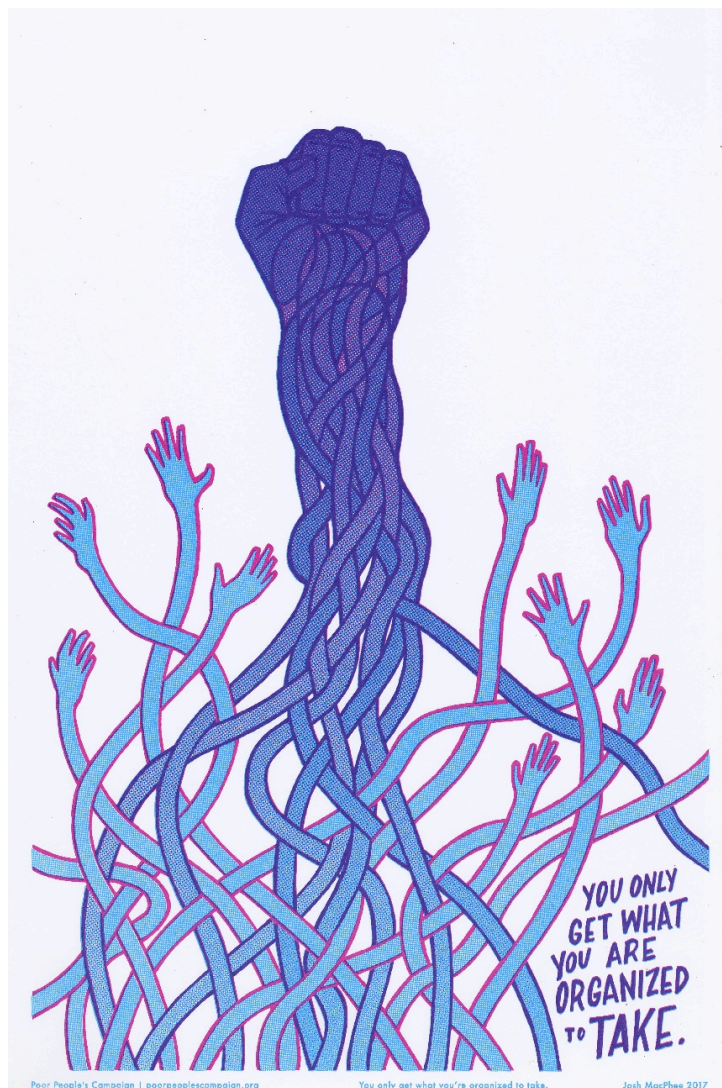


RADICAL TEACHER

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

Totally Radical

by Michael Bennett



YOU ONLY GET WHAT YOU ARE ORGANIZED TO TAKE, JOSH MACPHEE, 2017 VIA JUSTSEEDS

We at *Radical Teacher* are sometimes asked, and sometimes ask ourselves, what we mean by “radical.” Our usual response to queries from potential authors is that the meaning of our title is encapsulated in our subtitle: “a socialist, feminist, and anti-racist journal on the theory and practice of teaching.” In short, our version of radicalism is based in a left analysis of how classism, sexism, homophobia, and racism are intertwined and thus require a systematic critique and dismantling. We expect an analysis that is socialist, but not class reductionist; anti-racist, but not focused exclusively on race; feminist, but not just liberal feminist. I guess you could say that we are anti-racist and anti-ableist feminist eco-socialists, but I think it’s easier to say that we believe in intersectionality.

The utility of the term “intersectionality” is that it sums up in one word what I just tried to describe in a rather convoluted paragraph. I believe that this term more accurately describes our analysis because it comes out of a Black feminist tradition rather than the line of dead white males who launched a flotilla of sectarian organizations bearing their names: Trotskyite, Leninist, Shachtmanite, Many of us who are resolutely anti-sectarian embrace The Combahee River Collective’s 1977 “A Black Feminist Statement” for what it described, but did not name, as intersectionality: “The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives” (312). Later, Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins labeled this analysis as intersectionality, which Collins defines as “the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but rather as reciprocally constructing phenomena” (1).

In theory, this definition explicates the kind of radical analysis we have in mind. In practice, however, the word “radical” is subject to debates at our editorial board meetings, within the Left generally, and definitely between the Left and the Center/Right. During my fifteen or so years on the editorial board, we have had very productive conversations on this topic, and I have learned a lot about radicalism through the political discussions with which we end (almost) every board meeting and through reading hundreds of submissions to the magazine. Once I retired from teaching English, I devoted my post-retirement career to radical/socialist education, becoming Manuscript Co-Editor and eventually Managing Editor of this journal and Chair of the Board of the Democratic Socialists of America Fund. Now, it’s part of my “job” to articulate a political position by combining the theoretical and practical knowledge gleaned from *Radical Teacher* with my years of experience as an educator and activist involved with the anti-apartheid movement; women’s and LGBT marches and protests; union leadership and labor strikes; the anti-war movement;

The title of this essay and this issue, “Totally Radical,” simultaneously points to how difficult it has been to find a

totally satisfactory (though not totalizing) understanding of radicalism and to the ways in which the term “Radical,” starting in the 1980s or earlier, was often drained of its political content. As so often happens with words and concepts in a capitalist culture, “Radical” became a marketing tool. Radical politics became “totally radical” style or the even more diminutive “rad,” with “totally” reduced to “totes.” In “A Brief History of the Word ‘Rad,’” Aaron Gilbreath writes about this omnivorous quality of American capitalism (without labelling it as such—he refers to “the mechanisms behind the regurgitating cow stomach that is American pop culture”) that enacts this literal and figurative truncation. It was frustrating to be a nascent radical coming of age in the 1980s, when most of my peers thought of “Radical” as stylistic rather than political. This is what happens when, rather than just opposing anti-capitalist movements (which would involve having to name them), corporate capital co-opts them, markets them, and attempts to drain them of political meaning.

When I floated the idea of calling this issue “Totally Radical” at a *Radical Teacher* board meeting and suggested that we might further lighten the tone of the issue by infusing it with 80s style graphics, most of my comrades were not amused. Not in the way that the right depicts humorless “snowflake” leftists, but in the well-established left spirit of self-criticism. People felt that such graphics might trivialize the issue, erasing the sociopolitical roots of radicalism in the very way that I was trying to critique. I heard and appreciated this critique, and we have kept the “Totally Rad” graphics to a minimum, though I have worked with our Production Editor to sneak in a couple for irony’s sake. (Thanks, Chris!)

I guess you could say that we are anti-racist and anti-ableist feminist eco-socialists, but I think it’s easier to say that we believe in intersectionality.

Another reason I chose to label this issue “Totally Radical” is the stunning political similarities between the 1980s and the era of Trumpism. When faced with the choice between a tepid neoliberal politician and a right-wing populist outsider, the electorate chose the latter and ushered in a vicious form of authoritarianism, if not neo-fascism (though Trump’s victory should also be traced to virulent misogyny). Each resulting administration was marked by corrupt cronyism, toxic militarism, unhinged corporatism, and an all-out assault on unions and social movements. Dog-whistle racism gave way to its unvarnished counterpart, white nationalism. Reagan and Trump both turned their backs on pandemics that, at least initially, targeted constituencies they not only didn’t care about but actively disliked. Reagan famously didn’t devote a speech to AIDS until the very end of his second term, seven years into the pandemic, because, as his own Surgeon General C. Everett Koop noted, the President’s advisers “took the stand, ‘They [homosexuals and drug users] are only getting what they justly deserve!’” (White). Adam Serwer argues that under COVID, Trump created a new

version of the racial contract by which “The lives of disproportionately black and brown workers [were] sacrificed to fuel the engine of a faltering economy, by a president who disdains them.” Others have suggested that the Trump administration delayed a federal response to the pandemic because if “it was going to be relegated to Democratic states ... they could blame those governors, and that would be an effective political strategy” (Eban). As a result of their actions and inactions, Reagan and Trump were directly responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands.

And just as corporate culture of the 1980s downplayed radical resistance to the Radical Right, transmuting it into “rad” products, Pepsi famously attempted in 2017 to turn radical protest into a marketing campaign. In the “Live for Now” ad campaign, Kendall Jenner takes time out from a photo shoot to join an unspecified protest (though its soft-core confrontation with police sharply contrasts with hard-core police violence during Black Lives Matter demonstrations). Kendall diffuses the mildly tense situation by offering a Pepsi to one of the officers, transforming his light glower into a slight smile, which the protestors (for some reason) celebrate as a victory (www.youtube.com/watch?v=AfCiV6ysngU). Perhaps there is no better emblem of the continuities between the 1980s and the 2020s marketing of the “totally rad” than the resurfacing of 1982 film *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* as a 2020 Zoom table read of the script, under the leadership of Sean Penn, who played the “raddest” character of them all (Spicoli) in the original film (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MaZsPh6uyWg>).

The ability of corporate capital to channel political movements into marketing slogans calls upon us to reinfuse those ideas with political content: to transform “totally rad” advertising into a movement that is totally radical. The contexts of the 2020’s ads just mentioned give us some hope. Unlike the popular transformation of “The Me Generation” into “The Pepsi Generation” or the multicultural peace movement into the faux hippie ad “I’d like to buy the world a Coke,” the Kendall Jenner appropriation of radical resistance was protested by everyone from Black Lives Matter to Piers Morgan; the ad was a resounding failure, pulled within twenty-four hours and since labelled “the worst ad of all time” (Nicholson). And the table read of *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* organized by Sean Penn was used by Penn as a fundraiser for CORE, an organization he founded that provides Community Organized Relief Efforts primarily in Haiti, but also across the Caribbean and in Puerto Rico and the U.S. More importantly, the radical potential of the early 2020s seems more promising than did that of the early 1980s. While Trump never won the popular vote and lost his re-election bid, Reagan was incomprehensibly popular and won re-election by a landslide. The political landscape in 2020 featured an avowed Democratic Socialist as a viable candidate for President and a democratic socialist movement that is far larger than it was in the 1980s. The largest socialist organization in the U.S., Democratic Socialists of America, was founded in 1982 with roughly 6,000 members. In 2021, membership is approaching 100,000. In 2020,

Black Lives Matters became arguably the largest protest movement in U.S. history (Buchanan, et al.).

Though the depoliticizing “totally rad” marketing spawned in the twentieth century continues in the twenty-first, intersectional movements have had some success in creating a political climate in 2021 that is totally radical in the way defined by the subtitle of *Radical Teacher: A Socialist, Feminist, and Anti-Racist Journal on the Theory and Practice of Teaching*. Each strand of this radical DNA is encoded in this issue of *RT*. Jakob Feinig and Diren Valayden’s “Pedagogy of the Job Guarantee” explores a central component of socialism: democratic control over socio-economic life. The Job Guarantee (JG), a part of Modern Monetary Theory (MMT), makes a claim for a legally guaranteed and publicly financed right to productive work with benefits. Feinig and Valayden had students engage with readings, conduct interviews, and participate in other class activities to teach them about how and why JG framing sees unemployed people as an asset not a burden. A particularly important branch of socialism, eco-socialism, is on display in Allison L. Ricket’s “Teaching Land as an Extension of Self: The Role of Ecopsychology in Disrupting Capitalist Narratives of Land and Resource Exploitation.” Ricket offers an ecopedagogy that rejects traditional pedagogical approaches to environmental curriculum for reinforcing perceived helplessness in the face of capitalist forces that identify land only as exploitable other. Ecosocialism also appears to underlie Sari Edelstein’s teaching note on “Teaching *Moby Dick* in the Anthropocene,” which lays out ways to make this nineteenth-century novel relevant for contemporary students by focusing on issues Melville raises about the consequences of economic exploitation of the environment.

One of the tasks of socialist feminism is to challenge (neo)liberal feminism’s failure to engage in intersectional work by retreating into privatized modes of “corporate girl boss” feminism (Leonard). As Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser put it in the second thesis of their *Feminism for the 99 Percent: A Manifesto*, “Liberal feminism is bankrupt. It’s time to get over it.” They argue that liberal feminism “supplies the perfect alibi for neoliberalism” (12) and, in response:

Our answer to *lean-in* feminism is *kick-back* feminism. We have no interest in breaking the glass ceiling while leaving the vast majority to clean up the shards. Far from celebrating women CEOs who occupy corner offices, we want to get rid of CEOs and corner offices (13).

In this spirit, Carrie E. Hart and Sarah E. Colonna’s “Feminist Space Invaders: Killjoy Conversations in Neoliberal Universities” challenges the normative practices of neoliberal universities that create a cordon sanitaire around privatized feminism. Hart and Colonna brought together cross-campus dialogue between their classes from different universities because intersectional feminist theory is a dynamic practice of study in which communicating across difference is imperative. Another task of socialist feminism is, as Arruzza, et al. put it in their fifth thesis, to recognize that “gender oppression in capitalist societies is rooted in the subordination of social reproduction to

production for profit"; in response, socialist feminists "want to turn thing right side up" (20). Althea Eannace Lazzaro, Julia Ismael, and Brianna Ishihara address the role of social reproduction, particularly what has been called "care work," in their essay "It Takes Heart: The Experiences and Working Conditions of Caring Educators." They argue that care for students, while it can be deeply satisfying for the educator, takes considerable work and skill, and providing care for a wage (especially not a livable one, especially if you are a woman of color in a predominantly white institution, especially if you are working an unwaged double-shift) can lead to crisis. The authors conducted a series of talking circles with colleagues to build solidarity, knowledge, and mutual aid in response to this crisis of care.

Intersectional feminism is not only socialist; it also incorporates analysis of race, colonialism, sexuality, and other factors. As the title suggests, Awino Okech's teaching note "Screening *Winnie* and African Feminist Herstories" reflects on the screening of *Winnie*, an autobiographical documentary about the life of South African freedom fighter Winnie Mandela, as part of recovering an African feminist tradition that combatted *apartheid* and continues the struggle for decolonization within the neoliberal university. Jessica Ann Vooris's teaching note "When Did You Know You Were Straight? Teaching with the Heterosexual Questionnaire" describes how students confronted heterosexism and heterosexual privilege in responding to the Heterosexual Questionnaire designed by Martin Rochlin.

One of the central insights of intersectional anti-racist work is that "All politics is identity politics" (Fraser). In her book *The Purpose of Power*, Black Lives Matter co-founder Alicia Garza devotes a chapter to "The Power of Identity Politics." She traces the term back to the same Combahee River Collective manifesto that gave rise to the theory of intersectionality. Garza argues that in describing and theorizing how "their life experiences were shaped by what they called 'interlocking oppressions'" (188), the Combahee River Collective provided insights that helped shape the strategy and success of Black Lives Matter in the 2020s. In this issue of *RT*, John Conley's essay "To Teach the University is to Teach Reparations: A Class Project" discusses one component of contemporary anti-racist struggles, the reparations movement, in the context of the school where he teaches. By discussing a course project that looks into his own university's history, Conley models one strategy for educators to normalize the discussion of reparations as well as expand its reach to encompass more recent and ongoing injuries to African American communities. It's not always easy for intersectional work on race to reach across racial difference. Jay Gillen's review of Victoria Theisen-Homer's book *Learning to Connect: Relationships, Race, and Teacher Education* emphasizes the importance of building anti-authoritarian relationships between teachers and students, especially when those relationships attempt to cross racial boundaries.

Of course, the title of this journal is not "Totally Radical," but *Radical Teacher*. Each of the essays described thus far uses intersectional analysis in service of the theory and practice of teaching. The final two essays in this issue

focus directly on pedagogical praxis. Aaron Stoller's "Traditional and Critical Mentoring" is in our tradition of publishing articles about different forms of radical pedagogy. Stoller focuses on the need for critical theories of mentorship to replace traditional "value-free" theories. William Terrell Wright's "Reality check: How adolescents use TikTok as a digital backchanneling medium to speak back against institutional discourses of school(ing)" reflects *RT*'s interest in the radical potential of alternative media for student activism. Wright hopes that teachers won't simply dismiss or discipline students who use TikTok to speak back to educational authorities but rather engage these moments of rupture and feelings of dissonance to open up opportunities for understanding and dialogue.

Though this introduction to the issue "Totally Radical" can't help but fail to describe the totality of what we mean by "radical," it does provide one editor's insight into what I've learned about the parameters of radical teaching from reading manuscripts for every issue of *Radical Teacher* from #75 to the current #119. And I've learned as much, if not more, by interacting with friends/colleagues who have been part of the editorial collective from when the magazine was founded in 1975 to those who joined well after I did. As someone who came of age in the 1980s and felt despair when the first two elections I could vote in saddled us with Ronald Reagan, I remember being disheartened when it seemed like more people were familiar with the meaning of "totally rad" than they were with the long history of political radicalism. Seeking refuge, I joined Democratic Socialists of America in the 1980s, back when it had about 10,000 members, and now I can't help but be heartened by watching DSA grow to ten times that size. Likewise, I remember reading the Combahee River Collective's "A Black Feminist Statement" when I was in grad school, not imagining that it would shape the analysis of the largest protest movement in U.S. history: Black Lives Matter. I don't underestimate the threat of Trumpism and the global neo-fascist movement of which it is a part, but I feel radical hope over these political developments I could not have imagined in the totally rad 1980s. That hope grows every time we publish an issue of *Radical Teacher* filled with essays and teaching notes and poetry and reviews that are totally radical.

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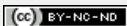
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The Pedagogy of the Job Guarantee

by Jakob Feinig and Diren Valayden



TIM MOSSHOLDER VIA UNSPLASH.COM

In the classroom, we frequently notice that students want to deepen their understanding of the way they live while thinking beyond the way social life is organized today.

We see this desire as a quiet rebellion against structural critiques that tend to make capitalism, racism, and sexism appear inevitable. But at the same time, students tend to view capitalism as static and unchangeable. Our teaching unfolds in this tension between the desire for thinking beyond current institutions, on the one hand, and structuralist critique, on the other. In this context, we have developed a set of activities that enable students to imagine a set of institutions through which societies can eradicate the specter of unemployment.

A Job Guarantee (JG) program would create a legally enforceable right to work at a good wage with benefits, including healthcare, childcare, and paid vacations. As a right, JG employment is not limited in time, and there is no means testing. In addition, it would create a realistic alternative to low-wage high-stress environments by providing an exit option that does not marginalize people as “the unemployed” but guarantees their inclusion as productive members of society. There are numerous other advantages. For instance, when someone who brings indispensable income to the household engages in domestic violence, women—the primary victims of such violence—would be able to move out and claim their right to a job with childcare. In addition, by providing a floor for pay, working conditions, and benefits, a JG would improve conditions for private-sector workers because their employers would have to match the JG package if they wish to retain them (Tcherneva 2018, 2020a, 2020b, Forstater 2013).

A JG would enable municipalities, school districts, NGOs, and other non-profit institutions to request workers, matching their skills with local needs, and potentially democratizing social life as assemblies or other democratic bodies could begin to decide about how to deploy JG workers (Kolokotronis 2018). A JG, for instance, could provide a much-needed supplemental workforce for infrastructure and education or for the myriad measures required to address and mitigate the effects of climate change. It would also boost consumer spending in economically depressed areas and stabilize businesses in these communities (Tcherneva 2020b). Even before the current pandemic, a large majority of U.S. voters supported the JG (Tcherneva 2018, The Hill 2019). Since then, unemployment has increased dramatically, and it is likely that even more people would be in favor now. For all these reasons, the JG offers a forward-looking paradigm to approach large-scale problems in the precarious world we inhabit, and to move beyond structural critiques of capitalism in undergraduate teaching.

We teach the Job Guarantee in an interdisciplinary social justice-oriented undergraduate program housed in a medium-sized public university. The Sanders presidential campaigns, enabled by movements such as the Fight for \$15 strikes to raise the minimum wage, have reinvigorated critiques of capitalism. Such critiques can be especially appealing to students with a generational experience of insecurity that permeates their lives—from precarious employment prospects and thread-bare benefits to housing crises, all of which are deepened by the COVID pandemic. In this context, students are poised to be critical of systems

of oppression but still struggle to imagine the concrete contours of potentially transformative government programs. In the following sections, we introduce a set of classroom activities we have developed to understand and collaboratively design large-scale policies. We discuss a set of activities that enables students to understand themselves as potential co-architects of social institutions as they grapple with existing proposals for a Job Guarantee.

Unemployment and the Job Guarantee

To begin classroom work about unemployment and the Job Guarantee, we use Freire’s (2017:78) technique of “decoding” a representation of a situation that points to a fundamental social problem. For instance, the Walker Evans photograph titled “South Street, New York” (1932) depicts three Manhattan men in postures of idleness: one is sleeping, one is reading a newspaper, and one is staring at the camera. As Sekula (1995:127) has noted, this image represents the “world of work, pointedly indicated through its absence.” Interrogating such representations enables students to articulate how they understand the situation of unemployed people, and recognize the fact that they, too, face the threat of unemployment. Alternatively, students can search for pictures, texts, or short videos about unemployment that are meaningful to them, and discuss (“decode”) them with a partner or small group. Decoding a situation enables the group to begin with concrete experiences, not abstractions that do not resonate with students and can even invalidate their experience.

When they first talk about unemployment, students often do so in individualist ways, which is unsurprising given that parents and teachers often tell them to acquire skills that make them “more employable.” Accordingly, some students see situations of involuntary idleness as the consequence of an inadequate educational “investment,” or of a deficiency of some kind, including “laziness.” Those students who connect unemployment to broader social processes tend to do so in a fatalistic way and depict it as a regrettable but necessary part of what they call the capitalist system, which they tend to imagine as static.

Decoding work occurs in a dialogue with students. The desired effect is for students to articulate their understanding of themselves in the world, and begin to problematize it. The initial decoding activity also provides a reference point for the remainder of the semester, and to gauge the distance travelled at its end. In addition, in keeping with Freire’s emphasis on knowledge as a social practice, students’ initial understanding is not an embarrassment to be erased from memory but an integral part of the process. An awareness of their initial understanding will, in addition, enable students to continue similar learning processes with people outside of the classroom.

Introductory Discussion of the Job Guarantee

Departing from the initial decoding activity, we then introduce the JG, asking students to imagine a government

program that would guarantee a job to every person in a community and that would match this person's skills with social needs. Students generally begin with objections. They often argue that people would stop working diligently if they were guaranteed a job. We then discuss the assumption that underlies this statement: That people are lazy, do not want to contribute, and will try to get away with not working. Throughout the semester, we rethink this assumption by asking students to consider how work is not simply about completing X number of hours and Y number of tasks during the working day. Work is a social relation between members of a community, and a cornerstone of people's self-worth and identity. Therefore, unemployment is a condition whereby some people find themselves excluded and marginalized. The idea of humans as inherently lazy limits possibilities for transformative change because it validates and naturalizes the threat of unemployment as necessary. When we start denaturalizing those ideas, students start to engage with the "untested feasibility" (Freire 2017:76) of a JG-oriented society.

It is critical to see the initial discussion of the JG, and the other activities we describe below, as more than a transfer of information from teacher to students. The threat of unemployment shapes most people's lives, and imagining its absence is a transformative act. When students question their understanding of unemployment and grasp possibilities beyond it, they rethink how they relate to an important part of the world they live in and can begin to think of themselves as political actors who become co-creators of institutions such as the JG. Ideally, they come to think of the classroom as a workshop in which they develop blueprints for a future society. To provide critical elements for imagining JG institutions, we assign Tcherneva's *The Case for the Job Guarantee* (2020b), in addition to videos and interviews that are available online,¹ and Forstater (2013).

In the next sections, we introduce a series of activities we have found helpful to further stimulate students' understanding of existing JG proposals, and to encourage them to creatively think about aspects of its institutional design.

Case Studies: How Would the Job Guarantee Change People's Lives?

The first time we taught the JG, students struggled with imagining the elements of a sweeping new program in abstract terms—i.e., disconnected from actual people's lives. In the end-of-semester evaluations, students suggested that concrete examples of people who would benefit from the JG would have deepened their engagement earlier on in the semester. In response we developed two examples, which students can use to imagine how JG institutions would operate. Class discussion includes considering how race, gender, immigration status, sexuality, place, and age shape the range of actions the person discussed in the example can undertake and, therefore, the JG's potential to transform people's lives. We leave the following examples unspecified so students and educators can raise those questions in class.

Case Study 1: A currently employed single parent who has little to no other local job opportunities.

Their supervisor regularly asks them to stay longer, sometimes without extra pay, and they have repeatedly picked up their children late from school, drawing attention from teachers and principal. They lack the time to supervise homework and the children are "falling behind." When the students have a day off but the parent doesn't, the situation worsens. The parent has almost no quality time with their children. Paid slightly above the national minimum wage, the wage is insufficient to meet living expenses, and the household relies on extended family to supplement it. The parent has substantial experience working with computers, small engine and bicycle repair, in addition to cooking skills.

Students decode this situation from the perspective of a JG future. Decoding could include the following elements: A JG job could use existing skills in various contexts, including teaching computer or engine repair classes, or working in a bicycle co-op. In addition, JG workers who work for the school district could provide assistance to the children. All this in addition to better pay, benefits, vacation, and childcare, and improved working conditions for friends and family who work in the non-JG sector.

Case 2: A prison guard who works in a juvenile detention facility.

They feel that what they do is harmful and want to drop the job. It is, however, the only one available that offers good health insurance, which is critical because they have a condition that requires substantial medical attention. In addition, their parents urge them to stay on the job to save money to go to college. They have considerable experience working in gardens and kitchens.

Students decode the situation, contrasting today's society with a Job Guarantee future. A JG office could connect this worker with employment possibilities in the Parks and Recreation department. They could also offer extracurricular cooking courses for the school district. But perhaps most importantly, they could exchange work they find harmful for a contribution they see as useful.

Decoding these examples is an ideal pathway for students to assemble elements of a possible JG future for various people. For instance, students with a migrant background are often interested in how a JG could help migrants regardless of their status. Decoding also helps contrast the neoliberal gig economy—characterized by low pay, precarity, and few benefits—with a JG future, even if some of the rhetoric that surrounds the gig economy (such as "flexibility") might be similar at first sight. First, within a JG framework, a job is a right, which contrasts with the gig economy's hire-and-fire practices. Second, expanded benefits and decent pay contrast with meager compensation practices in the gig economy. Finally, democratically decided and administered public-purpose work contrasts with production through undemocratic platforms geared toward only those who can pay. Similarly, these cases are useful for contrasting a JG sector with neoliberal workfare, which requires people to work for unemployment benefits. The JG is voluntary, does not replace existing benefits such as

unemployment insurance, and connects individuals' skills to local needs.

This activity helps students imagine how a JG might unfold in actual people's lives. In the next activity, students critically address the pros and cons of a JG through in-class debates. These debates turned out to be an effective path for students to become articulate advocates of a JG or its informed and constructive critics.

Debating the Job Guarantee

After we first taught the Job Guarantee, a student suggested that it would be useful to hold student debates between those in favor and those critical of a JG. In response, we developed the following debate, set up as a contrast between the JG and another social policy (in this case, the Universal Basic Income). After brief and timed (about 2-3 minutes) opening statements from a member of each group, the debaters go back and forth. At the end, both groups address audience questions. The activity needs to be adapted depending on class size. In a class of thirty students, for instance, there were three "pro" and three "con" groups of five students each.

Experience suggests that holding two or more debates does not mean that they will be repetitive—rather, groups emphasize and critique different aspects of the topic. This is in part because, while the "pro" groups primarily draw from class material, the "con" groups research different criticisms of the JG. Also, students have found it helpful to participate both as debaters and as audience members because they realize that they are not alone in feeling their way through the material, and the process of understanding and transforming the world becomes a more collective, concrete, and potentially democratic process. At the same time, as they prepared for and participated in the debates, some students found it challenging to defend policies and programs they recently had begun to understand. In the process, they understood gaps in their knowledge, which we took as points of departure for deepening the understanding of the JG after the debate.

The debates are not merely about the pros and cons of a given program but about students learning to imagine themselves as leaders who creatively think about society as an open-ended game whose rules remain to be written. Generally, whatever their position about the JG at the end of the semester, thinking through it enabled students to begin understanding economic life as a set of changeable institutions, which in turn enabled them to challenge mystifying abstractions such as "the market."

In the final activity, we approach the JG from yet another angle: Students conduct interviews with residents and leaders to investigate how a Job Guarantee could change lives in the local community.

What We Can do for Each Other: Gauging Local Possibilities

Students begin by contacting local leaders and residents, and asking for permission to interview them to

assess the potential for change through a JG. This project should come after several weeks of collective grappling with the JG through decoding situations, lectures, readings, and classroom debates. If this assignment is done too early, students will find that they attempt to explain the JG to others without sufficient preparation.

Students choose one of two tracks: Track 1 students interview leaders of non-profit institutions such as NGOs, local government agencies, or the school district. Track 2 students interview residents who would be eligible for a JG position. We split the class 50/50 between Tracks 1 and 2, but students can also work in groups and interview both a resident and local leader. The interviews focus on how JG workers could address unmet needs, including those needs people are not voicing in the current institutional conditions. Based on these interviews, students write up reports and present them in class (for guidelines and the interview protocol, see the Appendix).

As they interviewed individuals in an economically depressed area, several groups reported that it became easier for them to empathize with people who might need a JG. Hearing directly from community members who desperately need employment drove home the urgency of a public option for jobs, and some students who had voiced skepticism before the interview project now saw the JG in a more positive light. They came to see it as more than a policy but an opportunity for an entire community to reconstruct itself. For instance, students reported about a homemaker who runs a daycare service out of her home, who in a JG context would now be able to use her skills, but with regular working hours, better pay, and benefits. Taking the example of this person's life as a starting point, they then pointed out that the JG could stabilize the community as a whole.

In addition, the interview process has emancipatory effects because the interviewer-interviewee interaction considers all people, including those who are currently unemployed, as productive members of society not as deficient individuals in need of help. By design, the JG framing sees people as already-competent, and unemployed people as an asset not a burden (Kaboub 2012:307). Although we have not implemented this aspect, in a future class we will ask students to share the report they wrote based on their interview with the interviewee, and ask them for feedback, to which they will respond in a second report.

Through the interviews, students also identified potential obstacles to a successful and inclusive JG program. For example, one group of students said that their interviewee wanted to know more about how racial and gender discrimination would be dealt with by JG institutions. What kinds of recourse would people have if the local JG office operates in a discriminatory manner? Another group wondered how long it would take for their interviewee to find a job that would fit their skills. Such questions and concerns indicate that students started thinking of themselves as potential co-architects of large-scale programs, and that they came to see the JG as an open-ended project that requires ongoing vigilance about the oppressive patterns it is designed to combat.

Students also provided feedback about the interview project itself. In one class, students voiced the need for follow-up interviews: Since grappling with the JG is a transformative process for the interview partners just as it is for the students and the teacher, they stated that they would have liked to conduct a follow-up interview. We plan to include this suggestion in future iterations of the class, but we also take it as an indication that students value the three-way knowledge loop that emerges as they reflect upon unemployment with community members and teachers.

The three parties routinely swap roles: teachers become students within the broader community, community members teach, and students lead. For example, students reported that they learned from community leaders about past job programs not mentioned in class, such as the CETA (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act). They also deepened their knowledge about the lives, potential, and contributions of local community members. For us teachers, student reports made visible the interests and desires of the surrounding community, and thus deepened our understanding of how the JG could unfold as a place-based policy. In sum, distinct from empiricist data-gathering, this investigation generates knowledge and social relations that bear transformative potential.

In the next and final section, we address a common objection to the Job Guarantee framework.

But How Would We Pay for it?

The projects and activities discussed in the previous sections prepare students for a critical understanding of monetary institutions. This may sound like a surprising statement given that this article has so far focused on people and their contributions, not on cash and credit. But taking people and what they can do for each other as starting points can open up a set of questions about money and its transformative possibilities.

We ground the investigation of monetary institutions in an example taken from the current moment, characterized by an absence of a JG program, and by austerity as the default impulse of politicians and policymakers. Take the case of a child who receives occupational therapy through her school district. As local tax revenues decrease in a context of crisis, such services are often cut. This is a tragedy for everyone involved: In the case of occupational therapy, the child's well-being and development will suffer unless the family can pay out of pocket. For the now unemployed provider, it is also tragic: They might lose their sense of being a productive member of society and the meaning derived from helping others, all of which, in addition to the loss of income, will impact members of their household. Both in the child's and the provider's family, austerity has ripple effects. From the perspective of society as a whole, the investment in training someone who can help children is lost, for the time being, and the provider may even lose some of their skills during the period of unemployment.

As they decode this example, students begin grappling with a concrete-yet-general situation: Like the child, they might find themselves in a situation where their needs could

be met but are not. Like the occupational therapist, they might well have something precious to offer but there are no financing mechanisms that enable it. This is an example where needs and resources remain unchanged but politicians and policymakers are likely to cut ties between people (in this case, the child and the occupational therapist) by invoking financial constraints.

To begin problematizing their understanding of money, students articulate how they understand currency and credit. We invite students to do a quick write that addresses (1) their definition of money and (2) where they think money comes from. If students have difficulty formulating answers, they are invited to put together a response by using texts, including online resources, that resonate with their knowledge. The themes that emerge become starting points for a class discussion. Typically, students consider money from an individualistic standpoint centered on how they acquire and use it individually (to save, to exchange, to assess the value of a good or service). They might also mention money's imagined origins in barter ("individual actors invented it to facilitate exchanges between them once they found that barter had become too burdensome") or point to an origin story grounded in gold: "at first, everyone agreed on gold as a medium to make exchange easier, later, people substituted paper."

