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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Making Space for Radical Pedagogy

by Michael Bennett

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I say it so often that it has become a joke amongst my friends and loved ones. Whenever anyone has a complaint about anything (work, relationships, lack of sleep, anxiety, …), my rhetorical question is "You know what I blame?" In unison, we say together "Capitalism!" It would be funny if it weren't true.

Capitalism shapes everything we think and do. One of the most nefarious effects of capitalism is that it colonizes our bodies and minds, as well as the spaces we inhabit. How many relationships have you seen that fall to pieces because of arguments over money, or people who break up or never even go on a first or second date because one has fewer resources or a less prestigious job than the other? You know what I blame! How many sleepless nights have you or people you know had because they are endlessly worried about making ends meet? You know what I blame! How many students fall through the cracks thanks to those twin enemies of radical teaching: teaching to the test, which is encouraged by the conservative regime of Learning Outcomes Assessment (LOA), and what Paolo Freire famously called the banking model of education, which views students as empty vessels to be filled up with ruling-class ideology. You know what I blame!

It makes me especially angry to see young people subjected to educational spaces devoted to creating docile workers, rather than to freeing the minds of students to critically examine the world around them. How sad when students fail at what passes for education in the teaching to the test/LOA/banking model, and at the same time how heart-wrenching to see them succeed at it. How especially sad to see students who struggle get blamed for their own supposed deficiencies rather than blaming the structures around them that all but assure some students will rule the market while others become its victims. In an essay in this journal that I co-authored with my friend and *Radical Teacher* comrade Jackie Brady, we wrote that "the problems our students face with outcomes … are most directly and intimately connected to inputs: inadequate college preparation; extensive family obligations; working at minimum (or sub-minimum) wages; student debt; a corporatized educational system at odds with academic labor; inadequate healthcare and nutrition; lack of access to social, cultural, and economic capital" (150). In short, the space of the classroom is blamed for the problems created outside that space by the depredations of capital, which also assaults and dominates the classroom space, unless resisted by radical teachers.

This issue of *Radical Teacher* focuses on the ways, big and small, in which radical teachers try to resist the hegemonic presence of capitalism by carving out a liberatory educational space, whether in existing institutions or by building new ones. Left theorists have often tried to name and advocate for such spaces of resistances to capitalism and its companions (racism, classism, sexism, …). Though Marx theorized that the end of capitalism was an historical inevitability, those following in his footsteps have had to think about how to create spaces within capitalism to transform and challenge it when the mechanisms of dialectical materialism did not cause capitalism to come crashing down.

Theories that have been helpful for me and my socialist comrades include Gramsci's notion of counter-hegemony as "a creation of an alternative hegemony on the terrain of civil society in preparation for political change" (Pratt). The topic of such counterhegemonic spaces in both formal and informal educational settings today is taken up in an excellent recent collection: *Creating Third Spaces of Learning for Post-Capitalism: Lessons from Educators, Artists, and Activists*. After Gramsci, in the late 1960s, Jürgen Habermas offered the conception of the public sphere as the place where autonomous individuals come together in a nongovernmental discursive space to establish political and communicative norms that might bring about structural transformations. Nancy Fraser and others critiqued Habermas for imagining that there was just one public sphere as opposed to several "subaltern counterpublics," which Fraser defined as "parallel discursive arenas where members of the subordinated social group invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (123). I found Fraser's formulation especially helpful when thinking about the radical abolition movement as perhaps the first and probably the most impactful counterculture in U.S. history (Bennett 21). Homi Bhabha's conception of "Third spaces" and Gloria Anzaldua's concept of "borderlands" have been helpful for those of us trying to think about hybrid spaces where new identities and social relations emerge between our lived experiences and the authoritarian forces, including capitalism, that contain and restrain us. When it comes to thinking about how all this theorizing applies to education, we continue to be haunted by that presiding spirit of radical teachers everywhere: Paulo Freire. In opposition to the banking concept of education, Freire posits a "'problem-posing' education" (66) that helps students develop a "critical consciousness" or "conscientização," which the translator of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* defines as "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire 19).

These are rather grand and impressive theories about building spaces resistant to the control of capitalism and other authoritarian isms, but most radical teachers exist within very confined spaces where only small victories can be won in practice. However, *Radical Teacher* has long championed and celebrated praxis, the belief that theory has little meaning separated from the practices that embody it. And so we champion and celebrate the teachers represented in this issue, who are engaging in various practices that embody theories trying to shape the radical spaces where change happens.

Some of the contributors to this issue focus their attention on how to create liberatory spaces within traditional academic practices and classroom settings. In "Teaching and Learning a Joyful Citation Praxis: Affective Relations for Fostering Community Through Our Compositions," Kylie E. Quave and Savannah Hagen Ohbi explore how an academic practice as seemingly innocuous as citation can become transformative. This reflective essay suggests that teaching and learning about citations doesn't have to be a fear-filled practice of policing the

boundaries of a discipline and jailing those who improperly cite accepted authorities. Rather, it can be a joyful practice of finding and engaging with kindred spirits. True to their theory about citations, Quave and Ohbi end their essay with a long acknowledgement to the community who have made this not just "their" essay but the product of co-creators working together to resist the way that "authorship functions as currency: attaching one's name to an argument lends one legitimacy and capital."

The spirits of Paulo Freire and Gloria Anzaldúa hover over Jesica Siham Fernández's "Developing Classroom Community Agreements to Cultivate a Critically Compassionate Learning Community." Freire would no doubt approve of the ways in which Fernández resists the banking concept of education by forming a "critically compassionate learning community" with classroom community agreements arrived at through collaboration between students and teacher. That this process happens in Fernández's class offering an "Introduction to Latinx Studies" calls to mind the fact that Anzaldúa's concept of the "borderlands" was developed out of her experience as a Chicana woman developing a mestiza consciousness from living at la frontera, where hybridity is born. Fernández and her students see it as their project to build safe and brave spaces that put into practice what another radical educational theorist, bell hooks, names as an "education for freedom."

What could be a more traditional school subject than algebra? Algebra is all too often used as the gatekeeper course for allowing students to graduate from high school or enter into college. Yet, Jay Gillen's essay "The Educational Radicalism of Bob Moses" argues that the Algebra Project, founded in 1982 by former Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) field secretary Bob Moses to bring a different way of teaching algebra to predominantly African American and Latinx middle schools, was and is a radical project. For many students, the algebra classroom is a space of fear. Gillen asks, "Why choose one of the most hated and disempowering locations in already hated and disempowering schools?" Gillen's answer is that though the public facing goal of the Algebra Project was to promote the radical pedagogy of classroom democracy in order to make it easier to learn math, Moses's goal was the opposite: to use a new way of teaching math as an organizing tool for young people to learn the practice of radical democracy. Thus, Gillen argues, the feared space of the algebra classroom is transformed into an empowering space where young people build a sense of educational insurgency in the battle to destroy the American caste system.

Rather than focusing on radical interventions in traditional classroom settings, the other essays in this issue of *Radical Teacher* look at efforts to build spaces outside of such settings. The premise of Jennifer Queenan, et. al's "Learning from Our History: The Role of the New York Collective of Radical Educators in Movements for Educational Justice" is that educator activists can play an important role in transforming not only what happens inside classrooms but also in larger educational systems. This essay, co-written by a group of activists within the New York Collective of Radical Educators (NYCoRE), analyzes the role of NYCoRE outside of and in solidarity with union spaces to theorize about the role of educator collectives in education justice movements. The essay focuses on NYCoRE's efforts to support radical teachers in New York City inside the classroom (professional development focused on social justice curricula) and outside of the classroom (political education building bridges to other organizations working for educational justice), including the role of several core members of NYCoRE in founding the Movement of Rank and File Educators (MORE) in 2012, which now operates as the social justice caucus within the United Federation of Teachers. However, the authors also examine the commonalities of NYCoRE with teacher collectives and progressive caucuses in teacher unions across the country, particularly in places like Chicago, Boston, San Francisco, and Philadelphia. We learn that NYCoRE is also a part of a national network called Teacher Activists Groups, in addition to being connected to national organizations like the Education for Liberation Network and Red for Ed.

By its nature, the study of architecture invites us to think about built environments and the spaces those places inhabit. Thus, Lily Song's "Notes from the Anti-Displacement Studio," though ostensibly focused on architecture courses taught by the author at Northeastern University, enacts and engages with radical spaces both in how the courses were organized as studios and how the professor and her students reached beyond the studio to interact with a community (Roxbury) and a municipality (Boston) struggling with the constraints of capital. This essay addresses the question of how design pedagogy and methods can be reformulated and retooled to support community-led anti-displacement planning and design initiatives. The analysis particularly focuses on the anti-displacement studio, which takes a grounded, relational, and reparative approach to addressing current gaps in design studio education by aligning university-based teaching and learning with community-led decolonizing agendas.

All good teachers care about their students. Radical teachers have a more holistic understanding of what "care" means. In "Unconditional Care Beyond the Carceral Education State: A Call for Abolitionist Departure," Margaret Goldman writes about her experience working in a space where she could more fully develop the meaning of radical care. Goldman draws from her experiences as a teacher/ethnographer in an alternative high school, called FREE LA (Fighting for the Revolution to Educate and Empower Los Angeles), that serves and was created by system-impacted young people who have been pushed out of, been barred from, or otherwise refused to participate in traditional schooling. Based on this experience, Goldman concludes that the violent genealogies of conditional care are endemic to state schooling, and that the potential for reclaiming old-new genealogies of unconditional care require radically reimagined educational spaces, which engage with the entire ecosystem of these students' lives—lives shaped by racism, predatory capitalism, and the carceral state.

Though I've used the structuring device of dividing the six essays in this issue of *Radical Teacher* between half of

the essays focused on creating radical space within traditional classrooms and the other half focused on spaces outside such classrooms, as good radicals we know that these spaces are interconnected and mutually constitutive, just as we ourselves are shaped by a mixture of outside (structure) and inside (agency). Radical teachers are always trying to break down oppositions, or rather pointing out that they already are breaking down: the personal and the political, the public and the private, inside and outside, teacher and student, town and gown, … The spaces of radical teaching are always a mixture of these things. We try to shape radically mixed, democratic classrooms that make radical interventions in the world "outside." The essays in this issue show us some of the ways in which radical teachers can make and are making such interventions. It's now up to us to continue the work within capitalist spaces to transform and transcend such spaces.

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Learning from Our History: The Role of the New York Collective of Radical Educators in Movements for Educational Justice

by Jenna Queenan, Natalia Ortiz, Pam Segura, Rosie Frascella, Ashia Troiano, and Liz Velazquez

NEW YORK COLLECTIVE OF RADICAL EDUCATORS (NYCORE) LOGO

Overview and Objectives

While the literature on educator activism has grown in the last ten years, there is still little documentation of the history of educator activist collectives and their impact.[1] One well-known educator activist group––which originated in New York City —is the New York Collective of Radical Educators (NYCoRE). Unlike today, there were few identifiable educator activist groups in New York City in 2001 when NYCoRE was founded. While the teachers' union, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), continued to organize and fight for teacher benefits, it was not part of larger struggles for social justice (Asselin, 2019; Back, 2001; Podair, 2002; Stark, 2019). According to NYCoRE's mission statement,

> New York Collective of Radical Educators (NYCoRE) is a group of current and former public-school educators and their allies committed to fighting for social justice in our school system and society at large, by organizing and mobilizing teachers, developing curriculum, and working with community, parent, and student organizations. We are educators who believe that education is an integral part of social change and that we must work both inside and outside the classroom because the struggle for justice does not end when the school bell rings. (New York Collective of Radical Educators, 2011)

The purpose of this article is to analyze the historical and potential future impact of NYCoRE on educational justice movements in New York City. We do this to both reflect internally and share what we have learned with a broader community of radical educators. Given that NYCoRE recently celebrated its twenty-year anniversary, this article also looks toward the future by asking the question: What can we learn from NYCoRE's history in order to theorize the role of NYCoRE, and groups like NYCoRE, in educational justice movement work? In doing so, we seek to further develop ideas about the role of educators in social justice movements and, more specifically, the role of educator activist groups that organize outside of union spaces. These theoretical understandings inform the work we engage in collectively as NYCoRE.

Whose Voices Are Included in This Article?

One of the authors (Jenna) conducted oral history interviews with the six founding core members of NYCoRE (Ariana Mangual Figueroa, Keith Catone, Jessica Klonsky, Lisa Adler, Chris Maestro, and Daniel "Herm" Jerome) and three early core members (Edwin Mayorga, Bree Picower, and Sally Lee) during the fall of 2020. While NYCoRE has a larger membership of people who participate in and help facilitate events, "core" is the main decision-making body for NYCoRE and meets monthly to discuss and plan the work of NYCoRE. Core is and has always intentionally been led by a majority of people of color and women/gender expansive individuals. Each interview with the previous core members included questions about the individual's entry into education, memories about what NYCoRE did/does, the significance of NYCoRE's work, and the impact being involved in NYCoRE had on the individual. These interviews were then synthesized by Jenna into a paper that told a preliminary story about how NYCoRE started. In January 2021, the current NYCoRE core hosted a Zoom meeting with everyone who had been interviewed to get feedback on the initial paper.

While Jenna did much of the writing and synthesizing work in this article, the ideas presented here were generated through reading, reflection, and conversations amongst those interviewed as well as the six core members of NYCoRE in 2023, who are referred to throughout the article using "we." The use of "NYCoRE" and "they" in this article refers to the founding and early core members of NYCoRE, who are no longer actively part of core. In addition, former core members and others involved in similar teacher activist groups wrote many of the works we cite. Before submitting this article for publishing, we sent it back to those interviewed for a final round of feedback and to ask for permission to include their names.

As the authors of this article, we have been involved in NYCoRE in a variety of ways and are all currently on NYCoRE core. Natalia, a mother of two and a Chilena-Riqueña native New Yorker, began teaching and joined NYCoRE in 2006. In 2012 Natalia transitioned out of the classroom to pursue a PhD in Urban Education and is currently a Clinical Assistant Professor at New York University in the Department of Teaching and Learning. Rosie is a White, queer, trans masculine teacher who joined NYCoRE their first-year teaching in 2006. They have been a core member of NYCoRE since 2009. They teach English and social studies to newcomer high school students in Brooklyn. Jenna is a White, queer educator who joined NYCoRE when she moved to New York City in 2011, where she taught in Brooklyn for seven years before starting a PhD in Urban Education at the CUNY Graduate Center. This paper is connected to her dissertation research on educator activist groups like NYCoRE. Ashia was born and raised in Harlem, NY. Her mother is an Afro-Caribbean immigrant from St. Kitts, and her father was a first-generation Italian American veteran. She joined NYCoRE in 2012 when she first started teaching and currently works with college students who have experience in foster care. Liz, a mixed-race person of Puerto Rican and Peruvian descent, came to NYCoRE through the Educators of Color affinity group around 2014 in search of a sense of community with like-minded people. She is a public-school visual art educator with 21 years of experience. Pam, an educator with roots in the Bronx and the Dominican Republic, joined NYCoRE in 2016 when she began attending monthly meetings and participating in Inquiry to Action Groups, which are described in more detail below. After teaching in nonprofit and K-12 settings for nearly ten years, Pam has left the classroom to study General Psychology at the New School for Social Research.

NYCoRE's History

NYCoRE's Founding

2001 was quite a year, for U.S. schools and the nation. George W. Bush was inaugurated as president and soon

after, on September 11, 2001, terrorists attacked the World Trade Center in New York City as well as the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. Quickly after the attacks, anti-war rallies began in places like D.C. and New York City (Anti-war rallies, 2001). Lawmakers implemented a multitude of national policies, including the War in Iraq, the PATRIOT Act, and No Child Left Behind (NCLB). NCLB, a sweeping education reform policy, was signed into law by President Bush on January 8, 2002. In addition to increasing the focus on standardized testing (Klein, 2015), NCLB included a lesser-known provision that required "public secondary schools to provide military recruiters not only with access to facilities, but also with contact information for every student — or face a cutoff of all federal aid." (Goodman, 2002), As a result, the military started recruiting Black and Brown youth in public schools. The New York Collective of Radical Educators was founded in this context.

The founding six members of NYCoRE connected over the course of the 2001-2002 school year, with the group officially meeting in 2002. After 9/11, one of the founding members, Jessica Klonsky, was involved in ad hoc protests against the U.S. government military response to 9/11 and went to anti-war meetings around the city. Through this, Jessica met Lisa Adler, who she began meeting with to try to figure out where other radical teachers were organizing. Jessica and Lisa looked at model groups like the Coalition for Education Justice in Los Angeles and realized that there were no grassroots, teacher-based groups in New York City, so they decided to start one. As Lisa remembers it, "we started as teachers, with the vision of becoming this bigger thing [with parents and students], but also understood our own limitations in terms of time, our responsibility to teach a progressive curriculum" (L. Adler, personal communication, November 24, 2020). Jessica was teaching at EBC High School in Bushwick at the time and Lisa was at IS 145 in the Bronx (but soon moved to EBC with Jessica), while the other founders were all at Banana Kelly High School in the Bronx. Jessica knew Herm Jerome through previous organizing experiences and called him to ask if he wanted to start a group, saying that teachers needed to have a response to what was happening post-9/11, particularly in terms of the War in Iraq and the military recruitment happening in schools. Herm knew Keith Catone, Chris Maestro, and Ariana Mangual Figueroa through Banana Kelly and brought them into the conversations.

Determining NYCoRE's Focus and Identity

In the early 2000s, as NYCoRE grew, the group had questions about NYCoRE's focus and how they were going to organize. While NYCoRE had initially formed around military recruitment of Black and Brown youth in schools and anti-war sentiments amongst teachers, the organization soon expanded beyond this issue. Keith recalled that, "we were never intent about being a single-issue kind of organization. To me, it was always about connecting teachers to broader social movement issues, doing education justice organizing more broadly" (K. Catone, personal communication, November 11, 2020). In many ways, the issues NYCoRE chose and chooses to focus on were and still are based on what teachers and the communities they work with are confronting. Over time, these issues have included counter-military recruitment, anti-high stakes testing, decriminalization of youth, supporting queer and undocumented youth in schools, examining the intersections of racism and neoliberalism, fighting ableism in education, and more. For example, early in NYCoRE's history, the group created a curriculum to accompany the *Military Myths* documentary made by Paper Tiger television. Soon after, NYCoRE supported a campaign against military recruitment of youth led by the YA-YA Network. Eventually, counter-military recruitment became a working group in NYCoRE (more on working groups below). For more information on this and other NYCoRE projects and working groups, you can check out a timeline of our history Jenna recently added to our website.

In early meetings, questions about the group's identity developed. When the group ultimately settled on the New York Collective of Radical Educators as its name, the choice of radical was purposeful and centered the founders' belief that radical, systemic change was needed inside and outside of schools. In addition to the name, the collective also developed points of unity to express their values. Ariana shared that,

> We read together, we talked, we were learning together and growing. I remember that being really powerful in terms of really looking to the Black Panther Party, the Young Lords Party as, you know, Black and Brown coalitions that were radical, for justice, and that articulated a set of principles in this point fashion. That was really meaningful to us. And so we read those and we worked on our points of unity. (A. Mangual Figueroa, personal communication, November 3, 2020).

The points of unity were finalized in 2003 and NYCoRE started having one to two retreats every year, where the mission statement and points of unity were used to help guide the direction of the group. In reflection, Edwin said that "those points of unity helped to galvanize, or to solidify our relationship and really create friendships and family" (E. Mayorga, personal communication, November 16, 2020).

The points of unity developed by NYCoRE were revised in 2014 and again in 2022 based on learning sessions and feedback from the broader community after we celebrated NYCoRE's twenty-year anniversary. While the topics are mostly the same as those found in our original points of unity, we have shifted the language and format. In particular, our new points of unity, which can be found on our website, are each written with what we value, what we see as the problem, and our vision for the future of liberatory education related to that topic. The original points of unity from 2003 were as follows:

1. Racism and economic inequality in the school system reflect and perpetuate the systematic and historical oppression of people of color and working-class communities. As educators in the New York City public school system, we have a responsibility to address and challenge these forms of oppression.
2. In order to combat economic, social, and political systems that actively silence women and people of

color, we are committed to maintaining majority women and people of color representation in our group.

3. We oppose the current policy of high stakes standardized testing because it reflects the standards and norms of dominant groups in society, it is an inaccurate and incomplete assessment of learning, and it stifles pedagogical innovation and active learning.

4. Punitive disciplinary measures such as "Zero Tolerance" further criminalize youth and are not an answer to crime and other social problems. We believe economic and social priorities should be toward education of young people and not incarceration.

5. We oppose the increased efforts of military recruitment in New York City public schools. These efforts unfairly target the recruitment of low-income communities and make false promises about educational and career opportunities. We believe that these efforts are an extension of an imperialistic strategy to maintain a powerful military force in order to protect and promote US world dominance.

6. New school funding policies must be adopted in order to ensure equitable resources for all. Current policies based upon property taxes discriminate against low-income communities and urban areas, which disproportionately affect people of color.

7. Schools must be safe spaces for females and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) individuals. Verbal and physical abuse targeting these groups is extremely prevalent in most schools, cannot be tolerated, and must be challenged by all faculty, staff, and administrators.

8. Schools should be places of questioning and critical thinking that encourage students to see themselves as active agents of change. The present educational system is derived from an assembly line model that stifles critical thinking by focusing on the regurgitation of facts and information.

9. Schools should provide a neighborhood space through which community voices are heard. Teachers are an integral part of this space and must be held accountable to the community by being involved in addressing community needs. (*Points of Unity from 2013*)

The decision to focus on multiple issues brought up (and still brings up) questions of NYCoRE's purpose and focus. Over the years, NYCoRE has provided a space for educators to act and reflect on different issues they care about in a variety of ways, including curriculum and resource development, political education, political statements and actions, campaigns, building community with other organizing groups, and providing spaces for members to facilitate and lean into their own interests.

As a city-wide organization composed primarily of educators, what it means to organize educators was a question that NYCoRE grappled with and continues to confront because there are many issues that educators are concerned with, so focusing on one campaign is challenging. In the beginning, NYCoRE focused on military recruitment, standardized testing, and policing/discipline in schools by expanding to a working group structure. Working groups have varied over the years based on teacher interests but generally engage in both critical professional development and (in many but not all working groups) solidarity work with other organizing groups. Outside of working groups, NYCoRE members have contributed to organizations and campaigns in NYC educational justice movements such as Teachers Unite, Occupy the DOE (which occurred in collaboration with Occupy Wall Street), and the NYC Black Lives Matter Week of Action in Schools.

In addition, while NYCoRE did not organize within the teacher's union directly, the group did amplify calls for New York City teachers and the teacher union to be more aligned to racial justice movements. In recent years, there has been a rise in progressive caucuses in teacher unions across the country including in places like New York City, Chicago, Boston, and Philadelphia. These progressive caucuses were preceded by teachers being members of activist groups like NYCoRE (Charney et al., 2021; Stark, 2019). Several core members of NYCoRE were integral to the founding of the Movement of Rank and File Educators (MORE) in 2012, which now operates as the social justice caucus within the United Federation of Teachers (Asselin, 2019). MORE came together through a series of coalition meetings in 2011. At the time, radical and progressive educator groups in New York City included the Grassroots Education Movement (GEM), NYCoRE, and the Teachers for a Just Contract (TCJ) and Independent Community of Educators (ICE) opposition caucuses within the UFT. Sally Lee and Natalie Havlin from Teachers Unite, as well as NYCoRE members such as Rosie Frascella and Sam Coleman, helped to host meetings with representatives from each of these groups and the coalition called themselves Voltron. Eventually, in 2012, members from Voltron decided to come together officially to form MORE.

NYCoRE Membership and Structure

As the core grew, the question of who was on core and what membership meant emerged. In the early years, members who joined and stayed became a part of core, which typically consisted of 5-15 people, but after the external listserv was created and the group expanded, NYCoRE was structured with a core group that made (and makes) most of the planning decisions, working groups focused on various issues of interest to the broader NYCoRE membership, and a base comprised of the email listserv that currently has about 1,500 people. NYCoRE does not work directly with particular schools but rather engages educators from across New York City. NYCoRE members are educators, broadly defined, including pk-12 teachers and other school workers from the New York City Department of Education,

college professors and staff, social workers, staff in education non-profits, and more.

One way NYCoRE has engaged members beyond the core was (and still is) through monthly membership meetings, which are typically attended by between fifteen and fifty people and are open to anyone who wants to attend. One hour of the two-hour meetings is dedicated to political education and discussion. In the past, during the second hour, educators would choose a working group they wanted to organize with or continue the political education conversations. Presently, the second hour is focused on small group activities and conversation. In addition to the membership meeting structure, NYCoRE has offered reading groups, events featuring education scholars/organizers/activists, an annual (and later, biannual) conference, and annual Inquiry to Action Groups (ItAGs). Initially called study groups, the ItAGs started in NYCoRE in early 2004 (Picower, 2015) and are also modeled after similar work being done in activist spaces like Teachers 4 Social Justice in San Francisco. ItAGs last between six and eight weeks, meeting once a week for two hours. Each ItAG focuses on a particular topic of study and culminates in some type of action. Some examples of past ItAG topics from 2007 to 2012 include: media justice, radical math, restorative justice, social justice curriculum, creating safer spaces for queer and undocumented youth, interrupting Islamophobia, nonviolence education, and developing stronger parent-teacher relationships (New York Collective of Radical Educators, 2017). ItAG actions vary and have included shifts in curriculum and pedagogy in the participants' classrooms, the creation of new working groups, the production of resources for teachers such as websites or curriculum guides, public performances, and more.

NYCoRE was and is not separate from the society in which the collective operates and can replicate oppressions within the collective. This has been a challenge the collective must continue to confront, particularly in terms of creating supportive and welcoming spaces for educators of color. From the beginning, the core has been majority people of color. In Sally's initial email exchange with Lisa about joining NYCoRE, she remembers Lisa explicitly stating that the group was recruiting new members who were teachers of color and did not want a flood of White teachers joining the collective. As the group grew beyond the core, however, maintaining a majority of people of color in open meeting spaces became a challenge. Edwin remembers the initial core in the first few years being diverse both in terms of race and gender but reflected on the challenges of remaining committed to NYCoRE's (then second) point of unity, saying,

> One is the challenge of who's in the teaching force in New York City and beyond in this country and how not diverse it is and the gender politics that I think are associated with that. The other part of it is the practices in which, in what ways were we reproducing Eurocentric, White-centric practices in terms of progressive or radical educational stances. We were all influenced by Marx and critical race theory but even with that, I look back and realize, in what ways, in our open meetings, who are we appealing to? Who are we recruiting? What were the dynamics in those spaces? If it wasn't specifically about an organizing topic, in what ways were people of color, women, LGBT queer folk, feeling marginalized? (E. Mayorga, personal communication, November 16, 2020).

As NYCoRE grew past the first several years of the organization, challenges regarding the racial makeup and dynamics of the group, organizing focus and style, and capacity would continue to arise. While we make sure to maintain a core leadership of majority people of color, monthly membership meetings, which were/are open to anyone who wishes to come, often were (and are) majority White, reflecting the makeup of the teaching force, which is still about 80% White (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Some individuals would come once or twice and then not return; we struggled (and still struggle) with ways to address microaggressions in those spaces beyond doing NYCoRE 101s with new members to make sure everyone was clear on NYCoRE's points of unity and entered meetings conscious of their positionality.

In response to these dynamics, individuals in NYCoRE created racial affinity groups in 2011: Educators of Color (EoC) and the Anti-Racist White Educators Group (AWE-G). The Educators of Color (EoC) affinity space first came out of community potlucks initiated by core members of color who wanted to build intentional community with other educators of color. AWE-G emerged from the "My Classroom is Anti-Racist" Inquiry to Action Group in conjunction with EoC (Strong et. al., 2017). Despite all of the ways we have strategized to address the reality that our events were (and are) mostly attended by White folks, we continue to be in reflection around the ways we could make our space more welcoming and supportive for educators of color.

NYCoRE's Role

NYCoRE's ultimate goal has shifted over time but has always included fighting for education for liberation. We wrote our current goal in 2020, which is "to have liberatory educational practices/pedagogy, classrooms, and public schools for our students, families, teachers, and communities as a microcosm and model for society at large and the society we'd like to create." Ultimately, the role of and need for NYCoRE (and arguably, teacher activist groups more broadly) has been and could be creating a political home for radical educators, providing critical professional development, and moving educators to action through shifts in classroom practices and/or participation in larger movements for educational justice. Each of the following sections consists of what we see as a conversation between the literature of radical pedagogy (much of which has been written by people involved with NYCoRE or similar collectives), NYCoRE's work now, and our theorizing about NYCoRE's future.

A Political Home

The Literature

Radical educators often feel isolated in schools due to their political beliefs and identities, particularly given claims from public officials and school leaders that teaching should not be political (Walker, 2018). While many activists and scholars have argued that all teaching is political and teachers have the political agency to participate in social transformation (Catone, 2017; Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994; Kohli et. al, 2019; Picower, 2015; Love, 2019), radical educators have been and still are told to remain "neutral" in schools (Walker, 2018) and educators who are seen as too political, particularly educators of color, are often pushed out (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Castaneda et. al., 2006; Retta, 2021).

Our Present

NYCoRE has created and continues to create a political home for radical educators, a topic that came up in multiple interviews with founding members, one of whom said that NYCoRE "created an amazing space for so many other like-minded educators. Oftentimes, you feel like you're isolated [in your school]" (C. Maestro, personal communication, December 2, 2020). While the second Iraq War and military recruitment were catalysts, it was the lack of a radical organizing space for educators that ultimately pushed many of the founders to come together and start NYCoRE.

Twenty years later, this is still the case. At an NYCoRE event in the spring of 2022, we asked those attending to share what they loved about NYCoRE; a common thread was how NYCoRE brings people together to learn, create change, and be in community. We attempt to build community at our events by prioritizing food (when in person), music, play through icebreakers and activities that incorporate movement, and conversation. During the pandemic, we still hosted virtual events that prioritized political study and/or wellness through activities like virtual dance parties. We returned to in person open member meetings and social events in the fall of 2022 after much reflection on how to best do so during an ongoing pandemic. The return to being in person, in community with others, has been joyful.

Theorizing Our Future

While we have struggled to define what it means to be a member of NYCoRE, a common reflection from those participating in NYCoRE is the feeling of community. Many radical educators feel politically isolated in their schools. Change cannot happen individually and, as Mariame Kaba (2021) says, hope is a discipline, something that must be cultivated to continue fighting for justice. Keith Catone (2017) also found that teacher activists are sustained by critical hope, which, alongside having a clear purpose, allows them to see themselves (and the students and caregivers they work with) as agents of change. We maintain our hope that change is possible and combat feelings of isolation that still exist for radical teachers in New York City schools by being in community with like-minded individuals. Our hope is that NYCoRE is a space to process, reflect on, and strategize ways to organize inside and out of schools through story-sharing, political education, and connecting educators to resources and actions (see more below). For many of us, NYCoRE's community helps us stay in the teaching profession and continue to push for justice in our school systems.

As we return to in-person events and meetings after having gone remote for over two years during the pandemic, we are thinking about what it means to build community in sustainable ways that support educators and school staff, especially educators of color, to stay in the teaching profession, make their classroom spaces more equitable, and organize for school and system-level change. We want to build spaces that allow people to connect and move at the speed of trust (Brown, 2017). We are learning from transformative justice movements about structures and protocols to address harm when it happens, which sometimes seems inevitable in a collective space where educators come together across many different identities. In particular, in core, we are learning to center relationships and restorative practices when we work through conflict as a collective. After learning from several internal conflicts, everyone on core is now asked to commit to restoring with one another if/when harm happens. We use a yellow wing protocol in our internal core meetings, in which a card with a yellow wing can be placed on the table or given to a person as a way to signify a conflict that needs to be addressed. When harm happens in larger, open member meetings, someone on core follows up with those involved to determine next steps. However, we recognize that the current protocols we use depend on relationships; we are still thinking about ways to address harm and microaggressions, beyond having community norms, in open member meetings where we do not know everyone in attendance.

Ultimately, we believe and hope that NYCoRE's community building practices can serve as a counter to what's happening in schools. We recognize that the urgency and time constraints in school buildings often make it easier for all people in schools (teachers, school staff, administrators, students, etc.) to lose sight of the power of and need for community. Radical educators need community so that they don't feel like the only ones doing "the work" in their school buildings. Building community and relationships with other radical educators is also a prerequisite for establishing vulnerability and trust, factors which are necessary for educators to engage in critical, transformative professional development that can shift what's happening in their classrooms and schools.

Critical Professional Development

The Literature

One of the roles of teacher activist groups has been to counter the traditional narratives about teaching and pedagogy perpetuated in teacher education programs and schools. These traditional narratives include Banking education (Freire, 1970), which treats students as empty receptacles to be filled by (teacher) knowledge; ideas of classroom management in which the ultimate objective is to control children through punitive disciplinary practices (Hirschfield, 2008; Gillen, 2014; Love, 2019; Terenzi,

2017); and teaching to the test, in which curriculum is standardized and not culturally responsive or sustaining (Alim & Paris, 2017; Ferri & Connor, 2005; Oakes et. al., 1997; Schneider, 2018). Many social justice educators do not thrive in traditional or anti-dialogical professional development spaces because these spaces often utilize a banking method (Freire, 1970), which, as is done with the banking method used in classrooms, treats teachers as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge rather than co-contributors who can participate in a dialogue about pedagogy and education.

In contrast, in critical professional development "the role of the teacher is active, empathetic, emotional, intellectual, and professional" (Picower, 2015, p. 3). In Kohli et al. (2015), the authors point to the ways their respective teacher activist groups practice Freire's (1970) notion of dialogical action by providing transformative professional development for educators. In many ways, critical professional development is grounded in political education and shares common traits. Critical professional development nourishes the critical bifocality (Weis & Fine, 2012) of teachers, which helps them see themselves as part of larger systems and question their positionality in schooling and educational policy. This kind of thinking positions teachers to not only change their pedagogy but also participate in activism outside of their classrooms, working toward systemic change.

Our Present

NYCoRE is a teacher activist group that provides dialogical practices to reposition teachers and educators as "transformative intellectuals, who have a political analysis and take action for social justice" (Kohli et. Al, 2015, p.22). As discussed above, NYCoRE provides critical professional development primarily through member meetings and Inquiry to Action Groups. As Picower (2015) states in her study, educators see NYCoRE, and specifically co-participants in ItAGs, as part of a professional network with like-minded people. All these political education events are meant to fill gaps that exist in traditional teacher education and professional development and support educator activism. For example, in 2023 our ItAGs covered topics such as school abolition, disability justice, queer identities in schools, implementing culturally responsive frameworks in secondary classrooms, and the transformative power of art.

