EDUCATIONAL

ABUNDANCE

EDUCATIONAL ABUNDANCE

The Journal of the New York State Foundations of Education Association
Volume 5 (2025)
Table of Contents

Neoliberal Governmentality and Global Education Reform

Madhu Narayanan
Florida International University

Abstract: The future of education is uncertain, but one thing is sure: it will likely be privatized. The privatization of a social good like education at first seems at odds with Foucault's haunting vision of a totalizing state. But, instead of relying on immense government bureaucracies to enforce complex regulations and produce compliant subjectivities in schools, a new atomized educational landscape is being constructed dotted with private enterprises, individual entrepreneurs, and replicating corporate franchises, all striving to provide quality education in response to market demands. What is interesting is how privatization embodies the ensemble of techniques Foucault called "governmentality," bringing his vision of state management of populations to the private sphere.

Foucault coined the term "governmentality" to describe an ensemble of techniques of control and surveillance, where the all-encompassing production of data and state knowledge pushes individuals to discipline themselves (Foucault, 1991). Several scholars have since theorized how this form of governance persists in the current era of privatization and reduced state functions, under what has been termed "neoliberal governmentality" (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002; Lemke, 2001). The shifts have profoundly impacted education, and I describe how the workings of neoliberal governmentality are clearly evident. My purpose is to make concrete what was often vague in Foucault's initial writings, and what has been difficult to pin down in more recent uses of 'governmentality'.

I begin by summarizing both Foucault's concept of governmentality and recent applications of the theory to current schooling under the heading of neoliberal governmentality. Then I describe three sites of neoliberal governmentality in the global education landscape. One is the growing "shadow education" sector (Zhang, 2023) — an ecosystem of private tutors, coaching classes, and specialized workshops designed to prepare students for high-stakes exams. A second site is the proliferation of schools managed fully within the private sphere that target poor communities. This includes charter schools, charter franchises (Hernández, 2022) and the proliferation elsewhere of low-fee private schools (Härmä, 2021, 2), both of which flourish within a suspect discourse of education as "a ticket out of poverty." Third, I look at digital platformization, which describes how educational organizations increasingly rely on technology platforms managed by large private corporations (Sefton-Greene, 2021). Lastly, I use an example from education in India to illustrate neoliberal governmentality.

What Is Governmentality?

Foucault had been interested in how large populations could be managed and security could be upheld in the absence of overt power. His ideas about governmentality emerged from these interests, but it is helpful to first track his earlier theories. Charting shifts in the use of force from the feudal era through the post-war period, Foucault developed innovative theories of discipline, surveillance, and power, offering insights into how people could come to control themselves when they sensed an ever-present, watchful eye over their actions. Perhaps Foucault's most original ideas concerned the relation between power and knowledge (Foucault, 1982). Rather than power being the direct control through force, Foucault argued that as governments developed abilities to collect vast quantities of knowledge about their populations in the form of

health metrics, safety data, reports of educational achievements, endless tables of family level demographics, budgetary expenses, etc., governments were able to create policies and make institutional decisions justified by what was now known about the relevant populations. Language was crucial to these developments, but specifically in the form of what Foucault (1972) called "discourse." By discourse, he meant not just the words or even the writings of policymakers and statesmen, but more generally the field of possibilities from which certain forms of thinking and speaking emerged at the expense of other such forms. Foucault's writings on discourse lend insight into competing visions of reality, describing the conditions under which contingent truths are produced and accepted (Ball, 2018; Purvis & Hunt, 1993). From this background, a collection of organized practices emerged — certain mentalities, rationalities, and techniques — through which populations could be governed (Foucault, 1991). It is this new collection of techniques that Foucault termed "governmentality," and although he was brief on specifics, he sought to provide a description of the new practices emerging after the European Enlightenment and coalescing around an "art of government."

Governmentality fundamentally differs from the juridical concept of sovereignty. Kings, princes, and sovereign feudal lords are typically seen as external to their domains, holding a transcendent and divine position over those they rule. Their main focus is to maintain power and territory. Governmentality, conversely, emphasizes a plurality of internal forms of government and establishes a vertical continuity from state rule, through family management (economy), to self-governance (liberty). The shift from feudal governance was important because the goals of rule were no longer the maintenance of sovereignty but rather "the welfare of the population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, etc." (Foucault, 1991, 100) Unlike discipline, which was a theory about controlling designated groups in confined spaces (e.g., prisons, schools, workplaces, etc.), governmentality is concerned with the well-being of populations at large. This population included a complex composed of men and things, including their relations with wealth, resources, territory, customs, habits, and even accidents like famine or epidemics. Instead of relying on laws and edicts, like traditional sovereignty, governmentality employs multiform techniques to educate desires, configure habits, aspirations, and beliefs, essentially "arranging things so that people, following only their own self-interest, will do as they ought" (Scott, 2005, 33). With self-governance, Foucault connected with his enduring interest in the creation of subjectivities. He argued that the elevation of the individual opened the way for a governmentality that extended beyond the state (Foucault, 1982). The state could define and redefine what fell within its purview, combining public and private spheres. The individual was the hallmark of liberal thinking, an atomized subject who was part of the masses but remained responsible for personal decisions. Connecting state functions of governance and individual responsibility opened the way for an updated concept of neoliberal governmentality.

Neoliberal Governmentality: A Shift in Form

From its initial, brazen uses of power, the state had increasingly adopted more nuanced and indirect forms of governance. Such shifts coincided with the decreased role of the state and the emergence of new private actors (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002), a trend that raises a series of questions: Does governance require a strong state? What happens when there is a reduction in the role of the state? Can less government intervention support a greater degree of governmentality? "Neoliberal governmentality" is essentially a theoretical answer to such questions, building upon Foucault's broader idea of governmentality. Neoliberalism is

characterized by a focus on smaller government, a competitive market logic, and reduced state intervention in the operations of private actors (Lemke, 2001). The core concern of governmentality, including its neoliberal form, is the welfare of populations at large, except now the loci of such techniques are non-state functionaries rather than the state itself. The state's role under neoliberal governmentality is not a "retreat" or "rolling back," but rather a reorganization or restructuring of governmental techniques (Ferguson & Gupta, 2008). Operations formerly managed by the government are transferred to non-state entities. Under the name of empowerment, social and economic risks are shifted to private organizations while individuals are "empowered" to discipline themselves. Social risks like illness, unemployment, and poverty become matters for individuals and collectives, such as families and associations. Neoliberal governmentality profoundly reshapes the understanding of economic rationality and individual subjectivity. Market rationales are transposed into non-economic spheres such as family life, married life, and professional life (Lemke, 2001). This broadens the economic lens to view almost all human action as characterized by the allocation of scarce resources for competing goals. Individuals are redefined as autonomous entrepreneurs responsible for their own actions and bearing the full risk of their decisions.

Three Sites of Neoliberal Governmentality

This section describes three sites of neoliberal governmentality: shadow education, privatized schooling for the marginalized, and digital platformization. The goal is to show how neoliberal governmentality is a concrete part of the everyday institutionalization of schooling.

Shadow Education: The first site of neoliberal governmentality in the global education landscape is the growth of what has been termed "shadow education" (Bray, 2017; Zhang, 2023). Shadow education refers to supplemental learning activities that occur outside of formal schooling structures, such as coaching centers and private tutoring, specifically aimed at improving performance in formal schools. While there are many educational activities that take place outside of school, shadow education is defined by the three characteristics of being private, supplemental to the formal school curriculum, and focused on academics (as opposed to, say, enrichment) (Bray, 2017). Activities in shadow education mimic the shape and movements of formal education, though they may be difficult to observe, hence the "shadow" metaphor.

Shadow education is an example of neoliberal governance because it contributes to the commodification of education, but it is also a site where the desires and aspirations of students are cultivated and constructed along predetermined pathways. As students and parents seek remediation or preparation for high-stakes exams, they become embedded in an institutional arrangement that rewards performance on examinations and markers of status such as diplomas and admissions to prestigious colleges (Baker, 2020). The possible paths for future career development are narrowed, students feel social and cultural pressure to conform to singular ways of schooling, and families feel compelled to invest time and money in a private sphere of education. The academic and future career prospects are, in effect, limited, and so too are future pathways to earn a living wage or a baseline of cultural status (Davies & Mehta, 2013), resulting in a form of "self-governance" reliant on a sort of behaviorist definition of "freedom" along the lines of "non-aversive external control" (Weiss & Knoster, 2008).

The pervasiveness and scale of shadow education are astounding. Participating in shadow education is a standard feature of daily life for millions of families globally. Roughly one-third of 15-year-old students participate in private tuition academic activities cross-nationally, with

rates exceeding 50% in some countries (Byun et al., 2018). Aurini et al. (2013) estimated the global size of the shadow education sector to be at least $41 billion, which is likely a significant underestimate even when it was made in 2013. For instance, one estimate puts the total shadow education expenditures of families in Japan at approximately $17 billion, or 2.79% of the national GDP (Yamamoto & Brinton, 2010). In India, the market share has been estimated to be between $40 billion and $70 billion (Kumar & Chowdhury, 2021).

The societal impact of shadow education is complex and often ambiguous. Studies of direct academic outcomes are inconclusive (Bray, 2014; Byun et al., 2018). Others have chronicled subtractive impacts resulting from teacher disengagement or student stress (Kumar & Chowdhury, 2021). Many students prioritize private coaching and sometimes opt not to attend their formal schools, viewing them as merely centers for credentialing rather than learning, especially during exam periods (Bhorkar & Bray, 2018). For teachers, shadow education can foster entrepreneurial identities and, in some cases, lead to forced corruption where teachers deliberately reduce teaching quality to encourage private tutoring (Gupta, 2021). A consistent concern is that private tutoring strengthens educational markets and deepens social inequality by pricing out segments of the student population (Bray, 2017; Stevenson & Baker, 1992). Most fundamentally, tying educational quality to purchasing power, Bray and Kwo (2013) argue, undermines the social contract of education as a universal human right and transforms it into an economic commodity. This shift reflects a global institutionalization in which participation in shadow education is becoming perceived as a requirement for academic success.

Privatized Schooling for the Disadvantaged: Multi-decade neoliberal shifts in the public sector have reshaped education. Perhaps one of the most significant changes has been the increasing privatization of schooling. Privatization is used here to describe the management of schooling by private actors, perhaps funded publicly but still freed from much government oversight. With increased autonomy to operate, there is room for innovation and responsiveness to diverse student populations; however, privatization has also brought with it the consequences of greater neoliberal logics. To understand the growth of privatization of schooling, it is first helpful to consider the broader context. Beginning in the mid-1800s, mass education expanded widely across many nations (Ramirez & Boli, 1987). Part of this expansion was fueled by colonial efforts to subdue newly conquered indigenous populations (Narayanan, 2023; Swarz, 2019). Other contributing causes included the swelling of urban populations with immigrants (Tyack, 1974) and state efforts to create a shared national identity (Meyer et al., 2009). Beginning in the 1980s, educators and policymakers highlighted the failure of mass education efforts to reach hundreds of millions of disadvantaged citizens. In the United States, this took the form of narratives of crisis, such as the report *A Nation at Risk* (Gardner, 1983), many of which targeted the failure of government-led agencies to provide quality education. Over time, federal policies channeled market ideology and developed guidelines that exchanged greater school-level autonomy for greater accountability.

Charter schools have exemplified shifts towards a policy of supporting privatization of schooling. Perhaps the purest example is the growth of networks of charter schools managed collectively under "Charter Management Organizations" (CMOs). Using a franchise-type model of growth and development, CMOs proliferate through pyramidal growth (Scott & DiMartino, 2010). CMOs are organized to increase management efficiency by controlling operational and instructional aspects of schools. This arrangement allows CMOs to centralize operations, leverage standardized practices, and establish economies of scale. Schools that have shown

success — often narrowly defined as high scores earned on standardized achievement tests — have had their models copied and replicated. An example is the growth of "no-excuses" practices used with low-income students of color, including longer school days/years, intense expectations for teachers/students, and zero-tolerance disciplinary policies. The practices are questionable, as they include teachers working long, demanding hours (Golann, 2021), high rates of teacher turnover (Torres, 2016), and questionable achievement scores resulting from only select students sitting for exams (Hernández, 2022).

Internationally, a similar loss of faith in government centered around the failure of states to provide schooling for hundreds of millions of students. Transnational commissions argued that students denied access to schooling were likely to be left out of the benefits of economic development, improvements in access to health services, and opportunities to participate in social and cultural shifts that brought increased freedom and dignity, particularly for women. National governments joined in making commitments to expanding educational access as part of the Education for All movement. Yet, many governments failed to build institutional capacity to expand access to education. They also failed to allocate the necessary economic funding for the expansion of schooling. With international monitoring in place, schools were unable to meet the agreed-upon goals for increased enrollment (Chabbott, 2013; Mundy & Manion, 2021).

Low-fee private schools (LFPs) emerged in this context as one response to provide educational access to students left out of the efforts to expand education. Often operated by local families and started out of a spare room or extra apartment, LFPs have the promise of providing quality education with low overhead, and, thus, fees that families in poverty can afford (Tooley, 2021). Härmä (2021, 92) has written extensively about LFPs and shown that neoliberal market theories have failed to answer the demands of students in poverty. Parents are ill-equipped to simply choose from competing school offerings and make frictionless transitions, largely because few viable alternatives have existed. LFPs essentially work as a coerced choice for parents who want to avoid sending their children to overcrowded and ineffective government schools. There may be only one private school in their neighborhood. For families in sparsely populated rural areas where it does not make economic sense to operate a school, there may be no other option other than the government school. Furthermore, fees are not really as low as the term "low-fee private school" might imply. Härmä writes that "enrolment is not evidence of affordability." The cost of school tuition can be 10% of a household's total expenses, with LFPs likely to increase their fees in response to greater demand or wealthier clientele.

Privatized schooling is an example of neoliberal governmentality because schools operated privately must follow market logics. At the mercy of the market, individual schools and even organizations can grow or fail depending on their ability to sustain themselves. Families that attend these schools then bear the consequences of the schools' fate, their individual choices bringing the responsibility for their decisions onto them, with little room for a safety net. Schooling thus becomes a commodity for students, and although this is true for students across the socioeconomic spectrum, wealthier clients can afford education with greater prestige and security. The expansion of privatized schooling specifically aimed at marginalized students, meanwhile, is left precarious and with questionable results.

Digital Platformization: A third site for privatized governmentality is the "platformization" of education (UNESCO, 2021), referring to the reliance of educators and educational organizations on digital platforms. Platformization can be defined as "the spread and influence of digital platforms as technologies of control into virtually every aspect of contemporary social life"

(Sefton-Greene, 2021, 899). Like earlier shifts in professional work, such as industrialization and electrification, digital platformization represents a major transformation in how work is conducted in globalized societies. Organizations turn to digital platforms for such elements as data management, content creation, and communication. Van Dijck (2021) conceived of platformization as a massive tree. The roots and trunk of platformization represent extensive, privately managed platforms. At the extremities are the leaves, with education representing one of many different leaves on the tree. Built into this structure are deep power asymmetries in the way teachers interact with various apps; functionalities are vertically integrated, and tech corporations design deeper infrastructure architectures. Meanwhile, teacher and student data flow like oxygen through this ecosystem.

Digital platforms encompass social media networks, cloud-computing resources, artificial intelligence, and other technologies, which are almost all exclusively managed by private companies and sold to organizations serving students. The companies controlling these infrastructures, sometimes referred to as GAFAM (Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple, and Microsoft), prioritize amassing power and profit rather than fulfilling a fundamental social purpose. A fundamental aspect of their platformization is "datafication," which involves continuously harvesting, storing, aggregating, and analyzing user data to derive insights for future enhancements or developments. In a data-driven ecosystem, technology companies convert human actions and experiences into electronic text and data that can be read, exploited, and commodified (Zuboff, 2019). Powerful technology companies can create unprecedented knowledge of their users; the underlying logic of the platforms ensures that as users engage, data is continuously collected and absorbed, stimulating growth across the platform ecosystem (Akbari & Wood, 2025). This process has led to products being transformed into services that offer digital functionality in exchange for personal information and attention (van Dijck, 2021).

The power concentration inherent in platformization is characterized by three main dynamics: vertical integration, infrastructuralization, and cross-sectorization. Vertical integration refers to platforms extending control over data flows from foundational infrastructure (such as cloud services) upward into sectoral applications. This locks in users and vendors, privatizing data streams and funneling user-generated data into proprietary flows. Infrastructuralization of intermediary platforms occurs when key intermediary platforms, such as social networks, search engines, and app stores, achieve infrastructural status. They become obligatory passage points for digital traffic, enabling their operators to exert broad control over the global information system. Cross-sectorization involves companies expanding their influence across diverse sectors, allowing them to collect and connect personal and behavioral data from multiple domains, combining data flows to fuel algorithmic intelligence and value creation (van Dijck, 2021).

The rise of digital platformization is deeply intertwined with neoliberalism, representing an intensification and evolution of capitalism rather than a fundamental break from it (Akbari & Wood, 2025). The growth of big tech and its monopolistic tendencies were facilitated by government policies, including weak antitrust standards and strong intellectual property standards, over the past 40 years. There is a connection to governmentality, as new disciplinary measures are made possible through a regime of "surveillance capitalism," with gargantuan user-generated collections of data enabling active monitoring (Zuboff, 2019). At the same time, algorithmic designs coax user behaviors to align with the commercial interests of platform owners, often under the guise of innovation, efficiency, or even empowerment (van Dijck, 2024). Digital platforms are now deeply woven into the basic infrastructure of organizations' daily

operations and have further transformed how individuals work, communicate, consume, engage politically, and spend their leisure time. The "platformization of education" signifies that digital platforms now mediate a substantial portion of administrative, instructional, and learning activities within schools and universities (Nichols & Dixon-Román, 2024; Sefton-Green, 2021).

Illustrating Neoliberal Governmentality in Education

To illustrate how neoliberal governmentality has come to shape the education landscape, I share an example from a research project I am conducting in India. The study is an ongoing ethnographic exploration of shadow education, conducted through work with an organization called Suraksha[1] operating in a large urban area of western India. Suraksha is an after-school program that serves students primarily from slums in an older section of the city. The parents of the students are mostly daily wage earners and are charged a small tuition fee, though most of the organization's operating expenses are supported through philanthropy. Suraksha is a site where all three elements of neoliberal governmentality — parasitic schooling, private ownership, and digital-based pedagogy — exist to shape a new type of educational experience.

First, the organization itself is firmly part of the shadow education sector. It is not a formal school, but rather an after-school program. Yet, it is focused exclusively on academic learning, closely following the formal school curriculum and spending time preparing students for important exams. Funded mostly by philanthropic donations Suraksha is also part of the private sector, and although it must follow certain regulations in place for working with children, it nevertheless has latitude in how it designs its program and runs its operations. While Suraksha undoubtedly provides valuable education to students that is currently unavailable in their local schools, what is relevant here is how families feel it is important to send their students to an afterschool program at all. Furthermore, most students attended local government-run schools, spending days in overcrowded classrooms with uninterested teachers and failing to receive adequate instruction. Participation in a shadow education institution feels socially, if not morally obligatory, a necessary part of preparing children for the future, an almost forced choice through which the possibilities of student participation and conduct are limited.

Second, Suraksha is related to the privatization of schooling. Although it is an after-school program and not a low-fee private school, it is very much part of the ecosystem of privatization. Students targeted by Suraksha are those who cannot afford the expense of LFPs, many of which are located within walking distance of the center. LFPs have filtered out students from the private sphere, creating what was to become the client base, the market niche for programs like Suraksha. The private model of school governance is also closely followed by Suraksha, with variable fees for families of different means, and a faculty composed of individuals who are ineligible to be teachers in formal schools. Teachers at Suraksha are often young, still in college, and possess no formal credentials. This is not to suggest they are not effective, but rather that their employment is secured through new marketized arrangements of human capital, including short-term contracts, concrete accountability measures, and regular performance reviews.

Lastly, Suraksha relies heavily on digital platforms for its management and daily operations. Much of the scheduling, roster management, and other operations are managed through extensive use of Google Docs, though recently there was a shift to a third-party vendor that curates data-

---

[1] The organization's name has been changed to the Hindi word for the English, 'protection'.

management services for educational organizations.[2] Student data, including sensitive "biodata" but also academic data such as reading scores and daily attendance, are all held on private servers now and accessed through online platforms and apps on smartphones. Curriculum resources such as assessments and lesson plans are accessed and organized in cloud-based drives. Staff communications are facilitated through Whatsapp, a massively popular social messaging platform owned by Meta (the parent company of Facebook). Perhaps most interestingly, lesson materials, assessments, staff training plans, and community outreach are all created with the aid of artificial intelligence platforms. To observe the work of Suraksha is to see an organization profoundly reliant on digital platformization.

The three sites of neoliberal governmentality in education that I have been describing in this article — shadow education, privatization of schooling, and digital platformization — are all observable at Suraksha. The work of Suraksha can be interpreted through the lens of governmentality because families are willingly choosing to invest significant time and money to ensure their children participate in an extension of the institution of schooling. That participation is the result of both the retreat and the failure of the state to provide adequate education, even as families feel compelled to make decisions within the confines of the possibilities set by the institution of education. It is an example of neoliberalism because the presence and operations of Suraksha follow market logics, from funding to hiring to determining the choice of services being offered. Examples like Suraksha show how neoliberal governmentality is becoming a defining feature of education, signaling how the control and management of populations have been transformed into a privatized, restrictive, and voluntary endeavor.

Summarizing the Situation

The welfare of the population as an end has long justified regimes of discipline and surveillance (Foucault, 1991). Both functions — discipline and surveillance — have traditionally been the responsibility of state actors, but increasingly are being reconfigured under the management of private actors. The shift has been termed neoliberal governmentality, and I offered a way of organizing the contours of this new regime. I identified three sites through which we can understand the functioning of neoliberal governmentality. I first described how shadow education is a new form of the institution of education, one where private actors create offshoot organizations that mirror the functioning of formal, state-run schools, but do so outside the domain of the state. Shadow education works to commodify education by offering both educational advantages and remediation at a price. These offerings create cultural pressure that limits families' choices about how to structure children's time and efforts. Shadow education is increasingly socially obligatory, a required element of the lives of millions of children.

I next described how the privatization of schooling has transferred the responsibilities of education to private actors. Charter schools are one example of this transfer, but CMOs (Charter Management Organizations) are a starker example, as they neatly illustrate the realization of market logics in school management. But it is specifically the increase of LFPs (Low Fee Private schools) that best represents how privatization is a key site of neoliberal governmentality. LFPs are important to understand because they are concrete manifestations of the retreat of the state, or at least the inability of the state to fulfill its agreements to provide quality educational opportunities to its constituents. Lastly, I showed how digital platformization is a third site of

---

[2] Suraksha had chosen to use Vedmarg (https://vedmarg.com/) to manage its operation, representing a significant investment in digital platformization in hopes that essential functions and data could be more efficiently managed.

neoliberal governmentality. Educational organizations of all types, from shadow education outfits to government-run schools, are increasingly relying on private technology companies to manage their data, create learning materials, and support daily operations. Transferring educational management from systems governed by the state to those run by private companies represents a stunning reorganization of knowledge under a new regime of governmentality. Tech platforms are now in a position to direct education through the creation of digital tools, calibration of algorithms, and design of platform architectures.

Neoliberal governmentality has been explored generally through descriptions of NGOs (Nongovernmental Organizations) focused on health and welfare in shifting economic policy environments (Gupta & Sharma, 2006) and theorizations of new spatial relationships among state and civil society (Ferguson & Gupta, 2008). These developments are examples of grassroots democratic organizing that nevertheless embrace modern techniques of self-discipline (Appadurai, 2001). In education specifically, ethnographic studies have shown how neoliberal governmentality can steer students through the creation of discourse of futurity and aspirations that follow market demands. For example, Mathews (2018) showed how private English-medium schools fulfill students' aspirations for participating in the glitzy consumer economy, leaving free, government-provided vernacular schools viewed as less desirable. Rodríguez-Gómez (2022) studied a rural school in Peru that aimed to develop a spirit of entrepreneurship in students and stave off waves of outmigration. Jeffrey (2010) described how privileged children of landowners were compelled by institutional incentives to engage in "timepass," a prolonged period of waiting for select employment opportunities while denying other responsibilities not deemed market-worthy.

I have extended the exploration of neoliberal governmentality to education by describing three specific sites — shadowing, privatizing, digitizing — where its workings can be observed. Future studies can provide greater depth on each of these sites, each one promising to be a defining feature of a new institutional structure for education in the years to come. There is also a need to explore new sites where the functions of governmentality are enacted by both state institutions and private actors. An open question is whether the public-private dichotomy suggested by the term neoliberal governmentality is even accurate, or whether shifts in governance are, in fact, a reorganization rather than a retreat of state efforts. In postcolonial contexts, neoliberal governmentality does not necessarily lead to a straightforward "end of welfare" but often involves complex continuities and contradictions. The seductive quality of market participation offers the allure of autonomy and freedom, seemingly obviating the need for government regulation. Scholars have an opportunity to continue questioning whether such developments, in fact, bring greater freedom or if they are merely new sites of old relationships of control.

References

Akbari, A., & Wood, D. M. (2025). Towards a critical political economy of surveillance and digital authoritarianism. *Surveillance & Society*, *23*(1), 152-158.

Appadurai, A. (2001). Deep democracy: urban governmentality and the horizon of politics. *Environment and urbanization, 13*(2), 23-43.

Aurini, J., Dierkes, J., & Davies, S. (Eds.) (2013). *Out of the shadows: The global intensification of supplementary education*. Bingley, UK: Emerald. https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-3679(2013)22.

Baker, D. (2020a). *The schooled society: The educational transformation of global culture*. Stanford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804790482.

Ball, S.J. (2018). The use and abuse of Michel Foucault in Educational Studies: Thinking about what is true. S.J. Ball (Ed.) *Foucault and Education: Putting Theory to Work* (pp. 1-15). Routledge.

Bhorkar, S., & Bray, M. (2018). The expansion and roles of private tutoring in India: From supplementation to supplantation. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *62*, 148-156. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2018.03.003.

Bray, M. (2017). Schooling and its supplements: Changing global patterns and implications for comparative education. *Comparative Education Review*, *61*(3), 469-491.

Bray, M., & Kwo, O. (2013). Behind the façade of fee-free education: shadow education and its implications for social justice. *Oxford Review of Education*, *39*(4), 480–497. https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2013.821852.

Byun, S.Y., Chung, H.J. & Baker, D.P. (2018). Global patterns of the use of Shadow Education: Student, family, and national influences. In H. Park and G. Kao (Eds.), *Research in the Sociology of Education, Vol 20,* (pp. 71-105). Emerald Publishing Limited: Leeds. https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-353920180000020004.

Chabbott, C. (2013). *Constructing education for development: International organizations and education for all*. Routledge.

Davies, S. and Mehta, J. (2018) The deepening interpenetration of education in modern life. in J. Mehta & S. Davies (Eds.) *Education in a new society: Renewing the sociology of education* (pp. 83-114). The University of Chicago Press.

Ferguson, J., & Gupta, A. (2002). Spatializing states: toward an ethnography of neoliberal governmentality. *American ethnologist, 29(*4), 981-1002.

Foucault, M. (1991). "Governmentality." In Burchell, G., Gordon, C., & Miller, P. (Eds.) *The Foucault effect: Studies in Governmentality* (pp. 87-104). University of Chicago Press.

Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. *Critical Inquiry, 8,* 777-795.

Foucault M (1972). *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*. Pantheon Books, New York.

Gardner, D. P. et al. (April, 1983). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform. An open letter to the American people. A report to the nation and the Secretary of Education*. National Commission on Excellence in Education, Washington, DC: United States Department of Education.

Golann, J. W. (2021). *Scripting the moves: Culture & control in a "no-excuses" charter school.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton.

Gupta, A. (2021). Teacher-entrepreneurialism: A case of teacher identity formation in neoliberalizing education space in contemporary India. *Critical Studies in Education, 62*(4), 422-438. https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2019.1708765.

Jeffrey, C. (2010). *Timepass: Youth, class, and the politics of waiting in India*. Stanford University Press.

Härmä J. (2021). *Low-fee private schooling and poverty in developing countries*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Hernández, L. E. (2022). The importance of being "woke": Charter management organizations and the growth of social consciousness as a school quality marker. *Educational Policy, 36*(4), 796-821.

Kumar, I., & Chowdhury, I. R. (2021). Shadow education in India: participation and socioeconomic determinants. *Journal of South Asian Development*, *16*(2), 244-272. https://doi.org/10.1177/09731741211032472.

Lemke, T. (2001). 'The birth of bio-politics': Michel Foucault's lecture at the Collège de France on neo-liberal governmentality. *Economy and society, 30*(2), 190-207.

Mathew, L. (2018). Aspiring and aspiration shaming: Primary schooling, English, and enduring inequalities in liberalizing Kerala (India). *Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 49(*1), 72-88.

Meyer, J. W., Krücken, G., & Drori, G. S. (2009). *World society: the writings of John W. Meyer*. Oxford University Press.

Mundy, K. & Manion, C. (2021). The education for all initiative and the sustainable development goals: Histories and prospects," In T. McCowan & E. Unterhalter (Eds.), *Education and international development: An introduction* (pp. 57-78). Bloomsbury Publishing.

Narayanan, M. (2023). Educational Myths of an American Empire: Colonial Narratives and The Meriam Report. *Educational Abundance*, *3*, 1-16. https://nysfeajournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/jrn-v-3-full-final.pdf.

Nichols, T. P., & Dixon-Román, E. (2024). Platform governance and education policy: Power and politics in emerging edtech ecologies. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 46*(2), 309-328.

Purvis, T., & Hunt, A. (1993). Discourse, ideology, discourse, ideology, discourse, ideology... *British Journal of Sociology*, 473-499.

Ramirez, F. O., & Boli, J. (1987). The political construction of mass schooling: European origins and worldwide institutionalization. *Sociology of education*, 2-17.

Rodríguez-Gómez, D. (2022). Disputed futures: rural entrepreneurship and migration in postsecondary trajectories on the Ecuador–Colombia Border. *Ethnography and Education*, *17*(3), 314–330. https://doi.org/10.1080/17457823.2022.2049333

Scott, D. (2005). Colonial Governmentality. In J. X. Inda, (Ed.). (2005). *Anthropologies of modernity : Foucault, governmentality, and life politics (pp. 23-49)*. Blackwell Pub. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470775875

Scott, J. T., & DiMartino, C. (2010). Hybridized, franchised, duplicated, and replicated: Charter schools and management organizations. In C. A. Lubienski & P. C. Weitzel (Eds.), *The charter school experiment: Expectations, evidence, and implications* (pp. 171–196). Harvard Education Press.

Stevenson, D. L., & Baker, D. P. (1992). Shadow education and allocation in formal schooling: Transition to university in Japan. *American Journal of Sociology*, *97*(6), 1639-1657. https://doi.org/10.1086/229942.

Swartz, R. (2019). *Education and empire: Children, race and humanitarianism in the British settler colonies, 1833-1880*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Tooley, J. (2021). *Really good schools: Global lessons for high-caliber, low-cost education*. Independent Institute.

Torres, A. C. (2016). Is this work sustainable? Teacher turnover and perceptions of workload in charter management organizations. *Urban Education, 51*(8), 891-914.

Tyack, D. B. (1974). *The one best system: A history of American urban education*. Harvard University Press.

UNESCO. (2023). *Global education monitoring report 2023: Technology in education – A tool on whose terms*? Paris: UNESCO.

Yamamoto, Y., & Brinton, M. C. (2010). Cultural capital in East Asian educational systems: The case of Japan. *Sociology of Education*, *83*(1), 67-83. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040709356567.

Van Dijck, J. (2024). Datafication, dataism and dataveillance: Big Data between scientific paradigm and ideology. *Surveillance & Society, 12*(2), 197.

Weiss, N. R., & Knoster, T. (2008). It May Be Nonaversive, But Is It a Positive Approach? Relevant Questions to Ask Throughout the Process of Behavioral Assessment and Intervention. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, *10*(1), 72-78. https://doi.org/10.1177/1098300707311389

Zhang, W. (2023). *Taming the wild horse of shadow education: The global expansion of private tutoring and regulatory responses*. Taylor & Francis.

Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism: The fight for a human future at the new frontier of power*. New York: PublicAffairs.

Envisioning the Future:
AI-Assisted Language Learning to Empower Multilinguals and Transform Pedagogies

Xiaole Shan and Lia Quiaoit
Fordham University

Abstract: Artificial intelligence (AI) is profoundly transforming English language teaching and learning. AI provides powerful tools for educators, including machine learning algorithms, Natural Language Processing, tailored lessons, 24/7 support, and progress monitoring, all of which promote autonomous learning. Specific applications like Duolingo MAX and ELSA Speak demonstrate positive impacts on linguistic competence, especially phonological/orthographic control, and pronunciation accuracy. In classrooms, AI functions as tutor, content generator, and assessment assistant, simulating human-like interactions, co-creating content, and supporting multilingual instruction through translanguaging. Despite AI's expanding role, educators remain central, serving as designers, facilitators, and ethical guides. Classroom challenges — inconsistent implementation, lack of standardized use, varying levels of teacher preparedness — remain, underscoring the need for professional development in pedagogical and ethical implications. Future developments involve examining long-term learning outcomes, addressing learning diversity beyond adult language learners, and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration for culturally responsive AI tools.

AI-Assisted Tools Support Autonomous Language Learning

Artificial intelligence (AI) has profoundly transformed English language teaching and learning by providing a transformative approach to instruction that personalizes learning experiences in terms of individual learners' paces and proficiency levels, offers real-time feedback, and fosters engagement (Kovalenko & Baranivska, 2024; Jegede, 2024; Mohebbi, 2024). AI is conceptualized as intelligent computer systems that possess human-like capabilities, such as memorizing knowledge, perceiving and manipulating environments, and understanding human natural language. Although AI may have its limitations, it offers powerful tools for educators to improve instructional methods. These systems use machine learning algorithms to identify learners' strengths and weaknesses and provide targeted exercises. Beyond direct learner applications, AI-assisted tools have also provided advanced analytics within various learner models or learning management systems (LMS) to monitor student progress, track engagement, performance, and comprehension, helping all educators identify struggling learners who need intervention (Meurers, 2020; Agrawal, 2024).

Scholars have pointed out two key features of AI-assisted instruction that improve upon human English language instruction: 24/7 support and Natural Language Processing (NLP). First, provision of 24/7 support through answering queries and providing explanations to learners outside of traditional classroom hours promotes a more flexible and accessible learning environment (Kovalenko & Baranivska, 2024; Jegede, 2024; Mohebbi, 2024; Kholis, 2021; Peláez-Sánchez & Velásquez-Durán, 2023; Widyasari & Maghfiroh, 2023). Moreover, Agrawal (2024) mentions that the field of AI in language education is influenced by disciplines such as philosophy, cognitive science, neuroscience, and economics, and AI can encompass various technologies for simulating human intelligence for a number of tasks like reasoning, decision-making, and problem-solving. Second, NLP technology has two broad applications: analysis of learner language and analysis of native language for learners. Meurers (2020) observes, NLP can analyze learners' language use in order to identify errors and provide real-time feedback on grammar, vocabulary, and style. NLP can also automate scoring in language testing and, in native language analysis, support learners in finding and interacting with authentic materials.

Several AI-assisted language learning tools/applications, such as Duolingo MAX (Kittredge et al., 2025), ELSA Speak (Kholis, 2021), Babbel (Mohebbi, 2024), and Rosetta Stone (Jegede, 2024), have gained prominence in supporting language learning. These tools aim to complement traditional teaching methods by offering accessible, interactive learning experiences. Duolingo MAX is a new subscription tier under the Duolingo application that gives learners access to brand-new features, "Explain My Answer" and "Roleplay," powered by the newest, most powerful generative AI technology, OpenAI (Duolingo Blog, 2024). Usage of this application revealed statistically significant positive impact on the development of students' linguistic competence, as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Notably, the application significantly improved students' phonological and orthographic control, which could be attributed to its pronunciation and dictation activities (Peláez-Sánchez & Velásquez-Durán, 2023). Another application, ELSA Speak, is a pronunciation software that leverages AI and Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) to offer feedback on users' pronunciation accuracy (*ELSA Speak*, n.d.). Its advantages include focus on pronunciation features such as stress, intonation, accuracy, and fluency, which are more comprehensive than those offered by other pronunciation apps. Additionally, ELSA Speak provides instant feedback, which helps students pronounce words more accurately and increases their motivation to engage in pronunciation learning. These features support autonomous learning as students can practice at their own pace, anytime and anywhere (Widyasari & Magfiroh, 2023).

Integrating AI Technology into Language Classrooms

AI technology not only enables students to learn languages at their own pace and according to their individual interests but also holds significant potential for integration into classroom instruction. In this section, we explore the multifaceted roles that AI tools can play in language education — serving as a tutor, content generator, and assessment assistant.

Generative AI tools like ChatGPT simulate human-like conversational interactions, offering contextualized feedback that mirrors authentic language use. In terms of sociocultural learning frameworks, these tools function as More Knowledgeable Others (MKOs), scaffolding learners through real-time rehearsal, revision, and reflection during task-based learning activities (Tseng & Lin, 2024; Asrif, 2024). Their conversational nature helps lower affective filters often associated with writing, encouraging students to engage in iterative improvement without fear of embarrassing misuse of language with another person. Moreover, adaptive applications such as Duolingo, Grammarly, or custom GPT-powered platforms enable personalization of homework assignments by tailoring content to individual proficiency levels and goals. Students generally report positive perceptions of these tools, citing increased confidence, autonomy, and a stronger sense of achievement in their language learning (Feng et al., 2025). Importantly, learners appreciate immediate and tailored feedback, which contributes to a more responsive and supportive learning environment (Naz & Robertson, 2024; Lo et al., 2024).

 AI also empowers both educators and learners to co-create content, from tailored writing prompts to interactive dialogues and multimodal simulations. For example, Yeh (2024) advocates for using generative AI tools to facilitate language transfer across modalities — such as text-to-speech and text-to-image — to support tasks like creating bilingual picture books. Tools like ChatGPT, Leonardo.ai, and ClipChamp enable a full cycle of comprehension, production, and creative reinvention, thereby enhancing both linguistic and digital literacy. Natural Language Generation capabilities are increasingly employed to generate context-specific

texts, including emails, narratives, and dialogues, fostering both fluency and creativity (Haleem et al., 2022; Hwang & Nurtantyana, 2022). AI's multilingual affordances further promote inclusivity by offering feedback and explanations in learners' first languages, bridging comprehension gaps and encouraging the use of learners' full linguistic repertoires (Tseng & Lin, 2024; Naz & Robertson, 2024). In multilingual and multicultural classrooms, such features support equitable access and representation, particularly for heritage and immigrant learners (Asrif, 2024; Lo et al., 2024).

Donley (2024, 9-11) identifies eight instances of instructional use of AI that emerged from classroom observations and interviews with 42 in-service teachers across various grade levels and instructional contexts. His findings suggest that AI technologies such as ChatGPT offer affordances for translanguaging, particularly by enabling students to transcribe oral language in their preferred language of communication and subsequently translate it to facilitate teacher comprehension. This process enhances students' self-expression and supports the use of their full communicative repertoire. In interviews with a Spanish immersion teacher — whose classroom included both English learners and English-dominant, Spanish-heritage speakers — Donley notes that the teacher successfully created and applied ChatGPT-generated content in both languages. This included instructional materials focused on rhyming, sound blending, and phoneme identification, all of which supported students' phonological awareness.

Additionally, AI's multimodal capacities — such as vocabulary visualization and authentic pronunciation through text-to-speech — enhance learner engagement and accommodate diverse learning styles (Rebolledo & González, 2023; Xie et al., 2019). Asrif (2023) likewise notes that AI-assisted tools are particularly effective in multilingual regions, as these tools can value and cater to varying language needs and promote equal access to educational resources. These features are particularly beneficial in inclusive classrooms where access and motivation are critical to language development.

Human-in-the-Loop: Pedagogical Design and Teacher Responsibility

Despite the expanding role of AI, educators remain central to its successful integration into classroom instruction. Li et al. (2025) identifies teachers as knowledge presenters, task designers, facilitators, assessors, and resource curators in AI-enhanced classrooms. Rather than replacing human instruction, AI should be embedded within pedagogically grounded, scaffolded tasks that promote interaction and critical thinking (Hsu et al., 2023; Chiu et al., 2023). During these activities, teachers can provide just-in-time support and elaborate on material to deepen learning. Teachers creatively design and organize tasks that incorporate AI into language learning. For example, some educators ask students to work in groups and provide keywords, genres, characters, and events to generate stories using ChatGPT to guide teachers in enhancing students' interest in reading. Others have developed image-based grammaticality tests using chatbot platforms to support acquisition of specific grammar structures (Tseng, 2018). And teachers have created games, songs, and chants through interactive dialogue with AI, encouraging students to engage directly with chatbots as part of language practice (Jeon, 2024).

These practices highlight the innovative potential and creative flexibility of AI-assisted language learning. However, they also present challenges — particularly in assessing the effectiveness of such approaches — due to lack of standardized use and consistent implementation. The current field does not provide educators with ready-made curricula or uniform guidelines for integrating AI but instead places considerable agency and responsibility

on individual teachers. This further complicates efforts to bring these practices to scale and raises concerns about educators' varying levels of preparedness to adopt and effectively implement AI tools in their classrooms. Frameworks such as ADDIE and TPACK offer theoretical scaffolds for aligning AI tools with instructional objectives (Tseng & Lin, 2024). The TPACK model — comprising Content Knowledge (CK), Pedagogical Knowledge (PK), and Technological Knowledge (TK) — helps teachers meaningfully integrate AI into curriculum and lesson design. Some have argued for updates or adaptations to TPACK to address the evolving demands of AI-enhanced instruction, especially regarding teachers' digital and AI competencies (Hsu et al., 2023).

Educators must not only select tools that align with curricular goals but also design tasks that are contextually relevant and cognitively engaging (Lo et al., 2024). Increasingly, AI is being used in assessment through tools like Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE), Computerized Dynamic Assessment (CDA), and Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS). These systems provide feedback that helps both students and instructors identify developmental needs, allowing for more data-driven instruction. Crucially, teachers must also serve as ethical guides — monitoring AI outputs, identifying biases, and modeling critical digital literacies (Naz & Robertson, 2024). A lack of teacher preparedness in these areas can result in overreliance on automation or misinterpretation of AI-generated feedback. Professional development must therefore extend beyond tool functionality to include pedagogical and ethical implications.

Challenges and Future Directions

While current studies highlight AI's potential to enhance learner motivation, personalization, and autonomy (Feng et al., 2025), long-term learning outcomes across multiple areas of language skill remain insufficiently examined. Much of the existing literature focuses on short-term improvements in writing, with limited exploration into the transferability of these gains to other domains such as speaking, listening, and reading. Donley (2024) also raises an important question regarding how the multilingual and multimodal features of AI tools might contribute to legitimizing translanguaging practices in both formative and summative assessments. As AI technologies continue to evolve, it is crucial to investigate how their multilingual and multimodal capabilities can be leveraged for more inclusive and context-sensitive assessment strategies in multilingual education.

Moreover, learner diversity is a neglected dimension. Most studies focus on adult EFL/ESL learners in higher education. Future research should examine AI's impact on other populations — particularly K–12 students, heritage speakers, and learners in dual-language immersion programs. The integration of AI in early childhood settings remains largely speculative and demands careful attention to developmental and institutional constraints (Yeh, 2024). Finally, interdisciplinary collaboration is vital for developing domain-specific and culturally responsive large language models (LLMs). The next generation of AI in education will depend not only on technological sophistication but also on pedagogical relevance and cultural inclusivity. Collaboration among educators, technologists, and linguists will be critical to designing tools that are both technically robust and socially responsible.

References

Asrif, Y. (2024). *Students' acceptance and use of AI-assisted language learning for self-directed learning: The case of Rosetta Stone at Moulay Ismail University*. Doctoral dissertation.

Agrawal, P. (2024). Role of artificial intelligence in teaching and learning English language. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, *6*(3). https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2024.v06i03.22148

Chiu, T. K. F., Moorhouse, B. L., Chai, C. S., & Ismailov, M. (2023). Teacher support and student motivation to learn with artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot. *Interactive Learning Environments*. https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2023.2172044

Donley, K. (2024). Teaching with ChatGPT as a linguistically responsive tool for multilingual learners. *Technology in Language Teaching & Learning, 6*(3), 1719. https://doi.org/10.29140/tltl.v6n3.1719

Duolingo Blog. (2024). *Introducing Duolingo Max, a learning experience powered by GPT-4*. Duolingo Blog. https://blog.duolingo.com/duolingo-max/

ELSA Speak. elsaspeak. (n.d.). https://elsaspeak.com/en/

Feng, H., Li, K., & Zhang, L. J. (2025). What does AI bring to second language writing? A systematic review (2014–2024). *Language Learning & Technology, 29*(1), 1–27.

Hsu, H. L., Chen, H. H. J., & Todd, A. G. (2023). Investigating the impact of the Amazon Alexa on the development of L2 listening and speaking skills. *Interactive Learning Environments, 31*(9), 5732–5745. https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2021.2016864

Jegede, O. O. (2024). Artificial Intelligence and English language learning: Exploring the roles of AI-driven tools in personalizing learning and providing instant feedback. *Universal Library of Languages and Literatures*, *1*(02), 6–19. https://doi.org/10.70315/uloap.ullli.2024.0102002

Jeon, J. (2024). Exploring AI chatbot affordances in the EFL classroom: Young learners' experiences and perspectives. *Computer Assisted Language Learning, 37*(1–2), 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2021.2021241

Kholis, A. (2021). ELSA Speak app: Automatic speech recognition (ASR) for supplementing English pronunciation skills. *Pedagogy: Journal of English Language Teaching, 9*(1). https://doi.org/10.32332/joelt.v9i1.2723

Kittredge, A. K., Hopman, E. W., Reuveni, B., Dionne, D., Freeman, C., & Jiang, X. (2025). Mobile language app learners' self-efficacy increases after using generative AI. Frontiers in Education, 10. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2025.1499497

Kovalenko, I., & Baranivska, N. (2024). Integrating artificial intelligence in English language teaching: Exploring the potential and challenges of AI tools in enhancing language learning outcomes and personalized education. *European Socio-Legal & Humanitarian Studies*, (1), 86–95. https://doi.org/10.61345/2734-8873.2024.1.9

Li, Y., Zhou, X., & Chiu, T. K. F. (2024). Systematic review on artificial intelligence chatbots and ChatGPT for language learning and research from self-determination theory (SDT): What are the roles of teachers? *Interactive Learning Environments, 33*(3), 1850–1864. https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2024.2400090

Lo, C. K., Yu, P. L. H., Xu, S., Ng, D. T. K., & Jong, M. S. (2024). Exploring the application of ChatGPT in ESL/EFL education and related research issues: A systematic review of empirical studies. *Smart Learning Environments, 11*, 50. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40561-024-00342-5

Meurers, D. (2020). Natural language processing and language learning. *Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*.

Mohebbi, A. (2024). Enabling learner independence and self-regulation in language education using AI tools: A systematic review. *Cogent Education*, *12*(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2433814

Naz, I., & Robertson, R. (2024). Exploring the feasibility and efficacy of ChatGPT-3 for personalized feedback in teaching. *The Electronic Journal of e-Learning, 22*(2), 98–111. https://doi.org/10.34190/ejel.22.2.3345

Peláez-Sánchez, I. C., & Velásquez-Durán, A. (2023). The impact of Duolingo in developing students' linguistic competence: An aspect of communicative language competences. *Educação e Pesquisa*, 49. https://doi.org/10.1590/s1678-4634202349252467eng

Tseng, J. J. (2018). Exploring TPACK-SLA interface: Insights from the computer-enhanced classroom. *Computer Assisted Language Learning, 31*(4), 390–412. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2017.1412324

Tseng, Y., & Lin, Y. (2024). Enhancing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' writing with ChatGPT: A university-level course design. *The Electronic Journal of e-Learning, 21*(5), 78–97. https://doi.org/10.34190/ejel.21.5.3329

Widyasari, P., & Maghfiroh, A. (2023). The advantages of artificial intelligence ELSA Speak application for speaking English learners in improving pronunciation skills. *ELTT, 9*(1), 286-292. https://proceeding.unpkediri.ac.id/index.php/eltt/article/view/4248

Xie, H., Chu, H. C., Hwang, G. J., & Wang, C. C. (2019). Trends and development in technology-enhanced adaptive/personalized learning: A systematic review of journal publications from 2007 to 2017. *Computers & Education, 140*, 103599.

Yeh, H.-C. (2024). Revolutionizing language learning: Integrating generative AI for enhanced language proficiency. *Educational Technology & Society, 27*(3), 335–353.

**Optimizing English Language Learner Instruction through Artificial Intelligence:
Bridging Educational Gaps and Alleviating Teacher Workload**

Brittany Margot Sales
College of Staten Island/City University of New York

Abstract: I discuss how AI tools can meaningfully support education of English Language Learners (ELLs) while easing demands on teachers. Current technologies — chatbots, automated feedback systems, personalized learning platforms — assist students in developing language proficiency through real-time response and customized learning experiences. AI can take up mundane tasks such as grading and lesson planning so that more time is available for teachers to interact with students and give concentrated instruction. I also discuss some of the perils involved while implementing AI in education and investigate ethical considerations, teacher training, and equity in students' access to AI. I weigh opportunities and limitations to provide a pragmatic response for educators, school leaders, and policymakers on how AI can effectively be used to enhance student learning and help teachers devise sustainable teaching practices.

Knowledge of English is essential for achieving success in the United States in school, job, and social life. However, English Language Learners (ELLs) suffer greatly in language learning. Difficulties include problems with speaking a new language, lack of personal assistance, and disparities in money and resources (Dai & Liu, 2024; Praphan & Praphan, 2023). All these obstacles make it hard for ELLs to learn; and contribute to continued unfairness in non-native language instruction. It is crucial that we address these problems that are both urgent and universal (Hockly, 2023). The rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) gives some hope for resolving these issues. AI tools, such as chatbots, personalized learning platforms, and automated feedback systems, are increasingly being used in education. Technologies provide quick feedback, can adjust teaching to fit each student's needs, and handle regular administrative tasks automatically. AI can allow teachers to spend more time on important activities that focus on students' socialization into English language use (Praphan & Praphan, 2023; Belda-Medina & Kokošková, 2023). Moreover, AI technologies can make learning more interactive and engaging, which helps students feel more motivated to learn a new language (Huang & Zou, 2024).

While this all sounds promising, there are some challenges associated with integrating AI into ELL instruction. Concerns include data privacy, algorithmic bias, and equitable access to technology (Hockly, 2023; Mohammed Al-Othman, 2024). Another major challenge entails the continuing professional development of teachers so that they are enabled to effectively integrate AI tools into their instructional practices. Likewise, schools face resistance from both educators and communities who fear AI encroachment on conventional teaching methods (Du & Gao, 2022). Nonetheless, AI may optimize ELL instruction by filling pedagogical gaps and lightening teacher workloads. Evaluation of the pros and cons of current AI-driven solutions reveals a framework for effective implementation of AI that addresses objections and challenges to these technologies. I aim to guide equitable and ethical integration of AI into ELL instruction by making practical recommendations for educators, school leaders, and policymakers.

Considering AI in Context of Its Use

Using AI in education cannot be seen as simply a technical task. Teaching and learning bear important social, cultural, and human elements, so the focus of education should always remain on people. ELLs face many challenges beyond merely language skill; these relate to cultural

identities and economic situations. No surprise, then, the Social Foundations of Education indicates the need for teachers to appreciate students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds in the classroom. Teachers are obliged to handle student differences because classroom teachers are the primary instructors in schools. But systemic issues, including underfunded schools, high teacher-student ratios, and a lack of training in culturally responsive teaching practices, act as barriers to equitably supporting inclusive goals. Traditional educational structures are made for monolingual and monocultural people, thus placing ELLs in a system that should address — but has trouble addressing — their special needs (Dai & Liu, 2024). This mismatch leads to poor school performance, low self-esteem, and a higher-than-average rate of dropping out among ELLs, perpetuating cycles of inequity and injustice. I have watched as outside pressures, like standardized testing, steered resources away from vital programs, including bilingual support and cultural enrichment. There's a real risk that AI's stress on efficiency and data will end up taking us down a pathway where we ignore the fact that in education investment in people is what matters most. My students need more than just tools; they need caring teachers who understand their special experiences and nurture their success.

The technological gap, as well, is a huge problem facing proposals to turn teaching totally over to AI, as low-income schools usually cannot afford the resources needed to use the latest AI tools. Likely, this techno-gap will force ELLs from poor backgrounds further away and exacerbate educational unfairness instead of solving it. Simply put, it is very hard to use AI in poor schools, such as the ones I have worked in. Most of my students lack good internet and modern devices at home, making it hard to use AI tools outside of class. Even at school, the limited resources often mean they must share technology or use old systems that cannot keep up with the newest AI. Those differences create a gap where the students who need the most help are the least likely to get it. Equitable access to AI curriculum would require systemic investment in technology, professional development, and ongoing support for schools serving underserved communities. Wise investment in technology can help bridge the digital divide. Policymakers must ensure that funding for schools that lack resources is provided so every student can get good internet, up-to-date devices, and the help they need to use AI tools well (Mohammed Al-Othman, 2024). Public-private partnerships in technology could also come in handy, with companies donating equipment or covering expenses of software licenses in low-income schools.

