

RADICAL TEACHER

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

Introduction

Dispatches from the First Day of School in the Trump
2.0 Era

by Sarah E. Chinn



OLD COLLEGE CLASSROOM © SPIROVIEW INC. | DREAMSTIME.COM

When the editorial collective at *Radical Teacher* came up with the idea for soliciting pieces for this issue, we imagined it as what we call a “mini-cluster”: a handful of essays that wouldn’t fill a full issue but would open a conversation on the topic. We wanted to know: what are you planning to do on the first day of school under a very new set of political conditions that are constraining what we teach, how we teach it, and who we teach it to. Little did we anticipate how many teachers at every kind of institution, from K-12 to continuing education, had something to say about how they’ve had to rework, or at least rethink, their teaching to respond to the massive changes educators have experienced since Donald Trump took office for the second time.

Of course, the fallout of Trump’s re-election was not the first time that teachers have had to grapple with restrictions on their pedagogy: it’s not like things have been going well for educators in several states in the US over the past five years. As of 2024, on the K-12 level, close to twenty-five states, including Montana, South Dakota, Utah, Texas, Tennessee, Virginia, and New Hampshire, had already passed laws restricting the teaching of issues around gender and sexuality in schools.¹ More than twenty had passed similar legislation regarding teaching about race except in the most general and uncritical ways.

Tennessee was one of the first states out of the gate. In 2021, it passed Public Chapter No.494. which banned the teaching of “divisive concepts” in K-12. The law defined “divisive concept” to cover not just the idea that “One (1) race or sex is inherently superior or inferior to another race or sex” but any claim that race, gender, or sexuality might play a role in social relations. For example, Public Chapter 818 insisted that educational institutions were prohibited from suggesting that “meritocracy is inherently racist or sexist, or designed by a particular race or sex to oppress another race or sex” or that “this state or the United States is fundamentally or irredeemably racist or sexist,” even though both arguments have been borne out by any number of scholars over the past several decades.²

More remarkably, the law implicitly argued that these “divisive concepts” were not simply inaccurate or anti-American. Rather, they were by definition victimizing white people; indeed, part of the law forbade the teaching of any material that might cause “discomfort, guilt, anguish, or another form of psychological distress solely because of the individual's race or sex” (1).³ Also prohibited were any hints that racial, gendered, and other inequities were in any way systemic or structural, or that members of any racial, gender, religious, or other group might act out of engrained or unconscious bias. The following year, Tennessee enacted Public Chapter 818, which expanded these regulations into higher education.

At the same time, in response to rising conservative complaints about what they identified as “critical race theory,” but was in fact any teaching of US history that acknowledged the nation’s legacy of enslavement of Africans/African Americans and attempts to destroy Indigenous peoples, several states restricted history instruction in K-12 schools. The Kentucky state legislature

approved State Bill 138 in March 2022, a law that enforced a historical “understanding that the institution of slavery and post-Civil War laws enforcing racial segregation and discrimination were contrary to the fundamental American promise of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, as expressed in the Declaration of Independence, but that defining racial disparities solely on the legacy of this institution is destructive to the unification of our nation.”⁴ The law went further, mandating that schools teach belief in “personal agency and the understanding that, regardless of one’s circumstances, an American has the ability to succeed when he or she is given sufficient opportunity and is committed to seizing that opportunity through hard work, pursuit of education, and good citizenship.”

K-12 schools were not the only site of conservative control over curriculum. Regulations restricting higher education were already on the rise: Between 2023 and 2024 alone, Texas passed a law prohibiting public institutions from having DEI offices or anyone from doing that work; compelled state funded colleges and universities to demonstrate compliance with that law or lose funding; instructed the Texas A&M system to prohibit faculty from advocating “race and gender ideology”; instructed Texas Tech faculty to teach that there are “only two sexes.”⁵ These curricular and administrative changes were accompanied by the destruction of faculty governance bodies, replacing them with toothless “advisory councils.”

During that same time, Governor Ron DeSantis was hard at work in Florida, remaking higher education through both institutional and focused measures. Probably most notorious was the wholesale restructuring of New College, the small liberal arts campus of the state’s public higher education system. DeSantis transformed the college by closing its Gender Studies department, firing the college’s president and most of the administration, reneging on a collective bargaining agreement with faculty, replacing most of the board of trustees, putting Christopher Rufo at its head, and creating athletic scholarships (based on the belief that athletes would be more politically conservative and would soon outnumber politically progressive New College students). But no less wide-ranging in its effects was a raft of other legislation similar to that in Texas, Indiana, Iowa, and other states that enforced “viewpoint diversity” and prohibited pedagogy informed by theories of race, gender, or sexuality.

So when Donald Trump returned to the White House in January 2025, he faced a radically different educational landscape from the one he left in 2021. Faculty were at first astounded and then cowed into increasingly draconian measures that would have seemed impossible even six months earlier, and Trump saw an opportunity to turn what had been a state-by-state movement to suppress not just progressive but accurate education into a national mandate. What followed was a tidal wave of Executive Orders mostly affecting higher education – orders that were mostly unenforceable, as courts later demonstrated, but that announced the arrival of a new dispensation.

These EOs covered a congeries of issues: closing DEI offices; rescinding budgetary appropriations to increase equity and economic opportunity for underrepresented students, Tribal Colleges/Universities, and Hispanic serving institutions; cancelling a Biden-era initiative aimed at building educational capacity at HSIs; threatening to “investigate” all universities with endowments above \$1 billion. And the hits kept coming. Over the course of 2025, the administration prohibited federal funding for projects that “promote racial preferences,” reject “the sex binary,” support unauthorized immigration, or “compromise public safety and promote anti-American values.”⁶

Simultaneously, the Department of Education began targeting mostly elite institutions by either cutting off grants or extorting funds. A primary strategy was weaponizing antisemitism: the administration activated the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) to investigate claims of antisemitism at universities that had seen pro-Palestinian political activity, used Title VI policy to accuse and punish colleges and universities, forced agreements that included not just regulations about antisemitism but abrogated academic freedom. As a penalty for these supposed violations of Title IV, the federal government threatened to withhold federal grant money if elite universities didn’t pay “fines” of up to millions of dollars (from a low of \$50 million from Brown to a median of \$500 million from Harvard to a mind-boggling \$1 billion from UCLA).⁷

Additional states jumped on the bandwagon. As the box below shows, legislation restricting education in one way or another exploded in 2025.

It was in this context that *Radical Teacher* launched our call for submissions about how educators were addressing these immense challenges. Were they

disguising supposedly “forbidden” topics in course titles and descriptions that camouflaged what they were actually teaching? How were teachers at all levels in states not affected by these changes focusing on civic and political education? And what were the intersections between education and the Trump administration’s other authoritarian measures, such as the violent intensification of deportation of immigrants?

Once submissions started arriving via our submissions portal, we realized that this was going to be more than a mini-cluster. A few things stood out: authors were concerned not just, or even primarily, about legislation specifically concerning education. Other issues, ostensibly not educational in nature, affected them and their students – environmental degradation from the unregulated network of AI data centers, the ongoing trauma from the Covid pandemic and the anti-Black violence that led to the revival of the Black Lives Matter movement, the violent crackdown on immigrants (documented and undocumented), and the pervasive feeling of apocalypticism. Moreover, several of our authors focused less on the crises facing them and their students and more on strategies they had adopted to make their classrooms safe havens. The word “love” came up again and again; in an environment defined by hatred, fear, and distrust, how might the practice of love itself be a radical political action? And others addressed the need they felt to abandon formal instruction in the wake of censorship and white supremacy, to move education out of the classroom altogether.

These ten short pieces cover a wide array of educational institutions: community-based adult ed classrooms, urban public university campuses, selective

Topline Numbers for State-Level Higher Education Censorship

- In 2025, state legislators introduced **93** bills across **32** states that would censor higher education.
- This includes **15** bills with educational gag orders, **56** with indirect censorship provisions, and **22** bills that include both.
- Of the **93** proposed bills, **21** bills – or **23%** – became law in **15** states.
- **5** additional states policies restricting classroom teaching were issued or adopted in two of those states.
- State legislatures set **3** new records in 2025: the highest number of new laws censoring higher education enacted in a single year (**21**), the highest number of states enacting them (**15**), and the highest number of states enacting their first higher education censorship law (**8**).
- **23** states have now enacted laws or policies censoring higher education since 2021, and over **50%** of university and college students in the U.S. are enrolled in a state that has enacted at least one law or policy censoring higher education.

FROM PEN AMERICA, [EXPANDING THE WEB OF CONTROL: AMERICA’S CENSORED CAMPUSES 2025](#) (JANUARY 2026).

high schools, rural state universities, underfunded city public schools, to name just a few. They explore classrooms in New York City, Appalachian North Carolina, Baltimore, Alabama, and beyond. I hope that they will inspire you to reimagine your first day of classes when the new academic year begins.

As well as being a member of the *Radical Teacher* editorial collective, **Sarah E. Chinn** teaches in the English department at Hunter College, CUNY. She is the author of several books, most recently *Disability, The Body, and Radical Intellectuals in the Literature of the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Cambridge UP, 2024).

Notes

1. Information here about restrictions on teaching race, gender, and/or sexuality in K-12 schools comes from an excellent online article in the *Washington Post* from June 13, 2024, "Which states are restricting, or requiring, lessons on race, sex and gender." Although it's necessarily a little out of date, the article includes maps identifying which states have either expanded or restricted education on gender, race, and sexuality in schools, as well as detailed charts of each specific regulation state by state.
2. State of Tennessee, Public Chapter No.818, House Bill No.2670. Passed March 28, 2022 (1).
3. Conservative resentment about being labeled as racist (and, to a lesser extent sexist) has been in public discourse for more than a decade. In a 2013 blog post in *Mother Jones*, Kevin Drum argued that the right-wing taste for "outrage media" like the Rush Limbaugh show originated in conservatives' desire to operate in a space in which they could say whatever they wanted and not have to worry about defending themselves from (not necessarily inaccurate) accusations of racism.
4. For the final text of the law, as well as the various amendments added to it, see the entry on the Kentucky General Assembly webpage detailing the legislative process: <https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/record/22rs/sb138.html>.
5. Information about laws regulating DEI work and the discussion of race, class, gender, and sexuality in Texas and Florida come from the PEN America report *Expanding the Web of Control: America's Censored Campuses 2025* (January 2026).
6. These measures are detailed in the PEN America report.
7. See Isabelle Taft, "How Universities Cracked Down on Pro-Palestinian Activism" *New York Times* Nov 25, 2024, and AAUP, *Discriminating Against Dissent: The Weaponization of Civil Rights Law to Repress Campus Speech on Palestine*, 2025, for a full listing of various governmental measures.



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Dispatches from the First Day: Teaching Amid Crisis, Refusal, and Solidarity

by Remi Alapo



STUDENTS ACROSS RACIAL AND ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS—including Black, Asian, and Latino communities—engaged in collective dialogue, reflecting the classroom as a space of shared learning, difference, and solidarity. Photo courtesy of author

The first day of class is no longer a neutral pedagogical moment. It is a political encounter. Students arrive not only with notebooks and laptops but also with fear about immigration enforcement, about tuition, and about whether speaking honestly in a classroom is still safe. I entered my courses this semester knowing that the syllabus mattered less than the conditions under which learning was taking place. Teaching in public higher education currently means teaching within a structural, racialized, and unevenly distributed crisis (American Association of University Professors (AAUP), 2023; Giroux, 2020).

I teach in Africana Studies, Ethnic Studies, and Cultural Diversity, fields rooted in struggle and shaped by refusal - refusal of silence, refusal of erasure, refusal of the idea that knowledge can be separated from power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). While these disciplines create space for critical pedagogy, trauma-informed teaching is not always institutionally scaffolded. What I practice in the classroom is therefore not simply disciplinary convention, but an intentional intervention shaped by students' lived conditions (Carello & Butler, 2015).

Immigration Is Not a Topic. It Is the Air Students Are Breathing

Concerns about immigration status surfaced immediately and materially. During the first week of the semester, students referenced immigration enforcement activity near transit hubs they rely on to get to campus. One student wrote anonymously that her family had altered daily routines, avoiding public transportation and limiting movement after dusk, after seeing unmarked vehicles near their building. Another shared that uncertainty surrounding the future of DACA had led them to question whether remaining enrolled full-time was "worth the risk."

These conditions also shaped how students interacted with one another in the classroom. In small-group discussions, students often prefaced questions with phrases such as "you don't have to answer this" or "only if you're comfortable sharing." What initially appeared as hesitation gradually revealed itself as a collective ethic of care. Students recognized that disclosure carried risk and began negotiating new ways of learning together that did not depend on exposure. Rather than discouraging these dynamics, I named them explicitly as evidence of how political conditions shape collective behavior. We discussed how fear circulates socially and how practices of mutual protection are learned, not innate. Situating these moments within broader structures of immigration policy and racialized enforcement allowed students to understand their anxiety not as individual weakness, but as a shared condition produced by power.

These concerns reshaped classroom participation. Attendance fluctuated. Participation declined following high-profile immigration raids reported in local media. Rather than interpreting this as disengagement, I named what was happening and paused planned activities to acknowledge how fear disciplines speech not only in

society, but in classrooms (Wong, 2022). I reminded students that no one was required to disclose immigration status to participate fully and that the classroom would not function as a surveillance space. This did not eliminate fear, but it made it visible, and visibility matters when repression thrives on silence.

Trauma-Informed Pedagogy as Collective Resistance

Trauma-informed pedagogy in my classroom is not a set of wellness techniques layered onto an otherwise unchanged curriculum. It is a political stance. It begins from the recognition that trauma is not primarily individual or accidental, but produced by state violence, racial capitalism, surveillance, and institutional abandonment (Carello & Butler, 2015; Giroux, 2020). For many students, particularly undocumented students, students of color, and first-generation students, education does not occur in the absence of harm, but alongside it.

Practically, this means restructuring the first weeks of the semester to prioritize safety without demanding disclosure. On the first day, students collectively develop classroom agreements that foreground confidentiality, mutual respect, and the right to withhold personal information. These agreements are not framed as rules of civility, but as protections against the extraction of vulnerability. Students are explicitly told that participation does not require narrating trauma, and that silence can be a form of agency rather than disengagement.

Trauma-informed pedagogy also shapes assessment practices. I build flexibility into deadlines and modes of participation, recognizing that precarity does not operate on predictable timelines. Rather than penalizing absence or emotional withdrawal, I create multiple pathways for engagement: written reflection, small-group discussion, or asynchronous contributions so that learning remains accessible even when students' lives are disrupted by forces beyond their control (hooks, 2003). This flexibility is not presented as individual accommodation but as a collective condition of learning in an unequal society.

Trauma-informed pedagogy also reshapes how authority operates in the classroom. I am explicit with students about why particular pedagogical choices are made: why deadlines are flexible, why participation is broadly defined, and why silence is not automatically read as disengagement. Making these decisions transparent demystifies power and invites students into the pedagogical process itself. In course reflections, students frequently note that knowing there are "other ways to show up" makes continued engagement possible during moments of personal or familial crisis. One student wrote that this clarity allowed them to remain enrolled while navigating uncertainty related to immigration enforcement at home. These moments underscore that trauma-informed pedagogy is not about lowering expectations, but about refusing instructional practices that reproduce exclusion under the guise of rigor.

Importantly, trauma-informed teaching in this context resists the neoliberal impulse to individualize resilience.

Students are not asked how they will “cope” with structural harm; instead, they are invited to analyze its causes and imagine collective responses. Assignments such as the community counter-history project and discussions of Mutual Assistance and Defense Compacts (MADC) situate trauma within longer traditions of survival and solidarity, reframing vulnerability as a shared condition rather than a personal deficit (Newfield, 2024).

Students quickly connected MADCs to practices already present in their own lives. During discussion, several described informal group chats used to warn peers about enforcement activity, pooled funds for emergency expenses, and shared caregiving arrangements among extended networks. Rather than encountering MADCs as abstract organizational models, students analyzed them as extensions of strategies they already understood. This recognition prompted critical questions about why such forms of cooperation are routinely framed as exceptional or radical, while institutional neglect is normalized. For many students, the discussion shifted the narrative from vulnerability to collective capacity. MADCs became legible not as outside interventions, but as infrastructures of survival built in response to abandonment -- structures students recognized themselves as already participating in, even if they had not previously named them as such.

This approach is not always comfortable. It requires relinquishing some pedagogical control and accepting that emotional presence will vary across the semester. But it has also allowed students to remain intellectually engaged during moments when conventional classroom structures might have pushed them out. Trauma-informed pedagogy, as practiced here, is less about calming students than about refusing to reproduce the conditions that silence them. In that sense, it is inseparable from the broader project of radical teaching.

What Students Say When Given the Space to Say It

Early in the semester, students work in small groups to generate short slogans responding to the question: What should education do for you right now? This exercise follows a brief discussion of student movements and mutual aid traditions, situating students’ responses within a longer history of collective resistance (Rosen & Entin, 2024). The slogans reflected students’ material realities. Community college students, many balancing work, caregiving, and legal precarity, offered phrases such as “Education should not put us at risk” and “Learning without fear is a right.” Students in four-year courses emphasized voice and erasure: “Tell our stories before they disappear”; “Knowledge is survival.”

We did not treat these slogans as rhetorical flourishes. As a class, we discussed where they came from, whose experiences they reflected, and how institutional structures either supported or undermined these expectations. One student observed, “School asks us to be visible, but visibility can get us hurt.” That insight became a touchstone for later discussions of academic freedom, surveillance, and resistance (Theoharis, 2018).

A Counter-History Assignment as Pedagogical Refusal

In these discussions, students complete a community counter-history assignment. They select a history absent from prior coursework and trace its significance through family narratives, community archives, or local media. The assignment explicitly asks students to analyze why certain histories are marginalized and who benefits from that erasure (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). One student documented informal childcare networks among immigrant women as survival infrastructures developed in response to exclusion from formal systems. Another traced Caribbean mutual aid societies formed to confront housing discrimination.

In class discussions, students recognized these histories as predecessors to contemporary Mutual Assistance and Defense Compacts (MADCs), understanding cooperation not as charity but as collective defense (Newfield, 2024). For undocumented and mixed-status students, this assignment enabled participation without forced disclosure, affirming that political analysis does not require personal exposure. It also reinforced the idea that learning has always occurred beyond institutional permission.

Institutional Context and Pedagogical Difference

Teaching across community colleges and four-year colleges sharpens these dynamics in distinct but interconnected ways. Community college students are more likely to be navigating immediate economic and legal precarity, including unstable housing, food insecurity, caregiving responsibilities, and the threat of immigration enforcement. These conditions shape not only students’ availability for coursework but also their willingness to speak openly in classroom settings. In this context, care-based and trauma-informed pedagogy is not an enhancement to teaching but a prerequisite for participation. Flexibility around deadlines, multiple modes of engagement, and explicit attention to safety and confidentiality are essential for keeping students enrolled and intellectually present.

At four-year colleges, students often experience a different configuration of pressure. While they may have greater access to institutional resources, they are also more directly subject to professionalization narratives, donor politics, and heightened forms of surveillance tied to reputation, employability, and public visibility. Students in these settings frequently express concern about how political speech, protest participation, or even classroom discussions might follow them beyond graduation. These anxieties shape classroom dynamics in quieter but no less consequential ways, often producing strategic silences rather than overt withdrawal. In both contexts, solidarity-based teaching is essential for sustaining engagement and trust (hooks, 2003; Giroux, 2020).

Despite these differences, solidarity-based teaching is essential in both contexts. In each setting, students

respond to pedagogical approaches that make power visible, name structural constraints, and frame learning as a collective rather than competitive endeavor. As hooks (2003) and Giroux (2020) argue, education becomes a practice of freedom only when it resists the logics of isolation and individualization. Teaching across institutional contexts has clarified that while precarity takes different forms, the need for pedagogies grounded in solidarity, care, and shared responsibility remains constant.

Beginning with Hope

In the face of crises, such as budget cuts, censorship, and precarity, the first day could easily be consumed by despair. Instead, I began with hope. Hope is part of a pedagogy of freedom, not optimism, but the insistence on transformation. I asked students to write one hope for themselves and one for the world. We posted them on our refrigerators at home, in safe spaces and locations where we feel a sense of belonging: "NYC is not for sale!" "finish my degree," "see my family again," "IMMIGRANTS ARE WELCOME HERE," "justice for Palestine," "a safer city," "Muslim and Jewish Student Solidarity," "NO ICE on campus," "NO HATE, NO FEAR," "Free Tuition." We will return to these throughout the semester.

Hope is tangible. It is embodied in students balancing jobs and classes, in faculty fighting for equity, and in mutual aid groups sustaining communities. To begin with, hope is to refuse despair and to affirm that our classrooms remain sites of possibility. In the face of funding cuts, censorship, and political hostility, beginning a semester with hope might seem naïve. Yet hope is not the absence of struggle; it is the insistence on possibility amid struggle. For Spring 2026, I plan to extend these by connecting hopes to concrete actions, attending a campus event, mentoring a peer, and joining an organizing effort. I carry with me the conviction that every first day is a chance to remake the classroom as a space of resistance and renewal. This is both the challenge and the promise of teaching in a time of crisis.

What the First Day Now Demands

This reflection has reframed the first day of class as a political threshold rather than a procedural beginning. It is the moment when educators and students decide whether the classroom will reproduce silence or practice refusal. Beginning with hope is not sentimental optimism; it is a refusal to allow fear to define the conditions of learning (hooks, 2003). What this analysis has clarified is that radical teaching does not begin with abstraction. It begins with listening to what students already know about risk, survival, and solidarity. The classroom remains a contested space, but it is also a space where students are already theorizing the world they are navigating. Our task

is not to sanitize that analysis but to stand with students when doing so becomes politically dangerous.

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The Adverse Health Consequences of Resource-Extractive AI Data Centers: Analyzing Technological Innovation and Rurality with University Students

by Anna Mullany



MANSFIELD, GA - DATA AI CENTER. PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHOR

In her recent book, *Empire of AI* (2025), the award-winning tech-journalist Karen Hao chronicles how Open AI is reshaping our world and compares the AI industry to past colonial plunder -- different in form, but same in essence: technological development by way of seizure and extraction of resources, reaping profit for the few while others pay the price. I came across this book just weeks before I was to start up the new semester teaching "Seminar in Rural Health" at Appalachian State University in Boone, NC. Given the time in which universities are investing in exploring AI's use on campus, it felt pertinent to connect Hao's analysis to the increased emergence of data AI centers in rural regions of the U.S.

It is not uncommon these days on the university level to find a plethora of AI workshops or webinars to attend - how to and if we integrate AI into courses, how to use and adapt to AI, examples of AI policies for the classroom, how to spot AI in student work, and what the ethical issues are surrounding AI. There are, however, fewer sessions (if any) about the public health toll on population health, whether by toxic air contaminants AI data centers emit or these centers' massive water needs that contribute to the increased scarcity of clean water for surrounding communities.

I examined different syllabus policies regarding AI and decided to have a completely restrictive ban. Part of my policy reads:

There are ongoing ethical issues with AI such as data privacy, surveillance, bias, inaccuracy, intellectual property violations, and adverse environmental and health impacts; as a public health professor this is a population-health issue that needs more critical conversations and oversight . . . AI-generated submissions are not permitted and will be treated as plagiarism. In that spirit, I as your professor will not use AI to grade work, plan, or conduct class.

In the two courses I am currently teaching, I went over this policy on the first day of class and opened it up to discussion with my students. I wanted to be clear on two points: 1) I do not automatically assume students are using AI; and 2) faculty are not immune to also using AI. This is not an us-versus-them issue. Students who did speak up about their thoughts on AI described largely negative feelings. They expressed concerns from "sometimes ChatGPT is wrong" to "AI is creepy." One student described being accused of using AI for an essay and how she had to prove to the instructor that it was in fact her writing. Although I could not gauge how much students did actually use AI for course work, I was encouraged by the students who did speak up about the negative impact and their desire not to use it.

For my "Seminar in Rural Health" course, I wanted to take it beyond merely talking about course policy and put attention on the adverse health effects of data AI centers in rural areas. My pedagogical intention is to build analytical tools to investigate how technological advancements are organized, owned, and controlled within a capitalist economy. I sought to frame the conversation in terms of who actually benefits from AI technological

innovation and who suffers -- especially in terms of rural health.

These large data centers, whose massive physical and environmental footprint (Weise & Wetz, 2025) are essential to developing and maintaining large language models (LLMs), are an increasingly contentious issue in rural America: welcomed for economic gain, new jobs, and improved infrastructure from some people's point of view, while simultaneously met with community resistance and successful organizing to shut them down or halt construction (Barringer, 2025).

While AI data companies like Meta and Amazon benefit from cheap land and tax breaks in rural areas (Johnson-May, 2024), locals suffer the consequences on their mental and physical health. The public health toll of AI energy-intensive data centers has been largely overlooked. Han and colleagues (2024) projected 1300 deaths per year by 2030 as a result of the toxic air pollutants and a health cost-burden valued up to \$20 billion a year. Fine particle matter from air pollutants penetrate deep into the lungs, causing serious health effects from early mortality due to lung cancer to asthma, heart attacks, and strokes. As with all health conditions, AI data centers will continue to disproportionately affect the health of marginalized and low-income communities.

I opened that first class by asking students what words and phrases they associate with rural America. Common descriptors included: "low-resourced," "poor," "less developed," and "unique health challenges." We followed this up by watching a short clip featuring residents living next to an AI data center in Mansfield, Georgia owned by Meta and Blackstone; these rural residents face non-stop noise, air, water, and light pollution, and rising electricity bills (More Perfect Union, 2025). Students pointed out how the residents carry the cost of these data centers in different ways -- from health to finances -- while Meta makes massive profits. Students began to articulate the contradiction stemming from their initial word-association with rural America: although rural areas often get marked as "poor" and "low-resourced" there are, at the same time, those making huge profits from the abundance and wealth of land and energy.

A number of my students come from rural North Carolina and deeply care about the health and wellbeing of their communities. After we watched the short clip, I asked students their reactions. "Sad," "damaging," "shocked," and "major [health and environmental] repercussions" were some of the initial comments. Many reflected that it was important to learn of the (often obscured) destructive reality of AI data centers, as LLM's have become a normal part of everyday lives for many, and there is rampant use across universities. One student said she was "truly shocked" at the health and environmental impacts after seeing the video and that "citizens are not prepared." Another student, who lives in a rural NC community with her family, worried about continual development of AI centers: "it is terrifying what will happen to the land, animals, and our resources...[this development] could potentially push out families from their homes."

As I continue to develop this learning on AI data centers cropping up in rural areas, it is essential to provide examples of the community resistance happening in tandem. For instance, at the same moment we were delving into this subject, there were successful community efforts to halt the construction of a center in Mooresville, NC (Harris, 2025). Centering collective community efforts alongside learning about data centers is essential in leading with hope to counter what can feel like an overwhelming integration into all segments of society by the AI industry.

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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Navigating Uncertainty: The Challenges Facing Immigrant and Undocumented Students and Educators

by Lori Spradley



ARTIST TANAKA ATSUKO, UNTITLED, 1964

Introduction

The paths that immigrant and undocumented students will tread are perilously evolving, as the cutting-edge forces threatening their existence constantly morph. The perilous journey undertaken by educators to secure sufficient pedagogical independence for the undocumented students also means that as much emphasis as possible should be placed upon ensuring that immigrant students feel safe. Recent studies emphasize that immigrant students live in constant fear due to pending legislation that jeopardizes their safety and stability (Lopez Amezcuita, 2025). The hearts and minds of these young victims are constantly under siege, leading to anxiety and trauma that significantly impede their learning and growth (Posnick-Goodwin & Sanford, 2022). Therefore, educators need to focus on students' well-being and implement trauma-informed approaches alongside culturally responsive teaching (Paterson, 2024). It is essential to create classrooms that are safe and supportive, where students feel free to express their thoughts and feelings. By advocating for policies that protect immigrants, these students have better futures. It is a matter of being aware and vigilant in these areas while striving to create an environment that empowers students to feel heard and respected.

Impact of Policy Changes on Education

Policy shifts profoundly impact the educational journeys of immigrant and undocumented students. Additionally, laws that restrict access to or funding for programs and resources more broadly exacerbate the issues these students face (Lopez Amezcuita, 2025). For instance, state legislation requiring teachers to be trained in immigration policies and related matters is under consideration. However, when states cut funding for such programs, they fail to establish a supportive environment (Baur & Sylvan, 2024). Uncertainty about immigration policy has a lasting effect on students' lives and restricts educators' discretion in their teaching. Another limitation is that as laws tighten what can be included in the curriculum, teachers will not have enough freedom to use immigration as a tool for learning (Zehr, 2017). This lack of freedom leads to feelings of alienation among vulnerable students. Educators need to step up by prioritizing advocacy for the protection of human rights for all, no matter their status, and ensuring they implement culturally responsive teaching strategies that acknowledge the students' stress and trauma. Educators need to create a safe environment where students feel comfortable sharing the issues affecting them. This will help mitigate the negative impacts resulting from changes in policy enforcement (Paterson, 2024).

Psycho-social and Pedagogical Practices

It is essential to support students' emotional well-being, especially when considering the vicious forces that threaten the lives of immigrant and undocumented people.

The horrific stress and trauma these children experience due to stigma and the threats of being torn away from their families have an immensely adverse effect on their health and academic performance (Posnick-Goodwin & Sanford, 2022).

The first step that immigrant parents take toward freedom and independence is enrolling their children in school. This step provides access to a land of opportunity, the chance to learn English, and the opportunity for doors to open, doors to the education system that serve as a pathway to citizenship for immigrants.

Educators must understand the importance of implementing trauma-informed teaching practices to create inclusive, safe environments in schools and classrooms. Community leaders, educators, principals, and teachers must collaborate to foster the well-being of all parents and their children. We want to reassure students that they are in a secure environment where they can express their feelings.

This can be achieved by fostering relationships, demonstrating empathy and a passion for teaching, supporting students' academic success, and providing clearly defined goals, expectations, and learning objectives. Years before working for Auburn University, I worked at a local elementary and middle school in the once-sanctuary city of New Orleans, Louisiana. We began with a dedicated pre-registration day specifically for immigrant students and their parents. This pre-registration is held several times before the fall and spring semesters begin. It gives parents ample time to gather their children's materials and, if needed, obtain assistance from school personnel. At this time, parents can meet with teachers and staff and receive bilingual information packets outlining what students will need to ensure a smooth transition. At our school, we are well acquainted with the yearly journey of migrant farm workers and their families. For instance, we know that the beliefs and actions of educational leaders and teachers significantly affect students' sense of belonging and achievement. We recognize that assistance may be needed with toiletries and transportation. Therefore, our school leaders and teachers have voluntarily attended and participated in multiple workshops and training sessions on cultivating positive attitudes and behaviors, and on designing culturally responsive pedagogical practices with closely integrated strategies that respect the backgrounds of parents and students. We strive to demonstrate to every newcomer that the people at our school care about them, their well-being, and their success. As an illustration, we have incorporated social-emotional learning into the curriculum to help students develop skills that will ultimately enable them to build a solid foundation despite the multitude of challenges they face. This is where teachers develop knowledge of diverse cultural beliefs and lifestyles that support students' active learning grounded in their own experiences. Through an empathy-based approach, community leaders, the principal, teachers, and staff have focused on the holistic development of all students. Fostering relationships by simply showing empathy and a passion for teaching and learning. Group

interactions for problem solving, and gamification for peer interactions.