As a core, we are continually thinking of how to engage educators in critical praxis, moving from political education to action, both in individual classrooms and at a school or city-wide level. All the critical professional development we provide focuses on systemic oppression and the importance of both individual and collective action. During the COVID-19 pandemic, NYCoRE continued meetings online that aimed to create a political home for educators (particularly amidst the stresses of multiple pandemics, remote teaching, and the return to in-person teaching) and provide critical professional development through book clubs, ItAGs, and reflections on NYCoRE's points of unity as we celebrated our twenty-year anniversary. In the fall of 2022, as we shifted back to in-person meetings, we re-evaluated (and are still re-evaluating) what's needed right now. As a core, we meet monthly and have summer retreats. Our goal is to be as responsive as possible to the political and socio-emotional needs of educators, which is also why we prioritize a makeup in core not only of majority people of color but also individuals who are classroom teachers.

What we're noticing now is that educators are burnt out and need community with like-minded educators. What we decide to center in our meetings is based on what's needed in the moment and also draws on our previous experiences. We're currently looking to past events, such as a summer wellness retreat for educators of color NYCoRE hosted in 2012, when thinking about how to create healing community spaces for educators that are grounded in the current sociopolitical context. In the spring of 2023, for example, we held a "love on teachers and school workers day." The event included food and conversation, arts and crafts, professional massages, and a guided meditation as a closing. We also created space during that meeting for participants to explicitly process the multiple stressors and challenges educators were facing during the school year; people had a lot to say. There was a sentiment of heaviness in the room, but after our closing meditation, everyone expressed appreciation for the space, with a few saying they didn't realize how much they needed it. While we still believe political education is a necessary and important part of our work, our goal in this moment was to honor the revolutionary work that NYCoRE teachers and school workers do every day for students and families in schools.

Theorizing Our Future

We provide critical professional development because we hope that educators will take what they learn back to their classrooms and schools, and/or connect with educational justice campaigns in the city, to create systemic change that pushes us closer to NYCoRE's ultimate goal: to have liberatory educational practices, classrooms, and public schools as a model for the society we'd like to create. By studying in community, educators deepen their understanding of educational injustices and systems of oppression, including their own unconscious biases. NYCoRE brings together educators from various contexts in New York City, which also helps deepen awareness of the way educational injustices unfold across the city and how they take shape in relationship to the local nuances of individual school contexts. Our hope is that, as a result of NYCoRE's critical professional development, educators become more equipped to alter curriculum, adjust classroom dynamics, and influence school policies and practices that will further educational equity and create educational spaces where all students can thrive (Love, 2019). Testimonios we have gathered from NYCoRE members as well as previous research on NYCoRE ItAGs (Kohli et. al, 2015; Picower, 2015) have shown this to be the case. NYCoRE's critical professional development not only creates space to share resources and ideas around various topics related to educational equity, but also engages educators in freedom dreaming (Kelley, 2002; Love, 2019; Spaulding et. al., 2021). Dreaming about educational spaces where everyone can thrive is in itself a form of resistance and ensures that our fight is not stifled by our current systems and what is but also considers what could be.

Connecting Educators to Action

The Literature

Most research on educator activism in recent decades has focused on stories of and lessons from individual educator activists (Catone, 2017; Picower, 2012) or activism within teacher unions (Asselin, 2019; Charney et al., 2021; Stark, 2019). This literature has helped to define teacher activists as "educators who work for social justice both inside and outside of their classrooms" (Picower, 2012, p. 562), thus distinguishing activists from social justice classroom educators who might enact a justice-centered pedagogy inside the classroom but do not challenge larger power structures. Picower (2012) identified three commitments that represent how teachers engage in activism. The first is having "a vision of a socially just world and work[ing] to reconcile this vision with the realities of inequality that they s[ee] in the world around them" (564). The second is moving toward liberation inside of the classroom through their classroom practices and curriculum. The final commitment is standing up to oppression and pushing for systemic change using "two main approaches to make education equitable in the face of oppressive forces: (1) working collectively in groups and (2) getting teachers' voices into the policy arena" (569). Valdez et al. (2018) define educator activism as a "struggle for" (p. 246) in order to contextualize the activism within a broader history and to emphasize "educator activism as the struggle for the inalienable right of all people to human be—to be liberated from any project of violence" (p. 247). Essentially, educator activists cannot be isolated in their classrooms; they must work with other educators, as well as students and parents, to create systemic change.

Our Present

In 2021-2022, we celebrated NYCoRE's twenty-year anniversary. As part of that celebration, we hosted monthly learning sessions centered around our points of unity, in which we invited people doing organizing work related to those points of unity to speak on panels about the organizing that is both happening and needed in New York City schools. Videos of these sessions can be found on our Facebook page. The education justice landscape has changed in the last twenty years in New York City and there are many groups doing amazing organizing work to create change: the Movement of Rank and File Educators (MORE) within the United Federation of Teachers, Teachers Unite (and the broader Dignity in Schools Campaign), the Alliance for Quality Education, the Coalition for Educational Justice, Teens Take Charge, Integrate NYC, the Coalition to End Mayoral Control, the Black Lives Matter Week of Action in Schools, the New York State Youth Leadership Council, and so many others. Our role and place in the New York City education landscape compared to twenty years ago is both the same, in terms of pulling in educators and connecting them to action, and also different. For example, MORE now exists as a space for unionized teachers who are trying to shift power in the UFT. Teachers Unite is a member of the Dignity in Schools Campaign, working to challenge "the systemic problem of pushout in our nation's schools" and "dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline" through changes in policy, including "alternatives to a culture of zero-tolerance, punishment, criminalization and the dismantling of public schools" (Dignity in Schools, n.d.). The Alliance for Quality Education is advocating for equity in school funding, universal childcare, and improving school climate by dismantling the school to prison pipeline and investing in culturally sustaining education (Alliance for Quality Education, 2018). The Coalition to End Mayoral Control is fighting to end mayoral control in New York City and establish "a fully democratic, Human Rights based governance system" (The NYC Coalition to Finally End Mayoral Control 2022, 2022). Instead of always starting our own campaigns, we are looking to support campaigns like those described above. Over the years, many educators have told us that NYCoRE was their first connection to groups like those described above. In addition to continuing to foster these connections, we are also thinking more about what it means to work in solidarity and build coalitions with partners in the fight for educational justice, particularly given our limited capacity.

Beyond supporting and working in solidarity with other organizations fighting for educational justice, we also aim to be responsive to the needs of educators, students, and families and uplift those needs. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, we wrote a position statement listing education and community demands as well as long-term goals that uplifted some of the campaigns we mentioned earlier as well as others (New York Collective of Radical Educators, 2020). Currently, New York state is re-evaluating its high school graduation requirements. New York is one of a few states that still requires multiple subject tests in order to graduate from high school (FairTest, 2022). In NYCoRE, we have been fighting against the punitive use of standardized tests in schools since early in our history and are continuing this fight now with a petition that calls for an end to the New York Regents exams and a move toward "holistic assessments like portfolio-based assessments that are created by students, teachers, and parents" (New York Collective of Radical Educators, 2023).

Theorizing Our Future

NYCoRE engages educators in action on the level of classrooms, schools, and systems (particularly the New York City Department of Education) in various ways. Sometimes we wonder whether NYCoRE should be engaging in our own campaign, which is a conversation that many iterations of NYCoRE core have had, but then we look at the organizing already taking place around the city and realize that our members just need places to plug in, depending on what they are most passionate about. We are reminded of the hydra metaphor, "that the attack on public education works like a many-headed monster known as the hydra" (Picower & Mayorga, 2015, p.3). We know that when one head is being addressed, other heads are continuing the hydra's efforts, and so we continue to educate on the hydra body, neoliberalism and racism, so that educators may then come to understand how all of the heads work together as an interconnected web. In fact, our first point of unity illustrates this belief. The most recent iteration of our first point of unity is as follows:

> We believe in education that centers collective liberation and self-actualization for everyone. Currently, racism,

> especially anti-Black racism, neoliberalism, and racial capitalism are driving forces in educational systems, policies, and practices. These forces perpetuate the systematic and historical oppression of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) and other marginalized folx; they work in concert with all forms of oppression to perpetuate a school system that is antithetical to collective liberation. As educators, we have a responsibility to address systems of oppression and their manifestations as they impact our students, our profession, and public education as a whole.

It is our belief that by expanding collaborative struggles while maintaining a clear and compelling political analysis, the hydra will eventually be slayed. Our points of unity aim to illustrate what we believe to be our collective struggles when it comes to fighting for an education that centers collective liberation and self-actualization for everyone.

We also recognize that successful coalitions require relationships and commitment; we are currently thinking about which organizations we want to be in direct partnership with and what our capacity is to build strong coalitional relationships. We have asked and continue to ask ourselves: "How might NYCoRE and others who are part of the educational justice movement develop a shared political analysis to defeat the Hydra of racialized neoliberal education reform?" (Picower & Mayorga, 2015, p.13) We believe that educators should be organizing with students and their caregivers and that this work can happen on the school level. Beyond just providing a community within NYCoRE, we're also thinking about how NYCoRE can better support educators in returning to their school buildings and working with colleagues to create change on a school-wide level. We understand that the work of addressing the many inequities in our public education system requires community and that many groups are needed to address the various issues. NYCoRE can support by connecting people to those fights and providing the political education required to understand the ways in which all these inequities are connected.

Conclusion

Broadly, the role of NYCoRE has been and continues to be supporting radical teachers inside and outside of the classroom. Inside the classroom, NYCoRE has supported educators through critical professional development that pushes educators to examine and develop their curriculum through a social justice lens. Outside of the classroom, NYCoRE has contributed to educational justice movements in New York City through political education and by building bridges between educator activists/organizers and other organizations working for educational justice.

Beyond New York City, NYCoRE is certainly not the only collective of its kind. In fact, NYCoRE initially took inspiration from similar groups in San Francisco (Teachers 4 Social Justice – T4SJ) and Chicago (Teachers for Social Justice - TSJ). NYCoRE is part of a national network called Teacher Activists Groups, in addition to being connected to national organizations like the Education for Liberation Network (Teacher Activist Groups, n.d.). NYCoRE members have also supported the founding of similar groups in Boston and Philadelphia (K. Catone, personal communication, November 11, 2020). As Bree shared,

> NYCoRE was and is a model of what teacher activism can look like, that was grassroots and created by educators. At the time, we were, as far as I know, one of three groups nationally that was doing this work. It was us, T4SJ in San Francisco, and TSJ in Chicago. I think in a lot of ways it created a model for other teachers in other cities to think about what it could look like for teachers who care about issues of social justice to come together collectively. (B. Picower, personal communication, November 25, 2020).

In addition to being spaces for educator activists to share ideas and build movements, these teacher activist groups demonstrate the power and possibility of educator activism and organizing to create change in school systems. While this power has yet to be fully realized, recent shifts toward social justice unionism within the Red for Ed movement[2] have shown what can be accomplished when educators work with communities to fight for educational justice. Our hope is that this article can contribute to a broader conversation about the role of teacher activist groups in progressive movements for educational justice -- creating political homes, providing critical professional development, and connecting educators to action.

Notes

1. We recognize conversations about the distinction between activism and organizing here. We have chosen to use activism in order to build on previous documentation of NYCoRE's work that has used the term activism, particularly when focusing on individual educators within NYCoRE. However, we believe that some of what NYCoRE does, particularly in terms of political education and connecting educators to larger movements for change, is also organizing work.
2. The Red for Ed movement is typically used to refer to the wave of teacher strikes that took place in 2018 and 2019. Some, although not all, of those strikes became known for their demands that included not only increases in teacher pay and benefits but also incorporated issues affecting marginalized students and families. For more information, see *Teacher Unions and Social Justice: Organizing for the Schools and Communities Our Students Deserve*, published by Rethinking Schools.

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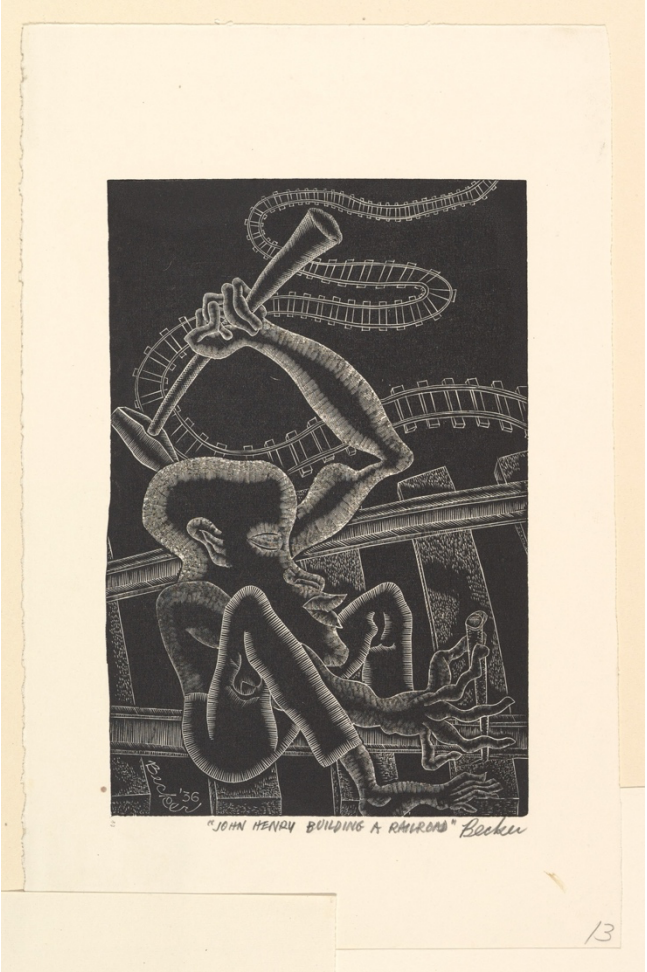
RADICAL TEACHER

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

Developing Classroom Community Agreements to Cultivate a Critically Compassionate Learning Community[1]

by Jesica Siham Fernández



JOHN HENRY BUILDING A RAILROAD FRED BECKER AMERICAN PUBLISHED BY WPA 1936. HARRIS BRISBANE DICK FUND, 1940. MET ONLINE.

The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy. … Urging all of us to open our minds and hearts so that we can know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so that we can think and rethink, so that we can create new visions. I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions… It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom.

- bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice Freedom*

Introduction

In this essay, I reflect on the development of *classroom community agreements*, and how these align with my radical teaching practice and pedagogy. I describe the classroom community agreements activity I engage with my students as a humble example of the radical possibilities of learning through critical thinking, reflexivity, and dialogues grounded in collaboration and community care. When we engage a decolonial feminist approach to re-imagine learning in community, or in relation to one another, we create spaces that are critical, compassionate and community oriented. Thus, I illustrate the process of developing and implementing classroom community agreements with students to demonstrate how safe and brave spaces can coexist to then create what I define as *critically compassionate learning communities*. I purport that what is *radical* about the classroom community agreements activity is that this exercise, which I facilitate on the first and second days of classes, strives to foster collaboration, community care, and mutual learning. Radical, according to Angela Davis (1984), is about "grasping things at the root" (p. 14). In my classes this means building roots to create classroom spaces that are anti-oppressive, humanizing, and flourishing toward relational modes of learning.

As an educator, I facilitate opportunities for students to collaborate in creating our classroom so that it can be and become a critically compassionate learning community. I encourage and guide students to image what affirming or humanizing learning environments can and must be. A critically compassionate learning community is a humanizing and caring space where safety and bravery, along with criticality and compassion, can coexist. Through the classroom community agreements activity I strive to cultivate with my students a learning space that reflects and represents inclusive values and practices aligned with community care. The agreements flow organically, relationally, and experientially from and through our engagement in critical thinking, reflexivity, and dialogues. The agreements are also informed by the experiences or moments where we have felt most encouraged and supported in our learning. That is, spaces where we recognize each other, the complexities of our personhood, positionalities, identities, and process of unlearning/relearning in ways that are aligned with anti-racism and anti-oppressive, decolonial feminisms, and collective radical praxes.

The purpose of the agreements is to foster experiential learning opportunities where we can cultivate supportive student-to-student and student-to-teacher relationships or interactions where we can reflect, dialogue, and connect. The agreements activity as invitation to educators—a gentle "call in" to practice collectively envisioning the classroom with our students. How I engage students to imagine what they desire classroom interactions to be is fundamental to building a critically compassionate learning community in the university. The process, however, must begin with a shared understanding of our intentions and commitments to mutual learning.

In this essay I describe *why* classroom community agreements are necessary, *how* these were developed, and *what* were some outcomes from our process and practice of upholding the agreements. In particular, I offer examples of how the agreements helped students work through moments of "productive tension" that led to critical thinking and humanizing recognitions of diverse lived experiences or points of view. First, I briefly outline some of the activities we engage on the first and second days of class to develop the agreements. Then, I describe our process of naming, defining, and implementing these agreements, followed by the practice of applying or sustaining these in moments of tension. Conflict in the classroom is understood as valuable, productive, and even a necessary form of tension that can help students broaden and deepen their critical reflexivity and understanding of a topic, as well as develop humility and appreciation for a view or perspective different from their own. I frame as "productive tension" any conflict that is often necessary for critical thinking and collaboration. The agreements, unlike typical "rules" or "standards" for classroom dialogue that often re-inscribe power dynamics, are arrived at collectively and modified as a class over the course of our time together. Finally, I close with reflections on the outcomes of developing and practicing our classroom community agreements for supporting students' critically thinking about social issues.

Student Reflections on Safe and Brave Spaces

Our classroom community agreements co-development process begins early in the quarter. We start by deconstructing what a college classroom is or feels like for some students, and who or what a professor looks like (Fernández, 2023) via critically reflexive dialogues that I facilitate. Critically reflexive dialogues are characterized by a process and practice of introspection, specifically being or becoming aware of one's thoughts, feelings, and emotions as these surface via reflections and dialogues that involve actively listening to others, whilst speaking from one's own subjective experiences (Fernández & Magaña Gamero, 2018; Silva, Fernández, & Nguyen, 2022). I guide students through variations of the following questions: *If you are comfortable participating, I invite you to close your eyes. Now, imagine a classroom or physical space that has felt affirming and humanizing for you. What does this space look like? What practices have led you to experience challenges and/or belonging or affirmation in that space, or in the classroom?* I invite students to imagine, visualize, or draw from their memories or lived experiences an image or scenario of an affirming space or an inclusive classroom experience, and to describe how it felt. This initial activity

helps us tune into our lived experiences as valuable sources of knowledge that can support mutual learning and a sense of community. Once students engage in this activity, specifically their visualizations of an inclusive or humanizing classroom, I assign students writing prompts.

Before the second day of class, students are encouraged to come prepared to class with a written reflection in response to the assigned readings: Arao and Clemens (2013) *From safe spaces to brave spaces*, and Leonardo and Porter (201) *Pedagogy of fear: Toward a Fanonian theory of 'safety' in race dialogue*. The critically reflexive dialogues we engage are in and of themselves an exercise for how classroom conversations, and even conflict, will be facilitated, engaged, or resolved. The written reflections help us generate our agreements as we proceed to discuss these in relation to our experiential knowledge of how classroom spaces have felt, what students hope to experience, and how we can create a critically compassionate learning community that is supportive of diverse lived experiences and worldviews. As a class, for example, students collectively and relationally share what they learned or engaged in the readings and written reflections. Students discuss in small and large group discussion what surfaced for them and why, and how what they imagined was reflected or not in the readings, their past and present learning experiences. To further our dialogues, I pose variations of the following questions as part of our class discussion: *What is a safe space? What is a brave space? What do you envision a critically compassionate learning community to be and feel like?*

In sharing with each other what we mean by safe, brave, and critical spaces, we co-develop classroom community agreements that are grounded in a commitment to mutual critical learning toward fostering what I describe as a critically compassionate learning community. Thus, students will often offer compelling reflections on what our agreements could be and why these are important. I offer a few quotes from students' writings:

> It is important to be more mindful of all groups and foster deeper conversations that allow all involved to growth. I want to try to incorporate this into my life by striving toward creating spaces that can be brave and safe, or supportive of our growth and care for each other.
>
> – White, cisgender woman, first year student

> I recently heard from a fellow student that they don't want everyone to feel comfortable or have a guarantee of comfort. And I grappled with this. … The concept of "challenge by choice" is an attempt to address this, yet I wonder if the depths of how the unfamiliar defines a brave space rather than just the choice to challenge was considered. The problem may not be that people do not wish to engage, that being brave is not a matter of speaking, but rather the act of challenging the unfamiliar.
>
> – Asian American, cisgender man, first year student

> We are all our own person, coming from our own different backgrounds, but that does not mean that we should treat others differently. As more and more of us begin to learn how to have conversations on difficult topics and re-connect, it is my hope that we can foster brave spaces that are also safe so that we can do better for ourselves and by others. I'm inspired to reflect on my own humanity, and identities to help me create spaces that are inclusive of all people.
>
> – Latinx, cisgender woman, third year student

> The idea of a brave space has resonated with me that I have adapted it into many other aspects of my life. It has made me reflect on every safe space that I am a part of and led me to question whether or not these spaces are encouraging critical consciousness.
>
> – White, cisgender woman, first year student

> Learning perspectives that I have likely not encountered previously will challenge me. However it is important to me that I am open to learning from these experiences as this will lead me to a path of personal growth and learning. I'm willing to see things in a new way.
>
> – White, cisgender man, fourth year student

We reflect, discuss, and describe qualities of safe, brave, and critical spaces to articulate how we wish to experience the classroom environment in ways that can support mutual critical learning.

Through critically reflexive dialogues students begin to connect what they imagined or visualized as inclusive classrooms with what they wrote in relation to the assigned articles, then to the classroom community agreements we are co-developing. Together, students and I are encouraged to reflect on how we felt about that which we imagined or envisioned, and what practices, actions, dynamics, or characteristics of a classroom space could lead students to feel included, affirmed, and supported in their learning. Through small and large group discussions students share their thoughts, and we begin to generate a list of reflections that serve as the foundation to guide us into an understanding of what could support our learning. All students have an opportunity to contribute to creating our classroom community agreements.

Developing Our Classroom Community Agreements

Our conversations on safe, brave, and critically compassionate classrooms draw from writings by Arao and Clemens (2013), who reference the work of Holley and Steiner (2005) on safe and brave spaces. Although safe spaces purport the illusion [purport to offer security . . .? give the illusion of security …?] of security or absence of harm, brave spaces invite a degree of audacity to embrace difference, uncertainty, and conflict, which is necessary for critical consciousness development. Thus, a safe space is "an environment in which students are willing and able to

participate and honestly struggle with challenging issues" (p. 49). A brave space, on the other hand, invites "courageous conversations about race" (Singleton & Linton, 2005; Sparks, 2002), or other difficult topics that often require the courage to challenge assumptions or hegemonic discourses.

As we reflect and dialogue, we develop an understanding of the differences between safe and brave spaces. Students' comments are written on the whiteboard for all to respond to, expand upon, and/or challenge. Some of the comments students have offered include the following:

1. Respect yourself & this focus group/interview space
2. Don't judge others
3. Listen with an open mind (e.g., show you care and have compassion for others)
4. Speak using "I" statements (e.g., I feel that..., I don't like it when...)
5. Don't share other people's stories
6. Be present by actively listening to others (e.g., make sure your phones are on silent)
7. Make space for others to participate
8. One mic - one person talks at a time
9. Challenge by choice (e.g., you can participate and share to the extent that you're comfortable)
10. Confidentiality & privacy (e.g., what is shared here, stay here)

FIGURE 1. CLASSROOM COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS, FALL 2015

> Different students, based on their positionalities and lived experiences, will experience safe and brave spaces differently at varied moments. Student experiences in such spaces are constantly changing.
>
> – South Asian American, cisgender woman, second year student

> Safety might not be best for difficult topics. We need to be open to discomfort to make progress.
>
> – White, cisgender woman, third year student-athlete

> Brave spaces call for courage and a way to help all people interact with each other authentically when engaging in difficult conversations.
>
> – Latinx, cisgender man, second year student

> In order to confront issues of social injustice we must recognize how power and privilege influence race relations in the U.S. – and how, as the article highlights: *this country is never safe for people of color*.
>
> – African American, cisgender man, fourth year student-athlete

The distinctions made between safe and brave spaces, and the importance of fostering a hybrid of qualities in both for cultivating critical spaces for dialogue, reflection, and growth, can help us proceed onto describing the classroom environment that *we*, as a class, want to experience. Our critically reflexive dialogues focus on classroom environments we have experienced as caring or nourishing of our learning. In this way, we envision what our co-learning experiences could be.

I have facilitated and led several activities toward the development of inclusive spaces for learning and solidarity. Yet, as an educator I am most intentional of ensuring that each class has an opportunity, and an experience, to co-create their unique set of agreements as a class, whilst recognizing that these may change over time. Featured in Figure 1, for example, are classroom community agreements created in my first quarter at Claradise University[2] in fall 2015.

Every quarter our agreements evolve, and often have expanded to include community care. Figure 2 shows another iteration of changes to our agreements to meet students' needs.

The agreements, along with their meaning, intention, and application have varied from class to class. Yet what remains consistent is that the agreements are created with a genuine sense of care that animates relational learning via criticality and compassion. Together, we develop classroom community agreements that help foster our process of unlearning/relearning and relationality.

1. Respect yourself & our learning community
2. Agree to disagree
3. Come with an open mind – and heart
4. Step up & Step back
5. Suspend judgements and assumptions
6. Engage in Critical Reflexivity
7. Challenge by choice

FIGURE 2. CLASSROOM COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS, FALL 2021

Engaging Our Community Agreements in Moments of Tension

Over the years that I have facilitated the development of classroom community agreements I have observed recurring themes in what we produce. Through critically reflexive dialogues, journaling, and small and large group discussions, variations of classroom community agreements are developed that help cultivate critically compassionate learning communities. One of the most immediate student impulses when creating our agreements is to name common ground rules, like respect and agree to disagree. When asked to think further about what these rules or expectations mean, students often come to a consensus that these are premised on a structure to maintain comfort or privilege tied to power at the expense of decolonial critical inquiry and collaboration. Most conceptualizations of respect are aligned with civility; yet, in relation to our agreements students view respect as more expansive. Respect as civility is noted as important, yet too limiting of a conceptualization in relation to caring and honoring the self, others, and our humanity. Thus, the addition of respect yourself and our learning community helps students recognize that while we are individuals, we are also part of a collective that is or must be critical *and* compassionate to facilitate meaningful learning in community.

Community Agreements

As an anti-oppressive decolonial feminist educator, it is important for me that we establish a set of "ground rules" or what I prefer to call "Community Agreements" for how we will engage with one another in reviewing, learning and discussing the course content. Below is a list of Community Agreements for our online class.

- **Respect yourself & our learning community** (respect your process and the subjectivities of others)
- **Suspend judgments & assumption**s (try to withhold judgments or biases about others and their opinions, be mindful of how you ask, or word, comments and questions)
- **Listen with compassion** (hear people out, don't judge or assume ignorant comments are made out of malice or hate, but rather see them as learning opportunities for all involved)
- **Engage with an open mind and heart** (all people have different lived experiences, however we are all deserving of respect and dignity, therefore please approach all discussions and on-line learning engagements with critical compassion -- call people "in" to a conversation)
- **Reflexivity** (engage in conscious self-awareness, be mindful about your emotions and though process as you are feeling and experiencing them -- discern the source of your thought and subjective experience)
- **Perspective taking** (try to consider where the other person might be coming from, walking in another person's shoes)
- **Step up & step back** (facilitate opportunities for others who have not spoken up to also join in the conversation, this means you stepping back so others can step forward, step up)
- **Challenge ideas -- not people**
- **Challenge by choice** (you have a right to participate to the extend that you want and are comfortable, you can challenge your discomfort to the degree that you are willing -- however, given the on-line structure of this course your on-line/virtual participation is imperative!)
- **Confidentiality/Privacy** (strive to maintain the stories and experiences shared by others to yourself or within our learning community, online learning environment; stories shared that compromise your safety/health and that of other student(s) will have to be addressed accordingly through OSL)

FIGURE 3. CLASSROOM COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS, SPRING 2022

Because most students strive to participate and contribute to learning with integrity and dignity, they are often very genuine about asking for help or recognizing that they may struggle with certain topics yet are open to being brave or courageous in their sharing. One student, for example, stated that "taking responsibility for my own learning process requires taking a risk and even being uncomfortable or brave." Similarly, another student noted that "respect is premised on civility"—and "if disagreements surface, maintaining respect can be challenging, but we must respect each other so we can learn." Rather than proposing an agreement of respect that is decontextualized or implicit of accountability, students often reframed the agreement to affirm their commitment to mutual learning via perspective taking, as Figure 3 illustrates.

When striving to foster a critical consciousness within a critically compassionate learning community, an agreement of agree to disagree, which can be associated with conflict, can also be recognized as valuable, productive, or even necessary because it can lead to critically thinking and engagement in actions aligned with social change and transformative justice.

The conflict, or "productive tensions," that may surface with a difficult topic, must not be defused, however. Instead, it can be directed or guided to help students better understand an issue, and elucidate different viewpoints among us. In fact, topics considered through various viewpoints can support the process of mutual learning through iterative cycles of reflection and dialogue, thus leading to deeper critical thinking. A student described this process of disagreement as a form of "necessary discomfort," sharing that "by troubling, deconstructing and rethinking issues from a critical, intersectional and sociopolitical standpoint we can reach a deeper analysis that sees issues from an intersectional lens." Rather than being avoided, disagreements that are discomforting can often lead to developing a critical consciousness, which is imperative of collaboration and solidarity as well. If troubling discourses went unchallenged, as is often the case in safe spaces, the critical learning that is characteristic of brave and critically compassionate spaces would not be possible.

In my classes it is common for some students to embrace disagreement because they see experiences as valuable opportunities for gaining new or nuanced insights. To offer an example of "productive tension" that served as an important classroom moment for critical learning, I offer a fieldnote of a dialogue between two students in my *Introduction to Latinx Studies* course in spring of 2022. The fieldnote highlights *how* the agreements are enacted by students, and *why* developing these with students is a valuable strategy to support critical consciousness.

It was the beginning of the fall quarter, and an uncertain return to teaching in person following almost two years teaching remotely or in a hybrid modality given the context of the pandemic. Students were thrilled to return to the classroom and engage in meaningful learning, dialogues, and community building with their peers. Fall quarter also coincided with Latinx heritage month, and there were several activities and events to be planned for the month of September and part of October. Among one of these [Among these? One of these?] was the 7th Latin American Speaker Series, which I was organizing as a campus wide event. As I announced the details and themes of the event, and connected it to our recent discussion on the role of U.S. foreign economic policies and military or political interventions in Latin America, one student, Carlos,[3] remarked that Latin American immigrants who flee their countries of origin do so in pursuit of human rights and freedoms, and he offered his experience on the violence that ensued in Guatemala in the 1980s. he wanted to underscore that while the U.S. is and can be an oppressive country, and even unwelcoming of immigrants, some people seek refuge and asylum in the U.S. because their home country has been pillaged by violence and a total violation of human rights often by people in positions of leadership or power who are not "American," but rather from their home country. Another student, Leo, a second generation Mexican American, who identified as Chicanx, expressed disagreement with the students, noting and citing a passage from Gonzalez's reading: "the U.S. economic and political domination over Latin America has always been –and continues to be—the underlying reason for the massive Latino presence here. Quite simply, our vast Latino population is the unintended harvest of the U.S. empire (xvii)." With this remark the student wanted to underscore that while these human rights violations in Latin American are taking place, these are a direct result from U.S. involvement in Latin American politics – from military training and funding to neoliberal economic policies that widen the inequities between the rich and poor. The student offered examples from Mexico and El Salvador. Both of these students were anchoring their thoughts in their lived experiences and understandings of themselves as recent migrants (Guatemalan student), or as children of immigrants with ties to Latin America (Chicanx student). There seemed to be discomfort in both of them sharing their differing viewpoints as there was some hesitation or pausing as they spoke, perhaps signaling their mindfulness to what they would say, and how they would say it. Students were seated across the classroom from each other, and as they responded to one another they turned around to see themselves as if they were conversing. The pausing in between their dialogue, the ways in which they turned their bodies to face each other, and the ease and slowness in the tone of their voice signaled for me that perhaps they were engaging in critical reflexivity and perspective taking. Students had a choice to respond or remain silent, yet our community agreement of challenge by choice allowed them to share, and subsequently listen to one another in what I perceived as a sense of openness. I observed the dialogue unfold, watching and listening as the students held their own. I also noticed how some of the other students in the class wrote notes, while others fixed their gaze to the ceiling or the students speaking thereby engaging in a form of witnessing. I then invited us as a class to introspectively engage with their peers' dialogue, and how what was shared could offer us a nuanced perspective of their points of view.

Disagreements, differing viewpoints, and even challenging comments, were most often noted by students as invitations to "see from another side," and to listen with compassion, specifically to hold back or pause before immediately responding. In that moment of pause students could engage in critical reflexivity that is introspective thinking or processing what information to share, and how it will be shared. Some students, as described, even took notes before speaking. As a class we tried to suspend any judgments or assumptions by allowing for moments of pause, silence, and note-taking or free-writing. Some of the class discussions that led to a degree of "productive tension" were not viewed negatively by students, but rather as an "aha" moment. These were important and meaningful learning opportunities that, as students noted in their end of quarter reflection paper, were necessary for them to be/become "woke." Students described these moments as valuable in helping them feel, reflect, and process their thoughts before considering other agreements such as stepping in or stepping back, or challenge by choice, and opening their hearts and minds as form of respecting themselves, their peers, and our classroom space.

The fieldnote example that I provided draws from an interaction in my *Introduction to Latinx Studies* course, which is an undergraduate course that fulfills the diversity requirement that all students are expected to take in order to graduate. As a result it is a highly sought out course that often brings non-social sciences majors from Engineering, Computer Science, and Math together with students majoring in the humanities or social sciences. Key readings and multimodal content are assigned ranging from articles to book chapters, blogs, poetry, and digital media, such as podcasts and documentaries. Two guiding texts that inform the content and structure of the course are Lisa Garcia Bedolla's *Latino Politics* (2014) and Juan Gonzalez's *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America* (2011). We engage, review, reflect, and discuss a variety of topics, starting with a sociohistorical comparative analysis of U.S. history, specifically settler colonialism, imperialism, structural violence, and the lived experiences of indigenous, mestizo, and Afro-mestizo/Afro-Latinx communities in the Americas. The course follows a quarter system which consists of ten weeks. Each week is aligned with a particular set of interconnected topics, such as citizenship at the intersections of race and gender, migrant labor, immigration, education, civil rights movements, activism and contemporary Latinx struggles, among these economic equity, racial justice, health and intergenerational wellbeing.