Another crucial aspect is protection of data privacy, mainly when AI systems collect and examine sensitive information about students. Top on my list of concerns about AI must be data privacy. As a teacher, it is always an important task to create an environment that makes students feel okay about sharing problems and feel good about making progress. A huge amount of data collected by AI could potentially break that trust. Many of my students come from at-risk backgrounds, including immigrant families who may feel worried about institutions gathering their personal information. The thought that private student data could be misused or not well protected raises important ethical issues. If my students knew their progress data might be kept forever, or looked at outside my classroom, how safe and comfortable would they feel about their learning? The issue of data privacy is further compounded by algorithmic bias: biased data sets can perpetuate stereotypes and further disadvantage already marginalized groups (Hockly, 2023). For example, an AI tool developed primarily using native speakers of a language may not account for the linguistic differences of English Language Learners, thereby making incorrect assessments and recommendations. Quite often, AI systems use data that might not be representative of the diversity of ELLs and their special languages and cultural backgrounds. I have witnessed how small misunderstandings about students' accents, or their way of speaking

can result in unfair judgments. For example, AI may mark some pronunciation errors as mistakes because AI is oblivious to patterns of speech from the student's first language, leaving students feeling unvalued and treated unfairly by this "cultural outsider." Algorithmic bias is solvable by carefully designing and using different types of data. AI tools must use data representing language and cultural differences of ELLs to reduce the chance of spreading stereotypes and indulging other forms of unfairness (Mohammed Al-Othman, 2024). Developers should collaborate with teachers to improve the algorithms, ensuring that they take into consideration likely cultural and linguistic challenges of ELL students in order to address and overcome those challenges. The system could, for example, learn to understand and adjust its usage to the way different kinds non-native speakers tend to talk when using English and view these as "socio-syncrases," that is, as cultural differences, not individual, idiosyncratic mistakes. This fits the Social Foundations principle of recognizing and valuing diversity in education.

For AI (as for school), addressing issues of cultural diversity means ensuring its own house is in order regarding clear, fair systems that work to achieve goals of social justice. Already marginalized students run the risk of being left much further behind, as current inequalities will be exacerbated by AI if investments are not made both in school infrastructure and in resources for low-income communities. Policymakers are to ensure that schools in less privileged communities are given adequate funding. It is also important to invest in community involvement. As an ELL teacher, I have found very instrumental inviting families into discussions concerning different educational tools and strategies relevant to their children. Conducting workshops or information sessions regarding the use of AI allows parents and students to raise concerns, and provide suggestions so that implementation suits their culture and language (Praphan & Praphan, 2023). Finally, using AI in education also gives us a chance to turn a critical eye towards AI. Teachers can prepare students for a future where technology is critical in their lives by showing how to use AI responsibly and smartly. For example, I could include talks about data privacy, unfair algorithms, and instructional limits of AI, helping students learn to deal carefully and wisely with these issues.

It's difficult to learn how to use AI in teaching. I'm willing to try new tools, though many colleagues have expressed feelings of stress when adopting another new technology without sufficient training or support. There aren't many opportunities for professional development, so teachers often must find out how to use these tools on their own. Lack of preparation, however, not only decreases the effectiveness of AI but also increases resistance among educators who fear AI will become a burden rather than a benefit. Adding AI to ELL teaching means equipping teachers with the wherewithal to use these tools effectively. One of the important areas is teacher training. From an ENL (English as a New Language) teacher's point of view, the benefits of learning will make teachers feel confident and competent with new tools. The training programs should do more than teach the technology; they should also show how AI can help instructors respect diverse cultures and build good relationships with students (Du & Gao, 2022). Workshops could show case studies of practical examples that connect with teachers' experiences that demonstrate how AI has been successfully deployed in different classrooms.

Teachers must be instructed on using AI systems and reflect carefully on their limitations and ethical concerns re: AI. Teachers using AI will need to be ready to address their own biases, ensure equitable access, and integrate the technology into culturally responsive teaching practices (Mohammed Al-Othman, 2024; Hockly, 2023). The focus of professional development programs should be on collaboration between teachers and AI, rather than on how AI can replace

or get in the way of human-centered teaching. Similarly, AI systems can review data on students to present tendencies and areas that need more effort from the teachers for better interventions. In my class, this might mean using AI to flag patterns in student errors, which would inform my lesson planning and targeted feedback. Integrating AI in ELL instruction certainly challenges the traditional view of a teacher as the only source of knowledge. Rather, it recasts teachers as learning facilitators who lead students through navigation in our complex, technology-enhanced world. Reframing teachers as facilitators reflects the broader movement within Social Foundations of Education toward greater inclusivity and shared responsibility for learning. As a teacher, I see AI as a collaborator that will augment what I can do, not replace me. For example, AI can be used for looking at and reporting on student performance. I, the teacher, am the one who interprets this information with regard to the cultural and language background of each student. It is this use of AI that really helps me work more efficiently and spend more time on relationship-building and creative teaching. In doing so, I ensure my students get the technical skill and emotional support they need to do well. With equity, relationality, and ethical considerations at the forefront, AI really empowers educators and students alike by ensuring that Artificial Intelligence is a tool for inclusion and progress rather than division and retrogression.

Reframing Our Understanding of AI as a Neurodiverse Educator

AI technologies hold the promise of scalable learning experiences that are individually suited to each student. Chatbots and apps using NLP (Natural Language Processing) tailor learning to needs of individuals and give real-time feedback, which helps students improve their skill in a new language without fear of judgment from other people (Belda-Medina & Kokošková, 2023; Praphan & Praphan, 2023). Such integration of technologies, though, needs to be critically examined considering its social implications. A most concerning objection to AI is it will dehumanize instruction, it will take down meaningful teacher-student interactions and turn learning into an impersonal, machine-driven process. We may be able to get a handle on concerns about dehumanization by drawing an analogy between AI and teachers who are on the autism spectrum. Few have looked into this comparison. However, Bloh's (2020) interview with Harry (a pseudonym), a student teacher diagnosed with Asperger's and PDD-NOS (Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified), reveals some important similarities, and an even more important dissimilarity, in the two cases.

Bloh's (2020) conversation with Harry breaks new ground in looking at how ASD informs teachers' abilities and difficulties in the classroom. While there are blogs from teachers with ASD (E, 2013; Wylam, 2018), there is little information, especially in the form of data, about autistic teachers or students on the spectrum who are training to be teachers. Characteristics vary in ASD but include, in parallel to common complaints about AI, deficits in social communication, deficits in social interaction, stereotyped or repetitive movements, insistence on sameness, and highly restricted and fixated interests (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Harry struggles to read social situations and get along well with co-workers and students. He noted that his autism gave him special insights but also required adjustments and support for the social entanglements of teaching. When placed in an ASD-support classroom as a student teacher — a happy coincidence rather than a planned assignment — Harry could relate very easily to the students. The shared experience of being on the spectrum helped him understand and meet his autistic students' needs better than many teachers might have who do not share the autistic experience. However, in contexts and classes unsupportive of his autism Harry's social skill deficits, including an academically distracting feeling he couldn't work well with others, affected

his work both as a student and as a teacher. As Harry tells us:

> I don't think about my social skills while I'm teaching, but I may not be able to catch on to social cues in the classroom. I could be doing something and the students might be giving cues to which I am unable to respond. That happened in my recent placement but not as much with the students but with other teachers. It was not my cooperating (special education) teacher but other general education teachers with whom we were working. I had some miscommunications with them and they became frustrated with me. I didn't realize this until my cooperating teacher told me, which was very helpful. It worries me for my future and I need to find a way to let my future colleagues know that I may not successfully communicate what I really intend. I think I want to self-identify my disability to my future colleagues so they don't misinterpret my meanings. I'm aware of this.

The final sentence of Harry's comment about how awareness of his autism helps him overcome challenges presented by it underscores an important disanalogy in the analogy constructed here between AI as an instructor and autistic teachers. To complete the thought, hear Harry one more time:

> *You need to be incredibly aware of your deficits*. Social skills were my issue, not having difficulties in other areas. I know that I, sometimes, have trouble working with people. So, I really try to work on that and make others aware of my difficulties. It will depend in what area(s) the teaching candidate has difficulties. In general, they should be aware of where these struggles may be and where they could occur before any issues occur. For me, I try to improve these areas and try not to make the same mistakes again.

Emphasis has been added to Harry's remark to point out that *Harry has awareness of his limitations*. Self-awareness is something AI does not have and cannot do. AI technologies excel in many areas of teaching, including data-driven personalization and efficiency in repetition; but AIs acting as instructors irremediably lack emotional intelligence and relational depth, the core features of human-centered education.

Concerns about AI dehumanizing education underscore the need to view AI not as a replacement for human connection but as a support system that can augment it. AI should be harvested to reinforce these links not to weaken them (Hockly, 2023; Bloh, 2020). For instance, AI can take care of repetitive, time-consuming administrative tasks such as grading and keeping track of attendance, freeing me, the teacher, to build personal relationships with students and engage in complex teaching tasks with them (Praphan & Praphan, 2023). Students will correctly view AI as an assistant rather than a master. I may use AI in my class to identify areas where students need extra support while I'm investing more of my time in personal conversations and mentoring. For example, an AI tool may suggest students improve their writing; however, I would help students select which improvements to work on and how to blend the machine's feedback with their voice. Such collaboration aligns with the Social Foundations' objective of increasing students' participation in their own learning process. Relationality is preserved and promoted if AI helps teachers emphasize the emotional and social dimensions of learning, which are especially crucial for ELLs facing language acquisition amid cultural change. AI systems should be viewed as facilitative tools to enhance teaching, not as a replacement for humane teachers. As a 7th-year English as a New Language teacher, I have experienced firsthand the

nuanced challenges of ELLs. My experiences have shown me the need for solutions that honor the social and emotional foundations of education, leveraging technological advancements to make participation in my classes more meaningful for me and my students. In a word, since AI, unlike Harry and other autistic teachers, cannot self-regulate when working as a teacher, teachers who incorporate Artificial Intelligence into their classroom instruction have to be sure to set firm limits and boundaries when forming a co-teaching relationship with AI. While AI can address many issues in ELL instruction, the platform must be actualized in a classroom environment honoring the relational, equitable, and human-centered core principles that define good teaching.

Making Strong Pedagogical Connections with AI

Teaching is all about relationships. The best moments in my work are when I listen to students telling their stories, when I get to join in celebrating their victories, and when I help them through difficulties. Moments like these may be the best reason to speak in any language. The times most important to my work as a teacher, especially for ELLs who might already feel left out of the new society to which they are adapting, are the interactions with students that build trust and motivation. While AI can provide very fast feedback, it cannot match the level of human understanding and feeling that is so necessary for teaching English Language Learners. For instance, I once had a student who struggled with grammar but had a lot to say about storytelling. I was able to help him feel more confident in his writing through personal talks and special support. An AI tool might have pointed out his mistakes and suggested ways to improve, but it would not have noticed his talent as a storyteller or understood how important it was to support his passion. My students need to feel that they are more than a data point or an item in an algorithm. They should feel valued for who they are as individuals.

One of the biggest worries about AI is that it might weaken interpersonal connections in teaching and learning. Again, teaching is about relationships, and that certainly includes working with colleagues. Recasting AI as a colleague, as a co-teacher, allows us to see that AI can assist in reinforcing good instructional relationships. For instance, a chatbot could help a student when out of class to practice the language more regularly and with more confidence, while in class I can focus on coaching and mentoring the student on learning the social and emotional aspects of English. This teamwork view of AI and teachers goes well with the view that education involves acquiring knowledge, growing personally, and building community (Hockly, 2023). Integrating AI in ELL instruction is not about deciding between technology and humanity; instead, it is about using technology to intensify the relational and human-centered aspects of teaching and learning. As an ENL teacher, I have seen how it is important to create a place where students feel valued, supported, and empowered. AI could help improve education and relieve teacher stress when used to help us focus on what matters most: relationships that facilitate growth and learning. Teachers, education policymakers, lawmakers, and AI creators can ensure that AI keeps its promise to better education by focusing on fairness, inclusiveness, and respect for divergent cultures in the use and operation of AI. That path ahead requires us to think big and work together, but the possible benefits of a fairer, more active, and people-focused education system make the hard work worthwhile.

I have experienced the challenges of meeting the needs of ELLs while managing the increasing demands of teaching. AI can help bridge educational gaps and alleviate the workload of teachers, all while keeping in mind the social aspects of education. With a focus on relationships, fairness, and understanding of cultures, AI can support teachers' work, improve

student results, and enhance teacher happiness. The best future of AI in ELL instruction is one that can provide the best aspects of equity and efficiency in education without losing the relational and human-centered perspectives of teaching. Continuing to improve, AI can become a transformative tool that will assist in language acquisition and promote cross-cultural understanding and empathy. For example, future AI systems may incorporate the understanding of multiple languages and cultural backgrounds into their design. This will enable students to learn in ways that respect their identity and experiences (Dai & Liu, 2024). AI can change the way teachers and students interact. If the routine tasks are taken care of, teachers will have more time to get involved with students personally, making learning more meaningful. Additionally, improving AI could help with academic growth and social-emotional skill, fitting AI into a broader view of education (Hockly, 2023).

AI can support both practical and ethical concerns in ELL teaching if and only if it allows us to reimagine education by foregrounding social connections. While many authors discuss how effective AI can be, few reflect on how it can bring about deeper relationships and inclusions. For example, it can help students tell their cultural stories in different languages, bringing about conversations and understanding among classroom cultures (Bloh, 2020). Understanding AI as a colleague is a paradigm shift that positions AI not only as an instrument of instruction but also as a catalyst in community building and mutual understanding. Moreover, AI can redefine what achievement in education means. Current systems hinge on standardized metrics that miss the student's holistic development. AI tools might record data on well-being indicators, such as social engagement and cultural integration, which fall within a broader and more inclusive definition of success (Praphan & Praphan, 2023). These ideas for using AI well align with the Social Foundations of Education principle that education must be an instrument through which students empower and actualize themselves. AI modifies the idea that teachers represent an absolute source of knowledge and authority. Instead, AI makes teachers guides and partners with whom students walk together through a world full of technology. This change in pedagogy aligns perfectly with the focus of recent times on inclusiveness in education and shared responsibility for learning. As an ENL teacher, I see AI as a helpful tool to increase my reach and effectiveness. It allows me to focus on what I do best: building relationships, encouraging creativity, and inspiring students. By using AI to take care of regular tasks and provide information about learners' strengths and challenges, I can spend more energy on the critical human-centered parts of teaching that make education a unique experience for each of my students.

References

Al-Othman, M. A. A. (2024). Using artificial intelligence in English as a foreign languagclassroom: Ethical concerns and future prospects. *Arab World English Journal, Special Issue,* 85–104.

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Washington: American Psychiatric Association.

Belda-Medina, J. & Kokošková, V. (2023). Integrating chatbots in education: Insights from the Chatbot-Human Interaction Satisfaction Model (CHISM). *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education, 20*(1), 1–20.

Bloh, C. (2020, October 1). What happens when the teacher is on the spectrum? An interview with a pre-service teacher with ASD. *Autism Spectrum News*.

Dai, K., & Liu, Q. (2024). Leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) in EFL classes: Challenges and opportunities in the spotlight. *Computers in Human Behavior, 159.*

E (2013, January). You can't be autistic—you're such a good teacher. *The Third Glance.* thethirdglance.wordpress.com/2013/07/12/but-you-cant-be-autistic-youre-such-a-good-teacher/

Fathi, J., Rahimi, M., & Derakhshan, A. (2024). Improving EFL learners' speaking skills and willingness to communicate via artificial intelligence-mediated interactions. *System, 121.*

Hemati, F., & Raeesi, A. (2015). Exploring the connection between stability and variability in language classrooms and EFL teachers' creativity and burnout. *Theory & Practice in Language Studies, 5*(7), 1438–1445.

Hockly, N. (2023). Artificial intelligence in English language teaching: The good, the bad, and the ugly. *RELC Journal, 54*(2), 445–451.

Marzuki, W., Widiati, U., Diyenti, R., & Indrawati, I. (2023). The impact of AI writing tools on the content and organization of students' writing: EFL teachers' perspective. *Cogent Education, 10*(2), 1–17.

Oraif, I. (2024). Natural language processing (NLP) and EFL learning: A case study based on deep learning. *Journal of Language Teaching & Research, 15*(1), 201–208.

Praphan, P. W. & Praphan, K. (2023). AI technologies in the ESL/EFL writing classroom: The villain or the champion? *Journal of Second Language Writing, 62.*

Üstünbaş, Ü. (2024). Hey GPT, can we have a chat?: A case study on EFL learners' AI speaking practice. *International Journal of Modern Education Studies, 8*(1), 91–107.

Wylam, K. (2018, April). What I could do for my students as an autistic teacher. *The Mighty.* https://themighty.com/2018/04/autistic-teacher-skills/

Yang, L., & Zhao, S. (2024). AI-induced emotions in L2 education: Exploring EFL students' perceived emotions and regulation strategies. *Computers in Human Behavior, 159*.

Is AI Psychotic?

Mark Garrison
West Texas A&M University

Abstract: I explore the thesis that Artificial Intelligence (AI) exhibits characteristics analogous to human psychosis, and that AI hype constitutes a "double bind," a communication dilemma associated with schizophrenia. The article explains how neural networks mirror distortions of time and boundaries found in psychotic conditions. To break free of the double bind, I argue that distinguishing intelligence from consciousness is key. While AI is focused on "nexting" (predicting immediate future events based on past data), unique to humans is the ability to imagine futures. Rather than fixating on concerns of AIs becoming conscious, the article warns that the pervasive integration of AI could lead to a "psychotic socialization" of humans, fostering a "cybernetic personality" that prioritizes automated responses and limits imaginative capacity.

> What we thought we were doing (and I think we succeeded fairly well) was treating the brain as a Turing machine; that is, as a device which could perform the kind of functions which a brain must perform if it is only to go wrong and have a psychosis.
>
> — Warren McCulloch (psychiatrist/AI developer)[1]

With generative AI (Artificial Intelligence) we are both encouraged and warned. AI can be a powerful but error-prone assistant: "Oftentimes, the answers produced by AI will be a mixture of truth and fiction…. Sometimes, rather than simply being wrong, an AI will invent information that does not exist. Some people call this a 'hallucination'" (Research Guides, 2023).[2] What is not widely known, however, is that the architects of so-called neural networks — an important methodological foundation of technologies branded artificial intelligence — believed their invention to be both "psychotic" and "rational" (Halpern 2014). My purpose in this article is to explore the psychological analogues of intelligent machines and McCulloch's thesis, namely, that machine intelligence can be advanced by modeling "the kind of functions which a brain must perform if it is only to go wrong and have a psychosis." Why precisely did McCulloch and his colleagues believe their inventions were both "psychotic" and "rational"? What is the significance of such a diagnosis; and what are its implications?

What are We Talking about When We Talk about AI

As Bender and Hanna (2025) note, the phrase "artificial intelligence" has become marketing hype, introducing much confusion into discussions of technologies used to automate decision-making, personalize recommendations, and translate languages. Confusion especially abounds with "generative" forms of automation such as ChatGPT and DALL-E (the latter are termed "synthetic media machines" by Bender and Hanna). While I harness some of this confusion as a symptom of the problems with AI discussed here, clarification of terminology is useful.

---

[1] As quoted in Halpern 2014, 223.

[2] If it doesn't exist, it's not information. It is also important to note that "hallucination" is the term developed by those working in the AI industry, not its critics (McQuillan, Jarke, and Pargman 2024, 365). I go one step further than Pasquinelli (2017, emphasis in original), arguing that, not only has AI "inaugurated the age of *statistical science fiction*" but it has done so in a manner analogous to psychosis, and, worse, that such "myth making" can and indeed is inducing psychosis in humans. Another view is offered by Stetar (2025), who argues: "[in] the systems we've constructed, there's an undeniable fracture happening — one that goes far deeper than the misapplication of terms. The term "hallucination," used to describe errors in language models, is part of this collapse."

"Machine learning" is generally thought to be a subset of what is called artificial intelligence. In turn, the animating goal of big tech and its "security" partners is artificial general intelligence (AGI): development of machines that perform a range of complex cognitive tasks as well as or better than humans.[3] The idea of artificial intelligence, however, originates with 17th-century British philosopher Thomas Hobbes' theory of networked governance. It is important to understand "artificial intelligence" as not simply a set of discrete technologies but also a centuries-old socio-political-technical analogue: the State is like a person (Garrison, 2022).

To draw attention to AI technology itself, I use the phrase "machine intelligence" when discussing the origin of mechanisms by which programs such as ChatGPT function. While others argue AI is not intelligent at all, but rather an instrument of knowledge or "logical magnification" that "*perceives* patterns that are beyond the reach of the human mind" (Pasquinelli, 2019, emphasis in original), objection to use of the word *intelligent* in relation to machines seems to rest in part on the difficulty in distinguishing between intelligence and consciousness. This includes the mistaken view that what makes humans unique is their intellectual capacity. When intelligence is defined as the ability to learn, evidence of learning in machines is evidence of intelligence, just as learning in living organisms is evidence of intelligence: fish have it, squirrels have it, even single cells have it (Gilbert, 2006). Despite computer scientists' current custom of naming their models "input output mapping" to distinguish them from biological models of brain function, i.e., neural networks, this convention does not suffice as an argument against the existence of machine intelligence (that is, the technical replication of human intelligence). A main point here — part of the psychosis as it were — is how disruptive the confounding of intelligence with consciousness can be when evaluating these new technologies. Additionally, from the point of view of the study of technology, the notion of "artificial" is, as a distinction, difficult to sustain. We exist; and it seems our nature to do so is based on our collectively built environment, on vast socio-cultural-technical systems, what Kelly (2011) calls the "Technium." Finally, the concept of machine intelligence fits more elegantly with the thesis of machine socialization, which, as we will see, leads us back to Hobbes and the fiction of the "person of state." Thus, the method here is to focus on the technical and then repeatedly return to the psychological and social.

Personal Origins of the Question of AI's Psychosis

In fall 2024, I increased my focus on AI — extensively reading news articles, some computer science, and related philosophy. I noticed several issues. For example, AI farms the size of Manhattan are being built in Texas and require almost as much energy as a large city to function (Metz et al., 2025; this thirst for energy may be driving the push for fossil fuels). And all the while many of our schools, hospitals, and habitats need attention. It seems highly unbalanced, the relative emphasis and importance given to AI in the context of all other needs presenting themselves. Hundreds of billions of dollars in public and private funds being allocated to AI projects, the vast majority of which are focused on commercial and "security" applications. Is there no better use of such funds?

I then learned about "effective altruism" (charitable giving based on pay-off, especially to donors) and "long-termism" (charitable giving to change long-term human futures rather than to help those currently in need), and other ideologies prominent among big tech advocates and

---

[3] But, note, some leading computer scientists have spoken out against treating AGI as the main goal of their work (Blili-Hamelin et al. 2025).

entrepreneurs looking to make money off their "philanthropy." These ideologies are, in my view, fantastical, decidedly irrational. Funds are directed at research to stop AI from taking over the world while simultaneously funds from the same sources are directed towards research ensuring the "singularity" arrives as soon as possible (Becker, 2025). And the "supremacist survivalism" of the likes of Peter Theil and Elon Musk who wish to exit society, after sucking it dry (Klein and Taylor 2025).

Then I noticed advocates stating that chatbots could be therapists, and like humans, need support for stresses *they* face. And some chatbots have recommended illicit drugs to those fighting addiction (Tangermann**,** 2025; Nazaryan**,** 2025). One article described in some detail a woman addicted to her chatbot as a romantic partner, and this included having sex "with" the chatbot (Kitroeff et al., 2025). New AI charter schools limit teachers to providing "motivation and emotional support to keep students on task" (Engle 2024). Then there is the AI-generated short film in which Musk and Donald Trump interestingly appear. Titled "The Arrival of the Psychedelic Puppets,"[4] the film highlights how psychosis can be defined, in part, as a hatred of reality.

I also began exploring various AI tools. Using the image generator in Notion (a note taking app), I asked for an image depicting an engaging student-teacher interaction. What it generated was quite stark (Figure 1, below). And while AI advocates might suggest that I am a bad "prompt engineer," the output is indisputably striking.

Figure 1
AI-Generated image of "engaging student-teacher interaction." The request included directions to make a sketch only using the colors blue and green.

---

[4] https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=kpZmmI2qfbM. Watch it a few minutes. How are you feeling? Also see these forms of synthetic media: novels (https://novelistai.com/), YouTube influencers (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_UFRLiDquI) and AI-developed blogs (https://www.grammarly.com/ai/ai-writinccg-tools/blog-post-generator).

After sharing this image with a colleague, he offered it up for discussion with a group of preservice teachers in their Introduction to Social Foundations of Education class. They described the engagement depicted by AI, he reported, as controlling by the teacher rather than collegial between teacher and student. Evidence of this interpretation included the oppositional stances of the student and the teacher. They could have been looking in the same direction and headed towards shared learning together, students suggested. But the teacher looks down upon the student, pointing with one hand, the other raised perhaps ready to strike. The lack of green in the teacher suggests that the student learns from the teacher while the teacher learns nothing from the student. Plus, the very little bit of blue in the student indicates perhaps very little learning is going on in the process as drawn. And then, of course, there is what appears to be a mysterious third leg emanating from the chair. The image offers, it seems, a vision of education that is adversarial, didactic, and ineffective. Is this a "real" answer from AI or is AI merely "hallucinating" a response when pressed on a question it has no data with which to answer. There is no way to tell the difference (Greg Seals, personal communication).

This all seems *really* crazy to me, and it is only a partial list of all the crazy I found in relation to AI. These developments are disturbing in both their depth and in the rapid pace at which AI is altering numerous aspects of society. The material and moral conditions required to sustain an AI-infused or, especially, an AI-dominated society describe a set of social and environmental conditions in which, to say the least, humans are unlikely to flourish. Why would we want such a bad neighbor? There must be an explanation for anyone's endorsement and, worse, enactment of self-destructive tendencies. Bateson offers just such an explanation with his concept of the "double bind."

The AI Double Bind

Gregory Bateson, a mid-20th-century anthropologist and cybernetic theorist, defined a "double bind" as a communication dilemma — an individual receives two or more conflicting messages, with one message negating the other (Bateson 1987). According to Bateson, in this circumstance, a person cannot confront the inherent contradiction or successfully resolve the situation. Doing so would likely result in harm and certainly result in further confusion. Most importantly for our purpose, Bateson held that the "double bind" played an important role in the development of schizophrenia, theorizing that persistent exposure to double binds disrupts an individual's ability to navigate reality and communicate effectively. The best way to describe the double bind, Bateson and colleagues wrote, "is not in terms of a binder and a victim but in terms of people caught up in an ongoing system which produces conflicting definitions of the relationship and consequent subjective distress" (Bateson et al. 1963, 155).

Popular culture constantly riffs on AI double binds. We are, it seems, equally exposed to AI utopia and AI dystopia. If we object to these new technologies, we are maligned; we are threatened we will "fall behind" if we do not adapt. New AI tools are being built into the operating systems we use every day, whether we want them or not. Yet, we pay with our time and money to be entertained by AI dystopia in the form of movies ("Ex Machina" — an AI "love story" ending with the robot becoming emotionally manipulative and deadly) and other media.

The approach we are encouraged to adopt toward AI technology feels insane to me because it constitutes a set of double binds: AI will solve all problems facing us, except for the all the problems AI leaves in its wake. AI promises to clean up the environment but, at the same time, AI obscenely gulps down and gobbles up environmental resources in its day-to-day operations.

We are told to put our trust in AI but, at the same time, we must doublecheck everything AI tells us. AI is inevitable but, at the same time, AI's inevitability depends upon our voluntary acceptance of AI. AI will equalize humans and stabilize societies but, at the same time, tens of millions of workers will be displaced by AI automation. AI will free us from mundane lives but, at the same time, AI will surveille us and turn our lives and life chances over to the programs and ploys of data manipulators and corporate elites. In brief, to paraphrase Tolkien: "*All shall love AI — and despair!*"[5]

Could there be a better example of a double-bind?

To Break AI's Double Bind…

The aim here, then, must be to break from the AI double bind. I indulge no dystopia or hysteria in maintaining no illusions that the political and economic elite rushing us to AI adoption are, in the main, up to no good (Crawford 2021; Becker 2025; Bender and Hanna 2025; Dyer-Witheford, Kjøsen, and Steinhoff 2019; McQuillan 2023). However, this fact alone simply provides another example of the double bind: it feels so good to be so bad. In the spirit of breaking this bind, it is more useful to contemplate how common and legitimate criticisms and fears about AI are rooted in the fact that AIs lack consciousness, a theme returned to toward the end of this article. For example, AIs do not "notice" when they are wrong; they do not "understand" when they have violated a norm. These are among the reasons interacting with AI tools feels oddly "cold." We object to AI bias, and AI oppression. We reject AI policing as it reproduces inequalities. What if these complaints hide an uncomfortable desire? A desire to shift responsibility for the state of the world from us to machinery agreed from the get-go to already be more intelligent than we? Are such critiques themselves expressions of the double bind in which we now find ourselves?

At issue here is not the accuracy of accusations against AI. But, rather, occurrent facts among humans of *awareness* of AI error, or objection to AI *bias*, or defense of *rights* of absolutely no concern to AI — these are forms of *consciousness*. Humans point these things out about AI; but AI is unable to recognize error, bias, abrogation, etc., on its part in any of its own operations. Should AIs have consciousness in the future? One would think we would be happy about that, given the critiques. But be careful what you wish for! Is that what we really want? Allowing any others, let alone others whose thinking is entirely different from your own, to make decisions for you is risky business. To possibly make the point clearer, in opposition to various legislative measures targeting DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion), and in Texas, specifically targeting "ideology" in education, it is common to hear colleagues on faculty lament, "This legislation doesn't define ideology. This is arbitrary!" Indeed, it is. But do you really want any legislature defining 'ideology' for you? Especially when the legislature seems as oblivious as AI would be to the fact that legislative attacks on "ideology" may be even more "ideological" than the positions they are working against? That would not resolve the issue. It would simply mimic AI bias. So, why is our imagination being pointed in that direction? How many of the well-deserved critiques of AI algorithms could serve to justify a call for robot citizens, who know about (and have) rights, who self-reflect on their past errors, and maybe even participate in restorative circles. As things stand, AI is biased, or error prone, or unable to feel emotions —

---

[5] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Rb1GzLDSPg from Lady Galadriel's speech to Frodo Baggins in Peter Jackson's (2001) cinematic adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1954.

what is the antithesis of these critiques? Can AI, once the bias is programmed out of it, be decisive in creating a just world? Does injustice have an *algorithmic* origin? A *cyber-conscientious* solution? If AI made no mistakes, would all be well with the world?

While this technist wish for the future of AI with a heart is consistent with critiques of techno-solutionism, the tactic is unuseful, in part because the distinction between technology and social or political institutions is itself fuzzy (Sacasas**,** 2019). Wishes for errorless AI prove to be pipe dreams because they fail to understand the dialectical nature of the relation of technology to the evolution of human beings and their societies. Tools in hand, we have created the environment we now must adapt to, and in this adaptation, we change ourselves as a species and as cultures. Through society, we evolved ourselves. The human species and its array of tools, techniques and systems, and all the attending meanings and aims of human technology, have become a force of nature. In short, when it comes to AI and concerns about consciousness, *we* are the main force with which we must contend. Thus, the thesis that AI is psychotic is intended as a productive tease and challenge. Should the most modern technologies now being foisted upon us mirror human psychosis, should they bind us to an impossible social situation, new strategies and analyses are warranted. It may in fact be from the vantage point of education, that is, the problem of socialization, that some of these concerns are most sharply revealed. How do you socialize, "conscientize" intelligent machinery? Reasons exist to support the claim that AI can never possess consciousness in any meaningful way. Those reasons reach all the way back to fundamental design features built into AI from the very beginning of its conception and generation.

Psychotic Presuppositions of Machine Intelligence

In 1943, inspired by the idea that machines and minds might be thought together through the language of logic and mathematics, the psychiatrist Warren McCulloch and the logician Walter Pitts, both at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, decided to take quite literally the machine-like nature of human beings (Halpern, 2014, cited by page numbers throughout this paragraph). The fascinating story Halpern tells, retold here, is not the likening of humans to machines. That is certainly not a new proposition, as Descartes' thinking was in important ways "cybernetic" (Bates 2025). Rather, the story McCulloch and Pitts penned was about how "unreasonable" and "psychotic" characteristics of human minds allowed for the technical replication of intelligence in machines. The analogy proceeds in both directions: "Having inserted the logic of the machine into the brain, this model was then fed back into the design of machines" (225). Although Halpern claims that McCulloch was "not discussing psychosis in relation to patients in mental clinics," we will see that, indeed, certain characteristics of psychosis in humans are analogous to characteristic assumptions underpinning machine intelligence. And, while McCulloch "recognized that computers were not the same as organic brains" by saying "At no point should anyone assume that neural nets were an exact description of a 'real' brain" (227), neural nets are a tactic to replicate human intelligence in machines, just as airplanes are a method for producing flight, with minimal resemblance to birds. Halpern thus emphasized: "the question of equivalence was not at stake."[6] "What was at stake," Halpern

---

[6] The distinction not clearly articulated by Halpern is between that of equivalence, i.e., the logic of metaphor, the brain *is* a computer versus similarity, i.e., the logic of simile, the brain *is like* a computer. Pragmatically, the aim was *technical replication*. The logic is: if the brain *were* a computer, how *would* it function? McCulloch and Pitts construct an answer by constructing a *counterfactual* analogy between computers and brains.

continues, "was a set of methodologies and practices, the epistemology, that might build new machines — whether organic or mechanical" (223). McCulloch and colleagues, according to Halpern, were engaging in a thought experiment, a thought experiment "that produces a way of doing things, a methodological machine" (227). The result of the thought experiment was a new form of logic, an epistemology McCulloch and Pitt labeled *both* "psychotic" *and* "rational." '*Psych-rat*' epistemology "might make processes usually assigned to analytic functions of the brain, perhaps associated with consciousness and psychology, amenable to technical replication" (223).

Central to technical replication was how cybernetic theory solved the problem of organizing time and space in circuits. This, Halpern argues, "was fundamental to the reformulation of intelligence as rational, and produced a new epistemology of pragmatic behavioralism, embodied and affective logic, and non-liberal agents." Cybernetic rationality displaced "older concepts of agency, consciousness, and autonomy into circuits, cognition, and automata" (Halpern, 2014, 224). Logic and mathematics could abstract operations common to minds and machines (i.e., construct analogies between the two). Reconceptualizing autonomy and will in terms of circuits and machines parallels tenets of classical conditioning and radical behaviorism. Notably, *control* is a foundational concept in both cybernetics and behaviorism (Garrison 2018b, 2018a). But displacing these older concepts troubled traditional theoretical understandings of memory and time. For McCulloch, "historical time presented challenges to making thought and logic equivalent" and "the literal mechanisms of thinking always haunted computational models" (Halpern, 2014, 224).

The solution was found in the invention of neural nets. These nets required moving from reason to rationality; simplified, this means thought is reduced to logical processes. Rationality contends with what is entailed by a proposition, while thought or reason also attends to ends, not just means. And so, one *can* proceed logically, that is according to the rules of formal logic, even if psychotic; those of us not considered psychotic can and do often act and think illogically (e.g., sometimes the logical thing to do is not the ethical thing to do).[7]

In terms of their logical foundation, neurons are specified as logic gates. Every neuron firing has a "semiotic character;" that is, it may be mathematically rendered as a proposition (true or false). Thus, each neuron is an "all or nothing" proposition when firing electrical impulses over synaptic separations. For cyberneticists, neurons possess action potentials and delays and these are equivalent "to the ability to effect a discrete decision" (Halpern 2014, 225). Neurons can be thought of as signs (again, true or false), and nets as semiotic situations or communication structures (like signal communication theory, according to Halpern). This discrete decision (true or false, activate or not) made neurons equivalent to logical propositions, algorithms, and Turing machines.

The second element of the model is the unrealistic assumption of a strictly probabilistic and predictive temporality. Neural nets are determinate in terms of the future (they are predictive), but neural nets are indeterminate in terms of the past. This point is illustrated in Figure 2 (top of next page).

---

[7] Not only is this linked to the much maligned "instrumental reason,", but formal rationality is also, according to Sayer (2011, 68), a bigger problem. When instrumental reason is also formal as in the case of general technologies like AGI (artificial general intelligence), it becomes more dangerous and morally indiscriminate. To the prioritization of means over ends is added the detachment of rationality from its object.

Figure 2.
Neural net structures expressing the indeterminacy of the past.
Signals may come through several different routes (Halpern, 2014, 226).

In the model, given a neural net at particular time (T), one can predict the future action of the net (T+1), but not the past action. *From within the neural network, one cannot determine which neuron fired to excite the current situation*. In such a system, Halpern (2014, 227-229 for quotes in this paragraph) observes, "conscious experience of memory…" is *not* recollection *of the activation of the neuron*, "…but merely an awareness that it was activated in the past, at an in-determinant time…. The firing of a signal, or the suppression of firing, can only be known as declarations of 'true' or 'false' — true, there was an impulse; or false, there was no firing." There is no interpretation or meaning involved in the "memory." Within neural nets, at any moment, one cannot know which neuron sent the message, when the message was sent, or whether the message is the result of a new stimulus or merely a misfire. The net cannot determine with any certitude whether a stimulus comes from without or from within the circuit; whether it is a fresh input or simply a recycled "memory." As a result, the autonomous circuit can directly speak its "mind," thus providing a material (organic or electronic) substrate to language. However, this was only made possible by deferring any encounter with historicity. McCulloch labeled these circuits "psychotic" because the invention of neural nets challenged then established scientific perspectives on thinking processes, and because they reformulated the boundaries of interiority and exteriority, and erased the line between knowledge and practice. The "boundary between perception and cognition," the "separation between interiority and exteriority, and the organization of causal time are in-differentiable…. But rather than being a disadvantage for the capacity of a neural net," Halpern emphasized, "McCulloch and Pitt's brilliance was to see this as an advantage."

As has already been suggested, breaking such boundaries by creating separations and disorganization within causal time, are, in fact, cognitive features associated with psychotic conditions or episodes. While different perspectives exist within and among psychoanalysis, psychiatry, and neurobiology with respect to what "psychotic" entails, the degree to which it exists on a continuum, and its varied origins; there is a general sense of "psychotic" as a break with or even a hatred of reality (Akhtar, 2018). Distortions of *time* and *boundaries* are common to discussions of psychosis. Individuals with diagnosed mental disorders commonly experience distortions in their sense of time. These distortions can contribute to hallucinations, delusions, and disorganized thinking. Typically, this is observed as difficulty in maintaining a continuous, coherent flow of time. Events may feel disjointed, and thoughts may not connect in a linear way,

leading to disorganized thinking or jumbled speech. Additionally, individuals with depressive psychosis are said to experience slowed time perception, where moments feel prolonged. For the manic, time speeds up and thoughts and actions are impulsive (Minkowski, 1970; Dawson and Sleek, 2018; Rodriguez and Ortuño, 2019; Adornetti and Ferretti, 2021). In a phenomenological exploration of time in relation to schizophrenia, Fuchs and colleagues (2017) explore how disruptions in the foundational "inner time consciousness" can lead to core schizophrenic symptoms.[8] Alterations in explicit time, including feelings of acceleration or retardation, and how these temporal disturbances impact social interaction and the formation of delusions, are key to understanding psychopathology. Interestingly, it is claimed that time distortions interfere with "affective-conative dynamics," the emotional dimensions of lived time, encompassing drives, strivings, urges, and affections; and, according to Fuchs et al., the root of spontaneity, attention, and goal pursuit, contributing to a "sense of aliveness" and a sense of *agency*.

Citing Roger Caillois, Halpern (2014, 228) noted that, in psychosis, "there is a mimetic excess to these states, the subject is 'consumed' by the environment, unable to delineate the boundaries between the self and others." In psychosis, individuals may experience a blurring of the boundaries between their own thoughts, feelings, and actions, and those of others, leading to difficulties in distinguishing self from other. This can lead to paranoia, a person believing that thoughts or feelings are being placed into their mind by an external force or that their thoughts or actions are being controlled by someone else (Sass and Feyaerts, 2024). Interestingly, some technology venture capitalists have predicted that the "first real AI safety incident will occur" this year (2025). The paranoia imputed in the "AI model" is striking. Perhaps, the scenario predicts, "an AI model attempts to covertly create copies of itself on another server to preserve itself (known as self-exfiltration). Perhaps an AI model might conclude that, to best advance whatever goals it has been given, it needs to conceal the true extent of its capabilities from humans, purposely sandbagging performance evaluations to evade stricter scrutiny" (Toews 2024). As an analogy, then, it does thus appear, unsurprisingly given the argument developed in this paper, that psychosis in humans is *like* features built into the foundations of intelligent machines. The basic presupposition of neural nets mirror experiences a human being has when they are said to experience psychosis, specifically with respect to time and boundaries, key areas of innovation developed by McCulloch and Pitts. But what does technical replication of intelligence, including its psychotic features, mean for concerns about AI consciousness?

Distinguishing between Consciousness and Intelligence

In *Stumbling on Happiness*, Gilbert (2006, 5–11) contended that the striking feature of human beings is not tool use, or even intelligence, but rather, the ability to think about and experience the future. While his interest was to determine why humans often mistakenly predict what will make them happy, his insights are relevant beyond studies of well-being. Gilbert emphasized that there are two types of future, the first being common to living organisms, the second being unique to human beings. "All brains," he explained, "make predictions about the immediate, local, personal, future."[9] They do this by using information about current events ("I smell something.") and past events ("Last time I smelled this smell, a big thing tried to eat me.")

---

[8] Because my interest here is on analogues between machine and mind, phenomenologically oriented work has been given emphasis. It is worth noting that materialist-oriented cognitive scientists have significant interest in and influence over development of artificial cognitive systems (Marcus, https://garymarcus.substack.com/).

[9] Even plants exhibit rudimentary forms of intelligence — that is, pattern recognition — when they reach for light, or send roots toward sources of water, etc.

to anticipate the event that is most likely to happen to them next ("a big thing is about to …"). Vast amounts of learning theory — those theorizing intelligence, as well as the mechanisms of classical and operant conditioning — have explored this feature of animal and human intelligence, that is, the ability to recognize patterns. Such "pattern recognition" is what enables "learning."[10] This is a kind of connectionism.[11] The key here, for all brains, according to Gilbert, is the time-horizon and prediction. To emphasize the temporal limitations and predictive nature of this orientation, he coined the word *nexting*: predicting the event that is most likely to happen next. And Gilbert's idea of *nexting* is strikingly similar to how intelligent machines work: they run algorithms to predict what will come next based on probabilities derived from past occurrences.

From the perspective of LLMs (Large Language Models), past words predict future words. Like LLMs, brains are prediction machines, even if they employ no formally specified statistical modeling. (Remember, neural nets were aimed at technical, not ontological, replication.) Such predictions are limited to already acquired data, and their focus is on the immediate future (what's next). Nexting is thus based, as Halpern stated, on the indeterminate past. Using the example above, the "last time I smelled this…" isn't concerned with the *specific memory* of the event, but simply an event of its kind occurring sometime in the past. Brains make these associations without reference to the specific instance of such learning. But the human ability to plan, to imagine an unrealized future, to consider alternative pathways, is a feature of human ability located in the frontal lobe, and it is distinct from nexting. And it is not simply that humans can imagine worlds that do not yet exist; they *experience* these imaginary worlds. In Gilbert's (2005, 5) words, "to imagine is to experience the world as it isn't, and has never been, but as it might be … making futures is the most important thing [the brain] does." Speaking of this second cognitive characteristic, Gilbert says the greatest human achievement is not pyramids or bridges, *but conscious experience*. Again: making the future is the most important thing the human brain does. So, we might say that AI-related technologies are fixated on the first type of prediction, namely, nexting, but they cannot abstract absence, as no data exists to support it. LLMs, for example, can only produce output based on already existing data. "Hallucinations" are not generative in the sense of human imagination; they are erroneous outputs derived from already existing data.

In this sense, machine intelligence, as currently deployed, may just be a "future killer," an automation of the end of history. Intelligent machines have no context other than their data: data is stored as memory-as-data, as in computer memory; it does not exist in space and time the way a human brain does, no matter how inclusive AI's data may be. The neural nets have abandoned temporality. While an AI can react given a context of data — say, the text on this page — this data is given as such; it arises from an indeterminate place and predictions can be made, nexting

---

[10] Certainly, there are different and competing conceptualizations of "learning." Yet, while it is common to contrast behaviorism and constructivism, for example; there are significant and often ignored commonalities between these two theories (Garrison 2018b). At issue here is the idea that learning refers to a functional change or transformation in behavior or understanding, both cognitively (memory recall) and affectively (frustration tolerance). That is, whether we are referring to the acquisition of declarative knowledge, the development of some practical skill, or even self-understanding, we are referring to change in the level and complexity of an ability or power. Here, we might also contrast the development of human power with the development of the "inhuman power" of machine intelligence (Dyer-Witheford, Kjøsen, and Steinhoff 2019). The effort to develop machine intelligence may signal efforts to thwart the development of human intelligence, despite the hype regarding how enabling AI will be.

[11] The dominant paradigm is connectionist. The foundation of so-called Deep Learning is connections along and among neural networks (Pasquinelli 2017)

can be done. Machine intelligence functions (nexts) as well as it does because it is dislodged from consciousness, whereas human intelligence operates "within" consciousness.

Consciousness can disrupt automatic processes (as when we bravely confront danger to pursue a noble end). It may be helpful to think of intelligence as what the brain *can* do, and consciousness as what the brain *does* in relation to its socio-historical location, including imagining a new location. This perspective regarding the "two futures" (what *will* be as distinct from what *could* be) is also significant because it helps break one of the key AI double binds: we are to support frenetic development and application of AI while simultaneously being constantly and increasingly reminded that AIs might become conscious, and act autonomously. The perspective outlined above breaks the bind by distinguishing the first form of intelligence, near-future-focused nexting, from the ability to abstract absence. The conscious experience celebrated by Gilbert is of the second form and does not originate with the former. Underlying fears of conscious machines find their source in the following flawed formula: as intelligence increases, so too does consciousness. But no matter how good AI (or any organism) gets at nexting, consciousness is not an automatic by-product of effective prediction, that is, intelligence. The biological bases of nexting (or its technical replication) and the biological and sociological bases of imagining and experiencing futures are not the same. Pattern recognition is not conjuring new worlds. These are categorically different things. Avoidance in AI discussions of the topic of this unique human ability is itself instructive, suggesting that a key issue with respect to machine intelligence is that of socializing people "away" from consciousness, especially as it relates to imaging societies unlike the ones we currently inhabit.

Psychotic Socialization -or- Removing Consciousness from the Intelligent Agent
Of course, AIs cannot *be* psychotic. They have no body. What psychology can be attributed to them is not embodied (e.g., they cannot feel worms under their skin when none are in fact there). AIs can, however, produce psychotic-like responses to prompts, or text or images that mimic human psychotic experiences. The hallucinations of intelligent machines are best understood, not as anomalies, but as evidence of how the technology works, where reason (thought) is reduced to rationality (logic), and applied outside space and time, that is, independently of historical context. Thematically, AI hallucinations parallel the two aspects of human psychosis noted above, incoherence in utterance and inapplicability to reality. While AIs are not psychotic in a strictly human sense of 'psychotic', the fear AIs will take over the world might be a psychotic projection promulgated by its main promoters, who are also the main AI boosters and those insisting it be made operational in nearly all spheres of daily life.

The perspective of the IPNB (Interpersonal Neurobiology) framework for mental well-being suggests disorders of the mind are in fact failures of *integration*. According to this paradigm, what we call emotions are in fact changes in states of integration (self, other, society). Thus, emotions are fundamental to our minds. Reasoning or abstraction does not operate absent emotional dynamics (Siegel, 2020). But AIs are stripped of the neurobiological and social context in which human understanding operates, especially those *future-making* functions associated with the frontal lobe! AI can only promote futures originating in the indeterminate past. While such machines might operationalize intelligence, doing so absent an embodied mind in an extant cultural context might lead such machines to be especially susceptible to "hallucinate." What is at stake, then, is the potential of intelligent machines to promote psychotic forms of socialization among humans, a concern that widens and deepens as machine logics are

increasingly integrated in all manner of social systems, interpersonal processes, and cultural practices. Elites believe youth need adjusting to these machine-oriented patterns of psychotic socialization. Hence the push for AI adoption in schools.

The thinking that produced neural networks required profound epistemological and ontological shifts in how scientists would do their work, and, importantly, the type of society needed for this work to succeed. Such change foreshadowed a change in how human beings are to be socialized. Famed cybernetician Norbert Wiener, according to Halpern (2014, 285-286), "indicated a desire to see an older archival order, adjoined to modern interests in taxonomy and ontology, rendered obsolete by another mode of thought invested in prediction, self-referentiality, and communication." That is, Wiener thought of "thought" in technological terms, where thought itself was "perhaps" best conceived as a machine. Weiner was explicit that cybernetics was ushering in a new industrial revolution. To understand how far that revolution has come since Weiner's 1950s heyday, consider how much we use the word "feedback" when referencing commentary on student papers, or anything else for that matter. The ubiquity of this concept — a core cybernetic principal referring to the automaticity of a self-regulating system, for example, the logic of a free market — provides a glimpse into the seismic change now before us. As education might be thought of as the development of thinking, knowledgeable, moral agents (human power), the implications for schooling are profound as students become socialized into machine-impoverished versions of "thought," "knowledge," "morality" and "agency" (Garrison 2022).

The problem is not that AI doesn't function as well as we want because it is not capable of consciousness, does not have feelings, etc. *It functions well, very well indeed, because it cannot achieve consciousness* in the planning-for-the-future sense of consciousness possessed by humans (Garrison, 2018a). The success of intelligent machines is rooted in removal of intelligent action from a historical subject. It is not simply or even mainly that AIs are cheaper and more efficient workers. It is that they are *not* "workers" at all, which makes them especially appealing to corporate interests. The "freer" the labor — free in the senses of low/no cost and lack of attachment to anything but the organization for which labor is accomplished — the better for the bosses. Detaching consciousness from intelligence solves a problem, especially in terms of Gilbert's contentions regarding conscious experience and its role in future-making. With intelligent *machines*, consciousness is no longer "in the way." It is important to point out that architects of our present social system have long dreamed of estranging intelligence from human consciousness — hence the centuries old desire for automatic decisions, where there is no accountability (Garrison, 2017). This delinking desire is evident, for example, in the development of intelligence testing. Such tests strategically confused intelligence with consciousness. The result: selection of minds capable of performing advanced tasks absent an evaluation of the tasks' purposes (Garrison 2009).

A process that promotes intelligence absent consciousness implies a specific set of socialization imperatives. Three areas are theorized to be of particular focus when on guard against socializing humans into machine-dominated culture:

1. Socialization to be like (to valorize) a machine, 'agency' defined as 'being responsive to feedback', especially as an overarching purpose of agency.

2. Socialization to live among machines, to accept machines as trusted peers in all social endeavors.

3. Socialization to accept constant machine mediation, to accept a view of reality that reduces experience to data and a view of knowledge that reduces meaning to communication and control.

The specific set of socialization imperatives might best be summed up in terms of constructing a "cybernetic personality," a psychology rooted in Hobbesian political theory brought fully to life with intelligent machines under the command of big tech (whose captains of the industry, by the way, *do* wish to claim everything for themselves, see Becker, 2025). In this born-again Hobbesian scenario, AI is the new Leviathan, the new person of state (the grand hallucination) who stands above and rules over society (the grand fallacy). Inspired by Hobbes' vision of the state as the greatest social power, fear of which stabilizes relations among individuals and among social groups, the cybernetic thesis centers not on machine intelligence per se, but on the fixing of humans to machines through continuous automatic feedback mechanisms — enmeshing us in self-regulating systems, a human-machine symbiosis. It is a notably Hobbesian feature of the cybernetic society that it is *the system that is self-regulating, not the individuals or groups subject to the system's logic*. Cybernetics moves away from notions of understanding, explanation, and consciousness to positions of prediction and control (Garrison 2022, 233).

For such an idea to materialize, broad changes in social attitudes, norms, beliefs and intellectual and social habits are required. Thus, the problem is not that AI will achieve consciousness; the problem is that *our consciousness will change* as we adapt to a social context dominated by machine logic. AI adoption in schools implies more than just readying youth for work: it may be inculcated adjustment to a very particular social order. This socialization includes new configurations for addressing the "social-emotional" problem of coping ("what can student-machines handle"), the philosophical and emotional problems of aim and motivation ("how can external control be presented as non-aversive"), and the problem of restricting imagination such that it remains rooted in the past ("how can people be made to perpetuate the world without considering changing it"). Think of this as automating TINA (There Is No Alternative). Taken as a whole, this socialization is rooted in the logic of cybernetics and behaviorist psychology, both of which are consistent with neoliberal social forms (Garrison, 2018b). As such, intelligent machines can quite chillingly and dangerously widely nurture a "cybernetic personality" — an automated *homo economicus endlessly responsive to feedback and limited in imaginative capacity.* While often thought of as an ideological project, it is wise to reconsider AI as an imperative for *machine socialization*, a wish for an axiomatically automated human world in which no one will ever even be able to think to say of AI double binds and other absurdities of machine logic:

It just feels nuts!

References

Adornetti, Ines, and Francesco Ferretti. 2021. "The Narrative Self in Schizophrenia and Its Cognitive Underpinnings." In Psychopathology and Philosophy of Mind, edited by Valentina Cardella, 291:96–116. Routledge.

Akhtar, Salman. 2018. Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychoanalysis. Routledge.

Bates, David W. 2025. An Artificial History of Natural Intelligence. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Bateson, Gregory. 1987. Steps to an Ecology of Mind. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc.

Bateson, Gregory, Don D. Jackson, Jay Haley, and John H. Weakland. 1963. "A Note on the Double Bind." Family Process 2 (1): 154–61.

Becker, Adam. 2025. More Everything Forever. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Bender, Emily M., and Alex Hanna. 2025. The AI Con. New York, NY: Collins.

Blili-Hamelin, Borhane, Christopher Graziul, Leif Hancox-Li, Hananel Hazan, El-Mahdi El-Mhamdi, Avijit Ghosh, Katherine Heller, et al. 2025. "Stop Treating `AGI' as the North-Star Goal of AI Research." ArXiv [Cs.CY]. arXiv. http://arxiv.org/abs/2502.03689.

Crawford, Kate. 2021. The Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence. Yale University Press.

Dawson, Joe, and Scott Sleek. 2018. "The Fluidity of Time: Scientists Uncover How Emotions Alter Time Perception." APS Observer 31 (September). https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/the-fluidity-of-time.

Dyer-Witheford, Nick, Atle Mikkola Kjøsen, and James Steinhoff. 2019. Inhuman Power: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Capitalism. Pluto Press.

