

JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY & HISTORY OF EDUCATION



2026

The Journal of the Society of Philosophy & History of Education

Journal of Philosophy & History of Education

vol. 76, no. 1, 2026

**Frank Giuseffi, William Woods University, &
Donna M. Sayman, Wichita State University, Editors**

Editorial Advisory Board

Lucy Bailey, Oklahoma State University

Roger Booker, Texas State University

Dan King, University of Pennsylvania

Linda C. Morice, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

Don Murray, Oklahoma State University

Wesley J. Null, Baylor University

Stacy Otto, Illinois State University

David Snelgrove, Oklahoma State University

Roy Tomashiro, Webster University

Brad Toland, University of Alabama

Stacy Warner, Oklahoma State University

2026

The Journal of the Society of Philosophy & History of Education

Society of Philosophy & History of Education

2026 Officers

President, Frank Giuseffi, William Woods University
President Elect, Evans Akpo, Wayland Baptist University
Past President, Donna Sayman, Wichita State University
Secretary–Treasurer, Ralph Olliges, Webster University
Webmaster, Ralph Olliges, Webster University
Program Chair, David Snelgrove, Oklahoma State University

Journal Editors

Frank Giuseffi, William Woods University
Donna M. Sayman, Wichita State University

ISSN 2377-3499 (print)

ISSN 2377-3502 (online)

The copyright of the *Journal of Philosophy and History of Education* in the name of the Society of Philosophy & History of Education protects the rights of individual authors who have contributed their intellectual property to this volume. For purposes of reproduction, written permission of the individual authors must be secured. When republished, a scholarly citation must accompany subsequent printings referencing the *Journal of Philosophy and History of Education* as the first source of publication.

The *Journal of Philosophy and History of Education* is a publication of the Society of Philosophy & History of Education. Following the 2024 annual meeting of the Society of Philosophy and History of Education in St. Louis, Missouri, a call for papers was issued and submissions subjected to the blind-review process. The opinions expressed in the respective works are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Society, the editors, the Editorial Advisory Board, or the publishers.

Membership in the Society is open to anyone interested in the profession of education. Only members may present papers at the annual meeting. Dues vary in accordance with the vote of the membership and may be mailed to the Secretary– Treasurer or the current Program Chair. Other SOPHE information may be obtained by visiting <http://sopheconference.com>

Printed in the U.S.A.

Copyright © 2026 Society of Philosophy and History of Education

Journal of Philosophy & History of Education

vol. 76, no. 1, 2026

Table of Contents

From the Editors,

Title of letterxiii

The 2025 Presidential Address,

"She told me I poisoned my kids with this diversity stuff:" Learning identity and difference through autoethnography. "

Donna M. Sayman.....xv

The 2025 William Drake Lecture,

Title

Frank Giuseffi..... xxxiii

The History and Philosophy of Education

Reimagining Academic Mentoring in Precarious Times: Insights from a Collaborative Collaging Inquiry

Lucy E. Bailey, Stacie Warner, and Lindsey Phillips Abernathy.....1

Oklahoma English Language Arts and Navigating Dissonance in Post-Democracy

Shaista Fenwick.....22

Neoliberalism and the Reframing of Public Education: A Historical and Political Analysis

Roger Booker.....35

Pragmatism and Radical Empiricism in Philosophy and Education

David Snelgrove.....50

2026

The Consciousness of Coloniality: A Phenomenological Inquiry

Roy Tamashiro.....65

From the Editors**Honoring the Past and Forging Ahead Toward the Future**

Greetings and salutations scholars, educators, and supporters of *JoPHE*! Donna and I are happy to present *JoPHE 76*, our first issue as editors. *JoPHE 76* would not have been possible without the assistance and support of our distinguished past editors, Stacy Otto and Virginia Worley. These wonderful scholars and educators guided Donna and I as we navigated through the various challenges that invariably emerge when editing a journal. Stacy and Virginia never wavered in helping us; they offered sound advice, meaningful encouragement, and steady guidance. But, of course, as good educators and mentors, Stacy and Virginia also allowed Donna and I to chart our own course and work together to care for a journal that has historically been a place for scholarship, professional growth, and intellectual enrichment.

Consequently, through meetings, research on best practices in editorship, and sincere intentions, Donna and I spent a great deal of time producing a journal that would reflect the spirit of SoPHE, respect JoPHE's past, and invigorate its future. Our work and discussions have culminated in a twofold editorial vision: 1) to uphold the importance of developmental editing; and 2), to offer a path for educators to engage in intellectual enrichment, foster professional growth, and positively impact communities that are navigating through the challenges of education.

As you will notice, this issue contains insightful articles from veteran members of *SoPHE* along with newer scholars interested in engaging in research and writing and developing a scholar-practitioner ethos. What you will discover in each of these articles are educators, scholars, and researchers, enthusiastic about their topics and committed to investigating, uncovering, or recovering the purposes of education.

Donna and I are proud of this issue and as we carry the mantle that Stacy and Virginia left us, we look forward to reading new manuscripts, collaborating with members of the SoPHE community, and carrying on JoPHE's illustrious history.

The 2025 SOPHE Presidential Address

"She told me I poisoned my kids with this diversity stuff:" Learning identity and difference through autoethnography.

Donna M. Sayman
Wichita State University

Introduction

Thank you. It is an honor to be addressing you all today. I would also like to thank David Snelgrove for his leadership and consistency. Since I first started attending SOPHE in 2006, he has been a steady, reliable presence. I also want to thank Carolyn Fridley, our President for 2024. She gave such a wonderful address last year that I was quite reluctant to follow in her footsteps!

A while back, I ordered a set of 60-minute blank cassette tapes for my 90-year-old cousin. He lives in the hills of West Virginia, and he couldn't find them. So, I just ordered them off Amazon and had them shipped to him. Now this man has been more of a father to me than a cousin. Our shared love of the banjo and all things hillbilly formed a tight bond between us. After he received the tapes, he called and asked how much he owed me, and I told him nothing as the tapes only cost 13 dollars. He adamantly said, "No! I must pay you back!" I said, but it's such a small amount of money, why do you need to pay me back? He replied, "What if I died and you came all the way to my funeral. You'd look in my casket and think, 'He owed me \$13 dollars.'" Believe me, if he died, my memory would not be on that, but I can remember things that I should probably forget.

For example, several years ago, when my stepdaughter attended an upstate New York university for her master's in business administration, she complained that someone filed a complaint with the dean for her "offensive language". In recent years, she has been greatly influenced by online conspiracy theories and other extreme ideologies. Evidently, during a Zoom discussion, she voiced her opinion and spouted some remarks which offended a few people. When she called me, she was angry and about to talk to the dean, and she vehemently claimed she was being targeted for violating Critical Race Theory (CRT). Let me repeat that...she was targeted for violating Critical Race Theory. As I have written several articles framed in CRT, I was gobsmacked. *What could she possibly mean by this accusation?* As she attempted to declare her innocence to me, she also elaborately insulted me by asserting that I '*poisoned my students with this diversity stuff*' and continued to pontificate how the teaching of diversity is detrimental to our society.

Purpose Statement

2026

In this message, I would like to reflect on autoethnography as a means to teach about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). I will refer to a small, pilot study I conducted with my special education graduate students that explored if actively participating in autoethnographic activities can assist students to understand identity, diversity, and differences within themselves and with others. The purpose of this project was to determine if autoethnography can be effective in teaching about diversity and differences to pre-service teachers.

What is Autoethnography?

We begin with a definition of Autoethnography. Goodall (2000) described it as “creative narratives shaped out of a writer’s personal experiences within a culture...” (p.9) working as a bridge between cultural curiosities and lived experiences. Through autoethnography, the reader is invited into your thoughts, history, and identity. Autoethnography can be a tool that “connects the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political” (Ellis, 2004, p.XIX). Madison (2012) stated that critical autoethnography “begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain” (p. 5).

Using autoethnography is also a way to empower voices who have been historically marginalized (McQueeney & Lavelle, 2017). Patton (2015) highlighted critical autoethnography as having the potential to break through constructs of White, colonialist privilege, questioning power imbalances between the researcher and the researched. Autoethnography takes away the concept of *other* as the focus of study and turns the gaze inward. Ellis and Bochner (2000) elaborated that the core of this methodological process is self-awareness connecting the personal and the cultural. But they also cautioned that autoethnographic writing can require difficult, intense introspection and self-reflection, “The self-questioning autoethnography demands is extremely difficult, so is confronting things about yourself that are less flattering” (p. 738).

Drechsler Sharp et al. (2011) posited that when university professors ask students to discuss life experiences, it is often accomplished could the use of it writing assist

Through means that silence the voice of the student. The student is given a prompt, they write their journal entry, and it’s turned into the professor, graded and handed back. No other person reads the reflection, and the exercise becomes nothing more than busy work. Another downside to classroom journal writing is that writing prompts are often assigned as a warm-up for more serious academic writing. Several research studies demonstrated autoethnography as a unique means to help people understand themselves and others at a deeper level (Allbon, 2012; Battle, 2016; Drechsler Sharp et al. 2012; Glowacki-Dudka et al. (2005).

Autoethnography may create a safe space for pre-service teachers to dialogue about race and culture in a non-threatening manner. Therefore, I wanted to know if autoethnographic writing could facilitate discussions of identity and diversity and could the use of its writing assist in a rich, robust conversation about social issues? To me, it seems as if constructive debate is dying in our culture especially in academia. It’s my contention that we can learn about each other’s differences as we better delve into an understanding o ourselves and our lived experiences.

Theoretical Frame

This discussion is framed through Social Identity Theory as defined by Abrams and Hogg (1990). This is a lens for understanding how a person defines themselves and their concept of family. Identity involves internal and external meanings of self. Identity also consists of levels of

definition: individual, relational, and collective. Individual identity refers to the aspects of self-identification which include beliefs, values, and behavior. Relational identity refers to one's role in connection with others. It also encompasses how an individual interprets that role and assumptions. Collective identity refers to people's association with groups and social categories. It also defines how that person gives meaning to these groups. Côté (1996) constructed a framework that explained the connection to identity and culture. The supposition is that individuals in most societies can actively strategize their identity through their means and access to capital. This can represent various forms, e.g., wealth, education, etc. and is closely tied to Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) social-class reproduction theory with the goal of social-class mobility. Autoethnography can serve as a powerful means of identity formation because it situates the self within cultural and structural contexts. By narrating lived experiences and connecting them to broader social patterns, individuals begin to see their identities as historically and politically shaped rather than solely personal. As Ellis et al. (2011) note, autoethnography "acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research" (p. 273), making it possible for writers to understand their identities as co-constructed through relationships and cultural forces. For marginalized individuals, this process can be especially affirming; Boylorn and Orbe (2014) argue that critical autoethnography enables those at the margins to "speak for themselves" and theorize their lived experiences as valuable knowledge (p. xx). In this way, autoethnography is not merely reflective, but constitutive — it allows people to claim, reshape, and affirm their identities through the act of storytelling.

Teacher identity influences the ways in which teachers "construct their own ideas of 'how to be,' 'how to act,' and 'how to understand' their work and their place in society" (Sachs, 2004, p. 15). It provides the basis for teachers' instructional "meaning making and decision making" (Bullough, 1997, p. 21). That is, when teaching, learning to teach, and interacting with their students, students' parents, and colleagues, teachers negotiate (a) what they value and prioritize in their professional practice and what kind of teacher they are or aspire to become (Yazan, 2017a) and (b) "the conceptions and expectations of other people, including broadly accepted images in society about what a teacher should know and do" (Beijaard et al. 2004, p. 108). Autoethnography may be able to help encourage the examination of lived experiences from a critical standpoint.

Background

For a little background on how I became interested in autoethnography. I was born, as polite people would say, out-of-wedlock, in 1959, Catholic, upstate New York, to a single mother. My mother rarely told me anything about my father. Sometimes, if I pressed for information, she would say something to placate my curiosity, but in my heart, I knew the stories she told were not true. When I was in elementary school, I asked the ever-present, but rarely spoken question of my paternal parentage, *Who is my father?* At one time, she said he died in Vietnam; however, we never visited a flag decorated gravesite. There was no evidence of medals, honors, or more importantly, no pictures. At sporadic moments throughout my childhood, I would try again. The reaction from my usually good-natured, quiet mother would turn to agitation and tears. She would become brusque and scold me to stop asking. As it upset her greatly, I didn't often ask. At times, she would give me a fictitious name and said he was someone with whom she worked. Even as she lay on her deathbed in late 2009, I asked for the

final time. Again, she repeated the fictitious name I had heard a few scant times before, a name I now understand was not that of my father.

For much of my life, when anyone asked me about my father, I was often evasive or just straight out lied. I told myself that knowing his identity didn't mean that much to me. But as I grew older, I now realize how much it really bothered me not knowing who my father was and by association, who I was, how my identity, my values, my morals and my life choices were determined growing up without that knowledge. It's like half of me was unfinished. What I learned long after this search was over is that I never felt legitimate.

What I discovered about myself during this long, emotional journey shocked me. My dad's entire family were from Appalachia and at first, I was quite taken aback. I must admit that I harbored a previously unknown prejudice. I was biased against what I perceived as illiterate backward hillbillies. Even when I visited family on Bradshaw Mountain in the southwestern region of W.V., I still looked at the homes and people as different from me. I must confess that I saw them as *other*. I learned that I am related to both the Hatfields and the McCoys! My paternal grandmother was a moonshiner, and she ran an underground speakeasy during the depression to support her 10 children from three different baby daddies. I met that information with snark and judgment! I hated that feeling. I hated recognizing the prejudice that was unknowingly buried in my heart. During this personal journey in the search for my father, I realized autoethnography was critical in helping me to unpack the intense emotions and feelings surrounding the process. As the deep reflection and journaling of my experience allowed me to gain new insight into my hidden biases, fears, and stereotypes, I realized that using autoethnography could be a way to teach about identity and diversity in higher education. In writing about family, I realized there is a constant shifting of identity as we grow and learn.

The Chilling Effect

Returning to the project! I live in a state identified as having strict Educational Gag Orders for all levels of education (Kelleher, 2022). During a recent town hall, the FORMER State Superintendent of Education in Oklahoma was asked a question as to how educators can teach about the Tulsa Race Massacre despite the educational gag orders. His response: "That is critical race theory. You're saying race defines a person – I reject that. You can be judgmental of the action, of the content of the character of the individual – absolutely, but let's not tie it to the skin color and say that the skin color determines it." (Morris, 2023, para 1). He further elaborated that teaching about this event considering race is prohibited by law. For years, I watched in dismay as our conservative lawmakers intensified the push to vilify CRT along with DEI. They banned books. They instituted educational gag orders for teachers in Prek-12 and faculty in higher education. They were successful in eliminating Offices of Diversity on university campuses. Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate introduced CRT into the field of education in 1995, recognized that the merging of CRT with any talk of race or equity opens a strategic effort to make the term dangerous and meaningless. This leads to any uncomfortable or contested discussion being branded as "CRT," even when it isn't. In many states, anti-DEI legislation often carries harsh punitive action for violations. Several public-school teachers have publicly lost their jobs, and a few school districts have had their accreditation downgraded because of this legislation.

Several states also have a hotline to call if they think a professor may be pushing anything they deem subversive and on February 27, 2025, a national hotline was established (U.S. Department of Education, 2025). The new EndDEI.ed.gov portal urges parents to report

“details of alleged discriminatory practices based on race or sex that are occurring at their student's local school” (para.2). Turning Point, USA has long maintained a hotline for the reporting of radical professors in higher education (Turning Point, 2025). The Libs of TikTok are another conservative organization monitoring educators. With over 3 million followers this organization encourages people to report any instance of divisive concepts in university classrooms. Chaya Raichik, the founder of that social media account, was named an advisor to the Oklahoma Media Library Advisory Board (Derksen & Carter, 2024).

DEI and subsequent bans

All of the attacks on DEI came to fruition as on January 20, 2025, when the President issued Executive Order 14151 for all federal agencies including universities and public Pre-K-12 schools to... “terminate, to the maximum extent allowed by law, all DEI, DEIA, and “environmental justice” ((Executive Order No. 14151, 2025). In addition, Pentagon officials ordered the purge of anything related to DEI across all military branches leading officials to delete images of the plane that dropped the nuclear bomb on Hiroshima, the Enola Gay, because it has the word *gay* in it (McCann-Ramirez, 2025). A list of words banned by the White House removed from all federal agencies the accomplishments of many women and banned words included *women*, *female* and *disability* were on the list, but the word *men* or *man* is not (Levy, 2025).

Importance of Diversity and Identity in Education

For pre-service teachers, an understanding of DEI is critical. Especially for those students with differences. According to the most current numbers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024), there are approximately 7.5 million students served in special education classrooms throughout the United States. This represents an all-time high as 15% of children in this country receive special education services. However, teachers are often ill equipped to differentiate either the curriculum or the classroom environment for diverse learners. Inequities occur within the disproportionate number of minority children in special education. These inequities exist at all levels from referrals, testing, IEP development, and implementation. Teachers often incorrectly recommend *difficult* children for special education testing rather than providing needed interventions alongside their peers. This often occurs due to a misunderstanding of the child's behaviors that may be racial, or gender based (Harry & Klingner, 2022; Pfende, 2024). For example, Butterworth et al., (2024) discovered “that Black students were 40% more likely to be identified as having a disability...” (p. 217). Reasons for the disproportionality are based on several factors such as race, gender, or geographic location. Most critically, researchers have found that teachers are not sufficiently taught how to recognize disabilities in students nor were these teachers trained how to accommodate a diverse student population (Strassfeld & Cooc, 2024). Teachers are the gatekeepers of testing and placement for students into special education. They are also a part of how students of color or students with differences are disciplined in schools. Years of research have clearly demonstrated that children of color are disproportionately disciplined at a higher rate than their White peers (Samimi et al 2025). It is therefore imperative that pre-service teachers learn about DEI and identity so they can be more cognizant in providing all students with needed accommodations and modifications.

The Project

After witnessing numerous publicized hate campaigns and bullying against individual teachers and school districts I wanted to find a way to teach about diversity that wouldn't offend anyone and not put my tenure in danger. I realized that faculty discuss laws and ramifications for not following the gag orders but there is scant conversation on *how* we teach critical issues of DEI to future educators

In this study, participants were graduate students enrolled in a special education degree program. All students were adults over the age of 18 years and not part of a vulnerable population. This project was embedded in a Family and Professional Collaboration course that is required for all of our graduates. The project consisted of biweekly small-group writing activities conducted in cohorts of four students. At the beginning of the semester, participants were asked to complete a pre-test questionnaire through Qualtrics. During the semester, the students partook in small cohort writing groups (4 students each) and were given prompts for writing essays. They shared their essays with their group discussing and reflecting on the writings. In addition to the writing, there were video clips and other activities for the groups. At the end of the semester, the participants took the post-course questionnaire.

What I found

In total, there were 34 participants. Of those, 25 identified as female and 8 identified as male and one who identified their gender as fluid. All defined their race as White/Caucasian, with one person indicating Hispanic and one person indicating Black. Most defined their religious belief as belonging to a Christian denomination, but some identified as non-believer, eclectic, Agnostic, and Unsure.

The pre-test survey asked questions such as: How well would you describe your understanding of your race? How well would you describe your understanding of different races? Have you heard the term white privilege? What does it mean to you? Most of the participants answered that they understood their race from moderately well to very well. In response to the question: Do you think you are aware of your own personal biases and prejudices about people who are different from you? Every participant said they were absolutely aware of their own biases; however, some had a caveat.

“Yes, I feel I am. However, I am always open to learning more about how I can be even more aware and conscious of my biases and prejudices.” And “I try to be. Though I am sometimes surprised at thoughts that come into my brain or subtle actions that I take when around people of certain ethnicities or races that are different from my own.”

In the first assignment, I was pleased with the responses from the students as they were engaged and forthcoming. The readings focused on poverty, so the participants discussed their experiences through that lens and the impact of poverty either directly or indirectly on their experiences. Many of the participants shared happy memories from their childhood. Some revealed truly traumatic events that happened in their past. Please indulge me with this very lengthy participant response, but it was so powerful and honest I didn't want to cut anything out. They wrote,

“Most of my memories from my childhood are not good memories as my dad was an abusive alcoholic and my mom was co-dependent. However, I must add that my dad never physically abused me; it was always abuse to my brother and mom. With this said, one of the most memorable (not a good memory) was of a night when he came home from one of his drunken excursions and was upset that he didn't have a meal waiting for him after 2

a.m. The importance of this memory was that I was going to do better as a person; as a parent; and most definitely as a citizen. The night was terrorizing. It was of the color black; it reeked of the smell of bitter beer breath; it sounded like glass breaking and was loud; it felt like I was going to drown; I couldn't taste anything but the lump in my throat and the salt of my tears. Despite this night as well as many others, I am an overcomer, and I have a decent relationship with my dad. I have been able to be forgivable, forgettable and use the experience to not only better my life but better the life of others. I am able to truthfully say to students going through similar situations that "I understand" and to be able to just listen and advocate on their behalf. It is with the love of other family members as well as teachers and school staff that I was able to overcome these childhood obstacles." Their peers were non-judgmental and supportive with one responding, "Thank you for sharing your memory. I can imagine it was a tough memory to share but I am glad you were able to forgive and continue on. I love how you were able to take a negative time in your life and use it to better yourself for those around you. That is a great quality to find in teachers and a great quality, I think, to find in a special education teacher. You are able to understand circumstances at a level that could be close to something they may be experiencing at home."

Another woman talked about growing up in Southern Louisiana and her experiences with bullying.

"Since we were first on the bus we had to sit in the back, and the other passengers would fill in as they got on. The second stop was a girl that liked to pick on me, she liked calling me white trash. I had no idea at the time what that meant, I was only 11 years old. I remember that the way she said it told me it was something bad and it made us want to cry. On this particular day she was calling me this again and I finally asked her what she meant by it. She told me "I had no momma, and I had to live off charity of others". Prompting another participant to share, "I can totally relate to your memory. It was with the amazing support of teachers and school staff that I was able to prevail through my childhood with an alcoholic father. For this reason, along with raising a child with ADHD has given me a passion to teach. I hope that I will be in the right place at the right time to give another child the reason to become who they are meant to be. I hope to be provided the strength, wisdom, and endurance to make a difference even if it's only for one child. This is my goal for success."