We then introduce a distinct understanding of money as a governance mechanism. To this end, we assign a short text by Desan (2017). Desan shows how money emerges in the relation between public authorities and populations. A government's desire to mobilize resources (for instance, to build infrastructure) leads it to create a class of tokens it wants a population to accept. To do so, it makes these tokens tax receivable. And because an authority has promised to accept them in payment of taxes, they become valuable to all those who owe taxes, and individuals start using it in private exchanges. Money, in this view, is not something pre-existing that needs to be collected. It needs to be spent by a government before it can be taxed. This view of money, which has become known as Modern Monetary Theory (MMT) in recent years (Kelton 2020), shifts the emphasis away from financial constraints while emphasizing real resources and skills: To return to the example above, the question is whether or not a society has produced enough occupational therapists to be able to hire them without causing inflation (see, for instance, Kelton 2020:41-74 and Kelton 2017).

Students often ask: If the federal government can create money, why do we need to pay taxes? Public levies exist to make a government's money widely accepted. Governments impose taxes in order to create a demand for money: Because most inhabitants periodically have to pay taxes, and because almost everyone may incur fines and fees they have to discharge, a specific category of pay tokens becomes accepted within a given community. Taxes thus serve the purpose of making money accepted. People who are forced to pay taxes will have to offer their labor or goods and services to those who pay money. The government has money and provisions itself by buying what it needs from its people. In addition, governments use taxation to discourage behavior they might deem harmful,

such as polluting (Wray 1998) and to reduce socially unacceptable income and wealth inequalities.²

Desan (2017) calls the institutional choices that shape the creation and distribution of currency and credit “monetary design.” A given monetary design empowers and enriches those authorized to create money, along with those it often reaches first in relation to those who are further removed from money creation processes (Desan 2017:126). Students—including the advanced economics majors who have attended our classes—are typically surprised when they learn about monetary design. Because it highlights the mechanism through which money enters circulation such a focus is distinct from discussions of distributive inequities. From this perspective, a JG would alter monetary design by guaranteeing access to money through work.

After this engagement with money, the class returns to the example of the occupational therapist and the student. If money is a governance mechanism to mobilize resources and connect people, it becomes difficult to invoke a “lack” as a reason for cutting links between people. Similarly, on a larger scale, the JG is no longer constrained by a “scarcity” of money—instead, it is a way of making a fuller, more democratic, and more inclusive use of the public power of money creation.

Conclusion

The JG lens is a transformative framework that challenges the dehumanizing idea that people can be superfluous, useless, a threat, or a burden. Even today, even before JG institutions have been established, it gives “the oppressed,” as Freire referred to those who are dehumanized, practical tools to begin redefining themselves: They can articulate themselves as useful people equipped to do things for each other. If realized, the JG framework enables entire communities to democratize social relations while opening pathways for the abolition of a range of dehumanizing institutions and practices. Freire, and Fanon before him, referred to such transformative actions as humanization: they break in action, thought, and expression with dehumanizing practices, and simultaneously attempt to craft a new way of being in the world. People struggle for what Freire (2017:30) called “the right to be human.”

The set of activities we presented in this article help students deepen their understanding of the Job Guarantee. Activities such as the interviews also create links between the teaching institution, students, and community members. In addition, the decoding activities, case studies, debates, and interviews help students grasp broader possibilities: What they had understood as fragmented realities to be fought in isolation (e.g., unemployment, underfunded schools, social isolation) become a series of interconnected problems that can be overcome as they participate in designing institutions. Students start thinking of collaboration and creation institutions as a habit, and they learn to take stock of what people can do for each other.³

Appendix: Interview Questions and Guidelines for Reports

Track 1 Interview Questions (for students who interview people in leadership positions)

1. Interviewers introduce themselves and the project. They clarify that it is a class project, that the material will not be used outside of the class, that they will not disclose the interview partner's identity, and that they will remove identifying information from their notes.
2. Interviewers discuss the purpose of this interview: To better understand possibilities/challenges for a Job Guarantee future in the local community.
3. Interviewers explain what the Job Guarantee is. Key points to cover: guaranteed unconditional employment, meant to provide additional workers, not meant to replace permanent staff, use idle skills for local needs, federally funded public-service employment. Good benefits, healthcare, childcare, 15\$/hour. It is useful to share a short reading about the Job Guarantee with the interviewee before the interview, and use this reading as a starting point.
4. Please tell me about your work history. Was there a time when you could have used a Job Guarantee position?
5. Tell me about the key challenges local residents face (e.g., food, housing, education, jobs, drugs).
6. Which of these challenges does your organization address and how?
7. How could Job Guarantee workers help your organization address these challenges?
8. If other NGOs, educational and government institutions could request Job Guarantee workers, and guarantee jobs that fit their needs to all residents, how would the community change? If respondents don't address one of the following, follow up (1) for the workers? (2) for the organizations? (3) for those who benefit from the (now expanded) services of the organization?
9. Which challenges do you anticipate for workers, organizations, or the community at large were a Job Guarantee to be implemented?
10. Which thoughts about the Job Guarantee do you want to add?
11. Interviewer asks additional question(s) in case one occurred to them during the interview or if they need clarification.
12. Ask if the interviewee is available for a follow-up meeting. Explain that it is often useful to return to the same questions after the interviewee has had some time to consider them.
13. Thank the interviewee, let them know that you will write a report based on this interview, that you can share a copy, and are available for questions.

Track 2 Interview Questions (for students who interview residents)

1. Interviewers introduce themselves and the project. They clarify that it is a class project, that the material will not be used outside of the class, that they will not disclose the interview partner's identity, and that they will remove identifying information from their notes.
2. Interviewers discuss the purpose of this interview: To better understand possibilities/challenges for a Job Guarantee future in the local community.
3. Interviewers explain what the Job Guarantee is. Key points to cover: guaranteed unconditional employment, meant to provide additional workers, not meant to replace permanent staff, use idle skills for local needs, federally funded public-service employment. Good benefits, healthcare, childcare, 15\$/hour. It is useful to share a short reading about the Job Guarantee with the interviewee before the interview, and use this reading as a starting point.
4. Please tell me about your work history. Was there a time when you could have used a Job Guarantee position?
5. If you could apply for a Job Guarantee position, which of your skills do you think might be useful to other residents?
6. Tell me about the support services local residents are most in need of. What could you (or other potential Job Guarantee workers) contribute to meet these needs?
7. [If currently employed in the private sector] What might motivate you to move from the private to the Job Guarantee sector? What might motivate others?
8. Which challenges do you anticipate for workers or the community at large were the Job Guarantee to be implemented?
9. Which thoughts about the Job Guarantee do you want to add?
10. Interviewer asks additional question(s) in case one occurred to them during the interview or if they need clarification.
11. Ask if the interviewee is available for a follow-up meeting. Explain that it is often useful to return to the same questions after the interviewee has had some time to consider them.
12. Thank the interviewee, let them know that you will write a report based on this interview, that you can share a copy, and are available for questions.

Guidelines for Writing the Report

1. Introduce the individual or organization, then address the following questions.

2. What did you learn about the local community and the challenges its members face, particularly those in disenfranchised groups?
3. Based on the data you collected, how would a Job Guarantee change community members' lives?
4. Would a JG help humanize society? If so, why? If not, why does it fall short?
5. How have the interviews changed your perspective on the Job Guarantee, especially (1) its feasibility and (2) its potential?
6. How would you improve the interview protocol?

Notes

1. See for instance, <https://wecanhavenicethings.com/nice-things-we-can-have/federal-job-guarantee/>.
2. See <https://denison.edu/academics/economics/feature/12184> for a project in which Fadhel Kaboub teaches about monetary institutions through community service.
3. This article is inspired by the Modern Money Network's Job Guarantee Teach-In in 2019. Thanks to Sherry Reson, Scott Ferguson, Alexandra Moore, and Dirk Ehnts for reading and commenting on drafts. We would also like to thank a former student, Jessica Flores, for her suggestions about how to teach the Job Guarantee. The usual disclaimers apply.

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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Teaching Land as an Extension of Self: The Role of Ecopsychology in Disrupting Capitalist Narratives of Land and Resource Exploitation

by Allison L. Ricket



"SYCAMORE," BY MALCOM MCGREGOR

I used to think the top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science we could address those problems. But I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy...and to deal with those we need a spiritual and cultural transformation—and we scientists don't know how to do that.

- Gus Speth

On the first day of ENG 3100J, I did the expected first. The students and I flipped through the syllabus detailing the assigned readings, the required textbook list, and the breakdown of the course's grading structure. I asked for questions and received blank stares in return. Students, most of them juniors or seniors in their undergraduate programs, introduced themselves and their various intended majors: one plant biology, a handful of business, more than a few engineering, a design-your-own major, and a handful of social sciences majors peppered with attached certificates. I also droned through a conventional, obligatory introduction, listing my credentials, my work in the field, and my goals for the semester insofar as developing their composition skills were concerned. Then, we left the realm of the conventional and springboarded into my real objectives for the semester.

With half of the class time left, I told the students to pack up their things, syllabuses and textbooks away, and to meet me under the sycamore tree on the green. I delayed packing my things, rummaging in my bag like I'd misplaced my favorite highlighter. "Go on," I said, "I'll be right there." I wanted to see if the students could identify *which tree* was the sycamore. There were only two among the towering oaks and maples on the small college green, a grass carpeted square criss-crossed with sidewalks and bordered by buildings such as our English hall. Although almost every student grew up in the midwest, most raised in this very state, I bet that my group of young adults would have no idea which tree was the sycamore. I was right.

When I emerged from the large brick building, I could see the gaggle of students pointing at the canopy laced above their heads, discussing, and looking around with urgency. A few had attempted to Google the solution. I walked up and smiled, directed them to the sycamore and their first real lesson in ENG 3100J. "This is a sycamore," I said, touching the silvery flaking bark of my giant, reaching friend. "I want you all to stand in a circle, around the trunk, and just look at the tree and observe while I set a timer for two minutes. Your only job is to observe the tree. Note in your mind every detail you can about it. If your mind starts to wander, bring it back to your eyes, to the tree, and notice something else."

The two minutes stretched painfully for the students. A few looked uncertainly around them, behind them, before catching themselves and looking back at the tree. One student stepped back to observe the protruding roots. Another student, his neck stretched to see the place where the bark turns smooth and bone white, sighed audibly as his shoulders relaxed.

At the end of the two minutes, I asked the students to quietly discuss their detailed observations with the person standing next to them. Then, I invited them to sit in a circle next to the tree, backs to one another and bodies facing out at the green. I invited them to close their eyes, and I led the students through Joanna Macy's (1998) "Opening through Breath, Body, Sound, and Silence," an exercise she designs as an introduction to the work of processing environmental despair to reawaken and connect to our deep love for the planet (p. 83-85). "First, I'd like to invite you to feel down through your body to where your legs meet the earth. Put your hands in the grass if you like, feeling the connection between your skin and the ground below. If a bug crawls over you, or a fly lands on you, try to observe what it feels like instead of instinctually swatting it away. Take a few deep breaths; what does the air smell like? What does the air feel like as the wind touches your skin? For a few moments, hold your attention on the place where the air moves across your body. Now, turn your ears outward, listening for the sounds of nature above the human sounds. What can you hear?" After five more minutes of listening, feeling, grounding, I asked the students to check in with their breathing, the beating of their own hearts. Had they noticed they feel more calm? More relaxed and focused? With their eyes still closed, I said to the students, "For centuries, for millennia, people have told stories and written books and articles trying to explain the connection humans have with the natural world: the connection you are feeling right now. For some writers, this connection with the Earth is love, *biophilia*. A love of the Earth. In this class, we will read these writers and others, and we will write about our own feelings of connection and our own observations of the Earth. Welcome to 3100J, Writing about Sustainability."

Biophilia

"Most of us view nature (to borrow a phrase from Thomas Berry) as a collection of objects rather than a communion of subjects, as resources rather than relatives. Sustainability will require that we re-envision the human-nature relationship and develop a strong sense of compassion with the nonhuman world" (Sampson, 2012, P. 24).

While environmentalism and eco- as a prefix attached to other disciplines and forms of academic inquiry, such as ecocriticism in the literary tradition, are certainly not new, ecopsychology takes the radical, holistic position that views nature and culture as one, without separation either physical or philosophical. Ecopsychology, a multi-dimensional field of study investigating the human-nature relationship, effectively eliminates all bifurcations of the world into culture and nature. Ecocriticism and ecofeminism preserve the nature-culture dichotomy, seeking to investigate the representation of nature in language, rhetoric, and artifacts of culture, and "also how such representations reflect and shape real-world environmental practices" (Bergthaller, 2015, p. 6). In these disciplines, "the starting point for the ecocritic is that there really is an unprecedented global environmental crisis, and that this crisis poses some of the great political and cultural questions of our time" (Kerridge, 1998, p. 5). In these traditions, the unit of investigation is

the cultural artifact: the representation of the relationship of humans to nature and the consequent sense-making humans do as a result of the arrangements of those representations. Cohen (2004), in his essay "Blues in the Green: Ecocriticism Under Critique" says "ecocriticism focuses on literary (and artistic) expression of human experience primarily in a naturally and consequently in a culturally shaped world: the joys of abundance, sorrows of deprivation, hopes for harmonious existence, and fears of loss and disaster" (p. 10). While Cohen's (2004) article also confronted the challenge of the first wave of ecocritics to adapt the school of critique to respond to the influences of postmodern feminist critique, post-colonialism, and what would become, later, post-human critiques of the canon of "nature writing" and its activist orientations, the aims of ecocriticism stayed focused on "decomposing texts into their constituent parts" as the process of understanding (p. 30). Like so many activities sanctioned by the academy, ecocriticism, environmentalism, and the "hard sciences" that lead us to activism still glorify the logical mind and ignore the subjective, feeling body as a place of knowing and connection. This fragmentation and study of disconnected artifacts we conceptualize as apart from ourselves falls short of the radical starting point of ecopsychology. In ecopsychology, the unit of study, critique, and investigation is the self as an extension of the Earth. The self is nature and culture is another manifestation of one Gaia, one natural organism. Nature, then, is not a place separate from industrialized society where one can escape to find metaphoric teachings in the processes of nature's cycles as Thoreau sought at Walden. Nature is not Muir's wildness to save or a substitute for God. Nature is not a resource or a gift or under our jurisdiction.

Ecopsychology rests on the Biophilia hypothesis. The Biophilia hypothesis, developed by Harvard zoologist E.O. Wilson (1984), posits that humans have the innate predisposition to connect emotionally with nonhuman, living organisms (Rozak, 1995; Sampson, 2012). More recently, evolutionary biologist Scott Donald Sampson (2012) refined the Biophilia hypothesis to theorize that natural selection favored *Homo sapiens* who formed place-specific affective bonds with local nonhuman environment (p. 27). Sampson (2012) uses the term "topophilia" to describe the innate affective bonds humans form with local place (p. 25). Sampson (2012) describes the *topophilia hypothesis*: "humans possess an innate bias to bond with local place, including both living and nonliving components" and "topophilia is an evolutionary adaptation that facilitated the ability of humans to live in a diverse range of settings, each characterized by its own unique suite of organisms, landforms, and ecological relationships" (p. 25-27). To Sampson, then, and other ecopsychologists, the love of the Earth, the expansive feeling of bonding with living and non living organisms is not a woo-woo feeling shared by tree-hugging hippies and nature writers, but an evolutionary-based characteristic buried deep in every man, woman, and child on the planet.

Ecopsychologists across the discipline agree, our current industrialized, capitalist society does not honor or

nurture our fundamental biophilia and topophilia (Sampson, 2012; Glendinning, 1995; Hillman, 1995; Metzner, 1995; Macy, 1995; Brown & Macey 1998; Shepard, 1995; Louvre, 2008). Techno-addiction lures more and more children and adults inside to the conditioned air of McMansions where smart homes and smart appliances automatically order groceries to be delivered by Amazon, separating humans farther and farther away from natural spaces, the dirt from which their food grows, and all of the psychological benefits communion with nature offers (Louvre, 2008; hooks, 2008). Ecopsychologists have warned for decades: the farther away humans separate themselves from nature, the more we neglect our topophilia, the more mentally and physically ill we become (Barrows, 1995; Conn, 1995; Glendinning, 1995; Hillman, 1995; Metzner, 1995; Macy, 1995; Shepard, 1995; Louvre, 2008; Fisher, 2012). Our current industrialized society has therefore created not only an ecocrisis, but an "internal crisis of mind" (p. 24) because our industrialized way of life cleaves topophilia from human's everyday existence. Further, as a result of failing to honor or create a society which nurtures our fundamental Biophilia and Topophilia, ecopsychologists argue that techno-addiction and the globalization of the Western mind-body split has created an epidemic of neuroses arising from our failure to mature as holistic beings (Shepard, 1995; Glendinning, 1995).

Capitalism, of course, exacerbates the collective madness we experience as globalization and the need for consistent brand recognition standardizes one city to the next, one country to the next.

Capitalism, of course, exacerbates the collective madness we experience as globalization and the need for consistent brand recognition standardizes one city to the next, one country to the next. If we have the refined capacity for forming bonds with the specifics of a locality, yet every place looks the same, then no "place" is home. Captured in capitalism's thrall to consume, we perceive our natural resources as "other," and as cosmic homesickness sets in, our ability to attend to the details of local landscape distort and dissolve into mental illnesses and ontological crisis.

When A Tree Falls in The Forest, It's The Same As Losing an Arm

I deliberately set out to disrupt traditional pedagogical approaches while teaching the junior composition course, Writing about Sustainability. Traditional pedagogy demands teachers keep quantifiable course outcomes in mind for all assignments, however limited they may be. For this class, I kept traditional course outcomes secondary to the real outcome I held for my students: I wanted them to develop "A Psyche the Size of the Earth," an understanding that the self cannot be extricated from the nonhuman world (Hillman,

1995). Because Biophilia leads to the broadened identity of the self to include "identification with all beings, even with the biosphere as a whole," I spent the first quarter of the class using activities and readings to connect students to their own sense of Biophilia (Conn, 1995, p. 163). To cultivate an understanding and direct experience of interconnectedness with nature, I assigned students weekly nature journals. For this ongoing assignment, students chose one place they could "observe...with love in [their] heart[s]...look[ing] closely and steadily at nature, and not[ing] the individual features of tree and rock and field" (Burroughs, 2008, p. 150). They returned to this place at least once weekly, at different times and in different weather, to observe closely, document changes, and capture their observations on paper in whatever writing or multimodal expression seemed fitting. In class, we examined the writing of great observers like Muir, Burroughs, Austin, and Dillard.

I watched students struggle to capture in writing the felt sense of awe and expansion they experienced while washing their senses in the complex natural spaces near campus. One student specifically agonized over the futility of her writing skills to capture the pulse-quickening, joyful surprise of observing a fox wander through her "place" while she sat mindfully watching one day. The students' biophilia strengthened as they practiced observing and noticing the ways in which the feelings in their own bodies responded as the nonhuman landscape shifted around them. No longer spatially isolated from the nonhumanized world (Metzner, 1995, p. 57), the students wrote about "interaction patterns": the core experiences humans have when interacting with nature that catalyze deeply meaningful feelings and produce fundamental shifts in perception (Kahn, Ruckert, and Hasbach, 2017, p. 55). My radical course outcome, not sanctioned by the university, in the first quarter of my class was for all students to have an experience of awe, joy, and wonder similar to the student who saw the fox: an experience of "*recognizing and being recognized by a nonhuman other*" in its own habitat, or the experience of "*being under the night sky*" through "*interacting with the periodicity of nature*," experiences which introduce and expand the idea of radical oneness (Kahn, Ruckert, and Hasbach, 2017, p. 55). Without the direct experience of interconnectedness, argue ecopsychologists and evolutionary biologists alike, humans devolve into comatose, fragmented shells either denying their individual impact on other beings or descending into madness.

During the middle of the course, I sought to accomplish two objectives. First, we would work on being able to name the flora and fauna in the places the students had chosen for their journaling. Second, we would write about our experiences with nonhuman nature past and present, and try to imagine ourselves "in a kinship relationship" (Sampson, 2012, p. 35) inside nature instead of separate from or disconnected from it (p. 45). To accomplish these objectives, I continued what I started on the first day of class; we tore down the impedences of the classroom walls and placed our class in "close physical contact with wild

things and wild places" (Albrecht, p. 250). I sought mentors for my students across other disciplines in the university, and those mentors took us on class field trips to the greenhouse, the woods, to visit the non-native plants which sculpt the the campus so we could begin to name, notice, and appreciate the nonhuman "others" we walk with and live beside every day. These mentors taught the students to read nature as text and understand themselves as one small element of that text.

With a firm beginning of biophilia and the work of topophilia ignited, I invited the students to consider the relationship of their development and identity to the land. Before we turned the pen toward ourselves, we studied Leslie Marmon Silko, Aldo Leopold's serious Land Ethic, and Edward Abbey's hilarious misanthropy. We examined not just the way in which the authors used the land as a metaphor for life lessons or the writer's representation of relationship to the land, but the moments in the text where the "I" or writer's personal identity and the identity of the Land became one and the same. We honored Camille T. Dungy's (2011) experiences in "Tales From a Black Girl on Fire, or Why I Hate to Walk Outside and See Things Burning," which brought up conversations of deep time and embodiment. We soaked in the disruptive position bell hooks (2011) takes in "earthbound on solid ground." hooks reclaimed for us the spirit of "backwoods folks" and the relationship of "black folks" to the earth; the earth whose power and rights can never be taken away by a white master (p. 184-187). hooks reminded us that, "when we are forgetful and participate in the destruction and exploitation of the dark earth, we collude with the domination of the earth's dark people, both here and globally" (p. 187), so the class sought a new language of expression to name, identify, and describe our bonds with the earth.

Using these texts as our guides, I asked the students to write an ecobiography: an essay where students described a moment from their life story where it was impossible for them to see where "Nature ends and the Self begins: ego and eco are inextricably intertwined" (Farr and Snyder, 1996, p. 203). The ecobiography is based on the dynamic feminine: those features devalued and despised by patriarchy, which encourage direct sensory experiences, open attention to increasing complexity and beauty, and the nonrational (Gomes and Kanner, 1995, p. 119). The dynamic feminine stands as the antithesis of the current narrative of domination and human-centric superiority. For the ecobiography, students reflected on a time from their lives where they were witness to ecological changes in the environment or landscape, where they were humble companions to the chaotic, wild, mysterious sensate landscape (Short, 2019). The ecobiography used writing as a means of developing what Anita Barrows (1995) calls the "ecological self" (p. 107): the self that embraces nature as a teacher, mentor, and friend, encouraging the loosening of the boundaries of "self" and the feeling of "me" to include the whole wide world (Barrows, 1995, p. 110).

The students uncovered deep layers of pain and emotion with these ecobiographies. One student, studying engineering, wrote delicately about the untamed wildflower

field at the edge of his stucco, suburban neighborhood. The field, edged with a thin line of trees, stretched to a small creek, where he spent many boyhood days creating imaginary worlds with the rocks and the plants he would collect. This land became a haven for him, sheltering and holding his grief when his parents were processing a painful divorce. He knew this land as a trusted friend and confidant, and wrote about the complete sense of devastation he felt when he came home from school one day to find bulldozers savaging the place he loved. What's more, the boy had no way of understanding the pain he felt at the sight of the bulldozers "developing the land." His father told him it would increase the value of their house to extend the neighborhood by building even bigger houses at the end of the street. The boy buried his pain so deep that he went to work for a construction company as his summer job in college where all day long, he watched bulldozers and backhoes clumsily tear through the earth. Through his ecobiography he expressed distress and conflict about his career path, a wondering about the ways in which his field could work to reconcile the needs of humans with the sovereignty of the nonhuman. Through acknowledging his ecological self and integrating it as an innate, central part of his identity and past, his relationship to his work, to human narratives of land as resource, have changed.

Ecopsychology as Radical Approach

In the evaluations at the end of the course, an overwhelming theme emerged. One student said that prior to the course she was nervous about taking the course because she expected the readings for the course would all be specifically aimed to create fear through dire statistics about climate change, overpopulation, and waste. She said that she already suffered from depression and knew she couldn't handle the internal pain she would experience through reading an onslaught of texts showing the earth suffering, the earth hurting from the actions of humans. These texts take the rhetorical approach of using the ethos of fear and panic and the logos of overwhelming numbers as a motivator toward actions. Similar to the approaches of traditional environmental pedagogy, many contemporary environmental writers and environmental activists also unintentionally create despair and apathy through shock and awe campaigns of fear or blame; images and statistics meant to communicate urgency and the need to act or donate immediately to solve the eco crisis actually create *Ecoanxiety*, "nonspecific worry about our relationship to support environments in the 21st century" (Albrecht, 2014, p. 257) and lead to *ecoparalysis*, "the inability to meaningfully respond to the climatic and ecological challenges that face us" (Albrecht, 2014, p. 257).

The majority of students in the class echoed this young woman's sentiment; these students are aware of the environmental disasters facing our time, but are forced into apathy or numbness because they have no tools to process or framework to understand the very personal sense of loss welling inside them. In class, when we needed coping mechanisms to deal with our sense of loss in the face of total

ecological destruction, we sought solace through writers such as Joanna Macy to process our *somaterratic illness* (Sampson, 2012, p. 36).

The latin root of education means "to lead out." In order to create curriculum and learning spaces that serve to draw out students' Biophilia and Topophilia, we must be radical in our approach to imagining what school should look like. Ecopsychology is a radical discipline which encourages us to imagine and "commit ourselves...to a different society altogether" (Fisher, 2012, p. 80) by examining the roots of the problem to find the cause and ripping them out altogether. To make superficial changes to education by merely encouraging more isolated, clinical study of nature will not be enough to combat ecoparalysis and insidious myopic logic; we must completely remove the impedences of the physical classroom space and shift the concept of child development to not just include development of the intellect or the human centered social-emotional development. We must begin with and center educational philosophy and practice on ecosocialization and the students' somaterric and pschoterratic well being (p. 241-259). Ecopedagogy, with development of the ecological self at the center, would teach all students what Native American Shamanism seeks to impart: Health in all aspects "equals balanced relationships with all living things" (Gray, 1995, p. 173). Under this Ecopedagogy, the fragmented pieces of society are put back together again, and the control of technology is relegated to its proper place as an addendum to human life instead of its current disordered place as the centerpiece of all life. Instead, with this Ecopedagogy, love for life and its component parts serves as the center of learning and growing.

Ecopedagogy would "draw out" the ancient wisdom of place, using indigenous practices to remind humans that just as the infant is born into a social context, it is born and grows in an ecological context to which it is dependent.

To facilitate these new values and stages in marking the development of the ecological self, we would turn to indigenous ways of knowing. As part of our deep time recollections of the histories of local places, we would invite those indigenous and first nations people to teach us the practices lost to European imperialism. Ecopedagogy would "draw out" the ancient wisdom of place, using indigenous practices to remind humans that just as the infant is born into a social context, it is born and grows in an ecological context to which it is dependent. Anita Barrows (1995) describes a Hopi ritual where the mother presents the child, after a period of time, to the earth saying to the east and the rising sun, "This is your child" (p. 102). This ritual situates the new human's place beyond the human community into the Earth community. Ecopedagogy would ask indigenous peoples to guide in developing curriculum that follows practices such as the naming of totem animals for young children, where any

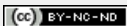
harm or benefit to the totem animal is perceived as harm or benefit to the self. For adolescents, rituals of solo wilderness treks as rites of passage, would allow students to demonstrate their individual ability to live within and to understand nature. Further, adolescents and university students would be encouraged to develop more than just the executive functioning of abstract thought; through practices such as indigenous shamanism, students would learn to value and access non linear, non rational ways to problem solve (Gray, 1995, p. 174).

Ecopedagogy puts the relationship of humans to the earth at the center of learning, instead of the current practice of humans' relationship to technology (STEM) or humans' relationship to other humans (Liberal Arts) at the center. When we remove the impedences of walls and developmental learning standards, and bring learning back into the wild, with a new ecologically based vision for education, we radically alter our understanding of our place in the universe, of our own identity, and of our responsibility to the rest of the extra-human world.

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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Feminist Space Invaders: Killjoy Conversations in Neoliberal Universities

by Carrie E. Hart and Sarah E. Colonna



COLLAGE BY FEMINIST THEORIES STUDENT. IMAGE COURTESY OF AUTHORS

Living a feminist life does not mean adopting a set of ideas or norms of conduct, although it might mean asking ethical questions about how to live better in an unjust and unequal world (in a non-feminist and anti-feminist world); how to create relationships with others that are more equal; how to find ways to support those who are not supported or who are less supported by social systems; how to keep coming up against histories that have become concrete, histories that have become as solid as walls.

- Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*

What does it mean to live a feminist life as a teacher or student? What practices, commitments, and conversations can unfold through an exploration of feminism as a part of formal curriculum? As teachers of Gender, Women's, and Sexuality Studies (GWS), we imagine our classrooms as spaces in which students can not only learn about what feminism means, but can also directly participate in feminism as a process that actively addresses the unjust systems we learn about together. The strategies we employ, and the ways in which we invite students to imagine what could be, are meant to expand our collective agency, courage, and creativity in the interests of transforming oppressive practices in formal schooling and beyond.

During the 2019 spring semester, we both taught sections of upper-level undergraduate feminist theory courses at two mid-sized public universities in the Southeastern United States. University A was chartered as a coeducational teacher training school for rural, mountain students and this regional location is still a large part of its identity today. University A is a predominantly White institution (PWI) with 82.6% white students, 45% male and 55% female (with no numbers on trans or nonbinary students). Low-income students make up 27% of the student body, with 30% identified as rural students and 28% as first-generation college students. University B was chartered as a normal school for women, which became coeducational in the 1960s. University B currently meets the definition of a minority-serving institution (MSI) with the 2015 undergraduate student body consisting of approximately 27% Black students and 7% Latinx students, 76% female and 24% male (with no numbers for trans or gender nonbinary students). University B draws 58% of its student body from a 5-county pool, including three of the state's largest cities. University B is designated a Title III school with 1/3 of undergraduates identified as first-generation college students and 45% identified as low-income students.

As an experiment in feminist pedagogy, we facilitated an ongoing, asynchronous conversation between our two classes over the course of the semester. Being mindful of the ways in which pedagogical experimentation can sometimes create an additional workload, we wanted to pursue this ongoing dialogue in a way that enhanced the overall learning experience without adding too much additional work for either us or our students. Since our classes met at different times on geographically distant

campuses, what we settled on was creating a Google document (template below) that was shared between our classes and editable by everyone. Within that document, we created a template where there was space for each class to "forecast" questions and ideas about that day's assigned material, a "recap" where the ideas of the class could be reflected upon, and a "response" section where the sister class could respond back to any questions posed or ideas raised. We incorporated the responsibility of filling out this template to the student who was the designated student facilitator for that class.

WGS SHARED GOOGLE DOCUMENT EXAMPLE	
Discussant/ Facilitator	Your name goes here.
Forecast	This is where you will briefly describe your plans for facilitating discussion during class. Is there a particular question or concept you will be exploring? What do you want your sister class to know about how you will be using class today?
Recap	An idea, question, or theme that you want to pose to the other class based on what you learned that day What connections to feminist theory/lived experiences are you making?
Sister class responds	

During our initial class meetings, we made each of our classes aware of the existence of their sister class and explained that we would be dialoguing throughout the semester in written form. Our goal in doing this was to generate some awareness of what the other class was working on and to highlight that the concepts we were discussing could be taken up in various ways. The rhythm we developed for our classes was that either the teacher or the student facilitator would pull an idea out of the document and connect it to our readings/discussion or find a question the sister class had posed and use that question to begin class. This ongoing practice let students see the work the other class was doing and also served as a reminder that the conversation was bigger than either group by itself.

In addition to hopefully enhancing the learning in each classroom by bringing our students together, we were also interested in collaborating in this way as a form of "space invasion" -- a concept that Ahmed (2017) and Puwar (2004) use to describe the irreverent, subversive, and scrappy methods by which marginalized groups can enter institutions and take up space even when patterns and practices of

dominance attempt to exclude them. Ahmed (2017) posits that feminists “can be space invaders in the academy” by asking uncomfortable questions about educational institutions and by noticing how they reward whiteness and maleness at the expense of other groups (p. 9). Our goal in connecting our students with each other was to help them notice and affirm the ways in which they, individually, and we, collectively, can operate as space invaders in institutions of higher education. By undertaking this experiment, we wanted to show ourselves and our students a pedagogy that works against the grain. By intentionally sharing, but also invading, each other’s spaces, we challenged the synchronous, spatially-bounded, and institutionally singular qualities that each of our sections had built into their official descriptions and the unofficial assumptions that come along with what teaching “should” involve.

Who We Are

As context for understanding what made this collaborative pedagogy possible, it is helpful to know that both authors have known and worked with each other in academic and community settings for almost 10 years. We attended the same graduate programs and have taught similar classes at various colleges, universities, high schools, and summer programs. We have been on conference panels together and have been involved with LGBTQ+ youth activism in our communities. We occupy some similar privileges (e.g. whiteness, a middle-class upbringing) and experiences (e.g. growing up in the Southeastern US) and some differences (e.g. sexuality).