Conclusion

Ultimately, by embracing effective pedagogical practices, educators can better support immigrant and undocumented students, thereby helping to ensure our humanity for others in this world to ensure more predictable futures in this complex and ever-changing world. The futures of immigrant and undocumented students are inextricably linked to the educational landscape, especially as it evolves with impending policy shifts. The wellness approach programs are established to support diverse individuals. Migrants' awareness facilitates effective planning and the development of tailored learning strategies. Designed to meet the needs of diverse learners by presenting examples of varied content knowledge, educational goals, and learning styles. Teacher training, organizational support, and ongoing quantitative student data collection are essential to achieving this.

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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Teaching Radical Love in Adult English as a Second Language

by Kate Kuczynski



BIG SCHOOL PICTURE; LITTLE PAPER MURALDATE, 1992 BY GLADYS NILSSON

Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to others. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause—the cause of liberation.

—Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

On the first day of my beginning English as a Second Language (ESL) course for adults, I taught basic greetings, question words, and love. With instrumental music playing in the background, students made table-tent nametags, decorated with stylized names, flags, and beloved objects and people. On the first day, 26 adult students from around the world gathered in a community college classroom on the West side of Chicago—where waves of new migrants denied welcome in Texas have found asylum since 2022—and spent the bulk of the class speaking together to share their names and stories.

Throughout the room, low voices hummed the introductory phrases: "What is your name?" and "You are from..." while raised intonation and an up-turned palm invited response. Answers were shared and received with recognition. "Oh, Cameroon, oh," the asker would respond. "I, Sudamérica, Ecuador."

I referred to this as a "party" for my adult students, moving in and out of the standing space, occasionally gesturing a small tornado in front of my torso, meeting fearful students with "Mix, mix! It's a party!" or warmly engaging them in the sharing of our nametags.

"Hi, my name is Kate. I am from the United States. My family is my wife and my dog. I love books. I love my family. I love my job. I am a teacher," I would narrate, smiling and pointing to the crude but colorful drawings on my own name tag. "What is your name?"

As the volume of the room gradually rose from silent glances to full-throated conversation and laughter, our fears of speaking and of each other subsided. I let the party conclude organically, without managing the timing or transition. Some groups continued their conversations out of curiosity, discovery of a shared first language, or a determination to practice the English phrases through labored articulation. Afterward, everyone's eyes were softer, smiles were freer, and shoulders were lower. Some students reclined more in their chairs; others gave two thumbs up: "Good party."

I bookended this activity with gratitude and a brief explanation of the purpose of the activity, with hand gestures accompanying key words and exaggerated slumped exhausted body language to express the concept of difficulty. "Studying. It's difficult. English... is difficult. The United States... is difficult." Vigorous nods, sighs, and sprinkles of laughter indicated recognition. "Life... is difficult! So, we are a community. We are people, together, for each other. Here, we have each other," I gestured broadly to all the people in the room, then clasped my hands together out in front of my body to approximate solidarity, community, togetherness.

Throughout the semester, we would encounter the many ways that the United States indeed is difficult for the

students I work with. As the federal occupation known as Operation Midway Blitz was fully and violently underway in our city, many Latinx students let me know they simply were not leaving home to avoid encountering ICE in their neighborhood. Some were only going out to work or do essential errands, and others were even forced to quit their jobs to avoid the risk of arrest. For some, this meant a pause in their enrollment, and for others it meant assuming great risk to come to class. When I would check in with students about their safety and ability to navigate life in the city, most spoke hope along with the fear: "Dios nos cuida."

I don't share this vignette of warm interactions on the first day of class to romanticize multiculturalism or to cast Standard American English as the language of global unity. I have no illusions about the colonial hegemony that those notions serve. That is the contradiction of teaching English to speakers of other languages. Colonization imposes Romance languages on my students who still speak their indigenous languages, like Mam of Central America or Wolof of West Africa. Imperialism creates conditions that prompt migration to cities like Chicago from the Global South. White supremacy demands Standard English fluency to access even the limited self-determination available to people once they are here. Meanwhile, in the classroom, students genuinely want to learn the language, and I have a duty to teach them well.

Here, I offer a window into our classroom to ask: how can the adult ESL classroom become a space to build solidarity and hope against forces of fear, domination, and despair? My speech after the introductory activity could not fully address the contradictions of the moment, so I was left with the simplest terms: "We are people, together, for each other." As the weeks passed by, our relations to one another grew along with our ability to communicate in English, and we held tightly to our weekly learning community.

This school year, there is no shortage of fear and despair to be felt. Like many educators, I worry about the crises and violence that appear to increase into fractal dimensions with each passing day. Black feminist educator and scholar bell hooks theorizes this challenge:

A profound cynicism is at the core of dominator culture wherever it prevails in the world. At this time in our lives, citizens all around the world feel touched by death-dealing cynicism that normalizes violence, that makes war and tells us that peace is not possible, that it can especially not be realized among those who are different, who do not look or sound alike, who do not eat the same food, worship the same gods, or speak the same language. (2003, p. 11)

The choice of my adult students to learn and survive in the face of this "death-dealing cynicism," then, is a radically hopeful one. To speak a new language in a room full of perfect strangers, to place a degree of trust (however tentatively) in a White teacher like me, to sacrifice their time for the sake of learning as working adults. In the moments when I am feeling un-courageous from my position as an educator—scared to reveal my trans or queer identity or my revolutionary politics—for

fear of the impossibility of peace that bell hooks (2003) attributes to a dominator culture, I can remember to see the courage of the other people in the room and move with love.

As educators, we must do this because practicing courageous love builds solidarity. For hooks, in order to fully embody a love ethic, we need to bravely connect and break through isolation: "Learning how to face our fears is one way we embrace love. Our fear may not go away, but it will not stand in the way" (1999, p. 101). What fears do we need to face in this moment—historically, collectively, personally? When our pedagogy makes room for love in the face of fear, we prepare ourselves for the work of collective transformation. Love changes us at the same time that it fortifies us as unique individuals and in community with each other.

And yet, in the quiet hours, this love ethic can feel woefully insufficient, especially when the U.S. empire wages war at home and abroad. The death-dealing cynicism looms everywhere we look. What if showing up with love isn't enough? How can I teach verb tense when a revolution is long overdue, but it still feels distant on the horizon? Freire speaks to this contradiction:

But the humanist, revolutionary educator cannot wait for this possibility [of revolutionary struggle] to materialize. From the outset, her efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization. His efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this, they must be partners of the students in their relations with them. (Freire, 2000, p. 75)

As such, a love ethic is foundational to mutual humanization, trust, and solidarity with students. We humanize by witnessing each other in our complexity. We build trust by making sure students find our classrooms places of safety, dignity, and agency. Where a common language cannot yet develop our critical consciousness, a radical ontology can help us make the road towards solidarity. Freire taught us that this is what love does: it helps us in the act of becoming more human (Allman et al., 1998) and it fortifies our spirits for the current and coming struggle. So, let us continue be loving in our praxis: without the power of radical love, there is no revolution.

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I've been an adjunct for 25 years, across 6 disciplines and 14 schools. I have experienced an ebb and flow of crisis; the current situation is only the most destructive crescendo so far.

In week one we observed ICE raids across Los Angeles, federal attacks on colleges, budget and section cuts on campus, rigid anti-protest rules, and removal of activist students and faculty. Students were caught in an upsurge of despair, looking for hope. I cautioned against either, and suggested we use our meetings to map a path to something stronger, namely principles connected with action.

"Hope" with Obama was a marketing campaign, a graphic and a feeling. It didn't stop the War on Terror or his massive deportation operation. It veiled them, letting us tarry in imagination while the real violence continued, as Cheney said, on "the dark side,"¹ in the unseen field of action beyond our focus. I share with students Spinoza's assertion that hope and fear are reactive conditions best moved past. They shadow one another, turning into each other, their cycle enacting a condition of passivity. Hope beseeches, and fear recoils from, something without. Spinoza counsels "directing our actions by the certain council of reason," "following necessity," such that we become causal, not just caused.² As we read later in Thoreau: "it is not my job to be petitioning..." It is "action from principle" which "changes things and relations."³

Students reply: "It would be nice if we could change things, but we can't. People did civil rights, and now there are camps. They ended slavery, and now there are prisons. What good did it do? We are outgunned." But if we understand that it is necessary to change things, I suggest, and if present conditions disallow effective action, then those conditions must be altered.

What are the conditions of possibility of Trump, ICE, and fascism domestically, and genocide abroad; and what are the conditions leading to empowered, active working-class students resisting these things while improving their own situation? How are classrooms involved with either?

In the first week of our Education class Freire recommends, and we try to enact, education that is a liberatory praxis, occurring through dialogue under conditions of equality, respect, and love. "Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself. It... cannot exist in a relation of domination... love is an act of courage, not of fear. Love is commitment to others."⁴ Here is Principle #1: In the classroom, we must open to one another without domination, with love. What should we lovingly discuss? "The starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation." Principle #2: In dialogue, analyze our situation.

Some find criticizing schooling and rejecting its core rituals disturbing. But before long everybody enjoys sitting in the circle, talking informally and laughing. Yasmine says that we have already achieved something "political" by creating a "safe space" where we can be ourselves. Malika later shared: "It was harder on day one. We had to get

used to each other first. We were afraid to talk. Then everybody started to open up."

Asked in the first week to discuss in small groups what influences us most, the Education class returns with the answer: "It's screens. Screens are our main educators... but often they lie. It's hard to tell what's real now."

The effectiveness of Trump has to do with the ubiquity of his image(s), which "flood the zone with shit,"⁵ as Bannon prescribed. What stays out of focus, in the darkness produced by the flood? On day 1 in our Media class Angelo asks whether it is possible to "become unblind." I answer with a metaphor from hand to hand fighting. Fighters like other athletes do not rely primarily on their focal vision. They hold their eyes at the level of their opponent's eyes, but adjust their attention to a wider aperture, responding to what moves peripherally. Peripheral vision, like peripheral hearing, is closely connected functionally and anatomically with motor systems. Principle #3: Don't attach to what is given focally. Peripheral attunement to the real context, not representations, is a part of acting within it. Streams of alluring and threatening images accost us every second, urging us towards things desired, away from things feared. Like the bad fighter whose eyes follow the opponent's hands or feet, attachment to the screen and its campaigns unbalances us. Entranced by pictures from and of elsewhere, and by the "slogans of the oppressor,"⁶ which falsify our real conditions, we become unresponsive where we are. To rebalance, I suggest: attune to the constitutive conditions.

In the first week our Education class also reads James Baldwin's "Talk to Teachers":

Now the crucial paradox which confronts us here is that the whole process of education occurs within a social framework and is designed to perpetuate the aims of society. Thus, for example, the boys and girls who were born during the era of the Third Reich, when educated to the purposes of the Third Reich, became barbarians. The paradox of education is precisely this: that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated... The obligation of anyone who thinks of himself as responsible is to examine society and try to change it and to fight it.⁷

We discuss whether those who perceive problems have a responsibility to correct them. To begin with there is pessimism. But through discussion we identify contexts where we can act to improve things. What to do, for example, if ICE shows up on campus? We determine it would be best to split into two groups. One group, those most in danger, would evacuate immediately via pre-planned routes hard to follow without knowledge of the campus. (Later, people spend time plotting those routes.) The other group, those least in danger, would go to confront and stall the agents.

Principle #4: Practice discussion, decision, action.

Through practice, people transform. In the Media class, students crafted assignments, chose topics, ran media show and tell days, held informal gatherings outside of class. Other classes participated in student town halls, attended organizing meetings and protests. Outside of school, some students joined community defense networks.

Neither hope nor fear is conducive to strength and capacity. It is calm necessity that we need to cultivate. Action on clear principles can “change... things and relations.” Principles can be tried, practiced, modified, and communicated. They can form a basis for alliance or antagonism and allow us to organize across identity lines. Education for struggle requires love and respect internally, circumspection situationally, attention to actions more than words, habituation of action from choice: we need imagine not futural outcomes happy or sad, but present means of inscribing principled practices. Classrooms are already training grounds; let’s determine and implement the necessary training.

Notes

1. Dick Cheney interviewed by Tim Russert on Meet the Press, Sept. 16, 2001: “We also have to work, though, sort of the dark side, if you will. We’ve got to spend time in the shadows...”
2. Benedict de Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*, EIVP47: “Affects of hope and fear cannot be good of themselves.” EIVP47S: “We may add to this that these affects show a defect of knowledge and a lack of power in the mind. For this reason also confidence and despair, gladness and remorse are signs of a mind lacking in power. For though confidence and gladness are affects of joy, they still presuppose that a sadness has preceded them, namely hope and fear. Therefore, the more we strive to live according to the guidance of reason, the more we strive to depend less on hope, to free ourselves from fear, to conquer fortune as much as we can, and to direct our actions by the certain council of reason.” (pp. 225-226).
3. Henry David Thoreau, *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*, accessible from *Elegant Ebooks*, p. 11. The full quote reads “Action from principle--the perception and the performance of right--changes things and relations; it is essentially revolutionary, and does not consist wholly with any thing which was. It not only divides states and churches, it divides families; aye, it divides the individual, separating the diabolical in him from the divine.”

4. Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Bloomsbury, 2000, p. 89.
5. In an interview with Michael Lewis, Bloomberg News, Feb. 9, 2018, Bannon said: “The Democrats don’t matter. The real opposition is the media. And the way to deal with them is to flood the zone with shit.”
6. “In their political activity, the dominant elites utilize the banking concept to encourage passivity in the oppressed, corresponding with the latter’s ‘submerged’ state of consciousness, and take advantage of that passivity to ‘fill’ that consciousness with slogans which create even more fear of freedom. This practice is incompatible with a truly liberating course of action, which, by presenting the oppressors’ slogans as a problem, helps the oppressed to ‘eject’ those slogans from within themselves.” Freire, *ibid.*, p. 95.
7. James Baldwin, “A Talk to Teachers,” Oct. 16, 1963. Accessible at ZinnEdProject.org.

Dr. Matthew Scott McGarvey is a lecturer in the California State University system, teaching in Labor Studies (CSUDH) and Political Science (CSULB). He is an intellectually broad thinker and teacher, first trained in Literature and Philosophy at Northwestern University (BA, double major) and Villanova University (MA), then later in “Critical Studies and Experimental Practices” in the Music Department at UCSD (PhD). Matt teaches Philosophy, Political Theory, and History, with an emphasis on material practices in built spaces, focusing on control mechanisms, especially media and ideology, and revolutionary theory and practice. He is also an active multi-instrumentalist, producer, and performer, working with artists and dancers.



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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Dispatch from the First Day of School, September
15, 2025

by Bronwen Exter



ARTWORK BY ARROW WEST. PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHOR.

The Lehman Alternative Community School is a small, 6-12 public school in Ithaca, NY, that is run democratically by students and staff. Founded in 1974, LACS is part of the NYS Performance Standards Consortium, and assesses students through narrative evaluations instead of grades. Within these structures, and within the context of New York State public education, multidisciplinary curriculum is supported and teacher expertise is respected.

I had a student in my high school American Studies class last year who kept his hands busy with embroidery, taking class notes with thread and needle. I looked across the room one day to find myself quoted in embroidery—so quaint, so jarring. Did I really say the phrase “de-fang apocalypse?” He said, yes, I did. I’m no scholar of future studies, but I understand the dynamics of political tyranny and its catastrophic promises. I am a disciplined student of history and live in this world aware of its firepower and climate tipping points. I respect the weight of our multidimensional fears, feel them high in my chest.

We are all scholars of apocalypse culture firsthand, swimming in its waters as we do.

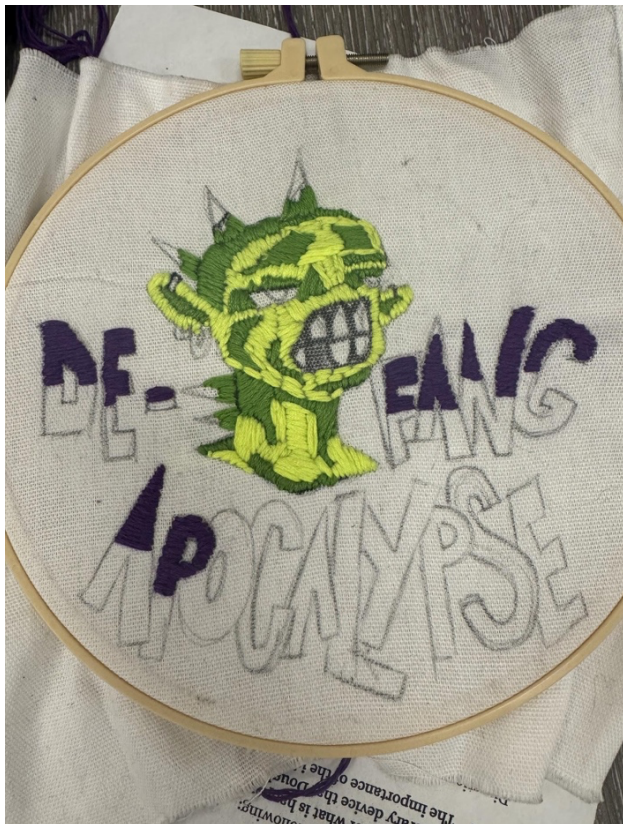
Any history teacher standing among the young in an American classroom today must doubt the certainty of what we’ve taken to be established, true, or relevant. What do I know, really? I think about uncertainty as a tool, a methodology, even, a salve and an antidote to fear. I look for a new dialectical relationship with the world, where I take responsibility for what I can touch, with humility, with what Krista Tippett calls, “a muscular hope.” I fight for my imagination. In my classroom, a conversation about

contingency is always on the table: people in the past had choices, as do we. Knowing our choices matter, imagination is the critical tool towards identifying a range of choices in the face of uncertainty.

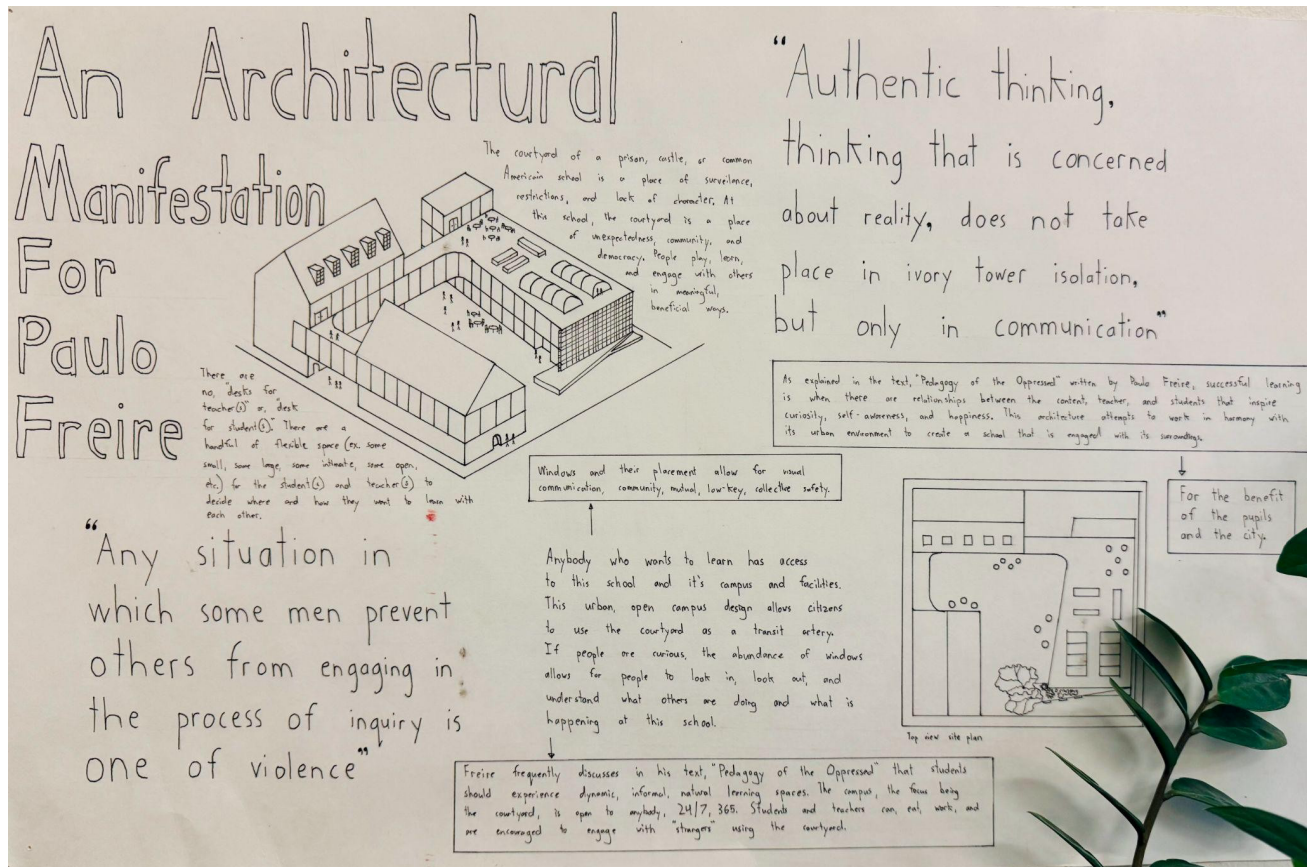
We owe our young a story where a different world might beckon; we owe them our best thinking and tools; we owe them respite from the noise of the status-quo and its scaffolding. Apocalyptic imaginings suggest we will run screaming from fire or flood, or just dissolve into inarticulate compliance with an artificial, autocratic world. No. In *What If We Get it Right? Visions of Climate Futures*, Ayana Elizabeth Johnson shows us Olalekan Jeyifous’s Proto Farm Communities: “These works build upon a vision of resilience and resistance that references the tradition of maroon communities, recast through the lens of an Afrofuturist, ecological, and solar-punk-meets-salvage-punk world brimming with Black joy.” Let’s contemplate what’s desired, necessary, flickering. There is no antidote more powerful against despair than creativity, understanding that what’s right in front of us is what’s real, especially what we make out of it ourselves. The simple pedagogy of building a community in a classroom stitches ideas of a grounded, interconnected, regenerative, and hyper-local future.

We practice visioning beyond fear. The kids I know face overlapping crises with clarity and new dreams. A student writes: “...it seems to me that the only way we can escape the vice-like grip of apathy and oligarchy is by seeking freedom with one another...being beholden to one another, growing together, working together, caring together, defining democracy together.” (Isabel Tilling) Another draws an architectural rendering of a school building inspired by Freire, an open campus and community hub with a flow of multigenerational experts, apprenticeship exchanges, meaningful shared decision making, a tool library and edible landscape.

I turn from September, 2025, to squint towards 2050. New forms of raising up our young come into focus, borne from crisis, collective need, ingenuity, and from serious pruning of old forms. We don’t know how things are going to unfold. Adrienne Rich writes, “Any truly revolutionary art is an alchemy through which waste, greed, brutality, frozen indifference, ‘blind sorrow,’ and anger are transmuted into some drenching recognition of the What if?--the possible. What if?--the first revolutionary question, the question the dying forces don’t know how to ask.” We can inhabit the future we long for by flexing into the practice of agency, harnessing imagination, and feeding a creative, critical consciousness that refuses the limitations imposed by a false sense of certainty about our doom. We might reframe this liminality as potent. I ask students to write about democracy and receive an essay about a mosh pit:



ARTWORK BY ARROW WEST. PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHOR



ARTWORK BY GRAHAM MORRIS. PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHOR

This phenomena of collective ownership, of perpetual guesthood is mirrored in the pit... I am lost in a crowd of strangers, made stranger by the lights, who are yet all the same as me in a deep and intrinsic way. We understand each other... I stood at the edge of the pit, the edge of a precipice, the end of something and the beginning of something else, neither of which I know the words for though they both sway inside of me, flashing their strange lights like something deep in the sea, unclear but holding a sort of presence for which perhaps you feel awe or fear, or maybe even comfort... the deep brotherhood of the room which really makes you feel like you get exactly how it feels for plants, linked by mycelium, sharing plant nutrients, communicating, separate but so irrevocably together that it destroys to be pulled from the network. Perhaps self requires a collective. (Alexander Armstead)

This year, more than ever, we follow bell hooks's call to "move from object to subject" in pursuing new forms of freedom and voice. We read bell hooks under this larger than life mural a graduating senior left for my classroom last year.

I've taught this 11th and 12th grade American Studies seminar for fifteen years. Every year is different. Underlying the curriculum lies a fascination with place, context, and the layers of belonging we might feel. We look for better language to describe the essential distinctions between nationalism, patriotism, and community, bioregional stewardship, perhaps: matrotism, perhaps:

social capital, perhaps: simply, consciousness, seeing. The class is interdisciplinary: the poets show us how to see; historical thinking is the muscle; the science and naturalist material remind us what is real. This year, we start every morning listening to music, simple alchemy for a public school classroom.

It's hard to grasp our historical period from within, with the exception of watershed moments that still the conversation with a stark inflection point. 2025 presents an electric, hazy liminality in relation to political and



ARTWORK BY TRE HOYT. PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHOR

ecological context. Everyday practice in moral imagination is more important than ever at this threshold. 2025 spoke to me two weeks ago and said, you, U.S. history teacher, are going 90 miles an hour off of a cliff looking backwards. We don't have time to waste. It's time to teach a history class that is about the future, the free fall, how we will catch our breath and hold each other and reinvent. It's time to create, not lull ourselves by shaking our heads at mythologies, old glamour, absurdity, or outrage. The violent and visionary ironies embedded in the foundations of this nation-state are our lived experience and curriculum, not shadows of stories on a flickering wall.

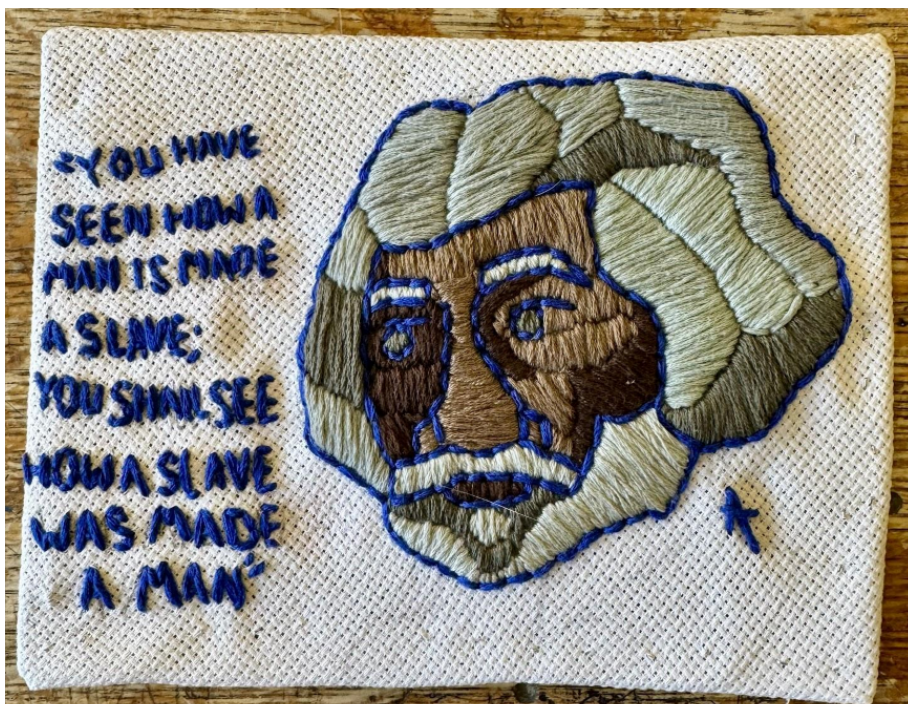
A primary fall text is *Narrative in the Life of a Slave* by Frederick Douglass, relevant as ever. Towards the end, Douglass weighs the peril of running into the unknown. We read Douglass because his thinking outlived the thinking of those who sought to oppress him. Heed. I ask, "Where is that quote, again, the one about the dim flickering, the doubt, the beckoning..." Douglass had no clear image of what he ran toward. He didn't know what was possible, only that staying meant death. As the freedom he finds unfolds, so does his astonishment: he lands in the warm, welcome homes of fellow readers, writers and thinkers. None of them are rich, but conversation, culture, and dignity abound. A potent tool of oppression had been to hold imagination captive inside the grotesque wealth chasm of the plantation and its enslavement. The reclaimed tool is imagination, faith that there is a different sort of wealth to discover.

Our first class days this year, 2025, paired Robert Frost's "Mending Wall" with a chapter from Robin Wall Kimmerer and we laid out an opening consideration of the nature of boundaries, ecosystem, and solidarity. By day one, we came to respect that what separates us might,



ARTWORK BY ARROW WEST. PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHOR

paradoxically, bring us together, as the responsibility to mend a fence is what brings your quiet neighbor out with you into the woods. We established the touchstone idea from Kimmerer, "All flourishing is mutual," that will apply to cross-disciplinary conversations across this year. Both texts are intentionally tactile, set outside, and situate humans as stewards. We move into texts about seeing and walking in place and time, the curriculum inspired by Ross Gay's question from *The Book of Delights*: "what if wonder was the ground of our gathering?" From there, we will consider what is underground, what transcends, and what goes beyond the framework of a nation-state, held by Priya Parker's question: "How do you think about what home is for you?" We closed the introduction to the class with a focus on language, power, and coming of age, arcing bell hooks's "talking back" with Chen Chen's poem, "Self-Portrait With and Without." The agency of the young in these texts—naming what they know to be true, claiming love, and forging new futures—is not window dressing in our community of practice. The truths of our times are blinding, as are its beauties. My class is about both.



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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Grief, Fear, and Persistence at the Beginning of the
2025-26 School Year

by Carrie Hart



WALLS PAPERDATE, 1973 ARTIST: GORDON MATTA-CLARK

The 2024-25 academic year, my 14th year as a teacher, was the first in which I began to seriously question if a long-term career in teaching was feasible for me. I love teaching, and the culture of political fear that had seeped into it at this time left me at an emotional and pedagogical impasse. I work at an arts high school housed within the public university system in my state. When I was hired at this school six years ago, the institutional embrace of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) frameworks was salient. During my first year in this job, I taught a senior class on civic engagement and advocacy; I proposed another in Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies; I attended EDI trainings and served on an EDI task force. I taught my 11th grade American Literature course through an overtly anti-oppressive lens. My school's institutional commitment to EDI was not perfect, and at times I worried that it was for the wrong reasons (e.g. managing public perception); yet it was part of a momentum that centered student experience and made more space for asking big questions about how education can contribute to positive social change.