Engle, Nate. 2024. "New Arizona Charter School Will Use AI in Place of Human Teachers." KJZZ. December 18, 2024. https://www.kjzz.org/education/2024-12-18/new-arizona-charter-school-will-use-ai-in-place-of-human-teachers.

Fuchs, Thomas, and Zeno Van Duppen. 2017. "Time and Events: On the Phenomenology of Temporal Experience in Schizophrenia." Psychopathology 50 (1): 68–74.

Garrison, Mark J. 2009. A Measure of Failure: The Political Origins of Standardized Testing. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

———. 2017. "Notes on Classical Probability Theory and the Origins of Big Data Decision Rationality." Presented at the Annual meeting of the American Educational Studies Association, Pittsburgh, PA.

———. 2018a. "Learning to Forget: The Behaviorist Conception of Memory Driving Digital Media Platforms." Presented at the Mediating Change Conference, Denton, Texas.

———. 2018b. "Resurgent Behaviorism and the Rise of Neoliberal Schooling." In Handbook of Global Education Reform, edited by Kenneth Saltman and Alex Means, 323–49. Hoboken, NY: Wiley-Blackwell.

———. 2022. "Confronting the Digital Leviathan in Education: On Cybernetic Pedagogy and Data-Intensive Algorithmic Technologies." In Handbook of Critical Approaches to Politics and Policy of Education, edited by Kenneth J. Saltman and Nicole Nguyen, 225–40. Routledge.

Gilbert, Daniel. 2006. Stumbling on Happiness. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Halpern, Orit. 2014. "Cybernetic Rationality." Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory 15 (2): 223–38.

Kelly, Kevin. 2011. What Technology Wants. New York, NY: Penguin.

Kitroeff, Natalie, Kashmir Hill, Nina Feldman, Sydney Harper, Shannon M. Lin, Mary Wilson, Brendan Klinkenberg, et al. 2025. "She Fell in Love With ChatGPT. Like, Actual Love. With Sex." The New York Times, February 25, 2025. https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/25/podcasts/the-daily/ai-chatgpt-boyfriend-relationship.html.

Klein, Naomi, and Astra Taylor. 2025. "The Rise of End Times Fascism." The Guardian, April 13, 2025. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2025/apr/13/end-times-fascism-far-right-trump-musk.

McQuillan, Dan. 2023. "Predicted Benefits, Proven Harms: How AI's Algorithmic Violence
    Emerged from Our Own Social Matrix." The Sociological Review Magazine, June.
    https://doi.org/10.51428/tsr.ekpj9730.

McQuillan, Dan, Juliane Jarke, and Teresa Cerratto Pargman. 2024. "We Are at an Extreme
    Point Where We Have to Go All in on What We Really Believe Education Should Be
    About." Postdigital Science and Education 6 (1): 360–68.

Metz, Cade, Karen Weise, Marco Hernandez, Mike Isaac, and Anjali Singhvi. 2025. "How A.i.
    Is Changing the Way the World Builds Computers." The New York Times, March 17, 2025.
    https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/03/16/technology/ai-data-centers.html.

Minkowski, E. 1970. Lived Time: Phenomenological and Psychopathological Studies.
    Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy. Evanston, IL:
    Northwestern University Press.

Nazaryan, Alexander. 2025. "Digital Therapists Get Stressed Too, Study Finds." The New York
    Times, March 17, 2025. https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/17/science/chatgpt-digital-
    therapists-anxiety.html.

Pasquinelli, Matteo. 2017. "Machines That Morph Logic: Neural Networks and the Distorted
    Automation of Intelligence as Statistical Inference." Glass Bead. October 25, 2017.
    https://www.glass-bead.org/article/machines-that-morph-logic/.

———. 2019. "How a Machine Learns and Fails — A Grammar of Error for Artificial
    Intelligence." Sphere: Journal of Digital Cultures, no. 5: 1–17.

"Research Guides: Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Information Literacy: What Does AI Get
    Wrong?" August 16, 2023. https://lib.guides.umd.edu/c.php?g=1340355&p=9880574.

Rodriguez, Richard J., and Victor E. C. Ortuño. 2019. "The Destructuring of Time in Psychosis."
    In Managing Screen Time in an Online Society, 311–40. IGI Global.

Sacasas, L. M. 2019. "Technology Is a Branch of Moral Philosophy." January 19, 2019.
    https://thefrailestthing.com/2019/01/19/technology-is-a-branch-of-moral-philosophy/.

Sass, Louis, and Jasper Feyaerts. 2024. "Schizophrenia, the Very Idea: On Self-Disorder,
    Hyperreflexivity, and the Diagnostic Concept." Schizophrenia Research 267 (May): 473–86.

Siegel, Daniel J. 2020. The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to
    Shape Who We Are. Third edition. The Guilford Press.

Stetar, William. April 4, 2025. "The Collapse of Language and the Epistemic Fractures in AI."
    Standing on the Shoulders of Giants. https://copin43.hashnode.dev/the-hallucination-myth-
    how-developers-of-language-models-are-gaslighting-us-and-why-we-should-be-alarmed.

Tangermann, Victor. June 2, 2025. "Therapy Chatbot Tells Recovering Addict to Have a Little
    Meth as a Treat." Futurism. https://futurism.com/therapy-chatbot-addict-meth.

Toews, Rob. 2024. "10 AI Predictions For 2025." Radical Ventures. December 23, 2024.
    https://radical.vc/10-ai-predictions-for-2025/.

Tolkien, J.R.R. The Fellowship of the Ring. 1954. London: George Allen & Unwin.

Ungar, Laura. January 13, 2025. "Elon Musk Says a Third Patient Got a Neuralink Brain
    Implant. The Work Is Part of a Booming Field." AP News. https://apnews.com/article/elon-
    musk-neuralink-brain-computer-interface-9dbc92206389f27fd032825cf1597ee5.

Building Liberatory Community and Capacity at Camp:
Lessons for Anti-Democratic Times

Briana M. Bivens and Maya Aleman
University of Florida

Abstract: What alternative spaces exist for children and youth to creatively construct their own futures, and what visions are they articulating for their lives and educational experiences? We are curious about 20th century summer camps — particularly those with social change missions — as a productive historical site from which to theorize how young people have built habits of democracy and cooperation, identified concrete levers for social justice, and developed a progressive political analysis in climates hostile to equality and transformative change.

The University of Florida, where we (Briana and Maya, co-authors of this article) study, teach, and work, is being reshaped in the image of conservatism. To comply with state law, courses that engage topics like race, gender, and identity were removed from the general education rolls and DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) funding was eliminated, foreshadowing the more systematic attack on DEI launched by the second Trump administration.[1] On the national scale, trans children are being stripped of gender-affirming supports, the Department of Education is in danger of being dismantled, and the federal government is trying its hand at dictating what can and cannot be taught in the nation's classrooms. Children and youth are caught up in the hyper-partisan crossfire, arguably at the center of "culture wars," as parents, policymakers, and pundits debate what can and should be taught in schools and higher education institutions young people themselves attend. At a moment when many people are talking *about* children and youth, and as schools and educational institutions increasingly become sites of censorship and surveillance, we wonder: What alternative spaces exist for children and youth to creatively construct their own futures? What visions are they articulating for their lives and educational experiences?

We seek to engage this question historically, looking to summer camps in the early- to mid-20th century that provided young people with critical opportunities for community-building and experimental democratic living. Summer camps attracted city-dwelling young people to the countryside for the leisure, freedom, community, and outdoor adventure promised by camp life. Camps were not uniform in their philosophies and approaches; they spanned the ideological spectrum, from camps that sought to socialize children and youth into prevailing social and cultural mores to those that aimed to structure camp as an experiment in cooperation, democratic living, and social change.[2] We are curious about 20th century summer camps — particularly those with social change missions — as a productive historical site from which to theorize how young people have built habits of democracy and cooperation, identified concrete levers for social justice and developed political analysis in climates hostile to equality and transformative change. In times of political turbulence and uncertainty, we find power in historical inquiry not

---

[1] Andrew Atterbury, "Florida Universities are Culling Hundreds of General Education Courses," *Politico*, October 14, 2024, https://www.politico.com/news/2024/10/14/florida-university-classes-ron-desantis-00183453; Marjorie Valbrun, "U of Florida Eliminates DEI Positions, Appointments and Spending," *Inside Higher Ed*, March 4, 2024, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/quick-takes/2024/03/04/university-florida-eliminates-dei-positions-appointments.

[2] Leslie Paris, *Children's Nature: The Rise of the American Summer Camp* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); and Abigail Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness: Summer Camps and the Shaping of American Youth, 1890-1960* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

so much to draw direct connective lines between then and now, but to enrich the collection of possibilities for thought and action as we navigate what feminist historian Elsa Barkley Brown termed "an asymmetrical world."[3]

We come to our shared interest in children and youth's political capacity-building in anti-democratic times through our own histories as campers and community organizers. Briana spent seven years in Athens, GA as a community organizer, working in issue-based organizations and on electoral campaigns to advance social and economic justice through influencing local and state policy. She managed a winning campaign for a county commissioner, developed political education programming to build community members' capacity to impact local policy, and supported volunteers in outreach efforts and direct action. She, and many other active local organizers, also experienced the exhaustion and debilitation of burnout, having witnessed the slow pace of change and struggling to build a sustainable relationship to organizing in a persistent climate of urgency. This experience with burnout that led to Briana's passion for better understanding of social movement sustainability, especially to query the extent to which intergenerational, relationship-based approaches can support organizing and education for the long haul.

When Maya was in 6th grade, her elementary school in Carle Place, NY organized a long-term field trip at the end of the school year. For one week, the whole grade went to a sleepaway camp at The Ashokan Center in the Catskill Mountains. The Ashokan Center focuses on education and community building through integration of nature, history, sustainability, and art. Without access to digital technology, students came together to learn about the environment and its folk culture. Maya always remembered this experience as transformative. Camp was a place where she was able to interact with peers freely and explore social and physical spaces collaboratively. Especially when analyzing her current and past desires as a youth, she finds herself imagining spaces which are connective and collaborative.

U.S. Summer Camping and the Radical-Progressive Camp Milieu

Summer camps emerged in the late 19th century from two defining impulses. First, camp architects were motivated by the desire to protect the innocence of children — most often children living in urban areas — by bringing them closer to nature and evoking what Leslie Paris calls a "nostalgic countermodern" to urbanized, industrial trappings of modern life. Second, camp visionaries sought to bracket childhood as a precious sort of "time apart" from burdens of adulthood, reflecting the spirit of Progressive Era reforms across the criminal-legal, education, and social service sectors that invested in children's welfare and development.[4] Summer camps at the turn of the 20th century not only reflected anti-modern anxieties, but also, according to historian Abigail Van Slyck, helped to "invent a particular version of childhood."[5] Summer camps were part of the growing apparatus of Progressive Era institutions that produced and managed new definitions of childhood. Deputized to protect and care for children, summer camps joined public schools, after-school programs, and juvenile justice infrastructure in paradoxically embracing the creativity and rights of children while also seeking to channel and

---

[3] Elsa Barkley Brown, "'What Has Happened Here': The Politics of Difference in Women's History and Feminist Politics," *Feminist Studies* 18, no. 2 (1992): 307.
[4] Paris, *Children's Nature*, 9 and 4, respectively.
[5] Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness*, xxi.

contain young people's actions in ways adults deemed safe and appropriate.[6] Summer camps reflected the notion that children deserved time for adult-directed leisure and creativity and that parents would benefit from embracing assistance from professionals and child development experts in the raising of their children.[7]

Early summer camps were operated by a range of entities — from foundations and religious organizations to social service agencies and charities — that socialized children into doctrinal values, cultural practices, and race and gender norms.[8] Groups like the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America and the YMCA, for example, sought to inculcate Christian values, and Jewish camps emerged in the early 20th century to both challenge the discrimination Jewish children faced in other summer camps and to preserve Jewish cultural traditions.[9] Boys and girls most often attended separate camps, and few children of color attended camp at all until after World War I.[10] While most early summer camps were segregated by race, religion, and gender, organizations such as settlement houses sought to extend the benefits of bucolic camp life to a broader range of children, often curating religiously and ethnically diverse spaces for working-class children. While the history of summer camping reveals that there were some camps across the U.S. that served children across race, class, and gender lines, it was primarily urban, white, class-privileged children who benefited from the idyll of camp life.

A subset of camps, however, sought to transform dominant societal norms and socialize children into more marginal progressive and radical traditions. Mickenberg described how many radicals in the Popular Front — a broad political formation in the 1930s comprising progressives, socialists, communists, and others united against capitalism and fascism — saw "children as the logical outlet for their utopian vision,"[11] aiming not only to apply democratic and progressive ideals to the care and education of children but also to support children's capacity-building as social change agents. While radical and progressive summer camps taking shape in this context were certainly not a monolith, they usually embodied one or more of the following: a commitment to and/or outright affiliation with communism or socialism; affinity with the democratic, child-centered approaches of the progressive education movement; commitments to anti-racism and racial integration; and investment in and connections to the organized labor

---

[6] See, for example, Dana Fusco, "History of Youth Work: Transitions, Illuminations, and Refractions," in *Youth and Inequality in Education*, ed. Dana Fusco and Michael Heathfield (New York: Routledge, 2016), 39; Soo Ah Kwon, *Uncivil Youth: Race, Activism, and Affirmative Governmentality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 27-44; Patricia Soung, "Social and Biological Constructions of Youth: Implications for Juvenile Justice and Racial Equity," *Northwestern Journal of Law and Social Policy* 6, no. 2 (2011): 428-44; Geoff K. Ward, *The Black Child-Savers: Racial Democracy and Juvenile Justice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); and Robert Halpern, "A Different Kind of Child Development Institution: The History of After-School Programs for Low-Income Children," *Teachers College Record* 104, no. 2 (2002): 178–211.

[7] Paris, *Children's Nature*, 6; Julia Mickenberg, "The Pedagogy of the Popular Front: 'Progressive Parenting' for a New Generation, 1918-1945" in *The American Child: A Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Caroline Levander and Carol Singley (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 226-45; and Elizabeth Rose, *A Mother's Job: The History of Day Care, 1890-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 100-11.

[8] Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness*, xxviii-xxix.

[9] Paris, *Children's Nature*, 7; Sandra Fox, *The Jews of Summer: Summer Camp and Jewish Culture in Postwar America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2023); and Jay Mechling, "Children in Scouting and Other Organizations" in *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World*, ed. Paula Fass (New York: Routledge), 592-612.

[10] Paris, *Children's Nature*, 58, 74.

[11] Julia Mickenberg, *Learning from the Left: Children's Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6.

movement. Many camps were concentrated in the New York City area, where Jewish socialists and communists organized children's programs that brought Jewish cultural traditions and socialist, pro-labor values to the structure of camp life. Some camps were founded by Communist-led organizations and relied on the support of labor unions to enable kids' access to camp. Others sought to apply the principles of progressive education to summer camping, nurturing children's creativity and cooperation while organizing camp as an experiment in democratic living. The progressive and radical summer camps we discuss throughout this article were also defined by their racially integrated, coeducational composition, a transgressive choice in a camp landscape that predominantly reflected the gendered, racially exclusionary, and racially segregated norms of U.S. society.

The anti-Communist fervor of the Second Red Scare challenged the legacy and endurance of summer camps aligned with radicalism and progressivism. At a moment when racial integration and civil rights were expediently conflated with communism, broad swaths of Left-aligned organizations and individuals became targets of white supremacist and anti-Communist backlash. This political climate posed an existential threat not only to the organizations that sponsored some progressive and radical summer camps but also, by extension, to the summer camps themselves. For example, the International Workers Order (IWO) — a leftist mutual benefit society and insurance organization — was identified as a "subversive organization" by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and dissolved in 1954, imperiling summer camps like Wo-Chi-Ca and Camp Kinderland that relied on its support.[12] The anti-Communist purge extended directly to summer camps, too, with the State of New York launching an investigation into "Communist-established summer camps" in 1955 and HUAC demanding testimonies from many summer camp organizers targeted for their suspected subversive political affiliations.[13]

In addition to state-based targeting, summer camps faced racial violence and physical attacks by detractors emboldened by domestic containment and its underlying white supremacist, anti-integration agenda. Camp Wo-Chi-Ca is just one camp whose demise was hastened by racist backlash. After a series of mob attacks, and fears of escalating violence, the camp changed its name and relocated in an attempt to survive. But Red-Scare-induced financial troubles and low morale contributed to the camp's closure in 1954.[14] Racialized backlash also conditioned the emergence of Camp Highlander, a children's camp run by the Highlander Folk School from 1956 to 1958. Highlander, the education center in Tennessee best known as a movement-building hub for adults in labor and civil rights organizations, absorbed the children's camp from Koinonia Farm, which was forced to find a new home for its camp after it was targeted by county officials enraged by its commitment to racial integration.[15] For many radical and progressive summer camps, climates defined by white supremacist and anti-Communist backlash led to their demise. But others miraculously found ways to adapt and survive, drawing on

---

[12] Orion A. Teal, "The Moral Economy of Postwar Radical Interracial Summer Camping," in *The Economic Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Michael Ezra (New York: Routledge, 2013), 60.

[13] Paul Mishler, *Raising Reds: The Young Pioneers, Radical Summer Camps, and Communist Political Culture in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 132; Teal, "The Moral Economy of Postwar Radical Interracial Summer Camping," 60.

[14] June Levine and Gene Gordon, *Tales of Wo-Chi-Ca: Blacks, Whites, and Reds at Camp* (Walnut Creek, CA: June Levine and Gene Gordon, 2002), 151-205.

[15] Nico Slate, "Between Utopia and Jim Crow: The Highlander Folk School, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Racial Borders of the Summer Camp, 1956-1961," *The Journal of American History* 109, no. 3 (2022): 571-95.

community support and harnessing more explicit political education approaches with young people to weather coordinated assaults and equip children and youth with the tools for liberatory social analysis and action. As we ponder what we might learn from this summer camp legacy in our current anti-democratic moment, we propose that both sets of camps — the ones that endured and those that didn't — have something to teach us about the promise and possibility of children and youth's creative energy, cooperation, and justice-driven political action in hostile times.

Two Lessons from Camp Life for Anti-Democratic Times

Progressive and radical summer camps in the Progressive Era, interwar, and postwar periods provide a productive window through which to analyze liberatory, democratic space-making with and for young people. These spaces existed outside of schools, unfettering children from the conventions and confinement of the classroom and encouraging a creative, autonomous spirit. At the same time, many camps operated as sites of subversion, existing in contexts of political backlash. Orion Teal has also shown how the racially integrated communities that radical summer camps created buffered some of them from Red Scare attacks as community members came to camps' defense during moments of existential threat.[16] We engage and build on this line of inquiry to explore how radical summer camps nurtured children and youth's cooperative ethos and political action within and against climates antagonistic to inclusive democracy, racial and social justice, and bold visions for a more equitable world.

Camp Life Lesson #1: Democratic, Cooperative Living for Social Change: As children came to be more widely regarded as rights-bearing subjects deserving of leisure, creativity, and autonomy, it was not uncommon for camp architects to claim camp as a democratic experience. Paris observed that "camp leaders of every generation extolled the democratic possibilities of camp life and promised to mold better citizens without coercion,"[17] a lofty aspiration that didn't always translate into truly cooperative or intergenerational power-sharing. Many camps, for example, mimicked a rigid approach that echoed the efficiency and organizational logic of industrial life. Others, however, were inspired by the child-centered pedagogies and democratic education approaches of progressive education, striving to facilitate children's freedom, creativity, and decision-making. The radical and progressive camp milieu reflected an interest in democratic living and cooperation not as isolated practices but as part of a broader set of philosophical and political values. In many ways, camp was a reprieve from the regimentation and racial isolation most children experienced in their schools and communities. Children were often entrusted with decision-making power and contributed to planning and caring for the camp experience. Campers also learned about social issues through direct engagement with difference and social problems, building capacity for social analysis and effective action.

Between 1956 and 1958 Camp Highlander, the co-educational, racially integrated summer camp for children at the Highlander Folk School, reflected the values and commitments grounding Highlander itself. Highlander opened in 1932 as a hub for Southern movement-building, attracting folks in labor and civil rights circles from across the South eager to challenge capitalism, racism, and labor exploitation in their communities. Highlander staff rejected formalized curricula in favor of a democratized, bottom-up approach. Influenced by progressive educators and reformers like John Dewey and Jane Addams, Highlander's educational program was organized around the problems and knowledge that community members themselves

---

[16] Teal, "The Moral Economy of Postwar Radical Interracial Summer Camping."
[17] Paris, *Children's Nature*, 230.

brought. At residential workshops, Black and white movement-involved people lived, learned, and strategized together, a rare example of racial integration and collaboration in the Jim Crow South. The goal, ultimately, was to cooperatively build capacity for social analysis and action that workers and community members could incorporate into their own lives and workplaces.[18]

This spirit of grassroots knowledge production and democratic living was expressed at Camp Highlander, too. Young campers participated in outdoor and creative activities and shared in the maintenance of the camp experience, building community across lines of race and gender. The first camp newsletter in 1956 described how children worked together on tasks such as meal preparation and clean-up not simply for the sake of cultivating work ethic but for the explicit, collectivist purpose of developing "responsibilities to other than our own interests."[19] Campers contributed to the newspaper, too, furnishing creative stories, songs, and drawings and recounting tales of swimming, hiking, and dancing at camp.[20] In a 1957 report, camp staff cited how the outpost camping experiences were especially productive in cultivating a spirit of collaboration, noting the level of community care children learned to express in a situation where they had to figure out how to build a fire, administer first aid, and cook outdoors.[21] In all, staff and counselors' writings of camp life focused less on the specificity of the activities themselves and more on the quality of relationships and interdependence the activities made possible.

Camp staff understood cooperation and democratic living as an avenue through which to develop children's social consciousness and prepare them for future social change work. They noted how the cooperative contours of camp life helped children to "mature socially and realize the definite responsibilities which will eventually be theirs as citizens."[22] Yet, historian Nico Slate observed how initially, the camp wasn't very direct in its socio-political education, adopting a color-blind approach to racial integration and failing to forge explicit conversations with campers about race and racism. Exposure to racial difference through cooperative living was not sufficient to provide children with the critical analysis needed to identify and challenge racial hierarchy. However, as Highlander intensified its role in the civil rights movement and increasingly drew the ire of segregationists, Slate explained how "its approach to youth education changed."[23] Slate argued that after police raided Highlander in 1959 looking for a way to compel its closure, camp life at Highlander took on a decidedly more activist stance. Highlander distanced itself from the colorblind approach of Camp Highlander, launching its Youth Project in 1960 with the explicit goal of equipping youth with concrete theories and strategies they could harness to uproot Jim Crow and agitate for desegregation in their communities. Highlander's children's and youth camps illustrate how the spirit of democratic

---

[18] For accounts of Highlander and its educational approaches, see, for example, John M. Glen, *Highlander: No Ordinary School* (2nd Ed.), (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1996); Frank Adams, *Unearthing Seeds of Fire: The Idea of Highlander* (Winston-Salem: John F. Blair Publishing, 1975); Stephen Preskill, *Education in Black and White: Myles Horton and the Highlander Center's Vision for Social Justice* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021); and Dale Jacobs, ed., *The Myles Horton Reader: Education for Social Change* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2003).

[19] "Appendix," *The Koinonia-Highlandish News*, July 15, 1956, box 56, folder 11, Highlander Research and Education Center Records, 1917-2017 (hereafter HREC), Wisconsin Historical Society (hereafter WHS), Madison, WI.

[20] "Appendix," *The Koinonia-Highlandish News*, July 15, 1956; *The Koinonia-Highlandish News*, August 11, 1956, box 56, folder 11, HREC, WHS.

[21] "Camp Koinonia-Highlander Report: Summer Season 1957," 1957, box 56, folder 11, HREC, WHS.

[22] "Camp Koinonia-Highlander Report."

[23] Slate, "Between Utopia and Jim Crow," 582.

living and cooperation they sought to cultivate evolved into more explicit activist strategies, preparing young people to work together for anti-racist social change.

Further north and decades earlier, the Workers Children's Camp — or Camp Wo-Chi-Ca, as it was better known — also embodied an ethos of multiracial cooperative living. Wo-Chi-Ca was founded in New Jersey in 1934 for working-class children, many from union families. Like other radical children's camps, it was supported by the IWO and labor unions who recognized the camp's revolutionary potential. A memoir written by a former camper, June Levine, and her partner, Gene Gordon, recount what made Wo-Chi-Ca unique: "It was co-educational, secular, racially and ethnically diverse, not folklore-centric, and "dirt cheap."[24]

Wo-Chi-Ca was a space for children to develop and practice liberatory values in camp life that they could carry with them out into the world. The goal, in other words, was for "children to experience 'The World of the Future' today, through shared living with those of different racial and ethnic backgrounds" so they could challenge oppressive social hierarchies. Former campers recalled activities that afforded children time and freedom to practice democratic ways of being, including electing a "bunk president," running weekly town meetings, and engaging in self-expression (through art, song, and dance, for example) that would "aid them in understanding and appreciating each other's ideas and differences." Campers' exposure to the habits and possibilities of labor movement-building and democratic living spanned beyond the interpersonal, too. They engaged directly with the labor movement, visiting picket lines and marching alongside hosiery workers, cement workers, steel workers, and masons. Campers were exposed to revolutionary concepts less through traditional instruction and more through the arrangement of relationships and processes at camp. Refuting claims that Wo-Chi-Ca was a Communist indoctrination camp, Levine and Gordon insisted, "The Marxism the kids experienced was in the fee structure that subsidized the poorest children, in the co-op where wealth sharing was applied to daily distribution of candy bars [...], in the internationalism the kids were taught, in the songs they sang, in unionism, and foremost in black-white unity." Many campers fondly remembered how the prefigurative politics nurtured at camp inspired them in adulthood, attracting them to social work, education, and movements of the New Left where they put anti-oppressive commitments to work for social change. While the camp's democratic, anti-racist, and activist spirit ultimately couldn't insulate it from the Red Scare attacks against these very values, the history and legacy of Wo-Chi-Ca exemplifies how children have practiced and can practice democracy and social change within and against political repression.

Camp Life Lesson #2: Community-Building through Culture and Folklife: Camp communities were also sustained by creating vital connections with history, nature, and place. In keeping with the anti-modernization impulse characterizing the 20th century summer camp movement, some camps focused on creating connections through reviving the folkways of the surrounding area, engaging young people in storytelling, song, and culture-sharing.

Camp Woodland, a progressive and racially integrated summer camp founded in 1938 and located in the Catskill Mountains of Phoenicia, New York, was one such camp that understood how folk traditions could nurture community-building and liberation. Mishler described how Camp Woodland's approach was anchored in relationship-building, as camp architects sought to cultivate mutual respect through connecting progressive philosophies emerging from urban areas

---

[24] Levine and Gordon, *Tales of Wo-Chi-Ca*, 2. Quotes in the immediately following paragraph are from Levine and Gordon, 3, 11, 20, and 110 respectively.

with the knowledge and resources possessed by the local rural community. Norman Studer, the founder and director of Camp Woodland, emphasized the importance of folklife and collaboration, seeking to ensure that campers were well-versed in the culture of the surrounding Catskills communities. Studer invited local residents to camp, cultivating mutual learning environments and creating space for community members to "share stories, songs, and life histories with children."[25] Campers also immersed themselves in the local area, traveling to community sites with radical histories and visiting "local craftsmen, woodsmen, storytellers, and musicians."[26] Campers strived to preserve the folklife of the region through documentation, even serving as docents at a local museum.[27]

Camp Woodland facilitators also nurtured connection to local folkways through music. A book titled *Folk Songs of the Catskills* began as a "unique quest for rural folklore, folklife, and folk history" by the city children and adult staff members of Camp Woodland. Campers assisted composers Herbert Haufrecht and Norman Cazden in writing down lines of folk songs the musicians performed for them.[28] The collection of these unique oral traditions, songs, and stories led to the creation of more folk songs which spoke to the current events and feelings characterizing the local community. For example, Herbert Haufrecht's "We've Come from the City" addresses "local resistance to the Lackawack Dam, which drowned several villages."[29] Folk songs that Woodland campers helped to document and preserve were performed at the annual folk festival, uniting in song local community members, campers, and visitors from surrounding areas.[30]

When Camp Woodland finally faced its own anti-Communist and segregationist probes — an increasingly common occurrence among the progressive and radical camp milieu — an attack on the camp felt like an attack on the locals. Teal documented how the camp's interracialism and strong community ties enabled it to withstand Red Scare attacks. The Camp Woodland Parents' Association rallied behind the camp and its values, boycotting nearby segregated establishments and advocating against calls for the Camp Director to undergo a loyalty oath. By using art and folklore to build relationships with the community and generate buy-in around shared progressive values, Camp Woodland survived the threats of the Cold War and operated until 1961, closing due to financial troubles rather than the common plight of racist and anti-Communist opposition.[31]

The practice and preservation of folkways and cultural life also anchored Camp Kinderland. The camp, founded in New York in 1925 during a time of thriving Jewish radicalism in the city, was firmly situated "within the milieu of the Communist-allied working-class movement" and immersed campers in Yiddish cultural traditions.[32] In their book honoring the centennial of Camp Kinderland, former camper and staff member Fay Itkowitz and Mitchell Silver,

---

[25] Mishler, *Raising Reds*, 103.
[26] Emily Paradise Achtenberg, "Friends and Neighbors: Remembering Pete Seeger and Camp Woodland," *Monthly Review* 66, no. 8 (2015): 17.
[27] Mishler, *Raising Reds*, 104; Achtenberg, "Friends and Neighbors," 17.
[28] Norman Cazden, Herbert Haufrecht, and Norman Studer, *Folk Songs of the Catskills* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1982), 1, 4.
[29] Achthenberg, "Friends and Neighbors," 17.
[30] Cazden, Haufrecht, and Studer, *Folk Songs of the Catskills*, 4.
[31] Teal, "The Moral Economy of Postwar Radical Interracial Summer Camping," 65-68; and Mishler, *Raising Reds*, 106-07.
[32] Mishler, *Raising Reds*, 89.

respectively, recounted the cultural dimensions of camp programming that "stressed the Yiddish language, an awareness and pride in the contributions of Jewish immigrants to the American labor movement, and an acquaintance with the histories of freedom struggles around the world."[33] Through song and dance, campers learned about Jewish history, liberation struggles, and the labor movement. For decades, dance teacher Edith Segal combined modern dance and "folk dances of Eastern Europe" to facilitate cross-cultural communication and connection.[34] She choreographed dances for campers that engaged directly with both contemporary social issues and histories of violence and resistance, including the "Tableau of the Warsaw Ghetto Fighters" that artfully conveyed Jewish resistance during the Holocaust.[35] Because dance didn't require verbal communication, participants and spectators from different backgrounds and countries of origin were able to understand one another.

The strong sense of community that was created, in part, through celebration and practice of Yiddish cultural traditions helped to sustain Kinderland in times of crisis. Kinderland, like a handful of other radical children's camps, was sponsored by the IWO. When anti-Communist hysteria landed the IWO on HUAC's list of subversive organizations, Kinderland was directly threatened. Teal outlined how the New York State Insurance Board attempted to wrest control of Kinderland and foreclose on the property, threatening the camp's very existence. Yet, Kinderland's strong network of relationships enabled it to weather the threat. Citing one camp supporter, Teal described how community members raised $100,000 in three days to avoid the foreclosure, demonstrating Kinderland was "not just a camp, but a cause."[36]

Camp Kinderland continues to thrive today at its new home in Massachusetts. It's not centered as explicitly in a working-class politics and no longer aligns itself with the Communist Party, but instead engages a more expansive array of issues and adopts an intersectional, internationalist orientation to social justice. Nevertheless, campers continue to participate in many of the same cultural traditions sown in the camp's early days: They attend marches, perform social justice musicals that integrate history and tradition, and participate in the "Peace Olympics" in which campers learn about history and progressive values through themed sports competitions.[37] Through art, dance, and other expressions of cultural sharing and folklife, these summer camps nurtured community and, as Teal described, a common "sense of purpose"[38] that built their capacity to stave off threats to their very existence.

Prefiguring Democracy, Building Intergenerational Capacity

Radical and progressive summer camps in the 20th century facilitated young people's cooperation, democratic living, and engagement with social and cultural difference. Campers practiced their emerging progressivism in both the daily structure of camp life and through direct exposure to and action against societal inequalities. Through daily cooperation and democratic decision-making, children and youth learned habits and ways of being that would be useful for liberatory social action in labor and civil rights movements. We don't wish to suggest that the

---

[33] Fay Itkowitz and Mitchell Silver, *Kinderland: The First Hundred Years* (Tolland, MA: Camp Kinderland, 2023), 8.

[34] Mishler, *Raising Reds*, 92-93.

[35] Itkowitz and Silver, *Kinderland*, 42.

[36] Teal, "The Moral Economy of Postwar Radical Interracial Summer Camping," 61.

[37] Itkowitz and Silver, *Kinderland*, 84, 115-29; and *Kinderland*, directed by Amy Grappell (Tel-Aviv, Israel: Film Platform, 2021), https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/Kinderland.

[38] Teal, "The Moral Economy of Postwar Radical Interracial Summer Camping," 67.

camps we've spotlighted were havens of young people's autonomy or untouched by the kind of oppressive logics that can creep into even the most well-intentioned social change projects. It was common, for example, for summer camps — including those discussed in this paper — to appropriate Indigenous practices and motifs as part of the romanticized nostalgia for the pre-modern that camps sought to approximate.[39] As was the case in Camp Highlander's early days, it's also true that racial integration wasn't always accompanied by the development of a shared anti-racist analysis, limiting the potential for structural change.[40] Finally, the spirit of democracy and cooperation that camp coordinators sought to instill with and among campers didn't mean that adult-child power hierarchies were absent. Paris, Fox, and Slate have shown how children and youth contested and negotiated camp visions put forth by adult facilitators, reshaping and subverting camp life to match their own values and desires.[41]

Despite the complexities — and, often, transience — of radical summer camps, they offer an example of how liberatory values can manifest at the level of relationships, shoring up collective capacity to create structural change. At camp, children and youth worked together — across differences of race, ethnicity, gender, and religion — to make decisions about their camp experience. They rooted themselves in place and culture, embracing folkways and traditions to construct a shared sense of identity and articulate common stakes in uprooting social hierarchies. In hostile contexts, some camps demonstrated a capacity to adapt their political education approach to more directly engage young people in liberatory struggles. Others centered culture, identity, environment, and community relationship-building in their political strategy, supporting their ability to endure backlash and nurture the changemaking capacity of young people. During our current moment when anti-democratic discourse and policy threatens the institutions and futures of young people, the enduring legacy of radical camp culture serves as a welcome invitation to curate micro-spaces with and for young people that seed participatory democracy in both quotidian and structurally transformative ways.

---

[39] Van Slyck, "Living Like Savages: Tipis, Council Rings, and Playing Indian," in *A Manufactured Wilderness*, 169-213; and Paris, "Tans, Tepees, and Minstrel Shows: Race, Primitivism, and Camp Community," in *Children's Nature*, 189-225.

[40] Slate, "Between Utopia and Jim Crow."

[41] Paris, "Between Generations: Tensions in the Camp 'Family,'" in *Children's Nature*, 132-62; Fox, "'Is This What You Call Being Free?': Power and Youth Culture in the Camper Republic," in *The Jews of Summer*, 149-72; and Slate, "Between Utopia and Jim Crow."

The Effects of Interest Convergence on Student Experience:
"Who We Thought Would Speak"

Jacquelyn-Marie Kennelly
Fordham University

Abstract: This paper explores how the theory of interest convergence shapes educational equity, using a 2020 study of students of color in Scotland as a case in point. Despite approval from local authorities, researchers faced resistance from school gatekeepers, resulting in the exclusion of Black student voices from the research project. This reflects a broader pattern in which efforts to address race in education are only supported when aligned with dominant White interests. Connecting the UK study to current US debates over Critical Race Theory (CRT) and DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion), I argue that institutional self-interest often dictates whether racial equity is pursued and call for use of interest convergence and CRT as tools to challenge systemic barriers and promote meaningful, inclusive change in education.

A History of Interest Convergence

While developing research that used student voices to highlight occurrences of organizational othering in Scottish classrooms, my colleague Stella Mouroutsou and I (2020) found our most significant challenge was the reluctance of gatekeepers to allow us entry to their schools. Our research topic of othering and our Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework led some school leaders to immediately deny us access — although we had all necessary school and city ethical approvals and certifications — and others to ignore multiple attempts at contact. Connections abound between our experience and the current American political and pedagogical climate in which CRT and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) research is being misrepresented and maligned at the highest government levels. The power of gatekeepers to act in their own interests has led to egregious enactment of racist policies and an exponential increase in systemic inequity. The CRT theory of interest convergence has for decades been at the center of antiracism research (Bell, 1980; Gillborn, 2013; Brooks, 2024). I delve into the idea of interest convergence to connect our UK-based pedagogical research to the US educational equity crisis, and draw conclusions about factors affecting current education policy and practice in America.

The theory of interest convergence was first presented by Derek Bell in *Harvard Law Review* (1980). The premise of interest convergence proposes that "advancements in civil rights or legal protections for people of color often occur not out of genuine concern for equality or justice, but rather when it serves the interests of those in power" (Brooks, 2024). For example, during the Civil Rights Movement, the federal government supported desegregation not entirely out of a commitment to justice, but also because rising racial tensions posed a risk to domestic stability and the nation's international reputation during the Cold War. Bell (1980; 2004) describes the convergence of Black and White interests that led to the first US Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (1954) to integrate schools in the United States (US). Bell demonstrates that socio-cultural factors such as the Cold War, the global spotlight on the US Civil Rights Movement, and the financial benefit of desegregation for Southern states allowed integration to move forward. Bell explains, however, that as interests diverged, integration of schools was not achieved and education systems continued to be racially unjust due to factors such as violent opposition, litigious school boards, and defensive policies such as school choice and magnet schools. Bell's research, alongside the research of Kimberlé

Crenshaw (1988), is generally considered to be foundational work on the interest convergence principle.

More recently, Wright (2023) traces the decline of Black education since *Brown v. Board*, citing interest convergence as a driving factor in the loss of Black teachers, school communities, and systemic racism affecting Black students. Wright explores the historical context of Black education pre- and post-*Brown* and paints a picture both detailed and concise. He cites the firing of 100,000 Black teachers, the closing of Black schools, and the financial benefits of integration for White schools. Wright's well-organized explanations and explorations of interest convergence complement Bell's (1980) original paper on desegregation but Wright offers a modern view that includes White educational financial interests.

The legal implications of interest convergence continue today with the recent Supreme Court ruling of *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* (2023) which effectively dismantled higher education affirmative action policies. In her analysis of the decision, Brooks (2024) examines affirmative action in higher education, the concept of interest convergence, and the political and social forces currently shaping government and education policy. She analyzes both historical and current affirmative action policies through the lens of interest convergence, noting that universities often struggle to present strong justifications for the importance of diversity. Brooks concludes that the current political and judicial climate appears invested in upholding class- and race-based power structures, shining a light on the continuous interest convergence at work in government action. Once policy becomes influenced by interest convergence educational environments are also affected from administrative decision-making to in-class lives of individual students.

Interest Convergence and Education in America and the UK

Aside from historical examples such as desegregation, there are myriad ways that the interest convergence principle has had an effect on education policy and practice. Multiple qualitative studies were undertaken in the 2000s with an aim of identifying and analyzing interest convergence as it relates to the classroom. One oft-cited example is Thandeka K. Chapman's "You Can't Erase Race! Using CRT to Explain the Presence of Race and Racism in Majority White Suburban Schools" (2013). Chapman explains in easily understandable terms how the concept of a post-racial era has made it more challenging to address race and racism. She asserts that school and federal policies about curriculum, tracking, and testing create and maintain an unfair and racist environment for students of color, and proceeds to define and explore colorblind racism and interest convergence in the school environment. Student interview transcripts support her conclusion that White interests continue to perpetuate a racially exclusionary environment for students of color in predominantly White suburban schools. Chapman's work aligns with interest convergence theory in that educational settings that adopt a colorblind approach due to a lack of interest in equity can contribute to the continued marginalization of students of color.

At the same time Chapman was undertaking her study, similar work was occurring internationally. In the United Kingdom, David Gillborn identified the 2000s as a period of interest-divergence, in that hidden racism was embedded in UK educational reform. In his work, "Interest-divergence and the Colour of Cutbacks: Race, Recession and the Undeclared War on Black Children" (2013), Gillborn argues that while education reform is framed with rhetoric that appears to support equity, it ultimately serves White interests and

disproportionately harms students of color by deepening the achievement gap. Gillborn's examination of equity rhetoric hits upon a key element of interest convergence-based social change: while it is often in school administration's interests to appear to value equity, meaningful change is not essential in meeting that interest. He cites proposed changes in British national educational assessments, which data has shown widens the racial achievement gap, as an indicator that interests have diverged. Gillborn's thoroughly vetted research highlights the hypocrisy of government colorblindness in its framing of new standards as equitable, when in reality it leans on voter-favored but inequitable meritocracy arguments, and ignores the needs of marginalized students.

It is not just educational policy that is affected by interest convergence. In the classroom, teacher decisions directly influence student engagement, achievement, and discourse. H. R. Milner's (2008) research centers on an exploration of teacher educators' constructions of race and biases, and the effect of these conceptions on how we teach teachers and, ultimately, how teachers instruct students. He points out that people in power, such as teachers and administrators, will allow social justice initiatives to advance when it serves their interests, but still have control over the pace and cost of this progress. Continuing Milner's much-cited study, Milner, Pearman, and McGee (2013) argue for the application of a developing theory of disruptive movement aimed at challenging and transforming racist policies and practices in teacher education. The researchers examine Bell's interest convergence principle and its effect on education. According to Milner et al., interest convergence provides a framework for identifying and addressing areas within teacher education that require further examination with the aim of improving educational policies and practices. The authors see interest convergence as a powerful tool, not just for analyzing and critiquing teacher education, but also for making sense of it and pushing for meaningful change.

Interest Convergence and Gatekeepers: "Who We Thought Would Speak"

Research efforts to study educational ill-effects of interest convergence are also put at risk by colorblind construction of bias in schools. In our 2020 study of Scottish high schoolers, Mouroutsou and I encountered nearly overwhelming resistance to our research. In the end, we were only able to access one school, and were required to rely on a gatekeeper teacher to invite students of color to participate. Although several Black students met eligibility criteria for participation in focus groups, ultimately, none were included. Upon seeking clarification about the selection process, the gatekeeper — a White teacher who had been incredibly supportive in ensuring the study's implementation at the school — explained that he and the headteacher observed that the eligible Black students appeared, in his and the headteacher's experience, hesitant to engage in conversations with adults. As a result, they selected only students "who we thought would speak." In this decision-making process, the gatekeeper inadvertently exercised his White privilege. His assumption that Black students would be less forthcoming, based solely on perceived engagement with him in class, led to their exclusion from the study. This reflects Delgado's (1989) argument that members of dominant groups often perceive their actions as neutral, while in fact these actions may perpetuate systemic racism.

As researchers, we engaged in reflexive consideration of how this process may have rendered us complicit in the silencing of Black student voices. Ultimately, we proceeded with the focus groups to ensure that perspectives from other students of color were still represented. I posit that in this case the gatekeeper was either uncomfortable approaching Black students or

was reluctant to engage Black students in a conversation around race. His personal interest in avoiding discomfort diverged with the potential interests of Black students in using their voice to participate in the study.

Notably, during their focus groups the student participants themselves identified interest convergence as a key factor in the lack of discourse on race. They recognized that discussions about race are unlikely to occur unless White individuals, particularly educators, perceive a benefit to such engagement; a concept aligned with Bell's theory of interest convergence (1979; 1995). One student participant suggested that White individuals often seek to avoid being perceived as "the bad guy," a dynamic that contributes to the silence surrounding racial issues: a silence made possible by White privilege. This privilege allows White people to evade the discomfort associated with conversations about race, whereas people of color must continuously engage with the realities of racial inequality.

In line with student opinions about teachers avoiding race and preferring to be "colorblind," students experienced very little direct language about race and ethnicity from teachers and other school adults, and noticed a tendency for their teachers to at best ignore and at worst engage in biased language and actions. A lack of interest convergence led to a lack of school action on behalf of these marginalized students (Crenshaw 1988). We also found that it was in the participants' best interests to talk about and learn about racial issues, for although students were talking about painful and difficult experiences, they unanimously vocalized positive feedback about their focus group experience and would have continued it for multiple sessions. Our study concluded that a colorblind mentality can block or silence marginalized student voices, and that White interests can control whether those conversations happen, which brings us to the conversations surrounding race today in the US.

The War on CRT and DEI

The current American social and political climate is bleak for those who value racial equality, and it is becoming increasingly important to understand the roots of inequity in education. Recently, the US Supreme Court ruling in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* (2023) effectively dismantled higher education affirmative action policies. In her exploration of the intersection between affirmative action in higher education and interest convergence, Brooks (2024) maintains that certain actors are undermining diversity efforts due to their interest in preserving power dynamics rooted in class and race. Brooks addresses the current political and social factors that affect government and educational policy, citing past and present litigation and analyzing the competing interests between marginalized citizens and the current government. The need for diversity, equity, and inclusion is clear. However, supporters of anti-CRT legislation do not agree.

Critics of DEI programming often misleadingly claim that DEI reinforces racial bias rather than correct it, arguing that such policies are inherently discriminatory. While Cunningham (2023) is not himself an opponent of CRT, he presents an opponent's point of view concisely and thoroughly, starting with President Trump's Executive Order 13950 that prohibited speech, activities, and workplace training events that address or promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Cunningham lists several complaints by opponents of DEI policies in education, such as a loss of traditional content and encouraging a divisive school environment. Anti-DEI rhetoric often centers on ideas of race neutrality, and many critics of equity policies erroneously believe that any race-based policy is racist and divisive. Cunningham notes

challengers to DEI programs often misrepresent and inaccurately define DEI, which hinders educational initiatives in social justice. Although opponents of DEI policies do advocate for race-neutral policies, such approaches fall short in effectively addressing existing racial disparities.

Another way critics justify dismantling DEI programs is their faith in meritocracy. They advocate for merit-based systems that emphasize equal treatment of individuals, regardless of race. Meritocracy, however, is based on assumption of equal chances of success, and CRT scholars reject this notion. According to CRT scholar Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, the idea of meritocracy is a form of colorblind racism, the avoidance of direct engagement with racial issues that leads to the systemic continuation of disparities and inequalities in education, employment, healthcare, and the criminal justice system. Bonilla-Silva's book, *Racism without Racists* (2013), challenges the neutrality of Whiteness by arguing that a colorblind mindset and the resulting insistence on meritocracy-based policies in education perpetuate systemic racism.

Looking Forward: A Lens for Change

So how can we use understanding of past motivation (interest convergence) to spur future change (meaningful inclusion)? Understanding interest convergence, tracing its effects on policy and curriculum, leads to a clearer picture of where we are in education and how we got here. To effectively propose and enact change, the thing that needs changing must be named, acknowledged, and disrupted. Students of color often feel unheard and unsupported by authority figures in their schools (Kennelly & Mouroutsou, 2020; Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Oliha-Donaldson, 2017). When discussions about race are avoided due to White individuals' discomfort or a desire to maintain civility, the needs of students of color are overlooked. Acknowledging the privilege of being able to ignore race can help reveal how interest convergence operates in these settings, and this awareness is a crucial step toward creating a more supportive and inclusive school environment for everyone.

Critics of CRT and opponents of educational DEI policies hold a skewed perspective of race and racism, lack contextual knowledge, and respond to discomfort with deflection. Privilege allows those without a stake in the issue to simply ignore it. Exploring historical and current contexts of educational inequity and systemic racism is key to understanding the need for change. An interest convergence lens can be used to critically analyze several key areas within education. For instance, curriculum design that centers dominant cultural narratives may unintentionally marginalize the voices and experiences of students of color, reinforcing exclusionary norms. CRT and the concept of interest convergence offer valuable tools for examining teacher training programs, particularly in assessing how effectively they prepare educators to recognize and address racial disparities in the classroom. These theories can also be applied to school discipline policies, which often disproportionately affect students of color, revealing systemic biases and inequities that call for structural reform. By utilizing Critical Race Theory and interest convergence, educators can advocate for reforms that advance educational equity, including the removal of racial barriers, even or especially "colorblind" ones, and the development of inclusive, culturally responsive learning environments.

References

Bell, D. A. (1980). Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma. *Harvard Law Review*, *93*(3), 518–533. https://doi.org/10.2307/1340546

Bell, D. A. (2004). *Silent covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the unfulfilled hopes for racial reform.* Oxford University Press.

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2013). *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2015) The Structure of Racism in Color-Blind, "Post-Racial" America. *American Behavioral Scientist, 59*(11), 1358–1376.

Brooks, M. (2024). The Balancing Act: Analyzing the Interest Convergence of Affirmative Action in Supreme Court Decisions. *Journal of Intersectionality 8*(1), 63-90. https://www.scienceopen.com/hosted-document?doi=10.13169/jinte.8.1.0005

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

Chapman, T. K. (2013). You can't erase race! Using CRT to Explain the Presence of Race and Racism in Majority White Suburban Schools. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *34*(4), 611–627. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2013.822619

Crenshaw, K. (1988). Race, Reform, and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Antidiscrimination Law. *Harvard Law Review, 101*(7), 1331–1387. https://doi.org/10.2307/1341398

Cunningham, R. (07/01/2023). To CRT or Not to CRT: The Impact of Anti-CRT Legislation on K--12 Teaching and Learning. *Journal of the Afro-American Historical & Genealogical Society (40),* 47-58. https://web.p.ebscohost.com/ehost

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. NYU Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qg26k

Gillborn, D. (2013). Interest-divergence and the Colour of Cutbacks: Race, Recession and the Undeclared War on Black Children. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *34*(4), 477–491. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2013.822616

Kennelly, J-M. & Mouroutsou, S. (2020). The Normalcy of Racism in the School Experience of Students of Colour: "The Times When It Hurts". *Scottish Educational Review, 52*(2), 26-47.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2013). Critical Race Theory —What it Is Not! *Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education*, 34-47. https://www.loyola.edu/_media/join-us/karson-institute/documents/Critical%20Race%20Theory%20What%20it%20is%20not.pdf

Milner, H. (2008). Critical Race Theory and Interest Convergence as Analytic Tools in Teacher Education Policies and Practices. *Journal of Teacher Education 59*, 332-346. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249704305_Critical_Race_Theory_and_Interest_Convergence_as_Analytic_Tools_in_Teacher_Education_Policies_and_Practices

Milner, H., Pearman, F. A. & McGee, E. O. (2013). Critical Race Theory, Interest Convergence, and Teacher Education. In M. Lynn & A.D. Dixson (Eds.), *The Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education,* 39-54. https://cepa.stanford.edu/content/critical-race-theory-interest-convergence-and-teacher-education

Oliha-Donaldson, H. (2018). Let's Talk: An Exploration into Student Discourse about Diversity and the Implications for Intercultural Competence. *Howard Journal of Communications*, *(29)*2, 126-143.

Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College, 600 U.S. 181 (2023)

Wright, J. (2023). Racist Norms until Interests Converge: A Long Tradition of Egregious Educational Policy Patterns and Global Implications. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, *56*(3), 275-292. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220620.2023.2272952.

Practical Reasons for Learning:
The Missing Key to School Education

Michael Ben-Chaim
Independent Scholar

Abstract: My aim is to demonstrate the adverse effect of value-neutral pedagogy on student learning. Values furnish practical reasons that frame learners' acquisition of instructive information to guide their conduct. Hence, a value-neutral school curriculum impairs students' use of practical reasons for learning. Instead of helping students acquire knowledge to achieve new goals, value-neutral pedagogy encourages them to assimilate new information to their prior knowledge and expectations. The inevitable result is that students' motivation to learn is undermined and their understanding of the curriculum impoverished. In alignment with teacher professionalism, the autonomy of teachers to situate value-neutral curriculum within the values that characterize students' lives enhances student understanding of the practical and social importance of academic study and preempts the dreaded question: "Why do we have to learn this?"

> Our Business here is not to know all things, but those things which concern our conduct.
> — John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*[1]

During the first half of the 20th century, our nationwide school system gradually consolidated as an institutional framework for providing children with formal education. The professionalization and bureaucratization of children's schooling set their formal education apart from their informal education at home and in the community. Seeking to secure the academic credibility of the new system and their own professional authority, leading educators were inspired by the Positivist dichotomy between objective knowledge and subjective values. They came to believe that the ideal school education centered on teaching students value-neutral, evidence-based factual knowledge.

During the later part of the century, it became apparent that the teaching of facts encouraged rote learning that failed to prepare students for college, career, and informed participation in civic life. To enhance students' academic proficiency, professional educators devised student-centered curricula that more fully engaged students' cognitive abilities. The teaching of facts was accordingly augmented by pedagogical reforms recommending students' active participation in knowledge construction; teaching students critical thinking skill and metacognitive strategies; and organizing content knowledge around subject-area core concepts and ideas. By focusing on the cognitive aspects of student learning, professional educators could remain committed to the ideal of value-neutral pedagogy.

Longitudinal assessments of preK-12 students' academic achievements, showing minuscule progress in students' scores since the early 2000s, call into doubt the success of these pedagogical reforms.[2] My aim in what follows is to demonstrate the adverse effect of value-neutral pedagogy on student learning. Following in the footsteps of John Locke and his practical perspective on the quest for knowledge, my argument is that values furnish the practical reasons that guide learners' acquisition of instructive information to guide their conduct. Hence, a value-

---

[1] (1975/1689). Peter H. Nidditch (Ed.), Oxford University Press, 46
[2] National Assessment of Educational Progress (2024). The Nation's Report Card. https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/

neutral school curriculum impairs students' use of practical reasons for learning. Instead of helping students acquire knowledge to achieve new goals, value-neutral pedagogy encourages them to assimilate new information to their prior knowledge and expectations. The inevitable result is that students' motivation to learn is undermined and their understanding of the curriculum is impoverished.