When we discovered that we were both teaching upper-level Feminist Theory for the first time, we met to share ideas, compare syllabi, and reflect on what we might encounter in our respective classes. During this conversation, we imagined “what if”: what if we taught together, what if our classes knew that students at another campus were grappling with the same ideas they were, and what if we were able to “pull back the curtain” to see how other students were learning and making connections with similar material. We began to explore the possibility of facilitating conversation between our students. From the beginning, our goal was to broaden the discussions that each of our classes were having on their own, but also to explore and demonstrate feminist praxis as a conversation between groups sometimes separated by experiences, spatial locations, and institutions. Independently, we had both decided to include Sara Ahmed’s (2017) *Living a Feminist Life* as a primary text in our classes, so our course schedules bore some similarities to one another. At the same time, there were also significant differences between our classes in terms of the texts that we read and when we read them. Even in each of our classes’ discussions of Ahmed’s work, there was never a time that they were reading the exact same chapter on the exact same day, so we knew that there would be many asynchronous dimensions to the interactions between our classes. The University B class was scheduled for Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2-3:15 pm and University A met directly after from 3:30-4:45 on our respective campuses. As these scheduling details had been set before we knew of our collaboration, we did our best to work with

the institutional parameters in place. We wondered -- if our classes couldn’t speak with one another in person or even synchronously, couldn’t there still be a way for us to be in conversation, and for us to view that dialogue as a way to work critically with what we had been given?

Most of this experiment was about our students and our pedagogy, but some of it was about us. So often, teaching seems a lonesome experience in which we are supposed to “know” rather than try. Teachers are positioned as experts within their classrooms, but we wondered how we might be able to critique expectations around expertise by being intentional about learning and trying new things. As we prepared to begin the semester, we wondered what would happen if we, as teachers and academics, connected with each other as we taught a new class; served as a sounding board, if needed; and supported one another through each of our experiences teaching classes that were new to us. We followed advice set out by bell hooks (1994) that it is “crucial that critical thinkers who want to change our teaching practices talk to one another, collaborate in a discussion that crosses boundaries and creates a space for intervention” (p. 129). Though hooks’s mid-1990s essay was not talking about a shared Google document, this document project created a new kind of space both in our respective institutions and also between them. Within and through it, we explored new ways of connecting, collaborating, and learning with and from one another. As teachers teaching feminist theory, but both being contingent to our academic departments, we need and value each other’s support and feedback. It is often easier, and more politically salient, to stick with tried and true pedagogy. To try something new is a change and change involves risk, bringing up questions like, “What if it doesn’t work?” and “What if students don’t engage with the new format?” Having a colleague there to bounce ideas around and to say “let’s just experiment for this semester” made this hard work more manageable, and we imagine it could do so for other teachers as well.

Feminist Conversation, Feminist Community

The reason we brought our classes into this kind of extended conversation with each other is inspired by a sense of collectivity that feminists have often pursued -- the idea being that feminists can understand patriarchy better when they listen to one another across a range of experiences with oppression, and that strategies that take this deep listening into account will be that much smarter and more complex. As Lorde (1984) famously wrote in her remarks to the primarily white feminist organizers of the Second Sex Conference in 1979, “As women, we have been taught either to ignore our differences, or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change... Community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist” (p. 112). Students in Gender, Women’s, and Sexuality Studies classes of the late 2010’s often read about the concepts Lorde references; in bringing our classes together, we were interested in how our students would entertain and grapple with the differences within and between the two groups, and we were hopeful that an ongoing conversation

between our classes would give them practice with being in community with another group exploring similar ideas, albeit from different personal and institutional locations. We wondered -- what different interpretations of feminist theory might students at a predominately white institution and a minority-serving institution entertain about themselves, and about each other? In what ways would our students bring new insights about the feminist theory we were exploring into each other's awarenesses?

Throughout the course of our time together, we encouraged our students to reflect on how some of the differences they encountered with each other were mediated by, within, and between their two institutions. In reflecting on this experience of teaching and learning in conversation with each other, we were interested in how this experience of collectivity highlighted difference, gave our students opportunities to become more aware of the ways institutions of higher education operate, and highlighted opportunities for feminist teachers and students to be scrappy and innovative, not in the interest of increasing the educational marketability, but because feminist dialogue is often much richer when we do.

Early on in the semester, a conversation came up between our classes that revolved around the difference between the two universities, particularly regarding the racial demographics of each university as a whole. University B's class posed the questions "How do we practice theory? Is it possible to practice intersectionality?" A few classes later, after each class had chimed in with general thoughts about how Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality helps them to think about oppression as layered and overlapping, University B then asked the institutionally-specific question, "How do you, at [University A], implement intersectionality in your lives at a predominantly white institution?" Author A's class responded with discomfort, but also acknowledged the accuracy of the assessment of their institution as deeply informed by whiteness. What followed was a genuine and honest classroom discussion about whiteness at University A and how GWS classes need to contend with it, as well as how GWS classes might give students opportunities and tools for better challenging whiteness as a form of institutional dominance. Several students of color in class spoke to how whiteness impacted them at the institution, and white students listened and affirmed these experiences. Ultimately, the class crafted this response to share with University B:

It is uncomfortable to acknowledge this reality at our school. Being aware of broader systems and also social practices that produce exclusion is possible. Try to be aware of our privileges, don't tokenize people, and be aware of the space we're taking up. Be really intentional about listening to voices of color both in person and in the authors we are reading in our classes. Be aware of admissions data and ask questions about the trends presented there. Thinking also about the local history of [the location of University A] and how that may be hostile to people of color.

That this conversation resulted from dialogue between a PWI and a more racially diverse institution demonstrates the difficulty and importance of grappling with difference openly and honestly. Even later on in the semester, the question about institutional whiteness and the discomfort it raised seemed to linger for many of the University A students, demonstrating the ways in which feminist community can be challenging and possibly contentious, even as it is also connective and potentially supportive. To Author A, the quality of this conversation took on an especially meaningful tone because University A's institutional whiteness was raised by an "outside" group. The directness of University B's question prompted University A's class to articulate the specific forms of action available to them within and perhaps despite the institution. It is one thing for a group of students to acknowledge their own institution's whiteness (and, for students of color, to experience this force daily) -- it is another thing for an outside group to say that they notice the whiteness of your institution and hold you accountable for speaking on it.

Feminist Killjoys in the Neoliberal University

Our approaches to teaching these courses collaboratively were informed by the pervasive way in which neoliberal politics have infused higher education. Our commitment to working together was fueled in part by a spirit of resistance to the conditions that neoliberalism breeds, and it was our objective to help explore these strategies for resistance and reimagining with and alongside our students. To be clear about our own understandings of neoliberalism in higher education, we refer to Griffey's (2019) explanation that "The neoliberal university (or college) is an institution of higher education whose governance is primarily organized around increasing revenue, even when it is a non-profit or public institution. All other functions are secondary." This overall commitment to profit produces a way of understanding education as an experience that is marketed to students as a commodity and in which students are understood as consumers of an overall experience that increasingly prioritizes facilities and a branded identity over actual teaching and learning. In the big picture, the neoliberal university is one in which the main purpose is to generate profit, and in which capitalist values of individualistic competition are infused throughout the discourse about the purpose and process of higher education. This paradigm positions the university experience as a series of commodities available for individual students to consume, which understandably warps the role of education in posing challenging questions, helping students to become critical thinkers, and providing communities with nuanced ways to understand their members. Professors might feel the pressure of neoliberalism in the form of increased class sizes, stagnating salaries and/or other forms of precarity, directives to produce and position scholarship in competitive ways, student anxiety about whether and how their studies are applicable to employment opportunities, and the common understanding of a degree as a commodity earned and then exchanged for a job after graduation (Canella, G. & Koro-

Ljungberg, M., 2017 & Saunders, D. B. & Blanco Ramirez, G., (2017).

In Gender, Women's, & Sexuality Studies, there is often pressure on already overworked faculty to increase the number of majors in order to prove program legitimacy to governing structures within the university. Students themselves encounter pressures from their families or relationships outside of GWS to major in a subject more legibly tied to profitable jobs. As one class explained to another about mid-way through the semester:

Many of our peers reported moments of being constantly questioned when bringing up that they're studying GWS because of myths that it's an "easy" subject or because others don't believe/don't know you can do anything with a GWS degree. For y'all: Why is there such an emphasis in our society to study subjects that lead to a "good career"?

The refrain of "Women's Studies? What are you going to do with that?" is commonly levied against our students, and our students drew attention to this question and the discourse that supports it as itself an expression of power. They also invited each other to commiserate in the experience of enduring this frequent line of questioning -- a move that we see as enabled by the feminist community they were participating in with each other. Though many of our students already had the ability to identify anti-feminist thought before they came into our classes, being able to share their observations with each other and trace their experiences as part of a larger pattern is a crucial reason for building feminist community.

Though neoliberalism is pervasive, is it not always understood as an interconnected system with identifiable patterns and effects. As we see it, developing a robust ability

tracing a larger picture of how resources are (or are not) allotted and how that shapes the climate of higher education. Together, they imagined how each of their schools would be different if there were more GWS classes, or even more classes that centered feminist inquiry. In response to an exercise in one class in which students considered what life would be like on an entirely feminist planet, the other class brainstormed components of their ideal feminist university. They shared the following image:



Author A's class responded by adding several other suggestions for what their idea of a feminist university would involve, including:

No buildings named after people at all, more accessibility in general, self-care centers with a nap area, equal funding for all programs (stop hyper-funding sports), more breastfeeding/pumping accessible spaces, free menstrual products everywhere, and the possible end to tenure (a suggestion that horrified Author A but that was compelling nonetheless).

This collective exercise not only required students to begin to imagine alternatives, but also to articulate what exactly was unjust about the university settings they inhabit. For many students, this exercise came easily. While the work needed to actualize some of these suggestions is substantial and would require considerable organization, imagining and articulating these changes is the beginning of those efforts, and can signal a crucial refusal to accept a harmful status quo. As Anzaldúa (1987) writes, "'Nothing happens in the 'real' world unless it first happens in the images in our heads" (p. 109).



COLLAGE BY FEMINIST THEORIES STUDENT. IMAGE COURTESY OF AUTHORS

to observe, critique, and re-imagine institutions is fundamental to feminist pedagogy. When our students shared observations with each other about the dearth of GWS classes at each of their schools, they were able to start

By being in dialogue and community with one another, our students were able to share in some of their own observations and experiences within their respective institutions of higher ed; additionally, they began to share

strategies with each other of how to operate bravely, subversively, and confidently in their roles as students. One class wrote the following summary of their class discussion in the shared document:

We talked about personal experiences of speaking up in non-GWS classes and either getting steamrolled or worrying about whether the prof would deduct points off of our grades. We also mentioned that sometimes especially in this situation, it is important to say something. Since [our school] is so predominately white, it can be even more dangerous for people of color to speak up. This connects to being dismissed as "the angry black woman." ... At the same time, sometimes we felt it isn't always as dangerous as it seems to talk about feminism in other contexts -- sometimes you just have to do it.

In Ahmed's (2017) *Living a Feminist Life*, the text that both classes read and discussed the most extensively throughout the semester, Ahmed writes about the feminist killjoy as a figure who not only notices the wrongs produced by sexism, racism, and other overlapping oppressions but also refuses to let them slide. In many cases, this means acting in ways that people perceive to be joy-killing -- by naming the joke as sexist, by identifying the racism in the conversation, by calling for institutions to change. As Ahmed and our students both discussed, being a feminist killjoy is hard and sometimes isolating work. Just as Ahmed includes other killjoys in her own feminist survival kit, our students too had the opportunity and experience to connect with each other as a group of killjoys -- a killjoy community across and despite institutional barriers (p. 244).

Since neoliberalism enshrines the individual as the most important social unit and efficiency as a desirable quality, our collaboration challenged both the idea that students, even feminist ones, ultimately should or do work in isolation from one another. Each time we "pulled back the curtain" to see what the other class had been discussing, we were able to explore the very real conversations that were happening in another space and think about how the discussions in our classes related. By setting up the learning environment in this way, we very intentionally resisted collapsing the two courses into one (as is sometimes the model of efficiency presented in inter-campus programs collaborations). Our collaboration wasn't part of the marketing for our classes or the universities; rather, we created it because we thought it would be helpful to us and our students, and because it makes logical sense in the tradition of feminists establishing critical communities with each other. Ahmed (2017) writes that "feminism is bringing people into the room" (p. 3). With the resources available to us, we took that directive seriously by invading each other's spaces and bringing our sister classes into each other's rooms. While this dialogue was challenging at times, our students also spoke to how it was beneficial to their thinking -- that hearing another group's interpretation of shared texts often revealed new insights for them each to consider.

In many ways, our pedagogical choices pushed our students to think about what it means to employ feminism in all dimensions and experiences of their lives, including as university students. This not only challenges the idea that

feminist theory is something that happens within school as merely a thought exercise to be applied later in the "actual" action, but that school itself is a depoliticized location. By connecting our classes, we hoped to push our students to consider how and in what ways they are sometimes encouraged to be disconnected within their learning processes, as well as to whom and under what conditions they are encouraged to connect with others as feminists and/or as students. Saunders & Blanco Ramirez (2017) argue that one of the effects of neoliberalism within education is a commodification of the educational experience in which students are understood as passive "recipients of an ossified education that is represented by their resume and academic credentials [rather than] active (co)creators of their educational experiences, which cannot be fully captured by a resume or reduced to a diploma" (p. 191). In facilitating dialogue between our classes, we hoped to push back on this passive, commodified experience of education by treating the conversations of the other class as a legitimate and living text -- one in which the ideas explored were not necessarily easily or ever resolved but instead continued to warrant active exploration.

Feminist Pedagogy as Sweaty Concept

In order to participate meaningfully in feminist thinking, writing, and movements, students need to have some sense of what institutions are and how they work. They need to be able to give themselves permission to notice the institutions that house them, as well as how those structures restrict and impact their experiences and how they might, through various tactics and actions, find the weak spots in those structures in order to alter them. We wanted to collaborate, in part, as an exercise in connection with one another, and also because of the ways in which doing so would expose our students to a re-imagining of what education can involve. For many students, feminism offers a new way of looking at the world, which Ahmed describes as a "reorientation to the world, a different slant on the same thing" (p. 13). While classroom cultures are often confined to the students and the teacher in the room (and the conversation they are having with scholars in the discipline in which they are studying), we opened up conversation between our classes so our students could be aware, in a concrete way, of conversations that other students were having with and about feminist ways of thinking. In regularly considering what the other class was discussing, we fought against the sense of isolation that students can sometimes experience when pursuing feminist thinking both within and beyond educational institutions. Which was an important consideration as both of our courses were taking place at mid-sized public universities with over 15,000 enrolled undergraduate students. These courses were among the few, if not the only, feminist theory courses offered during the semester we have described.

Feminist community involves seeking out and listening to others who are entertaining similar questions, but who are not necessarily on the exact same page, space, or time. It can certainly still be a valuable exercise for students to have an in-depth conversation about a singular text that they have all read and considered for any given class period;

however, pursuing this pedagogical choice exclusively can set students up for confusion, frustration, and defeat when they are in positions of needing to converse across a range of ideas, vocabularies, and experiences. For reasons that we both did and did not have control over, we did not align our classes precisely. They shared some but not all texts, and even for the shared texts, they did not read them at the same time. The conversations we opened up between the two groups were asynchronous both in terms of time and also content. This choice had to do with working with what we had, but also pushing our students to think experimentally about how it is possible to work with what is available, and how conversations do not have to occur exactly in synch with one another in order to further the learning and action that feminist frameworks can support. This is an unconventional way to work, but perhaps not so surprising when one thinks about the ways in which women and other marginalized groups have often had to be scrappy and experimental in their pursuit of justice.

Ahmed (2017) describes concepts as “sweaty” when they are sticky and also when they involve active work and working through. She writes that sweaty concepts “have questions that surround them... [Sweaty questions] are difficult questions, and our task is not to resolve them; they are life questions” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 195). We are reminded of our class’s conversation about intersectionality that emerged early in the semester and popped up at various points throughout the rest of our time with these students. Following the observations each group made about the racial diversity of their own and each other’s institutions, they each posed questions about their personal relationships to those demographics. University A asked, “Did you purposefully consider the diversity of [your school] when you decided to attend there?” -- to which University B replied that many of them did, and that this was an important factor in their decision to enroll. They also posed the question, “Did you consider the lack of diversity when considering [your school]?” For students at University A, this was a sweaty question. It did not seem like they anticipated it, but when posed with responding, they met the task with dedication and focus. Ultimately, they composed this response:

Some of us did consider the lack of (racial, gender, and sexuality, socioeconomic, religious) diversity, while others did not. It feels uncomfortable but also important to be called on that. We talked about the institutional whiteness of this institution, and how it is historical and geographical and how some of us felt compelled to try to address that personally through our attendance here, while others didn’t have to think about it when deciding where to go. We also talked about the way in which admissions marketing over-represents racial and also queer diversity. We are left with questions for ourselves about what to do.

These qualities of determination and uncertainty are central to feminist work. When faced with the injustices that oppressive systems perpetrate, what are feminists to do? Sometimes the answers are clear, and sometimes they can be made clearer by dialogue with others who have different experiences. As Lorde (1984) explains, “In a world of possibility for us all, our personal visions help lay the groundwork for political action... divide and conquer must

become define and empower” (p. 112). By working together, by posing uncomfortable questions, and by listening to each other’s ideas, feminists in community across difference can both learn and continue to do the complex, challenging work of taking anti-oppressive action.

The collaboration between our classes provided another dimension through which to pose questions, and also in which to observe questions being posed. The regular check-ins with the other class provided brief glimpses into the ways that others were working through the sweaty issues that feminist theory can raise about institutions and the way that individuals and collectives can both navigate and challenge them. These glimpses were not comprehensive -- there was no way for either class to know exactly what had been read or said or thought by all of the members of the other class, and this was part of the intrigue of the exercise -- because that is how feminist scholarship, activism, and conversation often operates -- in glimpses and snippets, building over time, but also sometimes dropping lines of thought, misunderstanding or mischaracterizing what has been suggested or done. Despite the messiness of building intellectual communities, people do still participate in and craft those communities, and when they do so in collaboration with others, new and potentially liberating possibilities can arise.

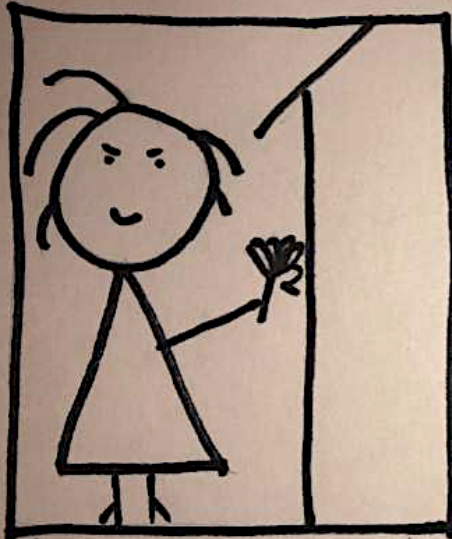
Conclusion

Establishing that there was a Feminist Theory class on another campus with similar goals was a strategic move on our part -- in conversing regularly, we wanted to prompt students to think beyond the boundaries of their own class. We wanted them up to know that, for better or worse, they are not alone in the practice of feminist theorizing, and that conversing with other feminist students across space and time can make learning richer. In pursuing this experiment, we wanted to show students that they too have the agency, skills, knowledge, and ability to do things differently in order to make education and the world around them work for them instead of passively consuming the status quo.

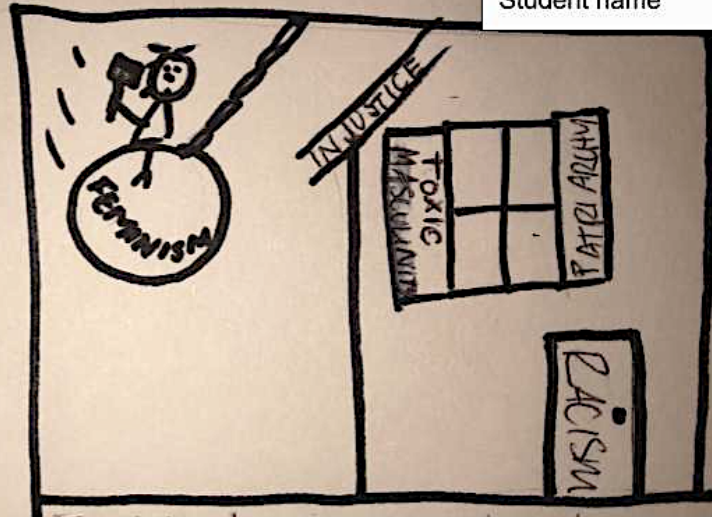
In reflecting on our pedagogical experiment, we find it valuable to highlight the creativity with which it is possible to approach institutions. The demolition of oppressions that live within and are enabled by larger structures requires an understanding of not only the structures themselves, but also their blind spots and the ways in which they can be strategically weakened. In employing these space invading strategies within our teaching, we asked ourselves what could be possible not because it was a requirement or an endorsement from our universities, but because as teachers and students of feminism, we recognize the value of conversing with those beyond the boundaries of any given class, program, or discipline.

The Feminine Mystique

Student name



Feminist housework does not simply clean and maintain a house,



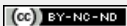
Feminist housework aims to transform the house, to rebuild the master's residence.

ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATION BY FEMINIST THEORIES STUDENT 3. IMAGE COURTESY OF AUTHORS

Raising questions about institutions from within them can be tricky, delicate work, but as teachers of feminist thought, we find it crucial to do. When we model ways to work strategically and critically within institutions, we provide our students with opportunities to recognize ways in which they can do so as well. There is no singular set of steps that will achieve the desired changes or calls for justice every time. But if students learn to be curious, creative, and resilient in their connections with each other, they will be well primed to make headway when they recognize injustice and can trace it back to the well-trodden ideologies that sexism, classism, and racism promote.

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RADICAL TEACHER

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

It Takes Heart: The Experiences and Working Conditions of Caring Educators

by Julia Ismael, Althea Eannace Lazzaro, and Brianna Ishihara



"TAKE CARE / CARE TAKE" BY PETE RAILAND. 2020 (VIA JUSTSEEDS)

Introduction

In my personal life I am struggling with self-care. I just spent some time in the ER and time away from work...I will just keep going, going, going till my body literally shuts me down, which has taken place.

- Interviewee from our care circle interviews

Like our interviewee quoted above, my body has “shut me down” with an acute episode of a chronic illness exacerbated by stress and overwork. While I sit on my couch recovering, I am thinking about how many of my students emailed me this week when they turned in their rough drafts to let me know that they were struggling—with under-treated illness because they were between insurance coverage, with a parent in the hospital, with a partner recently incarcerated and three kids to support. Even though I had a fever this weekend, I broke down and gave them feedback on their papers, because I didn’t want to add one more stressor to their already overwhelmed lives, and because I didn’t want one more piece of work hanging over my head while I recovered.

And that’s just me. Another co-author of this paper left our school—after a long struggle in her department to organize care for Black women—when she was forbidden from bringing her children to work over the summer but couldn’t afford to leave them home (her hourly wage was only a dollar more than her hourly child care costs). Our third co-author left during our writing process to pursue more meaningful work in hope of better pay one day. These are a few results of relentless care without replenishment (Arruzza, Bhattacharya, Fraser 68) -- quitting, illness, burnout, withdrawal -- which serves neither our students nor ourselves, in the end.

While these may seem like extreme cases, they are not unique. The city we live in is getting more expensive by the year. The current annual income needed to meet the cost of basic needs in King County for a typical family has grown by more than \$20,000 over 9 years, outpacing inflation (Pearce 13). House prices in the Seattle area have risen 57.7% since 2007, compared to the U.S. Average of 31.1% in the same time period (Federal Housing Finance Agency). Our colleagues describe longer and longer commutes to find more affordable places to live further from school, and so do our students. For our faculty, staff, students, and their families, pay isn’t keeping pace with the cost of living (Center for Economic and Business Research 6-11), while tuition has risen (Long “Could you go to College?”). The combined effects of an increasingly expensive city and inadequate wages mean that at our community college we are struggling to take care of ourselves and each other.

When we interviewed our colleagues for this research on care work, they talked about struggling to find time to care for themselves, trips to the ER, and their fear of slipping back into substance abuse from stress. They also talked with pride about the accomplishments of our students—many of

whom are political and community leaders, all of whom are dedicated to their studies. We feel that we must keep “going, going, going” to serve our brilliant students well, but while the need for care seems to be growing, our resources for meeting that need are not.

At the heart of the education work that we do at our community college is this “crisis of care” (Arruzza, Bhattacharya, Fraser 68). As a majority (51%) Black and Brown college of working adults (46% work; average student age is 27) (Seattle Central College), our students and colleagues have faced some of the worst ravages of neoliberal era “policy, deeply embedded racialized structures, and persistent discrimination” that destroy wealth and put them on a knife’s edge of precarity (Oliver and Shapiro 18). Students often arrive at our school having been denied what they need to succeed (like textbooks, rent, tuition) in a predominantly white city with an extreme wealth gap (Balk) and many of us take it as a pedagogical and moral necessity to help them meet those needs and remove unnecessary barriers to their learning.

Despite research on culturally responsive teaching and feminist education that demonstrates students’ greater ability to flourish when they are cared for in the classroom (Gay 48; Nodding 20, 176; Ladson-Billings 14), this work often goes either unrecognized or uncompensated (England, Budig and Folbre 467). To care for students well takes considerable work and skill; and providing care for a wage (especially not a livable one, especially if you are a woman of color in a predominantly white institution, especially if you are working an unwaged double-shift) can be dangerous, depending on the working conditions (Hochschild 89-90; England 391-392; Jocson Porter, Spence-Wilcox, and Tate-Malone 283). And while we’ve gotten consistent messages from our administration for years about how important it is to do this care work—lauding our “generosity,” our “empathy and understanding” (Edwards Lange, “Message from the President” May 15th, 2020), our “long hours” and “personal touch” (Edwards Lange, “Message from the President” April 24th, 2020) that are important because “we need to be there for all our students” (Edwards Lange “Message from the President” March 31, 2020), and reminding us that “how we support our students can be the difference between the decision for them to stay or withdraw from a class, the difference between finding self-confidence, or losing hope” (Pan “Convocation Address”)—the most recent of those have come at the same time that staff is being laid off and faculty contract negotiations have stalled on the issue of compensation. In the neoliberal, scarcity-based institutional context in which we work, these contradictions set the well-being of our students against the well-being of us as educators.

In the neoliberal, scarcity-based institutional context in which we work, these contradictions set the well-being of our students against the well-being of us as educators.

Care work is “people-making” labor (Arruzza, Bhattacharya, Fraser 68) that “develops the human capabilities of the recipient” (England, Budig, and Folbre 455) and falls under the category of “social reproduction” (Weeks 24-25, 140-141). Social reproductive labor--the work of feeding, nurturing, soothing, educating, and ensuring that basic needs are met--though often intangible, creates and replenishes labor power, and in that way produces value under capitalism (Federici 92). Despite this value, care work, associated as it is with women, is devalued in terms of both money and prestige for the worker, regardless of gender (England 382; England, Budig, and Folbre 466).

Because the specifics of care work are not articulated in our contracts or our job descriptions at our school, and because it belongs to a category of work that has traditionally been unwaged or under-waged, it is easy to frame it as “extra” work, that some education workers opt into--rather than “real” work that we all have to do. This obscures how essential that work is for students to learn, how valuable it is to institutional goals of student achievement and retention, and the way it is disproportionately done by women and people of color (Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser 45, Care Collective 19). Its feminization, racialization, and connection to emotion makes care work and care workers uniquely vulnerable to exploitation through both burnout (Hochschild 90) and a wage penalty (England Budig, and Folbre 468).

Many of our interviewees said that the care work that they do with students is the most fulfilling part of their job. But in contradiction to the adage that, “If you love what you do, you’ll never work a day in your life,” at our school we have found that we never work harder than when we do the work of love. Miya Tokumitsu, in her essay, “In the Name of Love”, exposes the danger inherent in “loveable” work:

No one is arguing that enjoyable work should be less so. But emotionally satisfying work is still work, and acknowledging it as such doesn’t undermine it in any way. Refusing to acknowledge it, on the other hand, opens the door to the most vicious exploitation and harms all workers.

Or, in the words of one of our interviewees, “I’m happiest when I’m teaching, but I’m also poorest when I’m teaching, which is unfortunate.”

To follow Tokumitsu’s logic, understanding the care work of education as labor is a step toward mitigating its potential exploitation by helping workers understand what working conditions will sustain the kind of care work that our students deserve. While research on care is extensive and thorough in its descriptions of what constitutes care and why it matters for the cared for, the literature is much more limited in talking about the worker’s experience of providing care and the conditions of that work. To contribute to this understanding, this paper asks: what is the experience of producing care in our college for caring educators, and what are the working conditions that enable or disable educators to do it well? The most significant themes that emerged from these interviews were: the value of care work in the

educational context, emotion as labor, the time it takes to care, the limitations of self-care as an individual practice, and mutual aid to change the working conditions of care.

Method

Working from Patricia Hill Collins, who puts an ethic of care at the heart of a black feminist way of knowing (282), we chose a method that would honor the great wealth of wisdom in our community, based on lived experience, that was being shared with us, and that would serve that community well as we moved forward. We chose to use a talking circle interview method as a form of critical participatory action research, which is “a commitment on the part of both researchers and actors to jointly observe, problematize and transform behavior” (Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon 12, 27). The talking circle—practiced first and most often in indigenous communities (Graveline 363)—was a way to build relationships amongst workers while also building knowledge in our area of inquiry. This method was chosen as a direct example of giving and receiving care: an allotment of time, dialog, and attention to understand each other’s experience (Shevalier and McKenzie 1093 - 1095).

We used a purposeful snowball sampling method to identify education workers for our circles who produce care (Beaudry and Miller 41). We defined “education worker” broadly as anyone who contributed to the education of our students. Using criteria developed through our research on culturally responsive caring in education, we drew up an initial list of educators to contact--we then asked those that we contacted to reach out to others in the college who met our criteria of a caring educator and extend our invitation. As a result, our participants came from all across the college: they were classroom teachers; librarians; student services workers; information technology (IT) workers; counselors; staff members of the multicultural services office, the financial aid office, and the tutoring center. The authors of this article and the interview group of 21 colleagues are a deeply diverse group in terms of race, age, nationality, position, income level, and institutional power (with the exception of administrators, who were not included in the interview group, in order to allow other workers to speak freely).

In order to enable the maximum number of workers from different job classifications to participate, we held three different circles of two hours each at different times of day. This was important to us because of the long-time separation between faculty and staff at our college, which has divided us along a number of lines of privilege, including race, gender, and income level. We also asked the office of employee development to promote our circles as professional development, so that workers could participate during work hours and would not have to take personal leave. During our circle interviews, several participants spoke about nearly skipping the circles because they were too fatigued, overworked, or burnt-out to add any additional thing to their schedule. One participant said, “I was not sure I was even going to come today – I’ll be absolutely honest. My year has been one big, long, shit storm. And this week I

was like, 'I'm done.'" From this feedback, we suspect that we may not have heard from some of the folks most impacted by care work and its consequences: about 20% of those who signed up for the interview didn't attend.

In each circle, participants were introduced to the major themes of our research and the form of the talking circle. We posed a series of three questions about their current life and work. After a question, each member of the circle in predictable turn spoke as long as they wished on the question without interruption. In order to break down the objectification of the research subject and the hierarchy of the researcher to researched (DeVault and Gross 215; Davis and Harrison 10), we three authors participated as members of the talking circles, and answered our own questions, but did not code or include our answers in the analysis of the interviews.

To systematically code the interview transcripts, we used a hybrid method that included a priori codes developed from our research on education and care, and in vivo codes that emerged from the interviews (Saldaña 587-599). This resulted in an initial list of 41 codes that were classified into eleven categories. These categories were used in a second round of coding to determine their significance within the data. Through this process, five of these eleven categories were chosen (and slightly reorganized to include some subthemes) as the main themes of this paper, based on their significance within the interviews.

Importance of Care in the Educational Process

Workers in a feminized field of work like education, have experienced the devaluation of their care work to the point of its erasure *as work* (England, Budig, Folbre 457). That erasure is usually achieved through the insistence that care is an emotion that emerges naturally and spontaneously from the individual (England 383) rather than an intentional "orchestration of skill and judgement" (Walker and Gleaves 65). Further complicating this is the deep, personal meaning that this kind of work can hold for education workers. For many of our interviewees, the care work they do with students is "how we contribute to the greater good." In fact, this was the most consistent theme in our interviews: the pleasure, meaning, and connectedness that our colleagues experience when doing care work with students. As one interviewee put it, "What's going to fulfill me when it's all said and done? This will fulfill me: higher education, and being able to help others, and to be a voice."

To bring attention to this important work and improve outcomes for students, feminist and critical race scholars work to transform the set of beliefs, moral imperatives, and deep emotions into defined, highly skilled actions in the work of care. Geneva Gay defines care in the educational setting as, "A value, an ethic, and a moral imperative that moves 'self-determination into social responsibility and uses knowledge and strategic thinking to decide how to act in the best interests of others'" (47).

