected young adult literature to consider how white women thwart real progress within social movements (Amato & Priske, 2021; martin, 2021). This example demonstrates how we approached literature pedagogy within L&L to facilitate intersectional and anti-oppressive ways of knowing through textual engagement.

We were intentional in balancing both the content of the books as well as the order of reading to avoid conflating queerness and transness with trauma. While it was vital our community addressed how oppression manifests in the daily lives of LGBTQ+ people and characters, we did not want our work to be defined by such harm; we wanted to highlight and study the real ways characters built community and fostered resistance. This pedagogical belief was especially important when reading and discussing QTPOC characters, considering the ways market forces that dictate the young adult literature market commodify and itemize Black pain for non-Black audiences (McKinney, 2020). Literature curriculum that includes Black characters, especially when approached uncritically, can situate Black pain as justifiable means for the ends of white learning (Avery, 2020). We sought to fulfill the call by Shamari Reid (2020) for balancing the need to "address the very real challenges our students [of color] face due to their undeserved oppression" while being "mindful that this is not the only story we tell to and about them" (para. 14). Thus, we routinely prompted members to consider how LGBTQ+ characters imagined new ways of being and found joy even when oppressive forces continued to bear down on their daily lives.

Queering Current Events: Critical Consciousness of Contemporary LGBTQ+ Topics

We began each session with an overview of major stories and current events relating to LGBTQ+ politics, culture, and policy. Discussions of electoral politics made the bulk of these overviews as the 2020 United States presidential election waged in media and broader discourse. We did not want to reify the idea that political participation was narrowly defined by engagement within statist institutions. In other words, we wanted to intentionally avoid what Wargo (2021) calls a "nationalistic vision of queer-inclusive civics" (p. 11). We constantly sought ways to challenge a prevailing idea that LGBTQ+ participation within electoral politics yielded LGBTQ+ liberation. Rather, we wanted youth to understand how electoral politics is a tool to harm LGBTQ+ people and communities and to consider how engagement

IMAGE 2: LGBTQ+ POLITICAL CANDIDATES WHO RUN RACES IN 2020

with existing political structures could be a form of harm reduction. In essence, we wanted to push members to critically examine the concept of "inclusion" of LGBTQ+ people and communities within dominant socio-political systems (Kokozos & Gonzalez, 2020). We worked to not conflate "LGBTQ+ topics" with "LGBTQ+ electoral politics" by incorporating discussions of popular culture and international news.

Young adult literature played an important role in developing critical consciousness around LGBTQ+ political topics. Young adult literature's role in constructing political awareness around LGBTQ+ topics has been argued as essential for critical and affirming LGBTQ+ curriculum (Bittner et al., 2021). Angel Daniel Matos (2019), writing about how David Levithan's (2013) *Two Boys Kissing* addresses the AIDS crisis, argues that LGBTQ+ young adult titles can push "readers to acknowledge a queer history that is constantly on the cusp of being forgotten" (p. 91). Similarly, we positioned Abdi Nazemian's *Like a Love Story* (2019) as a text to teach about the AIDS crisis and the ensuing impact that still shapes the reality of many LGBTQ+ people today, while we drew on *Anger is a Gift* to address the school-to-prison pipeline with specific attention to how the pipeline harms QTPOC. We addressed the role Dr. Anthony Fauci, who became a type of national hero throughout COVID, played during the AIDS crisis, including his complicated antagonism with ACT UP.

We often placed popular culture in its socio-political contexts to consider how both creators of popular culture and audience members can inform us about LGBTQ+ socio-political topics. For instance, we watched and read responses to Lil Nas X's music video "MONTERO (Call Me By Your Name)" to consider how non-LGBTQ+ audiences typically try

to restrict and silence LGBTQ+ art through both policy and cultural norms. We put Lil Nas X's video in conversation with an article by Matthew Dessem (2021) to discuss how religious organizations have historically used their power
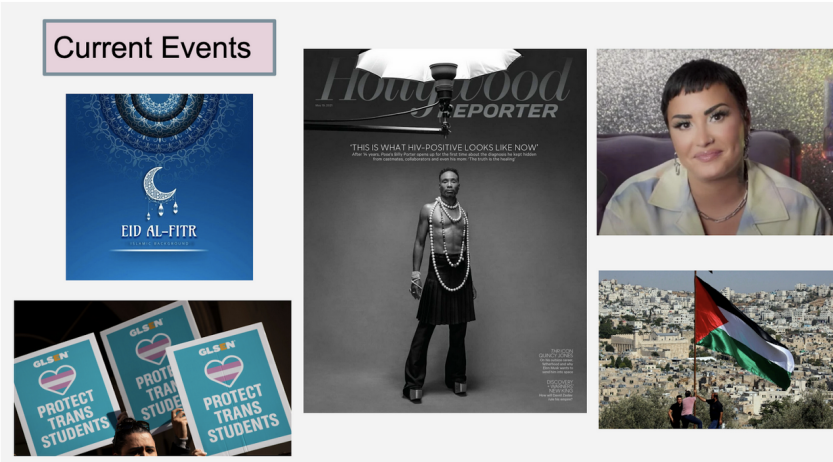

IMAGE 3: EXAMPLE OF POPULAR CULTURE AND CURRENT EVENTS

and influence to demonize sexual and gender minoritized people. Equally important, we addressed how LGBTQ+ religious groups and individuals turned to their faith to affirm their identities and experiences. In another example, we watched clips from the popular television show *Pose* to analyze how the scene approached a similar time period to that of *Like a Love Story*. In doing so, members drew connections between various types of texts to develop an understanding of contemporary LGBTQ+ political issues and their historical antecedents, which are often silenced within K-12 curricula.

Finally, we balanced discussions about politics and politics affecting LGBTQ+ folks with an intentional practice of dreaming in community. Throughout the year, we reminded students that "the future is queerness's domain, inviting them to critique, imagine, and create worlds rooted in a collective queer/trans liberation (Muñoz, 2009, p.1).

During this particular meeting, we shifted away from discussing texts and instead co-designed and facilitated a freedom-dreaming exercise in which youth reflected on their own experiences, needs, and desires for a world radically inclusive and affirming of their whole identities, not just their sexual orientation and gender, but also other identities they hold, such as race, ethnicity, class, religion, etc. During the meeting following the tumultuous 2020 election cycle, we facilitated a "freedom dreaming" exercise in which youth reflected on their own experiences, needs, and desires for a world radically inclusive and affirming of their whole identities (Kelley, 2003). In our framing of the exercise, we provided limited concrete directions, but provided a facilitator example (Image 4) and suggested members respond to the prompt via analog or digital written response, audio recording, or visual art.

Some community members used tools like Jamboard or Procreate to express their dreams, while others wrote poetry and lists in word documents. When done, those who felt comfortable sharing posted our dreams on a cohort-wide Padlet board that allowed for responses and affirmations from community members. During the next meeting, members shared their freedom dreams for our community and discussed them in both small and whole groups. Using freedom dreaming as a processing tool in this space achieved multiple aims, including (1) acknowledging the heaviness of the moment and its impact on our community; (2) centering LGBTQ+ youth joy, agency, and dreams in that processing; and (3) reminding youth of the importance dreaming beyond existing institutional structures as an act of resistance.

Moving Forward as Politics and the Pandemic Continue to Harm

At the time of this writing, COVID continues to ravage the globe. Governmental agencies' refusal to confront the threats posed by new variants continue to reveal the failures of capitalism and neoliberalism in the United States and abroad. While vaccines offer some reprieve, we can't help but feel the concept of a "post-COVID" world continues to shrink in possibility. Simultaneously, the institutional and systemic homo-, queer-, and transphobia that mars K-12 education has been fortified as several Republican-led states passed draconian book bans that intentionally targeted BIPOC and LGBTQ+ texts in libraries and classsoroms (Shivaram, 2021). State lines continue to shape the educational realities of LGBTQ+

IMAGE 4: FACILITATOR EXAMPLE OF FREEDOM DREAMING

youth. Though the foundation of L&L emerged from our cocooned time early in the pandemic, the community created and literary approaches to texts constructed remain important and necessary.

We are not calling for a direct translation of our work within an online book club intentionally cultivated to center LGBTQ+youth into a swift and regimented checklist. Context will always matter, and the contexts in which we constructed our group is not the same as a traditional classroom. We also caution against a teacher echoing our work without critical and constant reflection on their own positionality and experiences with LGBTQ+ texts and histories. With that preface established, we do believe there are pedagogical and curricular suggestions to be gleaned from the work we've outlined throughout this article. Teachers, especially those who teach secondary English and social studies, can incorporate and center narratives of QTPOC characters and people in their curriculum. Additionally, teachers can position texts from a wide range of genres as sites to interrogate oppressive structures and systems in order to cultivate a critical awareness with students. Given the current political landscape, all teachers might consider engaging in a review of their own classroom norms, policies, and procedures with the aim of identifying how practices may thwart LGBTQ+ youth from existing as their full selves within the space. All of these suggestions are not direct, uncomplicated steps to make tomorrow. Rather, they require constant work and unwavering commitment to eradicating from schools and our society at-large the forces that seek to marginalize LGBTQ+ youth.

Calls to resist a "return to normal" have become increasingly louder as COVID continues to infect and governmental responses remain ineffective. Such calls demand a more imaginative approach to the American social safety infrastructure that centers and nurtures people over profit, which would entail a radical departure from our neoliberal nightmare. Similarly, we, like many educators committed to justice, resist normalcy as a goal for K-12 schools. Normalcy has and continues to harm LGBTQ+ youth. Working within our contexts and boundaries to create more just schools for LGBTQ+ youth remains a goal of our work. Simultaneously, our hope is that educators embrace freedom dreaming as a practice to think beyond the limiting structures that continue to constrict our students' lives, communities, and futures.

We imagined, dreamt, and created a space where LGBTQ+ youth's experiences, ideas, and literacies were valued and loved. We hope we (both facilitators and members) can continue to build on this experiment of possibility going forward. Our dream is that spaces like L&L become integral parts of a COVID-free future that reaches beyond "normal," centering queer stories, dreams and pedagogies as an act of intentional investment into a more liberatory literacy landscape.

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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Teaching Journalism in the Era of Doomscrolling

by Bijoyeta Sahoriya Das

DAVID LOEWENSTEIN, CARE PACKAGE #3, JUSTSEEDS.ORG

Vildana Khamidullina imagines how the inside of a newsroom would be like. She wonders, is it all shiny? Fast?

"And I don't know when I will get to see one even though I have been studying journalism and even worked as an intern," she says. Khamidullina, 25, knew she was in a "unique situation" when she started her associates degree, with a major in journalism, at LaGuardia Community College in the Fall of 2020. By then the pandemic was in full swing. She was my student, and she shared her thoughts with me in an interview for the purpose of this article.

On one hand, she is very happy she saved a lot of time not having to commute to college and was able to work part-time and focus on her studies. But on the other hand, she says she misses new connections and the comradery of fellow journalism enthusiasts.

"I was an extrovert with a drop of introvert. However, in the last couple of years, this drop has become bigger," she adds. But when she reflects on her experience of becoming a journalist during a "once in a lifetime historical event," she says she is proud that she learned to appreciate solitude, became better at time management, and produced meaningful stories. Her story: "Here's how much it costs to live as a single person in NYC compared to other cities," which she produced while working as an intern for Schneps Media, has been clicked over 70,000 times.

The finish line of the pandemic remains blurry, triggering anxiety in Khamidullina about the future. She is not alone. The question—how to study or practice journalism when there is no newsroom to go to—confounds students and educators. We are all living the story of the pandemic, so how can we tell stories of such deep, personal resonance with objectivity? I drew comfort in the fact that this quandary was not unique to me, it wasn't even general, it was universal. Every single journalist was reckoning with it, every professor was winging it, all students were adapting, we were all figuring it out at the same time, while experiencing the *new* new which was constantly pulling us this way and that way.

"If someone says it's raining, and another person says it's dry, it's not your job to quote them both. Your job is to look out the fucking window and find out which is true." This quote has murky origins, but it has been cited so often that it has become an inescapable and provocative conversation starter about journalism 101 (Wood).

However, in a world dominated by fake news, journalists cannot afford to just look out of the window; they often go out in the rain and only when sufficiently wet do they master the courage to say it is raining. Journalists are entrusted with the responsibility to dig the truth out. But, as part of the verification process, it also becomes their moral duty to trust their own senses.

During the pandemic, journalists were not just reporting "on the crisis" but, like everyone else, were "in crisis" (Fowler-Watt, K., et al 1). We were all witnessing and enduring, shaking our heads in disbelief, yet hungry for the next update. But the safety protocols that were demanded of us in Spring 2020 caught us off guard and clearly mandated quarantine—forget about stepping out on the streets. The days of chasing the subject or taking pride in writing an eyewitness account were suddenly no more. Hunker down, isolate, separate, and distance—was the call of the hour. Therefore, as the Covid 19 cases soared, I, a journalism professor, was morally obligated to discourage my students from any field reporting.

As normalcy vanished, the enormity of this duty challenged me, and I had to transition to a new pedagogy and adopt practical methodologies to nurture prospective journalists. I had to contemplate the ways the pandemic upended the practice and teaching of journalism. I had to reorient myself as I had to improvise my training methods in real time.

But the first step was to listen to and understand my students' experiences.

I had the privilege of interviewing my students about their experiences of pursuing academic degrees and practicing journalism during the pandemic. My students were generous with their time; they reflected on my questions and shared insights into their experiences.

This essay is a combination of my reflections and their stories.

When News Consumes Us

My syllabus for the course Journalism: The Craft of Gathering and Reporting the News states, "I expect you to be updated on news happening around you. Pay attention to both local and community news as well as international news. All journalists should be driven by curiosity."

A journalist is, in essence, committed to being a student of the news. This contributes to their knowledge base, equipping them to provide a nuanced perspective to their audience. In a lighter vein, journalists are seen as quintessential mascots of the phrase, "a mile wide and an inch deep." This remark was made by the American journalist and humorist Edgar Nye in 1889 while describing the Platte River in the United States (Hatmaker).

I have tried to inculcate in my students the good habit of reading, with a special focus on being updated about the news.

But what happens when the pandemic unleashes doomscrolling, pushing us into compulsive, obsessive, half-hearted consumption of news? Doomscrolling happened even before, but it became so ubiquitous with the pandemic experience that the Oxford English Dictionary named it "the word of the year" in 2020. It refers to the tendency to constantly browse through bad news. It perfectly latches onto our anxiety around uncertainty. But it spirals and we get hooked, even though the news gets darker and darker.

Before we know it, the news consumes us.

The BBC asked, "Why does endlessly looking for bad news feel so strangely gratifying—and can we break the habit?" Of course, this "soothing compulsion" comes with consequences (Klein). Studies have linked consumption of

Covid 19-related news with increase in symptoms of anxiety and depression (Bendau, Antonia, et al).

I am as susceptible to doomscrolling as my students, or everyone else. This posed a dilemma. How do I train students to study and produce news while protecting their, and my own, well-being from news itself?

Countless news and journal articles, podcasts, op-eds espoused expert advice on ways to snap out of this infatuation. But how does one practice this self-care around news when news is bread and butter, and the world is on fire? Brian X. Chen, a technology reporter for *The New York Times,* shared his strategy to escape the panic-reading of news. He got out of the habit of doomscrolling by altering his digital habits, which included taking his corgi, Max, for walks and skipping the lunchtime Twitter scrolls and embracing hugs (Ovide).

Is it then possible to withstand the word of the year and come out saner?

It is continuously becoming clear that this addiction, wreaking havoc with our sensibilities, will require more than self-discipline and self-resistance. This also puts a spotlight on the role and responsibilities of media as we try "limiting limitless news" (Charney).

I seized upon this opportunity to have a conversation with my students about a future where they will have a say and where we can imagine media as constructive and affirmative too.

Balance in Life and News

Federico Bardier completed his associates degree, with a major in journalism, from LaGuardia Community College in Spring 2022. For more than a decade he has been working as an independent broadcast journalist, producing news for ABC news and Radio Carve among others.

Bardier says news always occupied a focal point in his life. His love for journalism started when he was in high school. At any given time, he is either chasing news stories or he is reading the news voraciously, or he is studying how to become a better journalist.

"I can definitely assure you, there came a day when I was just fatigued," he says.

The pandemic ushered "that day" for Bardier.

The nonstop news cycle of the pandemic drove him away from news itself. "Day in day out, it was the same thing," and that same thing, he says, was—all doom and gloom.

Bardier recollects the early days of the pandemic. He remembers feeling numb and fatigued. That is when he knew he had to make a change. "Since high school, journalism has been a part of my life. It is a muscle that I exercise every day, but the pandemic turned me off from journalism," he adds.

He made his journalism education a "reflective exercise."

"Being in school and studying in a formal environment made me pause and think—why do I do what I do?" he reflects. Bardier engaged in contemplation about the driving forces of journalism. For example, he began questioning the excessive importance of objectivity. He said he realized that he tends to lean towards fairness more than objectivity. "The real world is not objective. I want to show my readers how my environment affects me, how it frames my perspectives," he explains.

Classroom discussions about ethics of journalism helped him understand his own motivations for choosing a career in news. He said this reflection gave him deep insights into the positive and negative impact of the 24-hour news cycles.

He said he knew that he could not just "turn off" the news. He had to turn on something else within him to counter the negative impact of negative news. So Bardier went about designing a healthier lifestyle for himself, where news was a significant, but balanced, part of his life.

During the pandemic, he was unable to indulge in his love for group sports. He therefore began experimenting with new hobbies and interests. This is how he discovered a love for surfing, which he is pursuing with diligence.

"I am a curious person by nature, but the pandemic gave me a reason and urgency to broaden my interests, experiment with new things, try out activities," he adds.

Bardier says the burnout from too much news triggered a slew of changes. Choosing a healthier and more balanced life filled him with a sense of well-being. This in turn healed his relationship with news.

"At the end of this reflective process, I was able to renew my love and passion for journalism," Bardier adds.

Federico Bardier's experience revealed an astute strategy. He did not focus his energy on resisting bad news or being hard on himself for consuming too much news. Instead, he slowly filled his weekly routine with more joyful experiences. He experimented with new things. These new interests and hobbies gained more weight and the engagement with news shrunk. The transformations took time but had the desired effect.

Finding Hope in the Age of Doomscrolling

In a post, "Goodbye, Doomscroll," for Nieman Lab, Kawandeep Virdee, a writer-advocate, summed up this sentiment well: "There's a hunger for media formats that feel more considerate, more consentful, and are designed with care. It is absolutely crucial for our safety and our wellbeing." Virdee pointed out some qualities and formats of media that "care for you," and that are bearable and healthier. He surmised that media requires clear intention and not just seeking attention; a thoughtful narrative that responds to the reader; establishing clear boundaries and giving readers an option to choose how to interact.

Doomscrolling is as pervasive as it is universal. The Icelandic Tourism Board launched a site called Joyscroll, to persuade travelers to swap the 22.7 meters of bad news we consume everyday with 22.7 meters of "joy-inspiring" and

gorgeous Icelandic nature sights and sounds. This joyscrolling was not limited to vistas only. Pandora Sykes wrote in *The Guardian* that she adopted joyscrolling by sniffing out good news like a bloodhound and succeeded in breaking her doomscrolling habit.

Doomscrolling vs. joyscrolling brought into focus the debate about the propensity of journalists to report mostly bad news.

Miguel Madrid is pursuing a journalism major at LaGuardia Community College as a part-time student. Recently, he worked as an intern for the college newspaper, *The Bridge*, as part of a news internship class, ENG288, that I taught.

Madrid shared his experiences as an adult learner and the role the pandemic played in shaping his life journey. In Fall of 2019, he joined LaGuardia as a part-time student. He was excited to resume his academic journey after a two-decade gap. He was also working full-time in the hospitality industry.

"The pandemic was one of the most overwhelming situations I have ever been in. Every aspect in my life was affected by it, particularly my academic life," Madrid says. As the pandemic raged in 2020, he lost his job as a server.

"I was emotionally drained and financially unstable," he says. He did not want to take another break from his education. In addition to his dwindling finances, he injured his back. He said he had no option but to take a semester off. These months were a low point of his life. But Madrid used this time to delve into a spiritual quest.

"I had the time to strengthen my faith and somehow revisit my relationship with God. I had very dark days; on such days when there was not enough clarity, I asked why me? Instead of asking, why not me?" he says.

The pandemic made him "stronger, resourceful, and faithful," he adds. He got a new job and once again enrolled in LaGuardia to pursue journalism with a renewed sense of purpose and passion.

Madrid did not want to chase news cycles, especially the kind of news that follows the adage: "when it bleeds, it leads." His real interest lay in understanding human character and the emotional journey of his subjects.