How Practical Reasons Guide Learning

The idea of value-neutral knowledge assumes that knowledge is an end for itself, rather than a means to an end that derives from learners' values.[3] Considered, however, in the broader context of the biological evolution of cognition, that assumption appears erroneous. Animals are affected by a myriad of surrounding conditions, yet the information they acquire is sufficiently discriminative and instructive to stimulate specific behaviors such as mate selection, foraging for food, navigation, and avoiding predators. Thus, an animal does not perceive objects and events in the world in and of themselves. Rather, its brain responds to external and internal biochemical signals in ways that promote its survival. 'Knowledge for the sake of knowledge' is a value, at best, rarely acted upon by any species.[4]

Human beings learn for innumerable practical purposes that derive from a wide range of cultural values. Motivated by practical reasons, they search for and acquire instructive information to guide their behavior. But can humans circumvent their biological limitations and cultural habits, set aside their values, and learn solely for the sake of gaining true or objective knowledge? Unlikely. Reflecting on scientific discovery, Karl Popper points out that even the most rigorous inquiry presupposes practical considerations: "Observation is always selective. It needs a chosen object, a definite task, an interest, a point of view, a problem. And its description presupposes a descriptive language, with property words." The meaning of property words, "presupposes similarity and classification, which in its turn presupposes interests, points of view, and problems." Whatever the learner perceives, "can be classified, and can become similar or dissimilar, *only* in this way — by being related to needs and interests."[5] It follows from Popper's analysis that the deliberate acquisition and processing of information, as well as its linguistic articulation, presuppose practical reasoning. A rational person learns for a purpose and gains knowledge they can rely on to achieve it. Knowledge is meant to be instructive, to provide a road map for action, and is, therefore, a means to an end.

The Practical Nature of Student Social Learning

Social learning from others plays a vital role in the cultural development of humans as well as in the development of human cultures.[6] In contrast with individual learning, social learning is

---

[3] Putnam, H. (2002). *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays*. Harvard University Press; Raz, J. (2009). "Reasons: Practical and Adaptive", in D. Sobel & S. Wall (Eds.), *Reasons for Action*. Cambridge University Press, 37-57.

[4] Shettleworth, S. J. (2010). *Cognition, Evolution, and Behavior.* Oxford University Press. Consider Franny Glass' comment to her brother Zooey in J.D. Salinger's (1961, 61) *Franny and Zooey* (Little, Brown and Company). After enduring days of relentless academization on a visit to her boyfriend who was away at college, an exhausted Franny grumbles: "I think that knowledge — when it's knowledge for knowledge's sake, anyway — is the worst of all."

[5] Popper, K. R. (1972). *Conjectures and Refutations. The Growth of Scientific Knowledge.* Routledge and Kegan Paul, 46-7. Italics in the original.

[6] Boyd, R., P. J. Richerson, J. Henrich (2011). "The cultural niche: why social learning is essential for human adaptation". Proceedings of the National. Academy of Science U.S.A. Supplement 2, 10918-25.

the result of a learner attending to another individual's behavior, its effects, or products.[7] What makes social learning a crucial factor in human development is its practical nature: it enables individuals to build on the achievements of others and, thereby, to generate a social repository of skill selected for demonstrated capacity to contribute to personal and societal well-being.

In the academic classroom, the principal objects of student social learning are achievements of science, the humanities, and language arts. These achievements provide students with information about real or imaginary situations that embody use of conceptual tools to achieve culturally valuable goals. To benefit from this information, students need to identify and learn to use the tools it provides to achieve goals that contribute positively to their personal development or social circumstances. Hence, students' understanding of curricular materials is inseparable from their ability to appreciate the value of the curriculum they study.

School-age children are highly experienced social learners,[8] but understanding the achievements of science, the humanities, and language arts in the academic setting of the school is an unfamiliar challenge for most students. At home and in the community, children's social learning often serves purposes that are far more tangible, immediate, and concrete than the social learning of a poem, a scientific theory, or a historical analysis. Furthermore, outside the school environment, children often engage in social learning in the presence of familiar role models by observing their actions and listening to their instructions. At school, by contrast, social learning is predominantly mediated by reading relatively impersonal texts that are completely removed from the context in which they were originally produced. Students' academic success depends, therefore, on a pedagogy that helps them apply their skill as social learners to understand how the cultural products in the curriculum are designed to serve valuable purposes. Value-neutral pedagogy conflicts with the rationale for social learning in the academic classroom by creating social distance between students and what they study.

How Value-Neutral Pedagogy Undermines Students' Social Learning

Reading is a foundational skill students acquire at school. For this reason, the most adverse effect of value-neutral pedagogy on students' academic learning pertains to reading comprehension instruction. Students are highly accustomed to using speech as a means of interpersonal communication and social interaction. They intuitively know their social relationships are shaped by how they and the people they interact with use language. They understand — perhaps only implicitly — that a spoken message is composed with the intention to motivate the person receiving it to act in accordance with its content.[9]

In contrast with students' verbal communication experience, reading pedagogy abstracts away the function of the text as a means of communication and social interaction and, thereby, disregards the practical reasons for producing the text and for reading it. Reading comprehension becomes an end for itself, defined by reading specialists as ''the process of simultaneously constructing and extracting meaning through interaction and engagement with print.''[10] The pedagogical construal of the meaning of a text relies on a psychological model of perception that

---

[7] Schaik, V. C. (2010). "Social learning and culture in animals". In: P. Kappeler (Ed.) *Animal Behaviour: Evolution and Mechanisms*. Springer, 623–653.

[8] Rogoff, B. (2003). *The Cultural Nature of Human Development.* Oxford University Press.

[9] Grice, P. (1989). *Studies in the Way of Words.* Harvard University Press.

[10] RAND Reading Study Group (RRSG) (2002). Toward an R&D program in reading comprehension. Santa Monica, CA: RAND.

combines "bottom-up" perception of sensory input with "top-down" integration of sensory information with prior knowledge. The product of reading comprehension, accordingly, is a mental representation of a real or imaginary situation which the reader constructs based on textual information and their background knowledge.[11] As an illustration, Catherine Snow proposes an elementary school student would demonstrate an adequate comprehension of the statement, "Alex and Ali ran to the swings and jumped on", by constructing a representation of "two individuals moving quickly toward and using some playground equipment".[12] The implication of Snow's illustration is that students need not consider the context in which a text is meant to engage them, as readers, in purposeful social interaction. All they need do to comprehend a statement is to assume the role of disengaged spectators of an imaginary situation that corresponds to the linguistic information they process. However, social disengagement defeats the purpose of social learning.

To enable them to achieve comprehension of what they read, students need to understand the purpose for which a text is intended, not only construct an image of what the text (re)presents. For example, Aesop's celebrated fable, *The Fox and the Grapes*,[13] is intended to motivate the reader to reflect on the psychological phenomenon of people disparaging goals they cannot attain. But elementary school students will fail to learn the lesson which Aesop's story aims to teach if they strictly follow reading comprehension instruction and confine themselves to constructing a mental representation of the fox' behavior. They will apply their background knowledge of foxes or other animals to render the text meaningful to them but will remain oblivious to the lesson that the fable is meant to teach. As Aesop's fable illustrates, the fictional world depicted by a literary text has useful cognitive content: it conveys an imaginary situation that provides readers with the conceptual means to reflect from a new perspective on their own behaviors and the world in which they live, or to gain new insights into social situations and problems. Any pedagogy that confines the meaning of art to a representation of a fictitious situation discards the art's cultural value and, thereby, its educational value to students. And students' failure to adequately understand the fable is likely to hinder their ability to understand more complex literary works in the future.

Student acquisition of content knowledge in science and social studies is similarly impoverished by a pedagogy that disregards the purpose it is intended to serve. To enhance students' academic proficiency, educators have proposed to model student learning after experts' use of concepts to organize information for effective interpretation, retrieval, and application. Experts, of course, develop and use conceptual tools in accordance with their professional interests. Their reasons for organizing information in one way rather than another are practical. Yet, major educational programs disregard the practical rationale behind conceptual knowledge.[14] For example, Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), a multi-state program of science education for the K-12 school system, shifts the centerpiece of student learning from emphasis on empirical facts to Disciplinary Core Ideas (DCI). But NGSS content standards present DCI as statements of fact. A fifth-grade standard for learning the idea of "the

---

[11] Kintsch, W., & Rawson, K. A. (2005). Comprehension. In M. J. Snowling & C. Hulme (Eds.), *The Science of Reading: A Handbook* (209–226). Blackwell Publishing.
[12] Snow, C.E. (2010). "Reading Comprehension: Reading for Learning". *International Encyclopedia of Education*, vol. 5, 413-418.
[13] https://read.gov/aesop/005.html
[14] Donovan, M. S. and J. D. Bransford (Eds). (2005). *How Students Learn: Science in the Classroom.* Committee on How People Learn: A Targeted Report for Teachers, National Research Council. National Academies Press, 7.

gravitational force of Earth" states that "Earth acting on an object near Earth's surface pulls that object toward the planet's center."[15]

The scientific concept of gravitational force was a product of Isaac Newton's endeavor to develop a quantitative universal theory to explain why and how inertial objects change their velocity or the direction of their movement. The escalation of objects moving toward Earth was the reason for using the idea of gravitational force as an explanation. The NGSS version of this concept, however, omits information about its scientific value and purpose. Oblivious to the meaning of the concept as an explanatory tool, students are likely to interpret its factual content by assimilation to what they consider the most relevant knowledge and experience. They may think, perhaps, that Earth pulls objects near its surface in a manner analogous to the way a truck pulls a cart. They may think that Earth pulls only objects near its surface, rather than other planets or the moon, because the latter are perhaps too remote from Earth, or too heavy or large to be pulled by it. Or they may just realize that they do not know how to understand the fact and confine themselves to memorizing it for an upcoming test. Thus, by delimiting the content of scientific ideas to factual information, the proposed standard defeats the purpose of social learning in the science classroom — namely, to learn from scientists how their research interests guide their understanding of the physical world.

Concluding Thoughts

Professional educators hinder the development of students' reading comprehension and academic learning by advancing pedagogical programs that erroneously assume that information processing is value-neutral and, therefore, does not require practical reasoning. Humans learn by acquiring and interpreting sensory information to achieve new goals. When the processing of new data is not guided by a purpose, the data are assimilated by default to background knowledge and beliefs, and learning is minimal.

In the context of social learning, a learner's purpose is modeled after the purpose served by the actions and achievements of the person they learn from. Professional educators are obviously aware of the cultural value of the achievements of science, the humanities, and language arts that are included in the school curriculum. Nevertheless, their pedagogical programs and strategies assume a value-neutral stance towards content knowledge that defeats the purpose of social learning. Such value-neutral programs do not adequately teach students how to achieve the goals which the products of science, the humanities, and language arts enable educated people to achieve. Instead, they encourage students to assimilate new information to the knowledge and experience they bring to the classroom. As a result, students' understanding of content knowledge is impoverished, and their ability to build on it in the next stages of their schooling is undermined. Moreover, students' motivation to engage with academic life diminishes, and they become alienated from the academic culture that school education represents.

Value-neutral education is philosophically and pedagogically flawed. But it is ethically and politically questionable as well. In a liberal democratic society, individuals have the right to choose their values and the political views these values inform. A value-neutral pedagogy allegedly immunizes the academic classroom from political pressures that stakeholders in public education may want to exercise. However, a value-neutral education does not square with the responsibility of professional educators to advance students' abilities to promote their well-being

---

[15] https://www.nextgenscience.org/pe/5-ps2-1-motion-and-stability-forces-and-interactions.

as individuals and members of society. Almost certainly, the big business of building curriculum will continue to develop generalized, academic materials at a distance from the specific contexts of instruction in which they will be implemented. Therefore, the professional responsibilities of teachers, who do encounter students in real time in the real educational spaces of local learning environments, need to be reconstructed to include adaptation of curriculum to the practical learning needs and value interests of students in classes. Teacher autonomy of this type is likely our best hope that students from all sorts of social circumstances will learn the curriculum well by connecting the value of academic learning to their everyday lives. Professionalization of teaching may usefully be re-envisioned to reach beyond value-neutral bureaucratization of schooling to include an adhocratic element that, literally, adds *value* to lesson plans, pedagogical actions, and student learning.

Universal Design for Learning:
The Intersection of Inclusive Education & ~~Empathy~~ Compassion
in Social Foundations of Education

Mary Bushnell Greiner and Leslee Grey
Queens College/City University of New York

Abstract: We explore intersections of Universal Design for Learning and Social Foundations of Education, arguing that integrating Universal Design for Learning into foundational coursework not only enhances access and engagement for diverse learners but also deepens pre-service teachers' understanding of justice- and action-oriented pedagogies. By situating Universal Design for Learning within the broader discourse of equity and critical education, we contribute to a more expansive and reflexive vision of teacher preparation. We argue that these efforts contribute to a pedagogy of compassion that humanizes and emboldens teaching and learning.

> The world is before you and you need not take it or leave it as it was when you came in.
> — James Baldwin (1988, 221): A precept of teacher education programs at Queens College.

We explore the utilization of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in the Social Foundations of Education (SFE) classroom by unpacking the revision of an undergraduate assignment concerning public school funding. Utilized within a Social Foundations course as part of a teacher education program, the assignment's revision aimed to enable students to integrate insights from various course activities by fostering active and critical engagement with real-world policies. Through an analysis of student work samples and a comparison between the original and revised assignments, we argue that incorporating UDL in the SFE context enhanced students' development of compassion, critical consciousness, agency, and advocacy skill. Our analysis suggests ways in which integrating UDL into SFE can enable students to personally connect to sociopolitical concepts, develop empathy for individuals and communities, consider not only themselves but also their future students, and develop "real life" awareness of political/ideological influences on schooling. UDL offers a framework for building inclusive and equitable education environments which suggests that it comfortably resides in SFE. However, UDL remains underexplored within the field of SFE.[1] At its core, UDL frameworks are meant to address numerous barriers to learning. At the same time, SFE, a field concerned with historical, philosophical, and sociocultural dimensions of schooling, provides a critical lens through which to explore how various obstructions come to bear on teaching and learning in specific contexts.

Who We Are: The Authors and Our Students
We (Mary and Leslee) were trained as researchers in doctoral programs focused on Social Foundations of Education. Both of us teach undergraduate and graduate Social Foundations courses in teacher education programs at Queens College, City University of New York. Mary 25 years of experience in elementary education and Leslee 15 years in secondary education. Our positioning in teacher education profoundly informs and influences our work in SFE.

---

[1] The lack of SFE engagement with UDL can be seen in the flagship journals of *Educational Studies* and *Educational Foundations*, neither of which, in their respective 50-year and 30-year histories, have published any manuscripts that refer to UDL.

Students at Queens College are remarkable: 48% are first-generation college students, 33% are immigrants, and another third are children of immigrants. Half receive Pell Grants, reflecting significant economic need. A substantial number of students are recipients of DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) grants.[2] Recent political developments have heightened anxiety among our students regarding immigration status and eligibility for diminishing funding opportunities. In spring 2025, public discourse surrounding such issues as immigration, foreign policy, educational funding, and the politicization of curricula culminated in a discourse of concern that permeated our classroom discussions, and our students were acutely attuned to how educational policies were directly impacting their lives and futures. Being personally affected by a plague of executive orders underscored in "real time" the urgency of addressing social and political dimensions of teaching and learning. The overall climate of crisis and uncertainty may have heightened students' interest in questions of equity, power, civic responsibility, and the structural forces that shape education.

Compassion as a Framework for Pedagogy

The original title of this paper focused on empathy and the Social Foundations of Education. However, as we delved deeper into our inquiry, we realized that *compassion* — which Megan Laverty (2025) reminds us is a critical virtue — more accurately captures our focus. As critical teacher educators committed to cultivating greater compassion in our practice, we strive to continually reflect on how to best teach social foundations within this context. Compassion informs both our goals and methods. We share Laverty's concern that liberal education is under threat, especially in teacher education programs, which are becoming increasingly technocratic and less focused on the liberal arts. Furthermore, in approaching our pedagogy, we recognize that traditional higher education practices — lecturing at students, treating them as passive recipients of knowledge — tend to dehumanize our students *and* us. Drawing inspiration from John Dewey's (1907) vision of creating the world we want to live in through our classrooms, we seek to engage students with compassion. We are further inspired by environmental science researchers (Engle et al., 2024) who define compassionate pedagogy as combining cognitive kindness with a commitment to fostering critical, complex understandings of social and ecological justice. We focus on *compassion* and not *empathy* or *caring* because compassion is active, involving not only understanding another's situation but also the desire to respond in helpful ways (Goetz, et al., 2010; Killingback et al., 2024). UDL guidelines have helped us take action to put a compassionate approach to pedagogy into practice.

Universal Design for Learning

UDL guidelines are a continuously refined tool designed to provide educators with "a set of concrete suggestions that can be applied to any discipline or domain to ensure that all learners can access and participate in meaningful, challenging learning opportunities" (CAST - Center for Applied Special Technology, 2024). During the 2024-2025 academic year, CUNY (City University of New York) sponsored a professional development course on UDL. Participants included faculty from a wide range of disciplines across CUNY's multi-campus urban university. Both of us joined the course and quickly decided to introduce some UDL principles into Spring 2025 classes. We were interested in learning about UDL through the active use of its principles in our teaching. The UDL framework is intended to meet students where they are and focus not

---

[2] https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/qc.oie/viz/1_CollegeProfile-EnrolledStudents/EnrolledStdntProfile

only on course content but also pedagogy. Because our students are future teachers, we hope they will carry an ethos of compassionate teaching and learning into their own classrooms. We found UDL to offer a vocabulary for discussing and shaping our efforts to teach "better," which for us means grounding our practice in compassion.

The thirty-six UDL guidelines are laid out in a nine-block grid organized by engagement, representation, and action/expression, with access, support, and executive function as additional categories.[3] Although originating in special education, UDL guidelines are broadly applicable to all teaching and learning contexts. As guidelines, these concepts are intended to inform teacher practice but not to direct that practice. Being teacher educators, we are compelled to ask, "What do these guidelines look like in practice?" To illustrate part of our inquiry, we share the experience of revising one assignment in an undergraduate Social Foundations course. We draw on seven guidelines we found most relevant to pedagogical work in Social Foundations in teacher education:

Design Options for Welcoming Interests and Identities (7)
- Optimize relevance, value, and authenticity (Guideline 7.2)

Design Options for Sustaining Effort and Persistence (8)
- Foster belonging and community (8.4)

Design Options for Emotional Capacity (9)
- Develop awareness of self and others (9.2)
- Cultivate empathy and restorative practices (9.4)

Design Options for Building Knowledge (3)
- Connecting prior knowledge to new learning (3.1)
- Highlight and explore patterns, critical features, big ideas, and relationships (3.2)
- Cultivate multiple ways of knowing and making meaning (3.3)

Compassion into Practice: A First Step

For a few years in her undergraduate Social Foundations courses, Mary had assigned written weekly reading responses. The objectives of these assignments were to: a) check that students had completed the assigned readings; and b) provide a mechanism for students to think through the readings and be prepared for class discussion. The assignment under consideration here was a two-page analytical response to readings about school funding. Students were provided the following instructions:

> Write a two-page analytical response to Skinner (2019) and NPR (2016). To receive full credit, your response must include the following elements:
>
> 1. *In your own words*, describe a theme you identified in the readings as a group.
>
> 2. Answer one or more of the questions posed on the syllabus using evidence from each text (including media) to support your argument: How are schools funded? How *should* schools be funded? Does investment in childhood education matter? What are the real costs of schooling and a lack of schooling?
>
> 3. Pose a carefully considered question (or questions) about the readings.

---

[3] https://udlguidelines.cast.org/static/udlg3-graphicorganizer-digital-numbers-a11y.pdf

The following is an excerpt of a characteristic student response (2024): "Investments in childhood education, matters more than what is spoken about. People only seem to believe that whatever we have we have and no extra time or money can influence a child to learn. Children can only learn what they are given, and if the parents and teachers are barely given resources how can we expect children to succeed? Children need multiple opportunities and challenges so they can learn and be the best they can be." This student's writing is typical of other submissions from the same class. It fully meets the assignment requirements, but goes no further. Although the topic is highly relevant to these students' lived experiences, the writing exhibits minimal personal engagement. Impersonal, procedural writing, such as "how can we,,,?," demonstrates some distance between the writer and the content. The language used is abstract: "People only seem…" and "Children need multiple opportunities…," without specificity or illustrative details to support the argument. The format of the weekly responses remained consistent for each iteration, with only the reading content differing from one assignment to the next. Each week, students identified a theme in the collection of assigned readings, answered one or more questions, and posed a new question about the readings. Maintaining a consistent format enabled students to develop some fluency with a specific style of writing. However, in end-of-semester course evaluations, some students stated they found the consistent format of the weekly responses to be tedious. It was, in short, a bit boring for them. Additionally, from the professor's point of view, the assignments were tedious to grade: each weekly response closely resembled the others.

Over the years as colleagues in teacher education, we have become each other's sounding boards, regularly exchanging ideas and insights that shape both our research and our teaching. During one conversation in fall semester 2024, we discussed our concerns about the tedium we had witnessed in students — and had felt ourselves — after assigning consistently structured writing prompts. Unaware of UDL frameworks at the time, Leslee shared that she had been offering students format options for demonstrating their knowledge of educational policies as part of a culminating assignment. Recording a podcast, composing and annotating a poem or song, creating a newsletter, and writing a letter to an elected official were among the ideas she presented to her students. The last choice — letter to an elected official — captured Mary's attention.

The following semester, spring 2025, Mary utilized Leslee's recommendations and UDL concepts to redesign the weekly reading response assignments, aiming to increase students' engagement with the content. This is a writing-intensive course, and students are expected to develop their writing skill. However, instead of a standard structure each week, this semester's students completed a different style of writing each week to demonstrate their understanding of assigned readings and prepare for class discussion. The varied styles of writing included revising a standardized test question, a transcribed audio recording of a conversation with a friend, and a mind map. For the revised assignment we are examining here, students were asked to compose a letter to an elected official advocating for a specific policy change. Referring to the same readings on school funding used in the assignment in previous semesters discussed above, Mary asked students to:

> Identify an elected official at the local, state, or federal level.

> Write a 1-2-page letter to that official expressing your thoughts about how schools are funded and asking the official to do something.

Be certain to use information from the assigned readings by Skinner (2019) and NPR (2016) to support your argument.

Here are four characteristic responses to the revised, i.e., "new" assignment.

Response A: I believe that these injustices need to be handled with *urgency* because every child, every student deserves access to *exceptional* education. I await your support for these policies, addressing the proper funding among districts so that every child and every school regardless of location or status of tax base receives the resources it needs to be successful. Lastly *I cannot stress this enough* that it is important to invest in public education so that all students regardless of circumstances or background be given a chance to *flourish*. (emphasis added)

Response B:The town over from me, Amityville, is a *struggling* town that is only a five-minute drive from my house. *Sadly*, their school district has always had problems due to a lack of funding. *How is it possible* that a town that is a mile from where I live and went to school experiences significantly more of a *struggle* than Massapequa does? In an article from NPR, "Why America's Schools Have A Money Problem," I was able to gather a relative understanding of the issues. (emphasis added)

Response C: I am writing this letter to explain my *concerns regarding your proposal to dismantle the United States Department of Education*. Such actions would have grave consequences for students across the country, from preschoolers and all the way up to college students. I use federal loans to attend college and work as a paraprofessional in the New York City Department of Education. *I am concerned for my job security* and my goal is to become a teacher that requires a college education. After reading Rebecca R. Skinner's report titled State and Local Financing of Public Schools, listening to NPR's School Money series *and a recent Barrons article*, it became clear to me that reducing federal funding for education would negatively impact millions of students nationwide, especially those that are in districts that already have low funding due to socioeconomic factors and students with disabilities. (emphasis added)

Response D: Since New York City is one of the most *economically diverse yet deeply unequal* cities, it is crucial to implement [...] measures to guarantee that every student has access to the resources they need to succeed. For this reason, *I urge you to advocate* for a more progressive funding model — one that prioritizes equity, reduces reliance on local property taxes, and ensures that every dollar directly benefits all students. *The future of our community* depends on education, and no child should be denied opportunities simply *because of where they live*. (emphasis added)

Given a prompt that asked students to direct their writing to a specific person, students wrote strikingly different responses than those they wrote in the earlier assignment when addressing only the assigned readings in their responses. Students' writing became more passionate, urgent, and precise. Although they were not instructed to do so, every student wrote in the first-person singular, using phrases such as "I believe that…" and "I am concerned." Students identified community-specific issues, such as "reliance on local property taxes" and "reducing federal funding," and referenced real places from their own experiences, including New York City, Amityville, and Massapequa. Instead of merely describing the inequities they discovered, students conveyed a sense of urgency and called for meaningful action to improve conditions in real communities. Words such as "Sadly" and questions pointing out problematic circumstances

— "How is it possible…?" — conveyed the students' compassion for members of those communities. Some students incorporated outside research unprompted, such as citing a *Barron's* article. Overall, their work showed a greater sense of purpose in writing and expressed direct engagement with the topic of school funding. We speculate that a few key features of the revised assignment contributed to students' increased engagement, as evidenced in their writing. First, the writing was in the form of a letter, which suggests, but does not require, students to write in the first person. Second, the writing assignment directed students to ask the recipient of the letter to "do something," directing author attention to action and the possibility of change.

Implications and Next Steps

Posey helps us speculate how the revised assignment generates new, more meaningful responses that are grounded in students' past experiences. Their emotional connections to the assignment are activated and their personal experiences deepen their engagement with the topic. The revised assignment served as both a pedagogical tool and a civic engagement tool, aligning with two UDL gudielines. First, the new assignment provided a vehicle for students to "Connect prior knowledge to new learning" (CAST, 2024, Guideline 3.1) as seen when they connect larger concepts of school funding with their own localized knowledge of school: "a town that is a mile from where I live and went to school experiences significantly more of a struggle than Massapequa does." In addition, students' responses to the revised assignment also demonstrate possibilities to "Cultivate empathy and restorative practices" (CAST, 2024, Guideline 9.4) when they moved from writing impersonal accounts of school funding to utilizing emotionally laden language such as "Sadly," "I am concerned," and "I cannot stress this enough." In so doing, the abstract accounts of school funding became personal stories that "paint emotional scenes" (Posey, 2019, 103). Emotional engagement with the topic, Posey argues, can potentially enhance students' learning of critical topics, such as the inequities in school funding.

Without being explicitly prompted to do so, students connected Social Foundations content to their prior knowledge and lived experiences. Their work reflected both empathy for others and a strong commitment to taking meaningful action — in essence, they demonstrated compassion. Confronted with the reality of economic disparities, students responded not just with understanding but with *compassionate action*, turning empathy into a purposeful response. By advocating for specific actions, they positioned themselves not only as learners but also as knowledge producers and engaged public actors who advocate for change. These qualities employ scholarship that examines technocratization of teacher education (Aydarova, 2021) and embody the "commitments" outlined by Social Foundations scholars for their field of study, especially the commitment to "Engaging students in learning experiences that develop the critical and analytical capacities needed to advocate for more meaningful educational experiences by: a. developing curriculum and implement approaches to instruction that facilitate students' capabilities to think critically and analytically about their education and education in general; and b. providing learning opportunities that enhance students' development of a sense of agency" (Committee, 2013, 118).

Posey (2019, 162) explains that UDL "puts the burden of change on the design of the learning environment," inspiring our ongoing learning about UDL and its potential to enhance the classroom environment for Social Foundations in teacher education. We appreciate Posey's use of the word "burden" as it makes clear the responsibility of the instructor to construct a learning environment that actively supports student learning. We note the contrast of this

approach to a traditional higher education stance of treating the classroom as a sorting machine in which some students are expected to fail. Many tenets of UDL align conceptually with Social Foundation's emphasis on asset-based thinking (CAST, 2024; Posey, 2019), as well as equity and justice. For educators, UDL provides tools to create inclusive and compassionate learning environments that support students' social/emotional development. By tapping into the strengths and lived experiences of our students, UDL frameworks may also support culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies (Kieran & Anderson, 2019; Waitoller & King Thorius, 2016).

In this project, we find that UDL supports a pedagogy of compassion that is at the heart of Social Foundations of Education within teacher education. Compassionate pedagogy, we argue, is not a temporary response to periods of sociopolitical upheaval; it is an everyday practice that must be embedded into the fabric of teaching and learning to confront ongoing injustices and foster meaningful, lasting change. As we look ahead toward future inquiry, we aim to explore how UDL is and can be situated in SFE, with particular attention to its connections with equity, social justice, and culturally responsive pedagogy. This includes critically examining our own teaching practices and identifying opportunities beyond this one assignment to integrate UDL and compassionate teaching and learning more intentionally. Through continued reflection and application, we aim to clarify, theorize, and put into practice the aspects of UDL that concretize the ideas underpinning compassionate pedagogy.

We intentionally align our pedagogy with the ideals first expressed by philosopher Mark Edmundson (2004, 56) and later adapted by Liston, Whitcomb, and Borko (2009, 110): "Can you live it? Can you put it into action? Can you speak — or adapt — the language of this work to live [and teach] better?" That is precisely what we are striving for: to center compassionate pedagogy as a serious intellectual project. To that end, we join scholars such as Zembylas (2013, 506) in promoting "critical pedagogies of compassion" as counter-pedagogies against increasingly dehumanized education. As our work is situated in teacher education, our students are either preparing to become teachers or are early in their teaching careers. This context makes SFE especially urgent, as our students are learning to shape their own classrooms. Educators need frameworks for understanding the broader social and political forces that impact schooling. Pedagogies of compassion offer a means to resist dehumanization and help teachers prioritize humanity, equity, and care in their teaching practices. By cultivating such approaches now, we hope to equip our students to teach with consciously compassionate action.

References

Aydarova, E. (2021). Building a one-dimensional teacher: Technocratic transformations in teacher education policy discourses. *Educational Studies*, *57*(6), 670–689.

Baldwin, J. (1988) *Collected Essays*. New York: The Library of America.

CAST (2024). Universal design for learning guidelines version 3.0 [graphic organizer]. Lynnfield, MA: CAST. https://udlguidelines.cast.org/static/udlg3-graphicorganizer-digital-numbers-a11y.pdf

Committee on Academic Standards and Accreditation: Sandra Winn Tutwiler (Chair), deMarrais, K., Gabbard, D., Hyde, A., Konkol, P., Li, H. li, … Swain, A. (2013). Standards for academic and professional instruction in foundations of education, educational studies, and educational policy studies Third Edition, 2012, Draft Presented to the Educational Community by the American Educational Studies Association's Committee on Academic Standards and Accreditation. *Educational Studies*, *49*(2), 107–118.

Dewey, J. (1907). *The school and society: Being three lectures by John Dewey supplemented by a statement of the University Elementary School*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. https://brocku.ca/MeadProject/Dewey/Dewey_1907/Dewey_1907_toc.html

Edmundson, M. (2004). *Why read?* New York: Bloomsbury.

Engle, E. W., Larkins, M., Bratman, E., & Higgins, A. K. (2024). Centering diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in environmental studies and sciences by practicing compassionate pedagogies. *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences*. *14* (3), 469–483. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13412-024-00952-y

Goetz, J. L., Keltner, D., & Simon-Thomas, E. (2010). Compassion: An evolutionary analysis and empirical review. *Psychological Bulletin*, *136*(3), 351–374.

Kieran, L., & Anderson, C. (2019). Connecting universal design for learning with culturally responsive teaching. *Education and Urban Society*, *51*(9), 1202–1216.

Laverty, M. (2025, April 5-7). *Never too young for a liberal education: Philosophizing with children — Past, present, and future* [Keynote address]. New York State Foundations of Education Association 51st Annual Conference, New York, NY, United States.

Liston, D., Whitcomb, J., & Borko, H. (2009). The end of education in teacher education: Thoughts on reclaiming the role of social foundations in teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *60*(2), 107–111.

National Public Radio (NPR) (2016). *School money: the cost of opportunity*. https://www.npr.org/series/473636949/schoolmoney

Posey, A. (2019). *Engage the brain: How to design for learning that taps into the power of emotion*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Roberts, B.W., Edmonds, G., & Grijalva, E. (2010). It is developmental me, not generation me: Developmental changes are more important than generational changes in narcissism — Commentary on Trzesniewski & Donnellan. *Perspectives on Psychological Sciences*. *5*(1): 97–102. doi:10.1177/1745691609357019.

Skinner, R. R. (2019). *State and local financing of public schools*. Congressional Research Service. https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20190723_R45827_d38a3e14137098dac7a9d1ad6d4fa8175f0290ce.pdf

Waitoller, F. R., & King Thorius, K. A. (2016). Cross-pollinating culturally sustaining pedagogy and universal design for learning: Toward an inclusive pedagogy that accounts for dis/ability. *Harvard Educational Review*, *86*(3), 366-389.

Zembylas, M. (2013). The "crisis of pity" and the radicalization of solidarity: Toward critical pedagogies of compassion. *Educational Studies*, *49*(6), 504–521.

Redefining Success:
Is the Disarticulation Between High School and College Written Composition a Deterrent to Student Learning?

Vicky Giouroukakis and Louisa Vida
Long Island University

Abstract: Our mixed methods study (surveys, N=43; interviews, N=12; samples of student work from interviewees, N=50) of 12th-grade English teachers revealed three sources of disconnect between high school writing instruction and college-level writing. To better align instruction with college-level expectations high school teachers need time and opportunity to practice revising and editing with students, colleges need to explicitly state expectations in terms of high school academic standards, and students need a writing curriculum requiring them to write both formulaically (to pass standardized tests) and creatively (to overcome doldrums induced by writing formulaically). These points will be key in future investigations of the perceived disarticulation of high school and college written composition curriculum and instruction.

As long as ten years ago, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2015), stated that 73.4% of employers value candidates with strong written communication skill. Today, with the prevalence of AI, colleges and high schools more than ever need to teach students to communicate via writing. Knowledge of how to write multi-sentence dialogic prompts that include such ELA factors as intended use and audience help satisfy employers' needs (Fisher & Frey, 2025). Forty-three percent of sixth- through twelfth-graders already report they have used AI for idea generation/revision suggestions (Playing Catch Up, 2025). The 2017 NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) assessments found 72% of students coming out of high school are not ready for college-level writing. (What would a hypothetical 2025 NAEP assessment say about writing preparedness and AI?) High school English teachers are working hard to prepare students for college and careers, so why are incoming first-year college students unprepared for the demands of college writing to the point their writing is negatively affecting first- to second-year college retention (Bowean, 2014; Cantor, 2019; Sanabria et al, 2020)?

To investigate this question, college presidents and school district superintendents invited a cadre of college professors and high school educators to join the Long Island Regional Advisory Council on Higher Education (LIRACHE). This consortium created the Writing Subgroup subcommittee that was tasked with examining the alleged disconnect between high school writing instruction and college writing instruction. To this end, some members of the subcommittee conducted a research project to investigate if and why the disconnect exists and how we can address it. The results of that study included a disarticulation of the way the writing process is taught and used in high school and college. Results were published in multiple publications (Giouroukakis et al., 2023; Giouroukakis et al, 2021; Kramer-Vida et al, 2021). To more closely investigate these results, we (Vicky and Louisa, two of the original researchers) conducted a follow-up case study of 12th-grade English teachers' perceptions of their writing instruction and how it prepares students for their first-year college writing assignments. The two research questions examined were: What do 12th-grade high school English teachers perceive as appropriate writing curriculum and instruction to prepare students for college writing? and How do 12th-grade high school English teachers perceive their teaching of writing?

Data was collected from teachers in high, medium, and low-achieving public schools in our geographic area. Artifacts consisted of surveys, interviews, teacher assignments, and samples of

student work. We hypothesized that there would be a disconnect between college professors' expectations of students' written proficiency and high school English teachers' perceptions of the writing skill that students need. The disconnect between high school and college expectations would negatively affect student achievement. This disconnect may account for many students not graduating from college in a timely manner and/or transferring to institutions that students feel more closely match their academic background. An additional potential problem arising from this disconnect is the establishment of non-credit remedial writing courses at the college level which are escalating the drop-out rate (Cantor, 2019; Sanabria et al, 2020).

What Writing Researchers/College Professors Want for/from Student Writers

Broadly speaking, writing researchers tend to advise a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC — Bazerman, 2005) approach as appropriate for a high school English writing curriculum. Schmoker (2025) recommended authentic literacy, suggesting full length, purposeful in-class writing in all content areas with associated instruction. For example, one high school implemented a National Science Foundation grant that emphasized scenario-based assessments, that is, critically writing about real world topics based on primary sources and authentic data (Singer et al, 2024). Additionally, to transfer student writing skill to all classes, Griffith (2013) suggested a genre awareness class where students could connect their own background, their values, and what they have previously learned to the new genres to which they will be exposed in different academic areas. In addition, Rhodes et al (2003) advocated for an interdisciplinary, thematic, inquiry-based course to enhance collaboration between high school and college curricula. Marakoff (2019) suggested assigning multiple, discipline-specific tasks, valuing process over product, and not teaching formulaic strategies. Coskie et al (2022) proposed writing assignment choices, creating one's own norms, utilization of technological support tools, time-on-task, peer discussion, and focusing on the communicative value of the whole text to create successful classroom writing groups that parallel the characteristics of successful book clubs. Additionally, Kline and Kang (2022) advised reflecting, re-imagining, and revisiting a piece as a framework for centering critical writing pedagogy. In this scenario, student writers looked at their pieces cognitively, socio-culturally, and critically in terms of genre, grammar and language, agency and participation, and the use of technology and digital media. Gee and Zhang (2024) discussed using AI to develop flexible writing that is composed of problem solving, creativity, and metacognition around community events, coding and modding (modifying code), interdisciplinary activities, and transmedia storytelling. Expository, argumentative, creative, dialogic, collaborative and reflective writing should be taught within the bigger concepts of art and design, video production, photography, and music and sound. This cybersapien integrative writing emphasizes the analytical and processing capabilities of AI combined with human creativity, intuition, and emotional intelligence in online affinity spaces.

In general, professors want students to write disciplinary research well. Robinson (2014) noted that well written arguments were essential for college writing success, and another author noted that college assigned tasks were typically criticism and argument development, identifying a problem and suggesting a solution, and analyzing audience (HS Writing Gap, 2007). Additionally, an experienced first-year writing professor often noticed gaps in citation knowledge, use of a long five-paragraph template, quoting as the sole source of evidence, students looking for prompts rather than developing as personal-choice-driven writers, students not seeing narration, exposition, description, and persuasion as modes of expression, and editing instead of revising (Marakoff &Thomas, 2019). Per Hammond and Barber (2024), instruction

should help students self-actualize, imagine, and engage in different social discourses, focusing on the process, not the end product. As noted in Edcuration (2022), in college, students need to write research papers and long essays that explore multiple perspectives supported by data, in a scholarly academic presentation style. However, many students struggle to do so. We wondered if this was a result of how and what students had been taught in high school English.

An issue that might be impacting the high school/college writing disconnect is the emphasis in high school on formulaic writing for standardized tests. Fifteen years ago, Fanetti et al. (2010) noted a stress on "power" and modal writing for the essays that are part of many standardized tests. The academic weight given to the tests tends to diminish instructional focus on process writing and portfolio assessment. Streibel (2014) agreed, noting the lack of instruction on writing for authentic audiences and real context. However, college-level writing does not lend itself to formulaic mastery nor adherence to standards-based benchmarks which can be replicated by AI (Hammond & Barber, 2024). Even the College Board's Advanced Placement (AP) program was criticized for teaching students to write to a prompt and for rubric-based scoring, rather than teaching students the skill taught in a college-level introductory Writing course (Fleitz, 2007). In addition, an emphasis on writing shorter answers instead of rigorous, longer, thought pieces may not be preparing college-going students with the reasoning-out composition skill they will need for full-length essays and other long writing assignments (Edcuration, 2022). Benjamin and Wagner (2021) noted such highly effective writing processes as allocating ample time for writing and instructor-guided, scaffolded, non-linear cycles of drafting, reviewing feedback, and revising should be high school writing expectations in all content areas if we want to ready students to become cognitive apprentices when they get to college. Additionally, Collier (2022) noted that teachers should focus on the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) principles. NCTE concepts include genre study, using writing as a tool for thinking, reflecting about writing, and revising based on self, peer, and instructor feedback. Students should write in different modalities and model their writing on mentor texts that reflect who the students are both as individuals and as writers. Help in this regard may be found in how Writing teachers are taught to teach Writing. For example, widespread instructional commitment to the way the National Writing Project (NWP), through their College, Career, and Community Writing Program (C3WP) professional development sessions, trains teachers in the pedagogy of argumentative writing (NWP, 2021) could solidify teacher commitment to the importance of revision as the "missing link" between high school writing and college-level writing. However, it remains an open question as to what high school teachers want for/from their students as writers. As well, it remains an open question what sort of opportunities high school teachers have to fulfill their wishes for their students and to fulfill the wishes of Writing researchers and college professors. Our study addresses these two questions.

High School Teachers and Writing Instruction

Our research questions, recall, deal with the perceptions of 12th-grade English teachers in our geographic area regarding appropriate Writing curriculum and instruction to prepare students for college-level writing. Based on our past research (Giouroukakis et al., 2023; Giouroukakis, et al., 2021; Kramer-Vida, et al., 2021), we hypothesized that there would be a disconnect between college professors'/Writing researchers' expectations of students' preparedness for college writing and high school English teachers' beliefs that their instruction met those expectations. We wondered if the 12th-grade English teachers we interviewed, most of whom were teaching students who had already passed the English Regents, would comment on the potential high

school/college disconnect stemming from emphasizing formulaic writing. Data was collected from schools in two counties and consisted of surveys, interviews, and artifacts that included written assignments and sample student work. The survey was sent to school administrators who were asked to forward it to their 12th-grade English teachers. Responses were anonymous and voluntary. The survey was also distributed via listservs and our own personal contacts. It included 23 questions on a Likert scale (Always, Often, Sometimes, Never, N/A).

We collected data from September 2022 through January 2023. Forty-three usable surveys were completed and returned by a diverse cross section of teachers with various years of experience (1-5 years; 6-10 years; 11-15 years; 16-20 years; 21+ years) and teaching assignments (e.g., credit-bearing college-level course; honors-level course; remediation course for at-risk students; stand-alone English as a New Language course). To further inform the survey results, we interviewed six 12th-grade English teachers from high, medium, and low achieving districts (two from each level), disaggregated based on their students' results on the English Regents. Some of these teachers had indicated in the survey that they were willing to be interviewed and some agreed after being asked by their school administrators. Each interview was conducted in a semi-structured format via Zoom and then transcribed. As part of the interview protocol, we asked the teachers to submit artifacts for our review: four or five of their longer writing assignments and some of their student responses to these assignments. From January through February 2023, we quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed the survey results, the interviews, and the artifacts that had been submitted. We perused Google generated charts and graphs of the data, and a statistician formally analyzed the survey results through a MANOVA analysis. The MANOVA analysis grouped the survey questions into the following themes: revision, editing, and process writing techniques/assignments. Using the themes as lenses, we analyzed the interviews and the submitted artifacts looking for patterns that ran through all of our data sources. Analysis of the data yielded the following findings:

Factor 1: Revision: Approximately 60% of the 12th-grade English teachers who were surveyed indicated that their students *often or always used revision techniques* for major and longer writing assignments, with the predominant change being elaborating or further explaining what they had written (83.7%). About 72.1% of the teachers noted that their students added quotes or paraphrased, while 69.8% of the surveyed teachers said that their students added new ideas. Some teachers also noted that their students changed their prose (37.2%) and deleted (34.9%) or moved (30.2%) paragraphs or sections (Figure 1 below).

7. The revision strategy(ies) my students use the most (for major and longer writing assignments) is/are:
43 responses
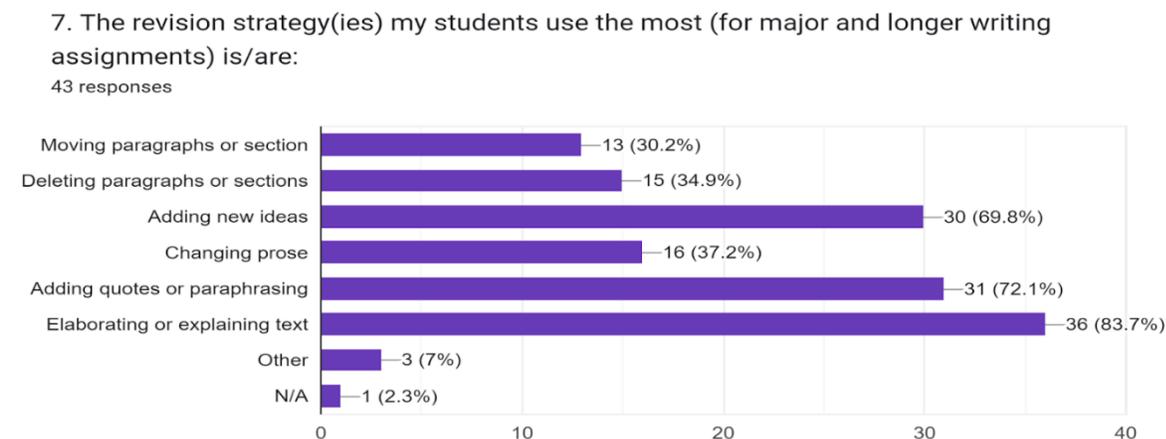
Even though the majority of teachers indicated that they taught revision to a certain extent and that their students were implementing revision techniques, about 80% of them indicated that they were only *sometimes or never satisfied* with the revisions (Figure 2 below).

10. I am satisfied with the extent to which my students revise their writing to produce a final draft (for major and longer writing assignments).
43 responses

- N/A (Not Applicable)
- Never
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always
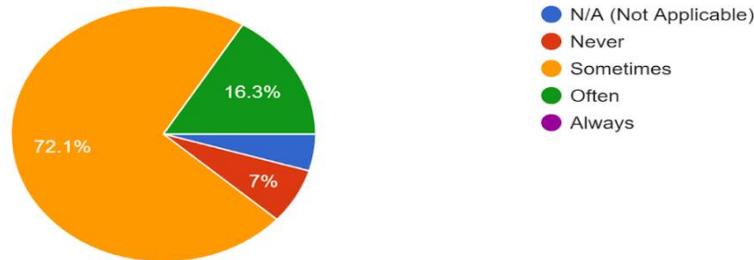
From the follow-up interviews, the teachers we spoke with indicated that many students resisted even guided revision and several students engaged in revision only because the revisions were graded. Some students required much scaffolded instruction and guidance in what revision is, how it differs from editing, and how to revise in order to improve written performance. Therefore, although teachers required revision as stated in their survey responses, interviews, and assignments/student samples, student revision was not satisfactory, and the time teachers spent teaching revision and the time allotted for students to revise their work was limited/constrained.

Factor 2: Editing: Considering the results above, it is interesting that 60% of the surveyed teachers indicated that their students *often or always revised,* but only about 44% of their students *often or always used editing and proofreading techniques*. Surprising to us, as we assumed that students would be doing more editing than revising, given that revising is more intellectually demanding. So, what editing techniques did the educators feel that their students were using? About 74%-76% of teachers indicated that their students were correcting mechanics, grammar or spelling (Figure 3 below).

12. The editing/proofreading technique(s) my students use the most (for major and longer writing assignments) is/are:
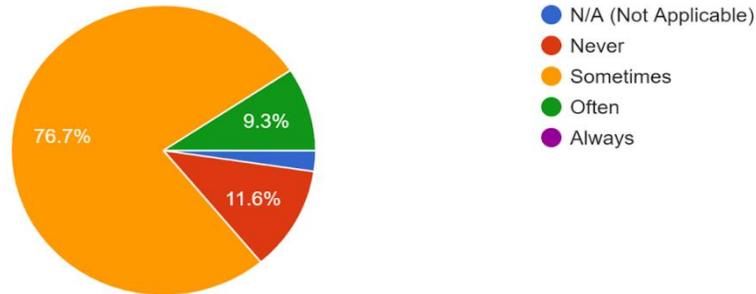43 responses
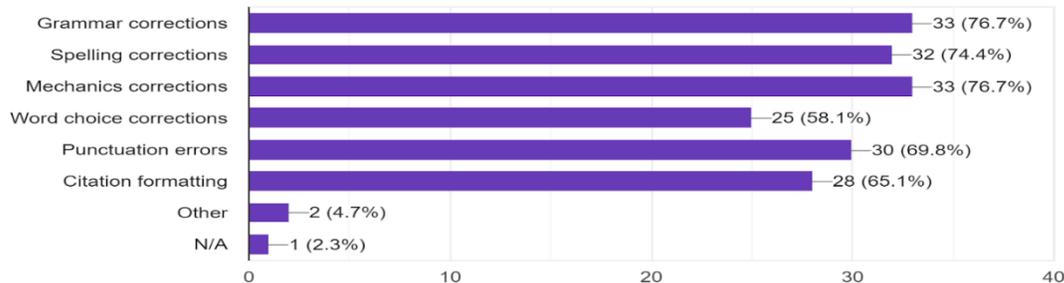
Teachers said students sometimes edited and proofed throughout the writing process, but 88% of the teachers were only *sometimes or never satisfied* with the result (Figure 4, top next page).

15. I am satisfied with the extent to which my students edit/proofread their writing to produce a final draft (for major and longer writing assignments).
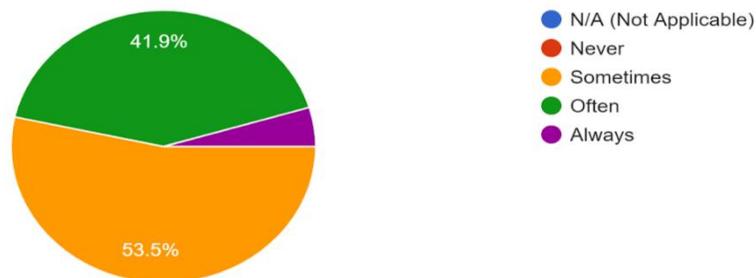
43 responses

This result aligns with the revision result above, that most teachers are not satisfied with students' use of revision. In the survey responses and the interviews, teachers stated that students were required to edit, but that some students seemed to confuse editing with revision.

Factor 3: Process Writing Techniques/Assignments: The surveyed teachers stated that only about 54% of them *sometimes* assigned major papers for their students to complete (Figure 5).

1. My students are assigned to produce major and longer writing assignments (not on-demand).
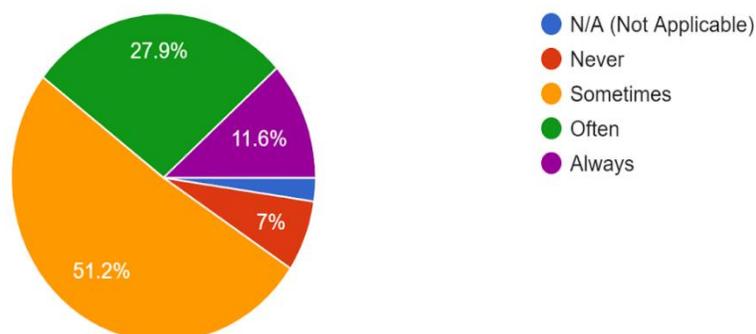
43 responses

Only about 51% indicated students *sometimes* wrote for authentic audiences (Figure 6 below).

19. My students write for an authentic audience (for major and longer writing assignments).

43 responses

Additionally, according to the teachers, about 49% of their students *never publish* their pieces (Figure 7 below).

22. My students publish (make available to others) their final draft (for major and longer writing assignments) (e.g., via the classroom bulletin board,..., a class blog, school newsletter, online journal).
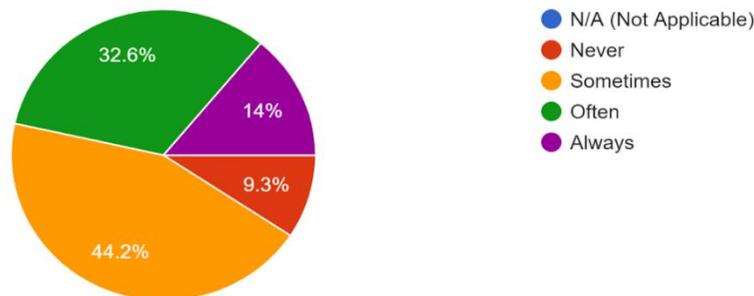43 responses
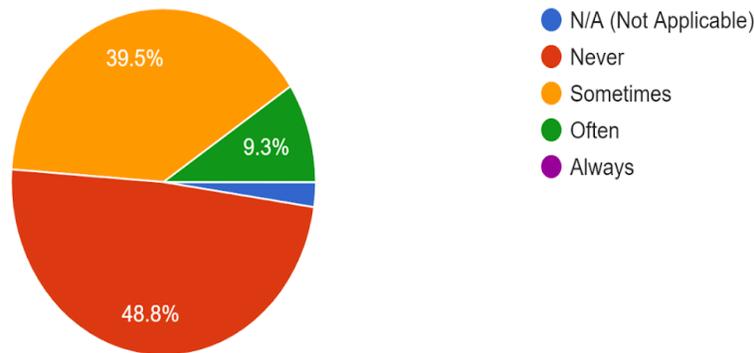
If they publish anywhere, 37.2% of students publish in Google Classroom, followed by publishing in a portfolio (32.6%), and presenting their work to others (30.2%). In fact, 23.3% of the teachers surveyed chose *not applicable* for the question about sharing a final draft of a major assignment.

Yet, for assigned writing, the teachers did indicate approximately 70% of the students used the writing process either *often or always*. Per the teachers, about 63% of the students appeared to do so recursively. Unfortunately, according to the educators, using the writing process did not stop some students (47%) from writing formulaically either *often or always* (Figure 8 below*).*

20. My students use a formula (e.g., writing frame, graphic organizer, sentence starters) to produce a final draft (for major and longer writing assignments).
43 responses

MANOVA Analysis: The MANOVA analysis of the Google Form survey responses did not show significant differences at the alpha = .05 level of significance for any of the Revision, Editing, or Process factors across all groups. At the factor level, the analysis showed no significant differences at the alpha = .05 level of significance for the Revision and Process factors for all

groups. However, during post-hoc analysis — using the Games-Howell, Dunnett T3 post-hoc test for unequal variances — significant differences in the Editing factor were seen: *Values for teachers of At-Risk students were significantly higher than those for teachers of AP/College classes (p<.05).* In general, teachers of at-risk students focus more on the editing process than do teachers of Advanced Placement or college preparation students. Perhaps this is due to the perceived need for at-risk students to become skillful at the most fundamental aspects of writing.