In her foundational work on care and education, Nel Noddings describes the essence of care as receptivity and engrossment on the part of the carer to the one being cared for (30),

Caring involves, for the one-caring, a "feeling with" the other....The notion of "feeling with" that I have described does not involve projection but reception. I have called it "engrossment."...I receive the other into myself, and I see and feel with the other. I become a duality. (Noddings 30)

Working from Noddings, Gay describes the important difference between the feeling of care that many of us have for our students and the transformation of those feelings into action,

Emotions (such as concern and compassion) are important anchors and catalysts in culturally responsive teaching, but they lack behavioral embodiments that are fundamental to facilitating student learning. Thus, all attributes of caring must be translated into actions for them to be of much value in improving the achievement of culturally diverse students. (Gay 53)

This distinction between "caring about" and "caring for" is an essential one in research on care (Shevalier and McKenzie 10898; Care Collective 21). "Caring about" is a "relatively detached" emotional experience, while "caring for" is an experience of "motivational displacement or the 'desire to help'" (Shevalier and McKenzie 1090), which education scholars like Gay would suggest is not fulfilled until it is embodied in action on behalf of students (53).

The active and skilled dimensions of "caring for" are articulated in a number of ways by different scholars, but the dimensions cluster around a few common strategies that caring education workers employ. These could be described as: cultural responsiveness through competence in students' cultures and identities and an acknowledgement of racism and other forms of discrimination (Gay 48; Ladson-Billings 36; hooks 131; Nieto 38; Shevalier and McKenzie 1092; Borck 3; Garza, Alejandro, Blythe and Fite 2); relationship building through dialogue, attention, trust, respect, and high regard (Ladson-Billings 38; hooks 131; Shevalier and McKenzie 1093; Borck 3; Walker and Gleaves 65; Garza, Alejandro, Blythe and Fite 4); attendance to students' socio-emotional and physiological needs (Gay 48; Shevalier and McKenzie 1097; Borck 3; Garza, Alejandro, Blythe and Fite 5); and a focus on instruction and skilled pedagogy in all aspects of the school experience (Ladson-Billings 161; Walker and Gleaves 65; Garza, Alejandro, Blythe and Fite 4).

In the majority of this research, these are described implicitly or explicitly as the actions and orientations of individual teachers (Borck 3). But for educators who truly care for their students, these essential aspects of care can represent an overwhelming individual duty. To act on the deep knowledge of students' lives means confronting the injustices they face on the basis of their race, socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality, and disabilities. For our interviewees, confronting those injustices has meant

transforming curriculum; providing food and other necessities; helping to navigate school and social services bureaucracies; confronting teachers and administrators who are creating barriers to students' progress; participating in protest and social movements that affect students; and being the confidantes of students who may be experiencing considerable pain, discrimination, and want. The reward for this work is to know oneself as a necessary part of another's development, and often to experience that care in return from students or colleagues. As one interviewee put it, "What I enjoy the most is to be able to help students to look at and believe in themselves." The danger is that defining this work as the responsibility of individuals is unrealistic and can lead to self-doubt, frustration, and despair. Expressing frustration when her colleagues did not help students enough, one interviewee said, "It affects me deeply when I see that others don't care as much as they should."

Education research says comparatively little, however, about the conditions *for the educator* that facilitate that caring labor. Borck begins this process by expanding the Noddings-based definition of care beyond individual teacher's behavior into the school at large (2) through the notion of "structural care." Borck describes structural care as "the social structural conditions that enable care to emerge" (2), including co-constructed culture among teachers (10), physical environments that are affirming (8), and "institutional priorities, policies, and practices that reflect commitments to regard students positively" (2). Borck warns that the capacity for care among educators is determined not by the intensity of the individual educator's commitment to this process, but by "structural forces that intersect with teachers' time, priorities, and ability to provide meaningful connections with students" (7). However, Borck's description of structural care focuses on the quality of interactions between students and the caring structures (teachers, administrators, school culture, school buildings), and does not elaborate on the working conditions that build and maintain these structures. Through our interviews, we found that losing sight of the conditions that enable the work of care interferes with the workers' ability to sustain that work over the long-term.

Emotion as labor

A number of our interviewees, the majority of whom are from marginalized backgrounds in academia, expressed their care work towards students as a form of "giving back," because they had experienced care themselves when they were students. For this reason among others, care work for education workers often has both an emotional and a moral dimension. While motivating, the moral and emotional dimensions of care work can also trap workers in poor working conditions. Folbre's "prisoner of love" theory explains that "emotional bonds put care workers in a vulnerable position, discouraging them from demanding higher wages or changes in working conditions that might have adverse effects on care recipients" (England 390; Folbre 40). In addition to a reluctance to organize for better conditions, care work has other unique dangers including

alienation from the self, and a dulling of the "signal function of emotion" (Hochschild 22). Arlie Russell Hochschild defines emotional labor as work that:

...requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others...the sense of being cared for in a convivial and safe place. This kind of labor calls for coordination of mind and feeling, and it sometimes draws on a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality. (Hochschild 7)

In combination with Noddings's description of care as a "receiving the other into the self" (30), Hochschild's description of emotional labor helps us to understand how the education worker may temporarily suppress their internal emotions and material struggles in order to sustain the appropriate outward caring state to facilitate student learning.

For the educator, that might mean putting aside the initial emotional response provoked by a student to create the emotional atmosphere of warmth, patience, acceptance, or authority that is necessary for that student's flourishing. In one interview, a faculty member describes this process of shifting her emotional state from frustration to care during and after a tense conversation with a white student who questioned her lecture on racism and genocide:

Having to argue this with him. And the level of how we have to regulate our emotions in those moments....And literally losing sleep, right? And the distress that comes with that. And that student feeling it too. And caring for those students, even though they just piss you off sometimes when they say stuff like that. So feeling the anger, but also still caring for them, and wanting them to learn, and wanting them to grow.

After the faculty member explained the frustration, hurt, and care that she was managing while teaching this student after the official lecture was over, she went on to explain additional working conditions that made that interaction especially taxing:

And that was just Monday. And then on top of that you're having to think about tomorrow's lecture and Friday's lecture. And thinking about the stuff I have to do this evening, like after I leave here. And the grading, and you know, just everything else on top of that....There's this sort of energy and care that you need to give to students that happens outside of the lecture itself. And that takes a lot of time, and it takes a lot of energy.

This instructor suggests that the emotional dimension of teaching, while challenging, is something to be expected when she says, "And caring for those students, even though they just piss you off sometimes." Rather than the interaction itself, what the instructor identifies as creating a strain is her worry that this essential teaching moment is taking time from her other contracted responsibilities, which will add time on to her work day as well as anxiety about getting everything done.

In the context of work, emotional labor competes with other forms of work in a way that puts a particular pressure on the worker, distinguishable from how we labor emotionally in our personal, non-work lives

In the context of work, emotional labor competes with other forms of work in a way that puts a particular pressure on the worker, distinguishable from how we labor emotionally in our personal, non-work lives. Hochschild describes the way that having to perform emotions on command for a wage can lead to stress and dissonance (90):

The whole system of emotional exchange in private life has its ostensible purpose in the welfare and pleasure of the people involved. When this emotional system is thrust into a commercial setting, it is transmuted. A profit motive is slipped in under acts of emotion management, under the rules that govern them...Who benefits now, and who pays? (119)

One interviewee answered the question of “who pays” by reporting a health professional’s concern for her health as a result of the emotional intensity of her work:

He [the medical professional] told me, when you care for others, you can’t resist your feelings to that person. You’re going to put their pain somehow into yourself when you really care. And if you don’t learn to take care of it, it’s not good for your health. And you can’t keep holding it. It’s only going to harm you in your very close relationships.

What Noddings describes as the essential “feeling with the other” (30) is framed by this worker as dangerous to her physical well-being.

The danger to the worker who does caring labor lies in being alienated from our emotions by continually suppressing or manipulating them for a wage (Hochschild 17). We use our emotions, like our senses, to tell us about our world and any potential dangers that we might encounter (29). If those emotions become distorted through overuse on the job, we can lose our ability to accurately detect and interpret the world around us for our own well-being (30). One of our interviewees described this in terms of “taking her work home with her”:

I’m exhausted. Especially this year and the work that I’m doing. It’s been a rough year....It’s interesting because I used to say like, “Oh I’m so lucky I don’t bring work home with me. [SCOFFS] How, like, deluded that statement is for anyone. You know? So, it’s really, it’s been interesting to kind of see that...shift.

While emotional labor, like any labor, can be tiring, time away from work provides relief and allows for recuperation. However, our interviews and research suggest that the pressures of time, efficiency, and too many responsibilities or students are the elements in the workplace that cause a

worker to “bring work home” and interfere with recovery time. As another interviewee explained, “When I don’t take my time...on the weekend, then I’m taking it away from somewhere else...I have to be honest with myself...it can make me resentful. Moving a little bit closer to breaking down.”

The combination of increased care work at school and reproductive labor at home amount to an increasing pace of work for our interviewees. As with our colleagues, Hochschild found that the airline attendant workers she interviewed reported a qualitative difference in their experience of fatigue from emotional labor when deregulation and efficiency measures resulted in an “industry speed-up” in their work (more customers, with fewer workers, and shorter recovery periods) (121-123, 126). This “industry speed-up” created a dissonance between workers’ desire to authentically care for customers, the lack of time to do so, and shorter recovery periods between shifts. Under these conditions, efficiency became antithetical to care. The workers we interviewed reported the industry speed-up at our school as significantly contributing to the strain of their care work, by making work responsibilities bleed into their traditional recovery times when they worked late in the evenings or on the weekends to catch up.

The Speed-Up and the Time it Takes to Care

More than just shrinking our recovery times, in contemporary neoliberalized higher education, we experience this “industry speed-up” (Mountz, et al. 1237) in the form of class size increases; staffing reductions; the replacement of permanent full-time positions with contingent, part-time, and adjunct positions (Brint 30); increased institutional assessment demands (Bennet and Brady 149); the expectation of monitoring email from home (Mountz, et al. 1251); higher bars for tenure and promotion (Mountz, et al. 1253; Wilcox and Schroeder 82); the absence of allocated time necessary to build culturally necessary, trusting teaching/learning relationships (Collins, 275); and an increase in student needs as a result of the elimination of social services in other parts of the social safety net (Meyerhoff, Johnson, and Braun 485; Harvey 22-23).

The education industry speed-up of increased responsibilities and decreased paid staff time to meet them requires a pace of productivity that workers struggle to meet. One of our participants, describing the pressures of efficiency, said,

I’m 65...I feel like I’m slowing down and everybody else isn’t. You know, like, I’m finding myself...I can’t process the same kind of way. I don’t have the same endurance. You know, I don’t have that, you know, like bubbly, keep going, you know, I can’t. I get home at night and I’m like, “I’m going to go swimming!” No I’m not. I mean, I just can’t...I can’t anymore. So I spent some time feeling horrible about that. Like, eh, everyone is kind of

working circles around me...and they're like gonna let me go here pretty quick because I'm not working quickly enough or fast enough.

In contrast, a 70 year old social worker at the school whose work was very similar to the interviewee quoted above, described herself as "potent" and able to "give a lot to the people around me." But she attributed this ability to the amount of time she is contracted to work:

I have to say to those of you who are younger that working half-time really is the way to go. [CHUCKLES] So I don't share these feelings of, gosh, my life's being taken over by work, that kind of thing. I love what I do. And it's only part of my life.

The expectation of efficiency in their care work created distress for several interviewees. They reported that when trying to concentrate on a student crisis, they were distracted with the pressure of other work piling up, their inability to complete their paperwork responsibilities during their paid work time, and their resentment at having to carve time out of their life outside of work to complete their responsibilities. Several interviewees expressed a sense that they didn't know where they could reclaim work time, because they were unable to turn students away when they expressed a need, but they had too much other work to complete to fit it all into contracted hours. As one interviewee said, "There's no shortcut. There's no saying to that student who's sitting across from you crying that, oh, you know, 'I've got four minutes. Can you, like, wrap it up?' You know, 'I'm in a hurry.'"

Self-Care and Mutual Aid

The squeeze that interviewees experienced as a result of a heavy care load was interpreted by many as a failure of self-care. One participant, who reported that his wife was "jealous of his students" because of the amount of time he spent at work, went on to describe how he is better at helping his students with self-care than at practicing it himself: "I have that expectation [of self-care] of my students, because I don't want to see them burn out—it seems like I'm more concerned with their well-being than my own." While popular self-care discourse typically positions it as an individual practice (Penny; Kisner), our interviewees' inability to ensure their own well-being appeared to be more structural than personal--related to low pay, precarity, and workload. In addition, there is an inherent conflict in care as it is formulated in education literature. This contradiction stems from demands of both an engrossment, an authentic "feeling with" the other (Nodding 30; Shevalier and McKenzie 1090), and the emphasis in popular self-care culture on individually determined and enforced "boundaries" between the self and other, and between work and other parts of our lives (Kurki 74).

A recent email from our HR director about pandemic conditions reminded us that, "Our students are relying on us to help them navigate this unprecedented time, so please take care of yourself" (Dixon). But even the workers most diligently committed to caring for themselves have a hard

time doing so when they can't afford nourishing food, when they have a 2-hour commute because they have been pushed out of the city by gentrification, or when that commute gets them home too late to schedule a doctor's appointment. Interviewees reported having a hard time fitting care work for themselves into a day already stretched by care work for their students, under pre-pandemic conditions. One of our interviewees articulated a theme that began to emerge in our discussions, but took shape more fully after the interviews were over:

Why does self-care have to be solitary?...There is that real, narrative thread around, like, "You gotta go take care of yourself," implied by yourself, alone, doing these various activities. And there's something, so... much more um... meaningful and also like, healing, being with other people.

Disability scholar, Yashna Maya Padamsee, explains the dangers of self-care conceived of solely as an individual practice:

Self-care, as it is framed now, leaves us in danger of being isolated in our struggle and our healing. Isolation of yet another person, another injustice, is a notch in the belt of oppression. A liberatory care practice is one in which we move beyond self-care into caring for each other.

Several interviewees described the collective action of talking about their working conditions through the lens of care as doing important psychological and material work for them. One interviewee called the circle interview "good medicine." Another interviewee said, after describing the problems that over-work was causing him at home, and his fear of relapsing into substance abuse as a result, "I can honestly say, if I wasn't sitting here, I probably wouldn't have put that out in the open. And I may not have actually consciously thought of that." As this interviewee shows, the isolation that many of us experience in the academic environment effectively obscures our shared experience of exploitation and overwork. In part because many workers we interviewed shared the notion that care work is an "extra" part of their work that they are personally compelled to do, they feared reprisal if they complained, or believed that others were handling that load more easily than they were.

Soon after our interviews ended, participants began developing mutual aid strategies with each other as a form of self-care. They strategized, empathized, and offered each other material assistance. Since our interviews, many participants have called on each other--based on what they learned during the circles, and the camaraderie that developed through mutual vulnerability--for assistance and advice. This has taken the form of drawing on colleagues' expertise and resources to aid a student, using each other as references for full-time work with better pay and fewer hours of hustling, having another colleague to grieve with when a student has died, and sharing tabling responsibilities at a union walk-out. Sharing the meaning, scope, and cost of their care work began a process that changed the material and emotional experience of work. During one interview, a

participant described this process of developing an analysis of working conditions while sharing stories of care work with the group: “my idea of self-care is more about learning a new way of looking at something which I can apply to the conflict.” Analyzing working conditions specific to care seemed to move participants from thinking about individual self-care to strategizing for collective care. An interviewee articulated the sense of strength in collectivity this way:

What makes this transformative is that there’s this bond with people that I barely know. You know, people I’ve never seen before and now we have this connection to just a deeper sense of who we are collectively. That gives me the staying power. That gives me the perspective.

Another interviewee echoed this desire for mutual aid when she said, “I like the idea of us helping each other when we need it...we spend a good share of our life in the workplace. And so why shouldn’t we share with those around us and ask for them to help us?”

Conclusion: Working Conditions That Facilitate Care

We would describe this one result of our circle interviews as the development of mutual aid networks, or in disability justice terms, care webs (Piepzna-Samarasinha 34) amongst colleagues and across job classifications as workers come together to help themselves, in spite of or without waiting for the institution or the state to provide the means (Kropotkin 184). The trust that developed during our care circle interviews enabled the continuation of care work with the practical support of colleagues, but has also supported broader work toward better working conditions.

The circle, as paid professional development, serves as an example of how an institution acknowledges and then manifests support for those in the profession of care. It is apparent through our circles that care also belongs to the external, in the community. In this setting, a caring community needed a date and time.

Our interviewees articulated that in our context, the overwhelming and negative experience of care work is created not by the work itself, which they described as an essential part of quality education for our students, but by the conditions under which it is performed: too much work, low pay (or non-replenishment), precarity, the multiple jobs necessary to make ends meet, and the material conditions of students. The conditions that will enable the continuation of our care work *with* replenishment, therefore, is more time to care, less work, and better pay.

As the social worker in our group asserted when she said “Half time is the way to go,” having more time to do less work makes a material and psychological difference for the worker who does care work. The idea of less work may seem counter to the well-being of employees who risk alienation if they do less of what is most meaningful to them: connecting to students. Unfortunately, despite the feminist and culturally responsive education literature that demonstrates the impact of care on student success,

education workers are asked to do a tremendous amount of work that does *not* contribute as directly to student and worker well-being as care work (Dunn 37). Working collectively, an analysis of the care work that contributes to student learning and well-being emerges. With this analysis in practice, we gain the ability to organize against work that doesn’t contribute directly to student well-being, a.k.a. the neoliberal education industry speed-up: accountability mechanisms, institutional assessment, committees for new institutional initiatives, extensive hiring and onboarding because of high turnover as a result of low pay.

Hiring and retaining an adequate number of permanent-full time positions prepared to share the responsibility of care work is another step toward having more time and less work. One of our interviewees who is an adjunct faculty member and serves on a number of committees across our college, described how insulting it felt to be working on committee work between quarters only realize that all that work might have been for free when she received her contract in the mail; her employment isn’t guaranteed quarter to quarter. Many of the participants in our care circle interviews are part-time and/or work multiple jobs. Our union recently conducted a study of faculty and found that 84% work at least one more job in addition to their primary teaching responsibilities in order to make ends meet (AFT Local 1789). Creating access to more staff hours to meet their needs with more full-time positions would reduce strain for current full-time employees with a high student load, for current part-time workers who are stretched between multiple jobs, and for students.

As our interviews demonstrated, we cannot, without harm, do all of the care and reproductive work we are tasked with at work while we suffer from inadequate recuperation time at home. And, not for this pay. Low pay means multiple jobs, long commutes, and additional stress. When care work is not seen as a formal aspect of our jobs, it is not compensated either monetarily or with an allocation of needed time. A recognition that care work is a shared responsibility that is essential to the educational success of students demands that care work be paid work in tandem with defined time for care work. Adequate pay would also reduce bureaucratic burdens on educators by reducing turnover (and therefore reducing hiring committees, and onboarding).

While the scholarship on educational care points again and again to the difference between “caring about” and “caring for,” the work that emerged from our colleagues to change working conditions at our school falls into a third care category, introduced by Joan Tronto: “caring with” (28). Tronto describes “caring with” as a notion close to solidarity (28) that moves beyond the individual to individual “caring for” to a recognition of politicized collective care for broader change (Care Collective 21). Our faculty union initiated a campaign that asked us all to log our extra hours: all the work that we did in addition to the work that is explicitly outlined in our contract. The information from the salary survey and the campaign was used to help faculty build a case for a cost of living adjustment to address the rising costs of our city and soon after we concluded our

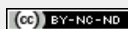
interviews, faculty, staff and students walked out to demand that cost of living salary adjustment in the spring of 2019. As a result, faculty won an 11% cost of living increase over the next two years, and classified staff cost of living increases were guaranteed through that process. Since then, under threatened austerity measures by the state and our college district, justified by COVID-19, workers have been organizing across the three unions of our college to demand an end to layoffs and furloughs, more full-time teacher and staff positions, and free tuition and adequate state funding for students. By reframing the stressors of care work from personal failings to dangerous working conditions, caring educators have been able to clearly articulate and struggle for changes to those working conditions that will benefit our students and ourselves. Understanding, in detail, the way that our working conditions affect the provision of care for students can fight the “prisoner of love” mentality that keeps care workers from organizing for better conditions when they think it might harm those they care for (Folbre 38-41). The formulation of these demands for better working conditions, the planning of events to raise consciousness about those conditions, and attendance at walk-outs to bring about change in those conditions all emerged from “caring with” relationships between coworkers and students built person to person that resulted in collective action for change.

But despite the successes of this solidarity born of mutual aid, there have been many consequences of our uncaring conditions. Many of our best colleagues have left our school because of low pay, too many demands, and emotional burnout, including five of the twenty-one participants in our interviews and two of the co-authors of this paper. These co-authors and colleagues were champions of racial and gender justice at our school, and leaders in their employment classifications. With each departure, it becomes harder to connect students to the offices and individuals who will care for them well--it takes time to develop the expertise and institutional knowledge to provision care. When (if) these colleagues are replaced, our new colleagues, by definition, won't have accumulated that knowledge and won't immediately be well connected to the community. Because these are hazards of our working conditions, every experienced employee who leaves because of burn out, every student who drops out of school when they can't find a staff member to connect them to available resources, is a workplace injury: not inevitable, and not an accident.

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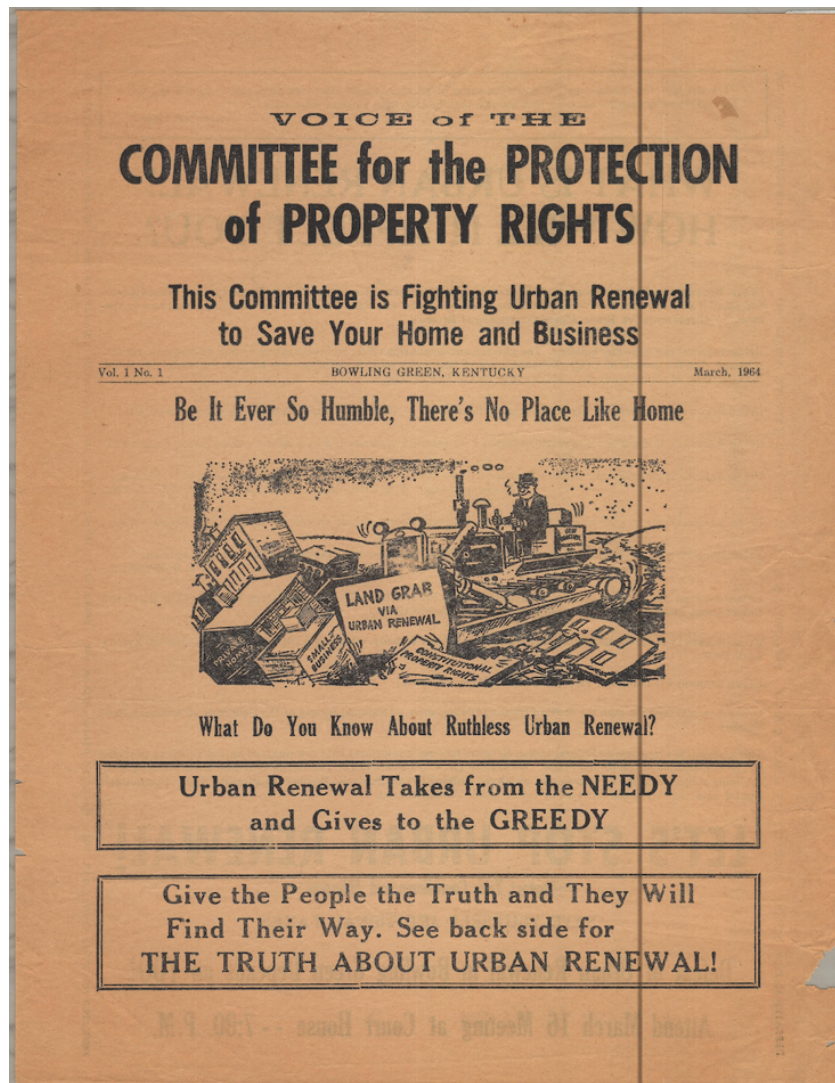
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RADICAL TEACHER

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

To Teach the University is to Teach Reparations: A Class Project

by John Conley



A FLYER AGITATING AGAINST THE DESTRUCTION OF JONESVILLE, 1964. COURTESY OF WKU ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS.

Reparations are a way of democratizing history and hearing those voices that were silenced in the past.

- Charles P. Henry, *Long Overdue: The Politics of Racial Reparations*

Because the university is the ground beneath our feet, we tend to take it for granted.

- Jeffrey Williams, "Teach the University"

On Introduction

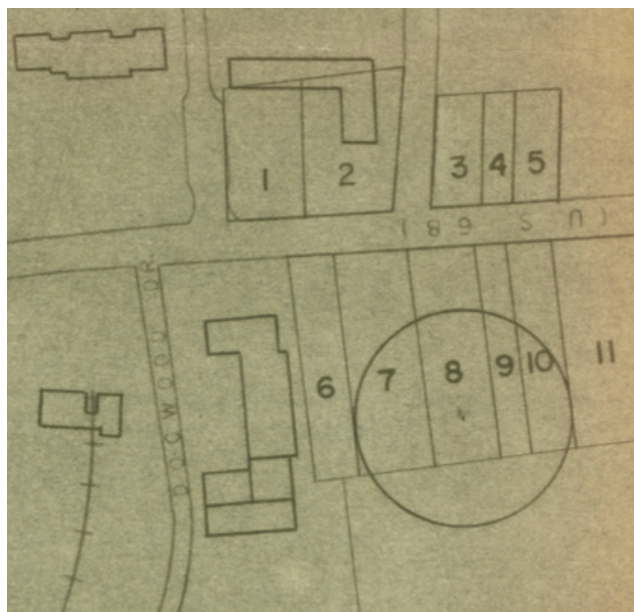
Even before the murder of George Floyd sparked the most widespread and sustained protests in the US since the Civil Rights Movement, the case for reparations had been re-emerging as a central demand of those calling for racial justice for African Americans in the United States. And although such a call may sound like novel ideas born of our present exigencies, scholars such as Roy L. Brooks, Charles P. Henry, or Robin D.G. Kelly would be quick to remind us that, since as far back as the end of the Civil War, there have been countless and varied proposals for reparations as partial compensation for the enslavement of Black people. Since then, calls for reparations have increasingly considered post-slavery injuries and injustices—such as Jim Crow laws, the exclusions of New Deal programs, voting restrictions, and police brutality—to be as central to their arguments for Black redress. This broader definition of reparations is a central thesis of Ta-Nehisi Coates's influential 2015 essay "The Case for Reparations," for example, which takes up the case of redlining and contract home-buying in Chicago. As Coates emphasizes, to properly understand the stakes and scope of the demands for reparations, we must reckon with the way that social, legal, and political institutions have wielded powerful tools – such as housing policy – to continue to injure, exploit, and compromise Black communities and Black people.

Nikole Hannah-Jones offers a most powerful recent example of the call for reparations in her essay "What Is Owed." Building on the legacy of numerous historians, legal scholars, and activists, Hannah-Jones constructs in just a few pages a sweeping, schematic history of the social, economic, and political inequities that have harmed African Americans. Hannah-Jones draws specifically on a 2018 Duke University study called "What We Get Wrong About Closing the Racial Wealth Gap," whose lead author is the economist and reparations scholar William "Sandy" Darity, Jr. Significantly, Darity et al. argue that the racial wealth gap is not just about poverty, nor about many of the other common "explanations" such as spending habits, education, or the lack of financial literacy. In fact, explanations such as these are myths that obscure an economic system "heavily infused at every point with both an inheritance of racism and the ongoing authority of white supremacy" (Darity et al. 3). Drawing on Darity's work, Hannah-Jones puts forward a strong case for the main target of reparations to be the wealth gap between White and Black Americans. In doing so, the case of reparations becomes about so much more than the fact of enslavement, attempting to account for and

repair the inequity wrought by a multi-faceted legacy of racial injustice against African-Americans in the United States.

When we put it this way, the university is hardly immune from critique – and not surprisingly, the university has become an important site of the renewed struggle for reparations. As of now, most critical attention both on the page and in the streets has been pointed at private, elite universities in which the fact of the university's founding during the antebellum US becomes a flash point for the discussions of the legacy of slavery. However, using my own university teaching context as an example, I will go on to insist that the discussion of reparations in the context of the American university need not – and indeed, should not – be limited to those institutions that were funded from slavery's profits or were literally built with slave labor. By discussing a course project that looks into my own university's history of racial injustice, I model one strategy for educators to take up the discussion of reparations while continuing to expand its reach to encompass more recent and ongoing injuries to Black communities.

I teach composition at Western Kentucky University (WKU), a public, regional-comprehensive university in Bowling Green, KY. Inspired by the recent intensification of reparations discourse and wanting to bring these issues home for students, I designed a course project in which students investigated and wrote about the history of Jonesville, a Black neighborhood in Bowling Green that was razed to make way for a major expansion of WKU in the 1960s. The displacement of hundreds of residents and the



A DETAIL OF A MAP SHOWING THE BASKETBALL ARENA AND PARKING STRUCTURES DRAWN OVER THE OWNERSHIP PLOTS OF JONESVILLE RESIDENTS. CIRCA 1963. COURTESY OF WKU ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS.

demolition of a vibrant neighborhood, legitimated by the laws of eminent domain and funded almost completely by federal urban renewal money, played a central role in the geographic and institutional expansion of WKU. This history – one that has analogous other examples at institutions across the country – should give us great pause. For

although there have been numerous attempts to theorize the ways that our classrooms *reflect* the racial inequities of our society, we must take more seriously that so many of our classrooms are literally *built* on the site of those inequities. Put simply: it's the ground beneath our feet.

My hope is that my course project and this article can contribute to the growing chorus of voices around the country calling for a reckoning with racial injustice. In addition to addressing the course objectives that concern academic writing, I had two pedagogical goals for my students: 1) to develop a deeper insight into issues of racism, history, and accountability; 2) to locate these issues in the past, present, and future of our own community and our own institution. In doing so, I am practicing two broad but significant pedagogical commitments: on the one hand, to respond to the calls of Gloria Ladson-Billings, bell hooks, and others to do "culturally relevant" anti-racist work in the classroom; and, on the other, to respond to the calls from Jeffrey Williams and others to "teach the university" – that is, to insist that the university and its cultural and social history be made a critical object of study.

Both critical genealogies demand that I locate myself within and as a product of this history. I am a White, cis-gender man teaching in buildings that were off-limits to Black students during segregation, and I am part of a faculty that is only 7% African American – a slightly lower percentage than the 8% of our student body that is African American (WKU Fact Book). Even using these superficial numbers demonstrates that our campus is deeply marked by the legacy of segregation and structured by the fact of racial inequity. What is more, I have a job in no small part thanks to the 1966 expansion of Western Kentucky State College into what is now Western Kentucky University. It was during this period of great expansion and reorganization that Jonesville was razed and its residents forced out. In other words, I both benefit from and am a product of exactly the racist and violent history I am asking my students to learn about, criticize, and imagine differently. I approach this topic not simply as a curious and distant historian but as someone whose social position as an instructor is conditioned directly by the razing of Jonesville, the displacement of its residents, and the theft of their accumulated wealth.

Using my assignments as a framework, I describe how I blend a desire to "teach the university" with a goal both to further and to localize calls for reparations. I discuss some of the strengths and limitations of the project, offering suggestions for teaching similar projects. I include student writing gathered from research projects and final reflection essays to give voice to my students' experiences and ideas, while presenting a critical self-reflection on my implementation of the project as a White, cis-male instructor. For scholars of both critical university studies and anti-racism, the university is hardly a transparent or neutral institution, but one that acts as a key site of the production and reproduction of the central inequalities that characterize our society. In what follows, I will show that teaching at this intersection can be especially powerful when we turn some

attention to the literal ground beneath our feet at our own institutions.

Course Context

I teach this unit in a 100-level composition course as part of my university's general education requirements. As a pedagogue, I specialize in teaching those who have been up until recently called "remedial" or "basic" writers, and many of my classes are an enhanced English 100 designed for students who are classified by university metrics as needing extra academic support. This is notable for at least two reasons: 1) my class meets five days a week, alternating between "class" and "writing lab" – as a result, these classes offer space and time that may be lacking in classes on a more traditional schedule; and 2) at my university, like many others, the way that racially-suspect standardized test scores are interpreted means that my enhanced classes have significantly more students of color than other classes– and, as a result, my classes are consistently composed of a majority or near-majority of students of color even though I teach at a predominantly White institution (PWI). In my classes, I mostly have students who identify as Black or White, but I routinely work also with students who identify as Latinx and Asian. Students tend to come from a mix of small, rural towns and counties as well as from large metropolitan areas, and this mix was well-represented by my students this term. Many students are first generation college students, and almost all students are working significant hours while taking classes.

To set up this assignment, my first unit asks students to critically examine their educational experiences, broadly conceived, before coming to college. We spend time in class sharing and comparing stories – often from high school – and hone a shared orientation of critical inquiry. To this end, we read selections from John Taylor Gatto and selections from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, and take a week to "unpack" several chapters of James Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me*. Modeled on one of the prompts from Bartholomae, Petrosky, and Waite's *Ways of Reading*, the first formal writing assignment requires students to choose an example from their educational experience and to "read it" like one of our assigned authors. In the context of an academic writing course, it is practice for students to place their own experience in conversation with an outside author, and for many students it reframes their frustrations and criticisms about their prior experiences with schooling. In the context of my course, this assignment is particularly useful because it prompts students to develop a critique of education that exceeds a criticism of any one teacher or principal. Conceptually speaking, this is a key component that makes way for the unit concerning reparations.