The pandemic news cycle made him question the value of news stories. "When the news showed the victims of Covid 19 being stored in refrigerators outside the Elmhurst Hospital, I stopped watching the news," he says. He found the continuous barrage of news pointless.

"Instead of giving me hope they were doing the opposite. I felt hopeless and desperate to live," he adds.

He knew he wanted to pursue a form of journalism that inspired and invigorated him. But first he had to wrestle with the challenges of online learning. "Online classes, on Zoom or Blackboard, were a new thing for me, but also for many professors. I noticed many struggled with technology but also being isolated in quarantine made it worse and annoying, particularly for me, as I am a social person," Madrid explains. He slowed down and kept plodding. He took

his time to understand the various online modalities and when in-person classes resumed, he was relieved.

He said the classroom discussions about why stories of murder get so much attention made him very conscious about the role of drama and storytelling. Madrid was determined to avoid sensational tragedies. "I understand that many people enjoy the drama about the simplest things." He said he was annoyed with the "repetitive nature" of bad news.

For his class assignments, where he had to produce news features, he focused on lighthearted stories. He wrote a feature, "New Normality, New Looks," in which he investigated how some students have embraced masks and use them to make fashion statements.

He is also writing a long-form feature, where he explores how the pandemic made immigrants reconnect with their roots and loved ones in their home countries.

Miguel Madrid says he is excited to carve a niche for himself as a storyteller who examines the human conditions and looks for stories of redemption and hope.

News Stories That Evoke

Disasters and crimes are read out first in most news broadcasts. Of late, the inherent pessimistic nature of news has been repeatedly called out. The pandemic coverage exposed the overindulgence and exaggeration of negative news. This became even more important for me to consider when a study revealed how the US media stood out for its bad news coverage compared to scientific journals and international media. The US news media is an outlier when it comes to pandemic coverage. Even when Covid positive cases were falling, the media focused on places where it was rising and downplayed the importance of the vaccine (Sacerdote, et al).

Yes, in the past decade, there has been an enthusiastic focus on producing news that draws our collective attention to positive events, solutions, what's going right, uplifting, and heartwarming stories, acts of kindness and generosity, and evidence of constructive change. Reasons to Be Cheerful is a non-profit editorial project founded by artist and musician David Byrne. It calls itself a "tonic for tumultuous times" and publishes stories of "hope rooted in evidence," such as "The City That Uses Its Lake as an Air Conditioner" and "This Rap Song May Have Prevented Hundreds of Suicides." There is *Positive News*, which is a magazine for "good journalism about good things."

Even legacy and established media have created dedicated streams of good news. For example, *Mother Jones* magazine has a newsletter, *Recharge*, that focuses on positive news, such as "As COVID Rages on, the First Malaria Vaccine in History Gets Approval." *The Washington Post* publishes "The Optimist," which describes itself as "A selection of inspiring stories to help you disconnect, hit refresh and start the week off right."

Solutions Journalism Network promotes and trains journalists to focus on the solutions to problems and thereby rebalance the news. And it stresses that the pandemic is a

"particularly good time for solutions journalism." It continues to share practical tips based on the "Solutions Approach," which includes advice such as: zone in on the magnitude of the problem and investigate who is responding effectively; examine a small slice of the problem; look for positive deviants in data; hold power to account by showing who's doing it better; proactively engage with the audience (Shaw).

But this begs the question, does hunting for good news constitute going against the tide and are we trying too hard?

The Columbia Journalism Review weighed in on this dilemma in the article, "The Good-news Trend: Uplifting? Delusional? Both?" The writer, Mathew Ingram, revealed that when he shared a video clip of a steam ship flowing by his house, he was thanked profusely. Ingram makes a thoughtful observation, "But a focus on only good news could easily turn into escapism, if it involves deliberately avoiding the truth in favor of something that feels better, because it implies that the world is just fine the way it is, and therefore nothing needs to change. That's a little too close to the 'bread and circuses' the ancient Romans provided as a way to keep the populace in line."

This infuses an urgency to the question—where does good news fall in the relentless coverage of the pandemic?

Rick Edmonds and Kelly McBride from the Poynter Institute deliberated on the ethics of good news in the coverage of Covid 19. McBride suggested, "The ethical imperative is not to provide a mix of good and bad news. Instead, journalists have a duty to really listen to their audience. Do that well, and then let what you hear influence your choice of stories." She explained listening closely will uncover stories that could be mostly negative but there would also be moments of "levity and clear ingenuity." This is how the newsrooms can select the most meaningful stories. Just seeking the feel-good news stories would lead to an overproduction of the cliché stories such as Zoom celebrations and novel workout solutions, she pointed out.

I tapped into this discussion. It played a crucial role in shaping my pedagogy. When I teach my students the craft of newsgathering, I spend a considerable amount of time elaborating on the process of finding news ideas and tips. I simulate a newsroom environment. I play the role of an editor. Students are asked to pitch story ideas, just as any reporter would do. They must go through the rigor of pitching and rejection. It is at this stage of the exercise that I introduce my students to the nuances of the good vs. bad news debate. It is important, given the pandemic context, to shield the students, and myself, from the risk of overindulgence in the gloom of news production and the doom of news consumption. It is here I reiterate the advice of Kelly McBride from Poynter Institute on the value of listening closely to the audience and community.

This exploration helped me to refocus my teaching strategy. The goal was not to tell students to avoid distressing news and seek out joyful news or find a balance. Far from it. I only wanted to bring to consciousness the proclivity for bad news and the prevalent despondent mood, while highlighting the possibility for reporting meaningful stories that comes from the sincere effort of genuinely listening.

I asked my students to seek out stories that excite them. I did not burden them with the pressure of actively avoiding negative stories or only seeking positive stories.

The assignment was titled: "Find a Story that Evokes You." They had to report and write a news story of 600 words.

The following are some of the examples of the stories that were written by the students:

- Profile of a librarian in New York: Finding joy in books during the pandemic
- Stories about entrepreneurs who opened restaurants during the pandemic
- Bands practicing music on Zoom
- Adults and senior citizens embracing enrolling in college
- Ethnic media newspapers providing comfort to local immigrant communities.

Students reflected on the above assignment in a short survey. Here are some of the responses:

- "Okay, so I can write a story that makes me smile!"
- "It was fun. It made me love news a little bit more."
- "Can too much positive news become toxic? Can we balance problems with solutions, gloom with inspiration?"
- "I don't care if my story is published. I felt so motivated to interview people who were not complaining and pursuing their passions."

Challenges of Online Learning and Self-Care

Latchmie Dookie came to the United States in 2019 from Guyana with a pocketful of dreams. She wanted to pursue a degree in psychology. She is the first member of her family to go to college. But she found herself in the doldrums because the pandemic robbed her of the opportunity to indulge in a true American experience, leaving her "emotionally disturbed."

"I would say the color of this experience is very dark, gloomy. I was away from home and family and craved for interactions; instead, I was staring at black boxes on Zoom," she says. She felt lonely and exhausted. "I just wanted to have some fun, have silly conversations," she says.

She devoted herself to her academics; she changed her major to English and joined co-curricular groups and clubs. She was acutely aware of the need for self-care. "I used to journal a lot and it used to help me process my emotions. But even that stopped helping, and I got some help in a wellness center," she explains.

The cloud only lifted when she was able to join in-person classes. She graduated from LaGuardia and is transferring to Queens College. "Coming out of the pandemic I just wanted to stand in the street and smell people," she adds.

Many students shared "feeling overwhelmed" with online learning.

"My experience as a journalism student was a roller coaster ride," says Kayla Greene. Online learning left her feeling anxious. "I was constantly thinking about if I am late or if the professor is late. I learned that in journalism, you can't be late," Greene said.

She knew she had to put extra effort to connect with sources and build networks.

"There were situations where I just spoke my ideas and answers when the whole class was silent because I wanted the professors to know that there's at least someone listening to the professor," she added.

As the semesters rolled on, she adjusted to the demands of virtual learning. The experience sharpened her time management skills. "I was able to interact with my classmates and build friendships thanks to making WhatsApp chat groups," she says. But practicing journalism continued to be a "nerve-wrecking experience," she says. "I am a shy person."

Greene knew that networking is essential in journalism. But finding contacts to interview was always challenging because of the isolation and lack of the support of physical communities. She never gave up. She diligently attended virtual events, asked for contacts, and remained focused on making the best of the challenging times.

"I believe what the pandemic taught me during the online environment is to make an effort to reach out and build connections," she adds.

But for many students online learning during the pandemic was a game changer.

Marilou Rivera always wanted to be writer. She was a prolific writer, recording her life experiences and stories. She wanted to self-publish her work. "I had saved all my writing from 1995 to 2011 in floppy discs and one day I lost all the discs," Rivera shared. She sunk into depression and paused her writing.

She has been working full-time at a children's center while also being a primary caregiver for her family. But her heart was always in writing and telling stories. In 2019, she joined college to pursue an associates degree. Scheduling her work was a challenge. She could not take the classes she wanted, and commuting exhausted her.

However, the pandemic changed it all.

"Pandemic was the catalyst that got me motivated," she explains. Online learning unleashed many opportunities. She returned home from work and took a nap and was able to attend classes. She was able to take multiple classes.

"Yes, the pandemic caused a lot of grief and sadness, but it also gave me a chance to be retrospective, do a lot of thinking about my life purpose and a chance to continue my education," she adds. Rivera did not mind the social isolation. "I was not going to college to make friends. I am always surrounded by people. I just want to focus on getting a degree, acquire new skills and change my job," she explained.

Rivera hopes to teach journalism and art to children one day.

Resonance

The pandemic also presented us with the golden era of open data. The International Journalists Network noted, "Many health-related organizations published daily and real-time updates about the spread of the virus around the world, circulating an unprecedented amount of numbers and figures. The challenge for journalists has been to analyze this information accurately and communicate their findings to the public effectively." The conspiracies around the origins of the virus and the vaccine efficacy required that we had to go an extra mile to verify sources and be sensitive to people's beliefs and propaganda. Journalism students were trained to develop "healthy skepticism" towards information on social media and any data, investigating who collected the information, who was circulating it, who funded the research etc.

However, there came a moment of reckoning for me. I realized this feverish attitude to reorient myself and offer my students pandemic-era skills and strategies is needed but is ultimately a knee-jerk reaction. The collision of Covid 19 with our normal lives is earth-shattering in its gross reality. But the subtle reality is that it is a contemporary problem.

All said and done, the pandemic-era restrictions are temporal in nature. I am training journalists of the future. Of course, in the Spring of 2020, coronavirus caught us off guard, and we had to frantically transition to distant learning and reporting. It became clear to me that the time-worn journalistic skills from before the pandemic, such as in-person interviews, eye-witness accounts, will be needed again. In fact, even as stay-at-home orders became commonplace, journalists continued to report about the havoc created by the pandemic. It was business as usual for reporters and photographers. We came to understand that journalists are performing as essential and front-line workers.

Hence, I was obligated to teach my students the very essence of journalism as a practice, while preparing them for eventualities. To return to the case of in-person interviews, even though I discouraged them from going on field, I taught them the necessary principles of field reporting. They might be simulations, and that is the best I can do. But they were rendered with utmost sincerity.

My pedagogical beliefs drive my practices but, more importantly, they influence student's success and growth. In the past two years, I saw my students produce in-depth reportage despite the pandemic-triggered restrictions. Students produced stories about immigrant families and remittances, new business openings, struggles of daycare workers and librarians, challenges faced by ethnic media, among others. In addition to nurturing the skills of a good

journalist, I am also keenly interested in their personal growth and the development of their values.

Efran Ahmed has been working as an independent journalist for more than a decade focusing on the ethnic media in Queens, New York. He was my student when he was pursuing his associates degree at LaGuardia Community College. Currently, he is pursuing an undergraduate degree at Columbia University, while continuing to work as a freelancer.

Ahmed shared his journey in an interview with me for this essay. "Covid was really a time to get into a conversation with the everyday person who often felt that their voices were neglected or not heard," he says. People shared their traumatic experiences as well as accomplishments such as learning how to cook or paint during the pandemic.

Ahmed struggled with the shrinking freelance market. He endured many challenges, but he still looks back at these two years with gratitude. For Ahmed, though, what makes him beam with pride is his personal growth. "Prior to Covid, I was always thinking what my next question would be. Given the Covid-related stories I covered, it has really made me listen carefully and digest the information as a journalist," he says. He has become very patient. Patient with himself and patient with the world.

Finding Meaning

This essay is a meditation on the questions that arose during two years of teaching and my pursuit of understanding the changing world of journalism and finding comfort and solidarity in shared experiences. I am very grateful to my students who took time to share their experiences, long after they completed my course.

I am left with the quest: How to continuously create a learning environment that is relevant to our changing times? And such an enquiry cannot be conducted in a silo. Journalism educators and the industry need to welcome diverse voices and influences to discuss journalistic values and practices, expand the idea of objectivity to include empathy and self-reflection, critically investigate news consumption models, and focus on making news a meaningful part of our lives. And I am confident the pandemic can act as a catalyst for growth.

As I look back at my own experience, I am humbled. The transition to distance learning and the shadow of the pandemic can be compared to the turbulence experienced as a plane takes off. But in retrospect, these were the very moments when I became aware of strengths and weakness in my instruction style, as well as of more in-depth understanding and appreciation for the role and impact of a teacher in a student's life. This was particularly helpful as I am at the very early stages of my academic career and still exploring the power and privilege of my position.

And in seeing students overcome challenges and blossom, lies the greatest joy of teaching.

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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

The Community School Initiative in Toronto: Mitigating Opportunity Gaps in the Jane and Finch Community in the Wake of COVID-19

by Ardavan Eizadirad, Sally Abudiab, and Brice Baartman

ALL WE HAVE IS EACH OTHER, N.O. BONZO, JUSTSEEDS.ORG

Introduction: COVID-19 and Educational Disruptions

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing systemic inequities and presented new hardships for marginalized communities and families associated with loss of income, lack of access to social support services, increased care responsibilities, and greater likelihood of contracting COVID-19 (Choi et al., 2020; Eizadirad & Sider, 2020; Goodyear, 2021; Royal Society of Canada, 2021; Yang et al., 2020). The pandemic significantly impacted the delivery of education, with widespread disruptions in schools and communities, particularly disadvantaging racialized low-income families who have less access to resources and support services (Colour of Poverty, 2019; Gallagher-Mackay et al., 2021; Eizadirad, 2019,2020; James, 2020; Toronto Foundation, 2021; United Way, 2019; Williams et al. 2013). Due to school closures and abrupt transitions to remote learning, opportunity and achievement gaps further intensified (Bonal & Gonzalez, 2020; James, 2020; Gallagher-Mackay et al., 2021; People for Education, 2021).

The prolonged nature of COVID-19-related school lockdowns and community restrictions not only impacted students' ability to attend schools but consequentially led to reductions in accessing co-curricular opportunities and supplemental education programs (SEPs), with a 90% decline in sports offered in schools (Ekeh & Okeke, 2019; Gallagher-Mackay et al., 2021; People for Education, 2021; Royal Society of Canada, 2021; Toronto Foundation, 2021). A SEP can be described as "a combination of academic training with unconventional methods (e.g., sports, games, arts, discussions) in an organized program to increase the number of positive academic outcomes among students relative to negative ones" (Ekeh & Okeke, 2019, p. 5). For marginalized students living in low-income racialized neighborhoods, evidence has shown that SEPs act as complementary academic training that improves outcomes in student's mental health, well-being, and overall academic achievement (Ekeh & Okeke, 2019; Royal Society of Canada, 2021).

Since the onset of the pandemic there have been increased demands for social services that far exceed the capacity of organizations to meet such demands (Toronto Foundation, 2021). Our research project was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada with the objective of exploring how community-based programming can be adapted and mobilized during the pandemic to mitigate opportunity and achievement gaps for Black, Indigenous, people of colour (BIPOC), and families from lower socio-economic backgrounds, particularly in the Jane and Finch community in Toronto, Canada. The Jane and Finch community is one of Canada's most under-resourced neighborhoods. This is timely and important as it provides race-based data within a Canadian context to fill the gap in the literature about the impact of COVID-19 on achievement in racialized under-resourced communities. Just as importantly, we discuss the significance of how the research was conducted in the wake of COVID-19. Hence, this article is about the findings from the data, but just as much about the community-driven approach for how the research was conducted, by the community and for the community in the midst of the pandemic. Our research methodology and approach in doing community-based research demonstrates the importance of not only "serving" marginalized communities but collaborating with the community to guide the research process to ensure multiple perspectives and lived experiences are valued and heard.

What is the Community School Initiative (CSI)?

The research project involved examination of the efficacy of an evening and weekend supplementary academic program called the *Community School Initiative* (CSI) offered to residents of the Jane and Finch community in Toronto, Canada. CSI is a partnership between the non-profit organization Youth Association for Academics, Athletics, and Character Education (YAAACE, 2022; learn more at https://yaaace.com/) and the for-profit enterprise Spirit of Math (Spirit of Math, 2022; learn more at https://spiritofmath.com/). It delivered a structured math curriculum to students in grades two to eight aged 8 to 14 years old from September 2020 to May 2021 at a subsidized cost supported by a team of caring adults, including teachers, coaches, parents, and volunteers. Spirit of Math has been operating for 35 years and typically offers their structured math curriculum to high-performing and gifted students in kindergarten to Grade 11 as a private service. They serve over 11,000 students across 40 campuses in twenty cities in North America and Pakistan. The foundation of the Spirit of Math curriculum is based on four elements: drills, problem solving, core curriculum, and cooperative learning. These elements as a collective create a multi-layered experiential learning experience that aims to develop well-rounded students.

CSI was offered as a 9-month (36 weeks) program. The cost of the program was subsidized at $100 per person, so families got access to it at a fraction of what it typically costs ($3000) as a private sector service. CSI began with in-person programming, moved to remote delivery due to COVID-19 restrictions in alignment with public health guidelines, and transitioned to a hybrid model to support families and their various circumstances. YAAACE students had access to the Spirit of Math curriculum with slight adjustments. Students attended the weekend learning session on Saturdays for 2 hours followed with a 1-hour remote weeknight drop-in session to get extra help. Students were assigned to a grade based on their skills and knowledge identified via diagnostic testing. Some older students were placed in lower grades based on their diagnostic assessment which showed they were behind in some of their foundational math skills for their age. YAAACE teachers were trained and supported by Spirit of Math instructors to deliver the curriculum. Bi-weekly check-in meetings were hosted between YAAACE teachers and Spirit of Math staff to discuss identified challenges and how to support students. Students were assessed weekly through homework assignments, math drills, tests, and a final exam.

Approximately 100 students participated in the CSI including 5 staff from Spirit of Math, 8 Ontario certified

teachers, 8 YAAACE coaches, and other staff hired by YAAACE to be part of the student support team. The support team would assist teachers in their classroom. It is important to note that many of the staff had direct community connections with families in the program. BIPOC educators were hired to represent the cultural identities of the students. YAAACE typically hires the same small group of educators to deliver its educational programs throughout the year such as the March Break camp and the Summer Institute to create continuity of care and establish trust with students and families. Coaches served as mentors as part of the program working collaboratively with the teachers to keep students accountable, motivate them, and facilitate transfer of life skills from the classroom to sports and the larger community. Overall, CSI aimed to minimize the achievement gap by creating access to academic opportunities that are accessible, affordable, and socio-culturally relevant, sustaining, and responsive with consideration for systemic barriers impacting community members living in the Jane and Finch neighborhood.

Distinction between the Achievement Gap and the Opportunity Gap

It is important to distinguish between what are referred to as the achievement gap and the opportunity gap. In the education sector, the "achievement gap" often refers to "[D]isparity in academic performance between groups of students. The achievement gap shows up in grades, standardized-test scores, course selection, dropout rates, and college-completion rates, among other [outcome-based] success measures" (Ansell, 2011, para. 1). Reference to these outcome-based statistics, particularly differences in achievement between various social groups, are used by policymakers and other educational stakeholders to assess and judge the quality of education offered by schools, communities, regions, or countries. In response to these disparities, educational reforms are proposed to mitigate achievement gaps – reforms such as greater investments in standardized testing as an accountability tool, which only promotes and reinforces a neoliberal market driven model of education (Au, 2016; Eizadirad, 2019; Eizadirad & Portelli, 2018; Kempf, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006). For our purposes, we refer to the achievement gap as the difference in achievement outcomes between identities and communities in dominant positions of society compared to those minoritized along the lines of race, gender, sexuality, religion, income, ability, and other factors. The emphasis is on outcome-based results, yet as Carter and Welner (2013) emphasize, "While these assessments [and by extension achievement gaps] attempt to determine where students are, they ignore how they may have gotten there" (p. 3).

