MAPPING POSSIBILITIES:
EDUCATIONAL RESPONSES TO THE TIME-SPACE DISRUPTIONS OF CLIMATE, COVID, AND INEQUALITY

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Mapping Possibilities: Creative Educational Responses to the Time-Space Disruptions of Climate, COVID, and Inequality

Issue Editors: Andrew Gebert & Lynn Harper

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Andrew Gebert & Lynn Harper, Issue Editors

Abstract

With the COVID-19 pandemic winding down, there is a strong push to return to "normal." But a too fast and unreflective attempt to get back to how things were carries its own risks. A rushed return to normal could limit the learning that should arise from an experience of this magnitude and could compound the loss already endured. This special issue, "Mapping Possibilities: Creative Educational Responses to the Time-Space Disruptions of Climate, COVID, and Inequality," is an effort to record and share some of the learnings educators have developed over the course of the triple pandemic. We have chosen this framing for a number of reasons.

- *We live in the context of time-space, so this framing makes possible an approach of breadth and inclusion.*
- *The disruptions of COVID have the potential to spark a deep reordering of the time-space parameters of educational thinking and practice.*
- *Climate and associated disruptions have been implicated in the zoonotic origins of COVID, and the pandemic has been described as a preview of the impacts of climate change and our response a kind of rehearsal.*
- *The disruptions have been experienced unequally, impacting different countries, communities, and individuals in different ways and with different degrees of intensity.*

Change inevitably creates possibilities. The greater the change, the greater the range of new possibilities created. Negative possibilities are often realized through inertia or negligence. Good and constructive possibilities are only realized through active imagination and collaborative effort.

Keywords: *education, time-space disciplines, disruption, triple pandemic, inequality, COVID, climate*

Reflecting on Disruption

Over the course of the past year, availability of effective vaccines and fatigue with the restrictions implemented to reduce the spread of COVID-19 have combined to drive a rush back to normality. On many levels, this is understandable. The scale of disruption, fear, loss, and grief has been such

that people have wanted COVID to be "over" and—despite the continuing global toll of the pandemic—a consensus has emerged that it is. Again, the urge to go back to "the before," to "normal," is easy to understand. But a too fast and unreflective attempt to get back to how things were carries its own risks.

As of the publication date of this special issue, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates the global total of COVID-related deaths at more than 6.9 million people, close to half of whom are thought to have been aged 60 or older. Developed on the basis of the reports of different governments and government agencies, these numbers may represent a gross underestimate. According to UNESCO, the number of children kept out of school at the peak of the COVID response was 1.6 billion (UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, 2021). At the same time, the shutdowns that figured prominently in the initial pre-vaccine response brought clear skies to cities long tormented by pollution and reduced the global output of CO_2 by 17% over the course of 2020 (University of East Anglia, 2020). Communications technologies were deployed in new and creative ways to enable people to connect and interact; at the same time the preciousness of actual presence was brought home to people everywhere in new and powerful ways. The pandemic impacted the world with a suddenness and simultaneity that made long-bruited ideas of interdependence—both among humans and between humans and non-human nature—an immediate and pressing reality.

In short, the world's people underwent a series of profound disruptions which, while simultaneous and ubiquitous in many senses, were experienced in highly uneven and unequal ways. To the extent that a rushed return to normal limits the scope of learning that should arise from an experience of this magnitude, it will refract and compound the loss already endured by so many.

This special issue, "Mapping Possibilities: Creative Educational Responses to the Time-Space Disruptions of Climate, COVID, and Inequality," is an effort to record and share some of the learnings educators have developed over the course of the (still on-going) triple pandemic. We have chosen this framing concept for a number of reasons.

- We live in the "painful kingdom of time and place" (Emerson, 1849). Such a framing offers the potential for an approach of the kind of breadth and inclusion required to consider the experience of recent years.
- The basic spatio-temporal orders of modern education can be identified, at least in outline, and have been generally stable for some 150 years. COVID profoundly disrupted these and has the potential to spark a deep reordering of the time-space parameters of educational thinking and practice.
- Climate and associated environmental disruptions have been implicated in the zoonotic origins of COVID, creating conditions for the virus to jump from another species to humans. Further, COVID has been described as a preview of the impacts of climate change and our response a kind of rehearsal. (What, for example, will be the long-term political outcomes of hundreds of millions of young people witnessing their governments having undertaken previously unimaginable forms of action in response to COVID even as an inertial commitment to business-as-usual prevails in much of the response to the threats posed by climate change?)
- The disruptions have been experienced unequally, impacting different countries, communities, and individuals in different ways and with different degrees of intensity. There have been high-tech knowledge workers enjoying freedom from long commutes and restricted office spaces, and there have been children standing outside restaurants

and coffee shops in hopes of finding the wifi bandwidth they need to connect to their classes; large numbers of children have simply disappeared from the educational map.

The Time-Space of Modern Education

In the modern era, it has been assumed that space-time extends evenly with an objectivity fully isolated from the subjective concerns of human beings. Major institutional developments of the 18th and 19th centuries were premised on this understanding and the particular forms of discipline which they both made possible and demanded. Considering first the spatial relations, we have the emergence of the nation-state, with its stress on clearly defined national territories (and assumptions of cultural, linguistic, or other forms of sameness); industrialization, centered on the space of the factory; and education, whose public primary practices had their spatial locus in the school. The spatio-temporal disciplinary regime of these institutions can be summed up in their demand that large numbers of people come together in the same place and the same time, often within complex patterns of repetition and variation.

In medieval and early modern societies, while people might gather once or a number of times each year for fairs, festivals, or pilgrimages, modern classrooms, factories, and armies require the consistent observation of the spatio-temporal discipline of gathering regularly at the same place at the same time.

In the case of the school, there is the additional temporal discipline of age-segregated grades, in which the same content is taught to children born between the same, arbitrarily defined, dates. The degree of detail and finality with which generational cohorts were subdivided and sorted was something unimaginable in earlier eras. Birth one day before or after the cut-off date for a grade defined both the materials that would be studied in that year and the peers with whom these would be studied. The idea, and perhaps more, the language, of a factory model of the school has been widely criticized, and any analogizing between the two must be conducted with care. But in terms of the overall structure of spatio-temporal discipline, the parallels between these two central institutions of modernity is hard to overlook.

Superimposed on this fine-grained system of division and discipline we can see the larger demarcations of the full span of life, with an initial period of formal learning to be followed by the years or decades of work. In the logic of capitalist production, these correspond to the periods of investment and recovery. This educational system, which developed and reached completion over the course of the nineteenth century, has been almost universally adopted the world over; it has been the normative practice continuing with only minor variation to our present time.

The COVID pandemic wrought profound disruptions in this educational system in ways that have brought to the surface underlying inequalities, including with regard to access to spatio-temporal resources.

In the United State, public schooling as an entitlement appears in policy and law by the late 1700s, and public schools were designed to maintain socio-economic and racial segregation and exclusion based on ability (Applied Research Center, 2013). As such, their spaces, assumptions, behavioral expectations, and temporal disciplines represent racialized Whiteness and the project of White conditioning. From the 1950's to the present day, Black, Brown, Indigenous, individuals with disabilities and multilingual communities have used legal decisions and precedent to demand educational equality. Educational attainment and disciplinary data confirm that schools pre-COVID continued to enact racial isolation, educational inequality and exclusionary practices. As long as student outcomes are demographically differentiable and disproportionate, it is difficult to

conduct authentic analysis without consideration to applications of critical race theory to education, specifically the presence of Whiteness in schooling (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Similar self-perpetuating regimes of inequality can be observed in societies around the world (Wilkerson, 2020).

Mapping Possibilities

Change inevitably creates possibilities. The greater the change, the greater the range of new possibilities created. It is crucial that we recognize the scale of the changes, and thus possibilities, that we are experiencing now, and think about the direction we want these changes to take—which of the possibilities of the present moment we want to realize and which we must work to forestall. This is important because negative possibilities are often realized through inertia or negligence. Good and constructive possibilities are only realized through active imagination and collaborative effort.

These are the qualities embodied in the work of the contributors to this special issue and it is hoped that they will serve as an invitation to readers as they envisage and work toward the possibilities of their own disrupted situations. This issue offers multiple perspectives and moments from the triple-pandemic and its intersectionalities. Each contributor's positionality directly impacted their access, observations, and the meaning they constructed as a result. It is the editors' contention that value is found in reading across texts, dialogically, with eyes and ears tuned to resonance and dissonance with one's own experiences.

This editorial collaboration grew out of an encounter in an asynchronous online course, taught by Gebert, focused on the Japanese reformist educator Tsunesaburō Makiguchi (1871–1944), his ideas on human geography and value creation. Harper and Gebert's shared resonance with Makiguchi's approach to mapping human possibilities over time and space provides an important point of reference for the conceptual framing of this special issue, which tracks the effects and opportunities of the triple pandemic on teachers, learners, and learning communities, in intrapersonal, K-12, vocational, and post-secondary contexts.

The Contributions

Lynn Harper's article titled *Imagined and Unimagined Spaces* weaves Japanese philosopher Tsunesaburō Makiguchi's educational recommendations, as well as contemporary educational equity scholarship, with timeline and autoethnography in her reflection on the imagined and unimagined spaces that emerged in her personal, local, and immediate K-12 context from 2020–2022.

Bernadeia Johnson and Julianne E. Schwietz present a case study on the self-proclaimed Good Trouble Principals, a group of school leaders committed to equity work and applying the exemplarist model of John Lewis to their own leadership of schools. In their article, *Making a Case for Exemplary Principal Leadership for Racial Equity*, Johnson and Schwietz follow the group as challenges and limits emerge in response to their applications of virtue theory within K-12 systems.

Alice Wexler's article, *What my students taught me about disability*, is a collaborative autoethnography of how online learning created the proximity necessary for a discussion related to disclosure of disability within educational and professional environments.

The article features teacher and student communications from spring 2021, when Wexler taught a synchronous online course in disability studies, communing with young people struggling with their present and future as educators. The students not only felt empowered to introduce themselves with their preferred pronouns, but one-third of the students identified as having, or as having had, a disability that significantly impacted their lives. As a result, participants were brought into conversations about what is important in life in a new way.

Joy Anogwih's article, *Reimagining K-12 School Assessment Measures in the era of Triple Pandemic through a logic of Human Empathy and Embodying Assessment,* troubles K-12 school assessment practices both formal (i.e., standardized assessment measures (SAMs)), and informal (alternative or context-based assessment types). It calls for more awareness on the urgent need to incorporate human empathy and embodiment into both forms of school assessment so as to close the power-relation gap that makes SAMs incompatible as an integral part of the K-12 school assessment system. Anogwih argues that human empathy, together with assessment embodiment, can ultimately result in the realization of K-12 school's original goals of equity and efficiency.

Marcus Johnson visits historical/philosophical models for conceiving social and planetary changes in his article *Agential Equanimity: Marcus Aurelius, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Educational Principles for Embracing Change.* From his perspective, "COVID provided us with an unexpected and unwelcome opportunity to grow." Johnson offers the "naturalistic model" of Aurelius and Nietzche as a constructive way of embracing change, agential equanimity, and the real world as it is, while refraining from qualitative judgements.

Barbara Tischler Hastie examines pandemic impacts on vocational education leadership in her article *A Story to Move Forward: A History of Past, Present and Future Ways of Responding to Education.* This qualitative case study examines the leadership's responses from Ulster BOCES (Board of Cooperative Education), during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. BOCES-Educator Edge leadership in Ulster County, NY, attended to the hearts and minds of staff in human ways throughout each stage of the pandemic. This qualitative case study applied adaptive resilient frameworks as an inquiry into the kind of environment that nurtures human development and promotes learning, how leaders can attend to the human elements in virtual and hybrid spaces, and how inclusive contexts highlight the need for varied approaches to nurturing and developing stakeholders.

In *Tsunesaburō Makiguchi's Recasting of Competition: Striving for Excellence in a Context of Interdependence*, Andrew Gebert explores possible transformations in the conceptualization and practice of competition through the lens of the human geographic studies of Tsunesaburō Makiguchi (1871–1944).

In *Creating Pathways for Learners*, Maria Guarjado recounts challenges and new learnings that emerged as teachers and learners worked to co-create an environment that nurtured the human spirit and promoted learning through the co-construction of knowledge during the early days of the pandemic. Teaching and learning experiences for this exploratory case study based in Tokyo, Japan, were examined through aspects of two pedagogical approaches: Ikeda's value-creating pedagogy and Freire's critical pedagogy. Featuring the importance of bringing the world into our learning spaces, exploring the possibilities, and connecting the relevance of global issues to student lives, new pathways are presented. The possibilities of deepening a sense of belonging, connection, and purpose are highlighted with the hope of imbuing an inspired perspective of advancing work in education that allows new transformative learning for both the student and teacher.

Jessica Bridges offers an autoethnography of anti-racist work and the weaponization of this work in media-based political discourse. In her article *The Epistemic Uncertainty in Learning and*

Doing Anti-Racist Work, she presents an overview of two major events in 2020—the Coronavirus and the murder of George Floyd—in order to contextualize White women's engagement in anti-racist work. She shares an autoethnographic narrative account of engaging in anti-racist work, concluding by highlighting the hopeful contributions White anti-racist work can make to the creation of a more just society.

Acompañamiento and the Sounds of Resilience in the Social Distance posits learning beside, or as an aspect of, instructional design found to build a sense of community in the virtual middle school classroom space. The case study by Jennifer Parker Monger, Mary Beth Hines,and Catherine Marchese describes the work of a student teacher to embody asset-oriented virtual pedagogy that fostered a community built on student funds of knowledge/funds of identity. The findings further highlight some common themes across texts within this issue: culturally sustaining instruction, repositioning students as collaborative experts, and learning alongside toward the realization of a humanizing virtual pedagogy.

This special issue seeks to contribute to the larger post-pandemic dialogue on education for this time-space. Accordingly, the issue places divergent priorities and perspectives side by side for consideration. The editors encourage reading between and across texts in order to expand the dialogic process into multiple contexts. The editorial team are deeply indebted to *Thresholds in Education* for this opportunity, and to the scholars who entered fully and graciously into this space.

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Imagined and Unimagined Spaces: Teaching within the Triple Pandemic

Lynn Harper

Abstract

This article surfaces the functions, possibilities, and problems that emerged during the triple pandemic for a public school teacher in an urban school. The author weaves research, narrative, autoethnographic excerpts and timeline to represent the imagined and unimagined spaces that she and her students occupied from 2019 to 2020. How the teacher and students occupied and narrated those spaces tells a story that can be compared and contrasted with the dominant narrative of "pandemic learning loss" found in media and public discourse. These moments highlight two lines of inquiry: What imagined and unimagined spaces emerged as a result of large scale disruption? And what conditions, dispositions, and resources are needed from public education for our interdependent, unimagined future? The conclusion suggests that due to perceptual and holographic variations between stakeholders, the way forward will require collaborative effort.

Keywords: *triple pandemic, teachers, ESL, cultural resilience, culturally responsive practice, learning loss*

Describing the External and Internal Scene

(Harper, 2020)

As a public school teacher, context matters. I am a middle-aged white woman in K-12 education, which I have seen described as a middle class, White-racialized, and female space (Milne, 2016). The statistics on teacher demographics bear out this description. The most recent federal teacher data collection effort (2017-2018) shows that 76% of teachers are female, 79% of teachers are White, and with an average base salary of $42,800, teachers are middle class (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Everything about school, from the curriculum and classroom arrangement, to the behavior policies and rigid time management, has been designed according to the standards and specifications of people who look like me. I should feel comfortable here, and yet, I do not. When schooling was flipped to virtual due to COVID in March 2020, I was shocked, then excited: How might these conditions of disruption impact the structure and function of schools? What possibilities and problems would emerge? This article surfaces the functions, possibilities, and problems that emerged during the triple pandemic for a public school teacher in an urban school.

In setting the context for this publication, the editors have specific intentions when referring to the triple pandemic. "Climate" is the environmental and atmospheric conditions that are producing extreme weather events with increasing frequency and devastating effects on a global scale. "COVID" refers to the SARs COVID-19 virus and its mutations during this episode of global transmission. "Inequality" references many different conditions of social life. Presently in the United States, inequality has particular connotations of systemic racism. My profession and training as an English as a New Language teacher makes me particularly sensitive to inequalities related to race, culture, language, and citizenship status.

"Climate" in the context of public schools is related to the internal environment of a school community, which is shaped by the adults who work there. In regard to climate considerations, I have found diversity, equity, and inclusion training (DEI) to be beneficial. Diversity training can be defined as any program designed to empower its participants to facilitate positive interaction, shape instructional methods, reduce prejudice and discrimination, and generally teach dissimilar others how to work together effectively (Banks, 2005; Bezrukova, Jehn & Spell, 2012). Multiple authors contend that diversity training is the most significant and necessary component of teacher preparation, given that there is often a racial/cultural/linguistic mismatch between teachers and students (Yuan, 2017).

In a spring 2020 diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training, participants in my virtual breakout group were invited to consider and name the spaces in our schools in which we tend not see groups of Black, Brown, and Indigenous students. Colleagues were able to call out some spaces that have been and remain dominated by White students—like advanced placement classes at the high school level, and "advanced learner" (gifted) programs in elementary schools. In truth, the educational attainment rates of Black, Brown, and Indigenous students (as student groups, not individuals) in our district were and are such that a long list could be made. When our breakout room internal timers were up and we were zoomed back to the large group, the facilitator asked individuals to share some of the spaces that had surfaced in our conversations.

I unmuted and then re-muted myself. The facilitator saw this, and invited me to speak. I immediately thought, *"How can I say what I want to say here? We have had this conversation many times, and after a while, the conversation grows hollow, because while we see it and say it, action to address these access issues is slow, uneven and sporadically attempted?"* I started slowly, "I think we know and can identify what spaces are largely not occupied by Black and Brown students, and I hear and see my colleagues calling some of those spaces out. What I am

more interested in are the unimagined spaces that my students occupy, the ways in which they occupy them, and I think those spaces bear consideration."

"For instance, right now we are operating in distance learning. There are students who are opting to participate in expected ways in distance learning, meaning, they are physically present at the assigned times for classes and groups, in the assigned virtual spaces. There are other students, who are creatively constructing their own daily school schedule based on their interests—who perhaps don't come to reading groups, or the math lesson, but attend morning meetings and specialists daily. There are still other students who participate asynchronously—who do the work that is required but aren't attending or are rarely attending classes, on the terms we constructed for them. I think there are opportunities here to create more responsive options if we are willing to consider the implications of this feedback."

I use narrative, autoethnographic excerpts and timeline to represent the imagined and unimagined spaces that my students and I occupied during the height of the triple pandemic (2019-2020). How my students, colleagues, and I occupied and narrated those spaces tells a story that can be compared and contrasted with the dominant narrative of "pandemic learning loss" found in media and public discourse. These moments cause me to ponder two questions: What imagined and unimagined spaces emerged as a result of large scale disruption? And what conditions, dispositions, and resources are needed to equip schools, families, and students for our interdependent, unimagined future?

Describing the Scene: Literature and Methods

My proximity to the internal workings of classrooms gives me intimate glimpses of the intersections of imagination, perception, and possibility. The internal, anecdotal statistics of my school district are not discrepant from broader statistics, according to Great Lakes Equity Center (2020). Black/Brown/Indigenous students who attend schools with a majority of Black/Brown/Indigenous students are less likely to have access to advanced courses and talent-based academic programs than students in schools serving mostly White populations. The state in which I work is majority White, so the programs are present; and yet Black/Brown/Indigenous students are under-represented in these programs.

Black/Brown/Indigenous students attending schools located in dis-invested communities are less likely to receive instruction or class work that addresses grade appropriate standards, reflects higher-level cognitive demand (e.g., Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, 1956), Webb's Depth Of Knowledge (Webb, 2002), or Marzano's taxonomy (Marzano, 2007)), or that is meaningfully engaging and relevant. Meanwhile, Black/Brown/Indigenous students are over-represented in documented behavior statistics, especially referrals and in-school/out-of-school suspensions.

What might these statistics of institutionalized low expectations and criminalization of behavior be attributed to, according to the literature? These circumstances are described as by-products of the "White spaces" which permeate schools (Milne, 2013). Singleton (2006) describes the role and presence of Whiteness as something that lives beyond individual White bodies, commanding space and setting parameters of acceptability in social, institutional, and personal spaces. In schools, Whiteness perpetuates through racialized deficit thinking, group stereotyping, inequitable funding, and biased disciplinary practices (Matias, et al., 2014).

 Consider that the majority of teachers nationally are White (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022), and that the design of public schools did not originally accommodate diversity of race, socioeconomic status, or ability. These factors contribute to the persistence of racially and

culturally oppressive structures in schools (Khalifa, 2019). What this means to me as a practitioner is that oppressive structures, not students, are the root cause of the distress and dissonance that I and other participants experience.

My entry into K-12 teaching in 2006 coincided with an emergence of equity professional development as a means of mitigating, if not transforming, climate conditions within schools. Over the course of my career, I have trained with the following organizations and individuals, who continue to influence my thinking and practices:

- National Urban Alliance (Yvette Jackson)
- Pacific Education Group: Beyond Diversity (Glen Singleton)
- Mindful Facilitation (Lee Mun Wah)
- E3: Education, Excellence and Equity (JuanCarlos Arauz)
- Ready for Rigor Framework (Zaretta Hammond)

The training I received has impressed on me that it is my obligation to interrogate my own thinking and practices alongside challenging the structures and practices of the schools/districts I serve. In the course of my studies with Pacific Education Group, I remember a presenter saying that the struggle for educational equity is like a moving walkway; I am only contributing to the pursuit of equity to the extent that I am intentionally walking against the direction that the walkway is moving.

The caveat I issue in advance is that the following is autoethnography, a narrative woven from theory, the research of others, and my lived experiences. As Chang (2016) warns, "…telling one's story does not automatically result in cultural understanding of self and others, which only grows out of in-depth cultural analysis and interpretation" (p. 13). I can only hope to accomplish some of this analysis and interpretation. I invite you, the reader, to continue this endeavor.

Lunch Land: Control in Public School Spaces

[*September, 2019-March 6, 2020, Monday-Friday, 12:05pm-12:35pm*]

Physically, there are a limited number of spaces in schools where students are able to control their presence and timing by opting in or opting out. Before the pandemic lockdown, I had lunch duty during middle school lunch. In a standard middle school, lunches might occur according to grade level, but in the K-8 building in which I taught, all the middle grades had lunch from 12:05 pm-12:35 pm. In order to limit unauthorized gatherings, fights, and/or disruptions to other classes, students had to sign in and out to leave the lunchroom, with two students allowed out at any one time. Students were not free to wander during this time; they could sign out to go to the bathroom or the nurse. If they got a hall pass from a teacher, they could come to the cafeteria, pick up their lunch, and go to the teacher's classroom. This alternate space was designated for privileged few, because it required the classroom teacher to surrender their contractually guaranteed "duty-free lunch." Teachers extended this access only to favorite students or students who needed lunchtime to make up missing assignments or tests. Around the middle of the year, a third lunch space opened for students who were serving time-outs for behavior or rule violations via silent lunch detention.

My duty during this time was to sign students in and out. I was assigned this job because of knee issues from advanced osteoarthritis. The job allowed me to sit down rather than balance a

walking cane and a clipboard. I should note that it wasn't too far into the year when a colleague declared in a lunch duty meeting that it was unfair for me to get the door job all the time, because I got to sit down. Like students, there are a limited number of times of day in which school teachers and staff can control their presence and timing. Many teachers are dehydrated by the end of a day because they are not free to drink liquids throughout the day, as the rigorous demands of bell schedules limit opportunities to use the bathroom. Getting to sit down at lunch duty, or anytime during the day, is a big deal.

The ability to be seated was possibly the only aspect of this job that was a good fit for me. I am not interested in controlling middle schoolers' behavior, except to the extent that their physiological development puts them at risk for acting impulsively in ways that can harm them or others. Realistically, my enforcement of the sign in/sign out procedure was predicated on any given student's willingness to comply. When students' approached me to engage in the procedure, I complied. When they tried to sail past me, I asked for them to sign out, appealing to fairness and safety. To the student serving me a "You-can't-make-me-but-I-would-love-to- see-you-try" look, I would say, "sign out, please." I might repeat my statement, but my Crisis Prevention Intervention training dictates that if a student is not in immediate danger (to self or other), I am not to attempt to prevent their movements. Students who are angry? "Give time and space" (CPI, 2015). A refusal to sign out of the cafeteria is a safe way to exert personal power in a space that otherwise seeks to contain and control, all day, everyday. I know the students who refuse. I know their names, because I hear them in the mouths of adults all day long. I write the names down, signing them out and back in. Nothing to see here.

Lunch is a time of day in which students' were likely to have the hoods of their sweatshirt hoodies up over their heads. This is a dress code violation; but many of the adults assigned to the hard-tiled basement lunch room could relate to the human need for safety and comfort in a loud and chaotic space. As happens, enforcement varied. It occurs to me that having one's hood up is a way to control one's visibility in a space that may be perceived as hostile, loud, or unpleasantly boring. It's an assertion of personal power that's either assertive or defensive depending on the particular student and their sensory capacity. Many hoods are up during middle school lunch, until such time as an administrator enters, and enforces the uniform rules with an assertive "Hoods off." Me? In picking my battles, clothing did not make the cut.

[March 6, 2020] The first confirmed case of COVID 19 in my state.

[March 13, 2020] The governor declares a peacetime state of emergency, allowing him to issue a stay at home order.

[March 15, 2020] Schools in my state were temporarily closed until March 27, 2020.

[*March 25, 2020*] The governor issued a stay at home order; closing schools and non-essential businesses through May 4, 2020.

[March 30, 2020] Emergency distance learning commences.

The Unprecedented Home/School Connection

A completely new space opens. According to state guidelines, distance learning begins in response to worsening local, regional, and statewide COVID-19 metrics. The walls of brick and mortar schools explode, and the classroom is each student's out-of-school environment.

This opened a range of challenges. Out-of-school environments varied, and in these early days, there were often lots of sounds coming back through the computer microphone: televisions, siblings, computers, household chores, adult conversations, pets, and other teachers from other virtual classrooms. During in-person schooling, family is visible at school in more formal ways, via conferences or meetings, parent groups or committees, or at the monthly food pantry. For a moment, educators have unprecedented access to student's and families' home lives, the expected and the unexpected.

As we entered emergency on-line school, the realities of working in a Title 1 school pressed upon me. Title 1, Part A is the section of the Every Student Succeeds Act (114th Congress, 2015) that allocates additional per-pupil funding to help mitigate the effects of poverty on student achievement (defined by statute as standardized test achievement). In person, my school feeds children three meals and two snacks a day, universal access, because the statistical occurance of financial poverty for our students is in the eighty percent range. We provide social work services, counseling, healthcare, uniforms, school supplies, transportation and childcare. We bring the food shelf in regularly for family "shopping" days. For some families, school is the village that supports them.

The first priority when we shifted to distance learning was to provide remote food distribution. All the prepared meals students would have received in person were packed for pick-up. Weekly food backpacks (normally placed anonymously in student lockers) were boxed and available for pick up. Nonetheless, there were families who couldn't get to school, because their previous transportation access via school bus was revoked.

Teachers were forbidden to deliver things to students at home (liability for the district), but many of us, including me, did anyway. Home visits bring other levels of knowing: who lives between parents, who has moved or been evicted, for whom do we have correct or incorrect address information. I imagine that nothing is lost in these deliveries: Someone will find the delivery and be curious. Someone will benefit. It is necessary for me to believe this way, to maintain what sanity is available in this difficult professional moment.

In school-as-emergency distance learning, dress code is unenforced, so the commensurate assertion of personal control is turning off one's camera. In the first weeks, cameras were expected to be on. Perhaps a family or staff person complained, so there came a centralized order that teachers were not allowed to insist on students' visible presence. I initially felt good about this small allowance, but two months in, when I entered our shared virtual spaces, I occasionally saw only a wall of name letters. A for Alice, who's camera is off, T for Tomas, M for Mahmoud. When I posed a question, I had to ask students to unmute themselves in order to hear a reply. Are they thinking? Are they even in the room at all? I had no way to know.

Participation and engagement at a distance was difficult to interpret. There were students who consistently stayed in camera off/silent mode, but engaged with me directly when other students had left the meeting. One student with whom I connected in this fashion used the chat feature of google hangout if asked a direct question during class. In emergency distance learning, I was asked to consider any log in, at any time during the school day as "daily attendance." As the definition of attendance changed, so did my definition of engagement. Hasn't it always been true that

students tune in or tune out during instruction? Unless/until I engage with each individual student, how can I know their level of engagement?

My school district operated in this scenario from March 2020 through the end of the school year in June 2020. Outside of school, things were quiet until the end of May.

[*May 25, 2020*] George Floyd dies in police custody one mile away from the school building I serve.

[*May 29, 2020*] The arresting officer, Derek Chauvin is charged with third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter.

[*June 3, 2020*] Former officer Derek Chauvin's charges are increased to second-degree murder and three other former officers, who were in attendance at the arrest, are charged with aiding and abetting second-degree murder.

Reimagined Spaces: The COVID Context

A study is released: Twenty-seven percent of Black students, thirty-five percent of Latino students and thirty-nine percent of Indigenous students lack access to high speed internet. Fifteen percent of Black and Latino students and twenty-three percent of Indigenous students lack the hardware needed to participate in school online (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2020). The education first responders within my school system knew this, and had already sent home technology and free wireless hotspots. There were still significant access barriers, such as parent experience with laptops and tablets, as many parents relied on their smartphones for digital access. Families needed one-to-one tech support to set up and troubleshoot access issues. As a non-native digital instructor, "tech support" and "screen sharing" became classroom jobs in my virtual school space. My young, digital native students could navigate web-based applications fluently, and were excited to access this fund of knowledge in our class meetings.

[*June 2020*] The Governor issues a request for school district contingency plans for SY2021.

School districts in my state were asked to develop contingency plans based on three possible scenarios:

In-person learning for all students. This scenario was recommended for a future time in which the numbers of COVID cases and deaths stabilized or decreased. Schools would be expected to create as much space as possible between students and teachers, but would not be strictly held to the six foot social distancing guideline in classrooms. Outside classrooms, during extracurricular and other non-instructional activities, distancing would be maintained.

Hybrid learning model with strict social distancing and capacity limits. Schools will limit the overall number of people in their facilities and buses to fifty percent of their maximum occupancy. During in-school periods, a social distance of at least six feet will be maintained. Some students may remain on distance learning within this model, or may attend in person on certain days per week.

Distance learning only. Guidelines for this scenario were released as part of the daily COVID briefings, but they did not contain clear directives for how to proceed. The guidelines took a localized approach, instructing districts to do what was needed according to their communities' needs, and to maintain the option for ongoing distance learning for families no matter how they choose to open in fall 2020-2021.

[*August 2020*] New education job title emerges: Pod leader.

Racial and economic privilege became visible in new ways, as job postings for a new category of non-unionized teaching positions emerged: Learning pod leader. Parents whose lived experiences intersected wealth, white-collar, work-from-home employment and educational access, made their own educational plans for homogenous learning groups called pods, led by adult pod leaders. This phenomenon emerged simultaneously around the country (Schoales, 2020; Silverman, 2020; Weiss, 2020).

An organization representing Black/Brown/Indigenous parents held a press conference in front of my district's central office building (Danik, 2020). They had met with the superintendent and asked tough questions about the district's level of preparedness to serve Black/Brown/Indigenous students whose families lacked the economic resources to arrange learning pods. The community organization proposed that, as a function of educational equity, the school district should either arrange or fund learning pods for all students. Dissatisfied with the non-response received, and fearing a repeat of the learning conditions of spring, the organization announced a boycott of the district just prior to the start of school. They offered to assist families with the process of un-enrolling their children and enrolling them elsewhere, preferably somewhere that shared the group's urgency and interest in educating Black/Brown/Indigenous children equitably.

Given the opportunity to localize a plan, area school districts went in different directions, even within the same county (Cogdill, 2020). The urban districts, such as the one where I work, started off in distance learning, the first tier suburbs were a mix of hybrid, in person, and distance. By mid September 2020, confirmed COVID cases emerged from schools. Some districts responded by moving away from in-person contact, other districts held tightly to plan, but institutional COVID fatigue had set in.

Unimagined Stressors: COVID Fatigue, the Supply Chain and Incidents

[September 9, 2020] Facebook query: Adults share experiences and difficulties with sending students to school under a mask mandate.

The question: Will students wear masks in the classroom when returning to school? Any problems?

      In Fall 2020, the impacts of institutional COVID fatigue were experienced by non-licensed staff providing state mandated child care to the children of first responders. Hazard pay was discontinued, and workers were no longer allowed the choice to work on or off site. These changes in policy were interpreted as a declaration of disregard from district leadership. Was attending to children in multi-age settings, supervising the distance learning of Pre-K through middle schoolers simultaneously, and managing classroom environments with inadequate custodial support the job for which care workers had signed up?

[September 16, 2020] Email - virtual open house instructions
I receive an action request, hidden within a link, within a google doc. "Create a welcome video for students and families for our virtual open house." The action request contains a due date (Noon on 9/23/2020), categories of information to be included, and suggested statements. These statements include: "Meals are available daily for pickup at several school sites;" "food boxes are available weekly;" and "School supplies were ordered for students and families, and we are awaiting their arrival. Currently, the supplies are on a ship in the South China Sea."

[September 17, 2020] Email - virtual learning incident
The headline "Distance Learning Incident" appears as a notification on my screen, after the end of the contract day. As a recipient (all staff_school building list), I am unsure whether to be relieved or horrified that "a parent was inappropriate with a student on camera," because "on camera" forces mandatory reporting (all licensed teachers are mandatory reporters by license, but the nuances of this action are expressed variously by practitioners). I am left with more questions than answers, such as "What does inappropriate mean in this context?" There is rumored to have been a gun involved. The incident occurred in kindergarten, in an unspecified classroom (as required by data privacy). Counseling is available for affected students and/or teachers.

Harper—Imagined & Unimagined Spaces

Unimagined Spaces: Taking Refuge

[*August-September 28, 2020*] Co-teaching and English Language Development Groups (online**)**

Teachers are asked to focus on social emotional learning (SEL) primarily, and academics secondarily as we enter the new school year in distance learning mode. For classroom teachers, there was a district imposition of Responsive Classroom® community building structures into the recommended elementary schedule: Morning meeting and closing circle (Davis & Kriete, 2014). As an English as a second language teacher, I attended the morning meetings of my cooperating classroom teachers and incorporated SEL-related content into my small group meetings with students.

I leaned into my healing arts background and made an offer to my grade level team: "I am certified in secular mindfulness for children, would you like for me to host weekly mindfulness experiences and group processing time during morning meetings?" I proceed to build small mindfulness decks in the Seesaw platform to share with my colleagues. I was not sure how this would be received by students, so it was an instructional experiment. Students described the experience as "restful," "calming," and "focusing". As students develop in their body-mind awareness, they started to describe sensations in their bodies, as well as sensory inputs they noticed in their environment when they quieted their minds and focused on breathing. To be clear, it is not quiet in the home environment. This indicates a growing awareness of and ability to use tools that allow students to control their alertness/agitation levels in spite of the environment. If that seems like a heavy lift for a child, understand that children do this quite naturally, all the time - zooming their attention in and out, favoring certain stimuli, blocking other messages out.

Through these interactions, I sensed that students needed an uplifting text, so I started the third grade English Language Development small group year with the mentor text *Hope is an Open Heart* by Lauren Thompson. The picture book features pictures of children who have experienced displacement, natural disaster, and other upheavals. It acknowledges the difficult feelings that come and go under hard conditions ("sad tears," "angry" and "scared words"), as well as the comforts of small familiarities ("mother's hand," "father's kiss," "strong arms around you"). From my ESL teacher lens, the book allows me to teach the figurative language structure of metaphor (the direct comparison of two things using "is"), and the multiple forms and uses of the word *hope* (its noun usage versus its verb usage). It also served an SEL function when we wrote our own version of the book based on students' lived experiences.

I was not prepared for the work I received from my students. Multiple students wrote variations of the same response: "Hope is the day we can go back to school." True to instructional life, one out of six samples uses the verb form of "hope" rather than the noun form which is central to metaphor structure: "I hope the Corona virus goes away so that we can go back to school."

Where We Go Next: Unearthing

As I consider my next instructional materials for fall 2020, I am acutely aware of the social and political unrest that has erupted into protests and incidents of police brutality in the communities surrounding school. I am also aware that it is a presidential election year, and that the sitting President of the United States is staking his reelection on a campaign of nationalism that demonizes and criminalizes immigrants and People of Color through extreme othering. The families I serve, like many families in the United States, may hold mixed immigration statuses. In the public

schools, we neither question nor record information about immigration, so I make this statement as a suspicion which is true for some, and not others, but which I will never seek to verify. I do not assume my students' parents can or will vote; and I know that regardless of their abilities to participate fully in the republic, the outcomes of this election are intensely important for their welfare as residents. So while I am watching the President of the United States attempt to curtail legal and humanitarian protections, I decide to open a window to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights through a picture book.

I introduce it simply as "our next book," reading aloud to students and pointing out the pictures as I go. No students initially volunteer that they have heard of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, however, part way through the reading, on the page that references World War II, a student interrupts,

Student: "Did this happen a long time ago?"
I pause my reading to clarify that the original real document was written in 1948, after World War II.
Student: "Yeah, I thought this happened a long time ago. Back then, everything was black and white."
My brain scanned quickly through the array of possible meanings for this statement, settling on the most concrete (because we are eight and nine years old in our class).
Me: "The pictures and movies we have from that time are mostly black and white, that's true."

Here are some other initial connections and comments my students made:

Text: *World War II was a time of war when a lot of people died, and some people lost their homes and families.*
Student: "Kinda like now."
Text: *Laws should be applied without bias, and all people have the right to be protected by the courts.*
Student: "Yeah but, in real life? Not really."
Me: "What do you remember from today's reading?"
Student: "You can leave a country and come back.

These connections suggest to me that several of my students recognize the statements in the UDHR as aspirational. The project of human rights education, as I understand it, means to advance public knowledge of human rights and their universal applicability, which can surface the distance between daily lived experience and the theory statements of nation-states. This awareness raising scheme is designed to empower. Will that be the effect of this unit on my students?

I acknowledge the ways in which the human rights and basic human dignity of my transnational, multilingual students are violated. I think of the macro and micro aggressions they endure, their surveillance and harassment by policing bodies at all levels of government, the fact that the U.S has not signed key international treaties (like the Convention on the Rights of the Child), and I wonder: Is human rights education value-creative and empowering, or is becoming acutely aware of human rights violations just disruptive? Or even ridiculous? Human rights are aspirationally universal, but humans are not afforded these rights as they are described on paper.

My students live surrounded by social unrest following the murder of George Floyd. Many of them had the stores in their neighborhoods burned or boarded up. They blame the protestors for these actions, because that is what they heard at home or on television.

  Student: "Black people burned down our stores."
 This crushes me. I am acquainted with some of the organizers of what came to be known as The Uprising. I know their work, their tactics. I watch the events unfold on the ground through their field reports and the media outlet Unicorn Riot on my social media feeds. My own thoughts went like this:
  Me: *Grabbing milk off the store shelf to treat acute tear gas poisoning? Yeah, sure. Arson? No, not arson.*

I received and validated my students' frustrations, and encouraged them to stay open to the possibility that more would be revealed about who actually set the fires.

[*October 12th, 2020*] 3rd grade social studies lesson, co-taught virtual classroom

 I was participating with my students in their social studies lesson. The classroom teacher introduced a lesson on laws, rights, and responsibilities. I was thrilled, thinking this would be an opportunity for my students to shine because we had been studying rights in the context of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The classroom teacher asked for examples of rights, so I attempted to prompt a connection back to our earlier lessons.

  Me*:* "Ms. Harper's students—we've been learning about rights, in our study of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Do you remember some of the rights that humans have, just because they are born?"
  Student 1: "Hope?" (our first topic of the year)
  Me: "We read about hope, that's true. Rights are different. Describing rights might sound like this: Everyone has the right to…"
  Student 2: "Rights are…everybody has the right to be kind to other people and help them out."
  Me: "Great example of a responsibility! Everyone has the responsibility to be kind and helpful."

Kindness as a right, a privilege, a responsibility: My students might be leading a kindness revolution. Perhaps human rights are a difficult exercise in abstraction, especially if they are a new idea, if affirmation of rights is not specifically part of your lived experience, and/or you're eight years old. Or perhaps my students do exactly understand rights in a way that is real and important to them.

Reality as Self-Generated Hologram

 This brings to mind something else I have been thinking: The pandemic and the murder of George Floyd have surfaced a disruption at the existential, perception-of-reality level. I'm not saying the phenomenon of blatant and systemic racism is new, or even that I was unaware of it before now, but reality itself appears more and more fragmented every day. There is a hypothesis

at the intersection of quantum science and spirituality, which describes perceived reality as a self-generated hologram (Eastwood, 2020; Nyland, 2019). I have never been more aware of the lack of overlap in perceptions of reality. Perhaps because of isolation and social media, I feel as if I am gaining a frightening level of insight into the diversity of holograms among my human co-creators. Some of these holograms are wonderful, some terrifying, each possessed of its own righteousness.

For example, a dear colleague died in the early days of COVID. She worked at a school across town, was on the school board of a nearby urban district, and was growing into community leadership. She got sick, was admitted to the hospital, then ICU, and never came out. That was spring 2020. This fall (2020), the forty-fifth President of the United States became ill with COVID. He reported mild symptoms, but was admitted to the hospital on a Friday, received experimental treatments and high-end drugs, was released Sunday and promptly held a press conference telling the American people not to fret over COVID-19. I fully believe that he believes those words, based on his lived experience. His entitlements and privileges as a White, male, head of state support and inform his holographic perception of "reality," but few other Americans will share his experiences or benefit from such a high-level medical response.

Meanwhile, Republican candidates from my state continue emphasizing that we should not allow the fake pandemic to rule our lives or curtail our activities. As a teacher, I am attuned to rhetoric that schools ought never have been closed, and that children should go back to in-person learning immediately. The rationale used for this declaration is that children are unlikely to experience complications, if they even become infected, which conservative lawmakers seem to be downplaying as a nod to their leadership. Whenever I hear these arguments, I think, "*When schools reopen, who do you think minds the children? Do you imagine school as the utopian counterpoint to Lord of the Flies?*" I mind the children—a fifty-one year old White woman with high blood pressure. Educational support professionals mind the children—who are predominantly Black, Brown, Indigenous and retired folks, and who so far in this pandemic, seem most likely to become ill.

This is a moment when I experience the intersectionality of a life at the Pre-K-5 end of education: Elementary school teaching was historically one of the few professions open to unmarried women. It is a position of great responsibility, less than adequate resources, and little status. In the neoliberal project of American capitalism, what I do and produce is my worth, and frankly, multiple factors limit my worth and worthiness.

Gay (1993) affirms that teachers tend not to have the same cultural frames of reference and points of view as their students because "they live in different existential worlds" (p.287). This is also the case between teachers and politicians. My holographic perception of infection risk is not shared by the conservative lawmakers of my state.

[*October 7, 2020*] Derek Chauvin, the former Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) officer charged with murdering George Floyd, was released from jail on a non-cash bond. The Governor activated the National Guard to keep the peace (Georgiades, 2020).

In late October 2020, an email was issued from the superintendent's office of my school district. He recommended a partial return to buildings for hybrid learning beginning November 9th, 2020. District officials had not yet completed the walkthroughs of buildings, which were advertised as data gathering activities to assess our readiness to transition to in-person learning. The county in which my school district is located has the highest number of COVID cases in the state. In bold print, the letter goes on to say that teachers will continue to instruct students via distance

learning. I try to decipher this riddle: *I'm a teacher, I'm going back to in person learning, but also teaching via distance learning. Does the new phase entail distance and in-person learning? Is in-person school to be provided by robots?* Details will follow. Have a nice weekend.

Central to this recommendation is the superintendent's stated belief that children need in-person learning, because learning happens primarily in school. I understand the allure of the level of control that underlies the equation in-person schooling equals learning. In person learning centralizes control *over*—teachers, students, curriculum—and in that way, best promotes the project of acculturation. Within this brave new world, is that the purpose of education? How does standardized instruction (which is largely generated from a White perspective) interact or inform, or better yet benefit, students who don't live that particular hologram? How can we normalize and incorporate multiple perspectives into our efforts to reach and teach?

A few years ago, my school started an ongoing collaboration with Dr. Juan Carlos Arauz and E3: Education, Excellence and Equity to reimagine our narratives about students and their strengths. Dr. Arauz posits that deficit narratives arise from assessing discrete skills out of context with incomplete data, or even assessing the wrong skills in general. He conceptualizes brilliance in terms of the skills of cultural resilience, and poses to educators the following questions:

INNOVATION: Can your students set goals that are both attainable and challenging?

ADAPTABILITY: Can your students use experiences to test multiple hypotheses?

CRITICAL ANALYSIS: Can your students synthesize information and prioritize results?

COMMUNICATION: Can your students persuade, reason, and write with their voice?

TEAMWORK: Can your students work successfully in diverse team settings?
(Arauz, 2010)

Variations of these skills have been identified elsewhere as twenty-first century skills. I worked throughout the pandemic with my English language development groups on helping students to self-identify the areas of brilliance they and their families possess based on the E3 IACCT model (innovation, adaptability, cross-cultural communication skills, critical analysis and teamwork). This was the opening activity for every English language development (ELD) small group, and we charted our collective progress on the walls of our virtual and in-person classrooms. The following slides demonstrate the process of teaching about and documenting student cultural resilience (Harper, 2022).

World Class Instructional Design and Assessment English language proficiency standards, which drive the work of English language development in my state, make clear that language learning occurs in a larger context than "the language of school" (WIDA, 2020). WIDA defines this climate as the sociocultural context. In the United States, the sociocultural context of multilingualism crosses multiple markers of status and belonging: Race, nationality, citizenship, monolingualism, and achievement expectations.

Learning Occurs in a Sociocultural Context

Figure 2-6: Dimensions of Language within a Sociocultural Context

Sociocultural Context

Discourse

Sentence

Word/Phrase
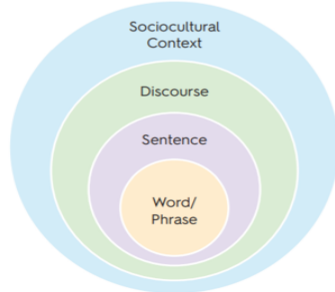
What is the sociocultural context in which multilingual learners operate at school?
- Systemic racism
- Implicit bias
- Xenophobia
- Linguistic Minoritization
- "The soft bigotry of low expectations." — Bush

In my state, students who are multilingual, identified as English learners, and have immigrant or refugee status are given one years' exemption from standardized testing. All other English learners are required to participate in the standardized testing of grade level requirements. So the IACCT activity, while intended primarily for social emotional learning purposes, must also fulfill my obligation to assist students in both English language development and meaningful access to grade level content. As such, I consider both Common Core ELA standards and WIDA Key Uses standards in how I position the lesson within my small group sessions.

By third grade, students become responsible for making arguments using a claim-evidence-reasoning discourse structure. One way for me to support students in developing comfort with this structure is to challenge them to utilize the structure with familiar, personal content. In this case, the content is a challenge to identify how they or their families demonstrate brilliance via the IACCT qualities (e.g., innovation, adaptability, cross-cultural communication skills, and/or teamwork) and then successfully conveying this thinking within the discourse structures of argument (e.g., claim, evidence, reasoning).

3rd Grade CCSS Standards

LANGUAGE
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.3.1.I
  Produce simple, compound, and complex sentences.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.3.5
  Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings.

SPEAKING, LISTENING, VIEWING, AND MEDIA
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.4
Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace.

Harper—Imagined & Unimagined Spaces

WIDA Key Uses (2020)

Argue

- State opinions or construct tentative claims and offer those in class discussions
- Recognize the difference between claims with and without support
- Offer observations to support opinions and claims
- Develop emerging research skills to use in constructing claims
- Begin to use data from observations as evidence for their claims

I taught the vocabulary of IACCT one concept/word at a time, taking advantage of intervals in which certain terms appeared in classroom content (innovation, in the engineering design cycle and social science, adaptability in our study of life science), taking special care to point out polysemy as it occurred. I never ask, "Do you know this word," because not to know something in some contexts and ages could be a stereotype threat trigger (Platts and Hoosier, 2020). I reframe word knowledge as "Have you heard this word before" in order to normalize word exposure. Occasionally, students will offer a cognate from Spanish. If it is not offered, I teach cognates during subsequent exposures, which increases student connectivity to English academic vocabulary.

Teaching Cultural Resilience Vocabulary
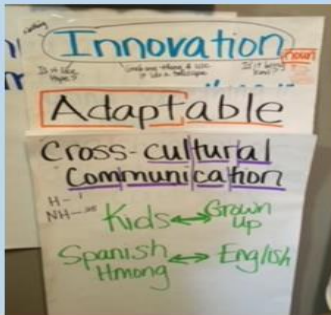
- Word
- "Say it with me/Read it with me"
- Repetition (7)
- Establishing familiarity (H/NH)
- Simple, student-friendly definition
- Use it in a sentence

Once the target word is taught, I issue the question for consideration "How do you, or your family members, show or demonstrate (insert target word)?" I then use language acquisition strategies, as needed, to support students in producing an English language reply (claim) with evidence and/or reasoning.

Levels of Questioning: "Since last time, how did you or your family demonstrate (IAACT)?"