Here at WKU, 100-level composition classes are designed to achieve student outcomes that involve the successful use of primary and secondary sources, the ability to position their own voice in conversation with others, and a development of their ideas through feedback and revision. To this end, my 100-level courses often are centered around a large project in the middle of the semester in order to

provide ample time for students to read, research, and develop drafts along the way. Working in a relatively traditional department, these projects always arc toward individual, academic essays, though I also evaluate and provide feedback for many other aspects of the unit such as informal journal entries, process writing, thesis revisions, peer reviews, reflections, and the like. Thus, I grade these units more like portfolios than individual essays, and the goal here is for students to understand the essay as a part – a large part, indeed, but a part nonetheless – of a larger personal project.

The Case for Reparations at Western Kentucky University

The central reading for this unit was Ta-Nehisi Coates's essay "The Case for Reparations," which worked to both frame and inform our discussions. Before we read it, however, I introduced the class to the issues by screening a 2014 Bill Moyers interview with Coates, encouraging students to select moments from the discussion that seemed compelling, controversial, or about which they had questions. Students then developed a list of questions they would have liked to ask Coates about the issues, and we used this list as a kind of roadmap for reading Coates's essay. I would suggest this interview for a few reasons, but most importantly because of the ways that Coates so clearly articulates his view of reparations as a large-scale, government initiative as opposed to small-scale individual White "paybacks." The interview is also a good way for students to be introduced to Coates as an author and a thinker before diving into a long and – at least for many of my 100-level students – admittedly formidable essay. When we turned to the essay, we spent considerable class time looking at passages, developing our conceptual vocabulary, and understanding the nuances of Coates's analysis. I did my best to let student interest and concerns guide and shape our reading, though at times I interjected when I felt like the class might benefit for the sake of clarity or efficiency.

On the last day of that week, my class met at the Guthrie Tower, a twelve-story memorial bell tower at the center of our campus. Conceived in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks and erected in 2002, the Guthrie Tower honors veterans and "celebrate[s] the freedom we share as American citizens." Ornate granite etchings include depictions of a former university president and other prominent alumni and/or faculty that served in combat, depicting them in military uniforms and postures. The tower is surrounded by benches engraved with quotations from disparate historical figures such as George W. Bush, Mitch McConnell, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Visible from the tower are the main sports complex, including Football, Basketball, and Baseball Stadiums, parking garages, and other buildings, all of which occupy the place of the former Jonesville neighborhood. At this central crossroads of our campus, there is no marker or mention of Jonesville. But the tower offers a pleasant place to gather as a group, and so we met there, taking time to notice, write, and discuss what we saw and how we regularly experience this place. I asked

the students to take 10 minutes to observe and then describe what they see and how they feel here. In such close proximity to the student union, the sports stadiums, and the campus gym, much of our discussion centered on how many students see these places as important sites of community and identity as WKU students.

It was here that I chose to introduce the history of Jonesville to the students by way of handing out the essay assignment. Numerous students commented that this was a particularly effective gesture, one that worked to simultaneously reframe how they see their own campus as well as set the stage for our work to come. During one of my sections, an official campus tour group came through and – as if on cue – proceeded to laud the "awesome" sports facilities and the "super cool gym" at the "center of social life here at WKU." Of course, there was no mention of Jonesville, and once the tour left my students and I had a chance to reflect on the tour guide's script. Some students began to question right away whether the university has an obligation to inform prospective students of the history of the campus, and our discussion became a sort of first iteration of the work we would develop together over the next few weeks. Of course, such coincidences are difficult to schedule, but I was reminded of the way in which class-time out of the traditional classroom often allows for these kinds of unplanned yet highly teachable moments. In any case, the point was to give the students a chance to imagine a very different kind of community in the very place they now inhabit. For my students, it was a class discussion that grounded our work for weeks to come, often coming back up in subsequent discussions and then explored further in several final student essays.

From there, our class then spent time visiting two nearby museums: first the African-American Museum of Bowling Green, a small, converted house at a far edge of our campus that, though technically on university property, is independently maintained by a small group of mostly elders from our local Black communities; and the second, the Kentucky Museum, a grand, central gathering place and focal point of our campus that was built by the Public Works Administration and that is staffed by almost exclusively by White museum professionals and academics. The African American Museum consists of a few small rooms of pictures and artifacts that represent various aspects of Black history in south-central Kentucky. However, our visit there was first and foremost meant to give students a chance to hear from and engage with elders such as Maxine Ray, who had grown up in Jonesville and lived through its demise. Some students found these first-hand testimonies especially powerful and persuasive; as one student put it, Ray "actually lived through this. She actually knows what really happened." Judging by how often my students referred to our time at the African American Museum, it was clearly memorable for them to hear what it was like for a community of hundreds of people to be at turns denigrated and then displaced. I also received feedback from several of my Black students that they appreciated the chance to hear from African American elders, now positioned as experts and acting as a stark alternative to the predominantly White faculty of our

institution. For others, it was having an “up close” look into the historical realities of segregation that proved most memorable. One student commented, “I have heard of segregation, but I have never really seen things like signs that say ‘whites only’ or ‘colored only,’ and so for me that really made it real.” This also makes me think that some of the impact was more general, and it seems significant that students had a chance to learn about life in the Jim Crow South and the ways in which racism shaped daily life for everyday people – Black and White – in the place where they now attend college.

The Kentucky Museum, by contrast, is a large, corporate-funded museum with a mix of permanent and rotating exhibitions. The museum has a program called a “classroom close study” in which archival librarians and museum staff collaborate with faculty to present a hands-on classroom experience with artifacts from the University’s archives and special collections, and so before the semester I worked with staff to set one up concerning the Jonesville neighborhood. The trip to the Kentucky Museum, then, was meant to introduce students to a range of archival holdings that document the expansion of the university, the construction of the sports complexes, and the displacement of the residents of Jonesville. I expected a relatively “objective” presentation of the university’s holdings, but the archivists worked hard to reframe the issues to cast the university in a positive light. While I had requested a focus on documents and artifacts that highlighted the resistance to the University’s expansion and demolition of the neighborhood, the archivists chose to instead present documents that did not evidence this history, and to downplay the tensions and strife that were real, living historical forces at the time. As a result, we were able to see a sizeable collection of historical photographs, maps, and urban renewal documents, but my students were presented with a narrative of a benevolent university working in conjunction with African American community leaders to improve blighted and underutilized property.

At first, I was frustrated that my requests for the presentation had been so disregarded and assumed that my pedagogical goals would be significantly undercut. However, my students seized on the tension between the two

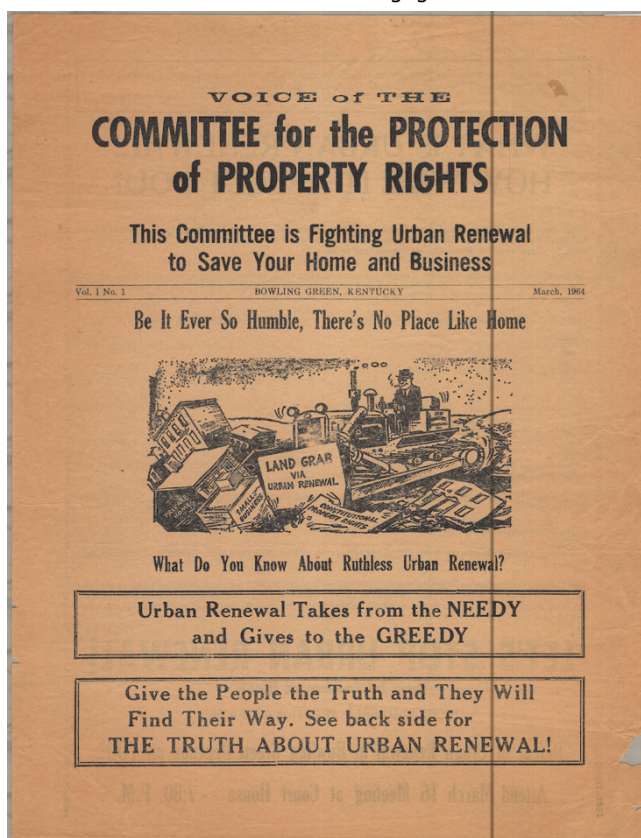
narratives presented at the respective museums. Upon reflection, student Bianca Wargel recalled an almost immediate response: “In my gut I had this funny feeling that something wasn’t right” (5). Sensing criticism from other students, too, I adjusted my class plans and decided to spend considerable time in the class periods that followed dwelling on these contradictions. As a result, we had probing and thoughtful discussions in comparing the voices, documents, narratives, and implications that we had all just experienced together. While some students found these contradictions an invitation to further investigation, others expressed clearly that they were suspicious – and in some cases, outright condemning – of what they perceived to be the University Archivist’s apologetic presentation of only part of the story. Reflecting on the experience, Kayla Jones wrote that even in the midst of numerous “official” documents, “when he [the archivist] was talking about the struggles of the community he conveyed that it wasn’t as bad as it was portrayed... [and] it felt like I was listening more to opinions on Jonesville instead of the facts and truth” (7). It was this tension that animated several of the best projects on the subject and also allowed my students to expand their engagement with mandated course outcomes. In this case,

engaging and evaluating different viewpoints, which I usually emphasize in the assignments that were to follow this one. Thus, a significant takeaway for me as a teacher was to trust my students’ existing critical abilities, and not to assume that my own curation of course materials is what completely determines my students’ own independent and powerful thinking.

The Dilemma of Inheritance: Student Responses

The central challenge for us as a class, then, was learning to articulate this dilemma as well as exploring creative ways to repair or repay our debts as a campus community. I lay out these ideas in the essay prompt:

In June of last year, Ta-Nehisi Coates testified before the United States Congress in a hearing for House Resolution (H.R.) 40, a bill that would establish a commission to study reparations. In a particularly cogent moment, Coates argued that “We recognize our lineage as a generational trust, as inheritance, and the real dilemma posed by reparations is just that: a *dilemma of inheritance*” (my emphasis). For Coates, American life presents us with the uncomfortable yet



A FLYER AGITATING AGAINST THE DESTRUCTION OF JONESVILLE, 1964. COURTESY OF WKU ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS.

defining choice to acknowledge the debt which we owe to those who have been mistreated in order to make way for us. Reparations for Coates and other thinkers like him is an acknowledgement that includes both words and deeds, and so part of our dilemma is not only to learn to articulate this inheritance, but also to creatively develop ways to repay our debts.

PROMPT: For your next essay, consider our dilemma of inheritance here at WKU with special regard to the historically African American community of Jonesville. For this essay to be successful, you will need to reflect on your personal experiences here at WKU, many of which literally take place where the Jonesville neighborhood once stood. And you will want to draw from our class trips to the African American Museum of Bowling Green and the Kentucky Museum, respectively, that will provide resources and artifacts that might act as anchoring texts for your essay. Additionally, you will need to do your own research and reading outside of class in order to inform and shape your writing.

In their papers, some students argued that the University was hiding the history of Jonesville, and that this was a significant injustice that needed to be addressed. For Bianca Wargel, this was most pronounced at the Kentucky Museum: “there wasn’t a single artifact on display about Jonesville, [and everything] we saw was in storage, out of view of the public” (5). In fact, Wargel was so taken by what she understood to be the contradicting narratives between the two museum presentations that her entire project attempted to come to terms with this tension. Other students, such as Courtney Ray, developed this insight as a frame for a broader discussion of the university and reparations:

We all have secrets... but sometimes secrets can affect people and their lives. The people in Jonesville have been kept a secret, and most people who either go to WKU or live in Bowling Green don’t even know how once Jonesville was right [where] WKU [now stands]. (1)

In a similar rhetorical move, Haley Flowers describes how it is possible to drive by WKU “every day and not ever know anything” about Jonesville, insisting “we need to start acknowledging what happened here on our own campus” (7). For students like Wargel, Flowers, and Ray, public acknowledgment is important because the institution carries a debt for this history. In order to partially repay it, the institution should acknowledge and actively educate the public about its role in the demolition of Jonesville and the displacement of its residents. In this vein, several students also felt that the Kentucky Museum should be compelled to represent Jonesville in its permanent displays.

Wanting to free this history from the space of a museum, Salvenia Hampton imagined numerous historical and informational markers around campus. “Every student and every tourist should have to learn about Jonesville,” Hampton writes, and WKU should “include Jonesville in every tour because that would make a huge difference” (7). For Hampton, more than finding space in the museum, incorporating the story of Jonesville into daily campus life is

what matters here. Similarly, Kayla Jones imagined at turns a large mural in Diddle Arena (our basketball facility) that would represent the neighborhood as it once stood, as well as a memorial marker that would replace the Guthrie Tower, given its central place on campus and proximity to the heart of Jonesville (8).

However, some students saw such measures as limited in their impact and explored other ideas: as Flowers writes, “A marker is not enough!” (7). Both Kayla Jones and Zion Brown argued that the African American Museum should be better funded and moved to the center of campus; for them, bringing the museum from the margins to the center of campus would not only be appropriate because “that was exactly where Jonesville was to begin with,” but would also signal more of a commitment to repairing what they take to be the ongoing marginalization of African Americans and their history at our institution. Taking this one step further, Courtney Ray and Su Meh suggested that the museum be consistently funded to specifically tell the story of Jonesville. Ray emphasized that doing so should be considered alongside other University-funded building projects: “in 2019, WKU is building a freshman village and adding on to the library, so I think we have money to spare for the African American Museum” (8). Noting the active construction around campus, students like Ray remind us that when we think of remembering Jonesville, we are dealing in the realm of priorities, not the lack of resources. Perhaps taking inspiration from the example of Georgetown University, where students voted in 2019 to offer a form of reparations to descendants of enslaved Africans who were sold in 1838 by the Jesuits running the school, Su Meh suggested that descendants of Jonesville be given free tuition at WKU, an idea that several other students took up as well.

Accounting for the Past: Post-Project Reflections

Reflecting upon the project, my students spoke again and again to the impact of the two museums. Their feedback noted how important it was to get out of the classroom, but also how much they valued getting to speak with community members and engage with archival documents. In developing their essays, a number of students expressed an interest in doing one-on-one interviews, but very few seemed interested in drawing on archived recorded and/or transcribed interviews. Even with historical photographs, though many expressed a keen interest in these artifacts and often referred to them in conversations, student engagement with such documents was very limited in their formal writing. This leads me to believe that I underestimated how much support the students needed to integrate these kinds of sources into their papers. In the future, I would build in clearer expectations and mechanisms of support for this aspect of the project.

I also should have provided more support to explore potential avenues of reparations. While I felt students were prepared to develop their ideas, many struggled to articulate responses that the institution could take, and very few chose

to develop responses that exceeded examples that were close at hand. I could imagine assigning readings from art history or museum studies that might encourage students to think more creatively and critically about their ideas for historical markers or monuments on campus. Alternatively, assigning a short piece that discusses the National Memorial for Peace and Justice might spark more far-reaching ideas. At the same time, I have reservations about tacitly endorsing symbolic steps, which might be seen as the limit to what is possible or appropriate. As reparations scholars such as Charles P. Henry, Roy L. Brooks, and Ana Lucia Araujo have suggested, this is a significant limit of current reparations discourse, and it seems critical for projects like this one to participate in the groundwork necessary to extend into what Henry calls asset- or community-building projects. With this in mind, perhaps learning about the work of Chicago Torture Justice Center (a community center that came out of years of organizing around police brutality by the Chicago Police Department) and related class activities could help students explore this limit. As my students showed, for some this limit was clearly problematic, but for most it was not something that warranted much comment or critical attention.

Similarly, many students seemed to struggle to connect our discussions with recent, highly publicized racist incidents on campus. And even when I introduced the history of the Student Government Association passing a resolution for reparations just a few years prior, it was met mostly with shrugs of disinterest; those students that did seem interested did not choose to link these events in their writing projects. Perhaps what I was experiencing is an example of what Eva Boodman has recently called in the pages of this journal “critique fatigue,” and my course design may benefit from more scaffolding so that students could see their own work as a part of other student-driven efforts to draw attention to these questions on our campus. In hindsight, I should have done more to familiarize these students with the “recent past” of our institution, and built in more time to discuss with students the ways that current debates about racism on campus resonated with our class’s concerns. Somewhat relatedly, it is certainly possible that students felt comfortable expressing criticism of the institution in the past, but less so toward the institution of the present.

I also failed at extending our inquiry into the land “beneath our feet” to include the history of Native Americans in south-central Kentucky. Given that the Shawnee and Eastern Cherokee peoples were stewards of the land long before the 1906 founding of what would become Western Kentucky University, my project as I taught it re-inscribes a violent displacement and erasure that lies beneath our conversations. In the short term, I plan to begin the class with a land acknowledgment, to focus specifically on those chapters in James Loewen’s *Lies My Teacher Told Me* that discuss how conventional historical narratives at turns misconstrue, deny, and legitimate Native American displacement and genocide, and to ensure that this theme is a thread that returns in later discussions and activities. In the long term, I hope to collaborate with colleagues in History and Folk Studies in order to develop this section of

the class. If we dare to imagine what a truly reconciled and equitable university could possibly look like in the context of a structurally divided and unequal society, then we must account for this “dilemma of inheritance” as well.

My whiteness, cis-gender maleness may have contributed in some significant ways to this project’s success as well as its limits. This project received mostly positive feedback from students and broad support from my colleagues, and even received a positive write-up in the school newspaper. As of now, I have not been accused of teaching “pet political projects,” have not been doxxed by right-wing trolls, and have had to face no charges of straying from what properly constitutes an introductory composition course. I wonder how this might be different for academics who embody subject positions that tend to command less respect on the job. My whiteness and cis-gender maleness also were consciously deployed when we hit snags as a class. When one White, male student stormed out in the middle of a discussion of White supremacy, I was able to appeal to him to not feel personally attacked in ways that are probably much less available to a woman of color, for instance. Checking in and following up with students of color created space for a range of discussions about their experiences in a PWI, and though I often “named” my whiteness in these exchanges, looking back I realize that I often only did so in small-scale conversations and not in front of the whole class, nor did I spend much time situating or troubling my own “dilemma of inheritance” for the students. I could narrate my own experience learning – but not living – the kinds of discrimination and displacement that our research explored without my intellectual authority or legitimacy in the classroom being questioned.

Such moments “cash in” on privilege in ways that may be in tension with the goals of my project, and I see significant limitations in my assignment sequence as well. Some of these are probably intractable in a department that places so much focus on distinct, dis-connected academic essays in early composition classes. Be that as it may, because my students were not expected to produce some kind of public project that ever risked being in conversation with the greater university, none of us ever had to grapple with public receptions or criticism of our ideas. To the degree that these questions are understood as private assignments about the isolated past, then they may be in tension with my goals to work as an ally toward significant, anti-racist institutional change and to design class work that potentially contributes to that change. I could imagine that organizing a public forum, much like the one Lora E. Vess has described, might be one way to extend and develop this project (117). Additionally, I am reminded that advocating for broader understandings of “acceptable” projects and diverse ways to meet student outcomes is a site of the politics of the university, and so therefore should also be one of the takeaways of this discussion.

By the end of the unit, students had learned that their institution has a history beneath the celebratory stories of expansion and integration. Perhaps even more importantly, students had the chance to grapple with how to account for that history. My students from Bowling Green and greater

Warren County, KY, reported that this this project doubly “hit home” in that our project changed not just their sense of campus, but of their hometown. As Su Meh wrote, “[Growing up in Bowling Green] I have heard many stories about segregation, slavery, and civil rights involving African-Americans, but one thing I did not know is that where I am standing on campus, as a student of Western Kentucky University, is a place someone once called home” (1). Haley Flowers decided to explore the limits of her own knowledge even further:

At first, I thought maybe I didn’t know about Jonesville because I was white. I started speaking to [family friend] Elise about Jonesville, but she had never heard of such a thing. I started to explain what Jonesville was and why it is no longer here. Mind you, Elise is African American, and she had absolutely no knowledge of Jonesville. While explaining everything to her, she makes these awful faces because she had no idea. She mentioned ‘After all of what you just told me, I let my son continue his education at Western. I’m glad he doesn’t go there anymore!’ This is a huge game-changer for most people. Western should let everyone know the truth behind their university being built. (6-7)

Seeing students take course content and using it their own lives, as Flowers does here, should be a significant mark of success for any teacher, and I am especially glad that students from here in Warren County could use our course to make connections with their lives in organic, practical, and potentially political ways.

Students also took this project as an invitation to think expansively about the institution as it stands today. Anatasia Phillips and Frederick Shute both indicated interest in exploring the way that a PWI could literally spring from the demolition of a Black neighborhood. For these students, our work together opened lines of inquiry that complicated the hegemonic stories of easy and frictionless integration of the university, especially hearing firsthand stories from community members at the African American Museum. In the course of their research, students unearthed stories of Black students admitted to the university but banned from living in dormitories, eating in cafeterias, or parking on campus; others students took interest in the diminishing enrollments of African American students at WKU and criticized low levels of support for minority and first-generation students. While these anecdotes are not directly related to the story of Jonesville, I observed a number of students beginning to take seemingly disparate “facts” and working to connect them. I count it as a great pedagogical success when students make such connections where before there were none. On a few occasions, these interests spilled over to the next paper assignment, and students developed essays calling for structural reforms such as free or significantly-reduced tuition for African American students from the region as well as significantly more academic and social support for African American students who choose to attend WKU.

To Teach the University is to Teach Reparations

While this project hewed closely to the particular contours of our university’s history, it is not so unique that it could not take shape in a number of different courses at a range of different kinds of universities. As scholars such as Georg Lipsitz and Mindy Fullilove have shown, from 1949 to 1970 urban renewal projects around the country displaced over 1600 African American communities. As opposed to the common narratives of broad shifts in the workforce, the development of Pell Grants, or the availability of federal research funding streams, the post-war expansion of the American university is also conditioned by the destructive, harmful, and often racist “development” projects of urban renewal. As scholars such as Sharon Harr and Davarian L. Baldwin have shown, the truth is that numerous public and private universities have a history – a history that is very much ongoing – of displacing African Americans and creating predominantly White residential enclaves in what were previously Black neighborhoods. Much of the work, and perhaps rightly so, has focused on metropolitan areas like Chicago. Hopefully, our project here at WKU can come alongside the work of Mia Taylor, Sophie Kahler, Connor Harrison, and others who are creating a critical archive of the ways that universities around the country have used urban renewal projects to fund expansions and displace African Americans. All that said, I do not think that casting a critical eye at urban renewal projects *per se* is essential to this project, nor should this be mistaken for a necessary component for others who wish to develop what Ball and Lai call “critical, place-based” projects with reference to their own institutional contexts. Put generally, I hope that this article demonstrates one more example of what it looks like when we articulate anti-racist concerns with a commitment to “teach the university” in order to frame course content.

In a quotation often cited in composition studies, David Bartholomae writes that each time a student sits down to write an essay, she has to “invent the university.” While Bartholomae is concerned with academic discourse, critical university studies scholars tend to take Bartholomae more literally. In a striking revision of Bartholomae’s claim, Heather Steffen has recently argued that there is great possibility for students and faculty who develop projects that dwell in the space “before the university’s invention is a *fait accompli*, when we encounter the university as an unfinished institution and when we might ‘dare to speak’ what we want from it” (20). By looking at historical examples of expansion, development, and growth of the university, one thing we are able to do is name those moments when the university reveals itself to be unfinished. And in those moments, we must summon the clarity and commitment to criticize any narrative of the university that denies the fact that it has been built on the unequal bestowing of advantage to some by way of injury to others. In the case of my university, the former residents of Jonesville deserve a commitment on the part of the institution to atone for their neighborhood’s destruction. Put simply, it could have been different. By daring to speak how things could have been different in the past – to borrow a formulation from Roy L. Brooks – we

attempt to right a heavy wrong in order to make the present and future university more racially harmonious. Here at WKU, my students have voiced – as have many students around the country – that accountability and reparations are what they want out of their university, and I think we should take them as seriously as any of the other scholars and activists I have cited here. At least at my institution, to teach the university is to teach reparations, and I hope that this article can contribute to a broad and nationwide movement to reckon with each and every university’s “dilemma of inheritance.”

Guiding Questions for Instructors:

- What other lives have lived here, and where have they gone?
- Knowing that this university has neither always existed here nor has magically appeared on this place, what can we learn about who was displaced for it to grow and expand?
- Urban Renewal projects ran from roughly 1949-1970. During this period, how does your institution change? Are there new buildings, stadiums, or infrastructure projects erected during this period?
- Does your university have librarians or archivists who could help source primary documents for students to engage?
- Are there elders in your community with living memories of communities that lived where the university now occupies? How could their stories trouble the narratives that the university cultivates?

Looking for texts to introduce and frame the question of reparations? Try these:

- Nikole Hannah-Jones, "What Is Owed" – published in the *NY Times Magazine* in wake of the murder of George Floyd and amidst the uprising of 2020, this article offers a clear and concise argument for economic reparations for Black people in the US
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations" – published in the *Atlantic* in 2014, Coates focuses on redlining and contract home-buying in Chicago in order to illuminate a legacy of injury to Black people from enslavement to the present
- Ways and Means Podcast, Feb 19, 2020, "Reparations: How It Could Happen" – in this podcast produced by Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy, leading reparations scholar William A. "Sandy" Darity discusses the topic with host Emily Hanford (~20 minutes)
- Moyers and Company video, May 21, 2014, "Facing the Truth: The Case for Reparations" – Bill Moyers interviews Ta-Nehisi Coates in a wide-ranging discussion of reparations that hews closely to Coates's piece in the *Atlantic* (~24 minutes)

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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Traditional and Critical Mentoring

by Aaron Stoller



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OPPORTUNITY AGENDA GRAPHICS, NINA MONTENEGRO (2019) VIA JUST SEEDS

The academy has long recognized that peer mentoring is an essential component of undergraduate learning and academic success. Almost all American colleges and universities have adopted some form of a formalized undergraduate peer mentoring program, which is usually centered on a site of student transition – for example, between high school and college, or as students enter a new program of study.

While undergraduate peer mentoring programs vary dramatically between campuses (Jacobi, 1991; Crisp & Cruz, 2009), their overall frame of reference is almost always the same: they view mentoring as a process of assimilating students into the existing cultures, practices, and values of an institution or group. The unspoken assumption of these programs is that the more quickly newcomers adopt the attitudes, skills, and languages of the institution, as well as build positive networks within the institution, the more likely they will be to remain and succeed academically. Almost all of the literature on undergraduate peer mentoring follows suit, focusing on the development of various models, methods, or approaches for facilitating this process (e.g., Chan, 2008; Hill & Reddy, 2007; Pitney & Ehlerst, 2004), or describing the characteristics of peer mentors who might be effective facilitators of this process (e.g., Cramer & Prentice-Dunn, 2007; Terrion & Leonard, 2007).

This article does not claim that traditional mentoring programs are ineffective in achieving their stated goals. There is a significant amount of evidence suggesting that these programs have a profound and positive effect on metrics such as student GPAs, retention rates, and graduation rates (Collings, Swanson, & Watkins, 2014; Cutright & Evans, 2016; Lane 2020). This article, instead, claims that traditional undergraduate peer mentoring programs are inadequate in achieving critical forms of education.

In the last twenty years, there has been a growing literature on critical mentorship (Margolis & Romero, 2001). Although these models and theories go far in advancing critical forms of mentoring, they are generally focused on mentoring graduate students through doctoral programs (Humble, Solomon, Allen & Blaisur, 2006), or mentoring new tenure-track faculty (Gair & Mullins, 2001). When these literatures do address undergraduate students, they typically focus on the needs of specific marginalized and minoritized populations in the context of historically white colleges and universities (Smith, 2013; Weiston-Serdan, 2017). As a result, critical mentoring theory and practice have yet to meaningfully impact the general discourse of undergraduate peer mentoring at the university level (Crisp & Cruz, 2009, p. 540). This essay is an attempt to bridge this gap.

It will begin with an overview of the four primary frameworks that ground traditional undergraduate peer mentoring programs in the US, which are broadly based on developmental theories. It will then present critical mentoring as an alternative theoretical framework, specifically focusing on how critical mentoring diverges in its conceptualization of the school and the student. Lastly, drawing on interviews with former critical mentors in my programs and my own lived experience, it will present a

model of critical mentoring in practice. Ultimately, this essay will argue that undergraduate peer mentoring should not focus on assimilating students to an academic culture but should establish a dialogical and critical relationship between students and the environment in which their education will be enacted. It is only by establishing such a relationship that we might begin to cultivate critical intellectual agency in our undergraduate students.

The Four Frameworks of Traditional Mentoring

Almost all undergraduate peer mentoring programs in the United States are grounded in one of four general mentoring frameworks, which I call “traditional” mentoring programs (Smith, 2013, p. 56; Gershenfeld, 2014, p. 366).

Mentoring as increasing involvement

The first framework views mentoring as a process of increasing student involvement in a wide variety of academic activities, as early as possible in a student’s college career. This framework draws from Alexander Astin’s theory of student involvement (Astin, 1977, 1984, 1999). For Astin, student involvement refers to “the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience” (Astin, 1999, p. 528). Involvement theory focuses exclusively on the behavioral mechanisms and processes that facilitate student development, as Astin argues that the extent to which students can achieve particular developmental goals is a direct function of the time and effort they devote to activities designed to produce these gains (Astin, 1999, p. 522). Astin’s theory is focused on involvement in any form, such as absorption in academic work, participation in extracurricular activities, and interaction with faculty and other institutional personnel (Astin, 1999, p. 528). However, because there is broad recognition by most colleges and universities that student success is linked to academic performance, mentoring programs grounded in this framework typically encourage mentors to focus on encouraging mentees to get involved in a wide variety of traditional academic activities, such as increasing academic “time on task” activities like increased studying, as well as participation in undergraduate research opportunities (Smith, 2013, p. 56).

Mentoring as facilitating integration

A closely related framework views mentoring as a process of facilitating students’ integration into the academic and social life of the campus. This framework is based primarily on Vincent Tinto’s theory of academic and social integration (Tinto, 1975, 1982, 1993). Tinto argues that students are much more likely to persist and thrive if they are connected to the academic and social life of the institution, both within and outside the immediate context of the academic learning environment. By integration, Tinto means students’ overall sense of belonging in campus culture, as evidenced by things like their willingness to participate in extracurricular activities, their overall feeling of involvement in and comfort with their academic

experiences, and their general feeling of connectedness to other students and teachers (Severiens & Schmidt, 2009). Tinto argues that individuals reformulate goals and commitments as a result of such integrative experiences and that positive experiences serve to reinforce institutional commitment. Mentoring programs of this type generally focus on creating positive academic and social experiences for undergraduate students as a means of helping them feel less alienated and building positive familiarity with the school environment. For instance, mentors may provide their mentees with opportunities to engage in informal socialization with faculty, staff, and other administrators so that they can build strong social networks (Smith, 2013, p. 56).

Mentoring as providing support (and challenge)

A third approach to mentoring views it as a process of offering students positive social support during the various challenges they face in the course of their education. This framework can be traced to psychologist Nevitt Sanford's studies of college students in the early 1960s (Sanford, 1962, 1966). Stanford argues that optimal student growth requires that academic and challenges must be met with social-emotional supports so that students can sufficiently tolerate the stress of the challenge itself (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). Challenges that students face can be motivated either internally or externally, and occur when the challenge upsets the current equilibrium of the student (Evans, Forney, Guido, & Patton, 2010). The student may respond to a challenge in a variety of ways. If the challenge overwhelms the student, he or she may retreat and not grow from it. A reciprocal danger is that too much support is provided in relation to the challenge, in which case support results in stagnation in growth (Evans, Forney, Guido, & Patton, 2010). Finding an adequate balance between providing challenges to and support for students is the key to this approach. Mentoring programs deploying this framework encourage mentors to meet with their mentees regularly to discuss concerns and provide support related to the student's entire college experience. For example, if a student has financial-aid issues, her mentor might call the Financial Aid office and make a personal request that the office schedule a meeting with the mentee (Smith, 2013, p. 57).

Mentoring as role modeling

A fourth framework for mentoring deliberately places various student developmental theories at the center of the mentoring relationship. There is a range of various developmental theories driving this approach to mentoring, such as Arthur Chickering's theory of identity development (Chickering, 1969), William Perry's theory of intellectual development (Perry, 1970/1999), or Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development (Kohlberg, 1971). Mentoring programs of this type typically emphasize the mentor's awareness of the developmental stages of their mentees, rather than any specific behavior that might be engaged to move through those stages (Thomas, Murrell, & Chickering, 1982). These programs also place a high emphasis on the selection of mentors who represent "advanced" developmental stages and can serve as role models for the

kind of attitudes and behaviors desired of mentees (Smith, 2013, p. 57).

Critical mentoring as an alternative paradigm

Each of the four traditional mentoring frameworks intends to support students' agency through fostering a process of assimilation while, at the same time, activating developmental stages in students. The first three frameworks (i.e., involvement, integration, and support) are concerned with the behavioral mechanisms or processes that facilitate student development through student assimilation to culture, while the fourth (i.e., role modeling) emphasizes modeling developmental outcomes of the mentoring relationship (Astin, 1999, p. 522). There is no doubt that traditional mentoring frameworks provide a useful heuristic for guiding undergraduate mentoring practice. However, from a critical perspective, they also hold problematic core assumptions that not only undermine the very aims they intend to achieve but also commit unintentional acts of violence to the very students they intend to serve.