In contrast, the opportunity gap as defined by Gorski (2018) involves "the troubling ways youth experiencing poverty are denied the educational opportunities more likely granted to more affluent youth" (p. 101). This is process-oriented rather than outcome-based. For our purposes, we expand on Gorski's (2018) definition in alignment with the works of Shah (2018), Schlueter (2021), Carter and Welner (2013), and Williams et al. (2013) to include all minoritized identities who are exposed to a magnitude of systemic inequities and their intersections. We define the opportunity gap as the intersection of systemic inequities that create barriers for minoritized identities and communities to access and secure opportunities to achieve their full potential. Similar to the achievement gap, the opportunity gap can be compared in terms of individuals, schools, neighborhoods, regions, or countries. Our analysis prioritizes a neighborhood level analysis focusing on the Jane and Finch community as a case study. Gorski (2018) outlines various "dimensions of the educational opportunity gap" (p. 103), which is helpful to analyze disparities in opportunities amongst schools in different neighborhoods. Some factors to consider include differences in school funding, availability of resources, student to teacher ratios, opportunities for family involvement, and the extent of access to various technologies. Whereas the achievement gap examines outcomes on tests as the barometer for identifying the magnitude of inequities in education, the opportunity gap provides a more holistic community lens going beyond the individual realm to explore the systemic inequities that serve as barriers impacting student achievement in schools across different social groups. This community lens approach should be prioritized given that "educational disparities and intergenerational economic inequality are highly correlated with skin color, ethnicity, linguistic and social class status" (Carter & Welner, 2013, p. 1).

Under a neoliberal education model, student achievements across social groups are often judged and compared via standardized test results (Au, 2010; Kempf, 2016). Although theoretically standardized tests are implemented to help identify inequities in the education system and areas for improvement (Volante, 2007), this has not led to significantly closing the achievement gap along the lines of race and socioeconomic since its introduction in the United States and Canada (Au, 2010; Dei, 2008, Eizadirad, 2018; James, 2012; Kempf, 2016). As Wayne Au (2010) critically asks in his book titled *Unequal by Design: High-Stakes Testing and the Standardization of Inequality*,

> The historical roots of high-stakes, standardised testing in racism, nativism, and eugenics raises a critical question: why is it that, now over 100 years after the first standardised tests were administered in the United States [and by extension in Canada], we have virtually the same test-based achievement gaps along the lines of race and economic class? (p. 12)

Although the context is different to a certain degree between how standardized tests are implemented in Canada in comparison with the United States (EQAO, 2015), the outcome of racialized students and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds doing more poorly relative to their white counterparts in education remains a persistent pattern in both countries (Colour of Poverty, 2019). As Nezavdal (2003) reminds us, standardized assessments are "a social construct" (p. 69) that contributes to increasing the opportunity gap where "norms [in standardized testing] are not incidentally held but deliberately upheld to stream students to propel some forward while systematically impeding others" (p. 67).

YAAACE's Social Inclusion Framework for Mitigating the Opportunity Gap

YAAACE uses a Social Inclusion Framework as an operational framework for implementation of its programs and services to mitigate the opportunity gap impacting students and families living in the Jane and Finch community.

IMAGE 1. YAAACE'S SOCIAL INCLUSION STRATEGY AND OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK

The Social Inclusion Framework has six components focusing on a range of services to mitigate the root causes of systemic inequities with a large focus on creating access to opportunities in a manner that is affordable, accessible, and socio-culturally relevant to the needs of the families living in the community. YAAACE acknowledges that negative pull factors in the community such as exposure to violence, guns, and gangs gravitate children and youth towards a lifestyle affiliated with risk-taking and poor decision-making (McMurtry & Curling, 2008). In response, the Social Inclusion strategy seeks to mitigate risk factors in the community by surrounding children and youth with access to quality programming to offset exposure to negative pull factors.

The Social Inclusion team works with the various stakeholders to identify the most volatile cohort of students to ensure that they have access to academic support, recreational programming, expanded opportunities, comprehensive wraparound support, and cultural considerations of care and reflective services year-round. The idea is to ensure students have access to a caring adult, whether a teacher, coach, or mentor, at all times in a 24-hour cycle, particularly outside of school hours on weekday

evenings and weekends, where there are greater risks for exposure to violence and other risk factors. The partnerships YAAACE has created and cultivated with various stakeholders over the years, such as with the Ministry of Education, City of Toronto, Public Safety Canada, Toronto Catholic District School Board, and the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), contribute to ensuring that the cost to their programs and services are minimal so opportunities remain accessible and affordable to the community members.

YAAACE seeks to engage students and families in the Jane and Finch neighborhood through socio-culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining year-round programming in academics, athletics, recreation, technology, and the arts (see Eizadirad, 2020 for a more in-depth history of YAAACE). Since its inception in 2007, YAAACE has created synergetic collaborative partnerships with various stakeholders to facilitate the growth of the organization and expand its programs and services. These partnerships focus on addressing the systemic barriers and the external factors impacting the achievement of students in the community, particularly for racialized low-income students. This is significant given that racialized students and other minoritized identities are further disadvantaged due to inequities in schools affiliated with streaming, push-outs, lack of representation, and neoliberal policies and practices proclaiming neutrality and colorblindness (Ahmed, 2021; Au, 2016; Battiste, 2013; Colour of Poverty, 2019; Eizadirad, 2019; Eizadirad & Campbell, 2021; James, 2020; Schlueter, 2021; Shah, 2018; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015; United Way, 2019). Overall, the CSI provides alternative academic support for BIPOC students after school and on weekends to improve their math skills guided by the curriculum, resources, and pedagogies provided by Spirit of Math.

The Jane and Finch Community in Toronto and the Opportunity Gap

Canada is a country with a population of approximately 39,137,232 as of October 2022 (Statistics Canada, 2022) and consists of 10 provinces and 3 territories. Ontario is Canada's largest province, and it "represents approximately one-third of the nation's population" (Pinto, 2016, p. 96). In Canada, there is no federal department of education. Instead, each province and territory has its own exclusive legal jurisdiction over educational policies and practices (Volante, 2007). Educational policies for governance are established at the provincial level and communicated to local school boards.

YAAACE operates out of different schools in the Jane and Finch neighborhood. From a historical spatial lens looking at the growth of the neighborhood over time, Jane and Finch underwent massive development by the Ontario Housing Commission in the 1960s to keep up with rapid rates of newcomers entering Canada (Narain, 2012). Jane and Finch represented an ideal community for many new immigrants due to low rent costs and relatively close proximity to the downtown core of the city. At the time, immigrants that were moving into the community were predominantly from the West Indies, Asia, Africa, South America, and the Indian subcontinent (Richardson, 2008). High-rise apartments and townhouses were built at a rapid rate without much thought about how to cultivate a sense of community amongst residents. This linear style of hollow urban planning, without much thought to the internal infrastructure of the neighborhood, led to the population of Jane and Finch expanding from 1,301 in 1961 to 33,030 in 1971, which included establishment of 21 high-rise apartment buildings in the neighborhood (Rigakos et al., 2004). Jane and Finch continued its exponential growth in the 1970s and 1980s with the majority of its residents being working-class immigrants and visible minorities (see Eizadirad, 2017 for an in-depth history of the Jane and Finch neighborhood). More recently, Toronto's northwest cluster of neighborhoods, including Jane and Finch, experienced higher rates of COVID-19 in comparison to other neighborhoods in Toronto (Choi et al. 2020; Goodyear, 2021).

Focusing on differences in educational outcomes amongst social groups and communities, the Learning Opportunity Index (LOI) created by the TDSB ranks schools based on external community challenges affecting student achievement (Toronto District School Board, 2020). The school rankings are updated every three years with the latest one being published in 2020. The LOI was created to acknowledge that learning outcomes differ in relation to the communities where schools are located, and to ensure schools facing greater external challenges receive more supports and resources. The LOI school rankings are calculated based on six variables, which include:

1. median family income

2. percentage of families whose income is below the low-income measure

3. percentage of families receiving social assistance

4. adults with low education

5. adults with university degrees

6. single-parent families.

Overall, Jane and Finch accommodates more youth, single-parent families, refugees, individuals without a secondary-school diploma, low-income households, and public housing tenants than any other neighborhood in Toronto (Ahmadi, 2018; Williams et al., 2013).

Another mainstream popular tool that ranks schools is the Fraser Institute (Fraser Institute, 2022; https://www.compareschoolrankings.org/). It ranks schools using publicly available data on achievement exclusively based on results from standardized tests. Many schools in the Jane and Finch community are ranked high on the LOI (needing more resources relative to student and community needs) and low on the Fraser Institute's school rankings (poor performance on provincial standardized tests). The Fraser Institute school rankings have gained so much currency in the public realm that they impact prices of homes around schools (Eizadirad, 2019). The rankings contribute to schools located in racialized communities being labelled as "bad" and viewed through a deficit lens, where the assumption is made that they do not offer quality education. Furthermore, the rankings do not shed light on existing opportunity gaps and how it influences achievement. The deficit thinking about "low-achieving" schools in racialized neighborhoods is further perpetuated through the media, where the social problems impacting the community are often blamed on its residents via neoliberal discourses affiliated with meritocracy and colorblindness without much discussion about systemic inequities impacting student achievement (Ahmadi, 2018; Eizadirad, 2017; Eizadirad & Portelli, 2018; James, 2012; Shah, 2018).

Community-Driven Research Methodology

The objective of this research project was to explore how community-based programming can be mobilized during the COVID-19 pandemic to close the opportunity gap as it impacts BIPOC and families from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Youth and parent advisors along with partner organizations were part of regular bi-weekly check-in meetings to guide the research process. They facilitated capturing the perspective of community members most adversely impacted by a neoliberal model of education. The meetings were conducted remotely via Zoom to make them more accessible. All the stakeholders were part of discussions and decision-making about how to collect the data and share the information in manner that is accessible to the community. It was agreed that survey and focus groups would be good at complementing one another for data collection purposes. We also decided to start a research blog immediately to share the vision for the project with the community (communityschoolinitiative.com). Instead of waiting till the project findings were complete, our goal was to take the community with us at every step of the research process. We used the research blog platform to compile and share literature reviews and resources targeting various stakeholders, including students, parents, educators, community partners, and policymakers. Youth and parent advisors emphasized the importance of making information available in formats that are accessible to the community and non-academics. In response, we created various infographics and posted them on the website periodically to make the information accessible in community-oriented language.

Once the research team outlined the survey and focus group questions, they were presented to the decision-making committee that included student and parent advisors. Based on their feedback, some questions were

removed or revised, and some new questions added. It was estimated that surveys would take approximately 20 minutes to be completed. Surveys were administered online via Qualtrics, a secure data collection website. They were completed anonymously and included a combination of open-ended and Likert scale questions. Questions captured demographic data about participants and information about their experiences in the CSI in different roles as students, parents, or teachers. Participants were recruited via a master-list that YAAACE used to communicate with parents, students, and teachers. 33 students, 33 parents, and 4 teachers completed the surveys. A 90-minute focus group was also conducted with all seven teachers delivering the curriculum in the CSI. A $30 Amazon gift card was provided to those who participated as a token of appreciation for their time. The decision-making committee advocated for Amazon gift cards, identifying them as practical given the pandemic conditions and the needs of the families in the community.

All data was collected between June to July 2021 upon completion of the CSI program. Responses were examined using Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a paradigm and thematic analysis as a methodology (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). CRT, which has been banned in some states in the United States, provides a framework to examine how racism operates through policies and processes embedded within the social fabric of institutions proclaimed as "neutral" and "colorblind" from a neoliberal lens that glorifies meritocracy, individualism, and competition associated with a survival of the fittest mentality (Au, 2016; Lopez, 2003; Tett & Hamilton, 2021). CRT provides a framework to critically examine who is privileged and advantaged by the conditions of the norm and who is left out and disadvantaged (Ahmed, 2021; James, 2020; Gorski, 2018; Eizadirad & Campbell, 2021). This involves an examination beyond the individual realm to community factors impacting teaching and learning conditions and access to opportunities outside of school hours. The narratives expressed by the participants in the CSI, who live in the Jane and Finch community, helped identify inequities that serve as barriers to student achievement, impeding their progress to achieve to their full potential. Through thematic analysis, we developed five interrelated themes, which included: *holistic and culturally relevant programming, structured programming, communication and parental engagement, digital divide and inequality,* and *effective pedagogies*.

Discussion: Closing the Achievement Gap by Mitigating Systemic Inequities in the Community that Create Barriers for Student Achievement

The majority of the survey respondents self-identified as racialized being Black and African Caribbean, with some representation from the Philippines and Somalia, and some being mixed-race. Over 45% (n=15) of the parents who responded to the survey were in single-parent households making less than $50,000 annually as a family. 58% (n=17) of respondents indicated renting or living in subsidized housing. Common responses for the highest level of education completed were a college diploma (51%) followed by an undergraduate degree (21%). All seven educators teaching in the CSI were racialized, with a teaching experience range of two to fifteen years in delivery of YAAACE programs and services.

The CSI provided a structured math curriculum to participants in the program. Each student was placed in a grade based on diagnostic assessments and provided an individualized binder to keep track of their progress. As one teacher expressed, "It's nice to have the lessons beforehand, step by step, structured, detailed with different manuals and books, drills set up, and problem of day and the week provided." This allowed teachers to spend less time preparing lessons and more time supporting students. Teachers also expressed that the consistency in the structure of the program helped identify struggling students who needed additional supports. Parents echoed similar sentiments about the structure and consistency in the curriculum being a positive aspect of the program. One parent stated, "Accountability. responsibility, ownership, pride, confidence all developed from program consistency." Teachers further emphasized that the technologies and resources made available to the students as part of the program were very helpful, such as the use of "iPads, AppleTV, laptops, and applications such as Brightspace, Microsoft Teams, and ActiveInspire." These were resources that many of the students may not have had access to or weren't able to afford if it was not for the subsidized cost of the program. Recognizing that similar programs exist but at a much higher price, one parent expressed gratitude stating, "Programs outside of YAAACE do not fit the budget."

"Closing the achievement gap" as an outcome has become a popular buzz word among educational policymakers and politicians when discussing inequities impacting various social groups, yet what is often silenced or not talked about are the opportunity gaps, which lead to achievement gaps as outcomes. These opportunity gaps were further intensified and exposed by COVID-19, reflecting the findings from our study. Examining the state of Ontario schools in the early 1990s, Curtis et al. (1992) outline that, "Working-class kids always have, on average, lower reading sores, higher grade failures, higher drop-out rates and much poorer employment opportunities" (p. 7). This trend continues to exist today largely due to inequality of opportunity rooted in systemic inequities. Race is a significant factor that impacts one's access to opportunities, particularly when systemic discrimination is embedded within the fabric of institutional policies and practices. Within the TDSB, "schools with high dropout rates are those with the highest number of racialized students" (Colour of Poverty, 2019, p. 4). In the TDSB, which is the largest and one of the most diverse school boards in Canada with 583 schools and serving more than 246,000 students, "students of African ascendance experience a 38% dropout rate and students from Central and South America had a 37% dropout rate" (Brown, 2009, p. 4).

CSI provided a holistic education model reflecting the needs of the students and the families it serves. Parents, students, and teachers as a collective expressed that they felt the CSI provided students who were struggling in the school system an opportunity to improve socially,

emotionally, and academically. Parents felt that the learning environment was inclusive and welcoming by being "family-centred," similar to a community hub. Having the support of coaches, extra tutoring, and academic support during the week remotely, access to technologies such as iPads and smartboards, and teachers that reflected the cultural identities of students who made the learning "fun and engaging," were identified by students and parents as strengths of the CSI. As one parent expressed, "YAAACE supports in the development of creating lasting relationships while building social skills and demonstrating the importance of respect. The public school system often does not provide this, especially in lower income and predominantly Black communities."

The involvement of coaches with the delivery of the educational component was seen as an integral component for the success of the CSI. The effectiveness of coaches being involved was ranked very high at 9.33 by the parents on a scale of 1 to 10. In the focus group, teachers also spoke very highly of the impact of coaches on the learning environment both in-person and remotely, contributing to increased student engagement and accountability. As one teacher explained, "It was night and day in terms of the difference in terms of behavior when the coaches got involved." Similarly, parents shared immense praise for the presence of the coaches by describing the great respect their children had for the coaches due to providing constant mentorship in and out of the classroom.

Teachers and parents expressed how supporting students was more challenging remotely. Some of the challenges were due to students and parents not having adequate access to internet or personal devices, such as the case with families with multiple children. Some parents also did not have adequate home space to support their children, with one parent stating, "Suitable environment without distractions is hard to identify at home." These challenges reflect the opportunity gap where systemic inequities create barriers that impede optimal student achievement. Many studies have found that students from higher-income and white families are more likely to overcome these challenges by being able to afford digital devices, adequate internet, tutors, and extracurricular supplemental educational programs that have positive effects on their academic and social development (Bonal & Gonzalez, 2020; Ekeh & Okeke, 2019; Gallagher-Mackay et al., 2021; James, 2020; Royal Society of Canada, 2021; Toronto Foundation, 2021).

Centering Community Voices as Part of Knowledge Mobilization and Dissemination

As we completed the project findings, we posted the final report on the research blog to make it accessible to the community: https://www.communityschoolinitiative.com/. The final 22-page report, titled *Addressing the Social Determinants of Learning: The Community School Initiative Closing the Achievement Gap for Racialized Under-Resourced Communities,* was made visually engaging and concise with intentionality to appeal to the community. We hosted a one-day culminating symposium in hybrid format in February 2022 with community leaders, scholars, educators, parents, students, local school trustees, and other stakeholders to engage the larger community in the findings from the research and to discuss next steps to make equitable changes in the community. We began the day with opening remarks from YAAACE co-founder Devon Jones, followed with a presentation by the research team about the research findings and recommendations. Three panels were

IMAGE 2. FLYER FOR THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL INITIATIVE SYMPOSIUM HOSTED IN HYBRID FORMAT IN

hosted throughout the day. The first panel was a community perspective panel exploring the theme of "Successes and Challenges in Implementing Holistic and Culturally Relevant Programming in Jane and Finch." The second panel focused on the perspectives of students and parents, with the theme of "Experiences Attending the Community School Initiative and Other YAAACE Programs." The final panel for the day focused on leadership in the community, with the theme of "Mitigating Root Causes of Systemic Barriers for Teaching and Learning in Racialized Under-Resourced Communities." The leadership panel included a teacher from the CSI, a local elementary school principal, and two local school trustees who represent the neighborhood from the public and Catholic board. All sessions were recorded and posted on the research blog website.

Conclusion

Findings indicate that public-private community partnerships such as the CSI effectively mobilized in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic to close the achievement gap by focusing on mitigating systemic inequities in the Jane and Finch community that created barriers for student achievement rooted in inequality of opportunity. CSI as a case study, supplemented with the community-driven approach of the research project, can inform ways teacher-scholars need to continue to work with marginalized communities and community agencies in the wake of the pandemic and post-pandemic to meet needs of families and students, particularly within racialized under-resourced communities. This is where research has the potential to be transformative as a tool and platform for advocacy, resistance, and activism to reflect the needs and lived experiences of community residents. While the negative impact of systemic inequities was intensified by COVID-19, the CSI mobilized in a short span of time to identify and respond to these challenges by prioritizing access to academic programs in ways that were affordable, accessible, and socio-culturally relevant, sustaining, and responsive to the needs of families in the Jane and Finch community. Although the CSI had its challenges, particularly around how to adapt the curriculum for lower achieving students as well as engaging and supporting students more consistently in a remote context, findings are promising as they demonstrate the potential for reciprocal non-profit community organizations and private enterprise partnerships to mitigate the opportunity gap outside of school hours to help students progress towards their full potential.

CSI serves as an example of how the achievement gap can be minimized by focusing on mitigating the opportunity gap by involving a team of caring adults working collaboratively to provide continuity of care and enhance access to support systems and timely academic prevention and intervention strategies to optimize student achievement. One of the key characteristics that contributed to the success of the CSI was providing mentorship and holistic programming from diverse educators and staff that reflect the cultural identities of students and families in the program. Another integral characteristic was offering programs through people who have established trust and rapport with the community and understand the local needs of the neighborhood, including the magnitude of systemic inequities influencing the teaching and learning conditions in schools and the larger community. Benefits of CSI during the pandemic align with findings from the larger literature which emphasize that supplemental educational programs offered by non-profits are significant in helping mitigate the impact of learning loss, particularly for racialized students and under-resourced communities. Unaffordability in accessing quality structured programs remains a key learning barrier driven largely by systemic inequities. This is where there is potential for synergetic collaborative partnerships between organizations and agencies to mitigate systemic barriers impeding student achievement at the community level. This will differ for each community, and by extension for each postal code, as every neighborhood has its own unique challenges.