- Total Physical Response (TPR)
- Point to
- Yes/No
- Choice question (either/or) "Is it an example of innovation or teamwork?"
- Fill in the word "Helping my mom with the dishes is an example of _____."
- Questions with a word bank of possible responses
- Questions that elicit a single word response
- Questions that elicit a short phrase
- Open ended questions

Additional scaffolds:
-Picture file cards
-Native language
-Peer support

Response Exemplars
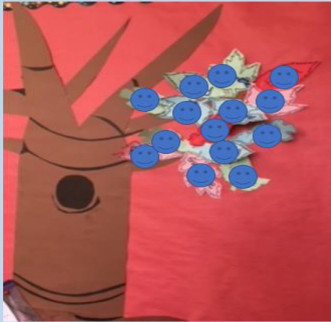
Student claim/evidence statement: "I demonstrated (IACCT word) by (action/activity)."

Teacher prompt: "How is (action/activity) an example of (IACCT word)?"

Student reasoning statement: "(Action/activity is an example of (IACCT word) because _____..."

When a student is able to identify an example, construct and share a claim with evidence and/or reasoning, they get a leaf on which to write their name. The leaves are then collected and added to our cultural resilience tree. In distance learning, I filled out the leaves and added them to the tree. When we returned to school, students completed and placed their own leaves. Because the nature of my service to students is language development, their contributions, however partial or complete, are embraced and welcomed. Partial answers (single words or phrases) are supported to completion through sentence frames and "I say, you repeat" sequences.

Harper—Imagined & Unimagined Spaces

Language Development Over Time

First 2 months: All examples were teamwork.
By winter break, students could use "teamwork" and "innovation."
It took 6 months to get students to consider multilingualism ("cross-cultural comm. skills") an asset.
By March, students were adding adaptability ("adaptable").
By April, a student asked "Teacher, what's that analysis one?"

Fievre (2019) suggests that teachers can create the conditions of safety in their classroom through the micro-affirmation behaviors of attending and active listening. Both language support and asset-based self assessment are different from micro-affirmations, but they also have validating effects. Twice to three times a week, students identified and affirmed their own and their families' brilliance. It's no accident that it took students a long time to think of multilingualism as an asset; that speaks to the sociocultural context of both school and life in the United States. But we got there. A few brave students even worked out how to use "critical analysis" as a way to describe their brilliance. Our tree filled out such that by the end of the year, the bulletin board in my classroom was flush with beautiful leaves. Students reflected at the end of the year, "Wow! Look how smart we are! Look how much we learned! We are pretty brilliant."

The "learning loss" narrative would have me focus on the reading and math skills of students at a time of social unrest and public health emergency. But the pandemic further highlights that resilience-based competences—like innovation, adaptability, cross-cultural communication skills, critical analysis and teamwork—are exactly the skills youth need to cultivate in order to solve the problems we are facing. How can my students be deficient, given their substantial cultural resilience capital?

(Harper, 2020)

The Function of School

There is, in any conversation, what is said and what is not said. Are the unsaid nuances of the conversation about distance versus in-person schooling really about the child care functionality of school, which should not be confused with learning? Early on in the pandemic, there was grave concern over the potential loss of access to the technical social fixes provided by school—food, health care (both physical and mental), child care. Even in distance learning, five days per week child care was extended to medical/emergency first responders, and food boxes that contained a week's worth of breakfasts and lunches were distributed to any family who needed school to feed their children. If the value of schools to society is in the distribution of the materials that occupy the largest blocks of Maslow's hierarchy of human need (Maslow, 1943), then I wonder, are public schools the safety net capable of sustaining the future?

If the function of public schools is acculturation and subjugation of children into middle class, White ideals, we get high marks for our in-person efforts. However, that project falls apart outside the school building. I wonder if it is these control functions—which by their nature are authoritarian, dehumanizing, and disrespectful of the multiple cultures, languages and perceptual realities that exist within any school's stakeholder groups—that most contribute to our climate and culture issues, discipline disparities, and opportunity differences? If so, then does the pandemic offer an opportunity to advance educational equity? Conversely, if things soldier on absent conscious collective effort and dialogue, we may witness the further resegregation of learning spaces. This would be an unfortunate but predictable achievement for a mid-sized city where de facto segregation is the unofficial standard, and student achievement and graduation rates are predictable based on race. How might the present currents of social unrest contribute to an expansion of school priorities and valuing?

Reflecting Disruptions as Potentials and Questions for Further Consideration

I question the narratives that emerge in the media of "learning loss." The discourse is too familiar, as deficit thinking is identified as a prevalent mindset for the teachers of America's children (Delpit, 2006). I'm unclear what "learning loss" means, because it seems predicated on the idea that everything was fine before students were out of school for one to two years. Untrue in my area, where many students were behind grade level expectations before the pandemic. Look at the achievement data of any district pre-2020 and I venture that you will find similar evidence. So instead, I would pivot the conversation to how schools demonstrated brilliance, offer areas for values clarification, and surface questions for further dialogue.

Creative disruptions found opportunity during COVID. These disruptions represent my experience of the unimagined spaces of teaching and learning from my "personal, local and immediate" vantage point (Singleton & Curtis, 2006). I also believe that these spaces indicate possibilities beyond "returning to normal" for public schools.

The school: From brick and mortar to virtual spaces and platforms - SeeSaw, google classroom, google meets. What are the untapped potentials of asynchronous learning on demand? How might asynchronous teaching create space for more Black, Brown, and Indigenous teachers through making efficient, accessible use of elders and community resources?

In fall 2022, I visited a school and had the opportunity to examine their beginning of the year math and reading data and I noticed something interesting. The baseline scores of the incoming kindergarten class were higher (cumulative, as a cohort) than the scores of any other grade level in the building. Might the conditions of remote schooling of older siblings have had a net positive effect on school readiness and background knowledge for the SY23 kindergarten class? Is this a byproduct of more time with and exposure to caregivers?

The school day: Even while teachers were asked to provide a structure that mirrored the school day, students and families participated in school in a variety of ways - some students attended scheduled classes and groups, others completed posted assignments to the best of their ability without group attendance or with sporadic attendance. One colleague, a physical education teacher, posted short demonstration lessons on TikTok as a way to engage students where they are, rather than demanding a controlled space and time for learning. How might accessible, on demand platforms be utilized more widely for academic pursuits? How might the school day be reimagined to capture more students while accommodating a variety of schedules and needs?

Attendance: School is a compulsory activity, and as such, truancy is a violation of law in my state, which blows back inconveniences and effects on parents. When school is in person, attendance is fairly straightforward - a student is in physical attendance or they are not. In the unimagined transition to virtual school, attendance has come to entail making one's presence known in any capacity: Attending one meeting or group in a day is attendance. Completing any assignments is attendance. A phone call or text message is attendance. In this sense, attendance has morphed from seat time into touch point. How might these touchpoints be utilized as coaching opportunities in support of learning? How might the location, timing, and availability of schooling serve families' needs and wants in more expansive ways?

Currently, school attendance requirements vary state to state. While the state in which I practice defines compulsory education by age (ages seven to seventeen), programming is offered from cradle to adulthood through formal and informal channels. Fifteen states end compulsory education requirements at age sixteen, and only eleven states begin compulsory education at age five (NCES, 2018). Depending on whether or not a state has truancy laws, compulsory may or may not have accountability means. What might universal kindergarten mean for students and families? How might states accommodate families who need students to earn income while also providing more options for career readiness? How might time and instructional efficiencies allow secondary students additional choices?

Grading: In the early days of virtual schooling, my colleagues teaching at the middle school level kept elaborate spreadsheets that monitored work completion. Meaning, if you completed assignments, you were rewarded high marks. These marks divorced themselves from notions of academic standards, mastery of concepts, or applications of knowledge. In the days when schooling was preparation for factory work, this type of assessment of persistence might have tracked some sort of continuum of development from childhood to factory-readiness. Grades for individual work, from a culture perspective, reinforce the White cultural archetypes of individualism, meritocracy, and competitive achievement (Hammond, 2015). Is that the education that is most relevant today? How might the disruption of the pandemic impress upon schools the value of skills not normally assessed that are essential for work life today - skills like innovation, adaptability, critical analysis, cross-cultural communication, and teamwork (Arauz, 2010)? How might systems reconceive attainment from an individual pursuit to both collective and individual measures?

Play: A colleague despaired that our students, outside of school, have no place to play during the lockdown. In my encounters with students through small groups and morning meetings in four classrooms, I find students adapting to virtual play spaces by sharing gaming handles and entering into virtual building projects. I discovered that a triad has developed in one of my classes, who are building together in an online, gamified maker space. I propose that this conversation demonstrates teamwork (three students working together toward a collective goal of building on the Roblox platform).

> **Student 1:** "What should we make next? Maybe we should make a unicorn."
> **Student 2:** "I think we should make a cat."
> **Student 3:** "I know! We can make a unicorn cat."
> **Student 1:** "A cat-i-corn!"
> **Student 2:** "YEAH!"

Students collaborate quite naturally toward their own goals and purposes. How might this creative, collaborative tendency be utilized in classrooms as a routine condition for learning?

Unimagined Space: An Historic Practitioner's Recommendations

It's time to reimagine the goals of school. I offer for consideration the model of a Japanese theorist and educator, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944). Makiguchi stated that transfer of knowledge is not and can never be education's purpose (Bethel, 1989, p. 6). Based on the inability of schools to equitably prepare students, or even come to consensus[1] on the wh-criteria (who, what, when, where, why, and how) for essential content, this admonition is sensible. Given that diversity and variation creates a massive web of values, histories and potential futures, all of society, including the family and immediate community, must contribute to the knowledge transfer and organization process for its developing children. Makiguchi held education, aside from knowledge transfer, as a guiding and facilitation process that repeatedly re-centers the responsibility for learning back to students (Bethel, 1989, p. 6). In his model, school is the adventure outfitter store (e.g., the REI or Midwest Mountaineering) of the life-long learning journey: Students come to school for tips, tricks, and equipment, but climb the mountain themselves, on their own time and route, or pursue other avenues of knowledge transfer, according to their own and their families interests. I'm not advocating uneven access (which arguably we have now); I am advocating expanded options that value home and community funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, et al., 1995). This seems strange as I write it, and yet, it is clear that there is no "one size" of education, and that this already occurs naturally without intentionality on the part of educational systems.

In accepting that the nature of all life, including human society, is diversity and variation; it makes sense that within the social framework of a family or community, there would be various educational needs, roles, and desires. In order to meet these needs, Makiguchi proposed that home, school and community make specific contributions to learner development. As such, he advocated for half-day schooling, and half day community or home-based learning that centered on vocational and life skills. Made in response to marginalized, disaffected, and/or disengaged learners in his own time, Makiguchi's proposal finds an eerie resonance with the current emergency models

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1. I acknowledge that the Common Core State Standards are an attempt at shared understanding of essential content, and that these standards are neither universal (not all states utilize them) nor valued equally among school stakeholders.

of hybrid and online learning. His model is not based on the assumption that more schooling is more learning. The consideration of Makiguchi's educational philosophy and recommendations is that learning is always present, as it resides within the interests and motivations of the learner. He envisioned, as an aspiration of schools, the achievement of a maximum economy of both teachers' efforts expended in teaching and children's efforts in learning (Makiguchi, 1981–1988). When forced into the less than ideal conditions of emergency online learning, schools and families were challenged to imagine and actualize new levels of economy in K-12 teaching and learning. As we enter the next phase, what innovations and adaptations might be intentionally woven into the fabric of post-pandemic schooling?

Reflection, Non-Closure

Glenn Singleton writes that when exiting a conversation that directly addresses race and racialization, one must expect and accept non-closure (Singleton & Linton, 2006). These reflections are as true to my lived holographic reality as I can make them, colored by positionality and memory. As I reflect on these perspectives, I am struck by their dichotomies: The unimagined spaces, uncovered and/or co-created during this formative time; and the places imagined and experienced, but dissimilarly perceived amongst participants.

The longer I work in public schools, the more I experience a sense that schools serve the function of child containment over educative development. This feeling has been re-enforced by the push from some parents and school officials for a return to in-person learning before vaccines are universally available. As a parent, I understand the difficulties of working from home while simultaneously managing children. As a former latch-key kid, I can also appreciate parents who don't want their children to be home without supervision. Yet there exists here, too, previously unimagined spaces. One example comes from a recent commentary in the New York Times, from a Black parent who declared that her child would not return to school to be a target for racially predictable discipline disparities. In distance learning, her eighth grader has found ways to control her exposure to negative tropes and racial microaggressions, ways that are unique to the virtual classroom (Anderson, 2020). School is neither a safe nor empowering space for this student. Sit with that, while simultaneously sitting with the large scale inability of school bureaucracies to predictably create the conditions of safety for children, youth, or adults.

As I return to the in-person classroom, I reconsider context and holographic reality. I find myself deeply questioning the function of schooling for the community I serve. One aspect is the container, as in-person schools provide childcare. Another purpose is knowledge transfer, which might be supported by standards attainment, if schooling resulted in outcomes that were less predictable by racial and economic status markers. Knowledge transfer, as a goal in itself, requires neither proximity nor synchronous instruction. But the voices of my students from our co-created classroom book ring loud and true in my head: "Hope is when we get to go back to school." Such as it is, there is something available here in peer friendships, comradery, and interest, that deeply meets the developmental needs of my students. In their third grade holographic reality, the brightest imagined future is co-created through highly structured days in brick and mortar containers. Let this current pause recommit me to hold myself, my colleagues, and my system able to do better as we strive to construct a way forward with our communities.

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Making a Case for Exemplary Principal Leadership for Racial Equity

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Abstract

The concurrent crises of climate change, a pandemic, and social unrest have laid bare systemic inequities in our economic, health, education, and criminal justice institutions that negatively impact people of color. School leaders face unprecedented challenges as they navigate these dilemmas and are compelled to address the implicit biases and resulting behaviors and policies responsible for the opportunity gaps in their schools. A path to equitable educational opportunities for all students in an era beset with compounding crises can begin with a new focus on character and virtues to provide a framework for right action. This prioritization of character and virtues dates back to nineteenth-century American educator Horace Mann, who asserted that the goal of public education should be to instill character and civic virtue. Our proposition that the philosophical analysis of character and virtue can be an effective framework for leading for educational equity is followed by an example of how this form of advocacy is utilized by a school principals' group founded in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the "Good Trouble Principals."

Keywords: educational inequities, principal leadership, virtue ethics, exemplarist virtue theory, moral theory, critical race theory

Introduction

In less than a decade, the crises of climate change, a global pandemic, and social unrest in response to police killings of Blacks in the United States have intersected to uncover systemic inequities in our economic, health, education, and criminal justice systems with undeniable transparency. Since climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic have a disproportionately negative impact on people of color and low-income families, children and youth of color carry a greater risk of home displacement, physical and mental health issues, and impaired cognitive functioning (Mann et al., 2020). Impacts of climate change, including periods of extreme heat, add "another layer of vulnerability to communities that are already burdened by historic and disproportionate pollution, poverty, political powerlessness, and unequal health access and quality of care" (American Public Health Association, 2021; White-Newsome, 2016), the same circumstances that resulted in these communities suffering more cases and deaths from Covid-19 (Centers for Disease Control, 2021). Police shootings traumatize children and college-age youth, resulting in lower academic achievement, missed days from school, and dropping out (Campbell & Valera, 2020; Redman, 2020; Ang, 2020). For example, Ang's (2020) study found that "on average, each officer-involved killing in the [southwestern U.S.] County caused three students of color to drop out of high school" (p. 4).

This convergence of crises challenges school leaders to address the foundational inequities in their buildings and communities with urgency and creativity as they navigate an environment impeded by implicit bias and its effects.

A strategy for leading for educational equity in these turbulent times can be framed around a process of emulating the character and virtues of exemplary leaders to define right action. This focus, applied to principal-led activism designed and organized around the safe space of an online community, introduces a new perspective for school leadership. Turning to character and virtues as hallmarks of leadership harkens back to nineteenth-century American educator Horace Mann, who established the idea that the aim of public education should be to instill character and civic virtue "rather than mere learning or the advancement of sectarian ends" (Cubberly, 1934, p. 167).

We propose that the philosophical analysis of character and virtue can contribute to effective advocacy for educational equity and offer an example of how this is put in practice by a school principals' group launched in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Inspired by the late U.S. Representative John Lewis, one of the nation's leading civil rights activists who famously referred to social justice work as getting into "good trouble, necessary trouble" (Hayden, 2020), Minnesota's "Good Trouble Principals'" (Good Trouble Principals, 2020) advance a set of principles and directives for dismantling systemic racism in education. For these leaders, John Lewis is an *exemplar*, defined in Zagzebski's (2017) exemplarist moral theory as someone to be admired because of the character traits they have acquired through their life, cause, or actions they take. According to this theory, as a society, we are especially drawn to admire the moral excellence of those who act for the benefit of others. The emotion of admiration then triggers a desire to emulate what we know to be good: "Admiration of exemplars can serve as a psychological force to (a) get agreement within a community about the identification of negative and positive duties and (b) motivate persons to act on their duty" (Zagzebski, 2017, p. 208). The Good Trouble Principals define their duty through a four-part action platform consisting of (a) de-centering Whiteness, (b) eliminating practices that "reinforce White academic superiority", (c) reconstructing "school" to revamp business-as-usual practices, and (d) speaking truth to power (Good Trouble Principals, 2020). This article explores how exemplarist moral theory is actionalized by principals who created a safe space for fortifying their advocacy for equitable education inspired by the work and example of John Lewis.

Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical frames address the negative impact of systemic inequities in our institutions, including education. Combined, they reveal their correlative aim toward a more just society. These are the exemplarist virtue theory and critical race theory.

Each of the converging crises listed in the introduction has in common inequalities that weigh the heaviest on the lives of non-white students. Consequently, educational leaders are faced with addressing deep-rooted implicit bias and its effects on learning and growing. To counter the convergence of crises, a confluence of social justice and what we identify as virtue ethics are practiced in the advocacy for equitable education by the Good Trouble Principals. In her prodigious work on the ethics of race, Zack (2011) upholds that "ethics today remains a powerful contribution to human equality and social justice" (p.4).

Virtue Ethics

Virtue ethics, focusing on character and virtues, is now included with deontology and utilitarianism as the three prime ethical approaches (Hursthouse, 1999, Hursthouse & Pettigrove, 2018). Virtue ethics is about human nature and how a person wants to live (Grant et al., 2017). "Virtue ethics aims to specify what constitutes a good human life" (Aristotle, Taylor, 2006, p. xxii).

Hursthouse (1999) explains the three approaches within moral philosophy. Deontology is about duty and rules. Utilitarianism claims that an action is right if it promotes happiness for the greater good. Virtue ethics focuses on *being* and connects the practice of good habits with an individual's character traits. The other two methods also consider virtues in their theories, but should not be confused with virtue ethics. The difference is these theories stem from the relative lack of attention philosophers of deontology and utilitarianism give to virtues in their approaches (Hursthouse & Pottigras, 2018). It is important to note that moral theories explain what makes an action right or wrong and outline what virtuous people ought to do in various situations. When moral theories are about duties, they primarily answer the question, "what should I do?" While knowing what to do is critical, having moral virtues makes us care to do the right thing. Virtues are characteristics that help us decide how to be or behave (Sommers, 2001).

When it comes to climate change, an environmental ethics study conducted by Morrison, et al., (2018) found:

> Relationality, interconnectedness, and contextual thinking allow virtue ethics to encompass environmental issues with a degree of flexibility unavailable through the application of utilitarianism or deontology. Through acknowledging our personal relationship, and our role within the environment, virtue ethics builds on a foundation which recognizes the intrinsic value of nature, and our profound reliance on its wellbeing. (p. 6)

The same can be said of how virtue ethics builds on our profound reliance on the wellbeing of humanity. Where there is race-based inequality, the concern needs to be about correcting *injustice* (Zach, 2011):

> People can peacefully agree all day long about what constitutes just or ethical behavior regarding race, but that in itself will not guarantee justice in reality. This is why it is possible to have a society with written, legal, formal justice, and widespread real-life injustice. Indeed, it is when injustice is identified as such that controversy, anger, and mindless rage results. (p. xi)

In the *Global Sustainable Development Report* (2019), global climate change is addressed as an ethical matter linked to inequalities:

> There is now consensus—based on robust empirical evidence—that high levels of inequalities not only raise difficult issues for social justice but also lower long-term economic growth and make such growth more fragile. Inequalities also tend to become entrenched through the efforts of those at the very top to secure and perpetuate their positions through various channels, such as having a greater say in the political process. (p. 25)

Corral-Verdugo et al.(2021) in *The Virtues of Sustainability* state:

> Character strengths and virtues are currently considered traits that may serve the purpose of sustainable development. Promoting the conditions that facilitate the prosocial and environmental use of character strengths and virtues should be imperative in every community and culture throughout the world. (p. 48)

Critical Race Theory

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017), critical race theory (CRT) began as a framework in the 1970s as recognition that the gains of the civil rights movement of the 1960s were dormant or being turned back. The theory was rooted in critical legal studies and radical feminism and drew from American liberation thinkers like W.E.B. Du Bois and postmodern philosophies as well as the Black Power and Chicano movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Critical race theory has extended beyond a legal framework to inform research and understanding in education, sociology, and other fields. The five basic tenets of critical race theory observe that:

> a) racism is the normal state of affairs in society, the usual and ordinary way things work and the everyday experience of people of color;
> b) racist policies, laws, and other circumstances do not change unless there is an "interest convergence" in which Whites recognize such change will result in a benefit for themselves, in other words, be in their best interest;
> c) race is a social construct with no biological basis;
> d) "intersectionality" recognizes that our layered identities impact our experiences; being both Black, and a woman, for example, faces different kinds of discrimination than being both White and a woman, or being Black, and a man;
> e) Black, American Indian, Asian, and Latinx people have experiences with oppression that give them a "unique voice of color," a definitive competence in communicating about race and racism that White people do not possess (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

The spring and summer of 2020 brought a new challenge beyond Covid 19 and social unrest—a widespread attack on critical race theory carried out across the nation predominantly at school board meetings due to a lack of understanding and knowledge about the theory (Waxman, 2021; McTighe, 2021; Sawchuk, 2021). Misleading information based on fear, misdirected anger, distrust, and willful ignorance can all too easily become believed lies or a "disruption to education" (McTighe, 2021, para. 2; Sawchuk, 2021, para. 32). Moody-Adams (1999) describe affected ignorance and its large-scale impact:

> Affected ignorance is a common accompaniment of wrongdoing. It is essentially a matter of choosing not to be informed of what we can and should know…Even our most deeply held convictions may be wrong. But it is also common for human beings to avoid or deny this possibility…The main obstacle to moral progress in social practices is the tendency to widespread affective [willful] ignorance of what can and should already be known." (p. 301, 180)

As the CRT controversy advances, Texas and other states are setting strict guidelines about what can be taught in public schools. House Bill 3979, the Texas law passed in May 2021, dictates how teachers talk to their students about current affairs and the country's history of racism. A test to this law came during a routine professional development session in which teachers were warned to "balance" books about the Holocaust by also providing books that share the opposite view. After a story broke about this interpretation of the law, a district official issued a statement clarifying that the comments at the session "were in no way to convey that the Holocaust was anything less than a terrible event in history. Additionally, we recognize there are not two sides of the Holocaust" (Hixenbaugh & Hylton, 2021).

Philosophical Analysis of Character and Virtue

A philosophical analysis of character and virtue that can contribute to effective advocacy for educational equity begins with the growing number of human sciences interested in cultivating an understanding of the advantages of living virtuously (Hursthouse & Pettigrove, 2018). Biglan et al. (2020) assert that the collective documentation of research from these sciences is a validation of what is needed for humanity to flourish and counter the inequities and crises our society faces. Character education, moral education, and more recently, virtue education are the subject of much research in this regard (Clement & Bollinger, 2016).

Virtue ethics is about human nature and how a person wants to live (Grant et al., 2017), rather than the morality of right versus wrong. Virtue ethics focuses on an individual's character and virtues. Virtues have been defined as "one's potential. It is that which enables us to become who we really are" (Solomon, 1999, p. 69). Defining character [and virtue] with consensus across fields of study has been argued and discussed since the Ancient Greeks laid their foundations (Clement & Bollinger, 2016). Mitchell (2015) finds:

> Character cannot be separated from the person. Virtue is an aid in this; it is the act of good character. Growing in the virtues, especially prudence (knowing what to seek and what to avoid) forms good character. What is at stake is the integrity of the person. (p. 149)

Ways of acting/being are not virtue traits by themselves. Our attitudes, emotions, what we value, our dispositions, beliefs, and mental states are all part of the fabric of our character (Goodwin et al., 2015; Mitchell, 2015). When it comes to educational leadership, Berkowitz (2020) teaches the concept of *being* by stating the importance of leading by example so others will emulate the character they see in you.

In a study of how virtues motivate principals specifically (Eisenschmidt et al., 2019), it was found that when principals live into their values, moral virtues generate purpose for ethical leadership in their work. "The principals in this study can be said to exemplify ethical leadership" as shown in their interaction with teachers, students, families, and the community (p. 443). This study concluded that virtue motivated principals' work toward solutions to challenges in a "morally sustainable way" (p. 444).

Leaders, such as principals, are role models and exemplars when their actions are seen as important (van de Ven, et al., 2019) and therefore, admired. In turn, admiration generates a feeling of inspiration in the admirer to raise the bar in their own character, in a sense of "self-expansion" (Schindler, et al., 2015, p. 305).

Exemplarist Theory

The exemplarist virtue theory (Zagzebski, 2010) is based on the emotion of admiration of an exemplar, which leads the person to emulate the virtues and character traits the exemplar displays. The concept of admiration dates back to Aristotle's use of the word *kalan,* which translates to "the admirable" (Miller, 2011). The *kalan* thus functions as the goal (*telos*) of the virtuous person, whose characteristic motivation is to act "for the sake of the admirable" (*E.N. III.7, III5b12-13; E.E. III.I2, 123oa28-29).* Moral motivation—that which causes us to engage in the practice of ethical action, is at the heart of the exemplarist theory. We learn through imitation. Our emotion of admiration naturally draws us to good persons, defined as exemplars. Through our admiration, we are led to want to imitate that which we admire (Zagzebski, 1996). As we each develop morally, we become more capable of improving our imitation and becoming like those we admire. The traits that make a person morally good are virtues.

In developing the exemplarist virtue theory, Zagzebski (2010) described moral theory as a complex domain that contains many theories created to simplify understanding and justify moral practice while giving us guidance that leads to improvement. Her interest is in explaining morality at a level that leads from the abstract to influence practice through the "imagination of ordinary people" (p. 44), not just moral philosophers. Several authors have written in the realm of personal goodness with ordinary people in mind (Miller, 2018; Quinn, 2000; Brooks, 2015; Popov, 1997; Tuan, 2008; Haidt, 2006, 2012; Bennett, 1993). Zagzebski points out there are non-moral exemplars with natural talents (like musicians and artists) whose talents we cannot imitate. We can, however, admire and imitate their virtuous acts like striving and humility.

In exemplarism, Zagzebski (2013) explains, it is good to start imitating character traits (the virtues) of someone slightly better than us at whatever it is we admire in them. Then, once we understand our own moral motives and our actions' consequences, we imitate the exemplar's behaviors. There are many ways a person can be good and admirable but not imitable. Zagzebski (2013) uses the example of admiring an explorer who went to the South Pole in 1912. Although she admired him, she had no interest in imitating him. Instead, she "wanted to be the kind of person who could do such a thing" (p. 201).

The exemplarist theory differs from most virtue theories. Zagzebski (2013) believes a moral theory needs to include definitions of concepts from all three normative ethics theories (Kantian deontology, Utilitarianism, Aristotelian virtue theory). She defines these concepts as:

- A *virtue* is a trait we admire in an admirable person. It is a trait that makes the person paradigmatically good in a certain respect.
- A *right act* in some set of circumstances C is what the admirable person would take to be most favored by the balance of reasons in circumstances C.
- A *good outcome* is a state of affairs at which admirable person's aim.
- A *good life* (a desirable life, a life of well-being) is a life desired by admirable persons. (p. 202)

Zagzebski (2013), MacIntyre (2007), and Engelen et al. (2018) see narrative ethics and stories as critical to inspiring moral insight and attracting attention to the importance of ethical practice. Moral learning is done mainly through stories and helps us identify exemplars. The exemplarist theory provides a structure to learn—the narratives are the substance. It is through the personal reflection of stories that we can revise our views as well. Engelen et al. (2018) report that

relatable stories about exemplars that produce an emotional response are best at promoting prosocial behavior.

Being prosocial includes possessing values, attitudes, and ways of being that are good for those we are around. Being prosocial contributes to the well-being of others when we are kind, supportive, cooperative, show interest, are appreciative, and virtuous in our behaviors. The movement from helping ourselves to benefiting others is a highly valued prosocial behavior and a marker of well-being (Biglan et al., 2020; Thomson & Siegel, 2013; Diessner et al., 2013; Vianello et al., 2010; Algo & Haidt, 2009). Studies indicate that people will choose prosocial values when they are free to select their own values rather than those handed down to them (Biglan et al., 2020; Gagné, 2003.)

Van de Ven et al. (2019) further support the role admiration has in inspiring people. Schindler et al. (2015) concur that those who admire others tend to seek higher standards for themselves. Schindler et al. (2013) describe admiration as having to keep our values and ideals in mind as we choose how to behave in situations that require the use of the traits we most value. Additionally, internal motivation drives development toward the person we strive to become—our best self. Thrash and Elliot (2004) discussed that being *inspired by* often leads to being *inspired to* do or to be. Archer's (2019) findings substantiate the connection between admiration, as an emotion, and the resulting motivation: "On my account, admiration leads to a desire to promote the values we admire in the object of our admiration" (p. 148).

In the many disciplines interested in virtue ethics, debates in literature worldwide have recently increased regarding Zagzebski's (2010, 2013, 2017) exemplarist theory (Szutta, 2019; Vaccarezza 2020; Vos, 2018; Marchetti 2018). Kristjansson (2020) refers to the interest in moral exemplars as "the hottest ticket in town, with major contributions from within moral philosophy, moral psychology, moral education, and even popular trade books" (p. 350).

Several references advocate for exemplars and/or admiration. Van de Ven et al. (2018) (psychology), Kristjansson (2017) (education), and Algo & Haidt (2009) (positive psychology) claim that (the emotion) elevation is a form of admiration (Haidt, 2003). Van de Ven et al. (2019) found that those who felt motivated to better themselves were most moved to do so after admiring another's behavior and judging it to be of importance.

Vos (2018), a theologian, and Kristjansson (2017), an education scholar, are among many who argue for learning not only from the exemplar but from the "virtuous qualities displayed by them" (Vos, p. 26).

In contrast to theories that posit exemplars in a role model approach, Levinson (2017) finds that even family members and ordinary people we know from our neighborhood can be greater motivators than those who stand out as exceptional. Hoyos-Valdes (2018) argues in favor of close friendships as role models who help nurture virtue. This is due to the knowledge friends have of the values and behaviors of those they are closest to. In this way, friends become models to emulate. Additionally, there is intrinsic value within oneself to be the person our admired friend sees in us. This "character friendship" (p. 68) provides ongoing practice of engagement in becoming or realizing our best potential.

Kristjansson (2020) agrees with Hoyos-Valdes (2018) that the "raison d'etre of character friendship is mutual character development" (p.361). At the same time, Kristjansson is not opposed to role-model education based on admiration and emulation. He articulates the origin of the term "character friendship" thoroughly as Aristotle's definition of a kind of deep friendship and how

that may be more influential in cultivating moral growth for oneself and the good of one's community than moral role modeling through emulating exemplars. Kristjansson employs Aristotle's (1915) definition of a character friend as "another self":

> When we wish to see our own face, we do so by looking into the mirror, in the same way when we wish to know ourselves, we can obtain that knowledge by looking at our friend. For the friend is, as we assert, a second self. (p. 1213a: 15-23).

John Lewis is an *exemplar* for the Good Trouble Principals as he fits the definition in Zagzebski's (2017) exemplarist moral theory as someone to be admired because of the character traits they have acquired through their life, cause, or actions they take.

John Robert Lewis

The late U.S. Representative John Robert Lewis, born in 1940 in Troy, Alabama, was drawn to the Southern preachers who inspired him during his formative years. Vos (2015) observed that we admire exemplars also for the "virtuous qualities displayed by them" (p. 26). Louis admired the qualities of one such preacher, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. King was a man who believed in non-violence and the ideal of the "Beloved Community," a community committed to inclusion and respect for the humanity of its people, a community that would not tolerate hate, divisiveness nor injustice:

> King's Beloved Community is a global vision for all of humanity, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth, where poverty, hunger, and homelessness will not be tolerated, where racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry, and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood because international standards of human decency will not allow anything differently. (The King Center, n.d.)

Dr. King, whom John Lewis tried to emulate, died after preaching at a Black Church in Memphis, Tennessee, about the plight of sanitation workers in Memphis. Lewis was also influenced by Rosa Parks, the slightly built Black woman who refused to give up her seat at the front of the bus for a White passenger. Her refusal led to one of the largest protests, as people refused to use public transportation. Her use of the term "good trouble" led John Lewis to say, "It is important to get into good trouble, necessary trouble." John Lewis, in his commitment to serving his community and bringing his country to a "Beloved" state, was admirable. Lewis himself was injured during what was supposed to be a peaceful march from Selma to Montgomery by way of the Edmund Pettus Bridge. He sustained head fractures from the police, and throughout his lifetime named others, mostly Black men, who lost their lives to police violence.

Before critical race theory was formulated by legal scholars in the 1970s, John Lewis understood the CRT theme that racism is permanent and ordinary, having lived through and observed the role that race played in education, policing, housing, and employment. He saw American society permeated with injustices that compelled him to take up the mantle of King and Parks and get into good trouble, necessary trouble, because nothing else would change and move us toward the Beloved Community.

Johnson & Schweitz—Making a Case

Emulation is the highest level of flattery, yet John Lewis had no self-interest. He was not doing this work for his own gratification, but his was a sacrifice for the good of the entire community. Correspondingly, the Good Trouble Principals don't seek self-gratification, but rather a way of being that has proven effective over the decades for civil rights activists. These principals join local Minneapolis leaders like Sondra Samuels, CEO of the Northside Achievement Zone, and her husband, Don Samuels, former Mpls city council and MPS board member who focus their educational advocacy for students of color on collaboration in the spirit of moving beyond self.

The Black Lives Matter movement and George Floyd's death have raised the volume of the alarm about how racism and discrimination are still alive and well. Through social media and mainstream news, leaders express shock at the deep injustices that are commonplace in the lives of Blacks. Yet for Blacks, this has been their lived experience every day (Morris, 2020).

Good Trouble Principals: Standing Up for Students of Color

The Black Lives Matter movement and George Floyd's death created the impetus to take up the mantle of publicly denouncing inequities caused by racism. Although racism is nothing new, the call for leadership to take action now rings louder than ever (Morris, 2020). Because all societal issues eventually land at the front doors of their schools, school leaders are charged with discovering, developing, and practicing ways to address the foundational inequities in their buildings and communities.

The Good Trouble Principals (GTP) describe themselves as a "loose collection of diverse Minnesotan principals bound together by a commitment to changing our nation's future by engaging in better, more equitable educational practices" (GTP, 2021a, para. 3). As shown in Figure 1, the majority of members are White and female (GTP, 2021b). Though they are diverse and work in different contexts, they found a common purpose to unify them.

Table 1

Demographics of Good Trouble Principals

Number of Members	Gender	Race	District Type
160	Female: 105	White: 138	Urban: 94
	Male: 55	Black: 13	Suburban: 63
	Other: 8	Rural: 3	

Note: Demographics gathered from follow-up identification of Good Trouble Principals' signatures

The GTP describe their site as a gathering place, a safe place to rest among like-minded leaders where convictions about educational justice in our country can be fortified and views of education as a transformative social force can be reinforced. Two mission-driven individuals launched the GTP movement, both high school principals in North Minneapolis, where they grew up, and where their own children attend high school. (Y. Abdulah and M. Friestleben, personal

communication, November 18, 2021). The community they serve is African American and impoverished and has experienced an increased level of gun violence in recent years—the City of Minneapolis has experienced a 90% increase in gun violence over the past year (Jany, 2021). According to the Children's Defense Fund (2021), a child in the U.S. was killed by gunfire every 2 hours and 36 minutes in 2019. Sadly, several victims of this gun violence and death have fallen on young school-aged children. The lived values of the two founders of GTP, who describe themselves as people of faith who feel deep concern for this community, precipitated their movement toward activism. In many ways, their motivation and actions (inspired by Lewis, as the name of their group implies) signal a similar strategy used by Dr. Martin Luther King in his letter from Birmingham Jail. In his letter to eight White clergymen who had criticized one of his marches and other demonstrations, Dr. King pointed out that creating tension leads to awareness and compels people to act: "there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth…the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood" (King, 1963, para. 10). By publicly declaring their commitment to specific actions to upend inequities in education, The GTP are articulating actions and ideas that create tension, exemplifying Dr. King, who wrote:

> You may well ask: 'Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches, and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?' You are quite right in calling for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. (p. 10)

The Good Trouble Principals recognize that institutional racism continues to be alive and well through the misuse of White power. Until there is accountability for the perpetuation of rhetoric and actions that do not change the plight of Blacks, change will not happen. The only way leadership can change the experiences of Black people is through instituting processes that are race proactive and held up within policies (Morris, 2020).

To become a member of the GTP, one must be a school building principal or assistant principal who is willing to support the group's Statement of Purpose as well as work within their buildings and communities while in the company of like-minded individuals who want to make a difference in the lives of the children/families they serve; in other words, to be just and virtuous leaders.

Principals in this organization are placed into project management groups that address the four action items defined in the Good Trouble Principals' (2020) statement: (a) De-centering Whiteness by calling out and advocating for "historically non-represented voices of color…to hold weight and power"; (b) "dismantling practices that reinforce White academic superiority" such as tracking and use of testing that contains intrinsic bias; (c) reconstructing ordinary practices such as staffing and schedules that are "open to drastic changes"; and (d) speaking truth to power (para. 14-17). Every member records their activities and experiences and shares them monthly through an interactive website portal (GTP, 2021b).

Analyses: Theory Meets Leadership

As we look at the leadership framework the GTP have designed for themselves, we see its origin emerge from the continuing need to confront inequities that persist in our educational systems nearly six decades after the Civil Rights legislation of 1965:

> We write today, 57 years later, to say the fight for educational equality rages on and so does our counter—we will not be moved. We write to say it is our role as school principals to be the faces and names of this fight; to be in the forefront and not the shadows. (GTP, 2021)

The GTP's existence and publicly stated mission can be more deeply understood through the lens of CRT, namely that racism is ordinary, voices of color possess more legitimacy and competency to speak about race, and interest convergence. Their commitment to "dismantling practices that reinforce White academic superiority like bias in testing and the labeling, tracking, and clustering that reflect an Americanized version of a caste system in our schools" (GTP, 2021a, #2) acknowledges that racism is the normal and permanent way of doing things in American society, including in institutions like education. The practices they list are long-held behaviors based on policies that assume the superiority of White culture and ways of knowing. The CRT tenet that voices of color carry the most legitimate authority in matters of racism is expressed in the GTP's mission to de-center Whiteness. They state this with the understanding that "traditional organized whiteness ensures domination through forms like PTAs and Unions. We purposefully call out and lift up historically non-represented voices of color in our spaces to hold weight and power" (GTP, 2021a, #1). This statement, as well as the entire GTP mission, is particularly powerful coming from an organization in which the vast majority of members are White. As part of an anti-racist community of school leaders, the White majority are committed to giving their colleagues of color a platform of power and influence.

In terms of intersectionality, which recognizes that White people engage in anti-racist action only when they perceive a benefit in it for them, the GTP claim that they are "not leaving white children behind by lifting Black, Brown, and Indigenous children up" (GTP, 2021a, #4, para #1). This implies that the common perception of White families is that policies and practices that even the playing for students of color degrade White-upheld standards and, as a result, the achievement of White students. In other words, White families do not see a benefit for themselves in such equity work.

Turning to the theoretical insights of exemplarism, the GTP's embodiment of this concept is reflected in their admiration of John Robert Lewis, who fits Zagzebski's (2017) definition of an exemplar as someone to be admired due to the character traits he acquired through his life, cause, and actions he took. "Character cannot be separated from the person. Virtue is an aid in this: it Is the act of good character" (Mitchell, 2015, p. 149). The Good Trouble Principals were inspired by Lewis' "good trouble" statement about the necessity of challenging the status quo and adopted it in their approach that emulates and continues Lewis' commitment to fighting against injustice and systemic inequality. Their actions reflect Thrash and Elliot's (2004) claim that being *inspired by* often leads to being *inspired to* do or to be. As seen through a virtue ethics lens, which focuses on human nature and how a person wants to live (Grant et al., 2017), these principals made a "covenant, a promise, a pact" (GTP, 2021b) in their principles and directives for dismantling systemic racism in education. Zach (2011) reminds us that where there is race-based inequality, the ethical

concern needs to be about correcting injustice. "Ethics is a matter of ideals and principles for action that involves human well-being in important ways" (Zack, 2011. P. 171).

The GTP see themselves as a group in support of their statement of purpose, their ideals, and principles, while in the company of like-minded individuals who want to make a positive difference in the lives of the children/families they serve (GTP, 2021a) This form of "character friendship" (Aristotle, 1915, p. 1213a: 15-23) cultivates moral growth for oneself and one's community (Kristjansson, 2020).

Conclusion

Morris (2020) states that the world is now able to see and document racism, discrimination, inequality, injustice, and the lack of a leader's response to it. There will be an expectation for firm, consequential action to be taken.

School principals are hired and entrusted individuals who are held accountable to take action when it comes to advocating for all students' welfare. Through a virtue ethics framework and an understanding of the tenets of CRT, this group of diverse leaders leads the way in calling out injustices by refusing to be bystanders to ongoing educational inequality.

The GTP chose a prosocial framework for right action that is designed around social justice work and activism with the intention of dismantling systems of racism in education. In this way, the exemplarist moral theory is actionalized by principals who created a safe space for fortifying their advocacy for equitable education inspired by the work and example of John Lewis.

Across the state of Minnesota approximately, 160 people publicly added their names to a list to announce their agreement with the declaration of the GTP. The principals who signed this letter have seen the injustices, murders, failing education systems, and discord across Minneapolis enough to know they had to "make some tension" (King, 1963, para. 10) to get people's attention. Such attention guarantees backlash, and the group's experience was no exception. Due to the attacks on CRT, individual principals started to ask to have their names removed after being intimidated to do so by parents, school board members, and superintendents where they are employed.

On a positive note, a local mid-sized university in the Midwest hosted the first gathering of the Good Trouble Principals who had previously connected only on Facebook. The event gave the principals a new space in which to engage in their purpose of supporting each other in advancing racial equity in their schools. They spent time sharing ideas for staying strong in the face of being challenged and received supportive feedback from the faculty member who hosted the meeting.

To better understand this group of school leaders, their motivation, work, and outcomes will require further study. Documenting how these principals address systemic issues of racism, impact the educational outcomes and experiences of their students, and potentially recognize other leaders and educators as exemplarists in their own actions will enrich the literature about equity work in education. While these leaders are licensed by the State of Minnesota's Board of School Administrators (BOSA) and held to a static and demanding set of standards, their actions as ethical leaders bring a "lived" dimension to better understanding how these standards can be met in additional ways.

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What My Students Taught Me About Disability

Alice Wexler

Abstract

In spring 2021, I taught a synchronous online course in disability studies, communing with young people struggling with their present and future as educators. The students not only felt empowered to introduce themselves with their preferred pronouns, but they were also empowered to disclose their disabilities. One-third of the students identified as having, or as having had, a disability that significantly impacted their lives: their education, families, and social structures. This article is about what I learned from my students as a result of spontaneous disclosures of their disabilities. As a result, we were brought into conversations about what is important in life in a way I, as an educator, have never witnessed before. Our discussions were filled with their insights, personal stories, and interactions with each other. Excerpts from their dialogue and essays make an important contribution to this paper.

Keywords: *disability studies, disclosure, access, ableism, higher education*

In spring 2021, I was invited to teach a virtual disability studies course at a New York State university where I had been teaching for sixteen years before retiring in 2014. I developed this course over those years, but as a result of the pandemic, it was offered virtually for the first time. Disability studies is a relatively new form of scholarship in the humanities developed and driven by disabled[1] people in the United States, Canada, and the U.K with the common experience of societal oppression. More recently, disability studies in education (DSE) concerns itself with disability as a subject worthy of study, as opposed to special education, which views disability as a deficit to be remediated. Disability studies honors the lived experiences, distinct cultures, and self-representations of disabled people in contrast to pervasive stereotypical representations. Disability is a cultural lifestyle rather than a limitation, a problem, or a void in an individual. Instead, disability studies values the varied and diverse experiences of being and living in the world, including and interconnected with other oppressed groups. With the emergence of the disability rights movement, disabled individuals promote respect and value for their lives, reclaiming disability as a positive identity with the entitlements of the mainstream society.

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1. In this article I use identity-first and person-first language because both are currently used by people with disabilities. Terminology is important in the representation of disability. Therefore, I consider the use of both forms of identification (disabled people or people with disabilities). I also respect that the American Psychological Association (APA) recommends the latter term (APA, 2010). However, since the disability rights movement, the term disabled people often has been used by disability studies scholars and disabled artists precisely because of the awkwardness and distracting nature of the "person-first" term and the negative connotation of separating disability from the identity of the person.

This article is a loosely-called collaborative autoethnography about what I learned from my students in this synchronous virtual course. Although I am the sole author, the paper is collaborative in the sense that the words of the undergraduate students take a central role. What I learned was the significance of disclosure. Because of several interlocking conditions (e.g., the pandemic and the virtual nature and content of the course), many of the 14 undergraduate students felt confident and, perhaps an urgency, to talk about their lives and identities. Their courage in disclosing their disabilities caused me to re-examine my reasons for withholding my own hidden[2] disabilities from colleagues and students. Those reasons are highlighted later in this article.

This paper is divided into two sections that discuss the meaning and importance of disclosing/not disclosing and the potential risks of both choices. I then describe the course Disability Studies in Art Education. Finally, I present student narratives[3] from the course and weave my own life and positionality throughout these sections. But first, a word about autoethnography.

Autoethnography Defined

Autoethnography is a distinctive style of self-narrative because it engages in social, political, cultural analysis and interpretation. It exists in multiple forms, and is used across the social sciences, including anthropology (Chang, 2008; Denzen, 2006; Reed Danahay, 1997). While the self is present in all these forms, the balance between self and culture varies. Generally, autoethnography serves as a qualitative research methodology that contextualizes self within a cultural frame, or vice versa, weaving culture through an experience and analysis of the self (Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2003). As Chang (2008) describes, the choice of emphasis between the research process (graphy), culture (ethno), and self (auto), will determine whether the autoethnography is either emotionally evocative or objective.

Recently, a political, activist model of autoethnography was introduced in the disability community. Tom Couser (1997) coined this new category "autopathography to categorize an emerging literary form that engages the disabled body as a political act" (Wexler & Derby, 2020). A population historically spoken *for* and *about*, now has control over their own stories. Thus, autoethnography, in its many manifestations, is not merely spontaneous self-expression, but an intentional act of claiming one's life (Couser, 2013). Storytelling has power in an ableist[4] world to reframe formulaic narratives about bodymind differences.

Carolyn Ellis (2003) points out that revealing the author's personal life is a potential professional hazard, since autoethnography exposes unappealing characteristics, and therefore invites the reader to judge the text not only on literary merit but also the personal life of the author. The risk is multiplied when disabled academics write autopathography, which has the potential effect of negative career outcomes such as refusal of tenure, or worse. I return to this subject later in this article.

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2. I use hidden and invisible disabilities interchangeably. However, since writing this paper these terminologies have been questioned. For example, Disability: IN, The Disability Inclusion Blog, prefers *non-apparent disability* because it does not imply a negative connotation. The term *invisible disability,* they suggest, is offensive for some people with disabilities because "It suggests the person is not visible or that you cannot discern that a person has a disability, which is not always true" (https://disabilityin.org/mental-health/non-apparent-disability-vs-hidden-or-invisible-disability-which-term-is-correct/).

3. I have been given permission from the students to use their names and words in this paper.

4. Ableism is a multi-layered term often defined as disability discrimination and prejudice. It is still in a nascent stage compared with racism, homophobia, and sexism.

While this essay does not fall within autopathography, the students and I reveal our lives to the degree we are comfortable. In our course we discussed the importance of self-examination in order to be authentic educators for our future students. This notion illuminates my choice to use autoethnography. I have found that the benefits of disclosure outweigh disadvantages, such as the ethical preparation of future teachers and curriculum content. For example, Chang (2008) explains that including the self in writing is not a self-centered act, but a way of examining personal experience and, therefore, a more sharpened sense of others, particularly "different" others. Ultimately, the intent of this autoethnography is to promote cultural understanding through the lens of self-examination and personal experience. In my view, the coupling of disability and the pandemic makes essential the disclosure of the author's positionality. Theory omits critical aspects of lived experience from which essential understandings can be communicated.