Overall, this assignment seemed to resonate deeply with the participants. They were transparent and vulnerable in their responses, and their peers were kind and accepting and a few opened up about their experience with abuse. As the semester went on, it seemed as though a foundation of trust and honesty was growing with the groups.

In the responses to the question, *"How do you identify your racial/cultural background? Are there aspects of your race with which you needed to "come to terms?"* I began to see what Alexander, (2004) called "social sense making" in relation to their identities. For example, one participant wrote,

Although I was raised in an upper-middle class suburban community in a middle-class family, I often consider myself as having grown up in poverty. All my basic needs were met. If I wanted or needed something bad enough my parents were able to provide. It wasn't that my parents were poor, but we were considered "low class" by community standards.

As the semester went along, it seemed as though the participants were feeling more at ease discussing controversial issues. For example, one participant wrote:

I still live in my small railroad town, and I love it. I love it because even though our community is small, we are diverse. Every year when I was growing up, and still to this day, on Thanksgiving day, my dad would remind us that he belongs to the Mayflower Society. The Mayflower Society is a group of people from all over, who are direct descendants of the Mayflower passengers. My dad questions why my siblings and I have not yet become members. Given the aftermath of the years following the Pilgrims and their initial settlement, we are not exactly jumping for excitement to become members. While I have always appreciated that we have this proven lineage with fascinating stories of survival, the future mistreatment of Indigenous peoples is not exactly something to embrace. In addition, Puritans had some scary parenting beliefs. I am still debating if I am able to appreciate the uniqueness of my ancestors and look into their stories when they were still in England.

One response from her peer was:

I think it's important to note that with Puritans as part of your history, you are not personally guilty of anything wrong that some of the Puritans did. It's good to be aware of horrible misdeeds done in the name of God and because of racism, pride, "manifest destiny", etc. Being aware of past and present errors of one's particular race and culture is humbling and will hopefully help us to avoid repeating them. It's also good to retain and appreciate what is good. Another peer responded: "I can relate to all of this small town girl; feelings of guilt for which I've overcome; a woman with a degree for which I've had family members ridicule me ("You just think you are better than use because you have a degree, blah, blah, blah"); and family members who shunned me when I married my first husband who was Hispanic/White. It's heartbreaking to have our family members as our worst critics.

I really wish I could have continued this project with these same cohort groups. Boylorn & Orbe (2014) talk about how critical autoethnographies can directly resist Eurocentric norms and makes power visible by showing how colonialism, racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression shape both personal experience and academic knowledge production. Using personal narrative as a tool for social justice, healing, and transformation rather than just as self-expression.

At the end of the semester, these participants completed the post survey. To the question: *Has your understanding of identity changed as a result of taking this class? Why or why not?* One participant said, "Yes. This course has taught me that the concept of understanding identity is continually changing and sometimes change leads to improved understanding and clarity." Another stated, "My understanding of identity is still the same, but I feel I have a better understanding of it now." And another participant stated, "I think it has. I was aware of some of these exceptionalities and even the economic inequalities based on where I worked last year and the classroom I was in, but this course gave me a concrete knowledge of what I already knew. But not everyone felt so positive, and one participant said: "No not really, I didn't have one to begin with."

In answer to the question, What did you learn about yourself that you never knew before? Some of the participants showed a great deal of introspection in their identities. For example, these responses: "I think I realized how much more I did have growing up than a lot of students." "I learned that I love seeking knowledge and this course has shown me that wanting answers,

wanting clarification, and wanting evidence for claims is a good thing, even if those around me find it inconvenient.”

The best answer to the question: In what ways could you integrate autoethnography into your classroom? One participant said, *“I am currently integrating autoethnography in my classroom for two classes. We are using the freedom writer’s method and independent reading. In answer to the comment, What other comments or concerns do you have in relation to the autoethnographic writing in this course? “I don’t have any. I really enjoyed this class. It allowed me to delve deeper into my way of thinking and become more open to other ways of thinking or perspectives. And “I really appreciated being encouraged to be honest and to say what I wanted to say rather than what I thought the teacher wanted me to say and that there was no judgment for sharing about my faith. I think that we must learn how to get along with people that we disagree with. I think it’s valuable to have discussions and share our heart felt ideas without the fear of being judged—even when we may sincerely believe that another is totally wrong in one or more beliefs and actions.”*

Finally, to the question: Has your understanding of racism changed as a result of taking this class? One participant said:

I am more aware of how and what I am teaching. I try to expose my students to those authors who have a different voice than theirs. This echoes what researchers have discovered centering marginalized voices and epistemologies while valuing Indigenous (Smith, 2012), Black (Collins, 2000), feminist, queer, and other historically excluded perspectives (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014) as legitimate sources of theory. This could be a means to challenge academic gatekeeping. Using narrative, storytelling, poetry, and embodied writing that may not fit within rigid “scholarly” norms but reflect lived realities more truthfully. Decolonizing autoethnography requires centering these marginalized voices as legitimate and generative sources of theory. Autoethnography situates the personal within power structures. This can foster critical consciousness (à la Paulo Freire), where a person begins to see their identity as political, shaped by histories of inequality, resistance, and community survival and may be a means to instruct about DEI. Finally, another participant simply responded if their understanding of racism changed, they simply said: *Greatly.*

Conclusion

I really struggled with this message and talking about the autoethnography project. As I was looking at it, it seemed so...high schoolish. Certainly not anything original or creative; nothing that would amaze the world of academia. But then I realized that for my students, this was something brand new and unique. Even though they all have an undergraduate degree, they never participated in these types of activities with their peers. They were eager to tell me how much it meant to them as exemplified in the comments on the post-survey test at the end of the semester.

I believe autoethnographic research is a powerful way for a person to reconnect with their past, their present, and their future. I know this was an overwhelming journey for me that forced me to examine myself. The use of autoethnography can disrupt traditional ways of thinking about identity (Gender, race, SES, ability, family). I believe that anecdotal writing does have a place in higher education and in the classroom as it can generate new knowledge through an individual’s unique perspective and view of the experience. This could be a way for students to understand and appreciate identifying formations in those with differences from them, or those who do not have the advantage of equitable social capital. Seems to be a help with understanding identity and diversity, but much more is needed. This cannot be a one time, one semester activity and

writing prompts need to be coupled with reflexivity. It really takes much more than a semester assignment to begin to understand issues of identity and how that relates to diversity.

Margaret Atwood (2012) once said, “The desire to be loved is the last illusion. Give it up and you will be free” (p. 115). I certainly agree with that...in principle, but in reality, it is so much more difficult. I believe that what we all want, really, is to be loved and accepted for who we are, but sometimes we do not even know ourselves enough to love the real us. My journey was couched in a personal narrative around an issue which shaped and redefined my identity. I found my sense of self shifting with each new piece of history of my father and his family, and through a somewhat painful emotional roller coaster of introspection. I discovered that identity is fluid and ever transforming. As Margaret Atwood (2006) said, “In the end, we all become stories” (p.248).

References

- Abrams, D., & Hogg, M. A. (1990). An introduction to the social identity approach. *Social identity theory: Constructive and critical advances*, 1(9).
- Alexander, J. C. (2004). Alexander, J. C. (2004). Toward a theory of cultural trauma. In J. C. Alexander, R. Eyerman, B. Giesen, N. J. Smelser, & P. Sztompka, *Cultural trauma and collective identity* (pp. 1-30). University of California Press.
- Allbon, C. (2012). “Down the rabbit hole—curiouser and curiouser” Using autoethnography as a mode of writing to re-call, re-tell and re-veal bodily embodiment as self-reflexive inquiry. *Journal of Organizational Ethnography*, 1(1), 62-71.
- Atwood, M. (2006). *Moral disorder and other stories*. McClelland & Stewart.
- Atwood, M. (2012). A Sunday drive. In *Selected poems II: 1976-1986* (p. 115). Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Battle, S. (2016). Black men, white teachers, white colleagues: An autoethnographic triangulate of racial profiling interaction and closure. *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping*, 22(2), 46-56.
- Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. C., & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering research on teachers’ professional identity. *Teaching and teacher education*, 20(2), 107-128.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. (1990). *Reproduction in education, society and culture* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Boylorn, R. M., & Orbe, M. P. (Eds.). (2014). *Critical autoethnography: Intersecting cultural identities in everyday life*. Left Coast Press.
- Bullough, R. V., Jr. (1997). Becoming a teacher: Self and the social location of teacher education. In B. J. Biddle, T. L. Good, & I. F. Goodson (Eds.), *International handbook of teachers and teaching* (pp. 79–134). Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Butterworth, L. N., Denham, M. L., & Hestenes, L. L. (2024). *Exploring the structural inequalities of the individualized education program: A dis/ability critical race theory perspective*. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 37(2), 209-222.
- Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Côté, J. E. (1996). Sociological perspectives on identity formation: The culture–identity link and identity capital. *Journal of adolescence*, 19(5), 417-428.
- Derksen, C., & Carter, M. S. (2024, January 23). Libs of TikTok creator Chaya Raichik

- appointed to Oklahoma's library review committee. *The Oklahoman*.
<https://www.oklahoman.com/story/news/education/2024/01/23/ryan-walters-names-libs-of-tiktok-creator-to-oklahoma-library-committee/72322896007/>
- Drechsler Sharp, M., Riera, J.L., & Jones, S. R. (2012). Telling our stories: Using autoethnography to construct identities at the intersections. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 49(3), 315–332. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jsarp-2012-6338>
- Ellis, C. (2004). *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*. AltaMira Press.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical Social Research*, 36(4), 273–290. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.36.2011.4.273-290>
- Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 733–768). Sage Publications.
- Executive Order No. 14151, Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing, 90 Fed. Reg. 8339 (2025).
- Glowacki-Dudka, M., Treff, M., & Usman, I. (2005). Research for social change: Using autoethnography to foster transformative learning. *Adult Learning*, 16(3–4), 8–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/104515950501600308>
- Goodall, H. L. (2000). *Writing the new ethnography* (Vol. 7). Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.
- Harry, B., & Klingner, J. (2022). *Why are so many students of color in special education? Understanding race and disability in schools* (3rd ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Kelleher, M. (2022, January 3). 10 states to watch for educational gag orders in 2022. *Ed Post*. <https://www.edpost.com/stories/10-states-to-watch-for-educational-gag-orders-in-2022>
- Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers college record*, 97(1), 47-68.
- Levy, R. (2025, February 20). FDA staffers told that 'woman,' 'disabled' among banned words; White House says it's an error. <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/fda-staffers-told-that-woman-disabled-among-banned-words-white-house-says-its-an-2025-02-20/>
- Madison, D. S. (2012). *Critical ethnography: Method, ethics, and performance* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- McCann Ramírez, N. (2025, March 7). Pentagon DEI purge reportedly targets Enola Gay bomber because of the word “gay”. *Rolling Stone*. <https://www.rollingstone.com/>
- McQueeney, K., & Lavelle, K. M. (2017). *Emotional labor in critical ethnographic work: In the field and behind the desk*. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 46(1), 81-107. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241615602310> [\[scholarwor..rimack.edu\]](#), [\[scholar.google.com\]](#), [\[researchgate.net\]](#)
- Morris, N. (2023, July 7). Ryan Walters: Don't teach that race led to Tulsa Race Massacre. *The Black Wall Street Times*. <https://theblackwallsttimes.com/2023/07/07/ryan-walters-dont-teach-that-race-lead-to-tulsa-race-massacre/>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). Report on the condition of education 2024 (NCES 2024-144). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2024/2024144.pdf>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and*

- practice* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Pfende, P. (2024). *The case of Blackness and disability: Disproportionality in special education identification*. *The Vermont Connection*, 45(1).
<https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/tvc/vol45/iss1/7>
- Sachs, J. A., & Young, J.C. (2024, October 8). *America's Censored Classrooms 2024-Refining the Art of Censorship*. <https://pen.org/report/americas-censored-classrooms-2024/>.
- Samimi, C. (2025). There are still more black boys in the office: educators' perspectives on racial discipline disparities after restorative justice implementation. *Teachers and Teaching*, 31(7), 1134-1163.
- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). Zed Books.
- Strassfeld, N., & Cooc, N. (2024). Disproportionality monitoring for special education and stakeholder practices in a post-affirmative action landscape. *Theory Into Practice*, 63(4), 366–376. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2024.2355817>
- Turning Point USA. (2025). Turning Point USA. <https://www.tpusa.com/>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2025, February 27). U.S. Department of Education launches “End DEI” portal. <https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/us-department-of-education-launches-end-dei-portal>
- Yazan, B. (2017). “It just made me look at language in a different way:” ESOL teacher candidates' identity negotiation through teacher education coursework. *Linguistics and Education*, 40, 38-49.

The 2024 William Drake Lecture

“Caring for Souls and a Teacher’s Courage in Plato’s *Laches*”

Frank Giuseffi, William Woods University

The literature abounds on the relationship between teaching and courage. Scholars claim teachers exhibit courage in their vulnerability (Brown, 2012); morality (Heischman, 2002); inner strength in the face of fear (Kohler-Evans & Dowd-Barnes, 2015), and in maintaining their integrity (Parker, 2009).

An ancient understanding of the role of courage in the teaching and learning process are in the Platonic dialogues. I will specifically turn to Plato’s dialogue, *Laches*. While the discussion essentially centers on the competencies required to care for youths’ souls, what also emerges is a new understanding of courage, made manifest in the person of Socrates who exhibits a longing to search for truth through philosophy, known today as Socratic inquiry. In this paper, I will first explain the dialogue, stressing the interlocutors’ views of courage, and Socrates’ refutations of those views. Second, I will claim that neither interlocutor offers persuasive definitions of courage or engage properly in Socratic inquiry, reflecting their lack of *eros* and consequently their incapacity to care for the souls of youth. Third, I will claim that Socrates exemplifies and reveals courage – a courage necessary for teachers to care for the souls of youth.

The dialogue begins with two concerned fathers - Lysimachus and Melesius – who believe their sons should learn armor-fighting – *hoplomachia* (Plato, trans. 1997, 179e). Given their roles and expertise in military matters, both Nicias and Laches agree to participate as special counselors and partners in the youths’ education. Laches is astonished that Socrates was not asked to join in the dialogue (180c), for Socrates is “always spending his time in places where the young men engage in any study or noble pursuit of the sort you are looking for” (180c). Nicias also remembers how Socrates recommended a music teacher – a man by the name of Damon – for his son. The two youths also praise Socrates, and Laches remembers how Socrates marched with him during the retreat from Delium (180de; 181b), the eighth year of the Peloponnesian War. And surmised that if all those fighting behaved like Socrates, the city would not have been destroyed (181d). Given these accolades, Socrates is added to the investigation concerning the efficacy of armor-fighting. In usual intellectual humility, Socrates obliges but states: “But if I should have something to add to what they say, then will be the time for me to teach and persuade both of you and the others” (181d).

After Laches and Nicias give their views on armor-fighting, Socrates believes the topic of armor-fighting is “some small thing” and not “the greatest of all our possessions” (185). Instead, the larger issue is if the fathers’ sons turn out to be noble and worthwhile individuals. The more important topic is dealing with the competencies and aims of teaching. Hence, Socrates states: “The question whether any one of us is expert in the care of the soul and is capable of caring for it well, and has had good teachers, is the one we ought to investigate” (185e).

As a prologue to the forthcoming discussion with Socrates, Laches states:

Whenever I hear a man discussing virtue or some kind of wisdom, then, if he really is a man and worthy of the words he utters, I am completely delighted to see the appropriateness and harmony existing between the speaker and his words. And such a man seems to me to be genuinely musical, producing the most beautiful harmony, not on the lyre or some other pleasurable instrument, but actually rendering his own life harmonious by fitting his deeds to his words. (188d)

Laches is more than willing to be examined by Socrates if he, indeed, possesses these attributes. We will eventually learn that Laches’ comment actually contributes our understanding of courage, teacher competency, and Socratic education as a whole. As the discussion has now turned to being educated in virtue, according to Socrates, one must first endeavor to find out a part of virtue as opposed to the whole of virtue. Socrates suggests they examine courage - *andreia* (190e), an essential trait for soldiers and those learning *hoplomachia*.

Laches claims courage is standing at one’s post and fighting. Socrates points out that certain soldiers have successfully fought, namely the Scythians and the Spartans, by retreating and then attacking. Consequently, Socrates broadens the definition of courage to warriors, fighters at sea, the sick, the poor, and those who run state affairs. Socrates also includes the courage people have in the face of pain, fear, desire, and pleasure (191d). As the definition of courage broadens, Socrates asks “What power is it which, because it is the same in pleasure and in pain and in all the other cases in which we were just saying it occurred, is therefore called courage?” (192b). Laches responds that courage is a “sort of endurance [self-control/persistence] (*karteria*) of the soul” (192b). But Laches also admits courage associated with wisdom or prudence is noble and fine as suggested by Socrates. But when accompanied with folly, it loses its nobility. Therefore, the courage Laches endorses must include wisdom or prudence. Socrates persuades Laches to agree that prudent endurance coupled with folly would not be a good thing (192d). And through several examples shows that those who lack the skill of courage and yet perform the action of courage, show the disgraceful and harmful disposition of foolish daring (193d). Socrates recognizes, however, one important element of Laches’ definition – endurance. “Let us hold our ground in the search and let us endure” (194). Laches agrees to continue but is frustrated that he cannot fully articulate what he knows courage to be (194b). In fact, he states what is stated by many interlocutors of the Platonic dialogues (Braan, 2019):

I am ready not to give up, Socrates, although I am not really accustomed to arguments of this kind. But an absolute desire for victory has seized me with respect to our conversation, and I am really getting annoyed at being unable to express what I think in this fashion. I still think I know what courage is, but I can’t understand how it has escaped me just now so that I can’t pin it down in words and say what it is (194b).

Laches' aporetic moment, which is the cornerstone of Socratic inquiry, indicates the importance of speech or *logos*. While Laches thinks he knows what courage is, the words are not there. In Socratic inquiry, the intelligibility and comprehension of something must be captured in speech, in clear arguments, in the *logos* (Klein, 1999).

Nicias believes courage is knowledge (scientific expertise-*epistemen*) "of the fearful and the hopeful in war and in every other situation" (195a). But to Laches, if courage is, in fact, knowledge of fearful and hopeful things, then artisans, doctors, and farmers would exhibit courage since they know fearful and hopeful things in their specific crafts. For instance, as a doctor would know when it is better to live or to die (195bcd). Nicias counters that a doctor's knowledge (and ostensibly artists' and farmers' knowledge) is restricted to just health and disease. If this is the case, then to Laches, Nicias is arguing that seers and diviners are the courageous ones for they have the power to know whether it is better "to live or to die" (195e). Laches scoffs at this idea and indicts Nicias as someone who refuses to offer a "gentlemanly admission that he is talking nonsense" (196b). Socrates enters the discussion as a joint effort with Laches (196c) – a telling sign.

Socrates posits if courage consists of knowledge of fear and hope, very few would possess it. He argues that no wild beast would be courageous. Nicias clarifies, arguing that only "sensible people are the courageous ones" (197c). These people possess prudence when enacting courage. Wilds beasts act based on rashness, which is not the same as courage. Nicias states:

I think that rashness and courage are not the same thing. My view is that very few have a share of courage and foresight, but that a great many, men and women and children and wild animals, partake in boldness and audacity and rashness and lack of foresight. These cases, which you and the man in the street call courageous, I call rash, whereas the courageous ones are the sensible people I was talking about. (197c).

Laches grows agitated and claims Nicias "decks himself out in words and does it well in his own opinion" (197c). Socrates eventually agrees and accuses Nicias of sophistry by seeking advice from Damon who associated with Prodicus, the sophist (197d).

Both Socrates and Nicias agree that courage is a part of virtue, or one of several parts (198) – such as temperance and justice. Socrates posits - fearful things produce fear and hopeful things do not. Fear emerges from things anticipated, not from things that occurred in the past or in the present since fear is the expectation of a future evil (198b). Nicias seems to agree with this description of fear and that hope comes from either future non-evils or future goods.

This leads to a new discussion about knowledge and its relation to the past, present, and future. Socrates argues there is not one type of knowledge (*episteme*, *scientific knowledge*) by which things of the past are known, or a type by which the present is known, or a third type by which the future is known. Knowledge is the same in each of them (198d). For example, medicine is knowledge of health; that knowledge does not make a distinction between past, present, or future. This can be applied to farming and generalship in war (199). Nicias agrees and concedes that "the same knowledge has understanding of the same things, whether future, present, or past" (199). This refutes Nicias' argument that courage is knowledge of only fearful and hopeful things since knowledge comprises the past, present, and future. Socrates states:

Then courage is not knowledge of the fearful and the hopeful only, because it understands not simply future goods and evils, but those of the present and the past and all times, just as is the case with the other kinds of knowledge. (199c)

Nicias described a part of courage, whereas Socrates' intention was to search for a comprehensive definition of courage. Socrates now holds the opinion that courage is knowledge "of practically all goods and evils put together" (199d). But to Socrates, the person with this kind of knowledge would not lack virtue, temperance, justness, or even holiness. Nicias agrees with this statement and realizes this claim describes the wholeness of virtue, not a part of it. Therefore, the search for a definition of courage continues (199e). Both Laches and Nicias agree they should abandon the idea of educating Lysimachus' and Melesius' sons and relinquish the responsibility to Socrates. Socrates in no way will reject the opportunity to educate the young; however, he states:

I say we ought to do, my friends – since this is just between ourselves - is to join in searching for the best possible teacher, first for ourselves – we really need one – and then for the young men, sparing neither money nor anything else. What I don't advise is that we remain as we are. And if anyone laughs at us because we think it worthwhile to spend our time in school at our age, then I think we should confront him with the saying of Homer, "Modesty is not a good mate for a needy man." (201ab).