Immigration is a topic that often raises or surfaces among students the most discomfort or "productive tension." Because of the complexities of understanding the U.S. immigration system, and the polarization of immigration debates and potential solutions that circulate public discourse, especially in the media, students often engaged the topic with a degree of hesitation and even anxiety. Immigration is a sensitive and dividing topic to discuss because it inevitably surfaces familial histories and lived experiences, whilst troubling U.S. narratives associated with the American Dream, meritocracy, and the pursuit of freedom. However, as most students from communities of color will express, actualizing the American Dream is an illusion for many, and one that immigrant communities and Latinx in particular may often live in struggle to achieve.

The classroom community agreements nevertheless help us anchor in a mutual understanding and shared value that while we may have our unique immigrant experiences, or story, and personal or political point of view, the histories of settler colonialism, imperialism, and racialization that shaped U.S. immigration patterns continue to inform present day conditions. Although agreeing to disagree can leave problematic oppressive beliefs or discourses unquestioned or intact, it can also help students understand that their views will be heard and respectfully challenged. Offering a more unique perspective on this agreement, a student shared that agreeing to disagree "can foreclose opportunities for developing a consciousness about injustice and its impact on communities, so rather than agreeing to disagree we must agree that there is no place for injustice, and we all deserve to be respected and treated with dignity." Variations of this comment were often stated and expressed by students of color and/or of marginalized genders who felt misrepresented or othered on campus.

To illustrate another moment of "productive tension" that ultimately helped students engage in critical thinking and solidarity around a local social issue in San José, I offer a reflection of a recent conversation that unfolded among three students who were dialoguing [about?] whether the removal of historic Chicanx murals was warranted:

> Shortly after sharing a video of news media coverage on the historic *Mural de la Raza* being painted over in the East Side, Sonia, one of the few white ethnic studies majors and a local of San Jose [first sentence in paragraph uses San José] raised in proximity to where the mural was removed, voiced her anger and frustration with gentrification that was displacing and impacting the Chicanx and Latinx communities. Andy, who seemed less disturbed by the erasure of the mural compared to Sonia, and several other students, among them Ana from Boyle Heights (Los Angeles), stated that if the property was purchased the owner had a right to do with the building as they wished. Ana immediately spoke up to underscore how such events of sociocultural and historic erasure would not happen in wealthier neighborhoods where communities are often asked and consulted rather than being ignored and silenced. Sonia announced that while the mural had been erased there were several others in the area, and that local communities and grassroots organizations were mobilizing themselves to be a part of the decision making process with what happens to community art. Ana restated Sonia's point: "Chicanx art is community art, it is art for us and by us." Andy's face flushed, seeming a bit embarrassed; he suggested that perhaps the removal of a mural could lead to new ones being made. Ana attempted to interrupt Andy; however Sonia intervened gently waving her hand to then express "let him finish." There was a very brief moment of silence which I held as important for us to review some of what was just expressed. Andy spoke slowly and thoughtfully about what he intended to convey, which I then paraphrased. I offered an interpretation of Andy's comment that underscored that while an important mural was erased, a new one could be made that could bring people together, the newcomers and the more established families. Sonia, who had been jotting some notes in her journal looked up, nodding in approval of what was paraphrased and shared that the goal was to create "community art, with the impacted communities having a seat at the table." In this way, she was affirming the interpretation I offered, to which Andy replied with a "For sure, I understand now." Both Andy and Sonia seemed to have arrived at a common understanding: people should come together to create community art for and by the community. There was a softness in Sonia's comment, and this seemed to create more space for Ana to follow up and share that "We want to be seen and heard." Andy nodding in agreement, taking a more related embodied posture in his seat, while both Sonia and Ana looked at each other signaling with their looks and gestures a validation noted through a reciprocal smile.

The agreements help students pause, reflect, and discern *what* they want to share and *how* to share. Specifically, they facilitate students' awareness of their needs and capacities as listeners, speakers, and learners. Reflexivity as mindfulness was noted in the pauses, affirmations, gestures, and journaling some students engaged in to help them process what was being shared. In their end-of-quarter reflection paper some students noted these as important practices that helped them learn with an openness of heart and mind. For example, in her reflection paper Sonia explained that reflexivity is about "having the curiosity to learn with others through wonder." Similarly, Andy expressed that reflexivity is "listening without judgement, being active and present with others." Consistent with their remarks, other students defined critical reflexivity as "being present" and "here and now." Although varied and unique interpretations of critical reflexivity were offered by students, the process of introspection, active listening, and mindfulness were foundational to learning in accordance with our community agreements.

Our classroom community agreements serve our vision of a humanizing decolonial feminist education. Thus, when there is conflict, or one or more of the agreements has been misunderstood or overlooked, we approach this through a process that involves sharing, reflecting, and discussing *why* and *how* one or more agreements may not be supporting our learning. We also identify the harm and wounding that was done, along with the impact and its implications on the person or people so that reparation and healing can begin. Reparation is understood as the restoration of a caring,

respectful, and collaborative relationship. Naming any form of transgression or harm is an important first step toward ensuring accountability, and that proper actions will follow, such as an apology that is intentional and active. The response must involve a sincere acknowledgement of the problem, and there must be accountability and relational responsibility to ensure a healthy and healing relationship is possible. The agreements are therefore always framed as a work in progress. We agree to revisit our agreements and revise them at any point in the quarter. Together we assess and adjust these as needed. In particular, we amend our agreements when one or some of these are inadequate to our learning process, and when they limit our opportunities for personal and relational development, critical consciousness, and collaboration as a critically compassionate learning community.

Concluding Reflections on Critically Compassionate Learning

As an educator I position myself as *a student of my students* from whom I learn. Together we form a classroom that is critical *and* compassionate. As the two examples shared demonstrate, the agreements guide our practice and intentions to share what we know, to challenge what we think we know or do not know, and to humble ourselves to the complexities of sharing knowledge and understanding grounded in a critical consciousness of the inner workings of power. To engage with issues that position students at seemingly opposite sides of misunderstandings, or which surface implicit biases and prejudices about race, gender, power, and other topics, is an important purpose of the classroom community agreements. As principles toward fostering collaboration in learning, as well as a community of care, the agreements hold potential for creating safe and brave spaces that over time become critically compassionate spaces. The agreements can help foster spaces where students feel brave enough to be vulnerable, yet safe to trust that they will gain insights about themselves, grow in the process, and build community with their peers. Indeed, the process of mutual learning must be embraced and understood as fluid, evolving, iterative, and ongoing. We are capable of learning with and from each other when we are anchored in principles that we are most willing to practice and sustain.

The community agreements activity, along with the agreements themselves, are my attempt at putting into practice my pedagogical principles, whilst creating a decolonial classroom experience with students. What I have offered in this essay is a reflection on our process and the outcomes of the agreements. However, the agreements are not meant to ensure that the classroom is always a safe and/or brave and/or critical space equally for all students. Instead what must remain true or consistent is our commitment to care for each other, and to see, hear, and learn *from* and *with* each other. Thus, we approach and practice the agreements not as classroom standards or ground rules but as principles. When enacted, these help us put into practice what bell hooks (1994) names as an education for freedom, and the heart to humanize our learning.

Developing a critical consciousness—and the heart to meet others where they are, and to accompany them in mutual learning—is at the core of an anti-racist, feminist, socialist, and decolonial form of learning. Our classroom community agreements activity therefore invites us, students and teachers, to engage mindfully in critically reflexive dialogues about the practices that will help us learn in wholesome and humanizing ways. We are constantly evolving, just as our agreements are. Teaching is an ongoing decolonial praxis that, as bell hooks (1994) underscored, requires and necessitates that we "open our minds and hearts … so that we can create new visions." As educators we do far more than teach; we support the leadership and development of citizens of competence, consciousness, and compassion. By cultivating a critically compassionate learning community in the classroom I am making a contribution to re-imagining a society where our humanity and interdependence are affirmed, and where shared values can guide us toward transformative justice. To build a more just, equitable, and sustainable world it is necessary that we foster critically compassionate learning spaces where we see each other as a community of learners, and where students can be brave enough to share and feel seen, heard, and affirmed beyond the mere label of a safe space.

Notes

1. Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Jesica Siham Fernández at jsfernandez@scu.edu, Ethnic Studies Department, Santa Clara University, 500 El Camino Real, Santa Clara, CA 95053 (USA). The author thanks *Radical Teacher* Editors and the anonymous Reviewers for their feedback and comments as these significantly contributed to the development of this essay.

2. I use Claradise University as a pseudonym for the institution wherein these activities and experiences unfolded to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of the students. Claradise University is a Jesuit private institution located in the Silicon Valley (California, USA). Although its social justice mission toward serving communities on the margins distinguishes Claradise University from other institutions in the Greater Bay Area, the institution does not reflect the demographics of the region; it is disproportionately attended by students who are upper- to middle-class and white. Recently, however, there are efforts to recruit and retain more students, faculty, and staff of color, and to implement diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives that can support Latinx, African American, low-income, first-generation college students, undocumented students, and students of marginalized genders of intersecting identities

3. All student names are pseudonyms to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of the students. Teaching reflections and fieldnotes are excerpts from my pedagogical journaling entries, which I maintain to reflect, improve, and revise my teaching and pedagogy at the end of the quarter and academic year.

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Unconditional Care Beyond the Carceral Education State: A Call for Abolitionist Departure

by Margaret Goldman

JACOBA VAN HEEMSKERCK VAN BEEST COMPOSITION, 1921. NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE COLLECTION.

Part I. The Story of a Free Space: A Point of Departure and a Site of Return

When Zahra was still a student at F.R.E.E. LA continuation high school, where she and I both now teach, she told me this:

> "I was always smart. I never had a problem completing the work. That wasn't the problem for me. I think it was the focus. That's why I like F.R.E.E. LA so much– 'cause it's people like me. It's people like me here, but not everyone is like *me*, you know. And especially the teachers— like, they just know. *They know life shows up for everybody*."

As we talked, a single braid, intent on freeing itself from the others, cascaded over her shoulder and she pushed it back without skipping a beat— her face, her breath, her eyes unchanging.

"In a regular school they don't really give a fuck," she continued. "Like, say if your grandma died. They might care for the moment, or say they care, but once it starts affecting your performance? They don't." She shook her head slowly, eyes narrowed, pointed towards the floor but looking past it. Looking at something that already happened, something replaying in her head.

"Once it starts affecting your performance, they don't care at all."

***

We had been sitting in my classroom at F.R.E.E. LA High (**F**ighting for the **R**evolution to **E**ducate and **E**mpower **L**os **A**ngeles)—what I'll call *FREE*, for short—as I was making the transition from ethnographer to teacher/ethnographer. FREE is a continuation high school in Los Angeles, California developed by the Youth Justice Coalition (YJC), a grassroots, abolitionist organization led by system-impacted young people and their communities. As part of their broader movement to end all forms of youth confinement, YJC developed FREE in 2007 as an alternative to both traditional schools and youth lock-up (YJC, 2022). Despite the use and public image of many continuation schools as institutions of confinement or abandonment, FREE is a police-free, punishment-free educational space grounded in principles of transformative justice (TJ), and focused on grassroots movement building and political education. It serves, and was created by, young people who have been pushed out of, barred from, or otherwise refused participation in traditional schooling. After being forced to relocate by the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which demolished their original home to build a parking garage, YJC took over and is in the process of beautifying a juvenile detention center that they organized to shut down about ten years ago. This is where FREE now lives— where Zahra and I sat in a room with windowless walls aching to be torn down. My broader ethnographic project has looked to this space, and these young people's stories and insight, as blueprints for abolitionist experiments in alternative forms of social organization.

More specifically, working from FREE's ideological positioning of itself as neither an institution of confinement nor an institution of traditional education, I am interested in what it might tell us about abolitionist alternatives to traditional schooling—as an anchor of carceral regimes and a site of anti-black enclosure (Sojoyner, 2016) that reinforces racial State power through its institutional, ideological, and interpersonal terms, conditions, and mandates. As part of a broader interest in the possibilities for creating liberatory educational spaces beyond or outside of the traditional school system, I have aimed to understand the ideological and interpersonal construction of the FREE space: What makes this space different? What makes it *fugitive* (which is not to say without contradictions)? In this paper, I wrestle with students' repeated theorizations of this difference through the concept of *care.* More specifically, my task in this paper is to think through students' conceptualizations of care at FREE—how it is experienced, theorized, and embodied in the space—in contrast to the type of care students say they experience in "regular schools." Things like, "once it starts affecting your performance, they don't care at all." My task, as well, is to consider what these conflicting articulations of care mean for abolitionist education.

Data and Theory

My larger 3-year ethnographic study utilizes observational field work, interviews with FREE staff and YJC organizers, and education-focused oral histories of FREE students. FREE's core staff includes three teachers, an academic counselor, a transformative justice (TJ) counselor, and two peace builders (unarmed South Central community members trained in de-escalation). Of FREE's ~25 students, all are Black, Latinx, and/or Mexican or Chicanx; most if not all are impacted by overlapping carceral systems of probation, incarceration, immigration, and/or foster care; and all navigate and resist overlapping landscapes of dispossession that are largely space-based. Here, my use of "space" refers to both body and place.[1]

While some students are referred directly from traditional high schools or other State agencies (e.g., Child Protective Services), a majority of students hear about FREE from friends, family members, and neighbors. As Lupita—a FREE graduate and now lead coordinator between FREE and YJC— described: "It's *all by word of mouth.* Because it's like, 'Hey you don't like that school? Forget that school, come to FREE.' And that's how *I* found out about the school." Many students were moved, or moved themselves, between multiple schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District before arriving at FREE. Some attended other alternative (continuation) schools along the way, which they often had to find on their own after leaving or being removed from traditional schooling.

In thinking through the possibilities for forging abolitionist educational spaces, I am guided by Ruth Wilson Gilmore's theorization of *forgotten places.* Critiquing her own concept of the gulag (2007) to capture California's

massive prison economy, Gilmore (2008, p. 34) asks: "What concept might get at the kinds of forgotten places that have been *absorbed into* the gulag *yet exceed them*?" In turn, she conceptualizes forgotten places as those beyond the margins of the carceral State, where organized abandonment and the critical consciousness that accompanies it cultivate unique capacities for collective organizing. *Forgotten spaces* helps me think through alternative schools as critical sites of meaning-making positioned slightly beyond or outside the traditional school system, and as spaces inhabited by young people and educators with distinct experiential knowledge of spatial displacement *and* transformation. In my reading, forgottenness signifies not a pathologization of dispossessed/racialized spaces (where space is both body and place), but rather a spatial relationship, and an act of flight, departure, or "stealing away" (Robinson & Robinson, 2017 p. 3). Forgottenness, in other words, is not reducible to abandonment from above; rather, as Lupita's "word of mouth" framing suggests, it refers as well to the ways individuals and groups of individuals *remove themselves* from spaces in which their lives are devalued. Thus, to *exceed* in this context captures a particular type of abolitionist transformation that is distinct from reform, critique, or resistance (Campt, 2017; Hartman, 2021; Harney & Moten, 2013).

Carceral Education Landscape
(*Image credit: Yasmine Gateau for NPR, 2019*)

To *exceed*: A particular type of abolitionist transformation
(*Source: iStock photo*)

Lastly, Gilmore's theorizations have led me to think through complex problems and their solutions spatially, which is always also to say racially. In analyzing the sometimes paradoxical role of alternative schools in processes and structures of dispossession and departure, I've found it most useful to think in terms of a landscape, which allows me also to think about the movement of people, ideas, emotions, relationships, and resources across space(s). Thinking about schooling and carcerality spatially—as a carceral-education landscape—provokes questions about what it means, what it takes, and when it becomes necessary to exceed, rather than reform or resist, that landscape.

Turning now to young people's experiences navigating this landscape, and their perceptions of FREE's attempts to exceed it, I wrestle with conflicting genealogies and possibilities of care— how it structures the landscape as a mechanism of domination, but also its potentialities as a means of departure.

Part II. Care in the Carceral Education Landscape

> *"Once it starts affecting your performance, they don't care at all."*

Using this notion of a landscape, I want to return to Zahra's words and read them alongside another student's, who similarly critiques traditional schooling through the lens of its contradistinction to FREE. Amidst the noise of books being closed and backpacks being zipped, this student, Diego, said: "You know, Miss, they actually help you here at FREE. In regular schools, once you do a bad thing, they just think you're a bad kid, a fuck up. And then *they don't care about you anymore*. After that, they're not gonna try to help you. They just kick you out."

As reflective of sentiments expressed by multiple students, these students' words capture a core juxtaposition, and a critical point of departure. In particular, Zahra and Diego's summary of the difference between FREE and "regular schools" reflects something that emerges continuously in interviews and conversations with young people in the space. While they express a profound sense of safety and trust in a school that does not rely on police or punishment, when I ask students what makes FREE "different" for them, what I hear most often are things like: "they get it," "they understand" and, especially, "they actually care." The frequent repetition of the phrase "they actually care" demands grappling with this concept and its place in the movement towards abolition.

Initially, this demand concerned me. Alongside its longstanding liberatory genealogies, *care* is also tethered to violent genealogies that have been and remain integral to colonialism, transatlantic slavery, and its many afterlives.

Care has been the fulcrum around which coerced reproductive, social, and other labor has been exploited and extracted (for Black women in particular), and around which violent and enduring gendered-racial ideologies and terms of order have been crafted (Hartman, 2016). Perhaps less visceral but no less violent, neoliberal individualized notions of care have functioned—at best—as an insufficient antidote to, and thus obscuration of, structural issues—a critique others have developed elsewhere (Thompson, 1998). Before thinking through the revolutionary possibilities of care in abolitionist education, I build from Zahra's, Diego's, and other students' theorizations to discuss how a particular iteration of care—what I am calling *conditional care*—functions to sustain and naturalize a perpetually uneven carceral-education landscape.

Theorizing Conditional Care

As Zahra and Diego maintain, FREE students' experiences leaving or being pushed out of schools, and/or barred from entire districts, reveal that schools (like prisons) function institutionally, ideologically, and inevitably—that is, as a matter of design—through a type of conditional care that polices the traumas of students of color and criminalizes the decisions they make to survive a white supremacist social order. Conditional care captures how, at a structural level and as a structuring principle, care in schools is meted out based on ableist, anti-black, colonial metrics of inclusion that punish any divergence from the perfect white citizen, or what FREE student Kimora calls "the ideal kid." These are metrics that are difficult for most and impossible for many to meet. Beyond performance, (proximity to) blackness always already places students on or outside the periphery of care, making inclusion a battle of respectability politics and spiritual warfare, and "demand[ing] self-negation as the key to an exam pass" (Willoughby-Herard, 2005). By hinging young people's worth on *performance,* attendance, and behavior—and proximity to white citizenship—conditional care exploits the ways, in Zahra's words, "life shows up" for Black and brown young people: ways that are structurally inevitable conditions of racial capitalism, obscured always as individual failures.

As a constituent of racial capitalist schooling and racial capitalism[2] more broadly, conditional care reserves both choice and chance as structural properties of whiteness. Another student, Beautiful, reflected on FREE being the first space, out of the many schools she had been pushed out of and into, to offer her "more than one chance." She shared: "FREE is really not like other schools, because [other schools] are like, 'Okay, well, screw it. *I don't care about what you got going on*. Shoot, that's *yo* problem.'" Finally, conditional care also punishes and abandons young people who willfully refuse to participate or perform in institutions, and according to legal/social contracts, that are predicated on their own death and dispossession. Less important than the reasons for which Beautiful, Zahra, Diego, or any of the other students were displaced between schools is the pattern, the structural inevitability, of the displacement itself, including the way it is justified and naturalized by exclusionary definitions of who is worthy of care.

Thus, within the carceral-education landscape—where there are, so we're led to believe, "good" schools and "urban" schools and "schools for the bad kids"—conditional care is both necessary for and an outcome of the colonial, white supremacist ideology that certain people are disposable. It is necessary for and an outcome of systems that disappear people, as racialized proxies for social problems, into forgotten spaces (like prisons and alternative schools). As constituent of these ideologies and systems, this conditional care is fundamentally anti-black and rooted in myths of meritocracy, and it binds productivity and performance to *who counts as human.* My argument is that this conditional care is endemic to American schooling. And, that this is not a matter of individual teachers who care or don't care (although that is certainly important), but rather of the institutional and ideological contexts they operate within. To wrestle with this conditional care is to recognize that relationships structure and are inextricably structured *by* these contexts, which determine the forms of social organization that are possible.

And wrestling I was, indeed. If conditional care played such a critical role in students' displacement, then what were the students capturing (or reclaiming) in the repeated assertion that what makes FREE so different is that "they actually care"? Thinking through what might reasonably be conditional care's antithesis (or antidote)—an unconditional care—requires thinking through *they actually care* on a structural or spatial scale. That is, rather than an emotion or condition or action that occurs (solely) at the individual level. With this as a starting point, I ask: What old-new genealogies, knowledge traditions, and epistemologies are students' definitions of care connected to? Relatedly, how does *unconditional care* reflect FREE's broader grounding ideologies, everyday practices, and the social relationships that structure and are structured by the space? Animated by these questions, I take students' definitions as a starting point (and a set of directions) to understand how care is theorized and embodied in the FREE space, and to consider how FREE's demonstrations of care might serve as a blueprint for abolitionist departures from the carceral-education landscape.

Part III: Possibilities for Departure: Theorizing Unconditional Care

My intention in the following sections is not to prescribe a precise definition of unconditional care*,* but rather to think through what students mean by care at FREE. In this project of thinking through, FREE's origin story and the school's foundations in abolition and TJ emerged as two points that help articulate how care is theorized and experienced in the space. As I discuss these origins and foundations, I move between discussions of care in vision/theory and care in everyday practice/praxis. Doing so reveals how unconditional care at FREE operates at and across ideological, interpersonal, and spatial scales, in broad movements, formal practices, and seemingly mundane interactions.

In the first section, I examine how unconditional care was envisioned through FREE's origin story, and how this

vision of care is continually enlivened through practices that refuse the disposability the carceral-education landscape requires. In the second section, I explore how FREE's foundations in abolition and TJ shape their visions and practices of care in ways that allow for new terms of relationality, and thus radically different forms of social organization, to emerge. Reading FREE's care practices alongside longstanding genealogies of care—specifically, abolitionist and Black feminist genealogies—helps identify what is being reclaimed in students' definitions, and illuminates the potentialities for care in abolitionist education in light (and in spite) of its violent iterations.

Section I: Returning to the Origin Story of a Free Space: Care as Spatial Reclamation

What might "they actually care" mean at the structural or spatial scale?

This paper opened with a brief genealogy of FREE and YJC. While their beautification of a former detention center is a powerful metaphor and promise for transforming carceral space, FREE's origin story begins before this—before the forced removal, before the beautification—with a group of people who "lacked resources but not resourcefulness" (Gilmore, 2008). Recounting this history, Tauheedah, a close friend and YJC organizer, shared with me:

"YJC started out in front of a store. Literally at a storefront. And we looked around and realized: all these youth from our community keep getting kicked out. So, we said, *Damn. We should make our own school.*"

And as another YJC organizer elaborated: "That's how the idea and the vision of FREE got started. And YJC stays partnered with the school. And the design, the vision, and the curriculum is geared towards our work, towards abolition, towards understanding and developing the will to end youth incarceration."

Here was the seed. The idea, birthed between the words and breaths of conversation at a South Central storefront. The vision, cultivated and toiled over by a group of people who identified a need in their community, and organized themselves in response to patterns of abandonment and forced displacement. Whereas neoliberal, individualized notions of care are necessarily conditional, FREE's origin story is a lens into thinking about care beyond the scale of the individual. In this story, care is envisioned and embodied in the form of reclaiming, demanding, and *carving out space* as a means of collectively refusing landscapes of domination. Integral to understanding this care, and its potentialities for (the) abolition (of schooling), is who was doing the carving and for whom.

Expanding on FREE's genealogy in interview, Emilio—a YJC organizer with a presence that grounds you and a laugh that shakes the ground—laid the groundwork for this understanding:

> What I was really inspired about when I first learned about FREE was that [its] *doors were open* to young people, regardless of what their system experience has been, what their immigration status is, and the trauma that they've been through in their personal lives and their families and generational trauma. The school was founded…by a group of formerly incarcerated and system-impacted people across LA County that decided we needed a space for the people most impacted, to be able to organize.
>
> Young Black and brown [and] Indigenous youth, particularly from South Central, Inglewood, Watts, Compton areas, were being pushed out of schools and into lock ups, into the war on youth, into oppressive systems…So basically, we're like, *students need a place to go, young people need a place to go. These schools aren't serving our young people.* We need to have our own school. And that's basically why, how FREE started (emphasis added).

Let us consider the implications of the statement that "students need a place to go, young people need a place to go." That Black, brown, and Indigenous young people, and young people living in racialized, criminalized geographic spaces—in a county that funds the largest prison system in the world—had nowhere to go.

That no school would take them.

Let us consider the possibility that this is not an anomaly or an aberration, but a structural inevitability of the carceral-education landscape.

It bears restating explicitly: FREE was formed by members of the community in response to the fact that schools across LA County refused to teach their children. In response to the refusal of State institutions to care for youth, community members—many of them formerly incarcerated or system-impacted young people themselves—*created a space outside of* those institutions, for Black and brown young people to *just be.* This demonstration of care in the form of creating, reclaiming, and demanding space is a radical gesture in an anti-black world where young people of color (especially those who are poor, queer, undocumented, and/or disabled) are relentlessly and systematically denied the right to (inhabit) space, the right to exist. Emilio's reflections also begin to sketch out a vision of what is implied in *unconditional.*

FREE's "open doors"—regardless of youths' system experience, immigration status, and personal, familial, and generational trauma—signify an educational space that refuses metrics of exclusion or inclusion contingent on performance, behavior, or proximity to whiteness. More than this, they signify a space premised on not only a tolerance of, but an explicit care for and responsiveness to, the trauma(s), modes of survival, and experiences being criminalized, confined, and surveilled, for which young people are—paradoxically—denied care in schools. These traumas and system-experiences, which serve as grounds for further criminalization in multiple institutional settings, *are* the ways "life shows up" for Black and brown young people. They are "what you got going on" that nobody cares about, and they are direct vestiges of colonialism and slavery, and the present-historical violences of racial capitalism.

Beginning as a recognition, an idea, FREE's origin story culminated in a broad, sweeping refusal of the "strategic abandonment" endemic to racial capitalist carceral regimes, "in which governing bodies carefully eschew responsibility for [social groups] deemed valueless by a logic of racialized criminalization" (Medel, 2017, p. 874). FREE's everyday care practices continually refuse this abandonment, and the disposability it naturalizes, by addressing rather than criminalizing the ways "life shows up," and by repeatedly rejecting the racial hierarchies of humanness on which conditional care, and carceral regimes more broadly, depend.

Origins in Practice: Unconditional Care in the Everyday

As Diego's experiences highlight, who is deemed worthy of care is wrapped up in who is deemed worthy of help. Students marked a process in other schools of being denied requests for help and, simultaneously, how "bad grades" were used as justification for their removal. Their stories elucidate the self-valorizing locomotion of a landscape that constitutively *produces* "(under)performance" and exploits it as an alibi for disposability. In contrast, in reflecting on their classroom experiences at FREE, students describe a pedagogical praxis of leaving no one behind. Rather than a particular policy, they emphasize everyday practices such as teachers "taking the time" to explain lessons to students who missed class (sometimes for days or weeks at a time) or did not understand the lesson the first time; allowing students to catch up on late work; and eschewing good attendance and performance as metrics of who deserves help. Extending that initial seed, these care practices are informed by a shared *structural* understanding of the ways life, in beauty and in hardship, happens beyond school.

However, what emerged more resoundingly from students' reflections on FREE is a praxis of care that exceeds the classroom, responding to multiple dimensions of young people's lives and the broader landscape(s) they navigate. As one student, Angel, explained:

> This school is nice, you know. Like they help you with a lot of things, and they really give you more than one chance. They always go out their way to help with our grades or even if you want a job or anything they'll help you, or with an interview. Or if you wanna get your own money, they help you and everything. And they're against certain things that public schools do—that [public schools] would hate how we do here. You know, cause at regular schools, they're not gonna care about you getting money or whatever. Over there, they would rather let the cops deal with you than fix a problem. And here, they don't have cops in here. They'd rather work things out and fix things, instead of kicking kids out that really need help.

Angel's critique that schools "would rather let the cops deal with you than fix a problem" highlights the shared locomotion between schools and prisons, which use punishment and exile as "all-purpose solutions to social and economic problems" (Gilmore, 2008, p. 32). Schools operate symbiotically within this landscape by *not caring* about those problems, instead churning *people* into problems—into "bad kids"—who can simply be disappeared. FREE's caring to help students with things like money and job interviews reflects their ongoing commitment to ensuring people's basic needs are met—not only as a precondition for learning and alternative to exile, but as a form of abolitionist care that insurgently refuses the systematic exclusion of racialized, criminalized people from the means of social reproduction (Medel, 2017).

Based on that initial recognition—that the students LA schools refused to teach live in areas most impacted by the economic dispossession racial capitalism requires—Lupita recently used her connections through YJC to organize a job program where young people get paid to come to school. Care about basic needs at FREE also exceeds formal programs, operating organically through the deeper personal relationships young people form within the space. For example, a student recently reached out to me about her housing instability. With that student's permission I contacted Ms. Tracey, FREE's main TJ counselor, who has connections to housing programs in LA, so that we could collectively create a care plan for her.

Another pivotal way FREE responds to the conditions that strategic abandonment creates is by refusing to criminalize the forms of survival it demands. Expanding on his insightful understanding of exile, Angel described another systemic pattern in "regular schools": young people being exiled for protecting themselves.

> Me and [another FREE student] went to [name of high school]. He got kicked out of [there] too, because he would get there late, and they did random searches or something like that. And he had a knife…because he would walk from school to his house. And he just has it, you know, to *protect himself*. But he had it in his backpack— not even on him, but in his backpack. And they kicked him out for that. He even explained it to them, like "I live far, and I walk home. So, at times I get there late and, you know, people are out doing dumb things, so I want to protect myself." He tells [the Dean] that. The next day, they tell him he's expelled.

In contrast, FREE cares against the contours of the landscape by ensuring that young people have "safe passage." As Ms. Tracey explained to the students during orientation: "If you do feel unsafe and like you need to bring [something] with you, talk to a staff member *that you trust* and we will find an alternative. We can accommodate if you live too far…So that you can find a way to feel safe on the street, and so that we can find a way for you to feel safe here at [FREE]." FREE's peace builders pick up and drop off students at their preferred location in the school van, while teachers/staff also work to create accommodation plans for students who live particularly far.

Finally, beyond simply refusing to criminalize young people, FREE collaborates with YJC's abolitionist legal clinic to support students who do become court involved. Court support includes attending court with the student, helping build their case, posting bail, and gathering materials such as letters of support from teachers. In my experience, letter writers do not ask the facts of the case. Like YJC's support

for the broader South Central community, teachers support students unconditionally based on an abolitionist understanding that young people do not grow in cages; rather, like flowers and all other living beings, they grow in spaces where they are cared for, all the way down to the root.

Of the five students I have written letters for, all have noted that if it weren't for FREE/YJC's legal support they would likely be incarcerated. One student, Trelin, who recently had this outcome with his own case, captured the broader significance of this form of care, and its inherent movement beyond the individual, noting: "Other schools, for sure, are not going to help one of they students get bailed out of jail. And other schools don't help change laws, and change the community. Other schools don't even worry about the community." FREE's court support signifies a particularly radical departure from the terms and conditions of traditional schools that position each individual institutionally, regardless of how much they care, as an agent of the State who must cooperate with the courts in the interest of so-called "safety."

Each of the practices outlined above reflect, and extend, longstanding genealogies of abolitionist care that refuse racialized hierarchies of human life, by unconditionally "[supporting] those made most vulnerable to criminalization" (Kaba, 2017), ensuring people's basic needs are met in the face of strategic abandonment (Medel, 2017), and by repeatedly developing alternatives to the use of criminalization as an "all-purpose solution." Rather than aiming to improve performance or produce more "ideal kids," the intention of these care practices is to disrupt the disposability carceral regimes mark as inevitable, and to show up for each other as a community in the ways the State refuses to.

Thus, FREE's "open doors" are the borderless conduit(s) into a space where young people navigating overlapping landscapes of dispossession are not seen as disposable. As expert wayfinders, what the students are describing in *they actually care* is a space where they know they do not face the threat of removal, where they know they will not be further criminalized or abandoned for the ways they choose or refuse to navigate a social order predicated on their un-survivability. They are theorizing care in the form of creating (a) space where they do not have to be *something* or do *anything* in order to matter—which is to say, they matter unconditionally.

If traditional schooling and all its ideologies—of meritocracy, equality, and access, of mobility and opportunity—function only through disappearance, then what becomes legible are the abolitionist implications of a space created for and *by* those deemed least worthy of care. If it is true that within a carceral-education landscape there must always be (Black, brown, Indigenous, queer, and disabled) young people who have nowhere to go, then what emerges are the implications of a space predicated on an unwavering commitment to caring for those who are disappeared so that the traditional system can function. Rooted in students' theorizations of what it means to "actually care," what FREE's origin story—in vision and everyday practice—exposes, are the possibilities for reimagined educational spaces where no one is left behind. To "actually care" in the world young people desire means that no one needs to be thrown away. It means that young people who refuse to be governed by extractive institutions always have somewhere to go.

As its seed and soil, unconditional care emerges in, structures, and is structured by the space itself. This process can be further understood through FREE's foundations in abolition and TJ, and how these foundations create the contexts in which new forms of social organization can emerge.

By Laura Chow Reeve via VAWnet.org, 2020

Section II: Unconditional Care and the Culture of FREE: Abolition and Transformative Justice

> *I think the difference with FREE and YJC is being unapologetically abolitionist and transformative justice-based.* That's*, that's the difference from most county or*

city or other nonprofit youth programs. (Emilio, personal communication, 2022)

Whereas restorative justice seeks to reconcile conflict or *restore* relationships, TJ seeks to *transform* the conditions, institutional and ideological systems, and power relationships that make harm inevitable (Kaba et al., 2021). TJ refuses victim/offender binaries, recognizing that harm is cyclical and multiscalar. Building from an understanding of violence as both interpersonal and always also systemic, TJ is not just a response to harm or an alternative to punishment, but an everyday, active transforming of the ways we relate to ourselves, one another, and the earth. And, as opposed to restorative justice, which is increasingly implemented as an "alternative" to punishment in schools and other institutions (including prisons), TJ refers necessarily to "a set of practices that happens *outside* the State" (Hassan, 2020). This difference—a crucial point for distinguishing educational reform from abolitionist departure—is reflected in FREE participants' visions of TJ as a grounding ideology, rather than an "implemented" policy at FREE.

Ms. Tracey articulated this distinction during one "Warrior Week": the first week of each trimester when, in addition to team building, students are introduced to (or reminded of) the mission and culture of the school. We had been sitting in what was once a courtroom. Mismatched chairs formed an imperfect circle; students cradled their backpacks between their knees, or hugged them in their laps. From the narrow doorway, you could see freshly painted murals that breathed life into the walls of the school lobby.