My Home

In our ocean-view home I had the privilege to find hope during the pandemic. From my position I peacefully contemplated what might come after, and questioned whether or not there would be an "after," since the possibility we returned to "normal" was doubtful. For people on the margins, "normal" has never been a livable option, and the pandemic has highlighted such inequities. In a second wave, the Delta and Omicron variants invaded what was hoped to be safe spaces in the US, and again the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) encouraged citizens to wear masks both indoors and in public places. The anti-vaccination storm continued to weaken and prolong progress towards a future without the deleterious effects of the virus.

I am thus even more aware of my privilege as a white "expatriate" of the United States, who has come to this beautiful country with U.S dollars and built a home with the help of Costa Ricans who, on average, earn only three to four dollars per hour. In voluntary isolation in a small coastal village, suddenly I was communing with young people struggling with their present and future as educators. They have aroused me into contemplation about my contribution as a retired educator. Clearly, my experiences are anecdotal, although I draw on recent scholarship about how students with disabilities were either surviving or prospering in the global pandemic (Berne, Brown, Piepzna-Samarasinha & Heath-Stout, 2020). The course consisted of 14 students: the majority identified as cis-gendered females, one student identified as non-binary, one student identified as male, and one student identified as a cis-gendered male. They not only felt empowered to introduce themselves with their pronouns, but they were also empowered to disclose their disabilities. One-third of the students identified as having had a disability that significantly impacted their lives: their education, families, and social structures. Others had close family members with disabilities. Their trust and candor encouraged me to take the risk to reveal my own multiple invisible disabilities. Self-identification with (invisible) disabilities is important in recognizing that choice exists outside of the classified labels of special education. To be part of the social-symbolic system is the privilege of representing oneself, and thus the significance of "counter-narratives." Through the lens of disability justice and crip theory, disability has meaning and value that resists neoliberal capitalism as "the dominant economic and cultural system" (McRuer, 2006, p. 2), which drives education and specifically special education. Similar to coming out queer or gay as an identity that resists the oppressive medical model, adults with invisible disabilities who were labeled in special education are becoming disabled by choice as an act of liberation and self-actualization. Importantly, as Ellen Samuels (2003) writes, coming out disabled is not a single event, but a decision that is made on a daily basis.

The Risks of Faculty Disclosure in Academe

Disability has always been constructed as the inverse or opposite of higher Education (Dolmage, 2017, p. 3).

My reluctance in the past as a pre-tenured and tenured professor to disclose my disabilities is manifold. The workload at my state college was well beyond the capacity of most healthy people. The merit system, based on the judgment of one's peers, sustained a culture of unrelenting hard work. As the years went on and resources and funding diminished, the faculty became even more vigilant about who was towing the line and who was "slacking off." Overwork was expected, and those who resisted the culture of overwork were marginalized and maligned. I knew tenure would be endangered if I disclosed my disabilities and sought support and accommodations. Studies have shown both junior and senior faculty seeking accommodations from the university invite disapproval and scorn (Steinberg, Iezzoni, Conill, & Stineman, 2002). Such reprisals from colleagues dampen disabled faculty from pursuing the support they need to teach without restraint. I had not yet found the community of disability studies scholars, and looked upon my lack of energy, focus, and organization skills as my own failings, ones I would need to either compensate for or fix in order to survive.

Jay Dolmage (2017) would argue that my experience is typical given that it is a physical and ideological foundation of the university to keep disability out. He uses the metaphor of "steep steps," a deliberate architectural choice of many universities—an impressive design element but also an imposing one—which literally signals that not all are welcome or desirable. "As a select few stay in, disability is kept out, often quite literally" (p. 3). The U.S. Department of Education revealed in a study in 2004 that the number of tenure-track professors with disabilities remains low, while the majority of disabled professors are adjuncts. The plight of adjunct professors is well-known, such as their need to teach at multiple universities to make a living wage, the lack of healthcare, and a lack of space to meet with students. The burden of these conditions is even greater for adjunct professors with disabilities.

In the article in *Disability Studies Quarterly*, the author who assumed the pseudonym Alice K. Adjunct (2008) wrote, as many disabled authors before and after her have done, despite the passage of the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), disabled faculty struggle with their university's commitment to provide accommodations.[5] Especially for junior faculty, "requests for accommodations may be taken as evidence that they cannot do their jobs as well as able-bodied colleagues. Professors unable to 'make do' without accommodation can face hostile responses from administrators, who see their requests as too expensive or indulgent" (Adjunct, 2008, n.p.). As a result of pervasive stigma, according to Lilah Burke (2021), the assumption of university administrators is that disabled candidates for faculty positions will not perform at the level of non-disabled faculty and will become a burden. Professors with hidden disabilities, therefore, will be reluctant to disclose their disability in the interview process or after they are hired. The lack of "disclosed" faculty with disabilities communicates an unwelcoming message to students with disabilities.

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5. Reports show that 90% of professors who sue their university under ADA for lack of accommodations have lost their cases (Abram, 2003).

A shift in how disability is perceived is foundational in order to make substantive changes. Disability is often left out of the axis of diversity,[6] "as an identity and an epistemology, a way of being in the world and making meaning in the world" (Dolmage, 2017, p. 42), and therefore is perceived as a problem to be solved by the individual. Like Dolmage, Tanya Titchkosky (2011) describes this problem as a naturalized form of exclusion inherent in the planning, building, and use of social spaces, which are presumed to be inhabited by "the typically functioning normate (male) body (Keifer-Boyd, Wexler, & Kraft, 2020, p. 54).This taken-for-grantedness sets up the conditions for the disabled professor who suddenly shows up as if from a foreign land, requires re-thinking and reimagining, and is thus a burden and expense to the university. How can we continue to measure human life and potential in terms of expense, asks Titchkosky (2011)? "More disturbing than the quantification of human life and limb is the social fact that this repetitive routine practice can remain unquestioned and continue to produce the differential value of people" (p. 33). Thinking and reimaging space in service of accessibility for all, the expectation of meeting all forms of bodies and minds on campus, is not a charitable project but a deeply human one. Mia Mingus (2017, 2018) has been shifting the perception of access as solely logistical and spatial towards access founded on justice, relation, connection, and community. In the subsequent section I discuss how Mingus's notions empower faculty, and particularly students, to disclose their disabilities in higher education.

Student Disclosure, Access Intimacy, and Liberation in Higher Education

Disability disclosure provides a platform to disrupt the hegemonic ableist framework around disability, that is, as an individualistic issue that is easily resolved by technical accommodations (Pearson & Boscovitch, 2019).

While disability resources are almost nonexistent for staff and faculty, higher education has developed disability service offices for students on most campuses (Kerschbaum, Eisenman, & Jones, 2017). Yet insufficient literature exists about disclosure and its ramifications for students in the "often unnoticed, areas of academe where knowledge is produced and power is exchanged" (Price, 2011, p. 60). In the existing research, authors suggest that disclosure is not a single act or event, but an ongoing, dynamic dialogue in a variety of contexts where disability awareness is negotiated (Kerschbaum, Eisenman, & Jones, 2017; Mingus, 2017, 2018; Pearson & Boscovitch, 2019; Price, Salzer, O'Shea, & Kerschbaum, 2017; Samuels, 2003). Nor is disclosure experienced equally given that we come with complicated, intersecting identities, each posing its own risk or cost (Kerschbaum, Eisenman, & Jones, 2017). Holly Pearson and Lisa Boscovitch (2019), who were Ph.D. students with hidden disabilities, wrote a compelling collaborative autoethnography, "Problematizing Disability Disclosure in Higher Education: Shifting Towards a Liberating Humanizing Intersectional Framework." They highlight the personal and professional cost of choos-

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6. Diversity discourses are replete with contradictions and multiple interpretations. Kerschbaum, Eisenman, and Jones (2017) claim that their complexity is the main challenge to achieving social justice. "And the way in which different people approach diversity is so multivariate and multifaceted that diversity discourses can run the risk of simultaneously saying so much and saying nothing. We don't want diversity to say nothing. It is a principle, a concept that has application to a variety of relationships among people and a variety of challenges that institutions and people face" (pp 3-4).

ing how, when, where, to whom, and if, to disclose. Their critical reflections of their lived experiences in the academy reveal the subtle ableist discourses operating in daily interactions, which impact the retention and achievements of students with disabilities.

As they state in the quotation above, the ultimate purpose of disclosure, in spite of the personal risk of isolation and humiliation, is to work towards non-obligatory access in universities and institutions. They envision the conditions in which empowerment, democracy, and citizenship in higher education replaces the ableist framework of individualism and the technical accommodations required by the ADA. The ADA, while legally providing access and the protection against discrimination, cannot promise that the dispositions and presumptions of faculty and peers will afford an equitable, inclusive, and joyful experience in higher education. Thus, the ableist structure that led to the necessity of federal legal action needs to be re-examined. An anti-ableist framework would relinquish logistics of access founded on burden in favor of relationship and interdependency based on the contribution of disabled people as essential within the rich variation of humanity (Mingus, 2017). Acknowledging disability as an essential and dynamic part of our lives, disrupts the all-too-common perception that disabled people are unexpected guests (Pearson & Boscovitch, 2019).

In this context, disability disclosure is a form of access, one that would require restructuring spaces since few opportunities exist for intimate dialogue in the higher education curriculum. "Disability disclosure could shift the traditional hierarchy between teacher (the depositor) and students (the receivers) towards an environment where all bodies embody value and knowledge, hence structuring an empowering environment" (Pearson & Boscovitch, 2019, n.p.). Opportunities for disclosure within the curriculum invite an examination of underlying power structures in the university. Silence reinforces normalcy while disclosure acts as political resistance.

Pearson and Boscovitch (2019) recount their personal trials as undergraduate students, how they grappled with disclosure versus silence. Pearson arrived at the following realization years after a numbing first attempt at disclosure.

> Our genuine and highest learning capacities result as we reveal who we are as individuals. The veil of perceived normalcy dissipates when I continue to disclose who I am. Disability moves freely in and out of my life like a river that has found a home. In disclosing my disability, I break down the walls and assumptions of perception. In revealing, I bring my educational experience of truth to the table. If I stay silent as a researcher and as a scholar, old perceptions become rooted in misperceived constructs of disability, for in silence nothing can change. (n.p.)

In Pearson's narrative, she reveals the injurious effect of disclosing her disability to her professor as an undergraduate in order to receive necessary accommodations. She calls her "threshold moment" the request for her professor's signature, which was met with the following response: "Oh, you are one of those students whose extra time gives you a better chance of earning a better grade in my class" (n.p.). Reading her story was painful. I was not aware of overtly demoralizing student-professor experiences. Yet I am aware that some undergraduates and a few professors tacitly suspect, question, and doubt students with hidden disabilities. Her experience highlights the problem of having the right by law for accommodation and the inability to exercise it with dignity.

Boscovitch's first experiences of disclosure as a young woman were also unproductive. Like Mingus, however, her intersecting identity markers impelled her to demonstrate through her life the impossibility of being compressed into a singular category. Mingus's notion of access intimacy transformed disclosure from degradation into a "tool of liberation" (Mingus, 2017,

para.16) by challenging the hegemonic structures that create an inaccessible world. "The power of access intimacy is that it reorients our approach from one where disabled people are expected to squeeze into able bodied people's world, and instead *calls upon able bodied people to inhabit our world*" (para. 19). Real access requires a shift from individual responsibility to a collective and interdependent existence, acknowledging our dependence on others for our survival, and rebuilding structures in which we challenge oppression collectively. I return to the need for disclosure after describing the disability studies course and how spontaneous disclosure affected our understanding, dialogues, and connections.

The Course and The Students

While the able-bodied and able-minded wearied of the pandemic, virtual classrooms afforded disabled students the luxury of participation on an equalized platform. Abled others who joined a changed world temporarily are in a cultural time warp, unaware that disabled people, who comprise the largest minority, have always lived in this space. Virtual classrooms and meetings are not only opportunities to participate, but also a promise for future accessible technology and a decentralization of power and resources. The pandemic has invited professors to be more attentive to and compassionate about the specific situations of individual students, such as depression and anxiety about their futures, let alone deaths in the family.

From my comfortable sunny room, I spoke to students who were struggling through a cold winter in New York's Mid-Hudson Valley, as cases on campus, and campuses around the United States, sored. They struggled under a government that had abandoned them, one of the several reasons my husband and I abandoned the United States. And yet they showed no discernable fear, self-pity, remorse, or defeat. The pandemic brought us to conversations about what is important in life in a way that I, as an educator, never witnessed before. It was in the second week of the semester that I asked students to view *Defiant Lives: The Rise and Triumph of the Disability Rights Movement* by Sarah Barton, a lengthy and potentially disturbing documentary about disability rights. It included vivid footage of the infamous Staten Island Willowbrook State School, a scandalous mental institution revealed by Geraldo Rivera in 1972, which initiated the deinstitutionalization movement in the United States. Their positive interest despite graphic content displayed their forbearance.[7]

The course Disability Studies in Art Education investigates the construction of disability in (Western) society, the invention of normality, and the presumptions about children with disabilities in the art classroom. It advocates for the rejection of medical labels and the individual as the problem in favor of a social-political-relational model that perceives the totality of disability as the person within the environment. Disability studies in education has informed art education (DSAE), and both seek to unmoor disability from special education, as a field of study, like racism and feminism.

Through the lens of the traditional deficit model, disabled people are perceived as abnormal, while non-disabled people are taken for granted as representatives of the universal human,

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7. In retrospect I realize I should have introduced the documentary with a trigger warning. However, educators debate about the efficacy and benefits of trigger warnings. In 2014, The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) reported that trigger warnings are a threat to academic freedom by discouraging difficult conversations. This point of view, however, is contrary to many disability scholars, such as Margaret Price, whose position is that they are "a matter of *access* rather than *avoidance*," which might require supports in order to engage safely with the material (Kafer, 2016, p. 2).

the prototype from which disabled people depart. The deficit model conceives of disability as a problem to be solved and cured, which is used to justify sorting and separating children in special education based on their differences. We discussed how this misrecognition of disability in society produces ableism in the places in which we live and work, built on invisible decisions made for the "normate" body. Therefore, planning for access is a political act.

Ableism appears in the media, literature, popular culture, and the arts. For example, visual artist Riva Lehrer grew up in the 1960s and 70s when television, movies, art, music, and literature were exploring everything but disability. Lehrer says (2020), "On TV, everyone was beautiful and "normal." People like me were invisible in popular culture, but I felt painfully visible everywhere else" (pp. 185-186). In art school, out of thousands of paintings she studied, she found no portraits of impaired subjects.

Ableism also exists in language. Terms such as *special needs* and *special education* set up barriers to a shared education and socialization between children and youth with disabilities and their nondisabled peers. *Special* and other euphemisms prevent the placement of disability on the same continuum as ability, inhibiting students with disabilities from acknowledging and responding to authentic differences regarding bodyminds and social and cultural understanding. *Differently abled* is another sanitized version of disability. Julia Thompson (2021) wrote in her midterm essay, "Typicals buy the 'differently abled' narrative, so we sell it."

> I am at the shallow end of the neurodiversity movement, an Inspiration Porn[8] Star. My momager and I have seamlessly spun my painful, shameful experiences into good PR, brownie points, power-points, and scholarships worth thousands. I talk about my symptoms constantly but I rarely show them, and the soccer moms swoon at my bravery, brilliance, uniqueness. (Thompson, 2021, p. 4)

The notion of "special" was an important topic in the course. With good intentions, special education has sought to cure and normalize students who are different. The illusion of a "normal child" is the root cause of this interest in uniformity, which produces more of the same, the lingering historical factory model of education. It defines who is inside and who is outside this category. Segregation, exclusion, and even integration (which is often called inclusion), move bodies to different spaces that act as forced containers. Integration is the inclusion of disabled bodies only as observers, while excluding disabled perspectives in curriculum content (Moore, 2016).

The source of our discussions in class was drawn from the discussion board, where I asked students to pose three questions for their peers about an assigned text and respond to one question of special interest. We opened the first week with a discussion about David Connor's (2020) provocative article, ""I Don't Like to Be Told that I View a Student with a Deficit Mindset': Why it Matters that Disability Studies in Education Continues to Grow." As a former special education teacher, and later as a retired professor, he offered presentations to in-service educators about the differences between special education and disability studies, emphasizing the limitations of special education's deficit-based understandings of disability. The quote in the title of the article was a statement by one of his participants. Defensiveness, he realized, was an integral part of the work being done in disability studies.

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8. Stella Young coined the term "Inspiration porn." See her at a TedX Sydney Talk in 2014. (See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SxrS7-I_sMQ).

When much of the information DSE scholars share is from people with disabilities them-selves, and the unintended consequences of special education are presented in critical ways, a form of dissonance occurs. The first engagement with DSE, after all, asks individuals to seriously consider another paradigm of thought. When this happens, all knowledge that has been built upon certain foundations is now called into question. (pp. 28-29)

I hoped the students in my course would embrace the discomfort and anxiety elicited from this discussion as a part of growth, expanding our vision of how disability is conceived in education. The article provoked the most troubling questions in special education: the separate versus inclu-sive classroom quandary; reaching all students, especially advocating for the self-determination of non-verbal students; and the effects of the medical model in education. In the subsequent section, students respond to questions about course readings through the lens of disability studies and their experiences as the subject or witness to oppressive strategies in special education. Therefore, these responses became a form of disclosure and personal narrative that supported dialogue in class. The following question refers to the medical model, which was answered thoroughly by Sarah Dan-ielson: "How can a search for 'scientific' or biological explanations for disabilities be dangerous? Similarly, how can the search for the 'cause' of disabilities or neurodivergence be counterproduc-tive?"

> **Sarah Danielson**: I think a search for a "scientific" explanation for disability can be dan-gerous because it looks at disability from a medical model and leads to viewing people with a deficit mindset. The scientific approach is counterproductive and dangerous in edu-cation because it creates this line that denotes between "normal" and "other." It leads to an ableist viewpoint where presumptions are made about a student's capability just based on a label. It can create a confined space where students are segregated and not given the same opportunities to achieve. In elementary school I remember disabled students were always in a separate class and I always wondered why we never had classes together. Other stu-dents would bully those in the special education classroom because they would say they were "different." I think this separation early on can lead to children forming damaging assumptions about disability and normalcy and lead to stigma around disability. I think what this article [Connor, 2020] was explaining was that even though special education had good intentions, it neglects the socio-cultural aspect and neglects the voice of disabled students, and instead DSE is trying to "challenge deficit-based thinking, 'flipping the script' and seeing disability as normal" (p. 26).

Amanda Monroe responded to the question, "What was your experience with children with disa-bilities in your schools or jobs? Were they separated or were they more inclusive? If there were inclusion classes, how often were they pulled out for resource instruction or was it push in (mean-ing the aide goes to the kid)?"

> **Amanda Monroe**: I found this question very interesting because I did grow up with an IEP [Individualized Education Plan]. I was a twin born prematurely and was a little behind when it came to reading. I was often separated from my classes to take tests, and often put into different rooms to learn at a different pace. The classes I were in also had secondary teachers to help with any questions I would have. To answer your question, it was a mix of everything. In my opinion, while getting pulled out of class did help with my testing anxiety

it also pushed me back from learning at the same pace as my classmates. I often was bullied growing up. After coming into college and realizing I do not need my accommodations anymore, I find it easier to be more inclusive and be part of a regular class. In class growing up I would often feel as if I was falling behind other students because I was learning at a slower pace. Co-teaching can be beneficial because it allows students to learn the same curriculum. I think that as future educators it is beneficial to take classes regarding disabilities so that we can understand more about how to accommodate certain people. A new age of teaching will help every student to become more understanding of one another.

Towards the end of the semester we discussed hidden disabilities, which invited students to talk about disclosure, the ambiguity of labeling, and the need for care. We watched the documentary *Who Cares About Kelsey?* by Dan Habibe (2013). Kelsey is a white high-school student with multiple disabilities, including attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) and emotional scars left from homelessness, drug abuse, and self-harm. A team called RENEW was hired by the school to shore up its appalling drop-out rate. Kathy, a member of the team, emerged as a particularly caring professional. Personal narratives in various forms inspire the reader to tell their own story. The following are two responses to questions that surfaced from Kelsey's story.

Danelle Read: Kelsey's story reminded me a lot of my older sister's experience when she was a senior in my high school. She suffered from a lot of mental health problems and missed months of school; the only teacher who seemed to truly care was the **one** school psychologist (in bold because it is insane) who was let go from the school halfway through the school year. I never full on witnessed a teacher say negative words about my sister, but it was extremely frustrating witnessing her teachers favoring and spending a lot of time with certain students who didn't need the extra help and support that she really needed to graduate. Some of those exact teachers were well regarded amongst the school community as "amazing" teachers. It's hard because those teachers, as someone employed by the school, can to a certain extent sway other teachers and administrators into believing that they go above and beyond for their students, but in reality, they just play favorites. The program that the group of teachers came together for in the film seemed like a really great way to hold teachers responsible for their struggling students; I wish my sister had had something similar in my school.

Margo Christie: I think the inspiration we feel from how Kathy, Kelsey's counselor, supported her is because, while it may not be unique, it is rare. It should not be inspirational; it should be commonplace. It seems a shame that we expect counselors and teachers to be these horrible, uncaring people just there for a paycheck or there to force an otherwise unique personality into a predetermined mold. We expect it because it is true. Whether it is the fault of the teacher by giving up on their ideals, the loss of joy for supporting children that got them into education in the first place, or it is a system that requires teachers to shape the square peg into a cylinder so that it could fit in the only hole offered—round. What we as educators can do is to compartmentalize our job into four titles. First, we are hired as *teachers* and so must teach. The etymology of "teach" is to "show, point out, declare, demonstrate," also to give instruction, train, assign, direct, warn, and persuade. This is what is expected of us by the community we work in and by the administration we work under. Then there is *educator*; to educate is to lead, bring forth as in the mind and we do

this among our colleagues, within our schools, looking for the best way to lead the child to a successful end. *Facilitator* is another; this focuses on the capabilities of the child and so we take knowledge and make it easier to grasp, analyze, or synthesize. All three of these positions, facets of our job as a teacher, are focused on us bringing something to the child. We bring them order for the sake of the community, we lead them to correct knowledge for our schools and to prepare them for their future teachers. We also facilitate for them by taking into account the differences in our students, being innovative and imaginative in our approach to informing our students. All three positions are about informing the student. The one "title" that is missing, the one that makes us think, "Oh! Only if we had someone like Kathy the counselor," is *nurturer*. She wasn't trying to change Kelsey's square peg so it could fit into a round hole. Kathy went out of her way to search for that square hole for Kelsey to fit in. To nurture is to look to the needs of the child, not the community, not the school, not our colleagues, but the child. It is what is missing from so much of our education system. What can we do to support all of our students—nurture them!

The following is a well-considered response from Ashlyn, who was diagnosed with ADHD. I asked whether or not ADHD should be considered a mental disorder.

> **Ashlyn Schuman**: In my case with ADHD (inattentive type, formerly known as ADD) and a generalized anxiety disorder, I consider myself to have disabilities. I think that if I don't call it so, I am not giving enough recognition and that it would be unfair to myself. But that is a personal thing. I am not normal, and I feel that I have to acknowledge that in order to not blame myself as much as I used to. Sometimes I feel guilty for calling them disabilities rather than disorders because I feel I am trying to take up the strength of "disability" and I don't want to take that away from others who identify with it, if that makes sense? A lot of people in society do not recognize mental disorders as disabilities either which makes it a bit harder to claim that as my identity. I am not sure that people understand the extent to which ADHD inhibits the things that you do. Everything just feels so overwhelming all the time. It is so hard to get out of bed in the morning or take up personal hygiene. It is so hard to not feel caught up in everything around you, but at the same time everything seems to sit still. It is more than just being fidgety, or out of focus, or disruptive. Those are only symptoms, but at least for me they take a huge mental toll even outside of learning.
>
> - Driving is exhausting; I have to force myself to stay attentive the entire time in order to not be reckless. I got a speeding ticket last semester driving by the school while accidentally daydreaming. People with ADHD are at a higher risk for traffic violations.
> - Conversations are difficult. If I am interested, I can only focus on what I want to say rather than wait and listen to what they are saying. Or sometimes I zone out and miss the entire point of a conversation. It is super embarrassing to chime in and say something that has already been said.
> - Now when it comes to education, I can't focus on lectures. Everything goes over my head, so I end up reteaching myself. I am always the last to finish a test. It is hard to read- I get bored of the text and think I am reading and next thing I know I am turning the page and realizing I recalled absolutely nothing OR I am fascinated to the point where I distract myself thinking about off topic things. Large texts are overwhelming and so I usually skip through it.

I felt similar to how Kelsey felt during her schooling. I don't know when exactly I started giving up, but it became really apparent in eighth grade when I prioritized certain assignments and ignored others. I was just barely passing my classes. I wish that I had acknowledged my ADHD and gotten a diagnosis sooner. I didn't think the film focused or really described her [Kelsey] ADHD or traumas enough to explain her struggles. The film really only showed a glimpse of it and of her working to achieve her goals.

These conversations, which occurred apart from our synchronized virtual classroom, offered opportunities for students with diverse abilities and proclivities to consider how and if they wanted to reveal their personal struggles. They were written during moments of introspection, given the luxury of time, and they confirmed that disclosure arises through ongoing dialogue. Their narratives also afforded the opportunity for deeper discussion when we returned to our virtual classroom. Being virtual, as we sheltered in place in the familiarity of our homes, also provided the confidence and relaxation needed to fully engage with each other as more than academics.

Conclusions

We offer each other that strength by being vulnerable together, by connecting with each other, by finding ourselves in each other's stories (Bhattacharya, 2016, p. 310).

The many unsolicited self-narratives students so generously wrote on the discussion board encouraged and inspired others to disclose their own stories. Disclosure thus became a more visceral topic as the course went on. In this article, the many examples from both the literature and student narratives attest that "passing" sustains ableist structures, while disclosing resists those structures. Yet silence is often the only option that offers self-worth and opportunity—if only for a limited time—in an ableist world. As many disabled faculty and students explained, however, the price of silence is the loss of self. Julia Thompson (2021) was especially aware of the paradox of the privileges of "passing" with the simultaneous emptying of her identity. She wrote in her midterm paper, "I recognize my privilege and my ableism, yet I struggle to feel seen. I, and others in the movement, reject the idea that we are either abled or disabled. We are both. My reality is simultaneously entertaining and ugly" (p. 5). I hope the students' candor and courage will serve them throughout their careers as educators. They set a precedent for the future of the course, which is to provide trust, comfort, and the conditions for students to grow through intimate dialogue.

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Reimagining K-12 School Assessment Measures in the Era of Triple Pandemic through a Logic of Human Empathy and Embodying Assessment

Joy Anogwih

Abstract

> *K-12 schools continue to insist on the use of Standardized Assessment Measures (SAMs) as the gold standard method for evaluating learning outcomes. And SAMs obviously lack the capacity to equip the futuristic learners with the necessary skills to thrive during these on-going time-space disruption by COVID, climate change, and social inequities referred here as the triple pandemic. This article troubles K-12 school assessment practices both the formal (i.e., SAMs), and informal (alternative or context-based assessment types). The aim is to raise more awareness on the urgent need to incorporate human empathy and embodiment into both forms of school assessment so as to close up the power-relation gap that makes them incompatible as an integral part of the K-12 school assessment system. More arguably, this is a better way for K-12 schools to adjust to and handle the unprecedented times that according to Cairns (2020), have implications for schoolwide assessment, exam anxiety, the positioning of the teaching profession, and broader equity issues. Human empathy together with assessment embodiment, can ultimately result in the realization of K-12 school's original goal built around equity and efficiency, which obviously, is slowly diminishing.*

Keywords: *standardized assessment measures (SAMs); human empathy; embodiment; K-12; alternative assessment*

Introduction

Standardized Assessment Measures (SAMs) are sets of uniform examinations and their corresponding answer keys issued across a population of students (Hutt & Schneider, 2018). Since standardized tests first appeared in 1845, their consequences are well-known and frequently identified in different settings (Reese, 2013). And so, inadequacies in assessment practices are no longer a hidden fact, thanks to the relentless efforts by scholars and researchers around the world particularly in the field of critical theory, disability, and mad studies (e.g., Erevelles, 2016, p. 133; Mahon-Reynolds & Parker, 2017, p. 153).

Traditional school assessment measures continue to rely on SAMs which unfortunately, has become an oppressive tool used by mainstream school system to manipulate and sort students along "hierarchies of (in)competencies" based on their embodied identities (i.e., race, class, gender, and dis/ability). Over reliance on SAMs in determining the academic fate of diverse students is intertwined with schools' inability to confront the uncertainties of the triple pandemic of COVID-19, climate change and social inequities. Consequently, school's failure to meet up with its ideal goal(s) built around "equity and efficiency" gets objectified as students' disability and

incompetence (Skrtic, 1991 p.153), disproportionately impacting students from marginalized homes.

More importantly, K-12 school curricula are now modeled along SAMs contributing to the discourse about SAMs as high-stake testing. This has led many scholars into criticizing K-12 schools as "teaching to the test" (UNESCO Bangkok, 2015; Alan & Artiles, 2016, p. 27). For instance, Cairns (2020) detailed how SAMs as a high-stake test shaped Australian teachers' curricula and indeed, all schools around the world. Little wonder why schools were thrown into a state of global confusion in figuring out the best way(s) to evaluate students. Unfortunately, K-12 schools are yet to wiggle their way out of this problem that has been compounded by the persistent triple pandemic that often intersects to worsen the socio-economic conditions of students, especially those who are already marginalized (Cairns, 2020; Duckworth et al., 2021).

School assessment practices continue to measure only students' cognitive skills mainly through short answers or multiple-choice tests or perhaps, other "purer" measures, such as the time it takes to react to a sequence of flashing lights, what Gardner referred to as "hedgehog orthodoxy"—more "foxlike," which simply emphasizes the archetypical nature of school assessment practices (Gardner, 1998, p. 19). The major problem with SAMs is that oftentimes, little or no attention is given to students' socio-historical background, especially at the time of assessment design and application despite the growing cultural awareness and constant reforms in K-12 schools. Consequently, SAMs continue to serve as a tool to prevent other vital intelligences and life-adaptive features from flourishing or being adequately harnessed and utilized by teachers and even students.

The main implication of this is that students, especially those from marginalized homes, continue to lose hope in schools as the "great equalizer." One typical instance is the "educational triage" found in Texas accountability policies that was used to inform school decisions on resource allocation based on student sorting into three different categories: "safe cases," "suitable for treatment" and "hopeless cases" with the last category at the lowest end of a consideration for school support (Feniger et al., 2016, p. 25). I, therefore, argue here that insofar as K-12 school assessment programs continue to emphasize SAMs as the gold standard objective measure for learning outcomes, the entire academic space will continue to be misconstrued as a place for perpetuating micro/macro injustices, regardless of the numerous reforms and academic support programs that are on-going in these spaces (e.g., Special education and section 504).

In this article, I join other well-meaning individuals to advance the expansion of school assessment practices that are currently in place and functioning. More specifically, my proposition is for K-12 SAMs rather than become abolished, should be combined with alternative methods in a more "humanized" way along the logic of empathy and embodiment which simply means devising ways for school stakeholders, especially the teachers and students, to enter freely and participate authentically in school assessment procedures or spaces. In this way, K-12 schools will be in a much better position to address the constant criticisms leveled against them. One of which is the question about whom school assessments are designed to benefit the most.

This paper begins by first contending that SAMs is a "biopower" of oppression, (i.e., that domain of life over which power has taken control) (Foucault, 1997). Even so, SAMs possess some merits that are often overlooked. For instance, SAMs have been associated with equity and meritocracy, a means of opening education to those who might have been excluded by discriminatory traditions. They also provide a relatively impartial means of assessment by providing student anonymity, which transcends student-teacher relationships, political and family influence, or socio-economic background (Kellaghan and Greaney, 2020).

However, the growing criticism against SAMs is chiefly because of the "gold standard" features it continues to enjoy globally in K-12 schools' accountability and learning outcome measurement. This makes it appear unquestionable as it persists, thrives, and continues to spread worldwide despite its inadequacies. SAMs are disliked mostly by the students, especially those whom it was designed to benefit the most (i.e., educationally disadvantaged students) (Kohn, 2000; Marcoulides & Heck, 1994). Moreover, SAMs impede the full development and/or the incorporation of more contextually based assessment forms, known as alternative methods, into the general K-12 school assessment system, locally and globally (Bol et al., 2000; Allan & Artiles, 2016).

In the following section, I talked about some existing alternative assessment practices, their unique and common features that distinguish them from SAMs. Also highlighted here are the barriers that hinder the expansion and integration of alternative assessment types into the overall K-12 school assessment system which works to undermine their potential to compete favorably or complement SAMs on equal footing.

I conclude this paper by further advocating for the incorporation of human empathy and embodiment into all forms of K-12 school assessment practices (i.e., SAMs and alternative assessment types), with the notion that through this approach, schools can close the power gap that has long existed between SAMs and alternative forms of school assessments. This is especially important as schools begin to transition into a more transformative teaching pedagogy geared toward securing the futuristic learners that can boldly withstand the triple pandemic of COVID, climate change, and social inequities.

Over Reliance on SAMs and its Potential to become a "Biopower of Oppression"

Since the 1980s, assessment has become an indicator of how well schools are performing relative to each other (Allan & Artiles, 2016, p. 33). SAMs, though very vital to school functioning, became problematic when they began to sort for differences amongst students rather than to unite students by helping every one of them succeed academically on equal footing, regardless of their social categories (i.e., class, age, gender, and race).

Historically speaking, SAMs have been known to do more damage than good to students' academic and emotional development particularly, for students who are at the margins of the society where the idea of full time employment, access to health facilities, good housing system and other basic livelihood appears illusory. The archetypical way of categorizing and labeling students as (in)competent, has led to the unfortunate grouping of schools into "functional" and "non-functional" schools (e.g., ACT and SATs scores).

Functionalism is tangential to educational realities and intensifies/legitimizes the ideologies of rationality, order, and certainty in the field of education by favoring empirical data over theory and assumes that empirical data are objective and self-evident (Skrtic, 1991, pp 152 – 153). For instance, some school administrators have been reported to wrongfully identify and classify low achieving students as handicap to prevent their poor scores from "contaminating" those of high performing students' so their schools are not labeled as "incompetent" (Blatt, 1979; McGill-Franzen & Allington 1993, p. 427).

This type of exclusionary practice that oftentimes draws strictly from SAMs scores, tends to (re)produce social structures (Cairnes, 2020). It has also been linked elsewhere to "school-to-prison pipeline" (Reynold & Parker, 2016 p. 153), or even "Carceral Logic" (Adams & Erevelles, 2016 p. 150), with the minoritized student population disproportionately impacted in all cases.

Furthermore, Foucault, 1983, argued that the idea of "special" education, one potential long-term side effect of SAMs, was a way to contain 20th century contradictions in public education implying that the original motive for creating Special Education was biased and fraught with socio-political agenda. Perhaps the reason why some authors like Price (2015, p. 66), questioned the very essence of the word "special" in Special Education, noting that it was a way to sort students based on their socio historical background in order to continue to keep them where they "belong."

Consequently, today's school reality becomes simply a historical space where individuals with social privileges lack basic self-awareness and empathy. And so, more often than not, the privileged students do not understand the plights of others around them let alone understand the wider world they live in apart from what they are told by their teachers or what they watch and read in books and media.

This condition of learning has been described elsewhere (Boaler & Greeno, 2000) as "didactic" in that students work individually to carry out procedures described by the teacher, with a focus on accuracy and memorization. In such a didactic learning environment, privileged students often take learning activities for granted at the expense of the not-so privileged ones who, are still struggling to fit into a system that continue to "spirit murder" (e.g., Mbembe & Meintjes, 2003) them (un)intentionally through SAMs, defeating the entire purpose of school to transform all students alike. It is simply because of these types of inequities that schools are continually misconstrued as necessary evils by many students, particularly those from marginalized homes. And along this same sensibility, American contemporary school systems have lost all credibility to bring up creative minds who can confidently take over the affairs of the nation and move it beyond its current dilemmas. Sadly too, we see an increasing level of anti-intellectualism flourishing and spreading like wildfire. Little wonder the controversies regarding climate change and mask usage. Apparently, there are still looming anxieties on whether or not to wear a mask and/or take a COVID-19 vaccine even when these measures are proven safe and effective.

Consequences of SAMs as learning outcome gatekeeper

(In)competence is rooted in the logic of segregation and perhaps, the reason why Connor et al. (2016 p. 66), noted that, designating some schools as "special" practically implies a shift from schools' original ideals. In other words, schools continue to disserve students by taking up a diagnostic function, thereby abandoning its ideal goal of cultivating learners into egalitarian citizens. The consequence of this is a complete distrust in the education system by stakeholders, especially students and the public, gradually crippling the entire school system.

Similarly, sorting, labeling, and pathologizing certain groups of students as "deviants" or "dull" and others as "conforming" or "smart" through SAMs, reifies the binary that in turn, perpetuates supremacist ideology including "whiteness as property" and "right to exclude" as noted in Allan & Artiles (2016, p. 137). One important example that was earlier mentioned was the "education triage" found in Texas accountability policies (Allan & Artiles, 2016, p. 25).

K-12 schools (un)intentionally construct embodied differences as gate passes to special education needs (SEN) and remediation even amongst very young children in what was identified as "psycho-pathologization" (i.e., assigning children's behavioral problems to categories of mental disorders) (Allan & Artiles, 2016, p. 7). Psycho-pathologization of behaviors can be traced back to the custodial care era of the 19th century when people with intellectual disabilities were incarcerated or confined in county poor houses. They were then labeled and sorted along hierarchies of

(in)competencies in "custodial homes," as opposed to the initial goal to cure and/or to rehabilitate inmates (Fergusson, 2014, p. 56).

Pathologizations linger to date as a key cause of the overrepresentation of socio historically marginalized students based on race, class, and dis/ability within special education and alternative schools. Allan & Artiles (2016, p. 7) noted that psycho-pathologization is particularly dangerous within schools because it obscures other interpretations of children and their behavior. It also takes focus away from how to assist a child academically into concentrating on how to manage the child's behavior.

SAMs have been implicated for causing heightened apprehension amongst educators and researchers, paving the way for fraudulent assessment practices by school administrators and widening educational inequities. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) pitted schools and students against each other by promoting unhealthy competition and perpetuating deficit ideologies including the notorious insistence that "everyone do better than everyone else" enshrined in NCLB tenets (McDermott, 1993, p. 271; Allan & Artiles, 2016). The notion of continuous improvement as indicated by improved test scores continues to haunt current school reforms, rendering them ineffective in promoting substantive change.

SAMs Persistence in the Face of Growing Criticism

Critically speaking, the continued elevation of SAMs by K-12 schools as "gold standard" and its persistence despite the controversies surrounding it, could be linked back to the desegregation victory of the 1960 Civil Right Acts that originally began as a push back against racism and the inequities in education and employment spaces (Russell, 2002). School desegregation literally meant "equal education for all" and that in fact, may have distorted the existing school structure of continuing to privilege a selected few at the expense of others.

More arguably, equal opportunity in schools translates into equal opportunity for jobs, and subsequently, into an equal opportunity for individuals to attain agency in the society regardless of their embodied identity (i.e., race, gender, (dis) ability, etc.). Therefore, associating SAMs with "equity and meritocracy" what perhaps, could have led to K-12 schools' insistence to retain SAMs as "gold standard" assessment practice despite the growing controversies against it, sends out a scary message that K-12 school administrators may be secretly opposed to the optimum actualization of the benefits of desegregation efforts from reaching those to whom it was meant to benefit the most. Along this logic too, SAMs could be considered as a historically powerful gateway to regulate the number of agentic bodies in the society, but in a more subtle and normalized way. Seemingly so, SAMs is unquestionable since it serves different interests and so, can be easily manipulated to provide opportunity for some students to excel, at the same time deny others that same opportunity, especially those individuals who are socio-historically defined as "undesirable" and "incompetent" to the society.

The above analogy ties back to earlier arguments of SAMs potentials to become a biopower of oppression as it continues to (re)produce social categories, "educational debt," "achievement gap," school-to-prison pipelines, and even juvenile imprisonment particularly for minoritized student population (e.g., Cairns, 2020; Ladson Billings, 2006; Allan & Artiles, 2016; Connor et al., 2016 pp. 150–153; Annamma 2017, p. 67; Love, 2019, p. 70; Randall et al., 2021; Allan & Artiles, 2016, p. 25).

The dialectical subtlety of SAMs is well documented which in part, supports the ongoing calls for a reimagining of SAMs and indeed all other K-12 school assessment methods rather than

their complete abolishment (e.g., Kelly, 2019; Lingard et al., 2016; OECD, 2017; Stobart 2008; Volante, 2017). For instance, Kellaghan and Greaney (2020) acknowledged the advantages and disadvantages of high-stakes examinations such as standardized tests. According to them, such tests help to focus teachers and students on key aspects of the curriculum but due to the artificial conditions and time constraints, they do not actually measure the diverse skills that curricula seek to develop. In the same vein, standardized tests have been reported to possess the power to influence "what we learn and how we learn them" (Klenowski, 2012, p. 178), which arguably, may help students to focus and to develop expertise potentials at an early stage of their career pursuit.

Even so, many continue to call for changes in school assessment practices to restructure American schools (New American Schools, 1994). Unfortunately, the argument for the use of alternative assessments that are known to be more contextually grounded and less discriminatory to students, especially those from marginalized homes, continue to attract little or no attention. However, a few well-meaning teachers, who understand the potential damage SAMs may have on students and schools in general if left unchecked or if completely abolished, have begun to combine both methods in their classroom pedagogies (i.e., alternative assessments with SAMs) (Bol et al., 2000; 2002). However, compatibility issues continue to pose a serious challenge chiefly because K-12 schools persistently rely on SAMs as the "gold standard" for school outcome assessments undermining the good potentials inherent in alternative methods.

Ultimately, K-12 schools' over reliance on SAMs is evident in their unpreparedness to handle increasing student diversity, especially in these unprecedented times of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change. and social inequities. Let me state here that my intention in this paper is not to completely discredit SAMs in favor of alternative assessment methods, rather, to advocate for two things: first, the redirection of the ideals of assessment practices (i.e., SAMs and alternative types), to better address the needs of learners through empathy and embodiment logics. And secondly, for K-12 school stakeholders to see a collective purpose in equalizing the power relation between these two major forms of K-12 school assessments (i.e., SAMs and alternative assessment methods) through genuine empathy and embodiment assessment logic.

Human Empathy and Embodying Assessment is simply a way to subjectify rather than objectify school assessment practices. The process includes triggering awareness of the self-and-others about their roles in ensuring that K-12 school assessments become more inviting and accessible to every school stakeholder including the students. We can start by making the teachers/examiners and their students to become more aware of their role in school assessments by empowering them so that they can willingly and freely recruit their embodied identities into the assessment space to help and/or accommodate others within the shared space. The utmost goal is to humanize assessment spaces and make them accessible to those who should benefit the most from the practice by dismantling the age long power dynamics that exist within it and loosening up students' efforts to get involved, think creatively, and share knowledge authentically rather than didactically.

Therefore, a more sustainable solution to the problem of SAMs is to continue to view the practice as a spectrum of events where its advantages and disadvantages intertwine. The current paper follows the same logic to advocate for a rethinking of SAMs practices and indeed, other alternative assessments, along a framework I called, the Human Empathy and Embodiment Assessment.

Socio-historically, SAMs represent different peoples' interests (Hutt & Schneider 2018 p. 3) which is why it exerts enormous power on local/global school decisions, reforms, and social functioning. For instance, schools without being questioned, are mandated to place entry criteria

for international students seeking admissions into higher education. Through this form of imperialism, countries abroad are coerced into accepting and practicing the logic of numbers enshrined within SAMs, as an objective truth for student outcome evaluation (Hutt & Schneider 2018; Allan & Artiles, 2016, p. 33). Thereby, undermining other inherent skills in students like spatial and bodily kinesthetic intelligences (Gardner, 1998, p.20).

One of the constant criticisms against alternative assessment methods however, was that they cannot be quantified and so have no empirical backup (Allan & Artiles, 2016, p. 198). Since SAMs rely entirely on short answers or multiple-choice tests, they are easy to score and quantify. However, it promotes rote learning rather than creativity as students, at home and abroad, are taught to memorize texts to pass local and standardized exams that are required for their academic advancements e.g., Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and SAT (Allan & Artiles, 2016, pp. 25–28).

Other vested interests on SAMs include those of the "assessment industries" who have continued to extort innocent students, reproducing the achievement gap that K-12 schools sought to eradicate. Little wonder the outcry for the replacement of "achievement gap" analysis with other, more contextually based frameworks like "educational debts" or "opportunity debts" (e.g., Ladson Billings, 2006). Even with all these concerns, there is still a global reluctance to broaden school assessment practices to that stage whereby alternative assessment methods can compete favorably with SAMs.

The wide spread preference or endorsement of numbers over theory was also noted and explained elsewhere through the "quick language" metaphor (Allan & Artiles, 2016, p. 27). School being an "under-organized system" (i.e., ambiguous settings that are shaped and reshaped by polarized values and beliefs), change can only occur when members of such "under-organized systems" are self-reflective and/or reflexive by considering themselves as part of the bigger problem (Skrtic, 1991, p. 168). Otherwise, members may continue to act on mistaken beliefs which can set in motion a sequence of activities that allow people to construct falsehood as the truth, thus reinforcing assumptions and presuppositions, such as the normalization of schools' objectifying their failure as students' disability (Skrtic, 1991, p. 153). For these reasons, I propose a deconstruction of K-12 schools' assessment process and practice beginning with a reframing of the ways students and their teachers/examiners view, enter, and interact within the assessment shared spaces. I now turn to some existing school alternative assessment methods and how they struggle to thrive on equal footing with SAMs.

An Overview of the Existing Alternative Assessment Measures, their Features and Prospects for the K-12 Schools' Assessment System

Shepard (2000), in arguing for a new social constructivist paradigm for classroom learning and assessment, contended that classroom assessment should instead be an integral part of ongoing instruction with the goal to develop students' critical thinking, problem solving, application, and metacognition. Review of the factors that affect teachers' choice and use of alternative assessment practices have been elaborated in several studies (Mertler, 1998; Suah & Ong, 2012; Shepard, 2000; Wayman, 2005; Fulmer et al., 2015). For illustrative purposes, I will focus on a targeted sample that allows me to highlight alternative assessment measures currently used in classroom practice. These examples further substantiate my argument for the restructuring of SAMs and alternative assessment types through empathy and embodying assessment logics to make school

assessments more humane for teachers and students to thrive rather than remaining as entities that accommodate one another (i.e., survival).

In their detailed study on Malaysian teachers' assessment choices and practices, Suah and Ong (2012) reported some of the factors that determined Malaysian teachers' choice of assessment and practices, including teachers' levels of education (secondary and primary schools), subject areas (language, science, and mathematics), and teacher's experiences. Junior teachers who had less teaching experiences used alternative assessments more frequently than the senior, more experienced ones. Math and science teachers used alternative assessments more than the language teachers who preferred essay type questions to practical works or homework.

The K-12 teachers in their study developed test items that measured more comprehensive knowledge or application of contents (e.g., multiple choice questions) compared to synthesis (e.g. matching questions) (Suah & Ong, 2012). For instance, teachers were more likely to use oral questioning and student observation compared to students' self-ratings and interviews (p. 97). Tests were frequently sourced from textbooks rather than questions developed by colleagues or the school head. In grading and scoring, teachers preferred to give encouraging comments than to consider students' attendance or even to provide descriptive feedback to their K-12 students. In sum, Malaysian school assessments practices continue to reify and perpetuate the ideals of traditional school assessment practices that aligns strictly with SAMs tenets by them focusing on grade determination, student's achievement, and ranking, regardless of the format they took (i.e., either alternative or traditional approaches).

In a different setting, Bol et al. (2002) conducted a study to address some of the limitations they encountered in their initial study (Bol et al., 2000). They designed a mixed method research to determine the extent and nature of changes in classroom assessment practices in relation to school restructuring models for Memphis City Schools in their first or fourth year of a restructuring program during the 1998–1999 academic year. Out of the four alternative types of assessment that they studied, namely portfolios, observations, performance assessments, and student self-assessments, teachers in their advanced restructuring stage (fourth year) reported to have more frequently used portfolios and student self-assessment types compared to those at the first year of their reform.

In addition, fourth-year implementers preferred the alternative approach to the more traditional standardized tests because of the way it was able to properly align classroom instruction, assessment, and student outcomes, as students themselves had higher expectations for their own work (Bol et al., 2002, p. 415). However, the overall result showed no significant difference in the use of the alternatives versus the more traditional standardized test herein known as SAMs, regardless of year of reform (p. 417). The schools used both methods concurrently and all the teachers agreed that the following major hitches needed serious attention to raise the standard of alternative types of assessment to the level of SAMs: More flexible rubric designs; compatibility with state standardized tests, district grading and report cards. Most of them however, acknowledged that the development, administration, and scoring of alternative forms of assessment is an iterative and time-intensive process.

Furthermore, some of these concerns were summarized in a more recent but different study by Fulmer et al., (2015) who analyzed micro, meso, and macro level spaces in school assessment practices. Micro-level spaces included the classroom space, as well as teachers' values, conceptions, and assessment knowledge. Meso-level spaces included the school as a whole, policies and support from school leadership that were external to the classroom but directly impacted classroom assessment practices. Macro-level spaces included educational policies imposed from outside the

school at the national, state and district levels. Accordingly, the factors that influence these teachers' assessment choices and practices overlap and interact in complex ways that are not easily predictable, mostly giving rise to misalignments in what teachers value and do in their classroom assessment practices (p. 6).