Laches defines courage as uncompromising duty and noble sacrifice (Rabieh, 2006), but the second definition is that it is endurance (*karteria*), with Socrates' addition of prudence (*phronimos karteria*). Laches reaches a state of perplexity because he struggles with Socrates' inquiry. A clear definition of courage has somehow escaped Laches (194b). But even with Laches' aporetic state, he joins in further discussion with Socrates. It should also be noted that Socrates never refutes the emended definition of courage as prudent endurance (Kahn, 1986), leaving us to wonder if prudent endurance is actually courage. Moreover, Socrates carries on the conversation with Laches since he admitted his *aporia*, and as I argue, recognizes those who are 'musical.' Socrates is willing to consider Nicias' view that courage is a kind of knowledge (Bruell, 1999), but this is short-lived. Nicias' definition of courage is scientific knowledge, the *know-how* (*technikos*) of something, specifically the know-how of the fearful and hopeful of the future, the past, and the present, but, as Socrates revealed, this defines virtue, not a part of virtue known as courage.

Therefore, neither Laches nor Nicias possess the aptitude to educate youths (Dobbs, 1986). They cannot care for their souls or teach them virtue. Laches and Nicias "lack the natural hardiness or toughness of soul" to grapple with courage (Rabieh, 2006). First, Laches quickly offers a definition of courage, seemingly to reach a quick resolution to the issue. Then as Socrates' inquiry develops, Laches spends his time accusing Nicias of using sophistical arguments, and outrightly levies attacks on him. Nicias, on the other hand, is concerned with ensuring he always has an answer, and thereby struggles to properly engage in Socratic inquiry. He does not realize the magnitude of his ignorance. For Nicias, it is simple. Damon will provide the answers if there is any more difficulty (Tessitore, 1994). We then realize neither of the interlocutors follow the *logos*. Laches recognizes the *logos* and does admit his perplexity, but because he continually exhibits vitriol and antagonism toward Nicias, sabotages his own future development to be a teacher. Likewise, Nicias cannot be a teacher. Futter (2022) has argued that following the *logos* improves the interlocutors' souls while sophistry separates the *logos* from the

self. Since Nicias is a sophist, he separates himself from the *logos*, using speech as a mere weapon to win arguments. Neither Laches nor Nicias possess this erotic disposition or love of knowledge essential for Socratic inquiry (Woodruff, 2000; Zhao, 2000). Without this longing, they lack the competency to care for the souls of youth.

Is it possible that courage is prudent endurance or knowledge? I do think it could be considered prudent endurance. Socrates does not refute this possible definition. However, true courage is Socratic inquiry, and the courageous person is Socrates. We know Socrates was courageous in battle. But Socrates is also courageous in what one scholar has claimed, in the “battlefield of words” (Tessitore, 1994) because he illumines for the interlocutors’ their inconsistent claims and to be otherwise. But even more importantly, Socrates is the person whom Laches describes as the one “genuinely musical, producing the most beautiful harmony” since he fits “his deeds to his words” (188d). By Socrates harmonizing words and deeds, he attempts to move people to action – to live virtuously, and in turn, to become musical themselves. As Dobbs (1986) has noted “Socratic inquiry counts as deed because it alone is capable of truly moving the soul once it has been brought to a recognition of perplexity” (p.839). Therefore, the truly musical are courageous. This person does not resist the *logos*, accepts *aporia*, and continues the inquiry. This “Socratic music” converts the soul toward philosophy (Braan, 1990) and *eros* – the longing for knowledge of the whole. Those who are competent to teach and care for youths’ souls share in this conversion and erotic state of being.

Is the Socratic teacher supposed to be a philosopher like Socrates? Is this too much to ask of a teacher? The answers may be found in Socrates’ closing thoughts. Socrates recommends they all find the right teacher. In other words, Socrates invites his fellow discussants and all of humanity - to investigate and probe through philosophy the basis for their beliefs, to strive for knowledge of the good (Stefou, 2018). In this way, Socratic education relies on *eros* and for us to be our own teachers. And those committed to philosophy, says Socrates, are like beggars in Homer’s *Odyssey*, with outstretched hands as if requesting food and drink, signifying their erotic skepticism. This is what we as teachers are to do to be courageous.

References

- Braan, E. (2019). Courage nailed down: Plato’s Laches. *Kronos*, 8, 57-71.
- Brown, B. (2012). *The power of vulnerability: Teachings on authenticity, connection, and courage*. Sounds True.
- Bruell, C. (1999). *On the Socratic education: An introduction on the shorter Socratic dialogues*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Cooper, J.M. (1997). *Plato: Complete works*. Hackett.
- Dobbs, D. (1986). For lack of wisdom: Courage and inquiry in Plato's Laches. *The Journal of Politics*, 48(4), 825-849. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2131002>
- Futter, D.B. (2022). How to read a Platonic dialogue. *Akterion*, 67, 29-41.

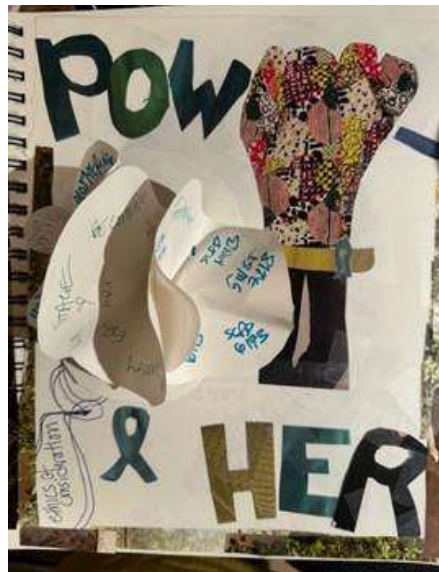
- Kahn, C. (1986). Plato's methodology in the Laches in Platon. *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 40(156-157), 7-21.
- Klein, J. (1999). Modern rationalism. In R.B. Williamson, & Elliot Zuckerman (Eds.), *Jacob Klein: Lectures and Essays* (pp. 53-64). St. John's College Press.
- Kohler-Evans, P. & Dowd Barnes, C. (2015). *Civility, compassion, and courage in schools today: Strategies for implementing in K-12 classrooms*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Parker, P.J. (2009). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. Jossey-Bass.
- Rabieh, L. *Plato and the virtue of courage*. The Johns Hopkins University Press
- Stefou, K. (2018). *Socrates on the life of philosophical Inquiry: A companion to Plato's Laches*. SpringerBriefs
- Tessitore, A. (1994). Courage and comedy in Plato's Laches. *The Journal of Politics*. 56(1), 115-133. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2132348>

Reimagining Academic Mentoring in Precarious Times: Insights from a Collaborative Collaging Inquiry

**Lucy E. Bailey, Stacie Warner, and Lindsey Phillips Abernathy,
Oklahoma State University**

Figure 1

Bailey. (2025). *Pow-Her*. [collage]



A graduate student tells me they have lost their job. Then, within a week, another one. Both skilled professionals, both with years of experience. None of that matters in These Times. The economy for some professionals is dismal. I watch as another struggles to get any kind of information from the university—10 days before the term starts—about whether they will have a graduate assistantship, tuition waiver, and stipend to help support their family and continue their doctorate. My advocacy emails to get answers land in vain. I

try to process these silences and uncertainties and embodied precarities swirling around me as the hungry academic institution I work for continues noisily churning out rules, deadlines, norms, forms, emails, and schedules to which I must respond—and always quickly. University discourse says we are “a family.” Incoming athletes sign million-dollar contracts. Emails advertise a seminar about the great ways to use AI. The push for student enrollment persists while major grants and faculty hires are cut. What does “good” mentoring look like in these circumstances? How should I advise graduate students who are uncertain about post-graduation opportunities? To get certificates? Attend academic conferences? I wonder which mentoring guidebooks might aid me amid the gritty uncertainties of social and economic precarity in these times (Bailey, reflection).

Introduction

We position this paper about collaborative collaging alongside other scholarship that is reimagining graduate academic mentoring in higher education (e.g. Abernathy, et al, 2026; Fox, 2020; Pauly, et al., 2023). Over the last two years, we have sought to join this conversation with other scholars in analyzing—and reimagining—common academic mentoring practices for graduate students in higher education that scholarship and faculty alike have long conceptualized as inherently valuable endeavors. We have done so through collaborative collaging sessions that we refer to as “co-mentoring” where we discuss graduate student/faculty needs, pressures, and hopes. The purpose of this conceptual article is to describe how collaging has aided us in conceptualizing and enacting co-mentoring in precarious times. Collaging is particularly generative in conditions of precarity because the practice is built on uncertainty, repurposing, and continuous reconfiguration. As our epigraph underscores, academia today is rife with tensions among its idealized educational mission, its daily demands, and its limits in meeting the conflicting and pressing needs of its diverse stakeholders. Even as educational institutions importantly tout their contemporary value and salience, leaders are fundamentally grappling with how to respond to changing economic and social needs and competing demands in the wake of severe funding cuts, grant reductions, pervasive mental health and learning challenges among students, AI proliferation, and threats to institutional autonomy, governance, and academic freedom that characterize this historical moment.

Such tensions and fragmentations abound in these constitutive bureaucratic engines, and graduate mentorship is no different, reflecting often decontextualized recommendations about “how to be successful in graduate school” or “mentoring for faculty jobs” that seem at times utterly detached from the erosion of institutional and social certainties. Precarity refers to social and lived circumstances in which people endure social unpredictability, lack job and material security, and navigate the psychological costs of such uncertainties. How does one, for example, mentor graduate students for faculty jobs when institutions are hemorrhaging faculty positions by the day? On December 12, 2025, for instance, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported that

New York's famed New School for Social Research offered 40% of its full-time faculty opportunities to retire early or to separate from the institution (Gardner, 2025). In June, 2026, the school laid off nineteen faculty and over 60 staff members (Farfan, 2026). Similarly, in 2025, the *Chronicle* reported that budget cuts and championing of majors that smoothly translate directly to "employable" skills have led to massive restructuring and program closures nationwide (Gretzinger et al., 2025). In 2026, eight small colleges shuttered their doors (Farrington, 2026). These are just a few of the recent and still unfolding changes that necessitate reconceptualizing what exactly good academic graduate mentoring might look like in amplified conditions of change and uncertainty. In these situations, decontextualized mentoring rules and recommendations for graduate students simply no longer apply.

Certainly, useful resources on academic mentoring have increased across the last decade to reflect a hearty number of guidebooks, student testimonials and lamentations, and field-specific materials to support formal and informal graduate mentoring (Bettencourt et al, 2021; Johnson & Griffin, 2025). This growth has occurred in response to important recognition in the field that mentoring is a craft, that everyone benefits from tailored support, and that graduate school is too complex and demanding to leave students to figure it all out for themselves. Indeed, in the first sentence of their mentoring guidebook, Johnson and Griffin (2025) emphasize that "[d]eliberate and thoughtful mentoring is one of the *most* important and enduring roles for the higher education faculty members" (p. 3, emphasis in original). In its most successful forms, the endeavor is relational, productive, and mutually-rewarding. Despite the richness of existing resources, we argue that advice and practices in the field are too often homogenous despite diverse student positionalities (Abernathy et al., 2026), problematically limited to socialization into deeply entrenched institutional grooves—how to perform in particular ways to "do" higher education well, or how to learn how to become future faculty members even as the contours of higher education fundamentally shift beneath us.

Too often, we believe, mentoring practices are problematically decontextualized from the complex tensions of precarity we note in the epigraph above and the dynamic social, political, and economic contexts in which academic institutions are situated. They perform a kind of stable set of steps mentees should follow regardless of context. In fact, in reviewing varied useful practical and scholarly resources, discussions of mentoring often emerge as a set of "best practices" deployed by a "mentor" who emerges as a noun, an identity that one person holds to guide others, mentees, from a stable position of authority and wisdom that can anticipate the "right steps" to be successful in some discernible futures. Although utterly well-meaning, and likely incredibly helpful in many instances, mentoring often appears in such discourse as a homogenous, even sunny term, accepted unquestioningly as a resource mentors are well-equipped to provide in the forms that students need it. Collectively, the message is that such mentoring can help ensure student success in graduate programs and future careers. Yet there are no such certainties in our current times. Scripting stability feels performative and out of touch. Mentors face unstable conditions in their institutional contexts just as mentees face in graduate school and in post-graduation career opportunities. Mentoring must trouble historic assurances of stability or student adherence to static norms that may have historically paved pathways to success. As we discuss in this article, the very instability of collaging as an inquiry practice has helped bring these realizations to the fore.

Critical scholars have long questioned practices in higher education that reproduce its norms and dictates despite rhetoric of change (e.g. Wisniewski, 2000). Some have argued the idealized pace and rhythms of higher education are fundamentally ableist and antithetical to well-being and embodied diversity (e.g. Dolmage, 2017; Mountz, et al., 2015; Price, 2024). Recent scholarship, to which our work has contributed, has argued for the importance of abolitionist feminist mentoring given the racialized, gendered, and class norms of higher education riddled with power dynamics (e.g. Abernathy, et al, 2026; Martin & Brooks, 2026; Pauly et al., 2023). In this sense, abolitionism embraces the radical politics of working to dismantle oppressive systems and build new sites of communal flourishing. While such arguments about contemporary universities are by no means new (e.g. Readings, 1996; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2000), the work of mentoring as a particular expression of reproduction in such systems remains undertheorized. In contrast, we recognize a need for academic mentoring processes more aligned with new visions of worlding and the realities of contemporary precarity to support faculty and students alike.

Our purpose in this essay is to describe how our ongoing collaborative collaging inquiry work has helped us imagine and begin to foster co-mentoring practices that offer promising strategies amid the demands of the ever-changing social and political landscape. This is part of a multi-step mentoring inquiry aiming, in time, to enact praxis. As we have reflected on our work, we recognize that it is the creative, uncertain, and fragmented nature of collaborative collaging, specifically, that has amplified our efforts to consider what co-mentoring *in precarity* might feel and look like. The three authors, all women, occupy various positionalities (first-generation, Black, white, caregivers, dis/abled) and academic roles (all academic workers, two of whom are faculty and one of whom is a doctoral candidate). We draw from our engagement with arts-based collaging for the last two years to imagine, create, and reconfigure livable mentoring practices in and beyond higher education. In the pages that follow, we introduce our collaborative mission, outline our layered inquiry, and detail three themes that currently dominate our thinking about the productivity of collage for our worlding in precarity. Our co-mentoring reflects an ongoing creative, relational, and communal practice—a verb rather than a noun—formed in dialogue and oriented to imagining and flourishing (Kimmerer, 2015). Like collaging, co-mentoring is neither top-down, nor binary, nor prescriptive, nor static, and resists closure through ongoing questioning, shared interactions, and creative practices.

Inquiry Approach

To enact the co-mentoring work, foster our imaginaries, and nourish spaces of refuge and possibility in the current context, the three of us began meeting to collage and dialogue together about graduate and post-graduate school life. Our inquiry emerged through these meetings, and continues to unfold as we continue to dialogue, ask questions, and raise new issues. In the wake of this inductive processing, we found ourselves pulled from conventional scholarship and research methodologies in which researchers generally design, chart out, and follow codified and scripted methodological pathways, step by step, to conduct research to contribute to “gaps” in social science literature. Instead, we followed our energy to embrace collaging processes as entirely (il)legitimate and generative scholarly practices for fostering new ways of knowing, being, and thriving. This is what methodologists might call a type of inquiry “without methodology.” As Mirka Koro-Ljungberg (2016) argued,

The notion of non-methodologies...represents methodologies without strict boundaries or normative structures—....that may begin anywhere, anytime, but by doing so can create a sense of uncertainty and loss (or mourning of stable, fixed, preconceptualized, or historical knowledge)...They [can] bring about methodological challenges and examples that may push current research practices and question rigid methodological traditions. They can begin anywhere, stay (at least temporarily) lost and uncertain, and still promote change in onto-episte-methodological practices (p.1).

As part of this creative pathway of beginning anywhere, anytime, and any way, we were particularly drawn to the *uncertainties* of such creative practices as collaborative collaging (e.g. Bailey & Woodall-Greene, 2022; Knelman, 2021), which invite practitioners to embrace non-prescriptive, inductive, emergent forms of inquiry oriented to process and data-*creation* (e.g. Ellingson & Sotirin, 2023) rather than data *collection*. In embracing a non-methodology of collaging, what surfaces is endlessly emergent and uncertain—failures, fragmentations, questioning, lines of flight, color, insights, repurposed bits of yarn, shared and revived materials—and is counter to almost universal research prescriptions in raising more questions than it answers. Such inherently unstable collaging configurations are conceptually aligned with the precarities of the present. Further, in embracing such uncertainties, like Koro-Ljungberg (2016) and others, we recognize these endeavors can “promote change in onto-episte-methodological practices” (p.1) that, in our case, also surface insights about doing mentoring differently.

We have interacted consistently for several years, meeting regularly for 2-hour sessions, to collage together over Zoom, dialogue about various issues that arise regarding higher education, social change, and becoming, and to theorize and question anew. We document our conversations, share readings and collages, and follow our work where it leads us. After our initial work (e.g. Abernathy et al, 2026), our attention shifted to precarity based on social and economic changes we are witnessing institutionally, nationally, and globally. Taking stock of our insights at this moment, we share three themes that we have created from our collaborative processing. We focus on collaging as a particularly generative practice of making and imagining aligned with the precarity of higher education and social life. We use the following themes to capture these ideas: (1) Shifting Terrain: Collaging Failures *toward* Co-Mentoring in Precarity; (2) Embodied Fragmentation and Reassembly in Precarity; (3) Continual Reconfiguration as Praxis. Collectively, they speak to our shared engagement in creative methodologies to rethink-reimagine conventional mentoring practices for these times.

Figure 2Bailey. (2025). *Within and Against*. [collage]

Shifting Terrain: Collaging Failures *Toward* Co-Mentoring in Precarity

This multidimensional theme captures our realization over time to render visible and articulate how collaging practices enact a series of necessary failures that mimic the ways we believe we must “fail” prescribed research practices and decontextualized mentoring recipes for success in social and institutional conditions of precarity. Among the most powerful realizations that have emerged from our dialogues, bit by bit and scrap by scrap, is our amplified awareness of the varied embodied effects of the profound discourse of failure and norms of success that shape higher education and our experiences within it. Educators are quite familiar with the language and norms of educational success and failure (e.g. Carr & Micciche, 2020). Its normative-if-supple force thoroughly guides covert and overt educational structures, grading scales, student advancement, and affective experiences. We sift students into different tracks. We grade and rank papers, faculty, and even schools through criteria of “success” and “failure,” as evident in the grading systems some lawmakers use to rate schools’ productivity (e.g. *Oklahoma’s A to F school grading system under scrutiny*). Through years of schooling, students learn which practices and behaviors help them achieve “good” student status—to become proper educational subjects—so that they can strive to do their work well in the frames available: writing in particular formats, meeting deadlines, completing requirements (Levinson, et al., 1996).

Discourses of failure, success, and excellence (e.g. Readings, 1996) are also endlessly malleable based on the culture and norms operating at a given historical moment. In the current context, opportunities to “fail” are all around us. As Troiani and Dutson (2021) argue, the new “imperative of the neoliberal university is to continuously increase performance—measurable in ultimately economic terms, imposing a new auditable disciplining, and quickening pace, of learning, thinking and working” (p.5). This furious institutional pace, fueled by corporate and

neoliberal regimes, has ushered a relentless focus on productivity and accountability with an ever-moving target of success. As feminist scholars have noted, rising to the demands of these imperatives disciplines us to a culture of speed and performance expectations that are impossible to meet (see Mountz et al., 2015) and at odds with the diverse bodies that make up educational spaces (see Price, 2024). We all inevitably face daily opportunities to fail. One of us noted this salient embodied experience:

In a doc program (and from what I've noted of faculty jobs), there is never a moment to feel good when you've accomplished something. It's always – what's the next thing? How soon can I do the next thing? I gotta get on to the next thing! (Author 3).

In this sense, we see such demands as intrinsically fueling the looming and constant potential for failure. We fail to meet the deadline. We fail to respond to the email quickly enough. We fail to publish in the best journal. We fail to get the funding or the job or the assistantship. We fail to write the paper exactly as the instructor (or journal, or committee, and so on) wants. We fail to get the reading done. As Author 2 reflected on one experience,

I had to read like 13 books for [my theory] class, and it was clear that one of two things was going to happen: one, sacrifice reading for depth and I was up late a lot of nights reading, and two—compromising a lot of time to do all the other things that I needed to do, right? (Author 2, reflection)

With these expectations, however meaningful the topic, this high-achieving full-time student, mother, and worker simply could not “succeed” in conventional ways—to do all the reading well—in that time and in that moment. Through such varied school-work-life micro-expectations—what Tricia Hersey (2022) refers to as “grind culture”—such expectations for performance and our inevitable failures to meet them are thoroughly affective, deeply absorbed, and lived in the bodies of educators, staff, and students who occupy academic spaces.

The embodied weight of this pervasive discourse of failure for our jobs and academic milestones became particularly clear through our collaborative collaging. We regularly collaged about juggling, joys, and pressures. Yet academic expectations also manifested in *how* we experienced our inquiry. For example, Bailey (Author 1) began to intensely dislike (and eventually abandoned) a collage riddled with bold phrases and colors that she was creating from a glossy university marketing brochure. The title, *Working Within and Against* (see Figure 2), is a favorite phrase that, in this case, was intended to capture the need to resist stable constructions of “successful” mentoring, research, and behavior as we grapple with social changes and needs. Yet the colors and jarring organization failed to capture the budding idea. In this sense, it became a “failed” collage, an inadequate effort to represent resistance from within, a project for the shredder rather than public display. In the collager’s dismissal of this collage, the ever-present nature of academic discourses of failure and success became abundantly clear. A failed collage, a

bunch of words on a page, endlessly open to reconfiguration, symbolizes the exact processes we need to embrace in theorizing and living out the fragmentations and failures of our current time.

All around us we see the need to “fail” conventional norms of success. Collaging has been a generative practice for doing so. Prescriptions for success in hungry institutions are often at odds with diverse embodied needs (e.g. Price, 2024). Learning the new trends in AI pedagogy, for example, while students need letters of recommendations for jobs and scholarships are simply not aligned. Neither is “needing” to make progress on a dissertation when your workplace closes. These gritty encounters underscore the tensions of navigating changing institutional contexts haunted by static notions of “success” and “failure.” Collaging, in fact, represents an enormous failure within academic norms that privilege sophisticated narrative discourse in research. Pausing to consider, through the lens of failed collages, what constitutes arbitrary constructions of success and failure in our embodied lives and needs of this social moment is a useful initial intervention in our layered inquiry. One of us described this kind of intervention as “hard and ongoing labor,” because normative notions of “success” are so entrenched and monitored in academia (see Figure 3). In fact, doing well affirms we belong.