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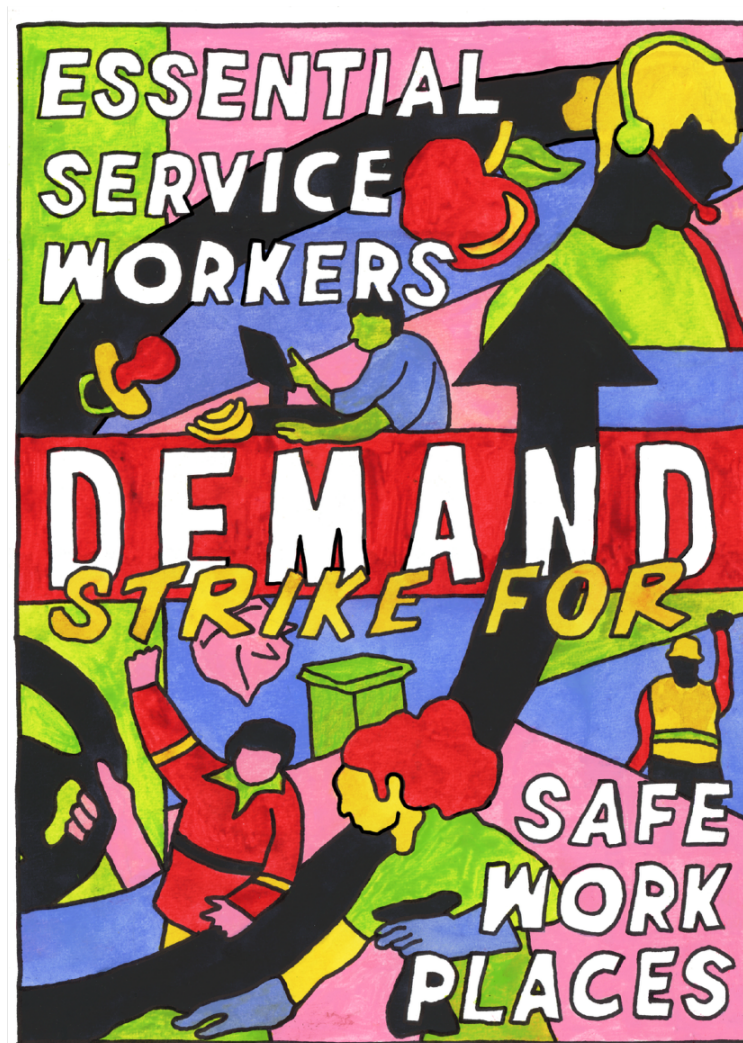
RADICAL TEACHER

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"What We Want is the Same Thing You Want":
Educator Union Organizing for the 'Common Good'
during Covid-19

by Rhiannon M. Maton

NICKY MINUS, JUSTSEEDS.ORG

In mid-February 2021, amidst mounting pressure from the local school district and the federal government to reopen schools during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) surveyed local parents regarding their stance on school reopening. The educator union's survey determined that 66% of Los Angeles Unified School District's parents wanted to remain with remote learning (Myart-Cruz, 2021) due to family health concerns. Thus, the UTLA articulated to local politicians that it would only sign an agreement to return to buildings if three health and safety demands were satisfied: "LA County is out of the purple tier [i.e., a tier indicating high Covid-19 rates]; Staff are either fully vaccinated or provided access to vaccination; Safety conditions are in place at our schools, including PPE [i.e. Personal Protective Equipment], physical distancing, improved ventilation, and daily cleaning" ("91% YES," 2021).

The Los Angeles mayor then presented the UTLA with a proposed new agreement in March 2021 that failed to sufficiently account for such health and safety demands but, if ratified, would have led to reopened school doors within the month with additional state funds as incentive. An overwhelming 91% of voting UTLA members voted against the mayor's proposal. The UTLA president, Cecily Myart-Cruz, reported: "This vote signals that in these most trying times, our members will not accept a rushed return that would endanger the safety of educators, students and families" ("91% YES," 2021). Further, pointing to the state incentivization of reopened school buildings through the provision of additional funds to districts offering in-person classes, while referencing the fact that the district serves over 91% Latinx and Black students ("LAUSD," 2021), Myart-Cruz stated: "[the state's incentivization] money will only go to white and wealthier schools that do not have the transmission rates low-income Black and [B]rown communities do. This is a recipe for propagating structural racism" (quoted in CBSLA Staff, 2021a).

The UTLA's story of pushback against management in their school district is representative of nation-wide tensions surrounding school reopening during the 2020-2021 school year in the U.S. broadly. Many districts across the country pushed for school reopening at this time, with few appearing to pay sufficient attention to the lived health and safety needs and concerns of students, families, and school workers (e.g., Madeloni, 2021). Meanwhile, many U.S. educator unions assertively and visibly organized for a "safe return to school" involving stronger health protections in school buildings. Such unions pointed to the ways in which community health concerns are bound up with the learning and working conditions of schools, and thus linked the health and well-being of children, families, and communities with those of educators. Such unions employed a range of tactics, including engaging in ongoing legal bargaining with districts about school conditions and, at times, outright refusal to follow employer directives, as in the case of educators in several cities who chose to work in the mid-winter cold rather than enter buildings that they deemed unsafe for students, families, and workers (e.g., Issa & Schuba, 2021; Maton, 2021a, 2021b).

Media coverage of the debates on school reopening gave voice to many groups with strong opinions about who was to blame for many school doors remaining closed. One visible faction blamed educators and their unions, asserting that they were driven by selfish motives such as wanting to work less (e.g., Snowball, 2021). Meanwhile, many U.S. educator unions—including the UTLA, Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), Boston Teachers Union (BTU), Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT), and others—framed organizing efforts as driven by social justice unionist philosophy and the effort to democratically organize for the common good.

Social justice unions are democratic worker organizations that seek to advance equity, justice, and common good issues that benefit their dues-paying members alongside the public more broadly. They tend to embrace a range of tactics, including those relying upon traditional bargaining and negotiation processes as well as more assertive tactics such as protests, workplace walk-outs, and strikes (Dyke & Bates, 2019; Stark, 2019; Maton, 2016, 2018, 2022b; Weiner, 2012). They strive to partner with local communities, pointing out with a common refrain that "teachers' working conditions are students' learning conditions" and that they are fighting for "the schools our students deserve."[1] (Maton, 2022a). One core element of this movement is the effort to center common good issues within labor organizing practices. For the purpose of this article, the *common good* is defined as the resources that are needed for the life preservation and growth of society's members. It includes those elements that allow for humans in a given society to protect and enable their lives and encompasses considerations extending beyond individual people, including environmental conditions and the availability of universally accessible resources.[2] Common good issues can include those of equitable access to resources in public health and education, as indicated in the example of UTLA described above, thus exhibiting how efforts to advocate for public health and enhanced learning conditions in schools may be understood as efforts to advocate for the common good.

In this article, I draw primarily upon popular media and artifactual union-published sources, alongside initial data from interviews with educator unionists, to tease apart what common good issues were taken up by social justice educator unions during the 2020-2021 school year and why they chose to take up this range of issues, as well as to consider the stakes of this frame for union organizing within and beyond the Covid-19 pandemic. Overall, this article seeks to build a stronger understanding of how common good issues are construed and employed by educators' social justice unions.

Social Justice Unionism and the Common Good

Business unionism is the most common union organizational model in the U.S. today. Here, the union operates like a top-down business that provides legal services to members such as collective bargaining processes and contract enforcement, representational services, and other group services like securing health plans, insurance, and group legal services. In contrast, social justice unionism

embraces grassroots democratic organizing approaches while expanding upon what it sees as the myopic focus of business unionism.

Social justice unions elevate principles of union transparency and democracy, equity-related issues, and demands affecting union members and local communities. They embrace assertive tactics (e.g., walkouts, protests, and strikes) alongside what might be considered more traditional demands (e.g., wages and benefits) and approaches (e.g., legal processes such as contractual bargaining) (Bradbury et al., 2014; Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008; Maton, 2022b; McAlevey, 2016; Weiner, 2012). Social justice unions tend to value active member engagement in democratic union decision-making approaches while prioritizing *both* the provision of necessary services to members *and* the achievement of gains benefiting the common good. Recognizing that their collective and legal position provides political influence and a platform for effecting change, educators' social justice unions employ common good positions to advocate for the material, cultural, and institutional facilities benefitting local communities and the public (Belsha, 2019; Maton, 2022b; McCartin et al., 2020). For example, in their quest to nourish and expand the relational nexus between schools and local communities, such unions might organize around expanding the rights of immigrants, public access to food and shelter, the right to be protected from police violence, or the health and welfare of students attending public schools. As seen in their tagline phrase "teachers' working conditions are students' learning conditions" (Maton, 2022a), social justice unions position rank-and-file educators' working conditions as inherently intertwined with the daily lives and socioeconomic and health-related needs of their students and local communities. Overall, social justice unions seek to prioritize the needs of rank-and-file members alongside those of the working class more broadly while using enhanced union democracy as a method for achieving such goals (Bradbury et al., 2014).

The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) strike of 2012 is commonly thought to mark the early stages of a U.S.-wide educator unionist shift toward social justice unionism that centers common good demands while seeking to protect and strengthen public education. Starting in 2008, members of CTU formed the Caucus of Rank-and-file Educators (CORE), a union caucus (i.e., rank-and-file group) of like-minded social justice unionists. Rank-and-file CTU members organized through CORE engaged in ongoing protest against school closures in close partnership with local parent and community organizations, and presented a major challenge to the corporatization and privatization of public education in Chicago from 2008 and on (McAlevey, 2016). In 2010, CORE members were elected into top leadership positions in the CTU and succeeded in pushing out the former "business unionist" leaders. Through community partnerships, CORE built enhanced trust between the CTU and local parents and communities of color and those facing economic insecurity. Thus, when the CTU later struck in 2012, with demands that included a nurse and social worker in every school, local parent and community groups offered significant support for striking educators by organizing a concurrent parent organization and participating in numerous union actions such as union pickets, rallies, and marches. The success of CTU's 2012 strike is often attributed to the strength of the union's community partnerships, and it succeeded in garnering significant national and international visibility for the educator social justice unionist movement (Brogan, 2014; McAlevey, 2016).

Since the CTU's 2012 strike, an increasing number of educator unions and organized groups of rank-and-file union members (i.e., caucuses) have been similarly using their political power and position to elevate social justice unionism principles and common good demands (Dyke & Bates, 2019; Maton & Stark, 2021; Stark, 2019; Weiner, 2012). As Myart-Cruz illustrates previously, such unions are actively identifying and pushing back against historically-situated systemic factors such as structural racism and capitalism (e.g., Maton, 2018, 2022a), thus shifting the terrain of what people expect of unions and labor.

The United Caucuses of Rank-and-file Educators (UCORE) was formed in 2014 to bring together and provide mutual support for what are now over forty active social justice caucuses in cities and states across the U.S., including Baltimore, Los Angeles, Massachusetts, New York City, North Carolina, Philadelphia, Rochester NY, Seattle, and West Virginia (Stark, 2019). Social justice caucuses like CORE are frequently, although not always, at the forefront of pushing their broader unions to embrace social justice unionism. In some locations, such as Boston, union leadership has embraced social justice unionism without the active support of a social justice caucus, while in other locations like Philadelphia, caucuses act as moral guides and political influences on their broader union even while not technically elected into leadership positions (e.g., Maton, 2021b). The educator strikes in Arizona, Chicago, Denver, Kentucky, Los Angeles, Oklahoma, West Virginia (e.g., Blanc, 2019; Dyke & Bates, 2019), and other states and cities in 2018 and 2019, marked the growth in educator unions' willingness to embrace social justice unionism by mobilizing assertive tactics around common good demands. Covid-19 appears to have continued, and perhaps intensified, this trend.

What Common Good Issues are Unions Advancing during Covid-19?

Social justice unions have tended to emphasize the impact of broader systemic issues on the learning resources and health protections offered by public schools. This section highlights how, during the Covid-19 pandemic, such unions have called attention to: (1) the need to resolve longstanding trends of underfunding U.S. public schools; and (2) the need to recognize and mitigate the effects of systemic racism and classism on public school resources.

Educator unions have pointed to the impossibility of "catching up" to the infrastructural and resource needs necessitated by Covid-19 following the lack of substantial public investment in schools over several decades (e.g., Owens et al., 2016; Steinberg & Quinn, 2015). Prior to the pandemic, educators in many U.S. locations had already brought attention to the dearth of learning resources, including books (e.g., Hendry, 2018), lack of available

hygiene products and clean water (e.g., Burke, 2020), and gaps in the provision of children's health and wellness resources such as nurses and social workers (e.g., Jaffe, 2019a, 2019b), along with widespread environmental hazards in schools such as inferior ventilation systems and unmitigated asbestos (e.g., Ruderman et al., 2018). During Covid-19, unions across the U.S. built on this earlier work through highlighting the challenges of providing sufficient safety protections for children and workers in schools during Covid-19, when many buildings entered the pandemic with already crumbling infrastructure due to decades of disinvestment.

Crumbling public infrastructure has been perhaps most visible during Covid-19 in the substandard ventilation systems and air quality of many public schools, and particularly those serving economically insecure and racialized youth.

Crumbling public infrastructure has been perhaps most visible during Covid-19 in the substandard ventilation systems and air quality of many public schools, and particularly those serving economically insecure and racialized youth. Educator unions in Boston, Philadelphia, and elsewhere have sought to highlight the public health-related implications of such infrastructural weaknesses. For example, the Boston Teachers Union (BTU) has repeatedly pointed to the lack of HVAC in the vast majority of local public schools alongside the plethora of school windows that should, but do not, open for the provision of fresh air. Such factors have led to inadequate ventilation in the majority of Boston public school buildings (Evans, 2020), and yet the union believes that the district has repeatedly sought to minimize the health-related impacts of such infrastructural weaknesses. Through striving to improve the environmental conditions of schools, educator unions like the BTU have pointed to the ways in which student, family, and community health and well-being are linked to that of educators. They have sought to remedy public health gaps in order to simultaneously improve the learning and working conditions of schools, and in this way have oriented much of their organizing work around common good demands during Covid-19.

Educator unions have also been at the forefront of identifying and striving to mitigate Covid-19's exacerbation of racial and class inequities. Data shows that Black and Brown communities have consistently been among the most hesitant to return to in-person learning (Walsh, 2021), and several educator unions have explicitly named the classism and racism inherent in district reopening policies and have centered their organizing on elevating the voices and demands of racially and economically marginalized communities.

During Covid-19, the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) sought to apply its continued strong public presence, which was first achieved by its 2012 strike, through pushing for the demands of the majority of its parents and students, of whom 64% qualify for free and reduced lunch and 89% are Black/Indigenous/People of Color (BIPOC) ("Demographics,"2021). In 2020, the union released a range of common good demands, including meals for quarantined students who were low-income students, access to free Covid-19 testing for the public, and enhanced access to internet and technological resources for young people in Chicago ("CTU, allies," 2020). When the district sought to force schools to physically reopen amidst an upsurge in Covid-19, the union worked with its longstanding parent and community partners to design and release a survey reporting upon parent preference for remote versus in-person learning. The survey found that just 25% of eligible students planned to attend in-person learning, and that the vast majority of parents of color did not wish to send their children physically back into public schools at this time. In response, the union drew upon its established ties to parent and community groups through advocating for strengthened access to remote instruction—rather than physically reopening school buildings. The CTU's March 2021 press release, authored by Jesse Sharkey, emphasizes:

> …it is clear that the overwhelming majority of the families we serve simply do not trust claims of equity from the mayor and [district]… Educators and parents spent months asking for improvements to remote learning, because that is what would provide the best educational outcomes. Educators and parents were ignored… It is incumbent on the mayor and her CPS [district] leadership team to [at] last listen to parents and students, in addition to teachers… ("Less than," 2021).

During these confrontations, the CTU allied with parents and communities of color to recommend spending time and money on improving the quality of online learning rather than focusing on reopening schools in unsafe conditions (Maton, 2021a; Issa & Schuba, 2021; Schuhrke, 2021). Such efforts sought to draw attention to disparities in how race and class shape the provision of education, and the ways in which district policy tends to respond to economic and social priorities that substantially diverge from those of local marginalized communities.

Social justice educator unions tend to value working on common good issues that affect students, families, and communities both within and beyond schools, and to prioritize working in partnership with local community groups in an effort to achieve tangible results. As such, issues of immigration are of concern to many social justice educator unions. For example, in the Trump era, BTU member Rosemary Connors described in an interview how the BTU became very concerned with the "immigrant crisis at the border and the children" and so "we [i.e., the union] spoke out, wrote and spoke out at union meetings about our position on that… we made alliances with the Boston Educational Justice Alliance and other groups to try to move things forward." Connors stated that this issue was of concern to educators because they embraced a "holistic view of the issues that our families are facing." Thus, the union identified a need connected with children and sought to partner with other area organizations to advocate for issues

affecting communities marginalized along racial and citizenship dimensions that extended beyond the classroom.

Why Are Unions Advancing Common Good Issues during Covid-19?

In a previous article, I discuss how a U.S. social justice caucus, Philadelphia's Caucus of Working Educators, draws upon race- and class-based frames while seeking to trigger public school policy change (Maton, 2018). I show that they use critical identity-based frames in ways that serve both ethical and strategic purposes, and thus hold moral and practical implications for social justice union organizing (Maton, 2018; also see Maton, 2021c, 2022a). Similarly, my current research finds that U.S. educators' social justice unions seek to advance common good demands during Covid-19 due to a combination of ethical and strategic purposes. Such unions engage an ethical set of perspectives while seeking practical outcomes for education workers and the public. They align their ethical goals with the strategic organizing dimensions of their work, and vice versa, in order to enhance their capacity for effecting tangible change in the public arena.

Unions appear to act on a sense of ethical obligation— or, in Sharkey's words above, an "incumbency"—to align their common good priorities with school policy ("Less than," 2021). Educator unions seek to challenge the existing systemic "order of things" by drawing attention to, and offering critical analyses of, the effects of schooling on the lived experiences of workers, students, families, and communities. They present and advocate for a range of possible solutions and strive to shift political perceptions of, and policy responses to, matters of equity and justice. For example, caucus members in Philadelphia had consistently critiqued their district's provision of PPE and ventilation equipment, including individual small window fans which the district provided as a primary ventilation mitigation system for large classrooms (Maton, 2021b; Wolfman-Arent, 2021). When the district emphasized a sudden and urgent push to reopen schools in early February 2021, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers' (PFT) president Jerry Jordan released a press statement highlighting that the district's sudden urgency stemmed from "sheer cruelty and a callous disregard" for human lives (Jordan, 2021b). Jordan pointed out that the district had not fulfilled its commitment to the provision of sufficient PPE and ventilation systems, nor released data reflecting the safety of school buildings:

> And the data that we do have is troubling. Entire schools have maximum occupancy of zero according to air balancing reports. We have repeatedly asked for real, concrete solutions, and instead have been presented with a dangerous window-fan installation program that further jeopardizes the health and safety of our educators and young people (Jordan, 2021a).

Accompanying this statement was a call for educators to refuse to enter school buildings on the following Monday in response to the district mandate for school reopening that day. Here, the union emphasized the "jeopardy" presented to workers and students by school reopening, which in turn implies the health risks for the district's families and communities, of whom over 85% are BIPOC (Fast facts, n.d.). By drawing attention to the value of human life, this ethical appeal implicitly allies the union with community and neighborhood needs, exemplifying the power of social justice unionist organizing for the common good.

Other unions have more explicitly called upon race and class in their ethical appeals. For example, in Myart-Cruz's discussion of the negative effects of school funding policy on "low income Black and brown communities," quoted in the article's introduction, she asserts that the district and state are responsible for "propagating structural racism" (CBSLA Staff, 2021a). Here, she articulates an ethical stance that the district is not only failing to provide for equity across economic and racial groups, but—perhaps even worse—is replicating and advancing systemic oppression. Such calls for common good issues serve to situate the union as doing the "good work" of supporting equity and justice.

There are also strategic purposes for social justice organizing for the common good. Through appealing to community members and allying with their causes, unions are able to build enhanced public support. For example, the CTU has exhibited longstanding commitment to building community alliances, including through partnering with community and parent groups in protesting the closure of over sixty public schools by the district in 2013 (Lewis, 2013; Maton & Stark, 2021). When the CTU engaged in a highly visible strike in 2019 over contract negotiations, the union embedded common good issues within its demands— including for accessible and affordable housing, and increased numbers of nurses and social workers in schools. Dennis Kosuth, a CTU member and school nurse in Chicago, credited the union's partnerships with winning legal agreements such as the district commitment to a nurse in every school. He stated: "I think none of this stuff that we've won, we've won on our own. I mean, if you look at the last strike in 2019, it was in conjunction with SEIU, who represents a bunch of educators in the system, and with an alliance with parent organizations. And that goes back to the 2012 strike of having those alliances with community organizations."