Traditional mentoring begins with the assumption that the school, as the site of student learning and growth, is either value-neutral or yields unilaterally positive impacts on students. In traditional approaches, the school is understood as little more than a container in which a generalized process of development is carried out.

Traditional mentoring's emphasis on "unlocking" inner developmental realms of the student has a long history in educational theory. It can be seen in Plato's theory of recollection, through Rousseau and his followers in educational theory, such as Kant and Pestalozzi. It moved into modern educational theory through early behaviorists like E.L. Thorndike. All of these theorists had a significant impact on the contemporary understanding of education, and all saw the process of learning as essentially a conflict between a human being's original (inner) nature and an (outer) social world (Russell, 1993, p. 176). This binary between person/environment remains rooted in traditional mentoring frameworks, rendering them incapable of accounting for the dynamic interrelatedness of history, culture, institutions, and the entanglements of persons and environments.

Critical mentoring, on the other hand, rejects the binary between person and environment, instead understanding persons as dialogically interrelated to and independent with the environments they inhabit. Critical approaches view learning as a socially situated process mediated through various environments, each with its own set of values, aims, cultures, and power relationships. Learning is a unique, context-bound process that takes place in and through all the environments a student inhabits (e.g., the classroom, dorm room, and athletics field).

Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991), for example, argue that learning is a process of gaining increasingly

legitimate “peripheral participation” inside communities of practice (p. 29). Learning is neither a process of value-neutral knowledge transmission (top-down) nor is it a process of passing through universal developmental stages (bottom-up). Instead, it is a culturally entangled process of developing modes of thinking and acting in live situations. At the same time, it is a process of increasing fluent inhabitation within communities where capacities and knowledge find their meaning and value (p. 53). Integration into a community of practice demands that members gain increasing fluency regarding the community’s core values, can operate according to implied rules, and have the ability to engage in forms of practice (e.g., modes of writing, speaking, and thinking) specific to that community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This process also affects a deep, transformative change on the individual who increasingly becomes “a full participant, a member, a *kind of person*” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53; emphasis added). What this means is that students, themselves, are social and cultural constructions that emerge from and are shaped by the environments they inhabit.

While there are undoubtedly positive effects of such socialization processes on student growth, critical mentoring also understands the process of learning as being mediated through patterns of domination and resistance between individuals and these environments. From a critical mentoring perspective, one of the most significant problems with traditional mentoring is that it evacuates the cultural politics of the institution and how those cultural politics shape the experience and identities of students. As a result, traditional mentoring fails to give students the tools to recognize the effects of this process of socialization on their emerging identities, nor are students given the critical tools necessary to engage the processes of socialization dialectically. Without holding such a critical awareness, learning and growth can easily slip from a form of empowerment into a process of alienation, marginalization, and colonization.

Critical mentoring begins from the perspective of the students who are being socialized by the school. It assumes neither that the needs of students align with the institution, nor that the processes of institutional socialization have a positive impact on students (Margolis & Romero, 2001). Critical educational theory has a long history of identifying and analyzing the colonizing effects of schooling practices on the growth and identities of students. Although these critiques look at the effects of schooling from a variety of perspectives, such as race (Yosso, Smith, Cega, Solórzano, 2009), gender (Carlone & Johnson, 2007), sexuality (Vaccaro, 2012), class (Taylor, 2008), etc..., what they share in common is an understanding that without attention to structures of power, domination, and resistance, schooling is largely a site of colonization that marginalizes and oppresses students. Critical mentoring is therefore aimed at fostering students’ *critical agency*. Here, agency is understood as the capacity of a student to bring about self-directed change and whose achievements are judged only in terms of the values and objectives set by the students themselves (rather than the goals the institution may have

for him or her) (Sen, 1999). Working toward critical agency demands that a student develop the capacity to critically engage with (e.g., drawing from, resisting, reconstructing) the cultures, values, and practices of a school in the service of his or her self-articulated goals.

This goal of critical agency is built on the foundations of critical theory in that it takes human emancipation as its guiding interest. It also understands mentoring as a process of enabling students to meditate and respond to the intersection between their own lived experiences and the normative structures and cultures of the institution (Giroux, 1983). Critical agency demands that mentors empower and enable themselves and their mentees to take a dialectical (rather than monological or unidirectional) stance toward institutional culture.

Critical agency is grounded in Paulo Freire’s notion of critical consciousness (1970/2000), a process in which people learn how to critically analyze their social conditions and act to change them (Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011). Freire’s model for critical consciousness rejects a universalized understanding of human development, such as those underpinning traditional mentoring programs. Instead, it understands growth as emerging out of the specific material and political contexts of individuals who work to conceptualize, critique, and reconstruct both their social roles and the overarching social order in which those roles are manifested. Traditionally, this process has been oriented toward the liberation of marginalized and minoritized populations because systems of domination impact these communities in specific and devastating ways. However, I understand critical consciousness as a wider concept that can be applied as a central conceptual tool within the context of mentoring. Taken in this wider sense, critical consciousness is a process by which any person works to disembody themselves from the norms, values, and expectations of their immediate cultural, social, and political environments via engaging in critical analysis and dialogue. It also requires those persons to take active efforts to reconstruct both their place in that environment and the environment itself (Mustakova-Possardt, 1998).

Critical Mentoring in Practice

In the previous section, I described how critical mentorship begins with the assumption that learning and growth are culturally and socially situated, and is mediated through patterns of domination and resistance between individuals and these environments. Further, the aim of critical mentorship is the cultivation of students’ agency through a process of critical consciousness-raising leading to praxis. This section will build on the previous two by offering an account of critical mentoring practice grounded in my own experiences and the experiences of former mentors in my program.

Background

I have attempted to develop a framework for critical undergraduate peer mentoring over the last 13 years of working as a professional in institutions of higher education. This section describes how I put that framework into practice between 2011-2012 and 2015-2016 (five years) in a first-year mentoring program in the context of a small, centralized University Honors Program (UHP) at a large, public land-grant research university situated in an urban context (University A). The university itself served approximately 26,000 undergraduate students of which 750 were students in the UHP. The UHP student body was broadly reflective of the institution as a whole: 55% male and 45% female; 67% White; 7% Asian; 6% Hispanic/Latino; 6% Black or African American; 4% International; 10% not reporting. The mentor program was made up of approximately 12 students annually, ranging from sophomores to seniors, who mentored approximately 200 incoming first-year UHP students. The majority of the first-year UHP students and all the mentors lived in the Honors Living-Learning Community (LLC).

During the first three years at University A, mentors worked with a "cluster" of mentees made up of a relatively equal number of incoming UHP students. The clusters were equally distributed based on core diversity metrics such as race, ethnicity, gender, and choice of major. Mentors were assigned randomly to these clusters. During this time, mentees lived in different areas of campus and were placed into different Honors first-year seminars. During the final two years at University A, each mentee cluster was designated by incoming UHP students' enrollment in a specific Honors first-year seminar. Mentors were assigned to each cluster/class through a collaborative process between my office and the faculty teaching first-year seminars. In addition to living in the LLC, mentors would attend these first-year seminars, often serving in a leadership role for the faculty member.

At University A, mentor training took place over three half-days scheduled before first-year students arriving on-campus.¹ These three days were organized to move from the theoretical into the practical. Over the summer, mentors were required to read the first three chapters of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The first day of training was focused on learning the core constructs of critical pedagogy through a combination of whole-group dialogue and individual reflection. The second day of training was focused on critical analysis through having mentors critically unpack their own educational identities and analyze the education environment of the university itself. To foster critical self-reflection on their identity, the mentors were asked to create a critical autobiography mapping their past educational

experiences and then critically interrogating those experiences through the lens of race, class, gender, and sexuality. These autobiographies were shared in the group. As the facilitator, I also created and shared my critical autobiography. The second day also included a critical ethnography of physical space on campus. In this exercise, small groups of mentors chose a space on campus (e.g., the library, a classroom auditorium, the blueprint of campus itself) and analyzed it in terms of the way space was based on a particular set of beliefs about learning and student identities, as well as how space actively shaped the undergraduate students' process of learning and educational self-perception. The final day of training was focused on mentoring practice through learning techniques for interpersonal dialogue and community organizing. This third day of training was important because mentors in University A were not expected to organize traditional mentor "programs," but instead to view their role in terms of Freire's model for critical pedagogy: listening, dialogue, and action leading to praxis (see Figure 1).

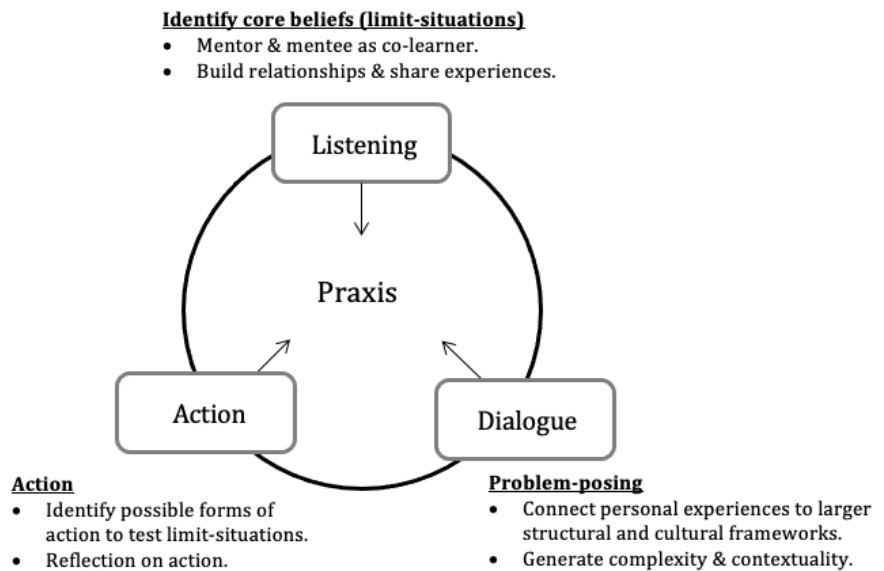


FIGURE 1: CRITICAL PEDAGOGY FOR UNDERGRADUATE PEER MENTORS

Rather than having 1:1 meetings with me or submitting programming reports as is common practice in traditional mentoring programs, mentors gathered every two weeks throughout the year in dialogue circles (3 mentors and one professional staff member).

The central expectation for mentors was building relationships with their students and trying to actualize Freire's model (see Figure 1). Because critical pedagogy is not a method but a process (Bartolome, 1996; Degener, 2001), mentors were not required to conform to a pre-defined set of methods (i.e., meeting with students X times per month or holding Y number of programs). Instead, mentors were required to develop their plan for mentoring at the start of the year and to discuss that plan in the

dialogue circle. Mentors were then asked to engage, reflect on, and (as needed) adjust the plan as the year progressed. In addition to the individual plan for action, mentors were asked to keep a mentoring journal to reflect on their experiences and keep notes about general themes and patterns they noticed in their work with students. The dialogue circles were semi-structured and used as a time to reflect on the last two weeks, to share experiences, and to help generate ideas about how each mentor might move forward over the next two weeks.

Reflections from Former Mentors

In preparation for this article, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 8 former mentors (out of ~50 total) who participated in various iterations of the mentoring program at University A. These interviews were transcribed and then thematic patterns were identified using a grounded theory approach. It is important to note that these findings represent a small, self-selected sample of former mentors who were invested enough in the experience to volunteer to be interviewed 3-7 years post-graduation. Despite this limitation, I believe that these themes support what I have witnessed from my own experience facilitating critical mentoring programs for the past 13 years.

1. Critical mentoring reframed the mentors' understanding of their educational process and gave them critical tools to empower themselves as students.

All the students interviewed expressed the idea that there was a shift that occurred during the experience as they came into contact with core ideas in critical pedagogy and began to recognize how they were socialized by the institution of schooling. Many of them expressed that gaining this understanding helped them beyond the mentor role, but was more broadly applicable in understanding themselves as a university student:

More than anything else, I think [the experience] helped to partially remove me "mentally" from the structure I was working in, including the very structure of being [a mentor]...I can equate it as a slightly less vivid version of studying abroad, which removes you entirely from what you're used to, and as a result, you can look back on what's familiar with a more critical and observant eye. After our reading sessions...it eventually gave me an invaluable perspective when it comes to being able to think on my own and operate within a predetermined structure without feeling as if I was held back by it.

I think being [a mentor] had more of an impact on me than on my mentees. In my opinion, I don't think I was very good at my job...I don't feel like I ever quite lived up to the dialogical expectations. Although, being a [mentor] helped to change my conception of education.

[What I realized is that] education influences who you are and how you instinctively interact with the world, not just the content of your thoughts.

2. Not all mentors in the program embraced the process or the theories

The idea that not all mentors embraced critical mentoring was mentioned by only one of the interviewees. However, I believe the comment is significant not only because the interview group self-selected specifically because they embraced the mentor role, but also because it is confirmed by my own experiences facilitating these programs. One interviewee commented:

...the number of [mentors] who actually cared about this was quite limited in my experience. Some [mentors] simply did not understand the task they were inheriting. I say this in all goodwill and harbor no contempt. Just an honest observation.

3. Those who embraced critical mentoring often struggled with the ideas in the context of the mentoring role.

In my interviews, this notion was expressed in two ways. First, almost all interviewees noted that as undergraduates they struggled with how to mediate the role without falling into cynicism about schooling:

The constant push to critically evaluate everything around us left me feeling very lost and uncertain. The perpetual, peer-pressured quest to identify what was wrong in everything around me left very little to cling onto as a way of finding some sort of truth and direction in the world.

I think that perhaps one of the inherent "dangers" of approaching mentorship from a critical perspective is that you are constantly critical (or at least questioning) of the system *and* of yourself, and this is multiplied exponentially in students who are possibly already more conscientious than your average [student].

Additionally, several mentors noted that the very act of taking a critical approach inserted a power dynamic between them and their mentees, even if they understood this was not the intention:

[Mentors] could very easily get caught up in the pedagogy and theory of critical thinking. At times, this, unfortunately, lead to a bit of a "superiority" complex amongst [mentors] (ironic because *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is an antithesis to this very problem), so keeping things in perspective was incredibly important to make sure that students realized that in order for this method to be practical (and helpful), it had to be connected with everyday life and had to come from a position of collective learning.

The idea of rejecting the mentor role as a position of power was one I was very happy with, though I always wrestled with what I saw as some degree of tension between the rejection of the banking model of education and the idea that the [mentors] had access to a "correct" view of approaching the world in critical theory that we were supposed to get others to come around to. The process of teaching in the two models may be different, but the fundamental idea that the mentors are right-er and the mentees wrong-er was still there.

4. *Internalizing the theory took multiple years of working in the mentoring program, or happened only years after graduation.*

Several mentors noted that they had re-read *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* after graduating and that it had begun to make more sense in the context of their professional lives. Two interviewees who were in the mentor role for several years as undergraduate students noted:

Reading Freire was significant in that way, then, though I don't know if I could say that I really got it at first. It took at least one more reading and several more years of being embedded in that environment and that peer group for those ideas to really sink in.

I almost felt like I "transformed" in my [mentor] journey — my first year was all about action orientation and figuring out *how* to be a mentor to my students, in my second year I was much more focused on the *ideas* behind why I was in this role, and in my third year I really felt like I was able to internalize them and was hopefully a better translator of these concepts, not only for the students in my cluster but also for myself.

5. *The community of practice within the mentor group was highly significant in their growth.*

Almost all mentors noted the community of practice within the mentor group was not only essential to them learning how to practice critical mentorship, but was highly significant to their growth. Most noted that the mentor learning community was far more significant than the work done with mentees:

If you do take as a starting position that the mentors are also in a process of development, then the environment [of] the mentor is one of the most important factors in determining how any program of critical mentoring is developed and sustained. ... [the] friendships I had with other current and former [mentors] was probably the biggest factor shaping the ideas I took in with me to the mentorship process.

6. *The community of practice was a freeing space within an otherwise non-critical or instrumental schooling environment*

This was an idea noted by several mentors, but it was expressed as both a positive and negative virtue of critical mentoring. Positively, many mentors expressed the idea that their community of practice was a space in which they felt free to discuss ideas and ask critical questions in a way that was different from other spaces on campus:

To engage in dialogue as an equal with an older mentor amid countless questions was to have the space to think critically and be forgiven...The space to test out unformed thoughts without judgment was a gift...

However, many also expressed that this critical orientation was simply not present in the rest of the university. This wider, non-critical environment shaped their expectations as they entered the role, often making it

difficult to conceptualize what the program expected of them:

My model for education had been up to that point very transactional/didactical, where I would be the knowledgeable one, the explainer. If only I knew something well enough and had the right words, I could help somebody come to an understanding. This model had been reinforced by my experience as a teaching assistant/tutor in other parts of the university, the computer science, and physics departments.

It also impacted their ability to carry out the role with their mentees:

...it's just hard to critically mentor students when they are 90% of the time surrounded by what I might call "non-critical" classes across the university. ...I wholly accept that it's still possible to critically mentor a sincere student even if they are surrounded by bad educational influences across the university. But it's just harder to find those sincere students amidst all of the conflicting messages they get in other classrooms across campus. It's like fighting a tidal wave with a fist-sized rock. The rock works, but there is too much water. Someone has to really love and recognize the value of the rock for the rock to become useful.

It is important to note, as a facilitator of a critical mentoring program at both University A and, now, at a small, residential liberal arts college, this is a continued theme I hear from mentors. In my experience, the idea of the "non-criticality" of the university environment is not correlated to University A being a research institution but is generally descriptive in my experience of a basic lack of reflectivity present in most college and university environments, including liberal arts colleges.

7. *Although challenging, it was an experience that had a positive impact on their learning and growth.*

Several mentors noted this idea, but contextualized it by saying that it was impossible to differentiate what they learned "as a mentor" from other aspects of their undergraduate experience:

Something I strongly associate with my time [as a mentor] was the constant push not to take the world around me for granted, but criticize and question. I am cautious, though, to say how much of this was due to [the mentor experience] and how much was just [being] a young person in college...[The mentor program] certainly was different in that it attempted to give the criticism structure, but I think the most important factor is actually the peer group. It is more about being surrounded by other people who were pushing those same frames of criticism.

However, almost all noted that it was an overall positive experience that has had residual impacts on their thinking and lives:

I think the main thing that sticks is a certain attitude/approach/internal character change that shapes how I interpret and interact with in the world.

I think a takeaway from my experience as a [mentor] and reading [*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*] is that the conversation is the fundamental unit of politics. In order to change people's beliefs you needed to develop a relationship with them.

To this day I still keep in touch with a few of my cluster, as friends...and being a [mentor] was one of the most defining experiences of my undergraduate career.

Reflections from a mentor facilitator

In addition to insights from former mentors, I would add the following four ideas based on my experience building and facilitating critical mentoring programs.

1. *Understand that critical mentoring is a complex learning experience for mentors*

Having led both traditional and critical programs, I have seen that although there is certainly learning and growth that occurs for mentors in traditional mentoring programs, it is of an entirely different kind than in a critical program. In traditional programs, expectations are clear, pathways to success are defined, and the labor is entirely practical. Critical programs, on the other hand, are not simply a form of practice but are a process of experiential learning for the mentors. Critical mentors are asked to confront their own identities and the system in which they work. They are also expected to become intellectually involved in their work in a way that is simply not present in a traditional program. This reality means that significantly more effort must be spent attending to their needs as learners throughout the process.

In my experience, there are always new mentors who expect to do the work of traditional mentoring and are frustrated by the ideas and expectations they find in a critical program. In these cases, I have found it important to allow them to make decisions about what kind of mentor they would like to become. For some, this means allowing them to leave the role with dignity if the expectations become too overwhelming. For others, it means developing a plan of work that creates a bridge between critical practice and their values.

Another (more frequent) learning challenge is mentors who are emboldened by the ideas, but who struggle translating those ideas to practice. In my experience and as evidenced in the interviews this leads to three different kinds of challenges: (a) mentors often incorrectly translate the framework into a kind of superiority complex, (b) they become paralyzed by a critical stance, or (c) they become overwhelmed by what they perceive as a lack of immediate impact of their work. Consistent reflection and the use of dialogue circles are essential to addressing all of these needs. In my experience, dialogue circles helped deepen mutual understanding and, more significantly, gave me - as a facilitator - an opportunity to identify, assess, and intervene when mentors were struggling. The dialogue circles also allowed me to continually remind them that self-reflection and time away from the position is a legitimate form of critical practice. More recently, I have moved to a

model where all mentors are required to take a 1-credit practicum course which is organized in the same way as dialogue circles. The credit-bearing model allows us to dive deeper into the root causes and potential pathways for action on the issues they see in their mentee groups.

2. *Treat critical mentoring as a legitimate form of intellectual labor*

The credit-bearing practicum model also addresses another challenge, which is getting the mentors to conceptualize and embrace this work as a legitimate form of intellectual labor. Since students are socialized into the traditional schooling paradigm of "academic" vs "non-academic," it was difficult in the early days to get new mentors to read or legitimately engage with critical theory outside a traditional classroom context. It was equally difficult to get them to meaningfully reflect on their experience through journaling (which is an expectation for all mentors). Most entering mentors simply view "thinking" as an activity strictly for the classroom and "doing" (e.g., organizing events, advertising opportunities, formal meetings) as the primary activity of a job. As such, many new mentors did not embrace the role as a form of intellectual labor.

Placing the mentoring program in the context of a practicum course blurred the boundaries between the "academic" and "non-academic," and helped give a framework for mentors to understand that activities such as reading, reflection, and dialogue were included as a legitimate form of work within mentoring practice. It also helped mentors understand why they should invest thoughtfully in the construction of a mentoring plan. As previously mentioned, critical pedagogy is not a method but a process. As such, mentors are required to construct their own grounded methods of practice in conversation with their dialogue circle. Through the years, this expectation has frustrated many mentors who prefer a methodological template (i.e., programming model) to be provided to them so they can easily complete the "tasks" required of them in the role. In requiring them (with the support of a dialogue circle) to create a mentoring plan, they are forced to ask critical questions and take intellectual ownership over their mentoring practice. Outside of a classroom context, this was often frustrating or overwhelming for mentors.

3. *Calibrate expectations carefully and appropriately*

Mentors who embrace the role often struggle with understanding its norms and expectations. On the one hand, some students find it difficult to "know" if they are doing enough in the role absent traditional markers (i.e., numbers of programs produced or student contact hours). On the other hand, there are students whose expectations for impact are far too lofty and believe that their goal is to revolutionize the institution of schooling overnight. In both cases, it is important to develop a communal understanding of "success" in the position.

I typically hold an initial workshop on "defining success" in the context of late summer training in which we collectively map our ideas of success and connect those

ideas to particular impacts. The facilitator must be heavily involved in this process to norm expectations appropriately. I then ask all mentors to include a section on “successful” mentoring in the context of their mentoring plan, which we review periodically in mentoring dialogue circles.

For mentors who struggle with what they view as a lack of clear guidelines, this process helps them feel confident they are making progress toward a goal. It also opens the door to allow a discussion regarding why activities that don’t “feel” like work (e.g., spending time in reading, reflection, and dialogue with mentees) are legitimate forms of activity that contribute to their overall success. For mentors who overestimate what is possible in the role, this exercise also helps ground their enthusiasm in smaller, more achievable steps. For example, rather than having *critical consciousness* as a goal of their mentoring activity, I will often redirect them in the first semester to simply focus on relationship building. This can be demonstrated, for example, by mentors being able to reflect on meaningful conversations they’ve had with their mentees, and articulate critical questions they want to ask them in future conversations.

4. *Take seriously the challenge critical mentoring presents to institutional paradigms.*

Like other forms of critical pedagogy, critical mentoring is empowering *because* it challenges traditional ways of being and behaving. It is therefore highly important that mentor program facilitators recognize and take seriously the inherent dangers in this process. Throughout the years, I have worked with mentors who have gone beyond dialogue to critical action leading to activities like organized protests, sit-ins, and campaigns (both on- and off-campus). In all of these cases, the mentor facilitator must be aware of these emerging activities, help the mentors and mentees contextualize their ideas, imagine possibilities for action, and identify potential consequences of those actions.

Additionally, this work - like all critical work - means that the mentor facilitator can quickly become the object of criticism from other faculty, staff, and administrators. These criticisms can be limited and local, or can become more serious. It is important that, like the mentors themselves, facilitators understand their positionalities and limits. In my work, I have been repeatedly criticized by staff and assessment professionals for facilitating a program that is not easily quantifiable and does not map onto pre-defined learning goals. I have also been criticized by upper administration for “encouraging” students to engage in behaviors that do not reflect well on the institution’s brand.

I have been most frequently criticized, however, by faculty. These criticisms are typically motivated because this work - like all critical pedagogies - problematizes traditional faculty authority. On one hand, there are those faculty who oppose it because it often leads to students (both mentors and mentees) questioning the built environment of the classroom learning environment. On the other hand, there are those faculty who oppose it because they believe it undermines the formal curriculum and classroom being the seat of student learning. For example, after I explained the

aims and scope of my critical mentoring program to a curious faculty member, I received the following email:

This looks to me like encasing students in a cocoon which circumvents self-discovery...and it promotes the administrative structure over the academic. This is social engineering at the expense of the life of the mind.

Here, the faculty member expresses the idea that “the mind” is the exclusive domain of traditional faculty members and any form of practice that challenges or questions this idea is a form of “social engineering.” It is therefore important that the mentor facilitator understand they are also embedded in the work and that this positionality comes with particular dangers.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have sought to advance a critical basis for undergraduate peer mentoring, which diverges from the traditional frameworks guiding most undergraduate peer mentoring programs in the US.

While there is no doubt that traditional mentoring frameworks have provided useful frameworks for supporting students’ transition to and integration in colleges, they have failed to account for the potential negative effects of mentoring and the wider socialization processes on mentees. Implicit in traditional mentoring models is the idea that the socialization process is not only positive but also more “successful” for those aligned with the values of the institution. The goal of mentoring is assimilation or, for those who are misaligned with institutional values, to code-switch as a way of becoming more institutionally accepted and acceptable. Left out of these discussions is the acknowledgment that such processes have a colonizing effect on the identities of students who are expected to submit to a distinct cultural consciousness (often rooted in normative class, race, and gender assumptions) to become legitimate participants (Gair & Mullins, 2001, pp. 35-36).

Critical mentoring, on the other hand, is a process of naming, critically analyzing, and resisting the invisible forces of domination that shape students’ experiences and emerging identities. From a critical standpoint, undergraduate mentoring is an intervention: it is a way of provoking critical engagement with culture. In doing so, mentorship becomes a practice of critical empowerment that enables students to recognize their capacities and values in dialectical relationship to the institution in the pursuit of critical agency.

Notes

¹At University A, I was not successful in implementing a required, semester-long mentoring class, but I did teach a spring Honors course in critical pedagogies that became an informal training opportunity for aspiring mentors. It was quickly apparent that the students who took this class were more prepared for the critical mentoring role. I have since developed this class into a critical mentoring practicum that meets once per week throughout the Fall semester and is required for all mentors (new and returning) in my current

program. The course blends core reading with practical reflection.

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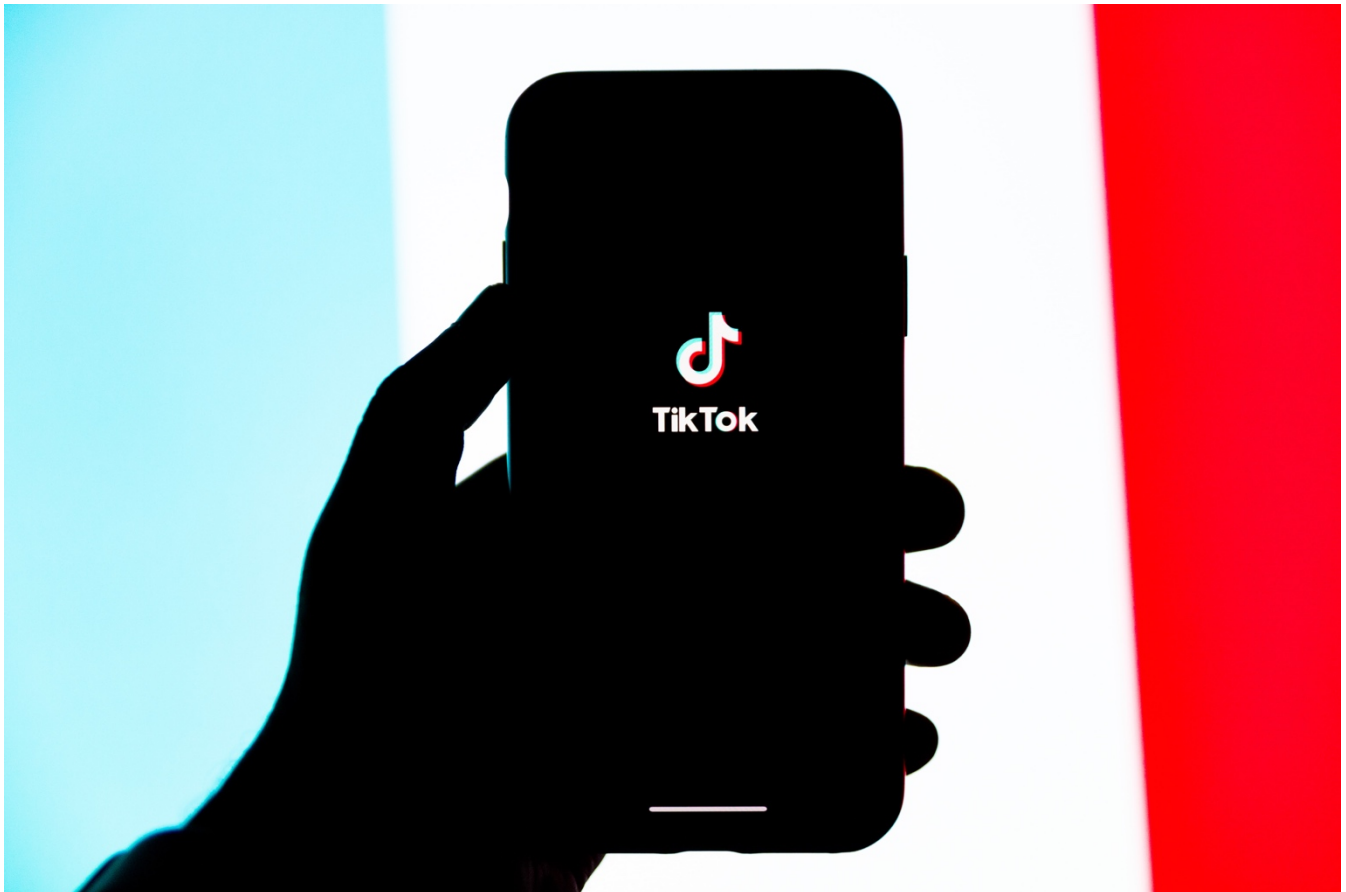
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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Reality check: How adolescents use TikTok as a digital backchanneling medium to speak back against institutional discourses of school(ing)

by William Terrell Wright



SOLEN FEYISSA VIA UNSPLASH.COM

I may as well have solemnly sworn I was up to no good when, just over ten years ago, as a high school student, I downloaded a soundbite onto my phone which played a shrill, mosquito-like sound that only young people could hear.

The night I came across this really quite annoying sound on the internet, my younger self immediately pounced on its possibilities. It happens that, as we age, our ability to hear high-pitched frequencies wanes through a process called presbycusis, a phenomenon observable in people as young as 18. Perhaps predictably, I took my phone to school the next day and played the soundbite on repeat in the middle of English class. A certain juvenile hilariousness ensued as my peers all winced in unison and looked about for the source of the sound while my teacher, deaf to its whine, attempted to figure out what had so rudely commandeered our attention.

I remember being captivated by this encounter. I played it once, maybe twice more throughout the day, quickly realizing how disruptive it was. But the notion that I had access to a secret frequency that our teachers were unable to access left an impression on me. It was a hidden channel, a form of covert telepathy. My imagination teemed with possibilities, and yet my younger self could have never predicted the rise of social media platforms such as TikTok, which grant today's young people the ability to create and circulate content on creative wavelengths that truly do transmit beyond the purview of most adults.

TikTok

For readers unfamiliar with the details, TikTok is a short-form video-making platform for iPhone and iOS where users create and share lip-sync, comedy, and talent videos. The app's website states that its "mission is to capture and present the world's creativity, knowledge, and moments that matter in everyday life" in such a way that "empowers everyone to be a creator directly from their smartphones" (<https://www.tiktok.com>). Within the past two years TikTok has become a global phenomenon, having been downloaded over two billion times (Carmen, 2020), with young people, overwhelmingly, its primary users. Launched by its parent company ByteDance in 2017, TikTok merged with the video-making app musical.ly later that year with the intention of capitalizing on their young userbase in the United States. The union proved a success, as TikTok went on to become the most downloaded app in the world in 2018. A feat it went on to repeat in 2019. The app then become embroiled in a series of international disputes in the latter half of 2020: most notably the South Korean-led pranking of the distribution of tickets for a Trump rally and the US-led charges that China may be using the platform as a means of overseas surveillance. That the app remains a subject of controversy remains clear.