Figure 3

Abernathy. (2024). *Outside the Lines*. [collage]



Several theoretical companions that accompanied us in our collaging helped us muscle our way through this predicament of wanting to perform as “good mentees,” “good students,” and “good academic workers” and the necessity of “failing” these very norms in conditions of precarity. Retheorizing what success and mentoring can look and feel like has been important reorienting work (Ahmed, 2017). Feminist theorist Sara Ahmed, via Carr and Micciche in *Failure Pedagogies* (2020), helps to reframe failure as a “sweaty concept” that demands labor

and time to unpack its diverse functions. In Ahmed's vision, failure, like any sweaty concept, is supple, alive, and suffused with powerful and nuanced meanings that can function in a variety of ways. The meanings of sweaty concepts demand embodied labor to consider and unpack in varied settings. Similarly, Halberstam's (2011) *Queer Art of Failure* embraces failure as an art form that marginalized groups must enact for their own well-being. Halberstam clarifies that conventional norms of success represent ideals and forms of capital only available to some. In this sense, destabilizing failure's connotations of deficiency can reframe failed collages, and failing institutional prescriptions of success, as potentially liberatory.

Collaging as and for co-mentoring—cutting, pasting, and assembling material images and scraps—can generatively invite and render visible possibilities beyond the pages we create; they can represent and produce new relationships among pressing material needs, discourses of success and failure, and institutional demands and norms. Such imaginaries can reframe the failure of the professional who cannot read every page of her 13 academic books because she must sleep and tend to her children as successfully crafting a schedule aligned with her holistic bodily needs; it can reframe the teacher choosing to support a student trying to find a job rather than meeting a paper deadline as successfully aligned with pressing material needs.

Many years ago, a student told me after finishing her degree that she stopped responding to her instructor's paper revision requests after numerous attempts across the course to meet their expectations –each submission coming back to her, choking with comments and revisions, burying her original words, a blur of exacting red markings that said to her– 'everything you are doing is wrong. It must be done: Just. Like. This.' By the final draft, she recognized the message there was only one 'right' way to do this work—down to the exact best terms, the exact best transitions, the exact best structure—and the writing she was supposed to be doing was not about cultivating her own voice and her own scholarship in her own way at all. To 'succeed' in these conditions, she realized she had to simply accept the revisions and track changes in an unfamiliar voice and resubmit the instructor's own revisions back to them. She did well in the course. (Author 1, reflection).

In this example, a student is actively collaging her life, reconfiguring her priorities among discourses of success, institutional requirements, and material needs to advance in her program.

She strategically “fails” to write in her own voice to simply “succeed” within course parameters, which is necessary to continue with her life, education, and career goals. Carr and Micchie's (2020) analysis speak to the potential generativity of sweaty concepts like failure, constantly in motion in collaging and in social uncertainty. Our collaging toward failure as art, question, and dynamic contextual strategy (see Figure 3), have been central to our co-mentoring dialogues in envisioning what failing toward flourishing might look like.

Figure 4

Warner. (2026). *Hanging on by a thread!* [collage].

2026



Most importantly, in collage’s productivity for embracing the art of failure as a creative practice, we landed on the conviction that co-mentoring in these times must involve transparent conversations about contemporary precarity (see Figure 4). It is all around us. As uncertainties proliferate, we cannot give static mentoring advice about how to prepare for an academic job, proceed through a graduate program, or perform confidence in “next steps” when we cannot know what the future holds. It is important to interrupt static notions of “good academic worker,” and “success,” as the world changes around us, so we can recognize such dictates as sweaty concepts at work in the institutional air we breathe. We should, in fact, call out decontextualized and entrenched institutional prescriptions to help faculty and students alike hear, speak, and co-mentor in *multiple* institutional languages. As one faculty member expressed recently, with the ethical weight of dissolving faculty positions hanging in the air, “*I’ve been wondering should I even be helping students seek academic jobs right now??*” Openly discussing these points are important forms of relational and context-sensitive praxis.

Figure 5

Bailey. (2026). *Endless Fragmentation and Reassembling* [Collage]



Embodied Fragmentation and Reassembling in Precarity

Higher education as a patriarchal, neoliberal institution has taken a lot from me, particularly during my time as a staff member. In this role, I experienced years of relentless gendered violence and harm. This was enacted on me, and I also witnessed it enacted on others in horrifying ways. These are experiences I carry with me that inform how I experience and show up in academic spaces. In this way, higher education has taken things from me that I cannot get back.... At the same time, it is a place of profound growth. (Author 3, reflection).

Collaborative collaging helped produce another insight salient to our collective work in cultivating co-mentoring: enacting the *embodied* fragmentation and reassembling necessary in precarity. Collaging time and again in varied spaces (a closet, offices, couches, while balancing a computer, often dragging boxes of supplies around to establish new locales of possibility) constitutively heightens awareness of embodied precarity as academic workers. As many have theorized (e.g. Ellingson, 2017), too often academic processes, research, teaching (and, we would add, mentoring advice) foreground the intellectual aspects of the academy. These norms ask us to rely on our scholarly traditions, our theoretical knowledge, our rationality, and our logic to produce important academic work. This is all serious business that we recognize and embrace. We thoroughly believe in the power of education and knowledge as potentially emancipatory in our lives and our globe; whatever our critiques of institutional practices, they come from within the institution, and against it, as loving ones (hooks, 2021), welcoming and fiercely charging all of us to work together to confront the demands of the moment. And yet the stubborn notion of

the Cartesian mind/body split suffusing higher education, in which the mind and body are somehow separate and hierarchical entities (mind over body; thinking rather than thinking-feeling-becoming), does a profound disservice to imagining co-mentoring practices that honor the fully embodied ways we show up in academic spaces and the embodied consequences of precarity. As Figure 5 represents, collaging demands us to engage with shredded paper drafts, shredded ideas, shredded certainties, to form tactile relationships with yarn, ideas, and job ads in new ways, and to feel-see-craft our ways in endless configurations that can help us imagine how to respond to the constant social, institutional, and embodied changes in our material worlds.

Phenomenologically, the collaborative collaging process foregrounds that we are fully sensory beings, always engaging in a swirl of thinking-breathing-affective-aural- oral- olfactory-proprioceptive interactions as we move with materialities in diverse environments. Collaging together can stir up communal life energy that constantly flows around us and entangles us with varied materials and other life forms. Collaging produces embodied interactions that, like higher education practices must be in these times, are fundamentally relational. And such spaces and experiences are also suffused with the possibilities and precarities that have long haunted higher education — body politics of size, age, race, class, voice and language, bodily adornment, abilities, movement, pain, objectification, and belonging that demand ongoing interrogation of homogenous conceptions of “graduate students” (e.g. Ahmed, 2006; Bailey & Hinton, 2026).

Indeed, as the opening epigraph for this section conveys, bodies enter higher education spaces in a range of ways, erratically hyper visible and invisible, objectified and celebrated, and affected and shaped, in turn, shaping the experiences with education and precarity we have as embodied beings (e.g. Bailey & Hinton, 2026; Bobel & Kwan, 2019; Clare, 2017; Pillow, 2003). Cartesian subjectivities and institutional markers of success can be at odds with the holistic experiences of mind-body-selves that collaging helps us order, disentangle, and entangle in new configurations. Scholars have long called out the limits of championing the “rapid production of quantifiable things over what is best for people and environment” (Museus & Wang, 2023, p. 16). It is hard to imagine whose bodies, spirits, and social interests are served by prioritizing the rapid academic production of quantifiable things. Indigenous botanist Kimmerer (2015) invites us to consider our ecosystems as entanglements among our embodied human, non-human, and material worlds. Collaging demanded this of us. It demands embodied interaction with material acts of shredding, cutting, and assembling. It demands attention to existing and imagined ecosystems. It invites conversations about our illnesses/vulnerabilities in meeting academic demands and imagining new academic strategies. It beckons new ways of being, imagining, relating, and becoming.

Feminist scholars have written at length about collaging’s power to enact critical and emancipatory work through subverting and interrupting (e.g. Atkinson, 2025). In this sense, we wondered how collective collaging can evoke new possibilities in precarity: in channeling fear and rage through snipping, gluing, and slashing, we can feel threats to academic freedom, institutional autonomy, bodily safety, and job security in the gut; as we process concerns about the future and organizational change from our diverse vantage points, we can channel emotional responses of grief, loss, and possibility (see Figure 6); and as we collectively engage with questions about how graduate degrees and post-academic jobs are changing we can honor the embodied urgencies of how faculty/students use their time. In such co-mentoring, we recognize the collective responsibilities to fragment old norms and reassemble them in new configurations. In community, pace slows, urgencies become collaborative responsibilities, questions become

loving opportunities to critique and to act (hooks, 2021). As one of us reflected, “*I always feel better when we have the chance to connect, process, and work together.*”

The processes of producing messy collages and experimenting with mixed media in our co-mentoring are fully embodied and relational experiences. As we move magical purple-then-white glue to paper, scissors to scraps, scraps to textured construction, and then return again, we are engaging in reassembling and assembling anew. In the collage of failure (see Figure 2) as part of the failed academic non-methodology of collaging inquiry, the collager extracted unsettling institutional commands from a marketing magazine to form in a jagged row visible in one direction. Then, after this cutting and deconstructing, she looked for words of resistance in the pages to move against the grain of the magazine’s cheerful purpose to champion university business. In this act, she repurposed and assembled anew. In its disruptive intent, this was bad art and a failed collage, ending because the page was not expansive enough to address the resistance and precarity driving the need for expression in the first place.

The practice of collaging is a fully embodied scholarly practice of becoming that both invites—and cultivates—a sense of vulnerability, openness, and community. We share initial fragmented thoughts and ideas; we produce temporary arrangements of materials and images; and we come together in our uncertainty to process and rearrange. Collaging allows us to bring our full embodied selves into the interactions—cutting and gluing bits and pieces together amid interruptions from family or the string of email dings, worries about the latest news from a medical appointment, and awareness of the inviting but steady to-do list. *How did email come to symbolize productivity, we wonder?* An engine that whirrs endlessly, catching our sensory attention, each response signaling responsiveness, and each then beckoning yet another response. One of us decides to print out and pulverize an email, adding it to a shredding collage (Figure 5). In such collaboration, all ideas are welcome, from honoring successful markers in a graduate program, to discussing how to productively fail email, to strategizing how to seek jobs in all kinds of spaces. Collaging surfaces new possibilities for communal work.

Continual Reconfiguration as Praxis

Figure 6

Bailey. (2024). *Embodied Precarity*.



Collaging toward co-mentoring can invite, we think, interconnections in which we see, feel, recognize, and foster our relations to enable new questions and relationships to arise. It is a generative practice that enables equity and collaboration as co-mentoring should. Its incomplete nature orients us to continual deconstruction and reassembly--toward both theory and practice.

I came across yet another mentoring description that sounded too much like a training manual that rendered the entire process lifeless and objectifying and foregrounding the Mind as separate from Body ...all the fancy scholarly language that folds in psychosocial and development theory and skill mastery... With words such as “informal transmission of knowledge... and capitalrelevant to career or professional advancement... one person with greater experience and one with less” All of this is a form of truth. All of this can happen in and through mentoring. Yet how can this transactional language help with the real interconnections needed to find jobs in these times? To work toward a meaningful degree AND save money? To connect and transform in relation across roles to imagine new ways to address social needs in these times...as the world shifts around us and under us? (Author 1, reflection)

There is nothing transactional about collaging. It is no magical elixir for the ills of the world, to be sure. Yet it has invited us to engage seriously in reflection and reassembly toward praxis. We have talked about available jobs. We have discussed strategies to navigate wellness. We began talking to other academics about their hopes, worries, and actions. It has thus supported possibilities for praxis in facing new demands from a changing social and economic landscape that each of us can carry forward. Such co-mentorship works against the artificial fragmenting of home/school, worker/person, personal/professional, to honor us all as holistic beings in different positions working in coalition. We embrace the spirit of Manathunga et al.'s (2022) reflections in their arts-based inquiry into academics' experiences, who write,

we take hold of the...idea that a valuable academic life is balanced, embodied and contemplative; that thinking is a biological, not a digital process, and that we are organic, psycho/spiritual/social not mechanistic beings who, without the wind, water, sun, land, air, rocks and breeze, and without movement through liminal spaces, would cease to exist (p. 247).

This vision continually orients us toward collaborative praxis. Within a culture hyper-focused on narrow constructions of expertise, our co-mentoring collaging practice opens equitable space for all of us — art degrees or not — to think outside and beyond conventional research, mentoring, and hierarchies, to remain connected to our embodied lives as we navigate our work, our relationships, and our own sense-making without demanding clarity or completion (see Figure 7 for a bit of collage salvaged from a larger, uncompleted piece). Collaging, within this relational ecology, is an accessible form of embodied inquiry. As a feminist practice, it can emerge out of the domestic and material landscape around us, with the materials that call to us, and with no institutional governance over its form or possibilities. It is productively illegible in such academic conventions.

When Author 3 noted that after a tough academic interaction, she “*did a collage about that*,” the gesture was not incidental nor performative; it signals how collage offers ways of thinking and acting that do not rely on academic discourse or visual training. For those with or without formal art backgrounds, collaging does not require mastering “academic language,” claiming artistic identity, or mapping on to norms. The praxis-oriented work makes room for more than one feeling, truth, or position at once - allowing “parts” to co-exist - and gives fleeting form to experience that otherwise might be challenging to narrate or explain coherently within institutional frames. In this sense, it functions as a relational site of meaning making where we can invite, make, hold, revisit, and negotiate possibilities of praxis. As Manathunga et al. (2022) noted of walking, it supports a way of thinking and producing that is embodied and reflective, inviting us to collectively imagine and continually reconfigure possibilities.

Figure 7

Abernathy. (2025). *Revolution*.



Collaging also resists closure; like co-mentoring toward praxis, it is always in motion. As Ahmed (2017) reminds us, any dinner table (and any hallway interaction, and any collaging encounter) can become a space for praxis. Rooted in reciprocity, this work fosters learning and guidance that move in multiple directions. Looking forward, we want to contribute to shaping the futures we want to inhabit, even as we navigate chaotic times in which former assurances simply don't apply. For those who entered graduate schools with the vision of becoming future faculty, co-mentoring must transparently lay out the statistics and realities of these declining opportunities while reimagining other fields of application. While there have always been ebbs and flows in faculty hiring, field stability, and tenure-track positions, higher education today is facing stark economic vulnerability, mass cuts of programs and faculty, and reinvention of its mission. As we noted earlier, a glance at the *Chronicle* or the Facebook community, The Professor is Out, lays bare the serious threats to higher education as we have known it and the desperate ways academics are reinventing their work lives and identities. One *Chronicle* article from December 2025 framed contemporary teaching conditions in this way: "The ubiquity of artificial intelligence, the enormity of political pressure, and the severity of financial constraints on many college campuses have conspired to create learning environments of profound unease and uncertainty" (Stripling, 2025, np). It is imperative to communicate openly about these uncertainties, identify actionable steps, and nourish relations that help us navigate.

In recent conversations with students, I urged them to consider alternatives to their planned dissertations and their thoughts about faculty roles. Consider which piece of your planned project might be an important area for future jobs, and what parts can go. Save money. Collaborate with others on your writing plan and your accountability goals. Redo your resumes. Look for side hustles you can do right now if you need to. Tell people to keep a look out for you. Share jobs ads. (Author 1, reflection).

Collaging Toward What We Need in this Moment

Between the precarity of academic and social life - where timelines compress, expectations mount and expand, and institutions navigate new conditions - collaging helped us repeatedly return to the same need: the freedom and grace to focus on being and becoming in community. Institutional pressures can sneakily orient us to convert our embodied and holistic lives into a problem to manage-our bodies, our care obligations, our unique ways of being and knowing, and our voices. To write in particular ways. To succumb to manufactured urgencies. And yet, what we need right now is not more entrenched conventions or rules. We need ethical and collaborative orientations that help us connect and strategize while we navigate structures and conditions that do not reliably keep us safe. In that orientation, the question is not, “How do we perform ‘successfully?’” but instead, “How do we perform, with integrity intact, collaboratively, to support our futures and becoming?”

Freedom to Choose and Refuse

A prevalent practice we identified is the freedom to decide what deserves our attention — and the right to refuse what drains and distorts it. This represents our reconceptualizing of success and failure. Author 1 named this directly: “*The things that keep coming up for us (health, seeking jobs, family time) are important...And we get to decide what’s important for us.*” Such insistence matters because precarity and competition train us to doubt our own significance and react through fear rather than creativity. Throughout our dialogue sessions, we often returned to certain essential points: moments signaling a boundary, a grief, a harm, a value, or a truth. Over our years collaging together, we have all created embodied collages, and Author 3 has created numerous collages exploring silencing mechanisms she has experienced within different institutions. She has represented the lingering affective and embodied repercussions of such silences with flames, cut or crafted from magazines and a course textbook containing only hegemonic leadership theories. She has filled collages with the words she would have said, had she felt safe enough to speak, and with representations of emotions she was not allowed to express in institutional settings. Naming what “keeps coming up” in this way has become a form of refusal for us: a refusal to outsource our ways of knowing/being/becoming, a refusal to treat institutional and societal ills as noise, and a refusal to *only* let institutional timelines and structures determine what merits our attention and how we process. The collaging process of breaking down and reassembling has helped open these pathways.

At the same time, we recognize that attention and refusal must be paired with *power-aware* decision-making. During one session, we highlighted the risk that lives inside scholarly storytelling: “*Who will read [my work]... and have some sort of ... power over it?*” From that thought, a strategy for relational care emerged: “*I’ll probably save some of my ... most personal stories for a different space.*” Author 1 affirmed this kind of decision-making: “*It’s important that we have some agency in what and where we share.*” Making such decisions in institutional spaces requires care. Protecting parts of our work can help keep what is sacred from being handled carelessly. Sometimes “praxis” looks like moving the story to a safer container, choosing the audience and timing, and refusing the demand that everything must fit neatly into “institutional expectations” to count as scholarship.

Space to Bear Witness

Indeed, indigenous scholars using decolonizing and indigenous methodologies (see Wilson, 2008) have underscored this expanded understanding of research. Their work is not,

primarily, *for* institutions or to *fill* scholarly gaps or to contribute *only* to a scholarly community of professionals who read, think, and conduct research. Such work is created primarily by—and *for*—their communities. Essential to that work is carrying it out through a relational ethics of care that honors the relationship between those sharing their knowledge and those bearing witness to it, and the new understandings that emerge from those interactions for others to learn. In that sense, our collaging and dialogue cannot enact care that solves financial crises or intervenes in attacks on higher education; instead, we see the relational ethics of care in co-mentoring as an ongoing process of bearing witness, expanding understanding, asking questions, and always having a voice in forging actionable steps for livable futures.

Re-making and Crafting Time

We also identified a shared need to *re-make* and craft time in ways that intervene in neoliberal temporal pressures. The clock can be one of the sharpest instruments of precarity - it is a constant reminder of what we still need to do, what we failed to do, and who we have failed to be. One of us discussed the turning point where wellness and survival become intentional practices. “*I’m not going to kill myself to do it because then time won’t be a factor... if I’m not here.*” That statement holds the truth many scholars carry quietly: we can meet deadlines and still lose ourselves, damage our health, not find a job. We can be “productive” and yet still be disappearing. So, we are practicing different measures of productive failure. As our opening epigraph conveyed, in precarious times, building a linear career path through prescribed steps or a series of promotions may not be an option. Collaging provides a literal representation of how we are working (messily) to craft the kind of lives we want to live that may diverge from what institutions might deem “successful.” Through collaging, we can blend varied resources – pieces of a flowery wreath; programs from a feminist conference; magazines from medical waiting rooms – to assemble and create entirely new relationships, pathways, and imaginaries. We can try out different combinations of materials, repositioning bits over and over or throwing them out altogether, and arrange such thoughts in any shape we want, rejecting linearity all together.

We count and celebrate what we can - small blocks of work, partial wins, an afternoon reclaimed, or a weekend that stays “unproductive” on purpose. We are learning that rest is not a reward for finishing; it is a condition for continuing (Hersey, 2022). Most importantly, we are learning to treat our relationships - especially co-mentoring and shared witnessing - as a method for fostering holism and action while doing academic work in precarity. We do not need quick or certain answers in These Times. But we continue to ask questions with and alongside others toward imagining more liberatory co-mentoring practices within—and beyond—educational spaces to expand counterspaces and strategies of flourishing.