Slowly, and then more quickly, the tide turned – not just at my school, but at schools across the state and country. All in the span of a few years, the state legislature passed laws banning gender affirming health care for minors, mandated that public school educators out trans students to their parents, and materialized a range of legislative threats to educators who teach openly about oppression. During this time, I received an increase in curriculum challenges from parents targeting LGBTQIA+ content in my classes; I felt an erosion of administrative support for curricular freedom; and higher ups in the university system eliminated EDI staff positions and frameworks in our state's public universities, claiming that EDI was sowing toxic and unnecessary political divisions. My students felt these changes too, in a range of ways. Some openly participated in campus protests about the restriction of EDI staff positions; others questioned or were unclear about the very need for those protests. Some students spoke in class about how restrictions on trans-affirming healthcare impacted them personally, and described their plans to leave the state (even the country) after graduation in order to access a better quality of life. Other students complained about LGBTQIA+ content in my literature courses, claiming the books I assigned were too explicit or made them uncomfortable. In this new political climate, their complaints held more sway, and I struggled with how to orient myself amidst these shifting ideological dynamics, including how to protect my most vulnerable students and signal to all my students that efforts to erase marginalized voices or intimidate them into silence were unacceptable. During this time, I myself began to feel less safe and more afraid as an openly queer educator. I began to feel that my ability to teach in the way that I was trained, and in the way I believe in my heart to be the most humanizing, was becoming less allowed and more penalized in ways I had never dreamed would be possible.

Based on my awareness of tactics in use for intimidating educators around the country, I attempted to prepare for the possibility that I might be doxxed, threatened, and/or stalked if the wrong person or group

came across my CV or my curriculum (including even a decontextualized shred of either). I thought carefully about how I set up the online portion of my courses, knowing that in posting readings and assignments to my campus's learning management software, I could be granting potentially antagonistic students and their parents access to my course material, and that they have avenues by which to take that material out of context and public far beyond the scope of its intended audience (Arsenault, 2025; Whitford, 2025). I weighed the risks and costs of obeying violent policies before they had even been passed or vague policies before they had been clearly articulated. I worried about the impact that this political shift might have on the school climate as a whole, including creating a culture of fear in which teachers learned to censor ourselves. Amidst these shifts (and still), some students seem aware of the chilling climate and have offered encouragement and appreciation for anti-oppressive course material; others remain silent for reasons that aren't always clear.

The speed and force with which this backlash continues to unfold is remarkable, and the question of how to teach within and despite it is quite fraught. This question often often presents itself to me as: "How do you teach when you're afraid?" My fear here is not only about the threat of losing my job as a source of financial stability – it is about the very vocation of education -- which both I and many of my students have experienced as life-sustaining, which is foundational to democratic society, and which can be an incubator for creating more freedom for marginalized people -- becoming choked for air. It is about coming face-to-face with people and policies that commit violence at the same time that they justify, minimize, and explain it away. It is about not knowing how bad the restrictions to academic freedom might get. It is about setting a courageous, dependable example for students who are learning how to navigate the world at this moment.

In planning for the the 2025-26 school year, I thought about the sources of my fear: legislators who invoke the importance of academic freedom while framing anti-oppressive frameworks as divisive, parents who claim they want protections for children while framing LGBTQ+ people as perverse, administrators who are willing to gloss over the impact this culture of fear has on all members of a school community. I also thought about the reasons that teaching still feels vital to me: my incoming students, the exploration of ideas that becomes possible in a classroom setting, the quirky sensibilities of teenagers, the salient feeling of love that forms within a strong class community when the room really gels. Over the years, I have heard students speak to the lasting power that a loving, affirming classroom can have in their lives. To connect to each other genuinely, to learn more about strategies for working toward a more just world, to gain vocabulary for describing their relationships to the world and themselves within it – these are all immense gifts of the anti-oppressive classroom I attempt to cultivate. In the moment and also much later, students have often told me what a positive difference this kind of learning environment makes for them: it helps them to understand and love themselves

better, it shows them how to be caring and dependable community members, it strengthens their curiosity and their skills for learning more. That authoritarianism and white supremacy threaten, in such a virulent way, these tender, transformational, affirming qualities of education fills me with grief.

I brought my grief and fear with me to the first day of the 2025-26 school year, along with a sense of protectiveness for myself, my students, and the very educational process. In planning how to introduce my Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies course (the course whose institutional position feels the most precarious), I landed on an exercise I have done many times before. When my students entered my classroom, I welcomed them and let them pick a seat. I shared that I was grateful for their presence and that I was looking forward to our year together. I asked them to introduce themselves (names, pronouns if they wished to share), and then to answer the prompt "What is a word or phrase that describes your thoughts on the concepts 'women', 'gender', and/or 'sexuality'?" Their replies included the following words: "fraught, skeptical, confusing, nervous, unknown, curious, intriguing, overlooked, overwhelming, vast, open-minded, complex". I used these responses, as I have in this exercise previously, to begin our first class discussion about why the foundational concepts of WGSS bring these words to mind. As in the past, my students had a lot to say about how these concepts are personal, social, cultural, fascinating, and quite important. This discussion, of course, underscores the very utility of the class – that there is much to explore here, and that our time doing so will be valuable. Returning to this simple exercise with new students, despite the unprecedented threats to our freedoms (academic and otherwise), helped me to reaffirm that despite regressive discourse about feminist or otherwise anti-oppressive frameworks, it is still quite meaningful and appropriate to explore these concepts in an academic setting. I know this to be true, and my students do too.

The students who enroll in my (often any) WGSS course do so because they are interested in the material. Though enthusiastic students in the past have often proclaimed that they think everyone should be required to take a Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies course, the class I currently teach is elective, and I believe its elective nature shields it from some possible backlash from students who might feel they are being forced or indoctrinated into material that threatens their worldview. State policy increasingly frames this kind of material as inappropriate, biased, extreme, and even dangerous. As an educator, I hold this dishonest framework alongside the enthusiasm, curiosity, and investment of students who do choose to take the course. I wonder what might happen, in both the short and long term, if students were not able to study this material in school, what access to life-affirming and community-building praxis might be lost. My students this year stated that they are grateful to be able

to take the class at this point in time, and that they don't take its existence for granted.

There is a strand of queer liberatory thought that centers existence as a form of community actualization and resistance – you can hear it in the chant "We're here, we're queer, we're not going anywhere!" popularized by queer activists in the early 1990s. This kind of insistence on our existence is powerful in a way I can feel throughout my whole body, and I bring its ethos with me into my classroom, as a way to think about many of my students and also myself. The foundational power in claiming our presence, the history of those who came before us, and the future to which we contribute feels like the best promise I can offer to my students at this moment. When I am present enough to listen, I know that many of them offer it in return.

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RADICAL TEACHER

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

So Far Gone, So Far Forward: A Dispatch of Possibility from a Baltimore Classroom

by Aliemma Kanu



MANY MANSIONS, 1994 ARTIST- KERRY JAMES MARSHALL

The hallway felt thinner.
Not quieter.
The laughter still there.

Running footsteps.

Lockers clattering.

But thinner.

Over the summer, the building shifted.

Fewer doors open.

Fewer teachers at their thresholds.

A student stopped outside my classroom.

"Where's Mr. K?"

Mr. K was one of our tutors. When federal relief funds ended, so did his position.

"He doesn't work here anymore," I said.

The student glanced toward the room where tutoring used to happen.

"Oh."

Loss does not always arrive as a headline.

Sometimes it arrives as a missing adult.

Later that afternoon, a parent waited near dismissal.

"Are they bringing back after-school?" she asked.

"He used to stay until five."

Our school was one of forty-four that lost after-school programming when federal funds were rescinded. The email called it restructuring; in practice, dismissal now means doors closed. "Not right now," I told her.

"We're trying to build something."

Federal decisions do not arrive as speeches in Washington. They arrive as missing tutors, locked classrooms at 3:00 p.m., children asking who will be here tomorrow.

What we have built are acts of refusal— teachers volunteering unpaid hours to run step team, a fashion show club in borrowed classrooms, adults staying late because joy will not be the first thing cut.

Educators and community partners created what they could to fill the void. At my school, we opened the first STEAM lab in West Baltimore, transforming an empty classroom into a space for building and imagining futures denied elsewhere.

On the first day, this room filled with wonder -- students huddled over a design challenge, arguing about how to stabilize a bridge made of cardboard and tape, testing,

revising, trying again, even as the MCAP standards that would measure their learning lingered in the background. Not absence, but abundance. Urban schools are often framed as problems rather than sites of resilience (Noguera, 2003). Baltimore is marked by outsiders as deficit space (Soja, 1996), yet inside, students turn that marking into possibility (Massey, 1994).

And still, we can

hear the echo

carried from afar—

So far gone, he declares.

A city measured only by its ruins, never by its classrooms.

Baltimore is flattened into stereotypes, invoked through scripts like *The Wire*, where caricature replaces complexity. Even when schools post progress, gains are dismissed as fabrication. Inside classrooms, the numbers tell a different story: literacy proficiency climbed 8.8 points since 2022, outpacing the state (Baltimore City Public Schools, 2025), even as state literacy mandates narrowed what counted as instruction, compressing time for projects and inquiry. To dismiss these gains is to deny the labor of students and teachers. As Annamma, Connor, and Ferri (2013) argue, deficit narratives are not accidents but structures. They frame communities of color as already failed, erasing evidence of achievement as soon as it emerges.

Clean up the city,

as if joy were litter and children's

voices, noise.

In Baltimore classrooms, "clean up" often means stripping away resources rather than sustaining them. A desk deemed too old is discarded instead of repaired; a program cut before it takes root. That abstraction became literal when the Department of Education rescinded \$48 million in post-COVID relief funds, forcing City Schools to shut down tutoring at 25 schools and after-school programs at 44 sites (Baltimore City Public Schools, 2025; WBAL-TV, 2025). These were not luxuries but lifelines— extra learning time, safe places, chances for joy. Yet Baltimore did not back down.

The first bell rang on the first day of school and students were already seated on the carpet.

Knees crossed.

Backpacks pushed to the wall.

A talking piece resting in the center.

"Share one hope for this year," I said.

I closed the door.

So far gone, he repeats,

as if futures could be foreclosed

before the first bell.

"Gone" for whom? For my students, the first bell was not foreclosure but arrival. Footsteps rushing down the hallway, laughter bouncing off lockers, voices tumbling into the classroom before I could even welcome them. They argued over chairs, dragged tables into new shapes, and crowded around the shelves to see what materials might become theirs. Even in the clutter of a first day, there was energy -- the kind that makes a room vibrate with possibility. Love (2019) names this freedom dreaming: the audacity to imagine a future where others predict failure. bell hooks (1994) reminds us that joy is not ornamental but central to pedagogy; it is the force that makes learning possible even in places deemed impossible. "So far gone" has never looked so alive.

*One hour away, the
National Guard
rolls into DC.
Here, the roll is of laughter, the
shuffle of desks.*

One hour closer, the sound was different; desks scraping against linoleum, sneakers squeaking as students leaned over books, shouts of "I want to read!" rising louder than any orders barked over loudspeakers. The classroom was not innocent of politics but alive in spite of them. Suspensions dropped 44% in schools adopting restorative practices (Baltimore City Public Schools, 2023). As Zembylas (2018) notes, education unfolds at the intersection of vulnerability and resistance. Ferguson (2000) reminds us how Black youth are often criminalized, their noise mistaken for defiance rather than eagerness. Yet here, their voices filled the room as evidence of desire; desire to learn, to claim space, to belong. Against the backdrop of armored trucks, the clatter of desks became its own declaration.

*So far gone, they
insist.
But in this room, so
far forward.*

Forward looked like students bent over pages, arguing about whose turn it was to read. Forward was the hum of a class learning how to share space, how to listen and respond to one another, even on day one. Freire (1970) reminds us that education is always unfinished, a collective project rather than a predetermined outcome. What happens in this room is not simply resistance but a re-writing of who gets to be seen as capable of learning. Patel (2016) calls this the refusal of ownership, pushing against research and policy that define Black and disabled students only through failure. To call Baltimore "so far gone" is to miss what unfolds daily: a movement forward, not linear or clean, but present in every scrape of a desk and every voice demanding to be heard. In the shadow of

a nation willing to erase us, classrooms like mine insist on being dispatches of possibility.

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Queering Couple and Family Counseling in Taiwan: Questions for the First Day of Teaching and Beyond

by Stuart F. Chen-Hayes



GAY NURSE, 1967-68 BY ARTIST JIM NUTT

My first day of class this year was with undergraduate students at National Pingtung University of Education in southern Taiwan as I started my third sabbatical in the most queer- and trans-friendly nation in Asia. As a professor of Counselor Education in the United States in New York City, I had the year off from teaching graduate students in CUNY to write a book after completing my time in Taiwan. This was my first time co-teaching a class of undergraduate students on the topic of couple and family counseling in a Taiwan university with Associate Professor Dr. Ta-Wei Wang. This was my 18th trip to Taiwan, having done many guest lectures, workshops, and interviews in print and visual formats over the years on unlearning oppression, queer and trans rights, queer families, parenting, surrogacy, and mixed-race, dual national couple and family relationships.

In Spring 2007, Dr. Lance Chen-Hayes and I became the first queer couple to co-teach a master's level sexuality and gender counseling course in Taiwan (and likely any course in Asia), and I taught the same course solo in a separate section of doctoral students at Taiwan's oldest school of Education, National Changhua College of Education. Ironically, Dr. Wang was a doctoral student there at the time and he had read about our family in a national counseling publication and learned we were traveling to Taiwan and he persisted in having us guest lecture on Unlearning Oppression as a couple. The Dean and former chair at the time, Dr. Shu-chu Chao, when asked, said that she would love to have me do a sabbatical there and secured a Taiwan research foundation grant to fund it. This was the first time Sexuality Counseling had been taught in a graduate counseling program in Taiwan. In the Spring of 2016, I returned to Taiwan to teach a master's level course in School Counseling at Shih Chien University in Taipei. In 2019, I published my family's memoir, which began at the behest of Dr. Chao, who felt our family's creation story should be put into writing: *Double Dads One Teen: A Queer Family's Trailblazing Life in the USA and Taiwan* (DIO Press).

The political scene in Taiwan had shifted dramatically from my first visit in the late 1990s. Still fairly fresh from the martial law period and the White Terror, Taiwan citizens, especially students, were leaders in shaping the new democracy. Queer and trans rights had been nonexistent for decades and slowly activists began to peek out of the closet doors and develop queer and trans organizations. The first LGBT organization, Taiwan Tongzhi Hotline, led the way in developing support and organizing across the island nation. When we came for the first sabbatical as a family with a 3.5-year-old Taiwanese-American born through surrogacy in 2007, we were flooded with requests for presentations and interviews as Dr. Lance Chen-Hayes was Taiwan's first out gay father. Over time, queer and trans families flourished across Taiwan, and a significant baby boom occurred. We collaborated with activists on couple and family law and assisted as Taiwan moved toward a whole host of queer and trans rights laws including same-gender marriage.

But seven years after this time all was not well in Taiwan. Conservatives led the government and threatened to merge Taiwan with China. Students were furious and

rebelled verbally and physically in what became known as the Sunflower Movement. As in so many other democracies worldwide, student activism was at the heart of challenging inappropriate power. Taiwan now hosts Asia's largest gay pride parade with hundreds of thousands celebrating from all parts of Asia. Almost all major cities in Taiwan have their own LGBT community centers and host their own pride parades as well. Queer and trans media and organizations have flourished. Several years after my second sabbatical, Taiwan became the first country in Asia to pass gay marriage, although it was limited only to Taiwanese and those from countries that had already approved gay marriage. It also only acknowledged biological children of queer couples. Over the years both of those exceptions were ended legally. Our nonbinary teen (now adult child) became Taiwan's first dual citizen with two dads' names on both an international birth certificate and an international marriage license.

We published a second memoir in Mandarin, *Baba and Daddy*, in Taiwan in 2021, with Dr. Lance Chen-Hayes as lead author. We had planned a multi-city book tour for this memoir that had to go online because COVID had just started to hit Taiwan. He had originally translated the 2019 memoir but the publishers and we agreed it made more sense for him to write the stories from his perspective from birth and school and work in Taiwan through his academic studies and work in the USA, and our relationship and family journey on two continents. While queer and trans rights continue to flourish in Taiwan, as in other democracies worldwide, attacks on transgender and nonbinary persons are on the rise. As with the fight for gay marriage, conservative Christians, who have very small numbers of believers in Taiwan, have those who are extremely wealthy and control vast networks to push their beliefs through both legal and media means. No rights have been lost in Taiwan, but the atmosphere has become more challenging for trans persons.

Similarly, conservatives took over the national legislature and attempted to block the Supreme Court and all sorts of progressive legislation. They have attempted to turn Taiwan closer to China when most Taiwanese citizens demand to remain sovereign and status quo. Students have protested but not to the extent of the 2014 Sunflower Movement. Part of the challenge is that Taiwan has the lowest birthrate of any Asian country and like so many democracies, a small group of wealthy Taiwanese, particularly CEOs and property owners, combined with Taiwan's lower than average salaries across Asia, have made Taiwan extremely unaffordable to live in for most youth and young families. It's hard to be politically active when you can't afford to live and when student numbers are in steep decline.

So, with that context, I began teaching in the middle of Dr. Wang's class. The text used for the whole course was Goldenberg, Stanton, & Goldenberg's *Family therapy: An overview* (9th ed.).

I added my 2019 memoir in English for the class to read for my four class sessions as well. Dr. Wang shared that all the students weren't reading the text. His teaching style was traditional: lectures with students seated in rows

like most Taiwanese classrooms from kindergarten to graduate school. I asked if I could flip my classes and instead make them all experiential including pauses for students with stronger English to translate since I was teaching in English with students reading the material prior to class. I also put the desks all in a circle and sat in the circle with the students.

On the first day I arrived he had to finish some lecture from a prior week. I noticed several students asleep and very little class participation even though he's a very talented and humorous lecturer. My first query to the class of 27 was how many of you would like to become couple and family counselors. Only 3 students raised their hands. I had my work cut out for me in a month's time. One of his assignments was to have students do a genogram about a famous family in Taiwan or pop culture. I was able then to have students illustrate the concepts I taught with examples from their chosen family genograms. The goal was to help the undergraduates move out of seeing potential counseling clients as individuals and instead examine the patterns and relationships within couple and family dynamics to make relationship changes. He agreed that my changes in teaching would be fine and a good contrast to his style.

So, when I taught a concept, I had all the students in the room share an example from their family genogram to bring the concept home. Students lit up. Everyone participated multiple times each class. No one fell asleep. My other strategy was one that I use with my graduate students in CUNY and that is to have the students role play. We had both couple and family role plays that really helped students move beyond reading the material in texts into directly experiencing being a couple or family member while I played couple/family counselor.

Each class I devoted one-third of the class to teaching my memoir. Each chapter starts with a picture so that they had visuals as we progressed through the years. I asked in that first class how many of the students knew an LGBT family with children. Only 2 students raised their hands. This has been my experience in all my years of teaching and presenting in Taiwan. Very few people outside of the main cities have direct personal experience with LGBT families. So, using my family's memoir really brought home, as a gay dad with a Taiwanese child, what it has been like for us. It also contrasted well with a rather dry and somewhat dated textbook. One class was about couple and family diversity. As if my memoir wasn't enough, I taught the students the Unlearning Oppression workshop, an experiential consciousness-raising workshop that I learned in my doctoral program at Kent State from the late Dr. Mary Smith Arnold, an African-American feminist couple and family counselor who co-created it as a doctoral student at the University of Iowa in the late 1980s.

Unlearning Oppression is a series of principles and examples of individual, cultural, and systemic oppressions and ways to challenge them. It includes four experiential activities that get students thinking and feeling about oppression with a focus on nondominant or target groups. During one exercise, students may reveal their nondominant identities to the class. Prior to teaching I had

asked Dr. Wang if any of the students were out as queer or trans and he didn't know of any. My gaydar said otherwise and during the workshop multiple students came out to the class. It was powerful to see the level of trust they had in each other, in Dr. Wang, and in me as an outside instructor.

My doctoral program specialty in Counselor Education was couple and family and multicultural counseling. This sabbatical allowed me to combine my specialties all at once in a concentrated format. They loved the stories about my family in the memoir, and the experiential teaching brought them alive as they literally worked through the concepts of couple and family counseling experientially.

At the end of each class in a sentence or less I have a checkout: What is your most powerful learning from the class? With the check-in, check-out, and at least one experiential activity each class, I guarantee each student participates three times in each class. My last query was the same as my first on the first day: How many of you would like to become couple and family counselors. Nine hands were raised. So, in a month, I tripled the number of students who desire to go on to graduate school to study counseling and become couple and family counselors. On the last day they also presented me with a lavender box of their feedback about the course and what they'd learned. Their comments included:

Thank you so much for coming all the way to Taiwan to teach us about couple and family counseling! It was my first time having a class in a circle-it felt so new and fun! Even though we often needed some translation, you were always so kind and patient with us. Thank you for understanding that our English isn't perfect and for sharing so many interesting stories.

...a wonderful class on family and marriage counseling. The class was not only rich in practical and meaningful content, but also full of engaging experiences that we truly enjoyed. We're especially grateful for your willingness to share your personal stories with us-your honesty and openness really resonated with us and helped us better understand the value of relationships within family and marriage. Thank you for the inspiration and encouragement you brought!"

I've truly experienced how different a flipped classroom feels compared to a traditional one. I always looked forward to hearing the stories from your life journey during each class. The discussions after the activities inspired me to think more deeply, especially about oppressions. I've learned so much...

...this is my first course taught by an international professor, and it was a completely new experience for me. It also gave me a brand-new understanding of my life path, making me hope to pursue a career in the direction of family counseling.

Thank you....for the wonderful lessons and fascinating stories you've shared with us. We've not

only learned about family counseling but also gained new perspectives and warmth from your experiences. Every class was inspiring and enjoyable. We wish you all the best and hope to see you again in the future!

These weeks have been such a fun and meaningful learning experience. I really enjoyed your classes—they were engaging, inspiring, and so different from what we usually have in Taiwan. It was great to have more chances to think, speak up, and really experience learning together. I'm especially thankful for how openly you shared your experiences as part of a gay family: The stories, challenges, and insights really touched me. It reminded me how precious and hard-won today's LGBTQ-friendly environment is, and it inspired me to keep supporting everyone's right to love and to build their own family.

Thank you for showing me, with your courage and determination, how to express myself in different environments and even in different situations. I also loved how you used humor and a relaxed attitude to help us understand the theories and professional topics of family and marriage counseling. I'll never forget the moment you walked into the classroom pretending to be an unique alien species from outer space—that was amazing and a fun way to learn about the dangers of oppression.

You really gave me a completely different kind of learning experience. Honestly I truly enjoyed every moment of your class. In Taiwan, it's very rare to have such a lively and thought-provoking teaching style. At first, I was worried that language might be a big challenge for me but your energetic way for us to share, your willingness to discuss with us, and your diverse teaching methods made the class not only enjoyable but full of growth. The happiness and learning I gained were far greater than any pressure I felt. I'm really grateful..."

As I return to the USA to CUNY to teach in the fall, I will be using these prompts in class with my facilitative responses:

What one thing happened over break locally, nationally, internationally that has you concerned?

I am interested in having my graduate students drive the conversation from my prompts and then I respond with my thoughts. In NYC my classes are fully online save 3 times a year when we gather in person outdoors.

What have you done, if anything, in response to the above concerns?

My focus is social justice and how counselors can work toward justice personally and professionally, so I want to know what action steps they've taken on each concern

expressed. My students range from organizers to those who've rarely seen themselves as leaders, but all have some advocacy experience.

Where do you get your news?

As a former journalist trained in a top public journalism school, I was primed to support the corporate media class. But I realized even in undergrad that I was too left and that I would be fired quickly. So, I found a different path as a counselor and now counselor educator. When I moved to NYC, I found Democracy Now on public radio station WBAI-FM and it completely shifted how I saw the news. I had also finished Howard Zinn's A People's History of the United States a few years before during my doctoral program. The extraordinary women of color I studied with helped push me to look for alternative sites of news just as I was pushing the boundaries of counseling theories with post-modernism and narrative techniques. With billionaire Zionists closing in on owning/controlling most major US media, it's critical our students find international and independent journalistic voices to learn what's going on. I especially enjoy New Bloom Magazine out of Taiwan reporting on youth movements throughout Asia. Glen Greenwald's Substack reporting from Brazil, and Ali Abunimah and colleagues at Electronic Intifada out of Chicago reporting on West Asia are three excellent international sources of news.

Have you heard of mutual aid or engaged in it?

With crony capitalism/fascism crashing both the USA and Taiwan, mutual aid is an essential tool for survival that comes from indigenous cultures and has been applied worldwide as a way to help folk struggling in oppressive systems. Rather than waiting on neoliberal and fascist government funding, which is never enough, we help each other out collectively and locally with the resources we have available. One of my favorites right now is Beloved Asheville, a people of color-run collective that has focused on food and housing justice in Asheville, NC and took a lead role after the massive hurricane devastated the area in mutual aid strategies on a county-wide scale.

What has your experience been with activists and activism in fighting oppression?

I'm always interested in finding out the skills our students bring to the fight against oppressions and their experiences. I give an unlearning oppression class each semester with experiential activities to raise consciousness and give away a bunch of tools to help increase activist skills.

What advocacy, leadership, and change agency strategies have you considered,

actually used, or decided against in dealing with the issue that has you most concerned?

There are many ways to advocate, lead, and make change. Having the conversation is the first step and hearing the collective voices of other counseling students is one of the richest conversations I have as a counselor educator. There is so much wisdom in the lived experience of our students in their challenges to multiple oppressions. My job in the classroom is to inspire future advocacy, leadership, and change agency personally and professionally outside the classroom as lifelong advocates, leaders, and change agents.

What is the difference between authoritarianism and fascism?

This, sadly, is a new question in the past few years but radical right-wing attacks on democracy in both the USA and Taiwan mean it's time to discuss the two. Taiwan spent decades under authoritarian rule with many fascist elements. The USA has always had authoritarian elements and phases in history and we are in a big one right now. Knowing the terms is key to recognizing and pushing back on the issues. One of the strategies I use is to write letters to the editor in the local community paper. It's been through five editors in five years as local independent journalism churns throughout the USA. The editor before last declared that all letters to the editor had to be factual and that she wouldn't allow use of the word fascism because we were not in fascism in the USA. I disagreed but took out the word to get the rest of the letter printed. Subsequent letters in two different papers have been printed verbatim. My letters the last two years have challenged war, trauma, genocide, and ethnic cleansing in Palestine & elsewhere in West Asia funded by Zionist, Christian Nationalist, fascist billionaires and the politicians they buy in the USA.

How do attacks on free speech, dissent, campus protests, academic freedom affect you and your future and what are you doing to fight back, if anything?

I've watched my institution use campus and city police to attack peaceful encampment protesters and those who continue to fight genocide in Palestine. It's the most troubling time in academe since the McCarthy era and in some ways much worse. My alma mater, Indiana University-Bloomington, had snipers on the rooftop of the student union pointed at peaceful protesters and imposed time, place, and manner restrictions on free speech and called in the state police. I'm done with alumni donations until the current fascist president is fired. But I am not afraid. It emboldens me instead to create the next generation of anti-oppression counselors and for all of us to not be affected by the fear but instead redouble our efforts to speak out and act up wherever we can whenever

we can. Not everyone is safe (especially recent immigrants/migrants and students/staff on visas) to protest in person or in writing but there are many ways to do so in solidarity.

With political threats to democracy and pushback against student-led social movements rising, what is your plan to combat them?

Student-led social movements have had a long history of success (and backlash) in the USA (anti-war, anti-nuclear weapons, free speech movement, civil/indigenous rights, abolition, ending apartheid in South Africa, feminism, queer and trans issues, disability rights, environmentalism) and Taiwan (Democracy movement, ending White terror; Sunflower Movement, Bluebird Movement). So, students have taken on Palestine rights worldwide and shaken settler colonialist capitalist nations like no other movement in decades. Students are the future and must be at the forefront of future organizing, not the billionaire Zionists who've come to control all too many academic institutions as donors worldwide.

Some people say it's best to avoid the news. Would you give that suggestion to clients and if so why or why not?

It's fine to limit time with news to once a day (and only with trusted independent media sources) but the danger of not keeping up is that you can't have the knowledge of how and where to fight back fast in times that are rapidly changing with greater harm coming to larger numbers of persons faster.

What is your experience with unions, and have you been/are you a member and what role can they play in challenging the concerns we face politically?

I'm active on the executive council of my union local branch and our delegate assembly. We've passed some successful resolutions challenging Israel and others have failed. I've watched administrators cancel films, speeches, events, and conferences all to protect Zionists. I've watched city council members conflate anti-semitism and criticism of Israel repeatedly in attacking my university. I've seen a city council member bring a gun to a protest to intimidate community members with no consequences. I've seen my own campus administrators work to curtail student protests related to Palestine. Recently four adjunct faculty were fired by CUNY for their Palestine activism; although three have been rehired, we wait the fourth's return. My union is pushing back hard against all of this.

What are your beliefs about political and economic systems and how they affect clients and counselors: capitalism, socialism, communism, liberalism (and neo-liberalism), conservatives (and neo-conservatism)?

I choose readings that help students see the economic and political contexts of how clients and counselors are affected daily. Taiwan is intimidated daily by formerly communist China, which operates with capitalist-like economics with strong authoritarianism. It's socialist only in name these days. The US has crony capitalism that has minted many billionaires and soon the world's first trillionaire at the expense of poor, working, and middle-class citizens. A Muslim democratic socialist became NYC's mayor last fall and that has the Zionist billionaire class howling in disgust.

Attacks on immigrants and wars are rising worldwide. What has your family's experience been with immigration/migration in and outside the country (Taiwan or USA) and what are you doing to protect immigrant/migrant clients and community members?

I'm descended from John & Priscilla Alden who crossed over the Atlantic from England to the USA as original settler colonialists and I'm third generation Scottish. My adult child is a dual national of Taiwan & the US and will have Canadian permanent residency shortly. My partner is indigenous and Filipino. I work in a city full of immigrants including recent migrants. Both the USA and Taiwan treat migrants abominably. The USA now spends more money on immigration patrols and ICE than it does police and the USA spends more on police than any other country in the world. Anyone who appears to be a person of color in the USA is now fair game to be picked up and put in detention according to the USA supreme court. The waves of racism and fascism will get worse until a new administration is elected in the USA. We recently created a telehealth counseling center as a training ground for our graduate students at Lehman College. It serves a training function and it's free for clients and families to use; no checking of immigration status, and folks do not need to leave their homes for services—an enormous benefit to persons of color with a target on their back from ICE. The 12-day Iran-Israel-USA war and the subsequent Iran-Israel-USA and Gulf States war drain money that could be used for public good and ends up in the hands of war profiteers, real estate developers, and corrupt politicians seeking campaign cash.