Oftentimes, externally imposed factors have pervasive influences on institutions, organizations, and individuals (Hofstede, 2001). It is important to recognize that these multi-level contextual factors are simply about power relations, which ties back to my previous argument about SAMs as a biopower of oppression. From now on, only the factors that were enumerated by Fulmer et al. (2015) that is, the micro and meso levels, will be discussed further just because the actors at these levels of assessment are the closest to the students and so, more accessible to them compared to those at the macro level of assessment. Hopefully, through the transformation of the K-12 schools and their teachers, those at the topmost power level (i.e., macro level), will begin to see the need to effect a statewide policy that will close the gap between SAMs and alternative forms of assessment in K-12 schools.

Securing the Future Learners through an Embodiment Assessment Logic Imbued with Human Empathy

Researchers have found a reciprocal relationship between motivation and achievement, with success positively influencing subsequent motivation, which in turn positively influences later achievement (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). For instance, Boaler and Greeno (2000) found that students' interest in pursuing higher-level math courses depended on whether their values and identities aligned with the types of knowledge that were valued in their math class. And so, the intersection between SAMs and "deviance" is only one out of the many assessment test paradoxes that exists in our K-12 schools today. Therefore, ways to reimagine assessments and advocacies committed to equity rather than student oppression becomes pertinent to answering the burning question as to whom school assessments should benefit the most.

Embodying assessment was coined from embodying identity, a concept that grew from Embodied Cognitive Science concept (Koszalinski et al., 2012). Embodying assessment leverages upon the connection between the body, mind, and the figured world of an individual (Carabello, 2009; Koszalinski and Williams, 2012). I use "embodying" in this context to signify a way to consolidate students', teachers', and/or examiners' knowledge in the shared assessment space to achieve either short or long-term assessment outcomes. Empathy, which means to understand another person's feelings, was used in this context to indicate that for school assessment to become humanized, all stakeholders must value and be able to exude empathy from within. Only then can they embody assessments as a humanizing venture, regardless of the type of assessment.

Situating instruction and assessment within the framework of human empathy and embodying assessment will tremendously improve all domains of children's development: cognitive, social, and affective domains. Let me now use Rubrics' design and scoring system as one of the major concerns raised by the New American Schools (NAS) assessment restructuring programs discussed in the previous section to illustrate ways in which human empathy and embodying assessment theory can be incorporated into the K-12 school assessment system. At this junction, it will be more logical to start with some of the assessment structures that are within the power domains of the micro and meso stakeholders (i.e., classroom teachers, students and schools). Rubrics designs and scoring systems can become good entry points for recognizing, recruiting, and attracting

students especially those within the terminal grades (i.e., from grades 6 to 12) to participate and embody the K-12 school assessment shared spaces together alongside the teachers and schools.

For instance, the teachers in the NAS assessment models complained about how to develop scoring rubrics that address the needs of all students alike and at the same time, are mapped onto district-wide standards of learning (Bol et al., 2002, p. 418). These teachers, surprisingly, failed to realize that the development of rubrics is an ongoing process that can give rise to short- and long-term outcomes if properly planned. To begin with the end in mind rather than the means or process may not always yield the desired result in the long run considering that with school assessments, the end users are "subjects" and not "objects" as has been misconstrued for so long with SAMs. Therefore, regardless of the kind of outcome (short-or-long term), rubrics and scoring systems must be imbued with empathy and embodying assessment logics. Developing rubrics is an iterative process and so can be initially daunting but gets better over time.

For short-term outcomes with rubrics, teachers need to understand that the type of assessment does not really matter as long as it reflects classroom instructional realities inclusive of the teacher's voice (prescriptive), and individual student's voice (subjective). Nonetheless, the most important thing to note here is that K-12 teachers/examiners need to cede part of the power they possess over their students for being the teacher/examiners through constant self-interrogation to challenge their implicit biases against students' languages and cultures. They need to understand language from a sociocognitive lens, interrogating personal biases in order to become more prepared to resist the status quo (Randall, 2021, pp. 3–4).

In a shared space like the assessment space, schools in general, should understand that the primary function of language is for communication. And so, must resist the common act of suppressing students' authentic voices during instructions and assessments. This type of sensibility is what Randall described as "assessment justice" (i.e., understanding and implementing the theory of equity in teaching and assessment with an intention and commitment to make teaching and assessment "be to the greatest benefits of the least advantaged members of the society") (Randall, 2021, p. 596); Rawls, 2001, pp. 42–43).

Through this framework, teachers, and examiners are made to intentionally commit to integrate knowledge about language development, identity, and linguistic variations in their teaching and assessment routines. Their subjects (i.e., the students), then become more empowered to discover their voices within the teaching and assessment spaces in a more flexible, creative, and friendly manner. In other words, schools begin to resist individual teacher's creative and cultural inheritance as default in teaching and assessments (e.g., "it's how I was taught," "it has always worked that way" etc.) (Chavez, 2021, p. 131).

Rubrics can also be developed for long-term outcomes. The main question to address here is how teachers and schools can use assessment rubrics to support a child down to their community, especially the at-risk group. The idea is for schools to use rubrics scoring as a tool to change individual student's misconception of school as a necessary evil into visualizing the K-12 school as a great equalizer, as should ordinarily be the case. There is a need to create something that resembles a "strike force" of teacher practitioners with artistic vision on how to form and frame a mind. Keeping in mind that continuous workshops, orientations, and professional developments alone cannot change all teachers' perspectives alike, particularly, the more experienced ones who have long internalized the status quo mentality and so, are often opposed to reforms.

The K-12 school system needs to first be sanitized at the micro and meso levels if all students are to be empowered alike, and down to their communities. After all, it takes the village to build a child. And to effectively tackle the academic impacts of the current triple pandemic era,

the K-12 school system needs to build futuristic learners through relevant supportive systems, tools and skills (e.g., technology). Power needs to first be redistributed in K-12 schools' instructional and assessment spaces through the proposed "strike force" of young teachers who may be more open to changes compared to the older ones because of their age, enthusiasm, and technology awareness. By doing so, K-12 schools can better inform more robust changes to instructions and assessments with the older and retired teachers reserved for consultancy jobs. These ideas are not exhaustive and indeed, subject to testing for five to ten years down the road to see how they will nurture the type of minds and bodies urgently sought after in K-12 learners.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Today's instructional and assessment world is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary, complex, and dynamic; therefore, K-12 schools need to complement one assessment method with a varied approach. All examiners need a solid understanding of multiple assessment methods to facilitate communication, promote collaboration, and to produce superior future learners. Therefore, we must first admit that in this era of uncertainties, the future of K-12 schools assessment practices centers around the integration of more objectively-grounded standardized measures on the one hand, and the more contextually-grounded alternative assessment practices on the other hand (albeit, not in their present state of design and application that tends to constantly discriminate against learners based on their embodied identity (i.e., class, race, gender, and (dis)ability).

By incorporating human empathy and embodiment into instructional and assessment practices, students feel more comfortable to enter freely and participate authentically in these spaces, thus, better equipping them to turn their present conditions into opportunities. Yet, it remains the crucial work of K-12 schools to prove to policy makers that through proper design and application, these two assessment measures—SAMs and alternative methods—can actually complement one another in such a way as to mitigate the common ground lost to the triple pandemic of COVID-19, climate change, and social inequities, that typically threaten(s) the most at-risk students, whether as a single or joint threat.

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Agential Equanimity: Marcus Aurelius, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Educational Principles for Embracing Change

Marcus Johnson

Abstract

Much of Western thought has been informed by an ontology of being and a desire to uncover or establish universal truths and principles. This tradition has catalyzed our propensity to see change and difference through the lens of crisis. With this frame in mind, I invite readers to reconsider our relationship to change and difference by discussing the meditations of Heraclitus, Marcus Aurelius, and Friedrich Nietzsche. I conclude by discussing an approach to life, which I call agential equanimity, that embraces change—including covid, climate change, and inequality as it decenters our anthropomorphic worldview and reminds us that we humans are fully within nature.

Keywords: *Friedrich Nietzsche, Marcus Aurelius, Heraclitus, agency, equanimity, covid, climate change, equity, equality, education*

The thought of change can elicit interesting and sometimes contradictory responses. Within a Hegelian-informed progressive view of history, for example, (social) change resides on the positive side of a binary-organized discursive narrative, while the status quo and the past occupy the inherently bad binary pole (Johnson, 2017). Viewed from this perspective, those who teach for social change are lauded as doing the good work, while those who protect the status quo are seen as getting in the way of progress/history (Johnson, 2014). In educational literature, is it often taken for granted that social change, including increased equality, will be good. On other occasions, however, (the thought of) change and difference evoke fear; discussions about significant changes invoke crisis language and claims that the end is near as well as the demonization of those who hold unsanctioned or unpopular beliefs.

This special issue considers how we might positively respond to change. Inspired by these concerns, I present a naturalistic model for encountering change. Informed by the Stoic concept of equanimity and the three pillars of Friedrich Nietzsche's thought (the will to power, the Ubermensch, and amor fati), this approach, called agential equanimity, invites us to embrace the real world as it is and to think twice before denigrating it and ourselves as immoral, sinful, or fallen in favor of a nonexistent possible world or society that might be better. I address the issue through the question: since disease, climate change, and inequality are natural, and since there is no longer any justification for belief in universal moral principles, why should we presume that these are bad?

Heraclitus, Change, and Difference

Heraclitus famously observed that one cannot step twice into the same river (Wheelwright, p.29). The river, in a constant state of flow/flux, changes from one moment to the next. Our step into the water changes the river, and hence our second step is into a different river. This is the standard interpretation. It is equally true, however, that we cannot step into the same river twice because between our first and second forays into the river, we too have changed. We breathe in new air. New cells are born. Old ones die. The water in our body flows. Neural connections in our brain strengthen and diminish. And on and on. The river, you and I, and all the rest of the world are in a constant state of flux, and Heraclitus's 2500-year-old claim about the ontological status of the river generalizes to all earthly systems.

If Heraclitus is correct and the world is flow, there can be no unchanging (universal) adjudicator(s) for good and bad. That is, nothing is inherently good or bad. Events, states of affairs, actions and so on are always good or bad only in relation to a desired or posited end. Climate change, covid, and inequality, for example, are not inherently bad. They are so only in relation to a designated possible state of affairs.

We sometimes seem to presume that climate change is universally bad. However, like Heraclitus's river, the climate is always changing, and this is neither inherently good nor bad. The desirability of the change depends on whose interests are being considered. Almost any climate shift will be terrible for some species but a boon for others, as has been the case for hundreds of millions of years. The climate changes, and populations of plants and animals rise and fall. Populations of particular species rise or fall, and the climate changes. A disease that decimates an over-populated herd of deer or humans, for example, is perhaps bad for those that die, but it often benefits those that survive. Such is the self-regulating nature of the world. A crisis seen from a different perspective is a blessing.

We learn in Biology 1101 that random mutation and natural selection foster differences within populations. These differences, which we might think of as inequalities, benefit the population as a whole by making it more resilient to outbreaks of disease, more adaptable to changes in the climate and to predation sources, better able to respond to changes in resource accessibility, and so on. These differences, which are good for the species as a whole, do not affect individual members of the species equally. There are winners and losers. And that is sort of the point. We would do a species no favors by attempting to erase all difference so as to provide each member of the species an equal opportunity for success in this or that environment.

Where life flourishes, change is ubiquitous, and difference propagates. With life there is change, with change there is difference, and with difference there is inequality. Only in the absence of life is there no change and no difference. There is but one possibility for perfect equality in our universe, and that is in conjunction with the death of the universe itself. In a scenario known as Heat Death or the Big Freeze, the universe might naturally evolve to use all its available energy and so become a barren sameness: undifferentiated matter/energy that rests at a temperature near zero degrees Kelvin (Davies, 1994). Everything is equal and everything is dead. The consideration of life from this cosmological perspective suggests that life is change and difference and that equality is death.

Thematically at least, Heraclitus understood this about 2500 years ago. Others were troubled by the consequences deduced from a world in flux, however, and sought to find eternal and unchanging beings or principles, hiding beneath the flow, that might save them from the vertigo-inducing world of change. Platonism, Neoplatonism, Christianity, Hegelianism, and a host of other

quasi-mystical belief systems can be understood in part as a desire to bind the flux. These and similar belief systems continue to influence thinking and sentiment, and they directly and indirectly lead people to fear change, inequality, and difference.

Marcus Aurelius

Nonetheless, there have always been those comfortable with the flux of life depicted by Heraclitus. Many, such as Marcus Aurelius, who ruled Rome from 161-180 CE, believed the ability to encounter change without irrational trepidation is one of the most important skills a person can cultivate (Aurelius, 1945). The term most often associated with this learned disposition is equanimity, a concept central to many nonreligious philosophies of life, including Epicureanism, Daoism, and Stoicism. Common to these slightly different conceptions of equanimity is the belief that the key to living a good life, regardless of one's circumstances, is to cultivate openness to change and difference. To achieve this openness, it helps to understand that change is natural and certain and that states of affairs become good or bad only as a result of our connecting them to our own necessarily narrow perceptions, expectations, and values. That is, events, people, and circumstances are not bad. It is only our perception that makes them so.

For those looking to open new paths that might develop from the context of covid, climate change, and inequality, Aurelius provides an apt study. He lived in a time of significant change that included a plague far more devastating than covid. The Antonine Plague, or Galen Plague as it is also known, is said to have killed as many as 2000 per day in Rome and up to ten million people total. This included a death toll of 1/3 of the population in many areas in Rome (Reff, 2005). With the world population estimated to have been about 200 million, this would have equated to $1/20^{th}$ of the world dying from the plague, even though the deaths appear to have been centered in the Roman Empire. It was, in a word, devastating. The plague ravaged the Roman army while involved a series of major wars with a formidable adversary. It has even been suggested that the plague was largely responsible for the demise of the traditional pagan religions of Europe and for the rise of imported religions, such as Christianity, that had not yet failed to save the world from death, disease, and war (Stark, 1997).

How did the Stoic emperor, Marcus Aurelius, deal with this plague that killed his adoptive brother and perhaps ended up killing Aurelius himself? With equanimity. Or at least that was his goal. In Book IX of the *Meditations*, Aurelius reiterated a point made repeatedly in earlier books: it is not death that should be feared; it is rather the fear of death that one must defend against. Said more familiarly and broadly, we should focus on those things which we can control: namely, our responses to events. Regarding the plague, he questioned the standard belief that people should do all they could to avoid the disease. For Aurelius, it was important to not hide in fear from the plague but continue to live courageously and attend to his responsibilities. His logic was that we all die one day, and given the expanse of cosmic time, dying one hour or fifty years in the future would be virtually the same. Of far greater importance than outliving the plague or the war was living with courage, composure, and clear mindedness; that is, with equanimity. We might say he valued quality of life over quantity of life.

Aurelius' Stoic values inspired him and others to bridle their emotions and to caution against the pursuit of popularity, fame, glory, and noncharacter possessions such as health and wealth. In contrast, however, he also maintained that it is ridiculous to feel guilty for the possessions and privileges that fate has provided. They should be appreciated while present and dismissed when gone—enjoyed as one would the beauty of a cloud or a falling leaf. Aurelius did not argue

that we should seek equanimity by wandering off into the woods, the desert, or the monastery to avoid all temptation. He himself led the Roman empire from the front lines and demonstrated that the goal for the Stoic sage is not to find peace beyond the world, but to live with peace and composure in this world of change and difference.

This is hardly an easy task, and Aurelius recognized the importance of what we might with reservation call moral education. Most of the first book of the *Meditations* was devoted to recounting the positive influence of various teachers who taught him how to live as a sage. It famously begins: "From my grandfather, Verus, I learned good morals and the government of my temper. From the reputation and remembrance of my father, modesty and a manly character. From my mother, generosity and…simplicity in my way of living…" (Aurelius, p. 11). He expressed his gratitude over several pages. Among those mentioned was a man named Rusticus, who Aurelius thanked for sharing the Stoic ideas of Epictetus, a former slave and originator of Stoicism. This is important because Aurelius and other Stoics believed these principles were suited for all excellent people, whether they be a slave or an emperor. The point, indeed, is that we are thrown into circumstances largely not of our own making, and the question is how we make the most of this life in which we find ourselves. The answer provided by Aurelius was rational action and equanimity.

Engaged Equanimity

For Aurelius, human life is best lived when we are rational, and to be rational is to act in accordance with nature. By understanding and aligning our goals and actions with nature, we swim with the current of the cosmos rather than against it. We will not change nature. We are fully within it. So rather than vainly attempt to control what we cannot and become irrationally upset that nature does not conform to our wishes, we should (i.e., it would be pragmatically advantageous for us to) focus on our proper purview: ourselves. This does not mean passive inaction, however. If we believe a friend or colleague is upset with us, and it is within our power, we should tend to the issue. If the water bill needs to be paid, and it is within our power to do so, we should pay it. We should do our jobs well, be good spouses and parents, and be contributing members of our community. We should not, however, expect that the rest of the world will be as rational as we aim to be. Nor should we become upset when things do not go our way. It is irrational, unproductive, and unbecoming for humans to be unduly upset by things beyond our control.

Aurelius' writings suggest that in his day, as in ours, people were drawn to emotionally engage in drama. In some cases that is fine, but in those cases that require clear thinking for success, we would do better to avoid the emotional additions to our interpretations and assessments. One might, for example, conclude that it would be better for the environment to buy a car with a smaller engine or to take public transportation. If this is the conclusion one reaches, and doing so is in one's power, then that is what should be done. All too often, however, people want to supplement that rational action by demonizing others who think differently. They take to social media and virtue signal. They go into the streets and protest. They engage in identity politics that leads them to experience feelings of hatred for the evil others who see things differently. This provides a certain primitive, emotional thrill: the righteous indignation that has always made propaganda so successful. It is addictive. We come to desire more and more group confirmation and more and more of the feeling of righteous anger we get from the Othering.

This emotional fix comes at the expense of clear-thinking. The Stoic approach offers an alternative to the polarizing effects of the emotion-laden demonizing of others with whom we

disagree. It boils down to thinking differently. Instead of focusing on what others believe or do, the Stoic is careful to look first at one's own personal reactions to make sure they are guided by reason rather than emotion. Rather than say, for example, "the climate is changing, and this is a crisis caused by evil, selfish, and dumb people" the Stoic would think "the climate appears to be changing. How can I ensure I don't fall into emotional fearmongering, and I am not distracted or vexed by things that are beyond my control?" Similarly, rather than say, "covid is killing millions of people, and the crisis is caused by selfish, evil, and dumb people," the Stoic might reckon, "covid is killing millions of people. How can I ensure that I don't fall into emotional fearmongering and become distracted by or engaged with emotional othering?" "What should I do to ensure that this does not negatively affect the simple and abstemious lifestyle that allows me to embrace life with stoic equanimity?" And so on.

Thinking in this way has helped improve my peace and clarity. Because this reflective process is more likely than Othering to afford opportunities for reasoned dialogue, perhaps society would benefit if more people were to take this approach. Stoic equanimity does not require that we stick our heads in the sand or spend our lives disengaged. We can still lead Rome from the front lines. We can live an excellent life despite starting on the lowest rungs of the social ladder. Stoically inclined academics and educators still write and teach.

Friedrich Nietzsche, Change, and Difference

Thoughtful ethical and moral systems begin with or at least contain an account of the world: a basic ontology. Aurelius, for example, believed that Nature is rationally ordered. From this ontology he surmised that humans are happiest, and societies function most optimally, when nature's lead is followed. Variations of the view that the world is rationally ordered continued to direct western thinking for a millennium and a half beyond Aurelius, until Charles Darwin proposed a different explanation for the order we see in the world. From this new explanation of order were derived new models for ethical reasoning. One such model was the product of Friedrich Nietzsche's thinking.

Nietzsche's model, as illustrated in the will to power, the Ubermensch, and amor fati retained many of Aurelius' contentions. Nietzsche too believed it is beneficial to allow oneself to be guided by nature, that we would do well to bridle emotions (and certainly not extinguish them), and that we should not pursue popularity or popular doctrines. There are substantial differences, however. Key among those is Nietzsche's rejection of the view that the world is rationally ordered and his acceptance of some central tenets of Darwinian evolution. Because of these important ontological shifts, some of the justification for equanimity as understood by Aurelius is lost. In particular, if Darwin and Nietzsche are correct, and the world is not directed by cosmic reason but by an unrelenting drive to change, then equanimous acquiescence can no longer be deemed supremely natural. If evolution rather than timeless reason is the cause of the apparent order, then the *soul* of the world is not Reason. Nietzsche believed that it is the impetus to complexify that most characterizes our world. Nietzsche called this primordial characteristic the will to power. Following this reasoning, to embrace nature no longer requires finding our preordained place. To felicitously follow nature impelled by the will to power, we would instead actively cultivate our own instinct and ability to practice self-overcoming.

This new understanding of the world characterized by growth and change rather than universal reason led Nietzsche to deny the existence of essences and universals. In so doing, he referenced Heraclitus (Nietzsche, 1968, 1996). In the distant and recent past, universals and essences,

the tools of philosophy and religion, were used to ontologically connect the cognitive and physical world. In the ancient ontology, physical humans were bound to the concept 'human' through Plato's essences and forms. This binding was necessary for the cosmos (the physical plus the non-physical world) to be rationally ordered and for everything to have its defined place and purpose. By positing that all humans have the same essence, reason and morality could be said to be universally binding for all humans. Now, however, all of that was gone. Nietzsche is perhaps most famous for having Zarathustra announce the death of God. Equally important, however, was Nietzsche's undermining of the Hegelian Geist (i.e., the Rational world). Following Darwin, equanimity required revision if not abandonment.

The Will to Power

Friedrich Nietzsche was an unlikely candidate for the spread of Darwin's views. Nietzsche was at first a Hegelian. This can be seen in his early seminal work from 1872, *The Birth of Tragedy,* where he more or less argued that the Greek tragedies were world-historic because they successfully synthesized the primordial elements of the Dionysian and the Apollonian. The concepts used and the form of his analysis were dialectical in nature. By the time he wrote the second *Untimely Meditations*, in 1874, however, he had come to question the teleology, essentialism, and whiggish moral progressivism inherent in Hegel's rational historicism. In time, Nietzsche incorporated some of Darwin's ideas into his understanding of the world and humans' place in it (Ansell-Pearson, 1997). Equipped with Darwin's naturalistic conception of evolution, Nietzsche was no longer bound to view the world as either eternally rational (Aurelius) or as becoming-rational (Hegel). Instead, he could allow for the influence of randomness and chance, combined with competition and an impetus for growth, to account for the dynamic order apparent in the living world.

In a rational, purposeful world, humans, fire, stones, and maple seeds each have a proper place and purpose. Their meaning and being are united as part of a rational, cosmic whole. In Nietzsche's nominalist naturalism, maple seeds that fall from a tree are not destined to find their proper place. There is nowhere the seed is supposed to be. The seeds are produced and then exposed to the vagaries of life on earth—winds, rains, changing climate, the passing animal that might or might not eat it, and so on. Whether a maple seed lands in an ideal location and grows into a great tree or lands in the middle of a street and withers and dies involves chance. The same is true for human lives. Life's fortunes are not determined by a cosmic rational force, and life does not conform to our made-up conception of fairness. Some are born into ideal situations. Others are not. Neither maples nor humans deserve the lives into which they are born. Someone accustomed to thinking in terms of a purposely ordered world might be inclined to think that this belief leads to nihilism. Nietzsche explained that while someone could come to this conclusion, doing so is not necessary. We may also embrace the fundamental element of chance that is, perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, necessary for the growth in complexity that characterizes the world.

Like Bergson (1907) who followed him, Nietzsche surmised that the doctrine of natural selection is too passive and external to be able to explain all evolution. Darwin explained how the world comes to have the appearance of being purposeful, but he did not provide an explanation for how or why the world practices random mutation and natural selection. Where did these things come from? At times, Nietzsche can be read to have flirted with cosmological, religious, and other teleological explanations for this development. In the end, however, he seemed to settle on a nominalist, internal explanation, which was that the world has a property or characteristic that gives rise to growth and complexity. He called this quality the will to power.

The will to power is best understood as a primordial quality of the physical world. It addresses the age-old question of *why something rather than nothing* by reframing it as *why did the world grow rather than sit eternally inert*? The nominalist answer is *that's just the way the world is*. We have not yet reached the point where we can explain why the world has a growth principle. The best we can do is to recognize that the primary characteristic of the world itself is to grow and complexify. We might think of it as something like the strong nuclear force. Atoms have this quality. If they did not, the universe would not exist as it does. As Nietzsche put it, "The world is will to power—and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides" (1968, p.550).

The will to power can also be understood as a forerunner of contemporary complexity and systems theories in that it attempts to theorize the appearance of autopoietic systems such as individual humans and human social systems (Ansell-Pearson, 1997; Capra & Luisi, 2014). Order, reason, and meaning thus understood are neither imposed nor static. Each are always in flux, and they are generated by means-end relationships that develop historically within overlapping systems. In conjunction with this ontology Nietzsche (1887, 1968) built his ethical system, discussed next.

The Ubermensch and Morality

In his books *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) and *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), Nietzsche attempted to explain the ethical ramifications of a world without essences and universals. In the *Genealogy*, he argued that ethical systems develop historically (evolve) and that moral sentiments express prejudices rather than universal truths. Nietzsche reduced moral systems to two general types: systems that embrace the world and those that denigrate it. Systems that embrace the world as it is he labeled aristocratic. He suggested that these systems were created by the agential conquering peoples of old who viewed themselves as courageous and capable. Their virtues and values reflected the will to power.

Our contemporary moral sentiments have a different history, however. They can be traced back to groups that found themselves on the losing side of the will to power. To these conquered groups, the world seemed unfair, unjust, and hostile. As such, these groups were driven by psychological pressures to contrive what most today would recognize as Christian/Western morality. To assuage their pride and later to wield a new type of psychological weapon, those people lacking in natural excellence transformed qualities such as patience, meekness, obedience, and humility from the odious burdens of the powerless into virtues had by "good" (i.e., moral) people. Moreover, because the natural world did not conform to this new moral vision, the earth itself was reinterpreted as fallen, evil, flawed, debased, and so on. In consequence, those *worldly people* who enjoyed life and excelled relative to others came to be labeled evil oppressors, sinners, and the like. The key point here is that our moral sentiments are merely prejudices that have evolved over time. They do not express anything universal. Universal human rights, for example are as real as unicorns and angels. They do not exist. They are cognitive tools people use to reach desired ends, and they are wielded precisely to muddle thinking by tapping into prejudice and emotion.

All is in flux, change is constant, and difference is the engine of evolution. Therefore, rather than improve mankind by futilely trying to make everyone equal, Nietzsche espoused the goal of liberating exceptional humans (Ubermenschen) who had been poisoned by the guilt-inducing, anti-nature morality employed to psychologically cripple and subjugate those who lived in accordance with nature and the will to power. The Ubermensch concept was a vision and doctrine intended to

help excellent people overcome the psychological sickness caused by resentment-based/herd morality and to embrace the world and its primordial quality, the will to power. As such, the Ubermensch can serve as the basis for a model of agency for those disinclined to take comfort in the values sanctioned by the herd.

Amor Fati

The third pillar of Nietzsche's thinking, amor fati, translates as love of fate. It can be understood as a revision of the stoic notion of equanimity—revised to incorporate the new Darwinian worldview. The concept was designed as a counter to heaven and similar utopias. Nietzsche was critical of these utopias because they lead us to denigrate the real world and ourselves as evil, fallen, sinful, and in need of redemption, salvation, and the like. We are all born into a world not of our making and that feels no compulsion to bend to our moral or other principles. Nonetheless, it is our world—and the only real world that we have.

To practice amor fati is to embrace this world and oneself. It is to recognize that we are the product of 46 chromosomes and a throw of the genetic dice: the manifestation of the history of our ancestors as realized in a novel place and time: the culmination of about three and a half billion years of evolution. I am the present tip of this organic trajectory. Had I a different set of chromosomes, I would not be me: i.e., *I* would not exist. Had these exact chromosomes been born in a different place, I would not be me. I am exactly who I am: one tiny instance of life that will be here today and gone tomorrow. Given the fact of my existence, I am faced with a constant choice to love myself and the world or to vainly wish that it was otherwise. It seems best to me to embrace who I am, with all my flaws, deficiencies, and privileges – and to embrace the real world as it is – with disease, death, change, competition, clouds, streams, and flowers. This includes an image of the me that I would like to become, one that requires cultivation. But I recognize that my desire to be that person is not one that I have "chosen." I wish to be that way because nature has created me this way. I am learning to be more comfortable with my difference and with that of others.

Agential Equanimity

To return to Heraclitus: change is the primary characteristic of the world, and changes are neither inherently good nor bad. To presume that climate change, covid, or inequality are universally bad is irrational, and it distracts from the cognitive poise characteristic of a stoic sage. As educators and scholars, we can model agential equanimity, and offer it as an alternative to the emotional moral sentimentalism characteristic of the present. It is the height of anthropocentric hubris to despise or lament the world that gave birth to you and all other things. Why should the world conform to your expectations and desires? How petty and narcissistic we are when we think in this way.

We can live our lives outraged by the injustice of a world that allows some maple seeds to fall in fertile soil and others to fall on barren ground. However, we might pause to recognize that we are such a seed (one of about one million eggs with which our mother was born), cast by nature into this world to live for a moment, reproduce, and die. Our fate is delimited by the circumstance of being human. This does not include the ability to divide ourselves by splitting in half and regrow, to convert the energy of the sun into our own energy via our skin, to fly, or change skin color; but it does include the ability to reflect and to value and to act in the world.

The ability to think and act with intention (agency) burdens us. It can make us a little crazy. It can make us feel like we are the center of the universe. And yet we are simultaneously guided—almost determined—by deeply primitive emotions that cause us to be anxious, reactionary, and responsive to herd pressures in ways that never make it up to cognitive awareness. The goal of agential equanimity is to help us recognize these facts, to think and act more clearly, and to model this behavior for others. This mode of living is not for everyone, but for some it might be a refreshing alternative. In the final section of the paper, I attempt to apply this doctrine to three issues: climate change, covid, and inequality. I want to explicitly note that a similar analysis could be applied to *crises* discussed along other areas of the political spectrum, such as demographic shifts, the censorship of conservative viewpoints, the loss of traditional values, the plight of Palestinians, and so on.

Climate Change

The sun has a life expectancy of about 10 billion years. It is currently thought to be 4.6 billion years old. In 5.5 billion years the sun will have burned all its hydrogen. At that point, it will expand and destroy the earth and everything on it. No matter how much I recycle, compost, or grow my own food, the earth will one day cease to exist. No matter how many whales, dolphins, and elephants I save, they will all die, eventually.

These thoughts might sound depressing or nihilistic, but our reaction depends on how we interpret these matters of fact. Hume woke Kant from his dogmatic slumbers by reminding him that we cannot derive an *ought* from an *is:* that it is not *unreasonable* to prefer the destruction of the entire world to getting a paper cut. Hume's insight is that there is no necessary connection between events in the world and how they *should* be characterized. States of the world belong to a different realm of being than do our evaluations of them.

Sometimes those who most closely identify themselves with fighting climate change and naturalism act and think in ways that seem very religious-minded to me. The language, rhetorical devices, and emotion seem to redirect the ancient trope that the world is doomed because of our sins, that the hour is nigh, and so on. It also reminds me of the story Foucault told in *Madness and Civilization*, where he explained how processes and structures can be carried forward from one era and then unwittingly be repurposed for another cause. In particular, he discussed how leper houses were transformed into sanitoriums. The processes, structures, and ways of thinking remained the same, but they were directed toward a new "problem." Is not the message of climate change that humans are sinners in the hands of an angry god who is going to destroy the world if we don't repent today and change our ways? Although we have made amazing technological advances, we seem to be using the same conceptual structures (Johnson, 2017b) we used when we believed the world was created by God: fear, propaganda, emotive language.

Notice that I am not claiming that the climate isn't changing. Nor am I claiming that humans play no significant role in the changing climate. I am only pointing out that the way in which we think and talk about this is steeped in a sentimental moralism that has roots in an irrational fear of change: the very change that has allowed us humans to come to exist. If the cyanobacteria had taken steps to stop climate change (the Great Oxidation Event), there would be no humans here to worry about the currently changing climate. And if we "destroy" the environment, some other organisms will likely look back and be happy we did. Taking the longer view used to introduce this section, it is clear that humans and the earth will, in the future, both cease to exist. It is almost certain that humans will exit the stage long before the flaming, supernova-induced end of the earth

and our solar system. And that's ok. We are not the point of all this, and change is the primary characteristic of the universe. Why do we allow ourselves to get so emotionally worked up about what amounts to changing the linens on the Titanic?

A related point is that the term *anthropogenic climate change* is redundant. The use of this term illustrates the influence of a prior religious worldview. It also suggests that humans are supernatural. (The term makes sense only if we humans somehow transcend nature.) We do not. You and I are fully and completely part of nature. If you will, allow me a personal illustration. My wife and I consider ourselves environmentalists, and we maintain an edible landscape in a .8-acre yard in our small rural town. We compost, keep organic vegetable plots, mixed perennial/annual pollinator garden spots, grow a variety of vines and fruit and nut trees, and keep a couple hens. My goal is to daily eat something we have grown in our own yard. This practice led to an experience which significantly changed my perspective on anthropogenic climate change.

As we have repeatedly observed, the Gulf Fritillary butterfly will deposit her eggs on the beautiful, purple passionflower plant. Once the larvae grow into spiky red-orange caterpillars, mostly in August, they will begin to eat every leaf on the vine. Then, rather than go to a different plant to eat, they will completely consume the plant, including the stem, all the way down to the ground, until nothing is left, save the root/rhizome hiding underground. Witnessing this annual event led me to understand that anthropogenic climate change is completely natural. It is not the case that we evil humans (especially Westerners) strip the world of its resources while other organisms righteously and naturally strike a balance with their environment. We are all the same. We are all driven, though differently, by the primordial will to power. Nature has made each of us (individuals and species) the way we are. The *problem* is that we like to believe humans are unique and inherently different. As a result, we over-esteem our very limited perspective and influence. We forget that we are nothing more than an instance in evolutionary history, that climate collapse is as natural as is climate continuity, and that change is constant.

A different perspective might help us think more clearly. Following Heraclitus, Aurelius, and Nietzsche, we might begin by acknowledging that climate change is inherently neither good nor bad. It just is. Change is always better for some and worse for other species (and individuals within a species). Rather than yell at people for not recycling or fly halfway across the country to deliver a paper on the evils of climate change deniers, we might plant trees that will benefit from the anticipated climate change in our planting zone, for example. I understand that not everyone will go for this. Some seem to relish experiencing the righteous indignation that accompanies doing good and fighting evil, especially when it occurs in a social setting. And that's ok too. Why would I presume that everyone should believe and act as I do? Nature creates people unequally – with different temperaments, instinctive desires, and so on.

COVID

As the Director of Faculty Development and the Center for Teaching and Learning at my small college, I was on the front lines, so to speak, in helping our faculty switch to a multiple access model for teaching that included online, hybrid, and socially distanced classes. At first, some faculty complained about having to move to an online or hybrid format. *My class can't be taught online* was a phrase I heard several times. Unsurprisingly, in some cases, those who were the most resistant to moving online have also been most resistant to returning to teach face to face.

Most faculty at my institution did a fabulous job, however. They dug in and worked extra hard to make the best of what they, and most students, viewed as a less than ideal situation. As a result, many of us learned a great deal about instructional technology and about teaching more generally. Covid provided us with an unexpected and unwelcomed opportunity to grow. Those who were predisposed to expect change and to deal with it rationally seemed to fare better than those who viewed covid as a world-historic crisis. Seeing the more and less effective ways that people dealt with covid as it related to teaching has only strengthened my appreciation for practicing equanimity.

The world is constantly changing. Humans are born, and in a tick of the cosmic clock, we die. And each of us *must* die in order for the next generations to come along and have their shot at life. Humans have been so successful, recently, at prolonging life and avoiding death that it is easy for us to lose perspective. It is estimated that in 1 AD, the world population was two million. In the five years from 2010 to 2015, the world population *increased by 420 million* to 7 billion and some change – the change being 150x larger than the world population in 1 AD. Probably everyone writing in this issue and reading it has lost someone to covid. That made us sad. But as we look forward, we might recognize that we have been inspired by the stoic equanimity of some of our peers and compatriots: those who have continued to do their jobs well, be excellent, and grow. In contrast, we have been embarrassed by others, who seem to have become irrationally fearful and have focused on the drama rather than the task at hand. One of the more unexpected but welcome sights for me has been seeing the young college students take up the torch for equanimity and develop a healthy skepticism in response to the mass hysteria they have witnessed over the last couple of years.

Inequality

Like climate change, inequality is perfectly natural. Difference is both the result and catalyst of evolution. Unfortunately, however, moral sentimentalism, derived from religious thinking, dupes most into believing that inequality is bad, that the US is bad, and that we all must be redeemed from our sinful ways. What would happen if we thought more clearly and less sentimentally, and we recognized that inequality is neither good nor bad?

It is an old idea that we are on the verge of the end of history: that God is about to end history, that the Geist has become self-aware, or that the equalizing revolution is just around the corner. Colonialism, industrialization, the information age, and overpopulation have all brought humans closer together in many ways. But we should not be fooled into believing that the forces of evolution and nature have ceased to function. We have perhaps largely evaded selection pressures for the moment, but this is just a blip. In time, new groups/races will surely form. There will be a series of unforeseen, cascading calamities that lead to geographic or other forms of separation/isolation, and the very real and natural differences between the different groups will lead to speciation. This is neither good nor bad universally, but the development of difference is indeed natural.

In some circles, the equality/inequality binary is as strong as the salvation/sin is in others. For many it is taken as an article of faith that people are essentially equal and that we should strive for equal outcomes. But why should we presume this? Why *must* we? There is no logical necessity. Perhaps it is because a cultural industry has developed around this that allows people

to feel like they are fighting for universal good and against universal evil. As with sin, we can always "find" inequality if we look for it, and so there is plenty of work to do in the moralizing trade—taking natural desires and differences and pathologizing them. Rather than lament inequality, however, why not celebrate difference? Rather than fear difference and unequal outcomes, why not accept them as perfectly natural? What would this look like as a different path forward—whereby people embrace the world as it is rather than denigrate it for not emulating our made-up concepts? For me, these are not rhetorical questions. They are starting points for reflection designed to help me think more clearly and to practice intellectual humility and openness. This helps keep me from being dragged this way or that by popular, morally-infused presuppositions. Again, this approach will not suit all temperaments or histories. Given our natural differences, how could it?

Conclusion

Throughout time, people have feared difference and change, and when faced with these have often positioned the other as evil and have lamented that the end is near. I commend the editors of this special edition. Instead of calling for the demonization of those who see things differently, they have invited us to enjoin a dialogue so that new and different paths forward might be considered. In this essay, I have used Heraclitus, Marcus Aurelius and Friedrich Nietzsche to present a naturalistic model for agency that is understood in contrast to emotional-moralistic approaches, which I have argued have no philosophical grounding in a world not governed by God or Reason. In so doing, I have attempted to refresh the stoic principle of equanimity with Nietzschean concepts that were derived after the shift toward a Darwinian-inspired worldview. I call this approach to dealing with change agential equanimity, and I suggest that given innate human difference, this is a doctrine for some but certainly not all.

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A Story to Move Forward: A History of Past, Present, and Future Ways of Responding to Education

Barbara Tischler Hastie

Abstract

The healthy functioning of a school system depends upon many factors. The internal micro factors require a leader to take into account the heart and human conditions that coexist within the lived environment. The external macro factors are the events that occur in unexpected ways. When these internal micro factors are not functioning well, and a macro external event occurs unexpectedly, the system can struggle. While leaders may equip themselves with dynamic leadership skills to assist in navigating through the uncharted macro events, there is no disputing the fact that the pandemic of COVID-19 caught all leaders off guard. Many leaders just wanted to get through it. Many yearned to get their organizations back to normal. This qualitative case study examined the leadership's responses from Ulster BOCES (Board of Cooperative Education), during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Ulster BOCES-Educator Edge leadership attended to the hearts and minds of staff in human ways throughout each stage of the pandemic. This qualitative case study used the adaptive resilient frameworks from (Heifetz, 1994; Scharmer, 2009; Schein & Schein, 2017) as an inquiry into three research questions: 1) What kind of environment nurtures human development and promotes learning? 2) How did leaders attend to the human elements in virtual and hybrid spaces? and, 3) How did inclusive contexts highlight the need for varied approaches to nurturing and developing learning for both the leader and the learner?

Keywords: *dynamic leadership, mission driven, adaptive leadership, Ulster BOCES-educator edge, COVID-19 pandemic, moral compass*

Introduction

Human beings are the heartbeat and rhythm of any organization. In organizations of schools, it is humans who interpret, choose and contextualize the meaning behind words, which then become the norms of their culture. Dynamic leaders understand these complexities and recognize the work that is needed, is work of the heart. They are cognizant that what they put out in words to a body of actors—made up of humans whose perceptions and experiences—can either shape the healthy functioning of an organization or dissolve its entire empire.

Starting in March 2020, all leaders were tested, and the long-term outcomes of how they addressed the COVID-19 crisis are still yet to be seen. Regardless of how steeped a leader had invested their teams in preparation for change, in March of 2020, every leader was caught off

guard. When COVID-19 hit, all systems stood still in disbelief. Despite many years of preparedness for emergency lockdowns, lock ins, and even a *Guideline for Developing High Quality School Emergency Operations Plans* (2013), published by the U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Department of Justice, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, not one plan of action addressed *what to do* when faced with a national health crisis that basically shut every school district and other organizations down.

From the perspective of schools, some dynamic and noble system leaders have demonstrated practices of courage and vulnerability. With these traits, leaders are better equipped to "recognize the sometimes fuzzy distinction between policy and practice" (Rallis et al., 2008, p. 7) and to illuminate strong practices of implementation that can lead to creating good policy. Whether decision-making is intentionally conducted or leaders follow personal or professional codes of ethics, educational leadership is a craft to be woven into the fabric of the organization of all schools (Rallis et al., 2008). A specific and related topic for organizations of schools, is how educational leaders make decisions whether they encompass areas such as inclusion, justice, professionalism, democracy, and social justice, ethical policies and practices with plans to be implemented and embedded into the culture of a school organization (Rallis et al., 2008).

According to Rallis et al. (2008), leaders who lead with thoughtful reflection, who recognize the choice of their words and how their effect upon others needs to be inclusive of everything they do before they take action, are leaders who can be considered as dynamic. Leading from a framework of dynamic leadership, is all done within the context of the culture they exist in, and, thus, the impact of influence in return. The biography of their organization depends on this leadership, and those within the culture who learn how to pivot when needed, or make sense of things that might be unclear to an outsider, are what can help a culture thrive or just survive. The implementation practices of *how* leaders govern can impact whether they enact effective policies, changes, and procedures, or create roadblocks that can lead to a path of ethical and moral dilemmas. Though every school is required by law to adapt a code of ethics, these codes can easily be interpreted to mean many different things. Under the Code of Ethics Law, "all school boards are required to adopt a code of ethics for the guidance of its officers and employees that sets forth the standards of conduct reasonably expected of them" (School Law, 2020, p. 125). The words, reasonably expected, are just words and like many laws, are open to interpretations, which is precisely why school leadership requires a myriad of knowledge regarding policies, practices, and procedures, and a strong moral compass. Absent this, "Without any guidelines of procedures to follow, moral reasoning about policy formation, implementation, and evaluation can be convoluted and frustrating" (Rallis et al., p. 13).

Ethical leadership requires the use of reflective practices to support policies aligned with justice and a deeper understanding of the needs of all (Rallis et al., 2008). This reflective lens is what Rallis et al. (2008) claimed "helps school leaders sort out what they want to do (or must due by directive or law) and *how* they are going to do it" (p. 4). Ethical leadership includes the practices of considering and including cultural proficiencies and socially just and equitable norms for all. During times of crisis, ethical leadership can create the space to move forward and learn new ways of being.

Unfolding the Story

Schein and Schein (2017) espoused, "Culture as a set of assumptions defines for us what to pay attention to, what things mean, how to react emotionally to what's going on, and what actions to take in various kinds of situations" (p. 22). Humans belong to various cultures, genders, and backgrounds, and they are the heart of any organization. An organization's culture can be examined from different frameworks to help unravel the complexity of how culture responds during times of crisis. Using this lens, I examined the contextual factors that influenced how leaders of the organization of Ulster Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES)/ Educator Edge faced the crisis of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic.

As a response to pandemic interruptions, all systems of education around the world needed to shift their ways of knowing and doing. This study examined the traits that support a system to be able to both survive and thrive during times of crisis. During these uncommon times, there is a calling to find a better way to compete and collaborate so that we, as a society, can build more equitable learning organizations. This paper focuses specifically on how mission-driven leadership practices can support leaders now and in the future to examine inclusive practices that arose from this crisis. The intention of highlighting these equitable practices is to point to a path of inclusivity for students who have been marginalized, whether through outdated policies, outdated mission statements, or outdated expectations of achievement. Based on the research, this paper suggests frameworks for designing policies and creating structures to nurture the hearts, minds, and interests of those leaders who want to do a more in-depth study on the lessons learned from living through the challenges presented during COVID-19. More specifically, this paper explores what was learned within a BOCES organization that highlights the leadership practices which helped strive to attain more equitable outcomes. Recommendations include ways that system leaders can take courageous steps to forward-face the (leader)ship and all those aboard toward a shared, forward direction.

Review of Literature

Research on how leaders have changed their practices during the crisis of COVID-19 is still being studied; several studies have examined the traits focused on in this current study (Anderson, 2020; Carpenter & Poerschke, 2020; Viner et al., 2020). From a crisis management perspective and school organizations, there are several studies that have examined the issues of crisis, and are mainly focused on the crisis that has been ongoing. For example, when faced with emergencies, school systems have varying levels of preparedness, depending upon the crisis. Over the years, school systems have had to plan and prepare communities for crisis events, create policies and procedures for things such as fire drills, lock-downs, lock-outs, floods, active shooters, hurricanes and health policies related to influenza and the like (Urick et al., 2021). The type of leadership needed during COVID-19 presented school organizations with a profound and different set of skills than those needed to address more familiar emergencies.

The preparedness for school leaders to be better equipped to handle crises within their organizations has been studied over time from an emergency preparedness lens (Urick et al., 2021). Models have been rolled out in school organizations, yet several scholars believe the problem of a lack of preparedness can be eliminated if training takes place throughout the entire school year (Urick et al., 2021). Some authors have posited that providing students with a voice early in the

planning could help those who currently are in those lived experiences better perceive the needs of the modern world (Day et al., 2020).

This type of training might address the social-emotional components that crisis planning does not take into account in the process of planning (Day et al., 2020). Studies on crisis leadership and self-care examine levels of burnout and examine reasons why leaders might leave the field of educational leadership (Carpenter & Poerschke, 2020; Darmody & Smyth, 2016; Wang et al., 2018). Though the field of nursing and social work have developed important bodies of research and evidence that support the importance of self-care, in education, it has only been since the pandemic that schools have begun to give rise to this work.
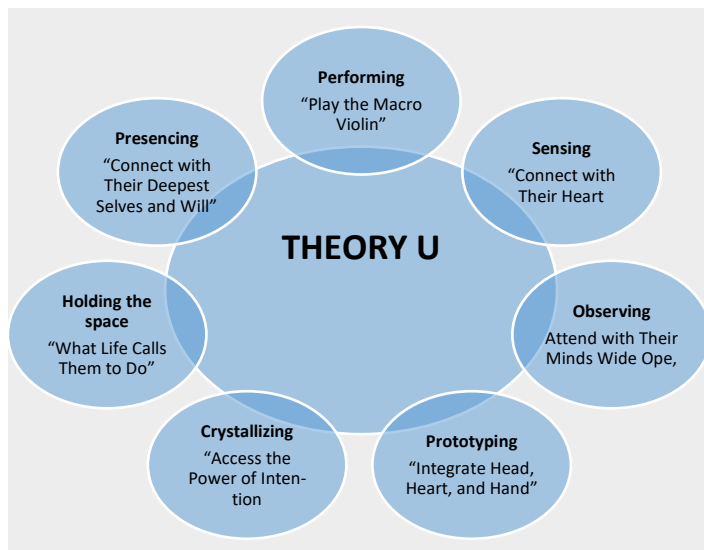
Theoretical Framework

I used the scholars Schein and Schein (2017), Scharmer (2009/2016, 2018), Heifetz (1994), and Heifetz et al. (2009) as the theoretical frames for this case study. I crafted interview questions to help inform data collection and hand coded responses to examine themes (Appendix A)

In defining organizational culture, Schein and Schein (2017) presented three levels of cultural analysis that examine and apply to "an individual, a micro system, a subculture, an organization, or a macro-culture" (p. 29). These three levels of culture are depicted in a model, organized into a framework that includes "artifacts; espoused beliefs and values; and basic underlying assumptions" (Schein & Schein, 2017, p. 18). Within this framework, complex organizations such as school systems can be viewed in terms of the explicit and implicit artifacts, beliefs and or values, and underlying assumptions that exist in the system, whether on a micro, macro, individual, or organizational level. From the perspective of examining the impact of leadership and culture, Scharmer (2009/2016) posited that people have been living during an era where conflicts and destruction have coexisted. Though it may be widely accepted that leadership in schools can directly impact a system, it is during times of crisis when it is most critical to examine the *how and what* leaders do to shift past ways of outdated institutionalized practices and past ways of thinking.