The app itself immerses users with a seductive, casino-like design. When the app is opened, full-screen videos start playing immediately whether or not the user has any followers or has even created an account. The phone's clock disappears, transparent touch-controls are confined tidily to the margins, and a simple swipe of the finger dismisses one

video for the next instantaneously. All is meticulously calibrated to ensure minimal distractions from the vibrant, unending stream of content available. As a result, the intention of a brief check-in all too easily lapses into a half-hour or more.

And yet for all its addictive properties, it cannot be denied that TikTok is still very much a wild west—both in the sense that it is loosely regulated and manifestly White (although video-makers use a lot of Black-produced music in their TikToks). Rampant stereotyping, often of a sexual or racialized nature, goes woefully unchecked. Copyright infringement, concerns over privacy and sexual predatorship, and reports of cyberbullying and racist abuse are disturbingly common. What is more, sharing one's voice on TikTok and other participatory mediascapes is also highly contingent on technological access and one's dexterity with dominant online discursive practices. And yet in spite of this, and perhaps most critically, TikTok's aggressive AI algorithms (i.e. users who enjoyed this content also enjoyed...) often shape users' feeds into digital walled gardens that effectively sequester perspectives and harden existing biases under the guise of plurality. This constellation of issues has yet to be addressed adequately—that is, in sustained, systematic, and proactive ways—and we (digital citizens, policymakers, administrators, teachers, and parents alike) can all do better.

As much as the user-generated content on TikTok reifies its fair share of problematic discourses, I have also found myself occasionally taken aback by the clever and subversive content its young users create, content which is then circulated, remixed, and taken up in various, unexpected ways. For certain, the skill with which previously published, often niche material becomes subject to multimodal recontextualization, juxtaposition, and commentary is impressive, especially given the enormous size of the TikTok community and the ever-shifting terrain of popular culture its users draw upon.

Despite this dynamism, in the eyes of many educators, TikTok is seen as a distraction at best and a bad influence at worst. Arguing against a blanket disavowal, Moore (2011) argues that, "The issue with criticizing the objects of students' tastes, and by association often criticizing students' navigation through their unique media worlds, is the assumption that the negotiation of teacher/student authority applies to what is fundamentally a process of personal and social discovery" (p. 225). For the time being, at least, TikTok has entered into popular culture, and popular culture is quite clearly capable of shaping people's everyday beliefs and perceptions (Sellnow, 2018). At the same time, to complicate the situation further, it is important to keep in mind that "Youth culture needs to be tapped not co-opted" (Alvermann, 2012, p. 225), and that, when it comes to online mass media, "It is adolescents who curate, reinforce, and contribute most to these digital spaces and teachers may need to capitulate to the idea that they do not necessarily have the responsibility to teach them about their own worlds" (Fassbender, 2017, p. 266). While Vygotsky (1980) held that the largest impact on student learning comes from societal influences, students' cultures, and their peer groups, it has become increasingly difficult for educators to responsibly (much less authentically) tap into

these potentials when an ever-increasing amount of young people's social interaction takes place online.

As a former English teacher and current literacy scholar, I wonder, in both personal and professional ways, how educators might reckon, variously, with the problems, popularity, and power of youth-dominated mediascapes such as TikTok. I certainly do not claim to know how to reconcile the often-competing observations spelled out here, but I do believe the tensions they typify are well worth educators' open-minded attention. I also believe that it is our responsibility as educators to be at least peripherally aware of what the young people in our classrooms are producing and consuming in their out-of-school lives.

This brings me to the focus of this article, which centers on how TikTok's adolescent users "speak back" to the discourses of school(ing). In considering this question, I refrain from offering ready-made solutions for educators or condoning the particular viewpoints expressed by any video or online trend. My aim is simply to offer up my observations of TikTok as a means to call attention to the ways school(ing), as a largescale, democratic project and socially constructed phenomenon, is being shaped by young people, for young people on a digital platform that backchannels a largely resistant attitude toward the institutional framing of school(ing) upheld by many adult educators today. I do so through a discussion of four viral, school-related trends that have proliferated on TikTok over the past two years. My hope is that educators might engage these moments of rupture and feelings of dissonance in considerate ways that do not combat or cheapen the experiences of the young people in classrooms but instead open up opportunities for understanding and dialogue.

Framing

For millions of students, TikTok operates as a kind of social backchannel. The term *backchanneling* has shifted from its linguistic roots in recent years to accommodate the advent of technological tools like texting and social media. Today, at least in scholarship, backchanneling is most often used to describe conversations that take place digitally during meetings, presentations, and classroom lectures (Seglem & Haling, 2018). My framing of backchanneling here, however, is more ubiquitous, referring, instead, to furtively-threaded lines of communication that make their way across spatiotemporal boundaries in a variety of contexts that scale cohesively from the intimate to the cultural. Online message boards, Reddit threads, YouTube channels, blogs, and memes all fall comfortably within my use of the term, so long as they operate as a channel of countervailing solidarity for a particular userbase.

My conception of backchanneling suggests that participatory mediascapes like TikTok may have considerably under-recognized effects in shaping the broader discourses of school(ing), particularly in the US. In describing the "discourses of school(ing)", I do not intend to evoke notions of dialogic exchange or even Gee's (2015) socially mediated "ways of being" within particular cultural

groups. Instead, I use discourse in the post-structural sense to mean "a historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs" (Scott, 1988, p. 35) which "systematically form the objects about which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). In this way, "Discourse can never be just linguistic since it organizes a way of thinking into a way of acting in the world" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 485). To put this concept to work, we can trace how the formation and function of school(ing) in the United States has been discursively constructed over the last century by drawing direct links from the assembly-line exploits of Fordism to our current era of neoliberalism, implicated in the heightened emphasis on standardization and efforts to commodify learning in privatized settings (Davies & Bansel, 2007).

I do not, however, take discourses to be totalizing in effect. Drawing on Butler's understandings of contingency (2013) and in particular the practice of "subversive repetition" (1990), wherein what is perceived to be given is routinely disrupted, I am instead suggesting an interpretation of discourse that is, at once, inescapable and ultimately malleable. Subjects in this case both reproduce and contest the various ways of being available to them in a state of ongoing, constitutive becoming. Here there are no stable meanings. Everything must always be questioned, attended to, and accounted for.

Relatedly, Döveling, Harju, and Sommer (2018) illustrate the online/offline entanglement between micro, meso, and macro memorial cultures (such as terrorist attacks and celebrity deaths) in order to describe how new media technologies such as TikTok influence and infiltrate social practices and cultural life via *digital affect cultures*—that is, "relational, contextual, globally emergent spaces in the digital environment where affective flows construct atmospheres of emotional and cultural belonging by way of emotional resonance and alignment" (p. 1). These digital affect cultures inevitably influence, reinforce, and produce sentiments that shape teachers' and students' lived behaviors in both the digital and physical worlds. Content on TikTok writhes and morphs to the tune of these affective flows. Whether hopping on a viral trend, riffing on a meme, celebrating the end of the school year, or referencing blockbuster films, TikTok users remain keenly up to date in creating "culture-specific communities of affective practice" (p. 1). These affective intensities resonate across spatiotemporal boundaries to produce meaning and change. What "happens" online, in other words, immanently alters the course of lived reality. It is therefore imperative that educational theorists and practitioners reckon more thoroughly with participatory mediascapes such as TikTok so as to better understand and account for the ways educational discourses are being shaped by those whom we often least assume: the students themselves.

Viral Trends

The four trends in the discussions that follow have each gone viral on TikTok at some point over last year and a half. I have chosen to focus in on these four trends to

demonstrate how users' engagement with the platform enters into sociocultural, political, and economic dialogue that is both relevant to school(ing) communities and the larger discourse(s) surrounding education in the US. Given the now-mainstreamed culture of neoliberalism in US schools (tending to dwell primarily on test scores and positive PR), I consider how TikTok might represent a compelling, if complicated, counter-narrative—that is, as a vibrant community of loose, constellating affiliations that could very well signal a future for responsive engagement with networked technologies in the context of 21st century schooling.

Acronyms

One of the most popular school-related trends to have proliferated on TikTok is the creation of acronyms intended to (re)inscribe meanings of commonly used educational words. "School," for instance, is frequently alleged on TikTok to stand for Six Cruel Hours Of Our Lives, a perhaps unsurprising indictment for those acquainted with traditional depictions of school(ing) in mass media (Trier, 2006). Similarly, "Homework" is said to stand for Half Of My Energy Wasted On Random Knowledge, a loaded characterization fundamentally averse to educators' goals to make the content they teach meaningful for their students. And finally, contrary to former American democratic presidential nominee Andrew Yang's suggestion that "math" be taken to mean Make America Think Harder, the average TikTok user has observed time and again that "math" stands for Mental Abuse To Humans.

Potential impressions of melodrama aside, these associations do not come from a vacuum. Something about the educative project we are a part of has created conditions where massive amounts of young people actively produce and relate to such sentiments. Perhaps, when we recall what it was like to be adolescents ourselves, these feelings may even sound familiar. Beyond providing us with insights—or perhaps reminders—into how school(ing) is experienced and perceived by young people, such instances also afford us opportunities to look anew at how and why we teach the ways that we do. If students, at the end of the year, have learned to dislike the subject we teach more than when they came to us, then we have done them an unequivocal disservice. There of course are no simple solutions or easy targets to point fingers at. What is plain, however, is that we still have work to do, especially when it comes to empathizing with our students and inspiring them in intrinsic ways.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that language and ideas often have slippery relations. We need look no further than the host of hotbed words (facts, socialism, etc.) which are actively being contested on sociopolitical levels that scale cohesively from policy on down to the personal. While youth's discursive grumblings on TikTok might seem inconsequential by comparison, the formulation and spreading of these resistive acronyms are prime examples of youth participating in ongoing constructions of meaning. Whether in Webster or Urban Dictionary, words must be

attended to. As youth readily engage in reading and writing their words/worlds (Freire & Macedo, 2005), educators who choose to sit idly or dismissively by miss out on opportunities to participate with them in the attempt to render a more fulfilling, less cynical tomorrow.

#callingteachersbythefirstname [sic] 825.6k views

#callingteachersbythefirstname [sic] is another viral trend in which students go about school calling teachers by their first names in order to film their reactions. A typical video consists of a mashup of a half-dozen or more short clips that cut off as soon as the teacher's face registers the tiny, unexpected breach in decorum. Teachers' reactions vary from irate to dumbfounded to pleasantly surprised, while we, the viewers, serve as witnesses to this break in a teacher's self-composure.

The trend, while only a gest, to be sure, nevertheless prods gently against age-old power dynamics that exist between students and their instructors. On the surface, the humor derives from its disruption of the seriousness and formality of the school setting. But between the lines is also the soft, subversive thrill of seeing the resident hierarchy flattened, in only for a moment. Under this polite guise, a hardened signifier of deference and respect is playfully cast aside. Suddenly an address to a superior becomes the nonchalant hailing of an equal.

These students, playfully knocking against the discursive protocols we have built for them, may be said to be questioning any number of things. What constitutes respect, for instance? Why do adults care so much about maintaining certain distinctions? Where are the lines that should and should not be crossed? Does taboo come in shades of grey? Or: perhaps deep down they are just seeking glimpses of who their teachers really are underneath that professional exterior of theirs. Are we willing to show it to them?

#publicschoolcheck 9.5m views

#publicschoolcheck is one of TikTok's most viral trends. To participate, students compile a series of clips that represent what they perceive to be the most shoddy, rundown, or pedestrian qualities of their school. Common subject matter for these montages includes "out of order" signs on bathroom stalls, STD prevention flyers, graffiti, close ups of school lunches, and shaky panoramas of cafeterias, hallways, and school grounds. As a rule, the intro to the song "Stoner" by Young Thug plays over the video.

On the surface, these students do not seem to be drawing a deliberate critical eye to the material conditions of their schools; it appears, rather, that they are simply having fun by cataloguing their experience to playfully commiserative ends. And yet these attempts to identify representations of "ordinary" (if largely suburban) public school environments nevertheless wind up providing an

intriguing commentary on the spaces in which we ask our young people to learn. Such a stance falls into even greater relief when held up against the countering #privateschoolcheck, where private-school students show off lines of sports cars in the student parking lot, in-school Starbucks, pristine sporting venues, and lavish, TV-lined cafeterias. Such contrasting portrayals demonstrate that students are in fact keenly aware of the ways in which adults do or do not value (at least monetarily) the dignity of physical environments in which learning is expected to take place.

#belldoesntdismissyou 1.9m views ("The bell doesn't dismiss you. I do.")

This last trend likely requires the least amount of introduction. The bell rings, students all stand to leave, and the teacher shouts, "The bell doesn't dismiss you. I do." On TikTok, this immanently-recognizable moment is characterized as a routine power trip. Content creators ask, "then what is the bell for?" or claim that teachers have no power in this case because they are "required by law" to let students leave when the bell rings. Other users illicit humor by juxtaposing their reenactments with dramatic showdown music from popular entertainment sources such as *Dragon Ball Z* or *Avengers*. In this way, a challenge is set up: *it's all of us versus you*. From the auspices of TikTok, what might have remained a minor frustration in the lives of young people transforms into a broad-based nexus of contention, a rallying point no longer experienced in isolation. The everyday is made epic.

While an element of humor of course underscores many, if not most, of these depictions, it is interesting to consider why such a statement—"The bell doesn't dismiss you. I do."—garners so much attention in the first place. It is, after all, a moment of tension, where power hangs in the balance, when a teacher's "time is up" and students feel it is their prerogative to flock to the halls and joke with friends, listen to music, or kiss their significant others.

While the routines and teaching style of a given educator is (and should be!) their own, it is nevertheless important for teachers to be mindful of how their statements are being perceived and, in this case, taken up. There may be a time and a place for such hardline demonstrations of authority, but if we are indeed unwittingly circulating tired clichés, then we must consider checking ourselves in an attempt to resist doing so, in order that we might seem less like automatons and more like the authentic human beings our students need us to be.

Finally, I want to make clear that "The bell doesn't dismiss you. I do" is far from the first flashpoint phrase adolescent students have been in league against. Years ago now, a high school student of mine wrote a poem called "Mitochondria are the powerhouse of the cell". In the poem, the title phrase was repeated robotically at the end of each stanza. The student and I had a candid relationship and often spoke together after class. It was here that he told me the phrase was based on a popular meme that most

students knew all too well, although he suspected most teachers did not. Indeed, online, the phrase "mitochondria are the powerhouse of the cell" is mocked as an example of the impractical information taught in schools, the irrelevant "third things" (Gambell & Sumara, 1996) students are expected to hardwire into their brains for test day. While there may be advantages to insisting our students learn particular facts, educators should, at the same time, attempt to avoid abetting obtuse caricature-building in whatever ways possible.

Discussion

Of course TikTok will not be around forever. Many, including Casey Newton of *The Verge* (2019), are already predicting its demise. Alternatively, as with Facebook, its user demographic could shift if more and more adult users begin to migrate to the platform. There will no doubt, however, be other apps, other means of transmission, which young people take up. Traditionally, whether it was a clubhouse, a favorite performance venue, or a friend's basement, unsupervised spaces have provided important enclaves for young people to experiment with their identities and their relationship to the world around them. Since young people's lives have begun transitioning into digital spaces, however, there has been an ever-retreating ragged edge where young people gather to create and communicate with each other online. This expressive frontier has taken many forms over the years—Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Yik Yak, Vine, Snapchat, TikTok, to name a few—and yet the expressive energy of young people inevitably finds new outlets to flourish when one platform or another comes under threat from the co-opting forces of adulthood. A few such platforms, such as Reddit and YouTube, have managed to stick around, diversifying themselves into large enough platforms that various communities, young and old, willingly or not, wind up compartmentalized into wholly-contained online ecosystems—a separate but related issue that is beyond the scope of this article to address, one which is nevertheless responsible, in part, for the proliferation of "fake news" and the reinforcement of political tribalism.

There may also be a need to expand classical definitions of activism in order to better account for the complexity of civic participation within 21st century participatory mediascapes. Setting oneself ablaze, standing in front of tanks, marching with picket signs, or placing flowers in the barrel of a soldier's rifle come to mind as emblematic images of activism. But perhaps, as Butler (2010) writes, "the 'act' in its singularity and heroism is overrated... [as it] loses sight of the iterable process in which a critical investigation is needed" (p. 184). Certainly the everyday courage of minoritized and non-conforming young people who risk their wellbeing to speak and be seen on social media are not to be taken lightly. Nor are students who upload mobile footage of their school security officers using violent force against their peers. These are forms of activism, too. But even on a less immediate note, one also cannot overlook the popularity of crowd-sourced GoFundMe pages, patron-supported YouTube channels, and online Reddit threads (where

creators connect directly with fans), which, in many ways, typify a collective desire among younger generations to bypass intermediaries or bureaucracies in whatever ways they can. One might certainly include here, as well, the “more playful style of activism...emerging through [the] appropriative and transformative dimension of participatory culture” (Jenkins, 2016, p. 2), such as those proliferating on TikTok, which are not about making a stand so much as finding countless, invisible allies with which to secretly resist.

Indeed, all of these examples demonstrate that youth “are often political insofar as they aim to influence or change existing power relations” (Brough & Shresthova, 2012). It is these small everyday revolutions, which become habits and trends, that Shukaiitis (2009) describes as “movement[s] through and of the entire social field [that] are nearly impossible to describe without imposing closure on them as open and constantly fluctuating processes” (p. 16). These interstitial movements, in many ways, escape signification. And it may well be the fact that they are difficult to pin down that leads to their eventual widespread affirmation, familiarity, and adoption.

As an educator myself, I am well aware and have written about (Wright, 2020) the ways in which hardline schooling environments that are beholden to test scores and good PR are often run in such a way that is restrictive to and, in many cases, outright adverse toward pedagogical explorations of the very same networked technologies that continue to shape the world we know in profound and momentous ways. As such, I want to suggest that deciding with finger-in-ear certainty to foreclose even the possibility of proactive institutional engagement with these technologies too often leaves today’s youth fending for themselves in the digital environments that most affect them. In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic especially, platforms such as TikTok are leaned on heavily as stand-ins for the sort of loose, affiliated interactions described here. In a time of social distancing, backchanneling, in effect, has become much easier, and new trends are already starting to emerge. To be clear, I do not believe that schools should take over or even necessarily monitor the TikTok feeds of their students; rather, I am suggesting that all of us—teachers, researchers, and administrators alike—might more empathetically tune into the subjective frequencies of young people’s experiences in schools (at least, as best we can), so that we might better understand and account for the ways in which we, ourselves, might be perpetuating students’ clear frustration and discontent with the ways school(ing) environments function in their lives.

Curiously, whether a wholesome step forward or another instance of existing power structures subsuming and thereby sterilizing whatever radical energies speak up against it, afterschool TikTok clubs (where teachers and students collaborate to create school-appropriate content) started to crop up across the US before the pandemic struck (Lorenz, 2019). Plenty of catchy dances and pep rally prep, to be sure, but also, perhaps, an opportunity to enter into dialogue with students about issues of online representation, the unpredictable power of virality, and the ways in which

we all might think and do otherwise—whether together or apart, in the open or in secret.

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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Teaching Note Teaching *Moby-Dick* in the Anthropocene

by Sari Edelstein



THE WHALEMOBILE IS A REPLICA OF A REAL ADULT FEMALE HUMPBACK WHALE NAMED NILE. IMAGE BY: COLLEEN LOCKE

"There are some enterprises in which a careful disorderliness is the true method."

- *Moby-Dick*, Herman Melville

When I decided to teach a semester-long course devoted entirely to *Moby-Dick*, I assumed the students who signed up would have a passing familiarity with the book, that they would recognize its title, know it features a white whale, maybe even be able to recite the famous first sentence of chapter one. I even naively thought they might have chosen the class *because* of their interest in whatever the title conjured, perhaps a desire for old-fashioned cultural capital or maybe an affinity for the maritime. And yet, on the first day of English 205, I realized that only three of the twenty-five students had ever heard of *Moby-Dick* at all. No one had selected the course because of a pre-existing interest in or curiosity about the text; on the contrary, the course fully enrolled mostly because it was offered during an opportune early-afternoon Tuesday/Thursday slot and satisfied the Humanities criteria for the General Education requirement with no pre-requisites.

But to be honest, this is what I wanted -- a room full of college students with no prior interest in literature. The students were drawn from multiple majors beyond English, many of them still undeclared. Half of the group was women; one was a trans/non-binary student, and the majority were students of color. The group also included queer students, veterans, immigrants, and parents. This range of subject positions and life experiences was a boon, especially given the novel's structuring interest in how meaning itself is fundamentally perspectival.

While Melville's novel is about an obsolete culture of a past economy that bears little surface relation to our own, I wanted the students to see that a massive tome about whaling, written over a hundred years ago, might offer a way of thinking about our contemporary relationship to the natural world and to one another. The course was anchored in the question: How do we read Melville's classic novel after nature: after the discovery of petroleum, after the US has become inextricably dependent on fossil fuels not only for our daily conveniences but for our notions of freedom and individualism, after we have permanently altered the atmosphere and the weather, after we have filled the ocean with trash? What does it mean to teach this book now – in a climate emergency?

I set up the course so that we would venture to different worlds, making the case that literature offers a way into many realms beyond itself. I hoped that off-campus experiences and interdisciplinary readings could simultaneously connect students to the book *and* connect the book to their everyday lives and to the urgent questions of the twenty-first century. Some of these activities were actual physical expeditions (a whale watch, a museum visit) while others were more intellectual. In this sense, the course enacted and extended the novel's own roving, promiscuous impulse, incorporating questions from other disciplines and animating Herman Melville's encyclopedic ambitions.

Jettisoning chronology, I divided the syllabus into conceptual units, each emphasizing a different world or vantage point, which included the historical, the oceanic, the animal, the literary, the ecological. The syllabus paired chapters of the novel with readings that moved from contemporary poetry to economic history to gender studies. I realized that I could not ask students to contemplate *Moby-Dick* and resource extraction without simultaneously learning something about the fossil fuel industry (which fueled our whale watch). Nor could we read the ocean as a material space (not merely a metaphor) without coming to understand more about the science and stakes of ocean acidification. For me, it felt just as experimental to invite the present onto the syllabus as it did to allow science into our discussions, not as a straw man but as a viable paradigm and source of knowledge. As Priscilla Wald and Wai-Chee Dimock forcefully put it, "Science illiteracy is no longer an option for humanists."¹ In a state of climate emergency, we cannot afford such willful ignorance; there is an ethical demand to recognize and wrestle with what we have done to the planet and to consider the uneven consequences of this abuse.

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Beyond expanding the methodological scope, I moved beyond the parameters of the traditional classroom. As we waded into the cetology chapters, I invited an expert in cetacean conservation, to inflate her life-size humpback whale in the university's Campus Center – and that afternoon, my class actually took place inside the whale, where we learned about whale biology, the crucial role of whales in oxygenating the oceanic ecosystem, and the massive and ongoing threat that fishing lines pose to marine mammals. Sitting inside the whale, we were in a position to consider the interconnectedness of marine life forms with terrestrial ones and to take the whale's body seriously as a biological reality not merely a figure for something else.

I was struck by a student's observation as we reached the end of the novel. The Pequod encounters another whaling ship, called the Rachel, whose captain is beside himself with grief and worry as his young son is lost at sea; he frantically begs the Pequod's crew to help search for the boy: "My boy, my own boy is among them. For God's sake—I beg, I conjure"—here exclaimed the stranger Captain to Ahab, who thus far had but icily received his petition. 'For eight-and-forty hours let me charter your ship—I will gladly pay for it, and roundly pay for it—if there be no other way—for eight-and-forty hours only—only that—you must, oh, you must, and you *shall* do this thing.'"

One of my students noticed that in this short interaction (a "gam" in whaling parlance), the word "stranger" is used more than eleven times to describe the desperate captain.

But the even more noteworthy aspect of this repetition is that Ahab is actually acquainted with this other captain; he is not, in fact, a stranger. As Melville writes, "Immediately he was recognized by Ahab for a Nantucketer he knew. But no formal salutation was exchanged." Thus, they are neighbors, landsmen from the same island, not strangers at all. Ahab's use of this word then signifies a willful misrecognition, and his rejection of the other captain's desperate plea is often read as his final abandonment of humanity – and the harbinger of his destruction.

But I would add that its more than just Ahab's lack of sympathy on display here: this culminating scene lays bare the social consequences of ecological exploitation: all lives, human and more-than-human are devalued, rendered disposable, in an economy premised on slaughter and slavery. An orientation of care itself comes to seem *strange* in a culture so deeply structured by violence, profit, and individualism. This scene thus offers a point of entry into and a way of thinking about what Margret Grebowicz calls the "simultaneity and co-creation of environmental and social loss."²

After Ahab's refusal, Captain Gardiner's ship moves on; it is "seen to yaw hither and thither . . . this way and that way her yards were swung around." This mode of sailing contrasts with that of the Pequod as it obsessively zeroes in on *Moby-Dick*, setting the course for its destruction, and eventually, it is Gardiner's ship, the Rachel, described as "deviously cruising," which rescues Ishmael in the final pages of the novel. The non-linear, desultory movement of this ship is thus lifesaving, though it seems unfocused and incoherent, out of step with the pursuit and profit orientation of other ships. Ishmael's survival thus underscores the point that "our planetary fate—whatever we do or however we identify—is yoked to the agency of strangers (human and nonhuman)," as Sarah Ensor puts it.³ In other words, our collective fate is tied to other human and more-than-human lives.

Within a university-industrial complex structured on disciplinary partitions, on coverage, on accelerated pathways to graduation, there is perhaps something strange about spending a whole semester on a single book, "deviously cruising" from biological science to literary history, from whale watches to close reading. But the unmapped, wandering course of Captain Gardiner's ship might offer a useful model for ecological thinking and pedagogical practice. Such devious movement can create the conditions for engagement and consequently for an ethical relationship to the living world. A slower pace necessarily offers an alternative to a curriculum of passive consumption and can encourage students to think critically – perhaps for the first time – about their own consumption habits (academic and otherwise) and the ways that those choices are often constrained or made for them by others.

In the last three weeks of course, I gave students the opportunity to pursue questions and topics of their own choosing in small groups. Where the midterm essay required

them to look deeply into the text (and to write a more traditional literary analysis), this final project asked them to pursue a line of inquiry borne out of the novel. Their presentations included biographies of little-known African American whaling captains, a report on the continued consumption of whale products in spite of the international ban on whale hunting, an analysis of *Moby-Dick* paraphernalia in popular culture (including the prevalence of *Moby-Dick* tattoos), an investigation into the history and ethics of whale tourism, and an exploration of how the ambergris chapter might shed light on Western complicity with the exploitative labor practices that produce iPhones. Collectively, they came to see how the lust for whale oil created the conditions for our contemporary reliance on oil, to see how the ostensible progress of civilization depends upon a genealogy of resource extraction, conquest, and violence. And while *Moby-Dick* makes that violence visible, even erotic, late capitalism often conceals it.

By the end of the course, we had been on a journey together: a voyage deep into the novel's philosophical questions and preoccupations, but we had also traveled outward into new realms where I was far from the expert. *Moby-Dick* offered us not only a prehistory of petro-capitalism but a meditation on ecological relationality and dependence. To teach *Moby-Dick* in the Anthropocene, then, is to look in many directions: back at the historical moment that commodified the natural world on a vast, global scale; forward at a future that will involve mass extinction and dislocation; and at the present, a time when we still have the opportunity to change course, to recognize other living beings not as strangers but as neighbors.

I am grateful to the Mellon Foundation for the High-Impact Humanities Mini-Grant that supported this course and to Betsy Klimasmith, Bonnie Miller, and David Terkla for administering this grant at the University of Massachusetts, Boston; to Raphael Fennimore for his assistance; to Cynde McInnis for bringing Nile to UMB; and to my students, of course, for making the course so vibrant.

Notes

1. Wai Chee Dimock and Priscilla Wald, "Preface: Literature and Science: Cultural Form: Conceptual Exchanges." *American Literature* 74.4 (December 2002): 75.
2. Margret Grebowicz, *Whale Song* (New York: Bloomsbury), 2017.
3. Sarah Ensor, "Queer Fallout: Samuel R. Delany and the Ecology of Cruising." *Environmental Humanities* 9.1 (2017): 149–166.



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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Teaching Note

Screening *Winnie* and African Feminist Herstories

by Awino Okech



WINNIE (2017) DIRECTED BY PASCALE LAMCHE

It is August 2018 and the London Feminist Film Festival is screening *Winnie*, a documentary on Winnie Mandela by Pascale Lamche. This is the only documentary endorsed by Winnie Mandela and at the time it had only been shown in South Africa and in the film festival circuit. The festival and documentary screening happened four months after Winnie Mandela's death. The documentary, which features interviews with Winnie and her daughter Zindzi, is argued to be one of the most comprehensive overviews of Winnie Nomzamo's life. *Winnie* is a haunting and extensive tale of a South African freedom fighter who was more publicly known as the wife of Nelson Mandela, the first Black post-apartheid South African President.

The documentary offers a comprehensive story of the woman beside Nelson. It is a view of apartheid from the front seat of one of South Africa's most persecuted families – the Mandelas. *Winnie* foregrounds a social worker who met a handsome lawyer who became a liberation icon through whom she became an active leader of the South African Black freedom struggle. Winnie becomes the consummate struggle hero's wife but also a freedom fighter in the African National Congress (ANC). The documentary paints a picture of a woman who co-led the release of the famous Nelson Mandela. In fact, it demonstrates that without her relentless campaign, many would have forgotten about Nelson Mandela. It chronicles Winnie Nomzamo's sacrifices – banishment, arrests, harassment – incurred because she was the wife of the "terrorist" and incarcerated Nelson Mandela. It is a difficult documentary, as is any film about apartheid South Africa.

I spent four years doing my postgraduate studies at the University of Cape Town, so I thought I had a fair understanding of South African politics. However, I walked out of the documentary screening with a new respect for Winnie Mandela and a realisation of how little her legacy had been recognised. It was a reminder of a feminist insistence on women's stories, their documentation and legibility. Through *Winnie*, the viewers were able to see first-hand how a woman's history could be re-written to serve the purposes of hetero-patriarchy – in this case her well known husband – Nelson Mandela. In life and death Winnie was haunted by actions taken as part of an armed struggle by the African National Congress against the apartheid regime. Specifically, the death of Stompie Seipei, a murder that she was found to not be responsible for (Saba, 2018). Winnie was also vilified for having a sexual life after becoming a political widow due to the twenty-seven-year incarceration of her husband. Winnie was thirty-three years old when Nelson was jailed and he was seventy-six when he was released in 1994 (See Msimang, 2018).

"Some people come in and out of history, but mummy is a constant"

– Zindzi Mandela

I teach at the Centre for Gender Studies at SOAS, University of London. SOAS is publicly known for its history as a training ground for British colonial officers and much

more recently for its work on decolonising higher education¹. In March 2019, I decided to screen *Winnie* to my gender studies students and open it up to other students in the university. I asked the gender studies student representatives to reach out to student societies to announce this as an open event. As a result, I ended up with a majority non-gender studies room. I saw *Winnie* as a powerful commentary on an argument I had made in class about the importance of feminist histories on the one hand and the invisibility of feminist intellectual knowledge in non-feminist spaces on the other hand. I structured it as an informal event within the university precinct that would be followed by a discussion session. I was clear that I wanted students who were African or Black but who were not part of the gender studies degree programme to benefit from this screening.

Given that the documentary chronicles the violent history of apartheid South Africa, the choice of a non-formal classroom space was critical to holding emotions in a way that a formal classroom could not do. I was also aware that there were a number of South African students who would be moved by the film very differently from those who did not have an understanding of South African history. I needed the students/observers to be present as film goes not as students. In this way we could process the complexity of their emotions outside of a classroom environment where they might be expecting me to hold them accountable to their critical engagement on the theme of the week as well as to hold space for others who may not necessarily feel any connection to the issues being discussed through the documentary. However, I was clear that I was constructing it as a pedagogical space even though it was happening outside formal classroom hours. I also saw this screening as a continuation of conversations I had begun in the classroom.

I paired the documentary with a musical performance by Thandiswa Mazwai, a South African artist performing her song *Nizalwa Ngobani* at Winnie Mandela's funeral service at Orlando Stadium¹. The song is a tribute to the African continent's freedom fighters and a reminder to younger generations to remember their labour. The song invokes Winnie and when she performs it at the funeral she focusses on that invocation. I chose this song as a follow-up to the documentary for two reasons. It was performed to a packed stadium that had gathered to celebrate Winnie's legacy. It was a powerful testament to how a woman who in life had been shrouded by decisions made for the liberation struggle or for personal freedom could in death hold the global stage and not in relation to her husband. Secondly, the song, which is an ode to memorialisation and intergenerational narratives of liberations, also served as an emotional bridge after a heavy documentary.

I followed this song with a speech by Julius Malema², the firebrand leader of the Economic Freedom Fighters political party. Malema's speech at the funeral service was the most talked about speech after that of Winnie's daughter Zenani Mandela-Dlamini. Malema's speech projects a narrative about Winnie Mandela that was missing after her death. As the former president of the ANC youth league, Malema offered a fairly comprehensive overview of Winnie Mandela's contributions to the liberation struggle in South

Africa. In addition, he “called out” individuals and institutions who had publicly dissociated themselves from Winnie when she was alive but who took centre stage during her funeral. In his refrain – “send me a signal, Mama” – he invoked for many Africans who discussed his speech on Twitter someone who wanted to set the record straight. I saw this speech as a powerful vindication if you will that would counter-balance the feeling of Winnie having been hard done by that is evident when you watch the documentary.