Earlier trust-building ventures assisted the union's ability to join a coalition of unions, community groups, and state and local elected leaders to propose and advocate for health and wellbeing protections for Chicagoans during Covid-19, including access to free testing for people in need, meals for quarantined low-income students, and policies to tackle the digital divide ("CTU, allies," 2020). Jennifer Johnson, Chief of Staff for the CTU, discusses the union's commitment to such partnerships during Covid-19 in a one-on-one interview:

> We work really closely with community partners throughout this, [and] we're in multiple coalitions. Our political coalition, the United Working Families Party, the grassroots collaborative labor coalition, our grassroots education movement, which is our community partner coalition. And so, we've been in dialogue with all of these partnerships, which are both, like I said, labor and community, and so we're not doing this in isolation, right? We're getting feedback from our parent groups who have been largely on the same page.

Partnerships between the union and local parent and community partners are identified as allowing for, and strengthening, the union's commitment to strategically organizing for the common good.

Educator unions also strive to elicit strategic change in resource distribution within and beyond public schools. For example, the BTU seeks to shift the lived experience of students, families, and educators within schools and society through advocating for common good demands including tenants' rights. In late November 2020, in the midst of the pandemic, the Massachusetts State Senate omitted housing stability amendments from its budget, despite nation-wide trends in housing insecurity amidst the economic shutdown caused by Covid-19. The BTU sent a political action update to its members, asking them to call or email policymakers and otherwise take action to support what they understood as a law that would negatively impact many of the district's students and families ("Political action," 2020). The union thus allied with local communities in order to advance concrete common good issues that would benefit the families that they serve—and the public more broadly. While it might be argued that the BTU could have gone further in employing more assertive direct action tactics in its efforts to advocate for improved housing security for Bostonians, it is clear that there is movement amongst social justice-oriented educator unions toward advocating for enhanced funds, resources, sociopolitical and environmental conditions that will directly benefit the public. In this way, such unions combine an ethical perspective (i.e., that such advocacy work is morally necessary) with a strategic orientation (i.e., that partnering with local communities will enhance relationships of trust amongst the union and public, and thus strengthen their ability to organize and achieve gains in the long-term).

Conclusion

In this article, I have shown that through applying their legal and political power to issues that support the social, health, and economic wellbeing of the public broadly, and not simply their members, social justice unions are able to position themselves as a central part of a social movement for social, educational, racial, and economic justice. Social justice unions apply legal powers to negotiate better learning and working conditions in schools, such as through establishing collective agreements, memorandums of understanding with the employer, and other aspects governing the conditions of schools. In the cases of Chicago and Los Angeles during the 2020-2021 school year, such legal power has included bargaining with school districts for access to clean classrooms, water and hand soap, and ongoing access to food and nutrition during school shut-downs, along with health resources such as masks for children in schools, Covid-19 vaccination access for children and other local community members, and adequate school ventilation systems. During this period in Philadelphia, Boston, Los Angeles, and Chicago, unions used grassroots job action as a method of exerting political power in order to advocate for common good issues. This was displayed in instances such as when they organized car caravans and teach-outs to demand safer schools. Social justice unions

position school workers as bound together with local children, families, and communities through their mutual dependence on the public health, wellness, and economic resources and conditions afforded by public schools.

Educators' social justice unions advance common good issues while seeking to dismantle systemic oppression. Covid-19 has brought such dynamics further into the light and it is vital that we pay attention to what issues unions are advocating for, and why they are rising up, within and beyond the global health crisis. The stakes are high in social justice unionist efforts to advance common good demands because the health and wellbeing of local communities, and society broadly, depends upon this work.

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Notes

1. Starting from around 2010, numerous North American unions have employed and popularized such phrases (for example, see Caref, 2018). Partnership with local communities has been a central mission of such social justice organizing efforts, made visible, for example, through the CTU's ongoing effort to ally with local communities through countering neighborhood school and hospital closures (see Maton, 2021a; Maton & Stark, 2021), and the UTLA's efforts to increase city green space and support for immigrant defense (see "Our contract agreement," 2019).

2. This definition is adapted from philosopher John McMurtry's (1998) definition of "the civil commons" (p. 24).

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RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Agents of Change: Modeling Two-Year College English Teachers' Change Resilience and Saturation during COVID and (we hope) Beyond

by Emily K. Suh, Brett M. Griffiths, Lizbett Tinoco, Patrick Sullivan, and Sarah Snyder

EYE CONTACT, ERIK RUIN, JUSTSEEDS.ORG

The classroom is one of the most dynamic work settings precisely because we are given such a short amount of time to do so much. To perform with excellence and grace, teachers must be totally present in the moment, totally concentrated and focused. When we are not fully present, when our minds are elsewhere, our teaching is diminished.

- bell hooks, *Teaching Community, A Pedagogy of Hope*

We dedicate this work to bell hooks (1952-2021), for indefatigably challenging us to become our richer, more resourced selves, and to all of the teachers who continue teaching, continuing surviving—and thriving—under the mountainous stress and strain of educational neoliberalism while juggling the triple pandemic of COVID-19, structural racism, and economic insecurity.

I n the spring of 2020, public health emergencies forced teachers around the globe to shift our teaching to predominantly online and remote modes. This change simultaneously contributed to the physical distancing of teachers from their colleagues, institutions, and—frequently—the teaching supports that sustained them. These changes were challenging for nearly everyone. Teachers drew on their existing knowledge of teaching, professional networks, and institutional support to maximize flexibility in course preparation and lesson implementation. This *en masse* transition required many teachers to incorporate new technologies (e.g., streaming software, video lectures, jam boards) into their teaching for the first time. Meanwhile, teachers sought to maintain or expand support for their students during this extreme crisis. Both changes added new dimensions to many teachers' perceptions of their teaching effectiveness and their experiences of joy for the craft itself.

As teachers and scholars, we have found this period at turns overwhelming and exhausting—but also intriguing. During the same spring that the United States first shuttered businesses in response to the pandemic, the authors of this paper were analyzing survey results from two-year college English instructors about their work expectations and constraints. In response to the shifting context of the pandemic, we developed a follow-up survey and solicited the same instructors to participate with the aim of capturing the lived experiences, frustrations, and triumphs of this time. We reported the initial results of the follow-up survey in three publications (Giordano et al., 2021; Griffiths et al., 2021; Tinoco et al., 2022); however, these summaries of broad themes could not adequately represent the depth and nuances of our data related to teachers' change responses. We asked: What strategies do teachers draw on to sustain themselves and their students during a crisis? What processes can help us to understand the affordances and limitations of adaptations available to teachers in such a time?

Our initial findings summarized changes in workloads and listed institutional and disciplinary resources available to support that increase (Griffiths et al., 2021). These findings fairly represent the responses' central theme, but they belie an additional complicating theme we identified. Some teachers reported an initial (extreme) increase in workload followed by what they described as more effective teaching strategies and improved connections with students. We were heartened by this thin thread of silver lining: teachers who, burdened in a tempest of demands and a cacophony of novel yet disconnected resources, were finding salve for the teaching soul.

The challenge for us in writing this article has been to simultaneously articulate the responses we received and to present frameworks that coherently showcase the impact of the pandemic on these teachers, their descriptions of increased empathy and compassion, while also honoring the burnout and fatigue described by the majority of respondents. We also attempt to highlight a subtle but important thread where respondents described overall improvements to their teaching and work experiences. Here, we invite you to witness with us the experiences our respondents described—those that showcase burnout, those that demonstrate compassion, and those that offer hope. These findings suggest that some changes made during crisis can contribute to greater resilience, affording the thoughtspace and energy for radical teachers to adapt their curriculum and connect better with students.

Literature: Teaching, Emotional Labor, and Burnout

Several writing instructors have published their experiences teaching after a crisis (Borrowman 2005; DeBacher & Harris-Moore, 2016; Murphy et al., 2005); however, few address the emotional dimensions of teaching during a crisis, in particular one as extended as the COVID-19 pandemic. Schlachte (2020) argues that "despite the recognition that disaster is increasingly a pressing concern for the discipline of composition, we still lack a more comprehensive approach to teaching through disaster" (p. 147). During our present crisis, many teachers needed to acclimate to the demands of incorporating technology into their teaching, as well as the increased emotional labor of supporting students, families, colleagues, and themselves during a time of uncertainty and often with decentralized resources.

Like public K-12 educators, community college instructors historically work with limited resources. Prior to the pandemic, two-year English teachers described rising levels of participant-defined burnout (Giordano et al., 2021). Heavy and unevenly distributed workloads (institutional service, curriculum reform, and equity-focused initiatives) contributed to discontent and reduced availability for students, leaving the most highly-engaged faculty burned out. School stoppages due to teacher shortages nationwide reinforce our belief that extreme teacher burnout and exhaustion continue (Fox, 2021). Indeed, teacher retirements and resignations are rising everywhere, increasing as much as 67% in some states (Sainato, 2021).

Helping students regulate their learning and their social and emotional experiences of learning is integral to two-year

college English instruction. For teachers, this means maintaining students' energy and motivation for learning in the face of challenges. Emotional labor refers to "labor that requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (Hochschild, 2012, p. 7). Teachers' emotional labor is evident in both tone (praise, moral support) and curricular modifications (extended due dates, supplemental assignment components, graded revisions and rework). Existing studies suggest such *ad hoc* adaptations can increase work for teachers and amplify burnout, particularly when teachers engage in prolonged compassionate pedagogies without broader structural support (Griffiths & Toth, 2017).

As hooks (2003) notes in *Teaching Community*, "The most negative consequence of this type of burnout is manifest when teachers begin to abhor and hate students" (p. 15), and, while we want to clarify that we did <u>not</u> observe this negative affect in our data, we also recognize this kind of burnout manifests when teachers begin to feel powerless to change the contexts in which they teach or the outcomes for student learning in those contexts. This form of hopelessness, what hooks calls "a prison of work" (p. 15), is a visceral danger of extended work in circumstances that teachers feel powerless to change and unable to avoid.

Experiences of burnout are higher when workers must perform emotions they do not feel (Jeung et al., 2018). Surface acting, or pretending to feel emotions for others' direct or indirect benefits, can exacerbate or accelerate burnout (Pienaar & Willemse, 2008). In contrast, deep acting, the intentional display of genuine emotions to facilitate connection with others, can mitigate feelings of burnout. Deep acting, a reflective engagement with students as other humans not just learners, is at the core of what bell hooks (1994) and others have called compassionate teaching.

In response to compounding stress in students' lives, many two-year college English instructors center their teaching in compassion, operating with increased love and care for students. Compassion is not just a feeling, but an intentional action (Goetz et al., 2010). hooks (2003) reminds us that teaching requires "an act of love, the act of entering and embracing the reality of the other, of allowing the other to enter and embrace our own" (p. 132). Perhaps because the pandemic afforded us "entry" into one another's homes by way of web-cameras, we also had unprecedented entry into one another's realities.

Some teachers found themselves for the first time seeing and embracing students' lived realities in previously impossible ways. What we saw—and what our students told us when we listened—generated several and overlapping public discussions, calling educators to recognize and validate the lived realities we all bring to our screens (Finders & Muñoz, 2021). Simultaneously, teachers needed to decide how much of our own realities we wanted to share with our students—and how much of students' realities we could ethically require them to share without significant changes to our teaching praxis. Combined with quixotic changes in public health policy, disparate roll out of measures across government locales, and the integration of

persistently evolving technologies into our teaching, compassion was at the forefront of support for our students and ourselves. As we show, it was also a driving force—though not singular and not sufficient—affecting the ways teachers adapted during the first two semesters of the pandemic.

Modeling Change: Stress Reaction and Teaching Modifications

Two theoretical frameworks conceptualize how humans respond to stress: the stress reaction model and the stress adaptation model (Michel et al., 2021). The stress reaction model describes stressors as cumulative; successive stressors increase the overall stress burden on an individual, leading to higher levels of burnout and exhaustion. Alternatively, stress adaptation posits that individuals adapt to stressful changes in their environments progressively. In this model, the initial stress caused by new circumstances decreases over time as an individual's capacity to adapt to stressors increases (Michel et al., 2021). This adaptation is made possible through the process of acclimation: people become accustomed to required changes in the stress-informed environment. Acclimation is informed by the circumstances of the work (e.g., in person, remote, etc.) and the availability of recovery behaviors (Michel et al., 2021). Importantly, stress reaction and stress adaptation may inform each other. When stressors continue beyond the point at which people can acclimate, the effect of acclimation may decrease, and reaction responses, such as burnout, increase. Within our examination of ongoing pandemic-induced stressors, we explore how stress reaction and stress adaptation frameworks can guide our understanding of how instructors interpreted, revised, and acclimated to their new learning experiences.

In addition to understanding how teachers responded to the stress of the current teaching environment, we also needed language for how they took up technology to enact change. We apply the definitional taxonomy of SAMR, substitution, augmentation, modification, and redefinition (Puentedura, 2014) to name and categorize teachers' new technology integrations. Substitution refers to the lowest level of integration, one in which teachers substitute one tool for another (e.g., discussions on Zoom replace but do not reimagine in-class discussions). Augmentation describes ways technology use adds to teaching (e.g., Zoom discussions with collaborative whiteboard or shared annotations). Modification refers to significant task redesign (i.e., an interactive classroom Youtube channel in which both students and instructors post videos). Redefinition refers to broad curricular changes in teaching afforded by technology, such as assignment and course design changes due to technological integrations (e.g., film adaptations of research papers, virtual visits from field specialists). SAMR offers interpretational definitions for the contexts and responses—both individual and institutional—that support or impede teaching. We applied the stress models and SAMR to understand the stress experiences and responses of instructors adapting to new and sudden demands to adapt their instruction and technology use *in situ*.

Methods

We surveyed two-year English faculty about their experiences teaching during the pandemic. A total of 438 teachers completed our 22-question survey, sharing about their instructional and workload changes during spring 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic and during the subsequent fall 2020 semester. We compiled responses to the survey's four open-ended questions related to teacher perceptions of how the pandemic has affected current workload, teaching of English, support of students, and emotional labor. Through an inductive approach to qualitative analysis (Thomas, 2003), we analyzed the data iteratively, creating a list of emerging themes (Appendix). We then independently coded overlapping data sections to confirm our applied themes. Throughout the process, we met to discuss code themes and resolve discrepancies. This article resulted from our reflections upon what we can learn from teaching during a crisis. In discussing our findings, we theorize the paradigms of *change resilience* and *change saturation* in order to articulate the benefits and limits of compassion to sustain our resilience as teachers.

What Teachers Say

In this article, we share three key findings to help teachers make sense of their labor during and beyond the pandemic. The first is related to compassion for students and experiences of change. Notably, teachers' overwhelming response was one of empathy for students' experiences of living, working, and learning during this time—while also caring for or grieving their own family members affected by the pandemic. Second, despite the great importance respondents placed on compassion, it was often an insufficient mediator for the new demands of pandemic teaching. Finally, we were surprised and motivated to discover that a small but vocal subcohort of our respondents described what we labeled *silver lining* teaching adaptations that they reported sustainably improved their overall teaching. These included more efficient delivery and grading practices, as well as increased emotional and social support for students resulting from redistributions of time. While our study is small, we believe the nuances between these responses offer more than mere hope or distinction. They document teaching adaptations that can improve teachers' experiences of stress during times of crisis and change, as well as a set of choices available for mitigating against—if not preventing—burnout and exhaustion. We present these findings as a nascent model for understanding how teachers adapt to extensive stressors and redefine teaching and learning in ways that sustain both their students and themselves.

Compassion in the Face of Crisis

Teachers discussed or demonstrated *empathy for students* 271 times. For some, the pandemic illuminated aspects of students' lives these teachers had not previously considered:

> I think I spend more time considering the educational backgrounds of my students than before. I rarely considered the impact of economics on education at the secondary level. I teach a number of dual credit students who have struggled with access. Emotionally, I want to help them all while I also know that I can't and I find this frustrating. I am more aware.

The pandemic inspired many teachers to recommit to seeing their students as humans with lives and responsibilities beyond the classroom. One teacher, trained in trauma-informed pedagogy, described trying to "understand their heartache, … the stress and the conditions they live in." Among the many challenges students faced, teachers identified new homelessness, illness, mental health challenges, and unemployment as the most pressing during the pandemic. As one teacher noted, "Many of my students are working harder than ever—sometimes teaching and caring for kids, caring for sick family members, and holding down jobs while also trying to go to school full time online (without quiet spaces to study, without reliable WiFi access, etc.)."

Teachers frequently described their students using phrases such as "stressed, depressed, and isolated," and they recognized the impact on students' ability to learn. Notably, these teacher-reported stressors were not new for many students but were exacerbated by the pandemic. Respondents suggest that the pandemic illuminated the many contingencies at play in the lives of most community college students (Parisi, 2020; Sullivan, 2017).

Our findings support recent work such as Nicole Mirra's *Educating for Empathy* (2018), Lisa Westman's *Teaching With Empathy* (2021), and Brené Brown's *The Gifts of Imperfection* (2010). These volumes and others put compassion and empathy at the heart of effective teaching and living. Griffiths (2020) recommends precisely this in her advice to new two-year college teachers: "To teach effectively and equitably requires that we hold compassion always at the center of our interactions with students" (p. 72). In centering compassion, these teachers' responses illustrated their reflexive and intentional teaching practices, which required—perhaps most essentially–their willingness to work situationally and creatively with students to help students achieve their goals. However, our findings also suggest that compassion for students alone is insufficient for sustaining these practices.

While we saw several teachers' increasing awareness of students' material realities and need for compassion, some teachers discussed the personal toll intense and extended compassion exacted:

> Listening to my students and hearing their heartbreaking stories has hurt my own emotional health and weighs very heavily on my mind all hours of the day. It feels unescapable. I sometimes feel powerless. Virtual/online teaching during this pandemic has been heartbreaking and has resulted in endless hours of emotional labor. While I try to focus on my students and their needs, the lack of support or empathy from my college toward faculty is hurtful, too.

Those who acknowledged the increased emotional investment required for this level of care often expressed feelings of powerlessness or concern about the sustainability

of their pandemic-driven student support. This kind of powerlessness is precisely the lack of control and efficacy that drives burnout and exhaustion.

The Limits of Compassion

Unsurprisingly, many teachers also described what they viewed as limitations or decreases in their teaching effectiveness. The pandemic and resulting instructional changes added yet more pressures to adapt their teaching by relying largely upon resources already exhausted prior to March of 2020—unsurprisingly, some teachers reported experiencing minimal effectiveness. We view these teachers as having reached what we call *change saturation*, a threshold after which one can no longer acclimate to new stressors, having already exercised one's fullest flexibility. In other words, faculty experiencing change saturation often recognized the benefits of adapting to support their students, but they had already been stretched thin by previous and constant adaptation demands. Importantly, many faculty experiencing change saturation continued to make changes—extending assignment deadlines or meeting students online outside class and office hours, but descriptions of these additional changes often corresponded with negative physical and mental well-being, including exhaustion, poor work-life balance, and—in some cases—even leaving the profession. Altogether**,** there were 52 examples of the theme of *exhaustion or decreased energy*. We found 62 additional examples of *frustration or low morale.*

As one teacher explained, "I'm constantly told to be empathetic to students but not given additional time or ideas on how to do so." This challenge compounded existing professional stressors. The material contexts of teaching can substantially impact instructors' feelings of satisfaction related to their teaching responsibilities, as well as their engagement with college service and their disciplinary communities (Griffiths et al., 2021). Two-year faculty have responded to austerity measures for decades, and since many were already stretched thin before the pandemic (Giordano et al., 2021; Griffiths et al., 2021), these teachers may have felt constrained in their ability to react to the crisis. One teacher's response echoed the weariness expressed by many others: "The lack of guidance and support from my college is one thing I've come to expect, but adding additional work responsibilities during this pandemic added insult to injury." Many instructors felt called upon to teach with greater compassion while their emotional, psychological, and physical reserves were simultaneously overtaxed by pandemic-induced additional emotional labor (Hochschild, 2012). Furthermore, perceptions of limited or nonexistent institutional support seemed to compound faculty exhaustion.