Research from Scharmer's (2009/2016) leadership framework guides this paper and helps to examine how leaders can shift school environments to support the varied learning needs within a complex school system. Scharmer's theoretical framework and practice include using a practice called presencing, defined as his theory U (see Figure 1). According to Scharmer, presencing is a process used in which leaders connect with their deepest selves and will. This theory provides leaders with a framework to break past patterns of practices that are unproductive. There are seven essential qualities of leadership that are identified by Scharmer (2009/2016) that can assist a leader to connect with their deepest selves. Scharmer's seven qualities are outlined in Figure 1 (next page).

Figure 1: *Scharmer's Seven Qualities*

Performing
"Play the Macro Violin"

Presencing
"Connect with Their Deepest Selves and Will"

Sensing
"Connect with Their Heart

THEORY U

Holding the space
"What Life Calls Them to Do"

Observing
Attend with Their Minds Wide Ope,

Crystallizing
"Access the Power of Intention

Prototyping
"Integrate Head, Heart, and Hand"

Note. A leader can use these qualities when moving through crisis situations. Diagram above was taken from the key concepts from *Theory U: Leading from the future as it emerges: The social theory presencing* (Scharmer, 2009, Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

    I sought to understand and connect the theoretical framework Schein and Schein (2017) and their work on *Organizational Culture and Leadership* to examine the presence of leadership during times of crisis. Schein and Schein provide a rationale for why the shifted conversations were needed, especially during this crisis. They propose that the tangible and visible parts of culture, the organizational DNA, and the embedded and deep unconscious areas lie beneath these tangible layers of culture. The theoretical work of Scharmer (2009/2016) and *Theory U; Leading from the Future as It Emerges* are referred to in this study. Scharmer's (2016) research outlined the shifts in organizations using frameworks that offer a new way of seeing, doing, learning and doing as compared to what is already known. These ways of knowing are referred to when extrapolating comparisons of how the organization of Ulster BOCES/Educator Edge, where I hold an administrative position, navigated through this crisis, leading the way for an emerging future. Through a series of interviews and review of artifacts, I present an array of practices, creating options for other educational leaders to support the needs of staff and students who have been marginalized by an outdated system.

    The framework by Heifetz (1994; Heifetz et al., 2009) was also used to examine the decision-making practices of the leadership of BOCES and explore how they operationalized moving their system forward during this time of crisis. Adaptive leadership theory emerged from over 30 years of research by Heifetz and Linsky through their research at Harvard University (Heifetz et al., 2009). In 1994, in *Leadership without Easy Answers*, Heifetz presented a theoretical framework based on what is defined as adaptive behaviors. This framework was developed and evolved around "two distinctions: between technical and adaptive problems and between leadership and authority" (Heifetz, 1994, p. 20). His work defined leadership as being best observed through the lens of a leader's undertakings rather than through their traits or skills. Heifetz (1994; Heifetz et al., 2009) asserted that leaders who apply an adaptive leadership theory could move beyond a simple way to address challenges, motivate, mobilize, and focus on different ways to solve them.

Additionally, they practice anticipating what challenges might come up and begin identifying the various root causes (Heifetz et al., 2009. Heifetz's (1994) metaphor of a leader knowing when to be on the dance floor and when to step up on the balcony applies to the skills needed in the COVID-19 crisis.

Methodology

This qualitative case study featured informational interviews gathered from administrators at the organization of Ulster BOCES (n.d.). A case study allowed for opportunities to explore "a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case)…over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information…and reports a case description and case themes" (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). A qualitative data analysis approach was used to describe the commonalities and differences in viewpoints among interviewees and various scholars on the challenges of leadership in the face of crisis and the significance of the effect of leadership on educational systems. Qualitative analysis allowed for searching data to identify thematic descriptions and overviews (Creswell, 2013). Data collected for this study were contextualized and fractured to allow for an overall understanding and making certain conclusions. An inductive approach allowed me to emphasize a theory critical for better understanding of school organizations. The case of Ulster BOCES was selected due to access to the administrators and their innovative practices during COVID-19.

Data Collection

Ulster BOCES was used in this case study, specifically examining the degree to which four members of the Ulster BOCES leadership team (a) the district superintendent, the chief executive officer responsible for all aspects of the programs sponsored by Ulster BOCES; (b) the deputy superintendent; (c) the director of learning and design for innovative teaching and learning student based programs, and (d) the director of learning and design for the career pathways programs, engaged in behaviors and took actions to support a culture of social-emotional safety for all throughout the interruption of COVID-19.

This paper examines how one organization, BOCES, rose to meet the community's needs during the COVID-19 global pandemic. In their planning for supporting public school supports and services, all BOCES throughout New York State required a response reflective of the many communities within each county they support. Ulster BOCES is located in the rural area of Ulster County, New York. It supports services to eight component public school districts in Ulster County. BOCES is a public organization and was first created in 1948 by the New York State Legislature. The purpose of a BOCES is for the provision of shared educational services and programs to the different school districts within the BOCES region (Jones, 2013). As of current, there are 38 BOCES that exist that incorporate all, except nine schools within the 721 identified public school districts in New York state. The process of forming a BOCES service is created when at least two or more school districts have similar needs and can be met through a shared program (Jones, 2013).

Through the support of a BOCES, school districts are able to save money through pooling resources and sharing costs to provide a wide array of services. These shared services are economical for districts to be able to provide services, programs, and supports that might not be affordable to provide. It is less costly and more efficient for BOCES to operate a central service rather than

to open separate programs for each school district (Jones, 2013). Each year, all local Boards of Education review the needs of their district and make decisions about purchasing BOCES services. The State of New York gives financial incentives for a district to participate in a shared service and offers state aid to school districts for the BOCES service they received. The application of a shared service helps the school districts to be able to meet the many unprecedented challenges. The Instructional Services Programs of Ulster BOCES supports the eight school districts in Ulster County in professional learning that keeps districts current in their practices, and to keep up with NYSED changing mandates.

The mission statement for Ulster BOCES (n.d.) states:

> At Ulster BOCES, our mission is to provide high-quality shared educational, administrative, and technical services that enable component school districts to develop the capacity of their students and adults to achieve higher standards of performance. With an emphasis on economic efficiencies, Ulster BOCES is committed to offering educational programs that prepare all students for employment and/or postsecondary education. (p. 3)

When this paper was written, I was employed by Ulster BOCES as an administrator in the Instructional Services division of Ulster BOCES. The administrators interviewed at Ulster BOCES were not direct supervisors of this author, and the author's supervisor was not interviewed. This was purposeful in ensuring relationships and biases were minimized as much as possible.

During the first year of the COVID-19 global pandemic, when many schools were busy trying to figure out how to contact trace, providing safety through use of masks, installing clear barriers for desks, providing supplies of disinfectant and hand sanitizers, and ensuring transportation was available, Ulster BOCES leadership did all that *and* engaged in innovative practices that prioritized the emotional health of staff. These innovative practices were determined to be priority needs by leadership from both their student-based programs, which support the education of around 230 students in the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning; 1008 students in the Career and Technical Education programs; 91 students placed in the Hudson Valley Pathways Academy, a program that offers college credit in addition to working toward a high school diploma; and 32 students in the Alternative Pathways Phoenix Academy and the leadership through the division of Instructional Services, which provides the programming and professional learning supports for all 8 districts in Ulster County. These priority areas came from the leadership's understanding that students and families of the community of learners attending the student-based programs were faced with a crisis like never before, and it was critical that staff and teachers servicing those communities be considered a high priority.

The focus on wellness for staff and teachers offered opportunities for online Zoom meetings to discuss other priority needs. This included the offering of wellness programs for staff, and attention given to weekly memos from the superintendent who kept everyone up to date on the current conditions of the pandemic, as well as reminders that self-care was a priority. In addition to the weekly offering of online meetings for wellness check-ins, staff were encouraged to plan to prepare wellness offerings for the eight districts in the county. As a result, several districts used the professional learning offerings during their superintendents' full-day conferences and courses were offered around learning for staff that helped build skills needed during this time. For example, there were wellness topics for staff and their students, mindfulness classes, classes on how to use

Zoom in a way that would bring empathy and engagement to families and students, and a focus on the needs of the current time. This shift came out of the crisis.

In the past, operations of school systems tended to perpetuate past ways of thinking and being. However, during this pandemic crisis, there was an opportunity to rise to the present and use the circumstances to help build thinking minds. Those systems that were focused on trying to "get back to normal" were ones that truly struggled and were caught in a lack of mobility. I am of the belief that if school systems really want to move their performance levels, they must operate to include the present times. During this time of COVID-19, to think that schools could operate as they have been, was to operate as if one was on a sinking ship and the captain was trying to use the navigation system they had been using all along to help it to stop sinking. During this time, the opportunity for a leader to use their mind to not engage in past ways of knowing and thinking required a different state of mind. For example, the deputy superintendent reminded everyone that their schedules needed to allow time to pause for their students, *as well as themselves*. Staff would often hear the deputy superintendent posit, "Our calendars are a statement of our values, and if we are not planning to include valuing the social emotional well-being of our students and ourselves, then it is less likely to happen." The value statement of time as a priority for self-care was most critical during this time. With leaders of school systems not being prepared to lead the way during the pandemic, it is no wonder why the cogs on the school systems were stuck with trying to get back to normal. This paper proposes that these adaptive, resilient frameworks (Heifetz, 1994; Scharmer, 2009; Schein & Schein, 2017) have been at the heart of their leadership. Using these conceptual frameworks, I investigated the following three questions of inquiry:

1. What kind of environment nurtures human development and promotes learning (negotiation of meaning, co-construction of knowledge and new ways of being)?
2. How is this created in virtual and hybrid spaces?
3. How do diverse inclusive contexts invite (or even necessitate) a variety of approaches to nurturing and developing learning for both the leader and learner?

Gaps in Learning and Knowing or Gaps in Responding?

Political divisions surfaced regarding *how* this pandemic should have been handled; the *why* school district leaders needed to address the systemic issues became even more critical because systems needed to move forward. In particular, school organizations became a target, a place for opening up an awareness of the deeper inequities. It became a domino effect from the heart of a school system, not fully functioning, that elicited many examples and other forms of crises across communities. Families were not prepared to juggle managing work while also needing to educate their children. In addition, not only were the inequities felt within the walls of each school, as a community, it clearly became an issue when access to technology was limited due to low socioeconomic conditions. The barriers of language and lack of education became an ever larger challenge when parents were faced with having to become partners of delivery in their child's education. For example, teachers were faced with teaching from a small square screen that gave them a glimpse into the lives of students. For the first time, teachers really started to see and hear how students from poverty live outside the four walls of school.

It is through this lens that the leadership at Ulster BOCES modeled the ability to work through some ground-level challenges faced by school organizations. Heifetz (1994) contends that by recognizing the different times of discord or chaos, communities tend to place the expectation

on the leadership (authority) to give them answers, decisions, and courage, and to create a map of the future. It is expected that leaders would be someone who knows where the community should be going and is someone that assists in making difficult problems simple. However, instead of looking for this kind of leader/savior, Heifetz (1994) suggested the real work of leaders is in challenging every single member within a group to face complex problems, problems that have no solutions that are not simple problems and require that each member learn to engage in new ways in sharing in the leadership practices. These complex sets of problems, problems faced through the COVID-19 pandemic, problems with no easy answers, are the kind of problems and challenges that K-12 leaders have been facing. Heifetz and Linsky (2004) asserted, "In this complex environment, it is more important than ever that educators at all levels exercise adaptive leadership" (p. 37). The leadership at Ulster BOCES purposefully created opportunities for staff and teachers to share their thoughts, questions and concerns during the COVID-19 crisis so that there was a two-way dialogue to problem solving. The superintendent would voice in meetings, "If anyone has a great idea, I am always interested in hearing about it, please share. My door is always open or you can message me anytime" (Personal communication, December 14, 2021). It was evident in these meetings that the leadership acknowledged that this time required all hands on deck and that the leaders did not hold all of the answers to fix it.

This pandemic halt not only culminated in remote learning and lockdowns, but it also forced leaders to take stock in exploring their lens of delivery. Ulster BOCES took the lead in recognizing that although it was still important to provide explicit instruction, skills, and knowledge, the priority for strengthening the focus on relationships and community needed to be the strong foundational practice that was prioritized by all.

Through the leadership team of Ulster BOCES, decisions were quickly made to adapt education to the technological shifts needed for both staff and students. This rapid swift change was made possible through clear communication and direction from leadership. These are examples where the leadership was able to use what Heifetz (1994) defined as solving technical problems. These are problems that have some known solutions and can be easily operationalized by all. However, it took adaptive skills to be able to think beyond the known solutions. Building upon the charge of Ulster BOCES's (n.d.) mission statement, the superintendent kept the community informed on a consistent timeline about the needs across the state that he gathered by attending ongoing meetings, and from his research which involved communications with his colleagues who are other thought leaders throughout the state. All pertinent details were readily shared with staff through ongoing email communications.

The leadership team was committed to supporting robust solutions using technology so that remote and hybrid learning opportunities were made readily available and the student-based programs were able to make radical education changes. Infrastructures were increased by leadership through licensing of updated technology systems for all classrooms within the Ulster BOCES student-based programs, allowing more fluidity of using Zoom for hybrid learning and instruction. The use of new tools provided the technology that included crystal clear enlarged view of the classrooms, dynamic audio ranges, and a camera that moved around the room to pick the continual fluidity of the classroom. Through the technology tools, families and students were provided with access to instruction as it was occurring, whether students were at their desks, or standing or moving around the room and not facing the camera. The technology used systems with which teachers had familiarity and they did not have to be concerned with learning new operating systems. This also provided provision of equity and access to education for those who could not physically return to the classroom when there were high infection rates. One example in the Ulster BOCES Career

and Technical programs was how technology provided instruction for what had previously required hands-on learning. Through the use of GoPro cameras, students were able to gain access to looking under cars during automotive labs and demonstrate cosmetology skills, and even the skills needed in culinary classes could be highlighted with technology. This approach provided not only access to instruction but equitable access to those who were unable to physically attend shop classes or labs. As posited by the superintendent, "We've been of the belief that teaching and learning should be the drivers of how technology is leveraged, not the other way round." He further clarified and stated, "This technology…through the Zoom application made that possible" (Personal communication, December 13, 2021).

Even prior to the pandemic, Ulster BOCES had been a leader in technology solutions throughout the county, supporting innovative approaches to teaching and learning. Over the years, through its Instructional Services and Model Schools departments, Ulster BOCES has provided its county-wide public school districts opportunities for teachers, students, and administrators to be leaders in the field of education through the wide array of professional learning programs. As the Ulster BOCES deputy superintendent stated during the interview, "What supported our success was several key pieces. First, we used a crisis management perspective, having a single point of communication. The narrative was consistent, elevating having a single access point" (Personal communication, December 13, 2021). When asked the questions if there was a point throughout the year, or not, when leaders began to notice opportunities for new ways of thinking about education or was there a push to go back to the way things have always been, the superintendent responded:

> In late April 2020, we began to think about planning for the 2020–2021 school year. We believed that we would continue to be remote or hybrid and as such we needed to refine our practices to take the best from lessons that we learned from the March 2020–June 2020 period to apply those lessons to a newer paradigm for that school year (2020–2021). We anticipated that there would always be a push back to return to the pre pandemic delivery systems. The pre-pandemic status quo. We sought, at least in our own programs, to refine our practices so that the issues, that the programmatic shortfalls, that were present before March 16, 2020, were addressed. Unfortunately, as a service agency, we could not influence many (or any) of our school districts to engage in a reimagining exercise. In short, we engaged in a reimagining exercise to create a better system and future, but we were alone in that endeavor and as such, and as a service agency, we were forced to succumb to the pressures of the status quo. (Personal communication, December 13, 2021)

As a BOCES agency, however, there were many opportunities to build the capacity to showcase possibilities during this time of crisis. When asked how instruction had shifted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the response from the deputy superintendent was:

> I believe that teachers are continuing to use some of the techniques and strategies that worked so well for them during the past 20 months. I also believe that teachers are paying more attention to engagement and the emotional and psychological well-being of their students. In that way, instruction has shifted (Personal communication, December 13, 2021).

In regard to supporting technology, the deputy superintendent made a point to say:

Building capacity using technology platforms was not negotiable…We needed the best technology we could use, we needed the best air purifiers and the focus on education was not going to be about pedagogy. It has to be about emotional safety and leveraging the trust that was already built within the programs. (Personal communication, December 14, 2021)

The deputy superintendent further elaborated this and shared that when he was asked by staff, "How are we going to deliver instruction," he answered them with the response and question in return, "How are we going to build our school and what do we want it to be?" (Personal communication, December 13, 2021).

Responding Versus Reacting

When a crisis occurs, it can either divert the conditions of what has been considered the normalcy, upending practices and ways of doing business, or it can paralyze the organization (Scharmer, 2018; Schein & Schein, 2017). With the latter, discourse for growth becomes frozen, and those in leadership become fixated by such crises only to perpetuate a reoccurring mindset, "We need to find a way to get back to normal." Such leaders assume their mission is to solve the issue at hand for those who have become attached to the system and the way it has been. All around, people and systems have been trying to get back to normal. It is almost as if they are determined not to learn from the crisis or develop anything new or creative from the experience. This concept of "getting back to normal" is a common response from organizations that depend on operationalized procedures and policies to function. However, the COVID-19 pandemic shifted the landscape of design thinking for many leaders in educational organizations, because suddenly, the concept of normal was lifted from the core ways of knowing and being. This crisis halted the status quo and remotely shifted the dialogue about education as a whole. This shift was brought on not only by the pandemic alone, but through the timing of a culture that was facing the strain of an over 400-year inequality race-based epidemic that polarized and shifted narratives in both organizational leadership, education, and government.

As exhausted teachers and leaders were faced with a need to continually pivot all aspects of education, the competitive battlefield of our school organizations faced increased pressures to meet performance demands from states and federal government, and it quickly became clear "doing business as usual to find a way back to normal" was no longer an option. That being said, the conversations among organizations of schools developed differently within each community, county, and state. The dialogue between most school leaders vacillated between trying to figure out what the best options for education during a pandemic should be, while also attending to the wellbeing and mental health of students and staff. With the structures of school organizations being fluid and more vulnerable during times of uncertainty, strong leadership was being called for to help communities cope and adapt to challenges of changing circumstances being faced by all.

Moving Beyond Crisis Thinking

The work being done at Ulster BOCES currently, and after these past years of pandemic and current COVID-19 variations, has been laying the groundwork for post pandemic recovery and rejuvenation of the life of education. As the deputy superintendent shared often with staff, "We are the ones who have to be the innovators, to be able to lay the foundation for moving forward out of this crisis" (Team meeting, January 20, 2022). The relationship of building social,

emotional, and culturally responsive practices has been expedited from the crisis of this pandemic. This is the type of thinking that digs deeper into my questions about exploring how environments can nurture human development and promote learning (negotiation of meaning, co-construction of knowledge, and new ways of being). When a superintendent explicitly defines the expectations for innovative ways of addressing a crisis, staff feel empowered to think outside of the box.

> The deputy superintendent expressed that over the past few years, teachers were able to get a good glimpse into the lives of families through Zoom. Once we started to return back to classrooms this school year, the instructional pieces started to become more of a discussion; however, it became more complicated with the continual new strains of the COVID-19 virus, and the challenges around having to have more conversations about testing.

These were challenges not with academic testing, as found in past decades, but with COVID-19 variant testing and how to keep schools safe. The infrastructure piece became even more of a critical conversation. Throughout, Ulster BOCES leaders and staff were engaged in conversations that involved innovative thinking and began shifting the dialogue from crisis thinking to planning a future. An example of this was shared when this researcher asked the administration about the lessons learned. Some responses included,

> The conversation about lessons learned and delivery of instruction (whether via Zoom, hybrid, or face to face—really "mask to mask") included innovative thinking about how to leverage time. For example, leaders at Ulster BOCES started to look at how they might take one day of the week and make it an asynchronous day, where students would be provided ongoing lessons via technology, while teachers are provided time to think, plan and take action for the things they have little time for when they are teaching a full day. Colleges are able to do this! Why can't we?

Additionally, it was stated,

> The need to practice the intentional shift out of crisis management…the acknowledgement that we are just starting to see things, and to be honest that we don't know it all. We need to continue observing and make honest assessments along the way. The expectations should not be to get it right, but to have leadership that is action centered. (Personal communication, December 13, 2021)

> With leadership like this and communication ongoing, Ulster BOCES' teachers and staff within all areas of the agency were able to focus more on building and maintaining relationships with each other, families, and the community at large. Often during the large Zoom meetings with the entire agency, staff, and administration, community-building activities took precedence over other agenda items. This priority for building community is something which both directors of the student-based programs spoke about during interviews. They discussed how the time allotted during this time of the pandemic was spent providing staff with:

> Equity and a systemic approach to learning. Whether the issues at hand were related to special education, students in the Career and Technical programs, or students placed in advanced opportunities for higher ed learning, the approach taken at Ulster BOCES is to

ensure that everyone was…taking care of themselves and each other, heart to heart, face to face, mask to mask or on-line. (Personal communication, December 14, 2021)

Additionally, these leaders expressed, "It requires a strong leader who is able to recognize that mental health is a priority need during times of crisis" and to recognize what is meant by the metaphor, "we are leaning over the edge now" (Personal communication, December 13, 2021).

There is significant attention being placed on technology and wellness at Ulster BOCES. In the department of Instructional Services (IS), many of the professional learning webinars being offered to schools, shifted from a focus of standards work, to wellness, project-based learning and cycles of inquiry. As a team, the IS department recognized the need to begin to triage and support teachers, staff, and leaders throughout the county through compiled webinars of professional learning that offered solutions to healing, rather than fueling stress. In addition, the staff of specialists within Instructional Services implemented a practice of Wellness Friday mornings that provided a live, 10-minute Zoom webinar for guided breathing and meditation. The link to this training was shared throughout the BOCES agency, as well as to other leaders throughout the county.

From the perspective of shifting the narrative around building programs, Ulster BOCES invested time in training staff in the work of design thinking, through trainings offered from Stanford University. Bernstein and Linsky (2016) described how the use of design thinking supports leaders to be "better able to understand the people they are serving. They develop the courage to fail and make mistakes…and…design their way out of many (if not all) problems" (p. 6). These authors also propose that people who work with a design mind, "they become more optimistic, more collaborative, and more willing to take risks" (Bernstein & Linksy, 2016, p. 6). At Ulster BOCES, the shift from expecting staff to focus on instruction instead of wellbeing originated from the work of design thinking. The leadership was committed to meeting with staff to "build engagement by first building student relationships and creating a sense of purpose with them" (Personal communication, December 13, 2021).

This shift in the prior mentioned practices speaks directly to the levels of culture about which Schein and Schein (2017) wrote in defining a leader's response to a crisis. These authors elaborated by further stating, "Crises that arise around the major external survival issues are the most potent in revealing the deep assumptions of the leaders" (Schein & Schein, 2017, p. 190). Scharmer (2016) also pointed to the challenges that crisis brings and postulates, "The crisis of our time isn't a crisis of a single leader, organization, country or conflict" (p. 1). Scharmer (2016) further defines that crisis can be seen from the lens of "three major divides: The ecological divide …the social divide…and the spiritual divide" (p. 2). These divides are barriers between the disconnections of ourselves and nature, ourselves and others, and the divide between ourselves and self (Scharmer, 2018). The ecological divide within the first divide is related to what is known today as global warming. Scharmer (2018) described this crisis collectively and stated that, as a whole, humans create "outcomes that nobody wants" (p. 3). The second divide, the social structures, are formulated from varying structures. Though in the past, these may have had meaning to the times, these divisions and disparities are the parts of crisis that can strain schools and organizations who are unprepared to address a global pandemic, such as with COVID-19. The result of loss in structures and cultures as has been known, and can lead, "to eruptions of violence, hate, terrorism, and civil war" (Scharmer, 2018, p. 3). Given the nature of this COVID-19 crisis and the many factors surrounding it, this theory expanded upon further by Scharmer (2018), leaves wide margins for those organizations still trying to operate and maintain their past ways of being.

Schein (1984) emphasized these divides in relation to the three layers for depth of culture. Emphasized in his theory is the importance for deepening understanding around the many layers within a culture. Each level ranges in the way tangible outcomes are manifested within an organization, which include the artifacts that can be seen, heard, felt, and embedded deeply within the assumptions of a culture. On a surface level, these are the superficial artifacts such as architecture, technology, employee's stories, office layout, public documents, and materials (Schein, 1984). Though pieces of culture can be easily found, they are not as easy to interpret. Schein (1984) defines culture as the *what* and *how* of the organization; however, it does not get at understanding of the why of the organization. Schein described that to better understand the why of an organization requires digging into what he defined as the second layer, which involves the values. At Ulster BOCES, it was clear from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic that what was valued were relationships.

I had given thought about illuminating the importance of these values through the process of interviewing key stakeholders within an organization. However, these create the challenge of receiving answers that only speak to the espoused values, the areas in which the organization asserts as its reasons of behaviors, but in reality, the lived environment is very different. The experiences of working through this crisis at the Ulster BOCES organization was one which the lived experiences matched the espoused values. As an employee of the organization, I can attest to these lived experiences. The value of leadership that prioritized these values in every department was critical to how the organization was able to move forward during this pandemic crisis. Schein (1984) claims the importance of interpreting and understanding what the underlying assumptions might be within an organization are important to developing meaning within the culture. According to Schein (1984), it gets at the level of the third layer that lives in the unconscious of the group members; however, when analyzed, it helps to better determine how the members of a group might actually be perceiving, feeling, or thinking about a situation (Schein, 1984). These basic assumptions connect to the learned responses to how problems and crises are solved. The learned behaviors stemming from a value ultimately become transformed into underlying assumptions and beliefs about how problems should be solved (Schein, 1984). From the lens of shifting the narrative for how this BOCES addressed this pandemic, it was clear from the start there was a commitment from leadership to move beyond the past and push toward taking care of the soul of the staff and the community as a whole.

Administrators did not always see a clear path even though the COVID-19 pandemic yielded the need to take pause and reflect upon current practices, policies, procedures, and ways of being. In an interview, one administrator expressed the need for a clear path out of crisis thinking and when asked what might be done differently, they responded, "What would you do differently, looking back now that a year has passed?" the administrator responded, "I think it would be learning how to listen to myself differently and realizing how much I have to learn…and making sure that people are in the right seats.". It was often communicated, even before the pandemic, that the work of this BOCES was to be a spotlight and beacon of light for demonstrating innovative practices that would assist school districts in moving beyond their traditional four walls. Reflecting upon all of this, I am reminded of the research from Laloux's (2014) work on transformation and their research on shifting the work toward living organizations. In *Reinventing Organizations,* Laloux (2014) referred to a people-centric process, streamlining the structures while helping to facilitate self-management and the active involvement of all involved. This way of thinking allows for an end product, according to Laloux's framework, to be able to work toward a more soulful,

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productive, and purposeful way of living. The provision of these practices aligns with the mission statement of Ulster BOCES. As expressed clearly by deputy superintendent,

> It is our goal to maximize student potential. We need to make sure that we get them out working and the way to do that is to give them work that they feel is meaningful to serve the widest communities possible. (Personal communication, February 13, 2022)

Results and Recommendations for Future Research

This research allows for further examination of the existing trends of leadership in schools during a time of crisis. It is possible to hope and postulate that, given the uncertainty of the topic, the methods of preparedness will continue to shift over time. However, it is through this deep study into understanding the actions of leaders during a crisis that school organizations can be better prepared for the future. It would behoove educational organizations to examine these types of soulful practices that can help shift schools to a new stage of consciousness. Though there is no "right way" to survive a crisis, there comes a time where a leader's vision must center on thriving instead of surviving. If the goal is only survival, the conditions for leading an organization forward over time become stifled and limited. As an administrator and employee of the Ulster BOCES organization, I can attest to the importance of a thriving mindset versus just trying to survive whole. I continually pose the question: How can leaders make sure there are opportunities to thrive, survive, and revive their communities of learners?

Leaders must create the conditions and learning opportunities for all students, from preschool to high school. Currently, the Ulster BOCES leadership team offers services to connect with thought leaders around the world. The superintendent and deputy superintendent launched an innovative professional learning website, *Educator Edge*. It is the hope that through this work and the work of Instructional Services, whose mission is to support our county schools, school systems will grow exponentially. The mission and north start of Ulster BOCES is to create opportunities for learning that addresses equitable outcomes for groups with the greatest needs. The vision for moving forward must come from a reflective space that includes principles suggested from theoretical frameworks referenced in this paper (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009; Scharmer, 2009/2016, 2018; Schein, 1984; Schein & Schein, 2017).

The crisis of the COVID pandemic opened a gap where leaders are being called to examine their own practices, and learn new ways to help strengthen our communities' moral compass. This is an invitation to deconstruct and reimagine education in a way that can exist among the diverse and divisive world in which we live. To reimagine education is a way forward, moving past crises, to evolve toward a kinder caring system that will expand learning for everyone. "The journey from being driven by past patterns and exterior forces…towards a place that allows us to shape the future from within … we call the journey of leadership" (Scharmer, p. 355).

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Tsunesaburō Makiguchi's Recasting of Competition: Striving for Excellence in a Context of Interdependence

Andrew Gebert

Abstract

The geographic studies of Tsunesaburō Makiguchi (1871–1944) offered an understanding of human activities on Earth's surface that differed from the geographic theories and practices of his Euro-American predecessors and Japanese contemporaries. With his rejection of geographic determinism and its imperialist/colonial orientation he sought to configure a decentered world, or a world centered on the lives of people in the unique settings of their local communities. In the second half of the nineteenth century geographic determinism was linked with the newly influential ideas of evolution, in particular with interpretations that directly transposed ideas of biological competition and survival of the fittest to the realm of human society. Under the rubric of Social Darwinism, these ideas of competition and dominance justified existing domestic and international orders as the inevitable outcome of natural processes. Makiguchi sought to redefine the concept of competition using the term jindōteki kyōsō *(人道的競争)—humanitarian or humane modes of competition. In doing this he sought to find ways of enabling the realization of the positive outcomes of competition—striving for excellence, inventiveness, innovation—while containing the more negative outcomes. The key to this, for Makiguchi, was to ensure that competition was conducted within an understanding of human interconnection and interdependence.*

Keywords: competition, evolution, Tsunesaburō Makiguchi, modern Japan, human geography, political geography, education

Introduction

In the first decades of the twenty-first century we live in a world in which competition—for access to education, jobs, and all the other necessary or desirable things in life—is the order of the day. The benefits of competition are often promoted as a panacea; we are told there is virtually no problem that cannot be solved by unleashing greater, more vigorous competition. In the tech world, this is often framed as disrupting incumbent industries and their sclerotic ways. The negative aspects of competition—the fate of the "losers"—are ignored or treated as a necessary price for the benefits of growth and progress.

The question of competition was, if anything, even more pressing in the time of Japanese educator and geographer Tsunesaburō Makiguchi (1871–1944) than in our own. The end of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth centuries was an era of fierce global competition. The major

imperial powers vied to expand their territorial holdings and to gain (to the degree possible, exclusive) access to resources and markets. The global losers were—then as now—largely silenced.

Likewise, the multiple layers of competition and cooperation that constitute the realm of international relations present aspects that feel at once novel and familiar. While the consensus emerged early in the pandemic that any more effective response would involve unprecedented levels of domestic and even international cooperation, there has also been a return to some of the more blunt and indeed atavistic forms of competition. In the field of education, there was even a brief suspension of competitive exams before these were revived in the effort to return to "normal."

In keeping with the theme of this special issue, this article considers an example of ideas not from our time and originating outside the Euro-American context. These are the thoughts of Tsunesaburō Makiguchi (1871–1944) on the conceptualization and practices of competition. Makiguchi was a Japanese geographer, educational theorist and practitioner. His criticism of the spiritual foundations of his country's military adventurism from a Buddhist perspective resulted in his death while incarcerated as a "thought criminal" in the closing years of World War II. The ideas he set out in his writings on human geography at the start of the twentieth century offer frameworks that can help us formulate modes of competition that will contribute to human welfare in the complex and contested sites of learning and living of the twenty-first century.

Biographical Sketch

Tsunesaburō Makiguchi was born in 1871, in a small port on the west coast of Japan as Chōshichi Watanabe. Three years earlier, in 1868, the military Shogunate that had ruled Japan since the early 1600s was replaced by a new government that made the youthful Emperor Meiji the symbol of a new era. This new government initiated a process of industrial, economic, political and military development that would, in just a few decades, make Japan a major power on the world stage.

In 1878, Makiguchi enrolled in the Kashiwazaki Elementary School, which had been established four years earlier (Origins, 2017, p. 470). Makiguchi was thus a member of the first generation of Japanese nationals to be exposed to the modern educational system and its associated spatio-temporal disciplines (See Editors' Introduction, this issue).

Makiguchi continued his efforts to study and learn during his years in Otaru, by some accounts gaining the nickname of "the studious errand boy" (Origins, 2017, pp. 30–31), for his habit of making use of every spare moment to read. Makiguchi's academic interest and potential attracted the attention of his supervisor, the head of the police station, who was also the administrative chief of Otaru City. It was this man who recommended him for entrance to the Hokkaido Normal School, the teachers college for Hokkaido, a recommendation that opened the path for Makiguchi to become a professional educator (Saito, 1989).

The Hokkaido Normal School was established in September 1886 through the merger of two existing teachers colleges in the island's two largest cities, Sapporo and Hakodate. There were two paths to admission: the first was to sit an examination; the second was through recommendation for provisional matriculation, with full admission granted on the basis of students' first semester grades. Makiguchi was recommended for provisional matriculation (Saito, 1989).

Although Makiguchi was spared the need to sit a highly competitive test, this does not mean that he was sheltered from the harsh realities of competition.

According to the memoirs of a fellow student who entered the school one year before Makiguchi:

> We were sorted [lit. put in a sieve and shaken] three times before we could become full students. And the shaking was fierce: of 23 students who gained provisional entry through the entrance examination, only 12 were granted full matriculation. This number continued to decrease until, by the time of graduation, we were only seven. (Cited in Saitō, 2004, p. 421)

Makiguchi survived these competitive sortings to graduate from Hokkaido Normal School in 1893, at which point he was hired as an instructor in the affiliated elementary school. Makiguchi's interest in geography dated back at least to his days as a student, and it was one of the subjects that he taught there. In 1896, he passed the Ministry of Education examination for the teacher's license for the teaching of geography in secondary schools. This was an extremely competitive examination: nationally, of the 137 candidates sitting for it that year, only 16 passed (Timeline, 2011, p. 23). Makiguchi was the first teacher in Hokkaido to be awarded this license, which had been adopted as part of an effort to make up for the shortage of university-trained instructors; it qualified Makiguchi to teach geography at the Hokkaido Normal School, and he became the school's first instructor to specialize in the subject in November 1897.

Following a series of incidents involving the internal dynamics of the Hokkaido Normal School (see Saito 1989 for details), Makiguchi quit his positions and moved to Tokyo, arriving with his family of five—his wife, three children and adoptive mother—on May 1, 1901. The family is thought to have first settled in Ishikawa Edogawa-cho in central Tokyo, later moving about 2 km to the northeast, to Komagome Oiwake-cho in present-day Bunkyo Ward (Origins, 2017, p. 83). These locations are symbolic of Makiguchi's success in relocating himself to the heart of national life. The first was adjacent to one of Japan's most important military arsenals, producing much of the weaponry used in Japan's modern wars. The second was just a short walk from Tokyo Imperial University, founded with the explicit mission to foster competent bureaucrats and regarded—then, as now—as the pinnacle of the nation's intellectual hierarchy.

Makiguchi also brought from Hokkaido the outlines of a manuscript, derived from his teaching notes and lesson plans from his Hokkaido Normal School days, of what would be his first published work, *Jinsei chirigaku* (*The Geography of Human Life*; Makiguchi, 1981-1996, Vols. 1 & 2). By the fall of 1901, Makiguchi appears to have completed an initial draft of the book.

In the spring of 1902, Makiguchi made contact with Shiga Shigetaka (1863–1927), at the time Japan's most famous writer on landscapes and geography. Makiguchi would most likely have encountered Shiga's 1889 *Chirigaku kōgi* (*Lectures on Geography*) as a textbook; his 1894 *Nihon fuukeiron* (*On the Japanese Landscape*) was a widely influential literary best-seller. According to the foreword Shiga would later contribute to *The Geography of Human Life,* Makiguchi arrived at his door with no introduction other than his name card, described his background and interests, and presented the older man with an 18cm-thick manuscript. Shiga was impressed by Makiguchi's ambitions and wished him success. One year later, Makiguchi again sought out Shiga, who was at that time campaigning near Nagoya for election to the Diet. Makiguchi asked Shiga's help in editing his manuscript, which by now totaled some two thousand pages. Shiga returned to Tokyo and spent the next six months helping Makiguchi shape his manuscript for publication. It was at Shiga's suggestion that the book was shortened to half its original length (Shiga, 1903, pp. 1-3).

The Geography of Human Life was published on October 20, 1903. By the end of the following year, the book had been reviewed in at least 41 newspapers and journals, receiving a generally warm critical reception (Shiohara, 2003). Although precise sales figures have not been determined, they would appear to have been brisk, as second and third printings of the book followed on October 28 and November 25. An expanded edition was printed in 1908 and it would continue to be reprinted in various editions for the next two decades. In 1911, it was included on the Ministry of Education's list of officially recommended books on geography (Origins, 2017, p. 123).

The book earned Makiguchi considerable recognition in the fields of geography and geographic education, and would later help him gain entry to some of the more elite circles of Tokyo intellectual life. Despite this, he remained hindered throughout by his lack of a university degree, seen as necessary for full acceptance as a member of the thinking class. At this stage and later, even genuinely enthusiastic academic praise for his work would often be couched in such phrases as "for an elementary school teacher..." or with remarks that he only read Western sources in Japanese translation (see Ishibashi, 1930; Takeuchi, 2004; Tanabe; 1930).

The Geographies of "Civilization"

In 1884–85, the Berlin Conference among the great European powers was held, initiating what would be known as the Scramble for Africa—the division and colonization of the continent. By the start of the twentieth century, the nations of Europe and the United States directly controlled huge swathes of the world's surface and much of its population. Other regions, such as Latin America and China, were nominally independent but under the economic and political sway of foreign powers to a degree that rendered that independence largely moot.

While *The Geography of Human Life* in places expresses views—particularly regarding the nature of "civilization"—that may strike present-day readers as anachronistic, there are many aspects of Makiguchi's first work that were both unusual for its time and make it relevant to our world today. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the book is how it forged an independent locus of understanding relative to the geographical studies of the time, most of which were deeply bound up with the objectives of European colonialism and imperialism. These very often sought to explain, using various scientific "laws," the reasons for the superiority of European civilization and the inevitability of its global domination.

An example of such a "law" of civilizational development was that of the German geographer Carl Ritter (1779–1859) that correlated the degree of civilization with the ratio of continents' landmass to the length of their coastlines. The idea was that the longer the coastline relative to the surface area of the continent, the more complex the coastline, and thus the greater the opportunity for people to interact with the oceans, something widely seen at the time as key to the development of civilization. In his highly influential *Earth and Man: Lectures on Comparative Physical Geography in its Relation to the History of Mankind* (1849), Swiss-American Arnold Guyot (1807–84), cites Ritter's theory and ranks the continents on this basis. In this account Europe is foremost, with 156 square miles of surface area for each mile of coast, with Asia (459:1) and Africa (623:1) rated geographically least hospitable to the development of civilization (Guyot, 1853, p. 47). Guyot reads prevailing European stereotypes about Africa and Africans into the land itself, which "seems to close itself against every influence from without" (1853, p. 45).

In thinking about these theories as they originated in Europe, it is also important to keep in mind deep cultural assumptions concerning the providential origins and purpose of the natural world. With roots in Abrahamic monotheism reaching back to the Book of Genesis, the idea that

the world was formed with the welfare of humans in view was so pervasive as to be easily over-looked; it provides an ontological basis for any form of order or meaning in the world. This worldview was highly compatible with the kind of geographical determinism that lent an air of fated inevitability to Euro-American dominance.

Guyot spells out this providential vision in terms of the respective roles of the continents in nurturing humankind.

> Asia is the cradle where man passed his infancy, under the authority of law, and where he learned his dependence upon a sovereign master. Europe is the school where his youth was trained, where he waxed in strength and knowledge, grew to manhood, and learned at once his liberty and his moral responsibility. America is the theatre of his activity during the period of manhood; the land where he applies and practises all he has learned, brings into action all the forces he has acquired.... (1853, p. 327)

Like most nineteenth-century geographers, Guyot dismisses out of hand the continents of the southern hemisphere: "As there is a temperate hemisphere and a tropical hemisphere, we may, in the same manner, say there is a civilized hemisphere, and a savage hemisphere" (1853, p. 263).

In his 1828 *Histoire générale de la civilisation en Europe*, translated into Japanese in 1877 where it was widely influential, the French historian François Guizot (1787–1874) took the idea of a providential project of civilization even further: "European civilization has, if I may be allowed the expression, at last penetrated the ways of eternal truth—into the scheme of Providence;—it moves in the ways which God has prescribed. This is the rational principle of its superiority" (p. 40).

In practical terms the role of geography here can be understood as the power of definition: the ability of Europe to define the rest of the world according to its perspective and understanding. It came down, in this sense, to a question of who *mapped* and who *got mapped*.

Japanese Geographers Respond

These geographical schemas presented Japan's intellectual elites with an important dilemma: Should they accept the maps of the world being drawn up in Western capitals and their own resultant marginalization? Or should they try in some way to redraw these maps or develop new ones of their own? Early nineteenth-century nationalist thinkers developed alternate cosmologies that stressed Japan's unique status as the "land of the gods" (*shinkoku*) and produced geographies that positioned Japan as the "head" of the world at the leading edge of the Eurasian continent, with Europe consigned to the role of "legs" (Kanō, 1999, p. 119).

On the title page of *The Geography of Human Life*, Shigetaka Shiga (1863–1927) is listed as having played the dual roles of "editor and critic," suggesting a certain distance between Shiga's views and Makiguchi's. This is perhaps inevitable given that the task Shiga set for himself, in both his geographical and landscape writing, was considerably simpler than Makiguchi's. Where Makiguchi sought to provide his readers with a grasp of general principles for understanding the relationship of people and the land, Shiga wrote from a distinctly nationalist perspective, seeking to guide a rising generation of leaders in responding to Japan's geopolitical challenges and to instill in his readers a sense of love for and pride in the land of Japan. In service of this latter purpose, he enlisted a range of literary sources, along with his own poetic observations, to offer testimony to the superiority of the Japanese landscape to those of other countries.

The geographical thinking of Kanzō Uchimura, a Christian educator whose refusal to bow before the Imperial Rescript on Education in 1891 generated intense controversy, was strongly influenced by his reading of Guyot's works. The first two books he cites in his 1892 work, *On the Earth and People* are Guyot's *The Earth and Man* and his *Physical Geography*. In the preface to the second edition, Uchimura notes that he revised the title (from *Thoughts on Geography*) at the urging of a friend who thought he should more directly acknowledge his debt to Guyot.

Uchimura was both a devoted Christian and an impassioned patriot, something expressed in his formulation that he loved above all the "two J's"—Jesus and Japan. As a Christian, Uchimura was determined to make evident the working of God's providential hand in the shaping of the world; as a Japanese patriot, he could not accept the relegation of Japan to a secondary role in the grand project of civilization. Reconciling these two imperatives is at the heart of Uchimura's geography.

In Chapter 8 of *On the Earth and People,* "On the Orient," Uchimura adopted the view, typical of the Eurocentric geographies of the era, that India and China were fated by their respective geographies to the kind of spiritual and physical unity and uniformity that inevitably produced stagnation. Unlike many Europeans, however, Uchimura was not ready to dismiss Asia as a place of purely past glory:

> A truly perfected civilization will only be realized when these three [civilizations of Europe, China and India] intermingle and assimilate one another. Unless one turns to the other two, it will not be able to make up for its own deficiencies. The hope of humankind lies in the harmonious unification of these three. (1897, p. 180)

For Uchimura, the work of bringing the civilizations of East and West together was the special vocation prepared by providence for Japan. It was the natural mission of islands to connect different continents, as Sicily historically linked Europe and Africa and Britain has served as a point of connection between Europe and North America. Using a gendered analogy, Uchimura expressed his hope that Japan would serve as a matchmaker to introduce China, "the bride," to the United States, "the new groom" (1897, p. 206).

Makiguchi's Geography

Perhaps the best way to understand Makiguchi's interest in geography is as a stand-in for his sustained intellectual engagement with material reality, specifically with the dynamic nexus of human and non-human nature. That reality is complex and in *The Geography of Human Life*, Makiguchi carefully avoids attributing to any single factor or cluster of factors an overriding causal or explanatory power. Likewise, his work is free of the kind of teleological inflection that can be seen in the work of Ritter, Guyot, Uchimura and others. The nuanced complexity of Makiguchi's descriptions derives from the fact that he was committed to the view, reflected in the book's title, that humans and their environment exist in relationships of constant and mutual co-influence. It also stems from his belief that the most valuable human–nature interactions are multifaceted; that the richest and most robust human character is developed through, and expresses itself in, a multi-vectored engagement with one's surroundings.

Not surprisingly, thus, he cites or acknowledges works and efforts from a wide range of disciplines: geography, of course, and also literature and history (as in Uchimura and Shiga), but, perhaps most strikingly, contemporary works in pedagogy and sociology, including those by Kern

(*Grundriss der Pädegogik* (1873)), Mayo-Smith (*Sociology and Statistics* (1895)), Giddings (*The Principles of Sociology* (1896)), and Fairbanks (*Introduction to Sociology* (1896)) (see also Goulah, 2013). Makiguchi's exposure to sociological theory at this point was principally through American sources; the works of Durkheim, for example, would not be translated into Japanese until after the end of World War I. He also references Friedrich Rätzel (1844-1904), considered the founder of the field of political geography, and a number of Western writers in the political and military fields as well as Buckle's *History of Civilization in England* (1857), Hegel's *Philosophy of History* (1837), and Mahan's *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* (1890), all of which were influential in shaping views of Japan's position in the world. The breadth of this reading suggests that Makiguchi fully availed himself of the resources available to him in Tokyo, including the Imperial Library, a short walk from his home.

In a sense, Makiguchi can be read as responding to the need more recently expressed by David Harvey (2006), to bring the geographic and sociological imaginations into conversation:

> I considered the disjunction between these two imaginations unfortunate and counterproductive. The relations between social processes and spatial forms needed to be better understood as a prerequisite to well-grounded critical research on urbanization, modernization, diffusion, migration, international capital flows, regional development, uneven geographical development, geopolitics, and a host of other subjects of considerable importance. (p. 212)

Dayle Bethel (2002) produced a summary translation of Makiguchi's work under the title *A Geography of Human Life*. This title, with its use of the indefinite article, in my view fails to convey the actual scale of Makiguchi's ambition, which was to offer a comprehensive and synthetic account of the varied relationships between natural phenomena and human agency. In doing so, he sought to overcome the disembodied fragmentation of knowledge that characterized the Japanese textbooks used to teach Geography in public schools. These were typically ordered as national or global tours of Earth's surface demarcated by political or administrative boundaries, with descriptions of physical, economic, and occasionally cultural highlights. Makiguchi pursued more universal, more broadly explicative, understandings.

At the same time, Makiguchi's *Geography* was in many ways built upon the paradigm of civilization that prevailed in his times. That is, Makiguchi accepted the idea that the world as it stood could be divided into the categories of civilized, semi-civilized and uncivilized (1981–1996, Vol. 2, pp. 180–185). He did so, however, with a critical distinction: he consistently avoided attributing these differences to any fixed or inherent factors, such as race, "national character," or geographical conditions.

A literal reading of the Sino-Japanese characters with which the different stages of human development were written gives us "opened," "partially opened," and "yet to open." Drawing implications from the individual characters with which Japanese expressions are written always carries risks of a reductive literalism, but as discussed below, there seem to be cases in which Makiguchi followed the meanings of the characters with which terms were translated more closely than he did the meaning of the translated terms in their original cultural settings. In any event, it is clear that he did not consider civilization to be a static endpoint, but an unfolding process of new possibilities.

For Makiguchi, whatever qualities prevailed within a culture were understood as the product of interactions between a people and their environment—which he understood as comprising

both natural and social dimensions. Humans, in this view, are always able to choose their response to the challenges and possibilities of a given set of circumstances and thus shape their own future. His optimistic faith in human agency realized through education was no doubt related to his own biography—a story of hard work rewarded—and the great changes and material advances he experienced in Japanese society over the course of the first three decades of his life. It is in this sense that *The Geography of Human Life* is educational both in its program of exposition as well as its core message: It is learning and education that enables individuals and societies to fully realize the positive possibilities of their circumstances.

This approach, which has been termed "environmental possibilism" (Saito, supplementary note 10, Makiguchi, 1981–1996, Vol. 1, pp. 407–408), represented a fundamental challenge to the geographic determinism that lay at the heart of much Euro-American geographic research and which was inevitably (if often unconsciously) linked to colonial-imperial projects. It is this focus on the possibilities present in a given set of circumstances that gives Makiguchi's approach to geography a deeply educational orientation.