References

- Ahmed, S. (2017). *Living a feminist life*. Duke UP.
- Atkinson, L. (2025). Agential cut and paste: Collaging feminisms. *Feminist Review* 139, 58-76.
- Abernathy, L.P., Warner, S., & Bailey, L. (2026). The ‘art’ of mentoring otherwise: Troubling, agitating, and flourishing in the academy. In J. Brooks & J. Martin (Eds), *Thriving in*

- higher education: Uncovering institutional counter-Stories through abolitionist Feminist Mentoring* (pp 39-65). Emerald Press. <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80592-833-120261003>
- Bailey, L. E., & Woodall-Greene, T. L. (2022). Collaging as embodied method: Use of collage in a study of American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters' experiences. *The Qualitative Report*, 27(9), 1958-1974. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5588>
- Bailey, L. E. & Hinton, K. (Eds.) (2026). *Educational embodiments: Life writing the body*. Emerald.
- Bettencourt, G. M., Friedensen, R. E., Bartlett, M. L. (2021). Re-envisioning doctoral mentorship in the United States: A power-conscious review of the literature. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 16, 237-252. <https://doi.org/10.28945/4735>
- Bobel, C. & Kwan, S. (Eds.) (2019). *Battlegrounds: Transgressions, tensions, and transformations*. Vanderbilt.
- Carr, A.D., & Micciche, L. R. (Eds.) (2020). *Failure pedagogies: Learning and unlearning what it means to fail*. Peter Lang.
- Clare, E. (2017). *Brilliant imperfection: Grappling with cure*. Duke UP.
- Dolmage, J. (2017). *Academic ableism*. University of Michigan Press.
- Ellingson, L. L., & Sotirin, P. (2020). *Making data in qualitative research: Engagements, ethics, and entanglements*. Routledge.
- Farfan, I. (2026). New school lays off nearly 90 people, dealing blow to humanities. Hyperallergic. <https://hyperallergic.com/new-school-lays-off-nearly-90-people-dealing-blow-to-humanities/>
- Farrington, R. (2026). 8 Colleges Closing In 2026: Full List Of Closures. <https://thecollegeinvestor.com/79342/8-colleges-closing-in-2026-full-list-of-closures/>
- Fox, A. (2020). Women advising women: Socializing doctoral students into a culture of sacrifice. *Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education*, 13(2), 211-229.
- Freedman, D. P. & Holmes, M. S. (2003). *The teacher's body: Embodiment, authority, and identity in the academy*. State U of NY Press.
- Gardner, L. (2025, Dec 12). 'We're being DOGE-ed': Sweeping buyout plan rattles the new school's faculty. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from: <https://www.chronicle.com/article/were-being-doge-ed-sweeping-buyout-plan-rattles-the-new-schools-faculty>
- Gardner, S. K., & Barnes, B. J. (2014). *Advising and mentoring doctoral students: A handbook*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.
- Gretzinger, E., Hicks, M., Dutton, C., Smith, J., Cutler, S., & Baiocchi, A. (2025, Dec 16). Tracking higher ed's dismantling of DEI. *Chronicle*. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/tracking-higher-eds-dismantling-of-dei>

- Halberstam, J. (2011). *Queer art of failure*. Duke UP.
- Hersey, T. (2022). *Rest is resistance: Free yourself from grind culture and reclaim your life*. Little, Brown and Company.
- Johnson, W. B. & Griffin, K. A. (2025). *On being a mentor: A guide for higher education faculty* (3rd edition). Routledge.
- Kimmerer, R. W. (2015). *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Milkweed editions.
- Knelman, S. (2021). The women artists who find freedom in collage. *Utopia-Apture* 241 (Winter 2020). <https://aperture.org/editorial/the-women-artists-who-find-freedom-in-collage/>
- Koro-Ljungberg, M. (2016). *Reconceptualizing qualitative research: Methodologies without methodology*. SAGE.
- Levinson, B., Foley, D., & Holland, D.C. (1996). *The cultural production of the educated person: Critical ethnographies of schooling and local practice*. SUNY.
- Manathunga, C., Black, A. L., & Davidow, S. (2022). Walking: towards a valuable academic life. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 43(2), 231–250. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2020.1827222>
- Mountz, A., Bonds, A., Mansfield, B., Loyd, J., Hyndman, J., Walton-Roberts, M., ... Curran, W. (2015). For slow scholarship: A feminist politics of resistance through collective action in the neoliberal university. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 14(4), 1235–1259. <https://doi.org/10.14288/acme.v14i4.1058>
- Oklahoma's A to F school grading system under scrutiny. (2023, October 3). <https://ktul.com/news/local/school-accountability-study>
- Pauly, J.A., Muntz, S. M., & Hernandez, L.H. (2023). *Feminist mentoring in academia*. Lexington Books.
- Pillow, W. (2003). *Unfit subjects: Educational policy and the teen mother*. Routledge.
- Price, M. (2024). *Crip spacetime: Access, failure, and accountability in academic life*. Duke UP.
- Readings, B. (1996). *The university in ruins*. Harvard University Press.
- Slaughter, S. & Rhoades, G. (2000). The neoliberal university. *New Labor Forum*, 6 (Spring/Summer), 73-79.
- Stripling, J. (2025, Dec 3). "The year in teaching was....." *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved January 9, 2026 from <https://www.chronicle.com/podcast/college-matters-from-the-chronicle/the-year-in-teaching-was>
- Taylor, S. & Kiley, M. (2025) (3rd Edition). *A handbook for doctoral supervisors*. Routledge.
- Troiani, I., & Dutson, C. (2021). The neoliberal university as a space to learn/think/work in Higher Education. *Architecture and Culture*, 9(1), 5–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20507828.2021.1898836>

Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Fernwood Publishing.

Oklahoma English Language Arts and Navigating Dissonance in Post-Democracy

Shaista Fenwick, Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education, University of Oklahoma

Abstract

In the democratic exercise of power, there are no irrelevant communities of fellow citizens. If, according to Parker Palmer, democracy itself depends on the cultivation of certain “habits of the heart,” (Palmer, 2011), then the mission of ELA teachers would be to curate books and guide experiences that have the capacity to reach the hearts of their students. Teachers within a democracy, especially those in English-Language Arts and related reading-dependent disciplines, have a civic responsibility to select diverse and representative texts in furtherance of the goals of democracy. Secondary ELA teacher excellence and duty includes the selection of diverse texts that represent their students’ lived experiences and the communities they may have to navigate, inhabit, create, or coexist with.

Teaching English Language Arts in Oklahoma can be a risky business, given the public attacks on books, reading access, critical thinking across curriculum from state office-holders, well-funded public figures, the risk of school violence by students and outside actors, and the increased stress of navigating ever-increasing taskloads and complexities in the profession. This paper presents the landscape of competing elements Oklahoma ELA instructors have to navigate and some implications of post-democracy for the teaching profession.

Introduction

The United States of America is facing a sea change in how we structure society’s wants and provide for the common good. The current public discourse is deeply divided over the social safety net, the general welfare itself, and the source of threats require a common defense as our policies are addressed in either global or domestic spheres. As Bellah et al. suggest, “the inability to make legitimate demands on others becomes an even more severe problem when one steps out of the face-to-face personal world,” (Bellah et al., 2007), such as the internet or in the varied media sources which now comprise most of our national arena. According to de Tocqueville, democracy as practiced in America was a substantive answer to a critical political question, ‘what is the best form of government?’ “Tocqueville contrasted the regular, stable, and effective institutions and mores of America with those existing in Europe at that time that contained relics of an aristocratic past that proved to be a stumbling block against political democracy,” (Craiutu and Jennings, 2004). These institutions of democracy, de Tocqueville postulated (Scherer, 1985), were due to certain habits of the heart in public life that balanced civic interest, identity, and loyalties against those of the individual themselves. Parker Palmer further

postulated that several ‘Habits of the Heart’ were intrinsic to education, and the chief responsibility of families and teachers to instill in children.

These habits of the heart arose from the literature, civic discourse, and common cultural touchstones of the time—elements that are easily avoided in the current highly individualistic media landscape. The socialization of the country’s larger voting blocks and the forced intimacy between disparate groups of people happens, in the United States, mostly in its public K-12 classrooms; in spaces where vastly different groups of young people are placed in proximity with one another and forced to contend with differing points of view and cultural microclimates as a whole body instead of in siloed, fragmented markets. Therefore, it is there that the battles of individualism versus cooperative governance must now be postulated and excavated in the minds and hearts of its electorate.

Parker Palmer claims there are five ‘habits of the heart’ which are integral to the functioning of a democracy, and without which we will falter in our educational quest to help people lift one another out of ignorant and ineffectual darkness. He codifies these five habits, adapted from de Tocqueville as:

- We must understand that we are all in this together
- We must develop an appreciation of the value of ‘otherness’
- We must cultivate the ability to hold tension in life-giving ways
- We must generate a sense of personal voice and agency,
- We must strengthen our capacity to create community.”

Palmer, after codifying these democratic ‘habits,’ exhorts the teacher that “when the heart is open and allowed to work its alchemy, suffering can generate vitality instead of violence,” (Palmer, 2011). However, there are significant challenges facing those teachers who do the work of teaching through and with the habits of the heart which are at the formative core competencies of democracy. These challenges have significant implications for the future of democracy.

Post Democracy—Characteristics as applied to Education

Colin Crouch identified conditions for thriving democracy as conditions where “major opportunities for the mass of ordinary people actively to participate, through discussion and autonomous organizations, in shaping the agenda of public life, and when these opportunities are being actively used by them,” (Crouch, 2000, p. 1). Crouch contrasted this state to nation-states where organizational and political will were being concentrated by financial and technocratic elites, public engagement with and participation in political processes were ebbing, and similar political distancing from out-groups were occurring between most political parties despite increasing rhetorical vitriol between those parties. In education, these de-democratizing forces also involve commercialization (Alikhani 2017). The post-democratic state still boasts the characteristic democratic structures such as social safety nets; legislative, executive, judicial and enforcement infrastructure; territorial ingress and egress mechanisms, the internal and external trade regulatory structures; suffrage; a reasonable expectation of public safety, but public confidence in characteristically democratizing structures is eroded or nonfunctional.

ELA teachers have a specific role in the democratic process, as they teach the skill of writing. Writing is not only a deliverable, but a task that requires examination of the world, formation of judgements about it, and then the effective communication of these ideas. According to Warner, students “struggle mightily with writing tasks that ask them to synthesize and create knowledge,” (Warner 2018, p. 16). Students have the opportunity to examine and

mimic these skills but rarely have the opportunity to form their own relationship to their shared reality through writing, the critical examination and response that Palmer claims differentiates autocracy from democracy (Palmer 2011). The simple rote mimicry or regurgitation of information from experts is insufficient to prepare students to be in a democratic structure with their colleagues and predecessors—as Palmer observed, “democracy is not a spectator sport in which citizens can sit back and watch the pros at work,” (Palmer p. 133, 2011). Instead, citizens must do more. They must be the pros themselves.

“We Must Understand that We are All in This Together”

The key to the unique nature of American democracy as stated by Palmer is not only the obvious urge to plurality, humanization, relational connection, and affinity, but the idea of the radical “we,” that in a democracy of any stripe, there is no ‘them.’ This emphasis on the radical ‘we’ to be an educated ‘we,’ is a concern which Thomas Jefferson also expressed several times.

The urge to engage in public life on an equal basis was a core American value from inception, despite the obvious myopias of the American founders. Jefferson held the core issue of education in a democracy was to balance the understanding of the world with a similar understanding of rights and obligations. “To give to every citizen the information he needs...to understand his duties to his neighbors and country...to know his rights...” (Jefferson, 1818). Jefferson paired these elements—rights and obligations—as core requirements for American citizens to understand, in order for democracy to function as he had envisioned with his colleagues during the founding of the country. The urge to American unity of purpose in everyday political activity through a multiplicity of religious organizations was noted by de Tocqueville “The sects which exist in the United States are innumerable. They all differ in respect to the worship, which is due from man to his Creator, but they all agree in respect to the duties which are due from man to man. Each sect adores the Deity in its own peculiar manner, but all the sects preach the same moral law in the name of God,” (de Tocqueville, 1835/2003). In the organizational and information-sharing structure of early American churches, these functions were paired implicitly with the rights of citizens and commensurate obligations to preserve those structures which served the country.

This pairing of education and effective public life on an equal basis was a necessary component of democracy, according to Jefferson. In his words to George Wythe, Jefferson observed “I think by far the most important bill in our whole code is that for the diffusion of knowledge among the people. No other sure foundation can be devised for the preservation of freedom, and happiness,” (Jefferson, 1786). The diffusers of knowledge—teachers in schools—are then at least partly tasked with the core competencies of democracy itself, namely with those dignities due from man to man, and the definition of human reciprocal responsibility and group endeavor within civic life. When those structures fail, democracy itself becomes precarious.

“We Must Develop an Appreciation of the Value of ‘Otherness’”

As public faith is eroded in governments in de-democratizing practices (Alikhani 2017), educators are affected both as governmental entities and as unique publics. Mass communications theory defines publics as distinct and complex groups of people who interact with mass communications distinctly. Although public school educators are by no means monolithic, they do experience a unique intersectional identity as both governed and governing, in addition to embodying the first experience most residents of a state have with governmental authority itself.

English and language arts (ELA) as a discipline is rooted in the art of communication. The goal of English teaching is more than just language competency, it involves critical thinking, communication, construction and understanding of rhetoric, appeals, and the ways in which we relate and galvanize one another within society—and also how we construct society itself. In effect, the ELA classroom teacher must stand in the gap between the self and their government, mediating as authoritative force to train many different students in effective meaning-making, self-expression, skill application, and citizenship socialization. They must do this as a somewhat unified front within a school building or risk harm to the coherence of school and district policies to support and protect the school and its faculty, staff and students.

The story is the single narrative unit of understanding another human experience, whether one's own or another persons. English and language arts are the art of communication between people, understanding and crafting messages from one type of human to another. When selecting texts for students to consider and contend with, teachers are tasked with creating a space and an intellectual platform from which myriad students can contend safely with the task of decrypting literature. The curriculum in K-12 schools today does not require the skills of reading long-form literature but instead focuses on close reading of short passages. Teachers themselves must choose to teach longer or whole texts. They know the civic skills developed when reading long-form passages in narrative support the development of empathy and connection to other people (Gallagher, 2015) fundamental to shared interests in civic life. As Styslinger emphasized in 2017, “One of the most important political decisions we can make as English language arts teachers is deciding what to teach,” (Styslinger, 2017, p. 13). As teachers of English, our curriculum can either support or challenge the status quo and systems of power in education and the world. John Dewey pushed strongly for education in the classroom to support and connect with lived experiences outside the classroom (Dewey, 1986). Rudine Sims Bishop famously referred to texts as providing mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. (Bishop, 1990) through which readers could reflect, see others, and inhabit others' experiences. As such, ELA teachers are tasked with including or connecting many different narratives and lifeways to their core texts, despite increasing reliance on short-form pieces driven by testing reform. These whole-text experiences offer the opportunity to consider the lives of other people and perspectives as a whole, not in decontextualized and essentialized snapshots.

“We Must Cultivate the Ability to Hold Tension in Life-Giving Ways”

When presenting differing perspectives to children, there will inevitably be tension between any students' thesis and other students' experiences as antithesis. According to Palmer, the responsibility to increase exposure and comfort with plural lifeways and experiences is an intersection between the discipline of the English teacher and the world, and is part of the core responsibility of engaging with democracy. In mentor texts or discussions of such, “...we must find ways to help people conduct an inner search free of any predetermined outcome while providing them with the guidance and resources they need to conduct it well. As we do so, we will be shaping some of the habits of the heart that make democracy possible.” (Palmer, 2011). In addition to the complexity of working with other students, students also need to be able to make their own mistakes and learn from them in a space where they receive generative feedback and safety. These inner searches and opportunities for reflection and analysis are challenging to create and scaffold appropriately individually or in small groups, much less large groups of twenty or more students.

Teachers are trained to provide these opportunities in their classrooms for their students, and also are trained ethically to respect learners in the difficult stages of grappling with subject matter. As Palmer went on to address, skilled teachers are tasked both with doing enough, but not too much, namely “creating conditions under which students can conduct an inner search does not mean dictating answers to inner-life questions, which by definition do not have answers in any conventional sense. It means helping students learn to ask questions that are worth asking because they are worth loving, questions that one can fruitfully hold at the center of one’s life,” (Palmer 2011). Instead of delivering reductive questions, the skilled teacher encourages students to grapple with rigorous questions and hone their skills with metacognition. Again, these limitations to teachers’ intervention in the classroom and in a student’s learning process are also a key element of developing the habits in students which contribute to reflective and responsible citizenship. Students developing the habits of connection, empathy, and plurality must grapple with the Other in the text and in the world, as well as the Other within themselves, in a civil and visible way. These methods and elements of connection and direct application of holding generative tension also tend to translate into tangible learning effectiveness (Warner, 2018).

This tension and reconciliation, the grappling with the Other is a generalizable skill which poses a disruption to the de-democratizing process of social siloing, especially those mechanisms tied to technocracy and social media saturation. The resulting humanization of others makes it far more difficult to discard their concerns. The ELA tools of democratizing are found in pedagogical tactics such as Socratic seminars, rhetorical analysis, narrative writing, and perspective-taking between students and in texts. Good ELA teaching at the secondary level can be accomplished effectively with minimal tools other than a space; the basic tools of paper and pen; and a teacher with the knowledge, drive, and curiosity to listen to and guide students.

Germinal linguist Walter Ong identifies writing itself as a technology which humans have adapted to relatively recently as a species, having primarily relied on orality and the tools of story to discover, further, retain, and transmit knowledge (Ong, 1979). The current media landscape is a place where devices send cultural messages which divide and essentialize student identities (Zeithaml, 1985), student attention is monetized, and children themselves are treated legally as possessions. The ability to disconnect from external publics in the educational space is inherently disruptive to the discourse of monetized engagement and control of public discourse. In a world where student attention is a deeply valuable commodity, disruption of corporate and technocratic access to children’s minds is both a necessary and dangerous dissonance for a teacher to create. Yet these habits of listening to other perspectives and skills of reconciling them are necessary habits of democracy. They are created by skilled teachers who are able to take professional risks in the classroom, knowing they have the ability to provide effective guardrails for their students, and the students are able to trust their teachers enough to engage freely in the process of experiencing and resolving these tensions.

“We Must Generate a Sense of Personal Voice and Agency”

Teaching ELA—helping students communicate effectively and receive communication effectively—is a core subject in American High School and is frequently the last (and sometimes first) place where students truly are placed in immediate company with a representative sample of their peers. This democratic experience is facilitated by the teacher whose role is to perceive and respond to the expressed needs of students and create an atmosphere of trust (Noddings 2012). This atmosphere of personal trust is created through the experiences of benevolence, competence, reliability, honesty, and openness, according to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000).

English curriculum in Oklahoma requires communication competencies from teachers, as it does from students as well. Peer to peer student trust thrives when students establish trust with teachers so they may develop further trust with their peers in the classroom, with the teacher arbitrating the social structure and ruleset. In this atmosphere of trust and intellectual safety, students feel more able to take intellectual risks and expand their zone of proximal development (Eun 2017).

Students in the Oklahoma ELA curriculum are urged to respond to texts and make connections from their own experiences, meaning they must feel safe enough to share and understand theirs and others' experiences. This work is complex, and not typically part of the testing standards to which most curriculum is geared. Instead, these skills of expressing the self and using the civic voice in the world is a part of a democratic standard expected from active citizens in decision-making capacity. Students who are empowered have choice. They develop effective choice through practice—being offered choices and allowed to develop preferences and rationales, after having those skills modeled for them by trusted others. To that end, reading choice in classrooms and schools is a key tactic in developing intellectual and civic self-determination.

As the mechanisms of access to literature, ELA teachers and the tools of their trade have come under significant scrutiny. From book challenges and bans, to the heavy censure of research tools, the ELA classroom's operations have seen increased suspicion. The ELA curriculum has been at odds with the now-national mandate to erase principles and the words of diversity, equity, and inclusion from curriculums and texts from early childhood through university classes. ELA teachers run particularly afoul of this agenda when making plural and representative texts available to their students. When upper-grade students engage with reading on a regular basis, the core of engagement with reading involves student choice, "Selecting one's preferred reading material encourages engagement in the materials and enables the reader to attain a higher level of understanding of the written word," (Dougherty et al. 2022, p.21). The researchers also found student choice led to a greater absorption of the material and more effective trust-based relationships in the classroom. Having a teacher walk students through decrypting and treating their preferred texts as worthy of scrutiny is an empowering and resilience-building tactic.

These tools of choice and curiosity about the lived experience of others are crucial elements in building the exercise of student voice into the classroom. It also allows authentic trust-based relationships between teacher and students and between students themselves to form a resilient, academically curious community. For high schoolers, too often the high school English classroom is the last opportunity to exercise their candid face-to-face democratic voices with dissimilar peers.

Technocratic and capitalistic structures within democracy serve to centralize schooling away from the 'why' and instead focuses teacher attention on the 'how' of education—a transformation from reasoning and criticality to technological task execution. Additional process and task-driven curriculum and mandates from industry partners push agendas and curriculum geared toward technicalization—the process through which technique displaces purpose and centers itself as the core of the curriculum (Kincheloe, 2011). However, ELA can address both aims of industry and meaning-making simultaneously. Students in ELA classrooms learn the skills of communication as well as the purpose of the authors and themselves in writing—and make connections between patterns of the past to current situations. The authentic voice of

communicating truths about the self is honed after learning to grapple with those voices in others, across difference, with the ability to focus on those stories and decrypt them with some depth. Then students can work to craft their own narratives with similar fidelity, using the tools of the writer and adapting their own in due course, as voice-building exercises.

“We Must Strengthen our Capacity to Create Community.”

Public discourse tends to bemoan the death of reading and writing in the technologically saturated spaces we inhabit, but the reality is we are conducting reading and writing activities on technology every day. We are “reading” cultural texts and the writing of social media, responding to them in kind, and having collaborative conversations where we “piggyback” or respond to memetic elements on TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Bluesky, and other platforms. We simply inhabit plural cultures, subcultures and valences of power virtually instead of physically. As Ong put it during the nascence of the internet, “far from being destroyed by electronics, orality and literacy interlace in electronic communication more complexly than ever before—so much so that we have not yet developed adequate concepts and terms to describe the interlacing,” (Ong, 2002).

An issue with teaching in a fractured media environment is that many of our young people—and adults—do not have the skills to navigate long-form narratives or put emergent incidents into appropriate contexts with research or history, largely because classroom ELA teaching has become more focused on delivering test results that cater to excerpted material versus examining the entirety of an argument (Anagnostopoulos, 2005). Students are working instead on a survival level of patterning, and their lack of academic and structural knowledge makes them manipulable by public actors to achieve a separate agenda. In the hands of skills-based versus deep understanding models, education can render students as cogs in a Fritz Lang inspired mechanism, “We often look at schooling as a force which frees us from ignorance, helps us envision alternatives, gives us choice in the direction of our lives, and opens the doors of opportunity. Viewed in the context of ‘personality adjustment’ school serves not as a force for freedom but as a vehicle of constraint,” (Kincheloe 2011, p.4). The saturation of the classroom and school environment by personal devices and the constant permeability of adolescent and child attention is a vulnerability to those agendas of constraint.