At times, this exhaustion struck deeply into respondents' foundational commitments to the profession. One respondent explained, "I can no longer say I love my life's work. I dread logging on to try to connect with students who signed up for classes they thought would be delivered in person." This comment highlights this teacher's empathy for students. It also illustrates a perception of limited ability to adapt teaching in crisis, seen in terms of the limitations resulting from the instructional mode; this teacher's role became limited to responding to the crisis through redefinition rather than reimagining instruction altogether to meet students' (and their own) needs differently. In this respondent's description—a common one among our sample—the mode of instruction ("logging on") is viewed as the primary barrier to effective teaching ability, which the participant emphasizes "would have been delivered in person." The adaptation from in-person to online instruction without a corresponding reimagining of what instruction looks like fits Puentedura's (2006, 2014) notion of technology integration at the level of substitution. Substitution is the most basic form of technology integration and does not enhance students' learning experience. In fact, it may be in this case that trying to achieve the "in person" experience at a time when so many restrictions pressed down on our professional and personal lives only amplified the crisis experience by emphasizing what we were *not* doing.

Indeed, one respondent linked the forced transition in instructional modality to decreased teaching effectiveness: "It's hard to funnel a ton of energy into blank screens with no feedback. It's hard to send emails out into the ether never knowing if they're actually getting to students. It's hard to watch them not getting the material." Another instructor described the limits of teaching effectiveness:

> My students don't get the lecture material unless they actually go through them whereas in a f2f class, they would get the info by being present. My struggling students who would previously make it through are disappearing. I reach out to students via telephone now, which I wouldn't have done before.

Here, similar to the previous example, the mode of instruction—moving from in-person lecture, described as "actually going through," is juxtaposed with online instruction, which the participant suggests limits their students' ability to be "present." The teacher augments instruction through individual outreach to students in an effort to improve—or even only maintain—pre pandemic levels of teaching effectiveness. However, this outreach is always *in addition to* their other teaching responsibilities, asking them to do more and to do so individually, compounding the work already required to adapt their teaching. This kind of augmentation was common in participants' responses, which showcased time and again teachers' commitment to supporting students. At the same time, these individual phone calls—clearly a demonstration of compassion—also loaded increased responsibility on the teacher with none of the integrated support that might make them sustainable.

Teachers described a desire for—and efforts to create—stronger connections to their professional community. Many teachers experiencing change saturation emphasized the toll of compounding "emotional labor" from simultaneously increasing efforts to support students and decreasing opportunities to interact with other teaching professionals. Even as some instructors returned to in-person teaching, this return seemed to exacerbate awareness of their isolation. Several teachers described "miss[ing] my colleagues" or other previous forms of collegial interaction.

As one teacher noted, "While I still connect with my colleagues, it's not the same." Beyond a sense of community, these teachers may have been missing the kinds of social connections and support Griffiths and Jensen (2019) highlight as essential for team resilience—a social structure that can reinforce and extend individual resilience to stress, prolonging and amplifying the change efforts of individual teachers.

Modeling Change Resilience

Although many comments suggested teachers had reached change saturation, our data also contained several instances of successful, sustainable changes and feelings of renewed hope. We describe these responses as illustrating *change resilience*. We define change resilience as the ability to continue acclimating to stressors through redefinition of one's teaching perspective and approaches in new ways that support long-term pedagogical change and work-life balance. In some instances, change resilience altered the very learning and relationship building possible within the (virtual) English classroom. Importantly, the cases we highlight here seem to showcase global adaptations in teaching. Teachers were not recreating their in-person courses online but entirely rethinking—modifying and redefining—their roles as teachers and the shape of their courses entirely (Puentedura, 2014). Faculty who engaged in change resilience noted in particular how they used the pandemic as an "opportunity to be more thoughtful and intentional about the course content and delivery." Frequently, the forced move to new online modes and the integration of new teaching technologies motivated them to envision the utility of their changes beyond the pandemic.

Oftentimes, teachers who demonstrated change resilience also described themselves as "[being] more creative, [having] more room to listen, [and being] more merciful." Other respondents similarly modified their hours, means/frequency of student communication, and assessment practices. They also connected students to resources and increased their support of the technological and noncognitive aspects of learning. Their actions enact teaching as a "caring profession" (hooks, 2003, p. 86) and Griffith's (2020) call to "incorporate any knowledge we have about the psychological and material realities of students' lives" (p. 76).

The ability to reciprocally reflect upon and alter one's practice was another important aspect of change resilience. Some teachers noted how shifting to remote teaching freed them to refocus and establish balance:

> Without the stresses that come from in-person teaching (like a long commute), I find myself having even more patience, empathy, and consideration for student needs, mainly because I have more time and energy to devote to those things than ever before. I am, overall, a dramatically happier, more productive, and more helpful instructor thanks to being able to focus most on what matters.

Similarly, another participant described:

> I am using new technologies that augment my particular teaching style and in some ways have improved my interactions with the students, more opportunities for formative feedback. I am also more engaged, more animated, more motion driven. I am now more of a cheerleader than I have ever been before.

Finally, some respondents noted that the shift to online teaching afforded them more opportunities to engage professionally with their discipline, which further allowed them to restructure their courses and redefine their roles as teachers:

> I feel like I am a better teacher. This has given me more time for professional development, getting certified to teach online, revising my peer workshop online practice and allowed me to create better work life balance. I don't have to commute between so many schools as an adjunct which has really benefited my mental health.

As these responses indicated, the shift to online teaching created significant modifications to the tasks of teaching and also positively affected respondents' mental health. Such online teaching went beyond attempts to replicate "in-person" instruction to reconceptualize connectivity within the course structure and curriculum (Puentedura, 2014). We also consider how our envisioning and integrating of technology into our courses in times of crisis has the potential to improve students' learning experiences and the experiences of teachers. Teachers who were able to exercise change resilience were better positioned to sustain their energy for change rather than extend themselves to the point of burnout. These changes to teaching were transformational—reimagined and redefined by teachers for the pandemic and beyond.

Redefining the Meaning of Teaching

Sustained, adaptive change required modification and redefinition of how to use technology as in Puentedura's (2014) SAMR taxonomy, and also the meaning of teaching and connecting with students. Change resilience necessitated a combination of individual efforts and a network of human, institutional structure, and technological resources for introducing and supporting adaptation. Differences in adaptability seemed to inform the sustainability of teaching and teachers' satisfaction with their work.

In particular, teachers who engaged in change resilience had sufficient resources to revise their teaching preparations post-pivot (March 2020) so that their subsequent teaching became easier and more efficient, and/or their ability to connect and support students' individual needs improved. In particular, we found tentative connections between institutional or professional support and teachers' proactive and positive response to pandemic-instigated change. While several instructors reported receiving limited institutional support and being simultaneously overwhelmed by new/increasing responsibilities, others described positive instructional and professional consequences of being able to control their own time,

While teaching entirely online from home, I am more relaxed and am able to spend more time interacting with students individually and planning course content…. I love it and hope I never have to go back to the way things were. Even though the amount of work is the same, it's better work.

Perhaps because this instructor felt ownership of their decision to not return to the classroom, they were also better equipped for sustainable changes in their course redesign. Our data illustrate the important role that agency and autonomy play in mitigating against frustration and burnout.

When institutional supports were insufficient or absent, some faculty sought out professional opportunities beyond their colleges. For example, teachers participated in remote professional development opportunities:

I took the initiative to take free or discounted online course design courses and webinars. I have quite the stack of certificates attesting to the number and nature of programs I attended. All of those informed my online course design…. Since the pivot last March, I have done nothing but train in online course design and best practices. I've overhauled my previous online classes and built others.

This sense of control over time and circumstances was present among many teachers demonstrating change resilience.

Practical Implications for Radical Teachers, Colleagues, and Administrators

We authors are faculty and dual-role faculty-administrators. These roles have positioned us variously to shape the conditions in which other faculty work while sustaining our own well-being during a period of educational austerity and a global pandemic. We, too, are tired. As we discuss the implications of this study, we draw on our experiences at our institutions, an exercise that points to both the importance of developing a framework for fostering change resilience and to the vulnerability of doing so. Here, we suggest an emergent framework for establishing and fostering change resilience among ourselves as radical teachers, our radical colleagues, administrators, and institutions. The essential components of a change-resilience framework are autonomy, action, disposition, and time—time to reflect on one's own teaching, to reimagine student learning, and to re-envision the teacher-learner relationship globally, supported by colleagues and institutions as outlined below.

The criteria of autonomy and action in this change-resilience framework make visible a fundamental tension between located agency and community cooperation. Both agency and cooperation are essential for teachers to autonomously adapt their teaching. We define professional autonomy as the ability to make theoretically-sound, student-responsive choices adhering to the recognized and regulated field of knowledge informing and advancing that work (Griffiths, 2017). Action depends on teachers' located agency to revise courses in a timely manner, and to construct our own teaching spaces and design assessments for learning in the classroom and online (Griffiths, 2017; Suh & Jensen, 2020).

Disposition, among all of these, is the most individual and personalized characteristic—and the most difficult to foster. Cultivating dispositions of hope, engagement, and compassion among faculty, colleagues, and staff calls upon administrators and lead faculty to curate and perform these dispositions. We cannot help colleagues adopt and adapt novel theories and praxis if we, ourselves, are disengaged from or unaware of disciplinary scholarship and the professional organizations that sustain our active dialogues. In contrast, time, the fourth element, depends most on institutional affordances over individual dispositions. Below, we draw on the framework's essential elements to offer practical implications for creating and fostering resilience in our teaching communities.

Although our data reveals change resilience as an individual characteristic, we recognize that our framework may be incomplete in addressing the interrelation between individual motivation and the social structures (i.e., classrooms, departments, institutions, disciplinary organizations) impacting change resilience. It might be daunting to consider one's individual responsibility for creating compassionate learning environments, but as hooks (1994) encourages, "As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another's voices, in recognizing one another's presence" (p. 8). We offer change resilience as a conceptual conversation to generate such interest in each other's experiences and voices, to find ways that colleagues and institutions can limit conditions fostering change saturation.

Radical Teacher: Critical Self Reflection (Disposition)

Before we can enact hooks's (1994) "recognizing one another's presence" (p. 8), we must start with ourselves and critical self-reflection in our immediate capacity, or disposition, for change resilience as radical teachers. We offer the following questions for reflecting upon our individual needs and agencies before we turn to the collective community cooperation necessary to move forward together:

- What is my current capacity for change resilience?

- How does my change resilience capacity affect my community?

Our answers to these questions can help gauge our disposition towards change resilience to enact hooks's classroom community through action, autonomy and time.

Radical Pedagogy: The Change Resilience-Compassion Intersection (Action)

Depending on where you are in your change resilience journey, here are some points to reflect on and share with colleagues:

Related to online-synchronous pedagogical modalities:

- How could the chat box or private message function create new, supportive lines of communication for students who may not traditionally be included in class discussions such as shy/introverted, multilingual, and differently-abled students?

- How do these modalities fit student learning needs, especially among working parents or first-generation college students?

Related to applying new understandings of compassion and change resilience to understanding past experiences:

How might students benefit from complicating the notion of grades (e.g., labor-based contract grading, ungrading, delayed grading) and grade deadlines (e.g., "best by" dates)? How do we compassionately and justly communicate students' options regarding assignment submissions and how those options can be empowering?

How does a flexible working environment impact student-facing services such as office hours? Is physical presence required, or can technological affordances make virtual teaching and office hours more convenient and effective?

Related to applying change resilience and compassion to inform programmatic issues such as directed self-placement, inclusive curriculum building, and assessment.

We offer these questions to complicate our pedagogical understanding, to stimulate reflection in collegial conversations about what is valued after the pandemic learning experience. Although it may be shared at this point by primarily individual voices more so than in chorus, such an understanding is one of the most important steps that radical teachers can take to transform their capacity for change resilience and compassion.

Radical Colleaguing (Disposition and Autonomy)

Perhaps even more essential to fostering change resilience is the work of colleaguing for resilience. We use *colleaguing* as a verb to emphasize the action involved in supporting other educators' praxis and change resilience within our institutions and our professional communities. Further, we recognize how disposition and autonomy impact our ability to colleague. Colleaguing for resilience resists the "prison of work" (hooks, 2003, p. 15), that hopelessness resulting from feelings of powerlessness, and begins with the disposition of compassion for our coworkers. But it does not end there. Indeed, the radical shift of being a colleague—

being in league with another—occurs when we move beyond feelings of empathy to recognizing our shared experience engaging in this work together.

As noted above, four members of our writing team have held or currently hold administrative duties. We have found ourselves best able to engage in change resilience and collectively seek sustainable change when we can overcome divisions between faculty, staff, and administrators. This requires us to act autonomously while simultaneously supporting others' autonomy. At some institutions, this might involve flattening administrative hierarchies so that those instituting pedagogical changes are better represented in policy decisions. However, we recognize in our own limited spheres of influence that this work begins by focusing on changes that need not wait for large-scale structural change. For example, before program-level goal setting, we examine whether our proposed goals fit our vision of community member affirmation. We further examine the anticipated workload required to meet those goals, seeking to assign tasks to equitably draw upon colleagues' time and talents.

Additionally, those of us who facilitate meetings can model rhetorical listening and radical empathy, thus fostering a culture for teaching reflection and growth. This rhetorical listening "has the potential to generate more productive discourses about and across both commonalities and differences" (Ratcliffe, 1999, p. 220). This listening can precipitate belonging. We can also share about our involvement in professional organizations, inter-departmental and inter-institutional collaborations, and other ongoing research or service. Such sharing structures space for learning with and from colleagues and establishes a program environment of professional engagement, communication, and collaboration. We create similar opportunities within our professional organizations by seeking out and engaging in working groups or networks. Importantly, the resulting colleaguing supports our agency to choose how we engage in the field and affirms our existing interests and work. We further encourage radical teachers to consider:

- How might we adapt our watercooler conversations to expand the perspectives included in our "community"?

- How could we structure our departments to better support pedagogical colleaguing and community?

- How can we support each other's emotional labor needs?

Through addressing these questions, we orient ourselves to consider how reshaping the elements of a resilience framework—autonomy, action, disposition, and time—can contribute to individual and organization-level changes that foster resilience–and by extension, better teaching and learning.

Radical Administration: Institutional Support (Time)

While individual critical reflection, pedagogical considerations, and colleaguing will be helpful in moving forward together, we do not wish to perpetuate neoliberal fallacies that individual actions solve systemic issues. Change resiliency is materially affected by many institutional conditions, including orientations to professional development, (mis)understandings of academic disciplines (e.g., rhetoric and composition), and students' pedagogical and emotional labor needs. While radical teachers engage with those things (sometimes) within our control, we also need radical administrators and radical institutions to act for optimal change resiliency.

First and foremost, faculty need to be trusted to guide their own professional development. Establishing institutional value for professional development is the most important opportunity that administrators can contribute to continuing education, specifically by offering incentive systems and protected time for professional development.

Second, radical administrators and radical teachers must collaborate to make teaching modality (e.g., online synchronous, asynchronous, in person) a merit-based assignment. The professional development structure can encourage this dialogue while enhancing student-facing flexibility. A merit-based approach explicitly recognizes that synchronous and asynchronous online teaching are not easier (and often are more difficult) than in-person teaching. Further, these modalities require high levels of technical writing and pedagogical skill, and modification and redefinition of how to use technology, as in Puentedura's (2014) SAMR taxonomy, and how the technology can change pedagogy and best practices. Adaptation of online synchronous modality en masse is the largest pedagogical advancement to date in postsecondary education and requires inquiry and development. Administrators who incentivize this inquiry through professional development support will be rewarded by faculty ingenuity and increased capacity for change resilience.

Finally, radical administrators must support their faculty through institutional conditions that reflect understanding of the field's pedagogical needs—faculty working conditions that maximize student learning. Fields that teach highly political and socially-situated subjects such as language or writing, and that are often "gateway" courses in a student's first semester, need more material and institutional support. These classes require greater emotional labor–and change resilience–to optimize learning conditions for an increasingly non-traditional population of students, especially while we all cope with the long-standing ramifications of a pandemic/endemic. Instead of offering self-care and webinars, the most radically compassionate move is to acknowledge and improve teachers' material working conditions. Any resiliency, but especially change resiliency, requires financial stability and adequate workload considerations. The National Two-Year College English Association describes a field in crisis due to a cornucopia of inadequate working conditions, specifically in teaching first-year composition (Klausman & Hassel, 2020; Suh et al.,

2020). With this documentation of the inequity of exploitative adjunct labor, crushing workloads of many full-time faculty (especially at community colleges), and high institutional service and emotional labor expectations, our change-saturated condition is unsurprising at colleges and universities throughout the nation. Ultimately, this harms not only students, but also faculty morale and institutional culture. Radical administrators who recognize these issues and work with faculty to change them will see palpable shifts in change resilience, which will then radically enhance their institution's missions.

A Call for National Composition Workload Reform: 4x4

Given what we have learned from our survey about the importance of teaching with compassion and empathy, and also what we have learned about change saturation—a threshold after which teachers can no longer acclimate to new stressors, having already exercised one's fullest flexibility—we call for a 4 x 4 teaching schedule for all two-year college composition teachers—teaching four classes each semester instead of five (Giordano et al., 2021; Toth & Sullivan, 2016). This is a structural way to promote change resilience instead of overwork and burnout. If we understand teaching conditions as student learning conditions, this national workload model puts student learning, sustainable compassion and empathy, and social justice front and center. We also echo calls for class sizes no greater than 20 students for all composition and writing-intensive classes across the disciplines. This policy model is supported by many (if not all) of the relevant national organizations in our field, including Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC, 2015), Two-Year College English Association (Giordano et al., 2021), and Association of Departments of English (MLA Academic Program Services, 2020). Indeed, CCCC states that "Ideally, classes should be limited to 15. Remedial or developmental sections should be limited to a maximum of 15 students. No English faculty members should teach more than 60 writing students a term" (CCCC, 2015, n.p.). Many of these best practice recommendations were in place pre-pandemic and are even more important now as we explore new models of serving students and faculty in college teaching. Enforcing this workload standard nationwide is one way to redefine the meaning of post-pandemic teaching and to empower departments, institutions, disciplines, and legislative bodies to structure change resilience into the daily lives of community college teachers.

Conclusion

The teachers' responses shared here powerfully illustrate what is most important for teaching and learning. Although many teachers described instructional changes and increasing flexibility as an enactment of their efforts to teach with compassion, their responses also illustrated the limits of compassion when teachers are stretched too thin, lack structural support to modify their work environment or conditions, or do not extend compassion to themselves. Our data suggest that change resilience is essential if teachers

are to sustain their ability to teach with compassion. Change resilience is made possible (but not inevitable) through autonomy, action, disposition, and time. In particular, the disposition of hope motivates our reconceptualization of teaching from a focus on content and instructional mode to a focus on relationships and the learning activities sustaining them. Where we saw change resilience, teachers prioritized communication, flexibility, and learning over communication mode or assessment.

We have important things to learn from the experiences of change saturation and change resilience. In particular, the gift of teachers experiencing change saturation have given us an increased understanding and sensitivity to the emotional labor required for teaching, especially for teaching composition and the limits of that labor (and not just during a pandemic). The responses shared here help us appreciate our vulnerability and encourage us to take care of our mental health, to seek out teaching practices that support our long-term professional development. They also demonstrate that we need to take care of each other. This may be among the most radical proposals we are tendering: *radical colleaguing* (not just teaching) with compassion is essential if we want to foster and support the conditions for sustaining radical teaching. Change resilience allows colleges to react to new situations with agility. As this will not be the last pandemic or catastrophe, such resilience will only be at our disposal if it is supported and actively fostered individually and collectively—and scaled institutionally.

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Coding Scheme and Quoted Examples

PARENT CODE	CHILD CODE	EXAMPLE
Opportunities		I took the initiative to take free or discounted online course design courses and webinars.. . .
Perceived Pandemic Pressure	Additional Responsibilities	I spend a lot more time teaching students how to navigate and use the virtual/online Canvas [and]the emotional and mental health ….
	Empathy for Students	Listening to my students and hearing their heartbreaking stories has hurt my own emotional health…. It feels unescapable. I sometimes feel powerless.
	Exhaustion or Decreased Energy	It's emotionally exhausting for all of us.
	Frustration or Low Morale	The lack of guidance and support from my college is one thing I've come to expect, but adding additional work responsibilities during this pandemic added insult to injury.
	Ranger Model (Increased Pressure to Solve Issues Alone)	I'm left holding the bag, trying to counsel in ways I should not be, have no expertise in,….
	Sickness/Crisis	Massive loss on a grand scale. Then there's fear of getting COVID. And then there's the uncertainty of when anything's going to get better. . . .
	Technology	Zoom is a soul-sucking nightmare.
	Work-Life Boundary Challenges	I wake up in the middle of the night to grade/work when my small children are asleep….
Pandemic-Inspired Change	Assessment	I excuse students from assignments when they are suffering as long as the skill is assessed at other times.
	Changes for the Better	. . . more patience, empathy, and consideration for student needs, mainly because I have more time and energy to devote to those things than ever before.
	Departmentally-Mediated Behaviors	. . . a fine line between upholding academic standards or letting them go . . .
	Individually-Mediated Changes	. . . reflect and focus more on my teaching practice.
	Institutionally-Mediated Behaviors	The institution [instituted]… structural changes [and]…propose[d] significant changes to faculty contracts

		without faculty input…necessitat[ing] paying closer attention, engaging more with colleagues.
	Instructor Personal	. . . better work-life balance. I don't have to commute between so many schools . . ..
	Pedagogical/Class-room	I have gotten really good at online teaching strategies.
	Student-Teacher Relationship	Communicating on Zoom has allowed a kind of close-up interaction and follow up with individual students not previously as manageable with in-person classes.
	Technology	I am thrilled to record all my classes now. If a student is absent, they can "attend" that way.
No Difference		My committee/service work has remained the same.