Makiguchi's treatment of oceans is illustrative. Oceans, he asserted, can serve either as isolating barriers or as connecting global routes, depending on the human factors that are brought to bear. For most of history, fear and trepidation of the oceans kept people from venturing onto their vast expanses. But with the deployment of human wisdom in the form of navigational technologies, as well as the courage and vision to travel to unknown regions, these same oceans were transformed into "thoroughfares" (1981–1996, Vol. 1, p. 221) connecting the world's peoples.

Needless to say, these thoroughfares brought new dangers, in particular to societies that had previously enjoyed the protections afforded by isolation. In *The Geography of Human Life*, Makiguchi expresses his understanding of the transformations of spatio-temporal as well as power relations wrought by the technology of his era.

> The civilization of recent centuries has expanded the scale of humankind's struggle for survival, until it now takes place over the entire world. The two great motive forces of steam power and electricity have reduced distances on the globe; they have shortened and eliminated time, making the entire world one. Thus, the small-scale competition that once took place between different tribes has now grown to become large-scale international competition. In this manner, all nations have been brought into proximity; countries and peoples eye each other with vigilance and envy, looking for the slightest opening or opportunity to seize another's territory. To this end, they do not hesitate to use violence and cruelty, for this is in keeping with the ideals of what is known as imperialism. If we consider what the legal or moral sanctions for this might be, we live in an age when one is punished as a thief for stealing the possessions of another person, but feared and respected as strong for stealing their country. (1981–1996, Vol. 1, p. 14)

Makiguchi's clear-eyed understanding of the global power relations of his time, however, was coupled to a response that was unlike that of Shiga—who sought to restore a Japanese sense of pride by extolling the beauties of the landscape—or Uchimura—who accepted the Eurocentric map of the world but tried to find a more honored place within it for Japan. Rather than try to rewrite the "map" of the world as it was predominantly defined, Makiguchi took a different approach, one that suggested a more fundamental reordering.

As noted, Makiguchi's consistent goal was to identify the universal principles that guide human interactions with their surroundings. What, for example, did it mean for people to live on

an island or a peninsula? What were the limitations and potentialities presented by those geographic facts? He considered an accurate understanding of our individual and collective place in the world as the necessary basis for formulating effective (what he would later term "value-creating") responses (1981–1996, Vol. 5, pp. 212–216).

At the same time, his analysis is marked by a complexity and multidimensionality that contrasts with, for example, Guyot, whose analysis of plains is limited to commenting on their fecundity (1853, pp. 75–76). For his part, Makiguchi notes the importance of this, but goes on to chart a further series of human-nature interactions that includes the elements of transportation, trade and social organization:

> Plains provide the most convenient form of land travel; as a result they are the site of the most frequent movements of people and goods. Ease of travel makes isolated ways of life impossible for the human inhabitants; it also militates against uneven pricing for goods. From this we can see the source of the tendency for mountain peoples to be stout defenders of their particular territory, and for the people of plains to engage more in interdependent and communal ways of living. (1981–1996, Vol. 1, p. 142)

Likewise, in his discussion of coasts, Makiguchi challenged the already-discussed formula that directly correlated a landmass' relative length of coastline to the level of culture. As a counterexample, he cited the east coast of India which, with the exception of the port of Madras (Chennai), was nearly entirely lacking in the complex curvatures and indentations that Carl Ritter and other Western geographers asserted were essential to cultural development. He also noted that there is little observable difference in the degree of cultural development between the east and west coasts of northern Japan, despite the fact that the former is far more convoluted than the latter (1981–1996, Vol. 1, p. 312).

The Geography of Human Life was published in October, 1903, a little more than two months before the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, when jingoistic passions were running high. Against this backdrop, Makiguchi eschewed the kind of nationalism that saw the state as an ultimate value in itself. Instead, he believed that the best way to locate our lives and loyalties is to recognize that we are simultaneously inhabitants and members of: 1) a local community, 2) a national society and 3) the world. Of these different levels, the local community was of particular importance because it is there that we can directly observe the various physical and social phenomena that shape our experience of life and from which larger conceptualizations can be extrapolated. The local community was thus for him "indispensable as a conscious basis for the lives of each individual and for understanding the entire world in a fair and farsighted manner" (1981–1996, Vol. 1, pp. 15–16). Encouraging learners to see their surroundings as the site of learning and the source of valid knowledge further has important implications for breaking down the claims to epistemological monopoly that underlie many formal educational systems and institutions.

One way of putting this is that Makiguchi sought to develop a map of the world without a fixed center; another is that Makiguchi mapped a world with an infinite number of centers. His method of studying geography, based on carefully observing the realities of the local community, meant that each of us stands at the center of the world. Where we are at this moment is the place from which we observe the world, the place where we experience our lives, where we learn and from which we can act in ways that will transform the world. Thus, if Makiguchi embraced a vision

of cosmopolitanism it was not abstract or ideal, but rather one realized through sensing other people's attachments to their lives in their respective local communities via the empathetic transposition of our own connections and commitments.

Evolution and Competition

The ideas of evolution that became influential from the middle of the nineteenth century provided a biological foundation for the racial theories that had already been deployed as part of the effort to explain and justify European pre-eminence in the world. To the spatial aspects of geography, evolution added a temporal element: If the evolution of all lifeforms was driven by competition for survival, some lives represented a past to be overcome or forgotten; others were successfully adapted to the present and competing for the future. The "losers" in evolutionary competition were condemned to a vestigial status of being irrelevant at best, a hindrance at worst.

Although Darwin himself was cautious about applying his theories to human society, this was not always the case among those who followed him. For others—the immensely influential Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) most prominent among them—the biological mechanisms of competition and evolution were then used to explain social realities—domestically, to explain the success of the new industrial aristocracy and the degraded state of the laboring classes; internationally, to justify the subjugation of supposedly weaker peoples by the stronger, more "fit" races of Europe. Spencer's view of evolution is one that is relentlessly, even cosmologically, totalizing:

> While we think of Evolution as divided into astronomic, geologic, biologic, psychologic, sociologic, &c., it may seem to some extent a coincidence that the same law of metamorphosis holds throughout all its division. But when we recognized these divisions as mere conventional groupings, made to facilitate the arrangement and acquisition of knowledge—when we remember that the different existences with which they severally deal are component parts of one Cosmos; we see at once that there are not several kinds of Evolution having certain traits in common, but one Evolution going on everywhere in the same manner. (Peel, ed. 1972, p. 72)

When social progress is argued as a continuation or extension of biological evolution, it is often undergirded by an ideological commitment to genetic inheritance. The scope of these supposedly heritable traits will vary and may include not only physical or intellectual capacity, but such qualities as ambition and morality (or their lack). In this context, Spencer weighs the benefits of the "purifying process" of physical war relative to the deleterious impact on the morals of the members of more highly developed societies, and suggests a transition to economic or industrial war as something that accomplishes the same outcome.

> Severe and bloody as the process is, the killing-off of inferior races and inferior individuals, leaves a balance of benefit to mankind during phases of progress in which the moral development is low, and there are no quick sympathies to be continually seared by the infliction of pain and death. But as there arise higher societies, implying individual characters fitted for closer co-operation, the destructive activities exercised by such higher societies have injurious re-active effects on the moral natures of their members—injurious effects which outweigh the benefits resulting from extirpation of inferior races. After this stage has been reached, the purifying process, continuing still an important one, remains to be carried on

by industrial war—by a competition of societies during which the best, physically, emotionally and intellectually, spread most, and leave the least capable to disappear gradually, from failing to leave a sufficiently-numerous posterity. (1873, p. 199, cited in Peel, ed. 1972, p. 173)

It was more in its social than its biological or scientific form that the theory of evolution arrived in Japan (Watanabe, 1984, p. 194). The lectures delivered by Edward S. Morse (1838-1925) at Tokyo Imperial University in 1877 are often cited as the formal introduction of evolutionary theory to Japan. Morse's lectures were enthusiastically received and he enjoyed teaching evolution "without running up against theological prejudices as I often did at home..." (cited in Duke, 2009, p. 234).

In the West it was evolution itself—the possibility that the work of divine creation was somehow either incomplete or mutable (permitting or requiring the addition of new species)—that tended to spark resistance. In Japan, it was the idea of competition and its implications for social stability that provoked anxiety within the political culture of the time. The influential translator, educator, and proponent of enlightenment values, Yukichi Fukuzawa (1835–1901), describes, with characteristic drollness, the official resistance that met his initial attempts to translate the word "competition" into Japanese.

> I was reading Chamber's book on economics. When I spoke of the book to a certain high official in the treasury bureau one day, he became very much interested and wanted me to show him the translation. He said that if translating the entire book was too much, he would like to see the table of contents. I began translating it…[and] when I came upon the word "competition" for which there was no equivalent in Japanese, I was obliged to use an invention of my own, *kyōsō*, literally "race-fight."
>
> When the official saw my translation, he appeared very much impressed. Then he said suddenly, "Here is a word for 'fight.' What does it mean? It is such an unpeaceful word...I could not take the paper with that word to the chancellor." (Fukuzawa, 1966, p. 190)

Likewise, the geographer Shigetaka Shiga, returning from a ten-month sojourn on the Navy training vessel *Tsukuba* in 1886, during which he had witnessed the incursions of the imperial powers in the South Pacific and the effects on the local population, was filled with dread at the prospects of a Japan exposed to competition. Were Japan to be opened to foreign populations, he wrote in *Conditions of the South Pacific* (1887), the upper classes of Japanese society would find themselves in direct competition with northern Europeans and Americans; the middle strata of Japanese society with Iberians and Irish; and the lower classes with the "East Indians" and Chinese. In such a case, "Ah, men of Japan! Will you then have the courage to boast of the Yamato Spirit?" (as cited in Motoyama, 1977, p. 287).

Another example of the impact of evolutionary ideas as they were introduced to Japan can be seen in the thinking of Hiroyuki Katō (1836–1916), a prominent intellectual who served as president of Tokyo Imperial University during the period 1890–93. In his 1882 work, *A New Theory of Human Rights,* Katō used the theory of evolution as the basis for recanting as "delusion" his earlier support for a natural law theory of human rights. A similar strand of "social Darwinism" runs through his 1893 work *The Competition for Rights Among the Strong*. Katō's understanding of competition was that when the assertion of their rights by the strong is not met with an assertion

of countervailing power, the strong simply prey on the weak in a "violent and cruel" manner. It is only when there is competition between forces of equivalent strength that it takes on a more "elevated and noble" aspect and becomes codified as legally guaranteed rights, thus propelling social progress (Katō, 1889/1943, p. 183) .

In reflections written in 1912, near the end of a long life, Katō described the transformation in his thinking toward a position of totalizing "monism" (1915, p. 462) in the following terms.

> From that point I started to feel how extremely important it was to apply natural science to the human sciences, and as I read work about evolutionism by such great scholars as Darwin, Spencer and Haeckel, I became ever more aware that there is only nature in the universe, and nothing that is supernatural. Thus I came to have no doubt that we humans are not inherently the highest among all living beings, but have come to be so entirely through the workings of evolution. (Katō, 1915, p. 462)

On a more popular level were the writings of the animal biologist Asajirō Oka (1866–1944), whose *Shikaron kōwa* (*Lectures on the Theory of Evolution*) (1904) became a best-seller, going through multiple editions and introducing a wide reading public to evolutionary theory. For his part, Oka advocated proactive measures to improve the national genetic stock.

> We need to apply the strictest possible sanctions against those who engage in harmful actions, making an example of them for others. Those with heritable illnesses should be prevented from having children, as painful as that may be. And there is a need to remove from society those with a congenital predisposition to do evil with all haste. Further, we must abolish all systems which artificially block the processes of natural selection and permit the weak and foolish to continue their splendid existence. (Oka, 1907, p. 621)

In contrast to Oka and Katō, who affirmed the value of competition, socialists such as Sen Katayama (1859–1933) and Shūsui Kōtoku (1871–1911) discussed evolution in connection with theories of socialist revolution. Katayama's 1903 work *My Socialism* and Kōtoku's work of the same year *The Essence of Socialism* both dealt with evolutionary theory in a way that was critical of current modes of competition. Terujirō (Ikki) Kita (1883–1937) is now remembered principally for how his later writings inspired the instigators of a failed coup attempt in February 1936, leading to his execution despite no evidence of his actual involvement. Kita's first major work was *On the National Essence and Pure Socialism* (1906), which has been described as an effort to "reread biological evolution from the perspective of socialism, and socialism from the perspective of biological evolution" (Kuno, 1975, p. 174). In it, Kita points out the contradiction in Oka's stance of simultaneously calling for reliance on the unimpeded work of evolutionary competitive forces while urging active eugenic intervention in those processes.

Socialists, perhaps predictably, tended to view competition as an aberration, an historical anomaly peculiar to the current capitalist stage of socio-economic development. Kōtoku and Katayama, for example, both looked to a future in which competition would cease to be a central feature of human society. Kōtoku cited Lewis Morgan's 1877 book *Ancient Society* to support the contention that communistic social organization had prevailed for all but 5,000 of the past 100,000 years of human history. Katayama, for his part, remembered the world of a more recent past, when labor was viewed as sacred and there were no intense competitive pressures:

This was a society in which our grandfathers went off to cut hay in the mountains, our grandmothers went to the river to wash clothes, in which there was not a single capitalist. This was a world that accorded exactly with the proverb that there is no poverty that will overtake those who truly work. (1969, p. 229)

Makiguchi's Views of Evolutionary Competition

The idea of evolution, that the natural and human worlds are subject to fluctuation and change, was something that seems to have met with little resistance from Makiguchi. Here also it is easy to find sources for this in his biography: His life had from the earliest years been marked by change, and he had learned to accommodate himself to this in creative and productive ways. (Saitō, 1981). For Makiguchi, the idea of evolution was most probably understood as the possibility of change for the better, that is, progress.

Within the range of responses to the idea of evolutionary competition examined above, Makiguchi's should be identified as falling more on the affirmative end of the spectrum. Makiguchi was clearly familiar with evolutionary theory and it can be said to form a leitmotif running through *The Geography of Human Life.* Zensaburō Tachibana's translation of *On the Origins of Species* is among the works referenced, and Makiguchi cites Darwin's ideas (1981–1996, Vol. 1, p. 79). At first glance, it might seem that Makiguchi uncritically embraced the new doctrine of evolutionary competition. We find, in fact, statements such as the following:

> Just as the cause for all evolution in the biological realm can be explained in terms of the influence of the competition for survival, all progress in the phenomena of the life activities of humankind can be understood from the perspective of competition for survival. (1981–1996, Vol. 2, p. 401)

This apparently blanket affirmation is, however, followed immediately by an important and characteristic caveat: "But it is of course unreasonable to imagine that all the complex phenomena of human affairs can be entirely explained by the competition for survival" (1981–1996, Vol. 2, p. 401) .

The stance expressed here reflects two acts of restraint, two boundaries that Makiguchi consistently observed throughout his intellectual career and which are key to understanding his thought.

The first is that, while Makiguchi was strongly drawn to large-scale, effectively universal, principles, he consistently resisted the totalizing impulse, the search for a single explanatory scheme such as Spencer or Oka found in evolution.

The second boundary that Makiguchi was reluctant to obscure might be described as the one delineating the biologically and socially human. This distinction can be seen in the structure of *The Geography of Human Life*.

Part 2 of *The Geography of Human Life*, Nature as the Medium for Mutual Interactions between Human Beings and the Land, concludes with Chapter 22 "Humankind" and Part 3, The Phenomena of Humankind's Life Activities with Earth as their Stage, opens with an exposition of the nature of human society (Chapter 23). The term translated here as "humankind" as the title for Chapter 22 is *jinrui* (人類), which at the time had quite strong biological overtones and could almost be translated as "the human species."

Thus, within the overall structure of Makiguchi's *The Geography of Human Life*, biological and social humanity are neighboring phenomena, and the transition from one to the other is the pivot and fulcrum of his system. This suggests how much importance Makiguchi assigned to the social nature of humans, to the idea that what is genuinely human is inseparable from our interactions as social beings. This would appear to be the reason why Makiguchi was, unlike some of the Western and Japanese thinkers noted above, highly resistant to any attempt to directly transfer the principles of biological competition and evolution to the human realm. For Makiguchi, the key paths of human heritage were extrasomatic—in lessons learned through experience and passed on as cultural systems of knowledge and wisdom. Together, these factors meant that his preferred model of competition-driven social progress was articulated through ideas of human agency and motivation rather than biological mechanisms of survival and extinction.

The phrase that translated "struggle for survival" into Japanese, *seizon kyōsō* 生存競, appears repeatedly throughout *The Geography of Human Life* and can be said to constitute one of its underlying themes. This Japanese expression, however, creates space for both the kind of biological interpretation practiced by Oka and others, and Makiguchi's more socially oriented understanding of competition. *Seizon* can also be rendered "existence" which has a less binary sense than "survival" and can indicate a full range of experience from just barely living to living well. Further, the lack of clearly defined relationships between the component elements of multiple-character expressions such as this opens it to such readings as "the struggles of existence," or "the competition inherent in existence," which seem more consonant with Makiguchi's use.

In his later writings, such as his major work on education, the four-volume *Sōka kyōiku-gaku taikei* (*The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy*) (1930–34; Makiguchi, 1981–1996, Vols. 5 & 6), we find evidence that Makiguchi's awareness of the negative aspects of competition had heightened over the intervening years. He writes, for example:

> Human beings, from early in their social life can be seen to engage in a life of vicious competition, producing scenes of carnage; at the same time, they carry out a welcome and desirable shared life, manifesting the realm of the compassionate bodhisattva. (1981–1996, Vol. 5, p. 180)

He continues in this passage to term a competitive way of life execrable (lit. worthy of being spit on) and a cooperative, collective one "beautiful and worthy of respect" (1981–1996, Vol. 5, p. 180).

Even in this later period, however, Makiguchi continued to see competition as potentially productive of advancement and improvement. In Volume 3 (1932) of *The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy*, for example, Makiguchi calls for elementary school principals to be selected through competitive tests rather than, as was the common practice of the time, personal connections and favoritism (Makiguchi, 1981-1996, Vol. 6, pp. 88–97). Even when competition was not to be deployed to forestall such clearly negative outcomes, Makiguchi seems to have viewed it as one element in a constellation that included ideas of economy, efficiency, rationality, purposefulness and innovation.

Makiguchi's focus on social rather than biological realms of competition supports the interpretation that he believed that it was ideas and practices, rather than people, that should be subjected to the winnowing effects of competition.

Humane Modes of Competition

Chapter 30 of *The Geography of Human Life*, "Competition for Survival and the Land," is where Makiguchi sets out one of his most expansive ideas—the possibilities of what has been translated as "humanitarian competition" (including by this writer) and which, as described below, might better be translated as a "humane modes of competition."

With the idea of evolutionary competition having served as a kind of leitmotif for the entire book, in the final chapters of *The Geography of Human Life* Makiguchi considered how the manner in which competition is conducted might also change; that competition, in addition to being a driver of evolution, might itself also be subject to evolutionary forces. In a sweeping survey of human history, Makiguchi suggested that competition within and between human societies had developed and changed along the following lines: The earliest, primitive form of competition was military, followed by political and then economic competition. Economic competition, he asserted, was the predominant mode employed in the world of his time—a world in which states as well as large industrial and financial concerns vied for domination of the world's markets and resources.

Finally, and looking to the future, he offered this vision: As the historical possibilities of military, political, and economic competition exhausted themselves, a new kind of competition would come to occupy an increasingly central place in human affairs. He saw this shift as not merely representing a change in the methods or site of competition, but as a qualitative transformation—from a zero-sum style of competition overhung by the threat of physical elimination to one conducted within a social framework of mutual recognition, what today might be called a "win-win" mode of competition.

Before examining the content of this concept, it is worthwhile to reconsider the aptness of "humanitarian competition" as a translation. Written in Sino-Japanese characters, the expression consists of two parts: the first *jindōteki* 人道的 comprises three characters, "person/human," "path/way," and "type/kind"; the second is the two-character expression coined by Fukuzawa for "competition" referenced above: *kyōsō* 競争 "strive/compete" and "fight/engage in conflict." While *jindōteki* did become the standard translation for "humanitarian" particularly in the context of the International Red Cross movement and international humanitarian law that developed starting in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the term has older, broader meanings rooted in the East Asian worldview that posits an inherent human morality. These meanings can be accessed through a direct rendering of the characters: the path of humanity; the way of being that people should follow or pursue.

"Humanitarian competition" suggests certain positive imperatives: striving, for example, to make the greatest contribution to human welfare, and a review of Makiguchi's different uses of the term would indicate that this sense is certainly not absent. On the other hand, the older use of *jindō* carries implications of negative restraints and bounds within which any competitive striving should be conducted. In his later writings, Makiguchi indicates his consonance with such negative restraints, referencing what he called a "maxim of the Orient" and which has sometimes been described as the "negative Golden Rule"—Not to do unto others what one would not have done unto oneself (1981–1996, Vol. 5, p. 339). To capture this second sense, while still retaining the meaning conveyed in earlier translations, in this paper I use "humane modes of competition" or "humane competition" as translations for *jindōteki kyōsō*.

Given the many negative aspects of competition apparent in the world around us—the freezing of winner and loser status into conditions of entrenched inequality—it may be difficult for readers to see the idea of humane modes of competition as a valid, workable concept. The

elements that comprise it—humane, competition—seem to represent an irreconcilable contradiction.

Over the years, different readers of Makiguchi have in fact suggested that he was principally calling for a shift from a competitive to a collaborative mode of social organization (Miyata, 1995; Matsuoka, 2005). This thread is certainly not absent from Makiguchi's thinking. But he was extremely deliberate in his use of language and, had he wanted to propose simply supplanting cooperation for competition, he would almost certainly have said so in as many words.

How, then, did Makiguchi see these seemingly contradictory ideas coming together as a coherent whole? First it is important to note that, for him, the different modes of competition outlined above were not stages in a simple, linear progression. Rather, they overlapped and coexisted, shifting back and forth as a new and different mode of competition came to occupy a more central place in human affairs (1981–1996, Vol. 2, pp. 393-401). Thus, while Makiguchi firmly and consistently believed in the possibility of progress, he never considered such progress to be automatic or inevitable. In line with this, Makiguchi assumed that transitions from one mode of competition to the next arise from within the internal logic of that competition. In other words, people would start to adopt a new mode of competition when the previous one had reached its limits and no longer functioned as a means for the achievement of desired ends.

As has been discussed, Makiguchi viewed competition as a universal, unavoidable reality of life. It had certainly been so for him. He witnessed it in the decline of the port city of his birth as steam won out over sail; in the process by which he gained entry to and was able to graduate from a teachers college; in the national examination that qualified him to teach geography. And as has been noted repeatedly, the entire Japanese national project was shaped by its competitive placement within the global system.

Implicit in his analysis of competition is that in order to produce valuable outcomes it must be conducted within the context of social frameworks and an underlying presumption of interdependence. Makiguchi appears to have seen competition and cooperation as paired, interrelated concepts. Thus, when he describes the process by which "we interact and compete, harmonize and clash" (1981–1996, Vol. 1, pp. 15–16), he is describing what was for him the inevitable phases of cooperation and conflict within human life.

It is interesting to speculate about the sources of Makiguchi's sense of interdependence, which is a consistent theme of his work, underlying many of his key ideas. Interdependence is, of course, central to the worldview of Buddhism, but *The Geography of Human Life* was written decades before Makiguchi formally associated himself with Nichiren Buddhism. This would therefore seem to be an instance in which Makiguchi remained faithful to non-modern values and outlooks because he felt they offered a more accurate and useful mapping of the world in which we live. In this case, Makiguchi refused to jettison the ethos of human interdependence long prevalent in East Asian cultures—where society has tended to be viewed as a positive good—for the Western post-Enlightenment view of society as a contractual arrangement that keeps atomistic individuals from engaging in unlimited violence against one another—Hobbes' famous formulation of "the war of all against all."

In this view, meaningful competition—that which spurs and encourages excellence—should not be for the necessities of life. Rather, the most effective incentives are social. As social beings, we are driven by the desire for the approval and recognition of our peers.

Makiguchi discusses even military competition in these terms, with a specific reference to the samurai classes of past eras when they were seen as "the most highly respected members of

society and it was considered the highest honor to be a samurai; it was this that made them the ultimate winners" (1981–1996, Vol. 2, p. 393).

Following the logic that modes of competition shift when the one currently prevailing has exhausted its possibilities, Makiguchi describes how, over time, the military competition that had long been the dominant factor in human affairs gave way to political competition.

> With the progress and advancement of society, military force alone was no longer enough to determine the functioning of authority. As people became aware that they could gain respect within society through the power of knowledge and wisdom, these became the means by which they sought to grasp political authority. (1981–1996, Vol. 2, pp. 393–94)

Internationally, Makiguchi saw the shift from primarily military to political (diplomatic) competition as propelled by realistic evaluations of the ultimate ineffectiveness of military competition. He illustrated this by noting that the states that had emerged victorious from military conflicts were now typically prevented by the other Great Powers from fully enforcing the demands they placed on the defeated. The result was that the economic benefits gained by the victors were now almost never adequate to compensate for the losses endured. This view was borne out two years later when Japan, despite winning its war with Russia, was unable to extract meaningful reparations and found itself victorious but deeply in debt.

Within the grand scope of history, Makiguchi saw political competition—both domestically and internationally—steadily yielding to the forces of economic competition:

> As the idea of freedom becomes more pronounced among individuals, it becomes impossible for those wielding political authority to make the masses submit to their will. As a result, there is a shift from the quest to seize political power to a greater stress on gaining economic power. (1981–1996, Vol. 2, p. 394)

He was also clearly conscious of the potentially destructiveness of economic competition among nations, what Johan Galtung (1969) identified as "structural violence."

> Military competition occurs suddenly, creating terrible suffering and tragedy, and we are thus clearly conscious that it is taking place. In contrast, economic competition takes place slowly and insidiously, and thus we are largely unconscious that it is occurring. But the suffering and misery that is ultimately produced by economic competition far exceeds that of military competition. (1981–1996, Vol. 2, p. 397)

Just as other shifts in competition had been driven by practical considerations—the ineffectiveness of a given form of competition to obtain the desired ends—Makiguchi assumed that the transition to humanitarian or humane modes of competition would be realized by a similar process: "Those who emerge victorious economically are not necessarily the final victors in the struggle for survival. This is something that is already recognized among those whose thinking has developed beyond a certain level" (1981–1996, Vol. 2, p. 398).

Although Makiguchi positioned humane modes of competition as the final stage in a series of historical transitions, he did not assume a static condition free from the disruptive energies of

competition, much less the "end of history" as envisaged in either the socialist or neoliberal imagination. Makiguchi clearly expected that some form of competition would continue to be an integral aspect of the human condition. He used the phrase *mukei no seiryoku* —"intangible force"— to describe the means by which humane modes of competition could function, including in the international arena.

> This means deploying an intangible force that—naturally exerts a positive influence on others. Rather than seeking compliance through the exercise of authority, we seek the willing and heartfelt compliance of others. Instead of conquering other lands in the selfish pursuit of territorial expansion, countries attract and draw others to them by gaining respect and admiration for their virtues. These are the methods of humanity. (1981–1996, Vol. 2, p. 399)

Makiguchi did not explain what exactly he intended by the phrase "intangible force." The idea that respect and admiration for character or virtue can be an effective motive force even in the realm of politics is another concept of enduring pedigree in East Asian thinking (Angle, 2017), and there is reason to believe the idea had a personal and cultural resonance for Makiguchi.

While it may be tempting to dismiss this approach as idealistic, the fact is that states—like individual humans—respond not only to concrete threats of loss or promises of gain, but to the more subtle forces of recognition, reputation, and prestige. In recent decades there has been serious discussion regarding the efficacy of the "soft power" of cultural attractiveness (Nye, 1990). What has been termed the "power of legitimacy" in international law literature has been demonstrated to shape the behavior of states in ways that strictly realist models would not predict; analyses have shown that the majority of states uphold the majority of their obligations under international law, including in a significant proportion of cases when doing so runs against their national interest as defined by rational actor models of behavior (Franck, 1990). In the international realm, Makiguchi's vision of humane modes of competition might be understood as an attempt to give full substance to the idea of international society or an international community; that is, relations among states that recapitulate the kinds of mutuality and reciprocity that pertain among individuals and groups in a sustainably functioning society.

> The goal [of humane modes of competition] lies not solely in self-profit, but in protecting and advancing the experience of life for oneself as well as for others. It is, in other words, to choose those means by which we benefit ourselves while also bringing benefit to others. It means to consciously engage in a shared or common life. (1981–1996, Vol. 2, p. 399)

Here the idea of *consciously* engaging in collective life is of particular importance. For Makiguchi, to speak of our social, cooperative nature was not to give voice to an ideal, but to make a statement of fact: As social beings, humans cooperate, communicate, and compete. And the greatest, most lasting good will be realized when our striving relative to others is conducted with a conscious awareness of our interdependence on and need for those others.

Within the total body of Makiguchi's writings, this exposition on the idea of humane modes of competition stands out as a rare example of a sweeping vision that gestures to a more ideal future. In point of fact, Makiguchi did not return to or elaborate on this idea in any of his subsequent writings. It may be that he experienced some degree of hesitancy or even embarrassment looking back on the ideals he had voiced in his early 30s. Makiguchi principally viewed writing

and publishing as means of expressing ideas that can be implemented by the reader, something which does not necessarily pertain in the case of a fundamental transformation in the vectors of human history. Conversely, however, nowhere in his writings does Makiguchi explicitly renounce or recant these ideas. It is thus equally possible that the remainder of his life was in some sense devoted to the realization of these early ideals in some modified or sublimated form.

Perhaps the form in which the idea of "humane modes of competition" continued to shape his thinking was in his commitment to the view that ideas, systems of thought and belief—even those that touched the core of personal or national ideology—needed to compete; to be discussed and debated openly, their validity tried and tested amidst the pressing realities of daily living. Makiguchi could be said to have engaged in such competition—however lopsided in terms of material force—in his critique not only of the ideas of ultra-nationalist education, but of their underlying structures of thinking of belief (see Gebert, 2022; Ito, 2009). It was this undertaken competition of ideas that led to his arrest in July 1943 for violation of the notorious Peace Preservation Act and to his death while still imprisoned as a thought criminal some five hundred days later (Origins, 2017, pp. 444–458).

Contemporary Educational Implications

What are the implications of Makiguchi's ideas of humane modes of competition? While Makiguchi's call for the adoption of humane modes of competition was set forth in the geopolitical context of international relations, the Geography itself manifested an educational philosophy (Saito, 2004) and lines can be drawn from this approach to Makiguchi's educational thinking and practice.

As discussed, Makiguchi recognized and focused on the motivational effects of competition: That humans as social beings find motivation in their relations with, and in comparison to, their peers; that there is a deeply rooted psychological drive not only to be *better*, but to be *better than*. Directing the energy that is unleashed by this motivational impulse toward positive, humane outcomes is the core challenge Makiguchi addresses in envisaging a qualitative transformation of competition. For Makiguchi, competition fails to fulfill this potential when it is waged in zero-sum terms cognate to biological competition for finite resources with the binary outcome of survival or extinction. In the educational setting this corresponds to high-stakes testing regimes based on uniform measures of success or failure.

My experience teaching in-person and online to an internationalized student body has brought into sharp focus the degree to which such testing has become a pressurizing reality for young people globally. Having gained entry to an institution of higher learning, the students I work with are, in that sense, winners. In my interactions with them, I make it a practice to ask if they can remember learning to hate a given subject. This has typically been met with the raising of many physical or virtual hands. I then ask if this includes subjects at which they were proficient and, again, hands go up. To develop a distaste for an entire field of knowledge represents forms of loss that—even if they can only be estimated counterfactually—must be counted as profound. These losses are incurred in intangible dimensions of human fulfillment essentially different from the kinds of institutional and career advancement made available by successful test-taking. But that does not reduce their significance.

The different modes of competition that Makiguchi reviews in the Geography suggest diverse, evolving, and contextual standards for success. This would imply similarly complex and nuanced standards for evaluating learning, an idea that finds support in Makiguchi's later ideas

about value-creation, which insist that value is something that is experienced relationally and subjectively (Makiguchi 1981–1996, Vol. 2). Although Makiguchi was widely recognized as a highly effective principal (Origins, 2017, pp. 207–216), the centralized educational system of pre-1945 Japan placed severe constraints on the scope for systemic innovation in methods of evaluation that could be employed in the public school system.

In the 1920s and 30s Makiguchi and his protege and successor, Toda Josei (1900–58), both achieved success in meeting rigid curricular demands and preparing students for the highly competitive middle-school entrance exams. Toda, in particular, ran a school dedicated to such test preparation—a cram school, in other words, the kind of place where love of learning goes to die. Outside the pressure of official observation/surveillance that prevailed in public elementary education, yet under the looming pressure of the tests, Toda was able to implement Makiguchi's educational ideas in a manner that, as former students have testified, enabled students to realize a high rate of acceptance to secondary schools while retaining interest in and even love for the respective subjects, something testified to by graduates (Makiguchi, 1981–1996, Vol. 5, p. 8–9; Yamashita, 2006). As Goulah and Inukai (2018) have described, Toda's approach focused on deductive reasoning—discerning "similarities and differences" (p. 311)—in a way that enabled learners to gain real understanding and problem-solving fluency in different subjects.

This suggests that, in his educational approach—which has deep connections to his thinking on geography (see Gebert, 2009)—Makiguchi was able to effect a qualitative transformation in the way that competition was conceived of and experienced. This is an important field for future study because, if Makiguchi was right and competition is an ever-present thread running through the order of things, it is vital that we give further focus to the nature of that competition and how it can be practiced so that its benefits may be realized and its harms contained.

Makiguchi's call for the adoption of humane modes of competition was set forth in the geopolitical context of the international relations of his time, an earlier era of globalization. Today, factors such as COVID-19 and climate change have brought the intertwined realities of global interdependence and competition into a new and different focus. The supply chains that run through global sites of comparative advantage have been revealed to include numerous chokepoints and vulnerabilities. Likewise, the development of highly infectious variants—and their subsequent global spread—has brought to the surface aspects of the bio-global order in which humans have always lived, but which has been obscured by the techno-medical prowess of certain societies.

Among the questions unleashed by the COVID-19 pandemic and its related time-space disruptions has been the role of competition in the processes of human and non-human life. In one sense, the pandemic may be seen as ushering in the end of the brief interlude, made possible by the invention of vaccines and antibiotics, when humans—at least those in the wealthier societies—lived largely outside our millennial competition with infectious diseases. As the hosts, victims, and vectors of viral infection, we are again compelled to an acute consciousness of the complex competitive-symbiotic contours of our relationship with these forms of life.

The scale and complexity of assessing and learning from the responses to the pandemic will make this a protracted and laborious process. Profound ethical questions regarding the use of coercive state powers and limitations on individual freedom in the interest of public health and safety demand earnest inquiry and debate. And this work, whether on the national or global scale, will be undertaken on a contested field littered with counterfactuals and in the teeth of political forces determined to have the justness of their respective decisions affirmed. Even given this, we can already discern in the various national and international responses elements of cooperation, of

zero-sum competition, and of forms of competition conducted within a framework of interdependence of a type Makiguchi would have recognized as "humane."

Perhaps most significant from a long-term perspective was the popular response, particularly salient in the initial phase of the pandemic, as billions of people took steps to avoid infection at least in part to keep from infecting others, actions consonant with Makiguchi's call to "choose those means by which we benefit ourselves while also bringing benefit to others" (1981–1996, Vol. 2, p. 399). There was also a renewed appreciation for all those who endure hardship and danger to maintain the functioning of society, an awareness of human equality that helped feed a wave of world-scale activism for the security and dignity of Black Lives. Finally, for all its ethical complexities—including the profit-driven nature of the enterprise—the global race to develop vaccines might also be identified as an instance of a humane mode of competition, especially if the focus is on the round-the-clock efforts of researchers.

Looking back, it is not surprising that other forces—including fatigue and a hunger for a return to "normal"—should have generated reaction and retrenchment. But through the pandemic and its response—things experienced globally and synchronously, if unevenly—the range of imaginable social arrangements has undergone a dramatic expansion that will remain as a memory, benchmark, and guide. How this experience is referenced—what is learned from it—will play a crucial role in our species' response to the challenges of survival and thriving on the planet we call home.

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Creating Pathways for Learners: Value Creation and Social Justice in Action

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Abstract

Disruption to the status quo in education erupted from a worldwide pandemic in 2020. COVID-19 pushed university teaching to emergency online teaching. This disruption intersected with a national and international call for racial justice in the US and internationally. Challenges and new learnings emerged as teacher and learners worked to co-create an environment that nurtured the human spirit and promoted learning through the co-construction of knowledge and new pathways. Teaching and learning experiences for this exploratory case study based in Tokyo, Japan, were examined through aspects of two pedagogical approaches: Ikeda's value-creating pedagogy and Freire's critical pedagogy. Questions explored included: How to cultivate a sense of community and belonging in synchronous, online classes at the university level? How to enhance the relevance of course content to contemporary global issues for students from diverse socio-cultural contexts? And, how to guide students towards hope and increased agency while making meaning of class themes during a state of disruption? Featuring the importance of bringing the world into our learning spaces, exploring the possibilities, and connecting the relevance of global issues to student lives, new pathways were presented. The possibilities of deepening a sense of belonging, connection, and purpose were presented with the hope of imbuing an inspired perspective of advancing work in education that allows new transformative learning for both the student and teacher.

Keywords: *Value creation, Social Justice, Belonging, Student Agency, Dialogue, Leadership*

Disruption to the status quo in education erupted from a worldwide pandemic in 2020. COVID-19 pushed university teaching to emergency online teaching and the familiar face-to-face teaching environment disappeared overnight. This disruption intersected with a national and international call for racial justice led by a resurgence of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, in the US and internationally. While the structural logistics of teaching semester-long courses on Zoom was an immediate challenge, even more important, and less discussed, was how to actualize a transformational educational experience via a computer screen. That is, the nurturing of an engaged learning experience that allows students to develop agency and be co-creators in their learning experience.

Refusing to be stymied in my pursuit of creating a learning environment that engaged students in meaningful and relevant ways with one another and with the course content, led to an exploration of how to bridge what one knows as an educator, to what is needed in a new learning

space. This paper explores how disruption led to creative pathways for actively engaging learners via a Zoom platform at a university in Tokyo, Japan, within English Medium Instruction (EMI) courses. Challenges and new learnings emerged as teacher and learners worked to co-create an environment that nurtured the human spirit and promoted learning through the co-construction of knowledge and new pathways. Racial justice, social change, democracy, and leadership were topics that were directly addressed relative to the seismic shifts occurring in diverse countries.

Pivot to Emergency Online Teaching and Learning

Based in western Tokyo, Japan, I teach at Soka University, a private, liberal arts university with approximately 8,000 students, 10% of whom are international. English Medium Instruction has expanded rapidly throughout Japan, including at my university where five of the eight departments offer EMI courses and degrees. International students and Japanese students take courses delivered in English towards the fulfillment of their degree requirements. The EMI courses, nonetheless, are limited and English-speaking international students often find themselves overrepresented in a smaller number of courses.

In March 2020, there was still much that was unknown about the impact of the pandemic on universities. As the start of the 2020-2021 Academic Year was approaching in April, faculty members at my university were informed that we could anticipate teaching online for approximately three weeks, and then in early May we could expect to come back to campus for face-to-face instruction. As an educator that cherishes the classroom interaction with students, I resolved to make the best of three weeks of online teaching, finding comfort in the brevity of the experience. Then, less than two weeks later we learned that the entire semester would revert to emergency online teaching via the Zoom platform, a completely new experience for me and my students.

Two questions immediately emerged for me. First, how could I develop a level of comfort with the technology involved in synchronous online teaching? Second, how would it be possible to create the teaching and learning experiences that I was accustomed to in face-to-face teaching? Layered upon these two immediate questions was the overlay of the racial justice movement occurring in the United States and worldwide. Two of my courses were directly addressing the themes of racial justice, democracy, leadership, and social change. I felt a sense of responsibility to connect students' current lived experiences with the impact of the pandemic and to engage in critical reflection of these themes.

University Ethos and Mission

The university's mission is to "foster value-creating individuals through rigorous academia, forever committed to its mission of serving peace of the world and happiness of people" (Soka University website, para. 10). The ethos and aim of the university is to nurture "the creative, life-enhancing potential of each student and to inspire students to employ that potential for the greater benefit of humanity" (para. 4). Students, although mindful of the mission, often struggle to make meaning of it in concrete, personal terms. The concept of fostering value-creating individuals through education emerged in the 20th century based on the cumulative scholarship and effort of Makiguchi, Toda, and Ikeda (Gebert & Joffee, 2007; Goulah & Ito, 2012, Goulah, 2021). Ikeda, the founder of Soka University, in his selected writings on education (2021a), and further expanded

in the next section, presents a more comprehensive view of his value-creating approach to education. Given the disruption of the pandemic, could adherence to these humanistic values be operationalized?

Conceptual Approaches

Teaching and learning experiences for this exploratory case study were examined through two complementary pedagogical approaches: Ikeda's value-creating pedagogy, and Freire's critical pedagogy based on social justice principles (Freire, 1998; Ikeda, 1996, Lupinacci, 2021). Three key areas bridge the approaches of these two thought leaders, developing student agency and the centrality of dialogic experiences in enhancing relevance. Additionally, both consider the relational aspect of education as central to teaching and learning. This aspect is connected to a deep care and concern for students that fosters inclusion and a sense of belonging.

Student Agency

Freire shares that the purpose of education as a transformative experience that allows one to contribute to the greater good is guided by wisdom, courage, and action (Horton & Freire, 1990). Students develop a critical awareness of the world based on the concrete experience of their everyday lives (Freire, 1973). Following this Freirean approach, the development of critical reflection serves to transform the learning experience (Guajardo, 2021). "Critical pedagogy opens up a space where students…come to terms with their own power as critically engaged citizens" (Giroux, 2010, p. 717). Freire's critical pedagogy has a central focus on power and agency, preparing learners to lead and manage their own lives, and to lead within their communities (Freire, 1998; Giroux & Bosio, 2021; Torres, 2009). The capacity for self-determination is an outcome of critical pedagogy.

Developing agency and maintaining hope during a time of great uncertainty is a perspective that Ikeda (2017a) conveys in the following, "The same power that moves the universe exists within our lives. Each individual has immense potential, and a great change in the inner dimension of one individual's life has the power to touch others' lives and transform society. Everything begins with us" (p. 3). This is an empowering perspective that mirrors the university's mission in recognizing the potential in students' lives. As Ikeda (2017a) has also shared, "Hope is the force that enables us to take action to make our dreams come true. It has the power to change winter into summer, barrenness to creativity, agony to joy…Most crucial is our determination to continue to believe in the limitless dignity and possibilities of both ourselves and others" (p. 5). The student capacity to develop one's potential can be interpreted as developing agency.

As I thought through my teaching approach, I understood that I needed to connect course content to the students' lived experiences. This was my accustomed approach to teaching, however, now the challenge would be to cultivate these experiences online. As I introduced the class themes, I wanted to make relevant the themes to student experiences in their home countries, which included Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Columbia, Indonesia, India, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan. The awareness and skills needed to relate to the 'other' calls for educational engagement to be relevant to the students' lives and this can be done by validating racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural realities and ways of knowing (Caldwell, 2004). Thus, providing a forum for students to connect to their own identities and the identities of others would also be important.

Taking note of being based in Japan, Japan's racialization process of embedded racism (Arudou, 2015) was also shared as a point of contrast. In Japan, racism is difficult to decode as it is embedded in everyday society and normalized. Racism is considered a foreign issue, an experience that occurs in other countries, not in Japan (Kawai, 2015). Kawai notes that racism in Japan has been "obscured and trivialized, as indicated in the Japanese government's refusal to intervene in racism" (p. 41). Arudou shared, "In Japan, you have to 'look' like a 'Japanese' to be perceived as and treated as a citizen by society…[and] where a social majority is so dominant that it seeks to deny the very existence of minorities within it" (p. 316). This perspective of embedded racism was also a topic of discussion.

Dialogic Experience

Ikeda (2001) expounds on the Buddhist approach to dialogue, sharing that, "Genuine dialogue results in the transformation of opposing viewpoints, changing them from wedges that drive people apart into bridges that link them together" (p. 57). Dialogue is a pathway for student learning. For Freire, dialogue is a way of knowing, implies epistemological curiosity, and is a way of approaching the object of knowledge (Freire & Macedo, 1995). "I engage in dialogue because I recognize the social…process of knowing. In this sense, dialogue presents itself as an indispensable component of the process of both learning and knowing" (p. 379). The goal of dialogical teaching "involves theorizing about the experiences shared in a dialogue process" (p. 381), encouraging students to become "apprentices in the rigors of exploration" (p. 384). Also, dialogue is a pathway for a way of knowing the self and others (Bradford, 2021; Freire & Macedo, 1995), the dialogic process is not solely conversation and sharing of experiences. Freire posits that it needs to be connected to social praxis, which involves reflection and political action (Freire, 1998). Expanding on Freire's concept of political action, hooks (1994) states that activism takes many kinds of forms; our mere presence together is a form of activism when it involves gathering to co-create pedagogical experiences that are transformational.

Both of my courses had a dialogic approach embedded in the delivery of the course. The dialogic process was incorporated as a means to support and develop student agency. Learning how to engage in transformative dialogue via Zoom would be a new experience for me and my students. Could this be a transformative, value-creating lived experience?

Relational Aspects

In light of the disruption experienced in 2020, how might learning spaces continue to provide the arena for navigating the building of relationships and nurture students in developing a sense of agency for the greater good? Freire stated, "To be human is to engage in relationships with others and with the world" (1973, p. 3). Central to an educational experience is the process of knowing others and connecting to the concept of community (Darder, 2002; Harding & Ikeda, 2013). Thus, the process of knowing is relational. How then could students develop and foster relationships when there was no physical, face-to-face contact?

Ikeda (2014) posited that the individual is central to the work of value creation and entails working with others to solve problems. Ikeda shared, "this is the challenge of creating value--the process by which each of us, in our respective roles and capacities, strives to create that value which is ours alone to realize in order to benefit our fellow citizens, society as a whole and the future" (p. 2).

Students were struggling with motivation and developing a sense of connection to peers. The racial justice theme was also challenging for students, as there was a desire to gloss over or perhaps minimize the discrimination and 'othering' that was occurring in their home countries, and in their own lived experiences.

Author's Positionality

In addition to Ikeda's and Freire's conceptual approaches, it is important to share my educational philosophy that guides my pedagogical approach. Hansen (2007) reflects that an educator's philosophy embraces three elements: values, moral compass, and a generator of ideas for teaching. In the absence of a teaching philosophy, Hansen states that educators rely on unexamined habits and memories. An educational philosophy directs the intentionality of an educator. My educational philosophy is operationalized in guiding principles. These five guiding principles have steered me in face-to-face teaching, and I realized that in 2020, they also undergirded my approach in my Zoom classes. My first principle is the belief that all learning space is sacred. I approach the students with respect and honor the time we share with one another. I wanted to uncover how to respect students on a Zoom platform. Second, engaged learning connects head and heart. I believe that the most meaningful learning occurs when knowledge and content connect to one's personal experiences. As we moved to online teaching, I wondered if I could still connect with my own heart and students' hearts. Third, to discover your truth, your voice and wisdom matter. Each individual's lived experience contributes to the shaping of new knowledge, and I wanted to create a forum on Zoom for student's voice. Fourth, the purpose of education is to become more human. Developing our sense of self, our humanity, our presence in the world is a process of becoming more human. How then could I share my own humanity via Zoom? Fifth, education requires a community. Education is relational and being in a community with others serves as a catalyst for growth. How could I best develop a sense of belonging and community via Zoom?

Research Questions

As I determined to create new pathways during this time of disruption, I was facing challenges in both the delivery of the teaching approach and in creating an engaged learning experience for students. Questions that guided and perplexed me included:

- How to guide students towards hope and increased agency while making meaning of class themes during a state of disruption?
- How to enhance the relevance of course content to contemporary global issues for students from diverse socio-cultural contexts?
- How to cultivate a sense of community and belonging in synchronous, online classes?

Case Study Methodology

The two courses, Democracy and Dialogue, and Global Leadership and Dialogue, each had approximately 30 students, from 12 countries, predominantly from the Global South, and approximately 15-20% were Japanese. Approximately 50% of the international students were unable to return to Japan and were taking classes, synchronously, from their home countries. Both synchronous courses were taught in English, 90 minutes per week, for 14-15 weeks and were designated

as Special Studies in General Education, attracting students from across faculties/departments including international liberal arts, economics, law, and peace studies. Additionally, both courses had a broad focus on racial justice, democracy, global leadership, and social change.

Every class had opportunities for students to engage in small group discussions, dyad dialogues, reflection, connector questions at the start of class, and check-in questions at the end of class. Students kept their cameras on for the most part. If they were experiencing connectivity problems or taking the class in the early hours of the morning in their home country, the camera would usually be off in the large classroom and on in the small break-out groups. Students were asked to reflect at the end of the course on the class experience, specifically on class themes, the use of dialogue and reflection, and relevance of the course content.

A reflexive thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases was utilized to code student reflection essays. Each narrative was read multiple times to generate the initial themes that were then further developed. Braun and Clarke (2021) share, "Within reflexive TA, the coding process is integral to theme development, in the sense that themes are an 'outcome' of these coding and theme development processes, are developed through coding; coding is not…a process for finding evidence for pre-conceptualised themes" (p. 332). Through the thematic analysis process, insights into the student learning experience were named. The findings included: 1. Challenges of online classes, 2. Cultivating community and belonging, 3. Relevance of student lives to global issues, 4. Inspiring hope and agency through leadership, dialogue, and diversity.