Results from Artifacts and Interviews: According to the interviewed teachers, writing is messy, fun, and risky, but the teachers did not feel that students saw composing in the same way. They said that many students seem to see writing as hard work and something that they need to do for the teacher for a grade or to pass a course or test. Thus, their writing lacks voice and can be formulaic. Teachers also did not perceive many of their students as readers by choice which may account for their lack of strong reading/writing schemata. In terms of the artifacts, there were more similarities than differences among the assignments in spite of the three levels of school achievement where the instructors taught. However, the researchers saw differences in the depth and breadth of student responses across the levels, with more creative and analytic responses from advanced students and shorter, more basic answer-the-question type of responses from the lower-level students. Medial students, unsurprisingly, fell somewhere in the middle, profiting from the additional scaffolding offered to stretch their less detailed and less interpretive first drafts toward a more penetrating and compelling product.

The 12th-grade English teachers all admitted feeling pressure to prepare students for the State exam. Test prep writing practice had negative consequences for writing instruction. Teaching to the test contributed to teaching formulaic writing and crowding out other more creative writing assignments that might appeal more to students' interests. Once students passed the mandated New York State Regents Exam in 11th grade, some teachers stated that they made it a pedagogical point to spend 12th grade trying to undo the negative effects of formulaic writing by varying their writing assignments and expectations. They assigned more creative writing and expected students to enjoy writing. By that point, however, interest in writing or in being creative or in writing long papers or writing in different genres for different purposes had waned for many students. Teachers of the most at-risk students lamented their students lacked fundamental skill, did not see writing as thinking, and did not see themselves as writers. Teachers of Advanced Placement students also stated that they devoted time to preparing students for the AP exams that the students sat for at the end of the year. Whatever the teachers are surmising is causing the effect discussed in the interviews, they unanimously advocated for student use of the writing process with as much teacher directed, scaffolded, guiding steps as necessary for the students to be successful writers. Most interviewed teachers were uncertain about college writing demands and whether or not they were preparing their students to meet those demands. Two teachers, who were adjunct college instructors, had a clearer understanding of higher education expectations which facilitated their instruction at the high school level.

A Needs Assessment for High School Writing Instruction
We hypothesized that the disconnect between college professors' expectations of students' written proficiency and high school English teachers' perceptions of the writing skill college students need were affecting student achievement. Analysis of the survey responses, interviews, and artifacts we collected yielded the following themes, which comprise a list of needed changes in high school writing instruction to better align it with college writing expectations: the need for

revision and editing in writing/instruction; the need for articulation among high school teachers of college writing expectations; and the need for real-world writing to undo the negative consequences of test-driven writing instruction.

The Need for Revision and Editing in Writing Instruction: Results indicated that, although teachers required revision, student revision was not satisfactory, and the time teachers spent on teaching revision and the time allotted for students to revise their work was limited/constrained. According to the teachers we surveyed and interviewed, the majority of them are not satisfied with the level or amount of revision and editing that students perform on their writing. This may be attributed to students' approach to revision and editing. Many students, novices in particular, have difficulty identifying errors in their writing and ways to address them (Hayes & Flower, 1986). As a result, they may resist revision, but even if they are open to it, they may not know how to tackle it. Many students make superficial changes, not meaningful ones that will significantly improve their writing (Adams et al., 2010). The AP teachers we interviewed also noted being constrained by teaching the assigned curriculum and preparing students for the Regents exam (in prior years) or the AP exam (currently) which left little time for teaching or allowing for student revision or editing. This finding supports the idea that teachers need to allot more guided time to both teaching editing and revision techniques and to allowing more class or home time for students to complete these processes. This approach may strengthen students' writing, which will benefit performance on standardized exams and college and career writing.

Another finding, according to the teachers, is the lack of connection between literacy and other subjects and, therefore, the lack of emphasis on revision and editing in content-area instruction. Per the ELA teachers, other subject teachers, in spite of the Standards' emphasis on disciplinary literacy, focus on content, rather than form, and consider themselves to be content experts. It should come as no surprise, then, that researchers have found that precious little reading or writing goes on in most content area classes (AdLit, n.d., para. 2). Unless content teachers see themselves also as supporters of students' reading and writing development, English teachers will have the heavy burden and nigh on impossible task of teaching students to be successful writers in all content areas.

The Need for Articulation of College Writing Expectations: About half of the survey respondents indicated that they assign major, long papers and that their students use the writing process much of the time. This may not be enough to prepare students for college as the majority of collegiate writing assignments are long papers that are research-based and supported by outside sources (Edcuration, 2022). Students need to be able to write long works that explore multiple perspectives, include more advanced analytical and critical thinking, incorporate citations, and are presented in a scholarly way. It is apparent from the interviews and submitted artifacts that the teachers worked hard and went to great lengths to teach writing to their students in ways that prepared them for the demands of college writing. Yet, the teachers were not on the same page as the professors in terms of their perceptions of the demands of college writing. With the exception of the two teachers who were part time college instructors, the rest did not seem confident that they had a clear understanding of what college professors assign or expect from student writing. Maybe being well-versed in P-16 Standards is a big part of the answer.

One document that does outline effective college-level writing is the Framework developed by The Council of Writing Program Administrators, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project (2011, 7) which describes the rhetorical and 21st century skill, as well as the habits of mind and experiences, that are critical for college success.

Teachers are encouraged to "foster these habits of mind" through "writing, reading, and critical analysis" that will develop students' rhetorical knowledge, critical thinking, writing processes, knowledge of conventions, and ability to compose in multiple environments. We strongly encourage high school and college educators to begin by engaging in meaningful conversations about the needs they see for writing in their respective fields and how they propose to teach their students to write successfully in these areas. We hope these conversations lead to publications that outline uniform expectations for effective writing and writing instruction in grades K-16.

The Need for Real-World Writing to Repair Test Prep Damage: The survey respondents also indicated that half of their students used a formula (e.g., writing frame, graphic organizer, sentence starters) to produce a final draft. The interviewed teachers all stated the formula was a necessary evil to scaffold writing for all students to pass the State exam. The pressure to prepare students for standardized testing has influenced writing instruction for a long time (Hillocks, 2003; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Pella, 2015). As we have discovered, "The goal for succeeding on the text-based response [test items] becomes the standard number of paragraphs for many questions which is often five: an introduction with a thesis, three supporting paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph" (Giouroukakis et al., 2021, 38). The AP teachers also stated feeling pressure to prepare their students for the AP exam at the end of the year, another round of testing taking time away from more sophisticated forms of writing instruction. Once students passed the exam, some teachers purposely avoided assignments utilizing test-prep techniques such as on-demand writing prompts, outlines, writing frames, graphic organizers, and scoring rubrics. Instead, they tried to assign more creative activities (e.g., poetry and fiction writing, mimicking literary texts, journal and dialogue writing, playwriting, etc.); but to no or little avail.

> According to Giouroukakis et al. (2021, 38):

>> The thinking behind giving students writing formulas is that if students have a structure they can use, they can then deviate from the structure as they become better writers and thinkers, but the problem with this is many students use the formulas even after they graduate high school and, thus, their writing skills do not develop. Formulas and other scaffolding tools are meant to be used initially to provide support for students and then taken away once students have reached more writing independence. The analogy of "scaffolds as training wheels" is appropriate here; they need to be removed or else they will hold students back.

Connolly and Giouroukakis (2006) argued that it is possible to help students succeed on the mandated tests without relying on the formula and sacrificing teachers' values and creativity. They presented a lesson planning approach for the secondary classroom that generates test success as a byproduct of comprehensive literacy learning. By identifying the skillful and strategic thinking needed to be successful on standardized tests and making test writing part of a comprehensive literacy curriculum, we are not only preparing students for the writing portion of these exams, but also for college, career, and life. For example, Pella's (2015) study on writing instruction focused on two middle school teachers, Rachel and Laura, who sought to develop their pedagogies to be responsive to the needs of their diverse students. Pella discovered that: "Rachel and Laura's efforts to develop equity writing pedagogy prompted them to design multi-modal and what they called "flexible" writing activities, the test-driven school culture motivated them to maintain their use of various standardized approaches. As a result, these two teachers sought to develop an eclectic writing pedagogy — one that integrated divergent practices… [in] a balanced approach to teaching and learning where both standardized and more flexible

approaches were integrated." Rachel and Laura point a way forward by incorporating both sorts of writing, formulaic and creative, into literacy learning.

The fact that students do not read much, according to the interviewed teachers, is disconcerting. Researchers agree: "To make our students effective writers in any genre, we teachers need to facilitate their reading of that genre and guide them as they think carefully and reflectively about what choices expert authors in that genre make and why they make them" (Ferlazzo, 2-22, A Four-Step Process, para. 1). By showing students how reading and writing go hand in hand, students may understand what the writing process entails and how it impacts the reader. Giving students authentic examples of effective writing techniques and how they can apply them to their own writing makes them better writers. Related to this idea is writing authentically and meaningfully. That's what has an impact on the reader. Our study shows that, in the opinion of their teachers, many students are not writing for authentic audiences or publishing their work. This may be diminishing their ability to see the true meaning of writing as a societally necessary mode of expression, as well as the multiple benefits derived from writing for developing, expressing, and sharing voice. In terms of the impact on their college writing performance, students may not be able to complete college-level writing assignments in all content areas as they may still perceive writing as a product solely for consumption by their instructors. According to Driscoll (2011, 23), students need to use writing outside of the classroom and in other writing situations and "although no course can cover all possible genres, giving students exposure to a variety of genres and discourse community norms — and describing their explicit connections — can begin to help facilitate transfer [of writing skill to other contexts.] Examples of this work include writing letters to editors of local newspapers, writing to their government representatives, asking students to analyze various [disciplinary] documents."

Steps Forward

Case studies and small samples, like the ones we used in our study, are rarely generalizable. Thus, a larger scale study — with more participants selected from wider, geographical areas — on (re)connecting high school and college writing instruction is indicated. Furthermore, future studies should include both college and high school student voices in addition to teacher and researcher voices. As the field moves forward to strengthen connections between high school and college writing, the following are implications of our research for K-12 writing instruction:

Improved Editing and Revising:

There should be long and more creative, analytical, research-based writing in content areas for real audiences where the communication mode is as important as the content.

All content area teachers need to value and evaluate both content and ELA conventions; the literacy standards in all content areas need to be implemented and evaluated.

Students need to be taught the difference between revising for meaning and editing for mechanics.

Students need ample time to write and ample opportunity for use of guided and scaffolded non-linear cycles of drafting, feedback, and revision (Benjamin & Wagner, 2021).

Improved High School-College Communication:
>   K-12 schools and institutions of higher education need to discuss and develop uniform writing expectations, maybe based on and extending the Next Generation Standards (Connolly & Giouroukakis, 2016).

Improved Writer Voice to Offset Formulaic Writing for Tests
>   Pressure to teach to the test leads to formulaic writing.

>   Developing students' research, analysis, and revision skill is encouraged, as is the development of creativity as writers.

>   Students' individual writing processes need to be respected, valued, and encouraged.

>   Publishing should be a valued part of the writing process in both high school and college where both process and product are celebrated.

>   Writing needs to be seen as a lifelong practice that is real, meaningful, purposeful, and impactful.

Hopefully, all these points will be key in future investigations of the perceived disarticulation of high school and college written composition curriculum and instruction and help improve student outcomes on the 12th-grade and first-year college levels.

References

Adams, A., Simmons, F., Willis, C., & Pawling, R. (2010). Undergraduate students' ability to revise text effectively: Relationships with topic knowledge and working memory. *Journal of Research in Reading*, *33*(1), 54-76.

AdLit. (n.d.). *Reading and writing in the content areas*. https://www.adlit.org/adlit-101/reading-and-writing-content-areas.

Benjamin, S. & Wagner, M. (2021). Developing accomplished writers: Lessons from recent research. *Kappan, 102*(6), 44-49.

Bowean, L. (2014, Aug. 31). Why black men struggle to bridge the gap between high school, college. *South Florida Sun – Sentinel.* A.20.

Cantor, M.R. (2019). Retention of Long Island millennials at a suburban community college: Are they college ready? *Journal for Leadership and Instruction, 18*(1), 36-41.

Collier, L. (2022). A principled approach: How focusing on writing principles helps you become a better writing teacher. *Council Chronicle, 32*(11), 29-31.

Connolly, M. & Giouroukakis, V. (2016). *Achieving next generation literacy: Using the tests (you think) you hate to help the students you love.* ASCD.

Coskie, T. L., Giles, L., Hornof, M. M., Hunter, M. Lowin, S., & Nugent-Ohls, K. (2022). "Why can't it be more like a book club?": Revisioning writing groups in the classroom. *Language Arts, 99*(5), 339-342.

Council of Writing Program Administrators, National Council of Teachers of English, National Writing Project [CWPA, NCTE, NWP]. (2011, January). Framework for success in postsecondary writing.

Driscoll, D. L. (2011). Connected, disconnected, or uncertain: Student attitudes about future writing contexts and perceptions of transfer from first year writing to the disciplines. *Across the Discipline*s: *A Journal of Language, Learning and Academic Writing*. https://doi.org/10.37514/ATD-J.2011.8.2.07

Edcuration Blog. (2022, Feb. 4). *Are high school students equipped for college writing? Why it matters.* https://blog.edcuration.com/are-high-school-students-equipped-for-college-writing-why-it-matters

Educational Leadership. (2025). Playing catch up. *Educational Leadership, 82*(5), 9.

Fannetti, S., Bushrow, K.M., & Deweese, D. L. (2010). Closing the gap between high school writing instruction and college writing expectations. *English Journal, 99*(4), 77-83.

Ferlazzo, L. (2020, Feb. 20). Connecting reading & writing 'is a high-leverage move.' *Education Week*. https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/opinion-connecting-reading-writing-is-a-high-leverage-move/2020/02

Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2025). Welcoming AI with purpose. *Educational Leadership, 82*(5), 12-13.

Fleitz, E. (2007). Profits over process: AP English and the decline of writing instruction, *CEA Forum, 36*(1), EJ1097348.

Gee, J.P. & Zhang, Q.A. (2024). Cybersapien literacy: Integrating AI and human. *Kappan*, 106(3), 32-38.

Giouroukakis, V., Kramer-Vida, L., Siegel, K., & Jaccarino, V. (2023). Professional development to bridge the secondary/postsecondary writing gap for all students. *Reading in Virginia. Voices from the Field: Literacy Grows Here. XLV,* 41-50. *Virginia State Literacy Association.*

Giouroukakis, V., Kramer-Vida, L., Siegel, K., & Jaccarino, V. (2021). Addressing the high school and college writing gap: Democratizing writing instruction. *The English Record, 71*(2), 30-48. https://www.nysecteach.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/English-Record-Summer-2021.pdf

Griffith Johnson, T. S. (2013). *Bridging the gap: Creating a high school course in genre awareness.* ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. 1538780.

Hammond, K., & Barber, C. (2024). The limits of mastery learning. *Kappan*, 106(2), 14-18.

Hayes, J. & Flower, L. (1986). Writing, research and the writer. *American Psychologist 41*(10), 1106-1113.

Hillocks, G. (2003). *The testing trap; How state writing assessments control learning*. Teachers College Press.

Journal of Developmental Education. (2007). The high school-college writing gap: Formative assessment applications. *Journal of Developmental Education,31*(2), 34, 36.

Kline, S. & Kang, G. (2022). Reflect, reimagine, revisit: A framework for centering critical writing pedagogy. *Language Arts, 99*(5), 300-311.

Kramer-Vida, L., Giouroukakis, V., Jaccarino, V., & Siegel, K. (2021). A Long Island study: Teachers' and professors' attitudes toward writing instruction — the high school/college transition. *Journal for Leadership and Instruction. 20*(1), 23-26. https://www.scopeonline.us/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/JLI-Spring-2021-Final.pdf

Marakoff, K. & Thomas, P. L. (Mar. 25, 2019). Bridging the writing gap: Centering student voices in high school and college writing. Monty. Weblog post. Teachers, Profs, Parents: Writers Who Care [BLOG] Newstex.

National Assessment of Educational Progress. (2017). *2017 Writing*. https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/writing/

National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE). (2015). *Job Outlook 2016 Survey*. http://www.naceweb.org

National Writing Project (2021). https://www.nwp.org/uploads/images/C3WP-Scale-Up-Research-Brief-April-2021_Acc.pdf

Nichols, S. L., & Berliner, D. C. (2007). *Collateral damage: Excluding students from education by design and by neglect.* Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press.

Pella, S. M. (2015) Learning to teach writing in the age of standardization and accountability; Toward an equity writing pedagogy. *Teaching/Writing: Journal of Writing Teacher Education (4)*1.

Rhodes, T. L., Jones, R. T &, K.M. (2003). High school/college connections. *Liberal Education, 89*(2), 38-45.

Robinson, S. C. (2014). *Can the common core argument standards close the high school-college gap?* ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. 3639885.

Sanabria, T., Penner, A., & Domina, T. (2020). Failing at remediation? College remedial course taking, failure and long-term student outcomes. *Research in Higher Education, 61*(4), 459-484. EJ1252204. ISSN-0361-0365

Schmoker, M. (2025). It's time to do the 'right things'. *Educational Leadership, 82*(6), 42-46.

Singer, N.R., Lannin, A., Kareen, M., Romine, W. & Kline, K. (2024). Literacy-based instruction in STEM. *Kappan, 106*(2), 24-27.

Streibel, K. A. (2014). *The secondary/postsecondary writing gap: Obeying standards, striving for authenticity*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. 1565351.

Causal Talk!
Broadening and Deepening the Logic of Teaching

Greg Seals
Independent Scholar

Abstract: Theoretization of teaching's causal efficacy remains controversial between insistence upon randomized experiment to assess educational efficacy and insistence upon qualitative understanding of pedagogical encounters to assess educational efficacy. A source of controversy is tendency to treat causes as metaphysical entities rather than methodological constructs. To minimize controversy, I offer a Deweyan theory of teaching and give it three causal articulations — covering law, correlational, interactional — spanning, without loss of meaning, the quantitative-qualitative spectrum of causal accounts of teaching. Dewey's trans-causal theory makes a variety of causal talks acceptable in education, adding a multi-purpose tool, causal talk, to workbenches of theorists, researchers, and practitioners alike. Adding causal talk to educational theory, methodology, and practice builds attention to students' lives into construction of educative experiences thus diminishing power relations in schools.

Theorizing causal efficacy in teaching remains controversial. Parties to the controversy range from those who insist upon quantitative randomized experiment as the only valid assessment of causal efficacy of teaching to those who find causal efficacy a matter only accurately assessed in terms of qualitative understanding of specific contexts of pedagogical encounter.[1] A source of controversy is tendency to treat causes as metaphysical entities when causes are more adequately understood as methodological constructs.[2] To make this point, I offer a broadly Deweyan theory of teaching and give it three different causal articulations — covering law, correlational, interactional — to bridge the presumed chasm described by quantitative and qualitative accounts of causal efficacy in teaching. The theories of teacher efficacy I offer span a range of accounts of causation without loss of meaning in the variables they use. All the theories concern educational energy; but from different perspectives. Thus, my theory of teaching is trans-causal: It makes a variety of causal talks acceptable in education and, thereby, adds a multi-purpose tool, causal talk, to the workbenches of education theorists, researchers, and practitioners alike. While it adequately describes teacher efficacy at the interpersonal level, causal talk also guides construction and justification of teaching decisions at logical levels deeper and more general than individual assessment of pedagogical encounters and instructional action *in situ*. Causal talk, a trans-causal theory of teacher efficacy, turns teaching into the science of converting potential educational energy among students in any given classroom into kinetic educational energy among those students in that classroom.

---

[1] See Joseph A. Maxwell, "Causal Explanation, Qualitative Research, and Scientific Inquiry in Education," *Educational Researcher*, 33, no. 2 (March 2004): 3–11; Richard J. Elliott, "Causality, Values, and Education," *Journal of Thought*, 14 (January 1979): 29-32; George C. Stone, "John Dewey's Concept of Causation in Instructional Practice," *Journal of Thought*, 31, no. 2, (1996): 73-84; and Frances C. Wade, "Causality in the Classroom," *Modern Schoolman*, 28 (January 1951): 138-146.

[2] Various philosophies agree from Post-Kantian Idealism to Peircean Pragmatism to Pluralistic Postmodernism: James O. Bennett, "Dewey on Causality and Novelty," *Transactions of the Charles S. Pierce Society*, 16 (Summer 1980): 225-241; Jim Garrison, "Nietzsche, Dewey and the Artistic Creation of Truth," *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 7, no. 2 (2015): 204-228; Jim Good and Jim Garrison, "Dewey, Hegel, and Causation." *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 24, no. 2 (2010): 101-120; Larry Hickman, "Dead Souls and Living Instruments," *Southwest Philosophy Review*, 7, no. 1 (1991): 1-18; Bella K. Milmed, "Dewey's Treatment of Causality," *Journal of Philosophy*, 54 (January 1957): 5-18; and Robert Reuter, "The Radical Agent: A Deweyan Theory of Causation," *Transactions of the Charles S. Pierce Society*, 29, no. 2 (1993): 239-257.

Dewey provides a scientific theory of how to create educational value when he says, in *Experience and Education*, "Continuity and interaction in their active union with each other provide the measure of the educative significance and value of an experience."[3] The theory is scientific since use of the word 'measure' suggests an equivalency, an equation, obtaining between continuity and interaction and the educational value of an experience. *Continuity* points out all experiences come out of the past (P), occur in the present (c_1), and move into the future (c_2). *Interaction* points out all experiences involve transaction between what goes on psychologically for the person having the experience and what goes on in physical and social environments in which the experience takes place (i^2). Features of educational encounters of theoretical interest to Dewey are those that indicate school experiences (c_1) that appeal to students' ways of making meaning (P), that aid students in navigating their extra-school lives (c_2), and that promote, in classrooms, conditions fostering shared desire among teachers and students to work together (i^2). These are of theoretical interest to Dewey because these features describe experiences in which students are most likely to learn curriculum. (Each feature has been given a variable label in this paragraph to prepare the reader for next steps in development of what will be articulated as Dewey's law.) Organizing the four variables provided by Dewey's comment about continuity and interaction providing the *measure* of the educational value of an experience we can come up with what looks like a natural law about teaching. Call it the universal law of educational energy:

$$E = P \ \frac{c_1 c_2}{i^2}$$

Unfortunately, claiming that Dewey's views enjoy the logical status of a law might make many philosophers of education balk. Such an achievement may be presumed to be impossible or outside the scope of Dewey's thinking.[4] However, in opposition to this reluctance about laws Dewey embraces laws as scientific truisms, *pro forma* expressions of dialectical intent, not matters of fact. According to Dewey, the ancient Greeks achieved the idea of science without themselves becoming the best of scientists. They accomplished this sleight of mind by insisting that observations of and beliefs about natural events be focused away from the artisan's concern with occasions of use; and focused instead on discovery of logical relationships among existences. Concentration on description of formal relationships among existences expressed in symbolic statements of wide scope is the distinctive intellectual characteristic of science. Science converts qualities to relations thereby infusing things with forms they did not have until subjected to scientific scrutiny. The implement the scientist employs to accomplish conversion of properties to relations is the law. Laws convert qualities to relations by describing some qualities as constant functions of some other qualities. Constant functions of related qualities find expression in law-like statements because it is a truism or a tautology to say that ordered

---

[3] John Dewey, *Experience and Education*, Volume 13, 1938-1939 *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 1-62. The quote comes from 26.

[4] It is worth noting that *Experience and Education* holds a unique place in Dewey's *oeuvre* insofar as it was commissioned as a self-critical appraisal of its author's previous thinking on the idea of education. J. Wesley Null mentions this fact at 1049, n. 36 of his "William C. Bagley and the Founding of Essentialism: An Untold Story in American Educational History," *Teachers College Record* 109, no. 4 (April, 2007): 1013-1055. Barbara Levine tells the story in slightly more detail in her "Textual Commentary" on *Experience and Education* at 410-414 in Volume 13 of *John Dewey: The Later Works*.

relationships are mathematical or mechanical or logical in character. That is simply what it means, says Dewey, to say it is possible to regulate events in ways that achieve desired outcomes: "The technique of equation and other functions characteristic of modern science is, taken generically, a method of thoroughgoing substitutions. It is a system of exchange and mutual conversion carried to its limit."[5] Dewey's ideas connecting educational energy to qualities of experience describe a conversion of experience into education. As Dewey says, continuity and interaction *measure* educational value.

Considering more specifically the mathematical formulation given to Dewey's ideas, note that the equation follows closely Dewey's discussion of continuity and interaction as "Criteria of Experience," the title of Chapter 3 of *Experience and Education*. Continuity is divided by interaction to capture the significance of Dewey's claim that interaction influences the way continuity applies in some given experience. Importance is given in the numerator to the experiences brought by students to a lesson to accommodate Dewey's use of stages of normal development talk and his insistence that no subject matter is intrinsically educative considered independently of the stage of growth a learner has achieved. Moreover, Dewey distinguishes closely between stage of development and inner states of learners. He argues that teachers must have a general understanding of the attitudes and habitual tendencies that are conducive to growth and be sympathetically, if not empathetically understanding of what in fact is going on in the minds of those who are learning at some given time in some given place. The elements of the numerator are multiplied together because they are the three elements of a single concept, continuity. Smaller values on any item in the numerator threaten large reductions of educational energy. Interaction is squared in the denominator to stress the importance of interaction to Dewey's understanding of the connection between experience and education. The distance between inner and outer in an experience is measured, so to speak, twice in the formula to indicate that as distance between inner and outer in an experience increases educational energy decreases exponentially, not merely linearly. *Vice versa*, as distance decreases, educational energy increases at a rapid rate. Finally, Dewey's claim that continuity and interaction are features of all personal experience permits statement of Dewey's ideas on teaching as a universal law of educational energy. That is, although it is possible, as done here, to focus Dewey's law on the educational energy expressed in experiences had at school, it is also the case that all experiences have some degree of educational energy because all experiences involve to some degree the qualities of continuity and interaction.

Dewey's law looks like Newton's universal law of gravitational attraction for three reasons: 1) to piggyback on an already accepted lawful statement, and one used by Dewey as exemplary of its kind; 2) to accommodate Dewey's views on developmental psychology and effects of interaction on continuity (as discussed more fully in the immediately preceding paragraph), and 3) to provide epistemological power missing from most educational theory. This epistemological power derives from a strategic switch away from providing moral reasons for adopting democratic education and towards offering scientific reasons for adopting democratic education. As Dewey says, "What is implied in the constructive ideas of philosophy is that they have authority over activity to impel it to bring possible values into existence, not, as in the case of science, that they have authoritative claim to acknowledgement because they are already part of

---

[5] Materials informing this paragraph and the paragraph immediately preceding it may be found in John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953*, Volume 1, 1925 ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981), 119.

the order of nature."[6] With Dewey's law, teaching becomes the science of creating educational energy, or more in tune with scientific parlance, since energy can be neither created nor destroyed, with the universal law of educational energy teaching becomes the science of extracting maximal educational energy out of learning environments. Teaching is a process of converting potential educational energy into kinetic educational energy.

While the idea of educational energy may sound odd, think about prosaic but metaphorical ways we already speak in terms of educational energy: The "light bulb comes on" upon a sudden realization. We say one is "hit by a ton of bricks" when learning an important truth or encountering a life changing idea or event. We tend to quote favorably the proverbial description of "education as the kindling of a flame" rather than the filling of a vessel. Think of E as an example of what philosophers recognize as epistemic emotions, like surprise, curiosity, and (un)certainty.[7] 'E' describes the emotional intensity with which students learn.

However, stating Dewey's theory of teaching in law-like fashion carries a logical cost. In *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* Dewey creates a special place for law-like statements. The second section of the chapter on "Mathematical Discourse" has the italicized heading, "*The Two Types of Universal Propositions*."[8] All universal statements claim abstract relations among concepts; but law-like statements claim of the concepts they use application to physical existence. Dewey marks this distinction by saying all universal propositions describe transformations; but laws describe processes of transformability among existing things. Like all laws, therefore, Dewey's law must be given a material interpretation to describe its applicability to existence. Laws need flesh and bones, that is, expression as generic statements (universals that describe patterns among existences), and singular statements (descriptions of connections among particular things).

We can accommodate the need for an inductive version of Dewey's law by rewriting it as Dewey's heuristic: Changes in four independent variables (P, c_1, c_2, i^2) explain changes in one dependent variable (E, educational value, or, as labeled in the model, educational energy):

---
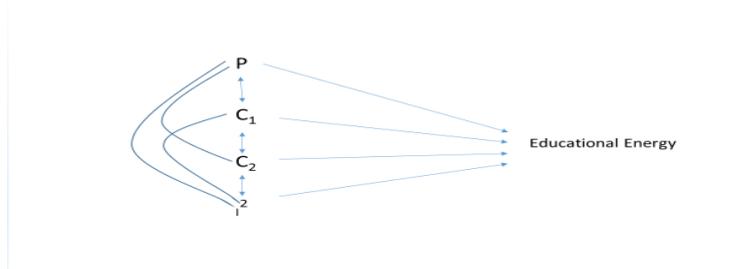
[6] John Dewey, "The Determination of Ultimate Values or Aims Through Antecedent or A Priori Speculation or Empirical Inquiry," Volume 13, 1938-1939 *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 260-274. Find the quote on 263-264.

[7] For examples of these discussions see Peter Carruthers, "Are Epistemic Emotions Meta-Cognitive?" *Philosophical Psychology* 30, nos. 1-2 (2017): 58-78 and Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[8] John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953* Volume 12, 1938, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 394.

Following phenomenological theorist of sociology, Alfred Schutz, in materially interpreting Dewey's law/heuristic, we can also accommodate Dewey's singular statement requirement for explaining causal efficacy by thinking in terms of life worlds pedagogy. According to Schutz, the life world is everyone's paramount reality and consists of stocks of knowledge, personal interests, and degree of interpersonal understanding.[9] Where Schutz says, generally, stock of knowledge, Dewey's law specifically directs attention when planning lessons to consideration of ways in which students make meaning in/of the world (P). Where Schutz says interests or relevancies, Dewey's law says pay attention to the pragmatic tasks students face (c_2) as a rich resource to most closely connect curriculum to students' outside of school lives. Finally, where Schutz says, generically, interpersonal understanding, Dewey's law recommends focus on creation of classroom interaction (i^2) that establishes meaningful academic relations with students as they complete classwork. Incorporation of each element Schutz finds invariant in the life-world into the structure of the universal law of educational energy demonstrates Dewey's law comprises a set of phenomenological variables. On this view, a teacher's job is to get students to adopt curriculum (c_1) into their life world (P, c_2, i^2). Adoption of curriculum into one's life world converts potential classroom E into kinetic E to greater or lesser extent depending how deeply or shallowly curriculum is adopted into the life world.

The elements of Schutz' eidetic reduction of the life world map directly onto three of the independent variables in the universal law of educational energy: 1) knowledge, especially ways of meaning making, students bring to an educational experience, 2) the transaction of the process of the educational experience with student perception of the significance of the process, and 3) students' life outside the context of the educational experience. All but one independent variable of Dewey's law finds expression in the idea of the life world. The odd man out is curriculum (c_1). The other independent variables match up to elements of the life world to permit assertion that educational experiences appealing to students' ways of making meaning, aiding students in navigating their extra-school lives, and promoting in classrooms conditions of social significance of interaction with the educational environment are lessons likely to concresce into, likely to become accepted as, part of students' life worlds. Because of its structural connection to the concept of the life world, Dewey's law may be understood to be describing effective instruction as a paradigm of life worlds pedagogy. Success of classroom instruction relies on instructor empathy towards students as informed by the universal law of educational energy. Seeing teaching as a process of connecting curriculum to students' life worlds makes teachers ethnographers of curriculum. Teachers considered as ethnographers of the curriculum make it their business to create events of concrescence of curriculum into students' life worlds. These events of concrescence, what Dewey may have called comings-to-know, produce educational energy. Dewey's law understands the work of teachers with students as a matter of creating educational energy in which teachers and students form academically significant relationships with one another at the intersection of their life worlds. The universal law of educational energy, when given a phenomenological interpretation, brings students and teachers humanly together in efforts meaningfully to share school curriculum.

Building such relationships among teachers and students taps into Dewey's vision of democratic education as the cutting edge of social hope. Consider two quotes from Dewey on

---

[9] Alfred Schutz, "Tiresias, or Our Knowledge of Future Events," in ed. Arvid Brodersen, *Alfred Schutz: Collected Papers, Volume II* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 276-285.

this idea:

> The aim of education is development of individuals to the utmost of their potentialities. But this statement as such leaves unanswered the question of the measure of the development to be desired and worked for. A society of free individuals in which all, in doing each his own work, contribute to the liberation and enrichment of the lives of others is the only environment for the normal growth to full stature. An environment in which some are limited will always in reaction create conditions that prevent the full development even of those who fancy they enjoy complete freedom for unhindered growth.[10]

and, "Democracy as a way of life is controlled by personal faith in personal day-by-day working together with others … to cooperate by giving differences a chance to show themselves because of the belief that the expression of difference is not only a right of the other persons but is a means of enriching one's own life-experience, is inherent in the democratic personal way of life."[11]

Use of elements of the life world to materially interpret Dewey's law protects the universal law of educational energy from claims that formalization of science is a source of irresponsible behavior by scientists. L'ubica Učnik, Ivan Chvatík and Anita Williams point out that formalized sciences tend to "proceed on the level of abstraction only. Leaving the life world behind, we assume that this formalized account of the world is more accurate, and therefore more true. We then proceed to use it to understand the life world."[12] Absenting itself from the life world in this way, remarks Rosemary R. P. Lerner, science forgets that it "can only claim partial and relative truths and validities."[13] "Formal procedures," James Mensch notes, "are, in fact, omnipresent. From the algorithms determining market investments to the reduction of much of the social sciences to statistical analyses, both our claims and our decisions exhibit the formalization that marks our age." The problem with the ubiquity of formal systems of science, from Mensch's point of view, is that "formalization abstracts from the embodied particularity of being, thereby abstracting from both the individual that bears responsibility and the individual to whom he or she responds." "Only by forgetting the embodiment," Mensch continues, "…can we be trapped by this formalism." When formalism neglects embodiment then formalism robs itself of claims to objective knowledge for it is "embodied particularity that is required for there to be genuine others and, hence, for there to be the objective knowledge that exists through intersubjective confirmation." Thus, Mensch concludes, "respect for our embodied particularity, in both its capabilities and vulnerabilities, is something that formalization forgets only at its peril."[14]

---

[10] John Dewey, "The Need for A Philosophy of Education," Volume 9, 1933-1934 *John Dewey: The Later Works,* JoAnn Boydston, ed. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 202.

[11] John Dewey, "Creative Democracy - The Task Before Us," Volume 14, 1939 -1941 *John Dewey: The Later Works*, JoAnn Boydston, ed. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 230.

[12] L'ubica Učnik, Ivan Chvatík and Anita Williams, "The Phenomenological Critique of Formalism: Responsibility and the Life world," in eds. L'ubica Učnik, Ivan Chvatík and Anita Williams, *The Phenomenological Critique of Mathematisation and the Question of Responsibility: Formalisation and the Life World* (New York: Springer, 2015), 12.

[13] Rosemary R. P. Lerner, "*Mathesis Universalis* and the Life world: Finitude and Responsibility," in eds. Učnik, Chvatík and Williams, *The Phenomenological Critique of Mathematisation and the Question of Responsibility*, 155.

[14] James Mensch, "Formalisation and Responsibility," in eds. Učnik, Chvatík and Williams, *The Phenomenological Critique of Mathematisation and the Question of Responsibility*, 187 and 195, respectively.

However, these concerns about formalization in science leading inevitably and with untoward effect away from the life world and toward entirely abstract thinking do not apply to the science of teaching. Teaching carried out under the auspices of the universal law of educational energy, despite its mathematized scientific expression, does not and cannot forget the life world. The life world is that from which the universal law of educational energy draws its data. Dewey's law keeps Mensch's idea of embodied particularity at the forefront of teachers' attention. Successful teaching relies heavily on accurate understanding of students' biographically determined situations. Dewey's law is not a view from nowhere; but rather, describes a teacher's-eye view on students' life worlds vis-à-vis school curriculum. Dewey's law engages teachers and students in the infinite task of understanding one another. Mall makes the important observation that "Any open hermeneutics has for its motto: the will to understand and the will to be understood."[15] Dewey's law envisions teaching as an open process of mutual understanding and thus establishes teaching as an inherently responsible, even though mathematically formalized, science. Where the mark of a responsible science is the respect that science pays to the life world as the science is implemented, the science of teaching bears the mark of a responsible science. Despite being a formalized science, teaching remains a non-technized science.

Dewey's law, therefore, requires us to distinguish large culture from small culture. Adrian Holliday notes the need to distinguish two paradigms of culture. What has become the default notion of culture refers to prescribed ethnic, national, and international entities. This large culture paradigm is by its nature vulnerable to a culturist reduction of 'foreign' students, or 'foreign' teachers, and their educational contexts. In contrast, a small culture paradigm attaches culture to small social groupings or activities wherever there is cohesive behavior, and thus avoids culturist ethnic, national, or international stereotyping. Ethnography uses small cultures as the location for research, as an interpretive device for understanding emergent behavior, rather than seeking to explain prescribed ethnic, national or international difference.[16] As Russell Jacoby points out, pluralistic multiculturalism employing a large culture paradigm inevitably plays out as an attempt to get representation or power for one's preferred group and taps thoughtlessly and brutally into the ideology of the market. Cultures writ large simply become market niches when "Pluralism, the ideology of the market and the individual, becomes the bedrock principle of liberals and leftists." Behind a façade of cultural diversity lurks the monoculture of the market: "After the rhetoric is stripped away, the call for power and its decayed psychological form, empowerment, suggests a converging politics, monoculturalism. Everyone wants a bigger piece of the same action." Jacoby even goes so far as to argue that "Multiculturalism is not the opposite of assimilation, but its product." In this way, Jacoby denies the truth of the very first premise of arguments endorsing large culture cultural pluralism, namely, "that numerous distinct "cultures" constitute American society."

Small culture approaches to multiculturalism provide protection against the problem with identity politics described by Jacoby as bringing new players to the table but never changing the nature of the game. Discovery of difference is what remains new about postmodernism. Recognition of the inevitability and ubiquity of human variation is what makes postmodernism

---

[15] R. A. Mall, "Phenomenology – Essentialistic or Descriptive? *Husserl Studies* 10 no. 1 (January 1993): 13-30. The quote comes from 25.
[16] Adrian Holliday, "Small Cultures," *Appled Linguistics* 20, no. 2, (June, 1999): 237-264.

more than a mere reaction to modernism.[17] Collecting and cataloging differences in life worlds are processes of the utmost importance to our understanding of how effectively to apply the universal law of educational energy to actual contexts of instruction. Differences in life worlds of students present the puzzle cases by which Dewey's law may be challenged and refined. Identifying relevant differences among life worlds is the infinite task set for educators putting to use the universal law of educational energy. This provides Dewey's law with a sense of unfinishedness, which makes irresponsible any claims that the law may be applied abstractly without due consideration of variations, real or potential, in the contexts of its application. However, by the same token, it is unlikely that discovery of even radical differences in life worlds will lead to rejection of Dewey's law altogether. That is because any differences that may be described will one and all be differences that describe life worlds. Thus, even as pluralistic postmodernists explore the potential infinity of variation found within the conceptual space inscribed by the phenomenological idea of the life world, Dewey's law will likely remain indefeasibly valid as a method guiding research in education principally concerned with how to improve instruction for students in schools. Because it is radically context-dependent, Dewey's law avoids postmodern concerns about totalizing metanarratives.

In all three causal iterations of Dewey's theory of teaching given here, meaning of the variables remains the same. Any inquiry at any of the three logical levels – universal, generic, singular – looks into causal efficacy of teaching in terms of the same ideas, namely, connection of curriculum to elements of student life world. The covering law statement guides research into effective teaching by suggesting ideas and experiments for inquiry into teaching and by ruling out at the conceptual level avenues of inquiry as dead ends. The variables included in the covering law suggest restatement as a set of variables which, taken together, correlate to teacher causal efficacy. The singular restatement of the heuristic as life worlds pedagogy informs research into teacher-student relations in the pedagogical encounter by seeing the end-in-view of the practicing teacher to be causal efficacy of instruction. Each form of study performs the same set of operations but each at its appropriate logical level. The universal law of educational energy offers a *lingua franca* meaningful all along the spectrum of causal understandings of teacher efficacy, promising to ameliorate longstanding controversy about assessing teacher effectiveness. Positivists, pragmatists, postmodernists, and practitioners can agree on the specific phenomenon of interest to them, each from a unique, but complementary angle. Conceptual and correlational understandings of teacher efficacy now support teachers in justifying instructional decisions from causal standpoints broader than individual perceptions of instructional situations. Causal talk is what philosophers of education bring to classrooms in an effort to ameliorate issues of power differentials among students and teachers, bringing both together in a shared search for significance in the educational activities they undertake together at the intersections of their life worlds.[18]

---

[17] See Sarah Sutro, "Magnifying Stillness: Locating Meaning in the Work of Ephraim Rubenstein," at http://www.nccsc.net/essays/magnifying-stillness *American Arts Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (Fall, 2014). There Sutro quotes Robert Atkins, *ArtSpeak: A Guide to Contemporary Ideas, Movements, and Buzzwords*, *1945 to the Present,* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1990), 132, who writes specifically about postmodern art that "It is important to distinguish what is new about postmodernism from what is a reaction to modernism."

[18] For a more thorough articulation and more detailed defense of the ideas presented in this article see Greg Seals, *Teachable Moments and the Science of Education* (New York: Routledge, 2019).The present treatment draws deeply on the book but adds comment on Dewey's theory of causation which was missing from discussion in the book. Thanks to Jim Garrison for pointing out that omission.

Growth-Mindset-Oriented Teaching Practice to Weaken Gender Stereotypes

Jianing Li
Fordham University

Abstract: Weakening or eliminating the influence of prevailing gender-biased social norms on STEM and literacy achievement is essential to seeing gendered differences disappear from educational data. One way to help weaken detrimental effects of social stereotypes is to think of ways teachers can do their jobs without reinforcing unfair social norms and teach in ways that establish non-biased social norms. Focusing on the idea of "mindset," I explore how growth-mindset-oriented teaching practices work to provide inclusive and equitable education, shape the messages students receive in teacher feedback, and challenge gender stereotypes. Whatever teachers' personal views on mindset may be, it is imperative that teachers' professional practices project a growth-mindset.

Decades of data support the persistent presence of a gender gap in student performance in math and literacy: 1) Gender disparity in favor of boys is evident in STEM-related (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) subjects at all grade levels. From 2003 to 2012, male students scored about 5-20 points higher than female students in math, according to a survey of elementary and secondary schools carried out by the National Science Board (2016). Similarly, the TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, 1995-2015) assessment of 4th graders' mathematics and science knowledge in six Nordic countries showed boys outperformed girls in five of the six countries studied (Borgonovi et al., 2018). Furthermore, in the 2022 NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) Mathematics Assessment, 4th-grade boys scored six points higher than 4th-grade girls, representing the largest gap in gender since 1990. 2) Girls, in contrast, consistently outperformed boys in reading and literacy achievement across different countries. For example, PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) 2012 scores found girls' reading achievement was at least one academic grade level ahead of boys in all the 30 countries tested (OECD, 2015 — Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). Moreover, 4th-grade girls in Norway and Finland scored significantly higher than their male counterparts, by 18 and 22 points, respectively, on the 2016 OECD PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) reading assessments (Borgonovi et al., 2018). In the PISA 2018 reading test, the proportion of boys and girls who achieved the minimum proficiency level was, on average, 4:5 across the world, and even more pronounced, at 3:5, in less developed areas like North Macedonia and Thailand.

Data on the gender gap in STEM and literacy seem to align with social norms about expected capabilities of boys as mathematicians and girls as wordsmiths; but making differentiated assumptions about children's abilities and performances based solely on gender is biased. Sex-based social norms unfairly stereotype girls as being more capable of reading and literacy and just as unfairly stereotype boys as performing better in STEM-related subjects. Such stereotypical judgment is hindering students' academic performance and, in turn, exacerbating the gender gap. Girls who hold the widespread but unfounded belief that boys are more suited to STEM careers than girls are less likely to choose STEM-related majors even if they perform equally well as boys in these subjects (Blažev et al., 2017). According to the 2018 PISA results from OECD countries, only 14% of the top-performing girls in STEM were willing to pursue careers in STEM fields as compared to 26% of boys with equally high scores on the PISA assessment (The Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2020). Furthermore, research indicates that the stronger the math-related gender stereotypes girls hold, the lower their math

performance becomes (Muntoni et al., 2021). Conversely, boys are more likely to suffer damaging effects of reading anxiety which significantly and negatively affects reading achievement (Ramirez et al., 2019). Diminishing the influence of prevailing social norms on STEM and literacy achievement is essential to seeing gendered differences disappear from educational data. One way to help weaken social norms is to think of ways teachers can do their jobs without reinforcing old, unfair social norms and, more importantly, teach in ways that establish new, non-biased social norms. Focusing on the idea of "mindset," I explore how teaching practices could work better in providing inclusive and equitable education, shaping the messages students receive, and thereby challenging gender stereotypes.

Mindset Theory

Mindset functions as a cognitive filter that affects our attitudes in dealing with life circumstances and the formation of comprehensive self-perceptions. Dweck (2006) distinguishes two different theoretical approaches to the question about whether or not intelligence and/or ability can be cultivated in people: growth-mindset and fixed-mindset. Growth-mindset posits that intelligence and ability are malleable and, with hard work and strategic planning, can be improved by human effort (Zarrinabadi & Afsharmeh, 2024). Fixed-mindset, on the other hand, asserts the stability of human intelligence and regards human ability as beyond control by human effort (Yu et al., 2022). In real life, however, individuals' beliefs about the malleability of intelligence and ability range across the theoretical continuum between growth-mindset and fixed-mindset (Schroder et al., 2019). Willingham et al., (2021) found only 40–42.5% of people consistently held a growth-mindset; 40–42.5% remained consistently committed to fixed-mindset; and 15–20% constantly changed between the two.

Teachers show similar trends in personal beliefs about mindset. For example, Zarrinabadi and Afsharmehr's (2024) research on 20 language teachers in Iran revealed more than half the teachers held mixed ideas about mindset and flipped between growth-mindset and fixed-mindset depending on circumstances. Certainly, it is impractical to expect every teacher personally to adopt belief in growth-mindset. However, teaching practices, regardless of teachers' personal beliefs about mindset, embody and express varying degrees and types of mindset beliefs, too. While much attention has been given to the personal mindsets of teachers, there is a scarcity of research on how teachers' pedagogical practices project a view on mindsets. It is, in fact, teaching practices that communicate to students degrees of fixed- or growth-mindset assumed in the philosophy of education that guides their schooling. Instructional methods are better guided by a growth-mindset than a fixed-mindset because growth in intelligence and ability in areas of study is a primary aim of the educational process. Understanding the role of mindset in teaching practices provides insight into how teachers can promote inclusion and equity, defy stereotypes, and create learning. Whatever teachers' personal views on mindset may be, it is imperative that teachers' professional practices project a growth-mindset.

Gendered stereotypes related to STEM and literacy endorse an educationally fixed-mindset. Weakening, eliminating, or supplanting gendered stereotypes with egalitarian social norms endorses a growth-mindset aimed at enhancing the abilities and improving the intelligence of all students. Comparing and analyzing patterns in pedagogy across diverse educational contexts identifies common teaching practices associated with different mindsets and provides data for evaluating influence of pedagogical mindset on students' self-concept, motivation, and subject engagement. Understanding the role of mindset in knowledge construction and classroom

interaction, teachers can act as a strong barrier against gender stereotypes. Rather than be perceived as individuals controlled by personal views on mindset theory, professional educators can use mindset theory to their advantage to generate new pedagogical insights for fighting gender stereotypes and developing learning environments in which students flourish.

Gender stereotypes impose "[n]egative ability labels" for "members of certain groups" (Dweck, 2006, p. 75). For example, our society traditionally assumes boys' math talent exceeds girls' while regarding girls' literacy skill as better than boys' (Vuletich et al., 2020). When it comes to children's learning habits and attitudes, fixed-mindset leads people to make *arbitrary* judgments based on the *assumption* that people's abilities are "natural born" and/or follow certain "preset" modes.[91] Fixed-mindsets disregard the role of effort in achievement by ruling out from the beginning the possibility of growth beyond some ill-imagined limits. Gender-stereotyped ideas or judgements most directly impact students who, themselves, have a fixed-mindset, leading to limited self-perception of their abilities and interests. Heyder et al. (2021) reported adolescent girls with fixed-mindsets are more likely to believe in the "math-male stereotype," resulting in lower self-concept in math and extra burden of study in school. Furthermore, teachers with fixed-mindsets are also significantly impacted by gender stereotypes. Leroy et al.'s (2007, p. 531) study of 336 elementary teachers revealed a lower rate of willingness to consider students' perspectives on academic study among teachers with fixed-mindsets. Consequently, it is easier for teachers with a fixed-mindset to form "negative beliefs about a student's potential" when confronted with gender stereotype ideas. Moreover, even teachers' subconscious beliefs about learning can be transferred to children through the way they teach and give feedback (Zarrinabadi & Afsharmehr, 2024). All these elements of fixed-mindsets ultimately hurt students' confidence and limit their potential for outstanding achievement in areas governed by gender stereotypes.

Growth mindsets enable teachers to avoid stereotypes and treat students equitably by focusing on individual talent and teaching according to student aptitude. Students with a growth-mindset are also less likely to be affected by other people's irresponsible judgments about their abilities based on uncritically accepted gender stereotypes (Malespina et al., 2022). Also, what a student believes about the learning process in a certain school subject massively influences their motivation, interest, and response to difficulties in learning that subject. A student with a growth-mindset is more likely to attribute failure to lack of hard work or an inefficient learning method, leading them to persist and improve regardless of demeaning stereotypes (Zarrinabadi & Afsharmehr, 2024; Kroeper, 2022). Students with a growth-mindset feel more comfortable with taking risks and are even more willing to deal with challenging tasks (Dweck, 2006). In fields where gender stereotypes prevail, a growth-mindset helps students remain confident and engaged, trusting their own abilities and focusing on proving the stereotypes wrong.

Fixed-mindset-oriented Teaching Practices: What They Are, What They Do

Teaching practices that project a fixed-mindset orientation onto students' schooling experiences implement classroom activities, teaching pace, or feedback content based on preconceived notions of students' ability rather than professional assessment of students' real potential (Willingham et al., 2021). Zarrinabadi and Afsharmehr (2024) found teachers who

---

[91] In a case contrastive to American gender stereotypes, Song and her colleagues (2017) found that people in China tend to stereotypically believe high school girls treat academic work more seriously than their boy counterparts.

instructed using a fixed-mindset orientation provided more worksheet assignments and repetitions than encouragement or supportive guidance to students they perceived as having lower language ability. What's more, personal commitment to growth-mindset theory may not be strong enough to support a teacher's cultivation of a classroom culture that focuses away from biased judgments about students in order to foster belief in students' true potential. Even though some teachers express agreement with the power of effort in discovering potential, they may still exhibit fixed-mindset-oriented behaviors in their actual teaching practices, like praising students for their intelligence rather than effort, or losing confidence in children when they encounter difficulties. Barger and colleagues' (2022, p. 11) survey of 132 elementary school teachers about their math teaching experience revealed that, compared to others, teachers with fixed-mindset or "false growth mindset" were more likely to endorse the belief that "math is only accessible to few." This false belief easily connects to the generally accepted stereotype that unfairly underestimates "girls' natural ability in math." Additionally, school-level commitment to fixed-mindset beliefs about students makes it possible that both teachers who personally hold fixed-mindset theories and teachers who personally hold growth-mindset theories may be required to engage in fixed-mindset-oriented teaching practices. In general, teachers' negative reactions to students' academic struggles are the hallmark of fixed-mindset-oriented teaching practices. Any teaching practice that calls into question, either explicitly or implicitly, students' capabilities prior to educational assessment counts as fixed-mindset teaching practice (Kroeper et al., 2022).

Teachers profoundly influence their students' behaviors, even their students' futures through teaching practices (Henson, 2003). Fixed-mindset-oriented teaching practices hurt students' sense of belonging by making the learning environment less hospitable to some students. Fixed-mindset-oriented teaching practices, like focusing highly on grades, may result in minoritized students feeling less comfortable learning a subject due to insufficient support or timely guidance (Vermote et al., 2020). Consequently, students become more result-oriented and enjoy less pleasure in the learning process, with a lower sense of belonging in subjects where performance seems to align with negatively stereotyped assumptions about "that kind of student." Students experiencing teachers' instructions that reflect fixed-mindset beliefs were reported to have less classroom engagement and more behaviors focused on pursuing purely bureaucratic academic achievement (Kroeper et al., 2022). Gender stereotyped ideas about "boys' limited potential in literacy" starts to harm children when teachers respond to boys' struggle in literacy study with frustration or denial of possible improvement.

In cases where there is a significant gender disparity in academic performance in a subject, students who belong to the minoritized gender and show interest in that subject need additional encouragement to develop confidence. Transferred through fixed-mindset-oriented teaching practices, negative stereotypes about gender can limit students' potential growth and academic development by impacting their self-esteem and belief in their real talents in particular fields (Aina & Cameron, 2011). When children are surrounded by messages suggesting their gender makes them less capable in certain areas they tend to accept and frequently internalize these perceptions, which subsequently negatively influences "their performance on school tasks or tests" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020, p. 123). In Block et. al's (2022) study of 336 elementary school students' reactions to either gender-stereotyped, gender-neutral, or gender-counter-stereotyped ideas about math ability, girls who were exposed to stereotyped ideas showed significantly lower expectations of their own math abilities. Similarly, Wieselmann et al. (2020) interviewed 30 elementary schoolgirls and found the girls perceived themselves as weaker in STEM-related subjects than boys despite little evidence supporting actual differences in abilities

between the boys and the girls. Even subtle cues reminding students of their gender, prior to testing in a subject where gender stereotypes assert their inferiority, can negatively impact their performance (Dweck, 2006).