ELA classrooms, however, are spaces in which teachers have the power of story, of communication competencies, and of community building—all of which are democratizing and empowering activities. Populist political discourse is a significant characteristic in the current neoliberal-administered public sphere, which is characterized by the idea that dissonant voices are not only differing, but *illegitimate*. ELA classrooms and the reading practices championed by Rudine Sims Bishop of texts as “mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors,” (Bishop 1990) allow and promote a legitimization of many differing voices, in addition to practices of collaboration and feedback within reciprocally trusting spaces. As has been clearly documented, mutual and reciprocal trust is essential in any functional community, especially learning communities (Sopko & LaRocco, 2018). These practices are inherently democratizing and build tolerance and potentially mutual respect between students as a means of basic function within a classroom.

ELA teachers have explicit and implicit burdens within their specialty and grade band which may complicate these tasks. ELA at the secondary level is partly a deliverable-oriented skills class, but significant portions of the curriculum lies in decryption of texts, meaning-making, self-expression, and community engagement in the writing process. Best practices for

ELA teachers require teaching texts that speak to student experiences of all kinds to support reading competencies and mutual engagement as a trusting community across differences, shared goals, and parallel experiences—the same competencies that comprise successful democratic engagement for an electorate. In Oklahoma schools, this work of democracy comes with risks that ELA teachers must navigate in order to be successful professional and community leaders within their classrooms.

Oklahoma ELA Teachers’ Awareness of Personal and Professional Risk

Oklahoma ELA teachers have been subjected to systemic and polemicized threat for performing best practices of their discipline in the classroom by weaponized virtual communities and the state officer in aegis over education. Over the past several years, individual teachers in the state have been censured for sharing a public library link with students, bringing vetted drag performers to read to children, having LGBTQIA+ identities or pastimes outside education, engaging positively with atheist organizations, and sharing personal commentary about the death of a political activist outside educational spaces—this censure was conducted by the then-head of the State Department of Education, Ryan Walters, who resigned in 2025. Teachers transferring to Oklahoma with out-of-state accreditation from California or New York have been required to take a formative ‘assessment’ with factual inaccuracies and misspellings issued by Prager University seemingly geared to create an understanding of safe versus problematized rhetoric for public life as teachers. Walters, after each of these incidents, engaged with social media and used the office of the State Department of Education to issue polemicized statements on legacy and state media.

Several educators such as Summer Boismier, Tyler Wrynn, and principal Dr. Shane Murnan have also been doxxed—targeted for harassment, reported to online lists, targeted for in-person retribution, and touted as threats by ideologues with reach within their communities by several online groups, primarily Libs of TikTok. The leader of LoTT, Chaya Raichik—a former resident and real estate agent in Brooklyn, New York, was subsequently appointed by Walters to the Oklahoma Library Media Advisory Committee.

Although she had to leave Oklahoma due to direct, physical threats to her and her family, Boismier was further targeted by Walters when he attempted to rescind her teaching certificate. Despite a judge recommending against revocation, the Oklahoma State Department of Education under Ryan Walters ultimately rescinded her teaching certificate after years of persistent administrative harassment (Wallis, 2024). Her students still talk about her as a remarkable teacher, and several parents of her former students remain furious she was forced to leave.

Dr. Murnan was forced to resign by his district. Although district administration resisted official state pressure from Walters, the ostensibly grassroots threats from online activists emboldened and directed by LoTT was directed at students and school sites, as district superintendent Brayden Savage disclosed to state news organization NonDoc.

“I’m not caving to Ryan Walters, but I have to ultimately keep the students and the staff of this school safe. The hate has not stopped. To bring Shane back to the building is a risk to safety for all,” Savage said. “I cannot be totally sure that one of those crazies would not show up to ‘cleanse the building,’ which is something that I’ve seen over and over again and something that we’ve heard over and over again.” (Brinkman, 2024).

The concern about children’s mental health and the ramifications of removing teachers who are visible supports and allies of nonconforming student populations is significant. It also

speaks directly to the core professional dissonance for teachers, particularly ELA teachers who are immediate bystanders to students' internal reflection and maturation processes. Teachers—especially those in poorly-compensated states such as Oklahoma where teacher pay regularly hovers near the lower 10% of the country (National Education Association, 2026), have significant personal investment in teaching as an identity and in the well-being of their students as a professional duty of care, (Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020). The experience of caregiving identity is a component of choosing the profession of teaching.

Although teachers contend daily with the realities of political violence in terms of school shootings and other forms of violence, a far greater threat to educator mental health and career tenacity than an abstract exterior threat to students is the potential for a student's preventable life-threatening despair. Data show that the presence of even one caring adult in a child or adolescent's life can help them avoid despair and potential self-harm, especially when combined with a school culture of caring teens who recognize and refer their colleague (Joshi et al., 2015) to intervention. This hopeful data indicates the transformative power of school culture and places significant pressure on teachers. Wrynn was an eighth-grade ELA teacher whose classroom was a haven to various students including Nex Benedict. Wrynn was forced to resign after being targeted by Libs of TikTok in 2022 for his personal online content expressing support for students identifying as LGBTQIA2S+.

Benedict, a nonbinary student, died after ongoing bullying resulted in a confrontation at Owasso High School. After prolonged bullying in the district, a culminating altercation occurred in a bathroom where Benedict lost consciousness, was revived, and was later suspended. On the day of the incident at Owasso High School, Benedict's guardian was persuaded not to file a police report by the campus resource officer as seen on body cam footage (KOCO 5 News, 2024). After Benedict was suspended, they returned home and overdosed—their death the next day was ruled suicide by the Oklahoma Medical Examiner on March 13th 2024 (Mandler, 2024).

Murnan's situation encapsulates the position of the ELA teacher who is caught in between curating safety from scrutiny versus fidelity to best professional practice, potential threats to student mental health, and their right to self-expression outside and inside the classroom. ELA teaching exposes good teachers and effective purpose-driven classrooms to student thinking, because student thinking is the actual goal of ELA disciplines—not technologization. It is one of the few academic spaces in high school where the fidelity to students' purpose and identities is inherently centered and supported. The writing process, when conducted with efficacy and fidelity, allows students to express their understandings and inner landscape, including potential risks they experience. As mandatory reporters, teachers do have a team to rely on and do so through reporting and collaboration with staff and outside agencies—but not all teachers have the knowledge and training to effectively handle those situations and not all school communities are effective at navigating student concerns.

Lately, in states like Oklahoma, the nature of teachers' qualifications has become an additional valence of differentiation. Oklahoma's 2022 Senate Bill SB1119 removed the 270-hour cap for non-certified instructors to teach full time classes in public schools outside Special Education, Early Childhood and Kindergarten. There was an attempt to introduce a bill enabling adjuncts to teach Early childhood programs during the 2025 legislative session which failed. Standard teaching certificates require a lengthy university training process in pedagogy, content area, dispositions, and circumstances of classrooms. Alternative certification requires behavior management and other classroom instruction in addition to a content-area degree which may or may not involve educational structures. According to the Oklahoma Office of Educational

Quality and Accountability in their March 2026 report, fewer than 90% of teachers in Oklahoma were traditionally trained and certified, almost eight percent of certified staff were alternatively certified, and almost five percent were emergency certified (OEQA, 2026). Adjuncts are not required to have any education beyond high school and are ideally given support by their districts and colleagues—but this support is not a mandatory element of the district in which they serve. According to the OEQA’s March 2026 report, 453 Oklahoman adjunct teachers taught approximately 27,000 students, mostly in elementary and middle school settings when formative inquiry, academic skills, and learning habits are established.

Oklahoma ELA Teachers’ Role in the Post-Democratic structure

The post-democratic model suggests the structures of democracy are present but ineffective, and that the resulting lack of efficacy is purposeful. In the current neoliberal landscape, the structured depublicization of state endeavors such as education, justice, incarceration, healthcare, and even taxation have been calculated to redirect public monies to private corporations—essentially providing for the welfare of private stockholders over public stakeholders. These efforts do not spring whole from the ether but are frequently tested in potentially manipulable spaces such as Oklahoma before launch on a broader scale. In terms of education, deprofessionalization and privatization efforts normalized in Oklahoma are now being seen nationally. Titular deprofessionalization of teaching and deconstruction of the US Department of Education are an inevitable step in the post-democratic state. Oklahoma and similar southern states have been receiving the leading edge of such strategy, and ELA teachers in Oklahoma have been on the front lines of an ideological war for some time. In addition to their professional capacities and identities, teachers are whole people, and the scrutiny and surveillance they are under regarding cultural and social norms they may not share has been weaponized against their own professional and personal safety.

Between doxxing, direct partisan targeting by the state Department of Education, and various social and physical threats, Oklahoma ELA teachers are asked to put themselves in harm’s way with every professional decision. They must also simultaneously be aware of and navigate risks to their students presented by intellectual passivity and the lack of inquiry, critical thinking, and dissonance with sophistic norms. Those potentially preventable harms are haunting and indelible from secondary teaching experiences despite all external threats to the classroom. However, there are teachers who respond with nuanced and fluid navigation of their internal and external realities, and persist in doing the curious work of teaching while constructing resilient structures in themselves and in their classroom communities. Those resilient teachers are the population most likely to generate best practices for their colleagues in the ongoing educational mission of information, skills, and care, and who present the best hope for retaining and reforming educational efficacy in the profession. These teachers are also most at risk of having their profession weaponized against them.

Standing in the Gap of Hope

According to Crouch, “the tension between the egalitarian demands of democracy and the inequalities that result from capitalism can never be resolved but there can be more or less constructive compromises around it,” (Crouch, 2004, p. 79). Public education is a public good, executed by the state for the benefit of the state, with the citizenry being of benefit to the state, and the state ultimately existing in service to the citizenry. Although this structure is somewhat

more dubiously executed of late with the impact of massive wealth on egalitarian public structures such as court systems, its moral appeal remains consistent with precedent (Crouch, 2004). Crouch goes on to explain the nature of business hegemony and its extending influence into the public sector, particularly with respect to education. If free markets comprise a test of ‘fitness,’ and successful corporations are tested by their ability to gather and use knowledge; then the surviving, largest corporations are fit by dint of displaying superior knowledge. The business community’s assertion is that corporate influence in education is a beneficial public use of knowledge for the betterment of the country through developing its economy with a more knowledgeable workforce (Crouch 2004).

However, this reasoning has significant faults which are visible in the rise and fall of stock markets, companies, hedge fund destruction of thriving businesses, and layoffs of highly qualified workers as a result of global economic tensions. According to Palmer, “millions of us have lost jobs and homes because of high-level economic and political machinations that created great wealth for a few and devastation for the many,” (Palmer p. 93, 2011). We are called upon to question the mechanisms that yield these results as inadequate to the purposes of democratic structures. In a democracy, financial tragedies happen to us all—there is no ‘them.’ But not all workers receive golden parachutes, and often the corporate architects of failure go on to fail again at workers’ expense.

The democratizing structures in education focus on the perspectives of every student, family, and experience as adding nuance and information that improves decision-making as a whole. As our governmental structure has moved from exclusive benefits to elites like Jefferson, Washington, and Franklin to benefit all people in the country, anti-democratic forces have focused on redefining a politics of exclusion (Crouch 2026). As social structures, free markets, and hierarchical structures have been implicitly focused on the financial welfare of elites since the founders of Lloyd’s met in a coffee house in 1688; it is critical to clarify that social safety nets for elites have become a significant portion of governmental work—as they simultaneously erode decades-old safety nets supporting other groups and classes of citizens.

Teachers, particularly ELA teachers, are called upon to do the work of hope...as Palmer calls it, “this is the place called human history where we must stand and act with hope even though neither we nor any of our descendants will see the gap permanently closed,” (Palmer p. 191, 2011). Palmer’s codification of the habits of the heart in democracy was a call to connect de Tocqueville and Jefferson’s answer to the ‘best form of government’ to the form of government our shared culture is responding to, preparing for, and preserving in the habits it curates in students and educators at all levels. Regardless of the nature of the expertise teachers share, the way in which school is conducted also has impact—it forms the ‘hidden’ curriculum of democratization or de-democratization.

An autocracy demands that citizens become objects of a subject ruling class—that they keep their heads down, their mouths shut, and repeat the party line whether it is understood or believed (Palmer, 2011). Palmer also pointed out that the habits of democracy are not taught in all subjects—in fact they are primarily reserved for the humanities, in which the subject matter is more ephemeral than just the nuts and bolts of grammar. The ELA teacher has to teach stories as important building blocks of self, selves as important building blocks of citizens, citizens as important building blocks of community, and communities as the foundation of democracy. The humanities and the work of story build the skills and capacity of the democratic habits of the heart that perform the title of Palmer’s book, “Healing the Heart of Democracy.” If the school is the church of reason, then de Tocqueville’s habits, along with curriculum and pedagogy, must

form its liturgy. ELA teachers are called upon not only to teach democracy, but teach democratically—enact the practice and use of the habits of the heart in classrooms so the way of acting, listening, thinking, reading and writing as the authentic self becomes acting democratically.

References

- Alikhani, B. (2017). Post-democracy or processes of de-democratization? United States case study. *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung*, 42(4), 189–206.
- Anagnostopoulos, D. (2005). Testing, tests, and classroom texts. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 37(1), 35–63.
- Bellah, R. N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W. M., Swidler, A., & Tipton, S. M. (2007). *Habits of the heart, with a new preface: Individualism and commitment in American life*. Univ of California Press.
- Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, 6(3), ix–xi.
- Brinkman, B. (2024, February 2). “Forced” out after drag drama, Shane Murnan rejects Western Heights’ confidentiality agreement. *NonDoc*. <https://nondoc.com/2024/02/02/shane-murnan-resignation-from-western-heights-drag-drama/>
- Craiutu, A., & Jennings, J. (2004). The third democracy: Tocqueville’s views of America after 1840. *American Political Science Review*, 98(3), 391–404. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055404001236>
- Crouch, C. (2000). *Coping with post-democracy* (Fabian Ideas No. 598). Fabian Society.
- Crouch, C. (2004). *Post-democracy*. Polity Press.
- Crouch, C. (2026). *Exclusion and the new politics of hatred*. Polity Press.
- de Tocqueville, A. (2003). *Democracy in America* (G. E. Bevan, Trans.). Penguin Books. (Original work published 1835–1840)
- Dewey, J. (1986). Experience and education. *The Educational Forum*, 50(3), 241–252.
- Dougherty, C. N., Parker, M., Nickson, L., & Creggan, C. (2022). The impact of student choice on reading. *English in Texas*, 52(1), 20–24.
- Eun, B. (2019). The zone of proximal development as an overarching concept: A framework for synthesizing Vygotsky’s theories. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 51(1), 18–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2017.1421941>
- Gallagher, K. (2015). *In the best interest of students: Staying true to what works in the ELA classroom*. Stenhouse Publishers.
- Jefferson, T. (1786, August 13). Letter to George Wythe. In J. P. Boyd (Ed.), *The papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Vol. 10, pp. 243–245). Princeton University Press.
- Jefferson, T. (1818). *Report of the commissioners for the University of Virginia*. Founders Online, National Archives.
- Joshi, S. V., Hartley, S. N., Kessler, M., & Barstead, M. (2015). School-based suicide prevention: Content, process, and the role of trusted adults and peers. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics*, 24(2), 353–370. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chc.2014.12.003>
- Kincheloe, J. L. (2011). Exposing the technocratic perversion of education: The death of the democratic philosophy of schooling. In S. R. Steinberg & A. M. A. Freire (Eds.), *Key works in critical pedagogy* (pp. 1–19). SensePublishers.

- KOCO 5 News. (2024, February 24). *Owasso police release body camera video, surveillance footage and 911 calls in Nex Benedict case* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVcneU4IJT0>
- Lavy, S., & Naama-Ghanayim, E. (2020). Why care about caring? Linking teachers' caring and sense of meaning at work with students' self-esteem, well-being, and school engagement. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 91, Article 103046. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103046>
- Mandler, C. (2024, March 15). What happened to Nex Benedict? *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/2024/03/15/1238780699/nex-benedict-nonbinary-oklahoma-death-bullying>
- National Education Association. (2026). *2024-2025 teacher salary benchmark report*. <https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2026-04/2024-2025-teacher-salary-benchmark-report-final-new.pdf>
- Noddings, N. (2012). The caring relation in teaching. *Oxford Review of Education*, 38(6), 771–781. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2012.745047>
- Office of Educational Quality and Accountability. (2026, March 4). Understanding Oklahoma's teacher workforce: Entry pathways and workforce trends. Oklahoma.gov. <https://oklahoma.gov/oeqa/about-oeqa/newsroom/2026/2026-03-understanding-oklahomas-teacher-workforce.html>
- Ong, W. J. (1979). Literacy and orality in our times. *Profession*, 1–7.
- Ong, W. J. (2002). *Orality and literacy* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Palmer, P. J. (2011). *Healing the heart of democracy: The courage to create a politics worthy of the human spirit*. Jossey-Bass.
- Scherer, J. (1985). Individualism and commitment in American life: An interview with Robert Bellah. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 30, 117–141.
- Sopko, K. M., & LaRocco, D. J. (2018). Leading and growing in a culture of reciprocal trust. *Young Exceptional Children*, 21(2), 63–75. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1096250615621361>
- Styslinger, M. E. (2017). *Workshopping the canon*. National Council of Teachers of English.
- Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, W. K. (2000). A multidisciplinary analysis of the nature, meaning, and measurement of trust. *Review of Educational Research*, 70(4), 547–593. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543070004547>
- Wallis, B. (2024, August 23). Former Norman teacher's battle over banned books isn't over. KGOU. <https://www.kgou.org/education/2024-08-23/from-the-classroom-to-the-courtroom-former-norman-teachers-battle-over-banned-books-isnt-over>
- Warner, J. (2018). *Why they can't write: Killing the five-paragraph essay and other necessities*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Zeithaml, V. A. (1985). The new demographics and market fragmentation. *Journal of Marketing*, 49(3), 64–75. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224298504900306>

Neoliberalism and the Reframing of Public Education: A Historical and Political Analysis

R.L. Booker, Jr., Texas State University

Introduction

In recent years, public education in the United States has faced sustained political and ideological challenges from actors who no longer uniformly regard it as a public good. As early as *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* (1973), the Supreme Court determined that education is not a fundamental right under the Constitution. This position has shaped subsequent policy debates. Contemporary efforts to reform education—often framed in terms of accountability, choice, and efficiency—reflect a broader shift in how public schooling is understood and justified. These developments are not confined to a single political tradition but emerge across partisan lines, signaling a deeper transformation in the role and purpose of public education.

This article argues that neoliberalism has fundamentally reshaped public education by reframing it from a democratic public good to a market-oriented enterprise that privileges individualism, competition, and private-sector influence. Using a historical and political analysis of educational policy developments and scholarly literature, this study examines how neoliberal reforms—including high-stakes testing, school choice initiatives, and the corporatization of schooling—have altered both the structure and purpose of public education. In doing so, it contributes to scholarship on social foundations by demonstrating how these shifts have intensified educational inequities while narrowing the democratic aims historically associated with public schooling.

Neoliberalism

What is neoliberalism? Neoliberalism is an ideology and a set of policies that privilege market strategies over public institutions to address social issues (Kumashiro, 2008). Such policies champion privatizing former public services, deregulating trade, and increasing efficiency while simultaneously reducing wages, deunionizing, and slashing public services

(Martinez & Garcia, 2000; Tabb, 2001). Neoliberalism defends the rights of the individual and uses the ideology of individual choice to promote the idea of meritocracy, “that presumes an even playing field” (Kumashiro, 2008, p.37).

Spires (2025) described neoliberalism as a broad term that encompasses an ideology, an economic theory, a set of discourses, a political position, and a practice. The term is generally associated with the writings of Milton Friedman (1962) and Friedrich Hayek (1944) who were proponents of a puritanical free-market economic approach, privatization of all aspects of human sociality, reduction in the role of government to the barest essentials, emphasis on the individual over collective and community social forms and the use of competition to improve, among other things, education (Brown, 2019).

Harvey (2005) defined neoliberalism as “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (p.2). Neoliberalism reworks liberalism to support global capitalist expansion (Torres, 2002; Sleeter, 2008).

Across the different ways neoliberalism can be defined or described, one consistency is that it is an economic theory that reduces the role of government in favor of private companies and individuals. According to Brown (2017), neoliberal economic theory emphasizes minimizing government's role (i.e., extreme deregulation) to maximize the free market's ability to run its course (Friedman, 1962). The underlying logic of neoliberal economic theory is that market competition should lead to progress and innovation. According to neoliberals, the state should enable, rather than constrain, private-sector influence (Baltodano, 2012). This is the logic, then, of the state actively enabling private-sector influence and competition in public schools (Baltodano, 2012; Brown, 2017, p.185).

Conceptualizing Neoliberalism

In this article, neoliberalism is understood as a multidimensional construct that operates across ideology, policy, and governance. First, as an ideology, neoliberalism emphasizes individual responsibility, market rationality, and the presumed efficiency of competition. Second, as a policy regime, it is reflected in reforms that promote privatization, deregulation, standardization, and accountability measures within public institutions. Third, as a form of governmentality, neoliberalism shapes how individuals and institutions understand their roles, encouraging subjects to view themselves as entrepreneurial actors responsible for their own success or failure. Distinguishing among these dimensions clarifies how neoliberalism simultaneously functions as a set of ideas, a collection of policy tools, and a framework for organizing social life, particularly within public education.

History of Neoliberalism

Steger & Roy (2010) stated that although neoliberalism comes in several varieties, one can find the first systematic formulation of its economic principles in the Mont Pelerin Society. Founded in 1947 by Friedrich August von Hayek, an influential member of the early 20th-century Austrian School of Economics, the society attracted like-minded intellectuals committed to strengthening the principles and practice of a ‘free society’ by studying the workings and virtues of market-oriented economic systems. Hayek considered most forms of state intervention in the economy as ominous milestones on the ‘road to serfdom’, leading to new forms of government-engineered despotism.