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Teaching Note
No, It Wasn't About Love:
Teaching Geoffrey Sax's *Othello*

by Boyda Johnstone
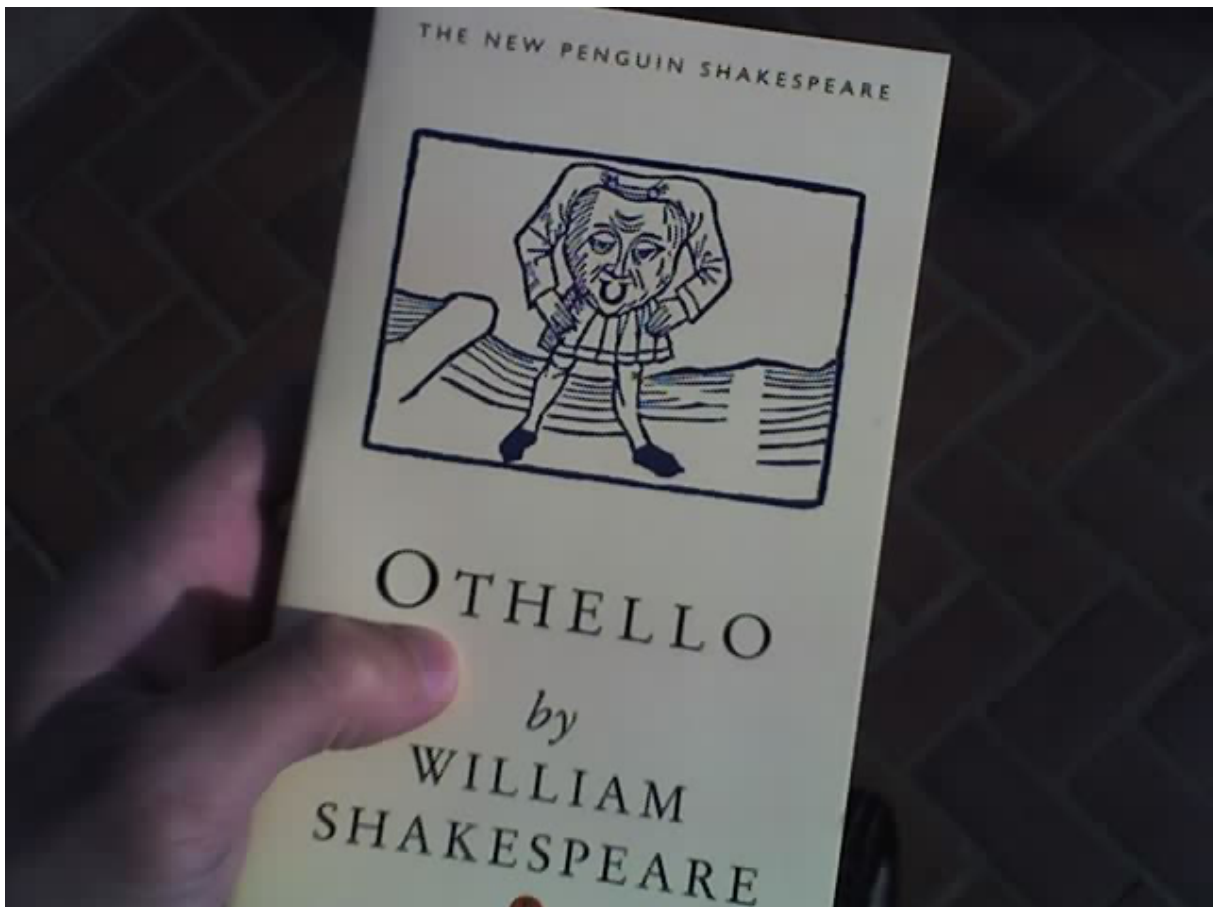
SHAKESPEARE'S OTHELLO PROGRAM VIA WIKIMEDIA.ORG

A n unarmed Black man is murdered in his home by a crew of white cops, and the streets have erupted in protest. Meanwhile, the white police commissioner is caught on tape making lewd and blatantly racist comments about the new official policy to diversify the police force, and is subsequently fired. After the Black officer who quelled the most recent riot by calling for "justice under the law" is propelled into the position of police commissioner, the white officer who was next in line is consumed with jealousy and turns to white supremacist online forums to plot out his revenge, beginning by doxxing the new commissioner's white wife and later convincing him that she's cheating on him. Things spiral, and yet another shallow attempt at reforming the structural rot of the carceral system proves disastrous and ineffectual.

This story could have been written in 2022; indeed, a version of this feels like it is playing out on the streets every day. But, instead, it's the 2001 creation of British television director Geoffrey Sax, screenwriter Andrew Davies, and our old pal William Shakespeare.[1] Readers may have recognized some of the contours of *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*, who is psychologically poisoned by his friend and confidante Iago into believing that his new wife, Desdemona, is cheating on him. Sax's adaptation, a little-known made-for-TV movie with a haunting original musical score by Debbie Wiseman, is a rewarding teaching companion to concentrated study of the play, transposing the action from Venice into the modern streets of London while retaining fertile (though sometimes pleasingly hidden) elements of the original plot. The best Shakespeare adaptations, in my estimation, display calculated respect for the original creation while offering enough fresh material for emergent debate, encouraging a dialogic relationship between text and production. This film achieves this balance perfectly. While nothing can make the ending *not* deeply disturbing and some content warnings may be required for the use of the N-word and for some explicit sexual content as well as domestic violence, it works well in my first-year Introduction to Literature classroom at the majority Black-and-Brown public community college at the City University of New York where I teach. At BMCC I encounter a wide range of familiarities with Shakespeare: some students have acted in school plays and been reading his work since middle school; others have scarcely heard his name. After we spend weeks wading through the scenes, using more conventional video productions as aids to comprehension along the way, Sax's modern language film serves as a refreshing reward for students who–unfortunately enough–immediately recognize the contextual circumstances, some due to personal experience having been harassed by the police.

The film's fiery streets and polarized online spaces (personally, I was shocked Nazi digital forums existed in 2001), standing in for the military setting of the original, offer students a natural opening into the film, and once the revenge plot begins to unfold they experience the pleasure of identifying overlap and subtle parallels. A handout I distribute for consultation during viewing encourages such analytic shifts: I ask students to fill out individual profiles of the play's filmic counterparts ("how is each character similar to the character we find in Shakespeare? How are they different? Can you find specific moments from the film and

play to back up your claims?"). While the motivations of Ben Jago (for Iago) are much clearer in the film than in the play, his character–played by the impish and charismatic Christopher Eccleston of *Doctor Who* fame–performs the same machinations of keenly sliding into people's trust, sometimes with the aid of alcohol and often using calculated deflections ("nothing to worry about…*probably*"), and stoking John Othello's jealousy through "ocular proof"--here both vivid language and suggestive photographs. Ben also breaks the fourth wall by speaking directly into the camera and enticing viewers into his version of the narrative, as in Iago's characteristic monologues ("And what's he then that says I play the villain? / When this advice is free I give and honest"). As in the play, Othello woos Dessie (for Desdemona) with stories of his past life, but here realizes he doesn't know much about hers and this lack of knowledge spurs suspicions of her ongoing sluttishness. A silk robe loosely stands in for the strawberry-dotted handkerchief, donned after an accident by a drunken Michael Cass (for Cassio) who has been hired as a guard for Dessie, and who develops a crush on her with the prodding of Ben. The realm of dreams and the imagination performs the same function of torturing Othello with the fabricated notion of Dessie's infidelity, and there is some intimation of Ben's homosexual regard for Othello, corresponding to queer interpretations of the play. The question of whether Dessie/Desdemona is at all guilty of a wandering gaze is debatable here just as in the original, sparking spirited debates in the classroom over whether John Othello's suspicions are even remotely justified.

Adaptations of Othello throughout the centuries have suffered from various racist reenvisionings, chiefly involving black- and brownface.

Adaptations of *Othello* throughout the centuries have suffered from various racist reenvisionings, chiefly involving black- and brownface. While studying the play, our class reviews this problematic history, analyzes the nuances of racialized terminology in the play, and considers how race intersects with gender and religion in the seventeenth century. After learning about such dispiriting performance history, it's refreshing to engage with an adaptation that confronts structural racism and violence directly, with a compelling Black actor (Eamonn Walker) playing the lead. Moreover, some of John Othello's paranoia is positioned within the context of generational trauma stemming from the slave trade. In a powerful dinner scene whose corollary would be the moment in Act 4 when Othello strikes Desdemona in front of Lodovico, John answers questions about his family heritage stemming from St. Lucia and North Africa and describes, pointing to LuLu (for the play's Emilia), how "your people brought my people over there to work and die as slaves on the plantations." As his audience of three white people becomes increasingly uncomfortable, he discloses that he used to want to be white, and claims his people only got the "leftovers" once they sought out a new life in England, his logic preempting Ben Jago's later accusation that "you took what was mine." This, in concert

with the unraveling court case that has lost its key witness who corroborated the racist nature of the murder, means that Othello's rage runs deeper than jealous sentiments about his wife, and opens questions about how to deal with injustice that remains unresolved over centuries.

One wishes that such a film did not continue to strike so close to home twenty years after its production, let alone 400 years after the play it is based on. The shots of the street riots–"mob rule" in the words of the previous commissioner–are uncannily resonant with recent protests in Ferguson, New York, Minneapolis, Baltimore, Kenosha, and so many other places in a country that continues to pour money into policing and incarceration rather than addressing unmet community needs that give rise to desperation and crime in the first place. As we continue to diversify our syllabi, offset the canon's reliance on dead white guys such as Shakespeare himself, and serve the needs of a student population that is experiencing higher degrees of inequality and precarity than ever, Geoffrey Sax's *Othello* helps engage students in debates over if and when a violent response is justified, the relationship between external affairs and mental health, how the media processes and publicizes issues of race and racism, to what extent Shakespeare's plays can or should be bent to fit modern contexts, and the ways some things have improved but others deteriorated over the centuries. The film also reminds us to fight for meaningfully structural rather than shallow cosmetic changes, in our institutions as well as our security apparatus.

"It was about love, that's what you've got to understand. Don't talk to me about race. Don't talk to me about politics. It was love. Simple as that." The falsehood of Ben Jago's deeply ambiguous words is increasingly apparent by the end of the film. Or perhaps it is about love, but an entirely different kind of love than the distorted version that plays out in this tragedy–love for a community rather than an individual.

NOTE

1. Sax, Geoffrey, director. *Othello*. London Weekend Television, 2001.

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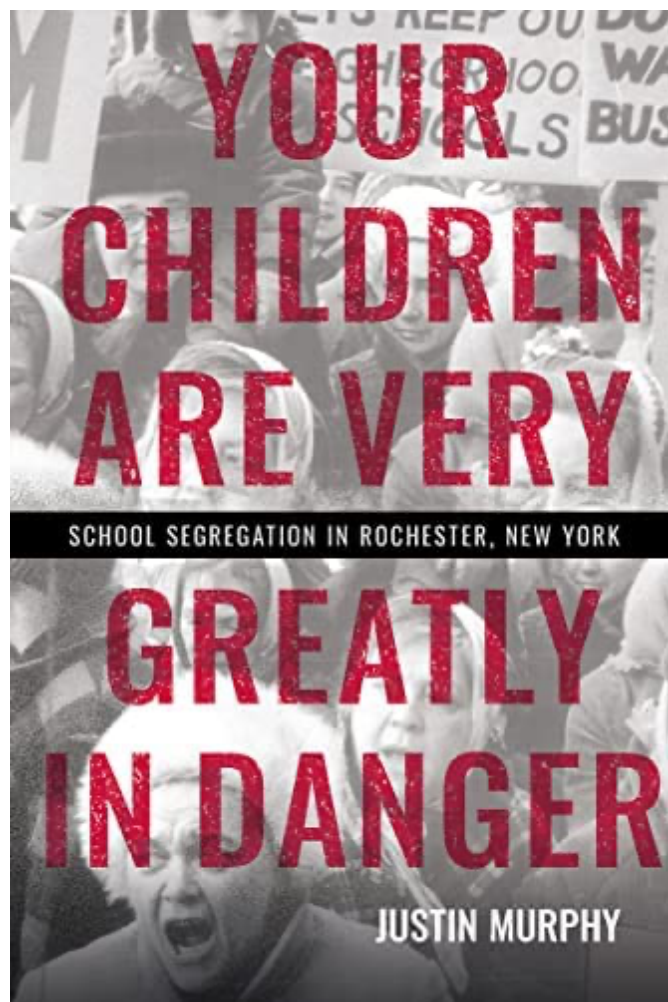
RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Review
Your Children Are Very Greatly in Danger:
School Segregation in Rochester, New York

by Janet Zandy

JUSTIN MURPHY. YOUR CHILDREN ARE VERY GREATLY IN DANGER: SCHOOL SEGREGATION IN
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK. ITHACA: CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2022.

Justin Murphy. Your Children Are Very Greatly in Danger: School Segregation in Rochester, New York. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022.

"no matter how hard we work, white people don't want integration" [1]

I n "Words of a Native Son" (1964) James Baldwin urges his readers to shed their "moral apathy" and to see that "as long as my children face the future they face, and come to the ruin that they come to, your children are very greatly in danger too."[2] Justin Murphy, an education reporter at Rochester's *Democrat and Chronicle*, draws on Baldwin's language as title for his important historical account of education in the city of Rochester, New York, where 91% of the approximately 23,000 students currently enrolled are considered "non-white" and 89% are "economically disadvantaged." How did Rochester, site of Frederick Douglass's home and newspaper, *North Star,* and of Susan B. Anthony's suffrage campaign, become *de facto* segregated by race and class? Today, in daily lived experience, Rochester is closer to *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) than *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Justin Murphy provides documented, historical context, decade after decade, of how, in his words, Rochester "slouched away" from the standard of *Brown* to its current apartheid state (my words).

Murphy begins in the present at Anna Murray Douglass Academy School 12, the site where Douglass lived with his family until his house was burned down in 1872. He cites Douglass's prescient words: "Let colored children be educated and grow up side by side with white children . . . and it will require a powerful agent to convert them into enemies" (*North Star,* 1848, 3). That's the crux of Baldwin's and Murphy's thesis—that integration benefits whites as well as blacks. Yet, that's an argument too many whites did not want to hear—and still don't. White resistance to integration has been as consistent as Black activism for equal educational opportunities.

This is a detailed case study which can be usefully juxtaposed with education policies and outcomes in other medium sized U.S. cities. Murphy skillfully narrates multiple shifts—political, judicial, demographic, economic—that shaped the race and class circumstances of Rochester's educational system. Some of these, such as the postwar Great Migration of African Americans from the South to the North, are comparable to those of other cities. Blacks seeking better opportunities left their southern rural homes and joined kin and established Black families in the North. Rochester's regional farms and orchards also drew migrant farm workers who faced harsh health and working conditions (and still do). In Rochester, though, employment and residential discrimination was more specific. Major Rochester corporations—Eastman Kodak, Xerox, and Bausch and Lomb—almost never hired Blacks until the pressure of the Civil Rights movement. George Eastman's philanthropy helped established Rochester's major university, its medical center, Eastman School of Music, and major art gallery. Eastman financially contributed to Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute and the eugenics movement. His Black valet, Solomon Young, told his niece Alice Young, "George Eastman was a lot of good things, but it was never his intent that African-Americans would be working in a factory in Rochester" (46). Alice Young would become the first Black principal in the city of Rochester school district.

Employment was an obstacle and so was (and is) housing. Murphy writes about the self-perpetuating relationship between housing and school discrimination. Ghettos are built through discriminatory housing policies orchestrated by realtors, banks, landlords, and home owners. Blacks faced limited rental choices, and those were often decrepit and over-priced. In the 1940s and 50s "red lining," deed restrictions and racial covenants (supported by the Rochester Catholic Diocese and Eastman Kodak), and coded advertisements were the structural impediments that Black would-be home owners faced in addition to blatant racial epithets and slurs.[3]

Murphy draws another distinction by questioning whether the Rochester City School District (RCSD) assumed responsibility for proactively resisting residential discriminatory practices in its placement procedures. He cites evidence, through the 1940s and into the early 60s, that school board and district administration decisions regarding the location of schools, newly built and older, and their assigned student populations, reinforced housing discrimination that determined segregated schools (94-96).

The Supreme Court landmark decision in favor of Linda Brown and other plaintiffs (*Brown v Board of Education* of Topeka, Kansas on May 17, 1954) named, through Chief Justice Earl Warren's opinion, the psychological damage school segregation does to "the hearts and minds" of Black children. The Court's 1955 follow-up decision directed school districts to implement "with all deliberate speed" desegregation plans (82). This decision, however, did not recognize James Baldwin's observation a decade later that segregation damages white people as well. By the early 1960s Northern school districts could no longer assume that integration was just a problem for the South. In Rochester evidentiary studies revealed through the organizing skills of Walter Cooper (who earned a PhD in chemistry from the University of Rochester and chaired NAACP's education committee) how "majority Black schools often received the least funding" and how green ($) follows white (89). True, segregated neighborhoods undergird segregated schools, but that, as Murphy deftly shows, is not the whole story.

Supported by a legal team from the NAACP to address segregation practices in the city school district, a lawsuit was filed in May 1962. *Aikens* (alphabetical listing of first child's name) v. *Board of Education* of Rochester, New York, represented twenty-two children from ten families, including white families, and asserted (presaging Baldwin) "that white children's constitutional rights were being violated by being kept separate from Black children, as well as the converse" (89). Over the years, the lawsuit floundered and, eventually, for several reasons, including financial support, the NAACP decided not to pursue it against the wishes of the litigants. What difference it would have made is unclear.

What is clear, as documented in Murphy's dense chapters, is that subsequent efforts to ameliorate *de facto* segregation, some with more likely efficacy than others, met opposition at almost every turn. Superintendent Herman Goldberg (tenure, 1963-1969), pressured by angry white parents on one hand and increasingly militant Black leaders on the other, tried to hew a middle ground of slow change through voluntary (key word) open enrollment efforts. But Black parents were discouraged from sending their children to schools outside their neighborhoods by whites driving cars through their streets with intended intimidating messages.

Then on July 24, 1964 a community outdoor party went awry, rumors spread, police arrived with dogs, violence erupted in other Black neighborhoods, and after three nights and the arrival of the National Guard, the riot/rebellion ended. Four people died and 900 were arrested, 86% of those Black and Puerto Rican (106). In a context of increasing Black Power militancy, a group of Protestant clergy brought organizer Saul Alinsky to town. Alinsky assessed Rochester "as probably the most extreme example of benevolent paternalism in the country" (107). A year later Rev. Franklin Florence formed and led a more assertive organization, FIGHT, and agitated for jobs, focusing on the most dominant company, Eastman Kodak. Florence also fought for integrated schools and agreed with the NAACP that school districts need to recruit and hire more Black teachers and produce a culturally and historically informed curriculum about race.

Murphy traces the Sisyphean efforts by Superintendent Herman Goldberg and Black leaders to desegregate Rochester schools from May 1962 to June 1972. Reorganization plans and other incentives faced opposition from a splinter group, United Schools Association, led by anti-busing, anti-desegregation conservative Louis Cerulli, a physician. There is a city school named after him, go figure. A rare, short-lived opening occurred in February 1971 when a Democratic controlled school board passed a resolution calling for a districtwide reorganization intended to desegregate schools. It involved school busing (129). By the end of that school year, Black students headed for Charlotte Junior High School had to crouch down in their school bus to avoid the rocks thrown by whites hiding in cemeteries along the bus route.