The case study narrative and findings also include my teaching reflections based on a journal kept throughout the semester. The use of journaling captures a researcher's reflections, positionality, and identity. "Journal writing expands the scope of such reflection beyond problematic situations…it contains a critical analysis of the (political) context in which actions unfold, the researchers' knowledge, skills, expertise, values, assumptions, and the emotions evoked by the research [and] is a tool for observing, questioning, critiquing, synthesizing, and acting" (Annink, 2016, p. 4-5). For each theme, teaching reflections proceed student reflections.

Findings

The findings are guided by the thematic analysis that resulted in four themes. Challenges experienced due to online teaching and learning were shared by all. Second, the work of cultivating community and belonging was facilitated through sustained small groups that proved pivotal for building relationships. Third, connecting student lived experiences to global issues enhanced relevance of course content. Fourth, student agency was linked to leadership, dialogue, and diversity, resulting in a feeling of hopefulness despite the ongoing challenges.

1. Challenges of Online Classes

Teacher Reflection

As someone who does not consider herself tech-savvy, the thought of teaching my courses on Zoom caused anxiety and nightmares. I worried if I would be able to do the basic functions of getting students into class via Zoom. I watched multiple videos and webinars on how to teach online and these created more angst. Finally, one video of a professor experienced in synchronous online teaching dissolved my worries. This individual shared that keeping the process simple worked best. As a result of his words, I imagined that all my students were seated in the front row

of my classroom. I used the Chat function extensively and popped into the breakout rooms as students met in their small discussion groups. I felt like we were all learning together how to navigate through the technology and how to express ourselves on a computer screen.

Student Reflections

Students expressed the challenges of shifting to an online format. Regardless of whether they were in their home countries or on campus in the dormitory, the challenge of taking classes online was evident, impacting motivation, a sense of loneliness, and a disconnection to the university experience. Rodriguez (2021) shared, "the pandemic has caused significant grief, loss and denial of peer and familial interactions, particularly for our most marginalized communities" (para. 1). As exemplified in their reflections, students questioned whether the course content could be taught online, shared their challenges moving to an online format, and struggles dealing with COVID-19.

> *It was difficult to believe that a class this profound was going to be conducted online but nevertheless, I am very grateful that each of us had the same heart to make efforts in getting as much of the full experience of taking this class.*

> *This semester has been challenging for me…As I am a passive learner, the class environment is what motivates me…Due to all classes being conducted remotely from home it has been a real challenge for me to develop my academic conscience and focus during class.*

> *This semester was probably the most challenging given the current circumstances and especially with having to get used to the new system of classes being online. I feel that this class was a sort of escape from the hardships…we were able to address the things that are occurring and be able to have a safe space to discuss them.*

> *When my family tested covid positive and I was unable to participate in the midterm assignment I felt really bad…I had forgotten about the meeting and at night saw the group chat where my mates had sent concerned messages inquiring about my wellbeing.*

Students shared the challenges of taking classes online. I also learned of family challenges as students voluntarily shared when family members became ill or passed away due to the COVID-19 virus. Creating a safe space and a sense of community then became particularly salient. My focus aligned with the approach recommended by Rodriguez (2021), "We need to focus not just on instructional strategies but also on relationships. We should focus on empathy, flexibility, respect and human connection. We should listen to students' voices and to their silences" (para. 3).

> *To be a good leader you have to be empathetic…Empathy is a quality that a leader should possess to be kind to the people around them and understand that each person is unique and has their limitations.*

Students recognized the need for empathy during these disruptive times and acknowledged the need to also develop empathy.

2. Cultivating a Sense of Community and Belonging

Teacher Reflection

Small things matter. As the first Zoom class began, I did what came naturally, which was to greet every student by name as they appeared on the screen. This was almost instinctual. It was only later that I learned from my students that this was one of the few Zoom classes where their presence was acknowledged. In addition to calling them by name, I would make a point of commenting on something specific to them from the last class or from a comment in the class platform for assignments. I also organized them into small groups, making the groups as diverse as possible by gender, country of origin, area of study. We collectively decided to call these small groups, tribes, reflecting a spirit of community as espoused by Junger (2016). Junger posits that we can learn from tribal societies about loyalty and belonging and taking responsibility for one another. Students shared that this word reflected a sense of community and belonging. They met in their tribes during every class to reflect on discussion questions. The tribes remained intact in one class for the entire semester, and in another class for half of the semester and then new tribes were formed. In both cases, students spoke to the value of meeting in the same small group for 7 or 15 weeks. As a tribe they had group projects to complete throughout the semester; projects that ranged from planning a movement to composing a group poem. Student interactions in their tribes allowed for bridging to occur. Heydemann and powell (2020, p. 4) share, "bridging helps us turn outward to form connections and partnerships between dissimilar individuals and groups…Bridging thus increases empathy and acceptance of diverse peoples, values, and beliefs while giving us greater access to different parts of ourselves."

Student Reflections

Students appreciated the connection to one another via their tribes. They formed friendships, and at times considered their tribes a lifeline to the university community. They felt loved and cared for in their small groups. A sense of belonging allowed them to feel safe, broaden their perspectives and build friendships. Freire shares that the elements of trust and respect are central to a learning experience (Horton & Freire, 1990). Student reflections attest to the sense of belonging that emerged, based on trust and respect.

> *I appreciate all the classmates, and especially tribe members who taught me different perspectives and the joy of learning, connection, and having a dialogue…I am proud to say that we creatively strengthened the bonds online! I received so much love in this class.*

> *Despite the physical distance, we have been able to connect straight away, creating wonderful bonds, that I would have believed impossible amidst all my doubts and prejudices regarding any online activity. The relationship and warm atmosphere…made me rethink my ideas [that] it is impossible to develop true friendships if you only speak through a screen.*

> *In this class, I felt a sense of belonging, which I do not feel in other classes. Even on the screen, I could strongly feel individuals' energy, love, passion, and emotions.*

Participating in a tribe community contributed to a sense of belonging, a quality found to mitigate adversity and contribute to a sense of well-being (Walton & Cohen, 2011). The opportunity to develop friendships is also central to social change. As Ikeda (2017b) notes, "It is my confident expectation that friendship among youth will powerfully turn back the sullied currents of divisiveness and give birth to a vibrant culture of peace based on profound respect for diversity" (para. 13). Student comments below specifically describe the development of friendships.

> *This whole concept of being a member of a tribe is so heartwarming to me because it was through this that I was able to gain new friends and to get a chance to hear their personal takes on what we read and dig deeper into the values they upheld.*

> *I had an amazing tribe experience. Every member in my tribe was extremely open from both their minds and hearts, and I could express myself without hesitation. Being in this tribe…gave me the courage to open my heart and to gain more confidence in myself. The tribe members created such an environment where we all felt safe…we built a strong bond of friendship through mutual understanding and trust.*

3. Relevance of Student Lives to Global Issues

Teacher Reflection

Both Ikeda and Freire speak to the importance of the current lived moment and the need to connect and make relevant daily experiences. Ikeda (2017b) elaborates, "Education gives rise to the actions and activities that shape the direction of society over time…can foster action and solidarity, enabling young people to bring forth their full potential and increasing momentum for global change" (p. 2). The centrality of educational relevance, couched in critical reflection and praxis, also connects to Freire's educational philosophy (Freire, 1973). Freire's (1994) perspective on the importance of learning to read the word and read the world is demonstrated in how students build community with one another, and then challenge one another to bridge their cultural differences.

For myself, as an educator, to bring forth the relevance and connection for students meant disturbing and/or illuminating student perspectives. As Freire noted, conflict is the midwife of consciousness, and yet this is not ever separate from a deep love for one's students (Horton & Freire, 1990). I challenged students to connect to and make meaning of the disruption they were experiencing and observing, both in their respective countries and worldwide.

Class exercises utilized to engage learners and build community included Dialogic Work, Co-Creating Activities, and Problem-solving Tribe Projects. Each presented the depth of possibility of building trust, friendship, agency, and a heightened responsibility to engage as a change-maker. Dialogic work included opportunities to engage in a structured dialogue with one classmate, initially within tribe and then later in the semester across tribes. A question or prompt related to the class content would focus the individual sharing. Co-creating activities involved exercises where students were tasked with writing an assignment as a tribe, for example, a poem based on the weekly class theme or a declarative statement of beliefs and ideals. Problem-solving Tribe

Projects were mid-term or final projects completed collaboratively with their Tribe mates. Examples of these projects included designing a social movement or conducting a 60-minute dialogue on a global issue, presenting diverse views.

Student Reflections

Through an enhanced awareness, students shared how they developed a global mindset for dealing with global issues as detailed in their reflections below.

> With the tools and insight that this course gave me on dialogue, democracy, and the various themes that we saw every day, we opened our hearts and made connections to one another, even when we were miles away from each other…each little step will take us to the fundamental change of society were everyone can be truly free, where we can truly live democracy and where our shared humanity transcends our differences.

> I believe the process of "learning" is not just about studying knowledge from textbooks…but to apply what we have learned into our life, so that our learning process has meaning…

> Regarding the content of the class…I was surprised by how related it is to the current situation and the fact that it is not only what is happening in the United States but also in many countries including my home country… it allowed me to have a better understanding of the history of my family when we talked about the idea of community, its connectedness to nature and to history.

> The content of this class I found applicable with the current issues, and it provided perspective in helping me to better understand…racial inequality…about the deep-rooted issue of racial injustice…to understand the history and the importance of racial equality.

These student reflections showcase the bridging that occurred between current global challenges and connections to their lived experiences. This bridging concept is captured by Freire as he shares that teaching and learning demand critical reflection, not just a transmitting of knowledge (Horton & Freire, 1990; Bajaj & Vlad, 2018). The processes of knowing and growing are inextricably linked.

4. Student Agency linked to Leadership, Dialogue, and Diversity

Teacher Reflection

By the fourth week of classes I wrote in my journal, "I was so touched by how they engaged in class, that after class I cried…I was moved by how sincerely students connected to the dilemmas and challenges posed. I feel like my students are being stretched to consider other possibilities, stretched to consider the challenge of having ideals like peace, nonviolence, democracy, and justice." I sensed that students were seeking answers. As Ikeda (2021b) shared, "Nevertheless, even as the dark clouds of this crisis continue to shroud the world, progress in efforts to build a global society committed to peace and humane values has not halted" (para. 4). My students had not

halted in their efforts to want to contribute to social change. Freire (1994) also posits that "There is no change without dreams, as there is no dream without hope" (p. 91). Hope and the sense of agency emerged in both classes. I pushed students to reflect and imagine what was possible, in terms of addressing global issues, locally.

Student Reflections

The students' expression of hope resonates with Ikeda's guiding ethos of hope and joy (Bogen, 2021). These qualities are not to be added into programs, rather they are central to the learning experience. Bogen reflects that the "core task of an educator is to light a spark in students…one that encourages them to follow their interests, trust their voice and believe in their ability to realize their full potential" (p. 145). The reflections below capture this sense of hope and agency.

> I do not see any better time to have taken this class. Our world right now is going through one of the hardest challenges…and still we are learning about hope and about community. We see many people losing hope. At one point, I was losing hope… I realized I could not lose hope…Our earth and our society depend on our generation, and we have a great role to play.

> I truly felt that this class prioritizes the students, especially their personal growth…It was filled with both great opportunities and difficult challenges…it felt more like a journey of self-exploration whilst tackling real-life problems that humanity faces. It allowed me to connect my small, tiny self to the big, vast world and opened my eyes to how all of us, as individuals, have the ability and capacity to contribute to change in the world…this class awakened me to reanalyze the whole meaning and importance of my role in society again.

> The concept of looking at my future as a blue and open ocean where I can explore many unexpected opportunities with excitement, rather than a wall or mountain that I need to overcome, was revolutionary…I could [re]fuel with courage and hope to continue this journey with a more positive mindset.

One student captured her learning process in terms of joy.

> [In] this class, I found the process of understanding others, and gaining wisdom through social engagement, a most wondrous and mysterious journey of joyful self-realization.

Student reflections strongly supported their sense of agency through three key concepts: leadership, the importance of dialogue, and the value of diversity.

Embracing Leadership

The concept of leadership was often tied directly to the concept of student agency. Ikeda (2017a) shared, "Education gives rise to the actions and activities that shape the direction of society…[and] can foster action and solidarity, enabling young people to bring forth their full potential

and increasing momentum for global change" (p. 5). Student reflections captured a sense of ownership of their own leadership capacity and hopeful expectations towards social change.

> *The hardest part to me is fully believing in myself as a leader of global peace. This class has showed me that it is "the heart that is most important." Without a cause that resonates with people's heart, without dialogue, others would not choose to join a social movement.*

> *It was in this class that I had laughed, cried, and felt many different emotions…but the most important of all was that I felt hope…and I will continue hoping that a peaceful and just world can be attained through our own actions as global citizens.*

> *I've realized that the fundamental qualities of a global leader are trained and not inherent. We are all capable of awakening dormant characteristics lurking inside of us. I feel more empowered knowing this and emboldened to throw myself into uncomfortable situations for the benefit of others.*

Student reflections capture the sense of agency connected to their own identity and understanding of leadership that was being nurtured and developed. Feeling empowered and emboldened, students recognized their own sense of agency in contributing to their own role as leaders.

The Role of Dialogue

Students practiced a structured approach to dialogue where they learned to listen to understand and speak their truth. Students were reminded that conversational exchange is an act of verbal ping pong and does not necessarily reflect dialogue. Dialogic experiences in class strive to approach Ikeda's views of dialogue as an experience that is transformative for both parties, with the goal of bringing out the best in oneself and others (Urbain, 2018). These reflections capture the relationship between dialogic learning and student agency (Bajaj & Vlad, 2018). Dialogue created opportunities for students to imagine a new reality.

> *I think we always achieved true dialogue…I experienced a microcosm of the diverse society that we all aspire to, one without judgment, fear and filled with warm company which just made us wish to have one more minute together to share a little more.*

> *We managed to dialogue in all classes…at times we disagreed but we always tried to understand the other side, thus practicing our Active Listening, which we managed to develop a lot during this semester.*

> *The discussions we held in class trained me to become an active listener. They cultivated in me a sense of compassion…I'm able to be more genuine with who I am rather than having to portray a certain image of myself…Being vulnerable has completely changed the dynamic of my dialogues. Dialogues feel rawer as if my being has been stripped down to nothing but its core without a blanket of insecurity.*

Valuing Diversity

As students approached the diversity of demographics and perspectives in class, they operationalized McDowell's (2018) conceptualization of diversity. "Demographic complexity speaks to the interconnection among people, even in the face of their differences" (p. 217). Students shared how these diverse perspectives were new to them, and at the same time welcomed.

> *All of us come from different parts of the world and speak different languages and we have a variety of ages in the group, from 20 to 33…we are able to come together as a team and have such a strong and deep dialogue… our differences in background bring more value to our dialogue because each of us could share our own perspective and experience.*

> *We discussed many topics related to diversity…such as the Black Lives Matter movement, which, especially in the United States, has redefined workplace diversity and brought to light the importance of inclusion and diverse representation in our society.*

> *During our final dialogue one of the questions redirected us to our cultural roots and we spoke about how culture is important for us to be socially accepted into our society…The class discussions and weekly questions were answered based on what our culture teaches us, and at the same time our cultural underpinnings were also challenged.*

Discussion

This paper explored how the disruption of a pandemic and the emergency move to online learning led to an opportunity to discover creative pathways for actively engaging learners. Three research questions were examined through the conceptual lens of Ikeda and Freire's approaches. First, students experienced a sense of community and belonging in synchronous, online classes. The value of forming small groups that sustained interaction throughout the semester served to create connections amongst students. These small groups served to both develop friendships as well as safe spaces to explore differences, and topics of injustice and oppression. During a time of physical distancing, students were also experiencing social distancing. A dialogic approach to these classes strengthened bonds and served to close the gap of distance. The stronger the bonds, the more the gap was minimized. Second, course content and the impact of the pandemic and the international exposure of racial injustice were intertwined in weekly critical reflections, challenging students to explore and make relevant the themes of racial justice, social change, democracy, and leadership. Through critical reflection, students bridged global issues to their diverse sociocultural contexts. Third, students embraced hopeful perspectives and increased agency about their roles in the world, mirroring the university's ethos of contributing to the greater good, even during a state of disruption. Perspectives and growth experiences related to leadership, dialogue, and diversity were also central to students' learning.

Transformation and the role as active participants, as espoused by Freire and Ikeda, illuminates the possibilities of increased agency in facing challenges in a learning environment, and emerging intact, with a deeper connection to heart. My own reflective process of teaching and learning was shared with the purpose of outlining possible applications and implications of this work for engaged learning and building community. Featuring the importance of bringing the world into our learning spaces, exploring the possibilities, and connecting the relevance of global issues to student lives, new pathways were presented.

Conclusion

A worldwide pandemic in 2020, COVID-19, disrupted education and pushed university teaching to emergency online teaching. Challenges and new learnings emerged as teacher and learners worked to co-create an environment that nurtured the human spirit and promoted learning through the co-construction of knowledge and new pathways. Teaching and learning experiences for this exploratory case study based in Tokyo, Japan, were examined through aspects of two pedagogical approaches: Ikeda's value-creating pedagogy and Freire's critical pedagogy. Questions explored included: How to cultivate a sense of community and belonging in synchronous, online classes at the university level? How to enhance the relevance of course content to contemporary global issues for students from diverse socio-cultural contexts? How to guide students towards hope and increased agency while making meaning of class themes during a state of disruption? A reflective thematic analysis resulted in four themes: 1. Challenges experienced due to online teaching/learning, 2. Cultivating community and belonging pivotal for building relationships; 3. Connecting student lived experiences to global issues enhanced relevance of course content; and 4. Student agency was linked to leadership, dialogue, and diversity, resulting in a feeling of hopefulness despite the ongoing challenges. The possibilities of deepening a sense of belonging, connection, and purpose were presented with the hope of imbuing an inspired perspective of advancing work in education that allows new transformative learning for both the student and teacher.

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The Epistemic Uncertainty in Learning and Doing Anti-Racist Work

Jessica Bridges

Abstract

In this article, I start with an overview of two major events in 2020—the Coronavirus and the murder of George Floyd to contextualize White women's engagement in anti-racist work. I make meaning of the learning process for other White Women as I reflect and analyze my own learning experiences using autoethnography. I offer an overview of critical whiteness studies and scholarship about White women who engage in anti-racist work. I share my autoethnographic narrative account of engaging in anti-racist work. I conclude by highlighting the hopeful possibilities anti-racist work can create for a more just society.

Keywords: anti-racism, education, critical whiteness studies, autoethnography

Introduction

In this article, I start with an overview of two major events in 2020—the Coronavirus and the murder of George Floyd – and use these events to contextualize White women's engagement in anti-racist work. I make meaning of the learning process for other White women as I reflect and analyze my own learning processes and experiences using autoethnography. I begin with an overview of critical whiteness studies and scholarship about White women who engage in anti-racist work including defining epistemic uncertainty (Sholock, 2012). Next, I describe the autoethnographic methods used to collect and analyze data. I follow this with an autoethnographic narrative account of my engagement in anti-racist work. I conclude by highlighting the hopeful possibilities anti-racist work can create for a more just society.

I situate my anti-racist work and learning through three educational experiences: 1) the journey toward anti-racism; 2) the work within the @antiracismeveryday virtual workshop I attended for 9 weeks, and 3) experiencing ridicule in conservative news for a presentation I gave at a gender conference in 2021 about my anti-racist research. To highlight these educational moments, I draw from an autoethnography I have been conducting for the past 13 months that involves participating in rallies and marches with Black Lives Matter in Denver, CO, attending virtual antiracist workshops with @antiracismeveryday, analysis of the workshop curriculum, and my experiences in dialogue with other White women. These forms of antiracist work are imperative in the intense context of social dialogue around critical race theory and White supremacy and provide broader transformational possibilities for society.

Major Events in 2020

In 2020, the global community faced a pandemic of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, commonly known as COVID-19. Among those disproportionately affected by COVID-19 in the United States were/are Black, Brown, and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC). In addition to the global pandemic, on May 25, 2020, while stuck at home, many people found their eyes glued to the television and social media as the video of George Floyd's murder at the hands of police officer Derek Chauvin played out over and over again. The New York *Times* (2021) described the videos circulating on social media as showing George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, being pinned to the ground, face down, with his hands handcuffed behind his back while a White male police officer, Derek Chauvin, held his knee on Mr. Floyd's neck for more than eight minutes. The next day, protesters flooded the streets of Minneapolis, MN, and by May 27, demonstrations started in other major cities around the nation (Deliso, 2021). Millions of people took to the streets chanting, "Say his name!" and "I can't breathe!" (Deliso, 2021). Amid this virus, awareness of and direct action against police brutality soared. According to the Pew Research Center (2020), 67% of White people supported Black Lives Matter in June 2020.

In June and July of 2020, in social media spaces—Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, my White women friends who had never mentioned racial injustice before instantly advocated for racial justice. I saw my White women friends declare their move from non-racist to anti-racist. As a White woman, also participating in these anti-racist movements I narrate my experience engaging in anti-racist work with other White women to illustrate the learning process and offer an example of grappling with epistemic uncertainty that occurs in anti-racist work in the current social context. By "epistemic uncertainty," I refer to the grappling with identity and emotions necessary as part of the process of reconciling my complicity in White supremacy (Sholock, p. 704, 2012). My intention is not to center my White experience, but relay my learning as a White woman.

Critical Whiteness Studies: An Overview

The foundations of Whiteness Studies rests on Black scholars of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. More than a century ago, W.E.B. DuBois, a significant African American sociologist and educator, anticipated that race and racism would remain one of the United States' key social issues when he argued: "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line" (Dubois, 1903/2007, p. 1). Dubois's (1903/2007) critique of Whiteness as a part of the problem laid the foundation for critical whiteness studies (Applebaum, 2016; Bailey, 2016; Casey, 2021; Yosso, 2005). Critical whiteness scholars frame race and whiteness within various forms of White supremacy as a socially constructed means of upholding and articulating varied institutions of privilege for White people and structures of oppression in the United States (Casey, 2021). At the same time, CWS scholars are critiqued for centering Whiteness in their analysis (Matias & Boucher, 2021).

Yosso (2005) argues that critical whiteness studies (CWS) developed from critical race theory, which also stems from critical legal theory, ethnic studies, and feminist studies. In the 1980s, CRT developed as a result of legal scholars feeling limited by the separation of critical theory and race and racism (Yosso, 2005). Legal scholar Haney López (2006) situates critical race theory (CRT) and race scholarship by constructing race historically through an examination of legal scholarship that traces how race is socially constructed through the work of anthropologists and case law. Lopez (2006) found that in law, whiteness was the norm. Leonardo (2009) traces the

construction of whiteness from critical social theory and Marxism while engaging with the movement of CWS and critiquing the call for the abolition of whiteness. Delgado and Stefancic (2013) argue that as members of a social world, social norms, practices, and structures of power that change over time construct our identities. When we write or speak about the social practices that are unfair and discriminatory, the hope is that we are contributing to a more just world (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). While scholarship about race and racism began in the 19ᵗʰ century, ethnic studies work in the 1980s advanced previous assumptions developing branches of critical race theory to include critical whiteness studies.

The development of critical whiteness studies can be outlined in two waves. Casey (2021) traces this history starting with scholars examining White privilege, followed by pedagogies of anti-racism with an emphasis on praxis in teacher education. Some first-wave scholars include Peggy McIntosh (1989/2014) who identified and critiqued White privilege, comparing it to an invisible knapsack of systemic advantages that White people are seemingly ignorant of carrying. Professors of teacher education use McIntosh's (1989/2014) work to begin discussions about White privilege. However, Lensmire et al. (2013) argue the continued widespread use of McIntosh's (1988/2014) article in teacher education has diminished the anti-racist work necessary in these programs to confessions of white privilege by White people. Another critique of first-wave scholars is focused on the lack of attention to the complexities of Whiteness as a racial identity (Casey, 2021). Second-wave scholars have engaged with these nuances placing White supremacy alongside and within other oppressive social structures to work towards anti-racism. Placing whiteness, White supremacy, and anti-racism in these structural spaces provides insight into the systemic assimilation and reproduction of racism in the United States and globally (Applebaum, 2016). It also creates a muddy hope for White people to become as Sleeter (2015) states, "antiracist racists" (p. 79). To Sleeter (2015), this means that although White women will always be complicit in White supremacist ideology because of their White privilege, they must learn to become active allies in dismantling racist structures. The following section builds upon this past work by taking a closer look at how White women have engaged in anti-racist work.

White Women and Anti-racism

An essential part of dismantling White supremacy, for White women, is understanding how, when, and in what ways we hold privilege and are complicit in maintaining systems of White supremacy. Making sense of our complicity is not enough to dismantle social structures. While we must dismantle these structures in our hearts, collectively we must work together to dismantle these structures socially. I articulate the work of transforming the heart as a starting point to changing White women's actions. When we, as White women, understand and grapple with our complicity, we can respond to racism through action. The road to anti-racism is not singular; it is difficult and often full of mistakes. As Sleeter (2016) explains, "White identities are not monolithic, but rather laced with spaces for learning…" (p. 1067). These differences connect in various ways with dominant social structures and a linear path toward becoming an anti-racist racist can become muddied. Here I highlight the grappling White women do through anti-racist work.

White women should fight against racism because, as Fellows and Razack (1997) declare, without fighting racism, White women cannot disrupt other systems of oppression (i.e. capitalism, class, race, sexuality, etc.) that uphold and contribute to White supremacy. Ann Russo (1991) asks White women to "analyze their relationship to race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality" (p. 299). Okun (2010) situates this relationship to White supremacy through socialization to color-blindness,

"where centuries of racism have left a toxic legacy felt by Communities of Color across the country, we are socialized into an ethic of 'colorblindness,' a twisted reconfiguration of the justice fought for by a culturally appropriated Civil Rights movement" (p. 18). Oftentimes White people overlook their White race because Whiteness is not seen as different or other. When White women are forced to examine racism as White supremacy, the narrative shifts from a focus on people of color to White people and a White problem (Russo, 1991).

For White women engaging in anti-racist work, Sholock (2012) proposes a "'methodology of the privileged' for White women that offers strategies for an effective coalition across racial and geopolitical inequities" (p. 703). White women must work on themselves, but also work together to dismantle systems of oppression. The privilege Sholock (2012) is referring to is the unearned benefit of being judged by a different set of standards based on white skin. The work Sholock (2012) proposes is for White women to rely on the stories and wisdom of women of color creating global solidarity. In addition, Sleeter (2015) asks White women to do anti-racist work "…beginning with the principle of complicity in maintaining racist systems rather than White privilege alone" (p. 180). Simply engaging with one's privilege can lead the learner to think that racism is defined by individual acts of oppression and that by doing the work as an individual, we can dismantle racism. Instead, White women must look at systems as perpetuating racism, acknowledge their role(s) in these systems, and move forward from there.

The realization of being complicit can be challenging because this enlightenment leads White women to question their actions and sense of self – everything they knew about themselves to be true can come into question. As Baldwin (1963/2000) clearly articulates, "what passes for identity in America is a series of myths about one's heroic ancestors" (p. 128). Denial, cognitive dissonance, feeling uncomfortable, and dealing with conflicting feelings are part of the journey of anti-racism (Linder, 2015). Okun (2010) argues that "…denial operates to preserve white supremacy" and therefore focuses her work on how White people, in denial of their privilege or even how systems of power function in their lives, begin to understand their role in White supremacy (p. 34). Matias (2016) emphasizes "the role white guilt plays in obtaining an antiracist white racial identity" and how White people in these spaces try to ignore feelings of discomfort (p. 60). This argument reinforces Lorde's (2007) argument that "guilt is only another way of avoiding informed action…" (p. 130). Anti-racism is about addressing the feelings of complicity and taking informed action. Lorde (2007) teaches that when guilt leads to action for justice, it is no longer guilt, it is becoming knowledge. Denial and guilt are the driving forces that Sleeter (2015) emphasizes as "less on what it means to *be* White and more on what it means to act while White" (p. 79). For White women, anti-racist work is embracing discomfort and it is complicated. For those who choose to do the work it can be uncomfortable (Matias, 2016; Thompson & White Women Challenging Racism, 1997).

Epistemic uncertainty is a critical part of anti-racist work for White women because of how it contributes to the inner transformational process that occurs when White women grapple with and understand their complicity in a White supremacist society. Sholock (2012) describes epistemic uncertainty as "an important skill within anti-racist and transnational feminist movements for worldwide justice" (p. 704). Epistemic uncertainty is complex because it resides in a complicated socialization for White women under the structure of a White supremacist capitalist patriarchy. Like cognitive dissonance, epistemic uncertainty is a challenge for privileged White people to deal with especially when confronted with their own participation in White supremacy; however, "Whiteness itself must be resisted" because whiteness is the structure (Sholock, 2012, p. 706).

Epistemic uncertainty also occurs when White women come to terms with their own racism. Linder (2015) found that White anti-racist feminists experienced guilt, shame, defensiveness, and anger when confronting their White privilege. Okun (2010), describing a time when her mom told her she was racist, turns her epistemic uncertainty to reflexivity, highlighting how anti-racist work does not follow a single path or trajectory. This non-linear path is an important illustration for White women to remember and consider as they engage with the work. These emotions: denial, anger, guilt, etc. also helped White women engage with their identities and led them to take action toward anti-racism (Linder, 2015).

Methodology

I use a feminist theoretical lens to ground my work as it is gendered and raced to understand Whiteness as a cultural, political, social, economic construct. I rely on Hawkesworth's (1989) ideas about critical feminist knowing as situated in diverse and complex political dimensions to understand that antiracist processes are not homogenized nor identical. Antiracist education has complex political dimensions given the evolution of critical whiteness studies. Hawkesworth's (1989) theory allows me to situate my learning and meaning-making in the present moment (2021) as racism takes new forms and right-wing media seeks to censor and/or change the definition of critical race theory.

Using autoethnography as a method of inquiry, I engaged in weekly live virtual workshops and discussions with the Anti-Racism Every Day White Allyship Group. Every Tuesday at 6:30 pm, I sat with my computer and gathered in dialogue and learning with anywhere from 23-55 people. Of the participants each week, only 2-3 did not identify as female and all identified as White. Each week we worked with a different theme around White privilege and White supremacy that we unpacked, processed our complicity as individuals, and discussed in small and large group settings. I narrate my epistemic uncertainty using prose and poetry to dive deep into the inner processes of the transformative possibilities of anti-racist education. This autoethnography also draws attention to the transformative work women are doing in anti-racist spaces to disrupt White supremacy culture.

Autoethnography "intends to expand the understanding of social realities through the lens of the researcher's experience" (Chang, 2016, p. 108). Grounding the work of anti-racist White women through my journey and activism allows me to critique with the perspective of someone who has shared cultural beliefs and practices. Although being a White woman does not grant me automatic acceptance or inclusivity into White spaces, I draw on my narrative, experience, and workshop artifacts to understand my experience in relation to others' experiences. Through autoethnographic inquiry, I see myself in the representations of Whiteness, complicity, and activism in society as much as I see myself reflected by these representations.

Each week the facilitator offered a different theme around White privilege and White supremacy that we unpacked and discussed in small and large group settings. We moved from active allies/anti-racist thinkers to co-conspirators – people committed to an anti-racist lifestyle. Committing to this lifestyle, we were learning how to be White people who are willing to take action for racial justice. There was a sense of solidarity and a safe space to be vulnerable, make mistakes, and be corrected. To illustrate the epistemic uncertainty within the learning processes of anti-racist work, I engage with the data in various forms of analysis, including poetic analysis. I use excerpts from my research journal, personal blog, and field notes during workshops to make meaning of my experience within the context of the current cultural moment. I use prose and poetry to communicate my learning process within the virtual space of the anti-racist allyship group and beyond.

Autoethnographic Narrative

The journey begins in 2014 when I engage in learning about education and deconstructing my identity as an educator during a university class. After the death of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, I find myself with other White people in Denver, Colorado marching for justice and seeking to learn more about anti-racism as a way of life. Under the restrictions of a global pandemic, I sought education through virtual spaces – ultimately deciding to participate in the weekly workshops with @antiracismeveryday. Finally, in 2021, when my academic conference presentation about this work is exposed, torn apart, and decontextualized, by Fox News and other conservative media outlets, my poetic analysis illustrates my own epistemic uncertainty and that of others as they disparage my work.

The subject of Whiteness, complicity, and activism is personal. As a K-12 teacher in the United States, I have been embedded in a system that some scholars have identified as reproducing social injustice (Anyon, 1980). I have been complicit, albeit unconsciously, in upholding structures of White supremacy/colonization as a teacher in the educational system and as a White woman benefiting from White privilege. While I believed I was non-racist and socially active as a union representative, I cannot say I was actively anti-racist—or that I knew the difference between non-racist and anti-racist. In a Master's program in Educational Leadership and Societal Change in 2016, I started on the journey to become an anti-racist White woman. In 2020, after the murder of George Floyd and attending protests, I wanted to do more, so I decided to join an anti-racist White allyship group through @antiracismeveryday. I liken my experiences to gazing at myself in a mirror and describing the woman who appears at various points in her anti-racist journey. As I recount my journey toward anti-racist co-conspirator I have divided these accounts of various moments in my life by the following themes: the woman in the mirror, polishing my mirror, my reflection in a broken mirror, marching on, onward to anti-racist. In the final section, I choose to include sub-themes based on the norms of the virtual Anti-Racism Every Day White Allyship group I attended.

The Woman in the Mirror

The woman in the mirror is where I begin. The person before beginning anti-racist work. I started teaching middle school Spanish in 2004. Before that, I worked as a Spanish language interpreter for the school district where I grew up. The people I interpreted for were often shocked when I started speaking. Looking at me, one family said they thought for sure there was no way I could interpret for them. I have blonde hair, blue eyes, and my skin is very light. My Spanish, however, is near fluent. I began studying Spanish in 7ᵃ grade, I studied and traveled and became bilingual/biliterate in late high school and majored in Spanish eventually earning a Master's in Spanish Language, Literature, and Culture, early in my teaching career. My parents sacrificed to give me these opportunities, but at the time it was lost on me. When I started teaching Spanish in the same school district, I taught mostly white upper-class students.

When I started to teach high school in 2008, I had more Black and Brown students, but my classrooms were still mostly White. Looking back on my career, I have to think about what it meant for my students, especially the Latinx students, to have a White woman teach them Spanish – educating them in the "proper Castellano." (A Spanish organization called the Real Academia Española decides the proper use and construction of the Spanish language or Castellano). I wonder what my practice as a teacher would look like in 2022 if I went back to teaching Spanish. Would I be able to make it a decolonizing practice, knowing what I know now?

Polishing My Mirror: A Clear Reflection

I still have vivid memories of a day in the fall of 2014 while sitting in class during my Master of Arts program in Educational Leadership and Societal Change. We were talking about the theory of social reproduction and the role of schools in reproducing societal values (Anyon, 1980; Bowles and Gintis, 2011). Our professor was a young, enthusiastic, White woman. But, that day was dark. In a simplistic way, she showed an image of a house-like structure – like a children's drawing, describing the basics of Marxism. She used the image to illustrate how the base shapes the superstructures and the superstructures maintain and legitimize the base or how the bourgeois exploits the proletariat and influences discourse, hegemony, and values in society.

We were six students in the cohort, from around the world – an Indian woman, a Ghanaian man, a Latina woman, an ethnically ambiguous woman, a White man, and me, a White woman. Five of us had experience teaching in the classroom, all of us left that day – three hours later with a new understanding of the role of schools in society. We ate lunch together. I think my words were "What the f*ck?!" I could not stop; I just kept questioning, trying to understand the cognitive dissonance felt throughout my body. The White man was crying. A few weeks later, as a class, we joined a small protest that some undergraduates had organized after the police officer who murdered Michael Brown (2014) was not indicted.

I offer this poem as part of my reflection at this point in my life, when I felt my self-image begin to crack.

My Reflection in a Broken Mirror

In the fall of 2014, in a graduate class, I realized I was a colonizer.

At lunch, my stomach hurt, there was food on my tray that I couldn't eat. How could I have done this to my students?

> *My Reflection in the broken mirror.*
> *He tried to hide his tears*
> *His sunglasses couldn't contain them.*
> *I could not stop talking,*
> *yet words were not alleviating my cognitive dissonance.*
> *Surely, I wasn't a racist colonizer*
> *What did it mean,*
> Social Reproduction?
> *Learning Spanish from a White woman*
> *I wish I could go back and tell my students not to learn power and correctness from this*
> *White woman. I would tell them to stand in their own power.*
> *White isn't right.*

My cognitive dissonance did not end that day. I took a job teaching Spanish in 2016 in Tulsa. My students in my regular classes were mostly Black and Brown. I had two classes of students that came from bilingual schools—these students were mostly White. My classes were segregated. The Black and Brown kids were in regular classes and the White kids were in advanced sections. I could barely stomach it. I was a witness to and participant in everything I had learned.

I stopped teaching public school that year. I gave away all of my teaching materials. I could not continue down this path, no matter how badly I needed the money. My students rarely questioned my Whiteness or my expertise as a teacher. Their confidence in my abilities seemed to be ingrained or assumed in my role as an educator. While I decided to stop teaching Spanish in a K-12 setting, my activism did not end.

Marching On

On May 31, 2020, at noon, I met a friend (a White woman) near downtown Denver. We carpooled to participate in the third day of protests downtown in support of Black lives and to protest the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Elijah McClain. Before we began marching, we gathered in Civic Center Park—the heart of downtown. We raised our hands in the air toward the stage of the amphitheater offering affirmations to the young people who had walked to the center stage. I saw, out-stretched, more white arms than black or brown ones. There were hundreds of people, mostly physically distanced, and almost all with masks because of the pandemic. I looked around and saw White faces peering behind the masks, just like my White friend and I. I thought, what are all these White people doing here? The increase of White people participating in the movement was not limited to physical spaces – after all, as of this writing in 2021, we are still experiencing a global pandemic.

I wouldn't say I am an avid Instagrammer, but I do prefer the platform for social media consumption. Instagram is about pictures, short videos, or memes. This appeals to me because the user chooses the feed. I can follow friends and special interests. In April/May 2020, my Instagram feed took on a different tone. Where there had once been mostly memes, scenic photographs from friend's exotic vacations, or food – my friends really like taking pictures of their food - George Floyd, #BlackLivesMatter, and episodes of police violence began to fill the screen. I began to see friends declare their sentiment to move from non-racist to anti-racist, post pictures of themselves marching and relating their experiences with police violence. The change in my feed led me to look to Instagram to understand what was going on with anti-racism.

At first, I silently observed the various videos and photos, posting in solidarity. Soon, though, I started to follow a more diverse group of people. I was looking for information about anti-racism and began to follow accounts such as @antiracismeveryday and @antiracismdaily as well as @BLM5280—the Denver chapter of #BlackLivesMatter. It was through this renewed Instagram feed that I found a free nine-week seminar dedicated to anti-racist education and White ally-ship from @antiracismeveryday.

Onward to Anti-racist

@antiracismeveryday describes itself as a community organization and "A Guide for White Folks to Commit to Anti-Racism Created and Maintained by Rebecca Grodner (she/her)". The posts on @antiracismeveryday include segments from "The White Folks Guide to Uncomfortable Holiday Conversations" to graphics about White privilege and transformative justice. On January 9, 2021, I saw a post about a nine-week, free, "Anti-Racism Every Day White Allyship Virtual Discussion Group" and I signed up for every session. I was feeling many emotions including excitement about talking to others who cared as much as I did about anti-racism.

Each week the facilitator presented a unique focus for learning about anti-racism and White privilege. The themes centered on unpacking our White privilege and moving from active allies/anti-racist thinkers to co-conspirators with an anti-racist lifestyle. We chose to show up each week to engage in The Work with each other. It felt like a safe space to be vulnerable and make mistakes because we all had the same goal—to become anti-racist. We dialogued in small and large groups opening up about our ignorance and figuring out how to do better. At the end of each session, the facilitator gave us homework that consisted of some questions and self-reflection to consider as we moved through the week.

In writing about my experiences within and outside of this group, I use the notes I took during the workshops. These "field notes" include details about the themes, homework, and general numbers about those participating as well as thoughts and questions that came up for me as I engaged with the work of the workshop and with the other participants (Weaver-Hightower, 2019). I am putting forth my experience in sections that relate to the norms of this group. The facilitator shared the norms on the screen, read them out-loud, and reviewed them before the start of each workshop. The following section examines my experiences with each of the norms of the workshop as I engaged and continue to engage in anti-racist work.

@antiracsimeveryday: Five Norms Towards Anti-racism

Anti-Racism Everyday: Norm 1—Be present: Come in ready to focus on the work and stay engaged when feeling discomfort. Discomfort, cognitive dissonance, epistemic uncertainty—I felt it all. In the first few weeks of the workshop I was struggling to make sense of myself with the other White folks. Working in small groups of three during each session I asked myself questions about my relationship to the people I was talking to. It was uncomfortable and difficult. I struggled to be engaged—to stay present. Did people not know about White privilege? What does the facilitator mean by perceived and actual risk? How are we all going to process this? We were engaging just like Sleeter (2015) argues we should—putting our complicity first. I was processing the process of becoming anti-racist and engaging in the process with others who were all coming from different backgrounds, points of privilege, and varying understandings of what anti-racism means in theory and practice. White supremacy has asked me not to talk about my positionality and my privilege. Being present became resistance. Being present became about my vulnerability and my compassion. I learned to honor the choice made by each of us who chose to engage with our messiness. This was difficult because I was distancing myself—others' comments were rubbing me the wrong way—they seemed to be saying if we only fixed racism all our problems would be solved. Was fixing racism a cure-all? That wasn't and isn't my worldview. I think racism should be dismantled alongside other systems of oppression. It was through a conversation apart from the workshop that I was kindly reminded to find my compassion.

Anti-Racism Everyday: Norm 2—Be open-minded: Listen to others to understand (not respond) and assume they have good intentions. Finding my compassion for others helped me stay open-minded. I spent time before the fourth session in my Buddhist practice determining that I would show up to the session that night ready to listen and speak from my heart. That was the beginning of finding compassion for myself on this journey. In determining to speak from my heart, I brought my best self to the workshop. I got vulnerable. I disagreed. I could relate to everyone I spent time with in small groups. I felt comradery. Opening my mind, opening my heart I asked myself, what is my resistance to what we are learning? I remind myself of Russo (1991)

"…racism originates with and is perpetuated by white people" (p. 300). Opening my heart is resistance. Solidarity in this work is resistance.

Anti-Racism Everyday Norm 3—Be thoughtful: Speak from "I" (your own experience), share the floor, and remember that words have an impact (even if it doesn't match their intention). I really messed up one night. I was frustrated. We were deconstructing our emotions around acknowledging our Whiteness and White privilege through the lens of grief and the process of grief. We talked about *mourning our (White) morality* using the stages of grief created by Kübler-Ross (1973). I questioned the use of a Western lens for processing White supremacy—a structure born from western colonization. In speaking up, I was questioned by a woman of color about my assumptions and how that would have impacted the murder of Black folks at the hands of police. I tried to explain that I was not meaning to relate the two. My words had an unintended impact. I wrote in my notebook that I felt attacked, but it was not real. I related my feelings to my internalized White supremacist assumptions. I sat with these feelings and decided to show up again the next week—resistance. That night I wrote in my field notes "Audre Lorde, the Master's tools" as a reminder to shed my internalized White supremacy. I was not giving up; if there is one thing about which I feel confident at this point in my life, it is my ability to be a learner. I am capable of change. Inner transformation is resistance to my learned White supremacy and a commitment to un-learning what it means to be White.

Anti-Racism Everyday: Norm 4 - Be vigilant: Call others in if they make mistakes and help them understand. I made a mistake in the dialogue. I made a mistake and I fought every learned White supremacist behavior that was telling me to be defensive. We apply vigilance to ourselves and others. It is so hard to be reflexive with one's self in the moment. I watch the local and world news with my mom in the evening as we eat dinner. I critique the way the reporting is done. I am critical of who is doing the reporting. I make comments about when someone's misogyny is "showing" or how they are not addressing the structures of White supremacy and instead highlighting individual acts of racism. I am sure my mother is tired. It was one of these evenings in May 2020 that I tried to gently explain privilege—it didn't go well. I wrote this narrative in the days following that dialogue.

> *I sat with my mom in her home, watching the ten o'clock news. We saw scenes of police, press, and citizens engaged in what was categorized by the media as rioting. However, the only violence on the screen was coming from the officers in blue. My mother and I began to talk about what was happening just miles from our home.*
>
> *She grew up poor in a village of 800 people in Illinois. Her parents struggled just to have enough food for their three kids. We moved to a neighboring county of Denver in the 1980s. My mom and I started talking about White privilege as we watched the news. The conversation became a little intense, and I think we both went to sleep that night a bit unsure of our relationship.*
>
> *My mom had not understood how she could have benefitted from her lighter skin color because of her economic circumstances, sometimes missing meals, working hard for every penny in her adult life. She was deeply offended that I brought up the possibility of White privilege. A week later, someone on a morning news show made the analogy that White privilege was like two fish swimming up the same stream with different currents running in opposition. This explanation resonated with my mom, the biologist. My mom reflected on our discussion when the subject was broached on the morning news. I believe*

Bridges—The Epistemic Uncertainty

if I had never brought up the subject of White privilege that night, the dialogue could have never continued with her new understanding via the morning news.

Anti-Racism Everyday: Norm 5—Be accountable: Own your mistakes, practice apologizing, and learn from them. Engaging with my family has been a multitude of lessons both subtle and overt. Engaging in dialogue takes courage. Part of my accountability is to continue, to struggle, and grapple with my internalized White supremacy. Dismantling White supremacy in society looks like dismantling it in my heart. Policy can be legislated, but as a White woman, I must learn to feel the tension of the uncomfortable, the adrenaline of injustice. Change starts with my resolve in my community. My accountability is also healing what author, therapist, and somatic abolitionist Resmaa Menakem (2017) calls, "White-bodied Supremacy". Menakem (2017) argues that regardless of race, "if we were born and raised in America, white-body supremacy and our adaptations to it are in our blood. Our very bodies house the unhealed dissonance and trauma of our ancestors" (p. 11). I do not know if my family enslaved others, but I know some of my ancestors caused harm with their beliefs and words. According to Menakem (2017), my White body holds the trauma that my White ancestors have inflicted on themselves and others. Liberation, then, occurs in the healing process, in healing the body and addressing the trauma—taking responsibility and holding myself accountable. I offer the following poem as a reflection of sitting in my White body, finishing the workshop without resolution, without a sense of completeness.

The dissonance

I am sitting uncomfortably in the symphony of our society
Shoulders tense; Doing work.
Playing two notes together at the same time
F and A-flat: a minor third
It grinds on the ears, and resonates through my brain
My chest tightens when I feel the dissonance, this minor third with no resolution
I take a deep breath,
dissonance
epistemic uncertainty
There is work to be done.
and the dissonance remains
No conclusion, no findings, just more work
I sit
In dialogue
In thought
With the minor third
And more violence surrounds
Derek Chauvin's conviction is a pause, a breath
And no resolution is in sight.

Conservatives and Critical Race Theory

The summer of 2020, seemed to be one of protest and demands for police reform. The summer of 2021 seemed to be about critical race theory (CRT) or at least the definition given by

Republicans and Republican news media. On June 2, 2021, I received an email from a Fox News digital editor. Someone at Fox saw a video of my conference presentation at Southern Connecticut State University's Gender and Women's Studies conference. The editor referred to a previous poem: My Reflection in a Broken Mirror, and my desire to stop teaching Spanish. My lizard brain froze. Menakem (2017) describes the lizard brain, scientifically known as the amygdala, as the part of our brain that is reactionary. It is not a thinking part of the brain; the lizard brain tells us whether we should fight, flee, or freeze, and it is the part most connected to White-body supremacy (Menakem, 2017). I was scared, frozen. Did all my previous anti-racism work disappear?

Together with a friend and the organizers of Southern Connecticut State University, I found out that Fox News was one of the last news media outlets to pick up on the story. The headlines followed the themes of addressing my Whiteness and my desire to stop teaching Spanish: "White Spanish teacher cancels herself because 'white isn't right'" (The Post Millennial, 2021), "Woman Quits Teaching Spanish Because Of Her Skin Color [sic] (Perri, 2021), "Oklahoma State teaching assistant says she can't teach Spanish because she's White" (Street, 2021). In my personal blog I wrote about my internalized reaction, "…I felt like I shouldn't have said what I said. But I said it. 'White isn't right'…At least he [Jon Street] capitalized White" (Personal Blog, 2021). The articles related my work to critical race theory.

On May 7, 2021, Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt signed a bill into law that would prohibit the teaching of CRT and among other concepts that argued: "that individuals, by virtue of race or gender, are inherently racist, sexist or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously" (Murray, para. 4, 2021). Perhaps my work resides within the frame of prohibited content? My epistemic uncertainty was flowing freely and I began to question myself. I turned to those around me. I shared with my family about Fox News's portrayal of my conference presentation and my 10-year-old nephew declared Fox News's actions "diabolically evil". In conversation with other anti-racist scholars and practitioners, I commented that they can ban teachers from teaching CRT, but they cannot ban students from learning it. Me, a graduate student, addressing my racism and working to become anti-racist triggered some people.