> "The idea of transformative justice is to create change," she began. "We are not a regular school. The *foundation* of this school, your high school, is transformative justice— which means that our goals, our missions, our *relationships are all formulated to create change.* We do not call the police here. We do not use court 'justice,' though we will support you if you get court involved. Calling on the police for us is like calling on the devil. What we do here is have conversations, learn how to talk when we're angry, or learn how to talk after we cool down. Oftentimes, the courts and schools miss something, or *they just don't care* to ask. I promise you we'll ask what happened from your perspective" (emphasis added).

Ms. Tracey's voice created soft waves of movement in the windowless room. After a short pause, she continued. "This is how I explain TJ love to young people," she said. "We are not talking about romantic love. I'm talking about loving people just because they are humans. I love you because you are human. How can I work with you because you are human? Support you because you are human? TJ has compassion for what you're going through."

Merging her own embodied theories of TJ with a long genealogy of the tradition, Ms. Tracey captures the elements of a space whose foundation—and forms of social organization—depart from the nexus between the courts and schools, which she theorizes as bound through their demonstrations of conditional care. She explains how what grounds these alternative forms of social organization is not only a type of radical love but, necessarily, radically alternative conceptions of what it means to be human: what it means to be worthy of care and healing, beyond and outside of anything you have done in the past or might produce in the future, or how well you can perform.

These broader interpersonal and ideological commitments of the space, as grounded in TJ, deepen a theorization of unconditional care beyond the individual, and connect students' definitions with Black feminist genealogies of care.[3] Black feminist thought has grappled with the centrality of care to colonial formations and, at the same time, its potentialities as "an antidote to violence" (Hartman, 2017). Black feminists have done the work to distinguish white feminist care—as care rooted in individualism, performed by or through the State, and in or through privatized conceptions of family—from care as (a) communal practice that builds towards something other. Including but beyond "other mothering" (Collins, 1987), Black feminist care is a deeply political framework and praxis rooted in a fundamental commitment to sabotaging present-historical structures of racial capitalism (Neely & Lopez, 2022; Nash; 2018; Sharpe, 2016)—not just the material conditions it creates, as the prior section discussed, but its terms of relationality. As opposed to individualism, as a violent mode of being and moving through the world, Black feminist care is rooted in the formation, transformation, and reorganization of *relationships*—as alternative modes of being (in community), and as antidotes to the anti-black and anti-relational project(s) of modernity (Gumbs, 2021).

This Black feminist commitment to interdependence has long envisioned and prefigured the conditions in which communal care, safety, and accountability can occur beyond the violence of carceral regimes, and explicitly challenges the exclusionary, carceral roots of white feminist care. Exemplified by the 1994 Violence Against Women Act—which "earmarked unprecedented federal funding" to "protect" victims of sexual/domestic violence through more policing, prosecution, cages, and criminalization—white feminists' demands for "care" *through* the State has been integral to the expansion of the US prison regime (Thuma, 2019, p. 7). In contrast, both Black feminist and abolitionist genealogies of care recognize criminalization as itself a form of gendered-racial State violence inextricable from interpersonal violence (Thuma, 2019), and critique the ways carceral regimes destabilize communities by leaving the roots of harm intact, and by severing the interdependency that truly keeps communities safe. This severing occurs not only through displacement, but also through the ways carceral-capitalist logics—of fear, individualism, and disposability—shape the ways we relate to one another at intimate scales. Black feminist care asks how we can move together in new ways that uproot (the many roots of) existing carceral structures, detoxify the soil, and make the space for other worlds to flourish (Gumbs, 2021).

Ms. Tracey's articulations of TJ as a grounding ideology of the space echo these genealogies of care in her emphasis on "relationships formulated to create change," and in the explicit connections she draws between these relationships and FREE's unwavering refusal to call on the police. Though her emphasis on "communicating" rather than punishing

may seem mundane, it signifies more than just an alternative to discipline. Rather, it signifies the potentialities of fugitive educational spaces, rooted in unconditional care, to exceed the terms of relationality and forms of social organization that structure and are structured by carceral logics and anti-black enclosures.

The dialogue initiated by Ms. Tracey above went on to discuss teachers' and students' experiences learning the culture of TJ, specifically through "circles:" a practice of convening in conversation, or a series of conversations, to address the root(s) of harm or conflict and collectively construct next steps so that all members' humanity is honored. While TJ is not reducible to circles, they are a meaningful lens into unconditional care for two reasons.

First, FREE's use of circles in response to conflict is another pivotal juxtaposition students draw between FREE and other schools. For many students, conflict was weaponized by prior schools as justification for their disposability, through precisely the processes of conditional care Ms. Tracey described. Second, circles are one way in which the broad theories of care articulated above—and the alternative visions of relationality and humanness they prefigure— are mobilized in practice. Rather than a singular practice, however, circles reflect and reverberate a broader praxis of care and communication that moves through and across relationships, to create a spatial context in which new forms of accountability, safety, and interdependency unfold.

Embodied Foundations: Unconditional Care in/as Praxis

Student Emani's experiences in circles artfully weave together these threads. Some weeks after the collective Warrior Week conversation described above, Emani and I had this conversation in interview:

> Margaret: How do other schools deal with conflict?
>
> Emani: Suspension.
>
> Margaret: Like right away?
>
> Emani: I got into a fight after school one time and I *was not* the cause of the fight. The girl hit me first and I tried to defend myself… they suspended me for two days.
>
> Margaret: There was no conversation?
>
> Emani: No
>
> Margaret: So what do they do here?
>
> Emani: It's a circle. You don't get suspended. I feel like they teach you to actually deal with your fuckin' problems and not just distance you from that person you got into a conflict with, and then come back to school with that grudge two days later, you know?
>
> Margaret: Right. So you think that works? The circles work?
>
> Emani: Me and [another student at FREE] we were not on the best terms when I got here. We was bumping heads, arguing, stuff like that. But once she got here things changed. Once we had the circle things became more open, we heard each other's side and after that, you know, after a few days things aren't just great but…It gets better. One morning it's "good morning," or "oh, what's up?" you know, "you're in the same circle I'm in," I'm not even uncomfortable to walk up to her or…There's not animosity anymore. They do a lot of things different that I will say I've never had in a different schooling.

Not caring about the root of a problem leaves those roots intact, creates "distance," and makes it easier—in schools, in court rooms, and in intimate relationships—to throw people away. At FREE, unconditional care occurs in the form of creating the space, through circles, to *ask why* (brown, 2017), to hear all sides and have all sides hear each other. Emani's reflections highlight how doing so not only precludes the need for exile, refuses disposability, and prevents unaddressed conflict from festering—but, critically, generates new forms of understanding and new relationships *across difference*. Presciently, Emani frames circles not as a singular fix or "alternative" to suspension, but rather as an ongoing, untimed, and nonlinear praxis of learning to coexist. Like Emani, many students speak about circles through their rippling, pedagogical effects: as a process of learning "how to deal with our problems" in ways that foster connection, and of *un*learning the anti-relational curriculum of carceral regimes that, in Beautiful's words, "don't nobody *care* so why just *not* talk about it."

Indicating the pervasiveness of this anti-relational curriculum, in the Warrior Week conversation above, students and teachers alike shared how difficult it was to learn to communicate, and learn to trust—not only trust each other, but a broader, more ontological trust: that people deserve another chance, and that people (including ourselves) are capable of transformation which, as Emani captured, might not happen in two hours or two days. This trust implies a fundamental recognition of *everyone's* humanity that unravels the exclusive definitions of personhood undergirding conditional care and Western epistemologies more broadly.

Circles are one practice through which these terms of relationality become woven, over time, into the very foundation of the space. As one method of holding people accountable, they perform the relational and epistemological work of Black feminist and abolitionist care, which discard hierarchies of humanness, refute "the false and damaging binaries we use to talk about [criminalized] people, like violent/non-violent and innocent/guilty" (Kaba, 2017), and seek the abolition of carcerality as it extends into our daily lives. Indeed, abolitionist care conceptualizes non-carceral forms of accountability as, in fact, one of the most radical ways we can care for one another. To hold someone accountable for the harm they caused, rather than throw them away for it, *is* to recognize their inherent value as a human being and their capacity to learn, heal, and grow. It is a demonstration of care that inherently extends beyond the individual, plunging down to the root to seek communal transformation.

Beyond circles, FREE's emphasis on trust, communication, and non-carceral accountability—as critical, relational dimensions of unconditional care—is cultivated through a broader everyday commitment to forging authentic connections, unraveling hierarchical relationships, and continuously centering support, safety, and healing over punishment. Through seemingly mundane interactions, practiced repeatedly and in collaboration, carceral forms of social organization are unlearned and uprooted, making way for an ecosystem of care that operates at the spatial scale.

Ecosystems and Curriculums of Unconditional Care

In Ms. Tracey's words, the goal of TJ is "not about correcting youth behavior," but rather *continuously* "learning the students as a community, and what they need" through everyday interactions. For example, if a student is having a rough day, staff will inform other staff (e.g., through group text) to give that student more grace and understanding, or will ask the teacher/staff with whom they have the deepest connection to go check on them. Sometimes what students need is to vent, sometimes times to eat, and other times to simply *be* in the space without being pressured to do work. By leaning on each other, and by continually moving from a place of communication and caring to ask "why," deeper forms of trust and accountability are generated—not just in the wake of conflict, but a general accountability to self, other, and the space.

Further, rather than typical power dynamics wherein "what the teacher (or cop, or judge, or adult) says goes," accountability and communication at FREE disrupt the hierarchal teacher-student relationships endemic to carceral schooling. As Ms. Tracey accurately describes, "if a student has a problem with one teacher or staff, they are *safe* to go to another staff and bring it up and resolve the issue." While students can call teachers into circle, staff also hold each other accountable in meetings and informal conversations on students' behalf. As one student, Calyfornia, recently told me in interview, FREE is not different from other schools because it is perfect; it is different because they *actually care* about how the students feel.

Bringing us full circle, this repeated emphasis on transforming carceral relationships echoes longstanding Black feminist and abolitionist commitments to building communal networks of care (e.g., mutual aid) as a means of departure from the State. As everyday praxis, the trust and communication cultivated by/through unconditional care at FREE enables the revolutionary work of understanding what safety looks like beyond punishment—what it looks like for calling on the police to become obsolete—and how we can collectively support each other in meeting those standards. Rather than a singular alternative to discipline, this vision of unconditional care demands a new relational curriculum: an ongoing process of relearning new (or reclaiming old) ways of existing together (Gumbs, 2021).

While this happens at FREE, in part, through formal trainings and orientations (like Warrior Week), it mostly occurs, in Ms. Tracey's words, by "supporting each other in the moment, *learning in real time*." My own un/learning, for example, has occurred by participating in circles and by leaning on folks with greater knowledge about TJ for advice as situations arise. For both teachers and students, this process requires turning inward: it requires evaluating the ways we perpetuate the logics of disposability in our everyday lives and intimate relationships; the ways we conflate individualized punishment with care and safety; and the ways deeply engrained assumptions and habits structure whose voices we deem valid, and whose lives we deem worthy of care. This opens broader points about the potentialities of unconditional care in abolitionist education, and for educators hoping to embody FREE's model in other schools.

Questions of Scope and Scale

The formulations of care discussed throughout this paper cannot simply be adopted as policy alternatives that respond to student behavior in new ways. Rather, they must be understood and practiced in ways that aim to restructure the very foundation of educational space, including (and perhaps especially) the relationships among students and teachers in and outside the classroom, and between educational spaces and the broader, uneven landscapes they exist within. As adrienne maree brown writes, "what we practice at the small scale sets the patterns for the whole system" (2017, p. 53). Rather than models implemented from the top-down, the potentialities for unconditional care in abolitionist education lie in, and must begin with, deep internal and interpersonal transformations that ripple outward. By prefiguring at the smallest scale the world we want to see, as abolitionists and Black feminists long have, educators and students can work collaboratively to question: What are the institutional, ideological, and interpersonal

Participatory defenses campaigns as abolitionist care practice
Image from campaign to Free Joan Little (1974); Source: USprisonculture.com

mandates, terms, and conditions that preclude unconditional care in the specific contexts we are in? Which can be transformed at broader scales (such as school-wide policies), and which demand departure into fugitive spaces—classrooms, study groups, afterschool collectives—that exceed even as they are absorbed into the carceral-education State?

Part IV. Conclusions and Contradictions

As mentioned, this work is always unfolding and never without contradictions. Abolition is not a project of perfection, nor does it try to be; it is one of experimentation, of (honoring and learning from) process, and of working through (and understanding) *tensions* as part of the conditions of possibility for transformation. Departure from the State is complicated by many things, not the least of which is access to resources.

A primary example is ADA. Even while rejecting attendance as a metric for care and belonging, FREE's need for State funding for its own survivability means that those metrics must still be navigated—and, precisely *because* they reject attendance as a metric for care and belonging, access to resources is a barrier that at times creates gaps between what FREE would like, and is actually able, to offer. To fill in these gaps, as Section I discussed, FREE leans on its connections to YJC and other local organizations (some of which are non-profits), staff pool personal resources, and FREE/YJC continue their fight to redirect resources away from youth confinement and towards youth development in LA County. While this too entangles them, in various ways, to the State, their long-term abolitionist vision is that these entanglements, in Emilio's words, will "shift and transform, as more people are willing to take the deep dive…and be like, we don't need these systems to be able to sustain ourselves; we just need the resources to do it."

That said, departure does not by any means occur as a "clean break" at FREE. But what FREE's demonstrations of care do, are open important questions *about* departure. These questions echo what Christina Sharpe asks (us to do) as part of *wake work.* She writes:

> I want, too, to distinguish what I am calling and calling for as care from state-imposed regimes of surveillance. How can we think (and rethink and rethink) care laterally, in the register of the intramural, in a different relation than that of the violence of the state? (2016; p. 20).

Using students' definitions as a map, I've aimed in this paper to read FREE as a blueprint for rethinking care "in a different relation than that of the violence of the state." In heeding their demands, it became clear that what students were capturing is not necessarily new, but rather a reclamation, a continuation, and a particular demonstration of longstanding articulations of care that exceed the State and the (always conditional) site of the individual. To reclaim or re-create these old-new genealogies is to reclaim a radical re-definition and re-vision of *who counts as human*. In their most radical potentials, these old-new genealogies might approach a decolonial care, like a decolonial love (Maldonado-Torres, 2021), as a "practice rooted outside modernity," rooted in "the well-being of other human beings," and rooted against the "*individual* as the basis of liberal democracy."[4] Wise theorists as they are, students' juxtapositions of these conflicting genealogies of care raise complex questions—around the limitations of reform and the possibilities for abolition, around what demands *departure* and *what is possible from within*—that educators, community members, and scholars must "think (and rethink and rethink)" collectively, collaboratively, and in ongoing conversation.

Notes

1. Likewise, "space-based" dispossession refers to forms of dispossession structurally concentrated in geographic *places*, like neighborhoods, that are also racialized (e.g., food deserts or hyper-surveillance); and to processes—like being pushed out of schools or banned from entire districts—that dictate which *bodies* are allowed to occupy, and move freely through, space.
2. All capitalism is racial capitalism, meaning capitalism requires racism (Gilmore, 2020). Understanding *racial differentiation* as central to the maintenance of global capital makes clear how people's value (e.g., who is worthy of care), and relative "vulnerability to premature death" (Gilmore, 2007), are determined by race, where race is a structure of power (Kelley, 2017), rather than an identity. Gender and race are mutually constitutive structures of power.
3. Black feminist genealogies of care are far from homogenous, and it would be impossible to describe them comprehensively in this paper.
4. I thank Dr. George Barganier for this language, which he shared in conversation in a study group as part of his personal reflections on decolonial love.

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RADICAL TEACHER

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Teaching and Learning a Joyful Citation Praxis: Affective Relations for Fostering Community Through Our Compositions

by Kylie E. Quave and Savannah Hagen Ohbi

RAFIL KROLL-ZAIDI SCAFFOLDING (MUMBAI). NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE

Citation is the practice that makes composition scholarly; it is the process that disciplinarily silos our academic fields. Yet citation, for some of us, is also a habit vulnerable to introducing misattribution, defensive choices, courtesy shout-outs, and even fear and shame. In this reflective essay, we co-authors (an instructor and a student) offer reflections on the evolution of our relationships to citation and how we have enacted and reacted to teaching choices resulting from those affective relations with citation praxis.

Kylie: As an anthropologist and faculty member teaching in a multidisciplinary writing program, I've had a long journey toward finding joy in the act of citation. That personal struggle, informed and shaped by ongoing conversations inside and outside my home discipline, has re-formed my affective relation toward citational praxis; this re-formation has helped me overturn the usual script on citation for myself and helps me foster a more generative citation praxis with students. Here, I'm addressing anyone who cites, including myself. I want to hold myself accountable to citing conscientiously and with joyful purpose. And I intend to address others in a way that induces us all to lean into the joy and communal engagement that citation can produce.

Savannah: As a student in my second post-secondary year I am constantly citing. I strive to live a perpetual loop of learning, which underlies my deep love for education. Moreover, my position as an abolitionist reaffirms my core values of radical imagination, empathy, and joy, allowing me to critically evaluate the systems in which I engage every day. My adoption of joyful citation practices has wholly transformed my relationship with citing and thus elevated my entire academic journey. I believe all students can benefit from re-imagining citation norms and ought to have the space to explore the joy that comes with shifting those practices.

What is Citation For? And What Do Students Think It's For?

Citations generate, reify, and challenge disciplinary boundaries. Which works and whose works are cited foment not just bodies of knowledge but also determine *who* belongs to or does not belong to a discipline. Citation lends legitimacy to certain voices, while the absence of citation can silence, exclude, and marginalize others.

However, scholars do not consistently respect disciplinary boundaries and, thus, citation does more than generate disciplines. Citation also links disconnected and already-related voices to amplify, reify, alter, or reject former ideas. The processes of reading, comparing, and refuting are the core of knowledge production: citation is not only the textual evidence of that work, but also an artifact that promotes and erases over some ideas.

But how have many students educated in the United States typically learned to cite? Students have learned to avoid accusations of academic dishonesty by tracking who they read, who they learn from, and who they paraphrase. Their introduction to a course via a syllabus is typically accompanied by a legalistic statement on plagiarism. Instruction about the usefulness and process of citation often reifies this preoccupation by focusing on citation as accounting, and by rewarding formatting adherence.

Savannah: My first week of college, what we students dub "syllabus week," was, in a word, overwhelming. I imagine this is a rather universal sentiment. What surprised me, however, was the seemingly endless renditions of the same threat-infused lecture on citing sources to avoid academic dishonesty used to open each of my classes. Learning citation became an all-powerful protection against the risk of sudden expulsion and academic death: our only life jacket in the dangerous plagiarism accusation-infested sea of academia. Professors made the fair assumption we had already been introduced to citation in high school, yet in doing so they skated over any meaningful discourse around the practice, choosing to instead focus on the dangers of what would happen if we cited incorrectly or not at all. Such rhetoric tackled the question of "why" we cite with a resoundingly un-nuanced answer -- to not get caught plagiarizing. This introduction to citation was just as intimidating as my first encounter with it as a high school freshman five years ago and reinforced the transactional nature of such a practice. This legalistic enforcement of citation coupled with the lack of serious efforts to explain the complex evolution of citation practices made it a much-dreaded chore. I'd neglect that chore until 11:50 pm before a midnight deadline, when a quick scramble (and heavy reliance on algorithmic citation generators) allowed me to check the final and infuriatingly tedious item off before final submission.

Kylie: In my first-year research writing course, which is a general education required course of 17 students per section, I am fortunate to have a partner librarian visit once or twice a semester to assist students with source identification and use. In a recent semester, the wonderful librarian instructor, Megan Potterbusch, asked students in my course why they cite and to write their answers on a virtual Jamboard. Their responses focused on variations of "to give credit" or to avoid plagiarism (fig. 1). When I ask this question verbally, results are similar. Seeing this exercise play out semester after semester, I realized that issues of citation primarily induced a fear response and exacerbated an antagonistic relationship students have developed with naming and using sources.

I'm not convinced that this is something we all must endure, and I tell students this as well. Raising my hand from the audience of the librarian-led session, I'd offer some variation of "citation can be rewarding when we think about the conversation we're generating. What if we thought about it as more than formatting chores and avoiding dishonesty?" These sessions led me to conclude that I, too, had been in a toxic relationship with citation, but had somewhat moved through it. I wanted the same for the students, but I'd need to be more intentional in how that was incorporated into course structures.

Our realizations about citation being taught in formulaic, legalistic ways are not original. Others have pointed out the uselessness of writing instruction as an obsessive exercise in citation formatting and plagiarism

avoidance through uncritical naming and citing (Robillard and Howard 2008, Schick 2011). Writing handbooks describe citation as a utilitarian, functional matter (namely, *citation supports your argument*). Joseph Harris argues that citation—as typically taught and defined--is more a matter of *typing* than *writing* (2006: 28). Some composition guidebook authors go further in describing citation as a method for establishing a writer's authority, for making claims trustworthy, and for "rewarding" or "depriving" source authors (Heard 2016: 135, 137). However, most advice is functional, framing citation as some exchange of capital: "every citation is a transaction" (Heard 2016: 132).

Savannah: As a student, my frustration around citing included overwhelming anxiety about the threat of unintentionally claiming ownership over someone's work. My citation practice was simply a chase to identify who had ownership over an idea and, in cases where such ideas seemed rather universal, who had the luck of a pen and paper handy to be the first to write it down. I often found myself nervously searching for people to credit for information that was simply learned as a byproduct of being alive in one's particular social setting. Being a student in the 21st century means we have the privilege of easily accessing ample knowledge production, often digitally and constantly. It's awesome. It also presents an endless challenge: how can we become true critical thinkers when trapped in a constant cycle of regurgitation? Students become cornered into an endless search for the "owner" of an idea. When I start to write I can so often outline exactly what I want to say, yet the ensuing hours that follow searching for "the right authors to cite" makes the writing process one that engenders much self-doubt.

Compositionists have long argued that writing entails entering a scholarly conversation and making knowledge come into the world (e.g., rhetorician Kenneth Burke's parlor metaphor [1967], Bartholomae's inventing of the university [1986], and Swales's discourse communities [1990]). And writing studies scholars often plead for an end to plagiarism worries and a turn to a more nuanced, discursive practice of teaching attribution (Anson and Nelly 2010: 11). Overall, though, such norms do not appear to persist in introductory writing courses or in other college courses that include writing instruction across disciplines.

Would students develop a citation practice not primarily motivated by plagiarism fears if they were acquainted with more imaginative, inclusionary, joy-generating reasons for attribution rather than to robotically attribute names and dates to their thoughts? What if students instead *first and primarily* learned that citation is a dialogue for creating a new reality and not just a typographical chore? That the Works Cited page is more like what Dan Martin calls "textual DNA" or "the intertextual pieces of other texts an author used to build a new text" (2018)? That citation is not a unidirectional record of credit for things taken or even a gift to a colleague, but rather that citation is sowing, fertilizing, and tending to community?

And what if students learned that citations are not inevitable formulae, but are rather choices made progressively in multiple phases? That we choose which terms and disciplines to search, which authors to read, where to read carefully and generously, which sources to ignore, and which sources can be readily dismissed from the conversation? One cannot possibly cite every source that has ever contributed to a subject; we select. But how are

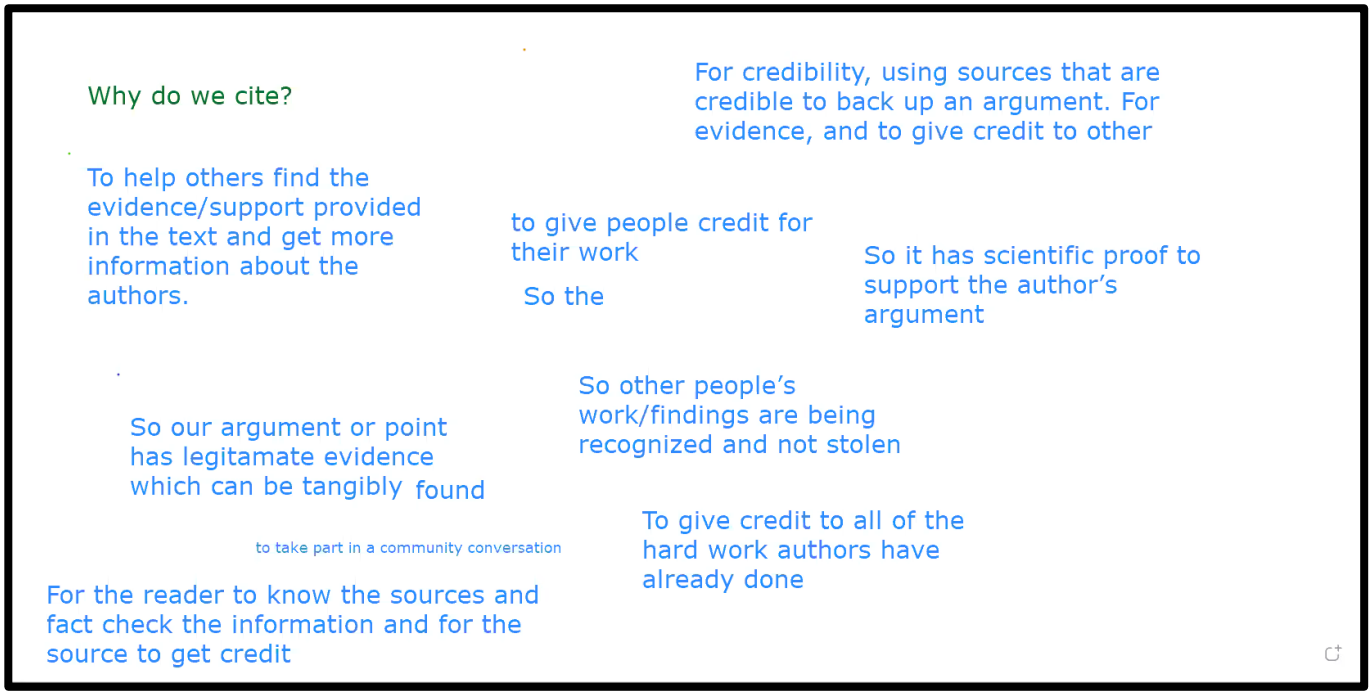

FIGURE 1. AUTHOR'S SCREENSHOT OF STUDENT RESPONSES TO AN IN-CLASS QUESTION FROM A LIBRARIAN INSTRUCTIONAL PARTNER IN A SPRING 2021 FIRST-YEAR WRITING COURSE. STUDENTS WERE PROMPTED TO ANSWER: "WHY DO WE CITE?" THE SMALLER FONT IS WHAT THE INSTRUCTOR (THE AUTHOR) WROTE ON THE JAMBOARD SPACE ("TO TAKE PART IN A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION"). NOTE THE FREQUENT MENTIONS OF "CREDIT," "GIVE CREDIT," AND "GET CREDIT" BY STUDENT RESPONDENTS.

those decisions made in conscious and sub/unconscious ways instead of being framed as natural, neutral outcomes?

Beginning From a Position of Shame Around Citation

Kylie: As an instructor attempting to answer these questions to inform my pedagogy, I find that I have first had to grapple with my shame, fear, and discomfort in citation. Here I reconstruct how I moved beyond a pernicious relationship with citation, and thus, with writing.

As a first-generation college student (and a white woman from the rural US South who grew up in a mix of poverty and stability), I entered higher education without knowledge of cultural norms and unwritten rules. I struggled through writing from my first undergraduate semester, even though I had found academic success throughout K-12 education. In college I learned to identify as "not a writer," though I was highly motivated to hone my writing craft. In graduate school, I was labeled a weak writer in official departmental evaluations. As an art history undergraduate major who then pursued a graduate degree in anthropology, a subject in which I had no prior experience, it was clear to me that I hadn't read "the right people" and couldn't cite them during the performative conversations with peers in seminar rooms and happy hours. It didn't occur to me that citation patterns were anything other than merit- and credibility-based, though I now see the difference between how often works are cited and how valuable those works may be to society (Baas and Fennell 2019, Lerman et al. 2022). I tried (reading and) citing based on what others cited… I never felt fully engaged in a conversation. It was as if there were inside jokes I couldn't access as an outsider looking in on the real work happening beyond my capacity. I struggled to cite the oft-cited because so many people seemed to be mis-citing these works and creating alternate meanings not originally intended by the authors. (I would later learn that erroneous and counter-factual citation is prevalent in scholarly writing [Hosseini et al. 2020], a phenomenon which Rekdal calls "academic urban legends" [2014].) Even in this essay, in which I am arguing for re-envisioning how we present citation to learners, I have included some citations out of obligation, to show I've read the same literature as imagined others who might gatekeep my ideas out of these pages. This sort of defensive citation doesn't benefit the writer, the reader, or the project of knowledge production.

After submitting the first draft of this essay, anthropologist Mwenza Blell published a compelling and insightful account of her experience as a graduate student citing beyond the canon of famous anthropological names (2023). What Blell describes is a similar environment to what I observed as a student, yet Blell already knew as a graduate student that reading at the margins was devalued. Her mentors expected her to pretend she hadn't indeed learned from under-cited scholars, and she realized that citing beyond recognizable (typically White) names would be used against her to undermine her own intellectual contributions. Blell names the dichotomy of the oft-cited (White, recognizable) scholar and the under-cited, erased "Other" scholar as the "giant" and the "mule" (the latter evoking Zora Neale Hurston's character Nanny who describes [Black women as] "de mule uh de world" [1937]).

Only after I had completed graduate school did I first become aware of how citation patterns have been documented across disciplines to be systemically exclusionary: that scholars disproportionately cite writers of the most dominant social identities (Ahmed 2013, Liu et al. 2023, Mott and Cockayne 2017, Smith et al. 2021, Tuck et al. 2015). I also came to understand that citation was a declaration of alliance, a public badge of membership. This realization came when a faculty hiring committee asked me to name my "top three theorists." I was a theory omnivore, seeing theory as an explanatory tool that I could choose from my utility belt depending on the questions I wanted to ask and the evidence available. But here was a search committee implying that I could signal my particular brand of belonging by naming three recognizable figures. I refused to answer and instead explained all of the above. I do not have to tell you I didn't get that job.

Re-directing Away From Defensive, Obligatory, Habitual Citation

Beyond a signal of who we're allied with, citation ought to move scholarly conversations forward. As readers and writers we enter into "unending conversations" already begun (as in Kenneth Burke's parlor metaphor [1967]), but so often the conversations begun by some thinkers are not forwarded; they are instead marginalized, left unread, or, more insidiously, they are read and subsequently ignored or pilfered. While we are not obligated to engage all the conversations already happening, the way we make those choices is steeped in our worldviews in unnamed ways that we must place at the center in our teaching. Scholars have discretion into which unending conversations they contribute and may choose to prioritize engaging those who were already being sidelined when they arrived.

Over the past decade, writers from historically excluded, marginalized, and minoritized backgrounds in particular have proliferated calls for awareness, reflection, and action—or praxis—that overcomes the tendency to cite in a way motivated by fear and the desire to cite all the "right things" (i.e., all the sources valued by those whose demographic homogeneity serves to uphold disparities [Clauset et al. 2015, Wapman et al. 2022]). These conversations bring to light issues of, as Christen A. Smith and Dominique Garrett-Scott put it, being "*symbolically included* but *epistemologically erased*" (2021: 19; italics in original).

Kylie: Learning of Christen Smith's international Cite Black Women campaign helped me to belatedly realize these epistemic erasures are prominent (see Smith et al. 2021 on the principles of this urgently needed movement). Smith's work helped me see that my discomfort with citation choices had a name and a suite of causes. Who is credited with brilliant ideas and who is spoken over and spoken for are not arbitrary. While universities position themselves as oases of multiculturalism and celebrate the inclusion of diverse participants, there is nevertheless a pattern of devaluing

Black women's work and intellectual contributions, and of appropriating their work (Edmonds 2020, Makhulu 2022) to elevate others who are deemed "more credible" (see Medina and Luna [2020] for how this works for other scholars of color, including Latinx/e writers). Audre Lorde had also made these points about extractive citation since at least the 1970s: "Do you ever really read the work of Black women? Did you ever read my words, or did you merely finger through them for quotation which you thought might valuably support an already conceived idea concerning some old and distorted connection between us? This is not a rhetorical question" (1984: 68).

Aboriginal and Indigenous scholars are making similar calls to problematize citation habits, reflect on them, and challenge disciplinary norms. Eve Tuck, K. Wayne Yang, and Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández explain the impetus for their Citation Practices Challenge:

> Indeed, our practices of citation make and remake our fields, making some forms of knowledge peripheral. We often cite those who are more famous, even if their contributions appropriate subaltern ways of knowing. We also often cite those who frame problems in ways that speak against us. Over time, our citation practices become repetitive; we cite the same people we cited as newcomers to a conversation. Our practices persist without consideration of the politics of linking projects to the same tired reference lists. (2015)

While normative citation habits tend toward consumption (read, collect ideas, credit them nominally), some Indigenous scholars are calling for a paradigm shift toward relationality instead. Zoe Todd (2016), Lauren Tynan (2020), and Max Liboiron (2021), for example, each urge scholars to avoid extractive citation, to engage with writers' ideas sincerely, to be in kinship with their research. Tynan critiques how reading research can be *consumption* within a supermarket of ideas and how we must reject that neoliberal way of extracting from writers (2020: 164). Kinship instead requires care and mutualism.

Savannah: One devastating outcome of citation can be the devaluing of expertise that isn't visible within the credentialism of academic spaces. A rigid hierarchy of academic worth is created when citation instruction emphasizes formatting above all else. This privileges the already-privileged and leaves little space for alternative ways of knowing, knowledge learned from lived experiences, or scholarship that falls outside the Western, Global North canon. There are many consequences: poorer quality papers, but also a policing of who is allowed to belong comfortably and whose presence comes with an asterisk to explain their inclusion. Shifting these norms can instead create a space for students to see themselves as scholars, too. When students and others think more critically of the sources they are using and the people, practices, and ideas they are supporting and refuting, citation can empower everyone involved.

Citation ought to be conscientiously practiced with consideration of representation and equity (Chakravartty et al. 2018), but such concerns are the starting place rather than the ultimate goal. Mott and Cockayne (2017) have described citation as performative politics. Who and what we read and cite define the boundaries of who gets a say in knowledge production. Scholars (and non-scholars) whose work is excluded from citation or diminished in citation communities have a reduced influence in developing disciplines and transdisciplinary research. Particularly in the first author's home discipline of anthropology, the purportedly "essential" citations are disproportionately written by white men (Bolles 2013, Davis and Mulla 2023). Privileging those voices silences and erases the perspectives of those not afforded unearned dominance: "citation is equally a technology for reproducing sameness and excluding difference" (Mott and Cockayne 2017: 960).