In "From Charlotte to Milliken," Murphy documents the violence, most often instigated by white parents, that spread to students, affected teacher safety, and triggered racial fights. As one school sentry reported, "the kids will be great friends, then all of a sudden parents come down and you don't recognize the kids" (134). Fear generates more fear and the benefits, tangible and intangible, of integration are hard to recognize (143). "There were parents—perfectly nice, decent, good people—throwing rocks at school buses," recalled a teacher at the time (149). I can imagine Murphy's challenge in balancing his reportorial voice with the need to shape a narrative relevant to the present. He concludes this chapter with reference to the right-swing of Nixon's America and the Supreme Court case, *Miliken v. Bradley*, where Nixon-appointed judges ruled in favor of those opposing a plan of "intracity" desegregation. Murphy sees this ruling as the "sunset" of the Civil Rights era, and quotes some of Thurgood Marshall's dissent: "Desegregation is not and was

never expected to be an easy task. Racial attitudes ingrained in our Nation's childhood and adolescence are not quickly thrown aside in its middle years . . ." (155).

What is the solution to the actuality of school segregation? Murphy details various versions of "Intracity" or metropolitan school proposals, the quagmire of funding, the many walls of resistance, and the few islands of support for desegregated schooling. One of the few remaining ideas is the Urban-Suburban Program, ideally a two-way exchange. In actuality, a few select city students attend primarily white suburban schools. By the mid 1980s what was left of Civil Rights consciousness shifted to technocratic methods and arguments for "accountability." Murphy writes, "the fundamental question of whether to integrate schools or to fix them in place has been settled decisively. Every new current in education reform—magnet schools, charter schools, standardized testing, governance changes—falls into the latter paradigm. . . . The logic of *Brown* is forgotten; a disavowal of desegregation is implicit in local, state, and federal education policy" (205-206).[4] The current mayor Malik Evans, a graduate of Wilson Magnet High School and the University of Rochester, a banker, school board member, city councilman, and father, supports metropolitan education reforms and targeted desegregation measures, but nevertheless, feels such changes are "never going to happen" (239).

And yet, Murphy finds hope in the grass roots efforts of students through an initiative called Roc 2 Change, regional gatherings of high school students meeting to discuss antiracist strategies. He concludes with "Three Steps Toward Change": the writing of a foundational report leading to the development of a comprehension metropolitan shift in school systems—perhaps recommending a federation of school districts and moving money revenues rather than students; an action plan to build on and more equitably design the current Urban-Suburban program, including employing a lottery system rather than drafting a few select students by district administrators, and providing bus transportation for students' after school activities and as means for city parents to visit suburban schools; and "intensive anti-racism education for children and adults in all Rochester-area school districts," with the understanding that segregation harms everyone (237). How an anti-racism curriculum is developed is a large matter for another purview. It is certainly not about making little white kids feel guilty, as Baldwin understood. Rather, turning to the language of Richard Wright in his *12 Million Black Voices,* it involves seeing the intersection of oppressive race/class forces, what Wright called the "Lords of the Land" and the "Bosses of the Buildings."[5] Many years ago, I asked Manning Marable about the difference between ethnic workers' struggles and black struggles. As I remember, he said, "imagine being forced to hold a rope; for whites it burns the hand, for blacks it cuts the flesh."

If James Baldwin were writing today, I wonder if he would still use the language of "moral apathy" as he did in 1964. The word *apathy* suggests an indifference to what is known, but does not account for the will to **not** know, a determined ignorance, an agnosis, an always present American anti-intellectualism that now manifests itself in grievance, white supremacy, and lies. In "A Talk to

Teachers" (1963) Baldwin reminds us that "the whole process of education occurs within a social framework and is designed to perpetuate the aims of society" and "what passes for identity in America is a series of myths about one's heroic ancestors" and "it is your responsibility to change society if you think of yourself as an educated person" (678-686).[6] *Your Children Are Very Greatly in Danger"* is one important effort to foster that crucial change.

Notes

1. Conclusion reached in 1969 by Reecy Davis, organizer of United Federation of Inner-City Parents, Rochester, NY, 142.

2. *James Baldwin, Collected Essays,* edited by Toni Morrison, New York: The Library of America, 1998, 713.

3. A personal aside—I have lived in the city of Rochester for over fifty years. My neighborhood was integrated when we moved in and still is. I've wondered why it wasn't redlined as the nearby suburb was. I speculate that the Jewish original owners of homes in this neighborhood were willing to sell to Black people, perhaps because they understood the wrong of discrimination. Perhaps a study for another book.

4. In a frontpage article on June 15, 2022, Justin Murphy reports on the closing of the Rochester City School District's Leadership Academy for Young Men after 11 years. He lists "inconsistent resources and attention from RCSD; overwhelming levels of student need and trauma, including poverty; and the COVID-19 pandemic" as factors affecting the school's demise. The originating ethos of structure, mentorship, community, and relevant pedagogy collapsed over the years as students were assigned to the school rather than self-selecting it, as school leaders faced a rapid turnover of RCSD administrators (eight different administrators over eight years), and as a third of students have disabilities and ninety-four percent are considered economically disadvantaged, as graduation rates decreased (60% for male students) and fewer than half the students got passing grades on Regents exams in 2019.

5. Richard Wright (text), Edwin Rosskam (photo direction) *12 Million Black Voices,* New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1949, 1988.

6. *James Baldwin Collected Essays.* Regarding teachers, I wish there had been more space given to the voices of teachers in the city school district, especially across generations and geographic backgrounds.

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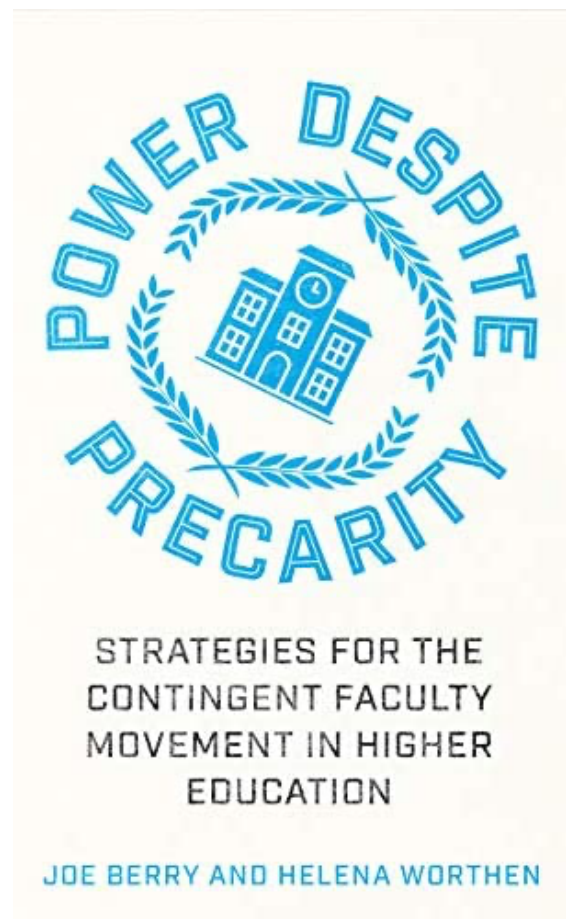
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A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Review
Power Despite Precarity: Strategies for the Contingent Faculty Movement in Higher Education

by Michael Batson

JOE BERRY AND HELENA WORTHEN. POWER DESPITE PRECARITY: STRATEGIES FOR
THE CONTINGENT FACULTY MOVEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION. LONDON: PLUTO

Joe Berry and Helena Worthen. Power Despite Precarity: Strategies for the Contingent Faculty Movement in Higher Education. London: Pluto Press, 2021.

Higher education is at an inflection point: The continuous creep of neoliberalist dogma into academia over the past four decades has completely transformed universities and colleges, the most troubling element being the transition of the academic labor force from a predominantly full-time tenure and tenure-track faculty to majorities of contingent, or adjunct, faculty on campuses throughout the United States. While the particular arrangements and conditions of contingent faculty labor vary from college to college, common features are a lack of job security; low pay; usually part-time employment; subpar benefits, if any are offered at all; a lack of institutional support such as office space, computers, and professional development; and exclusion from, or underrepresentation on, the governing bodies and committees of the institutions in which they teach. Additionally, all too often those conditions are accompanied by alienation, a sense of powerlessness, and interactions with colleagues that hint at a second-class status within their college's hierarchy.

In *Power Despite Precarity: Strategies for the Contingent Faculty Movement in Higher Education*, authors Joe Berry and Helena Worthen offer both practical strategies and inspiration for fixing the contingency problem while arguing that doing so is essential to repairing our broken higher education system. This moment, they assert, requires a national contingent faculty movement that is "conscious of its place in the broader struggle within the political economy of higher education" (160). Berry and Worthen utilize the insights and knowledge they gained from decades of experience as both contingent faculty and as organizers to provide valuable analysis and anecdotes, and while they focus primarily on their own and their colleagues' experiences at their home institution, California State University (CSU), there is much to be gleaned from *Power Despite Precarity* for those across the nation who desire to understand and improve the circumstances of contingency or, preferably, to abolish it altogether.

Like many other institutions, higher education has been gradually succumbing to the predominance of neoliberal thought. Neoliberalism's assault on the Keynesian consensus that allowed for at least a limited role for the government to redistribute wealth, to provide mechanisms for social mobility, and to curtail the excesses of the free market, as well as its success in reducing the scale and scope of state functions, loosening constraints on the market, flattening the progressive tax system, and promoting privatization would inevitably have consequences for higher education. As Berry and Worthen write: "Higher Education, which had until now been somewhat protected from market forces, was going to learn what it meant to be 'run like a business'" (77). The consequences have been

…demands for program-based budgeting and therefore program-based discipline and performance metrics within universities and colleges. …. Students became "customers" or even "products" to be tailor made for corporate employment as demanded by employers, rather than young citizens to be educated. Tuition in the whole sector was pushed up, which represented cost-shifting to students and parents as part of higher education's marketization and this conversion from a social good, to be supported by taxation, to a private good, to be purchased as a commodity, by individual families. (78-79)

The expansion of contingent labor has played a dual role here: it has both facilitated the transition by weakening the resistance that a unified faculty with job security and academic freedom would likely put up, and it has provided a solution to the tighter budgets and fluctuating enrollments that managers and administrators face.

That managerial solution has become endemic and deeply entrenched. At the City University of New York (CUNY), where I teach, management has been deeply opposed to any contract demands that infringe on their control of the adjunct workforce. In each round of bargaining, management has sought to maintain and even increase flexibility across different professional titles. Despite this, the Professional Staff Congress (PSC) has been able to win significant gains for contingent faculty over several rounds of negotiations. Since 2000, with the election of the New Caucus slate, contingent faculty have won paid office hours, health benefits for about 2000 members, the allocation of about 225 full-time lecture lines with a Certificate of Continuous Employment after five years of service for long-serving adjuncts (one of which I was appointed to after seventeen years as an adjunct), three-year contracts guaranteeing at least two courses per semester for eligible adjuncts, professional development grants, and in the last round of bargaining in 2017, a per-course minimum salary increase from about $3200 to $5500. As significant as these extremely hard-won breakthroughs are, they do not achieve either parity in pay or benefits with full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty, and they still leave thousands remaining on a semester-by-semester employment basis.

In *Power Despite Precarity*, Berry and Worthen describe the many ways this two-tier system creates a structural inequality that imposes both dire material conditions and emotional distress on tens of thousands of higher education instructors while also undermining the core mission of colleges to produce and transmit knowledge through open discourse, faculty governance, and democratic mechanisms. The existence of large numbers of faculty and staff on campuses perpetually at risk of losing their livelihoods and largely excluded from governing bodies and campus committees is very much at odds with that mission. As Berry and Worthen point out:

Higher education is certainly an institution with definite norms -- for example, the norms of what good curriculum, good teaching, and other good practice looks like. The AAUP Statement on Tenure and Academic Freedom is an example of one of those norms. The

mission statements produced by every institution of higher ed, even the sleaziest, also boast of 'quality,' which is another norm. In the daily effort to practice 'quality' under degraded working conditions, every contingent has lived under the pressure that shows the sky through the cracks in the contradiction between what is supposed to happen and what does in fact happen. (157-158)

Despite the dismal present situation, Berry and Worthen tend towards optimism about the future. Their decades of activism within the College Faculty Association (CFU), the union that has represented the faculty at CSU since winning a contentious election in 1982, suggest the possibilities for what can be accomplished when contingent faculty and their allies get organized and develop sound strategies for collective actions. Their first-hand accounts and interviews with fellow organizers about that history -- a history that resulted in significant gains in wages and benefits, and a level of security through seniority for CSU's contingent faculty -- are likely the most useful chapters of *Power Despite Precarity* for current academic union activists.

This from-the-trenches approach takes readers into the minutiae of organizing from member mobilization to movement building. We can see how the tap on the shoulder, the knock on the office door, the ringing of the phone, the small ask, the invitation to a meeting is the beginning of moving people from isolation to association to action, or in the authors' formulation, from "fear-and-fatalism" to "hope-and-courage" (165). This is the first step in the process of turning individual discontent and self-blame into group-consciousness, a shared vision, and collective action.

Throughout *Power Despite Precarity* are examples of how organizing both raises consciousness and develops the skills necessary to transform the workplace. About midway through the book, for example, the authors tell a story about a long-serving contingent faculty member and organizer at Long Beach State University who, prompted by an incident with her daughter, decided to fight for and won emeritus status for contingent faculty there. While attending an event, her daughter pointed out the omission of her name in the catalogue, thus highlighting her official invisibility on the campus she served for some twenty years. In a book that pulls no punches in describing the "degraded working conditions" (158) of contingents in higher education, the issue might at first seem trivial, yet the anecdote illustrates two important points: one is that in addition to the poor material circumstances that tens of thousands of contingents labor under are the all-too-normal exclusion, alienation, and slights that come with contingency; the other is that the act of organizing is itself transformative and points the way to full inclusion, dignity, and decent working conditions.

The authors argue that the rising collective power of organized contingent faculty must be exerted first within the local union, a space of contested terrain. Employing Antonio Gramsci's theory of the role ideology plays in achieving cultural hegemony as a framework (Chapter 9), the authors prescribe the use of the Inside/Outside strategy to shift the culture of the union away from "the tenured gaze" (184-185), away from thinking and acting in ways shaped by the legacy privileges of a seemingly bygone era in higher education. The Inside/Outside strategy, whereby "a sub-group organizes itself as an independent base of power within a more powerful group in order to create a safe space where they can have a significant impact on the more powerful group" (135), can shift the entire frame of discussion and action within an organization. This, in turn, will amplify the voice and concerns of contingent faculty in the various spaces where decisions about their conditions are made, such as bargaining tables, college and university boardrooms, legislative halls, and affiliate conventions. As the authors point out, there are precedents demonstrating the efficacy of the Inside/Outside strategy. One of the handful of historical examples they mention is the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). Although short-lived, the MFDP was able to change the discourse within the Democratic Party, which in turn led to the end of segregated seating for delegates at Democratic Party conventions after 1964 and enough political pressure to win passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

This Inside/Outside strategy does beg some questions: since contingent faculty are not a monolith, claims of speaking for the majority or representing the rank-and-file is problematic in conditions where, on the one hand, contingent faculty's membership in the union is low and their engagement not widespread, and, on the other, democratically elected representative bodies exist. This does not suggest that unequal power dynamics are not at play within those elected bodies, merely that it complicates the discourse and decision-making. Likewise, while shifting the conversations within an organization towards the needs of contingent faculty is incredibly important and absolutely necessary, building solidarity requires taking into account many different interests and issues, particularly come contract negotiation time. To use CUNY as an example again, the PSC represents several different titles within its roughly 30,000-person bargaining unit. Full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty, teaching and non-teaching adjuncts, library faculty, higher education officers, continuing education instructors, and college laboratory technicians each have their own concerns, and each expects the union to address those concerns.

As important and consequential as this local work is, Berry and Worthen stress that "the transitions we need to bring about are not going to be won by individual local unions at the bargaining table" (160). The problems higher education faces -- attacks on tenure, sometimes wholesale by state legislation, more often informally institution by institution; shrinking state support for public universities; the acceleration of online education due to the COVID 19 pandemic; demographic changes pointing to fewer college-age individuals in the near future; and an increasing emphasis on vocational training at the expense of the general education model -- are national in scope and necessitate a national and unified movement to respond. One particularly effective platform for bringing local activists together to compare local conditions, to learn from the numerous actions taking place across the country and beyond, and to begin to think of strategies for nationalizing the struggle is the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor

(COCAL). COCAL is a coalition of activists from higher education founded in 1997 that most notably holds biennial conferences rotating between Mexico, the U.S., and Canada. These conferences provide a setting for activists to share notes and knowledge and to begin to think of the work they do more broadly than at just their own college or university. Learning what has been won in a particular place and how that victory was achieved expand the possibilities for all. Sharing and aggregating data reveals the true nature of the problem, one that goes beyond particular college administrations and city and state legislators. I found the COCAL conferences I attended in Mexico City and in New York City to be both enlightening and empowering. The one in New York City in 2014 had a direct impact in growing the activist base within the PSC at CUNY and in shaping the demands of the 2017 round of contract bargaining.

Power Despite Precarity is a timely piece of work that persuasively makes the case that fixing the contingency problem is extremely important in-and-of itself, but it is also absolutely essential if we hope to heal what ails academia as a whole.

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RADICAL TEACHER
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Poetry
Unsanctioned

by Willa Schneberg

KEISUKE NARITA/A3BC, JUSTSEEDS.ORG

Unsanctioned

Like any grand manor's garden this institution has a topiary--
kangaroos, elephants and turtles, but we are the real animals,
jezebels, segregated from male patients.

Dr. Gray calls himself "Our Protector."

In this bucolic setting, safe from noxious vapors
we are instructed to dance virtuously, recite
poems that will not excite, and become ladies again,
as if we ever were.

Tourists picnic on the manicured grounds to stare,
feel self-righteous, leave contented, and certain
that we aren't contagious.

We hide scraps of purloined butcher paper
and writing implements in our corsets,
limn depravity, and godlessness on rags
inside our thighs and behind mirrors.

We are the women relieved
our children are born dead.

In the wards at night, if we pace or scream,
we are tied to our beds, and matrons shut
our mouths with their palms until we blubber.

If Dr. Gray's minions could, they would tat
scalloped edges around our death wishes,
turn them into doilies, but sometimes
our unsanctioned words have wings:

with pieces of chalk and pencil nubs
we scratch green and yellow hot air balloons
that lift us over the padlocks.

Willa Schneberg is a poet, essayist, visual artist, curator, and psychotherapist in private practice. She has authored five poetry collections including: *Box Poems* (Alice James Books); *In The Margins of The World,* recipient of the Oregon Book Award; *Storytelling in Cambodia* (Calyx Books), and her latest volume, *Rending the Garment*. Willa has read at the Library of Congress and has been a fellow at Yaddo and MacDowell. Her work has appeared in numerous anthologies and literary journals, including: *American Poetry Review, Salmagundi, Poet Lore, Bellevue Literary Review,* and *Psychohistory Review.* This January, her newest collection, *The Naked Room*, will be released from Broadstone Books.

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Poetry
Dr. Henry Anonymous Speaks at the 1972 APA Convention

by Willa Schneberg

KILL JOY VIA JUSTSEEDS.ORG

Dr. Henry Anonymous Speaks at the 1972 APA Convention

The panel "Psychiatry: Friend or Foe of the Homosexual?" had a gay astronomer
and a lesbian activist. There was no psychiatrist, so one was recruited.
In the DSMII queerness was labeled a "disturbance of sexual orientation."

I am a homosexual.
I am a psychiatrist.

I'm not using my name.
I'm donning this ridiculous mask,
a baggy tuxedo, a bow tie,
a wig of wild curly hair,
to retain my current position.
Since Tricky Dick is still president,
it wasn't hard to find an easy-to-alter
Nixon mask in a joke shop.

We *homosexual psychiatrists must deal*
with what I call 'Negro *syndromes.'*
We must know our place and *be more healthy*
than our heterosexual counterparts.
When your fellow professionals denigrate
'*the faggots,' …don't just stand by idly.*

I've always been theatrical or flamboyant.
That's what I was called at my last position
when they fired me. I've been known
to wear wild patterned dashikis and bring
a room to order by ringing a cowbell.

So here I am, facing you,
speaking into a microphone
that warps my voice—
beseeching you to see this psychiatrist
not as a pervert, but merely a person
who prefers male partners to the female sex.

I'm wearing a mask,
but the one I always wear
doesn't peel off.

Notes

1. Dr. John E. Fryer was "Dr. Anonymous." His speech has been cited as a key factor in the decision to de-list homosexuality as a mental illness from the APA's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. The words in italics are taken directly from his speech.

2. Today, comparing the homophobia Fryer experienced to "The Negro syndrome" would be unacceptable.

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