Some of the readers of these articles appeared threatened by my work in anti-racism and expressed their outrage accordingly. I composed the following found poem from articles written by conservative news outlets, the comments sections of these articles, and an email I received in response to these articles (Mike Villano, personal communication, June 2, 2021; gearguy, 2021; Huber, 2021; Perri, 2021; rustyshackleford771, 2021; terrsgal621, 2021):

Intellectual Pedophile

You're a stupefied brainwashed moron…
Not to single you out but the profession you infest is likewise infested with intellectual pe-
dophiles like you.
STUPID!
Resigns for diversity reasons.
Teachers are such toxic people now.
She probably can't teach Spanish because she is retarded.
Now-former Spanish teacher said she quit teaching that language to be a better "white
ally" and "anti-racist coconspirator"

(In)conclusion

The journey does not end. I use my experience to highlight how I have experienced an important element in anti-racist work—epistemic uncertainty. If as White people we do not question how we benefit from unearned privilege or acknowledge how institutions perpetuate injustice, we are not creating change. From the Fox News experience, I can conclude that White people doing anti-racist work calls into question how others view themselves in society, causing epistemic uncertainty. I find the comments and the news articles refresh my determination for an anti-racist society and reflect on Okun's (2010) words:

> At its best, privileged resistance is an inevitable stage of development that those of us sitting in positions of privilege must move through in our desire and efforts to be both effectively engaged and fully human. At worst, privileged resistance is a way of life. (p. 42)

I know that privileged resistance can no longer exist as a way of life. Anti-racist work is ongoing education, and the results of this work continue to develop as the social, cultural, global context changes. In the current context, though, I am left with dissonance—an ongoing ringing in the ears as the work reverberates, resonates, and triggers those who come in contact. I find anti-racist education more misunderstood and more necessary than ever. I see anti-racist work transforming how White women understand the construction of race and how they choose to engage with and disengage from their privilege.

The hope for undoing the White supremacist seams in society lies in anti-racist work. Much like Sara Ahmed's (2017) concept of the "feminist killjoy," who disrupts patriarchy by giving voice to its oppression, perhaps we can become White supremacy's killjoy – disrupting Whiteness, speaking truth to power, and calling out racism when we see it (p. 37). Maybe we need a White woman's anti-racist army much attuned to Ahmed's (2017) idea of a "feminist army" where in solidarity, we collectively fight and pull each other up when we are down, calling in, calling out, and never giving up (p. 84).

As critical whiteness scholars pointed out, systems of oppression are not separate. Patricia Hill Collins (2002) explains these systems are "interlocking," and that "race, class, gender, and sexuality all remain closely intertwined with nation" (p. 229). I cannot help but take a moment and visualize the interlocking systems as a chain. A chain that physically ties one down, ties people together and tied Africans to ships as they sailed across the Atlantic. Unlocking a link in the chain weakens its hold. Dismantling one link, one structure means dismantling all.

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Acompañamiento and the Sounds of Resilience in the Social Distance

Jennifer Parker Monger, Mary Beth Hines, & Catherine Marchese

Abstract

This article draws from inquiry-based research that explored the efficacy of practitioners' efforts to create an asset-oriented field experience with preservice teachers and middle school students, responding to the challenge of building a virtual learning community during the pandemic. Through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), we investigated the pedagogical practices of one preservice English teacher who engaged three emergent bilingual middle school students in composing multimodal identity artifacts during a nine-week project. The findings of this study point to the value placed on acompañamiento—that is, learning "alongside" and "with" students (Sepúlveda, 2011). This aspect of the instructional design was found to be especially important in building a sense of community in the virtual classroom space.

Keywords: *acompañamiento, funds of knowledge, funds of identity, multiliteracies, preservice English teachers, asset-based pedagogy*

> *As transborder crises like climate change and COVID-19 endure, children worldwide are at the forefront of our collective consciousness. In a 2020 policy brief...the United Nations warned of the considerable impact of the pandemic on young people across the globe (Thakurta et al., 2021, p. 5).*

As instructors attempting to walk our talk by honoring the linguistic and cultural differences students bring to the (virtual) classroom, the three of us forged a collaboration because of and in spite of the pandemic. Catherine, a middle school English as a New Language (ENL) teacher, Jennifer, the field experience instructor for preservice English/Language Arts teachers (PSETs), and Mary Beth, the English education program director at the university, developed a partnership that would tap into the assets of emergent bilingual middle school students and PSETs alike. We also wanted to foster community despite social distancing, serving both middle school and college students in conditions that were less than optimal for learners at any level. Thus, the pandemic challenge became an opportunity for rethinking conventional in-person field experience: How might we create a field experience that was innovative and asset-oriented, teaching "to and through" diversity (Gay, 2013, p. 52) with PSETs and middle school students alike, responding to the challenge of building community virtually? In addressing this question, we hoped to provide enriched learning experiences for our respective students that would work on several levels: 1) to engage Catherine's middle school emergent bilinguals in learning English, 2) to engage Jennifer's PSETs in developing culturally sustaining instruction appropriate for Catherine's middle school students, 3) to build a

welcoming online learning community, and 4) to offer a testimony of resilience about emerging language learners and emerging teachers.

This article draws from a larger practitioner inquiry project (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) designed to explore the efficacy of our efforts to achieve those four goals. We highlight the teaching and reflective practices of one PSET, Brian (pseudonym), from Jennifer's field experience class, who engaged three of Catherine's middle school students in composing identity artifacts during a nine-week unit of instruction entitled *Soundscaping Funds of Knowledge & Identity*. The project involved both the PSETs and middle school students creating digital multimodal artifacts to represent key assets and identity traits in ways that moved beyond written text-only communicative practices. By leveraging an array of semiotic resources (i.e., sounds, visuals, words, etc.), PSETs and students were able to showcase multiple literacies throughout the process. Moreover, the emphasis on digital media in these activities resonates with the forward-looking NCTE Framework for 21st Century Curriculum and Assessment (NCTE, 2013), summoning schools to utilize a variety of digital tools for communication, expression, and problem-solving. This article traces the ways in which Brian cultivated an asset-oriented virtual pedagogy that fostered community as it built upon middle school students' funds of knowledge and funds of identity.

Literature Review

Funds of Knowledge and Funds of Identity

As Moll and his colleagues (1992) demonstrated, funds of knowledge (FoK) is a term that represents the accumulated skills and knowledges that reflect household and community practices outside of schools. As an extension of this concept, funds of identity (FoI) (Jovés et al., 2015), emphasizes the learner's lived experiences and those resources that a learner uses in defining oneself (Hogg & Volman, 2020). Taken together, FoK/I offer a platform for challenging deficit views of learners, rendering curricular materials that center on students' differences as strengths to be utilized, not as problems that need to be remediated. Moll et al.'s (1992) work is foundational to the groundbreaking line of research characterized by asset-oriented approaches to instruction, tapping into literacies informed by family and community ways of knowing, and leveraging such resources in the classroom, thereby making instruction culturally sustaining (Alim & Paris, 2017; Flint, Laman, & Jackson, 2021).

Multiliteracies, Multimodality, and Multilingualism

Complementary to the FoK/I approach, a multiliteracies pedagogy adopts a strengths-based design for teaching that disrupts logocentric definitions of literacy by inviting students' wide-ranging use of semiotic resources such as sounds and visuals (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; New London Group, 1996). Hull and Nelson (2005) describe multimodality as "a democratizing force, an opening up of what counts as valued communication, and a welcoming of varied channels of expression" (p. 253). Especially in a digital age where young people consume and create meaning through the affordances of many modes, it is now more than ever essential for teachers to provide students with opportunities to engage more equitably in the production of new knowledge through their multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009).

In line with creating an equitable learning climate, a pedagogy of multiliteracies rejects the privileging of one dominant language within the classroom (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). In asset-

oriented classrooms, the use of multiple languages and "translanguaging" are valued forms of expression that positively support students' belonging and engagement within the learning space (Auld et al., 2020). As cited by Auld et al. (2020), García and Li (2014) define translanguaging as:

> An approach to the use of language, bilingualism and the education of bilinguals that considers the language practices of bilinguals not as two autonomous language systems as has been traditionally the case, but as one linguistic repertoire with features that have been socially constructed as belonging to two separate languages. (p. 2)

Inviting translanguaging practices into the classroom as strengths thus positions culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students as creative experts, expanding pathways for sophisticated meaning-making that disrupt the boundaries of traditional composition genres (García & Li, 2014; Auld et al., 2020).

Acompañamiento: Walking the Talk

Sepúlveda (2011) emphasized that his role as a practitioner working with undocumented immigrants was to be sensitive to student precarity and to walk alongside students in their academic journey, supporting them through the process of becoming emergent bilinguals and thriving individuals in a dynamic community of learners. Walking with his students meant anticipating their learning needs and providing scaffolding so that they could effectively communicate in English and build new relationships in this learning community and beyond. In so doing, Sepúlveda hoped to offset the displacement and dispossession they experienced as immigrants. "Acompañamiento represents the creative acts of a people making space, creating place, and building community in an increasingly fragmented global world" (Sepúlveda, 2011, p. 568). Sepúlveda (2011) argues that this relational work is necessary for fostering a learning community.

While Sepúlveda (2011) could not have anticipated the pandemic, his research speaks to the importance of "the quality of the relationships we build as we stand or walk with others" (p. 559) in schools and in society. Sepúlveda's (2011) work speaks to this historical moment, for despite COVID-19 surges impacting youth, young adults and their teachers yearn for community, a desire that cannot be extinguished by sanitizers, social distancing, masking, and virtual pedagogies. As Sepúlveda walked alongside his emergent bilingual students, so too could we walk with Catherine's students as they improved their English communication skills and forged an online learning community.

Context of the Inquiry: The Soundscapes Project

As the pandemic spread, local university and public-school classes shifted to online-only delivery. Creating a new online field experience course for a full semester presented both a challenge and an opportunity that would require a tremendous amount of creative planning and coordination among several individuals over many weeks. Traditionally, in-person field experiences involved one or two PSETs working with a middle school teacher whom they would observe and assist throughout the semester. However, placing 15 different PSETs with 15 different teachers during a pandemic was not a feasible option. Nonetheless, it was important to all of us that PSETs still had an opportunity to apply firsthand the culturally sustaining teaching practices they were learning in their literacy methods courses, albeit virtually. In the online redesign, all PSETs would

work online in pairs as peer teaching partners and as mentors to the students of one veteran teacher.

To initiate the online field experience design, we contacted and met with Catherine, a well-experienced teacher of ENL at a local middle school. Together, we worked to develop a thematic unit plan entitled *Soundscaping Funds of Knowledge and Identity*, which would serve as the common exemplar instructional guide for students. We envisioned two cycles of inquiry for this project: 1) Jennifer would model scaffolding by inviting the PSETs to create multimodal FoK/I artifacts and offer support to PSETs throughout the design process; 2) the PSETs would follow suit, working in pairs to collaboratively design and teach a series of lessons to guide Catherine's students in creating multimodal FoK/I artifacts. Throughout the process, the PSETs would develop scaffolding in support of the middle school students, while Catherine and her middle school students, in turn, would support the PSETs in learning how to teach English. Table 1 maps out all the participants' primary roles and responsibilities throughout the collaboration.

Table 1: *Participants' Primary Roles & Responsibilities for the Soundscapes Project*

Participant(s)	Primary Roles & Responsibilities
University English Education Program Director (Mary Beth)	• Oversee courses, students, and instructors in the English education program • Crystallize the articulation of program courses and field experiences • Assist cooperating teachers, PSETs, and instructors in meeting their respective goals as well as course and program goals • Co-design a practitioner inquiry project to investigate the effectiveness of the online field experience and the FoK/I field experience
Field Experience Instructor (Jennifer)	• Co-design a practitioner inquiry and exemplar FoK/I unit plan in which PSETs could create differentiated/culturally sustaining lesson plans for their students • Model scaffolding by inviting PSETs to create multimodal FoK/I artifacts and offer support throughout the design process • Provide feedback to PSETs on their instruction through online discussion boards, teaching/inquiry e-portfolio submissions, reflections, and teaching evaluations.
Cooperating ENL Teacher (Catherine)	• Co-design an exemplar FoK/I unit plan in which PSETs could create differentiated/culturally sustaining lesson plans for middle school students • Coordinate the project's technical/physical logistics with school leaders, staff, and faculty • Scaffold instruction for and in support of participating emergent bilingual middle school students

	• Provide feedback to PSETs on their instruction through video teleconferencing
Preservice E/LA Teachers	• Conduct a practitioner inquiry tracking students' FoK/I using a teaching e-portfolio • Design/instruct weekly differentiated/culturally sustaining online lesson plans for small groups of emergent bilingual middle school students • Record, self-evaluate, and reflect on weekly online instruction
Emergent Bilingual Middle School Students	• Participate in weekly online lessons delivered by PSETs • Create multimodal FoK/I artifacts as guided by PSETs and cooperating teacher • Collaborate with peers and PSETs throughout the design process

In contrast to traditional academic discourse that relies almost exclusively on print literacies, the *Soundscapes* project welcomed middle school students' multiple literacies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009) into the English/Language Arts (E/LA) classroom for the co-authoring of an interactive e-book that would showcase their assets and social identities to Catherine and the PSETs. Using a project-based approach with an emphasis on differentiated instruction, PSETs invited students to creatively compose with multimedia to share their backgrounds, interests, strengths, and identities. The overall project thus infused the PSETs' and middle school students' FoK/I into the E/LA curriculum as a way of building a (virtual) community of mentors, learners, and producers of knowledge.

In preparation for their virtual field experience, Jennifer provided PSETs with instruction on FoK/I (Moll et al., 1992; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014), multimodality and multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009), practitioner inquiry (Hall & Wall, 2015), and pedagogical design for CLD classrooms (Heineke & McTighe, 2018). Then, Jennifer invited PSETs to create soundscape artifacts to represent their FoK/I. The PSETs subsequently used their multimodal FoK/I artifacts to model for Catherine's middle school students the use of various semiotic resources — i.e., sound, visual art, found poetry, and digital tools — to represent their richly diverse FoK/I. Additionally, Jennifer guided the PSETs in learning to use Microsoft Teams — the video conferencing platform approved by the cooperating school district — to virtually interact with students, some of whom would log in from school and others from home. It was often the case that Catherine's students who logged into the online lessons from home would choose to disable their webcams; thus, the PSETs would usually only hear these students' voices without seeing their faces.

Framed around the essential questions, 'What does it mean to be a (21st century) writer?' and 'How can our FoK/I contribute to our E/LA learning community?', we designed the *Soundscapes* project as both a unit plan and practitioner inquiry in which groups of two or three PSETs would co-develop and co-teach a series of five lessons over the course of nine weeks. The soundscapes project was carried out in full through five production phases (i.e., lessons) that included a pre-production and post-production phase (see Table 2). In the pre-production phase, PSETs guided groups of three or four students in responding to the following prompt with visual art and spoken/written language: 'What does it mean to be a writer?' PSETs then developed lessons for

production Phase 1, in which students created audio clips that captured meaningful sounds from their homes and/or communities. For Phase 2, PSETs guided students in composing visual artifacts that represented their FoK/I as inspired by their soundscape composition. Then, during Phase 3, the students narrated their soundscape/visual composition using written or voice-typed text. As part of Phase 3, PSETs also helped students to generate found poetry based on either their originally written narratives or from pre-existing texts that were meaningful to them, such as song lyrics or book passages. The final post-production phase invited students to reflect on the whole process of producing what Pahl and Rowsell (2010) describe as literacy artifacts — the soundscapes, found poems, and visual representations that captured their identities. PSETs guided students in sharing final reflections by visiting the original prompt describing what it meant to be a writer. PSETs were then able to compare their students' responses from the pre-production phase to that of the post-production phase as part of their practitioner inquiry.

Throughout the entire virtual field experience, PSETs kept an electronic teaching portfolio, where they tracked their students' FoK/I, designed differentiated lesson plans, and self-evaluated/reflected on their instruction. Two times during the field experience, each PSET submitted a recording of their online synchronous teaching for a formal evaluation via GoReact — an online password-protected multimedia-sharing platform that enabled each PSET to self-evaluate their teaching, and allowed Jennifer, as the field experience instructor, to annotate the recordings with written feedback. Moreover, through an online discussion board, PSETs shared journal entry reflections about their teaching practice in terms of how their students' FoK/I informed their instruction and pedagogical philosophies. In their final journal entry, PSETs shared an aspect of their virtual teaching they were particularly proud of. The virtual field experience inquiry concluded with the PSETs' development of a differentiated action plan for future instruction with their students.

Table 2: *Soundscape Project Production Phases and Descriptions of PSETs' Responsibilities*

Production Phase	PSET Responsibility: Guide students in composing with...
Pre-Production: *What Does it Mean to Be a Writer?*	Visual art and spoken/written language to describe what it means to be a writer
Phase 1: *Writing with Sound*	Sound recordings collected from home to capture FoK/I
Phase 2: *Writing with Visuals*	Visual artistic media to capture FoK/I based on soundscape composition
Phase 3: *Writing with Words*	Spoken and/or written sensory language to narrate soundscape composition and visual art Found poetry from meaningful/relevant books or song lyrics and/or originally written/voice-typed descriptions of soundscapes and artwork

Post-Production: *What Does it Mean to Be a Writer?*	Visual art and spoken/written language to revisit what it means to be a writer

Methods

Case Study Participant

Brian was a third-year undergraduate student majoring in middle/secondary English education. In a professional biography he sent to Catherine's middle school class prior to teaching, Brian shared his three goals for the field experience: "1) bettering my educational ability, 2) growing more natural in the teacher position, and 3) refining my philosophy of pedagogy." Brian was paired with James (pseudonym) to co-teach three emergent bilingual middle school students: Analisa from Mexico, and Marisa and Aurelia from Colombia. Similar to other PSETs in the field experience course, Brian and James opted to take turns in leading the online synchronous instruction.

For this case study, we chose to highlight Brian's lead instruction during the field experience. His e-portfolio documented an exemplar of "acompañamiento"—purposefully walking alongside his students during the learning process. Among the 15 PSET e-portfolios, Brian's teaching artifacts provided the strongest and most compelling evidence of a PSET purposefully eliciting students' FoK/I to produce culturally sustaining ELA instruction. In particular, it was the annotated video-recorded lesson featured in this article that Brian demonstrated his building of an inclusive online learning community by purposefully instantiating asset-oriented instructional practices that welcomed and honored his emergent bilingual students' FoK/I and multiliteracies. Additionally, his affirming engagement and care for students persisted through the field experience and materialized in a video he created for his students as a farewell gift. Of the 15 PSETs, he was the only one to index a depth of caring in the form of a gift to his emergent bilinguals. The video rendered an even deeper reflection about his priorities in teaching, learning, and building relationships with students. Finally, although Brian was fluent only in English, his teaching portfolio was the only one to demonstrate the use of translanguaging during synchronous online instruction, encouraging both English *and* Spanish in the students' artifacts. Encouraging students' repertoires of language and culture, Brian offered yet another way of creating a culturally sustaining virtual classroom.
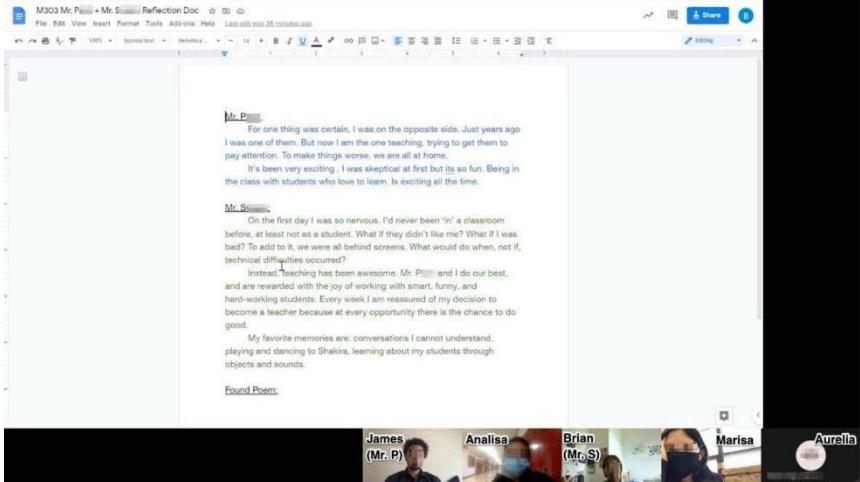
Data Sources

To conduct our analysis for this case study, we triangulated the data through a variety of artifacts that Brian submitted throughout the 16-week field experience course. The most significant datum was a 52-minute-long teaching video that Brian annotated for a formal evaluation. To limit the scope of this article, we highlight excerpts from Brian's teaching video and supporting documentation from additional assignments he completed in preparation for and in response to this particular lesson. We drew these supporting data from a teaching-and-inquiry e-portfolio where Brian tracked students' FoK/I for his E/LA lessons, collected student artifacts, and wrote self-evaluations on his instruction. Moreover, we included Brian's self-reflections from the journal entries he shared with Jennifer and fellow PSETs on the online discussion board. During the final week of his field experience, Brian also sent an unrequired three-minute "final send-off video" to

his three students, which we transcribed and included in the case study dataset, as this source provided us with additional information relevant to Brian's teaching experience.

Collaborative Thematic Analysis

To carefully examine the data in a way that generated reliable results, we conducted a collaborative analysis that enabled us to collectively merge our insider-outsider perspectives as both teachers and researchers. Cornish et al. (2014) describe "collaborative data analysis" as "processes in which there is joint focus and dialogue among two or more researchers regarding a shared body of data, to produce an agreed interpretation" (p. 79). To establish trustworthiness, we carried out a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017) that began with transcribing Brian's teaching video. The transcription process allowed us to become fully immersed in Brian's teaching as we not only transcribed the dialogue, but also took video screen captures and wrote descriptions of the interactions that occurred during the virtual lesson, as illustrated in Table 3. After transcribing, we identified codes and recursively confirmed, revised, and added new themes, as seen in Table 4.

Table 3: *Excerpts from Transcription of Brian's Teaching Video*

Excerpt Description	Screen Captures of Activities & Transcribed Dialogue
Excerpt 1: Brian reads his personal narrative aloud Co-PSET James (Mr. P) and middle school students listen as Brian shares on-screen and reads aloud a personal narrative that he composed on a Google Doc in preparation for his lesson on found poetry.	**Timestamp: 21:08** Brian: On the first day I was so nervous. I'd never been "in" a classroom before, at least not as a student… Mr. P and I do our best, and are rewarded with the joy of working with smart, funny, and hard-working students… My favorite memories are conversations I cannot understand*, playing and dancing to Shakira, learning about my students through objects and sounds. *Note: "Conversations I cannot understand" refers to the moments during Brian's previous lessons in which the middle school students would converse with each other in Spanish — a language in which Brian was not fluent.

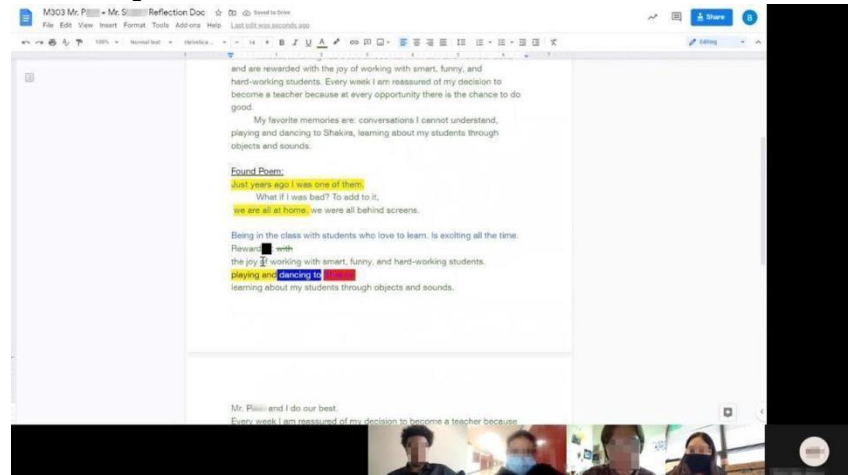| Excerpt 2: Brian and students negotiate use of flag colors to represent Colombia in the poem

Brian leads a collaboration, drawing from students' interest in Colombian singer-songwriter Shakira. Brian uses the highlighting feature in Google Docs to represent the Colombian flag within the poem. | **Timestamp: 28:11**
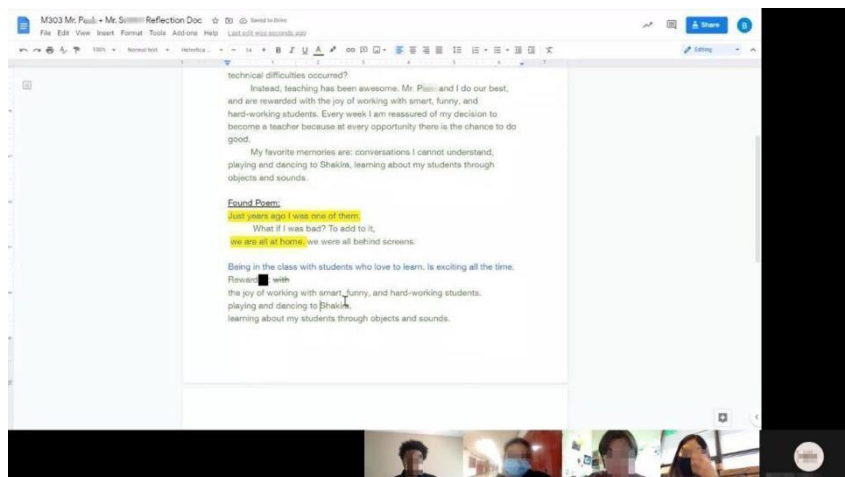
 Brian

(B): I know Shakira's Colombian and there are three colors of the Colombian flag. What colors should we pick?

Marisa (M): Blue

B: Blue, gotcha. This blue? [moves cursor to dark blue shade] Lighter? Darker?

M: I think it's uh the color for us is .. has a dark blue and red.

Timestamp: 29:56
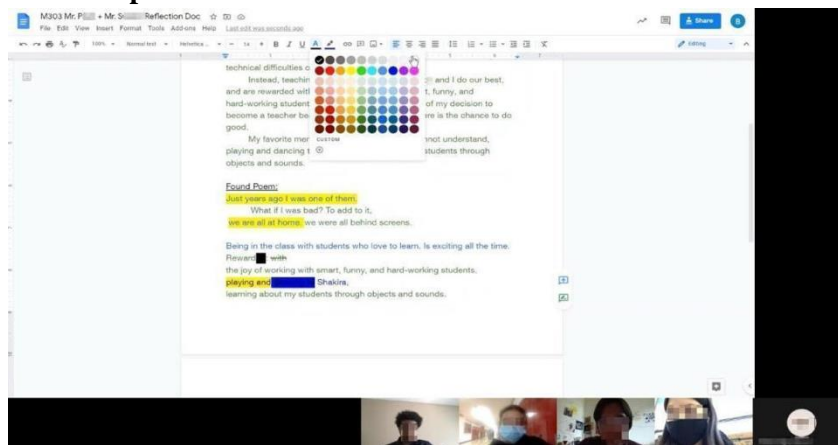
Brian: There we go. Good call. Thank you Marisa. And then we'll make this red highlight and we won't have to change the text [Highlights 'Shakira' in red]. Oh, the white background. That's okay, we know. 'Playing and dancing' No it needs to be red. I don't know why it didn't change. Nice! We have a kind of little Colombian flag. I love that. |

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Excerpt 3: Brian includes students' names in collaborative found poem Brian facilitates the collaborative composing of a found poem, typing the students' names. Aurelia becomes excited by Brian's inclusion of her name in the poem. Marisa suggests that Brian write her middle name so that all the student names mentioned in the poem begin with the letter A.	**Timestamp: 31:40** Brian (B): Could we type out 'conversations I cannot understand' in Spanish? I'm going to type real fast just a sec. I think if we can, it'd be so fun. [Types 'Marisa, Analisa, and Aurelia:'] Okay. Aurelia (Au): My gosh you know how to write my name! It is so exciting to me! Nobody knows that. Marisa (M): Fun fact. Actually my middle name starts with an 'A' too. B: Wow! So many As. And there's another Marisa. There's all sorts of names and stuff. That's crazy. M: Yeah actually just now that you are saying 'Marisa, Analisa, and Aurelia' and actually my middle name starts with an 'A' too. And it'll be really funny if you put it over there. B: I can. I'll put it.
Excerpt 4: Brian invites students to translate phrase from poem in Spanish Brian invites the students to translate part of the found poem in Spanish. Marisa volunteers to transcribe the phrase in Spanish. The students discuss and negotiate the translation. Using	**Timestamp: 33:30**
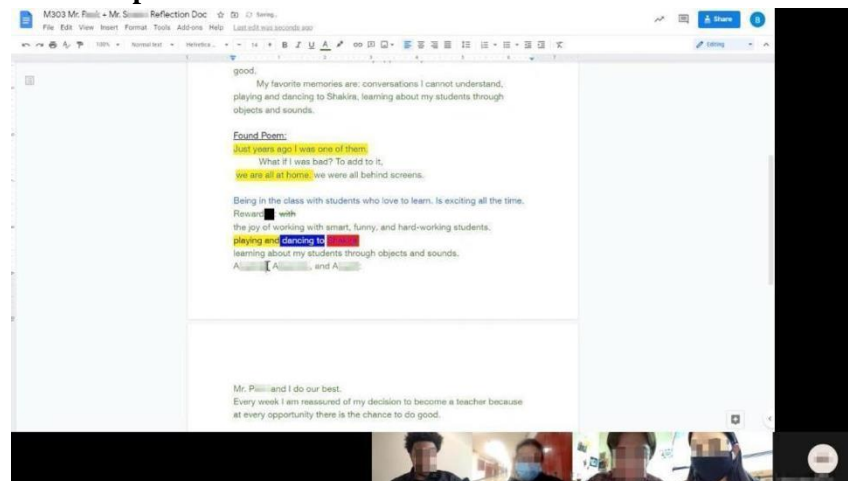
a paper and pencil, Marisa writes and holds the translation up to the screen. The students are enthusiastic for Brian's inclusion of Spanish in the poem.	Brian (B): Can we do the 'conversations I cannot understand'? Like say that in Spanish? Y'all will have to tell me really slow but ...

Marisa (M): Yeah I can do that. Okay so you want to try to say 'conversations that I cannot understand'?

B: Mhm

M: Okay so let me write it on a paper and I will show you.

James (J): Okay

Aurelia (Au): Que vas a decir, Marisa? *Translation: What are you going to say, Marisa?*

M: Conversaciones que no puedo entender. *Translation: Conversations that I cannot understand.*
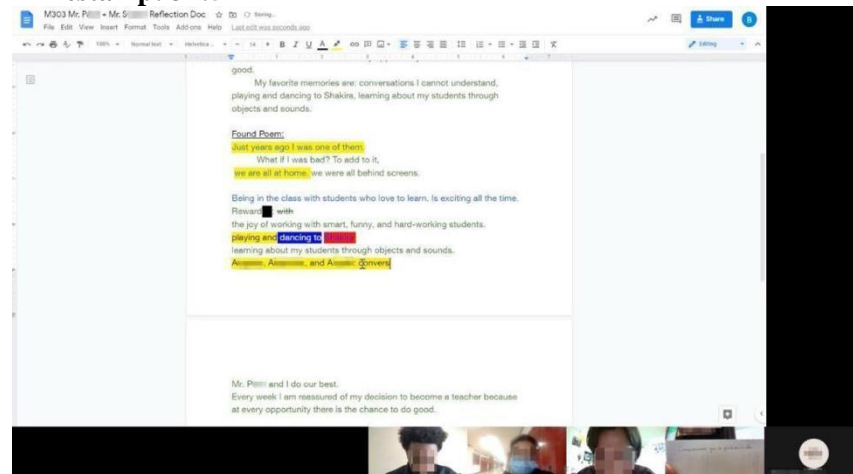
Au: Pero que cosa? Hay muchas cosas. *Translation: But what? There are many things.*

Au: Conversaciones [inaudible] pequeñas y muy grandes. *Translation: Conversations small and very big.*

[Students continue negotiating translation in Spanish]

M: Okay, gracias.

Timestamp: 34:52

[Marisa holds up paper with handwritten Spanish translation]

B: Oh, one sec. Marisa, will you say something real fast?

M: conversaciones que no puedo entender.

B: Uhh is that an 'E' or an 'R' |

	M: An 'R'
	Au: That's it.
	B: Conversaciones que no puedo entender. M: [gestures 'okay' with both hands]
	B: ¡Perfecto!
	Au: ¡Perfecto!
	B: I love it. Love it, love it, love it.

Table 4: *Themes, Codes, and Excerpts for Thematic Analysis*

Theme	Codes	Excerpts
Making Learning Culturally Sustaining by Incorporating Shared Funds of Identity and Lived Experiences	Incorporating shared lived experiences	PSET Brian (B) reads his text aloud: …. My favorite memories are: conversations I cannot understand, playing and dancing to Shakira, learning about my students through objects and sounds. (Teaching Video Excerpt 1)
	Making learning meaningful by drawing on students' FoK/I	B: Could you say.. could we type out 'conversations I cannot understand' in Spanish? I'm going to type real fast just a sec. I think if we can, it'd be so fun. [Types 'Marisa, Aurelia, and Analisa:'] Okay. Aurelia (Au): My gosh you know how to write my name! It is so exciting to me! Nobody knows that. (Teaching Video Excerpt 3)
	Increasing sensitivity to diverse learners' identities	Aurelia's comment made me so so so happy, validated my value of knowing and using student names appropriately, and also made me sad at how people of diverse backgrounds often must reconcile with improper pronunciation or use a pseudonym in America. (Self-Evaluation)

(Re)positioning Students as Collaborative Expert Designers of Multimodal Identity Artifacts	"Giving more agency to the students" toward a "student-focused" pedagogy	I would like the class to be more student-focused or involved. (Journal Entry)
	Collaboratively composing by drawing from students' expertise and FoK/I	B: I know Shakira's Colombian and there are three colors of the Colombian flag. What colors should we pick? M: I think it's uh the color for us is .. a dark blue and red. B: Can we do the 'conversations I cannot understand'? Like say that in Spanish? Y'all will have to tell me really slow but … M: Yeah I can do that. Okay so you want to try to say 'conversations that I cannot understand'? B: Mhm
	Composing multimodal identity artifacts using translanguaging increased engagement	M: Okay so let me write it on a paper and I will show you. James (J): Okay Au: Que vas a decir, Marisa? *Translation: What are you going to say, Marisa?* M: Conversaciones que no puedo entender. *Translation: Conversations that I cannot understand.*
	Reflecting on student engagement with translanguaging through collaborative inquiry	B: I want to celebrate the line in Spanish (conversations I cannot understand). This was something James and I have celebrated since day 1 with our students, and this moment, them translating our English phrase to Spanish and excitedly including it, felt like the peak of the semester in my opinion. (Journal Entry)

"Learning Along-side" Students Toward a Humanizing (Virtual) Pedagogy	"Being responsive to the needs of our learners"	James and I agree that we are being responsive to the needs of our learners as much as we know them….
	Building a caring community of learners by developing relationships	I am engaging students with rapport, building relationships with students, and am going above and beyond in preparing for lessons …
	"Developing a strong relationship with students as people"	I think developing a strong relationship with students both as people and, well, students, helped tremendously (Teaching E-Portfolio)
	Learning alongside students (acompañamiento)	Y'all were just incredible and it was such a pleasure...to know you.to know more about you and to learn alongside you learn with you learn from you (Send-Off Video)
	Humanizing pedagogy	I'm so excited to see what the future holds for you all. You have so much potential as writers but even larger than that, as people.

Findings

Making Learning Culturally Sustaining by Incorporating Shared Funds of Identity and Lived Experiences

As evidenced by his teaching videos, journal entries, and self-evaluations, Brian intentionally designed culturally sustaining instruction by utilizing the collective FoK/I and lived experiences of both students and PSETs. For example, in his teaching video, Brian drew upon shared experiences from previous online interactions with his students and PSET partner (James/Mr. P) by preparing a personal narrative that he used to scaffold the collaborative writing of a found poem. During the virtual lesson, Brian read his personal narrative aloud to his students:

> On the first day I was so nervous. I'd never been "in" a classroom before, at least not as a student…Mr. P and I do our best, and are rewarded with the joy of working with smart, funny, and hard-working students…My favorite memories are conversations I cannot understand, playing and dancing to Shakira, learning about my students through objects and sounds.

Brian's sharing that he "was so nervous" and that he had "never been 'in' a classroom before" demonstrated his willingness to be vulnerable. Brian also inserted the perception of his students as "smart, funny, and hard-working," thus highlighting the asset-oriented qualities of his students.

Moreover, Brian mentioned his students' FoK/I and shared lived experiences from participating with them in the soundscapes project up to this point—e.g., "playing and dancing to Shakira, learning about my students through objects and sounds." In so doing, Brian named his students' assets in offering a testimonial to the "joy of working" with his students, reinforcing his care for them.

During Brian's facilitation of the collaborative found poem lesson on Google Docs, he decided to include the students' names as part of the composition. As he typed all three of the students' names, one of the students, Aurelia, exclaimed, "My gosh you know how to write my name! It is so exciting to me! Nobody knows that." This instance in which Brian intentionally wrote in his students' identities—their Spanish names—marked a particularly engaging moment in the lesson, as it immediately sparked conversations among the students about their middle names and names of extended family members. Another student, Marisa, even suggested that Brian include her middle name—Ana-Lucia (pseudonym)—in the poem to match her peers' names, since it also began with the letter 'A', giving the final version of the poem an alliterative quality, that Marisa described as "funny."

In a written self-evaluation of his online teaching practice on this found poetry lesson, Brian noticed how the simple act of knowing, pronouncing, and spelling Aurelia's name correctly was enough to spark her motivation to contribute:

> Aurelia's comment made me so so so happy, validated my value of knowing and using student names appropriately, and also made me sad at how people of diverse backgrounds often must reconcile with improper pronunciation or use a pseudonym in America.

Brian recognized the micro-aggressions that many CLD students have experienced upon entering school, beginning with a basic identity marker—a misspelled or mispronounced name. Brian's responsiveness to his students began before his first lesson—i.e., learning how to spell and pronounce their names.

(Re)positioning Students as Collaborative Expert Designers of Multimodal Identity Artifacts

Prior to teaching the lesson on found poetry, Brian wrote in his reflective teaching journal about his desire for "the class to be more student-focused and involved" by "giving more agency to the students." To address these goals and as demonstrated in his teaching video, Brian made several instructional decisions throughout the online lesson that increased student engagement and collaboration through the production of a multimodal identity artifact — i.e., the found poem. During his instruction, Brian leveraged students' FoK/I in ways that (re)positioned them as collaborative expert designers. Specifically, Brian led a collaboration in which he drew from students' interest in Colombian singer-songwriter Shakira. Moreover, Brian used the digital highlighting tool in Google Docs to multimodally guide students in representing the Colombian flag within the poem:

> Brian (B): I know Shakira's Colombian and there are three colors of the Colombian flag. What colors should we pick?
> Marisa (M): Blue
> B: Blue, gotcha. This blue? [moves cursor to dark blue shade] Lighter? Darker?
> M: I think it's uh the color for us is...dark blue and red.

Marisa's use of the word "us" when explaining the Colombian flag colors to Brian was particularly salient during this exchange because it emphasized the strong geographical connection she and her classmate had to Colombia as a shared identity marker.

In his personal narrative and during the lesson, Brian emphasized that one of his "favorite memories" with the students was engaging in "conversations I cannot understand," referring to moments during his previous lessons in which Marisa, Analisa, and Aurelia would converse with each other in Spanish — a language in which Brian was not fluent. Brian suggested that as part of the poem, that they translate this phrase into Spanish:

> Brian (B): Can we do the 'conversations I cannot understand'? Like say that in Spanish? Y'all will have to tell me really slow but…
> Marisa (M): Yeah I can do that. Okay so you want to try to say 'conversations that I cannot understand'?
> B: Mhm
> M: Okay so let me write it on a paper and I will show you.

At this moment, Marisa volunteered to take the lead in translating the phrase. As Marisa worked on composing the translation, Aurelia conversed with Marisa in Spanish to discuss what she should write:

> Aurelia (Au): Que vas a decir, Marisa? *Translation: What are you going to say, Marisa?*
> M: Conversaciones que no puedo entender. *Translation: Conversations that I cannot understand.*

After negotiating the translation, Marisa responded to Aurelia, "okay, gracias," and then held up to her iPad camera a piece of paper with the handwritten Spanish translation "Conversaciones que no puedo entender" for Brian to see. With the students' guidance, Brian proceeded to revise the poem:

> Brian (B): Oh, one sec. Marisa will you say something real fast?
> Marisa (M): conversaciones que no puedo entender.
> B: Uhh is that an 'E' or an 'R'
> M: An 'R'
> Aurelia (Au): That's it.
> B: Conversaciones que no puedo entender.
> M: [gestures to the camera 'okay' with index fingers and thumbs touching on both hands]
> B: ¡Perfecto!
> Au: ¡Perfecto!
> B: I love it. Love it, love it, love it.

Throughout this exchange, Brian purposefully used and permitted translanguaging as a way of positioning the students as expert composers.

(Re)positioning students as collaborative expert designers of meaningful multimodal identity artifacts promotes an instructional model that is both equitable and accessible (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; New London Group, 1996) and that can "successfully incorporate students' backgrounds by drawing in the 'students as experts'" (Lee & Walsh, 2017, p. 203). The students' responses to this moment were palpable. Brian said that the act of the students translating an English

phrase into Spanish "felt like the peak of the semester" because he and the students demonstrated rapid and intense turn-taking in the conversation. As Brian observed in a teaching reflection, "The collaborative found poem was a highlight for us and students, as they described 'loving it' and it as 'awesome,' and something Catherine asked us 'why students left with sparkling eyes, saying 'that was amazing.'" In other words, the emergent bilinguals who drew from their FoK/I to coauthor the found poem were highly engaged in this production of knowledge.

To put this pedagogical moment in perspective, we situate it against the backdrop of the academic performance of emergent bilinguals in U.S. schools:

> Academic identity and what it means to be recognized (or not recognized) as a well-performing student are significant, particularly to students who come from diverse linguistic backgrounds and who are often labeled as "at-risk" in the U.S. Historically, all English language learners are considered "at-risk" because languages other than English are not given value...viewed as a barrier. (Nuñez, 2021, p. 11)

Marisa, Aurelia, and Analisa each were recognized as the "well-performing student" in this exchange, and their knowledge of Spanish became an asset, not a "barrier."

"Learning Alongside" Students Toward a Humanizing (Virtual) Pedagogy

Acompañamiento involves building an inclusive learning community by honoring linguistic and cultural pluralism and by walking alongside students in the learning process. Brian did that intentionally and even virtually, exemplifying culturally sustaining teaching as symbiotic; students gained fluency in English as he learned Spanish, in acompañamiento. In a teaching journal he wrote prior to planning the found poem lesson, Brian acknowledged the amount of careful preparation and commitment that goes into designing a culturally sustaining pedagogy that would allow him to walk alongside his students during the field experience:

> I am engaging students with rapport, building relationships with students, and am going above and beyond in preparing for lessons...I feel that I have learned things from all of my students and vice versa, laying the building blocks of a working relationship and meaningful education.

While Brian's interactions in the "conversations I don't understand" segment may appear as improvisational, he mindfully created a lesson in which he could tap into students' FoK/I, triggering knowledge production about Spanish, Colombia's flag, and Shakira, for instance. In a final reflection, Brian continued to consider the value of building a virtual classroom community by "developing a strong relationship" with students as both learners and as human beings, thus emphasizing the practices of developing a humanizing pedagogy.

In his final send-off video, Brian emphasized to his students their "potential as writers, but even larger than that, just as people."

> We made, *you* made, the most of this very weird and very non-physical experience...I just wanted to say I'm really appreciative. This went, like the multimedia project, so so much better than what I had anticipated or expected and that's really down to y'all. Y'all were

just incredible and it was such a pleasure to work with you and to know you, to know more about you, and to learn alongside you, learn with you, learn from you.

While we have no evidence to conclude whether or not Brian was familiar with the term "acompañamiento" prior to the field experience, his comments do point to the value he placed on the acompañamiento aspects of learning "alongside" and "with" his students, especially important to community-building in their virtual shared space.

Twenty-First Century Literacies

While student engagement was consistently demonstrated, Brian, Jennifer, Catherine, and Mary Beth also wanted tangible learning outcomes from this experience. What, finally, did students learn through this experience? We posed that question to Brian and to his students. Brian wrote in his teaching journal,

> I feel that students' horizon of writing expanded, particularly from the lens of multimedia. I remember on the first day students telling us they didn't like to write because they did not like using pens/pencils, and/or they were hard to use with a manicure. With this extension of what writing is, I feel that students either included themselves into that categorization now—even if it was drawing, music, or dancing…showing progress towards a conception of being a writer.

Brian heard the resistance to writing with pens and pencils and urged students to use 21st century tools to become 21st century composers. In so doing, the students showed their abilities to "develop proficiency and fluency with the tools of technology," a goal of the NCTE 21st Century Literacies Framework (NCTE, 2013). Brian valued his students' individual and collective array of literacies and leveraged them for multimodal communication and expression in the collaboratively constructed found poem. In this way, the students demonstrated their abilities to achieve another NCTE 21st Century goal—to "manage, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimodal texts," as they considered the design features of the composition they were creating, from the colors of the flag to the representation of Shakira. Participating in the collaborative found poetry experience, they were able to "manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information," in this case about language and culture, achieving yet another goal of the NCTE's 21st Century Literacies Framework.

Brian's students gave their insights about what they learned about themselves as writers and what they learned about writing at the end of the project. Analisa said, "We are all writers then in some form because we text and many other things in daily life. In class, we expressed through writing, drawing, and sound." Marisa said, "I feel that I know how to write, but I hesitate to say I'm a writer due to my perception of myself creatively. But, we can express ourselves through music (sounds, lyrics)." Aurelia said, "I am a writer. I know how and I like to do it (sometimes). Through images we also convey emotion." All three students moved to extended definitions of writing, from exclusively print-based to multimodalities. Brian was not the only person to consider "this very weird and very nonphysical experience" successful. Catherine followed up with the students almost half a year after the collaboration:

> [The students] all wanted to know if we were going to do something like *Soundscapes*

again this year. They could see value in it at a time when not a lot of academic work seemed relevant. They didn't see the specific weekly tasks as "academic" even though they were reading, writing, and creating. They, of course, wish that the sessions had been in-person, but at a time when they couldn't be, having a project to look forward to was the next best thing. [Analisa], who really found her voice through the visual aspect of the project last year, has continued to create her own "Soundscape" pages. Beyond the craziness of "behind the scenes," seeds were planted and are flourishing.

Catherine's comments suggest that designing student "work" that highlighted multiple literacies and drew from students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds made the experience of schooling much more appealing to her class, even as those pedagogical moments occurred virtually, separated by much more than six feet of social distancing. Given that Analisa "has continued to create her own 'Soundscape' pages" and that the class has asked about doing a similar project in eighth grade suggests that those "behind the scenes' seeds" were not only "planted and are flourishing," but are also now bearing fruit.

When we started this project, we had no idea if an online collaboration would work, and we worried about the middle school students losing interest, given the pandemic and the online context. At the end of the project, Catherine recalled those sentiments and challenged their validity. She explained,

> At a time when student participation was at an all-time low, attendance was sketchy at best, and distancing, masking, and limited English just complicated the situation. From this was born an innovative opportunity for learning that was the embodiment of acompañamiento. What happened during the few weeks of this experience was nothing short of miraculous. The bonds the students created with their [PSETs] kept students logging into school at a time when they were completely disconnected otherwise. I saw students claim ownership of their learning, embrace the responsibility of being present, and become leaders of their craft. Perhaps what was most interesting was what happened behind the scenes. As the seeds were planted by the PSETs, students started collaborating with each other. They shared ideas about art, music, and writing. They compared cultural experiences. Most of all, they were present and communicating. In nine weeks, differences became assets. As per the mission of this experience, my students had become writers.

Catherine's testimonial about the power of this online partnership for middle school students and PSETs derived from her prior time with in-person university students in field experience. The engagement typically seen during in-person field experiences between her students and PSETs paled in comparison to this online collaboration.

Conclusion

Six months after the project, Catherine asked her students what they liked best about the Soundscapes project. She summarized their comments:

> Although they are working with face-to-face preservice teachers now, they preferred working in small groups and felt that the [PSETs] from last year got to know them better as

people. I do believe that the focused Soundscapes project gave them a long-term goal and sense of purpose…

Pairing small groups of students with small groups of PSETs cultivated a shared sense of purpose and belonging for both Jennifer's students and Catherine's students. In essence, the virtual learning opportunity itself became an authentic shared experience. Both groups went the extra mile to establish and sustain these relationships by walking alongside each other. The partnerships prevailed over the challenges of connecting virtually during a time of physical and social distancing.

Despite the logistical challenges and technical barriers involved in a project such as this, we were nonetheless impressed by the level of perseverance and empathy that our students demonstrated during the entire process. Brian's and his students' experiences in this project reinforce the value of asset-oriented pedagogies for cultivating student engagement and for enacting 21st Century Literacies. This study also illuminates the students' resilience in the face of the pandemic, remote learning, and participation in an educational system that often mistook their names. These students navigated 21st century literacy practices, not only in one, but in two languages, and they will be designing new social futures that encompass Shakira, digital media, soundscapes, and "Conversaciones que no puedo entender. Translation: Conversations that I cannot understand." Therein lies the hope.

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