Teaching Toward Joyful Citation

Kylie: Teaching undergraduate research-based writing helped me connect all these lessons with practices for a new relationship to citation and thus to writing: I began to see citation as an act of gratitude for writers who have made me think deeply and in new ways. Being in a writing classroom rather than in an anthropology classroom gave me space to critically consider how my prior attitudes about citation had affected my instruction habits. Working in a writing program helped me feel I had the freedom and time to read scholarship I was interested in, rather than obligation to the anthropological canon. Liberation from disciplinary limits led me to read the brilliance of Katherine McKittrick, who models the joys, responsibilities, and possibilities of citation in a chapter from Dear Science and Other Stories *called "Footnotes (Books and Papers Scattered about the Floor)" (2020). Bending genres, McKittrick urges the reader to consider that "the works cited, all of them, when understood as* in conversation *with each other, demonstrate an interconnected story that resists oppression" (2020: 28). Pulling on the threads of such interconnectedness, Chanda Prescod-Weinstein describes how ideas are made in communities and are rarely the result of a single genius working in isolation, including even the work of Albert Einstein (2021: 55-56).*

Savannah: Current citation praxis may unwittingly advance this myth of "single geniuses working in isolation" critiqued by Prescod-Weinstein (2021) and normalize the idea that a single mind, absent from community and collaboration, can (and is often expected to) produce scholarship (2021: 55-56). In this lies perhaps the most dangerous part of the current model of how citation is taught: that knowledge is something to be capitalized. To be owned. This is the backbone of an ever-present student fear—-that improper citation is tantamount to theft and will be punished as such.

The paradox of working alongside my peers to build reference lists populated with "et al." while still under the assumption that single individuals could somehow maintain ownership over entire thought processes took a while to sink in. Why is our current citation process not reflective of actual scholarship in practice? Learning is collaborative by nature and the way we document such learning should be, too. Instead, we remain tied to a fear-forward rhetoric that threatens the very collaboration learning and discovery necessitate.

Given all this, what if we stop thinking about citation as a matter of elevating single authors by naming them and instead as including the communities within which people are writing and thinking? What if we resisted fetishizing authorship, especially single authorship and first authorship (see the Society for Cultural Anthropology's collection on co-authorship as feminist practice [Kotni et al. 2020]), and instead recognized and named the webs of knowledge production in which we all participate? Questioning assumptions and norms around citation and authorship are not only useful for seeking out solutions to inequities in knowledge production, but raising these questions with students helps them move beyond a robotic, box-checking citation praxis.

Citation Is Relationship. Is Communal. Is Not Arbitrary. Is Not Automatic.

Realities are made when we cite. The act changes us as the writer. It could change the reader. All of that can happen in ways that result in better social and individual outcomes if we think through the many possible reverberations of our citation choices.

Kylie: When I cite someone's writing, I feel as if I'm posting them a note: "hi, you may not know me, but you inspire me to think more expansively, and I want readers to know what a difference you made for me so they, too, can learn from you!" This is perhaps a less intimate version of acknowledgments; I have no right to claim to know you, but I know what you've written, and I want to thank you and celebrate you, dear writer. Indeed, where are the boundaries between citation and acknowledgment anyway? At times, those relegated to acknowledgements may have played a greater role in shaping our ideas than those on the works cited page. This is another thread of citation praxis that warrants questioning.

Savannah: Class discussions have always been my favorite part of school. When fear of academic expulsion and the stress of correctly verbalizing full citations are no longer centered in our conversations about learning, discussions are much more accessible, collaborative, vibrant, and engaging. I love talking about the sources I've read and how they build on previous courses or research done by my peers. This is where I feel as though I am collaborating with authors. Where I am in conversation with them.

When students are unbound from disciplinary silos and encouraged to creatively explore connections between sources, we can come to citation from a place of gratitude. The ease of building ideas and connecting sources that is easily found within classroom discussions should be just as present in norms for writing with sources. Writers can transform their reference lists into a space meant to recognize not simply whose name goes with what idea but instead articulate the importance and power of each work. Citation can be used as a vehicle for collaboration, turning writers and their sources into co-creators as their ideas grow together to generate new scholarship.

Of course, citing someone is not only developing relationships: accruing citations augments a researcher's metrics of academic success, whether one believes those are a fair way to assess our contributions or not. Citations are counted to rank academic job candidates and to quantify merit for tenure and promotion. Advice to evaluators on how to count citation credits in a purportedly "unbiased, proper way" has even earned precious space in the pages of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Romesburg 2019). Citation promotes an individual's career and engaging citations beyond "the canon" (read: the white, masculine, middle-class body of work) may ultimately contribute toward generating representation and equity in our academic fields. Chanda Prescod-Weinstein explains how *white empiricism–in which scholars from marginalized backgrounds (especially Black women) are held to much higher standards of evidence than white men when making research claims*–shapes how scholars invoke sources and evidence to produce knowledge (2020). In citation practices, this manifests as offering white men's research under a presumption of empiricism and demanding a higher threshold of evidence for marginalized others. This type of epistemic oppression "involves a denial of a knower's competence based on ascribed identity" (Prescod-Weinstein 2020: 425).

Bringing Joyful Citation Into the Classroom

Kylie: Amid this struggle for credibility, citation can also be a rewarding affective experience in which the writer is fulfilled and joyful in contributing to a scholarly conversation. Many developing writers experience writing (including citation) as a painful process. Once I saw students in my courses fixated on the formatting chore, I resolved to identify just and equitable ways to think through citing sources, which unexpectedly has led to a whole host of other positive outcomes intimately tied to enacting justice and equity in knowledge production: joy and pleasure. When I speak of the joy experienced in citation, I refer to a specific version of joy that creates a feeling of harmony with other humans and a sense of freedom of thought (Johnson 2020: 7-8).

Another way I've started to think about this joyful orientation is inspired by adrienne maree brown's pleasure activism (2019). As brown advocates:

> *Pleasure activists believe that by tapping into the potential goodness in each of us we can generate justice and liberation, growing a healing abundance where we have been socialized to believe only scarcity exists. […]*
>
> *Pleasure activism includes work and life lived in the realms of satisfaction, joy, and erotic aliveness that bring about social and political change. (brown 2019: 13)*

What brown urges is that we behave in ways that actually feel good. A citational practice filled with fear, guilt, and shame results from our bodies and minds telling us to alter course. I don't want students or anyone else to feel such anguish in writing. I want students to know that they may not enter a scholarly conversation that has formed due to meritocracy, but rather one molded by the social and political variables of disciplinary knowledge production. I want them to know that they are also choosing which

sources to engage (not just consume); that their choices may elevate certain actors and leave others out; that they are subjecting their readers to the works they cite. Not all ideas are equally valuable, and there is not always room for everyone to enter the unending scholarly conversation. But who is left out of the conversation shouldn't be determined by false hierarchies and prestige economies. I want to feel citations as an act of gratitude, and not in the sense of a reward for the academic merit game, and I want students to find that, too.

These joys and pleasures go hand in hand with more equitable and just citation practices. Approaching citation in pursuit of joy ought to result in a more inclusive and less extractive citation practice, while orienting our citation toward equity also ought to have pleasurable outcomes (fig. 2).

we ought to recall one of brown's principles of emergent strategy: "There is a conversation in the room that only these people at this moment can have. Find it" (2017: 41). If we apply that abundant inclusion to citation, it invites us to expand the number of voices we bring into the conversation, citing more rather than less, honoring more kinds of contributions and expertise. These are values at odds with academia's orientation toward singular geniuses and exclusive accolades, and we must explain this tension to students.

Before even asking students to consider the differences in citation styles, we can invite them to question what they think they know about the purposes of citation (see Appendix 1). Ask them to consider what impacts citation choices can have, what rewards and costs there may be, and to whom. What we want them to arrive at are realizations

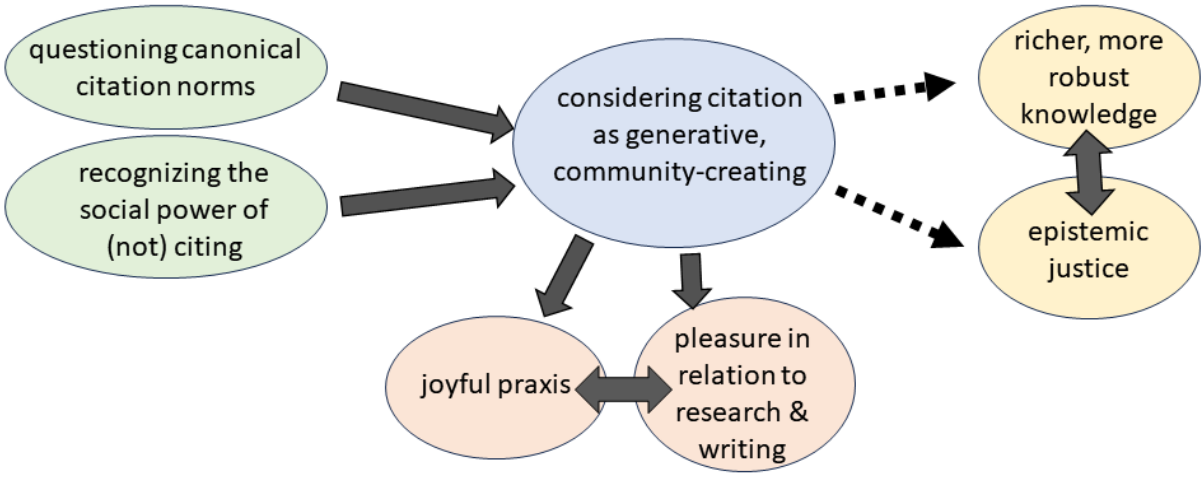

FIGURE 2. ORIENTING CITATION TOWARD EQUITY ALSO OUGHT TO HAVE PLEASURABLE OUTCOMES

Figure 2. If we start from a place of questioning the reproduction of the scholarly canon without reflection, and if we recognize the social power of citation, that can lead us to practicing a generative and community-oriented citation practice. Those habits can result in joy and pleasure, while such an orientation *may* also lead to richer, more robust knowledge, as well as epistemic justice. Dotted lines connect the latter two outcomes because it is possible that writers could approach citations as generative in ways that merely reproduce the status quo, which would not in turn lead to epistemic justice and a more robust knowledge base.

To lead students toward these more productive and generative relationships with citation, instructors can talk to them more intentionally from early in the semester about how there can be a pleasure in conscientiously making these choices and considering the ways they engender community. If we think about and teach citation as an act of creating relationships, we may be more apt to take seriously the imperative to faithfully represent writers' ideas, to think deeply and authentically with their ideas, and to give writers the benefit of the doubt when we don't understand or agree. Moreover, brown's pleasure activism doesn't ask us to exclude voices through feigned scarcity: it is generative and honors the abundance within us and between us. And here

about how citing is crafting community and initiating possibilities for future dialogue. We can ask them to look for evidence in course readings of how citing can be a multi-directional interaction with colleagues and others who we recognize, celebrate, and elevate. Relationships are not only built in the spaces between the writer and the authors they cite, but as writers we are also introducing sources to each other. Perhaps the sources have already met elsewhere, but in some cases the writer brings them into dialogue for the first time. Students can look for and trace networks of citation through visualizations that they (co-)create such as concept maps and timelines of scholarly writings (see Appendix 2).

We ought to focus the re-calibration of citation pedagogies on affirming matters, and on the potential benefits to all, but we can also ask students to look at the harmful outcomes possible in citation choices. For example, naming the most cited works merely because they are already the most cited doesn't move scholarship forward; it only satisfies an exclusionary status quo.

When we consider citation decisions as crafting community, it gives us license to then conscientiously decide when to not tip our hat to someone; it allows us to discern

where our inclusive abundance need not apply to all kinds of knowledge producers (Mansfield et al. 2019, Souleles 2020). As Dan Souleles prompts in reference to academic predators, *do you really need that citation in your bibliography?* Are you citing someone simply because of their prestigious name? Are they really the only source on that subject? Granted, this is not a popular stance, as explained by Brian Leiter (2018), a philosopher and legal scholar, who explicitly forbids excluding harmful colleagues from citation habits. Leiter's essay was a response to Nikki Usher's own advice column (2018) on the conundrum of citing a serial harasser when a peer reviewer required it. But why is the dominant assumption that one must promote the most-known name on any given subject, regardless of their history of harm? Aren't there usually others who have done the work, too? Why continue to prioritize the same actors? I seek joy in the freedom of not having to cite in these defensive ways that work against building community (see Appendix 3).

If citation is a *pro forma* matter of citing who's already been cited, then what is the point? How are we participating in a process of forging a better future with our scholarship if we perpetually list the same voices and ideas? Let's teach students and ourselves that citation is not a compulsory act under threat of sanction, but rather an opportunity for community and dialogue.

How Teaching the Joyful, Pleasurable Citation Praxis Is Good For Teachers, Too

"I know teaching is a survival technique. It is for me and I think it is in general; the only way real learning happens. Because I myself was learning something I needed to continue living. And I was examining it and teaching it at the same time I was learning it. I was teaching it to myself *aloud*" - Audre Lorde (Lorde and Rich 1981: 719, italics in original).

Kylie: When we teach, we are actively creating realities in our discipline. We are setting up expectations students may carry with them well beyond our classrooms. We are also creating lived realities for ourselves. Transforming my instruction in citation beyond formatting and checklists has brought unanticipated joys. Watching students work through hard questions about why some authors are cited and not others, and how they are actively participating in the scholarly conversations themselves has been immensely rewarding. I do not claim to have found all the solutions, but I can recommend to others that they also allow for writing instruction to include considerations of epistemic inequities, and the ways that knowledge becomes power through and with citation.

Savannah: Kylie's class was the first time an educator pushed me to think critically about citing. To reflect on its importance and understand its power. These conversations linked to themes of decolonization and deconstruction of white supremacy within academia. In any form of equity work, joy should be centered. I was struck by how this course could transform a chore I had primarily done out of fear into a practice that not only worked to dismantle oppressive cycles of privilege within academia, but which also genuinely made the writing process more fulfilling and joyful.

But how do we truly change the norms around teaching such an entrenched practice? I was lucky enough to encounter an educator early in my academic career who gave me the tools and space to reevaluate how I approach citation, but I also sense this is rare. The responsibility of shifting one's citation practice should not fall on students or educators alone–instead both can support each other in more meaningful citation methods. Ones that are infused with joy.

One of the biggest steps is shifting from a focus on plagiarism and academic dishonesty related to citing. Instead, we must all work to reframe the practice as a conversation–one that encourages collaboration rather than threatens it. This requires intentional time and space to allow students to explore their understanding of citation and for educators to share the meaningful reasons behind why we cite. It is not enough to simply tell students to cite more marginalized authors or "allow" them to venture away from peer-reviewed sources. Changing the way we understand citation practices can only be accomplished through compassionate conversations. These talks must directly tackle the purpose and possibilities of citation. Like all equity work, this deeper understanding does not come from performative acts and half-baked disclaimers. It is not a throwaway paragraph on the syllabus or a revamp of the citation lecture. Rather, it is a continuous journey that requires time and effort; however, it is not without reward. As I continue my college education, I am hopeful that more professors will hold space for me and my peers to explore what citation is, to collaborate together, and, perhaps most importantly, to center joy.

What do we want teachers, students, and ourselves to be accountable for?

1. To learn what we can about the writers whose work we engage. To ask what shapes how they know what they know, and how it reveals our own gaps in experience and understanding.
2. To read generously and with resistance to urges to "efficiently" consume others' ideas. Instead, we will read to listen. We will strive for relations.
3. To cite not for the performance of "knowing the right names" but rather with sincerity of interest in what the source brings to the unending conversation.
4. To not think of citation practice as a box-filling endeavor: we will not count identities or quantify diversity. We will strive for holistic, multivocal ways of knowing and asking about the world.
5. To cite primarily to honestly explain *how we know what (we think) we know (or cannot know)*, in a larger, lifelong project of epistemic transparency.

When Kylie initially submitted this essay for review, generative artificial intelligence tools (GenAI) such as

ChatGPT were just becoming widely available; higher education has since catastrophized on what this could mean for teaching, especially teaching writing. There is much to be said on how good writing instruction disincentivizes GenAI use. However, it is most relevant to this essay to posit that any writing habit that infuses joy and pleasure into the process may be a productive way to move students away from relying on it. Resorting to ChatGPT may be due to a person's attitude about the worth of their education, but it may also be due to avoidance, fear, and shame around writing and citing. Intentionally and iteratively re-orienting our classroom practices toward joys in citation may circumvent such struggles among students.

What have become the norms in teaching citation are not serving students or the disciplines in which they write. We hope for students and colleagues to see citation not merely as the avoidance of dishonesty, but as much more. We may not always know the particulars of why and how students have struggled to develop a healthy relationship with citation, but we can draw from our own shame-filled and fear-inducing experiences as a starting place here. As teacher and student, we each acknowledge we may continue to encounter spaces where citation is centered on fear and intimidation around plagiarism and formatting, but we are each committed to centering a more reflexive citation practice. And we now find joy in thinking back on all the works we've read beyond the "canons" of our disciplines that show us worlds we wouldn't otherwise find on our own.

We grasp that re-imagining citation practices involves more emotional labor; we believe that labor can be re-channeled in pleasurable, joyful ways. If we're going to be doing emotional work, it ought to be generative rather than exclusionary. We don't have to be in a toxic relationship with citation. We cannot recalibrate these relationships toward abundance and joy with one-off interventions; it must be part of the fabric of our courses and our writing practices beyond our roles as teacher and student. Joy is a form of resistance to the structures that ask us to exclude, rank, and marginalize knowledge producers; we each are accountable for intentionally taking part in the transformative process.

Appendix 1

There is no single moment in which students learn the purpose of citation in my (Kylie's) writing courses; my pedagogy iteratively visits aspects of citation, moving from observation to reflecting on our attitudes, to taking actions. I do not wish to prescribe specific activities to readers because I believe that we each must examine our citation habits and then be transparent with students about that as they form their own citation praxis.

First, students must consider citation as a problem to solve: they write a letter to an acquaintance/relative/friend about sources from the course and must decide how to offer the reader enough information to find/understand the sources. This positions students to see citation as a technology, or a problem to be solved, rather than a formula, and shows them how different citation modes fulfill different rhetorical purposes.

Next, I prompt students about a specific journal article:

- Observe how citations are formatted in this paper. Observe where they are included, how many are included in each instance, and what kind of sources they are pointing to. Tell me about one thing you learned about academic citation practices by observing them here.

In Week 2 or 3 (of 15), I break down the demographics of who participates in the discipline on which our course is focused (anthropology). Students discuss recent studies of authorship and citation demographics. I lecture about recent quantitative research on whose voices are centered and who receives research funding. In this class period, we discuss these questions:

1. In this discipline that is purportedly about the study of human diversity,
    a. Who is representing what/whom?
    b. How do the identities of the knowledge producers affect the knowledge produced?
    c. How do gatekeeping and exclusion alter disciplinary scholarship?

I then ask students to look outward from the examples we are examining from anthropology. We discuss:

2. Do you know anything about the demographics of degree holders, researchers, professors, or writers in your (intended/possible) major? How could you find out more about that?
3. Think of a course you've taken/are taking: how did the identity of the knowledge producers influence that field of study? Share examples of what you do or do not know about this.

Finally, I ask them to reflect on these questions, all of which we revisit throughout the semester:

- How is this relevant to who you are as a researcher-writer relative to a research area?
- How can this inform how you research? How you write about research? For whom you write?

Appendix 2

The courses I (Kylie) teach position students to become familiar enough with an area of scholarship that they can ask a new question about it and write about it in ways that critically evaluate how they use sources (or ignore/exclude sources). Additionally, I ask students to principally consider citation as joyfully forming relationships with knowledge producers. One strategy for shifting their citation labor is to require students to use a particular open-source citation manager (e.g., Zotero) so they can focus on joyful, generative citation rather than formatting chores. I tell them repeatedly that the labor they might otherwise spend on scrutinizing formatting can be re-directed to joyful citation praxis.

I iteratively urge students to describe how sources form knowledge networks: We collaboratively annotate readings before class (in Perusall), then build with in-class discussion. As students develop their individual research projects, they create concept maps as graphical representations of connections between sources. I ask them to follow webs of citation by seeing who has cited whom since a piece was published and in what ways (by chasing citations through Web of Knowledge and Google Scholar). When they propose their research projects, they must explain the ways they are finding sources beyond using the library skills they've been taught: they must reflect on whose voices might be missing and how they can go about finding them. Their research must also include non-scholarly yet credible sources, urging them to see that expertise can take many forms and that those with academic positions are not the sole arbiters of knowledge.

During the research paper outlining stages, students also submit a series of timelines of sources from their research. These are graphical timelines made in Canva where students illustrate how sources are in conversation with each other over time, a visualization of the Burkean Parlor. I also prompt them to again consider who is missing, what marginalized perspectives can be centered, and what other patterns of knowledge production emerge from the citation networks.

After a first draft of their research papers, I ask students to highlight all the places they have quoted an author and to defend the inclusion of each quote. They must consider who they quoted and the author's relationship to their research. Students defend these choices to each other during a class discussion. I do not prescribe how to make these choices, but rather aim for students to ask more questions about how/why they quote. They are required to include multi-source citations to compare multiple sources and to go beyond merely paraphrasing and quoting one source at a time.

When students submit the final versions of their research papers, I ask them to include a reflective statement that addresses "how you thought about citation as building relationships."

Appendix 3

Sometimes excluding a source is a way of creating and tending to community. I (Kylie) illustrate this to students using case studies of scholars who have been found responsible for exploiting their students or mentees and whose research has also been revealed to be lacking in integrity in related ways. I do not tell them what to do with dishonest researchers, but rather ask them how including everyone might be counter-productive to generating a more joyful, community-oriented web of knowledge.

To model methods for harm reduction, I tell my students about ways that harassment and abuse have affected scholars in my area of specialization, and share a bibliography I created to recognize, elevate, and include scholars other than a dishonest, exploitative scholar in our citation community. We do not have to talk specifically about those we exclude but we can orient our joyful abundance in other directions.

Works Cited

This reference list is an outcome of our lived joyful citation practice, but is, to a lesser extent, shaped by the fact that we wrote this essay to submit for peer review. As we crafted this essay, we occasionally referenced prior works due to defensive motivations. In other words, we sometimes cited works for the benefit of imagined peer reviewers and other doubtful readers: to ensure no one would think we didn't do our homework or that we were presenting our joyful praxis as more original than it is.

However, most of the sources cited were joyfully engaged in conversation. This list is an artifact of our generative relationships with the sources and the delight of seeing in new ways, and an exertion of gratitude for what we learn from these writers.

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Authorship functions as currency: attaching one's name to an argument lends one legitimacy and capital. We wish we knew how to reject participating in it. For now, we choose to call ourselves co-authors while merely listing all those who shaped our thinking, whether in the Works Cited or here in the Acknowledgments. In writing this paper, we felt a blurring between authors, acknowledgements, and sources, finding discomfort in their mutual exclusion. We would not see citation as we do without these others we have named, celebrated, tipped our hats to. And we would not know how to practice the joys of citation without our conversations with each other as co-authors either. We ask readers to consider each name as a critical producer of the knowledge shared here.

For now, we'll settle with merely naming those who collaborated with us along the way, while knowing that if we lived in a different system of authorship norms, we might all instead be labeled as co-creators at the top of the article. And we'll continue to reflect on how to better conceptualize authorship versus acknowledged (unauthored) contributions. These ideas were written over a three-year period, in which many generous colleagues offered advice on whether it was worth publishing. Kylie's co-creative accomplices helped her reflect on joyful citation: Pamela Presser, Sarah Kennedy, Alexandra Antohin, Danika Myers, Phil Troutman, Phyllis Ryder, Jason Alley, Jordi Rivera Prince, and Di Hu. Savannah is tremendously grateful for all of the educators in her life who have cultivated her love for learning and taught her the power of education. Her relationship with knowledge production was shaped by the incredible teaching of Heidi Freeman, Jessica Williams, Copland Rudolph, Rachel Hagen, and of course Dr. Quave, who all believed in her before she ever could.

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RADICAL TEACHER

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Notes from the Anti-Displacement Studio

by Lily Song

"VISION FOR VACANT PARCEL". DESIGN CONCEPT BY KALAMU KIETA. VISUAL BY ANASTASIA LEOPOLD.

Introduction

Since fall 2021, I have been teaching the anti-displacement studio to architecture and urban planning students at a Boston-based university. The community-based participatory planning and design research studio offered at Northeastern University activates the role and responsibility of the designer as creative accomplice to anti-displacement activists and movements. The course partly stems from the tradition of the design studio, a foundational pedagogical model in architecture and planning education for teaching practice through open-ended problem setting, skills synthesis, real or constructed clients, and teamwork (Long 2012). However, it departs from the traditional design studio's tendency to neglect community activism and place-based movements adjacent to campus and reinforce professionalized norms and career trajectories. In bridging between academic and local contexts, the studio pushes designers to interrogate their identities, privileges, biases, and blind spots while centering the perspectives and agential capacity of community-based activists and leaders. It further incorporates a reparative pedagogy and methods that shift the design process from a solution orientation to one of collectively reimagining and rebuilding from spatialized injustices and harms.

This article examines and reflects on two-years of teaching community-based participatory planning and design research in the context of Roxbury, a historic African American and Black neighborhood of Boston, in partnership with the district-level city councilor, neighborhood leaders, and artists. A spring 2022 seminar course helped develop a planning framework for the ARTery, a 3-mile community-arts corridor connecting neighborhood squares and secondary commercial areas. The fall 2022 anti-displacement studio next codesigned urban planning and design strategies reinforcing the cultural identity of long-time residents and businesses along the ARTery. The spring 2023 anti-displacement studio then focused on community-based activation and redesign strategies for vacant parcels in Roxbury. After providing some topical and contextual background and touching on the studio's significance in design education, this article describes the process of building the university-community partnership and reiterating studio work in alignment with community-driven planning and design processes across three semesters. The analysis focuses on teaching strategies to build on the strengths of the studio model while addressing current gaps in design studio education, and is followed by a concluding discussion on the implications for radical planning and design practice.

Background

Urban displacement refers to the forced relocation and exclusion of people from places of origin, residence, or belonging. The spatial development of American cities and towns relied on the forced removal of Indigenous people and appropriation of their lands for resource exploitation and property ownership at a continental scale (Witgen 2021). 20th century US metropolitan growth was predicated on urban renewal and highway projects that cut through and displaced urban communities of color so that suburban communities could conveniently access the cities they were fleeing (Avila 2004). During decades of national economic boom, discriminatory land use and housing policies constrained investments and wealth building opportunities for racialized communities (Rothstein 2018). In the 21st or "urban" century, the restructuring of cities as engines of economic growth based on knowledge and service sectors, commodification of housing as financial assets and instruments, and escalating socioeconomic inequality have routinized urban displacement (Marcuse and Madden, 2016; Florida 2017).

Such historic forces and trends are strongly present in Boston, a colonial educational and economic center with high levels of segregation and racial wealth and health disparities (Boston Public Health Commission 2023; Federal Reserve Bank of Boston 2015). The city's ever-expanding constellation of college and medical campuses encroach on surrounding communities and compound housing unaffordability (Elton 2004). Northeastern University occupies a particularly contentious position in Boston, next to Roxbury, the South End, and Mission Hill—historically red-lined working-class, Black and Latinx neighborhoods that are rapidly gentrifying (Pan 2020). Over the past few decades, Northeastern's Boston campus has grown along Columbus Avenue, where entire blocks were demolished as part of mid-century urban renewal and highway projects, and the university later took possession of vacant parcels (Sasani 2018; Pattison-Gordon 2016; Bluestone et al. 2003). The campus-oriented development has further crept into surrounding neighborhoods through students seeking private housing options as on-campus housing units fail to keep pace with surging enrollment (Cutler & Comer 2002).

In Boston—as in many cities around the world—a growing number of residents are pushing back against exclusionary real-estate development and trying to reclaim their neighborhoods from speculative capital and external control (Serrano et al. 2023; Kern 2022; Chapple and Sideris 2021; Marcuse 1984). They build on community-led struggles to stop urban renewal and highway projects, and advocate for better social/public services, tenant rights, inclusive workforce policies, and fair housing/lending (Vrabel 2014). Many are rooted in long-standing acts of collective refusal and cultural preservation among Indigenous, Black, decolonial, and poor people's movements. Notwithstanding community frustrations over Northeastern's expanding footprint, various local organizations and change leaders engage with university staff, faculty, and students through teaching, research, and other initiatives. Some have called on the support and collaboration of university-based partners in undertaking community-led anti-displacement planning and design initiatives. Such an invitation catalyzed the teaching and learning practice described below around the central question: to what extent and how can design pedagogy and methods be reformulated and retooled to support community-led anti-displacement planning and design initiatives?

Design Education and Studio Pedagogy

The anti-displacement studio builds on the tradition of the design studio, a pedagogical model that has been foundational to architecture and planning education since their inception in the 19th century. Studios distinctly serve goals of synthesis and learning-by-doing, and incorporate open-ended problems, real or constructed clients, and teamwork (Nemeth and Long 2016; Long 2012). As pedagogical practices, material spaces, and creative design practices, studios can be invaluable in: (1) making artefacts and selves; (2) bridging between academic and professional contexts; (3) conferring meaning on educational activities; (4) enabling or constraining activities, experiences and interactions; (5) backgrounding the activity of learning; and (6) expressing and shaping disciplinary identities (Corazzoa 2019). Noted challenges of design studios include: (1) engaging current contexts of students, (2) refocusing from solutions-driven design process to exploring, feeling, and empathizing as integral parts of design process, and (3) overcoming disconnection from real-world problem scenarios (Corazzoa 2019). Traditionally, design studios have been better at inculcating professionalized norms and reinforcing corporate career trajectories than engaging community activism and place-based movements adjacent to campus. Studio courses have also been critiqued for reproducing societal tendencies of class, race, and gender discrimination and asymmetrical relations of power in the classroom setting (Dutton 1987).

In addressing the limits of the studio model, the anti-displacement studio draws inspiration from K. Wayne Yang's concept of *third worlding universities* (2017). Writing as his avatar, la paperson, the decolonial educator proposes:

> *First worlding universities are machinery commissioned to actualize imperialist dreams of a settled world. Second worlding universities desire to humanize the world, which is a more genteel way to colonize a world that is so much more than human. A third worlding university is a decolonizing university. This frame helps us assess the academic-industrial complex with its current neoliberal machinery and its investments in colonialism, but more importantly, it is a frame that describes the decolonial desires that already inhabit and repurpose the academic machinery (p. xiv-xv).*

Calling to action all "decolonizing dreamers who are subversively part of the machinery and part machine themselves" (p. xiii), he asks, "how might we operate on ourselves and other technologies and turn these gears into decolonizing operations?" (p. 24). Yang extends the technologies framework to further redefine settler colonialism as a set of technologies that generate patterns of social relations to land and can be reappropriated for decolonizing purposes. This includes technologies of settler supremacy (i.e. citizenship, private property, civil and criminal innocence, normative sexuality), indigenous erasure (i.e. military terror and genocide, partitioning of earth into resources and commodities, land privation and privatization, boarding schools and institutions of cultural assimilation), and anti-Blackness (i.e. criminal presence, landlessness, lethal geographies, carceral apparatuses, non-personhood) that circulate across bodies and spaces. The idea of repurposing the academic machinery and reappropriating settler colonial technologies is particularly ripe for consideration by educators in the built environment disciplines and professions, immersed as we are in the politics of land.

For studio instructors seeking to align university-based teaching and learning with community-led decolonizing agendas, the indigenous studies and education scholar Eve Tuck's "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities" (2009) is additionally instructive. Tuck calls for a moratorium on damage-centered research and narratives "that [establish] harm or injury in order to achieve reparation" yet carry long-term repercussions of rendering marginalized communities depleted and broken (Tuck 2009). She argues for re-envisioned research on Native communities, city communities, and other disenfranchised communities that not only document the effects of oppression but more importantly "capture desire" in ways that recognize the complex intricacies, contradictions, and informed seeking of lived lives that point towards becoming more of who they are (Tuck 2009, p. 416). Tuck writes, "Desire, yes, accounts for the loss and despair, but also the hope, the visions, the wisdom of lived lives and communities. Desire is involved with the not yet and, at times, the not anymore" (Tuck 2009, p. 417). To "capture desire" requires grounding research projects in the lived lives and ongoing efforts of communities, which in turn requires trust-based relationships between researchers and communities. As examined in the following sections, developing such relational, grounded, and desireful approaches to university-based research and learning can help address current gaps in design studio education, in part by unsettling and complicating underlying assumptions, professional norms, and creative practices.

Laying the Groundwork for University-Community Partnership

I began teaching the anti-displacement studio from my first semester at Northeastern University (fall 2021) as a faculty hire in the area of race, social justice, and the built environment. Tasked with teaching an architecture option studio, I chose to embed my studio teaching in community-based organizing and advocacy for development without displacement. To some extent, I was responding to student demands for design studio projects that support racial equity and inclusivity and meaningful community engagement in the wake of 2020 mass protests in defense of Black lives.[1] The first iteration of the anti-displacement studio in fall 2021, which enrolled 12 students across the master of urban planning, master of architecture, and bachelor of science in architecture programs, conducted participatory planning and design research with the Alliance for Community Transit-Los Angeles (ACT-LA), an organization with which I previously conducted design research to promote non-policing public safety investments on LA Metro transit systems (Song and Mizrahi, 2023). Virtually meeting with ACT-LA staff and members throughout the fall semester, studio participants researched and codesigned different social housing typologies for ACT-LA's advocacy campaign for housing and land use justice—helping visualize

community-owned and managed housing on public land with state-of-the-art green building and urban design elements that simultaneously harness and enhance existing neighborhood infrastructures and amenities.

As universities returned to in-person instruction and Boston experienced political transition, this opened up new teaching and learning opportunities. Michelle Wu became the first woman and person of color to be elected Boston mayor and was joined by an incoming class of city councilors representing Boston's growing diversity. Among them was Tania Fernandes Anderson, Boston City Councilor for District 7 (D7), consisting of Roxbury and parts of Dorchester, Fenway, and the South End. Before becoming the first Muslim American, African immigrant, and formerly-undocumented person elected to the Boston City Council, Anderson worked as a trauma-informed social worker, main-streets director, theater/fashion designer, small-business owner, and foster mother/caregiver. Having connected through a peer-learning and leadership development program for place-based organizations and public space stewards launched by the Boston Foundation in late summer 2019, the two of us stayed in touch. While campaigning for the city council seat, she asked for and received my advice on questions of urban policy, planning, and design. Stopping by the fall anti-displacement studio just after her electoral win in November 2021, she asked if I could offer a course that would support anti-displacement efforts in D7. My answer was yes! Notwithstanding the successful collaboration with ACT-LA, I was eager to immerse course teaching in the local context.