One difficulty in providing a history of neoliberalism is that it has emerged at different times and in various guises over the last 30 years. Davies and Bansel (2007) identified countries that are only now experiencing the first pressures towards neoliberalism (Chile), while others have adopted it only in part (Sweden). Meanwhile, some have deliberately and thoroughly implemented neoliberal practices and principles over the last 20-30 years (Australia and New Zealand) (p.250). Neoliberalism as a form of governmentality first emerged in the 1970s in response to some of the more radical and progressive positions being taken in education and the media at the time. At this time, democracies were beginning to be seen by some of those in the world of high finance as ungovernable. Research was commissioned to diagnose the problems and seek solutions. The Report on Governability by Crozier et al. (1975) argued that democratic citizens must be made both more governable and more able to serve capital (Davies & Bansel, 2007).

Those who advocate neoliberalism oppose Keynesian economics. Keynes, in particular, advocated massive government spending during an economic crisis to create new jobs and boost consumer spending. The political applications of Keynesian ideas inspired what some economists called the golden age of controlled capitalism, which lasted roughly from 1945 to 1975. The American New Deal and Great Society programs spearheaded by FDR and President Lyndon Johnson, the much-admired model of Swedish social democracy, and the British version of welfarism launched in 1945, reflected a broad political consensus among Western nations that led some pundits to proclaim the “end of ideology.” (Steger & Roy, 2010, p.4).

When the Keynesian economic system of the 1960s and 70s was seen to be working well, Western governments invested in social institutions that would improve human capital, such as education and health. Education was one of the central means by which the quality of capital and labor was to be improved. The generous funding of educational institutions during this period was based on the belief that knowledge and education were valuable to the state and society for defense and for ensuring that all members of society could participate and contribute. (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p.254).

Due to the economic malaise of the 1970s, the apparent failure of Keynesian economics was presented as justification for widespread, radical changes. Davies & Bansel(2007) argued elsewhere:

The inflationary crisis was an opportunity for classical liberal theorists, most influentially Hayek and Friedman, to regain dominance. In the US, it gave Carter (and, later, Reagan) had the opportunity to (re)vitalize the discourses of (neo)liberal economics (Tabb, 1980). In this new order, big business once again gained the upper hand, workers' wages and conditions were reined in, and the global market dominated government decision-making (Davies et al., 2006) (p.250).

The Move Towards Neoliberalism

Neoliberal policy reforms in education have taken shape through a combination of legislative mandates, accountability systems, and market-oriented restructuring. Within this policy landscape, reforms such as school choice initiatives, charter schools, and high-stakes testing have challenged the legitimacy of public schooling by reframing it in terms of competition, efficiency, and individual responsibility (Chapman, 2018; Lipman, 2005; O'Neal & Bridgeforth, 2025; Picower, 2011). Rather than addressing structural inequities, these policies often shift responsibility onto students, teachers, and families through accountability mechanisms that emphasize performance metrics over systemic conditions (Ayers, Dohrn, & Ayers, 2001; Hall & Pulsford, 2019; Hursh, 2007; O'Neal & Bridgeforth, 2025).

Central to these reforms is the expansion of high-stakes standardized testing as a mechanism for evaluating students, teachers, and schools. Proponents argue that such measures provide accountability and transparency within public education systems. However, critics have demonstrated that these policies frequently narrow curricular focus, constrain teacher autonomy, and reinforce existing inequalities by disproportionately penalizing under-resourced schools (Au, 2016; Lipman, 2011; Lipman, 2013). In this way, testing regimes operate not only as assessment tools but also as instruments of policy enforcement, aligning educational practices with broader market-based logics.

The growth of school choice policies, particularly charter schools and voucher programs, illustrates the shift toward market-oriented approaches. These reforms are often justified as expanding opportunities for families dissatisfied with traditional public schools. Empirical findings on their effectiveness, however, remain mixed. While some charter schools have

demonstrated improved outcomes in specific contexts, broader analyses indicate that many perform comparably to, or in some cases worse than, their public school counterparts (CREDO, 2013; Horn, 2014). These inconsistencies underscore the need to evaluate such policies not only in terms of access, but also in terms of equity and long-term outcomes.

Federal policy interventions have played a significant role in advancing neoliberal reforms. The *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) and the *Race to the Top* (RTT) initiative exemplify how accountability systems and conditional funding structures incentivized states to adopt standardized testing regimes and curriculum alignment. These policies tied financial support to measurable performance outcomes, effectively compelling schools and districts to conform to externally defined benchmarks. As a result, authority over curriculum and instructional practices has increasingly shifted away from local educators toward state agencies, private organizations, and testing corporations (Au, 2016; Horn, 2014; Mallinson & Lovell, 2022; Ydsen & Dunn, 2022).

Taken together, these developments reflect a broader transformation in the governance of public education, where market principles increasingly structure policy decisions and institutional practices. While framed as mechanisms for improving quality and expanding opportunity, neoliberal reforms often reconfigure educational systems in ways that prioritize competition and efficiency over democratic participation and equity. This shift illustrates how neoliberalism operates not only through discrete policies but through a redefinition of what public education is and what it is intended to achieve.

Impact on Education and Schools

Neoliberalism has not only reshaped educational policy but has also reconfigured the purposes of schooling and the forms of subjectivity that education seeks to produce. Within this framework, individuals are increasingly understood as entrepreneurial actors responsible for managing their own success in competitive environments. As Davies and Bansel (2007) suggested, neoliberal governance encourages the production of “responsibilized” (p.248) subjects who are expected to navigate social and economic conditions through individual effort rather than collective support. Schools and universities, in this context, become central sites for cultivating these dispositions, aligning educational practices with broader economic priorities.

This shift corresponded with a broader transformation from what has been described as the “social state” to the “enabling state,” (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p.251) in which responsibility for social well-being is redistributed from public institutions to individuals. Rather than ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities, the state increasingly positions itself as a facilitator of individual advancement, expecting students, families, educators, and institutions to assume responsibility for educational outcomes. Within education, this transformation manifests

in policies that emphasize accountability, performance, and self-regulation as core indicators of success.

The competitive logics embedded in neoliberal reform further shape how schools are evaluated and how resources are distributed. As schools compete for funding, enrollment, and performance rankings, inequalities between institutions are often intensified. Research suggests that such competition disproportionately advantages schools with greater access to social and economic capital, while under-resourced schools face increased pressure to meet standardized benchmarks with fewer supports (Brown, 2017; Oliver, 2022). In this environment, the success of some schools is frequently tied to the structural disadvantage of others, raising important questions about the compatibility of market competition with educational equity.

Empirical research has also called into question the broader effectiveness of neoliberal reforms in improving educational outcomes. While policies such as high-stakes testing and accountability systems are intended to raise achievement, evidence suggests that they have not consistently produced improvements in overall test scores or reduced longstanding disparities related to race and class (Au, 2016; National Research Council, 2011). Scholars such as Ladson-Billings (2006) argued that persistent inequities in educational outcomes are rooted in structural and historical conditions rather than individual performance, challenging narratives that attribute disparities primarily to student effort or school quality.

In addition to shaping outcomes, neoliberal policies influence the content and structure of curriculum and instruction. The expansion of standardized testing has been accompanied by the increased use of prescribed curricula aligned with state standards and accountability measures. In many cases, these curricula limit teacher autonomy and constrain opportunities for critical or contextually responsive pedagogy, particularly in schools serving historically marginalized communities (Horn, 2014; Hoyt et al., 2022; Narayanan et al., 2014; Sleeter, 2008). Such developments raise concerns about the narrowing of educational experiences and the diminished capacity of schools to engage students in broader social, historical, and democratic inquiry.

The regulation of curriculum also extends into broader political debates over what knowledge is considered legitimate or appropriate for schools. Recent policy efforts aimed at restricting the teaching of topics related to race, inequality, and historical injustice illustrate how educational content can become a site of political contestation. These interventions reflect ongoing struggles over national identity, historical interpretation, and the role of education in fostering critical engagement with social issues.

Taken together, these developments suggest that neoliberalism operates not only through policy mechanisms but also through the redefinition of educational purposes and practices. By prioritizing individual responsibility, competition, and market-based accountability, neoliberal reforms reshape how success is defined within education and who is held accountable for achieving it. In doing so, they raise significant questions about the capacity of public education to fulfill its democratic role in promoting equity, critical engagement, and collective well-being.

Charter Schools, Vouchers, and Choice

One of the central expressions of neoliberal reform in education is the expansion of school choice policies, including charter schools and voucher programs. These initiatives are often framed as mechanisms for increasing educational opportunity, particularly for families dissatisfied with traditional public schools. In policy discourse, choice is positioned as a means of fostering competition, improving school performance, and empowering parents to select educational environments that align with their children's needs (Boyd, 2007; Hall & Pulsford, 2019; Lakes & Carter, 2011; O'Neal & Bridgeforth, 2025; Sleeter, 2008; Stanford, 2023).

Charter schools, in particular, have been described as operating at the boundary between public and private education, combining public funding with varying degrees of private management and autonomy (Au, 2016; Boyd, 2007). Their rapid expansion reflects broader efforts to introduce market dynamics into public education systems. While charter schools are often promoted as innovative alternatives to traditional public schools, research on their effectiveness presents a complex picture. Some studies indicate improved outcomes in specific contexts, particularly in urban settings, while others find no significant differences—or even negative outcomes—when compared to district schools, not to mention the financial mismanagement of some of the largest charter school districts in Oklahoma (EPIC) and Texas (IDEA) (CREDO, 2013; Horn, 2014; Martinez-Keel, 2025; Miron et al., 2010; Oklahoma Statewide Charter School Board (OSCSB), 2026; Ravitch, 2024). These mixed findings highlight the importance of evaluating charter schools not only in terms of access and choice, but also in relation to equity, accountability, and long-term sustainability.

Voucher programs similarly reflect neoliberal priorities by redirecting public funds toward private educational options. Advocates argue that vouchers provide critical opportunities for students in underperforming schools to access higher-quality education. However, critics contend that such programs may contribute to the erosion of public school systems by diverting resources away from already underfunded institutions, while disproportionately benefiting families with greater access to information and mobility (Harvey, 2005; Sleeter, 2008). In this context, the expansion of vouchers raises important questions about the role of public funding, the distribution of educational opportunity, and the long-term viability of public education as a collective institution.

The growing influence of philanthropic organizations, policy entrepreneurs, and corporate actors further reflects the restructuring of educational governance under neoliberalism. Wealthy individuals and foundations have played a significant role in promoting school choice policies and shaping reform agendas at both federal and local levels (Au & Lubienski, 2016; Barkan, 2011). While such involvement is often justified as a means of introducing innovation

and resources into public education, it also raises concerns about democratic accountability and the concentration of decision-making power in unelected entities (Ravitch, 2013).

Importantly, support for school choice policies is not limited to policymakers or private actors. In some historically underserved communities, these reforms are viewed as offering potential solutions to longstanding inequalities in educational access and quality (Sleeter, 2008). However, over time, evidence suggests that market-based reforms tend to reproduce or exacerbate existing disparities, as competition for resources and students benefits schools and communities with greater social and economic capital (Harvey, 2005).

Taken together, charter schools, voucher programs, and related choice initiatives illustrate how neoliberal reforms reshape public education by prioritizing market mechanisms over collective provision. Although framed as expanding opportunity and improving quality, these policies often reconfigure education as a competitive marketplace, raising critical questions about equity, access, and the democratic purposes of schooling.

Teacher Preparation Programs

The influence of neoliberalism extends beyond K–12 schooling into the structure and purpose of teacher preparation programs themselves. As broader educational reforms increasingly emphasize accountability, efficiency, and measurable outcomes, teacher education has come under intensified scrutiny regarding its effectiveness and relevance. Critiques from both within and outside the field often focus on issues such as perceived disconnections from classroom practice, lack of curricular coherence, and insufficient quality control (Levine, 2006; Sleeter, 2008). While these critiques are frequently framed as efforts to strengthen teacher preparation, they are also embedded within larger political and economic shifts that seek to redefine teaching as a technical rather than professional practice.

Within a neoliberal policy context, teaching is increasingly positioned as a form of labor that can be standardized, measured, and optimized according to market principles. This shift is reflected in efforts to redefine teacher quality in terms of testable content knowledge and student performance outcomes, rather than professional judgment, pedagogical expertise, or commitments to equity (Sleeter, 2008). As a result, teacher preparation programs face pressure to align their curricula with state standards, accountability systems, and external assessments, often narrowing the scope of what constitutes effective teaching.

Alternative certification pathways provide a clear example of this transformation. Programs such as Teach For America (TFA) have emerged as influential actors in the teacher labor market, promoting models of teacher recruitment and preparation that prioritize efficiency and rapid classroom entry (Gale de Saxe et al., 2020; Horn, 2014). While such programs are often justified as responses to teacher shortages—particularly in high-need schools, they also challenge the centrality of university-based teacher education by suggesting that extensive

pedagogical training is not necessary for effective teaching (Horn, 2014; Sommer, 2014). In doing so, they contribute to the broader deprofessionalization of teaching by positioning it as a short-term service activity rather than a sustained professional commitment.

Neoliberal pressures have also shaped how teacher education programs conceptualize diversity, equity, and community engagement. For example, Perkins (2025) alludes to initiatives such as *Grow Your Own* (GYO) programs, which have been promoted as strategies for recruiting teachers from local and historically underrepresented communities. Although such programs hold potential to increase representation and strengthen connections between schools and communities, research suggests that their impact may be constrained when they operate within policy environments that prioritize standardized outcomes and market-driven efficiency over culturally responsive and socially grounded approaches to teaching.

These developments reflect a broader restructuring of teacher education in which programs are increasingly expected to produce educators who can operate effectively within highly regulated, performance-oriented systems. In this context, teacher candidates are often prepared to implement prescribed curricula, meet standardized benchmarks, and respond to accountability pressures, rather than to engage critically with educational inequities or contribute to the democratic aims of schooling.

Taken together, the transformation of teacher preparation programs under neoliberalism highlights the extent to which market-based reforms reshape not only educational policy but also the formation of educators themselves. These shifts raise significant questions about the future of teaching as a profession and about the capacity of teacher education programs to prepare educators who can advance equity, exercise professional judgment, and support the democratic purposes of public education.

Resistance and Counter Movements

Whereas this pressure to conform to neoliberal policies, teachers are clearly creating identities of resistance to neoliberal reforms in the United States and globally (Au, 2016; Brown, 2017; Costigan, 2013; Dovemark, 2010; Duarte & Brewer, 2022; Huff, 2013; Picower, 2011; Vassallo, 2013; Webb et al., 2009), many scholars also note teachers' internal dissonance as they attempt to teach for social justice or equity within a consistently more inequitable, commodified and marketized environment. Webb et al. (2009) argue that some teachers, to resist what they deem the "neoliberal panopticon" (Brown, 2017, p.188), engage in certain kinds of fabrications or performative pedagogies that allow them to operate using two types of scripts – one to meet standards when supervised and another to resist neoliberal reforms. While not ideal, they state, the kind of ideological schizophrenia that results is a necessary alternative to complacency, given the reality.

In the Picower (2011) study, participants found themselves in environments characterized by fear, compliance, and pressure to conform; the teachers employed four strategies to implement their critical pedagogy. First, they worked collectively to build a haven that protected their social justice pedagogy by participating in the Critical Inquiry Project (CIP) (The CIP was used to collect data from new teachers in urban schools). The program provided new teachers with a space to develop their curricula and devise strategies to defend themselves against unsupportive colleagues. Second, they camouflaged their social justice pedagogy within their classrooms by integrating it into the mandated curriculum and substituting alternative materials to keep their work under the radar. Third, they gave their students opportunities to become critically aware of larger systems of inequity by teaching them the tools they needed to engage in activism themselves. Fourth, in a few instances, the teachers went public with their work by openly rejecting school policies or speaking out about their pedagogy.

Resistance to these neoliberal policies often aims to challenge these inequalities in the name of social justice. In the test boycotts in the US, teachers, parents, and students have resisted testing policies they feel have damaged their schools and the public education system more generally. Further, the test resistance is fundamentally an assertion of autonomy against state-sanctioned control of education, since the tests have become the lever for imposing free-market reforms on schools and communities (Au, 2016). In addition to resistance to high-stakes testing, there should also be strategies, such as creating critical inquiry projects focused on social justice education, that give them space to transition into the profession while remaining connected to the goals with which they entered (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Picower, 2007). By providing opportunities for teachers to build and sustain safe havens and connect with broader movements for social justice, teacher educators can help our graduates not only survive in the profession but also challenge the larger neoliberal forces waging war for control of public education (Picower, 2011).

Conclusion

Neoliberal reforms in education are often justified on the grounds that competition, accountability, and market responsiveness will improve school quality and better prepare students for participation in a global economy. Proponents of these reforms argue that exposure to competitive environments encourages innovation and fosters individual responsibility (Brown, 2017; Au, 2016). While these claims have shaped policy discourse over the past several decades, the evidence presented in this analysis suggests that such reforms produce uneven outcomes and raise important concerns about equity and the broader purposes of public education (Au, 2016; Lipman, 2011, 2013).

This essay has argued that neoliberalism has reshaped public education by reframing it from a democratic public good into a market-oriented enterprise. Through a historical and political analysis of policy developments and scholarly literature, the study has demonstrated

how reforms centered on privatization, standardization, and accountability have altered not only educational structures, but also the assumptions underlying schooling itself (Harvey, 2005; Sleeter, 2008; Torres, 2002). In particular, these reforms reconfigure relationships between the state, schools, and individuals, shifting responsibility for educational success away from public institutions and toward students, families, and educators (Davies & Bansel, 2007).

This analysis contributes to social foundations scholarship by synthesizing historical and contemporary critiques of neoliberalism to highlight its impact on educational equity, governance, and subject formation. Rather than treating neoliberal reforms as discrete policy initiatives, the article illustrates how they function as part of a broader ideological and institutional transformation that reshapes what education is expected to accomplish and who is held accountable for its outcomes (Brown, 2017; Apple, 2006; Au & Ferrare, 2015). This essay offers a historically grounded synthesis that connects neoliberal policy reforms to transformations in subject formation and democratic purpose within public education. In doing so, it provides a framework for understanding how market-based reforms influence not only policy decisions but also the lived realities of schools, teachers, and students.

The findings also carry important implications for teacher education programs. As these programs operate within increasingly market-driven and accountability-oriented policy environments, they face pressures to prioritize standardization, efficiency, and measurable outcomes over professional judgment, critical inquiry, and commitments to equity (Sleeter, 2008; Horn, 2014). Preparing teachers to navigate these tensions requires a renewed emphasis on the social, historical, and political dimensions of education, as well as support for pedagogical approaches that address inequality and democratic participation (Picower, 2011).

More broadly, the expansion of neoliberal reforms raises significant questions for democratic theory and practice. Public education has historically been understood as a foundational institution for fostering civic participation, collective responsibility, and social cohesion. As market principles increasingly shape educational policy and practice, schools' capacity to serve these functions may be constrained (Giroux, 2014; Ravitch, 2013). This shift suggests the need to reconsider how democratic purposes are defined within contemporary education systems and the extent to which current policy trajectories support or undermine those aims.

Future research should continue to examine the varied and context-specific effects of neoliberal reforms, particularly in relation to race, class, and access to educational opportunity. Evidence suggests that persistent disparities are rooted in structural inequalities rather than individual performance alone, reinforcing the need for analyses that attend to historical and systemic conditions (Ladson-Billings, 2006; O'Neal & Bridgeforth, 2025). By situating neoliberalism within broader historical and political contexts, scholars and practitioners can

better assess its implications and identify alternative approaches that more fully support equity, professional autonomy, and the democratic purposes of public education.

References

- Apple, M. (2000). Away With All Teachers: The Cultural Politics of Home Schooling. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 10 (1), 61-80.
- Au, W. (2016). Social Justice and Resisting Neoliberal Education Reform in the USA. *Forum* 58(3), 315-322. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15730/forum.2016.58.3.315>
- Boyd, W. (2007). The Politics of Privatization in American Education. *Educational Policy*, 21 (1), 7-14. DOI: 10.1177/0895904806297728
- Brown, A. (2017). Biting the hand that feeds you? Teachers engage with an ethnography of neoliberalism in education. *Policy Futures in Education*, 15 (2), 185-201. DOI: 10.1177/1478210316639415
- Chapman, T. (2018). Segregation, Desegregation: Charter School Options as a Return to Separate and Unequal Schools for Urban Families. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 93 (1), 38-51. DOI: 10.1080/0161956X.2017.1403174
- Davies, B. & Bansel, P. (2007). Neoliberalism and education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 20 (3), 247-259.
- Duarte, B. & Brewer, C. (2022). “We’re in compliance.”: Reconciling Teacher’s Work as Resistance to Neoliberal Policies. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 30, 105. <https://doi.org/10.145.07/epaa.30.6173>.
- Friedman, M. (1997). Public Schools: Make Them Private. *Education Economics*, 5(3), 341-344.
- Gale de Saxe, J., Bucknovitz, S. & Mahoney-Mosedale, F. (2020). The Deprofessionalization of Educators: An Intersectional Analysis of Neoliberalism and Education “Reform.” *Education and Urban Society*, 52(1), 51-69. DOI:10.1177/001312451878

6398.

- Giroux, H. (2014). Austerity and the Poison of Neoliberal Miseducation. *symplokē* 22, 1-2, 9-21.
- Hall, R. & Pulsford, M. (2019). Neoliberalism and primary education: Impacts of neoliberal policy on the lived experiences of primary school communities. *Power & Education*, 11(3), 241-251. DOI: 10.1177/17577438119877344
- Harvey, J. (2012). A Drain on Public Schools. *Educational Leadership*, 49–53.
- Horn, B. (2014). Moments or a Movement? Teacher Resistance to Neoliberal Education Reform. *Forum* 56 (2), 277-284.
- Hoyt, K., Hunt, S., & Lovett, M. (2022). Impact of Cultural Responsiveness on Student Achievement in Secondary Schools. *Alabama Journal of Educational Leadership*, 9, 1-12.
- Hursh, D. (2017). The end of public schools? The corporate reform agenda to privatize education. *Policy Futures in Education*, 15 (3), 389–399. DOI:10.1177/1478210317715799
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2022). Is There Still a Public for Public Education? In D. Berliner & C. Hermanns (Eds.), *Public Education: Defending a Cornerstone of American Democracy*. (pp. 226–232). Teachers College Press
- Lakes, R. & Carter, P. (2011). Neoliberalism and Education: An Introduction. *Educational Studies*, 47, 107-110. DOI: 10.1080/00131946.2011.556387
- Legiscan (2025). *Bill Text: TX SB2|2025-2026|89th Legislature|Enrolled|Legiscan*. Legiscan.com. <https://legiscan.com/TX/text/SB2/2025>
- Lipman, P. (2011). Contesting the City: neoliberal urbanism and the cultural politics Of education reform in Chicago. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 32 (2), 217-234.
- Mallinson, D. & Lovell, D. (2022). Race to the top and the diffusion of state education Intervention policy in American States. *Politics & Policy*, 50 (6), 1221-1240.