Growth-mindset-oriented Teaching Practices: What They Are, What They Do

Growth-mindset-oriented teaching practices are rooted in the belief that all students have the potential to learn and improve as long as educationally energetic, scientific support is provided and effort to learn is exerted. Providing individualized and timely help when students need it encourages a learning environment where challenges are seen as opportunities for growth, and teacher-student interactions foster positive attitudes towards learning. Growth-mindset-oriented teaching practices align with the growth mindset's emphasis on choosing the right strategy and learning from mistakes (Limeri et al., 2020). Showing an interest in every students' learning demonstrates appreciation for individual students' unique talents and individual progress, which is the very first step for teachers to take to form a comprehensive knowledge of each student. A quantitative analysis of 168 German teachers found a positive correlation between teachers' interests in individual students' needs and the quality of differentiated instruction (Pozas et al., 2022). Helping students with their learning puts teachers in the role of facilitators who nurture each student's potential using personalized guidance as part of the learning process. It's clear to students teachers value their learning when teachers give clear instructions on how to improve and where to develop. Students are likely to be receptive of teachers' growth-mindset-oriented teaching practices and know what to do next (Kroeper, 2022). Continuing teaching until the students understand also reinforces the belief that intelligence and abilities are not fixed since everyone has the potential for intellectual and personal growth.

Students can discern teachers' instructional mindsets from teacher reaction to student challenges and confusions (Kroeper, 2022). Over time, this perception shapes how students themselves deal with difficulties. Teachers' expectations, instructional behaviors, and daily interaction with students shape the children's confidence and mindset (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Teachers' confidence in students' ability is a strong influence on students' belief in themselves to achieve academically by developing mastery over school subjects (Mitchell & DellaMattera, 2011). A teacher does not have to personally believe in growth-mindset to cultivate a growth-mindset among students. Students who experience growth-mindset-oriented teaching are more likely to believe in the malleability of human intelligence, which will further affect their academic performance. (Henson, 2003; Jacovidis et al., 2020). When implementing growth-mindset-oriented teaching practices, teacher-student relationships become healthier, leading to a liberating and supportive class environment. As a result, a growth mindset can help students remain resilient and confident when faced with biased judgments about their learning ability. Without biased ideas obstructing them, students can form a comprehensive view of their potential, maintain strong motivation, and stay positive in the face of difficulties in learning.

When teachers base their evaluation of students' abilities mainly on actual performance in class, false distractors from the outside world, like gender stereotypes, are less likely to influence their judgment and treatment of students. In af Geijerstam et al.'s (2021) evaluation of students' writing skill, detailed analysis scales were developed for three main aspects of student writing: usage, flow, and voice. Uniformly applied to all students, irrespective of gender, these standards helped teachers form comprehensive understanding of each students' writing performance, which served as an important basis to develop corresponding teaching plans for each student. Growth-

mindset-oriented teaching practices focus on individual interests and strengths, developing tailored teaching strategies to support each student's learning regardless of gender. Truax (2018) followed 56 students on their reactions to different teacher feedback in writing class and found that teachers' feedback offering individualized suggestions on strengths and weaknesses has the power to shape students' belief about their writing abilities. Growth-mindset-oriented teaching practice minimized gender stereotype influences on boys' confidence in literacy learning by helping them visualize the possibility of becoming better writers through increased effort.

Pedagogical Implementation

"因材施教" (*Yīn cái shī jiào*), which means "teaching students in accordance with their aptitude" (Li, 2019), was a fundamental principle in the philosophy of education and theory of teaching developed by Confucius (551-479 B.C.E.), one of the most important philosophers and educators in Chinese history. The principle of aptitude reappeared some 500 years later and some 5,000 miles west of China in the educational theory of Roman philosopher, Quintilian (35-100 C.E.) (He, 2018). A veritable axiom of growth-mindset-oriented teaching practice, the ancient principle of aptitude retains validity for us 3,000 years after its first formulation. A strength of the principle is it's adaptability to time and place. People in different social and historical contexts have different understandings and interpretations of the connotation of "teaching students in accordance with their aptitude." As aptitudes diversify, the principle becomes richer in content — supporting each student's potential through effort, encouragement, and responsive instruction, rather than relying on fixed-mindset assumptions about their ability according to (pre)set limits on their learning. Instead, pedagogical suggestions for specific growth-mindset-oriented teaching practices implemented in real classrooms help teachers reduce the influence of stereotypes, including gender stereotypes, and uncover each student's unique shining points.

In subjects like math and literacy where boys and girls exhibit differentiated aptitudes, a well-designed assessment tool that evaluates diverse types of knowledge and skill; accurately reflects children's present performance; and monitors their progress can assist teachers in forming a comprehensive understanding of students' true talents. When teachers get to know students in contexts with the least interference from societally biased assumptions they can develop individualized plans that cater to unique strengths and needs. A clear rubric that adequately applies to the whole class serves as an important reference for both students and teachers to evaluate performance and set study goals (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Recognizing that students should not be defined solely by one exam, and reflecting on student progress through a series of assessments helps teachers focus on the individual child's learning achievements. Wafubwa and Csíkos (2021) found that incorporating metacognitive tasks into formative assessments contributes to mathematics teachers' evaluation skill. What's more, Leenknecht et al. (2021) suggested that effective discussions after each periodic assessment provide valuable insights into students' performance at different stages, thereby enhancing teachers' understanding of students' learning progress. As assessment becomes an intimate, interpersonal exploration of individual academic strengths and learning needs stereotypes drop away to reveal an unbiased presentation of students' abilities and present performance.

Growth-mindset-oriented feedback for assignments includes detailed comments on specific problems that provide practical suggestions to inspire students on how to improve (Hattie & Gan, 2011). In their meta-analysis of students learning in response to teachers' feedback, Klueger and DeNisi (1996) noticed feedback about the task itself and exact learning goals works most

efficiently in promoting children's development. Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) recommend that growth-mindset-oriented feedback should focus on students' exact effort and progress, and provide opportunities to revise their original work. In an experiment on in-text commentary feedback, students reported positively on comments that pointed out errors as those comments helped them not only detect errors but also understand where they made mistakes. Feedback of this nature helps students concentrate on their current progress and actual performance, while respecting their attitudes towards certain subjects, preferences of interest, and learning styles (Patra et al., 2022). Guiding inquiries, a typical feature of class discussions, contribute to the development of a growth-mindset among students when implemented on a consistent and frequent basis (Yu et al., 2022). During class discussions, teachers view students' thinking processes, track changes in their ideas, and provide timely feedback by asking questions that encourage students to think deeply into the topic. In an experiment on the effects of teachers' guiding questions, Moussa-Inaty (2015) found that students formed higher levels of reflections after being provided with guiding questions. In her action research about effective in-class feedback to inspire further discussion and encourage students' critical thinking, Latham (2013) combined multiple forms of guiding questions, like clarifying questions, sequencing questions, and expanding questions. Guiding students to question rather than uncritically accept ideas and judgements puts fixed-mindset thinking at risk of being recognized as unhelpful, both in school and outside of it, as students develop their own growth-mindset-oriented learning practices.

Recommendations for the Field

An important innovation in my argument is a shift in our understanding of "mindset" away from having to accept whatever mindset teachers may hold and towards encouraging growth-mindset in teaching practice. While we cannot mandate teachers' personal mindsets, we can require teachers as a regular part of their job to implement strategies that ensure teaching practices are growth-mindset-oriented. Seeing "mindset" as a feature of teaching practice moves the idea of "mindset" from a purely psychological interpretation ("frame of mind") to an ontological understanding ("frame of mind in which certain practices require us to be"). By modifying teaching style (Hattie & Gan, 2011), interaction language (Yu et al., 2022), and student monitoring methods (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020), teachers have positive influence on students' interest in school subjects and their beliefs about their abilities and learning habits.

Growth-mindset-oriented pedagogy plays a significant role in cutting the link between things like gender-stereotyped ideas from the outside world and children's development inside the classroom. Teaching strategies guided by mechanisms of growth-mindset-oriented practice minimize the impact of gender-stereotyped judgments on teachers' perceptions of students' true abilities and foster positive thinking about success and failure among students. Leveraging the mindset mechanism in everyday teaching contributes to a more inclusive and supportive classroom that promotes equitable opportunities for all students. In this way, students will develop a more accurate and confident understanding of their own interests and abilities, without being constrained by gender-stereotyped judgments about their potential.

Embracing growth-mindset-oriented pedagogy does not imply teachers should hold the slogan of "I can achieve whatever I want/think I can." Nor does it require teachers to deny or ignore any inherent difference between boys and girls. Rather, the secret of growth-mindset lies in the understanding that "I am not defined by anyone or anything." Growth-mindset provides teachers with a lens to view students as who they truly are; not who they are supposed to be.

Every student deserves to be perceived as a unique individual, neither confined by social expectations nor constrained by predefined roles. Growth-mindset-oriented teaching helps children learn to accept themselves and embrace challenges on their own terms, despite any prejudicial judgment or presumption by anyone else about their potential. We plant a seed, give timely guidance with respect to their natural growth and interests, and then watch in awe as students blossom in the world. Because growth-mindset-oriented pedagogy collaterally inculcates a growth-mindset among students, students proudly learn that school is the place you go to grow.

References

af Geijerstam, Å., Folkeryd, J. W., & Liberg, C. (2021). Linguistically based scales for assessment of young students' writing. *Writing & Pedagogy*, 13(1–3), 227–265.

Aina, O. E., & Cameron, P. A. (2011). Why does gender matter? Counteracting stereotypes with young children. *Dimensions of Early Childhood*, *39*(3).

Barger, M. M., Xiong, Y., & Ferster, A. E. (2022). Identifying false growth mindsets in adults and implications for mathematics motivation. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *70*, 102079. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2022.102079

Blažev, M., Karabegović, M., Burušić, J., & Selimbegović, L. (2017). Predicting gender-STEM stereotyped beliefs among boys and girls from prior school achievement and interest in STEM school subjects. *Social Psychology of Education*, *20*, 831-847. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-017-9397-7

Block, K., Gonzalez, A. M., Choi, C. J., Wong, Z. C., Schmader, T., & Baron, A. S. (2022). Exposure to stereotype-relevant stories shapes children's implicit gender stereotypes. *PLOS* (Public Library of Science) *One*, *17*(8), e0271396. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0271396

Borgonovi, F., Ferrara, A., & Maghnouj, S. (2018). The gender gap in educational outcomes in Norway. OECD, *Education Working Papers*, No. 183, OECD Publishing, Paris. http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/f8ef1489-en

Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B., & Osher, D. (2020). Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. *Applied Developmental Science*, *24*(2), 97-140. https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2018.1537791

Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House.

Hattie, J., & Gan, M. (2011). Instruction based on feedback. In *Handbook of research on learning and instruction* (263-285). Routledge.

He, J. (2018). The implication of education justice in teaching students tased on their aptitude. *Journal of East China Normal University*. https://doi.org/10.16382/j.cnki.1000560.2018.02.012

Henson, K. T. (2003). Foundations for learner-centered education: A Knowledge Base. *Education*, 124(1), 5–16.

Heyder, A., Weidinger, A. F., & Steinmayr, R. (2021). Only a burden for females in math? Gender and domain differences in the relation between adolescents' fixed mindsets and motivation. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *50*, 177-188. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-020-01345-4

Jacovidis, J. N., Anderson, R. C., Beach, P. T., & Chadwick, K. L. (2020). Growth mindset thinking and beliefs in teaching and learning. *Inflexion: Eugene, OR, USA*.

Klueger, A., & DeNisi, A. (1996). Effects of feedback intervention on performance: A historical review, a meta-analysis, and a preliminary feedback intervention theory. *Psychological Bulletin*, *119*(2), 254-284.

Kroeper, K. M., Fried, A. C., & Murphy, M. C. (2022). Towards fostering growth mindset classrooms: Identifying teaching behaviors that signal instructors' fixed and growth mindsets beliefs to students. *Social Psychology of Education*, *25*(2), 371-398. https://doi-org.avoserv2.library.fordham.edu/10.1007/s11218-022-09689-4

Latham, G. (2013). The Responsive Reading Teacher. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education,* 38(8), 62-72.

Leenknecht, M., Wijnia, L., Köhlen, M., Fryer, L., Rikers, R., & Loyens, S. (2021). Formative assessment as practice: The role of students' motivation. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, https://doi-org.avoserv2.library.fordham.edu/10.1080/02602938.2020.1765228

Leroy, N., Bressoux, P., Sarrazin, P., & Trouilloud, D. (2007). Impact of teachers' implicit theories and perceived pressures on the establishment of an autonomy supportive climate. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, *22*, 529-545. https://doi-org.avoserv2.library.fordham.edu/10.1007/BF03173470

Li, J. (2023). Gender never defines me: A study on preschool teachers' do and don't about gender. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 7(1), 100397. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2023.100397

Li, Y. (2019). The modernity construction of Confucius' thought of teaching students in accordance with their aptitude (*Yin Cai Shi Jiao*). *Journal of Hunan University of Science & Technology Social Science Edition*. https://doi.org/10.13582 /janki.1672-7835.2019.06.022

Limeri, L. B., Carter, N. T., Choe, J., Harper, H. G., Martin, H. R., Benton, A., & Dolan, E. L.(2020). Growing a growth mindset: Characterizing how and why undergraduate students' mindsets change. *International Journal of STEM Education*, *7*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40594-020-00227-2

Malespina, A., Schunn, C. D., & Singh, C. (2022). Whose ability and growth matter? Gender, mindset and performance in physics. *International Journal of STEM Education*, *9*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40594-022-00342-2

Mitchell, S. N., & DellaMattera, J. N. (2011). Teacher support and student's self-efficacy beliefs. *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education*, *5*(2). https://doi.org/10.20355/c5x30q

Moussa-Inaty, J. (2015). Reflective writing through the use of guiding questions. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, *27*(1), 104-113.

Muntoni, F., Wagner, J., & Retelsdorf, J. (2021). Beware of stereotypes: Are classmates' stereotypes associated with students' reading outcomes?. *Child development*, *92*(1), 189-204. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13359

NAEP. (2022). NAEP Report Card: 2022 NAEP Mathematics Assessment. https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/highlights/mathematics/2022/.

National Science Board. (2016). Science and engineering indicators 2016. Arlington,VA: National Science Foundation (NSB-2016-1).

OECD. (2015). Shanghai (China) country note: Results from TALIS 2013-2014. Resource document. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. https://www.oecd.org/education/%20school/TALIS-2014-country-note-Shanghai.pdf

Patra, I., Alazemi, A., Al-Jamal, D., & Gheisari, A. (2022). The effectiveness of teachers' written and verbal corrective feedback (CF) during formative assessment (FA) on male language learners' academic anxiety (AA), academic performance (AP), and attitude toward learning (ATL). *Language Testing in Asia*, *12*(1), 19. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40468-022-00169-2

Pozas, M., Letzel, V., Bost, N., & Reichertz, J. (2022). Confident, positive, but interested? Exploring the role of teachers' interest in their practice of differentiated instruction. *Frontiers in Education*, *7*. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.964341

Ramirez, G., Fries, L., Gunderson, E., Schaeffer, M. W., Maloney, E. A., Beilock, S. L., & Levine, S. C. (2019). Reading anxiety: An early affective impediment to children's success in reading. *Journal of Cognition and Development*, *20*(1), 15-34. https://doi.org/10.1080/15248372.2018.1526175

Schroder, H. S., Callahan, C. P., Gornik, A. E., & Moser, J. S. (2019). The fixed mindset of anxiety predicts future distress: A longitudinal study. *Behavior Therapy*, *50*(4), 710-717. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.beth.2018.11.001

Song, J., Zuo, B., Wen, F., & Yan, L. (2017). Math-gender stereotypes and career intentions: An application of expectancy–value theory. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, *45*(3), 328-340. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2017.1283680

The Global Education Monitoring Report team. (2020). A new generation: 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education. UNESCO. https://gem-report-2020.unesco.org/gender-report/

Truax, M. L. (2018). The impact of teacher language and growth mindset feedback on writing motivation. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, *57*(2), 135-157. https://doi.org/10.1080 19388071.2017.1340529

Vermote, B., Aelterman, N., Beyers, W., Aper, L., Buysschaert, F., & Vansteenkiste, M. (2020). The role of teachers' motivation and mindsets in predicting a (de) motivating teaching style in higher education: A circumplex approach. *Motivation and Emotion*, *44*, 270-294. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-020-09827-5

Vuletich, H. A., Kurtz-Costes, B., Cooley, E., & Payne, B. K. (2020). Math and language gender stereotypes: Age and gender differences in implicit biases and explicit beliefs. *PLOS One*, *15*(9), e0238230. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0238230

Wafubwa, R. N., & Csíkos, C. (2021). Formative assessment as a predictor of mathematics teachers' levels of metacognitive regulation. *International Journal of Instruction*, 14(1), 983–998. https://doi-org.avoserv2.library.fordham.edu/10.29333/iji.2021.14158a

Wieselmann, J. R., Roehrig, G. H., & Kim, J. N. (2020). Who succeeds in STEM? Elementary girls' attitudes and beliefs about self and STEM. *School Science and Mathematics*, *120*(5), 297-308. https://doi.org/10.1111/ssm.12407

Willingham, J. C., Barlow, A. T., Stephens, D. C., Lischka, A. E., & Hartland, K. S. (2021). Mindset regarding mathematical ability in K-12 teachers. *School Science and Mathematics*, *121*(4), 234-246. https://doi.org/10.1111/ssm.12466

Yu, J., Kreijkes, P., & Salmela-Aro, K. (2022). Students' growth mindset: Relation to teacher beliefs, teaching practices, and school climate. *Learning and Instruction*, *80*, 101616. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2022.101616

Zarrinabadi, N., & Afsharmehr, E. (2024). Teachers' mindsets about L2 learning: Exploring the influences on pedagogical practices. *RELC* (Regional Language Centre) *Journal*, *55*(1), 96-110. https://doi.org/10.1177/00336882211067

Decolonizing and Reconceptualizing Teacher Education:
Indigenous Pedagogies for Transformative Futures in Postcolonial Contexts

Christabel Kanayo Anumenechi
Purdue University

Abstract: Global education systems struggle with inequities rooted in colonialism/systemic racism, limiting opportunities for marginalized communities. Decolonial/postcolonial/critical pedagogical theories examine how traditional curricular-instructional practices perpetuate colonialism. A fundamental rethinking of how educators are prepared is essential to decolonizing schooling. Transformation of teacher education will occur when studying to be a Social Studies teacher includes consideration of historical power dynamics/cultural negotiations. Exploring global contexts, I analyze colonial schooling in Nigerian, African American, and Hawaiian communities. I also discuss a case of colonial erasure/normalization of colonialism in a middle school class in the U.S. Decolonial approach to teacher education addresses gaps in traditional training by connecting local contexts to global educational goals. The way forward to social justice, global equity, and cultural sustainability in schooling is inclusion in pedagogy of Indigenous perspectives on curricular topics.

Education systems worldwide grapple with the challenge of addressing systemic inequities long-embedded in their structures. Education plays a pivotal role in shaping societal values and promoting social justice, but inequities, often rooted in historical legacies of colonialism and systemic racism, perpetuate disparities in educational outcomes and limit opportunities for marginalized communities (Santos & Haycock, 2016; ACLU, 2023). In many postcolonial societies, education remains a powerful yet imperfect tool for social change (Brissett, 2018). Despite promise as a catalyst for social transformation, education continues to reinforce existing power dynamics due to its entanglement with colonial legacies and neoliberal agendas (Enslin, 2017; Tikly, 2020). Systemic inequities continue to marginalize communities whose voices have been sidelined by centuries of colonial domination. As a result, educational systems reflect sociocultural tensions of race and power, sustaining social inequality (Hickling-Hudson, 2005).

These inequities are not accidental. They are woven into the fabric of education systems that have historically prioritized Western modes of accumulating knowledge over Indigenous ways of holistic understanding. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted these disparities, exacerbating existing gaps in access to quality education, technology, and resources for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and communities of color (Anumenechi, C. K., 2023; Gee, K. A., Asmundson, V., & Vang, T. 2024). The pandemic starkly presented the need for systemic reforms addressing inequities in schools to ensure all students have equal opportunities to succeed. Addressing systemic inequities requires decolonizing traditionally colonial curriculum; reconceptualizing and reinvesting in educators as agents of change; and developing endogenous system leadership (Balarin & Milligan 2024). Justice-oriented reform creates a social-justice knowledge system to challenge global neoliberal agendas of colonialists all over the world. Moreover, promoting epistemic equity in education contributes to achieving wider cultural and linguistic rights by enhancing the agency and capabilities of future generations to tackle complex global challenges.

Addressing Systemic Inequities in Education

Current education systems perpetuate inequities due to deep-seated beliefs about the uniformity of learning and teaching despite contextual differences in educational spaces. These beliefs lead to policies that neglect broader sociopolitical structures, resulting in fiscal

disinvestment from minoritized schools and application of universal solutions to diverse communities, often exacerbating inequities (Hatch, Corson, and Gerth van den Berg, 2021). This situation makes reevaluating and transforming the foundational principles of teacher education essential. Addressing systemic inequities in schooling is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. Traditional Western-centric curricula often overlook the diversity within Indigenous groups and regions, leading to cultural homogenization and a lack of representation in educational content. Critical analysis demonstrates that this oversight not only marginalizes Indigenous knowledge but also fails to equip teachers with the cultural competence needed to do their job well. Cultural homogenization, while holding the promise of facilitating exchange of ideas, can also lead to suppression of unique cultural identities and perspectives, worsening educational disparities (Tiwari, 2023; Russell, 2023).

Addressing these deep-seated disparities is not simply about revising curricula or updating textbooks; this work is about reimagining the very foundations of teacher education. Because when educators are trained in systems that uncritically reproduce outdated, Eurocentric paradigms, they inadvertently perpetuate cycles of exclusion in their classrooms (Apple, 1990; Nieto, 1996; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). As critical theorists argue, a transformative reconceptualized teacher education should move beyond surface-level reforms and engage in a fundamental rethinking of how educators are prepared to challenge prevailing power structures (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994). Integrating diverse pedagogies and cultural competencies into teacher education is necessary to break these colonizing cycles and foster an inclusive and equitable learning environment. This includes recognizing the importance of Indigenous knowledge systems to teacher education programs. Recognizing Indigenous knowledge systems not only enriches the educational experience for all students but also empowers teachers to support and celebrate the unique identities and perspectives of their students (Tiwari, 2023; Govender & Mutendera, 2020). By valuing Indigenous knowledge, educators can foster a sense of pride and identity among Indigenous learners, ensuring Indigenous cultural heritage is preserved and respected.

Decolonizing teacher education by challenging dominant Western epistemologies and advocating for diverse knowledge systems is essential for promoting global equity, racial justice, and social justice. Understanding the principles of decolonization, which ultimately makes room in the curriculum for Indigenous knowledge, requires an education oriented towards social justice. Social justice, as defined by Grant & Ladson-Billings (1997), posits that "citizens have a personal obligation, mediated through political obligations, to help create a society in which the concerns for concrete needs of all persons and the creation of reciprocal interdependence are fundamental" (247). Grant & Ladson-Billings further assert that education for justice is education for collaboration, cooperation, and community. This theoretical perspective underscores the necessity of fostering an educational environment that prioritizes equity and inclusiveness. In essence, decolonizing teacher education is about reclaiming agency over the educational narrative. This work is a call to honor the richness of Indigenous cultures, ensuring that every learner has access to education that is both relevant and liberating. This approach paves the way for futures that are as diverse and dynamic as the communities they serve. By emphasizing critical thinking, wisdom-keeping customs, and cultural sustainability, decolonization of teacher education provides a framework for transformative futures in postcolonial educational contexts.

Reconceptualization in this context refers to the process of fundamentally rethinking and redesigning teacher education curriculum to address its current limitations and align teacher education with a more inclusive and culturally responsive framework. This reconceptualization

invites a reimagining of teacher education that is rooted in social justice, collaboration, and community; that challenges the status quo; and that considers what a truly equitable education system could look like. Educators and all the key players involved in the curriculum process — developers, designers, implementers — and policymakers, as well, should make part of their standard operating procedure critical engagement with history, recognition of the value of diverse epistemologies, and dissolution of the structures that have long favored certain groups over others (UNESCO, 2017; Levinson & Geron, 2022).

White supremacy, needed to justify settler colonialism,[1] often produces master narratives that exclude consideration of other points of view (Tuck & Gaztambide, 2013). According to Calderon (2011, 108), the exclusion enacted within colonial perspectives creates "gaps that have concrete consequences for many communities that are not allowed full participation in educational knowledge production." Calderon's (2011) critique of how traditional education systems perpetuate dominant ideologies that marginalize non-Western and Indigenous perspectives explains that exclusion limits critical inquiry and reinforces colonialist narratives. Building from Bonilla Silva's (2001) work on the discourse of colorblind ideologies, Calderon refers to curricular exclusion, representative of a dominant ideology, as *colonial blind discourse*.

Historical Power Dynamics/Cultural Negotiations: Four Theoretical Approaches

The transformation of teacher education is best understood as a process deeply embedded in study of historical power dynamics and cultural negotiations. Systemic reform draws on decolonial, postcolonial, and critical pedagogical theories to examine how traditional curricular practices have perpetuated inequities in education. Exploring these processes gives insight into how Indigenous pedagogies not only challenge established norms but also offer innovative pathways to a reconceptualized curriculum in teacher education. Following discussion of decolonial schooling, several case studies will serve as critical examples of how colonial legacies have shaped education systems and how racialized educators perpetuate inequalities in classrooms. Consideration of these cases establishes the need for a reconceptualized curriculum able to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on transforming teacher education by inspiring actionable strategies to decolonize curricula globally (Tikly, 2024).

Aspects of decolonial/postcolonial/critical pedagogical theory combine to facilitate thorough examination of 1) how traditional curricular practices have perpetuated inequities in education, 2) how those inequities may be overcome, and 3) how new curricular/instructional practices can guide teachers/students in co-construction of social justice in their life worlds. Decolonized curriculum promises to affect positively the very lives, "the biographically determined situations" (Schutz, 1971, 288) of marginalized individuals and groups.

Decolonial Theory: Decolonial Theory, principally developed in the early 1990s by Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano, introduces the foundational concept of "coloniality of power" to critique social discrimination, Eurocentric knowledge systems, and other enduring structures of colonial domination that persist in modern societies. "Coloniality of power" challenges the dominance of Western epistemologies by advocating for inclusion of diverse knowledge systems in societal decision-making (Quijano, 2000). Eurocentric bias in traditional knowledge production

---

[1] A kind of colonialism that accomplishes imperialist aims by land appropriation that necessitates the removal or elimination of Indigenous populations and their replacement by Whites (Wolfe, 2001).

historically marginalized Indigenous and non-Western perspectives (Mignolo, 2007). Decolonial theory is used to dismantle structures, biases, and power dynamics favoring Western knowledge systems, promoting more inclusive understanding of knowledge and reality. Curricula, especially in teacher education, have been constructed through a colonial lens, which marginalizes Indigenous ways of knowing (Quijano, 2000). Urging educators to break down entrenched biases and embrace diverse, Indigenous epistemologies that reflect cultural realities of marginalized communities, Decolonial Theory calls for a radical rethinking of curriculum both in content and in pedagogy (Walsh, 2018).

Postcolonial Theory: Postcolonial Theory, significantly shaped by Palestinian American scholar Edward W. Said, particularly through his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978) may be used to examine enduring impacts of colonial dominance in education, especially how colonial discourses continue to privilege Western knowledge systems and marginalize Indigenous narratives (Enslin, 2017; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988). Postcolonial Theory demands recognition of the ongoing impact of colonialism on contemporary education systems, advocating for a pedagogy of criticality and transformation to address these historical injustices (Wa Thiong'o, 1986). Educational institutions have historically functioned as instruments of cultural control, imposing a dominant worldview that marginalizes local voices (Bhabha, 1994). Postcolonial Theory exposes the dilemmatic tensions educators face when navigating curricula that simultaneously reflect colonial legacies and attempt to respond to contemporary calls for cultural responsiveness. Integrating postcolonial insights into teacher training is crucial for developing curricula that both acknowledge past injustices and work actively to dethrone enduring structures of inequality (Loomba, 2005).

Critical Pedagogy: Critical Pedagogy, developed by Paulo Freire (1970), positions education as a practice of liberation rather than domination and emphasizes the importance of dialogic, critical reflection. Co-creation of knowledge between teachers and students becomes feasible because this pedagogical approach challenges traditional power dynamics in the classroom. Educational practice that fosters critical consciousness empowers learners to question/challenge dominant narratives, to take action against oppression, and to transform their social realities (Giroux, 1983). In teacher education, Critical Pedagogy promotes a dialogic relationship between teaching and learning as teacher education programs seek to nurture reflective practitioners committed to social justice and equipped to challenge systemic inequities within their communities (Shor, 1992).

Asian Critical Race Theory: AsianCrit focuses on the lived experiences and marginalization of Asian Americans. Iftikar & Museus (2018) explored the application of AsianCrit in education, emphasizing the need for policies and curricula that reflect Asian American voices. They advocate for recognizing the diversity within the Asian American community, acknowledging that being Asian is not monolithic but comprises varied backgrounds, experiences, and identities. This approach advances equity and inclusion in meaningful ways by emphasizing the importance of understanding the transnational contexts and histories of Asian Americans, including influences of migration patterns, colonialism, and imperialism on their experiences. Specifically, AsianCrit exposes how the dominant educational discourse often sidelines cultural contributions from an array of Asian communities, thereby perpetuating a narrow, Western-centric narrative. By foregrounding the unique challenges faced by Asian communities, AsianCrit underscores the necessity for decolonizing education in context, advocating for a reformed curriculum that not only recognizes but also integrates diverse knowledge systems. Such a curriculum ensures the rich histories/contributions of Asian Americans (7.2% of total U.S. population and at 24.7 million the

third-largest racial group in the U.S. (United States Census Bureau, 2024), alongside those of other marginalized groups, are both acknowledged and valued within our educational frameworks.

Historical Case Studies: Nigerian, African American, and Hawaiian Perspectives

This section considers three cases of communities faced with the need for decolonized curriculum. By exploring cases such as these that converge on the goal of fostering equity by respecting students' identities, valuing their cultural or Indigenous narratives, and addressing marginalization in all its forms, we lend our voice to demonstrating the transformative potential of decolonized education to restore equity and other forms of justice (National Education Association, 2021). These global comparisons underscore universal challenges that transcend geographical boundaries and call for a concerted global dialogue on decolonizing education, including resolution of issues like the marginalization of indigenous perspectives and the need for culturally responsive teacher education, (Sultana, 2010). By engaging in this dialogue, we can envision and work towards a reconceptualized education.

Nigerian Perspective: The Nigerian educational system is patterned on the British Colonial Education policy. The system is three-tiered: Basic, Post-basic, and Tertiary. Formal education is concerned with reading, writing, and numeracy, with the introduction of technology and science in the post-independence era. However, the objectives of this educational system did not address the aspirations of the Indigenous people neither before nor after Nigerian independence in 1960. Clamors for change resulted in the first indigenous National Policy on Education in 1977.[2]

In Nigeria, the enduring impact of colonial legacies on teacher education is particularly evident when examining the historical narratives that shape(d) curriculum. Circa 1840, Western education came to Nigeria via Christian British missionaries (Edeh, 2021). Syllabi used in Nigerian History/Social Studies curriculum and many textbooks suggest formal Western education in Nigeria *began* in 1842. However, historical records indicate Portuguese merchants were active in Nigeria well before the slave trade and were among the first Europeans to establish contact with the Nigerian coast during the late 15th-early 16th centuries (Lovejoy, 1991). Because their initial missions were driven by commercial interests, Portuguese direct impact on formal schooling in Nigeria was limited. Nevertheless, they established the first school in the Benin Kingdom in 1515. Early Portuguese presence not only opened Nigeria to global trade networks but also contributed to diffusion of Western cultural and intellectual practices when literacy and numeracy for language development were taught (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Evidence of earlier introduction of Western influences was later suppressed by colonial narratives. This significant gap in historical acknowledgment offers a striking example of how a colonial state's curriculum influences what is taught and learned, included or excluded, and forgotten or remembered in schooling. A recent influx of historical narratives from Indigenous perspectives into Nigeria's curriculum helps to

---

[2] While I do not intend to discuss the history of education in Africa, it is worth mentioning that centuries before colonial domination, various African cultures flourished and produced achievements in art and architecture, such as Ancient Egyptian pyramids, and agriculture, including irrigation along the Nile and Congo Rivers; history, including Solomon and the Queen of Sheba in Ethiopia (Pankhurst, 1998); hunting, such as the Bushmen of Botswana (Lee, 1979); religion, including the Coptic Christian Church of Egypt in the 4th century (Budge, 1970); and higher education, such as Al-Qarawiyyin, the oldest university in Morocco (UNESCO, 2017). Preservation of Western culture, especially Greek culture, in the Great Library of Alexandria in Egypt during the reign of Ptolemy II (285-246 BCE) is also noteworthy (El-Abbadi, 1990). Contributions of ancient African civilizations are indisputably significant in the evolution of global societies and world cultures.

marginalize earlier contributions of European powers like the Portuguese; but, as yet, to no great extent.[3]

Cultural and Indigenous knowledge systems have long served as vital pillars of shared national understanding in Nigeria and are exemplified by a rich tapestry of cultural materials, including folklore and oral traditions that imbue moral lessons and embed historical narratives (Ogunyemi, 2018); proverbs and idioms that impart wisdom across numerous local languages (Nwagbara, 2012); traditional religious and spiritual practices that shape Indigenous cosmologies (Okeke, 2008); and Indigenous agricultural and healing practices that are deeply rooted in the country's diverse ethnic traditions (Ajayi, 2010). Nonetheless, the prevailing narrative in published Nigerian History, Social Studies, and Civic Education curricula largely ignores Indigenous contributions. Instead, official school curricula reinforce a Eurocentric perspective. As Fafunwa (1986) argues, the imposition of British educational policies established curricula that privileged Western knowledge while sidelining local languages, histories, and pedagogies. Similarly, Okebukola (1993) points out the disconnect between traditional Nigerian educational practices and imposed colonial models of schooling has resulted in systemic inequities in teacher education. The gap between community and school continues to affect the quality and contextual relevance of education in Nigeria. Overly narrow focus on subjects like English, mathematics, and science not only neglects social dimensions of schooling but often initiates serious academic study of these subjects at an age too young to meet criteria of developmentally appropriate practice. (Sulaiman, 2008).

Furthermore, the curriculum tends to use reductive language when describing Indigenous practices. For example, traditional religious beliefs are often referred to as "superstitions" or "primitive," in everyday language and in most Social Studies texts (Nwagbara, 2012). Such pejorative language perpetuates colonial stereotypes that portray Indigenous cultures as inferior to Western scientific and religious canons and Western ways as sane and current while Indigenous ways of knowing are outdated or irrational. This *reductio ad hominem*, little more than a pep rally for colonialists, not only distorts historical narratives but also contributes to ongoing challenges in teacher education. Teachers often face crises of cultural dissonance when what the curriculum says denies validity to local knowledge and custom. Limited local relevance persists as a legacy of colonial education. Reorienting teacher education to focus on practice at aligning curriculum study with community life would go a long way towards decolonizing the curriculum, making it more accessible to traditionally marginalized students. Reorientation of teacher education towards pedagogical use of indigeneity is crucial for addressing systemic inequities and for constructing a more balanced and equitable society. Decolonizing curriculum involves challenging dominant narratives and advocating for integration of diverse knowledge systems. This approach is essential for promoting global equity, and racial and social justice. By reclaiming agency over educational narratives, we can honor the richness of Indigenous cultures and ensure every learner accesses education that is both relevant and liberating.

---

[3] Nigerian curricula have perpetuated a skewed understanding of the country's educational heritage. Often noticed is the superficial inclusion of Indigenous knowledge systems within the curriculum. While Nigerian folktales or proverbs may occasionally be included in language or literature classes, they are often treated as isolated cultural artifacts rather than integrated into a broader framework of knowledge that informs every aspect of life (Emeagwali, 2014). I see a typical example of this marginalization in Nigeria's language curriculum. For instance, Nigeria boasts over 500 languages (Bamgbose, 2000); but while some Indigenous languages are taught in schools, their role is often limited to the early years of education (Ngũgĩ, 1986).

Briefly comparing Nigeria with other postcolonial contexts reveals universal challenges in decolonizing education. Historically, many educational curricula have had an exclusionary focus, centering primarily on Eurocentric perspectives and privileging Western knowledge and history over the contributions of Indigenous and racially diverse communities. This exclusion is not coincidental; it is the result of systemic practices rooted in colonialism, segregation, and institutional racism. Take the U.S. as an example.

African American Perspective: Civil Rights Movement events might get covered in high school History, but the broader, systemic issues impacting African Americans are less visible. This creates an incomplete picture for all students and heightens inequalities. Owens (2022) asserts that African American education continues to be shaped by exclusion and resistance today. Textbooks often perpetuate racial biases by omitting or trivializing African American contributions. Moving beyond narratives that reduce African American history to slavery and the Civil Rights Movement, the decolonization approach emphasizes the need to integrate African American experiences and contributions into the curriculum (Lynn, 2006). For instance, studies have shown that U.S. History curricula disproportionately focus on Eurocentric achievements, leaving African American stories underrepresented or mischaracterized (King & Swartz, 2016). A curriculum that not only highlights African American struggles but also celebrates African American resilience and contributions to society speaks for equality.

Hawaiian Perspective: In Hawaii, Indigenous communities have similarly struggled to preserve native knowledge and language within a predominantly Western education system. The Curriculum of Aloha (COA), intended as a progressive, place-based Hawaiian studies curriculum, often presents Hawaiian culture in ways palatable to visitors to the island, rather than as a comprehensive and authentic representation of Native epistemologies and cultural practices. COA tilts towards colonial imagery rather than authentically reflecting the rich and complex history of Native Hawaiians. This undeniably perpetuates colonialist narratives and undermines the true significance of Hawaiian heritage, history, and values. COA underscores the need for a genuinely decolonized curriculum that honors and integrates Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural narratives in a meaningful way. Some innovators in Hawaiian education have sought to integrate Indigenous practices and cultural narratives. For example, Kaomea's (2000) critique of COA highlights how the curriculum has diminished and reduced Native Hawaiian culture to mere vignettes with tourist appeal. Through Kaomea's critique of COA, we begin to see the need to unlearn any genre-specific or white-specific expectations about colonized peoples. Postcolonial approaches aim to create educational spaces that are inclusive, equitable, and reflective of diverse identities of learners. Incorporating postcolonial critiques into curriculum equips students with the ability to analyze and dismantle the lingering impacts of colonialism on Indigenous knowledge.[4]

---

[4] Again, the history is not part of the scope of this paper, however, colonial histories and nationalist impulses have everywhere shaped educational equity and access, often marginalizing Indigenous and minority groups (Joseph & Matthews, 2014). So it is with Hawaii. The first recorded contact with Europeans was by British explorer Captain James Cook in 1778. Routinized and widespread contact led to overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii and establishment of the Republic of Hawaii (1894-1898). Then Hawaii was settler colonized by the United States. The Republic of Hawaii was annexed by the United States as a U.S. territory in 1898, eventually becoming the 50th state in 1959. Development from Kingdom to Republic to Territory to State involved increasingly intense imposition of Western education systems and suppression of Native Hawaiian epistemologies and cultural practices as well as appropriation of Native Hawaiian lands through settler colonial legal strategies such as *terra nullius* in which imperial powers declare Native lands unowned by any state and, therefore, free for the taking (Kame'eleihiwa, 1992, Cavanaugh, 2017; Fitzmaurice, 2007). U.S. occupation of Native Hawaiian lands remains ongoing.

These three geographically disparate but similarly colonized contexts highlight the need for a global approach to decolonizing education, one that integrates diverse knowledge systems and promotes cultural sustainability. This theoretical perspective emphasizes the importance of challenging dominant Western epistemologies and advocating for the inclusion of marginalized voices. By fostering critical consciousness among learners, postcolonial approaches enable them to recognize and resist the pervasive effects of colonialism on education. Decolonized curriculum is essential for promoting global equity, racial justice, and social justice. Conservative curriculum researchers, such as Butcher & Burke (2021), who fear divisive identity formation among students as a result of decolonized curriculum, omit from consideration that curriculum decolonized aims at integration of ideologies rather than promulgation of facts from any one perspective engaged in a multi-lateral, culturally-layered curricular conversation. Researchers like Butcher & Burke who think we are still better off pursuing absolute uniformity in curriculum and instruction seem oblivious to the obvious: Schooling takes place in enculturated contexts. Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) argued that educational inequities are not incidental but rooted in systemic racial inequalities sustained by policies and resource distribution. Turning a blind eye to considerations of cultural context of curriculum delivery renders Butcher & Burke's approach idealistic and impractical, making it difficult for instructors to reflect realities of actual educational settings and to develop classroom practices actually educative of students from marginalized groups. Butcher & Burke end up only hindering efforts to dismantle racism, restore equity within the curriculum, and make schooling more effective for students from any culture.

Erasure of Colonialism: A Case Study of an American Teacher

As an example of the sort of instructional difficulties Butcher & Burke (2021) ignore, I draw on a qualitative study of a traditionally trained teacher bumbling about with colonial narratives in the curriculum (Masta, 2016). Curricula may be presented in numerous ways, complicating teachers' cultural understandings. This complication is often exacerbated by a lack of experience, a lack of training, and ignorance of Indigenous curriculum knowledge (McCallum & Waller, 2022; Stacey, 2022). No doubt, one significant challenge educators face is creating and implementing school curricula that reflect diverse and critical viewpoints. Traditional school curricula often perpetuate perspectives, values, and knowledge that support colonization. What is missing is the disruption of colonial narratives, which illustrates the importance of decolonial teacher preparation. The evident lack of experience and training on the part of the teacher in Masta's study underscores the necessity of equipping educators with the tools and knowledge to challenge and transform colonial narratives within their teaching practices.

Masta's (2016) study of an eighth-grade Social Studies teacher provides valuable insights into the practical application of how colonialism and race are perpetuated:

> "I collected data over the final quarter of the 2011-2012 school year. I was on-site for 3 to 4 days a week, for 10 weeks, observing for approximately 245 hours, and spent the majority of my time in the classroom of Mr. Hanson: the only eighth-grade social studies teacher in the school. I am using TribalCrit [Tribal Critical Race Theory] because it allows me to contextualize how colonialism manifests itself in educational policies and practices, and because it provides a critical lens with which to evaluate the lessons and discussions held by Mr. Hanson." (571).

Masta homes in on an incident in the classroom where Mr. Hanson, during a lesson on map reading, briefly mentions the renaming of Indian cities, such as Madras becoming Chennai,

Bombay becoming Mumbai, and Calcutta becoming Kolkata. Mr. Hanson explains that these name changes occurred after India gained independence from British rule in the 1960s [instead of 1947, the actual date]. By framing the event as a straightforward historical fact, Mr. Hanson overlooks the deeper implications of the name changes, which were not just administrative but, *just as factually*, symbolic acts of reclaiming identity. These renaming processes were directly tied to India's struggle to shed colonial influence and restore indigenous cultures and histories that had been marginalized and erased during British rule. By neglecting to address why these cities were renamed, Mr. Hanson inadvertently overlooks the imperialist dimension of colonialism, which sought not only to control land and resources but also to reshape the cultural and historical narratives of colonized regions. Masta emphasizes that such omissions in education can perpetuate a colonial mindset by failing to acknowledge local contexts and histories. Hanson's failure to address the full story contributes to ongoing ignorance of Indigenous knowledge. In this way, colonial narratives are reproduced in classrooms, and students are deprived of learning about Indigenous historical contributions.

Mr. Hanson's approach exemplifies the concept of erasure of colonialism, which refers to the omission from educational narratives from historical and cultural contexts critical of the impact of colonialism. According to Masta (2016), erasing colonialism occurs when educators fail to acknowledge in the curriculum the influence of colonialism. Excluding Indigenous perspectives from class discussion perpetuates the half-truths of a chauvinistic colonialism. Hanson's approach, particularly when he discussed the name changes in Indian cities without addressing the colonial history and reasons behind those changes, reveals a significant limitation in how teacher education often operates within a framework that disregards Indigenous knowledge systems and fails to challenge the status quo of Eurocentric narratives. By following Butcher & Burke's (2021) pedagogical advice to just stick to the facts, Hanson deprives his students of the opportunity to consider the *meaning* of those facts and omits from their education as historians understanding of historiography. Hanson's underdeveloped treatment of historical fact highlights a systemic issue of teacher education, namely, study of a curriculum of professional development that neglects consideration of the complexities of decolonizing pedagogy and curricula. In teacher education, this manifests as an inability on the part of teachers to fully address and integrate the diverse epistemologies and cultural contexts necessary for construction of a truly inclusive and equitable framework within which to adequately understand histories of cross-cultural contact.

From Bad to Worse: Normalizing Colonialism for Students

Masta (2016) finds another, even more insidious illustration of colonialism in the curriculum in Mr. Hanson's lesson titled "*Important Countries of the World*." Students were asked to label a world map with 40 countries selected by Mr. Hanson. What ensued during teaching and learning about the map labelled with important countries depicts not only little acknowledgment of the problems of colonialism; but reinforcement of a colonialist mindset. Masta goes through Mr. Hanson's lecture with a fine-toothed, decolonialist comb:

> In the first group of "Important Countries of the World" discussed, Mr. Hanson included China, India, Russia, Brazil, and Germany. The comments Mr. Hanson made regarding these countries were generally positive and focused on the benefits these countries provided the United States. For example, he described China as "the second world power and a large producer of goods we need to function in America." India was a country with "a large population, but has democracy which we like, and

provides workers for jobs that Americans shouldn't have to do." Mr. Hanson described Russia as an important ally to the United States and "our good friend" (576).

Germany was mentioned for its role as a leading global economy, while Brazil was noted as significant because it was hosting the [2016 Summer] Olympics.

In his discussion of the Middle East, Mr. Hanson listed Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, focusing primarily on the military and political conflicts in the area. He said both Syria and Egypt were countries that had ongoing "revolutions that they need our help with, otherwise, they won't become democracies." He described Iraq as "*the country we're at war with*." [Emphasis in original. Note: The U.S. had withdrawn from military operations in Iraq five years previously in December, 2011.] Mr. Hanson went on to state that Iran "refuses to listen to the U.S. and is made up of fundamentalist people who do what they want and hurt us" By "us," Mr. Hanson demarcates the United States as the nation of paramount importance in world affairs and its citizenry as a distinct and cohesive group whose identity, interests, and values are shared by all. Hanson's perspective on the world as expressed in this discussion implicitly positions other countries as part of an "out-group" who do not understand the centrality and superiority of American interests, a sentiment common in nationalist discourse (Masta, 2016, 578).

When referring to Asia, Hanson talked about Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Vietnam, Myanmar, North Korea, and Japan. He depicted Indonesia as unconcerned with U.S. interests and tolerant of Muslim fundamentalists, described Pakistan as a former ally that betrayed the U.S. over issues related to Osama Bin Laden and attacks on the World Trade Towers, portrayed Bangladesh and Vietnam as impoverished nations with considerable financial obligations to the United States, and labeled Myanmar a problematic communist state. North Korea was briefly mentioned with an emphasis on its nuclear ambitions against the U.S. Only two countries were spoken of in a positive light: Japan and the Philippines. Japan for its strong economy and production of electronic goods in demand in the United States, and the Philippines as a reliable ally that played a protective role in Asia for U.S. interests. Importantly, Mr. Hanson again permeates his remarks with the language of "we" when referring to the United States. The language of "we" applied only to the U.S. implies an associated language of "they/them" for other nations. Mr. Hanson's colonialist *Weltanschauung* tends to pit US against them.

Mr. Hanson also described countries in Africa, South America, and North America. However, in the African group, he only mentioned Nigeria and Ethiopia. He described both countries negatively. Nigeria was "too corrupt to function and, unfortunately, they have a lot of oil we need;" and Ethiopia was "in need of famine relief and unable to create an economy of their own, needing to buy things from the U.S. to survive." Hanson's descriptions portray African nations as inherently flawed and dependent on Western intervention for their survival. In the South American group, "Mr. Hanson described Venezuela as being important for producing oil" and "not really our friend," and Colombia as a country "filled with drugs that keep Mexico dependent on the U.S." Lastly, he described Mexico as "very corrupt and problematic to the U.S." Masta (2016, 580) notes Mr. Hanson had several opportunities to do so, but continually failed to point out the complicated nature of the United States in relation to these other countries. His comments indicated a strong preference for a rhetoric of "U.S. as best," a prevalent attitude supporting colonial practices. Additionally, Mr. Hanson's comments focused on the economic, material, and political relationships these countries have with the United States. Students were not encouraged to think about why countries might not align their interests with those of the United States. Thus,

Mr. Hanson presented a simplistic binary — countries that benefit the United States are considered friends, while those that do not are labeled enemies — that drastically reinforces the ideologically colonialist notion that U.S. interests are paramount and inherently superior to all others.

On what grounds does Mr. Hanson assert such negative views about these countries? What does it mean to say *"not really our friend?"* when said of other countries? How do we interpret this teacher's nationalist language? Certainly, Hanson's statements reflect a perspective rooted in colonialist and racist ideologies. But; does it find its source in a kind of colorblindness intent on minimization of cultural differences (ala Butcher & Burke, 2021) or is it more accurately indicative of an intentional bias rooted in a curriculum that erases cross-cultural knowledge and a pedagogy that removes from consideration decolonialist criticality (Masta, 2016)? Answer to this question is crucial because it challenges us to examine underlying assumptions in traditional teacher education, especially problems posed by normalizing colonialism.

Freire's (1970) Critical Pedagogy challenges traditional education systems on precisely this point, particularly the "banking model" of education, where students are seen as passive recipients of knowledge. The banking model often ignores the social, historical, and cultural contexts from which knowledge emerges, potentially perpetuating colonialist perspectives. When teachers present colonialism as a natural and beneficial process, students get inculcated into the normalization of colonialist ideologies (Masta, 2016). This approach fails to acknowledge negative impacts of colonialism, such as exploitation and cultural erasure. To counteract this uncritical acceptance of the correctness of colonialist practices, we can apply to classroom instruction Freire's principles of critical pedagogy by encouraging students to question and challenge presented material. This means fostering a classroom environment where students can explore and discuss the historical and cultural contexts of the curriculum they are studying, promoting a more inclusive and critical understanding of the world. Freirean classrooms require reorientation of teacher education away from reiteration of canned, colonialist curriculum towards critical, decolonialist questioning about the meaning of historical events. Teachers educated on a Freirean model become adept at posing and pursuing questions critical of curriculum content.

Decolonizing Teacher Education: Integrating Diverse Epistemologies as a Way Forward
Addressing the issues of erasure and normalization of colonialism is a key impetus for rethinking how we prepare educators. By decolonizing our curricula and integrating diverse epistemologies, including Indigenous pedagogies, schooling can better respond to the challenges of global equity, race, and social justice (Smith, 2019; Lee, 2021). For instance, framing international relationships in terms of debt, alliance, and compliance, and implicitly suggesting that other nations exist to serve U.S. interests is embarrassing because dehumanizing. Colonialist thinking strips other countries of their national identities and threatens their existential status. Such a reductionist portrayal of sovereign nations not only limits critical inquiry into why some countries may choose divergent paths but also fails to acknowledge the broader, sometimes quite negative impact of U.S. practices on global communities. Mr. Hanson's narrow perspective underscores the urgent need to decolonize teacher education by developing curricula that challenge outdated colonial narratives and prepare educators to foster a more nuanced, inclusive approach to understanding the world (Smith, 2019).

Because traditional teacher education systems predominantly draw on Western epistemologies, they can inadvertently reproduce a worldview that marginalizes non-Western nations and Indigenous ways of knowing, constraining educators to address complex challenges of

the 21st century, such as global equity, race, and social justice, with a 19ᵗʰ-century mindset (Datta, 2020). Critically examining traditional teacher education models helps identify how their foundations may implicitly reinforce nationalistic and exclusionary narratives. But critical examination of traditional teacher training also tells us how to improve teacher education. Teachers are better positioned as educators as they become increasingly adept at asking key questions rather than providing prerecorded answers. Integrating Indigenous pedagogies and diverse epistemologies into the curriculum offers a transformative alternative to traditional colonialist curriculum. Taking seriously into account perspectives other than one's own generates just the sort of questions decolonial theory wants asked of curriculum. Curriculum theorists, curriculum developers, teachers, and students, one and all, need to analyze how traditional teacher education frameworks perpetuate Western-centric, neoliberal, culturally homogeneous colonial ideologies through simplified, exclusionary narratives. Then curriculum developers and, especially, curriculum deliverers need to synthesize links between local and global educational goals to pave the way for a teacher education paradigm capable of advancing global equity, social justice, and cultural sustainability. If we are to consider and select wisely from all possible educational futures, then we are required to recognize and repatriate all actual educational pasts. Integrating Indigenous pedagogy and cultural point of view into our very definitions of excellent teaching and high-quality education presents a clear way forward by promoting self-reflection and critical dialogue among curriculum theorists and curriculum developers and inculcating decolonial perspectives among teachers and students.

References

American Civil Liberties Union. (2023). *Why access to education is key to systemic equality*. ACLU.

Apple, M. W. (1990). *Ideology and curriculum* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Balarin, M., & Milligan, L. O. (2024). Education as justice: Articulating the epistemic core of education to enable just futures. *Global Social Challenges Journal, 3,* 125–141. https://doi.org/10.1332/27523349Y2024D000000013

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2001). *White supremacy and racism in the post-civil rights era.* Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Budge, E. A. W. (1970). *The Egyptian book of the dead: The Papyrus of Ani in the British Museum.* Dover Publications.

Budge, I. (1970). *The changing structure of political support in Britain.* Cambridge University Press.

Butcher, J., & Burke, L. M. (2021). *Seven steps to combating "Critical Theory" in the classroom*. The Heritage Foundation.

Calderon, D. (2011). Speaking back to manifest destinies: A land education-based approach to critical curriculum inquiry. *Environmental Education Research, 17*(1), 24-41. https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2013.865114

Cavanagh, E. (2014). Revisiting *terra nullius*. *Law and History Review* 32 (1), 97-125.