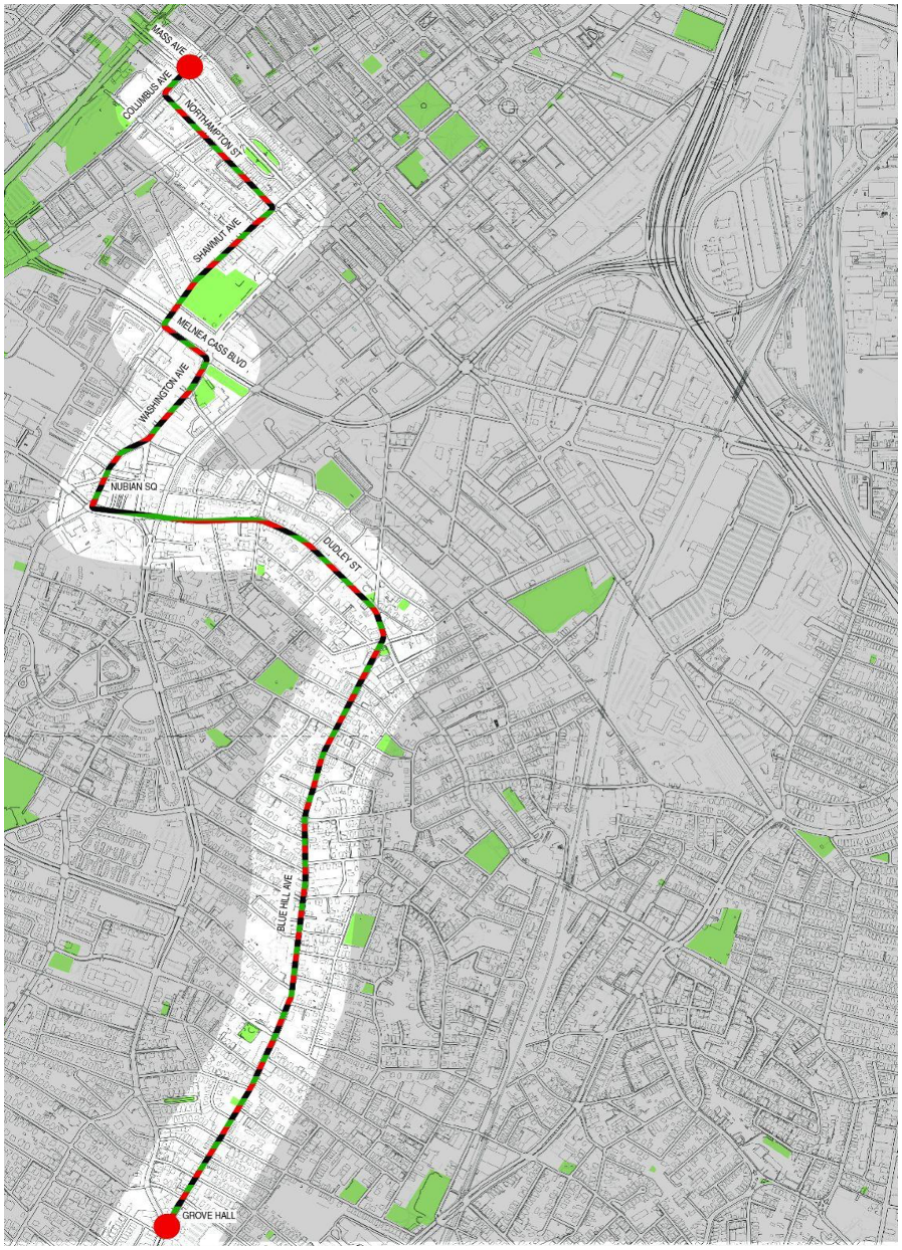

FIGURE 1. MAP OF THE ARTERY ROUTE. DESIGN CONCEPT BY TANIA FERNANDES ANDERSON. VISUAL BY KATELYN KEEN.

Planning Study for the ARTery

Among Anderson's immediate priorities was to address the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on small businesses and public spaces in Roxbury along with the lack of safe, well-maintained open spaces for communities to gather outside. Through brainstorming sessions with the D7 office (including the newly hired chief of staff and directors of community relations, constituent services, and budget and operations), we arrived at the idea of the ARTery, a cultural corridor connecting neighborhood squares and secondary commercial areas across Boston's Roxbury and South End neighborhoods. Running from Jazz Square in the South End through Nubian Square down Dudley Street and along Blue Hill Avenue to Grove Hall, the planned 3-mile route contained a high density and diversity of local businesses, numerous vacant lots, low foot traffic, and diminishing number and quality of public spaces. The idea was to hire local artists, activists, and entrepreneurs to reface and beautify small businesses, paint public murals, activate green/open/community spaces, and improve street safety in historically-disinvested neighborhoods. Many of them were already doing this work and could utilize funding support through the City of Boston. Anderson shortly filed a resolution establishing the ARTery and gained funding allocation ($1.6M) through the City budget.[2]

Leaning into Northeastern's location in Boston's District 7 and partnering with Anderson, I adapted a spring 2022 graduate-level professional practice seminar to inform the planning framework for the ARTery initiative. Enrolling 13 master of architecture students, the seminar course was

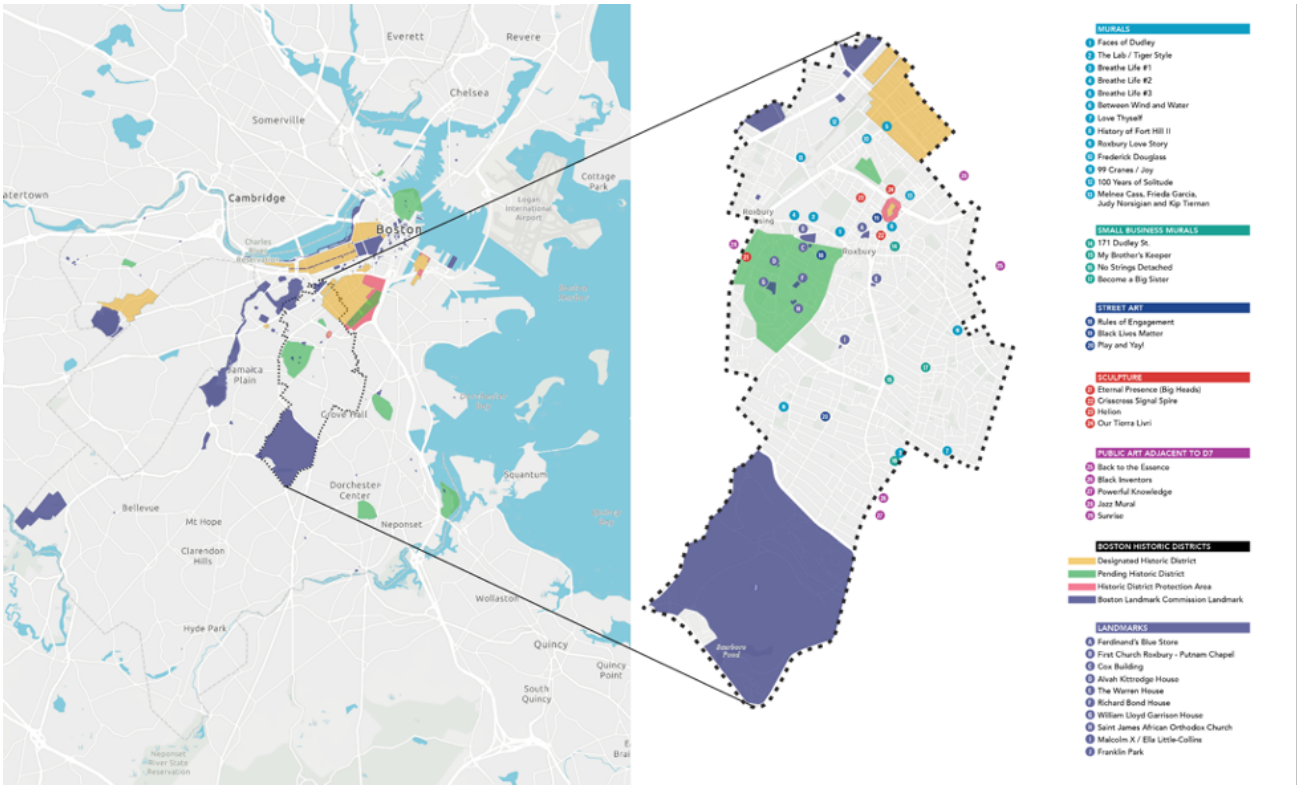

FIGURE 2. CITY OF BOSTON DISTRICT 7- COMMUNITY ASSET MAP. CREDIT: KATELYN KEEN.

structured around a series of community-engaged design principles and exercises. The class started at the individual level with students mapping their personal and social identities as well as well as home and chosen communities (the first where they grew up and the latter where they decided to live as adults). Then in groups of two to three, they shared thoughts on their own privileges, biases, and blind spots related to their positionality and living environments (as predominantly white people in their 20s from middle-class and affluent households who were new to the area) before discussing overall themes and takeaways as a class. Next, we used the Boston Area Research Map created by the Boston Area Research Initiative (BARI) at Northeastern to spatially analyze data about the population, housing, land value, transit access, crime, public safety, medical emergencies, and other characteristics of D7. Subsequently visiting Roxbury and learning about public landmarks and neighborhood assets as well as meeting with community activists and leaders allowed the class to partly challenge the deficit and damage-based narratives about the neighborhood that surfaced in the data mapping exercise.

With this preparatory training, the students were ready to conduct more hands-on work to support the ARTery initiative. Students conducted exercises mapping community assets with the D7 Office and interviewing Boston Black artists and makers (with whom Anderson and her team had pre-existing relationships) about how they would artistically approach public space activation on city-owned parcels. On site, they worked with the D7 directors of constituent services and community relations to conduct street audits along the ARTery route, and canvas local businesses, neighborhood establishments, and community members to learn what city agencies could do to improve streets, public works, and public spaces. Over the summer, I hired research assistants to follow up on the street audits and canvassing conducted by the spring class—analyzing the data files, filling in the gaps, and synthesizing needed city actions and

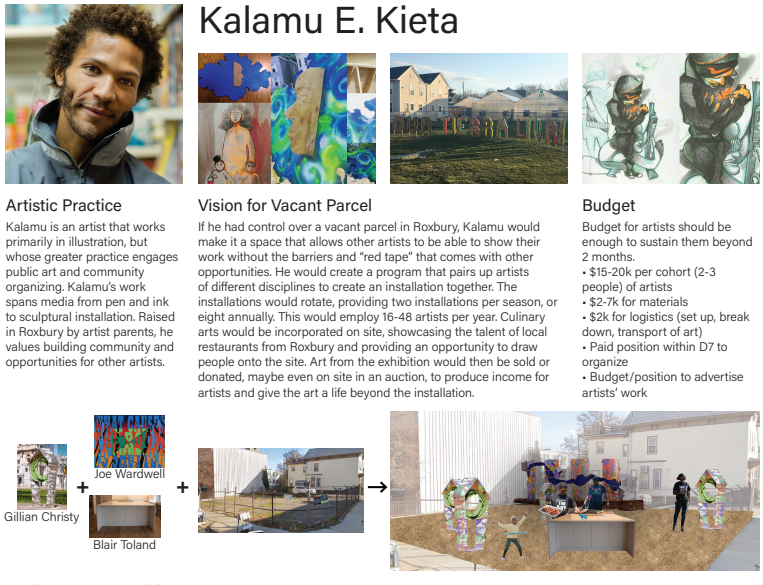

FIGURE 3. SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW WITH KALAMU KIETA. DESIGN CONCEPT BY KALAMU KIETA. CREDIT: ANASTASIA LEOPOLD.

improvements. Within the City of Boston, Anderson shared our research findings from the street audit and canvassing with the Chief of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion, Chief of Arts and Culture, Chief of Environment, Energy, and Open Space, and Chief of Streets, and gained their unanimous support for the initiative. Utilizing funds allocated by Anderson through the city budgeting process, the Chief of Arts and Culture additionally hired a program coordinator and put out a Request for Proposals for artists and teams to reface businesses, produce murals, and organize events along the D7 ARTery.

Trash + Recycling	• Limited trash and recycling bins (along Blue Hill Avenue, Dudley Street, and around Nubian Square) • Discrepancy between trash truck arrival times and street signs (near Brunswick/Intervale Streets) • Potholes in multiple locations along the ARTery • More street lighting needed • More frequent street cleaning needed (Blue Hill Avenue, Nubian Square)
Parks + Greenery	• More public benches/seating needed • More shading needed • More tree coverage needed
Buildings	• Many buildings have unwelcoming grated entry • Signs on storefronts need to be replaced for more curb appeal • Storefronts themselves need to be renovated and/or painted
Sidewalks	• Many cracks in the sidewalks • Uneven sidewalks in some areas • Lack of ADA accessibility pads for street crossings
Transportation	• Lack of overall parking availability for both customers and staff in Nubian Square • Need for more parking with time limits to create more turnover on Blue Hill Avenue • Lots of traffic issues including bus accidents and congested intersections by the Roxbury BPL branch

FIGURE 4. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM STREET AUDIT AND CANVASSING. CREDIT: AUTHOR.

Guiding ARTery Implementation

Going into fall 2022, Anderson requested that the anti-displacement studio work with members of the D7 Advisory Council to help guide ARTery implementation. Comprising over 40 neighborhood association leaders, the Advisory Council physically embodied Anderson's approach of organizing and uniting her constituents to hold the mayor, city council, and public agencies accountable to D7's communities of color and working-class households. She met with this group of predominantly African American/Black leaders and long-time residents on a weekly basis to discuss district-wide policy and planning priorities, and coordinate strategies and actions. For my 16 students (from the master of urban planning, master of architecture, and bachelor of science in architecture programs) to effectively work with D7 partners required understanding the history of spatial injustices and collective traumas sustained by local communities as well as cultivating empathy, respect, and humility. While I had a diverse mix of Black, Asian, Latinx, and white students, they were all new to the area and largely from middle-class and affluent backgrounds. Again, having them map their personal and social identities as well as draw cognitive maps of both where they grew up and were now living helped unpack their positionality and privilege in terms of class as well as ableism, gender/sexuality, race/ethnicity, and citizenship. To mitigate any potential sense of superiority or benevolent prejudice, we discussed the cognitive biases and blind spots accompanying privileged statuses along with the necessity and power of working in solidarity and complementarity with D7 partners.

For the first studio exercise, we leaned into Northeastern University's location in District 7 and interrogated problematic practices of institutional land banking and expansion in addition to reading and watching informational videos about urban displacement. Students researched how housing, commercial, cultural, and climate displacement showed up in Roxbury and created data narratives summarizing their findings. For the second studio exercise, they conducted a listening session with the D7 Advisory Council about important sites of cultural heritage and memory that the ARTery must help preserve and lift up (e.g. churches, theaters, jazz clubs, community gardens). Following up with archival research and summarizing their findings in posters, they shared back with community leaders what they learned. Showing studio partners an initial set of outputs based on what we learned from/with them—rather than design solutions— allowed us to gain their trust and invitation to codesign spatial propositions [together]. For the final project, Anderson and the D7 Advisory Council asked the

FIGURE 5. MINI-GUIDE FOR BEAUTIFYING LOCAL BUSINESSES. CREDIT: VERONICA FADEL AND ELIZABETH GUERRERO.

students to focus on spatial planning and design strategies for utilizing public investments and improvements to reinforce the cultural identity of long-time residents and businesses and strengthen community building along the ARTery. For the final outputs, students co-created with D7 partners a series of mini-guides for beautifying local businesses, creating public art, activating vacant lots, repurposing churches, and improving walkability/street safety.

For Anderson and the D7 Advisory Council, the ARTery was part of a larger strategy by which Roxbury community leaders and residents could guide public investments and spatial improvements in their own neighborhood. They were especially concerned about the City's growing control of land use planning and development at the neighborhood scale. In Wu's first year as mayor, the City of Boston conducted an audit of city-owned land, released a land inventory and mapping tool to improve public transparency and information access, and initiated Article 80 development review and approval reform to expedite affordable housing development, particularly on city-owned land.[3] The higher presence of publicly-owned parcels in Roxbury due to historical redlining, urban renewal, highway demolition, public disinvestment speculative/sub-prime lending, and arson and insurance fraud—in other words, racialized and spatialized injustices of top-down policy and planning processes— meant the neighborhood would inordinately bear the impacts of yet another set of top-down decisions from the City. Our D7 partners spoke back. In November 2022, Anderson co-sponsored a council measure calling for a moratorium on the development of affordable housing on city-owned parcels in D7 until the City agreed on how to best involve the community in decisions regarding what will be built in their neighborhood. In December 2022, she hosted an anti-displacement studio showcase (of our semester-long work) at Boston City Hall with the aim of showing the council and city staff the possibilities of community-based land use planning in D7[4]

Vacant Parcel Activation and Redesign Strategies

Meeting regularly with Anderson, her staff, and the Advisory Council provided the contextual understanding to orient continuing iterations of the anti-displacement studio. For spring 2023, the D7 partners requested that the anti-displacement studio focus on community-based activation and redesign strategies for publicly-owned parcels in D7. Cognizant that our collaboration was embedded in their larger contestation of the City's efforts to accelerate affordable housing development on city-owned parcels in D7, I initially felt perplexed and alarmed. Built environment professionals widely embrace new affordable housing as an inherent good and straightforward solution to displacement, and interpret any opposition as "Not in My Back Yard" (NIMBY) reactionism, and I was no exception. However, knowing the D7 partners as place-based leaders whose families and neighbors would be most directly impacted by the land use changes forced me to reexamine my ideological beliefs and assumptions. Attending a D7 Community Moratorium Listening Session, I witnessed heated discussion and debate among D7 residents, including renters, homeowners, and developers, not to mention people of different ages and ethnicities, about what should be done with vacant parcels, some of which were previously taken from Black property owners through eminent domain and tax liens. I also learned that the moratorium was not actually legally enforceable but more of a political strategy to pause or slow down rapid-pace parcel disposition and redevelopment while initiating a community-led planning process that serves the needs and interests of long-time residents, not just broader city goals.

Setting up the spring 2023 anti-displacement studio to engage with Roxbury-based activism and advocacy campaigns to gain community ownership of vacant parcels and shape land use planning and development, I incorporated background reading on the D7 moratorium and candidly discussed with students tensions and opportunities of our focus on non-housing anti-displacement strategies. As most of my 13 students were white and Asian women from the bachelor of science in architecture program, I again used identity and cognitive mapping to introduce concepts of positionality and privilege, flag corresponding biases and blind spots, and emphasize the importance of working with D7 partners. For the first studio exercise, students created comic-based stories about urban displacement and anti-displacement focused on vacant parcels in Roxbury that could be used by D7 partners for community organizing and coalition building purposes. For the second studio exercise, students responded to the request from D7 partners to explore historical precedents of community-driven vacant parcel activation and placemaking in Roxbury (e.g. food gatherings, health clinics, urban gardens) by conducting archival research and creating summary posters of their findings. For the final project, students worked with Anderson and other D7 leaders, including a place-keeper's cooperative comprising Black artists, to develop six ideas for

FIGURE 6. D7 VACANT PARCEL REIMAGINED AS SENIOR VILLAGE. CREDIT: ALEX ISRAEL AND EMMA VAN GEUNS.

public, open, green, and recreational spaces, partly based on the historical precedents: a community theater, food gathering space, senior center, game spaces, small business incubator, and multi-sensory recreational and healing space.

During this time, Anderson and her team continued to meet with city departments that held the largest share of vacant parcels in D7 to negotiate their usage. The studio's task was to create concept diagrams, plans, sections, and perspectives and generate high level cost estimates for each of the six ideas. By giving form to their ideas using standard tools of the trade, so to speak, the studio outputs were intended to convey that these alternative proposals for shared spaces of joy, rest, creativity, and connection were as viable as any developer-driven project. At the end of spring semester, Anderson invited us to share studio outputs at the D7 Anti-displacement Town Hall at the Dewitt Community Center with community leaders and residents. At the event, Anderson introduced the anti-displacement studio as participatory planning and design research partners and true allies to the D7 office and Advisory Council. I noted the importance of the university-community partnership in educating and training architects and urban planners to work with community leaders in place-based ways that amplify their continued advocacy and struggles against displacement. Then we asked the attendees to go to the six stations where students set up posters presenting the ideas for vacant parcel activation and redesign. Many took time to examine the posters, ask students questions, and offer their thoughts and suggestions. As a next step, Anderson would seek funding for the ideas from a major foundation and through the city's budgetary process.

Reformulating and Retooling the Design Studio

What did this teaching and learning experience across three semesters teach me about repurposing "the academic machinery" to support community-led anti-displacement planning and design initiatives (la paperson 2017, p. *xv)*? For one, it was imperative to meet students where they were and accommodate their strengths, including the aesthetic and design sensibilities of architecture and urban planning students. In the case of the identity and cognitive mapping exercises, I incorporated diagramming and drawing activities to open up conversations about identity and privilege. To help my students process the somewhat dense readings and informational videos about different forms, drivers, mediating conditions, and effects of urban displacement, I designed studio exercises that incorporated visual representation and communication techniques such as concept maps and graphic stories. Immersing students in a process of making appeared to spark a sense of buy in—they became observably more interested to see what their peers were doing and share their own work. Second, it helped to adopt standard teaching formats for the design studio such as mini-workshops, desk-crits, and pin-ups with which students were already accustomed. Introducing students to key concepts, ideas, and exercises through mini-workshops, I then transitioned them to desk-based work and used desk-crit sessions to provide one-on-one feedback on their work-in-progress. After that, we held pin-ups, giving each student the opportunity to pin up their work-in-progress before the entire class and receive constructive feedback on the merits and areas for further development.

Gaining some level of conceptual understanding about urban displacement, the students next attended to "the hope, the visions, the wisdom of lived lives and communities" in D7 as central to anti-displacement planning and design strategies (Tuck 2009, p. 417). Going beyond the traditional design studio model, we visited with D7 leaders to learn about neighborhood histories and assets and their ongoing struggles for racial, economic, and spatial justice. Students practiced active listening with D7 partners, affirmed and expanded on what they heard using web-based research and archival materials (e.g. historical photos, oral history collections), and created visual summaries (posters) re-presenting what they learned. Through this iterative process of learning from and with studio partners, we established a collaborative working relationship. The codesign process was largely consistent across semesters. The main ideas came from Roxbury community members—rather than the instructor and students as in the case of most design studios. Students researched design precedents and strategies, conducted site analyses, and gained community feedback as they designed spatial structures, programs, and other intervention. The process clarified for us the difference between developer-driven development based on speculative capital and external control, and spatial planning, design, and investment that reinforce and amplify community-based advocacy and struggles against displacement.

Where most design studios have a final review with faculty members and leading professionals serving as critics, the anti-displacement studio culminated in the city hall research showcase in the fall 2022 semester and D7 town hall in the spring 2023 semester. We held two rounds of pre-final reviews leading up to these public/community events—with our community partners and university-based allies respectively. After these feedback sessions, students had another week to finalize studio outputs (slide presentations and boards), and upload corresponding raw files to the shared drive (for needed edits and adaptations over time). The final class session was devoted to reflecting on critical moments of learning and growth throughout the semester. These were moments of key decision, action, negotiation, beginnings, endings, or transitions when students may have felt uncomfortable, nervous, surprised, ecstatic, or other strong emotions. Students were asked to each take a moment to jot down notes about their critical moments at the personal, team, and class level. On a whiteboard, I drew a timeline and asked students to mark critical moments with their initials. Proceeding from the beginning of the semester to its end, I called out initials along the timeline, and students shared their critical moments. Every one of my students was new to this practice of reflecting on studio practice.

Some of the critical moments noted by students reveal key tensions and challenges of the anti-displacement studio, one of which had to do with moving students from a conceptual understanding of positionality and privilege to actively reckoning with one's biases and blindspots. Each semester, the class walked over from the architectural

studios at Northeastern underneath Ruggles Station to Nubian Square and met one of the community leaders for a guided walk around the neighborhood. Most students were new to the 15-minute walk from campus in that direction. During a debrief session one semester, some of the students expressed how they felt self-conscious walking as a large group in a predominantly Black neighborhood and would prefer to instead volunteer in an organizational setting. Part of their critique had to do with the fact that studio participants were merely observing the neighborhood setting rather than being of service to people there. Subsequently meeting the D7 partners for listening sessions and codesign exercises at City Hall, the students appeared more comfortable and enthusiastic in that setting. Later as a class, we unpacked their assumptions and expectations of frictionless movement through urban and institutional spaces associated with majority status. Reflecting on the issue long afterwards, I wondered if I could have further addressed how racialized perceptions of space show up in our work and interrogated the desire to be of service as potentially paternalistic.

For me, another critical moment for the studio was when Anderson, with the support of the Advisory Council, issued the moratorium on affordable housing development on publicly-owned parcels and received public criticism and backlash. Despite my initial skepticism, affirming the right of the most-impacted communities to determine courses of action and sitting in on the D7 Community Moratorium Listening Session allowed me to realign my position with the values of empathy, respect, and humility that I wanted studio participants to espouse and practice towards our D7 partners. What I learned—in part by sharing and processing observations together with my students—was that D7 communities were heterogeneous as any and wanting to have fuller conversations about what happens in their neighborhoods. They distrusted the profit motives of developers and outside investors, and opposed the advancement of citywide affordable housing goals on their backs. Noting that Roxbury already has the highest proportion of subsidized and income-restricted rentals among Boston neighborhoods, they inquired about alternative housing options—including pathways to home ownership and wealth building. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and in light of racial disparities in chronic health conditions and mortality rates, D7 residents further sought public investments in community-serving land uses such as green, open, and recreational spaces that are safe, healthy, and culturally affirming, and enhance quality of life.

Implications for Radical Planning and Design Practice

The anti-displacement studio expands on the design studio tradition in ways that bear on radical teaching, that is, planning and design pedagogy which proceeds from the root, whether it's unraveling root conditions or supporting grassroots movements. It maintains the studio's defining pedagogical, material, and creative functions through the making of artifacts (such as posters, diagrams, maps, plans, sections, and renderings) and selves (individual, social, political), but in a grounded and relational way that enlists the perspectives, ideas, and guidance of place-based partners. In bridging between academic and professional contexts, the studio explores the role and responsibility of the designer as creative accomplice to anti-displacement activists and movements—rather than hired hand to profit-maximizing real estate developers and other corporate agents. The studio confers meaning and significance on educational activities such as critical moments reflections—for instance, taking time to reflect on practice as an integral part of the design process. It additionally enables connections and interactions with place-based communities, who bring rich knowledge and insights about needed spatial investments and improvements that further shape shared inquiry and codesign activities. As the studio provides a container for these essential teaching and learning activities to take place in, it also expresses and shapes disciplinary identities that interrogate straightforward solutions and underlying beliefs and assumptions, among students and instructor alike.

Conducting participatory planning and design research with D7 partners through the anti-displacement studio allowed us to address the noted challenges of traditional design studio education in engaging current contexts of students and overcoming disconnection from real-world problem scenarios (Corazzoa 2019). We did this by leaning into Northeastern's location in Lower Roxbury and harnessing my existing relationship with community leaders as an anchor for ongoing collaboration. By coordinating how students enter and exit the ongoing community-driven planning and design process, I tried to promote iterative efforts while reducing engagement fatigue by community partners and knowledge loss with student turnover from semester to semester. Incorporating reflective practice into the studio helped surface difficult and conflictual aspects of this work, including my own hesitation to follow the partners' lead at times, and the self-consciousness and discomfort of predominantly white students from our private high-tuition university being shown around Roxbury by D7 leaders instead of volunteering in an organizational setting. Yet introducing students to community settings in this way helped combat professionalized norms along with internalized societal hierarchies and power asymmetries (in relation to local communities) that may have only been perpetuated had we remained in the classroom setting (Dutton 1987). Taking time to reconcile the D7 moratorium and the studio's focus on non-housing anti-displacement strategies further provided the chance to practice exploring, feeling, and empathizing as integral parts of studio work and move away from a straightforward solutions-driven design process.

As a final point, working with D7 community leaders on anti-displacement planning and design strategies over two academic years—from the spring 2022 graduate-level professional practice seminar to two semesters of the anti-displacement studio over fall 2022 and spring 2023—renewed my appreciation for grounded, relational, and reparative methods of teaching and learning. I thoroughly understood that to practice urban planning and design in the 21st century is to reimagine and rebuild the world from harm. The disproportionate number of publicly-owned parcels in D7 result from targeted and systematic injustices of top-

down policy and planning processes such as redlining, urban renewal, and highway demolition. The sum result perpetuated the profound racial wealth and health gap that mars Boston today. The City appears slow to acknowledge and make amends for past harms and quick to move forward with land disposition policies and procedures that inordinately impact and are contested by D7 communities. As an educator, I can begin with my own students in mitigating further harm by guiding built environment professionals to wrestle with their own limitations and discomforts, center localized, community-based knowledge and insights, and work in solidarity and complementarity with place-based activists and movements, who seek to build collective power with respect to the land and self-determine land use planning and development. I can try to clear up misperceptions that any one of us is serving those in need but rather showing up and working together as best as we can to nurture seeds of change.

Notes

1. After the George Floyd murder, the students and faculty had a series of conversations about how race and social justice were being addressed in the curriculum and in the School of Architecture. Among identified priorities were to ensure design studio projects support equity and inclusivity, and not reinforce racial exclusion and displacement. Another was to create strategic community engagement that establishes long-term community partners; avoid superficial understanding of communities; scrutinize impact of student work on communities; avoid being a political tool of community groups; avoid "extraction" of information from communities of interest; consider Service-Learning opportunities through Northeastern's established relationships and offices.

2. The ARTery was just one of Anderson's projects—in her first year, she filed a series of ordinances, resolutions, and orders for hearings to address racial injustices and harms in District 7 (e.g. the ARTery, a health center in Nubian Square, senior recreational center in Roxbury, Black historical landmarks, re-naming streets and places, studies on free life insurance for low-income residents, and reparations for Boston's role in the transatlantic slave trade and ongoing detrimental impacts on Black Bostonians).

3. In 1996, the Boston Redevelopment Authority adopted Article 80 to make Boston's Zoning Code's development review regulations easier for all residents to use and to understand, and to apply those regulations consistently throughout the city. Article 80 development review requirements apply to all large projects, small projects, planned development areas, and institutional master plans.

4. We organized a mini-exhibition of our semester-long work around the questions: (1) How do we center the joy and beauty of Roxbury communities while wrestling with present racial and spatial injustices? (2) How can urban design and planning support community stabilization and development amidst gentrification and displacement pressures? (3) How do we get ahead of external development forces with community-led ideas and initiatives? Scheduled on the same day as a city council vote on the formation of a task force on reparations (to help the Mayor and City of Boston on healing racial inequities for descendants of slavery), the showcase drew various city councilors and staff along with community organizers and members of the public, who stopped by to view our posters and speak with students on their way to the council meeting.

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RADICAL TEACHER

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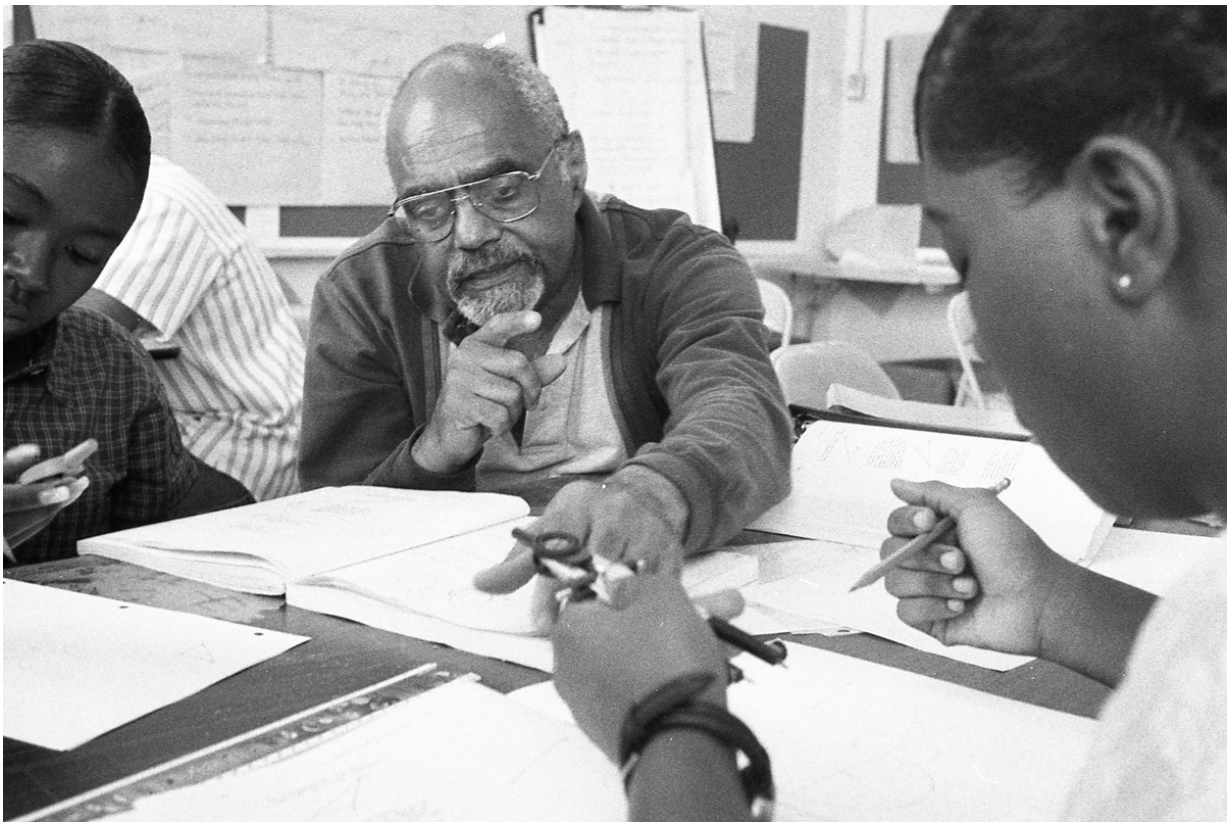
The Educational Radicalism of Bob Moses

by Jay Gillen



BOB MOSES WORKING WITH STUDENTS. PHOTO BY DAVID RAE MORRIS

The Algebra Project was founded in 1982 by former Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) field secretary Bob Moses as a grassroots organizing effort around the problem of math education. Since then, thousands of teachers have learned about the Algebra Project's unique adaptation of constructivist pedagogy, tens of thousands of young people have participated in Algebra Project classrooms or after-school activities, and many more thousands of parents, organizers, activists, professors, and school officials have become acquainted with at least some aspect of the Algebra Project's work.