Attacks on trans and queer persons are rising worldwide. What have you done to support queer and trans persons now and what will you do in the future?

As a queer person and drag queen, my identities have been attacked my whole life. But the outrageous attacks against trans people worldwide are the worst in my lifetime. Sex and gender and sexual orientation are all on a continuum. But the Christian Nationalists want no part of a science lesson getting in the way of their dogma. Taiwan has the most progressive stance for queer and trans rights of any Asian country, but the forces of queer and trans hate are international. In the USA, trans and queer persons with resources have fled red states with draconian hate laws for blue states. But most people haven't been able to move. Mental health issues including suicide in youth have skyrocketed due to the hateful political climate and so much needs to be done to overturn it.

What do you do each week for joy and fun to counteract the issues that challenge you the most?

Swimming, cooking, being a dog dad, being a plant dad, being a queer dad of a queer nonbinary young adult, activism, reading, the arts, & spending time with queer/trans friends & family.

How do you take care of your own mental and physical health so that you can be there for others - what daily and weekly strategies are most effective for you?

I eat/cook organic, pescatarian, and try to get good sleep. I've had no alcohol for 40+ years and don't do drugs. I swim 20 laps a day, go on long dog walks, and practice yoga and massage. I have a large network of friends and colleagues whom I socialize with and organize with on issues of the day as well as making time for fun. I get out in nature and enjoy plants/gardens/parks/forests as often as possible. I mask daily with an N-95 Aura respirator indoors and out except when I swim. COVID has not stopped, and it is harming more every day internationally.

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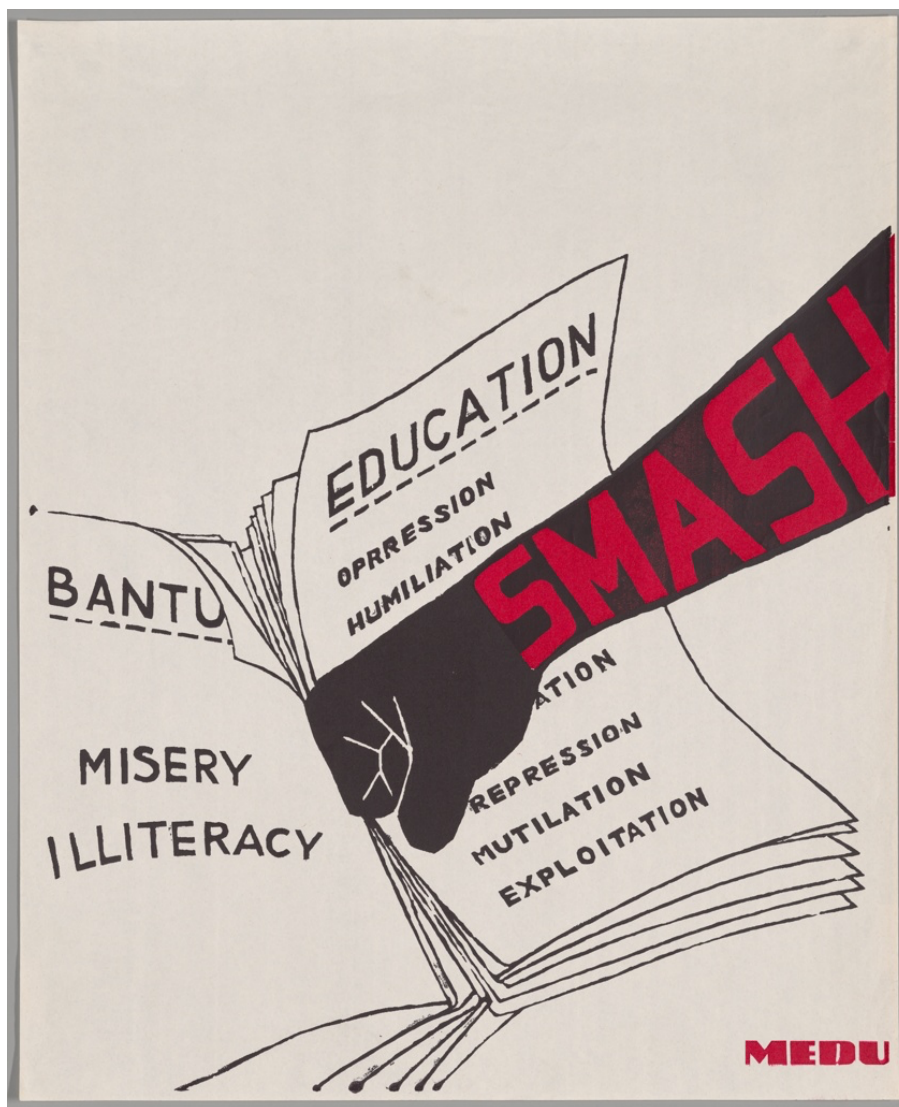
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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Moving my Political Work Outside the Classroom

by Scott Ritchie



ARTIST ALBIO GONZALEZ, SMASH BANTU EDUCATION, 1980

Things keep getting more restrictive in the college of education where I teach in the southeastern United States. "You cannot use the words diverse or diversity in your teacher education syllabi," our dean told us a few years ago, in response to a ban on Critical Race Theory. Then came attacks on DEI. University centers closed. People's titles changed. Student groups were defunded and dismantled. Trans- and gender-inclusive student housing shut its doors. As the 2025-2026 school year opens, those of us who teach at public universities in my state must post our syllabi online for the public to be able to access. Next semester, we must make our curricula vitae (CVs) public. The right wing "wokeness" assessors must have easy access to our data.

What did I do on the first day of school? I moved a lot of my political work outside the classroom. Let me explain.

For decades, radical educators have debated whether one's political work should occur within the formal education system or outside it (see Horton & Freire, 1990). After working inside the system for years, I am moving much of my political work to spaces outside of the classroom while also advocating for new classroom spaces that will allow me to teach the critical curriculum I feel is important for P-12 teachers. In this essay, I focus on one particular change I have made: the formation of a study group.

As a radical educator who studies the political economy of schooling, I understand that U.S. schools and universities serve as an ideological superstructural arm of the capitalist ruling class. Until we transform capitalism, education will always serve billionaires and not working people. Like Assata Shakur asserted, "No one is going to give you the education you need to overthrow them. Nobody is going to teach you your true history, teach you your true heroes, if they know that that knowledge will help set you free" (Shakur, 1987, p. 181). As the vast inequalities and crises of capitalism become more apparent in the U.S., and the potential for revolt among the masses grows stronger, it comes as no surprise when the government enacts authoritarian measures in many areas, including education. I hope my work as a scholar-activist may serve a dual purpose: a long-term goal of helping build the conditions necessary to transform capitalism and a more immediate goal of creating educational spaces of resistance in the meantime.

Because of Draconian measures against teaching the truth in the Deep South that have made it nearly impossible to do the kind of teaching I feel is necessary, I decided I needed at least one space in which I could teach authentically, without censure. This would be a space where true political education takes place, education for liberation and transformation. As someone whose political views have become more radical with age and experience, I wanted to experiment with teaching radical politics in a small setting, one without the restrictions that characterize teacher education initial certification programs. I also wanted a space where students could learn from revolutionary thinkers and activists of the past and explore how their successes and failures speak to current events.

This year I secured university funding to mentor a group of first year undergraduate students in a study group inquiry project on anti-imperialist education. Throughout the semester, we have read and discussed books as well as engaged with films, podcasts, and other media on anti-colonial and anti-imperialist theory. We have explored 20th century liberation movements in the Global South and how the issues they faced are connected to what is happening today in Venezuela, Palestine, and other areas. In the spring, we are starting a research study on critical literacy that explores in more depth how education upholds the status quo and how we might help move education away from colonial and imperial models and toward liberation.

Does this mean I am replacing radical teaching in full-size university classes with a small study group? No. I am doing an educational "reset" given the current climate. In addition to offering authentic political education for undergraduate students, this inquiry group serves as an educational "sandbox," an experimental play space where I have the opportunity try out various curricular and pedagogical approaches that may be used in other arenas. My hope is that I will grow this project and scale it up to be used in settings that are both inside the formal classroom space (my scheduled teaching) as well as outside of it (such as student clubs and organizations). So far, the experimentation is paying off; in the fall, I was able to use curriculum developed for this study group in my master's level teacher education classes, and vice versa. For example, I developed a mini-unit on the political economy of race that I used in both settings, with positive feedback from students.

While this study group is happening, I am also trying to utilize and build additional structures to sustain radical pedagogy. These include rewriting existing course content and curricula so that they maintain their political edge without using banned terminology; exploring the possible launch of a new degree program that has fewer restrictive accreditation and certification requirements than other teacher education degrees; and organizing with other faculty to push back against repressive measures coming down from the state.

As Freire argued, the pedagogy of the oppressed takes place both in the classroom and in the streets (Shor & Freire, 1987). If we are serious about radical education, we can help develop the conditions necessary for transforming society: educating for critical consciousness, building internationalist solidarity to overcome capitalism's divide and conquer techniques, and engaging ourselves and our students in praxis through reflection and action. For some of us, this happens within the walls of our assigned classes; for others, it happens in extra-curricular spaces outside the classroom and in social movements.

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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Contemplating Capitalism: How Introductory Anthropology Texts Depoliticize Class, Oppression, and the Climate

by Ahmed Kanna



THE EARTH (TUDI), 1998, ZHAO ZONGZAO

Introduction

This essay is part of the larger project about the meanings of materialism in anthropology, about the reasons for the decline and fall of Marxism and Marxist materialism as both an analytical and praxis framework in our field, and about how this process has influenced our anthropological pedagogy (Kanna 2022, Kanna 2023, and Kanna 2024). The questions I want to pose here spring from my engagement with an understudied and, as the structuralists used to say, “good to think with” set of materials. Specifically, I will explore the ways that introduction to anthropology textbooks disconnect capitalism and class from racism, gender, and colonialism. In turn, these texts end up arguing for a contemplative rather than a political engagement with capitalism. Ultimately, this generates a reformist praxis and an image of capitalism as something immovably entrenched in current conditions, perhaps even in “human nature.”

To adapt a comment from the anthropologist David Price, there is here an erasure of socialism and communism both as analytical frameworks and as contributions to the question of human “nature” and human potentials (Price 2004). The erasure of Marxists of color and Black Marxists is particularly notable: the work of CLR James, Claudia Jones, Walter Rodney, and Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, among others, which has done arguably more than any other tradition to highlight the necessary interconnections between capitalist class exploitation, racial and gender oppression, and colonialism, goes almost unmentioned in the materials analyzed here. WEB Du Bois is cited more often—albeit far too little—but the clear connections he made between anti-racist politics and the necessity of socialism are wholly ignored; for that matter, so is the lifelong commitment of Franz Boas to socialism.

Source Texts and Summary of the Argument

The texts considered for my research consist of popular introductory cultural anthropology textbooks published over the past decade and a half, free copies of which were sent to my campus mail on an approximately yearly basis. These are texts published by major trade and academic imprints and often written by distinguished scholars (Guest 2020, Podolefsky, Brown, and Lacy 2013, Lavenda and Schultz 2016, Pountney and Marić 2021, Scupin 2012, Salzman and Rice 2011, Spradley and McCurdy 2012, Welsch and Vivanco 2015).

Of the dozen or so examples with which I have familiarized myself as I debated adoption for my introduction to cultural anthropology course, I have chosen to focus in this article on three in particular. These are *Applying Cultural Anthropology* (Podolefsky, Brown, and Lacy 2013), *Core Concepts in Cultural Anthropology* (Lavenda and Schultz 2016), and the special edition of the flagship journal *Cultural Anthropology* entitled “Teaching Ecological Distress” (Rudge, Simpson, and Quasem 2025). I begin with *Applying* because it is the text with which I

am most familiar, having used it in my introduction to cultural anthropology classes for several years between 2009 and 2015. From the aesthetic choices made by the publisher—the common cover image of what I term “happy peasant of the Global South in repose”—to the survey of case studies to the generalities of the thesis, the text is a typical example of the genre. *Core Concepts* is a different animal: It is a superb text overall, exhibiting an unusual theoretical sophistication and fair-mindedness, along with a thesis that is more incisive and compelling than the rest. It is the best of the bunch and is, consequently, especially “good to think with.” Finally, “Teaching Ecological Distress” shares *Core Concepts’* theoretical sophistication and is the most sustained engagement with the climate crisis I have encountered in an introductory anthropology context.

Before looking more closely at these three texts, some patterns shared by many of the above-cited texts should be mentioned. First, they tend to locate colonialism in the past, framing it as a historical background to the emergence of anthropology rather than, as Native American communist scholars have pointed out, an ongoing process (Dunbar-Ortiz 2015, Red Nation 2021). Second, they disconnect racism and gender oppression from capitalism. The last is usually placed in a chapter or section called something like “Economic Anthropology,” thereby framing—and depoliticizing—capitalism as merely an economic system. One text even makes the puzzling, uncited, assertion that Marx thought that individuals were “passive,” that the possibility for individuals to change their class position somehow negates Marxist analysis, and that increasing living standards in “contemporary capitalist societies” challenge the Marxist idea about the widening gap between ruling and working classes in those societies (Pountney and Marić 2021:119). Almost all the texts cited above insist that Marx and Marxism are economically reductionist.

These texts further obscure how capitalism works by categorizing it as a system localized to industrialized economies. When discussing “non-capitalist” societies, the relevance of Marxism is, not coincidentally, summarily dismissed. This is usually done in no more than a sentence. A typical example: Marxism, it is asserted, is “not entirely satisfying, because non-capitalist societies work so differently” (Welsch and Vivanco 2015:218). One wonders whether there might be some mystification owing to semantics here. The reader might replace “non-capitalist” with “colonized,” “subaltern,” “neocolonial” and the like to begin to see how central indeed the colonial and the non-capitalist have been to the Marxist tradition, from Marx and Engels to Trotsky, Luxemburg, and Gramsci to the present day (see among others, Anderson 2016, Dunbar-Ortiz 2015, Hudis 2023, and Red Nation 2021).

Furthermore, the lack of a thesis beyond generalities about “humanity,” “difference,” and the like yields a representation of human difference as an unintelligible profusion of diversity. This conceptual vagueness only compounds the obfuscation. Concepts are, inherently, class concepts (See Marx and Engels 1978[1883]:473 and Marx 1978[1852]:608). They align with specific, albeit mostly unmentioned, class politics. A lack of clarity on the conceptual underpinnings of an analytical framework

results from a lack of clarity about the class nature of science. In other words, my contention is that our neoliberal and increasingly neo-fascist reality obscures class perhaps more than any other aspect of our material situation. Consequently, middle-class and bourgeois ideological assumptions (“Marxism doesn’t apply to the colonized,” “Marxism is economically reductive,” and the like) unconsciously become consolidated as the intellectual and methodological substrate of our field.

Such erasures and conceptual fuzziness produce at least two baleful effects. First, they lead to the impoverishment of theory, specifically, muddled thinking on the material (class) basis of oppression. Second, they lead to flawed or misguided practical politics, offering at best, a lack of clarity on what kinds of interventions, organizations, and theoretical work are needed to confront the key issues of our times, from racism and xenophobia to gender oppression to the destruction of the earth.

Erasing Settler Colonialism

When I started my first appointment as an anthropology tenure-track professor in 2009, my more experienced anthropology colleagues were using, and recommended, the text *Applying Cultural Anthropology* (Podolefsky, Brown, and Lacy 2013). I used this book for my first several years at the institution, at which point I began changing my syllabus in the ways I discuss below in the conclusion. As with the other introductory pedagogical materials I consider here, I want to be clear on my general view of *Applying Cultural Anthropology*. It is a fine introduction to the field and any instructor wishing to use it will find it an engaging and useful resource for beginning undergraduates.

Applying’s authors make two central claims. First, that their emphasis on application of anthropological knowledge fills a gap in anthropological pedagogy, which has tended to focus merely on the simple fascination that human diversity provokes in newcomers to the field. Second—and here they overlap with the more conventional approaches they critique—that anthropological research “is oriented to by certain basic human values,” including being against ethnocentrism, racism, ignorance and inequality (Podolefsky et al. 2013:xiii). This sounds agreeable to any reader with an ethical outlook that is not that of a sociopath or a capitalist. But here also is where virtue becomes difficult to distinguish from flaw. To paraphrase Lenin, such vagueness leaves one with a sense the authors will try to “wriggle out” when it comes to a confrontation between “mutually excluding points of view” (James 1947).

This comment by Lenin does tend to leap to mind when considering *Applying’s* inclusion both of Lila Abu Lughod’s classic “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?” and another piece, a rationalist analysis of religious ritual based on fieldwork in Israeli kibbutzim. While the Abu-Lughod essay is a principled, clear-eyed, and ferocious critique of racist US imperialism as exemplified by the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan and of the inadequacy of the concept of cultural relativism to intervene in that context,

the Israeli kibbutz piece is staggering for the shallowness of its scientific reasoning and its normalization of settler colonialism (Abu Lughod 2013[2002], Sosis 2013[2004]).

That second article is based on fieldwork conducted by a US-based behavioral ecologist in collaboration with an economist from Israel’s Ben Gurion University. To be fair, in 2013, the date of the edition of *Applying* considered here, the #anthroboycott movement, US anthropology’s affiliate of the Palestinian-led campaign to boycott work by scholars complicit in Israeli colonialism—which most are (Wind 2024)—had yet to emerge. However, at that time, both BDS and the Israeli crimes to which it is a response were obvious to all but the most uninformed. The article in question, carrying the title “The Adaptive Value of Religious Ritual,” cites at least one other Israel-based scholar, analyzes the purportedly positive effects on human cooperation of living in kibbutzim, and mentions Palestine and Palestinians exactly zero times.

The word “cooperation” carries a heavy conceptual burden in this article. The central thesis is that “the primary adaptive benefit of religion is its ability to facilitate cooperation within a group.” Further, “costly” rituals—costly in terms of time and resources—communicate commitment to the group and solve the “free rider” dilemma that confronts tight-knit communities (Sosis 2013[2004]:87). One wonders how a clearer understanding of the inherent colonial nature of kibbutzim would reframe terms such as “cooperation” and “free riding.” Who is cooperating with whom and to do what; who really is the free rider? To be more concrete: Where does the water, the land, and the food that enable the survival of these kibbutzim come from and at what cost to the colonized?

Explaining the inclusion of both pieces in the volume would challenge the abilities of even the most imaginative teacher. Framing the two pieces as part of a larger, vague anthropological humanitarianism would indeed require an almost total naïveté with respect to the ways that politics informs anthropological theory. Moreover, how a book that both accepts the normalization of colonialism and claims to teach students to be against racism avoids collapsing into self-contradiction is not explained by the editors.

Flawed Politics: Race, Sex, and Gender in an Introductory Textbook

Core Concepts in Cultural Anthropology by Lavenda and Schultz (2016) is, I would argue, the best of the panoply of introductory anthropology textbooks I have considered for adoption in my classes. Its strength is that it offers a comprehensive history and survey of cultural anthropological theoretical debates, fleshing them out with judicious, concisely summarized ethnographic examples. Even though its unstated, implicit politics are left-liberal, it presents opposing schools such as formalism in economic anthropology and Marxism fairly and with enough information to allow students to come to their own conclusions.

The second chapter, "Culture," begins with a section titled "Culture against Racism: The Early Twentieth Century." The heroes here as in most conventional accounts of the discipline are Franz Boas and his students. The Boas circle's contributions are rightly considered foundational to our discipline. Two erasures or silences in the conventional accounts—and the Lavenda and Schultz text is no exception—are, however, worth considering. The first is that Boas's antiracism was deeply connected to his socialism. As the anthropologist Chris Knight has written, "Boas was the son of Sophie Mayer, a Jewish feminist and one of the leaders of the German revolution of 1848 in the town of Minden in Westphalia. By 1851, her book group was reading Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto*." Knight continues:

In 1913 [Boas] founded modern anthropology by demolishing the racism of stages theory. In *The Mind of Primitive Man*, Boas argued that 'primitive' people were as smart as anyone, as wise and as creative. In 1913 Boas was not rejecting his mother's politics, but as a Jew and a partisan of indigenous America, he hated racism. Boas was a lifelong socialist. His mother's influence was also evident in his nurturing of a generation of women anthropologists like Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Zora Neale Hurston and many more. Boas and his students solved the problem of racist stages by simply deciding to stop talking about the evolution of human cultures, the topic was so polluted. [Knight 2021].

The second notable aspect of Lavenda and Schultz's account of anthropological antiracism is the absence of Black and anticolonial struggles. This is not only to leave out perhaps the main driver of the political challenge to the racist regimes in which anthropology early on played a justificatory role, it continues to impoverish anthropological theory today. For example, as Walter Rodney, drawing on his mentor CLR James, taught, oppression develops on the basis of economic exploitation (Rodney 2018a). What is obscured by this textbook and all others I have considered for adoption in my classes is the material context in which racism is enacted in daily life and institutionalized in the larger historical context which constitutes its framework and environment.

The impact on anthropological theory of this erasure becomes clear in the fifth chapter, "The Dimensions of Social Organization," which includes the book's main treatment of race. Whereas the authors briefly mention the origins of racism in European colonialism (and don't mention the connections between racism and class exploitation at all), the bulk of the section is devoted to the themes of white or "light skin" privilege. The analysis here makes it seem as if the key issue with racism is whites' failure to acknowledge the "advantages associated with whiteness" (Lavenda and Schultz 2016:67). Rather than on relations of production and class analysis, the authors base their analysis of the dynamics of power both in the US and beyond on "world domination by societies whose ruling groups trace their origins to Europe to sustain a global hierarchy in which light skin is valued over dark skin" (Lavenda and Schultz 2016:67). In turn, this narrows—or perhaps, it is better to say, misdirects—the authors' conceptualization of what political forms of

organization and intervention can be deployed to challenge racism. The only form of antiracism that they mention are training workshops "intended to bring white participants to acknowledge, and denounce, the racist ideology that makes them unaware of their own race-based privileges, thereby disrupting the power and reproduction of racism" (Lavenda and Schultz 2016:67).

Leaving aside the highly questionable assertion about how effective such training workshops are, it is striking that examples of far more effective historical struggles to dismantle racist societies and replace them with egalitarian democratic ones are simply ignored. I am thinking here of examples such as the Haitian and Russian Revolutions and of the "general strike" by which WEB Du Bois referred to the revolt of the enslaved during the US Civil War, events which still today inspire what Du Bois called "abolition democracy" (Greene II 2018). These are examples not of middle class intellectuals, or worse, corporate managers, "training" members of their ascribed racial groups in interpersonal interactions, but of militant proletarian organizing from below of political struggles for liberation. It was in the process of such self-organization that proletarian and oppressed sectors gained the confidence to analyze the material roots of oppression, such as anti-Black racism, antisemitism, and national chauvinism, to mobilize for concrete victories against the agents of that oppression, and to imagine new, liberated social orders.

Lavenda and Schultz's sixth chapter, "Sex, Gender, and Sexuality," is generally quite good but contains another set of notable erasures. In a section that, rightly, discusses Black and POC feminists' critiques of the whiteness of second-wave feminism, the authors discuss how the contributions of "non-white feminists" showed how women's oppression was not just the result of "male domination, but also structures of racial and class oppression, a phenomenon now called intersectionality" (Lavenda and Schultz 2016:73). We note two erasures here. The first is theoretical. It relates to the authors' conventional definition of intersectionality, which for them refers above all to women's "intersecting identities." The liberal reduction of class to one of multiple intersecting identities, rather than a materialist theorization of it as an objective relation of production, is, as we might say "industry standard" for the muddled progressivism that is currently hegemonic in academic anthropology. The second erasure is historical. It was not simply "non-white feminists" who first theorized intersectionality. It was the Combahee River Collective (CRC), a group of Black queer women with socialist feminist and Marxist feminist politics (Taylor 2017). As the Marxist political theorist Asad Haider has discussed, there is a qualitative and indeed class difference between the intersectionality of the CRC and that of other communist and socialist feminists, and what was later consolidated as the intersectionality of liberal theory (Haider 2018, see also Kanna 2022). While the former bases its analysis and interventions on a materialist engagement with imperialism and class struggle, the latter takes a reformist approach, basing its hopes on potential reforms afforded by the capitalist state.

On the Climate Crisis: Antipolitics of the New Irrationalism

In recent years, *Cultural Anthropology* (CA), one of the premier journals in our field, shifted to an open access model. Along with this came a new effort by the editorial board to make the journal's content more inclusive and to broaden its readership. An important part of these efforts is a section called "Teaching Tools" targeted to anthropology teachers. These changes are laudable. When I first encountered the recent "Teaching Tools" edition with the title "Teaching Ecological Distress," I was excited (Rudge, Simpson, and Quasem 2025). This promised to be a contribution that combined grounded pedagogy lessons with theoretical sophistication, which is CA's specialty.

Of the texts analyzed in this article and the others I have considered for course adoption, however, engaging with "Teaching Ecological Distress" posed the most significant challenges. There is much to recommend this text. Along with the seriousness with which the text tackles new and pioneering ethnography and theory—particularly in the areas of the so-called new materialism, object ontology, and posthumanism—it offers concrete, innovative and exciting suggestions for in-class exercises and conversation starters to get students to start thinking about the climate crisis (See Foster 2023a for a critical overview of new materialism, object ontology, and posthumanism). Moreover, it is clear that the writers are sensitive and caring ethnographers, alert to cultural difference and to the experiences of their interlocutors.

However, the authors also abandon some of the strengths of the more traditional textbooks discussed above. The author of this article—and, it is safe to say, the emerging mainstream of anthropology—assumes that doing anthropology well means being at least critical of capitalism, if not outright anticapitalist. With respect to the climate crisis and ecological despoilation, moreover, the case for being anticapitalist is even stronger (Malm 2021, Saitō 2024). Today, it becomes more and more clear that it is impossible to reconcile the climate movement with capitalism, "green" or otherwise. This is a position that the editors and contributors to "Teaching Ecological Distress" seem to share.

Given all this, if the two basic questions that an anticapitalist social science must answer are, how to analyze the most important contradictions of our society and what to do in relation to them, then it is not clear that "Teaching Ecological Distress" is an improvement over more traditional textbooks and it may in some ways represent a retrogression. Specifically, the theory underpinning this text exemplifies what the Marxist ecologist and political economist John Bellamy Foster has termed "the new irrationalism" (Foster 2023b). This intellectual current emerges, Foster explains, in the contemporary "dangerous and destructive climate of late imperialism." The new irrationalism, he continues, "draw(s) directly upon an irrationalist, antimodernist intellectual lineage going back to the reactionary antimodernism of Nietzsche, Bergson, and Heidegger." While Žižek, whose work is "a carnival of irrationalism" is

exemplary of these tendencies, Foster sees a far more widespread "skepticism, nihilism, and a pessimistic, end-of-the-world outlook" at play across the humanities—and, this author would add, in humanities-adjacent fields such as cultural anthropology. The new irrationalism, moreover, is not simply coincident with imperialism. It is both its product and an ideological weapon to demobilize progressive struggles from below against it (Foster 2023b).

A flavor of this irrationalism is provided by the authors of the CA volume's first section, "Reflecting on Distress," who ask:

What more-than-human beings do we rub with in everyday life, and what forms of enchantment do these encounters enable? How do ecosystemic losses materialize and intersect with individual experiences of ecological distress? How might differently situated practices of wonder be harnessed to challenge the systems of power and privilege that determine where one world ends and another begins? [Chao and Chance 2025].

The more conventional textbooks discussed above gave the reader a sense of overarching and contextualizing structures that connect individual experience with extra-individual and "other-than-human" phenomena. Anthropologists of an older vintage sometimes called these structures and structuring practices by the names "culture," "performance," "ritual," "belief," "ideology," "habitus," and so on. The new ecological writing in our field is notable for a lack of interest in any of this. What seems to emerge is an image of individual "selves" floating around an "enchanted" universe in an unmediated way. I elaborate on this below. But first let us consider the question of class in relation to this genre of anthropological writing.

Walter Rodney, in his book *The Russian Revolution: A View from the Third World*, insisted on the class basis of theory. He denounces writing from the "the bourgeois view," which, he argues, has the following characteristics: "1) claims to be concerned with humanity rather than a given class; 2) a high level of subjectivism; 3) it refuses to recognize contradictions, except at a superficial level" (Rodney 2018b:12). The contributions to "Teaching Ecological Distress," strikingly, exhibit all three.

According to the editors, their intervention is a product of the Ecological Distress Collective, whose work is motivated by the ecological distress that its members are seeing among their students. "As a collective," they write:

we see it as our responsibility to encourage critical inquiry about the ways in which ecological distress is a shared planetary problem, and the ways in which it is unevenly distributed, or incommensurable, across bodies, minds, landscapes, and within and between pedagogical spaces [Rudge, Simpson, and Quasem emphasis added].

One of the contributions is summarized thus: It "invites reflection on loss and wonder as ways of

challenging power and privilege.” In the first main content piece, “Reflecting on Distress,” the authors discuss “differing responses and levels of urgency ascribed to conflagrations among citizens, scientists, and officials.” What Rodney called a bourgeois “concern with humanity rather than a given class” is exemplified by a term like “shared planetary problem,” one that supposedly impacts bodies, spaces, and minds of abstract citizens and various sectors of the upper-middle class (scientists, officials). Obscured is the reality that the “developed”, imperialist countries and, in particular, their bourgeoisies, are the source of most of the world’s ecological destruction and the main drivers of the beyond acute climate crisis today. As Andreas Malm writes, there is a “very tight correlation between income and wealth on the one hand and CO2 emissions on the other,” adding that, “one Oxfam report from 2015 suggests that the richest 1 per cent of humanity has a carbon footprint 175 times larger than that of the poorest 10 per cent; distending the hierarchy, the richest Americans beat the poorest Mozambicans two thousand times over” (Malm 2021; see also Watts 2024 and Carrington 2025).

The other contributions to “Teaching Ecological Distress” similarly offer both innovative forays into the more personal and embodied dimensions of ecological distress while leaving the reader with more prosaic materialist concerns wanting to know more about the larger contexts of class, imperialism, and accumulation by dispossession/expropriation in which the ecological crisis is playing out (on the accumulation by dispossession—expropriation debate, see, for example, Angus 2023, Bailey 2017, and Federici 2018). As the Marxist philosopher Kōhei Saitō has written, the aforementioned “distress” is a direct and intelligible result of the “imperial mode of living.” This mode of living, with its more and more open imperialist gangsterism (the Gaza genocide, the attacks on Venezuela, Cuba, and Iran etc.), its post-industrial consumerism, commercial travel and cruise ships, and much more, is “based on the sacrifice of others.” Saitō elaborates, in an understated yet devastating way: “Lowering the standard of living for those in the Global South is a prerequisite for the workings of capitalism” (Saitō 2024:9).