Post screening discussion

After the screening, I set up a circle of chairs and those who chose to remain were invited to reflect on how the film made them feel. What questions it raised for them in this moment and in relation to where we were – a university in the United Kingdom. I was struck by the fact that the non-Black students joined the circle, but they chose to witness the conversation rather than participate. While I suspected that this was a deliberate move on their part, I spoke to some of the students after the screening who confirmed that they did not think it was their place to intervene in a discussion that was rooted in an experience of Blackness that they did not have. The documentary exposes the violent and the complex machinery of the apartheid regime and it is hard to not be impacted by it. This was an act of solidarity. Rather than leave the room after the screening they stayed to witness their comrades. This was powerful.

Two strands of discussion emerged from the circle that I want to draw attention to in relation to critical feminist pedagogy, particularly using experience as a resource, transformative learning, and resisting hierarchy. In setting up a screening and discussion space outside the classroom we could collectively build the contours of the discussion and decentre me as a teacher. We therefore disrupted the power dynamic that ordinarily exists in a classroom where it is always expected that the teacher knows more than their students and who is ultimately looked to, to resolve any contention, confusion, or inaccuracies. Secondly, in this space I could actively call on the students’ feelings. We could discuss what those feelings invoked without the pressure of learning outcomes and the one- or two-hour class limit. We could witness these feelings. Third, I did not facilitate the discussion space. We collectively facilitated it. This was made possible by three actions. The first is through the non-Black students who chose to listen and learn. The second is in the other Black students who wanted to honour the South Africans present by giving them space to remember their histories, and for most of them this was embodied in the 2015 Fees Must Fall protest movements (See Agenda, 2017). Finally, the South African students who invited the others in by situating the apartheid history in the Black experience at SOAS.

Secondly, there was organic learning that happened in three main ways. First, the South African students in the room had watched this documentary before but in a context in which the discussion focussed on Winnie the murderer (See Saba, 2018). They commented on the pairing I curated

for this documentary. They noted that it altered the way they were able to be present in the room including making their emotions available to grieving Winnie rather than being angry at Western narratives about Winnie Mandela that I pointed out at the beginning. Secondly, the non-South Africans in the room had an opportunity to have a deeper understanding of racial justice issues in South Africa and contextualise the Fees Must Fall student protests for free higher education that were well known in the United Kingdom as part of decolonising universities projects (See Chigudu, 2020).

Third, there was a transfer of the underpinning questions of white supremacy that framed apartheid and its legacy in South Africa to their manifestation in a university that outwardly projects itself as a decolonising champion. In this context, the documentary and the discussion after elicited their concerns about their frustrations about the nature of the classroom experience both in relation to curriculum and how Africa in particular was taught. These frustrations were discussed in relation to racialisation and the implicit anti-Blackness that they experienced in the university. The fact that the space drew students from across the university allowed us to unpack what their version of a decolonised curriculum was and to discuss the opportunity that the screening had created for other forms of pedagogical engagement that they did not have in the classroom.

In conclusion, this experience drew attention to the limits of the university classroom today, particularly in institutions that take seriously the meaning of transformative and conscientizing education. There is a tension between learning outcomes, assignments, and employability and the desire that both students and teachers have to create organic and evolving spaces for transformative learning. The space that was created in screening *Winnie* was a reminder of what it means to create a critical pedagogical space where the hierarchies between the lecturer as the “knower” and “the student” are disrupted. This is a request that is often desired in the decolonised university, which is challenged by concerns with a degree certificate and value for money due to rising university fees.

Notes

1. <https://www.soas.ac.uk/centenary/the-soas-story/early-years-1917-36/>
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cnBssyqI3U4>
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmQktSjP2Jq>

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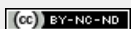
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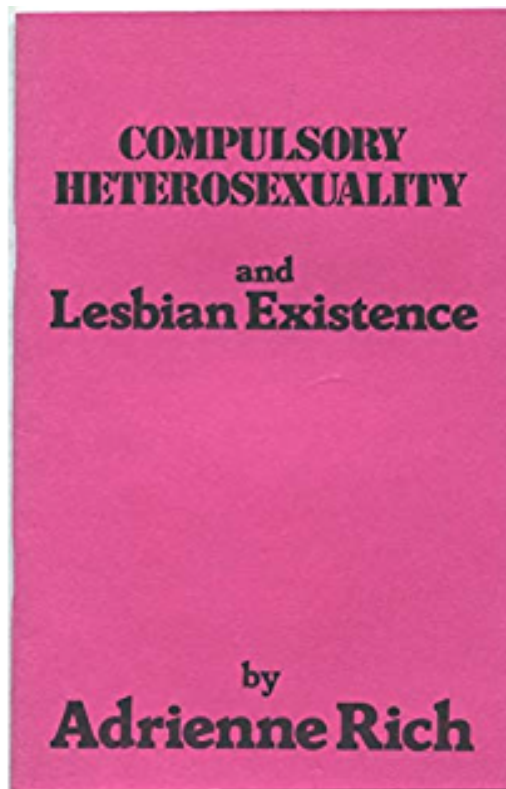
RADICAL TEACHER

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

Teaching Note

When Did You Know You Were Straight?: Teaching with the Heterosexual Questionnaire

by Jessica Ann Vooris



"COMPULSORY HETEROSEXUALITY" BY ADRIENE RICH

“What do you think caused your heterosexuality?” an audience member asks the straight panelists. “Uh, I don’t know, I just am,” says one of them with a shrug. Another reflects on the fact that he grew up in a religious household so he didn’t have a choice when he was younger, but as he has gotten older being straight still feels right to him. A third says that she has always liked boys, but notes that she saw mostly straight relationships on television, so didn’t know there were other options.

My students are participating in an activity that I facilitate in my LGBTQ Studies courses, a panel of straight-identified students, answering questions from the Heterosexual Questionnaire by Martin Rochlin. The class is *Intro to Sexuality Studies*, at a small, predominantly white, liberal arts institution, and includes WGSS majors, as well as students who are just interested in learning more about sexuality and LGBTQ identities. Although it is an introductory course, students range from first-years to seniors.

The panel activity highlights heterosexism and heterosexual privilege, provides an opportunity to talk about satire and queer humor, and is a useful way to engage with concepts from class readings. The Heterosexual Questionnaire was first written in 1972, and challenges negative stereotypes about lesbian and gay people. It takes the questions that lesbian and gay folks are often asked, and addresses them to straight people instead. The questions ask them to explain and justify their sexuality and the choices they have made about their heterosexual life-style. For example:

“What do you think caused your heterosexuality?”

“To whom have you disclosed your heterosexual tendencies? How did they react?”

“With all the societal support for marriage, the divorce rate is spiraling. Why are there so few stable relationships among heterosexuals?”

“Why do you attribute heterosexuality to so many famous lesbian and gay people? Is it to justify your own heterosexuality?”

The Questionnaire denaturalizes heterosexuality, and challenges straightness as the norm. It continues to be relevant almost 50 years since it was first published, and has been re-published in many Women’s and Gender Studies textbooks, and on various websites online. I have used it in many of my classes including *Intro to Women’s and Gender Studies*, *LGBTQ Identities and Communities*, and *LGBTQ Life Trajectories*. I have taught at several small liberal arts colleges, as well as at large state universities, and the activity has worked well in both elective courses where students are already invested in the topics of the course, as

well as general education courses where students are new to the subject of gender and sexuality. I have found it particularly useful to use alongside class texts such as *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism* by Suzanne Pharr (1988), “Compulsory Heterosexuality” by Adriene Rich (1980), *Straight: A Short History of Heterosexuality* by Hanne Blank (2012), and *Dykes to Watch Out For* by Alison Bechdel (2008).

While it is possible to spur discussion by simply handing out the questionnaire and asking students to connect it to class texts, I have facilitated more in-depth and rich discussions by organizing a panel of straight students who then answer questions that their fellow students select from the list. I first ask for a few volunteers (2-5, depending on class size) who identify as straight and are willing to participate on a panel and answer questions about their sexuality. I then pass around the Questionnaire to the rest of the students, and ask them to pick a few questions to ask the panelists. I ask the panel volunteers to think carefully about the questions and to answer as honestly and clearly as they can, but reassure them that they are always free to say “I don’t know,” or to skip questions that they do not feel comfortable answering.

The volunteers are taking a risk, and usually are a bit nervous, but are also eager to share their experiences. There is often a lot of laughter during the exercise, as to be expected with some of the questions, but the panelists have always tried to answer the questions sincerely. Students eagerly raise their hands to read out the questions, and queer-identified students in particular seem to find great satisfaction in the exercise. In the conversation that follows, many of my LGBTQ students discuss how that they have been asked similar questions and how hurtful it can feel to have their sexuality challenged. They appreciate the opportunity to turn those questions around and present them to those who are straight-identified, and it is a good way to talk about heterosexism, and the ways that straightness is accepted as a norm.

The panelists often reflect on the fact that no one has asked these questions to them before and that they haven’t really thought about what it means to be straight. Some of the questions confuse them, and they note that some of the questions touch on private information they don’t want to share. Again, this provides the opportunity to talk about privilege and power, and how straight people are not asked to validate their sexuality.

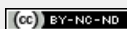
Overall, the exercise is an effective way to make heterosexism and homophobia visible, especially as the questions touch on the different systemic ways that LGBTQ folks are denied equal treatment in terms of marriage, jobs, schools, and therapists’ offices. In the discussion afterward, I make sure that we connect specific questions and the panelists’ responses to the course readings. I also talk about what was happening at the time that the Questionnaire was first written in the 1970s post-Stonewall: the first Pride marches, the removal of homosexuality from the DSM in 1973, and the Anita Bryant “Save Our Children” campaign in Florida. We then reflect on the ways that LGBTQ rights have changed, and also how homophobia continues to affect the LGBTQ community.

The Questionnaire also opens up a conversation about satire and queer humor as resistance. The first question I always ask students during the discussion period after the panel is: "What kind of writing is this?" The first few times I handed out the Questionnaire, a few students were offended and responded angrily to the list, as they didn't recognize it as satire. While we were able to reach an understanding of what the Questionnaire was trying to accomplish through the following discussion, I have found that it is better to address the tone of the writing right at the start of discussion. That way, we are all approaching it from the same perspective before jumping into a deeper conversation about specific questions and the experience of participating in the activity. It also provides a moment to talk about how the queer community has often used humor, and "camp" humor in particular, as a way to fight back against homophobia.

My final piece of advice for anyone who would like to do this activity is to be careful that you do not unintentionally out LGBTQ students if you have a small class. Even though the panel is for heterosexual volunteers, queer students who do not volunteer may feel uncomfortable or feel that they are being outed by virtue of not being on the panel. When I did this exercise in a small class of 10, most of the students had already disclosed their identities within the first few weeks of class, so I wasn't worried about outing any students. Given the small size of the class, I wasn't sure if anyone would feel comfortable coming forward for the panel, and I noted that if no one wanted to volunteer, we would just discuss the text as a whole class. However, I ended up with two volunteers, and it went really well. I think in many ways this exercise was a turning point for students in that class in terms of creating a more open environment for discussion, by facilitating trust between students.

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Poetry

A Nation in Need of Invective

by R.J. Begiebing



ALEC DUNN, 2018 (VIA JUST SEEDS)

A Nation in Need of Invective

Rome being what it is, it is difficult not to write satire.
—Juvenal, *Satire I*

Forget the compunctions and dogmas
of the 21st-Century literati and book-slingers,
of faddists and ideologues, the literary Mafia,
the hot-shot gatekeepers, prigs, and aesthetes!
Forget the invective manqué of toadies, hacks,
and conspiratorial maniacs!

It is good at times in a nation's life
to place blame rather than
deflect or diffuse it.

If Juvenal had his Lucilius
and Swift his Juvenal and Rabelais,
why can we not clear our vision
with painful doses of veracity,
with *Dunciads* of our own?

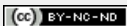
When Ben Hecht wrote
of stockyard owners
importing Billy Sunday
"to divert their underpaid hunkies
from going on strike
by shouting them dizzy with God,"
we see that he should have been another Mencken
(who skewered charlatans, demagogues,
and bawling Tin-Pot Pauls plaguing us still
in the latter-day gasps of the Anthropocene)
rather than a writer of famous screenplays
he respected but little himself.

Why suffer bread and circuses
to divert our gaze from the ego-systems
of our oligarchs and their pols
any more than from the brutalities
visited on children, women, and men
on our old plantations or in sweatshops then and now
or from the cruel follies and meltdowns of Wall Street
or of the global disruptions and wars

or of the neurological catastrophe imposed on
generations addicted to their ubiquitous screens
or of biotic despoliation and renunciations of science?

Who (like some biblical prophet
or outlaw satirist) will name
our scoundrels and miscreants
our hypocrites, conmen, and con-women
whose venalities and corruptions have wormed
into the best dreams of a nation?

Who will give us the Emblems
to scourge our revived gullibility?
Emblems equal to Ashley's Sack—
that coarse-cloth bag into which
the slave-woman Rose
placed a tattered dress,
three handfuls of parched corn,
and a braid of her own hair
for her daughter Ashley
(about to be sold to another slave owner)
and said to her nine-year old girl
she would never see again
"It be filled with my Love always."



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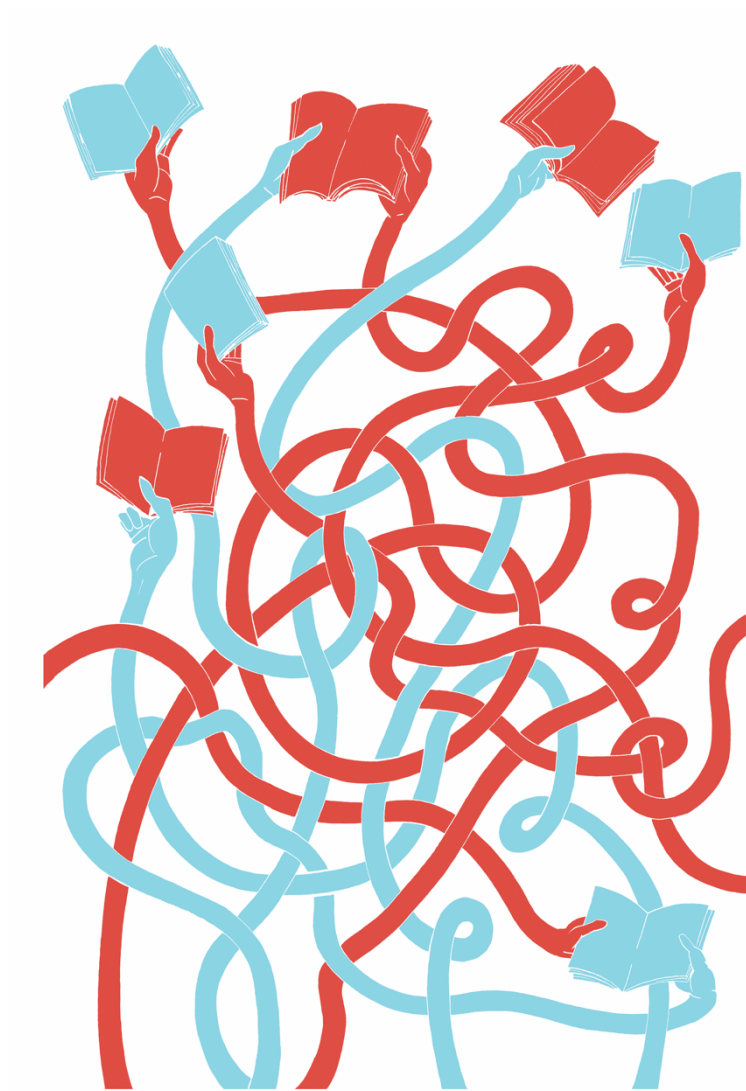


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RADICAL TEACHER

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

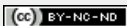
Poetry
To My Students
by Nina Pick



JOSH MACPHEE, 2014 (VIA JUST SEEDS)

To My Students

I'm so sorry,
we are teaching you all the wrong lessons,
repeating the fictions of anxiety
replicated on computer screens.
I'm sorry that we drag you
out of your body and into your head,
wrenching you from your gentle center,
your own innate knowing.
I'm sorry that we have taken your inborn
love of the earth and replaced it
with videogames, and then fed you
pharmaceuticals to numb your grief.
I'm sorry that we weld you to reason
at the expense of intuition,
homework at the expense of heartwork,
science at the expense of mythos,
and capitalism at the expense of everything.
And I'm so sorry
that our voices have silenced the wisdom
at a stone's center, in the heart of a seed,
in the mouths of animals and rivers,
in the stars' far-reaching, time-traveling light.
Go out of the classroom and into the forest.
There you will find your true teachers
shimmering with answers to questions
we never taught you to ask.
Let the rain wash you free
of your human education.
Follow the light of those stars.



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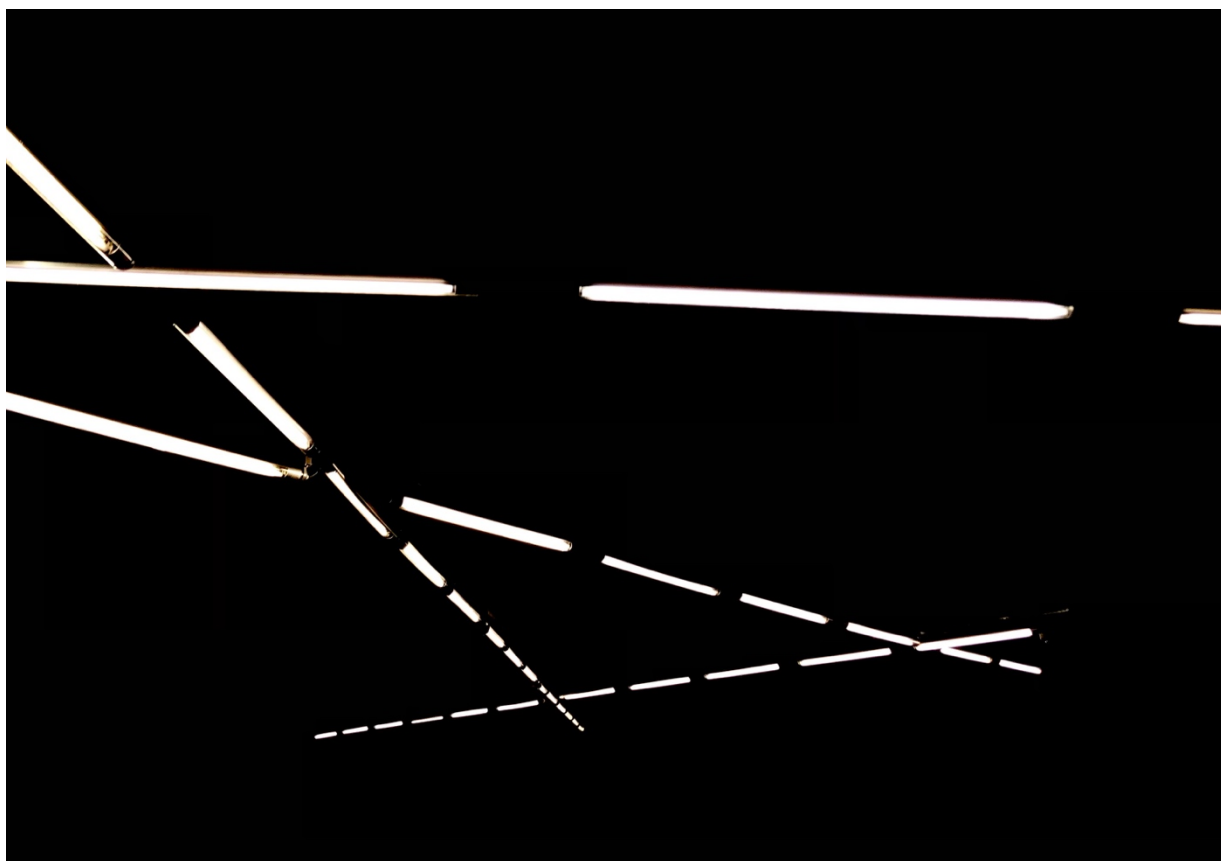
RADICAL TEACHER

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Poetry

My Seattle Sonet by Jaclyne T

by Susan Zeni



ISTVÁN JÁNKA VIA UNSPLASH.COM

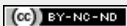
My Seattle Sonnet by Jaclyne T

So (on?) the fairy boat to Bremerton last week, he ask me
to marry, give me fifty. But if I reach for my gold,
chief my degree in art all over the world, see
all walks, meet my stander, I could live mild class, no
sailing there body on the street for no needles in there
arms. my two kids. Mother she could not see her beauty,
no looking glass glory in mopbucket water. Kill my brother
some cop on his throat. On my last day, God well not hide me,
father neither, covid coughin body baggin dead Chicago.
"Jaclyne," Grandmother, big lovey, says, "depent on your self,
depent on your own two." Seattle it rains cold and blows.
I ride my bike fast and faster round Green Lake, O Lord help
Jaclyne T Jaclyne T cant give nobody nothing no more no way.
Fairy boat to Brainbridge at ten, he ask again, I say
no.

Jaqueline: I am so happy you can finally get online. Other students were having similar problems, but now we're good to go! You've tackled a Shakespearian sonnet. Wow! When the plague closed theaters in London and there were food riots in the streets, Shakespeare wrote some of his best sonnets.

I really like the line, "no looking glass glory in mopbucket water." So well said.

Suggestions: I stuck some arrows in your poem where there are errors in spelling and verb tense. Look at those. And look at line length. You have mostly 14 and 12 syllables in your lines. Nice round numbers, but Shakespeare used 10. And Shakespeare used little enjambment. Look at that as well. Overall, you might want to regularize your expression a bit more so readers can understand what you're saying. I got a bit lost in the language. With everything else that's going on right now in the world with protests and the pandemic, I suspect readers don't want to struggle with meaning. Hey, nice Shakespearean couplet to end the sonnet, and I really like your final no. Shakespeare wouldn't do it, but it sure works here.



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RADICAL TEACHER

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Review
Learning to Connect: Relationships, Race, and Teacher Education

Reviewed by Jay Gillen



LEARNING TO CONNECT: RELATIONSHIPS, RACE, AND TEACHER EDUCATION BY VICTORIA THEISEN-HOMER. (2020). ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD PUBLISHERS.

Can pre-service teachers be taught how to build strong relationships with students? What is a strong teacher-student relationship? What are strong relationships good for? How do teachers learn to build relationships with students across racial lines? Victoria Theisen-Homer—formerly an award-winning teacher in Los Angeles, and now a researcher at the Arizona State University—attempts answers to these questions through a superb comparative study of two teacher residencies that explicitly include relationship building in their coursework. She names one the “No Excuses Teacher Residency” and the other she calls the “Progressive Teacher Residency.” The charm of the book is in using the comparative study of two very different pedagogical orientations to try to elucidate aspects of the underlying problem: can relationship building be taught?

Theisen-Homer decides that each residency succeeds in helping new teachers think about relationships, practice them, and value them:

[T]eachers can be taught to form relationships with students...They can learn to honor parents and guardians, to reach out to them in multiple meaningful ways. They can learn to listen to students: what they say, what they imply, what they omit. They can learn to care for students, to push them academically, to try to empathize with their needs/interests/worries...They can learn to view students not as pupils who must acquire a predetermined set of skills, but as multifaceted human beings capable of teaching quite a bit to themselves, each other, and the teacher. (196)

Underlying Theisen-Homer’s research is the conviction that meaningful teacher-student relationships are “a crucial aspect of good teaching across racial and social differences” (xviii); however, the question of how pre-service teachers learn to build relationships with students and then sustain those relationships as they begin their careers is rarely addressed in the literature. Theisen-Homer hopes to begin filling in this gap, and she is testing the hypothesis that pre-service residencies where relational work is explicitly addressed may have pointers that other programs can follow. She finds that they do, in fact, have much to offer, partly just from the programs’ intentionality about relationship. But she also finds that teaching relationship building does not automatically result in effective teaching across racial and social differences.

The role of relationship building is very different in the two programs, and it turns out that the schools where the teachers are later assigned have an outsized effect on their ability to sustain the relationships they have been taught to value. On one hand, it seems that the relationship lessons of the “Progressive” teacher residency only work in schools where the students are mostly White and wealthy. On the other hand, the “No Excuses” relationship strategies only seem to work in schools where low-income students of color have already accepted that their role is to be compliant and

unquestioning in return for the promise of future access to dominant power structures.

If this outcome sounds bleak, it is because the book is honest. The author announces in the preface that her aim is to promote “I-Thou” relationships, following Martin Buber. This is a high standard. For Buber, “I-Thou” relationships contrast with “I-It” objectifications. “I-Thou” makes us human, and in fact the paradigmatic “I-Thou” relationship is our relationship to God. So Theisen-Homer holds up as a goal a quality of teacher work that goes well beyond what we normally think of as “schooling.” She is right to do this, and of course she is likely to be disappointed (in the short-term, at least) when she measures her goal against the practicalities of the racialized caste system in America today.

But this correct, idealistic intention lets Theisen-Homer read the teacher residencies with great accuracy; her most valuable contribution is the rich analysis in the portraits of the teacher residencies. The “No Excuses” residency is open and explicit about its teaching of relationship building as strictly instrumental. Teachers should use a set of “moves” on students to establish sufficient positive relationship-like interactions to cause the students to comply with teachers’ instructions 100% of the time. The fourth relationship “move,” for example, is that teachers should “chat for no reason” with students outside of class time, to build up a sense of ease and relaxation that can then be cashed in during the highly formalized—and in fact mostly boring and repetitive—class periods.

Clearly, this is not the author’s own style of relating, but she is not trying to score points. Instead, she is trying to show just how far the teaching of relationship can go in the “No Excuses” format. Students she interviews feel remarkably positive about the “No Excuses” teacher residents in the study, are willing to obey them, and accept that their subordinate roles now will pay off with money and power in the future. They also say clearly that their teachers don’t really know who they are. Theisen-Homer points out that this dynamic makes it impossible for the “No Excuses” preparation to address racial injustice, no matter how hard the program leaders might say they want to. Assimilationist means are only suited to assimilationist ends. “I-Thou” relationships, in contrast, would have to involve the possibility that the teachers could change their orientation to the dominant society as *they are affected* by the students. But that’s a revolutionary idea, and “No Excuses” clearly isn’t going there.

The “Progressive” residency fares better in one respect, but worse in another. Students are thought of as whole human beings. Teachers make no demand that their students follow them, but rather learn to follow their students—designing curriculum around interests, modulating expectations in response to student reactions, and so on. Relationships are “reciprocal,” not only instrumental. Not unexpectedly, the “Progressive” residency takes place at a wealthy, century-old, overwhelmingly White private school that the residents almost uniformly describe as “cozy.” In stark contrast to the “No Excuses” curriculum, classroom management is taught only vaguely through a “Nurtured Heart Approach,” which emphasizes the primacy of relationship and the importance of directing “energy”

towards positive behavior rather than “fueling” the negative. Theisen-Homer uses the pseudonym “Xanadu” for the host school, and it is hard to avoid a sense that the entire description of the “Progressive” residency is partly satirical. No pleasure-dome like this could really exist in our harsh world.

In fact, the “Progressive” residents do encounter public schools with less well-off students of color in some of their student teaching placements and after the residency. Predictably, their preparation reads as inadequate to both the teachers and to Theisen-Homer. There are too many students to build the reciprocal relationships that were possible in Xanadu. The culture of the stressed public schools conflicts with the cozy, supportive culture of the residency, and so the new teachers feel at sea. Theisen-Homer points out that none of them remain in urban or even racially-mixed suburban schools after the first year.

We know from the Preface that Theisen-Homer sides with the Xanadu theory of reciprocal relationship, so her chapter analyzing the “Progressive” residency’s failure to deal adequately with race is especially important. There is coursework around race, reading lists, guest speakers. But the residency employs only one Black instructor (the director of the program) and one Latina instructor (who points out that she represents “stealth diversity” because she “comes across as white”). Both instructors are wary of pushing residents out of their comfort zones, and the question of how much “racial work” the residents will do is ultimately left up to the almost all White residents themselves. Theisen-Homer sees this strategy as ultimately a failure, the evidence being that the “Progressive” graduates uniformly retreat to a White bubble as they move ahead in their careers.

The expertly crafted *Learning to Connect* makes a valuable contribution to the field of teacher preparation. I would love to see a sequel that widens the lens in ways that Theisen-Homer gestures towards, but doesn’t have a chance to cover. For example, there is roughly a page near the end of the book on “Lessons for Schools,” but I would like to hear much more. The book gives examples of well-prepared teachers who are nevertheless relatively helpless to sustain relationships in schools where relationships are not prioritized. So Theisen-Homer makes some excellent suggestions: keep total teacher-student ratios low; schedule lots of informal time for teachers and students to interact; and stop rushing through curriculum (“urgency [is] the enemy of human connections,” and an “efficient” pedagogical approach “bleeds the joy out of classes”). But these excellent suggestions implicate an enormous, politically complex set of assumptions, all of them tied up with race, caste and economics. Theisen-Homer argues persuasively that the question of how to prepare teachers for positive relationships with students cannot be separated from questions about the nature of the schools they will be teaching in, so we need to have that conversation, too.

Second, we hear very little about relationships of students with each other. Theisen-Homer mentions several times that students do learn a lot from each other, and I imagine that as a teacher she is extremely well-attuned to student-student relationships. These are vastly understudied, however, and we are blind if we think that teacher-student relationships are the most important relationships in schools. For teachers to truly know their students, they must also know that their own relationships with students are part of an immensely complicated social ecology.

Finally, the “I-Thou” standard is far from innocent. It implies that radical change is needed not only in our schools but also in our entire political economy. In this sense, Theisen-Homer’s excellent book is “stealth radical,” and I would love to hear more openly about the fuller implications of serious challenges to neo-liberal, data-driven relationships. Theisen-Homer lays her cards on the table when she writes of the “No Excuses” residency that “a system predicated on uncritically advancing dominant culture, of simply teaching students to navigate it, can never truly achieve any form of social justice” (45). The dominant culture must be challenged and changed if relationship building is to matter in political terms at all. But no one in the book decides to take that work on explicitly and consistently. The Black director of the Xanadu residency comes closest, but even she “tries to avoid ‘push[ing] too hard’ with residents” (110). Ultimately, even the Xanadu residents “seem poised to primarily advance the...life outcomes of already privileged students” (111). If we truly prioritize relationships, can we continue to allow three separate school systems: one for the very wealthy, one for the segregated suburbs, and one for the poor, both rural and urban? Doesn’t the value of recognizing each person’s full humanity through “I-Thou” relationships conflict with the value of property and racialized caste? I am sure as outstanding a teacher and scholar as Theisen-Homer is has fascinating answers to these questions and that we’ll hear them in due course; in the meantime, *Learning to Connect* has more than enough excellent material to start us off.



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Contributors' Notes
Totally Radical



"WE ARE STILL HERE." BY AUTUMN PELTIER (2020) VIA JUST SEEDS

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Jay Gillen has taught and organized in and around Baltimore City Public Schools since 1987. In 1994, after a 2-year organizing campaign, he became teacher-director of the first community-controlled public middle school in Baltimore in many years. Working with graduates of the school, Gillen developed the peer-tutoring and youth activist agenda of the Baltimore Algebra Project (BAP). He is currently helping to design youth-led math research centers and to develop a peer-to-peer youth enterprise incubator.

Carrie E. Hart earned her Ph.D. in Educational Studies and her M.A. in Women's & Gender Studies, both from the University of North Carolina Greensboro and teaches courses that focus on gender, sexuality, feminist theory, and education.

Julia Ismael is the Founder and Head Architect of Aspirations of The Equity Consortium, whose mission is to institutionalize equity. Julia joyfully and productively works now on her own schedule after serving others as a Student Involvement Coordinator at Seattle Central College and a Restorative Justice Coordinator at a local high school. She continues to hold monthly community listening circles for equity advocates to inform, inspire, and educate.

Brianna Ishihara is an Emotional Behavioral Classroom (EBC) elementary educator in SeaTac, Washington. She is *yonsei*, or fourth generation Japanese American, and her passion lies in equitable education and practices. Brianna was formerly employed at Seattle Central College in the Office for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

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Nina Pick is a teacher with ten years of experience in Waldorf and progressive education, she is also an oral historian and a practitioner of mind-body healing.

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Aaron Stoller is a transdisciplinary philosopher with a specialization in critical pragmatism, and who's research contributes broadly to the field of critical university studies where he focuses on questions pertaining to the sociopolitical and organizational contexts of learning, the role of universities within democratic knowledge economies, and the epistemic cultures of the disciplines.

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William Terrell Wright is a Ph.D. student at The University of Georgia in the department of Language and Literacy Education. His research spans/entangles teacher education, critical media literacy, participatory action research, and educational technology.

Susan Zeni lived in the East Village, Chinatown, and Harlem for five years; Seattle for ten; and recently retired from teaching community college in Minneapolis. Precovid, Susan got her kicks playing accordion with the Polkastra and the Tsatskelehs.



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