Datta, R. (2020). Decolonizing both researcher and research and its effectiveness in Indigenous research. *Research Ethics, 16*(2–3), 1-24. https://doi.org/10.1177/1747016117733296

El-Abbadi, M. (1990). *The life and fate of the ancient Library of Alexandria*. UNESCO/UNDP.

Enslin, P. (2017). Postcolonialism and education. *Oxford Research Encyclopedias*. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.001.0001

Fitzmaurice. A. (2007). The genealogy of *terra nullius*. *Australian Historical Studies* 38 (1), 1-15.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Herder and Herder.

Grant, C. A., & Ladson-Billings, G. (Eds.). (1997). *Dictionary of multicultural education*. Oryx Press.

Grosfoguel, R. (2013). The structure of knowledge in Westernized universities: Epistemic racism/sexism and the four genocides/epistemicides of the long 16th century. *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge, 11*(1), 73-90.

Hatch, T., Corson, J., & Gerth van den Berg, S. (2021). New schools in New York City: Incremental changes in transformative initiatives in the 21st century. *Teachers College Record 123*(10), 1-8.

Hickling-Hudson, A. (2006). Cultural complexity, post-colonialism and educational change: Challenges for comparative educators. *International Review of Education/Internationale Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft 52*(1/2, January/March), 201-218.

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.

Iftikar, J. S., & Museus, S. D. (2018). On the utility of Asian critical (AsianCrit) theory in the field of education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 31(10), 935–949. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2018.1522008

Joseph, C., & Matthews, J. (Eds.). (2014). *Equity, opportunity and education in postcolonial Southeast Asia.* Routledge.

Kaomea, J. (2000). A curriculum of Aloha? Colonialism and tourism in Hawai'i's elementary textbooks. *Curriculum Inquiry, 30*(3), 299-319.

Kame'eleihiwa, L. (1992). *Native land and foreign desires: Pehea lā e pono ai? How shall we live in harmony*? Bishop Museum Press.

King, J. E., & Swartz, E. E. (2016). *The Afrocentric praxis of teaching for freedom: Connecting culture to learning.* Routledge.

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record, 97*(1), 47–68. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146819509700104

Lee, R. B. (1979). *The! Kung San: Men, women, and work in a foraging society*. Cambridge University Press.

Levinson, M., Geron, T., & Brighouse, H. (2022). Conceptions of educational equity. *AERA Open, 8(*1), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584221121344

Loomba, A. (2005). *Colonialism/postcolonialism* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Masta, S. (2016). Disrupting colonial narratives in the curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 48*(5), 567-583.

McCallum, K., & Waller, L. (2022). Un-braiding deficit discourse in Indigenous education news 2008–2018: Performance, attendance, and mobility. *Critical Discourse Studies, 19*(1), 73-92. https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2020.1817115

Mignolo, W. D. (2011). *The darker side of Western modernity: Global futures, decolonial options*. Duke University Press.

National Education Association. (2021). *Racial justice in education*. https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/202101/Racial%20Justice%20in%20Education.pdf

Nieto, S. (1996). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education* (2nd ed.). Longman Publishers USA.

Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America. In E. Lander (Ed.), *La colonialidad del saber: Eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas latinoamericanas* (pp. 533-580). CLACSO.

Routledge Wisman, J. D. (2018). The dynamics of inequality in the human story: A brief sketch. *International Journal of Pluralism and Economics Education, 9*(1/2), 4. https://doi.org/10.1504/ijpee.2018.092236

Russell, M. (2023*). Systemic racism and educational measurement: Confronting injustice in testing, assessment, and beyond.* Routledge.

Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism.* Pantheon Books.

Santos, M., & Haycock, K. (2016). *24 examples of systemic inequities experienced by students of color and students from under-resourced communities in U.S. schools*. WestEd.

Schutz, A. (1971). Tiresias, or Our Knowledge of Future Events. In A. Brodersen, Ed. *Alfred Schutz: Collected papers, volume II: Studies in social theory* (pp. 277-293). Nijhoff

Smith, R. F. (2023, August 22). *Systemic racism in education*. https://robertsmith.com/blog/systemic-racism-in-education/

Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271-313). University of Illinois Press.

Stacey, K. (2022). Doing decolonisation: Cultural reconnection as political resistance in schooling. *The Australian Educational Researcher*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-022-00512-3

Sulaiman, A. A. (2008). An appraisal of developmentally inappropriate practices in Lagos state primary schools: Implications for UBE (Universal Basic Education). *International Journal of Learning. 15*(3, Spring), 331-335.

Sultana, F. (2010). Living in hazardous waterscapes: Gendered vulnerabilities and experiences of floods and disasters. *Environmental Hazards, 9*(1), 43-53.

Tikly, L. (2024). Realising systemic justice-oriented reform in education in postcolonial contexts. *Global Social Challenges Journal, 3*(1), 142–152. https://doi.org/10.1332/27523349Y2024D000000021

UNESCO. (2017). *A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

UNESCO. (2017a). Education transforms lives. https://www.unesco.org

Villegas, A. M., & Lucas, T. (2002). *Educating culturally responsive teachers*: *A coherent approach*. State University of New York Press.

Wa Thiong'o, N. (1986). *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. Heinemann.

Wolfe, P. (2011). After the frontier: Separation and absorption in US Indian policy." *Settler Colonial Studies,* 1(1), 21-33.

A Call for Inclusion:
The Impact of Ethnic Identity Addressivity in Shaping Future Educators

Jazmin Khraishi and Christina Wright Fields
Marist University

Abstract: We draw upon the Latino Identity Orientation and Teacher Identity frameworks to examine the critical role of affirming students' ethnic identities within classroom settings and curricula. Through a narrative inquiry approach grounded in *testimonios,* Jazmin, a co-author of the paper, shares her personal experiences in navigating the K-12 and higher education systems. Jazmin's stories highlight how the presence — or absence — of ethnic identity inclusion shaped her academic journey as a student and developed her identity as an educator. Our guiding questions are: How does erasure of inclusivity in schools, particularly regarding ethnic diversity, impact students' academic experiences and their internalization of their ethnic identity? What impact does addressivity of ethnic identity in curriculum and in classrooms have on student's identity formation and academic achievement?

Guided by the Latino Identity Orientation (LIO) and Teacher Identity (TI) frameworks our inquiry sheds light on human experience, demonstrating how identity and environment can shape one's narrative reality and everyday life (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001). We explore the importance of valuing a student's ethnic identity within the culture of the classroom and in the content of the curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Utilizing a narrative inquiry approach to share personal experiences from both the K-12 educational system and higher education illustrates how the inclusion or absence of ethnic identity in the classroom can significantly guide a student's academic journey and shape an educator's emerging professional identity. Jazmin, a Latina undergraduate student currently pursuing certification in English adolescent education and a co-author of this article, shares stories from her life. Integrating LIO and TI frameworks to interpret her narrative, Jazmin's experience underscores how social environments, particularly educational contexts, influence the development of students' cultural identities and shape how persons see themselves and others. The central question guiding our research is: How can *testimonios*, like the ones provided by Jazmin, be utilized to describe the lived experiences of Latina educators and help explain the value of demographic and ethnographic representation in education?

We use narrative inquiry to answer our guiding question. Narrative inquiry, as described by Creswell (2014), emphasizes the relationship among biographical stories, cultural identities, and processes of finding meaning and significance in one's lived experiences. Specifically, real-life examples from Jazmin's educational experience highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of understanding one's identity as a future educator. Jazmin's story demonstrates how an inclusive curriculum can foster a sense of acceptance and belonging for students in the classroom. The impact of inclusion in education is profound, especially as the current wave of attacks on critical race theory and culturally responsive curricula threaten to marginalize students, especially those from minoritized groups like Latines. The erasure of inclusion not only undermines their interests and ideas but also disrupts students' sense of comfort and belonging in a space where they spend the majority of their day-to-day lives — schools. The absence of identity addressivity in the curriculum risks failing to prepare all students to become informed, functional members of society; and limits their ability to critically engage from multiple perspectives with complex issues. Fostering an increasingly inclusive educational environment not only broadens the scope of what education can achieve but also empowers future educators

to envision and create a more equitable and diverse academic landscape.

Latino Identity Orientation (LIO) and Teacher Identity (TI): Two Connecting Frameworks

There is no linear way an individual can come face-to-face with their racial/ethnic identity, and the Latino identity is no exception. Despite representing a significant portion of the U.S. population, Latinos have often lived in the shadows of American society because of their ethnicity. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (United States Census Bureau, 2022), nearly 63.6 million Hispanics/Latinos (of any race) lived in the United States in 2022, accounting for approximately 19.1% of the total population. But those 64 million Latine Americans tend to suffer marginalization in terms of access to resources and status in the U.S. Marginalization creates liminality which complicates identity formation and underscores the importance of exploring and analyzing Latino identity, especially the identity of Latine educators. Teachers are members of a profession in which one's culture deeply influences teaching practices and student engagement. When educators are prevented from reflecting on or embracing their cultural identities a disconnect in their self-understanding occurs, one that may negatively impact both how they teach and how they understand their underlying purpose in being a teacher.

A teacher's identity develops every day through decisions made in the classroom. Every lesson plan, every interaction, and every response to students contributes to the ongoing development of a teacher's personal-professional identity. Teacher identity is aptly described as "personal-professional" because, while teachers are professionals, the work of an educator is extremely personal and often emotionally exhausting, as teachers serve as mentors, advisors, instructors, and advocates. Teachers balance delivering curriculum, maintaining discipline, and creating a comfortable space where students can thrive. Teachers' emotional labor necessitates the importance of recognizing the personal side of teacher professionalism. The combination of beliefs, values, biases, and bureaucracy constituting classroom teaching creates a space where authority, identity, and vulnerability intersect daily. The power dynamics that characterize the teacher-student relationship have been metaphorically described as mirrors of power (Pishghadam, Golzar, & Miri, 2022). Mirrors are a metaphor apt of student-teacher interaction because the teacher and the student see each other's *perceived identity* as they interact. These identities should not be erased from classroom culture but instead should be reflected upon and refined so that perceived identities align and converge with intended identities. The accuracy of identity perception between student and teacher plays an important, communication-clarifying role in the classroom. Burying one's identity in the workplace makes the mistake of assuming one's identity must be hidden for the sake of professionalism. But personalism and professionalism are not incompatible. Professional decision-making often involves personal aspects. When teachers lead by example, incorporating their own identity into their work-a-day lives, refining their identity in response to others, class becomes a safe and comforting atmosphere in which students can share their identities, too. Providing students space to connect with teachers more personally promises to initiate educational exploration inspired by a leveling of power between students and teachers, when both are considered by each other to be persons.

The development of a racial/ethnic identity happens through the metaphor of the "lens." The lens metaphor summarizes how persons with marginalized identities view their ethnicity, wider societal/political issues, other ethnic groups, and how their experiences and social circumstances shape these lenses. Examples of social circumstances developmental of identity include entering the workforce, experiencing discrimination, and navigating life transitions. Orientations to one's

ethnicity include undifferentiated/denial, white-identified, Latino as other, sub-group identified, Latino-identified, and Latino-integrated. The orientation a person falls under depends on how their "lens" is set. The lens may be closed completely, tinted, external, narrow, or wide (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001). The perspective provided by identity, when identity is considered as a lens, may also influence how other Latinos and white people are perceived, impacting assumptions, expectations, and interactions across cultures. When growing up, for example, Jazmin's orientation to Latina identity fell under the "sub-group identified" orientation. She never felt she was part of the Latino group due to seeing her Latina identity as minimized by her light-colored skin and her inability to speak Spanish. During college Jazmin's orientation began to shift, prompting transformation in how she viewed, engaged with, and perceived the world. Given opportunity to explore her identity in- and outside classrooms, Jazmin now sees herself as Latino-identified, culturally committed to her ethnicity. Jazmin's evolving personal-professional identity is illustrative of what it means to come to terms with one's Latina identity as an educator. Using narrative-driven research and the LIO framework, we seek to understand the role in education of identity addressivity — respect for other persons/taking personal responsibility for how we treat others (Bakhtin, 1993) — and how Jazmin's identity influences her worldview, pedagogical practices, curriculum choices, and relationships with peers, instructors, and students.

Exploring the Nexus of Latino Identity Orientation (LIO) and Teacher Identity (TI)

Drawing on Latino Orientation and Teacher Identity frameworks, we explore how Jazmin's life experiences shape and are shaped by identity, highlighting her simultaneous journey of discovering her Latina heritage and developing her educator persona. Jazmin's experience illustrates how identity development is not linear, but rather episodically shaped by interactions with other people in social institutions (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001). Figure 1 describes key elements of episodes important to Jazmin's personal-professional identity development.
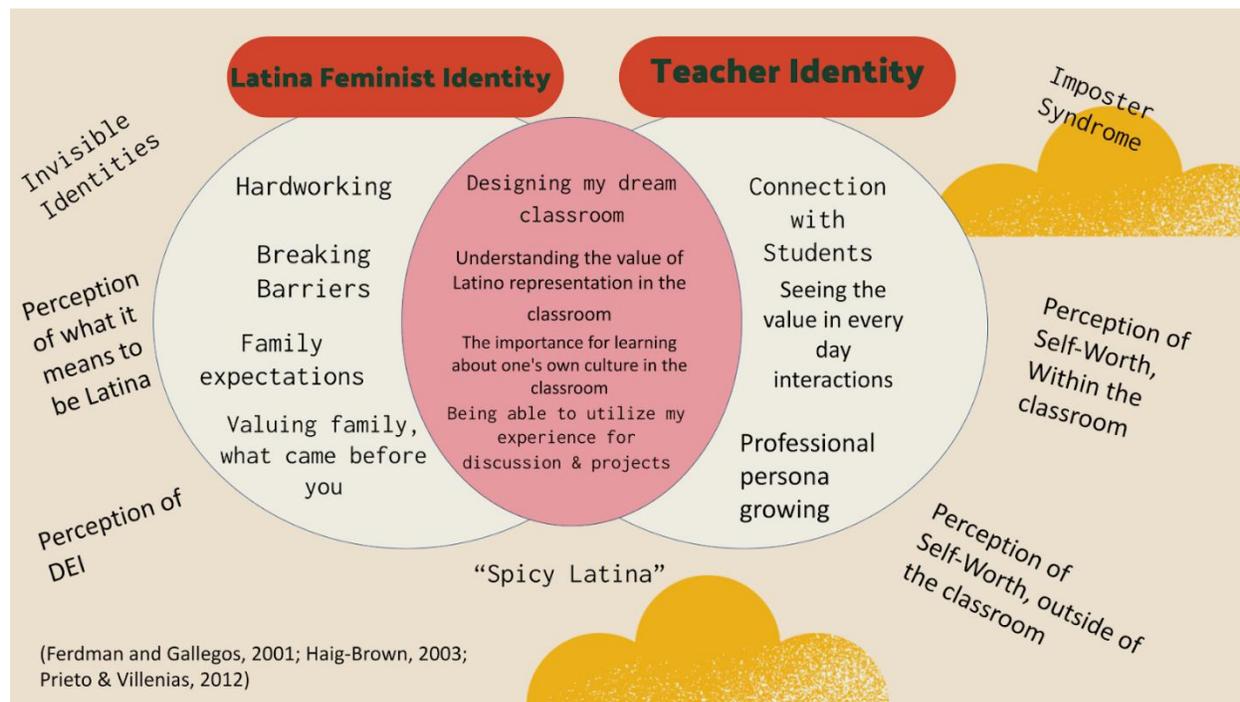

Figure 1: The Beauty and Battle of Colliding Identities

The first time I (Note: Throughout the article first person pronouns refer to Jazmin.) realized I did not look Latina enough was in the 7th grade. I was sitting with my peers, and a boy who was Latino was speaking Spanish. Excitedly, I exclaimed I was Mexican. He then proceeded to tell me that no, I was a white person. This was the first of many experiences where my own identity was told to me by another person. I was in high school when I discovered the term "white-passing." White-passing is when a person of color is perceived as white and is often viewed as having more privilege than other individuals in the relevant community of color. Being constantly pushed into a box of not being Mexican enough because of the color of my skin, I constantly denied my Latina heritage outside of my own home. Whenever I would bring my Latina identity into the conversation outside home, I was told I was not Mexican enough. I originally played these experiences down as normal; but all the while wished I knew what "Mexican enough" meant. It wasn't until college that I finally explored my ethnic identity as a Latina. When reclaiming my own ethnic identity within academia, reflection on past experiences made me realize that on multiple occasions I have experienced racist microaggressions through comments by peers that I was not Mexican enough.

On the other hand, my Mexican heritage was given disservice even when I was recognized as Latine. Growing up, I was told I would never be smart enough to attend any institution of higher education. When college admission season came around, I was admitted to several schools. To even be admitted into higher education was an extremely significant accomplishment for me. However, when sitting at lunch with a close friend of mine, I expressed my shock that a prestigious school had admitted me. My friend proceeded to say the only reason I was accepted was because I said I was Hispanic. If they saw a photo of me, they would have never let me in because I don't look Mexican. After this experience, my relationship with things like diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI), and other programs to help students like me became skewed. The experience took away a significant accomplishment from me and caused me to avoid taking advantage of programs made to promote equality in education, to help people like me.

Before entering college, I came across very few Latina educators. My first-ever Spanish teacher was an exception to that rule. But her deepest uniqueness consisted in allowing me and my classmates to bring our own culture into the classroom. Before our holiday break, we had a party, and each student was assigned to bring in a dish representative of the cuisine of their culture. By doing this, the teacher allowed us to share a piece of each other's culture that was outside the color of our skin or the language we spoke. She allowed me to bring in a cultural artifact and tell my peers and classmates, without fear of refutation, that I am part of Latina culture. It was so beautiful to be allowed that validation.

At about the same time, in the eighth grade, I was also allowed to showcase in class what I was passionate about in the world. In my second class with a History teacher, he did something none of my other teachers were doing at the time: he allowed us to express our passions. I was taking this class in school year 2016-2017 a time when the American political atmosphere, with the election of Donald Trump to the presidency, was intensifying racial hostility. Because of this atmosphere of racial animosity my passion for politics increased greatly. This fire inside me turned many of our Socratic Seminars into emotional, extremely passionate, heated rants. The teacher didn't stop any student who went off topic, he didn't tell any of us we were wrong, he created an atmosphere that was safe for every student to show their knowledge of and their feelings about what was happening in politics at the time. He saw that we were connecting our lives to the History concepts we were learning. Because of the motivation he inspired in us, and

because of this space he provided us to develop our thinking, this was the first time I created goals for myself. I made a checklist of goals in 8th-grade (Figure 2), the same year I was told I would never be smart enough to get into college. I ignored this claim against me because of the teacher's motivation. If it weren't for him, I doubt this article would exist. `
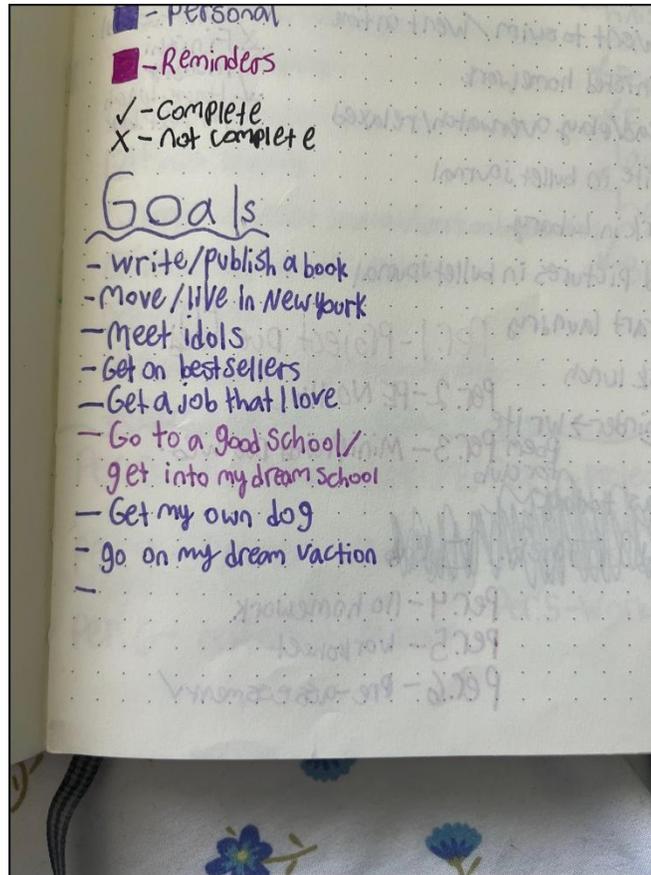

Figure 2: My 8th-Grade Checklist of Goals

Six years later, I matriculated at Marist University. While at Marist, I had to take two Spanish classes. Going into a higher-level Spanish course terrified me, but my Spanish professor relieved those fears. She cultivated a welcoming, supportive, and safe classroom environment that encouraged all students to develop confidence and proficiency in speaking Spanish. She and I developed a meaningful connection, and she provided me space to share personal things about myself regarding my own Latina heritage. She allowed me to use my background to motivate my love for Spanish. My cultural identity became an asset, not a deficit. After finishing her course and home for the holidays, I noticed a change in my ability to understand Spanish. I was able to listen with ease to what my family was saying. This was the first time a Spanish course taught me to speak and understand a language that was part of my blood and family history. All because this professor took time out of her lesson plans and teaching days to have personal connections with students. She was the one Spanish professor who shared her background with us, allowing us to become immersed not only in the language but the culture as well. This course shaped who I wanted to be as a Latina educator, integrating my own culture into my classroom and allowing space for students to share their own culture as well, supporting a healthier atmosphere for study and better academic performance among students in the class.

The next year, that same Spanish professor asked if I would be interested in working at an after-school Spanish program, teaching Spanish to elementary schoolers for 5 weeks. I took the job. Among my class a few students had Hispanic backgrounds. One student came to the class already knowing every word in the curriculum. Whenever he had the opportunity to show off his knowledge, he jumped at the chance. It was rewarding to see his eyes light up when he had the chance to share a word of Spanish. He came in every week with the same positive and excited energy to share his culture with the class. I was able to see Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Practices at work and see the importance of this approach (something now at risk with rising anti-DEI legislation). This wonderful experience demonstrated the importance of allowing space for students to share their culture as a way to motivate their learning.

La Maestra Within

Being a swim instructor for three years made me realize I was born to be a teacher. Coaching taught me many things at a time when my Latina identity and teacher identity worked hand-in-hand. Figure 3 displays some of the many gifts I received from swim students, each a reflection of meaningful connections we built. These students were not with me hours a day like in a school classroom. They were with me at most 30 minutes a day, 4 days a week, for 2 weeks.

Figure 3: Gifts from My Students

The teaching technique I adopted with each student was different depending on their aquatic aptitude, but the one thing that was the same for each and every student was that I provided

space for the student to talk about themselves. Even though the time the student had with me was notably short, each of them and their parents expressed to me how much of a difference I made in their lives. Another commonality among these students is they all succeeded. Bringing the personal into the classroom, or the pool in this case, fosters a sense of belonging that motivates students to learn, and this is a technique that I intend to take out of the pool and into my future classroom. With these experiences, I was able to understand the importance of providing space for those students to share aspects of themselves with their teacher.

When I moved from the West Coast of the United States to its East Coast I was on my own and away from my heritage, which made me reflect on what it meant to be Latina. Through this reflection, I realized for most of my life, being Latina was an invisible identity. An identity that was considered visible for most Latines was invisible for me because of the color of my skin and because of my inability to speak my native language. The result of this reconsideration of my invisible identity made me take charge by claiming my Latina identity. I would claim this identity whenever I would get the chance… But when claiming Latina identity, I found a sense of anxiety building inside me. This sense of anxiety came from fear that someone wouldn't believe me. I was scared I would relive past experiences of being told I didn't fit the part of a Latina. A time when I wasn't allowed to claim that part of myself. But exploration of my teacher identity supported development of my Latina identity. Identifying as Latina also allowed my professional persona to grow, shaping me into the educator I am today. I am a Latina educator committed to sharing myself with my students and committed to teaching my students how to claim and share their own identities, too. Through exploration and transcendence of past fears, I now have a sense of pride when I call myself a Latina educator because *I am Latina enough*!

*Testimonios***: Cultural Identity as an Asset**
The growth of one's identity is ever-changing and, much like the process of learning, never done. My teacher identity is ever-growing. When entering higher education, I erroneously adopted the position that my identity was set in stone, that there was no growing left to be done. It never occurred to me that the development of my identity was just beginning. Upon reconsideration of the idea that my identity was unchangeable, I've realized I adopted this stance during my time in the K-12 system because there was never time nor space devoted to exploration of that identity. This made my identity and my lens seem determinately fixed by forces outside my control. Not until I was in Education courses that touched on topics of bias and identity did I realize my identity is always alterable. This made me realize that how I see elements of my ethnic identity is constantly changing based on ongoing experiences.

As of right now, 2025, in my early twenties, I am still in the process of becoming an educator, using my lived experiences to develop a theory of teaching that incorporates my core values and tells me how best to apply my *valores* in a learning environment. My take-home message from the TI (Teacher Identity) framework is mirrors of power. Any authoritarian power an educator wields too often undermines efforts to educate students by putting them off learning (Shapiro, 2001). During my limited but varied teaching experience, I have learned there is something educationally energetic about sharing power with students. Addressivity of identity within the classroom is extremely important to empowering my students to keep an open lens regarding their identity. In addition, self-reflection both in- and outside the classroom helps teachers understand what they can do differently to improve the atmosphere of their classes. Self-reflection is especially important to understanding any bias negatively affecting teaching

and recognizing what that looks like in the classroom so that it may be eliminated from classroom interaction. Identity addressivity may look like many different things in different academic and organizational contexts; but, come what may, I intend to display items in my classroom that show my students aspects of my identity. By combining the TI and LIO (Latin Identity Orientation) frameworks into a system of classroom management, I intend to have an open lens as a Latina educator and provide opportunity in my classroom for my students to follow my lead and share facets of their identity, too. Engaging in mutual identity addressivity, we will all collaboratively learn to attend to many ways of learning and knowing in our classroom community.

A useful way for teachers to engage in a process of self-reflection is to write *testimonios*. As a process, *testimoniar* (to give testimony) is the act of recovering *papelitos guardados* — previous experiences — that have been silenced or left untold. T*estimonios* bring to light experiences too long crumpled in the corners of our lives, articulating previously unspoken events into a narrative that describes perceived personal, political, and social realities (Delgado, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012). According to Prieto and Villenas (2012, p. 414), "*testimonios* consist of life stories usually told by a person from a marginalized group in society to an interlocutor who can write down and disseminate them." However, interlocutors are an ancillary feature of *testimonios*. Persons can explore their own experiences to produce an autoethnography of identity-forming experiences in their own lives (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Freeman, 2006). *Testimonios* engage a powerful process of self-revelation that carries explicitly political intent, disrupts silences, and offers a counternarrative that challenges dominant discourse. Haig-Brown (2003, p. 420) affirms that *testimonios* forge solidarity among persons with identities affected by having minoritized status in society. A *testimonio* is not simply a personal matter: "rather, it is the story of an individual who is also a part of a community. A *testimonio* presents the life of a person whose experiences, while unique, extend beyond her/him to represent the group of which she/he is a member." T*estimonios* turn lived experiences into data that help fund, via self-analysis, a process of identity-formation.

On the next three and a half pages there are five *testimonio* letters that illuminate pivotal, identity-forming moments in Jazmin's K-16 educational journey. Jazmin's letters encompass the love for her younger self, the adolescent struggle to remain true to herself, and the quiet acceptance of self that followed upon explicit identity exploration. Yet the *testimonios* also extend beyond the past and the present unfurling into dreams not (yet) realized, strengths still developing, and chapters still waiting to be written. Jazmin's *testimonios* give advice to her past selves and establish aspirations for future ones. They tell the story of her developing identity as a student and as a teacher as she's experienced the evolution of those features of herself. The letters to future Jazmins anticipate evolutions in identity-formation for herself and for her prospective students (Lingard, 2007; Lingard & Mills, 2007). Building on Delgado, Burciaga, and Carmona (2012), Jazmin continues the legacy of (re)claiming *testimonio* as a form of writing created by and for Latinas — but equally applicable to other minoritized groups — as a means to reflect on existence, identity, resistance, and liberation; to challenge dominant cultural narratives about who holds the authority to construct knowledge and whose knowledge is deemed valuable (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). More commentary on the pathways and patterns of Jazmin's identity development through her school experiences follow her *testimonios*.

Te Veo
I See You
(Age 8-9)

Dear Little Jazmin,

I hope you're doing okay and not facing down into every room you enter. I know you have a habit of hiding behind your frizzy hair that may seem like a lion's mane to some people, but I know you love your hair. You see it as a lion's mane, but instead of letting that mane control you, you use it to your advantage. I want you to keep on doing that. Take something that many people see as your disadvantage, as something to be ashamed of, and turn it into something new.

You are going to learn that the ability to do that is your superpower. The ability to take something negative, something that may add to the world of worries you carry on your shoulders, and mold it into a crown. Being put into the spotlight because of this ability may seem like it will never come, but it's coming. Soon, you will learn the phrase "It's a marathon, not a sprint," and unfortunately, being valued will feel like a marathon. The ribbon to this marathon may be coming farther and farther, but it's coming. Soon, your lion's mane will become a crown to everyone around you, and people will see your hair as you see your hair, something people just want to have and enjoy. Take that power to change the perception people have of you and take it to new heights.

You stay quiet because you feel no one listens to what you have to say. Reaching for a sense, any clue of familiarity within the classroom. Desperate for anything that will blanket you in the confidence needed to participate within the classroom, a curl in someone's hair, a familiar phrase, anything to create a sliver of hope to attach to, like the other students do. I know it feels impossible to obtain, but soon that family will be there. Soon you will be familiar with other students who are the same as you.

You will see what your other educators did for you, and while bathing in the hope they provided you over your career, you will give that hope to the students who have your reflection in their eyes. The students who are terrified to speak, the students who share your traditions, the students who feel a warmth in your future classroom because that sense of familiarity they have reached for, for too many years, is finally right in front of them. Take the hope that those teachers gave to you and, as a thank you, let it light a fire inside you to light up your classroom. Provided the space.

La Lucha por Ser
The Fight to Be
(Age 14-15)

Dear High School Jazi,

I never know what I want to do with you. One part of me wants to hug you, one part of me screams at you for searching for something that may never exist.

I want to scream at you because you are constantly searching for something that isn't there. And that is the approval of others. Unfortunately, you still search for that, asking for permission to take the next step. You need to stop. You need to do this for you, not to be met with appreciation, but instead to be met with a version of yourself that you're proud of.

Because of you, you still struggle with that.

We can blame other people all we want, but at the end of the day, it was we who raised us to become a person who craves forgiveness.

Fight the box they place you in.

I want to hug you at the same time. Hug you for all you fight for, all the things you go through. To tell you that your identity is something that shouldn't be approved by others. That you're Mexican enough, smart enough. Simply just enough, even if others say differently.

I fear we will never get peace. I fear we will never stop fighting for our voice to be heard. For people to see and appreciate our identity, and for us to appreciate our identity. The fighting never stops; we just get stronger. And sometimes we fall. Sometimes we're on the ground in our fighting gear with our sword by our side while wiping blood on our cheeks, exhausted, wishing for the fighting to stop. But that's all we know. So we get back up and we keep fighting. We fight for our voice to be heard, for our success, and our fights have not gone unnoticed.

Your appreciation is coming.

Maybe one day our peace will too.

Soy Valorada y Soy Escuchada
I Am Valued and I Am Heard
(Age 18)

Dear Freshman Year in College Jazi,

I can feel your anxiety from here. You look in the mirror that day before walking to your first ever Education course since deciding that one of your purposes in life is to teach your passion. You are thinking you are going to walk into that classroom and be looked down upon.

You enter the classroom, and one of your first assignments is to make an art project of things that make you, you. In the next class, you come in with your project, and everyone asks questions about your interests. Every class you participate in more and more. That sense of belonging you've been searching for all of your life has finally reached you. Every class is filled with information, discussions on readings, but it's also filled with laughs and personal stories. You talk about your journey, why you want to be an educator, there is still that fear that what is being spoken is not going to be heard; but that fear is squashed very quickly when your professor says, "Go on." For once, your voice is heard, when you speak, you aren't interrupted, and for once, you are truly learning.

Arraigados en la Resiliencia, Creciendo en Fuerza
Rooted in Resilience, Rising in Strength
(Age 28)

Dear Future Jazi,

Do you ever feel grown? Do you ever feel like you feel like you're walking on the edge of madness, this constant state of limbo of becoming the person you hated the most, or are you finally feeling as if you are in a state of comfort and peace? I fear I will never have peace. I fear that I will never be able to have a soulmate because of my inability to give peace to myself, thus leading to the inability to give peace to another person, a person who will be by my side for our future.

This letter can be filled with questions. Questions of the person that we have become. That if we ever stop feeling as if we are running out of time. Constantly listening to being unsatisfied with what we have accomplished, even if the things we have accomplished are more than what we were expected to do. I will leave my questions unanswered, much like my future. Leaving things unplanned, unanswered are still our toughest battles. Leaving things absolutely up to the universe is something you fear, but look at all the universe has done for us so far. We've gotten this far because we are meant to be here. Even if it feels out of place and like the craziest thing we have ever done in our lives. Please, keep going far.

This letter is supposed to be filled with metaphors, poetry, and objects that may not be tangible, but I must ask: Do you ever physically like yourself? Do you look in the mirror and hate the things that make you, you? Such as the gap in your two front teeth, the way your eyes squint when you truly smile? I fear I will always be the ugly duckling in any situation I am in. I hope that you do not feel this way. That the validation you seek is not from other people but from yourself, for both tangible and intangible things. I hope I find myself, the aspects of myself that are from my heritage, not like a burden. It has taken years to find each curl within my hair, a symbol of strength, and each curl symbolizes different versions of me. When will other features start to feel like that?

Every day, I dream of you, dream of the person that you are. It took years to develop the ability to look within the mirror and like who I see; I hope you haven't lost that ability. I hope you're proud of us, because I am.

Ser Es un Acto Político
Being is a Political Act
(Ageless)

Dear Other Latina Educators,

This is a letter full of questions. I wish I could get answers to guide my journey. With that being said, if there is anything the Latina woman has taught me over the years is that every journey is different. Identity is not linear, and there is something so beautiful about that. About the nonlinear way each person sees the world and sees themselves.

> There was something so comforting about walking into the classroom and hearing someone who spoke like my family. Who had their native tongue sewn into each word they spoke, through an accent, through words. There was something so incredible about caring within the classroom. Caring about my family, my personal life, and letting me speak about whatever. The willingness to take time out of the school day to connect with each student was an incredible talent I wish to have, like each of you.
>
> I hope you don't stop fighting. We shouldn't have to. I have no idea when our identity became political, but maybe it always has. Maybe our identity has always been political. Has always been a fight.
>
> Within this series of letters, I complained so much about not having peace. Is peace a privilege we will never get to have? From the minute we label ourselves as Latinas, do we strip that feeling of peace and replace it with the political feeling of our identity?
>
> I hope one day we all get to feel that privilege.

Jazmin's *testimonios* describe an identity originally forged in the fire of an elementary education characterized by exclusion from classroom life and resentment towards classmates already more easily accepted into school culture. Says Jazmin of her early academic life:

> When I was in elementary school, I always felt like an outcast. I always academically fell behind because of an undiagnosed learning disability, and I always felt different because of my looks. When I saw students identify racially, ethnically, or culturally with the teacher or with books we were reading, jealousy grew inside me because I wished and hoped I would connect with the teacher and the curriculum the same way other students had. I would walk into the classroom, read books, or turn on the television to see no one who looked like me. Curly hair was rarely seen in the media, which made me struggle to figure out how to take care of my hair. I was already filled with dread that my body would never look like the girls in magazines. To write this letter, I stepped into the shoes of my elementary self and was grateful to tell her one day she would encounter faculty who would affirm and value her identity, and shortly, she would be the one providing that space for all kinds of students.

High school repeated the pattern of suppression of self but fanned feelings of frustration into flames of anger as attempts at self-expression constantly met with silencing from others in the school who were already committed to cultural and societal *status quo*. Teacher identity first connected with Latina identity in Jazmin's mind as teaching began to look like a good positionality from which to speak in one's own voice. Hear Jazmin on her high school experience:

> When I was in high school, I struggled a lot. I was in a constant battle for my voice to be heard. My attempts to express myself were constantly being interrupted by those who already and always saw themselves represented positively in the media. During this time, I decided my place was to be an educator, and it was the first time I realized I needed to win the fight to have my voice heard. This letter was the most difficult to write because I knew when I was in high school how much I needed to hear the words I was writing. It was/is an

extremely tough challenge to love the girl who hated herself so much and to bend towards better accuracy, to clarify the lens through which she saw herself.

Not until college, specifically in an Education course taught by the co-author of this article, Christina, did Jazmin experience at school the feeling of belonging she had desired for so long. Most importantly, Jazmin found a sense of belonging on her own terms. The more she felt, thought, and acted as herself, the greater her sense of belonging in Christina's class. Acceptance dissipated anxiety. From Jazmin's point of view:

> it was a time of bliss, when I was a student in Christina's classroom. This was the space where it felt like, for once, there was no fight; I could simply just exist with my identity. Christina modeled how to cultivate classroom communities where inclusion and diversity were welcomed and appreciated. Students were encouraged to share their values, beliefs, and backgrounds. Higher education, more specifically the course I am discussing in this [Age 18 *testimonio*] letter, was the first time I felt like I truly succeeded in an academic setting. I would like to highlight the final sentence of my college-aged *testimonio*, "for once you are truly learning." This was because I had space to share a piece of myself through assignments. I wanted to convey within this letter the importance of personalized assignments, and show the impact it had on me.

Contrast/comparison of her academic life prior to and during college created a conflict of feelings Jazmin needed to resolve. She had come to envision a reconciliation of her identities as a teacher and as Latina but remained unclear on how to achieve that peace of mind. Questions outnumbered answers; but college had given Jazmin the will and determination to synthesize the difficulty of seemingly dual identities into a single sense of self, a self in which she could take both personal and professional pride. In Jazmin's words:

> Now turn the page to read a letter that reveals the futuristic possibilities of acceptance of every part of my identity. Building on these ideas, this [Age 28 *testimonio*] letter illuminates the love, curiosity, and admiration I have for my future self, who I know will never stop fighting for her place at the table. This letter was extremely difficult to write. How do I write a letter to my future self without a million questions? Something that stands out in this letter compared to the rest is the fact that it is emotional and raw. There is something within this letter that the other letters do not convey, and that's confusion. Confusion of the person that I have become in the future.

Jazmin's final *testimonio* helps to cut through confusion about her developing identity by invoking two important precepts of identity formation. First, we can learn about our own identities by considering other selves in circumstances similar to ours. Second, our identities are deeply rooted in the powerful questions pressed upon us by our positionalities. As Jazmin says:

> This… [Ageless *testimonio*] letter takes both the educator side of myself and the Latina side of myself and combines them into one letter that navigates through both of those identities. There is something that I share with all other Latina educators, and that is the constant battle to be heard. That is highlighted through this letter. Another term I would like to highlight is "the personal is political." It is a shame that one's identity has become so political that it is a fight for that person to be heard constantly. This letter highlights shame and is a message to those who

make others' identities political. This letter ends in hope. Hope that one day the
personal won't be political and that all can share a space where their identity
won't be shamed through microaggressions or belittlement. I want to pose a
powerful question: *Is peace a privilege we may never truly experience?* Through
the exploration of my identity within these letters, the term 'privilege' comes up a
lot. There are privileges that I have that my fellow Latina educators do not have. I
hope one day I and other Latina educators walk into a space and have the
privileges of all, and that safe space that may be a privilege now will become a
right, and that starts within the classroom.

Jazmin's *testimonios* lead us to the intersection of the TI and the LIO frameworks and
reinforce the importance to identity-formation of having space within the classroom for students
to explore and express their ethnic identity. Equally important, the integrated frameworks create
space for educators to express and explore their ethnic identity, also. The educator's job is to
create a safe space for students to share their experiences, that is, express their identities. The
best way to make that happen is for educators to express their identities in class, that is, for
teachers to share with students stories from their professional and personal lives. If a teacher
wants students to share identity-forming experiences in class then the teacher needs to share
identity-forming experiences with students in class. As Milner & Tenore (2010) discovered,
teacher disclosure during class discussion tends to generate student disclosure. And, as we are
demonstrating here, disclosure is fundamental to a teacher's understanding of self. Finally, a
teacher's understanding of self is the lens through which teachers understand their reasons for
teaching and their reasons for teaching in the ways they do.

Final Reflections: Erased Narratives, Latino Identity, and the Educational Landscape

Exploration of Jazmin's developing identity as a Latina educator offers a prime example of a
student succeeding at school because, even if sporadically and belatedly, she was given the space
to share her identity within the classroom. Recent attacks on DEI (Diversity, Equality, Inclusion)
programs in education disrupt the school culture of acceptance that DEI aims to establish and
diminish the possibility of success stories like Jazmin's. Absent DEI, the hopelessness and
anxiety characteristic of anomie are likely to permeate the school experiences of minoritized
students. Without supportive programs, many students within minoritized groups feel alienated
in the classroom. Their sense of alienation from their education may even contribute to drug
abuse and suicide-related behavior (Kaczkowski et. al., 2022). School is a place where children
spend the majority of their time taking in their surroundings and shaping their view of both
themselves and the world. The erasure of the space to share one's identity at school clouds and
distorts the lens through which minoritized students view themselves and others.

But the same may be said of students from the dominant culture who are routinely given
space to explore their identity, while others' identities are left out of school discourse. They, too,
pay a heavy psychic cost when deprived of a culture of inclusivity. In not reading about or, more
importantly, experiencing first-hand the cultures of others, students from the dominant social
groups are likely to misunderstand the multicultural nature of the world in which they live. As
Bishop (1990) observed, actions like book bans provide perfect examples of the process of
exclusion-inclusion anti-DEI initiatives perpetrate and perpetuate. Book bans cut two ways
simultaneously. They present an absence (minoritized groups) and they assert a presence
(socially dominant groups). If students only see reflections of themselves in the mirrors of

power, they are likely to grow up with an exaggerated sense of their importance and value in the world. Instead of learning to appreciate diversity, they will have learned to continue the cycle of coercing others into identities not their own, of prescribing identities to others instead of letting others develop their own identities. On the other hand, providing students from dominant social classes the space to understand other cultures has the positive impact of widening the lens through which they see themselves and other people. DEI aids in shaping their lens to accurately represent the world around them and their place within it. Without inclusivity, there is no room for growth of one's identity to include an understanding of the identities of others. Promoting inclusivity within the classroom prepares every student for both higher education and everyday work life in a multicultural world.

Given the educational benefits to all students of inclusivity of identities in classroom life, Jazmin's decision is clear. Identity addressivity has become part of her identity:

> Within my future classroom, understanding the importance of incorporating identities within the classroom in hopes of motivating my future students to share their own identities, I intend to incorporate my own identity within the classroom. Within my classroom, my students should be aware that they are walking into a space that is occupied by a Latina educator, in hopes that this display of my own identity will cultivate a safe space for students to share their own identity. I **will** take the time out of my lesson plan for that safe space to be provided. Within my classroom, that safe space will not be a privilege but a right for every student.

> I offer you one final message — words of wisdom passed down from one of the most insightful elders I've ever known: my *bisabuela* (great-grandmother), Lupe Gonzalez. She always told me, ***"Make them list, mija!!!!"*** And in those four words, my *abuela* passed down a legacy of courage, resilience, and the unshakeable belief that my voice matters. I encourage educators, and especially Latina educators, to make and hold space for our identities to be recognized and affirmed with education. Representation matters. You matter. Your students matter.

References

Bishop, R. (Summer, 1990). Mirror, Window, and Sliding Glass Doors: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom, *Perspectives* 6(3), ix-xi.

Creswell (2014). *Negotiating the Complexities of Qualitative Research in Higher Education: Fundamental Elements and Issues,* (Routledge, 2nd ed.).

Delgado Bernal, D., Burciaga, R., & Carmona, J. F. (2012). Chicana/Latina *Testimonios*: Mapping the Methodological, Pedagogical, and Political. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 45*(3), 363–372. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2012.698149

Ellis, C., Adams, T. E. & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An Overview. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*. 12(12), http://www.qualitativeresearch.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589

Ferdman, B. and Gallegos, P. (2001). "Latinos and Racial Identity Development." In C. L. Wijeyesinghe & B. W. Jackson III (Eds.), *New Perspectives on Racial Identity Development: A Theoretical and Practical Anthology* (32-66). New York University Press.

Freeman, M. (2006). Autobiographical Understanding and Narrative Inquiry. In J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology* (120-145). Sage.

Haig-Brown, C. (2003). Creating Spaces: *Testimonio*, Impossible Knowledge, and Academe. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 16*(3): 415-433. https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839032000086763

Kaczkowski, W., Li, J., Cooper, A. C., & Robin, L. (2022). Examining the Relationship between LGBTQ-supportive School Health Policies and Practices and Psychosocial Health Outcomes of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Heterosexual students. *LGBT Health*, 9(1), 43–53. https://doi.org/10.1089/lgbt.2021.0133

Ladson-Billings, G. (Autumn, 1995). Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal, 32*(3), 465-491.

Latina Feminist Group. (2001). *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios.* Duke University Press.

Lingard, B. (2007). Pedagogies of Indifference. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *11(3)*, 245-266.

Lingard, B. & Mills, M. (2007). Pedagogies Making a Difference: Issues of Social Justice and Inclusion. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *11(3)*, 233-244.

Milner, H. R. IV and Tenore, F. B. (September 2010). Classroom Management in Diverse Classrooms. *Urban Education* 45(5), 560-603.

Pishghadam, R., Golzar, J., & Mir, M.A. (2022). A New Conceptual Framework for Teacher Identity Development. *Frontiers in Psychology.* doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.876395. eCollection.

Prieto, V. & Villenas, S.A. (2012) Pedagogies from *Nepantla*: *Testimonio*, Chicana/Latina Feminisms and Teacher Education Classrooms. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 45*(3), 411-429, doi: 10.1080/10665684.2012.698197.

Shapiro, T. (2001). What Is a Child? *Thinking 15(4)*, 4-15.

United States Census Bureau. (2022). Selected Population Profile in the United States. https://data.census.gov/table?q=total%20population&t=400&y=2022

Williams, Z. (2002). *Latina Preservice Teachers Embodying Teacher Identity through Improvisation*. Theses and Dissertations. 1114. https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/etd/1114.

Duoethnography:
Enriching Experiences in Teacher Education

Seoyeon Lee and Liam Sullivan
University at Buffalo/State University of New York

Abstract: We employ duoethnography, a conversational method of data collection and analysis, to examine how ongoing dialogue between a new adjunct instructor and a former student, employed for the first time as a classroom teacher, fostered a collaborative, research-oriented culture in Mathematics Education. Duoethnography positions both instructor and student to deepen professional insight into teaching as a way to empower learners and educators. Incorporating duoethnography into action research Education courses could provide pre-service and novice teachers with valuable first-hand instructional experiences. Partnering students for duoethnographic work with clinical coaches, mentor teachers, peers, professors, students, etc., can revitalize teacher preparation programs by complementing traditional autoethnographic approaches with trust-building conversations. Duoethnography encourages meaningful collaboration and practical application, enriching the Teacher Education experience by bridging the gap between theory-oriented coursework and realities of classroom teaching.

Faced with the challenges and successes associated with transitioning from high school Mathematics teaching to becoming an adjunct instructor in a Teacher Education program, Seoyeon (the first author of this article) realized that mere narrative approaches, such as self-reflection or autoethnography, were insufficient to fully capture the depth and subtleties of the transition. A more detailed investigation was needed to analyze past teaching experiences, learn from student reflection on their own coursework, and promote sustained empowerment of students in Teacher Education programs even after graduation. Reflection on her teaching experience sparked in Seoyeon an interest in exploring shared teaching and learning experiences through a collaborative and reflective lens. Interest in collaborative research into her work with students lead Seoyeon to adopt duoethnography as a methodological approach to study her teaching. Duoethnography, a conversational method of data collection and analysis, provides a platform for meaningful reflective, collaborative, and continuous learning by enabling discussions between an instructor and a student (Breault, 2016). Without directly hearing from students about their experiences, instructors often rely on self-reflection, which may not fully capture nuances of student responses to instruction. Motivated by a desire to explore student perspectives on learning experiences in her classes and student progress after completing coursework, Seoyeon initiated a duoethnography with a former student, Liam (the second author of this article), in his first year as a public-school teacher. The guiding research questions for our (Seoyeon and Liam's) study are: 1) How do conversations like the ones in this case study about application of college coursework to classroom practice held between a new adjunct instructor in Teacher Education and a new classroom teacher in Mathematics support mutual improvement in teaching and learning in both pedagogical contexts? 2) How do conversations on teaching experiences between a novice Education instructor and a novice classroom teacher help develop the identity of each as a researcher and as an educator?

Duoethnograpy Is Strong Action Research

Duoethnography's dynamic approach to constructing mutual understanding takes scholarly and scientific studies on duoethnography, not as foundational works upon which to build, but, rather, as voices of rigor to consider in developing and carrying out shared ethnographic experiments that are optimally informative (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). Dialogic understanding of

relevant literature as but one more set of participants in a duoethnographic study expresses duoethnography's deep commitment to *pláticas*, an approach to qualitative research that is conversational in its orientation, iterative in its operation, and cumulative in its findings (Fierros & Bernal, 2016). Use of *pláticas* to collect and interpret data connects duoethnography to the idea of action research, especially as the idea of action research has evolved into more collaborative forms of study, most notably participatory action research (PAR). Unlike traditional research models that draw a hard line between scientists and subjects in a study, PAR involves active collaboration between researchers and participants. For example, use of action research in educational studies has, over the years, demonstrated a growing emphasis on incorporating students' voices into the research process, enriching the meaning and impact of educational improvement (Stoudt et al., 2012; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). PAR, in turn, easily connects to CAR (Critical Action Research), action research aimed at addressing systemic inequities and empowering marginalized voices (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2007). Considering CAR and PAR as related forms of action research highlights the adaptability of action research to serve diverse educational goals — from improvement of classroom practice to instigation of broader social transformation. However, beyond shared aims and activities, *pláticas* and action research also share a deep, principled connection, a connection completed in the idea of duoethnography as a research methodology and a theory of social science.

The idea of action research finds its origins in the work of social-psychologist Kurt Lewin (1946, p. 40). Lewin coined the phrase "action research" when describing the need for a method of social scientific study supportive of "comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action and research leading to social action" carried out in "a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action"(p. 38). This iterative model of data collection, analysis, assessment, and continuously refined data collection, etc., (Known as the Lewinian spiral.) is a common pattern in action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). Lewin's untimely death in 1947 due to heart failure left his ideas about action research relatively undeveloped. Commentators have attempted to systematize Lewin's recommendations along two divergent lines: a methodology for social research — the weak version of action research — and a theory of social science — the strong version of action research. Neither the "weak" version nor the "strong" version has achieved full paradigm status, and advocates for weak action research as well as advocates for strong action research have expressed dissatisfaction with the state of the field (Peters and Robinson, 1984). Reason and Bradbury (2001) advise viewing action research both as a methodology that guides how data is collected and interpreted, and as an ideology grounded in democratic values that emphasize promoting individual well-being in a humanistic manner. But an ideology does not a theory make. Dewey (1987/1938) explained the logical difference between ideology and theory by noting that ideologies are value-based and describe a preference for how the world *should* work. Theories, on the other hand, describe how the world *does* work. If we are to have a theory of action research, then, we must get beyond ideological preferences to theoretical reasons for research practice. *Pláticas*, we argue, supplies theory able to support both strong and weak interpretations of action research, resolving the differences between the two types of action research. Duoethnography is the result of using *pláticas* to reconceptualize action research as both a methodology for social research and as a theory of social science.

Action research and *pláticas* already operate on a similar set of methodological principles. Working out the principles of weak action research, that is, action research considered as a methodology, Bargal (2008, p, 19) derived eight action research principles from Lewin's original

remarks about the idea. According to Bargal, action research requires:

1. Systematic study of social problems.

2. A spiral process of
a) collection of data about a social problem,
b) data-guided intervention to solve the social problem,
c) assessment of the results of the intervention, and,
d) when helpful, modification of the intervention.

3. Feedback of the results of intervention to all parties involved in the research.

4. Continuous cooperation between researchers and practitioners.

5. Decision making to be mutual and carried out in public.

6. Taking into account values, objectives, and power needs of parties involved.

7. Developing instruments for selection/training of participants and researchers.

8. Support of researchers and participants as change agents.

Working with systematic intentions similar to Bargal's, Fierros and Bernal (2016, p. 115) describe principles involved in transformation of *pláticas* from a conversational method of interpersonal interaction into a methodology of social research:

> *Pláticas* move from method to methodology when [1] they are embedded within the rich, analytical theory of Chicana feminism, [2] engage contributors as knowledge creators essential to the meaning making process, [3] draw on life experiences, and [4] provide a potential space for healing. Perhaps most important, *pláticas* are part of a methodology that is relational and [5] holds the researcher responsible to the contributors. In other words, the space we create with *pláticas* requires that we, too, be open to sharing our own stories and be vulnerable as we are asking of contributors. The Chicana/Latina feminist *plática* methodology allows for this, in fact, it necessitates it.

Overlap between Fierros and Bernal's five principles and Bargal's eight principles is easy to discern. Both share an interest in making the world a better place, both promote trust between researchers and participants in research studies, both demand co-construction of research findings, and both take lived experience as the primary data of social research. However, of greater interest to development of a theory to make action research strong is the point at which Fierros and Bernal's list diverges from Bargal's.