Section Two of the CA special issue, “Grappling with Ecological Distress,” attends to the problem of experience: how are processes of accumulation by dispossession/expropriation experienced, embodied, and enacted by individual and collective subjects? As the authors put it, what is the subject “who navigates these changes” of ecological and experiential worlds? The authors, in practice, argue for replacing the extra-individual structures mentioned above—“culture,” “ideology,” “habitus,” etc.—with “the person, the individual, the community, and at the core, [interlocutors’] sense of self.” They continue: “change and adaptation, we’ve found, are often responses to distresses of people’s senses of selfhood. However, these responses are not resignation, but forms of resistance and resilience in the face of losing their identity in a world that systematically ignores them.” (Schneeg et al. 2025).

The third and last section of the special issue, based on fieldwork among chardwellers in Bengal (a char is a shifting riverine sandbar on the Bengal Delta) centers the somatic and the sensuous:

Somatic, embodied, material practices may concretize otherwise seemingly temporally and spatially distant notions of change, and prioritize embodied, attentive, and sensuous ways of knowing. This has potential in mediating the unknowability of climate change, which itself is a driver for ecological distress. One can see an ice cap melting, feel, touch and hug an ice cap melting—can even say goodbye to it—as opposed to the unknowability of an ice cap melting somewhere temporally and spatially distant. [Quasem and Bala 2025].

It is undeniable that the body, the “self,” and stories and parables (Quasem and Bala 2025) can be crucial arenas where macroprocesses such as the ecological crisis and the tendency of the rate of profit to decline are most directly or emotively experienced, and that, in turn, these should be important sites of anthropological inquiry. What is, however, disconcerting, is how these problematics have crowded out the forest of capitalist class and imperialist dynamics, neocolonial expropriation, and the like for the trees of the self, the body, and the individualized subject.

There is here a lot of seemingly theoretically incisive terminology, such as “distribution of distress,” “reflection,” and “power and privilege” as well as lots of what might be called “intersectionality.” But there is no class analysis and no materialism. What goes unmentioned here and (albeit to a lesser extent) in all the texts considered in this article are questions such as which class is responsible for the forms of consumption and production, and politics, that are destroying the earth? What are the specific processes and materiel—the private jets, the resorts, the cruise ships, the coal burning factories, the data-processing centers, above all the genocides and wars—that are instruments for carrying out this damage? How are the crimes of ecological destruction and genocide related to the capitalist mode of production in an epoch of prolonged economic crisis? How do forms of expropriation from mineral extraction to colonial dispossession relate to renewed right wing (and liberal) assaults on oppressed groups? What might be done to or about some or all of these? These questions are unfortunately crowded out by a focus on subjectivity—feelings, emotions, somatic sensations—and assertions about the “unknowability” of climate change. That this can be maintained given the climate catastrophist “logorrhea,” as Malm puts it, put out by climate science, climate summits, and the like, is staggering (Malm 2021).

Conclusion: Anthropology and Socialism from Below

This Marxist critique of anthropology textbooks sprang from two sources. The first was that I grew bored with the conventional textbooks, a few examples of which I have cited above, and frustrated with their lack of rigorous materialist analysis, which I found politically obfuscatory

and debilitating. In particular, while it would be incorrect to say that these texts, generally, are uncritical of capitalism, it is fair to say that by treating questions of race and other identities as distinct from each other and from the climate crisis, they obscure the condition of possibility for contemporary racism, gender oppression, and the environmental crisis: The capitalist mode of production and its compulsion to reproduce capitalist property relations.

The second source for this critique began when I started noticing confusion on my students' part—or perhaps ineffectiveness on my part as an instructor—about how anthropology can illuminate their own conundrums and struggles. Most of my students are of minoritized backgrounds; many are the children of immigrants or, like me, themselves immigrants. It is not unusual for a large majority of my classes to consist of women and queer students or both. And although the institution at which I teach is private and thus exorbitantly expensive to attend, a majority of my students come from working-class and precarious, petit-bourgeois families. Some, I assume, are undocumented, based on anecdotal evidence from in-class conversations. Increasingly, my students express specific needs in areas of disability and mental health.

These young people have grown up in a United States whose imperial power is in palpable, precipitous decline, and whose political system and ruling class are reacting to that decline through, at best, denial or, at worst, the most ugly, violent forms of exclusionary “America first” white supremacy. What also became obvious with the continued Israeli destruction of Gaza since October 2023 is the ruling class and capitalist state's open embrace of genocide.

One path for the teacher is to meet students' increasing despair that anything can fundamentally change for the better in their lifetimes through a pedagogical form of bearing witness to and validating that despair. This seems to be the path outlined by the aforementioned anthropologies of enchantment and the unknowable. Another approach is to try to show young people that change is possible through collective “socialism from below” struggle. This is my preferred approach.

While summarizing my entire syllabus, let alone assignments and exercises, is beyond the scope of this paper, I will give two examples: The first is my focus on feminist scholarship on hunter-gatherer societies, scholarship which has advanced immeasurably the conversation in our discipline on questions of human possibility and which has put women at the center of hunting, political alliance formation, and leadership of hunter-gatherer societies (Dyble et al. 2015, Hrdy 2009, Lacy and Ocobock 2023, Ocobock and Lacy 2023). Much of this literature has reinforced and built upon Engels's proto-anthropological notion of early forms of “communism” (Löwy nd). Life was not, as both Hobbes and neoliberal theory would have us believe, “nasty, brutish, and short.” Humans were not always individualistic profit-maximizers. Early humans, often women-led, formed alliances based upon combinations of calculation and

preferred lifestyle and usually beyond the consanguineal (“biological”) family.

In class, we discuss what this might mean in relation to questions of gender hierarchy and oppression. Are these reflections of “human nature”? If human evolution depended in important ways on pair-bonded duos forming new alliances with far-flung, non-consanguineal relations, what does this say about human nature and “welcoming the stranger,” what ancient Greeks called “xenophilia”? What critical resources are thereby offered to those of us who want to critically intervene in and combat rampant xenophobia today? Moreover, if humans once did not practice gender oppression, how did this emerge? What is its relation to class? What even is class?

This relates to the second example. If the first third of the class focuses on hunter-gatherer societies, the next major section might be called “the ways that racialized, subaltern, and oppressed groups have self-organized.” We read and discuss excerpts from Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, which, drawing on lessons from CLR James's *Black Jacobins*, deploys a materialist explanation for the historical construction of the ideas of race and whiteness. (In my Ethnic Studies classes, we look more closely at the Haitian Revolution and the general strike of enslaved workers in the US Civil War, both discussed in Paul Ortiz's wonderful *An African-American and Latinx History of the United States*. Ortiz 2017). We then move on to Silvia Federici on anti-capitalist women's praxis and autonomous communities both at the dawn of capitalism and as forms of survival after the consolidation of capitalism (Federici 2018). Later in the semester we study and discuss more recent anticolonial, sovereignty, and dignity struggles as exemplified by case studies from Brazil to India to Guatemala to Palestine (Bacha 2017, Ekelund 2007, Schepher-Hughes 2012, Yates and Sigel 1983, Yates-Doerr 2018).

I have chosen all of these materials because, more clearly and beautifully than the texts discussed above, they show the complex connections between capitalist accumulation's inherent drive to undermine the environment, sovereignty, and social reproduction, on the one side, and, on the other, the role of local, embodied, religious-ethical practices and value-imaginaries, in other words, “culture,” in working-class and colonized peoples' praxis. In turn, we learn about the entry of working classes and colonized peoples into collective struggle and the heightened political consciousness that develops through such struggle. And sometimes, as in cases from the Haitian Revolution to the general strike of the enslaved to, more recently, the defeat of dictatorship in Brazil (Schepher-Hughes 2012), and of the Coca-Cola corporation in village Rajasthan (Ekelund 2007), to diverse BDS wins globally, these materials help us imagine what political victory for the oppressed might look like.

To be clear, I try not to approach my inclusion of texts by materialist and feminist anthropologists, along with scholars from related fields, in a way that excludes some of the more classic or more conventionally disciplinary texts. For example, my students and I read and discuss the ideas of the Boas school, of WEB DuBois on double

consciousness and on Black reconstruction, and more current research, much of which is published on the wonderful website sapiens.org along with, for example Cultural Anthropology (culanth.org) and Anthropology News (anthropology-news.org).

But, at the same time, I try to critically expand the discursive frame by drawing out the materialist connections or critiques that relate to these classic texts. For example, when we read an excerpt from Nancy Scheper-Hughes's seminal *Death Without Weeping* (Scheper-Hughes 1993), I devote a section of the exposition – and try to highlight in the discussion – the role of the United States-allied Brazilian military dictatorship in the racism and oppression experienced by the precaritized working class women protagonists of the ethnography. Discussions tack between the micro scale, for example the “second” and “third” jobs that Scheper-Hughes's women interlocutors are compelled to do, and the macro scale. An example of the latter is the military dictatorship's patronage by the CIA's Operation Condor around the same time, and under the same covert operations program, in which the United States was conducting its bloody anti-communist coup in Indonesia, another case we learn about in class. These were both imperialist interventions in which women disproportionately suffered, as they did in the events that we discuss at the end of the semester, the US-fueled genocide in Guatemala (see Bevens 2020 on Indonesia and Yates-Doerr 2018 on Guatemala). My materialist approach is intended to de-exoticize and internationalize anthropological case studies, a move against the grain of our field, in which “culture” is usually represented as particular and localized. It is also meant to persuade students that they, as United States people, have a responsibility, that they themselves are actors in much larger historical and geopolitical processes.

My anthropological and pedagogical ethos has been most deeply influenced by the work of the Marxist and feminist anthropologist Eleanor Burke Leacock. I understand her life work as, partly, an attempt to show students pathways to knowledge through struggle: As Marx said in his “Theses on Feuerbach,” the only way to understand the world is to try to change it (Foster 2023a:8). In *Myths of Male Dominance*, Leacock mentioned with special fondness her mentor, the anthropologist Gene Weltfish at Columbia. Weltfish, she writes, inspired her students to:

retain the attitude toward learning that many young people lose: That interesting as knowledge about society may be in its own right, it is meaningless if not made available as a tool, or a weapon, in the hands of people who are trying to wrest control over their lives from people in power, and to move toward a cooperative and peaceful world. [Leacock 1981:11 - 12]

This passage offers a more eloquent expression than I can devise to articulate what inspires my own anthropological pedagogy.

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RADICAL TEACHER

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

From a Feminist Ethic of Care to a Total Learning Experience: Co-creating Knowledge with Student Researchers on the AdArchive Project

by Jana Smith Elford, Michelle Meagher, Wolfgang Edwards Van Muijen, and Tiffany Braun



CANDIDA AND HER MOTHER, CELIA, II, 1994 BY DAWOUD BEY

...as undergraduate researchers on the AdArchive team... we achieved many broad and transferable skills; more importantly, we were taught to be researchers on a team, not simply trainees.

– Wolfgang and Tiffany

...it has been empowering to use what I have learned as a student outside of my regular classes.

– Tiffany

From 2022 to 2024, we—Dr. Jana Smith Elford (she/her, Medicine Hat College) and Prof. Michelle Meagher (she/her, University of Alberta)—held a national grant for “AdArchive: Tracing Pre-Digital Networked Feminisms,” a two-year pilot project in which our team collected and digitised hundreds of advertisements published in feminist movement magazines in a single year (1979). This project is part of an ongoing multi-institutional feminist digital humanities project that examines the history of feminist publishing networks. In the larger AdArchive project, we examine the important roles that feminist magazines play in making social connections and sustaining relationships between readers, writers, publishers, and feminist organizations. Focusing on the advertisements, we trace the rich, diverse, interconnected, and overlapping pre-digital feminist networks in the United States during the 1970s and 80s. AdArchive is an explicitly feminist project. We understand feminism to be a practice and an orientation, which means we take a feminist orientation to our objects of study: the advertisements and the data our team produces to represent these ads in digital form. We also take a feminist orientation to building a collaborative team and, vitally, to student mentorship and training. Between 2018 and 2022, research funding and competitive grants for this project were held at the University of Alberta, a major research-intensive university, and we drew our research assistants from graduate programs in gender and social justice studies, library and information studies, and digital humanities. The grant awarded in 2022, however, was held at Medicine Hat College, a small regional undergraduate-only college where students work on two-year diplomas or pursue vocational degrees in social work, graphic design, education, nursing, or trades. Two of the co-authors of this paper, Wolfgang Edwards Van Muijen (he/him) and Tiffany Braun (she/her), were Research Assistants on the project and undergraduate students at Medicine Hat College, completing coursework towards BA in Social Work (BSW) during the granting period.

This paper describes and discusses the difference that research assistant opportunities can make for undergraduate students. In our team’s close collaboration, we came to fully understand the impact of research opportunities on the specific total learning experience of the students with whom we worked. One of the key lessons of our experience is that research opportunities need not be reserved for graduate students, or for students at major research institutions. While their paths diverge from typical undergraduate students at research-intensive institutions, the undergraduate student researchers on the

AdArchive team developed practical and transferable skills while also gaining learning opportunities that contributed in meaningful ways to their full undergraduate learning experience. As they describe below, and indeed throughout this article, undergraduate research assistants also benefited greatly from the opportunity to undertake a research assistantship on a collaborative, federally-funded, cross-institutional project.

Written collaboratively, this article maintains a distinction between the voices of the team leads -- Jana and Michelle -- and the team undergraduate researchers - Wolfgang and Tiffany -- in order to ensure that our various situated experiences of working together on this project are represented. The practice of writing this article together as co-creators and co-authors neatly illustrates how our approach to training cultivated supportive relationships in this research team. The paper begins with a discussion of the conflict between the institutional demands of skills-based student training and a feminist approach to mentorship. This is followed by a description of the feminist ethic of care that shaped our approach to student researchers on the team. These sections are written collaboratively. The remainder of the paper is written in a way that highlights our individual voices. These sections describe the process of building a collaborative team, the way that we apply feminist research methods and a feminist ethics of care to our research practices, and, finally, our personal reflections on working together as researchers on AdArchive. Overall, our experience suggests that the team’s feminist collaborative practices, grounded in feminist ethics of care -- or more specifically, what we are calling here feminist ethics of care pedagogies -- enable meaningful and engaged learning for the students involved in the project as research assistants and co-creators of knowledge.

Background: From Student Training to Holistic Skill Development

The term “training,” with its disciplinary connotations, is one that we come to through institutional demands and expectations. Like many humanities and social science researchers in Canada, we rely on institutional grants and financial support from national bodies like the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) to sustain our work. SSHRC is the premier source of research funding for Canadian academics. An important value of this funding scheme is the training of undergraduate and graduate students. Application forms require that researchers requesting funds consider students as members of a “research team,” and applicants must provide detailed descriptions of “proposed student training strategies” to ensure “high-quality training for students.” Significantly, SSHRC describes training to include both “academic research competencies” and “general professional skills... that [are] transferrable to a variety of settings” (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council). Though we were committed to working with a research team, and to writing student researchers into our grant application, we also found ourselves asking big questions about the relationships we wanted to establish

within our research team. While we had worked with graduate student research assistants in previous grants, the 2022-24 SSHRC was held at MHC, which meant that we would be working primarily with undergraduates who were not in honors programs or following a direct path towards graduate school. We wanted to be more intentional in our approach to their training. How would we imagine “the specific roles and responsibilities of students and research assistants”? How would we determine “the duties, especially with respect to research, that they will be undertaking”? What kinds of “skills” and “training” would we provide to our students? How would we ensure that in addition to training, we would provide opportunities for research creation and knowledge production? How would we respond to the tendency of granting programs like SSHRC to highlight skills and training over a more robustly defined educational experience (see Zacharias, 2011)?

Despite the instrumentalist orientation of many granting agencies, including SSHRC, we argue that large nationally-funded research projects like the AdArchive project may still prioritize holistic development over transactional skills acquisition by emphasizing a feminist ethic of care. In so doing, project directors may facilitate learning environments that value meaningful engagement with knowledge creation, fostering a deeper understanding of the collaborative and relational nature of research itself. Participating in research on our team is what Tsang et al. (2024) describe as “High Impact Educational Practices” or HIPs. In their article discussing the impact of a student fellowship program at a small undergraduate liberal arts institution in Ontario, Tsang et al. (2024) describe a range of meaningful educational practices or approaches that include community service learning, internships or capstone projects, learning communities, and, most relevantly for our goals here, transformative collaborations in undergraduate research. They argue that there are a myriad of positive impacts on the students and faculty involved in such programming: they draw on a rich body of scholarship on teaching and learning (SoTL), which suggest that undergraduate research opportunities “foster broad knowledge of human culture” and strengthen “intellectual and practical skills, such as technical writing.” (Tsang et al., 2024, p. 1) Students involved in research opportunities “derive personal and intellectual benefit,” “greater persistence in post-secondary studies,” and an “increase in understanding, confidence and awareness related to their field of inquiry” (2024, p.1). Moreover, participation in HIPs programs and programming, including participation in research teams led by faculty supervisors, facilitates transformative or engaged learning. One key example of the way that HIPs accomplish this is by providing students the opportunity to participate in the creation of knowledge. SoTL scholars have identified the creation of knowledge in independent or collaborative ventures as having a higher impact than more traditional classroom experiences, in which students are expected to consume knowledge -- to memorise, to assess, and only rarely apply (Tsang et al., 2024). The Research Assistant role in AdArchive, made possible by a SSHRC grant and other institutional supports, offers undergraduate students participation in a high impact

educational practice. Our priority was to support undergraduate student research assistants in developing a broad range of technical, scholarly, and administrative competencies that would be transferable to future projects within and beyond university settings. Undergraduate student researchers on the AdArchive team learn about the recent feminist past by working with print culture artifacts drawn from movement magazines. They contribute to feminist scholarship by supporting the work of creating and connecting digital archives. They learn how to practice feminist research methods in the digital humanities. But, most importantly, they contribute to a collaborative team not only as trainees but as co-creators of knowledge.

Feminist Ethics of Care

Insofar as our project takes up feminist content and practises feminist research methodologies in the digital humanities, it is vital that the relationships that we build with student researchers are grounded in feminist ethics of care, or more specifically, what we are calling here feminist ethics of care pedagogies. First articulated by the American feminist ethicist Carol Gilligan (1982), a feminist ethics of care was an explanation of how women -- trained from childhood to value connection to and responsibility for others -- develop a moral orientation that emphasizes context and relationships when making decisions. Though contemporary feminist scholars push back against the claim that there might be a singular ethical approach shared by a clearly definable group called “women,” or that female-identified children are all trained in the same ways, a feminist ethic of care urges us to consider what it might mean if the values of caring that are often relegated to the private and interpersonal sphere were prioritized and incorporated into public discussions (Joan Tronto 1993, p. 161, see also Kaufman-Osborn 2018, p. 1).

Applied to the context of the university, a feminist ethics of care is an orientation to both students and colleagues that decentres an individualist and individualizing productivity paradigm (Johannson et al., 2024, see also Dwyer et al, 2021). Incorporating care into scholarly research projects fosters “a deeper understanding and acceptance of diverse perspectives and varied trajectories in academic career progression” (Johannson et al., 2024, p. 2242). In terms of scholarly research relationships between experienced researchers and students, practising an ethic of care can enable transformative learning experiences that are grounded in “empowerment, inclusivity... and reciprocity” (Goerisch et al 2019 in Abeyasekera 2025). Collaboration has the capacity to disrupt institutional hierarchies and displace the logics of power that structure the modern university, with its neoliberal push for increased productivity and responsibilization. Embracing a feminist ethics of care is one way that we, as team leads for AdArchive, cultivate supportive relationships that foster deep learning and enable all team members to play a role in knowledge creation. For research assistants, this results in a richer sense of their role as researchers who can take what they have learned on the project and apply it to other parts of their educational experiences.

Collaborative Team Building

Jana and Michelle: We began to collaborate on the project that would come to be AdArchive in 2018, just as Jana was completing her doctoral research and taking up her first full time teaching position at a regional undergraduate college and as Michelle was moving from a regular teaching position at a research-intensive institution into the role of department chair. From the very start, we were both committed to fostering a balanced and collaborative research relationship. We both had much to learn from one another, and our combined scholarly interests and expertise could, we believed, enable us to ask exciting questions about feminist histories, feminist cultural production, feminist digital humanities, and the way that the feminist movement -- itself so often committed to and grounded in collaborative relationship -- was sustained. We were studying feminist texts that valued collaboration and foregrounded diverse voices, distinct methods, and even at times, disagreements. Authentic collaboration begins with relationships grounded in trust and respect, which we extend to each other and to our students. When we won a SSHRC grant in 2022, we were eager to create a research and learning environment that would offer student researchers opportunities for learning, experimentation, and reflection. Respecting the student research assistants who have participated in our team meant, and continues to mean, recognizing their own areas of expertise and unique embodied experiences, while acknowledging that they are inevitably on an unequal footing with us, who are not only their research collaborators, but also their professors and their employers.

Wolfgang: I came to the project in 2022 as a mature student in my second year of social work education. With limited formal education, I was coming from a family of tradespeople, having just left a long-term career in the construction industry. A passion for social movements, feminism, and ethics drew me to apply for the job, as I was hoping to develop my technical skills and align myself with research, since that is one of my future goals. Framed by course assignments and stories from a friend in medical school, I expected to be prescribed text to translate into a machine-readable format, and little more. In a way, I thought I was going to be doing strict technical tasks on behalf of more skilled researchers so that they could focus on more important work. After the interview, I knew that I was in for something a little bit different. I was asked not only about my technical skills but also my familiarity with feminism and social movements. They made it clear that the work I was about to be doing would require critical thinking and reflection; that I would be adopting and utilising an ethical framework and not just following some schematic or blueprint. This was all exciting for me because it meant that I could put to use overlapping knowledge that I had been gaining from my education as well as actively using the knowledge I would gain on the project.

Tiffany: Like Wolfgang, I came to the project in 2022 as a mature student in the second year of my social work education. I returned to school after several years of

working in the graphic design field following the completion of a 2-year visual communications diploma. I was intrigued by the exploration of ads within obscure feminist publications; I had a passion for research assignments and a desire to expand my knowledge of early social and feminist movements. Curiosity drove me to apply for the position. During the interview, it became clear that the position offered more than an opportunity to grow my knowledge and technical skills. It would afford me the chance to implement my social work education through critical reflection and collaboration, and to be a part of something innovative and exciting.

Jana and Michelle: Although we knew early on that we wanted students to develop a broad range of technical, scholarly, and administrative competencies that would be transferable to future projects within and beyond university settings, we also wanted to go beyond technical training to a full learning experience. In this learning environment, we would teach student researchers a range of instrumental skills and those skills would be applied to move the research project forward, but ultimately, it was vital that we create an environment in which all members of the team are involved as "as people rather than simply as human resources to be exploited for academic publication and the winning of grants" (Johansson et al., p. 2242).

With an awareness that research collaboration -- like mentorship and teaching -- is "often embedded in the logics and structures of power" (Russo, 2019), we were committed to nourishing collaborative research learning environments that would benefit our project as well as all members of the research team. One way that we addressed power differentials in the team was to be open and explicit about expectations related to pay and working hours. We were explicit that students were able to work at a pace that made sense to them; they were paid for hours worked, not for projects accomplished. We placed emphasis on taking the time required to develop skills as a way to counteract the pressure that research assistants felt to get things done quickly. Another way that we battled the tendency of students as research employees to feel pressure to produce perfect data quickly was to describe our work as an experiment; we made making mistakes an option. Finally, collaboration was something that we modelled in regular team meetings and in the process of writing about the project in the current article. Michelle and Jana frequently write collaboratively and in preparation for writing this article, we practised collaborative writing with Tiffany and Wolfgang in low stakes writing projects like conference abstracts and grant proposals, which we wrote together in Google docs. In this way, undergraduate researchers experienced first-hand the way that we worked through ideas, challenged or changed each other's words, and moved, sometimes painfully slowly, from messy notes to a more carefully structured narrative. Seeing this work -- and the collaborative working relationship of the team leads, which is grounded both in care and reciprocal trust -- Wolfgang and Tiffany came to understand the value of sharing ideas, even when they are only half-formed.

Caring for Data: Our Team's Approach

The primary research activity assigned to AdArchive student researchers was to support the project's exploration of advertisements in second-wave feminist periodicals. Specifically, Wolfgang and Tiffany were tasked with compiling information about the advertisements they found in social movement magazines and then storing that data using digital tools. This involves remediating the contents of an advertisement so that it can be machine-readable and standardized. We use the term "data authoring" to describe the work of representing the contents of advertisements as machine readable data. Authoring refers to the act of transcribing each element of an advertisement into the Extensible Markup Language (XML). We use the term "authoring" instead of "transcribing" because it is vital to recognize that whenever we work with data, we are engaged in an active process of re-mediation and meaning-making. The process of data authoring is neither neutral nor objective. As we write elsewhere, "We argue that all researchers need to recognize their role as interpreters, and that digital humanists working in LOD [Linked Open Data] need to be particularly mindful about the ways that our interpretation of data transforms or remediates the artifacts that we study" (Smith Elford & Meagher, 2023). As researchers, we are present in the data that we produce.

While we are aware that the language we use to describe the concepts presented in the advertisements is shaped by the individual who is authoring data, we are also committed to remaining faithful to the intentions of the original work. We relied on feminist values and methodological frameworks to serve as the foundation for decisions about how to describe the contents of advertisements and how to represent them in XML. As an example, when making decisions about how to represent what we saw in an advertisement, we often thought about the women -- and often feminist collectives -- who had made these ads. We nourished a sense of responsibility to honour their voices; we considered a responsibility to feminist publishing activists to be part of the decision making process. Questions that drove this work include not only, "have we accurately and completely described what we see?" but also "does this description accurately represent what the maker may have meant?" and "does this description illuminate that maker or conceal her?" Asking these questions set the conditions for reflecting on feminist research ethics, which in turn drove us to consider how feminist research ethics ought to inform our relationship as researchers. In other words, the feminist orientation to data that we were practicing in the research reflected the feminist orientation -- indeed, a feminist praxis -- to the team, and to the training of research assistants on the team. This feminist approach to research is, we argue, also a form of feminist pedagogy that can contribute to ongoing discussions about feminist teaching and feminist approaches to high impact educational practices, including but not limited to undergraduate student research opportunities. In addition to completing the specific task of data authoring, research assistants were also brought into ongoing and iterative discussions about the decisions we were making about the process of

data authoring. As members of the research team, they were deeply engaged in the production of knowledge.

Wolfgang: The start of my work looked a lot like I expected: checking over XML and familiarising myself with the Oxygen application. Once I learned how to write in XML, I began to understand that my work would involve forming deep relationships with the materials, meeting the demand of a much more holistic approach. Thankfully, my AdArchive training had involved getting me up to speed with a feminist ethic of care when approaching the data. It was empowering to be trusted with the data; this work enabled me to exercise my abilities as a feminist thinker and to expand my capabilities through active practice. Additionally, engaging with feminist periodicals offered many opportunities to get first-hand experience with the materials that mobilised the movement in the 1970's. That has been the greatest joy of working on this project.

Tiffany: In the beginning I found the authoring process challenging and I had to reach out for help while I was in the training phase of the authoring process. In retrospect, I can see how these challenging aspects were a necessary part of the process. They pushed me to navigate complex problems, seek clarity, and take ownership of my learning. In time, and in collaboration with our team members, I began to feel confident and familiar with the data authoring tools. Like Wolfgang, I also felt empowered when I realized the team trusted me with the data.

Wolfgang and Tiffany: Our primary role was to use digital tools to provide rich descriptions of each advertisement. For any ad, we begin the authoring process by defining the ad creators, connecting them to an address, defining their roles, then going about describing each part of the advertisement. We always proceed by defining the main subject, copying any texts or lists, and then describing the contents of the text with concepts, publications, products, services, events, dates, and finally any order forms and prices. Through the project's feminist data ethics and praxis, data authoring became more than a technical exercise. Through reflexive thinking during the authoring process and the logical inductions required for accurate description, we were given greater opportunities for engaged learning.

Representing the data in the advertisements means that we develop close relationships with the advertisements, and with the women who produced them. These women often worked in collectives with anticapitalist ideologies while simultaneously operating in the market to promote their work and the movement itself (see Meagher and Burton, 2021). The people, organizations, and businesses that were advertised in these publications make up the networks that we are working to represent in our online tool. Highlighting these relationships not only underscores the importance of second-wave print publishing but also the importance of well-defined data ethics to our research praxis. We learned to pay careful attention to the way we represent this network -- carefully authoring and checking ads to ensure that all text and images reflect the correct intention, demographic, and events being represented. These

networks are expressions of human connections. We are

engage with them, emphasising respect, contextualization, and preservation. In this specific case, Galaxia was advertising the release of Maxine Feldman's album titled Closet Sale (1979, see Figure 3). This ad has two endorsements, which are a vital part of the network of feminist publications. As such, the endorsements not only validate the album and organisation as valuable feminist aligned materials, but also demonstrate how feminist networks support and amplify each other's work. Kate Millett, known for her 1970 book Sexual Politics (Millett, 1970), can be seen throughout many of these publications, reviewing and endorsing various feminist aligned products from a broad range of different publications. Rita Mae Brown is another American feminist writer who can be found throughout the publication network.