Often, however, those who come in contact with the Algebra Project, or even those who become involved in its organizing, tend to underestimate the radicalism of Dr. Moses's strategy. As a SNCC field secretary in Mississippi in the 1960s, Bob Moses earned the respect and admiration of, for example, Stokely Carmichael (later Kwame Ture) as he guided Carmichael through Mississippi's violent White supremacy. Proponent of Black Power as a political agenda, Carmichael is rightly remembered as a revolutionary. Dr. Moses was and is no less revolutionary. He had, however, a different strategy towards an equally revolutionary end.

This essay locates Dr. Moses's radicalism in his vision of young people as potential insurgents in the battle to destroy the American caste system and attempts to explain how the Algebra Project sees math classrooms as uniquely suited to the building of an earned educational insurgency for the 21st century.

Political Function of Math Education

There are many more champions of student "voice" today than there were even ten or twenty years ago, but the problem faced by young people in poverty is not simply about "voice." It is a problem of power, and the radical strategy of the Algebra Project is that the purportedly ineducable young people of the unworkable schools can learn not only to speak out, but actually to wield power.

The radicalism of the Algebra Project is often watered down by confusion about the choice of math classrooms as sites of insurgent political action. Why choose one of the most hated and disempowering locations in already hated and disempowering schools? Algebra Project pedagogy emphasizes student control of classroom discussions, student-initiated content, the role of teachers as questioners and students as mathematical authorities in their own right. But even parents, teachers, professors, and administrators who are open to these methods think that the reason to promote this kind of classroom democracy is that such classrooms make it easier to learn math. Dr. Moses's purpose, I believe, went in exactly the other direction. He taught that a well-structured mathematics classroom makes it easier for young people to learn democracy, and so prepares them to step out of classrooms altogether into the not-yet-written future of a youth-led educational and political insurgency.

Math for the Algebra Project is an organizing tool.

> To make myself very, very clear, even the development of some sterling new curriculum—a real breakthrough—would not make us happy if it did not deeply and seriously empower the target population to demand access to literacy for everyone. That is what is driving the project. What is radical about the Algebra Project is the students we are trying to reach and the people we work with to drive a broad math literacy effort—the Black and poor students and the communities in which they live, the usually excluded…Young people finding their voice instead of being spoken for is a crucial part of the process. Then and now those designated as serfs are expected to remain paralyzed, unable to take an action and unable to voice a demand—their lives dependent on the goodwill and good works of others. We believe the kind of systemic change necessary to prepare our young people for the demands of the twenty-first century requires young people to take the lead in changing it. (Cobb and Moses 19)

It is a truism of 21st century leftist activism that "everything is political," and the interpretation of this truism in math classrooms today usually envisions lessons like studying the distribution of police traffic stops in terms of the demographics of drivers or neighborhoods. But Dr. Moses had something different in mind when he decided to focus on algebra in the 8th grade. He wants us to understand the *politics* of questions that almost everyone thinks are not political at all. Who is taller, Matteo or Charnell, and by how much? Which fraction is larger, $\frac{3}{7}$ or $\frac{1}{3}$? What does x represent in the equation $3x + 7 = -2x - 8$ and how do you know? How can you prove that the three angles of a triangle equal 180°, do they always, and what counts as a proof?

These straightforward mathematical questions might be on worksheets in elementary, middle, or high school, and most teachers would mark any answer to them either right or wrong, with a check or an x. But Dr. Moses insists that the teacher's check or x masks important political issues that need to be brought to the surface for young people to debate and grapple with. One important question, for example, is "Who has the authority to decide the validity of an answer to a mathematical question?" The correct answer for people who believe in freedom is, "We do." It is up to a community of mathematicians, who may well be an 8th grade class of poor and oppressed students, to come to a consensus on how they want to pose and answer questions in their math classroom.

In the Algebra Project, math classrooms and youth-run after-school math spaces are where young people can learn (1) why it is important to hammer out agreements on the language we use to represent our ideas and values, and (2) how to hammer out agreements. Dr. Moses challenges us to try to understand the parallels between political freedom struggles and math freedom struggles.

There is a school of thought, almost entirely unquestioned outside of rarified philosophical circles, that mathematical truths are *not* subject to debate. The set of mathematical truths presented in the world's math classrooms are thought to have been "discovered" or "invented" by people a long time ago, mostly by very smart men, and passed down in authoritative writings. Teachers who "know their subject" affirm these truths and instill them in their students.

Dr. Moses takes a different position in line with a much less widely appreciated but in philosophical circles equally respectable line of thought. This alternative line of thought sees mathematical language as requiring agreement among a community about the meaning of terms and the structures of syntax they are using. That agreement about language grows out of the shared experiences of the community. They see objects, actions, and relationships in the world and agree to describe them in certain ways. That agreement becomes formalized in a set of definitions and operations, but in all cases the language of the community grows out of shared experiences and can be "tested" in the sense that anyone willing to pay attention can come to agree that the language fits their experience in some way.

In the Algebra Project we teach $3x + 7 = -2x - 8$ by first inviting students to participate in certain kinds of races and other physical experiences (before ever sharing the algebraic notation). We then talk about what they have experienced in the community's own language. Next, we invite them to "regiment" or "straight-jacket" their language using particular syntactic modifications used since the 17th century by mathematicians in public forums.

We treat young people with full respect as mathematical *citizens*. They have as much intellectual autonomy as the teacher or as the professional mathematicians who designed their curriculum or textbooks. They have as much right as anyone to demand that mathematical sentences and procedures make sense, and they can learn to take the meaning of mathematical sentences seriously by *taking each other seriously as mathematicians.* For example, most classrooms accept an "answer" like "x = -3" for the "problem" 3x + 7=-2x – 8. We are more interested in students discussing with each other whether the equivalence of "x" and "-3" makes sense in the context of the sentence "3x + 7 = -2x – 8." And it is important to understand that *they do not need a teacher to be present* either to have that conversation or to be certain that "x = -3" may make sense in that context.

Sometimes the question arises: What if the students come up with something mathematically "wrong"? In fact, this is a question that professional mathematicians themselves have to deal with in their most advanced work, and it is a question that is answered through an understanding of public space. If a group of students—two or three, say-–—come up with some mathematical assertion or other that they hold to be true, a larger group of students—five, ten, twenty, or thirty—may notice some flaw in their argument and persuade them that their assertion doesn't hold water. It is entirely possible that a group of students heads off on a wrong track and ignores some valuable mathematical insight—until they encounter a particular mathematical citizen, or until their public space is enlarged sufficiently that the error in their thinking is pointed out to them. But this is a part of the human process of doing mathematics: there are literally thousands of historical examples. "Zero," negative numbers, the square root of 2, or the square root of -1 were all outlandish ideas at one time. Mathematicians who believed they were experts in their field had to be persuaded that they had missed something. No one compelled them—only the weight of reasoned arguments in mathematical communities.

Teachers can play an important role as a part of the public space that helps create correctives for students when they need correctives, but this is much less often than imagined. And it is not the teacher's authority that provides the corrective; the teacher simply represents a certain enlargement of the public space so that students encounter more or different opportunities to defend their thinking.

There are many philosophical and mathematical questions about how quantitative discourse works in public forums. Here we are interested in the political questions. Any group of people can designate themselves as a "we" for mathematical or any other purposes. They can offer whatever arguments or evidence they want to try to establish the validity or usefulness of their terms and procedures. They can integrate and involve themselves with other groups, provided those other groups accept their involvement. But in all cases, their constituting themselves as a "community of mathematicians" is an important *political* act, especially in the 21st century.

Dr. Moses's conviction is that there is an opening for radical organizing around math literacy today that closely parallels the opening around voting rights in the 1960s. The strategy in both cases is to exploit a consensus that is both superficial and profound. In the 1960s the consensus was around the right to vote. No one, not even the racists, denied the importance of voting. Their commitment to voting was superficial, only lip service, in relation to the sharecropping caste, but even their superficial pronouncements opened a crack towards a profound, radical opportunity because the vote held so much meaning—historically, politically, emotionally—for the excluded. As Dr. Moses said scores of times, "It wasn't radical to register people to vote. What was radical was registering sharecroppers to vote." Registering sharecroppers, or more precisely, sharecroppers registering themselves, changed the political calculus of the South and in fact of the whole country. The radicalness of this issue is, of course, still with us today as racists try to roll back the franchise for those who are supposed to simply accept their lower caste status.

In the 21st century, virtually everyone agrees that education without math and science is second-class education. At least, people agree to this superficially, with lip service. Just as few Black and poor people today receive first-class math education as were registered to vote in Mississippi in the 1950s, but there was no *explicit* ban on Black people voting then, and there is no explicit ban on Black people learning advanced math today. The superficial consensus, however, opens a door to a radical political opportunity. Dr. Moses says that the Algebra Project works the demand side of a political problem. The strategy is for young people who are poor and oppressed to "demand what everyone says they don't want" (Cobb and Moses 18).

In the 60s the racists said sharecroppers and domestic workers were apathetic about politics and happy to leave "that mess" to Whites. SNCC learned to organize the disenfranchised to line up at courthouses and to vote by thousands in the parallel election for the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and so prove that not apathy, but access was the problem. Today, millions of people believe that Black and Latinx, poor White, and other oppressed young

people "don't want to learn," are apathetic about school, drop out, don't care, and that their families are apathetic, too. Working the demand side for the Algebra Project means learning to organize young people and their families to demand access to first-rate math education.

The consensus on the importance of math education is superficial in the sense that few people envision a massive reordering of society as a consequence of successful education. In fact, few people believe mass excellence in mathematics is possible in any short-term future. Even among people who claim to truly believe that no one should be left behind in STEM, the picture most of us hold is that the economic and political structure of America today would stay more or less as it is, but some greater number of Black and Brown children would live in larger homes, graduate from college at a higher rate, and hold more elevated management positions in government and industry. This is *not* a radical vision. It is a vision of better access to a burning house.

The superficial consensus on the importance of math education, however, is potentially an opening to something much deeper. Dr. Moses insisted that math education is an organizing tool, and the purpose of the organizing tool is to try to devise the means for destroying the caste system in America. In this vision, it is young people who must provide momentum for radical change, just as it was young people who provided momentum in Mississippi in the 1960s. They must dig in, establish their own authority in math teaching and learning, create structures for educating their peers, model democratic forms of self-governance, make plans and carry them out, invent new structures of education that do not create a pyramid of opportunity where the masses are crushed beneath the vanishing few at the top.

And where will young people in the 21st century learn to organize themselves, learn to devise the means to seriously challenge the caste system over a generation or two? In math classrooms, where every young person is forced to be. That is where they can learn to build consensus among themselves, learn to make demands on each other to dig in against an oppressive enemy, learn to enjoy themselves without abandoning their collective life and death purpose.

Who Is Qualified to change the System?

The political origins of these ideas are in the teachings of Ella Baker, a prolific organizer for Black freedom and the guide and fundi of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the 1960s. Her words form the epigraph to Dr. Moses's book, *Radical Equations: Civil Rights from Mississippi to the Algebra Project:*

> In order for us as poor and oppressed people to become a part of a society that is meaningful, this system under which we now exist has to be radically changed. That means we are going to have to learn to think in radical terms. I use the term *radical* in its original meaning—getting down to and understanding the root cause. It means facing a system that does not lend itself to your needs and devising the means by which you change that system. That is easier said than done. But one of the things that has to be faced is, in the process of wanting to change the system how much have we got to do to find out who we are, where we have come from and where we are going…I am saying as you must say, too, that in order to see where we are going, we not only have to *remember* where we have been, but we must *understand* where we have been. (Cobb and Moses 3)

What does this mean? What is Baker's challenge to us? And why did Bob Moses feel that it was important to prioritize?

First, what is the difference between "remembering" and "understanding" where we have been? It must be an important difference. Miss Baker and Dr. Moses did not use words loosely. One key to the difference between remembering and understanding, I believe, is repetition. I did not have the opportunity to learn directly from Miss Baker, but I know that Dr. Moses's teaching and learning habits relied on and covered the same material many times over. If a book caught his interest and he wanted to really understand it, he would read it again and again. He used to tell the same stories dozens of times, often to the very same people, because he wanted them not only to remember the stories, but to understand them.

One of these stories, for example, is about Judge Claude Feemster Clayton in Greenville, Mississippi:

> The link between voting and education had been made explicit with the question Judge Clayton put to me on the witness stand of the Greenville Federal District Court in the spring of 1963. Months before, our SNCC car had been "grease gunned" on highway 82 and SNCC converged on Greenwood, raised food in Chicago, and rallied hundreds of sharecroppers to confront the registrar at the Courthouse. When SNCC Field Secretaries were arrested, Burke Marshall [of the U.S. Department of Justice] filed suit against the city, had our cases removed to the Federal Court and sent John Doar to be our lawyer. Judge Clayton had one question: "Why is SNCC taking illiterates down to register to vote?" My answer was: "You can't have your cake and eat it, too. You can't deny people an educational opportunity through your political arrangements, and then say the reason people can't vote is because they can't read." (Cobb and Moses 69; Moses 2019)

Dr. Moses told this story again and again because it is not enough to remember that the political arrangements of White supremacy denied educational opportunity to sharecroppers and to the enslaved before them. You must try to understand the circular nature of the racist argument. You must look from many different angles at the deceptive appearances of illiteracy—how illiteracy itself is subject to misreading.

Judge Clayton read illiterate sharecroppers as unqualified to participate in the country's political arrangements. But Dr. Moses asserts that illiteracy cannot be read as the essence of the people SNCC is bringing to register. Illiteracy tells us something about the system of

White supremacy but says little or nothing about the sharecroppers themselves.

Today, the educational subtext of political and economic power remains difficult to read. As Jerome Givens points out, Black educability is still suspect (Givens 10). Not necessarily in official declarations and not necessarily in the abstract, but in each individual case of sorting, educational neglect, and punishment, millions of Black and other throw-away children are judged as intellectually and morally incapable or unworthy.

There are many ways to see this if we are looking, but the clearest may be the hurdles to admission to "selective" high schools or colleges. Black children and young adults submit applications to these institutions as do children of other races and ethnicities. But the applications from Black children are set aside in far greater proportions. We do not say generally, as an official principle, that Black children are innately inferior or ineducable. We just say for *each individual*, *one at a time* that they haven't achieved some minimum standard that the school or program is looking for, that they "have not lived up to their potential," that they are "unlikely to be successful" in this challenging environment, and we prove our racial equanimity by admitting a few Black students, demonstrating that the race of the applicant is no barrier.

How is this process different from Judge Clayton's question: "Why is SNCC taking illiterates to register to vote?" The judge was correct that many of the sharecroppers did not know how to read, just as it may be true today that many Black students who apply for the most challenging schools are unlikely to pass their courses in those schools. But Dr. Moses's response to Judge Clayton remains unanswerable: You can't have your cake and eat it, too. The illiteracy, including the mathematical illiteracy, of our children says nothing about our children; it only gives evidence of the injustice designed into the country's system of education and into our collective values. The country continues its circular reasoning that uneducated Black children are properly assigned to lower caste status precisely because the country doesn't adequately educate lower caste children.

A reader may agree with the tenor of the exposition so far but may still be a long way from understanding Miss Baker's challenge to devise the means by which we change the system. It is sometimes easy to know what is right, but much harder to do what is right, or to understand why doing right is so important. Remember Baker's words, cited above: "…this system under which we now exist has to be radically changed. That means we are going to have to learn to think in radical terms. I use the term *radical* in its original sense—getting down to and understanding the root cause." What is the "root cause"? White supremacy? Capitalism? Imperialism? What does Miss Baker mean? Certainly, these things poison human relations and are causes of poverty and oppression, but are they the "root cause"? Miss Baker says the system has to be radically changed and then she says that this necessity implies that *we* need to learn to think differently—"we who are poor and oppressed." Not that the oppressor must think differently, but that *we* must.

She goes on: "It means facing a system that does not lend itself to your needs and devising the means by which you change that system." Judge Clayton, what he stands for, what he represents, what he believes, even the racist systems and structures of which he is a symbol, are not the root cause. Another judge sitting in Judge Clayton's chair, even a progressive judge, even the abolition of the police and courts would not solve our problem because our problem goes much deeper.

"The key word here is *you*," Dr. Moses explains in *Radical Equations*. "Devising the means by which *you* change the system." "Our efforts with our target population is what defines the radical nature of the Algebra Project, not program specifics" (p. 19). He is talking about the young people themselves, about a root cause deep inside each of them that quiets them, that urges them to settle, that distracts them from their own thoughts and feelings or that raises a barrier between their thoughts and feelings and the public sphere that is shared by all the people in the land.

The question that Ella Baker asked young people to confront in 1960 as they were deciding to form SNCC, and that Bob Moses asks young people to confront today in the Algebra Project, is this: How are you going to organize yourselves as young people to devise the means to change your society? What demands will you make on yourselves as individuals and *how will you make demands on each other as peers* so that you will earn the attention and respect of the elders in your community and of at least some portion of the dominant society, enough respect that the disruptions you plan to the system can dig in and gain some traction for the long haul?

This question of how young people under oppression will learn to organize themselves and to make demands on each other horizontally and democratically is a question that gets to the root of the problem. Are young people who are poor and oppressed qualified to enact this kind of self-organization and self-determination or are they not? What do you think?

Bob Moses believed that they are, and he believed that it was in math classrooms with highly trained, radical teachers and in out-of-school math programs run by young people themselves that a youth-led insurgency could develop. Just as sharecroppers and domestic workers in Mississippi interrupted the political arrangements of the South so that those arrangements could no longer function, so Dr. Moses believes that young people can learn to initiate and sustain a disruption to the educational arrangements of the country so that the structure of caste education will have to change. But they will need to earn their insurgency, and they will need to earn their insurgency by organizing themselves to do math.

How This Works in Practice: The Three Tiers of Demand

The Algebra Project asks young people to consider three "tiers" of demand: demands on oneself, demands on one's peers, and—*subsequent* to those first two tiers—demands on the larger society.

The first tier of demand is a demand on oneself. I need to learn to think differently and to do differently. I cannot pass this obligation off to anyone else; it is for me in my human uniqueness to decide and to act. I must go to class or go to the meeting, or do my research, or complete my work, or ask the necessary questions, or gather the necessary tools, or listen instead of talk, or check my assumptions, or face my fears. Much more could be said about this first tier of demand from the philosophical, moral, and political perspectives that informed Dr. Moses's work, for example, through his study of Albert Camus. But this essay centers on the second tier.

The second tier of demand is a demand on one's peers. "We" must learn to think differently, and we must learn how to constitute a "we." Another of Dr. Moses's repetitive questions: "Who is the we?" And the answer is another question: "Can you build a consensus about the nature of the problem you want to take on, and at least an initial consensus about how you are going to go about tackling it?" Whoever can build and join that consensus becomes a "we," a group of peers. Those peers—each one already making first tier demands on themselves—must then be willing to make second tier demands on each other: Let's all study the next chapter of the book before class; then we'll have a better discussion. How will we divide up the tasks for this project, and how will we hold ourselves accountable as a collective? We said we would all be at the meeting Tuesday; why weren't you there?

A properly functioning Algebra Project math classroom is not only "student centered"; it has evolved into a student-determined culture. This is equivalent to saying that the structure of demand in the classroom is not teacher-to-student, but peer-to-peer. In a student-centered classroom, a caring, thoughtful teacher may institute a set of systematic practices that respect students as the principal agents of their own education. A youth-determined culture goes even further: the systematic practices are created or at least accepted over time by the young people themselves as practices that are worth passing along to peers and near-peers. Teachers have crucial roles in offering insights, ideas, knowledge, and especially invitations to try new things or to think about things in a new way. But it is the young people, not the teacher, who are ultimately the "power in the room" as Omo Moses puts it (2008).

Another way to think about this additional step towards youth-determined culture is that the scope and sequence of a school's math curriculum might not necessarily determine the scope and sequence of the students' mathematical (or other) work. This is, of course, impractical in almost every contemporary public school. And in fact, there are very few Algebra Project classrooms that function in this maximal way. But spin-offs of the Algebra Project, specifically the Young People's Project and the Baltimore Algebra Project, which operate largely outside of school time, have been successful—at least in spurts—in creating youth-determined cultures around math education.

Both the Young People's Project and the Baltimore Algebra Project pay young people to teach math to their peers. The Young People's Project originated through Bob Moses's sons, Omo and Taba, who were working in Mississippi in the 1990s to try to support the Algebra Project's classroom curriculum with after-school math programing. YPP is now directed by Dr. Moses's daughter Maisha and promotes a "cascading" approach to near-peer math teaching. Paid college students (College Math Literacy Workers) teach number theory games, coding, and other math content to paid high school students (Math Literacy Workers) who then teach middle and elementary school students through highly interactive activities. YPP is a multi-million dollar annual enterprise, legally independent of any academic or governmental institution, receiving funding through school districts, the National Science Foundation, and private philanthropy to advance a vision of youth-determined math education.

The Baltimore Algebra Project evolved somewhat differently, but it also has paid millions of dollars in wages to young people in Baltimore for teaching math and self-advocacy skills in youth-determined spaces. Originating as an after-school tutoring program founded by high school students who had learned Algebra Project pedagogy from their middle school teacher, BAP evolved into a cooperative economic enterprise governed by a youth collective. It has managed to pass the governance reins along to succeeding generations of Baltimore young people over more than two decades. BAP also evolved a prominent "advocacy" wing that periodically galvanizes political demands around youth priorities in Baltimore, including campaigns for year-round youth employment in knowledge work, preventing the construction of a new youth jail, and fighting for equitable school funding.

The relative independence of YPP and BAP from typical educational command structures (district hierarchies and state and federal policy mandates) has allowed them to develop cultures that are not only centered on young people, but that young people are able to structure according to their own needs. I am most familiar with BAP's development of this vector and will focus on it as an illustration of Dr. Moses's broad strategy.

BAP activities often have no adults present at all. Schools are usually hypocritical about the power and autonomy of young people. For example: it is unthinkable in most public settings that a high school class would have no adult teacher. Young people are conceived as generally incapable of structuring their own education. At the same time, schools expect most students, and especially adolescents, to do enormous amounts of learning on their own. The teachers' responsibility is to lay out certain conditions and to "present information," but it is the students' responsibility to actually learn what is required. How else could schools rank and grade young people for their success or failure in "meeting standards"? Implicitly, schools acknowledge that both adults and young people are somehow "responsible" for education. But the relative accountability of teachers and students as causes of learning is a topic that is absent from virtually all policy discussions The two major ingredients—students' contribution to their learning, and adults' contribution to the students' learning—are part of entirely separate accountability systems. The *relative* accountability of teachers and students isn't discussed because the autonomy of young people is generally taboo as a policy matter. Policy makers simply

cannot afford to treat adolescents as fully autonomous actors, clearly a hypocritical posture. Teachers, principals, parents, social workers, police, and everyone else who work directly with children know that adolescents have will, autonomy, and power to do what they want in any given circumstance, policies be damned. That is why we adults feel part of our responsibility is to try to "hold young people accountable" for their actions. But for complex historical reasons, the current official stance of almost all policy setting institutions is that adults are ultimately responsible for the "success" or "failure" of young people under the age of 18.

The Baltimore Algebra Project tries to avoid this hypocrisy. It recognizes adolescents as autonomous. They have a kind of "negative" autonomy in the sense that they can simply *not do* what adults ask them to do. And they have a "positive" autonomy in the sense that they often do formulate plans, individually and collectively, with the purpose of meeting goals that are not set by adults, but that are set by young people themselves. Those goals are often "non-academic," but not necessarily. Recently a group of nine young people in BAP decided to coach a team of elementary schoolers in Flagway (one of YPP's number theory games) so that they could participate in the Flagway national tournament in Miami. The BAP youth worked with an elementary school to recruit students, talked with parents and school officials about the trip to Miami, picked up the students after school to walk to the BAP after-school site, structured coaching sessions for two months so that the elementary schoolers could learn the game, and then coached their younger near-peers to a third-place finish at the tournament. Parents asked to meet the adults who would be chaperoning the trip; adult staff of BAP (several who were themselves alumni of the organization) were often on hand and accompanied the young people on their trip. But young people independently facilitated all work sessions and decided themselves how to proceed at each step.

The self-determined work of young people's collectives shares all the same challenges and opportunities that adult collectives have. In the Flagway trip preparation, for example, some BAP members showed up more, followed through more, and generally worked harder than others. This led to internal discussions about commitment and how to organize the work, but it did not lead to adult intervention. Peers made demands on each other; adults were not making demands on young people.

These demands on one's peers are what Dr. Moses saw as the crucial, first *political* demands. In a democracy, politics is peer-to-peer. Equals make arrangements to achieve mutual or collective interests, and a necessary aspect of those arrangements is the acceptance of a peer's insistence that you perform as agreed. Demand on peers is the distinguishing accountability mechanism of what we now call democracy: the "higher" authorities of democracies are only representatives of common citizens, acting on some kind of consensus. The judge, the President, the "government," are our peers in theory. Dr. Moses asked us again and again to consider how "We the People" in the preamble to the Constitution is a collective noun referring to specific people in concrete historical circumstances, constantly renewing a commitment to operate *as peers* with common purpose. Practice, of course, is very different in America's caste society, but all over the world, including in the United States, small organizations centered on particular, community-based needs regularly institute democracy through structures entirely between peers. This was the structure of SNCC and of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. It was and is a realistic, but demanding, ideal.

The examples of BAP or YPP and of successfully implemented Algebra Project classrooms raise the possibility that the internal politics of schools could be different. Currently, the politics of schools is authoritarian in keeping with the "business" culture of the country. Superintendents command principals, who command teachers, who command students. Some "school leaders" or progressive teachers lean in varying degrees towards more communal practices: inviting buy-in and input, delegating authority, and fostering collaboration. But almost everywhere, those higher up in the hierarchy make demands on those lower down. This could be different. Accountability could be horizontal, the way it is in democracies. This could even be the case for adolescents (and is often the case in BAP and YPP) and possibly for even younger children.

The significance of the first two tiers—demands on self and demands on peers—is that they are the necessary preconditions for successful third tier demands on the larger society, on the country. The lesson Bob Moses took from what he called the Mississippi Theater of the Civil Rights Movement was that "democracies require earned insurgencies." The "earning" is done in the first two tiers of demand. By demonstrating that they could face their own fear, that they could pick themselves up from tragedy and defeat, that they could link arms and keep singing and coordinate their creative protest on some significant scale, the young people from SNCC earned enough backing to turn the tide of public opinion.

It is relatively easy to see the structure of these three tiers of demand in hindsight when we look at the Civil Rights Movement. We understand the heroism of John Lewis, Fannie Lou Hamer, Jim Forman, Ruby Sales, and so many others as evidence of demands they made on themselves and their peers, gaining respect from at least some elements of the larger society until even the most unbending elements of the power structure were compelled to compromise. But in an irony of history, it is much harder to see how the same structures can operate today, partly because of the earlier successes. We tend to get stuck on tier one and then skip to tier three, without clearly understanding the structure of the series.

Tier one, demand on self, is read today in the context of America's mythic individualism. "You can be anything you want to be." Every school child hears again and again that their individual effort determines their "success." Republicans and many libertarians stop at this point in their political analysis: everyone gets what they deserve through their own individual effort. But those of us with more left-leaning ideologies jump from here to the third tier—demand on the larger society. We argue that the structures of our society are oppressive, racist, caste-based, unjust, and immoral. So we make demands on individuals or on

institutions in the larger society to try to bring about change. I believe we are right to make these demands.

The challenge that Ella Baker and Bob Moses pose to us, however, is not only about the demands we make on ourselves as individuals, or the demands we make to the larger society. Ms. Baker and Dr. Moses ask us to think about the demands we must make on our peers. And oddly—because after all we live in a democracy—this is an unfamiliar kind of demand and one we are very rarely *taught* how to make. Most of us have never experienced or learned the process of making democratic demands on peers. The point of the Algebra Project turns out to be that math classrooms are especially well-suited to teaching and learning this core democratic skill.

What young people can learn in math classrooms that is difficult to learn anywhere else is how to make demands on each other as "reasoning subjects" (Givens 10). Of course, students can learn to use evidence and argument in the course of studying history or literature, too. But the community of mathematicians and scientists demands a level of consensus that goes beyond other subject areas. Mathematicians and scientists do disagree about certain topics passionately, and don't share a consensus on everything. But there is a basic, and we would say democratic, agreement among mathematicians and scientists that the typical arguments in their fields persuade literally everyone who is willing to pay attention. Nobody needs to take anybody's word for it; no one needs to accept any arbitrary authority in a well-designed math classroom. Each individual is able to verify the truth of the evidence and argument for themselves. But the actual test, and constant re-testing, of mathematical truths comes from the process of building consensus again and again among groups of people who agree to do this peculiar kind of work—to both verify each one for themselves *and* to find words, symbols, forms of communication, and arguments that build a "we" in consensus.

Of course, this rejection of arbitrary authority is very different from most people's experience of math classrooms where mathematical truths are simply asserted by textbooks and teachers claiming to be authoritative, and where institutional power is entirely in the teacher's hands. Most secondary math textbooks embed an interesting critique of this teacherly authority in their very structure: because they are written by mathematicians, textbooks paradoxically include at least informal proofs of many theorems, the mathematicians believing with all their hearts that the practice of mathematics involves "reasoning subjects," not people who accept dogma from arbitrary authorities. Students mostly ignore the proofs, because they are almost never included in anyone's grade; the real game of the caste-reinforcing "system" is the imposition of arbitrary authority, not the democratic practice of actual mathematicians.

Nevertheless, the mathematicians' practice is exactly the process needed for a successful democracy; we require both the assertion from each individual that they are equally qualified to contribute to the general welfare and also a willingness to be questioned and challenged by peers, who need not and should not accept any individual's authority over them. In the English classroom you can go your separate ways arguing over an interpretation of a poem or whether there is space in the canon for both Shakespeare and Toni Morrison. And in a free country you can go your own separate way about what kind of music you listen to or what god you worship. But math classrooms require everyone in the end to be on the same page in some way: we should all be able to agree that the three angles of a triangle do *not* always add up to 180°, for example, on a sphere—it isn't a matter of "opinion" in a community of mathematicians.

This is a key lesson of the 1960s voting rights movement, as Dr. Moses insisted many times. Each article of the Constitution and each statutory law, just like a mathematical theorem, is language agreed on by a community of practitioners to accomplish a particular purpose. Participants in a democracy—both government officials and ordinary citizens—can be confronted about the meaning of the laws or changes needed in the laws. And somehow, even without a thorough theoretical understanding of the issues, most participants in a democracy agree that some common attitude towards these pieces of language, the corpus of law, must be shared and respected *by everyone* for the democratic practice to continue. It is this common understanding that causes all sides in our current political crisis to hold up the Constitution as their banner; although relatively few Americans have a clear idea of what is *in* the Constitution, the great majority believe that its words—whatever they might be—hold some kind of truth of great importance to freedom, justice, and security.

Dr. Moses learned in the 1960s that this vague but deeply rooted belief in the power of the Constitution's words opened a door to a certain kind of organizing. The oppressed could be organized to demand that words be taken seriously, and the oppressors could decide, once they felt enough danger, to conform their behavior a little less hypocritically to the words they claimed were true. This organizing strategy led directly to the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which was a belated attempt to bring the country's practices in line with the country's principles. The point here is that this strategy hinged on the tacit acknowledgement—forced by the Civil Rights Movement insurgency—that we could not simply agree to go our separate ways. We had to agree on *something*, and that something turned out to be that every adult has the right to vote, illiterate or not.

The Algebra Project is a strategy for forcing a confrontation parallel to the voting rights struggle, but focused on the much deeper hypocrisy of our education system. Starting from math classrooms and out-of-school community math sites, young people can begin to develop shared language, shared demands, shared ways of moving together until some of them devise ways to step into the public arena and demand a change from the system that passes wealth, power, and opportunity from one generation to the next on increasingly rigid caste lines. You may not agree that math classrooms will work as venues for this organizing of oppressed young people's self-determination. And maybe you are right. But you are certainly mistaken if you believe that Bob Moses's goal was anything less than the uprooting of caste in America. His vision, a long-term

vision to be sure, is of the most radical change possible: from a society built on greed, violence, and exploitation to a society in which no one at all is either oppressor or victim.

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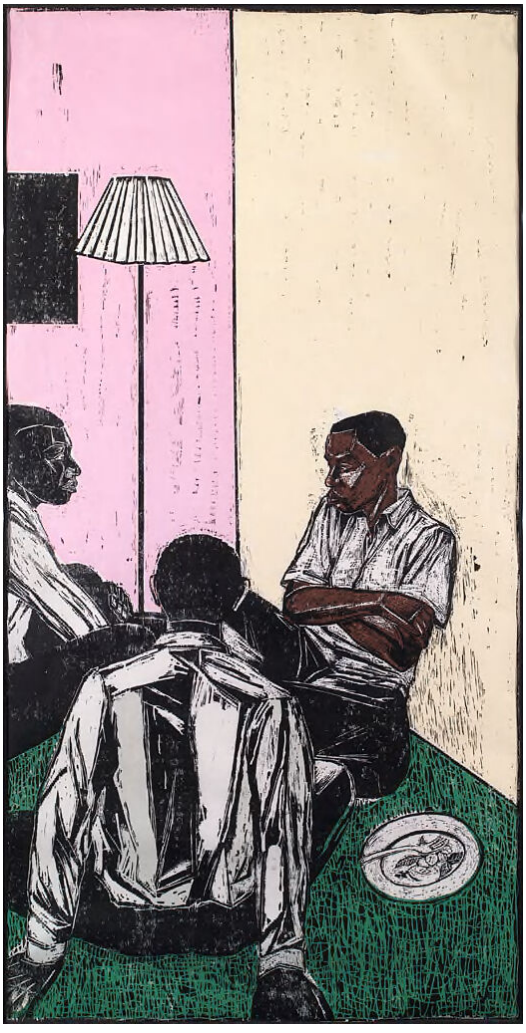
RADICAL TEACHER

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

Teaching Note

Visibility, Precarity and Public Spaces: Reading Matthew Arnold's "West London" in an Indian Classroom

by Saradindu Bhattacharya



KERRY JAMES MARSHALL, 1998 – UNTITLTED. MET MUSEUM ONLINE

In 2022, I offered MA English students at the University of Hyderabad a course on Victorian Literature and Thought. Building on preliminary remarks on the explosive impact of the Industrial Revolution on the growth and movement of populations in England during the period, I took up Matthew Arnold's "West London" for discussion in class. The poem presents a brief scene, described from the point-of-view of an unobtrusive but observant speaker, featuring a tramp who lurks about Belgrave Square and sends her little daughter begging for alms. My aim was to explore the possibility of reading the figure of the tramp as one that evokes recognition as a *human* agent, even as she confronts the dehumanizing conditions of her survival in a hostile social environment. The students in my class – most of them having had some exposure to the English canon at the undergraduate level – were already familiar with the history and conventions of basic literary genres, and could thus immediately identify that Arnold presents a recurrent 'subject' of Victorian literature (the urban poor) in a form (the Petrarchan sonnet) that typically posits a personal problem or crisis in the first eight lines and then offers a contemplative (re)solution to it in the next six lines. Arnold's poem, a student remarked, seemed to have thematic resonances with other Victorian texts they had already read (such as Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "The Cry of the Children"). I pointed out that the tramp in Arnold's poem was akin to solitary figures like prostitutes, peddlers, vagrants, leech gatherers, and discharged soldiers who populate the poetry of William Blake and William Wordsworth. The literary tradition of representing such socially marginalized characters, I suggested, might be seen as a symptom of the growing cultural anxiety over the rapidly changing economic and geographical landscape of England in the 19th century. Another student remarked that while Arnold's poem tackles the topical issue of urban poverty, it does so in a format and tone that was less "polemical" and more "intimate" than that adopted by many of his contemporaries. This sense of intimacy, I suggested, was partly a result of our expectations as readers of the genre of the sonnet itself, and partly also of the fact that Arnold's speaker prompts us to keenly observe the central character of the poem from his perspective.