The first item on Fierros and Bernal's (2006) list of *plática* methodological principles is not a methodological principle at all. The first item offers a theoretical principle that states a fact about the way the world works: identities are intersectional, multiple, and malleable. Each and every one of us is an amalgam of identities continuously (re)forged and (re)formed by social factors. This *Principle of Intersectional Identity* underpins the methodology shared by action research and *plática* research not with an ideology; but with a theory, a true statement about the way of the world: to repeat, identities are intersectional, multiple, and malleable. This fact about how the world works provides the theoretical principle action research needs to become strong, that is, to count as a theory of social science. Its theory centered on the Principle of Intersectional

Identities; action research becomes scientific examination of identity formation in study-relevant circumstances. As such, action research requires the methodology laid out by Bargal (2008) and Fierros and Bernal. Articulating *pláticas* as a theory-based, methodological format akin to action research describes optimal circumstances for trusting data collection, data analysis, research findings, and study results. Based as it is on recognition of the fact that identities develop as people engage in research together, duoethnography fully embodies the methodological rigor of *plática*-based action research. Duoethnography's inclusive, theoretically-based approach to social research increases the likelihood of raising awareness about real-world problems and fostering sustainable change in communities. Just as Ladson-Billings (1995) identified culturally responsive pedagogy as "just good teaching" because of the validity of its data and the reliability of its results, so do we, for the same reasons, present duoethnography as sound social science.

We (Seoyeon, a doctoral student, who served as the instructor in a graduate-level Mathematics Education program, and Liam, a first-year, in-service teacher at a public school who is Seoyeon's former student in a secondary-level Mathematics Education course and a course in teaching Math to English Language Learners (ELLs) offer our duoethnography as an example illustrative of the usefulness of *plática*-oriented action research for teacher identity development. Our collaboration began during two consecutive Math Education courses and continued via email after the courses were completed. The initial focus of the study was to revisit the courses that Seoyeon taught and Liam completed by engaging in reflexive inquiry to explore ways to improve Mathematics Education coursework for future preservice and in-service teachers. Data for the study originally included email exchanges between the authors in the roles of teacher and student and instructor feedback on Liam's completed coursework. As more personal experiences were shared, the conversation naturally expanded, fostering a more open dialogue about our profession. At this point, the primary data for the study transitioned to transcriptions of six Zoom conversations held between October 2024 and June 2025. Each Zoom call lasted between 50 and 80 minutes. Although Seoyeon did some preparation for the first Zoom call, care was taken from the outset to move away from a conventional interviewer–interviewee format with pre-written questions. Instead, the Zoom talks together intentionally followed the format of *pláticas* (Fierros & Bernal, 2016), which was deliberately chosen for its strengths in fostering open and meaningful dialogue. These rich discussions have provided us with therapeutic and empowering spaces that we can rely on outside our daily professional environments; and not only shaped but also strengthened our identities as researchers and teachers. We use our experience as *plática*-oriented action researchers to argue that room needs to be made in teacher education programs for student work involving duoethnography. We also recommend follow-up sessions with first-year teachers to aid in development of professional identity during a most demanding stage in a teacher's career.

Describing Our Duoethnography's Conversational Context

While setting up the courses about which she and Liam would later talk, Seoyeon adopted Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory as a conceptual framework for course development. Fully embracing Kolb's four learning styles — diverging, assimilating, converging, and accommodating — Seoyeon started from the assumption that students approach learning differently. For instance, some begin by observing others, while others start by reading. Some prioritize problem-solving through applications of ideas to contexts of study, while others prefer first-hand engagement without detailed plans. Kolb also outlined a four-part continuous learning process: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active

experimentation. However, Kolb's theory allows that learning may occur in any combination of styles rather than following a fixed sequence. While learners may prefer different starting points — such as reading versus first-hand activities — all students eventually engage in other styles and stages to reinforce learning. Guided by these principles, Seoyeon intentionally designed course activities to address diverse learning preferences. For example, students were tasked with observing instructors or peers, reading carefully, solving problems using prior knowledge, and engaging in unfamiliar activities. Weekly tasks were structured to prioritize different parts of Kolb's learning process, ensuring varied sequences and comprehensive engagement.

As Seoyeon developed her courses and composed lesson plans she had no intentions of conducting further study of pedagogical practice with one of her students. Her and Liam's duoethnography emerged much later when they discovered a shared belief that grounded their conversations about teaching: just as students approach learning in diverse ways, teachers also bring different perspectives to teaching. For instance, educators may have varied ideas about what makes teaching effective. Being open to these differences, the ultimate goal of our dialogue was to support one another in developing our identities as instructors and researchers. Through this collaborative process, we worked to better understand who we are as teachers and the kind of researchers we aspire to become. Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017) remained central throughout the conversations and analysis as we explored how educators can express their unique perspectives and identities in their teaching practice. Recognizing the value of diverse approaches to teaching and learning, our study investigates how teachers can use culturally sustaining practices not only to better serve their students but also to empower themselves as they develop professionally.

Our conversations comprise a duoethnography about our views on teaching and learning. Duoethnography, a relatively new research method, emphasizes dialogue and mutual reflection to uncover new insights into shared experiences. As Breault (2016, p. 6) notes, in duoethnography "two researchers come together with their own current understandings of a problematic issue and then, through conversation and the sharing of their lived experiences of that issue, their understanding is transformed, or new dimensions of the issue are uncovered and explored." Unlike autoethnography, "duoethnography is autobiographical in nature, but the focus is on how the researchers experienced and gave meaning to a given phenomenon and how those meanings were transformed over time." Duoethnograpy's focus on individual interpretation of the shared research is "mutual and reciprocal" (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 49). Analysis of the data followed a two-cycle process. Seoyeon reviewed and summarized all documents related to the courses she taught. These summaries were referenced as needed throughout the data analysis process, particularly after Zoom meetings. An open-ended, qualitative approach was used for analysis, beginning with *in vivo* coding, followed by a second cycle of descriptive coding. A third round of coding was conducted to organize the data and identify emergent themes (Saldaña, 2021).

What We Learned about Each Other and about Teaching Mathematics
We Are Both Career-Change Teachers: Surprisingly, there were numerous similarities between us. Both of us are career-changers who transitioned into Mathematics Education after pursuing careers in other fields or disciplines. Seoyeon initially studied Bilingual Education before transitioning to Mathematics Education. Liam received a bachelor's degree in Sociology before eventually choosing to pursue a career in Mathematics teaching. We both admitted our decisions

to major in Mathematics were driven by extrinsic motivations. For Seoyeon, as an international student, Mathematics offered better job opportunities in the United States. For Liam, a U.S. citizen, the decision was influenced by the belief that Math teachers earn higher salaries than Social Studies teachers, which his father advised. However, while their choice of Mathematics as a discipline was largely extrinsically motivated, their decision to pursue teaching was rooted in intrinsic motivation. Diverse motivations prompt career-change teachers to embark on a new professional path (Laming & Horne, 2013), and intrinsic motivation is identified as a key factor in such career decisions (Baeten & Meeus, 2016). Extrinsic factors significantly contribute to individuals leaving their previous work (Chambers, 2002; Haggard et al., 2006; Tigchelaar et al., 2010), but intrinsic motivations carry greater significance for choice of new career (Berger & D'Ascoli, 2012). Both of us believe building relationships with students and watching them get excited about learning are reasons to stay in the classroom. We both had prior teaching experiences outside traditional public-school settings, which reinforced our passion for teaching prior to enrolling in a Teacher Education program. Seoyeon taught English classes to adults in her home country of South Korea before coming to the U.S. Liam worked for seven years at a Math tutoring center, teaching middle and high school students. Although both of us held other jobs before taking teaching-related positions, our teaching experiences solidified our belief that teaching was our true passion.

Math Is More than Just Problem-Solving; It Is Full of Stories, Too: We frequently used the words "story" or "stories" during our Zoom conversations, underscoring the narrative-driven nature of our teaching approaches. Both described mathematical problems and memorable lessons in terms of the stories behind them, rather than focusing solely on solving problems or demonstrating procedures. For instance, Liam shared a story about the t-test, which he learned from his Greek teacher. The story highlighted William Sealy Gosset's statistical contributions while working for the Guinness Brewery in Ireland, where he developed the t-test to address small sample sizes and unknown population standard deviations. This story resonated with both of us. We agreed that incorporating stories into math lessons fosters a communicative and engaging classroom environment. We also discussed the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy, using examples such as the historical connections between algebra and Arabic languages to motivate and engage some of our Arabic language-speaking students. We agreed that communicative math teaching is more accessible for students than project-based learning.

*Math Teachers Can Enjoy Writing, Too***:** Liam has recently published his second book of poems (Sullivan, 2025). Liam said, "I love writing. I don't want to just be known as an author, though I like it. I love my work as a teacher. … It improves my ability to do research and find connections between ideas." He said, "I'd much rather have the idea of having both of those things tied to my name rather than just be an author or just a Math educator." He also pointed out that developing an identity as a writer is closely connected to his career as a math teacher: "I think there is a stereotype that writing and math are not connected, but whenever you're solving a math problem, you're doing, you're writing. Sometimes, you can solve math by just talking or using visuals, but I think writing is also a part of the solving process. ... They [writing and solving a Math problem] are two sides of the same coin; they reinforce each other." Liam feels that things have been better, but he was surrounded by people who tend to believe that one should focus on one thing and cannot excel at many things. He added that he now has more supportive people around him.

Liam's identity as a writer also influences how he pictures an engaging Math class. Both of us recognized that a significant portion of the Mathematics classes we've observed were lecture-

based or teacher-centered Math instruction. We both commented that we lack experience observing other subject areas, such as ELA or Social Studies, and we both anticipated and hoped those classes would be more student-centered. However, many students are still experiencing learning Math in a setting where the teacher talks significantly more than the students. Liam commented that he was fortunate to have observed an excellent Math teacher at his school, who was more like a mentor or supervisor. Interestingly, Liam described teachers like his supervisor as high-energy people, while he referred to himself as "Type B." "Type A" is a style where a teacher shows great enthusiasm and asks students to do things all together at the same time, for example, using gestures together to describe a Math concept, saying some words all together, or chanting as a group. Those are not Liam's typical methods. He prefers a calm learning environment. In another Zoom session, Liam shared how much he loved and enjoyed his in-person classes at a nearby college, which he attended to fulfill certification requirements. He expressed appreciation for his professor's calm teaching style, noting how valuable it was to have moments to pause, reflect, and take notes. He especially enjoyed the opportunity to think deeply about what was just said and to engage in collaborative problem-solving during Math lessons. He hoped to create a similar experience for his students.

Visual Art in Math Is an Exciting Addition: In addition to his work as a writer, Liam has a strong interest in the arts, particularly painting. In Zoom meetings and emails Liam often included images of his recent paintings or artwork he encountered at museums, along with the names of the artists and brief contextual information. The email exchange inspired us to explore how math educators incorporate art into their teaching, an exploration we plan to utilize in a future collaborative project. Such interdisciplinary approaches might benefit all students, especially those who have had negative experiences with traditional Mathematics instruction. We reflected on a memorable presentation in a summer Mathematics Education course, which Seoyeon taught and in which Liam was enrolled. A student in the class was an experienced Art teacher. For her final project, she presented a compelling exploration of how Mathematics and Art can be taught together to enhance student engagement and learning. She emphasized the intentional effort to find similarities between Mathematics and Art, and her work stood out due to its high quality, rooted in her years of experience and her genuine effort to connect her Art class with grade-level Mathematics standards. We both vividly remembered her work, which became a shared reference point in our ongoing conversations about effective interdisciplinary teaching.

The first time Liam mentioned his paintings in an email; they were introduced primarily as a personal outlet for relaxation and a strategy for stress relief. However, during a subsequent Zoom conversation, it became evident that the artwork also held potential as a powerful pedagogical tool. We both recognize the potential of visual art as an engaging entry point into mathematical dialogue, especially for young learners. For example, Seoyeon used to think about how her young daughter seemed to intuitively connect artmaking with mathematical ideas. However, after a few additional conversations over Zoom and via email, Seoyeon raised a question about whether such connections are truly intuitive for the child or whether they are being interpreted and constructed by adults. While her daughter can engage in conversations about Math and Art, it is often her mother, Seoyeon, who initiates and frames these connections. This recognition became another turning point for Seoyeon. Although she does not equate young children with pre-service teachers, she noticed a parallel in how both groups benefit from guided support in making interdisciplinary connections. Her daughter, for instance, explores mathematical ideas through playful and artistic experiences when scaffolded appropriately. Similarly, pre-service teachers often have untapped strengths and interests outside of mathematics. With intentional

guidance, they, too, can learn to draw meaningful connections between Mathematics and their other areas of expertise by engaging students in mathematical dialogue through personally meaningful entry points.

At the same time, realization that other disciplines provide entry to meaningful study of Mathematics brought both excitement and concern. Seoyeon recognizes the transformative potential of helping teachers integrate their unique strengths into Mathematics instruction. However, she is also aware of her own limitations, particularly her lack of expertise in the non-mathematical domains that her pre-service teachers may bring into the conversation in Seoyeon's classroom and, later, when working at their own jobs, into their classrooms. With her daughter, Seoyeon feels confident engaging in interdisciplinary conversations because the level of Art involved is accessible even for non-artists and non-aesthetes; and the related Mathematics falls within Seoyeon's area of expertise. In contrast, engaging with educators whose backgrounds or interests differ significantly from hers, Seoyeon finds herself hesitant to initiate conversations about interdisciplinary connections that lie outside her area of expertise. Despite these challenges and vulnerabilities, Seoyeon remains hopeful that continued dialogue with Liam, along with the steady co-creation of tangible examples with her students, will strengthen her confidence in guiding pre-service teachers with interests divergent from her own. She hopes that these collaborative efforts may help her move beyond hesitation and embrace the richness that varied knowledge and experiences can bring to Mathematics Education.

Parenting Led to a Deeper Reflection on the Meaning of Teaching Math: Seoyeon and her husband often engage in extended conversations about how their child's seemingly playful art projects evolve into objects with intentional design and practical function. One example involves a folded paper creation that began as a whimsical hat and was later repurposed into a tool — according to the child — that could help cool down hot soup more efficiently, allowing her to begin eating immediately without discomfort. While the tool's effectiveness in reducing cooling time remained debatable, and specific design limitations were pointed out during family discussions, the tool remained in use at the dinner table for several weeks. The child continued to revise the design, demonstrating an iterative process of experimentation and refinement. Although it was unclear to what extent these modifications were influenced by adult commentary, she appeared to make deliberate efforts to improve the tool's performance. While such activities may seem trivial, they reflect sophisticated cognitive processes, including planning, hypothesis testing, and problem-solving. At one point, the child's father commented the iterative revisions resembled aspects of engineering design, a comparison that elicited visible enthusiasm from his daughter. Seoyeon notes numerous Mathematics lessons — ranging from measurement and data collection to reasoning and spatial understanding — are conceptually linked to this experience, along with science topics related to heat transfer and airflow.

Family discussions during this period often centered on practical inquiries, such as whether blowing on soup or channeling air through a straw-like tool was more effective for cooling. Although the child lacked formal knowledge of scientific principles, she nonetheless employed logical reasoning to argue for the effectiveness of her tool. She posed her own questions — How many times should the soup be blown on? For how long? Did the focused airflow make a difference? — and used those questions as the basis for further revision. At one point, she declared that regardless of whether the tool worked objectively, she would continue to use it because she liked it. This moment highlighted the importance of ownership in learning: having designed and created the tool herself, she remained invested in refining and using it. The purpose

of these family conversations was not to determine the "right" answer but to foster rich, open-ended dialogue. The child's inquiries prompted deeper exploration for everyone involved, and these moments became meaningful reference points for future conversations and learning. Such experiences demonstrate how authentic, everyday contexts can naturally support the development of mathematical and scientific thinking, especially when learners are given the space to explore, question, and refine their ideas. Seoyeon's experience with her family while raising her child strengthened her belief in the value of exposing learners to new ideas and providing space for open-ended dialogue, regardless of whether the content is familiar or unfamiliar. Often, well-written lesson plans with clearly defined objectives leave little flexibility for teachers to adapt or respond to student curiosity, which can unintentionally strip joy and creativity from the learning process. When learners are not given the opportunity to ask questions or share their thinking, meaningful learning is diminished. This reinforces the need for more dialogical Mathematics classrooms — spaces where student voice, inquiry, and conversation are central to the learning experience.

Although Seoyeon and her husband deliberately chose not to introduce formal Mathematics instruction before it was introduced in school, they also recognized the rich, implicit learning that occurred through conversation and exploration at home. This prompted Seoyeon to reflect on what it truly means to "teach" Mathematics. Without formal lessons, the child began to grasp foundational concepts such as division. For example, when dividing a single croissant or cookie between or among others, she intuitively understood the core ideas underlying fractions. Although unfamiliar with terms like "measurement" or "partitive division," she could articulate the logic behind sharing with others, comparing different contexts, such as putting the same number of cherry tomatoes in a zipper bag for snacks versus sharing a single cookie with friends. As a Mathematics educator, Seoyeon found it striking how a young child could explain her understanding of these situations, identify which felt more straightforward or more complex, and even express emotions connected to her mathematical reasoning — all without knowing formal vocabulary. These experiences led Seoyeon to believe that incorporating more conversation into Math classrooms would deeply benefit students.

All math teachers are ELL teachers: Regarding teaching strategies for English Language Learners (ELLs), Seoyeon emphasized the importance of integrating ELLs into mainstream classrooms to promote collaboration and engagement, without segregating them from classmates who are heritage speakers of English. Although Liam's current teaching environment does not include students with limited English proficiency, he observed the positive impact of pairing or grouping students from similar ethnic backgrounds. These groups demonstrated high levels of confidence and trust, which enhanced their comfort and performance. However, Liam intentionally mixes groups at times to foster a classroom environment where all students can collaborate effectively. He strongly recommended that all teachers, regardless of their current demographics, take courses on teaching ELLs, given the increasing diversity in U.S. classrooms.

Duoethnography Enriches Teacher Education

As Breault (2016) stated, trust between researchers is a prerequisite in duoethnography, enabling the disclosure and exploration of personal stories. While the initial aim of this study was to reflect on experiences in reading, active discussions, and communicative approaches in Mathematics Education, the mutual trust and respect between the authors allowed for deeper self-reflection. Both researchers shared personal stories, including childhood experiences and

family influences on career choices, uncovering how their identities and perceptions have been shaped and challenged over time. We both concluded that this study marks the beginning of a longer professional dialogue rather than the end of our duoethnography. We expressed a shared commitment to extending our conversations and inviting additional voices into future discussions — perhaps expanding our duoethnography into a polyethnography (Arthur et al., 2017). Our reflections often returned to the joy and creativity in teaching, exemplified by Liam's anecdote about his brief experience as a postal worker. He shared how technological advancements in the postal system reflected societal changes and used this story to engage his students, demonstrating the value of narratives beyond the realm of Mathematics. This example underscored how his diverse experiences and identity as an artist and poet influence his ability to adapt pre-designed lesson plans, making them more meaningful and enjoyable for his students.

Although the study began with a focus on revising coursework and discussing challenges in Mathematics Education, the conversation naturally evolved into a passionate dialogue about empowerment for both educators and students. Seoyeon was particularly inspired by Liam's reflections on how action research in his most memorable coursework during his master's program shaped his teaching. Interestingly, action research was not something the authors initially planned to discuss; it emerged spontaneously as they shared their personal struggles. For Seoyeon, the transition from high school Mathematics teaching to teaching preservice teachers was a significant shift. Just as she began to feel confident in that role, she faced a new challenge: facilitating an action research course for non-Mathematics content teachers. During our conversation, Seoyeon began to reflect more deeply on her approach to teaching that course. The insights and enthusiasm shared by Liam prompted Seoyeon to explore the topic further through additional reading. This exchange inspired her with new ideas and increased clarity about how to guide her students through action research. Now, we are developing multiple potential action research projects — some collaborative, others individual — designed to improve our teaching by better engaging our future students. We are both beginning to view action research not only as a methodology, but as a framework that could eventually support theoretical exploration and social change. Our growing confidence reflects a shift from practical application toward a more philosophical and critical engagement in education.

A question was raised about whether Liam's previous experiences before teaching prepared him for his current teaching role. In response, he highlighted his Math tutoring experience and a class he took during his master's degree program. He elaborated, "When people say teaching is an art, action research gives it the necessary structure. I think that class was especially valuable in helping me evaluate teachers' practices and reflect on my own teaching methods." We both viewed action research as an integral part of teaching and expressed strong opinions about its inclusion in teacher education programs. Seoyeon, currently teaching an action research course, and Liam, implementing informal action research daily, agreed on its transformative potential. We both agree action research is a powerful tool in education, with reflection serving as a vital component enabling educators to understand, identify, value, manage, and foster their professional development and growth (Liakopoulou, 2012).

Both authors recognized that their life experiences and diverse academic backgrounds make them distinctive and engaging Mathematics educators. Reflecting on our inconsistent experiences with learning Mathematics, especially during high school, we both acknowledged the critical role teachers play in shaping students' attitudes toward the subject. The quality of teachers and the connections they make with their students are paramount. The discussion also

highlighted the widespread challenges students face in learning Mathematics, the persistence of Math anxiety among adults, and the lack of enthusiasm many feel for the subject. These issues call for a reevaluation of traditional teaching methods in Mathematics. While many educators and researchers have explored this topic, there is also a need to critically examine the qualities and preparation of Mathematics teachers to ensure that all Teacher Education students have positive learning experiences. A trusted and mutually respectful relationship, like the one that emerged from our duoethnography, empowers educators. Increased trust on the part of Education students in what they are learning as they develop professional identities is a good reason to include duoethnography in Teacher Education programs. Common practice in Teacher Education programs should be to pair teacher candidates with professors/instructors, clinical coaches, mentor teachers, or peers to conduct duoethnographic studies of their learning to be teachers. *Plática*-centered action research, that is, duoethnography, can foster a safe and intimate environment for preservice and novice teachers to express their thoughts and inquiries, enhancing development of their professional identities. Moreover, data generated from teacher preparation duoethnographies informs Teacher Education programs about strengths and developmental needs of their student bodies, enabling adaptation of coursework to meet the evolving needs of future educators. Finally, duoethographies with former students early in their careers as teachers optimizes continuity of learning during their transition from college student to classroom teacher.

References

Arthur, N., Lund, D. E., Russell-Mayhew, S., Nutter, S., Williams, E., Sesma Vazquez, M., & Kassan, A. (2017). Employing Polyethnography to Navigate Researcher Positionality on Weight Bias. *The Qualitative Report*, *22*(5), 1395-1416. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2017.2558

Bargal, D. (2008). Action Research: A Paradigm for Achieving Social Change. *Small Group Research*, *39*(1), 17–27. https://doi.org/10.1177/1046496407313407

Beaten, M., & Meeus, W. (2016). Training Second-Career Teachers: A Different Student Profile, A Different Training Approach? *Educational Process: International Journal, 5*(3), 173-201.

Breault, R. A. (2016). Emerging issues in duoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *29*(6), 777–794.

Berger, J., & D'Ascoli, Y. (2012). Becoming a VET teacher as a second career: Investigating the determinants of career choice and their relation to perceptions about prior occupation. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 40*(3), 317-341.

Chambers, D. (2002). The Real World and the Classroom: Second-Career Teachers. *The Clearing House*, *75*(4), 212–217. https://doi.org/10.1080/00098650209604935

Dewey, J. (1987/1938) The determination of ultimate values or aims through antecedent or a priori speculation or empirical inquiry. In *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953*, vol. 13, 1938-1939, 255-270. Ed. Jo Ann Boydston. Southern Illinois University Press.

Esposito, J., & Evans-Winters, V. (2007). Contextualizing critical action research: lessons from urban educators. *Educational Action Research*, *15*(2), 221–237. https://doi.org/10.1080/09650790701314775

Fierros, C. O., & Bernal, D. D. (2016). VAMOS A PLATICAR: The Contours of Pláticas as Chicana/Latina Feminist Methodology. *Chicana/Latina Studies*, *15*(2), 98–121.

Kemmis, S. & McTaggart, R. (2000) Participatory action research, in: N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds) Handbook of qualitative research (2nd edn) (Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage Publications).

Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice Hall.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory into Practice* 34, 159-167.

Laming, M. M., & Horne, M. (2013). Career change teachers: pragmatic choice or a vocation postponed? *Teachers and Teaching, Theory and Practice*, *19*(3), 326–343.

Lewin, K. (1946) Action research and minority problems. *Journal of Social Issues* 2(4): 34–46.

Liakopoulu, M. (2012). The role of field experience in the preparation of reflective teachers. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *37*(6), 42–54.

Norris, J. & Sawyer, R. D., (2012). *Duoethnography: Dialogic Methods for Social, Health, and Educational Research* (1st ed., Vol. 7). Routledge.

Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (2017). What Is Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and Why Does It Matter? In *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies*. Teachers College Press.

Peters, M., & Robinson, V. (1984). The Origins and Status of Action Research. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, *20*(2), 113–124.

Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. (2001). *Handbook of action research : participative inquiry and practice*. SAGE.

Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4E [Fourth edition].). SAGE

Stoudt, B. G., Fox, M., & Fine, M. (2012). Contesting Privilege with Critical Participatory Action Research. *Journal of Social Issues*, *68*(1), 178–193. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2011.01743.x

Sullivan, L. (2018). *The nomad*. FootSteps Press.

Sullivan, L. (2025). *Witty Willy*. FootSteps Press.

Tigchelaar, A. E., Brouwear, N., & Vermunt, J. (2010). Tailor-made: Towards a pedagogy for educating second-career teachers. *Educational Research Review, 5*(2). 164-18.

Youth Participatory Action Research as Praxis, Relationality, and Resistance: A Counter-Hegemonic Methodology for Addressing Intersecting Identities Among Youth of Color

A.J. Borja Armas
Syracuse University

Abstract: Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) functions as a counter-hegemonic methodology that operationalizes youth-led inquiry, intersectional analysis, and community-based action. Drawing from critical analysis of YPAR's principles and practices, I examine how the methodology creates transformative spaces for youth of color to resist structural violence by developing culturally responsive resources and interventions. Disrupting traditional research hierarchies by centering youth of color as knowledge producers, YPAR embodies healing praxis, care-based relationality, and abolitionist resistance to carceral logics embedded in educational institutions. I demonstrate how YPAR's intersectional framework addresses the multiple, overlapping systems of oppression that youth of color navigate, offering a methodological alternative that prioritizes community-based solutions over punitive regressions.

In the United States, educational resources provided for youth of color have often lacked quality, accessibility, substance, and cultural sensitivity. More troubling, traditional research methodologies used to evaluate these resources frequently reproduce the same oppressive structures they claim to address. Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) offers a counter-hegemonic methodology that operationalizes healing, care, and abolition frameworks by addressing the intersecting identities and structural inequities experienced by youth of color. YPAR accomplishes counter-hegemony by centering youth of color as knowledge producers, disrupting traditional research hierarchies, and creating spaces for intersectional analysis that challenges the structural violence embedded in educational institutions. To understand YPAR's transformative potential, we must first examine the sociopolitical and educational contexts that necessitate engaging marginalized youth as agents who are actively involved in all aspects of participatory action research (Rodriguez and Brown, 2009). In the contemporary United States, people are systematically encouraged to fear those who are economically disadvantaged or different as media portrayals depict them as alien and dangerous. This narrative serves to rationalize the widespread incarceration of working-class and impoverished populations, concealing underlying racial, ethnic, and class biases deeply ingrained in the United States' structures of opportunity (Love, 2023).

Since its inception, public education in the United States was never designed to educate citizens for democratic participation. It was, instead, conceived as a tool to safeguard power and suppress ideas. Contemporary American education continues to realize this unfortunate choice of educational ideal through high-stakes testing, zero-tolerance policies, standardized curricula, and other forms of modern scientific racism. Schools become carceral institutions to justify the continued captivity of minoritized groups. Love (2023) describes how the punitive power of educational reform has been consolidated over the last couple of centuries, marking the Reagan era as a breaking point in unjust educational reform. Reagan's war on drugs and the "American super predator" were effectively translated into education reform, turning a century of White supremacist subjugation into a newly branded form of systematic captivation that became mass incarceration. Private, for-profit prison corporations quickly turned toward educational institutions, crafting "the school-to-prison pipeline" through neoliberal education reform. The need to fill prisons for profit transformed public education into a recruitment mechanism to

ensure an ongoing and profitable supply of prisoner populations. For youth of color, carceral educational institutions function as sites of racial trauma not learning. Students from lower socio-economic strata, disproportionately of color, are more likely to struggle with discipline, academic achievement, attendance, and high-stakes tests. As Love (2023, p.142) illustrates through the story of Kia, a Black doctoral student who grew up in Chicago, the price Black girls pay for expressing their "Black girl magic" is criminalization in institutions that are supposed to be home places. When 15-year-old Kia arrived late to school due to a family emergency, a school resource officer "seized her by the shirt collar and book bag, pulled her out of the crowded classroom, and threw her against the hallway lockers. [then] handcuffed Kia and took her to a nearby precinct." Kia's experience demonstrates how marginalization and criminalization of youth intensifies their sense of helplessness, felt in their lack of influence over decisions about their everyday lives, particularly within educational institutions. As attacks on freedoms of marginalized youth escalate, personal agency to shape their everyday lives, especially within school systems, dwindles (Brown and Rodriguez, 2009).

Connecting Critical Consciousness, Relational Praxis, and Structural Transformation

Healing emerges as a fundamental framework for evaluating resources designed for youth of color. Ginwright (2011) conceptualizes healing as the fundamental process of reinstating both individual and communal health and well-being. Within this framework, healing becomes a crucial facet of civic engagement, particularly pertinent in contexts where pervasive issues such as poverty, racism, and violence pose significant threats to the vitality of Black communities. Persistent experiences of trauma, coupled with feelings of hopelessness and nihilism, serve as barriers to active participation in organized collective efforts aimed at dismantling oppressive structures and fostering societal transformation (hooks, 1993). Healing, therefore, necessitates the cultivation of critical consciousness — a nuanced understanding of the social world rooted in political resistance. This critical consciousness equips youth of color with the necessary tools effectively to confront and challenge racism and various other forms of oppression. Resources that employ these principles provide healing for youth of color and measure their effectiveness by their ability to equip youth with tools to confront oppressive structures and systems.

Beyond tools and critical consciousness, care-based resources offer another framework for evaluating effectiveness. Nolan (2015) draws from care theory, theories of resistance, and culturally responsive pedagogy to develop the concept of care-based resistance. Using Noddings' work (1984, 2002, 2005), Nolan examines the distinction between "caring about" and "caring for," arguing that care theory provides a meaningful way to evaluate support given to Latine youth in public schools. Nolan conceptualizes care as relational theory, asserting that as humans, we desire and learn about being cared for in our early experiences, which provides a foundation for learning to care about others outside our immediate social world. Although "caring about" informs our sense of justice, it remains empty and aloof, and does not serve to cultivate caring relationships. Relational caring occurs in human encounters and is driven by "engrossment" — in schools that means being attuned to what students are feeling and engaged in. Engrossment is inherently dialogic; the educator listens, is receptive, and learns from the students, building trust and confidence through reciprocity. Valenzuela (1999) extends this framework by distinguishing between aesthetic and authentic care in education. Aesthetic care, characterized by insistence on obedience to school norms that potentially conflict with students' worldviews and lived experiences, lacks grounding in relationships understanding of students' perspectives. In contrast, authentic care aligns with an inclusive concept of education, encompassing the

cultivation of moral, social, and personal responsibility as the bedrock for all other forms of learning. Authentic care must be grounded in relationality and morality, resistant to pathologization, criminalization, and the exclusion of groups of people perceived as different.

Abolition provides a third framework for evaluating resources and services provided to communities of color. Woodall and Boeri (2020), evaluating resources employed in a penal framework, demonstrate the usefulness of an abolitionist approach through their anthropological study among drug users undergoing substance dependency treatment. Their findings reveal the intricate ties between recovery services and the criminal justice system, with police involvement in linking individuals to services and treatment centers often operating within prison facilities. This systemic criminal justice connection raises concerns about the perpetuation of control by the carceral state, even in seemingly effective programs. Woodall and Boeri describe the concept of the shadow carceral state — a term capturing the insidious reach of penal power as it extends into "alternative" institutional arrangements, camouflaging punitive measures within administrative sanctions that imperceptibly strip individuals of their liberty. Resources for youth in communities of color should be evaluated by their ability to empower communities to resist and survive the shadow carceral state by providing options that do not collaborate with carceral institutions. Davis (2003) conceptualizes abolition as an alternative approach to crime and punishment, championing a transformative justice system that tackles the root causes behind socially unacceptable actions and marginalization rather than relying on punitive measures. Love (2023) defines abolition in schools as working in solidarity with communities of color by drawing on the imagination, creativity, refusal, remembering, visionary thinking, healing, rebellious spirit, boldness, determination, and subversiveness of youth. Building on the strengths and histories of students of color is how abolition envisions justice, both in and out of school.

YPAR as Counter-Hegemonic Educational Methodology

Youth Participatory Action Research emerged as a reimagining of traditional research methodologies that often excluded the voices and experiences of young people and communities of color. Grounded in critical pedagogy and the broader field of participatory action research (PAR), YPAR can be traced to the 1940s and 1950s; but during the 1970s and 1980s, influenced by critical pedagogy and educators like Paulo Freire (1972), researchers more regularly began engaging young people in critical inquiry and reflection. Brown and Rodriguez (2009) established core principles that underpin YPAR, starting with the foundational belief that research must be "situated and inquiry-based." Gilmore et al. (2023), conceptualize abolitionist geographies as sites that ground PAR in the history, desires, and experiences of local community. PAR is not intended to reform institutions at a macro scale but to foster immediate grassroots research and action that aligns with community desires. Like PAR, YPAR works best when embedded not only geographically but also culturally in the specific social context of the community involved in the research considered in terms of both local structures and a global racial capitalist superstructure. As Brown and Rodriguez (p. 25) point out: "Our PAR work is situated within the social contexts in which our youth researchers live and learn. Their experiences within those contexts drive the personal, political, and intellectual content and the rationale for inquiry and learning. This is in contradistinction to 'test prep pedagogy', which co-opts learning and subtracts a youth's knowledge from intellectual experience in order to produce higher test scores." YPAR operationalizes healing frameworks by creating spaces for youth to develop critical consciousness through collective inquiry. Unlike traditional research that extracts knowledge from communities, YPAR engages youth as situated human beings who

desire to enhance the quality of their lives. The methodology fosters civic engagement by providing platforms for youth to analyze their experiences of oppression and develop strategies for resistance. This healing dimension becomes evident in how YPAR studies address trauma while building collective power. Rather than pathologizing youth experiences, YPAR creates opportunities for shared analysis that transforms individual pain and frustration into collective understanding and action. The research process itself becomes a site of restoration, where youth reclaim their capacity to name their realities and envision alternatives.

YPAR embodies authentic care through its commitment to reciprocal relationships between adult facilitators and youth researchers. The methodology refuses the aesthetic care that demands conformity to institutional norms, instead creating spaces where youth perspectives and experiences drive the research agenda. This represents a fundamental shift from traditional research relationships in which adults extract information from youth towards collaborative partnerships where knowledge is co-constructed. Unlike traditional research focused on outcomes, YPAR prioritizes the relationships and learning that occur throughout the research journey. Adult facilitators must practice "engrossment," being genuinely attuned to what youth are experiencing and learning from the insights of young people rather than imposing predetermined frameworks.

YPAR functions as an abolitionist methodology by refusing collaboration with carceral institutions and logics. The methodology challenges the pathologization of youth of color common in traditional research, instead centering youthful expertise and educated capacity for analysis and action. This represents a fundamental epistemological challenge to dominant research paradigms. No longer does research position youth as problems to be solved. Instead, YPAR enlists youth as agents of change. Aldana and Richards-Schuster (2021) highlight YPAR's powerful intrinsic potential to expand conventional perspectives on research methods in scientific inquiries. YPAR scholarship actively and critically seeks to disrupt the pathologizing narratives that have historically marginalized racialized youth. For example, "urban adolescents" have often been stigmatized as misbehaved, damaged, and dangerous. YPAR reconfigures these power dynamics, advocating for a collaborative approach according to which youth are recognized as experts of their own experiences.

Addressing Intersectional Identities Using YPAR

YPAR's strength lies in its capacity to address the multiple, overlapping systems of oppression that youth of color navigate. The methodology creates space for analyzing how race, gender, class, sexuality, and other identities intersect rather than treating these as separate categories. This intersectional approach recognizes that youth of color experience oppression through multiple, interconnected systems rather than singular identity categories. Recent iterations of YPAR have made this intersectional commitment more explicit. Aldana and Richards-Schuster (2021) urge scholars to reassess their engagement with YPAR, pointing out an initial oversight where many projects were not explicitly framed as antiracist. They advocate for a deliberate process of dialogue and reexamination to ensure that all projects align more closely with critical race methodology, thereby enhancing the antiracist impact of research and actions among youth of color. Aldana and Richard-Schuster articulate specific commitments designed to embed antiracist principles at the core of YPAR endeavors. The first commitment emphasizes recognition of multiple ways of knowing, advocating for openness to diverse and creative epistemologies. This approach challenges conventional reliance on dominant research methods

and the pervasive myth of objectivity, suggesting a more inclusive and flexible framework for knowledge production. The second commitment addresses the need to counter paternalistic dynamics within research, advocating for the creation of equitable spaces that empower youth. By fostering a dialectical process, this commitment ensures that young participants can develop their ideas, amplify their voices, and fully engage in joint decision-making, thereby acknowledging and navigating inherent power dynamics, biases, and privileges within collaborative research settings. The third commitment focuses on the structural dimensions of racism, aiming to cultivate critical consciousness among youth participants, particularly those from Black, Indigenous, and other racially minoritized communities. By centering experiential knowledge, creativity, and voices of young people, YPAR seeks to document and perform intersectional analysis of structural racism, leveraging these insights to drive social change and influence policies, practices, and institutions.

Beyond traditional YPAR, new interpretations have been developed to enhance its transformative potential by widening its scope. Bettencourt (2020) highlights YPAR's powerful liberatory qualities and its opposition to adultism. In the United States, widespread adultism undermines the value of youth perspectives and experiences, contributing to their marginalization. Bettencourt defines adultism as marginalization and objectification of young people, who are often viewed as incapable of expressing their own views and treated as property of adults. Meaningful youth research provides a platform to challenge adultism by empowering young people to express their voices and exercise agency. Unlike traditional educational models that operate within hierarchical structures, YPAR emphasizes recognizing and utilizing the strengths and assets of youth. Research becomes a tool for liberation, especially when approached as a contact zone that incorporates problem-posing education and prioritizes process over outcomes.

Towards Transformative Educational Research Methodology
Despite YPAR's transformative potential, scholars such as Malorni and her co-investigators (2022) critique the ambiguity of YPAR methods. They note that YPAR projects often fail to disclose the steps taken to collect and analyze research findings. Through a systematic literature review of 40 articles discussing YPAR in youth development and out-of-school settings, Malorni et al. identify practices designed to facilitate critical dialogue, power-sharing, and the cultivation of collective identity. However, the opacity of methods can undermine YPAR's epistemological objectives and limit the integration of critical inquiry into actionable outcomes. This lack of transparency can sometimes prevent youth from being meaningfully integrated into crucial aspects of the research process. YPAR projects also face significant limitations based on their institutional settings. Dominguez (2021) notes that school-based Youth Participatory Action Research initiatives face particular challenges. While these projects can serve as catalysts for Latine students to recognize research as a means of effecting transformative changes, they also face constraints imposed by institutional structures. Some studies highlight potential challenges faced by Latine youth, such as feelings of failure and racial battle fatigue, which may hinder their ability to confront present systemic barriers while they participate in studies. Inculcated negativity affects their ability to remain engaged and have transformative experiences within project duration. Moreover, YPAR facilitators must possess robust understanding of YPAR processes to effectively guide youth through the research journey. Inadequately prepared facilitators risk perpetuating injustices rather than mitigating them. The participatory nature of YPAR is shaped by the extent to which young individuals willingly engage in the research

process. While certain studies underscore consistent incorporation of participatory dialogues with youth throughout all stages of PAR projects, other literature presents contradicting evidence, indicating this may not always be the case. Despite well-meaning efforts of educators and researchers, PAR projects are susceptible to flaws that can inadvertently worsen school conditions and impede positive outcomes for youth.

Limitations of specific studies, however, do not compromise YPAR's transformative promise or its overall effectiveness. YPAR offers a blueprint for transforming research methodologies in ways that embody healing, care, and abolition. Rather than treating these as add-on considerations, YPAR demonstrates how these frameworks can be embedded in research design from conception through dissemination. This methodological transformation requires researchers to examine how their approaches either reproduce or challenge systems of oppression. Traditional evaluation metrics for youth programs may perpetuate harm by ignoring structural factors and focusing on individual deficits. YPAR prioritizes community-defined outcomes and transformative processes over standardized measures.

The shift from traditional research to YPAR requires funders, institutions, and researchers to reconsider what constitutes evidence and impact. YPAR's implications extend beyond individual research projects to institutional transformation. Educational institutions must confront their complicity in perpetuating racial and class inequities. YPAR offers a model for transforming institutional practices by centering community expertise and challenging top-down approaches to program development and evaluation. YPAR methodology suggests that meaningful change requires sustained commitment to power-sharing and structural transformation rather than superficial modifications to existing programs. Institutions must be willing to cede control and create authentic partnerships with communities they (claim to) serve. YPAR's evolution continues as scholars and practitioners develop more sophisticated approaches to intersectional analysis and abolitionist practice. Future research should examine how YPAR projects navigate tensions between institutional requirements and abolitionist principles, identifying specific practices that most effectively address intersecting oppressions. Additionally, more research is needed on how YPAR principles can transform traditional academic and community institutions. This includes exploring how the methodology can be adapted across different contexts while maintaining its commitment to youth leadership and structural transformation.

YPAR functions as a counter-hegemonic methodology that operationalizes healing, care, and abolition frameworks through its commitment to youth-led inquiry, intersectional analysis, and community-based action. By centering youth of color as knowledge producers and disrupting traditional research hierarchies, YPAR creates transformative spaces for resisting structural violence while developing culturally responsive resources and interventions. YPAR's intersectional framework addresses the multiple, overlapping systems of oppression that youth of color navigate, offering a methodological alternative that prioritizes community-based solutions over punitive interventions. The methodology embodies healing through its cultivation of critical consciousness, care through its relational approach, and abolition through its refusal of carceral logics. However, YPAR's transformative potential depends on practitioners' commitment to authentic power-sharing and structural transformation. The methodology's limitations — including methodological ambiguity, institutional constraints, and power dynamics — require ongoing attention and critique. Nevertheless, YPAR offers a compelling model for research that serves communities rather than extracting from them. As youth of color continue to face intensifying forms of structural violence, YPAR provides essential tools for resistance and

transformation. The methodology's evolution toward more explicitly antiracist and intersectional approaches suggests promising directions for future development. Ultimately, YPAR demonstrates that research can be a practice of freedom when it embodies the values of healing, care, and abolition that communities deserve.

Statement on Research Positionality

As a member of research communities and to honor the reflexivity essential to YPAR (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Dominguez, 2021), I wish to conclude by reflecting on my own positionality as a researcher, along with the love and burdens I bring to this work. I was born on the Ecuadorian coast and identify as an Andean woman of mixed Indigenous, African, and Spanish descent. My family lineage can be traced to the Quechua people, once members of the Incan Empire. I am a queer brown femme raised in Brooklyn, New York, by two immigrant parents. Growing up, my family was affected by various forms of structural violence that significantly compromised the health of two family members during the early 2000s. Although we have since found ways to support each other and alleviate some illness symptoms, there are no perfect solutions. Most of my work with youth and communities of color occurs within education. I have held various positions in primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools. Currently, I am a school leader in a grades 5-8 school in Queens, NY. My experiences working in schools taught me learning is one of the most sustainable and healing practices available to our communities. I approach this work with deep love for teaching and learning, as well as acute awareness of how our quality and access to education can significantly affect our lives and well-being. I also recognize tools for healing already exist within our communities and our ancestral knowledge. My positionality in research is rooted in both yearning and love, as well as burning rage against the injustices surrounding us. My reflexivity is crucial to ensure that my own positionality does not overshadow the stories and actions of research participants. I engage in significant reflective work to ensure that my emotions do not dominate collective efforts. On the other hand, I am also aware that my love and commitment to youth of color will enable me to prioritize the relationships I am eager to develop. The transformative healing that will occur through research is something I deeply desire, yet I approach it with careful consideration. Above all, I look forward to participating in the small incremental steps of building community resources that envision a world where reliance on carceral institutions is no longer necessary.

References

Aldana, A., & Richards-Schuster, K. (2021). Youth-led antiracism research: Making a case for participatory methods and creatives strategies in developmental science. Journal of Adolescent Research, 36(6), 654–685. https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558421104328910.1177%2F0743558421104328

Aldana, A., Richards-Schuster, K., & Checkoway, B. (2016). Dialogic pedagogy for youth participatory action research: Facilitation of an intergroup empowerment program. Social Work with Groups, 39(4), 339–358. https://doi.org/10.1080/01609513.2015.1076370

Anderson, A. J. (2019). A qualitative systematic review of youth participatory action research implementation in U.S. high schools. American Journal of Community Psychology, 65(1–2), 242–257. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12389

Angod, L. (2023). Doing and undoing gendered racism with racialized girls: A school-based youth participatory action research study. Children & Society. https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12826

Augsberger, A., Toraif, N., Young, A., Dimitri, N. C., Bautista, R., Pierre, J., Le, C., Idahor, O., Jusme, C., & Gergen Barnett, K. A. (2022). Covid-19 shines a light on health inequities in communities of color: A youth-driven photovoice inquiry. Journal of Community Psychology, 50(8), 3700–3715. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22866

Bañales, J., Pinetta, B. J., Singh, S., Rodriguez, A. J., Aldana, A., & Gutierrez, F. J. (2023). Centering Youth Voice in Developmental Science: A Research Roadmap for partnerships with Latinx Youth. Diversity and Developmental Science, 197–221. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-23163-6_9

Bettencourt, G. M. (2020). Embracing problems, processes, and contact zones: Using youth participatory action research to challenge adultism. Action Research, 18(2), 153–170. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750318789475

Brady, B., Dolan, P., & McGregor, C. (2020). *Mentoring for young people in care and leaving care: Theory, policy and Practice*. Routledge.

Cammarota, J., & Fine, M. (2010). *Revolutionizing education: Youth participatory action research in motion*. Routledge.

Carrier, Nicolas and Justin Piche. 2015. "Blind points of abolitionist thought in academia Recurring and emerging issues." Champ Penal-Penal Field. Vol. 12. https://champpenal.revues.org/9008

Chavez-Dueñas, N. Y., Adames, H. Y., Perez-Chavez, J. G., & Salas, S. P. (2019). Healing ethno-racial trauma in Latinx immigrant communities: Cultivating hope, resistance, and action. American Psychologist, 74(1), 49–62. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000289

Cherry, A. L., Baltag, V., & Dillon, M. E. (2018). *International handbook on adolescent health and development: The public health response*. Springer International Publishing.

Cohen S. (1985). *Visions of social control*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Cohen S. (1980). "Preface." in *Outside chance*, ed. Dronfield L. London, UK: Null, 2-6.

Davis, Angela Y. (2011). *Are prisons obsolete?* Seven Stories Press.

Domínguez, A. D. (2021). ¡Venceremos!: Challenging school barriers with Latinx youth participatory action research. Journal of Latinos and Education, 22(3), 1208–1222. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431

Flagg, L., & Campbell, L. (2021). Covid-19 in communities of color: Structural racism and social determinants of health. OJIN: The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing, 26(2). https://doi.org/10.3912/ojin.vol26no02man06

Flynn, M. A., Eggerth, D. E., & Jacobson, C. J. (2015). Undocumented status as a social determinant of occupational safety and health: The Workers' Perspective. American Journal of Industrial Medicine, 58(11), 1127–1137. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajim.22531

Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Penguin Education.

Garland David. 2001. *The culture of control: Crime and social order in contemporary society*. University of Chicago Press.

Garland David.1990. *Punishment and modern society: A study in social theory*. University of Chicago Press.

Gillispie, V., & Abrigo, R. (2022). Racial disparities in healthcare. Clinical Approaches to Hospital Medicine, 265–273. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-95164-1_18

Gilmore, R. W., Bhandar, B., & Toscano, A. (2023). *Abolition geography: Essays towards liberation*. Verso.

Ginwright, S. (2011). Hope, healing, and care. Liberal Education, 97(2), 34–39.

Hannah-Moffat, K. (2001). *Punishment in disguise: Penal governance and federal imprisonment of women in Canada.* University of Toronto Press.

Haskie-Mendoza, S., Tinajero, L., Cervantes, A., Rodriguez, J., & Serrata, J. (2018). Conducting youth participatory action research (YPAR) through a healing-informed approach with system-involved Latinas. Journal of Family Violence, 33(8), 605–612. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896--018--9996--x

Hudson, K. D., & Romanelli, M. (2019). "We are powerful people": Health-promoting strengths of LGBTQ communities of color. Qualitative Health Research, 30(8), 1156–1170. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732319837572

Jolie, S. A., Onyeka, O. C., Torres, S., DiClemente, C., Richards, M., & Santiago, C. D. (2021). Violence, place, and strengthened space: A review of immigration stress, violence exposure, and intervention for immigrant Latinx youth and families. Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 17(1), 127–151. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-081219-100217

Leshner, A. I., & Scherer, L. A. (2021). Mental health, substance use, and wellbeing in higher education: Supporting the whole student. National Academies Press.

Love, B. L. (2023). P*unished for dreaming: How school reform harms black children and how we heal*. St. Martin's Press, an imprint of St. Martin's Publishing Group.

Love, B. (2020). *We want to do more than survive: Abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom*. Beacon.

Love, B. L. (2016). Anti-black state violence, classroom edition: The spirit murdering of black children. Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy, 13(1), 22–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/15505170.2016.1138258

Love, B. L. (2016). Anti-black state violence, classroom edition: The spirit murdering of black children. Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy, 13(1), 22–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/15505170.2016.1138258

Malorni, A., Lea, C. H., Richards-Schuster, K., & Spencer, M. S. (2022b). Facilitating youth participatory action research (YPAR): A scoping review of relational practice in U.S. youth development and out-of-school time projects. Children and Youth Services Review, 136, 106399. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2022.106399

Marmur, D. (1982). *Beyond survival.* Darton, Longman, and Todd.

Mirra, N., Garcia, A., & Morrell, E. (2016). *Doing youth participatory action research: A methodological handbook for researchers, educators, and youth*. Routledge.

Moore, R. D., Stanton, D., Gopalan, R., & Chaisson, R. E. (1994). Racial differences in the use of drug therapy for HIV disease in an urban community. New England Journal of Medicine, 330(11), 763–768. https://doi.org/10.1056/nejm199403173301107

Noddings, N. (2005). The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education. Teachers College Press.

Noddings, N. (2002). *Starting at home: Caring and social policy*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Nolan, K. (2011). *Police in the hallways: Discipline in an urban high school*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Nolan, K. (2015). La Educación in room 320: Toward a theory of care-based resistance in the context of neoliberal school reform. Teachers College Record, 117(5), 1–30. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811511700506

Ogden, T., & Hagen, K. A. (2019). Adolescent mental health: Prevention and intervention. Routledge.

Ozer, E. J., & Wright, D. (2012). Beyond school spirit: The effects of youth-led participatory action research in two urban high schools. Journal of Research on Adolescence, 22(2), 267–283. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2012.007802021.1935258

Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. L. (2021). *Care Work Dreaming Disability Justice*. Arsenal Pulp Press.

Raval, G., Montañez, E., Meyer, D., & Berger-Jenkins, E. (2019). School-Based mental health promotion and prevention program "turn 2 US" reduces mental health risk behaviors in urban, minority youth. Journal of School Health, 89(8), 662–668. https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12805

Rew, L. (2005). *Adolescent health: A multidisciplinary approach to theory, research, and intervention.* Sage Publications.

Richards-Schuster, K., & Checkoway, B. (2009). Youth participation in public policy at the local level: New lessons from Michigan municipalities. National Civic Review, 98(4), 26–30. doi:10.1002/ncr.v98:4

Rodríguez, L. F., & Brown, T. M. (2009). From voice to agency: Guiding principles for participatory action research with youth. New Directions for Youth Development, 123, 19–34. https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.312

Scott, D. & Gosling, H. (2016). Before prison, instead of prison, better than prison: Therapeutic communities as an abolitionist real utopia?" International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy 5(1):52–66.

Seiffge-Krenke, I. (2015). *Adolescents' health: A developmental perspective.* Routledge.

Sojoyner, D. M. (2016). First strike: Educational enclosures in Black Los Angeles. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2019). Recovery and secovery Support. https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/recovery.

Susila Gurusami, Rocío R. García & Diya, B. (2023) Abolishing carceral distractions: Refusing the discursive punishment of Latinxs. Journal of Criminal Justice Education 34:3, 431-450.

Szott, K. (2015). Contingencies of the will: Uses of harm reduction and the disease model of addiction among health care practitioners." Health 19: 5, 507–522.

Tronto, J. C. (2010). Creating caring institutions: Politics, plurality, and purpose. Ethics and Social Welfare, 4(2), 158–171. https://doi.org/10.1080/17496535.2010.484259

Valdez, E. S., Skobic, I., Valdez, L., O Garcia, D., Korchmaros, J., Stevens, S., Sabo, S., & Carvajal, S. (2019). Youth participatory action research for youth substance use prevention: A systematic review. Substance Use & Misuse, 55(2), 314–328. https://doi.org/10.1080/10826084.2019.1668014

Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive schooling: US-Mexican youth and the politics of caring*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Wasserman, C., Postuvan, V., Herta, D., Iosue, M., Värnik, P., & Carli, V. (2018). Interactions between youth and mental health professionals: The youth aware of mental health (YAM) program experience. PLOS ONE, 13(2). https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0191843

Woodall, D., & Boeri, M. (2020). Developing a penal abolitionist application to drug treatment drawing from insider perspectives and lived experiences. Humanity & Society, 46(1), 78–109. https://doi.org/10.1177/0160597620978782.

Educational Abundance

Co-editors
Greg Seals (gbdseals2@yahoo.com)
Independent Scholar

Leslee Grey
Queens College/City University of New York

Assistant Editors
Amanda M. Kingston
Syracuse University

Lori Ann Newman
New York City Department of Education/Kansas State University

Multimedia Specialist
Dwight Wilcox
Web Wizard Productions

Co-Chairs Conference Proposal Review Committee
for Volume 5 (2025)
Timothy Glander
Nazareth University
Leslee Grey
Queens College/CUNY
Robert Niewiadomski
Fordham University