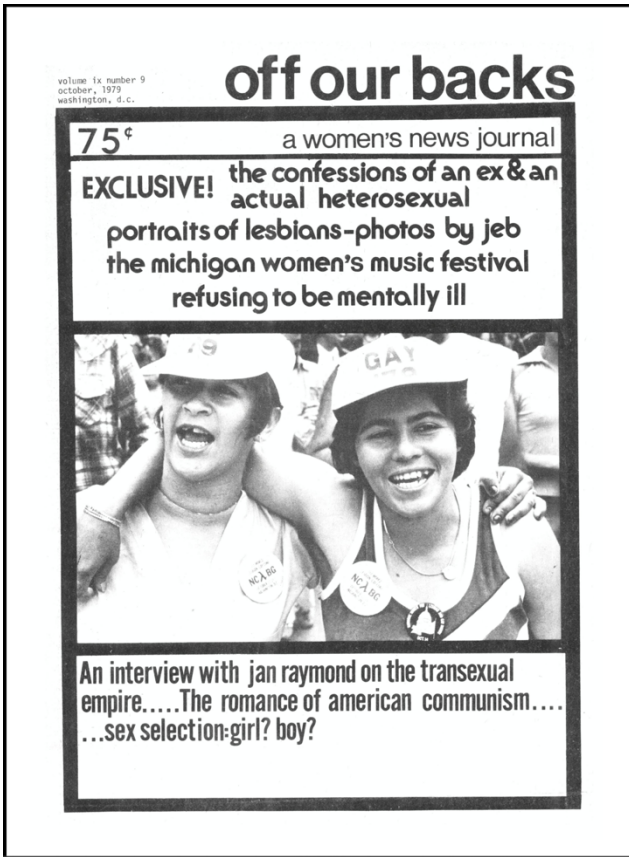


FIGURE 1: COVER OF OFF OUR BACKS, VOL. 9, NO. 9, OCTOBER 1979

The representations of these key figures are vital to illustrating the network of American feminist journals published in 1979. By producing endorsements for Closet Sale (Feldman, 1979), Rita Mae Brown and Kate Millett allow us to connect various publications, products, and individuals, facilitating the dissemination of information and empowering the agents of second wave feminism. Including rich detail about the influential figures and cultural concepts in a digital environment are significant because they allow us to understand the network of influence that would otherwise remain obscured. Visualizations of this network have the potential to help illustrate the transmission of movement ideologies through periodicals, organisations, cultural events, and people. This is why our ethical framework for treating the data in

tasked with representing them digitally. This demands the utmost respect and care in representation.

AdArchive in Action: Examples from the Data

Wolfgang and Tiffany: For example, one of the many items in the AdArchive collection is an advertisement by Galaxia: Women Enterprises, a music label out of Woburn, Massachusetts (off our backs, 1979). We located this advertisement in off our backs, volume 9, issue 9, which was published in October of 1979 (see Figures 1 and 2). Galaxia signed and distributed music by women -- particularly lesbian musicians -- and sponsored numerous live music events over the years. The women who operated this business were pioneers. They made space for artists who were actively being excluded from their industries. It's worth noting that despite the importance of this organisation, Galaxia does not currently have an online presence, which effectively means that the organisation and the women's contributions to it are invisible to contemporary researchers and students.

Although our work as research assistants requires that we describe the contents of the advertisement in XML, this advertisement is not just a set of data points. It is a historical artefact that represents the labour, vision, and voices of pioneering feminists of the second wave. This perspective on these artifacts shapes the ways in which we

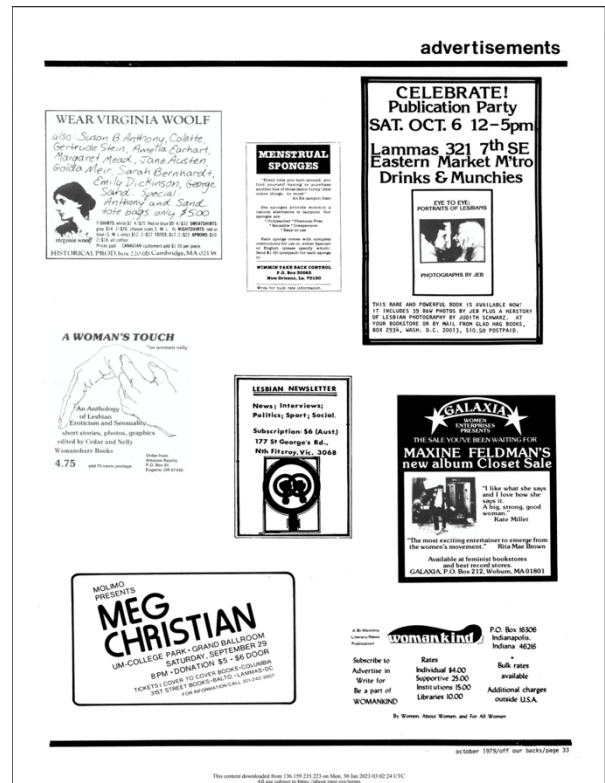


FIGURE 2: ADVERTISEMENTS IN OFF OUR BACKS, VOL. 9, NO. 9, OCTOBER 1979, P. 33

advertisements is so important. If we are engaging with tools that can represent the interaction of artifacts, individuals, and the environment in a way that traditional wikis and archives cannot -- then we must operate with the highest ethic of care.

Wolfgang: In addition to accurately describing the contents of advertisements, we are also charged with describing, as accurately as possible, what an advertisement is about. This involves curiosity, respect, self-reflexivity, and care. For instance, when authoring an advertisement for the Federation of Egalitarian Communities from the periodical *Off Our Backs* (1979), I might want to describe the advertisement using the term "communism." However, if I were to simply use the term "communism" to describe what the ad is about, I would be doing a great injustice because the authors of this advertisement did not identify it as such. In the research space, the use of the term communism would connect this Federation of Egalitarian Communities to communist and consequently Marxist philosophy, which would be a misrepresentation. Instead, it is important to represent the data how its producers intended and so I chose to use the terms "egalitarianism" and "intentional community." Critical thinking is vital to making representative inductions when authoring data. In addition to the social justice and scholarly implications, the practice of making these inductions offer constant learning opportunities and the potential for growth not only as future social workers but as well-rounded, thoughtful, individuals.

Tiffany: Much like the collectives who produced the publications we are archiving, we cannot do it alone. Authoring data is collaborative -- we check each other's work and bring questions and images we encounter to the full research team for discussion. With regard to data, making logical inductions in the authoring process would force me to consider "is this the intention of the author or is it my thought supplanting the materials?" Often it is not possible to know with certainty what was intended. When meaning was not clear, I would collaborate with team members to consider the author's intention. Together, we learn as much as we can about the advertisement from its contents so that we can make the clearest possible conclusions of what was intended by the particular text or image. We would then all be responsible for the co-creation of that particular line of text.

Wolfgang: During the collaborative process, it has been interesting to see parts of our individual identities manifest in the code. For example, I tend to identify concepts beyond the scope of my duties and so the team member tasked with checking my authoring might have to delete some tags or provide better encompassing ones so that the data can be more focused. In the same breath, when checking others' authoring, there are instances where I can identify concepts that might be missing from our data and so I must insert them for sufficient representation. Thus, I learned that the ethic of care involves acknowledging that we bring our own identities to the code we write and the way we represent the data. This is why collaboration is important. Instead of a singular perspective, we come to our understanding together, making decisions about how to represent the material in

GALAXIA
WOMEN
ENTERPRISES
PRESENTS

THE SALE YOU'VE BEEN WAITING FOR

MAXINE FELDMAN'S
new album **Closet Sale**

*"I like what she says
and I love how she
says it.
A big, strong, good
woman."
Kate Millet*

*"The most exciting entertainer to emerge from
the women's movement." Rita Mae Brown*

Available at feminist bookstores
and best record stores.
GALAXIA, P.O. Box 212, Woburn, MA 01801

FIGURE 3: ADVERTISEMENT FOR GALAXIA, *OFF OUR BACKS*, VOL. 9, NO. 9, OCTOBER 1979, P. 33

ways that are as close as possible to the original data, with many voices participating.

Wolfgang and Tiffany: We have collaborated not only in data authoring, but also through meeting and learning with graduate student RAs, liaising with researchers and technical experts in LINCS (a national DH organization), preparing public presentations for conferences, writing proposals, and, finally, in writing this article. AdArchive's collaborative team model has made space for people of different backgrounds and training. From these different backgrounds, in collaboration, and as collaborators, we co-create knowledge. The collaborative approach to the DH project fosters a sense of shared purpose in a unique way because of the relatively flattened hierarchies (to the extent they can be), producing a greater sense of agency and involvement in all aspects of the project.

Wolfgang: The AdArchive Project has also enabled us to reconceptualize how we gain knowledge and discuss the ways that it has taught us that systems of knowledge are never neutral. Prior to my job as a research assistant, I would have relayed something about cultural relativism, subjectivity, and the fact that everyone has biases. That is to say, my understanding of knowledge neutrality was very general. I had never really reflected critically about the partial positionality of knowledge. Engaging with feminist materials and then being reflexive about them, I started to understand more clearly how hierarchical systems reinforce and reproduce ideologies and how social movements are built and mobilised. As for my approach to data authoring, my awareness of situated knowledge brought me to focus on the intentions of the content

creators as opposed to how I might interpret them -- with a parallel understanding that my partial position cannot be simply removed.

Student Reflections: A Total Learning Experience

Wolfgang and Tiffany: When we reflect on the learning experience of working as undergraduate researchers on the AdArchive team, we learned to be researchers. We learned how to practise an ethic of care in relation to our data and were taught to take ownership over the knowledge that we, as a team, were creating together. Although we achieved many broad and transferable skills, more importantly, we were taught to be researchers on a team, not simply trainees. We were encouraged to practice critical thinking, and to understand both interdisciplinary scholarship and the intersections of gender and digital technologies. We learned that our work challenges instrumentalist methodologies by offering new and careful approaches. We learned how feminist ethics can redefine mentorship, expand/animate research, and unsettle power dynamics.

Thinking about the impact of our AdArchive work on our total educational experience requires thinking about how it relates specifically to our training in the field of social work. Although the classroom space also allows for deep learning, our work on this collaborative digital humanities research team helped us synthesize our knowledge and transform our awareness. Because we are being relied upon and trusted to do right by the data, the consequential aspect of working as a research assistant adds higher stakes to the work that are non-existent when we are simply writing an essay for a humanities course.

As research assistants and future social workers, our relationship with identity is multifaceted and intersectional. We are charged with acknowledging the diverse identities we engage with from a place of respect and an ethic of care. In the social work classroom, we are taught to understand how identity forms, and to consider the fact that all subjects have their own identities. Our identities as future scholars and social workers are constructed through the materials that make up our theory and practice. The highest impact that the AdArchive project had on us was helping us to integrate what we learned in the social work classroom. In our AdArchive work, we put our social work training into practice by representing the contents of the advertisements with sincerity, care, and justice.

Tiffany: With regard to data authoring, we often treated the data like a client in social work, carrying other people's voice in an authentic way, attempting to reach a mutual understanding, accessing resources when a particular issue is beyond our purview, then creating something productive out of it all. We are then "gifted" the opportunity to grow from these experiences, which reflect the deeply meaningful feminist action of the periodical and advertisement creators. In this way, our work as research assistants provides us with an opportunity to grow into more thoughtful and better-informed feminists ourselves.

From that point, the after- and during-work introspections would help set the stage for future knowledge synthesis.

Wolfgang: There are other important parallels to our social work training. Careful, intentional use of language, and being mindful of the value of semantics has been extremely impactful on me and will inform my practice forever. Additionally, the ethical frameworks that inform the AdArchive project overlap significantly with many ethical approaches to social work. First of all, we are taught about a feminist ethic of care in the introduction to social work course. A social worker must be careful about how they treat all people, with absolute respect and integrity. In my undergraduate elective choices, I was also given the opportunity to take a range of courses that further primed me for my time on the AdArchive project. From a course in ethics, to reason and argument, to deviant group theory, gender studies, and many more, it has been empowering to use what I have learned as a student outside of my regular classes. In particular, my ethics course made it much easier to adopt the feminist praxis for AdArchive because it taught me about different ethical theories, including a chapter on feminist virtue ethics which employs a similar feminist ethic of care that we use to approach our data.

Wolfgang and Tiffany: Indeed, the AdArchive project encompasses many of the theories that we learn about in school and will adapt into our future social work practice. These early, obscure feminist publications we document and review share passion for advocacy, self-determination, and integrity, and thus overlap with our social work values and beliefs. Learning from those who helped to pave the way is important for us moving forward. The integrity of the AdArchive project also fits with our understanding of how power and privilege can affect individuals, and the impact of the voices of publishing women.

Tiffany: The AdArchive project is also grounded in feminist social justice models and an intersectional approach. In the field of social work, this is often described as having an Anti-Oppressive Practice (AOP) lens. This social work lens helps us as RAs to recognize the structural origins of oppression and social transformation that existed during the late 1970s. While authoring and checking these publications we question why we choose to use the descriptions we do, and what the impact that it will have on others reading our work while preserving the creator's intention. It has encouraged us to reflect critically about the thoughts that arise during the authoring and checking of the ads that we are sitting in front of, and how we represent all facets of them. Feminist theory and intersectionality work hand in hand with having an anti-oppressive practice; the key theme throughout focuses on how power structures are based on gender, race, and class, and affect social opportunities. It is important for us to acknowledge the intersectionality of both oppression and empowerment. It is important for us to honour these as it allows us to understand the creator's vision and the ad, and meet them where they were during their creation. Being culturally competent as social work students allows us to ethically engage with the diversity we discover while working on this project. It will also provide valuable

experience for our future practice when including interventions that are informed.

Wolfgang and Tiffany: Looking forward, the opportunities that have come our way by working on this project have inspired a great deal of gratitude and excitement for the future. Digital archival environments and research spaces propose innovative approaches to research, with tools that have the potential to advance the ways that we interact with bodies of knowledge. Adopting the partial positions of our work by enacting particular ethical approaches has provided meaningful learning opportunities and proven to us that the outcomes of our RA experience and education can be applied beyond our working careers and into our living thoughts and experiences. Working with the AdArchive project gave us the opportunity to adapt to different methodologies and embrace the idea of research early on in our academic careers. This has prepared us for future teamwork, lets us see alternative ethical frameworks in action, and fosters greater social, cultural, and political sensitivities.

Thinking Pedagogically: Towards a Conclusion

Over the course of a two-year period, SSHRC funding allowed the AdArchive team to hire undergraduate students to participate in an innovative, interdisciplinary, and multi-institutional digital humanities project that examines the history of feminist publishing networks. In this article, we have described the ways that a feminist ethic of care pedagogy informs the approach that the research team takes to training, teaching, and mentoring undergraduate researchers. Writing collaboratively, four members of the team have described a model that enables critical thinking and reflection, promotes relational learning, and practices a collaborative approach to research that aspires to flatten hierarchies in order to allow for “a fuller sense of participation and a holistic representation of the insights offered by any one individual” (Mauro et al., 2017). We describe how a feminist ethic of care shaped the approach we take to the data that we represent in digital form. We describe how this ethic of care structured our relationships within a collaborative research team, and we reflect on how it enabled a broader understanding of how working in a research team can be a transformative and expansive experience for everyone involved.

As Jana and Michelle note above, at the onset of the project, their goal was not to extract labour from research assistants, but to contribute to a total learning experience that would increase student self-determination and empowerment, and to foster a sense of agency (Savonick & Tagliaferri, 2017). As team co-leads, they have learned that hiring undergraduate research assistants to participate as collaborators rather than trainees ultimately does something profoundly different than simply free up time and reduce labour. As undergraduate student researchers, Tiffany and Wolfgang developed technical skills that supported the aims of the AdArchive project. They learned to work in an interdisciplinary and

interinstitutional team, to author data for a digital humanities project, to collaboratively write and present their work to an audience (Braun et al 2024), to publish an article in an undergraduate journal (Edwards Van Muijen 2024), and to work on successful grant applications. But, most importantly, they became research collaborators and co-creators of knowledge. As our work as a team taught us, a feminist ethics of care pedagogy grounded a holistic approach to mentorship and scholarship, and ultimately set the conditions for innovative research and transformative learning.

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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Undoing Neoclassical Economics in Elementary School: Three New York City Classrooms and the Teaching of Class Division

by Debbie Sonu



"SWEET EARTH- EXPERIEMENTAL UTOPIAS IN AMERICA", 2005 BY ARTIST JOEL STERNFELDGRAND

The narrative underlying much of economics education in elementary and secondary schools across the United States is neoclassicism (Adams, 2019; Shanks, 2018). While other schools of thought exist, neoclassicism primarily emphasizes rational decision-making and self-interest with a focus on how individuals act in ways that optimize their goals for happiness, income, and capital accumulation. In the New York State Scope and Sequence Standards for Social Studies, Grades K-8 (NYCDOE, 2014), economics, one of the 10 unifying themes in elementary school, is identified as "Creation, Expansion, and Interaction of Economic Systems." Here, topics include "production, distribution, and consumption; scarcity of resources and the challenges of meeting wants and needs; supply/demand and the coordination of individual choices." By focusing on maximizing growth and the satisfaction of human wants and needs, such approaches neglect to contextualize the unsustainable inequalities that result from the systematic amassing of wealth by a select few. Even more, they claim a neutral starting position (Pinto & Chan, 2010) that severs economics from a long legacy of colonialism and the raced and gendered sociopolitical hierarchies that have been built for centuries under the logic of accumulation and a culture of deregulated capitalism (De Lissovoy, 2022; King & Finley, 2015).

At the same time, scholars in critical childhood studies argue for conceptions of childhood that are "discursive, inclusive, sociopolitically situated, transitory, [and] multiple" (O'Loughlin & Johnson, 2010, p. 1). These scholars, and teachers in this vein, understand that children make insightful observations about their social worlds, and thus challenge the notion that children are blank slates upon which to bank educational goals and objectives (Freire, 1970). Moreover, ample studies in child psychology show that children are continually internalizing the cultural milieu of the capitalist state. As early as age 3, they begin to internalize harmful ideologies and biases based on social class (Hazelbacker et al., 2018; Mistry et al., 2017). Within years, they learn to draw discriminatory comparisons between wealthier peers as hard-working, intelligent, and responsible, and low-wealth peers as lazier, prone to criminality, and uninterested in school (Bullock, 2006; Woods et al., 2005). Even as children explicitly share their resources, such as toys and food, in ways that intend fairness and equity, some studies show they still prefer to affiliate themselves with those more advantaged (Fehr et al., 2008; Li et al., 2014) and care more for members of their own ethnic, gender, or peer group when supplies are limited (Weller & Lagattuta, 2014). Additionally, while those with greater social power tend to protect the myths of meritocracy (Kane & Kyyro, 2001), children from low-income households are more apt to acknowledge the emotional toll of systemic inequality (Heberle & Carter, 2020) and to express skepticism about the promises of opportunity, social mobility, and work ethic (Kluegel & Smith, 1986).

As part of a larger survey project on how elementary school teachers in New York City experience, conceptualize, and imagine the teaching of economic inequality and social class, this phase followed teachers

into three classrooms across two public schools in the Lower East Side of Manhattan to witness what it might look like when teachers design curriculum and teach for economic justice. While elementary school teachers are often neglected in the scholarship on economics education, the three classrooms presented in this essay demonstrate how the foundation of a critical economics education begins with unpacking common capitalist-driven ideologies that are felt and internalized years before children enter their very first days of school. Not without its own challenges, teachers plan their lessons by first reflecting on the experiences of children growing up in a city with one of the largest wealth gaps in the country and create learning spaces that shift neoclassical meanings of economics toward critical understandings of economic inequality as it manifests in their lives and sociopolitical contexts.

In a school district of close to one million students, an astonishing 73% of children enrolled in the NYC Public Schools meet city benchmarks for economic hardship, including 119,000 children with housing insecurity (Advocates for Children of New York, 2023). At City School (pseudonym), one of the two participating schools in this project, the numbers cast a more concerning portrait. According to data published by the New York State Education Department (NYSED), 87% of families at City School are "economically disadvantaged" and 129 families are experiencing homelessness or living in temporary housing. At Community School (pseudonym), just down the street in the same district, 60% of students are "economically disadvantaged" with 23 families experiencing housing insecurity. The teaching of economic inequality, then, requires thoughtful consideration and great sensitivity to children's needs and understandings about self and others. As will be seen, in each of these classrooms, teachers make concerted efforts to dismantle the flawed belief that wealth equates to deservedness and value over others, which then becomes the foundational basis from which their lessons unfold.

Teaching children with a wide range of diverse learning abilities, first-grade teachers Sam and Diane craft a lesson on the difference between equity and equality and how resources might be allocated differently depending on individual circumstance. Their lesson on inequality draws from direct observations of children's emotional capacities to understand the meaning of fairness beyond the universal. In third grade, Isabel and Lawrence, who teach a class where many of their students and families experience economic hardship, lead children through a restorative circle activity that surfaces internalizations of privilege as more than financial well-being and then use children's literature to analyze characters through the lens of social class and its hierarchies. Finally, Jia, a fourth/fifth grade teacher introduces the concept of classism and couches incidents of teasing and comparison within a multi-scalar approach that examines divisive institutional policies and practices in relation to their curricular unit on New York City immigration.

Teachers in this project were asked to participate in one initial and one exit interview and to plan and teach one lesson on social class and economic inequality that was

filmed, edited, and published online. Links to the short 10-minute films are provided below. There were no parameters set for the lesson and no feedback was given on its detail and sequence. Rather, I arrived at the school site, alongside two doctoral student researchers and one filmmaker, without much hint into what teachers had planned for the approximate hour. These portraits are not intended as best practices, knowing that the particulars of each context will always derail attempts to generalize what is best in schools. Rather, informed by scholarship within the field of critical childhood studies and with respect to the context of teaching economics in elementary school, each case is a glimpse into what can happen when teachers consider economic inequality as a subject worthy of consideration. The aim is that teachers and teacher educators everywhere come away with a sense that broaching these topics with young children is not only possible, but that accounting for the study of economic inequality in elementary schools is necessary to any agenda that views education as a vehicle for social justice.

Critical Childhood Studies

Oftentimes the very idea of teaching social class to children is met with discomfort, trepidation, even outright refusal. Part of this response sits within traditional discourses on childhood innocence (Garlen, 2019) and developmental appropriateness (Farley, 2018), two pillars of stage-wise theories that deny the complex entanglements of children with society while normalizing a particular vision of what children should be and become (Burman, 2017; Walkerdine, 1993). Oftentimes, anxiety and panic over what children are learning stem not from the capacity of children to explore the world around them, but from the discomfort and moral certitude of adults who, as critiqued by scholars in critical childhood studies, use the figure of the child to justify their own political and social agendas (Castañeda, 2002).

On this, scholars in this field interrogate the ideological, symbolic, and affective roles that the child figure plays as the centerpiece of broader political arguments and tensions manifested by adults. Anchored to Western European Enlightenment and the modern split of adult/child (Aries, 1960), the child figure is far from a biological or neutral fact. Central to a range of shifting adult-centered aims, the mobilization of the child figure within institutional policies, practices, and popular discourses served for centuries to inscribe societal anxieties around morality and corruption (Silin, 1995), decency and civilization (Ishiguro, 2016; Rollo, 2018), evolution and futurity (Castañeda, 2002), all which are inextricably tied to the maintenance of racial projects. Throughout history, metaphors of progress and advancement, alongside child-rearing practices including those found in schools, have catapulted forward a long legacy of recapitulation and evolutionary theories that reify white settler status (Bernstein, 2011; Lesko, 2001) and middle-class capitalist values (Lareau, 2011).

As the underpinnings of late-stage capitalism glorify competition, conquest, and unfettered capital accumulation, the child figure then embodies the

hallmarks of the future consumer primed to move forward a modern capitalist economy, a system that inherently produces specific kinds of vulnerabilities that are emotionally felt, witnessed, and learned by children themselves. Any critical approach to social education, then, should first acknowledge how children are observing and living amid the very historical and contemporary forms of economic dispossession that continue to target entire communities along the axes of race, gender, immigration, and ableism, while acknowledging how traditional theories of childhood innocence serve to perpetuate silence about social inequalities and injustices.

Teaching Economics in Elementary School

According to Jim Stanford (2010), economics education ought to teach about the real causes and potential solutions to financial problems, the forces that shape opportunities, as well as the role of the government in mitigating or exacerbating societal inequities. Key tenets of a critical economics education should include: (1) exposure to how moneyed interests operate behind the scenes of a democracy; (2) content knowledge that demystifies economic policies; (3) real-world examples of how the power of organized people has rivaled, and can continue to rival, organized money; and (4) a forum to explore their own beliefs about these topics (Sober, 2017, p. 84). Yet the actual teaching of economics at the elementary school level is found to be at low levels of critical engagement and can inadvertently reproduce neoliberal capitalist logic (Swalwell, 2021). Extrinsic reward systems that distribute tokens to later spend in a classroom store is one example of how capital accumulation, consumerism, and competition are promoted in the classroom. In first grade, common lessons on basic wants and needs attempt to teach about scarcity yet often fall short of examining the forces that create such conditions. On this, Katy Swalwell (2021) offers alternative lines of questioning that include: "What basic needs should we ensure everyone has?" or "Why are some people rich and some people poor?" (p. 53).

In a review of the literature, lessons on economics in the elementary school include investigating the making and selling of clothes and tracing labor and human rights (Lyman, 2002/2003; McCall, 2017). Others draw from children's literature through themes of social class and meanings of welfare (Chafel, et al., 2007). Books such as *Sí, Se Puede!/Yes We Can!* (Cohn, 2005) or *Click Clack Moo: Cows That Type* (Cronin, 2000) introduce children to the struggle over the rights of workers; *Nibi Emosaawdang/The Water Walker* (Robertson, 2019) shares the story of an Ojibwe water protector; and *Those Shoes* (Boelts, 2009) emphasizes the virtues of family and care over material possession. With these texts, educators can help children question power structures and perceptions of socioeconomic class and status (White, et al., 2013). As found, children in classrooms where teachers taught directly about economic inequality were more inclined to think of class as malleable, rather than inherent, and began to imagine a range of ways to

alleviate class inequality beyond volunteer work and donations (Mistry, et al., 2017).

Since the global financial crisis of 2008, school districts have been rapidly trending towards financial literacy, which makes up only six of the 50 concepts and 20 standards published by the Council for Economic Education (2021). Disseminated by Federal Reserve banks and partnerships between state governments and national and international financial and credit organizations, financial literacy benchmarks for fourth grade include: monitor financial statements for a personal savings account, summarize the advantages and disadvantages of using credit, describe reasons for investing, calculate simple and compound interest earnings, and explain the benefit of a compound rate of return (Jump\$tart Coalition, 2017). Critics of financial literacy argue that its emphasis on the individual rational consumer overwhelmingly promotes a depoliticized and overly rational view of economic issues (Arthur, 2012; Lucey & Henning, 2021). Moreover, financial literacy often carries deficit perspectives on poverty that are laden with gendered and raced innuendos masked by the language of choice, empowerment, and value-neutrality (Soroko, 2020). The proliferation of online curriculum and its seemingly uncontroversial stance may make financial literacy an accessible replacement for critical economics education, especially for teachers who do not have the space, time, and support to plan and create curriculum on their own.

Films on Teachers Teaching Economic Inequality

In what follows, readers can view the 10-minute films made in each of three classrooms. Descriptions of the lessons are accentuated by interviews that offer greater insight into the rationale for why each teacher decided to create their lessons in the way they did. The intent is not to capture the entirety of the lesson but to draw out some of the key concepts and takeaways that teachers and teacher educators can use to foster further discussions in their classrooms and programs, and for other teachers to find inspiration and support in their own efforts to address economic inequality through their teaching.

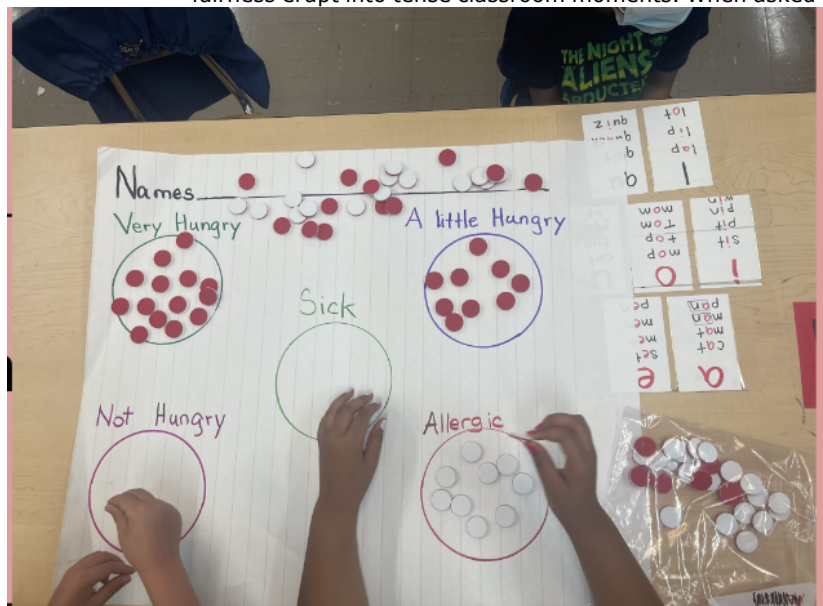
Teaching About Equity & Resource Allocation in the First Grade

To view this resource visit:
<https://vimeo.com/848024021>

Teachers at City School are acutely aware of the ways that economic inequality affects their students' lives and learning. To meet the real material challenges faced by families, Sam and Diane's school regularly offers assistance programs, such as food pantries and clothing drives, and with Title I funds, provides an impressive array

of school-based programs including South Indian dance, cooking with visiting chefs, music instruction, and health and wellness clubs. In addition, the school enrolls a majority of students of color: 54% Hispanic, 23% Asian, and 14% Black students, with 23% identified as experiencing learning disabilities. Many of the classrooms at City School are Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) settings, where one of the teachers must carry special education certification. In 2022, when buses of asylum-seeking families began arriving in New York City, the school experienced a sudden surge of interest from families looking to enroll their children in a language-rich learning environment. Taking great pride in their cultural diversity and offering two dual language programs in Spanish and Mandarin, teachers found themselves faced with supporting the needs of children who experienced enormous adversity and cultivating classroom communities that were welcoming, caring, and just for both newcomers and all.

This film highlights Sam and Diane, two first-grade teachers working in an ICT classroom where children (ages 6-7) with and without special needs learn together. They open their lesson with a read aloud of the book, *Fair is Fair* by Sonny Varela and ask students to follow changes in the character's feelings as they are provided food that is distributed equitably and then equally. At the end, students use their new conception of fairness-as-equity and work together to decide how to divide resources to groups with specific needs (for fuller description of lesson, see Sonu & Herold, 2023). Sam and Diane designed this lesson partly in response to times when demands for fairness erupt into tense classroom moments. When asked



FIRST GRADERS DISTRIBUTING RESOURCES. PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHOR.

about this, Diane recalls a time when a free book giveaway led some students to feel angry for receiving fewer free books than others. As one student lamented, "Why can't they just go to the bookstore?" Sam and Diane are put in a position where distributing books equally may have avoided the situation altogether. Instead, Diane reminds the student, "Well, you can go to the bookstore. But stop

and think, is it fair that someone can't go to the bookstore? Should I give you the same amount of books as them, if you can go to the bookstore and buy it, but someone else can't?"

Certainly, and as seen at the beginning of the film, young children (and many adults) tend to equate fairness with equal resource allocation, and for some children (and some adults), the concept of offering extra support, welfare, and assistance can be seen as an unfair and undeserved privilege. By investigating how resource allocation can account for care and need, the teachers use a simulation activity where children exercise their newfound understanding of equity and their emotional responses to the characters in the book to then make informed decisions that respect the dignity of individuals in context and to ensure the wellbeing of the common good (Lucey & Henning, 2021). While neoclassical views proffer individual action as financial achievement, this lesson lays a critical foundation for children to acknowledge the very real obstacles faced by others and, as shared by Sam, the role that social services and government institutions can play in mitigating the inheritances of hardships for particular groups.