The poem opens dramatically with a description of a tramp, in ragged clothes and bare feet, in the vicinity of one of London's poshest residential areas, Belgrave Square. The visual incongruity between character and setting, which is the result of 'seeing' a woman belonging to the lower class in a location that connotes class privilege, opened up the scope for analysing how 'space' might be central to understanding the representational strategy of the poem. The fact that the tramp is described as "ill, moody, and tongue-tied," observed a student, seems to project her presence in an otherwise prosperous, fashionable location as discordant, *out of place*, as it were. Another student commented that the tramp's "crouched" posture is potentially ambiguous, suggesting at the obvious level her own awareness of her illicit presence in her surroundings and her *defensive* attempt to be inconspicuous, but also physically resembling a hunting animal and thus bearing the faint trace of *offensive* menace. On the basis of these remarks, I suggested that the tramp's incongruous presence is visually configured in terms of her body itself as a marker of her 'otherness,'a *sign* that defines (through contrast) but also threatens to contaminate the spatial sanctity of Belgrave Square as the domain of the English upper classes. The speaker's strategy of directing his (and through extension the reader's) visual attention to the figure of the tramp is thus a means of confronting that which would otherwise be rendered unseen, invisible by the class-specific regulation of urban spaces in Victorian England.

Building on this premise, another student observed that the dramatic element of the poem extends into the second quatrain, where we witness the tramp sending her little daughter across the street to beg from a group of passing labourers and the girl coming back after successfully completing her mission. The habitual, wordless interaction between the tramp and her daughter and the swiftness with which the task of begging is accomplished, indicate, in terms of physical 'action,'an ability on the part of these characters to negotiate the space of the city. I suggested that it might be useful to consider how the tramp, located literally on the margins of this setting (on the pavement), is paradoxically also the centre of the scene; in *showing* the reader her ability to navigate through the public space of the street, the speaker identifies her subordinate class status while simultaneously also ascribing to her a degree of agency that implicitly questions the very basis of such subordination: "The rich she had let pass with frozen stare." Insofar as she is the source/ agent of this moral judgement – one that the speaker interprets as a sign of the "spirit [that] towers" above her state – the tramp embodies an essential humanness that the rich fail to recognize but the reader must.

The tramp's moral agency, I further added, may be read through theories of mobility proposed by critics like Michel de Certeau, who highlights the ordinary, everyday "tactics" adopted by social "poachers" to utilize and circumvent institutional norms through which urban spaces are organized. One of the students, with a particular interest in social history, reminded us that while gypsies and vagabonds have been traditionally associated in literature with social disruption, during the Victorian period homelessness and begging were declared outrightly illegal under the Vagrancy Act of 1824. The tramp in Arnold's poem would therefore immediately auger the spectre of criminality to a Victorian audience.

To this I added that the anonymity of the tramp, a figure whose contiguous presence would trigger collective anxiety amongst the residents of Belgrave Square, is combined here with sympathetic characterization, wherein the speaker prompts a recognition of her *human* instinct for survival, especially as a mother. In fact, the presence of the quasi-family unit of the mother-child duo is precisely what unsettles the 'respectable' social order of Belgrave Square. The little girl, one of the students observed, demonstrates a certain precocious expertise in the act of begging (requiring no more than a touch from her mother as instruction) that suggests her acquired ability to successfully navigate through the public space of the street; this ability, necessary for survival within this social order, is also ironically a reminder to the reader that a child (the lowest common denominator for humanity, as it were) should ideally not

have to beg on the streets and thus serves as an ethical condemnation of the inhumanity of such an order. Thus, in the sestet of the poem, the speaker shifts from direct observation to contemplative social commentary and posits a clear binary opposition between "the unknown little" and "the unknowing great." Having established a degree of sympathetic visual familiarity with the tramp through her dramatic portrayal in the octave, the speaker can now offer a critique of the class segregation between the rich and the poor through an alternate binary division within the same spatial domain – the passing labourers as "friends" versus the resident upper class "aliens." The contrast between relations of cordiality (between the beggar and the labourers) and of animosity (between the rich and the poor) prompts an identification of humanness with the former, the unlawful occupants of the ordered space of Belgrave Square, whose rightful residents are shown as lacking in humanity. I proposed that this moral binary constitutes an imaginative, ethical reconfiguration of the titular space of Belgrave Square, its meaning(s) having been revised through the humanization of the unnamed tramp.

At this point, one of the students wondered if the tramp's strategic negotiation with(in) the public space of the city street might yield insights into how certain sections of the population, such as migrant workers in our own immediate context (the Indian metropolis), are often seen in everyday contexts and yet never recognized as individuated human characters. This set off a discussion on how the presence of daily wage labourers, peddlers, and beggars (including children) in public spaces (railway stations, construction sites, traffic signals, street corners, and pavements) is a fairly common phenomenon in India, so much so that this goes unremarked, practically unnoticed, by members of the middle and upper classes who happen to occupy the same spaces but also enjoy the privilege of retreating into exclusive spaces such as restaurants, shopping malls, office buildings, and of course private houses and residential complexes. I argued that if the figure of the tramp in Arnold's poem symbolizes *vulnerability* (not only to the elements of nature but also to social ostracism and legal punishment) and her visibility functions as an ethical call to the Victorian audience to address the problem of urban poverty, then the pervasive presence of similarly marginalized characters in the urban Indian landscape may symptomize a normalization of class disparity. Their presence in our everyday public spaces, a student observed, is socially regulated and rendered 'harmless,'even necessary – for instance, sanitation workers and food delivery agents are often required to wear certain uniforms, making them visually identifiable, while surveillance systems monitor the entry and exit of courier agents and domestic servants within the premises of residential complexes. These forms of institutional regulation, the student suggested, render them visible only as particular 'types' rather than individuals to those who benefit from their labour.

Another student ventured that there might be certain extraordinary circumstances under which the visibility of these 'types' of citizens becomes unsettling, even threatening. As an instance, she cited the news reports on the mass migration of manual and semi-skilled labourers following the sudden imposition of a nation-wide lockdown in India in March, 2020 in response to the outbreak of Covid-19. The media coverage of this migration (reportedly the biggest since the exodus of populations during the 1947 partition of the country), I proposed, might be seen as foregrounding (in a literal, visual sense) citizens whose occupation of public spaces is otherwise inconspicuous. Thus, visuals of thousands of migrant workers walking through empty national highways, railway tracks, and inter-state check posts, created an unsettling spectacle, one that reminded the audience, safely ensconced in their homes fearing exposure to the deadly virus, of their own privilege, while at the same time also conjuring up the fear of contamination through the unregulated, illicit movement of the (now) hyper-visible 'other' through the spatial territory of the nation. One of the students interjected that the lockdown was imposed precisely with the intent to keep the body of the average Indian citizen immune to a highly contagious disease and thus the movement of workers *en masse* was potentially a source of infection; another student countered that not all bodies that share the space of the nation are equally vulnerable when we consider the fact that class disparity renders the existence of the average migrant worker in urban India particularly precarious when s/he confronts hunger and starvation due to lack of employment. The class recognized that the visual representation of migrant Indian workers, seen in the act of re-locating themselves away from the Indian city through the exercise of their bodies (traversing thousands of miles on foot), performs a role similar to the figure of the tramp in Arnold's poem, in that both underscore the physical and social vulnerability of the urban poor, albeit in very different historical and cultural contexts; both serve as an unsettling reminder of their "precarious lives" (to borrow a phrase from Judith Butler), even as the audience, the relatively privileged Indian student studying English at a university, acknowledges, with Arnold's speaker, the moral imperative to *see* the 'other' as "sharers in a common human fate."

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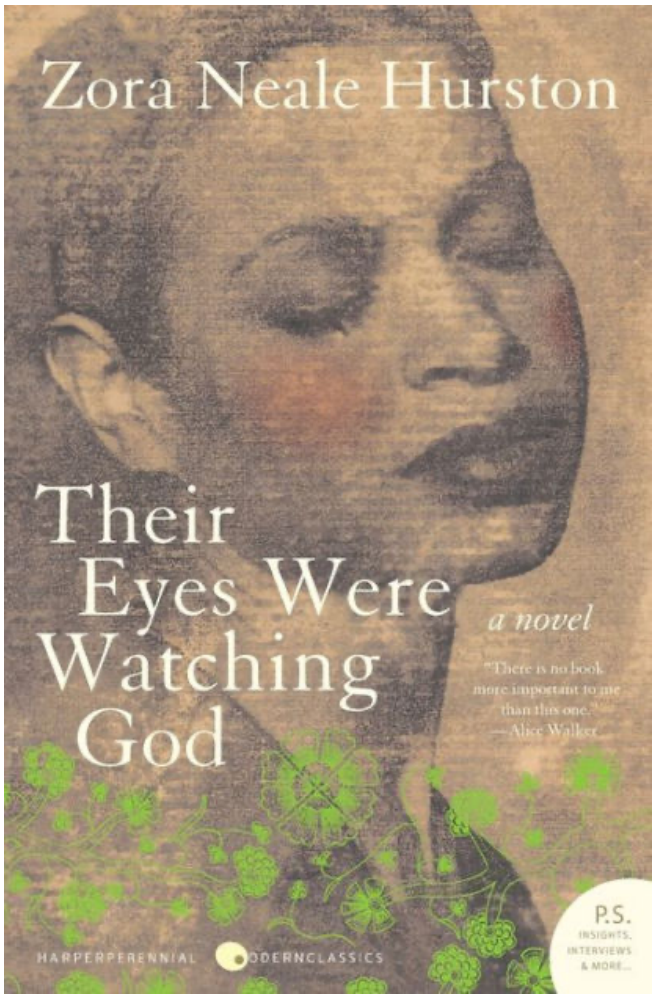
RADICAL TEACHER

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

Teaching Note

Teaching Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in First-Year Composition

by Samantha Prillaman Conner



ZORA NEALE HURSTON, 2006. THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD. HARPER PERENNIAL MODERN CLASSICS

In 2022 Zora Neale Hurston's 1937 novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, opens many gateways to critically thinking about themes such as race, gender roles, and identity. Many first-year students are exploring who they are as individuals, and many use their time in college to develop an identity outside of their parents' identity. I currently teach first-year composition at Radford University as a Graduate Teaching Fellow. Radford University is a rural, mostly white university in southwest Virginia. However, Radford University's student population is over one third students of color, a higher percentage than neighboring schools like Virginia Tech. Many students come from lower income families and choose Radford for its small-town environment and affordability. Radford University students are mainly women. Keeping these demographics in mind is important to understanding the reception of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in my first-year composition classroom.

Their Eyes Were Watching God follows the life of Janie, a Black woman from the South who experiences discrimination based on race and gender. She marries several men who each show readers how women are mistreated by their husbands and belittled by society. Though she is faced with discrimination based on her identity as a Black woman, Janie still holds onto her hope for independence and true love. The story is told through Janie's reflection on her life to her friend, Pheoby, which makes this a powerful novel to pair with feminist pedagogy due to the focus on reflection. Janie is developing her own ideas and identity in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, thus making this novel a great starting point for discussion, self-reflection, and writing in the FYC classroom.

Starting in small discussion groups allows students time to gain comfort with their peers and speaking in class, especially about controversial topics like race, gender, and sexuality. Starting with something like age discrimination and then moving into discussions of intersectionality of race and gender worked best in my classroom. Students are more inclined to talk about the experiences that Janie goes through in the novel because they can remove themselves from the equation initially. For example, students may bring up Janie's age as she is forced into her first marriage to Logan Killicks or they may talk about Hurston's purpose for writing *Their Eyes* in 1937. However, as they warm up to their peers and to me, they eventually become more comfortable relating the experiences of Janie to modern day issues concerning race and gender.

While teaching an emotionally-charged novel like *Their Eyes*, it is important to take notice of the zones of learning. I worked to keep students in the "stretch" zone, where they are learning but are not so overwhelmed that they shut down (Samu-Vissar). In this class, students were exposed to dialects different from their own, and ideas of racism, sexism, and sexuality, as well as comparisons of the novel to real-life events. The reason I use the word "possibly" when referring to my students' position in the "panic zone" is because I have no true evidence to present that suggests my students were uncomfortable talking about issues relating to gender roles, sexuality, or race. In fact, I received student writings that demonstrated respect and understanding of others' perspectives during our time discussing the novel. However, these student writings and discussions demonstrating respect for one another and myself are no help in explaining why my attendance rates were so low and why students, particularly the male students, stopped turning in assignments after the first month of classes.

To explain in more detail, I taught two sections of FYC using the same syllabus incorporating Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* into the curriculum. My 8:00 a.m. class was comprised of fifteen students, with only two males. My 9:00 a.m. class also consisted of fifteen students, seven of whom were males. After about a month of classes, I began noticing my male students were becoming less attentive in class and many stopped coming at all. In addition, all but three of my male students stopped submitting assignments.

At first, I attributed this decline in male attendance and assignment submission to my male students existing within the "panic zone." I thought they were upset about our discussions about women's sexuality, traditional gender roles, and masculinity. These are big, controversial topics for any student to encounter, especially during their first semester of college. However, I assigned a journal activity to allow students to reflect on their feelings about discussing topics such as feminism, gender roles, masculinity, race, sexuality, etc. Here are some of the responses that I received from the male students whose attendance had dropped:

> **Male student A**: "Personally, I am very comfortable with talking about sexuality, sex and race in the classroom. As someone who is very comfortable in how they identify, others' opinions don't really affect me that much when it comes to gender and sexuality."
>
> **Male Student B**: "I would not feel discomfort talking about those various topics in the classroom. Like I said before, I feel like everybody should have a wide understanding of gender, sexuality, and race, because learning about it can possibly help you in the future. I was always taught to always keep an open mind when learning about difficult topics in the world. I enjoy learning about those things and getting to know more about History."
>
> **Male Student C**: "I do not really handle my discomfort, but if a teacher would ever call on me, I would just suck it up and say my opinion then just stay quiet the rest of class because I would see people give me a nasty look because it is not what society wants me to believe. I truly feel like nowadays if you do not believe what society does then you are just automatically wrong. I know in classrooms it is like a safe space but if I did ever have to say my opinion to the class no one would say anything, but I would see people look at me in a weird way and judge me from across the class. I would not mind if I talked about my opinions on things in a paper that only you would see, but I would not like to share in front of the class."

Male Student D: "In the classroom I have mixed opinions about talking about race, gender, and sexuality in the classroom. At some points when talking about the topic I feel fine like talking about the history. I can go for a while when we go through the timeline of how the movements started, important people, and specific points in time. When it comes to talking about personal experiences or even trying to relate my own situation to a topic I do not feel as comfortable. I do place in the middle of the political spectrum, but there are a lot of things I just don't have a strong opinion on. I would not want to say something that could possibly upset someone or even have a debate due to the fact I really wouldn't have to many points on the topic."

Overall, these responses show students want to experience respect in the classroom and learn about perspectives different from their own. Male Student A has an understanding that sometimes misinformation happens and that is okay. Classroom discussions seem to be a place to learn for this student. Male Student B agrees with Male Student A and possesses a respect for learning and an open mind. Male Student C has some reservations about discussing controversial topics in class but has no problem discussing these topics on paper for various writing assignments. Though Male Student C is comfortable sharing his opinions on paper, he enters the "panic zone" when asked to share ideas and opinions aloud in whole group discussions. Lastly, Male Student D does not like to participate in controversial discussions about race, gender, sexuality, etc, but his reasoning shows respect for others' feelings as well as his own. Male Student D could easily enter the "panic zone" if conflicting ideas are brought to the table. It will be especially important for this student to understand that working through ideas as a class is a part of learning within the "stretch zone." These excerpts from their journal assignment show promise for classroom discussions and writings within the "stretch zone," though Male Students C and D have the potential to enter into the "panic zone" during whole group discussions.

My final evaluations revealed that the Southern Black dialect use in the novel was the primary cause for the low attendance and assignment submission drops, not the discussions about race and gender. The aspect of reading difficulty alone may have been causing students to enter the "panic zone." There is also the possibility of unconscious bias related to understanding her Southern Black dialect. In retrospect, students were more uncomfortable with the dialect and content than I realized even though I started with the age discrimination discussions. Though they may have felt some discomfort at times, I made sure to use antiracist teaching strategies based on Ibram Kendi's definition of an antiracist: "An antiracist idea is any idea that suggests the racial groups are equals in all their apparent differences – that there is nothing right or wrong with any racial group" (Kendi 20). As a white female instructor, I needed to be sure I was not "speaking for" BIPOC individuals. It was important for me to be able to hold class discussions that did not alienate any student and did not allow room for racial discrimination.

Though I prepared for code switching lessons before the semester began, I did not see dialect as a possible "panic zone" at first. One way to incorporate discussions of dialect into the classroom and help students understand Hurston's reasons for writing the majority of *Their Eyes* in a Southern Black dialect is to assign journal entries relating to code switching. Keeping these assignments low stakes allows students to experiment with their writing and ideas without the fear of being "wrong." Journal entries allow students to reflect on their own experiences using their own language. We then discuss as a whole group why we think Hurston uses a Southern Black dialect. Many students say, "Because it's where she's from," but with slight guidance I can move students towards thinking about how these Southern Black voices were often silenced. Some students presented hidden "panic zones" as they would sometimes refer to the Standard English dialect as "proper," so I was sure to explain why no dialect is "proper," in an effort to end the subtly racist comments. We end our whole group discussion with the idea that by incorporating dialect into *Their Eyes,* Hurston is giving a voice to those who did not have one. I bring this idea up often as we read through the novel in the following weeks. Finding common ground through discussions of dialect and code switching brings students together though they may be different.

Hurston's novel teaches students that it is acceptable to keep their own identities in their writing. While some of their values may be challenged, the use of antiracist and feminist pedagogical strategies helps students to remain in the "stretch zone" as they explore new ways of thinking. The journal responses from my male students show promising open-minded individuals who want to learn and respect others, but have reservations about voicing their opinions in class. By teaching the importance of code-switching in conversation with this novel, students learn to think critically about and respect the identities of those who may be different from them.

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Poetry

Safe Space

by Carol Smith

MARTIN KLINE - ANNUNCIATION 2002. MET ONLINE COLLECTION

Safe Space

In this English 10 classroom, racism is not welcomed.
So, it sneaks in and hides.
It enters beneath rock band t-shirts and tattered Levi's
or stashed in Jansport backpacks.
It crouches under desks like a concealed cell phone
ready for activation.

Some days, it leans against the pale blue cinderblock wall
with the quiet back-row listeners.
Other times, it sits up straight, eyes on the whiteboard,
with the eager front-row hand-raisers.
Sometimes, it peeks at the self-isolated Black kids staring
out the window at nothing.

Under the glare of linear fluorescent tubes,
it can be hard to detect.
Especially if it flattens itself to lie between lines
of five-paragraph essays in three-ring binders,
or when it slithers up onto a bookshelf and wedges
between Achebe and Coates.

Often, it lies in wait within my teacher-mouth,
ready to burst forth as an
Anglicized stutter of an unrecognized name.
When that happens, it echoes
off the linoleum floor and ricochets off laminated posters
of Angelou and Morrison.

Carol Smith, Ed.D, is an MFA candidate at Arcadia University, who has taught in public schools and universities for 30 years. Her poetry reflects upon personal, social, and political experiences, including the tensions inherent to racism, antiracism, and social injustice. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *The Last Stanza*, *In Parentheses*, and *Mobius*. Carol lives in Southern New Jersey, where she currently teaches college composition. She can be reached at c.a.smith.author@gmail.com.

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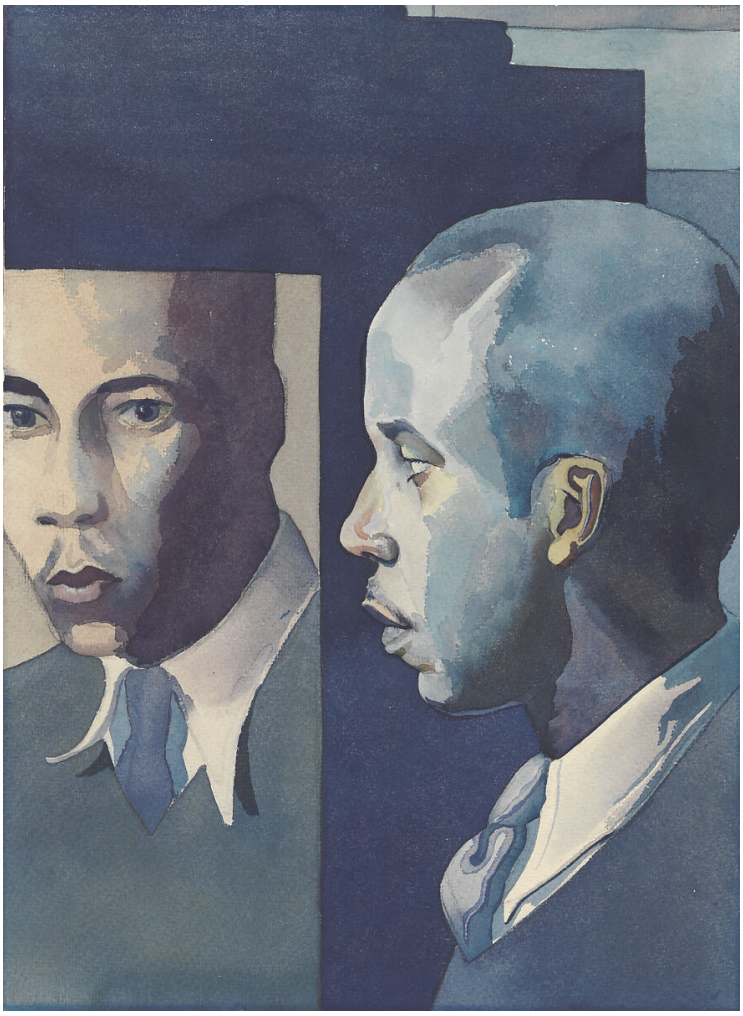
A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Poetry

Still

by Mary E. Cronin



SELF-PORTRAIT SAMUEL JOSEPH BROWN, JR. AMERICAN CA. 1941. MET ONLINE COLLECTION

Still

Let me step aside
from the reading wars
and data sheets
and progress reports.

Let me be still,
still here
still open
to the wonder of you
learning to read,
making sense
of Frog
and Toad,
and their bickering way of loving.

Let me listen
to you stumble over words,
trip on the cobblestones
of *afraid* and *friend,*
careening
down the path of
story.

Let me be part of
your story.
How you arrived here,
wide-eyed,
wary,
angry.

And now you read,
you laugh,
you sit,
still,
while I bend
to tie the frayed laces
of your shoe.

Mary E. Cronin's Massachusetts teaching career spans 30 years, preschool to college, Boston to Cambridge to Cape Cod. Mary's poetry for adults has been featured in *The New York Times*, *Rise Up Review,* and *Provincetown Magazine.* A Literacy Coach in the Dennis-Yarmouth schools and a dedicated 5 a.m. writer, her poetry for children has appeared in numerous anthologies for young readers. Mary has two children's books under contract, yet to be announced. You can find her at www.maryecronin.com.

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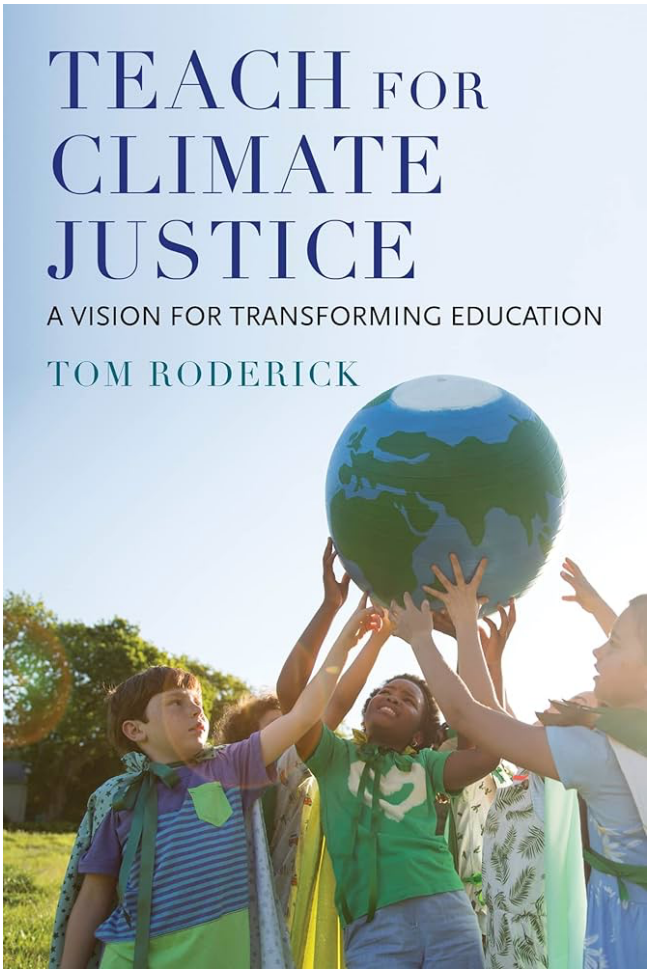
RADICAL TEACHER

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

Review

Teach for Climate Justice: A Vision for Transforming Education

by Paul Buhle



TEACH FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE: A VISION FOR TRANSFORMING EDUCATION. (2023). BY TOM RODERICK. HARVARD EDUCATION PRESS.

***Teach for Climate Justice: A Vision for Transforming Education*. (2023). By Tom Roderick. Harvard Education Press.**

How can we speak to young people about the ecological disaster and increasing inequality that will shape their lives without making them feel hopeless—or succumb ourselves to a deadening fatalism? How can we educate the next generation to find ways to make a difference, to see that a better future is possible?

Tom Roderick, a veteran teacher, writer, and education activist, spent 36 years before retirement at the Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility in New York City. If anyone has the credentials for the task at hand, it's him—and he approaches the subject with a light touch, urging educators to teach for joy and justice.

The task is to move step by step, realistically taking up what children can make sense of on their own terms and at an age-appropriate level. Much of this, as Rachel Carson argued long ago, hinges on their being able to "feel" long before being able to "understand." Through case studies and interviews with educators from a range of grade levels and types of schools, Roderick shows what is possible.

Young people want—or at least can be helped—to enjoy direct contact with nature in a wide variety of environments, from woods to water, to look and touch and perhaps do something as adventurous as taking a canoe ride or wading through shallow water while collecting samples, even in a city park. If a river (like the Bronx River) has been improved in recent times, the return of life opens a vision of what is possible in education, to teach others (to quote an elementary school teacher) "about the natural world even when it is being destroyed" (p.53).

What does this mean? It takes teaching children to go beyond passive acceptance and toward "trying to come up with ways to create social change" (p.66), to quote another teacher, this one a veteran of student participation during pre-pandemic youth climate marches in New York City.

It means identifying the most pressing problems, not only ones students can see in their own environment but also the dire conditions in the Global South. Various forms of habitat destruction—above all the harm to rainforests, the overuse of fertilizers, the damage or destruction of animal habitats, which has led to the massive spread of human diseases—have real causes that can be usefully discussed. Children who have experienced mega-storms know already, at a young age, that something is amiss. They can catch up with events and their causes through many available documentary films. They can connect what they see and what they experience with "climate justice," that is, how dire events fall heaviest upon those least able to protect themselves. It is a truism that children respond to the harm caused to almost any animal species, and, through this empathy, they can make connections to the wider world and also to things humans have done that must not continue.

Many young people in classrooms today are themselves climate refugees, brought here or born here because their parents were forced from their homeland by economic or political turmoil brought on—at least in part—by climate change.

How to offer young people positive lessons? If there is potentially good news, it must be that climate movements are thriving and that rather than being left behind, young people are very often leading the charge, with Greta Thunberg as today's singular model world citizen. Alternative ways of feeding populations, like more "green" sources of energy, are abundant, if only politicians (Democrats as well as Republicans) can be impelled or compelled to take seriously the urgency of the moment.

At the heart of Roderick's vision of climate justice education is "active hope," a concept he borrowed from Chris Johnstone and Johanna Macy in their book of the same name. Active hope is not a feeling; it's not something we have, but something we *do*. We envision the just and sustainable world we *hope for*, discern how we can best contribute, and then get to work—doing our part to accomplish what Johnstone and Macy call the "Great Turning." This is science fiction of a sort—but of a potentially active sort. Finding ways to protect the oceans while "wilding" larger land masses, making cities more nature-friendly through rooftop gardens and reduced use of automobiles—these and other visions allow young people to think of what could be possible.

Perhaps the most controversial chapter of this book is "Teach for Civil Resistance: The Power of Grassroots Movements to Effect Transformational Change" because it demands action that the powerful will naturally wish to resist.

Students in one example view a powerful documentary film and discuss the Freedom Rides that the US Justice Department asked civil rights leaders to suspend for the sake of public order. The Movement chose to escalate non-violent action instead, compelling the Interstate Commerce Commission to enforce the laws against discrimination in interstate travel. As the teacher in the example concluded, political leaders had been the followers while activists themselves—overwhelmingly young—were the leaders through non-violent direct action. Civil rights came to be seen as the most crucial problem of the nation, and allies high in government took action.

Such experiences, taught in a wide variety of ways (Roderick recalls his own third-grade daughter in a school play about the Montgomery Bus Boycott campaign), lead logically to potential action on climate change. Students learn and discuss the wide range of non-violent direct actions that can be taken. The experiences are updated with students' role-playing and discussion of the recent campaign led by Indigenous people to stop the construction of Enbridge Energy's oil pipeline and its destructive and violent invasion of their tribal lands in Northern Minnesota.

The chapter also tells the story of the encampment, led by Indigenous young people, to stop the completion of the 1,200-mile Dakota Access pipeline, explaining how it

would endanger drinking water and tribal lands in the Standing Rock Native American Reservation in North Dakota. After months of nonviolent training and action that gained worldwide attention, the Obama administration denied the permit for the construction. Upon taking office soon after, President Donald Trump issued an executive order allowing the pipeline to go forward. Although a federal judge struck down a key federal permit, the pipeline was allowed to continue operating pending an environmental review. The ultimate outcome remains uncertain, while the oil continues to flow.

How can students learn to feel supported in action for climate justice? How can they feel capable of reversing the current drift toward catastrophe? Black Lives Matter events helped create mutual-aid and protest-support networks that students could understand, even as the COVID crisis shut down global Climate Marches. At a more granular level, students could borrow from a method developed in Scotland that involved learning about a river: visiting it intermittently over the school year, studying together what was flourishing and what was becoming endangered. Likewise, by engaging in activities connected with Indigenous food sources and developing their own recipes for uses of plants and seeds, students could study the issues of food justice and injustice, waste, and scarcity.

So many examples can be found in these pages, so useful and adaptable, that no summary can do justice to the text. The author urges readers—educators, parents, and others—to make the struggle for public schools matter, to build a movement for climate justice. The teacher insurgency that swept through a variety of states during 2018-2019, sometimes well beyond the wishes of teacher-union leaderships, demonstrated that educators themselves are ready.

Paul Buhle has been active in social movements since his teen years, and most recently turned to editing nonfiction graphic novels. The latest is a history of the Jewish Bund, published by Between the Lines.

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Review

Israelism

by Bob Rosen

ISRAELISM. (2023). DIRECTED BY ERIN AXELMAN AND SAM EILERTSEN.

***Israelism*. (2023). Directed by Erin Axelman and Sam Eilertsen. 84 min. www.israelismfilm.com**

Do you ever wonder why some Jewish supporters of Israel are so zealous, even fanatical? Why some friends who are very progressive, or radical, on other issues, fiercely defend a brutal occupation? A new film called *Israelism* offers a possible explanation: Maybe they were just brought up that way.

This engaging and powerful documentary shows the extensive network of Jewish schools, summer camps (complete with military games), and synagogue groups that create a supportive and passionate culture for children and teens that teaches them that Jewishness means love of Israel, that Israel is a beautiful homeland where they're always welcome, and, as they get older, that defending Israel in a world of enemies is their privilege as well as their duty. Exciting (and carefully curated) trips to Israel through Birthright and other well-funded organizations; rousing group trips to AIPAC conventions; mega-events featuring celebrities, "hot" IDF soldiers, and passionate speakers – the film captures the deep appeal of this indoctrination and the vast network that facilitates it.

But, thankfully, some escape. The film features two young American Jews who ultimately rejected the myths they'd grown up with. Simone Zimmerman, initially a promising youthful advocate for Israel, meets real Palestinians as an undergraduate at Berkely, decides to visit the West Bank to see for herself what Jewish settlers are doing, and ultimately co-founds IfNotNow, a Jewish group that opposes the occupation. "Eitan," eager to do his part, joins many of his peers in heading to Israel to enlist in the IDF. But when Israeli soldiers brutally kick a shackled Palestinian detainee he is responsible for transporting, Eitan is shaken. "I didn't even speak up," he tells us, and the growing guilt gnaws at him, eventually, despite his shyness and shame, leading him to tell his story publicly back home.

But there's more than just disillusioned youth on display here: a few talking heads on both sides (including the odious Abe Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League), a Palestinian-American who offers alternative tours, footage of demonstrations in support of Palestine, and even a couple of rabbis. Though a little redundant toward the end (as many documentaries are), this is one terrific film. You don't have to be Jewish to find it deeply frightening as well as hopeful—and, best of all, perfectly suited for encouraging necessary discussions in your classroom.

Bob Rosen is a member of the editorial board of *Radical Teacher.*

Editorial note: If you are in fact discussing the current war on Gaza or the occupation more broadly with students, Scholars Against the War in Palestine (https://scholarsagainstwar.org/) has an incredible array of documents, resources, lesson plans, etc. to help facilitate such important conversations.