Sam and Diane's commitment to equity as contextual, circumstantial, and needs-based is a direct challenge to the nascent beliefs and behaviors exhibited by their students. "I don't want to shelter the kids from understanding their reality," Sam shares, and while items such as snacks and materials are passed out in equal measure, she also recalls times when they instill in children the idea that equity might require that someone receives more than others to ensure everyone's well-being and accessibility to the promises of education. "One kid needs to take a break, or to play with Legos...Our kids have special needs, [and] this helps all of them learn." At the end of the read aloud, Diane asks the first graders, "So, what does fair mean?" In response, one child shares, "Fair doesn't mean everyone gets the same thing. Fair means everyone gets enough and sometimes they need more." The teachers here are impressed with their students, their ability to make such a complex ideological shift, to empathize with the plight of others, and to make decisions that apply their newfound theories to the welfare of the common good. Their lesson shows, in one small way, how the evolution of a child's thought can move from a belief in equality as universal application towards a more nuanced conceptualization of equity that is based on a deeper inquiry into one's circumstance and need.

Teaching at the same school as Sam and Diane, Isabel and Lawrence work with third-graders (ages 8-9) as they explore various aspects of social identity. Since the beginning of the school year, students in this classroom have been utilizing the model of restorative circles and the identity wheel as tools to discuss gender, race, and ethnicity as part of their social studies curriculum. Yet social class is an aspect of identity that is perhaps more complicated than others, as it is usually perceived to be earned rather than ascribed and is not celebrated or sustained for its diversity and difference. In an interview, Isabel admitted: "We looked all over the place and it was so difficult to find social class lessons for our elementary students. We had to come up with our own way of discussing social class; it just wasn't there." Prior to this filmed occasion, Isabel and Lawrence created and taught a series of introductory lessons on social class, which included discussing scenarios, reading children's literature, even a math lesson which showed how some neighborhoods had more and nicer benches in their local park than others.

Knowing that the integration of class strikes differently from inclusive approaches taken with race, ethnicity, and multilingualism, Isabel and Lawrence learned that conceptualizing social class would take some extra thought and planning. They drew concept maps and worked with children to show how wealth as symbolic discourse produces a set of social privileges tied to judgments on education, leisure, clothing, language use, and housing, not only income and occupation. They then staged an activity where students would align themselves along a row of chairs each representing 1/10 of the nation's wealth percentile. "In the end, a group of students ended up having to share one chair," Isabel explained. "But then one child ended up sitting in the 1% chair and the students were going, look at him, he did nothing to get that chair! And then the kid [in the chair] goes, well look, I'll give you everything!" Amid the bustle of the activity,



THIRD GRADERS IN A RESTORATIVE CIRCLE. PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHOR.

Using Restorative Circles to Surface Social Class in Third Grade

To view this resource visit:
<https://vimeo.com/786442204>

Isabel explains how the conversation then veered into how the ultra-wealthy have made gains over others, to which another student decided, "Well look, one person has all the riches, and he probably inherited it." On their own, the young children in this class have exposed a major facet of

our imminent economic crisis -- that the U.S. is projected to incur the greatest wealth transfer in its history, which according to economics and historians will play an outsized role in exacerbating racial disparities and future wealth gaps (Zhu & Zinn, 2024). Not only are the children making nuanced and candid hypotheses about the distribution of wealth at the national level but are also acknowledging the role of inheritance and generational wealth transfer in the exacerbation of class division and hierarchy.

Restorative circles are pedagogical spaces for dialogue where students come together to foster collective understanding across differences (Koltz & Kersten-Parrish, 2020). On the day of the observation, the teachers utilized the well-practiced method of restorative circles to engage students in a stand-up/sit-down activity that examined the kinds of uneven privileges that result from economic differences. Through guided listening, restorative circles center the perspectives of children by encouraging them to share their experiences and respond to others with sensitivity and care. These practices have been built into the fabric of Isabel and Lawrence's classroom, and their deftness is so well-known that it is common to find visitors from across the district in their room to witness and learn from their work. Yet in a lesson that intentionally acknowledges and publicly discusses who has and who has-not in the room, it is hard to ignore the emotional gravity that begins to appear. When asked what they noticed from the stand up-sit down activity, one student shared how such division can create feelings of happiness for those who stood up and sadness for those who remained seated. In their study with drawings, Howard et al. (2018) found that children are continually engaging processes of "class-making" wherein understandings of wealth and poverty are not only material, but also linked to variable emotional states of happiness and exclusion.

Emotions are not merely psychological states, but cultural practices that carry the affective force to align bodies in ways that can be either collective and exclusionary (Ahmed, 2004; see Massumi, 2014 on affective capitalism). They do not reside solely in an individual, but function to differentiate, circulate, and move individuals together and apart, oftentimes in conformity with social norms and expectations. While the study of class is typically treated as rational inquiry (Lindquist, 2004), the actual experience of social class is affective and emotional. To acknowledge this requires a kind of pedagogy that moves students not beyond but rather into and toward an understanding of class-based relations and histories, an embodied approach that is often absent in neoclassical approaches to the teaching of economics. Nonetheless, numerous ethical and pedagogical questions abound and certainly not all discomforting pedagogies are appropriate (Burgard, et al., 2024). But if we accept that emotions are intricately bound up in relations of power, then a level of discomfort might be necessary for interrogating the deeply-entrenched normative practices that sustain social inequities (Boler, 1999; Zembylas & Papamichael, 2017; Zembylas & McGlynn, 2012). Even in a classroom where difficult conversations and social issues are frequently discussed, Isabel and Lawrence admit that the planning and teaching

of social class, a new topic for students, required an extra level of trust, responsibility, and compassion in order for difficult conversations to not lead to feelings of despair or exclusion. "This is personal to me," Isabel shares, "because I lived this. We didn't want kids to say, I'm poor, I have nothing. We didn't want them to walk away with that...But it isn't an easy life, you know. Yuyi Morales when she first came to the United States, she had nothing. She was looked down on because she spoke Spanish. It was personal for us. That's what teaching is."

Introducing Social Class & Institutional Classism in Fourth/Fifth Grade

To view this resource visit:

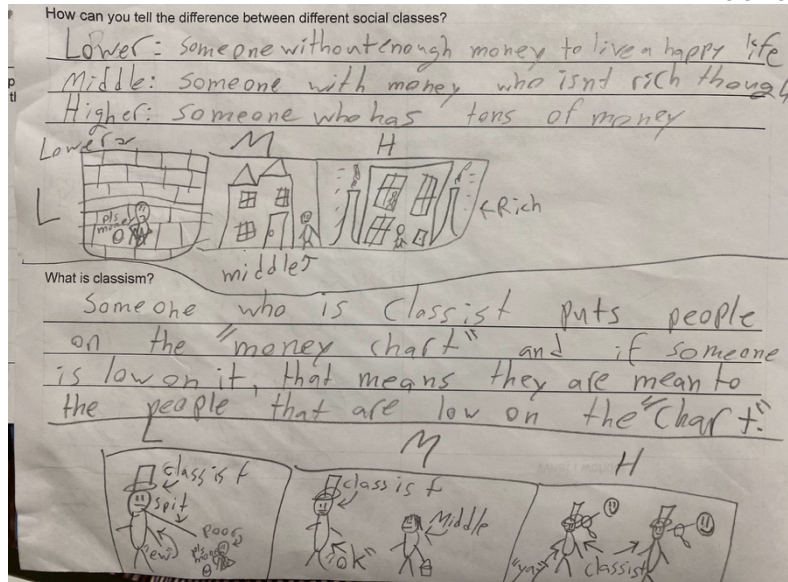
<https://vimeo.com/761939810>

A few blocks over at a different school, Jia, a fourth/fifth-grade teacher, is exploring the concept of social class and classism with her students (ages 9-11) for the very first time (for a fuller description of lesson, see Sonu, 2022). As part of a progressive consortium, the school Jia teaches at is well-known for their centering of social issues in the classroom. Serving a majority students of color (49% Hispanic, 9% Black, and 5% Asian), the teachers practice descriptive reviews of their students, submit narrative reports instead of traditional grades, strive towards egalitarian and participatory governance, and have instituted an open work period once a week that is completely student-led. This year, 80% of the students at her school opted out of taking the state exams. In contrast to the previous school she worked at, which in the wake of No Child Left Behind shifted dramatically towards test scores and accountability, Jia shares that a central core of her teaching is collaboration, not just with other teachers, but when possible, with students and their families. They ask together: "What does it mean to be well-educated? How do we make whatever they are learning purposeful? Teaching has to have meaning," she shares. "We have to attend to education in an emotional way, as well as research and analytical skills."

In teaching economic inequality, Jia begins by helping students as they slowly open up about the ways classism plays out with each other. In an interview, she remarks, "my interest in the work is from seeing how children treat each other. People might assume that kids don't understand or recognize social class, but they do whether we name it or not." When asked about how economic inequality appears in her classroom, Jia recalls how, in the recess yard, conflicts sometimes arise as students notice who has new sneakers, outfits, or fresh haircuts. Children have been seen "saying hurtful and mean things to delineate the haves and have-nots." Those without certain things begin to express embarrassment, covering their hair if it grows too long or if they feel unkempt in comparison. The fear, Jia explains, is that they begin to believe that "if you just work hard enough, you can make it right. You just have to pick yourself up by the bootstraps. That kind of messaging...we're trying to debunk that." In direct opposition to economics theories that foreground self-interest over community, her lessons serve as an

intervention that disrupts the belief that “stepping on or pushing down” others for the sake of personal gain and recognition is acceptable and necessary.

For many of her students, this will be the first time they are hearing the term ‘social class’ and learning directly about the historical and contemporary machinations of capitalism. To begin, and as seen in the film, Jia draws out their emergent ideas as they develop a working definition



FIFTH GRADER WRITES ABOUT CLASSISM. PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHOR

that includes the terms “ranking,” “separating,” “power,” and “worth.” She then hooks their own experiences with and observations of classism with a broader analysis using an analytical chart on the four levels of inequality -- internalized, interpersonal, societal, and institutional. Bridging internalized and interpersonal encounters with broader socioeconomic and political critique is the leap Jia hopes to make. To do this, she returns the children to their previous unit on immigration, a documentary they viewed on the NAFTA trade agreement, and patterns they noticed when looking at census data or when discussing the push and pull factors that spurred waves of immigrants during various historical epochs. In surfacing primary source photographs from their study of the ‘American Dream’ and encouraging them to think deeper about how institutional and foreign policies contour the limits and possibilities of economic mobility, Jia admits: “I did anticipate maybe some confusion between some of the different layers like maybe societal and institutional. I had that in the back of my mind. We’ve talked a lot about things, but it wasn’t quite connecting. But I know this. As an educator, I can recognize it.” She vows to pick up from this reflection to build a more expansive analysis into the societal and institutional realms of economic policy and its far-reaching impact on communities and society itself.

To some degree, Jia disagrees that there is a lack of resources available for elementary teachers on economic inequality. When asked what resources she drew from when planning her lesson, she recounts the book, *The Spirit Level* (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2011), which

demonstrates how societies with the most severe income inequalities tend to present the greatest societal ills and hardships. “Everything I see is through this lens now,” she shares. “If you live in a society where everyone feels taken care of, it actually benefits everyone in that community. We need to unpack that for kids very early on.” Although much of published curriculum is geared for middle and high school/secondary students, she believes the work of elementary school teachers is to know their children well enough to make the needed modifications, “to try things out.” “If you notice it’s not quite connecting,” she goes on, “be able to tweak things and learn from that.” Building from her own study into economic inequality and her many years of teaching and wisdom, Jia crafts her lesson to help children root out the ways that classism plays out in their own sense of self, in their relationship with others, and within the expanse of the social world around them and in which they participate. Of course, learning about the world takes time, continuity, and practice, and even as teaching about social class presents its own challenges, Jia is certain their curiosity has been piqued. The students go home that day and discuss the lesson with their parents; they come back the next day wondering if they would learn more.

Future Directions

Certainly, there is much for teachers and teacher educators to parse out from these three films on teaching social class to young children. Upon viewing them, discussions can lean into curriculum and pedagogy, but also a multitude of other directions including teacher epistemology and beliefs, child-centeredness and care, the pros and cons of capitalism and its excesses, the teaching of neoclassical economics versus inequality, as well as the classed history and hidden curriculum of schooling and educating for economic justice. In the cases presented here, all teachers begin with an intimate understanding of how social class matters to the lives of children and the relationships they forge with others. All the teachers were particularly concerned about how banal meritocracy (Fine & Burns, 2003) affects their students’ perceptions of self and others, and how such judgments are shaped through an oversimplification of achievement, hard work, and individual will. They make clear that material and social privileges are not solely a function of one’s ability and capacity, but rather contextualized by the realities of inheritance, historical denials of opportunity, and bandwagon beliefs on resource distribution.

At the heart of this work is an acknowledgement that children, too, harbor deep feelings about the conditions of their own welfare. Internalized from within the ideologies of American exceptionalism, young children possess a strong sense of the stereotypical tropes tied to various social categories and are found to play out the neoclassical belief that material wealth determines status and value (Heberle & Carter, 2020). This is no less true in classrooms where a significant number of children experience

firsthand the hardships that come with economic poverty. Since children who do not have class privilege can subscribe to the notion that their class position is of their own making (Gilbert, 2008), this makes the redress of beliefs and behaviors fundamental to fostering the beginnings of critical analysis. The fear that such teaching might elicit discomfort should not prevent engagement with what Wayne Ross (2018) claims is “perhaps the single most important variable in society” (p. 250). Instead, teachers should take care in their curriculum, be thoughtful with their classed assumptions, and mitigate the capitalist ideologies that push some students into feelings of despair, shame, and inadequacy.

In such work, it is also important to recognize that one of the greatest false dichotomies lies in the ideological rift between a critique of capitalism and the individual desire for upward mobility (Fine & Burns, 2003). As if striving for opportunity, access, and security somehow runs counter to demands for an economy that tempers unfettered accumulation for the sake of greater stability and egalitarian good. As if ensuring basic wants and needs -- of securing house, health, and sustenance to live -- is separable from dismantling systems of labor exploitation and expropriation (Fraser, 2022, p. 149). As argued by Heather Bullock and Kathryn Lott (2019), the teaching of social class should not be an investigation into poverty alone, but rather a shift toward examining how economic inequality is a problem for all. To do this, the teachers importantly bridged curricular standards on economics with the civics standards of “social class, systems of stratification, social groups, and institutions” as well as “social and political inequalities” and the “expansion and access of rights” (NYCDOE, 2014, p. 2) to ground a range of pedagogical moves including interactive read alouds, simulations, restorative circles, character analysis, whole-group discussions, document analysis, and historical connections and investigation.

At a time of tightened curriculum and heightened surveillance on teachers and teaching, notwithstanding the great limitations of mayoral control over schools, all the teachers here credit their administrators and school culture for supporting this kind of teaching, for enabling the freedom and space they need to create and design, to collaborate and discuss. In her interview, Sam shared: “our principal is very passionate about cultural diversity and equity. She doesn’t shy away from having those talks. You really can’t pretend that it’s not happening.” In addition, both schools are known to lift up the teaching of social studies as the central subject from which other disciplines, content areas, and skills are taught. While social studies is said to be at-risk in the elementary school classroom (Halvorsen, 2012), overshadowed by the predominance of literacy and math, it remains one of the most important disciplines in which to study identity, history, and civic engagement.

This project responds to a gap in literature on the teaching of social class and economic inequality (Shanks, 2019; Vagle & Jones, 2012). In contrast to neoclassical economics and financial literacy, the teachers in this project take a critical lens on local, historical, and felt experiences of inequality and critique the inability of free

market capitalism to materialize fairness and justice for all. For younger children, this includes unpacking meanings of fairness and equity, instilling the values of social cooperation and collective good, and drawing from stories to focus on solidarity and change. For older children, teachers can teach about the structural bases of social class and its inequalities, how social class is conceptualized and measured, and the role of institutions in creating, mitigating, and maintaining class status. The current times will always call for an education in which students recognize societal problems and think together about how to act upon the world. Social class and economic inequality, as an issue that is both nowhere and everywhere, needs more saliency in our classrooms and the teachers in this project show us, each in their own way, how such teaching begins with our young children.

Note

To view all the films mentioned in this article, as well as additional resources visit:

<https://inequalities.commonsc.gc.cuny.edu/short-films-on-teaching-economic-inequality-to-young-children/>

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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Teaching Note

State of Incarceration: Listening and Empathy in Creative Writing Workshops on the Inside

by Nancy Caronia



D-YARD ATTICA, 1971 ARTIST: ROGER BROWN

The fluorescent lights and industrial grey, white, and black floor tiles and classroom walls are not designed to bring warmth or calm. The windows, shuttered and dirty, push out any sense of time or weather. There are no clocks on the walls, and no one wears watches or are allowed cellphones. We sit in a suspended space with only ourselves, the poems we read, and the writing we complete and share.

There are 10 women today in addition to myself and my co-facilitator. We sit in a circle in desks that feel meant for middle school students, not full-grown adults. We fiddle with our pens and paper. We write first to a simple prompt based on that week's reading from Ross Gay's *Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude*: Write about a time you felt loved. They use this opportunity to jot down memories about their children, a beloved dog, their grandparents. After five minutes, we share what we choose from this writing prompt and check in with how the day is going—where we are in the present moment.

As we move on to the first large prompt for the day—write about a time when a mistake turned out to be good—we give the participants time for this writing, almost twelve minutes. Some of the women do not lift their heads for the entire time and write in small, careful script or block lettering in the notebooks provided by Write Pittsburgh, the organization that has brought me to the Allegheny County Jail as a Community Collaborator. Others look up at the ceiling or at their classmates and sigh. A few whisper-giggle to one another before turning back to their writing. Once we begin sharing, I note how quickly they've come together in only three weeks. This group is unstable due to how the jail is structured. Friday is the only day the women have access to GED, basic computer, and creative writing classes like the one I am co-facilitating. Some women have work duty; they might get stuck at work and miss class. Other times commissary arrives at the time of our class, and they need to make a choice: writing or commissary; if they don't grab what they need or want then, they may not have access for another two weeks.

There are three times as many men as women in this jail, and the men are afforded more opportunities off their pods (the units where their cells are located): work duty, two to three days a week of classes in the education center where I facilitate the creative writing classes, and other privileges the women never see. The women are relegated to their pods for six days a week. The only outdoor space is a courtyard in the center of the facility that allows just a small smidgen of sky, but no natural landscape, and rarely are the women allowed out there. While many folks on the inside are there for five weeks, others might be inside for up to seven years while they wait for their trial dates. The jail is a minimum-, medium-, and maximum-security facility and the only place these women see each other outside their pods is in the classroom.

Today, the women are all here and they are feeling a LOT. I am reminded of PEN America's Director of Prison and Justice Writing Caitis Meissner's (2022) statement that "writing can become a lifeline of connection" (p. xix). I witness the connection as they read and share. One woman quietly cries as she remembers her mother, who

died two years ago. They all whisper words of encouragement, and she swipes at her eyes as she says, "I shouldn't be crying. I'm being too emotional." Another woman shares about a favorite day at a lake with her family and then, as another, younger woman is about to begin, a booming male voice on the public address system interrupts: "We are going into a full lockdown. Everyone must return to their pods and cells immediately. No exceptions."

I look around the room and am reminded of the Wednesday men's group—they said that there had already been two full lockdowns that week. Lockdowns happen for a variety of reasons—sometimes it's as simple as too many correction officers are out sick and they are short-handed or as complicated as conflicts on one pod mean all pods are placed on restrictions. I remember how the men's group earlier that week also had been emotionally charged. The joking was a little too loud. The bravado a little too forced. It took me a beat to recognize that Valentine's Day was coming up and they couldn't see the people they loved. They might have short phone calls or video chats, but it's not the same as getting a hug from your child or having your mom or grandma give you a squeeze and a piece of your favorite cake.

While I've never heard the voice over the PA system before, the women know this drill. On this Friday, we are forty-five minutes into our one-and-a-half-hour weekly meeting. Some of the women sit back and sigh, others look around nervously. I look to my co-facilitator, who jumps in, "until they tell us you have to leave, let's keep going." I shake my head up and down in agreement. We try to get back into the rhythm. Five minutes pass. One young woman laughs, "maybe we can stay here all day!" I look at my co-facilitator and don't ask but my face says it all: "Will we have to stay here too?" One student reads the unasked question on my face and says, "Don't worry. They'll let you go home." But then another woman says, "he's coming," and they all look down at the floor.

The tall, burly correctional officer on watch at the front of the education center knocks on the classroom door before he enters. With one hand on the doorknob and the other on the door jamb, he looks up and out at the group. "I'm sorry," he begins. All the women look up at him. "I was told you all could stay. But then the captain called back and said you all need to go back to the pods. I'm sorry," he repeats. The women call out to him "We know it's not you. Don't worry. We know it's not you."

The women pack up and shuffle out of the classroom. Some say, "see you next week" or "sorry we have to go." One woman stays behind. "Please," she pleads with me, tears in her eyes. "Please. I need poetry. I need some hope. I got bad news today, and I need to read poetry by people who are in my situation." I don't ask why. I nod my head and say, "I can take care of this. I'll bring you some poetry next week."

Each time I enter the Allegheny County Jail in Pittsburgh, PA, I surrender my cellphone, my coat, my scarf, and an umbrella if it's raining. I cannot carry any bags unless they are clear plastic. I cannot bring liquids or

certain kinds of pens. I always go through a body scanner—a few times my body is also wanded—and a machine examines what I bring as if I am at the airport going on a trip. The strictures and structure of the jail are not relegated solely to those on the inside. I recognize quickly that I too have rules to follow, and I do not deviate from what is expected since I want to make sure this class exists for these participants.

The men and women who come to these classes self-select into them. They need permission once they choose the class. Their desire to be with me and my co-facilitator and the other men and women from across the jail means that they thought about what this class might do for them. Sometimes they choose a class like a creative writing workshop to simply try something new; sometimes it is to get off the pod for an hour or two; and other times it is to build up their portfolios for the judge—to show that they are trying to meet the standards of a judicial system that doesn't account for their individual situation or needs.

I learn that I need to give up control and to let things breathe. I need to listen not just to what is spoken, but to the quiet gesture made as someone speaks or the way that a student asks shyly what a word means. I can tell the courage it takes to admit unknowing in a place where you always must make contingency plans and always seem like you already know everything that has happened, will happen, or is happening. The class has a curriculum focused on Ross Gay's poetry, but once the student took the courageous move to ask me for poems, I knew I wouldn't bring poems only for her. Instead, I make packets of poems each week that are meaningful in different ways. I got in touch with West Virginia University's Higher Education in Prison Initiative and they shared writing by incarcerated women from *Essential Voices: A Covid-19 Anthology* and *Women of Wisdom: Writings by the Women's Book Club*. Another week, I bring in poems by Jimmy Santiago Baca. And in other weeks, I bring poems by Mary Oliver, Lucille Clifton, Diane DiPrima, and Audre Lorde, just because I know this student likes Oliver and I love Clifton, DiPrima, and Lorde. I want to give them women writers—I want to show them that women can be emotional, funny, and radical. My co-facilitator, a poet, brings contemporary poems by Natalie Diaz and Terrance Hayes into the mix. These students now have access to poems that are sad, angry, sexy, and humorous. We don't read every poem together, but the packets I make allow them to take these writers and their poems back to their pods and read them when they are alone. They can write to them or simply read them, repeatedly. They have poems that speak to their situation as women and as women on the inside. They write poems that emulate what they read, and one student, after receiving the *Women of Wisdom* excerpts, says, "I think I have a book I want to write about my experience here" and she fills her notebook with her ideas.

Patience and listening are my central practices in the jail. Patience for myself and the errors I make along the way, but also for the time the participants need to arrive, not just physically, but also emotionally and mentally. Sometimes, we wait ten or fifteen minutes until they show up at the classroom entrance, held up by an incorrect

count, which means they can't be released until it is correct. Other times, they are late mentally or emotionally, not quite ready to trust us or the process. Other times they arrive immediately and want to see how much I and my co-facilitator are able or willing to give. I see this with my first-year undergraduate students as well. They have a routine in high school, and they want to see how it will change once they are in college. In the jail, they want to know if we will be generous or withholding. If we will follow the rules or bend where we are able. If we mean what we say or if we are only doing our own kind of time. We have a curriculum, but the need is greater than the curriculum outlines. We expand. We are patient. And the students tell us time and again how important it is for us to be there—just to show up and listen to them. To connect with them as human beings. Showing up counts for a lot, but the way they feel heard, I had not expected the enormity of that need. I use not only my pedagogical expertise, but my empathy as a human being to acknowledge we are in a difficult situation that requires flexibility even as the rules suggest the need for rigidity.

Valentine's Day changed how I approach these classes. Before I had adhered strictly to what was laid out in the curriculum guidelines. Afterwards, I bend to the situation, allowing us all to change and grow as the need demands.

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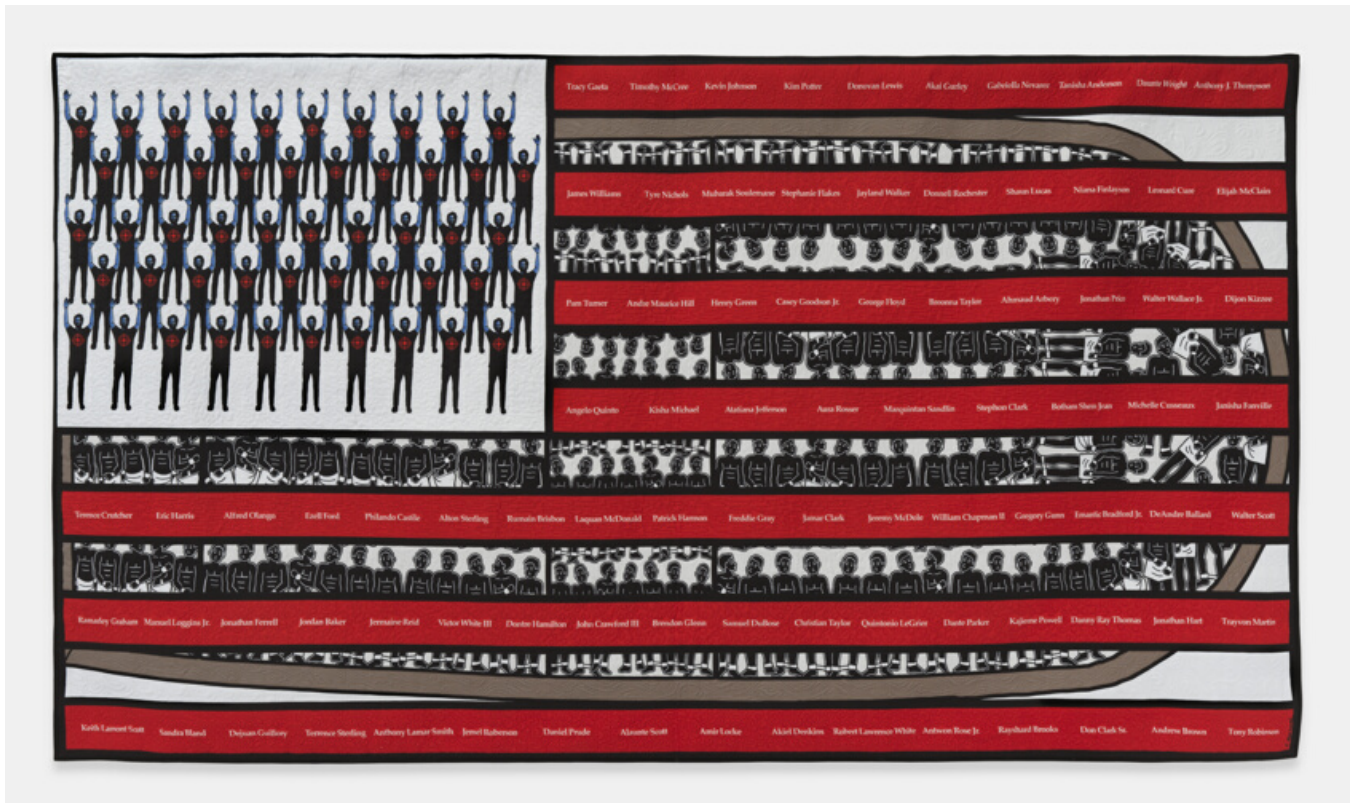
RADICAL TEACHER

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

Teaching Note

“Powerful Stories of Resistance Against Impossible Odds:” Teaching Rebecca Hall’s *Wake: The Hidden History of Women-Led Slave Revolts* as Critical Methodology

by Maggie Mang



HANDS UP ... DON'T SHOOT #2, 2024 ARTIST: CAROLYN MAZLOOMI

My first quarter teaching, I was assigned a tall order: in just ten weeks, I was expected to teach a major requirement class on interdisciplinary research methods. A precursor to a capstone Senior Project specifically for Interdisciplinary Studies in Liberal Arts (ISLA) majors, this class was designed to expose students to diverse methods they could draw upon for their senior projects. I teach at California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo, notorious for being the whitest, the wealthiest, the most expensive, and the most selective among the 23 campuses in the California State University (CSU) system. This fact is a bitter one to swallow considering that the CSU system was created in the name of providing affordable education to one of the most ethnically and economically diverse student bodies in the country.

In this short teaching memo, I show how teaching with Rebecca Hall's (2021) *Wake: The Hidden History of Women-Led Slave Revolts* subverts what undergraduate research design classes can do, showing how critical methodology courses – contrary to their reputation as scientific exercises surveying a pre-packaged list of methods – are an especially apt place to teach about anti-racism, feminist theory, resistance, and social power.

Wake's Subversiveness

Wake arrives roughly in the middle of a fast-paced ten-week quarter. By the time I assign *Wake*, students have learned about situated knowledges (Harding 1991), feminist methodologies (Sprague 2016), the politics of what Mimi Qnūḡha (2018) calls "missing data sets," citational politics, and more. They have begun to query the politics of knowledge creation. Within this context, assigning *Wake* mid-way through the quarter as the only full-length manuscript produces a novel, but challenging, experience and serves as an apt continuation of the main aims of the course.

Wake is the graphic novel adaptation of Hall's doctoral work on recovering the forgotten and erased histories of African and African American women-led revolts against their enslavers. Supported through a Kickstarter Campaign and brought to life by Hugo Martínez's riveting illustrations, *Wake* is the part memoir, part graphic historiography of Hall's personal and academic journey of recovering these stories of women warriors. Hall's direct intervention into the historiography of slavery is three-fold. First, Hall's work rejects anti-Black and white supremacist myths that enslaved people never resisted. Second, Hall shows that it was not only men who led these resistance efforts, pushing back assumptions steeped in misogynoir about histories of Black women's resistance. As Hall (2009) shows, even when feminist historians later recovered the role of women in slave revolts, they often relegated these women to resisting through auxiliary and "feminine" ways – poisonings, burnings, and the destruction of weapons. Hall's third intervention expressly makes plain that enslaved women actively organized and led acts of violent resistance against their enslavers.

What, then, is interesting about *Wake* from a methodological perspective? By answering this question, students interrogate epistemic and political consequences of assuming research, knowledge, and history only look one linear way – a way that claims to document an objective, linear account of history. About halfway through *Wake*, Hall travels to London, the headquarters of Lloyd's Bank. As Hall explains, Lloyd's amassed massive wealth and power from its involvement in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade by insuring slave ships. When Hall shows how she gets turned away from Lloyd's archive under threat of police violence, with the excuse that Lloyd's is a private archive, my students express righteous anger at the refusal of powerful institutions to account for their ties to slavery. As one student, Ross Altenberg, wrote with great indignation, "the infection of capitalistic interests in historical research is truly a disturbing concept, and the roadblocks this presented towards Halls' endeavors to uncover the truths of 18th century slavery is beyond infuriating." Taking Lloyd's as the norm rather than the exception leads us to riveting conversations of how data and knowledge are intentionally obfuscated by the rich and powerful in contemporary examples. The stakes of these conversations are germane in an era of increasing austerity, wealth inequity, and corporate oligopolistic control.

Because *Wake* is a superbly executed graphic novel, my students are affectively moved by Hall's story in a way they are not with previous readings. As another student, Lane Bjerken, put it, "it was like nothing I've ever read before...Seeing history come to life in comics made it feel more real and accessible. The mix of visuals and narrative really helped me connect emotionally—it's such a different experience from reading a typical history book." *Wake* consists of ten chapters, each telling a different story of women-led slave revolts. In one, Hall describes the efforts of quantitative historians who compiled data of over 36,000 slave ships across a 400-year period. While these efforts demonstrated that there were slave revolts in about one in ten voyages across the Middle Passage, these researchers could not determine why revolts were more likely to happen on one ship versus another. One pattern emerged: "The more women aboard a slave ship, the more likely a revolt" (Chapter 8). Yet, as Hall shows, despite the evidence, these historians continued with their assumptions that women didn't participate in these revolts. In our class discussions, it is obvious that even though we have discussed how research and knowledge are shaped by social power – especially from an intersectional feminist starting point – students don't feel the affective and political weight of this fact until reading *Wake*.

But perhaps the most radical intention and outcome of teaching *Wake* has been to disrupt ahistorical myths of nonviolence and women's significant roles in revolts throughout history. *Wake* is ultimately a deeply moving portrait of "powerful stories of resistance against impossible odds" (Chapter 8). By centering *Wake* as a critical methodological text, students better understand the stakes of what radical scholarship, rigorous research, and creativity can do in the world.

What Critical Methodologies Can Teach Students about Social Power

How students feel about methods classes (and research more broadly) can be illuminating. The primary affective response to research design seems to be that of boredom; under this approach, methods classes are treated as a prescriptive checklist where one simply learns what different methods are and how to apply them (e.g. interviews, surveys). That this is a feeling my students have about previous methods classes – or their conceptions of methods classes – signals how traditionally-taught methods classes can be divorced from critical teachings of social power and history. Many of my students come into my classroom with rigid understandings of what “proper” research is. My students struggled initially with research design and methods beyond just quantitative data collection or adherence to the scientific method. At first, many students were surprised over conversations on autoethnography and situated knowledges, skeptical that they could write with and from their lived experiences and still be considered a legitimate student researcher doing rigorous “academic” work. These, and more, are all real anxieties rooted in structural inequity that my students have shared with me.

While I have not (yet) used this framework in this iteration of class, these examples exemplify the stakes of what many scholars have termed epistemic violence and justice. There is a reason – along with a genealogy – why students feel like some questions and topics are not considered “academic enough” for a senior project or that they feel like an illegitimate researcher. This has to do with larger structures of social power and the organization of academic knowledge production. Unsurprisingly, these feelings are felt the most by my minoritized students: disabled, trans, queer, undocumented, poor, working-class, commuting, transfer students from community colleges, international, Black, Indigenous, and students of color. An insistent focus on critical methodologies can empower students to see themselves capable of research and as knowing subjects. Most importantly, incorporating a text such as *Wake* in a methods class – within a context where one may not expect a text like *Wake* to exist – can be a particularly effective way of teaching about social power and resistance as it relates to knowledge production.

Ultimately, in no way was this class perfect. Ten weeks is an incredibly short time to even begin the process of unlearning traditional research norms and reimagining more capacious and just practices of research. Most of my students came out of this class still thinking that interdisciplinary research allows for a more “holistic” understanding of the world. Many of them, inspired by our readings and discussions, wanted to strive for less “bias” in their research. These feelings are admirable and genuinely fulfilling to see. But these student responses also signal entrenched perspectives that the myths of

objectivity and holism continue to provide, crowding out a view of research as co-produced with the researcher as a situated knower. Yet when Hall writes openly about her research process, it peels back the layers of research as a black-boxed and gate-kept process. Seeing such a powerful piece of scholarship that is accessible, situated, and moving is meaningful for my students as they embark on their own research journeys. *Wake* thus makes significant interventions in these spaces that will hopefully be felt long after these students have left the classroom.

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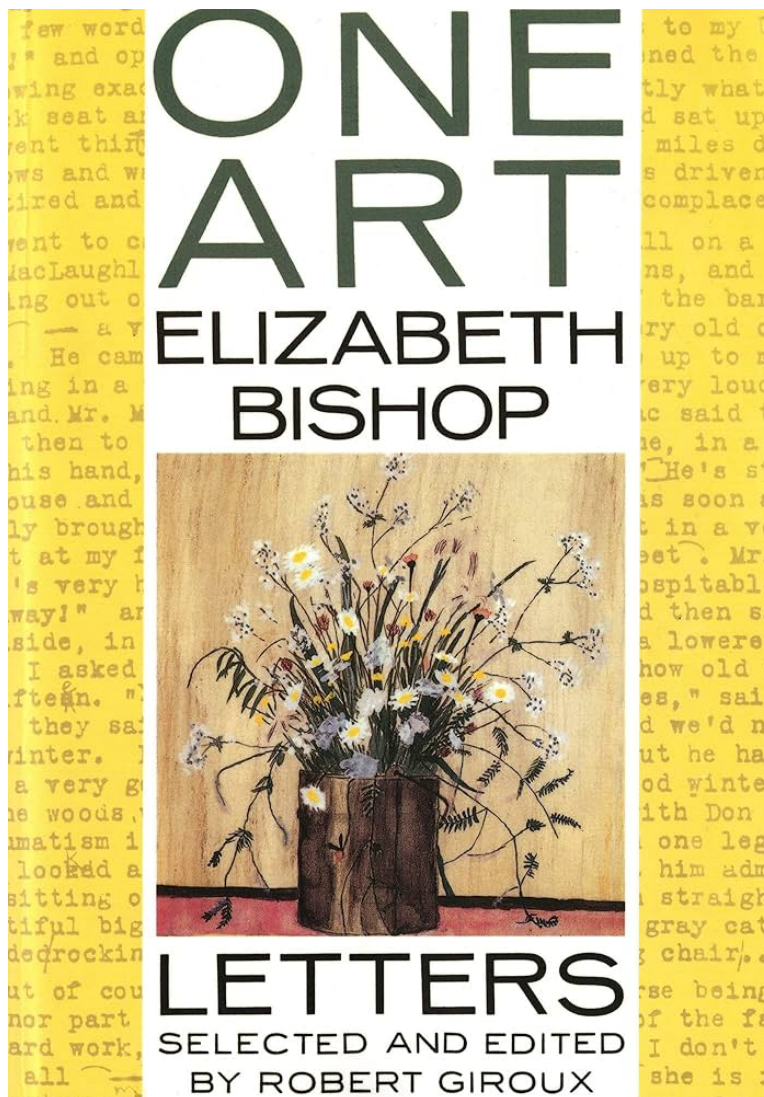
RADICAL TEACHER

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

Teaching Note

Teaching the Art of Losing: Elizabeth Bishop's "One Art" in an Indian Classroom

by Kevin George



ELIZABETH BISHOP, "ONE ART" FROM THE COMPLETE POEMS 1926-1979.

Elizabeth Bishop's "One Art" is a rare poetic meditation on loss that resists sentimentality, instead framing bereavement as a skill to be practiced. Its villanelle form, known for repetition and control, becomes an ironic container for emotions that ultimately break through. Teaching this poem in an Indian classroom—where success is emphasized and failure is stigmatized—was an experiment in unsettling normative ideas about loss, resilience, and control. How can poetry help students rethink loss in a rigid, success-driven educational culture?

Bishop's poetry, despite its significance in American literature, is largely absent from Indian university syllabi. While students are familiar with Whitman, Frost, Eliot, and Poe, Bishop remains largely overlooked. Her poems *The Fish* and *The Moose* appear in some American literature courses, but "One Art" was introduced as a non-detailed reading, selected for its thematic relevance. Teaching the poem opened up conversations not just about poetic form and loss, but also about queer erasure, pedagogical resistance, and the role of literature in challenging dominant ideologies.

Teaching "One Art": Rethinking Loss in a Success-Driven Culture

Indian education is deeply entrenched in a culture that valorizes achievement. The pressures of board exams, competitive entrance tests, and career expectations leave little room for failure. Losing, in this context, is not an art—it is a crisis. "One Art" challenges this by reframing loss as something inevitable, even mundane. The poem's progression—from misplaced keys to lost homes, continents, and lovers—suggests that all loss, no matter how great, follows the same trajectory of normalization.

When I introduced "One Art", my students responded first with intrigue, then with discomfort. One student, engrossed in note-taking, paused and asked about the phrase "(Write it!)" in the final stanza. I explained: "An intervention of overwhelming emotion. Emotions don't rhyme. Only words do." The poem's structure—so tightly controlled—ultimately breaks down, forcing us to confront what cannot be mastered.

This led to a broader discussion: Can loss truly be mastered? Some students argued that moving on is necessary for survival. Others resisted the idea that loss could be reduced to an "art" at all. The poem opened space for students to critically reflect on their own experiences—many of them, first-generation college students, are intimately familiar with loss, whether through migration, financial instability, or the weight of family expectations.

As an exercise, I asked students to write a short reflection on something they had lost. Some wrote about personal failures—exams not passed, opportunities not taken. Others wrote about lost homes, friendships, even languages. One student wrote, "I lost my childhood when I realized my family could not afford to send me to the college I wanted." "One Art" had done what literature should do: it had made the personal political.

The Politics of Teaching Bishop in an Indian Classroom

Teaching "One Art" is not just about loss—it is about the politics of what can be openly discussed in the classroom. In conservative institutions, subjects like queer identity and Marxist critique are often silenced. I teach in Kerala, where conversations about gender and sexuality are somewhat more permissible, but even here, queer theory is dismissed by many senior faculty. In other parts of India, particularly in states governed by the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party, teachers have been suspended for including queer writers in their syllabi.

When I mentioned Bishop's lover, my students assumed I was speaking of a man. I clarified that it was, in fact, a woman. This moment of cognitive dissonance was telling—literature has a way of revealing what has been erased. In many Indian classrooms, queer relationships are either ignored or euphemized. Teaching "One Art" was an opportunity to resist this erasure, however subtly.

This resistance extends beyond LGBTQ+ issues. Teaching loss itself is an act of pedagogical defiance in a system that does not accommodate failure. Students are taught to equate success with self-worth. Those who fail often internalize it as a moral failing. By reading "One Art", students encountered an alternative perspective—one that neither romanticizes loss nor offers false consolation, but instead acknowledges its inevitability.

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's vision of education as liberation rather than indoctrination came to mind. If learning is to be empowering, it must acknowledge struggle, discomfort, and loss as integral to growth. The architect of the Indian Constitution, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, embodied this truth. Belonging to the Mahar community, he was considered an untouchable and was not even allowed to sit inside classrooms as a child. Yet he pursued education relentlessly, eventually earning degrees from Columbia University and the London School of Economics. For Ambedkar, education was both a means of personal liberation and a tool for social justice. He had, in a sense, mastered the art of losing—not by accepting loss passively, but by transforming it into resistance.

Literature as Pedagogical Resistance

"One Art" is more than a poem—it is a disruption. It forces students to sit with discomfort, to question the narratives they have been given about success, failure, and identity. In a higher education system that prioritizes quantifiable achievement over intellectual reflection, reading Bishop became an act of resistance.

The final line of "One Art"—"(Write it!)"—is more than just a poetic device. It is a call to acknowledge, to name, to resist forgetting. In teaching this poem, I found myself rethinking not just loss, but the very act of teaching itself. What does it mean to teach literature in a system that discourages introspection? How do we, as educators, create spaces where loss is not seen as failure, but as part of the human condition?

Bishop died a few years later, having requested these lines from her poem "The Bight" as her epitaph:

All the untidy activity continues, awful but cheerful.

The art of losing may not be too hard to master, but the art of teaching it remains an ongoing struggle. Perhaps this struggle itself is a kind of learning.

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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Review

Palestine in Film: A Review Essay

by Linda Dittmar



NO OTHER LAND (2024) MASAFA YATTA, PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI COLLECTIVE

Remembering Mohammad Bakri (1953-2025)

- Actor, writer, filmmaker

Finally, a door cracks open, letting films about Palestine squeeze into select auditoriums—still only a few and still with uncertain distribution. But the numbers are as telling as the acclaim. Once I set out to review the Oscar-winning documentary *No Other Land* (2024), I found myself reaching both forward and back, noting other current films as well as earlier ones. (See the appended filmography below.) Among these are recent feature-length documentaries I particularly regret leaving out here: *Where the Olive Trees Weep* (2024) and *Occupation, My Ass* (2025). Another film, *Israelism* (2023), was reviewed in this journal two years ago. But no matter which of these films you're able to see, their suppression en masse is a measure of their power.

Released in quick succession at a time of heightened public awareness of Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza, the following feature-length documentaries reach us like a blast of long suppressed anguish and rage. And they keep coming. Newly screened as I write is also the story of the six-year-old Hind Rajab, stranded for hours under fire in Gaza and the paramedics sent to save her are all murdered by the IDF. Two other half-hour versions of this heart-breaking story were also made, all three in 2025. Included are miles of documentary footage—some archived, some lost—that were taken by journalists, bystanders, victims, and perpetrators. At issue is a war that for years seemed a smoldering norm: Israel's seemingly static but in fact continually determined forward-thrusting conquest of historic Palestine.

With genocide in Gaza, violent ethnic cleansing in the West Bank, and a regional escalation fed by a miasma of international conniving, these films document history in its inchoate formation Omar El Akkad puts it in the title of his extraordinary book, *One Day, Everyone Will Have Always Been Against This*. For now, even the films that do win standing ovations and major festival prizes still face uncertain distribution. Attending screenings, discussions, and reading about them, therefore, are among our acts of resistance.

No Other Land (2025)

The burst of applause that erupted when *No Other Land* was announced as the 2024 Oscars winner for "Best Documentary" was jubilant. Captured on camera, you see the film's directors, Basel Adra and Yuval Abraham, loping forward to accept the prize, Yuval's arm briefly on Basel's shoulder. Smiling broadly and still boyish in their dark suits, they seem unfazed by the glitz of the moment.

But the euphoria does not last. Basel's and Yuval's acceptance speeches protest Israel's brutal policies in the Occupied Territories, passionately explicit about what their film has already documented: Israel's relentless territorial annexation, an ongoing Nakba. Focusing on Masafer Yatta's years-long nonviolent resistance to preserve its community and homes, the film offers a powerful case-

study in the courage, determination, pain, love, and sacrifice inherent in resistance.

In production from 2019 to 2023, *No Other Land* makes it clear that Masafer Yatta is just one of many Palestinian communities that have already endured, are currently dealing with, and will continue to face Israel's obdurate wresting of Palestinian lands. Similar documentary footage abounds: Bulldozers crushing buildings, children meandering on rubble, desperate Palestinians trying to reason with inflexible Israeli soldiers, women cooking meals on makeshift fires, the disabled living in rickety shelters.... Grief, rage, and despair.

Within this struggle, it's especially the relationship between the two protagonist-directors—the Palestinian Basel and Jewish-Israeli Yuval—that gives us hope: "brothers" in their commitment to Masafer Yatta. They even look alike: slim, disheveled, intense yet unassuming, and deeply affectionate with each other. Admitting us into their life, they let us know their hopes and doubts, their exhaustion but also their stubborn resilience. There is an intimacy that occurs in a void during moments when the outside world melts away: inside a car steeped in darkness as it heads to an unknown destination, in a deserted coffee shop, or in Masafer Yatta fast sleep. Illuminated by passing cars, checkpoint spotlights, or the guard-lights of a Jewish settlement, at those moments everything separating them recedes.

Yet the walls are still there. Basel risks his life daily while Yuval doesn't; Basel is forbidden to drive on certain roads while Yuval isn't; Yuval can go home for a shower any time while Basel can't. "Why are you here with us?" asks one of the residents as Yuval lays bricks alongside him.

This is the key question for Yuval and all outsiders, though not for Basel—and it's also a challenge to many of us in the audience. As *No Other Land* creeps toward its final sequence, we search for resolution that the film withholds. Its events are just variations on a theme, its wearying, five-years struggle like an Escher drawing, a closed circuit of people forever walking uphill and forever down. The "situation" is a trap, a *matzav* in Hebrew, which is a word that signifies an unmoving situational stasis. Tony Blair may advocate for building a much-needed school—only for us as viewers to see, minutes later, a bulldozer bite into its new white wall.

Toward the end of *No Other Land*, we see a giant concrete mixer pouring concrete into wells on reclaimed agricultural land, an olive grove awaiting destruction, Jewish contractors slicing through Palestinian irrigation, and families leaving Masafer Yatta, their cars and rickety trucks piled high with houseware. It is the Nakba yet again, an ending to the film that makes many people leave in tears. And even so, *No Other Land* is a story not of defeat but a tale of what the Palestinians call *sumud*: rooted in the land and the people, an unswerving commitment to resist, to be patient and determined, sustained by the dignity of being in the right. Over the film's five-year duration, we see a community enacting this *sumud* daily and know this practice will stretch to an end yet to reveal itself.

In this film, Basel and Yuval are guides, serving as both protagonists and directors embodying the political and emotional struggle that shapes and challenges them. It is important that Basel is of the village, one of their own. And it is important that Yuval is an Israeli Jew—who, by national law and consensus, is challenging his nation's interests. Their deep affinity and determined persistence show us the way. Their being Israeli Jew and Palestinian, respectively, gives us hope, and their youth offers viewers a sense of a future.

The Voice of Hind Rajab (2025)

While *The Voice of Hind Rajab* did not win this year's Oscar for "Best Documentary," it already won the Golden Lion award and received a twenty-minute standing ovation at Venice's 93rd International Film Festival. Perhaps most significantly, the film has also opened to limited screenings in the U.S.

The story of Hind Rajab, a six-year-old Palestinian girl trapped for hours in a car next to her dead relatives under IDF fire in Gaza and begging to be rescued is well known. Protesting students even renamed Columbia University's Hamilton Hall "Hind Hall" in her memory. Her heartrending cellphone requests for help were recorded by the Red Crescent's rescue volunteers as they tried to arrange for her rescue. When I first heard the story on the radio, it was just a recording, no images—a scared and lonely young voice. As told by acclaimed Tunisian director Kaouther Ben Hania, the film, which is a very close recreation of the actual hours of her entrapment, is rooted in this recording.

We also never see Hind in her eponymous movie. As the film starts, all we have is a fast-moving audio wave stretching and leaping across a black screen. A few long minutes later, we are at a seemingly ordinary day in the Red Crescent rescue center—until the volunteers get a call for help. There's the sound of a woman's urgent voice, then screams, then total silence. Then explosions and bursts of rapid gunfire. An uncle calls from Germany. The connection is shaky, then blocked. Tense minutes later—or is it seconds?—the call returns. Time crawls, freighted with ghastly possibilities. The Red Crescent's offices are airy, new, and well equipped: Its gleaming glass walls at once connect and separate, distort and muffle.

We as viewers hear volunteers Omar and Rana (played by Motaz Malhees and Saya Kilani) take turns on the phone, trying to keep Hind's spirits up through the terrifying long wait. She goes to the "Happy Childhood" school, they learn, in the "butterfly" group. "In the name of Allah, the all-merciful and compassionate," Rana recites with Hind. Omar, frustrated with the delay, loses his temper. Mahdi (Amer Hlehel), the middle-aged director, insists on procedures to ensure the ambulance's safety. Their anguish is palpable, and Nisreen (Clara Khoury), the psychologist, helps them keep going through this ordeal. A bulletin board is crowded with photos of people they failed to rescue. Hind's will eventually be added.

The cameras spend a lot of time with Mahdi, the office head. Rules-abiding, we follow him through a labyrinth of bureaucratic barriers, indifference, and plain cruelty. We

see Mahdi on the phone, desperately begging for permits, speedy decisions, a bending of rules. He needs to line up the one remaining ambulance, to get UN approval, to get the IDF just to listen, to have a certain doctor use his influence, to get the IDF to approve a secure route for the ambulance, and ultimately to get the required "green light." Rana faints. Hours pass. Tempers rise. Omar counts the minutes. Hind is just eight minutes away as Omar rages and wrests the phone from Mahdi several times. There's a poster honoring some twenty ambulance attendants killed during rescue operations on Mahdi's wall. Mahdi locks himself in the toilet and, sitting on the floor, he cries.

Were Hind's story a fiction, it could easily descend into melodrama—a tearjerker about a child killed in wartime. But this is a true story, and Kaouther Ben Hania's film avoids that temptation: The child remains invisible throughout. She tugs at our heart, but what we see instead of her terror is the heart-breaking commitment of Hind's rescue team as it faces a system where even the most up-to-date communication and surveillance technology proves useless, and people's determination—no matter how powerful, principled, and constant—ultimately doesn't matter. The electronic mapping of the ambulance's advance toward Hind captures it all: the lurching moves forward, an unexpected obstacle, a detour, a hesitation at a bend, and the unbearable duration of it all.

Powerfully acted and often seen through closeups, we as viewers are joined with the people trying to save Hind. They lose her, but we know this is also not the end. *The Voice of Hind Rajab* is not about pity: Rather, it is a searing and brilliantly told story of courage and resistance. Crashing though the film's very close recreation of actual events is protest, a call to both our conscience and action.

Selected Filmography

- The Inner Tour (Raanan Alexandrovicz, 2001)
- Jenin, Jenin (Mohammad Bakri, 2002)
- *Rana's Wedding (Hani Abu-Asad, 2002)
- Arna's Children (Juliano Mer Hamis, 2004)
- Five Broken Cameras (Emad Burnet, 2005)
- The Diary of Yoseph Nachmany (Dalia Karpel, 2006)
- *Paradise Now (Hani Abu-Asad, 2006)
- *Salt of the Sea (Annemarie Jacir, 2008)
- The Law in these Parts (Raanan Alexandrovicz, 2011)
- The Gate Keepers (Dror Moreh, 2012)
- *When I Saw You (Annemarie Jacir, 2012)
- The Great Book Robbery (Benny Brunner, 2007-2012)
- *Omar (Hani Abu-Asad, 2014)
- Al Helm; Martin Luther King in Palestine (Connie Field, 2014)
- *Wajib (Annemarie Jacir, 2017)
- The Viewing Booth (Raanan Alexandrovicz, 2020)
- Blue Box. Re JNF (Michal Weits, 2021)

- Tantara (Alon Schwarz, 2022)
- *The Teacher (Farah Nabulsi, 2023)
- Israelism (Erin Axelman and Sam Eilertsen, 2023)
- Lyd (Rami Yunis & Sarah Ema Friedland, 2024)
- Where Olive Trees Weep (Zaya & Maurizio Benazzo, 2024)
- Palestine: The Reality—Arthur Balfour and the Document That Destroyed the Middle East (Karl Sabbagh, 2025)
- No Other Land (Basel Adra, Rachel Szor, & Yuval Abraham, 2025)
- Occupation, My Ass (Amber Fares, 2025)
- Hind Under Siege (Naji Salameh, 2025; not feature length)
- The Voice of Hind Rajab (Kaouther Ben Hania, 2025)
- Close Your Eyes Hind (Amir Zaza, 2025)
- Hind Under Siege (Naji Salameh, 2025)
- *All That's Left of You (Cherien Dabis, 2026)
- *Palestine 36 (Annemarie Jacir, 2026)

* *Fiction films instead of documentaries*

Linda Dittmar, winner of an Excellence in Teaching award, taught literature and film studies for forty years at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Her co-edited books include *From Hanoi to Hollywood; The Vietnam War in American Film* and *Multiple Voices in Feminist Film Criticism*. Retired as Professor Emerita, she wrote the memoir, *Tracing Homelands: Israel, Palestine, and the Claims of Belonging*. Her current writing and activism concern Israel's genocidal self-creation as a nation-state. She is a long-time member of Radical Teacher's editorial group.



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RADICAL TEACHER

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

Poetry

elementary

by Emma Roth



STUDENTS OF ST. MICHAEL'S SCHOOL, SOUTH CHICAGO ANTONIO PEREZ 1988

elementary

she stands in front of me, small-palmed and skull
burst open. her breath a kite and string cut across
the world

but she stands in front of me and asks for
a snack. their shirts are both pink and did you know
that brain matter is actually gray?

her foot dangles
by a thread and i am sewing with a plastic needle,
the felt beneath my fingers. she beams a mostly-gum
while i think of teeth

against the ground. one among
many, afraid to flush the toilet for the sound. and yet
the bombs.

their obscenity and cracked against the sky.
the white sheet, the paper in my hands and the words.

at the end of the world there is a teacher reading a book,
doing the voices, refusing the shaking of the ground.

Em Roth (they) is an educator and organizer based in Boston. They believe in the promise of liberation and are enamored with the strange questions children ask. They have been previously published in *ANMLY*, *beestung*, and *BRAWL Lit*. They encourage you to link up with your local mutual aid organization or bail fund if you are moved by their work.



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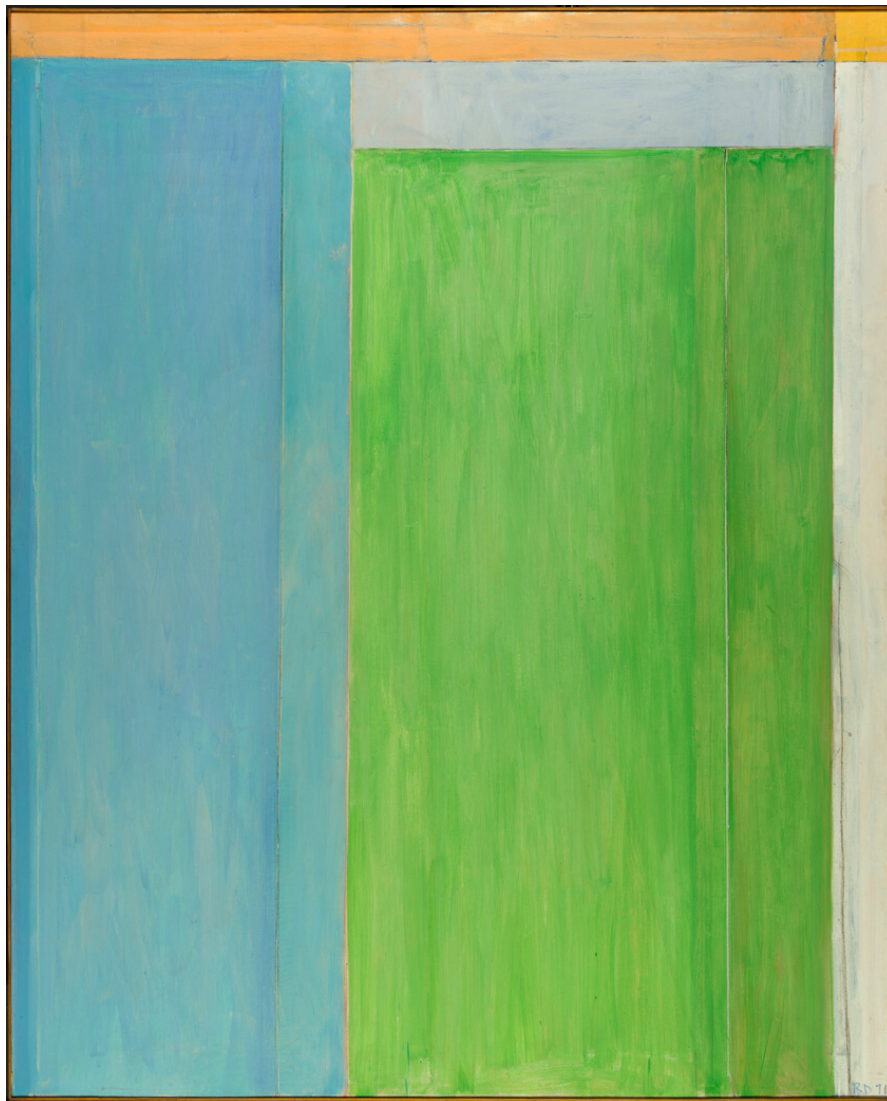
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Poetry

English Writing Tutor

by Sheryl Slocum



OCEAN PARK #45, 1971 ARTIST: RICHARD DIEBENKORN

English Writing Tutor

The soft pad-pad, tick-tick
of fingertips on the laptop keyboard
comes in bursts.

In the pauses, I sit and wait,
count my breaths,
look out the window,
admire the trees—
anything
to maintain the silence

for a mind thumbing through words and phrases
remembered as heard:
theirs and mines...
Base on my experience, I believe...
could of being me...

Then, nothing—silence.

I ask:
How would you say it in your language?

The answer:
We don't talk about things like this at home.

After the barely-remembered escape,
the refugee camp,
the airplane flight,
middle school, adolescence,
high school,
and now college,
only ten fingertips and a slim laptop
must navigate this no man's land
between languages, mined with
grammar rules,
cultural taboos,
untranslatables,

plus all the inarticulate yearnings to
fit in,
achieve,
graduate,
get the job,
support, sustain, and please.

Not wanting to
paste my words

into someone else's story,
I sit and wait,
check my nails,
contemplate my hands,
turn them over...

No matter whose wrists,
the fingertips are tender pink.

Sheryl Slocum lives in West Allis, Wisconsin. She has taught English to multilingual learners and trained multilingual practitioners for the Peace Corps, US language companies, and several colleges and universities. Sheryl has published many poems and a book of poetry, *Leaving Lumberton* (Wipf and Stock, 2022). She has also published articles focused on English language instruction in *Essential Teacher* and *The Writing Lab Newsletter*.



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