- Martinez-Keel, N. (2025, June 9). *EPIC Charter School superintendent resigns after major cuts to staff, facilities*. Oklahoma Voice /2025/06/09/epic-charter-school-superintendent-resigns-after-major-cuts-to-staff-facilities.
- Narayanan, M., Shields, A., & Delhagen, T. (2024). Autonomy in the spaces: teacher Autonomy in the spaces: teacher autonomy, scripted lessons, and the changing Role of teachers. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 56 (1), 17-34.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0022020272.2023.2297229>
- Oklahoma Statewide Charter School Board (2026, January 12). *Investigative Report: Leadership Failures, Poor Financial Oversight Led to EPIC's Budget Crisis*. Oklahoma Statewide Charter School Board. oklahoma.gov/scsb/news/news-release-charter-schools-forensic-investigation-report-related.
- Oliver, D. (2022). *Campus Improvement Plan Quality for 6th-8th Grade Texas Middle Schools Rated Overall-F in 2019*. (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Houston).
- O'Neal, D. & Bridgeforth, J. (2025). Reading Between the Lines: Neoliberal Racism and K-12 Education Policymaking. *The Urban Review*. 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-02500756-6>.
- Picower, B. (2011). Resisting Compliance: Learning to Teach for Social Justice in a Neoliberal Context. *Teachers College Record*, 113 (5), 1105-1134.
- Ravitch, D. (2024, March 7). *Scandal in Texas: IDEA Charter Schools Placed Under Conservatorship*. Diane Ravitch's blog. [Dianeravitch.net/2024/03/07/Texas-Idea-charter-schools-placed-under-conservatorship](https://dianeravitch.net/2024/03/07/Texas-Idea-charter-schools-placed-under-conservatorship).
- Sleeter, C. (2008). Equity, democracy, and neoliberal assaults on teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 24, 1947-1957.
- Stanford, L. (2023, February 14). *Ending 'Government-Run Monopoly' on Schools Is Top Priority Top Priority for Rep. Virginia Foxx*. Education Week.
<https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/ending-government-run-monopoly-on-schools-is-top-priority-for-rep-virginia-foxx/2023/02>
- Steger, M. & Roy, R. (2010). *What's 'neo' about liberalism? Neoliberalism: A very short*

Introduction. Oxford University Press.

Ydsen, C. & Dorn, S. (2022). The No Child Left Behind Act in the Global Architecture of Educational Accountability. *History of Education Quarterly*, 62, 268-290.
doi:10.1017/heq. 2022.11

Pragmatism and Radical Empiricism in Philosophy and Education

David Snelgrove, Oklahoma State University

Abstract

This paper examines the relationships between the scientific and mathematical logic of C. S. Peirce and the psychological, theosophical, and empirical philosophy of William James. It focuses first on the early development, and the principles of Pragmatism in the work of Peirce and James the place of Louis Agassiz in their development, then on the continued relevance of pragmatic thought in the philosophy of education. Tracing the development of Peirce's and James's philosophies allows the formation of an understanding of the origins of Pragmatism and the opportunities for its idiosyncratic development is examined. The paper culminates in an examination of the impact of these early thinkers of education and their different roles impacting education in society and the continuing of pragmatic thought in education.

Keywords: Philosophy of Science; Philosophy of Education; Pragmatism; Radical Empiricism; Psychology; Logic; Abduction; Darwinism; Louis Agassiz; Charles Peirce; William James

“The Final Word in Philosophy”

When William James (1842-1910) presented the idea of pragmatism to the Philosophical Union at the University of California at Berkeley in the Fall of 1898, he was expressing what had already been around for over twenty years. Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914) had provided, in James' (1898) words, the “final word in philosophy. It would bring theory down to a single point, at which every human being's practical life would begin” (p. 287). The continued interest in philosophy and especially the philosophy of education calls into question the problematic relationships of the idealist, realist, empiricist, and scientific views that lead to an unending discussion of historical and traditional problems. In this investigation, I focus on the rise of pragmatic thinking

in the writing of Charles Sanders Peirce and William James. Beginning with Peirce, I provide an overview of his expansive philosophic, scientific, and mathematical interests with a focus on his pragmatic thinking and writing. Turning to James, I look at his influence on the development of pragmatic thought and the contrasts between James's Radical Empiricism and what Peirce came to call Pragmaticism to distinguish it from other pragmatic conceptions. In conclusion I ask readers to consider the importance of the mode of thinking described by Peirce's experience-based epistemology and logic, the importance of the abductive logic which it requires and the impact of the philosophical and psychological basis for teaching and learning described by James. I also examine the influence of Louis Agassiz (1807-1873), who played no small part in the indoctrination of Peirce and James into the ways of science.

Charles S. Peirce

With his father's guidance, Peirce studied mathematics, science, and philosophy from an early age. He later commented, "When I was beginning my philosophical reading, my father, Benjamin Peirce (1807-1873), forced me to recognize the extremely loose reasoning common to the philosophers" (Pierce, 1958, p. 2.9) Charles Peirce graduated from Harvard in 1859. His father arranged a field trip for him to survey Louisiana where he learned of the publication of *On the Origin of Species* (Pierce, 1958, p. 5.64). Back in Cambridge, he studied with the naturalist Louis Agassiz in summer of 1860, (Fisch, 1986, p. 37) gaining an understanding of the importance of careful observation and classification. Although the influence of Charles Darwin (1809-1882) and evolutionism dominated the decades after 1859 there was plenty of discussion about the mechanism of evolution. The selective breeding of plants and animals has a long practical history, but it was not until Gregor Mendel's (1822-1884) experiments that an idea of the workings of genetics was hypothesized, a hypothesis that would have worked well with Peirce's interests in probability and chance. Mendel's (1901) description of his experiments with peas presented as a lecture and published in 1865 in the journal, *Abhandlungen des naturforschenden Vereines in Brünn* (vol. 4). He published a second essay on the genetics of hawkweed in 1869 (vol. 8) His work lay dormant for nearly fifty years until William Bateson (1861-1926) who in 1900 had agreed to give a lecture on the problems of heredity, read Mendel's "*Versuche über Pflanzen-Hybriden*," on the train, and changed the Lecture to "The Problems of Heredity" introducing Mendelian genetics (Henig, 2001). Bateson (1902), a long time student of variation in living organisms, became a leading Mendelian evolutionist. He wrote, "Had Mendel's

work come into the hands of Darwin, it is not too much to say that the history of the development of evolutionary philosophy would have been very different from that which we have witnessed" (p. 39). In an 1884 Metaphysical Club lecture, Peirce noted that the impact of the "idea of evolution" was increasingly governing science (1992, p. 219). Peirce returned to Harvard during the summer of 1860 to enter graduate school. During the summer and fall of 1860 he worked with Louis Agassiz applying the scientific method to zoological classification and taxonomy (Fisch, 1986 p. 381). Though Peirce did not accept Agassiz's creationist preconceptions, the influence of Agassiz on Peirce is not negligible. Agassiz's influence is visible in Peirce's use of classification in his theory of signs, the sciences, and his logic in general.

Agassiz, a recognized geologist and zoologist in Europe, came to the United States in 1846 to deliver the Lowell lectures at Harvard titled "The Plan of Creation in the Animal Kingdom" at Harvard (Lurie, 1960, p. 26). A charming and likeable man, he soon became very popular in Cambridge social circles, so much so that he had to take a secret room to escape the demands on his time that prevented him from his work. Agassiz, ever the self-promoter, soon developed the relationships that resulted in being named professor of Geology and Zoology of the Lawrence Scientific School in the Fall of 1847. He believed that natural science had to be learned from discovery and experience (Lurie, 1960). Agassiz promoted the creation of a Museum of Comparative Zoology which became a reality in January of 1859 with himself as director. As a geologist and zoologist, Agassiz excelled but his expressed creationist, racial, and religious ideas were used as an explanation and justification for slavery and institutional racism forever marred his reputation. Agassiz's interest in human differences continued through the Thayer expedition with his study of the indigenous population. Although Agassiz was an anti-evolutionist whose contrary opinions drove most of his students and readers into the evolutionist camp (Fisch, 1986), Peirce saw in evolution the logic of the adaptation to environment (Peirce, 1958).

Peirce obtained a degree in Chemistry in 1863 from Harvard's Lawrence Scientific School, continued graduate studies in science and philosophy. He delivered the Harvard Lectures on "The Philosophy of Science" in the Spring of 1865 at Harvard where he introduced his theory of signs and semeiotics, defining logic as the science of the conditions which enable symbols in general to refer to objects" (Peirce, 1865, p. 11). In the Fall of 1866 he delivered the Lowell Lectures on "The Logic of Science; or Induction and Hypothesis" (Brent, 1998, p. 69). In Cambridge, Peirce, William James, and others formed the first Metaphysical Club in 1871 for the discussion of current topics in philosophy. Peirce (1958) chose the name "half-ironically, half-defiantly, ... for

agnosticism was then riding its high horse, and was frowning superbly upon all metaphysics" (p. 5.11). For the Harvard Metaphysical Club, he wrote "a little paper expressing some of the opinions that I had been urging all along under the name of pragmatism" (p. 5.11). It was published in volumes 12 and 13 of *Popular Science Monthly* with five additional essays (Peirce, 1992, p. v). When Peirce began teaching Logic at Johns Hopkins in 1879, he reorganized a Metaphysical Club which met monthly to hear papers from students and professors, many of which were published. *Studies in Logic*, containing essays of his students and his essay, "A Theory of Probable Inference" where he maintained that "all knowledge is based on experience, ... science is only advanced by the experimental verifications of theories, ... [and] that all human knowledge, up to the highest flights of science, is but the development of our inborn animal instincts" (1883, p. 181) In an 1884 Metaphysical Club lecture, Peirce (1992) noted that the impact of the "idea of evolution" was increasingly governing science as "the postulate of logic" (p. 219). The Johns Hopkins Metaphysical Club, one of five scholarly organizations supported by the University, met monthly until Peirce was removed from the faculty. Peirce, G. Stanley Hall (1844-1944), and George Sylvester Morris (1840-1889) served as President and faculty sponsors. The final meeting of the Metaphysical Club was in March 1885. When Morris departed for a full-time appointment at Michigan, G. Stanley Hall oversaw its replacement with a weekly psychology seminary as a part of the new department of psychology (Behrens, 2005).

Peirce's contributions to the sciences and philosophy include pragmatism which relates meaning to consequences; objective idealism or ideal-realism which he attributed to his father as "the opinion that nature and the mind have such a community as to impart to our guesses a tendency toward the truth, while at the same time they require the confirmation of empirical science" (Houser, 1992, p. xxv); fallibilism, the necessity of considering knowledge tentative, under continuous reconstruction; semiotics, the relationship of signs, symbols, signification, with the growth of knowledge; tychism, the importance of chance; synechism, the existence of continuity; agapism, the necessity of empathy, sympathy, and love; as parts of Peirce's evolutionary cosmology (p. xxii.). Peirce hypothesized that three elements are active in the world: first, chance; second, law; and third, habit-taking. He wrote [that] "in evolutionary cosmology, in which all the regularities of nature and of mind are regarded as products of growth" (Peirce, 1992, p. 312) Peirce became known as a logician. He posited that the "chief business of the logician is to classify arguments; for all testing clearly depends on classification" (Peirce, 1958, p. 2.619). This relates to the

work done with Agassiz whose work he appreciated for the process but found inadequate in the inductive or synthetic reasoning.

Peirce noted that his first use of the term pragmatism was at the Metaphysical Club in Cambridge which he later composed into a set of articles on the logic of science published in *Popular Science Monthly*. These six articles titled “Illustrations of the Logic of Science,” expanded logic, especially logic of science from the classical logic of rationalist deduction from self-evident truths; and empirical induction from experiential phenomena to include hypothetic inference what he early on called hypotheses, later retrodution, then abduction. The first of these papers, “The Fixation of Belief,” suggested that there are four ways in which our opinions, knowledge, and beliefs are established, tenacity, authority, a priori, and science. Tenacity represents the rejection of contrary data that does not fit the belief of the individual. Authority bases belief on an external source, sacred or secular. A Priori beliefs are held because they are reasonable and workable. Science (abduction) provides for tentative beliefs, knowledge continuously reconstructed based on new or increased experience. For Peirce, logic is the art of reasoning and reasoning depends on our ability to draw inferences “[which] is not so much a natural gift as a long and difficult art [and] the object of reasoning is to find out, from the consideration of what we already know, something else which we do not know” (1992, p. 111). In the second of his logic of science papers, “How to Make Our Ideas Clear,” Peirce suggested ways that pragmatism supplies a logic of science that can provide a process by which the irritation of doubt or unfamiliarity can provide belief or knowledge. The pragmatic rule: “Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object” (1992, p. 132). This maxim provides a baseline from which investigation begins. He wrote that even though “[d]ifferent minds may set out with the most antagonistic views, but the progress of investigation carries them by a force outside of themselves to one and the same conclusion” (p. 138) Peirce saw all reasoning as either deduction, induction, or retrodution, a term he used early on as hypothesis, or abduction. Early in his philosophy and logic studies he had little appreciation for hypothesis except as a corollary to induction, both serving as inference from the specific to the general. Hypothesis represented a starting point for reasoning which either assumed its correctness or outlined the process for the accumulation of more information with which to either accept or reject the hypothetical content, the scientific method.

By the time of the publication of the *Popular Science Monthly* articles, Peirce (1992) identified science as the most reasonable way to fix belief. He wrote, “with the scientific

method ... I may start with known and observed facts to proceed to the unknown.... [B]ad reasoning as well as good reasoning is possible; and this fact is the foundation of the practical side of logic" (p. 121). Perhaps it was his training in mathematics, science, and philosophy that his father oversaw, or perhaps it was the Darwinist timber of the times.

To understand the Perceian triad of the scientific or pragmatic process as described in "The Fixation of Belief (1992), it seems to me that retrodution in Peirce's early thought is the basic inference. It proposes an answer based on an existence or occurrence and determines with little evidence what the cause or source must have been then relies on either tenacity or authority to fix that belief. Later he added hypothesis which proposes answers on what appears to be reasonable, relying on a priori explanations to fix its belief. Finally, abduction applies the scientific method to fix its belief concerning the existence or occurrence by obtaining more information through study or experimentation (p. 211). The results of the scientific/pragmatic process have symbolic meaning in Peirce's Semeiotic, his theory of signs. The sign serves in relation to the experiment or study of which it is the result. Ultimately, Peirce came to judge pragmatism as logic of abduction, the abductive-deductive-inductive method. Abductive inference is related to perceptual judgements that account for experiences and ideas that allow one to come to some belief as a result of the abductive investigation until, writes Peirce, "he should discover that the real state of facts was quite contrary to his belief" (1998, p. 456). Pierce continually sought ways to interweave his ideas about fallibilism, semiotics, tychism, synechism, agapism, and evolutionary cosmology into a grand system. Throughout his writing he sought to expand on the interrelatedness of his logic to science, mathematics, social sciences, and the method of science to philosophy.

William James

If Charles Peirce's father influenced him towards the study of mathematics, science, and philosophy, William James's father, Henry James senior (1811-1882), a theologian interested in the social, utopian, and mystical religion, instilled in his oldest son an interest in the impact of religious convictions in life which William revisited often in his lectures and writing (Boutroux, The most comprehensive of these was his book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), which explored the relationships between philosophy, the sciences, and religious attitudes. In 1896 *The Will to Believe*, James first book of focused philosophical and religious thought, was dedicated to his

"old friend, Charles Sanders Peirce," expressing his appreciation for the influence of his writing and thought. In his review, Peirce, ever the logician, while agreeing with James's views on metaphysical monism still took him to task mainly for his imprecise use of language and for the inconsistencies that appear between religious beliefs and the "limitation of its applicability" (Peirce, 1897, p. 35). James, with good grace, accepted the 'contemptuous language' as befitting a logician. William James and Charles Peirce were friends during their adult lives. Peirce wrote,

No man could be closer to the antipode of their model than America's and the world's highest respected and closest beloved philosophic soul, William James. Nobody has a better right to testify to the morality of his attitude toward his own thoughts than I, who knew and loved him for forty-nine or fifty years. (Peirce, 1958, 6.182).

James and Peirce became friends while studying chemistry at the Lawrence Scientific School at Harvard. It took James some time to discover what he wanted to do in life. Until 1861 he wanted to become an artist, studying in the U. S. with William Morris Hunt and in Europe with John La Farge. In 1861, James enrolled in the Lawrence school to study chemistry with Charles W. Eliot and two years later anatomy with Jeffries Wyman. In 1864 James began medical school, but the next Spring signed on as a volunteer with the Thayer expedition organized by Louis Agassiz, accompanying him to Brazil. When the expedition returned on August 6, 1866, it had accumulated over eighty thousand items of natural history to be studied. At first James found his expedition leader tiresome, writing to his father, "I have profited a great deal by hearing Agassiz talk, not so much by what he says, for never did a man utter a greater amount of humbug" (Lurie, 1960, p. 347), but later came to appreciate Agassiz's qualities, "[B]ut by learning the way of feeling of such a vast practical engine as he is, ... I delight to be with him. I only saw his defects at first, but now his wonderful qualities throw them quite in the back-ground ... I never saw a man work so hard" (p. 347). "Agassiz so taught me the difference between all possible abstractionists and all livers in the light of the world's concrete fullness (sic), that I have never been able to forget it" (James, 1911, p. 14). Agassiz's influence on James might be recognized in his *Principles of Psychology*, especially the chapters "Discrimination and Comparison" and "Reasoning" (James, 1890) James returned to his medical studies after his Brazil expedition. He studied physiology in Berlin in the fall and winter of 1867 then returned to Cambridge, finishing his medical degree in 1869. James, with his knowledge of medicine and physiology, was appointed to the Harvard faculty as instructor in anatomy and physiology 1873. He added psychology to his classes in 1875 and directed the first

psychology laboratory in America (Boutroux, 1912). By 1879, James had changed his focus again, this time to philosophy. By 1885 he was assistant professor of philosophy and in 1889 was also named chairman of the psychology department. After 1897, James became full professor in philosophy (Boutroux, 1912).

James's first publications were in psychology. His two volume *Principles of Psychology* was published in 1890 followed by an abridged Text-book of Psychology. His responses to reviewers and critics were published in *Philosophical Review* (1892), *Mind* (1891), etc. Many of these reviews questioned the place of psychology in the scientific community. One of James's responses considered,

[psychology is] a mass of phenomenal description, gossip, and myth, including, however, real material enough to justify one in the hope that with judgment and good-will on the part of those interested, its study may be so organized even now as to become worthy of the name of natural science at no very distant day (James, 1892, p. 146).

James saw the value of psychology as a social science as well as an emerging natural science. Hewrote, "The kind of psychology which could cure a case of melancholy, or charm a chronicinsane delusion away, ought certainly to be preferred to the most seraphic insight into the natureof the soul" (146).

In *The Will to Believe* (1897), James presented his 'philosophic attitude' towards belief and truth. His preface defined his philosophic attitude as 'radical empiricism' which meant, for him, that knowledge consisted in workable hypotheses and that radical treated the world as pluralistic as opposed to the monism with which experience must agree. He insisted on the interrelatedness of personal experiences making knowledge a social commodity. James did not consider other current empiricisms like positivism, agnosticism, or scientific naturalism to offer adequate resistance to monistic philosophies. James explained, "After all that reason can do has been done, there still remains the opacity of the finite facts as merely given, with most of their peculiarities mutually unmediated and unexplained. [Knowledge and belief are] "a *Grenzbegriff*. Ever not quite" (p. 3) James strove in all his philosophical writing to separate his radical empiricism from pragmatism, pragmaticism, and humanism. In his preface to *Pragmatism*, James regretted the designation of pragmatism on the philosophy of the primacy of experience and the necessity of scientific reasoning and denied a logical connection of pragmatism and his radical empiricism (1907). For James the source of ideas is direct knowledge, and the source of knowledge is the associated experience. Radical empiricism then, with its pragmatic method and its principle of

pure experience holds that "Everything real must be experienceable somewhere, and every kind of thing experienced must somewhere be real" (James, 1909, p. 372). The pragmatist relates perceived truth to the fact of experience and pure experience admits as fact in reality that which can be experienced by an experient (p. 372). "Reality is," for James, "an experience continuum" (1920, p. 152).

This excursion into James's thought has focused on his "radical empiricism" but he was interested in so much more. Fundamental to his interest was also the study of humanity and its interactions experientially and scientifically with the natural world. He was equally observant of the psychological, physiological, social, religious, and philosophical aspects of existence which impacted human life. In reading his works one encounters the regular intermingling of these various topics for his world-view encompassed the range of human thought and behavior. In terms of his radical empiricism, he engaged both the historical empiricists and positivists on the one hand and the theists and absolutists on the other. James witnessed the growth of pragmatic ideas, not only Peirce's original conceptions, but his own and also the instrumental view of the Chicago School led by Dewey and the humanist formulation of the Oxford school led by Schiller.

The Role of Philosophy and the place of Pragmaticism and Radical Empiricism

Karl Otto Apel (1922-2017) in his book *Der Denkweg von Charles S. Peirce*, [Charles S. Peirce: From Pragmatism to Pragmaticism], wrote,

"that in the world of so called industrial society there are exactly three philosophies that really function. By this I do not mean just that they are advocated, but that they in fact mediate between theory and practice in life. These philosophies are Marxism, Existentialism, and Pragmatism" (Apel, p. 1).

Those now must be updated. Marxism must be replaced by the rule of Authoritarianism in current and former Communist nations. Not that Authoritarianism is a philosophy in any meaningful sense, but, like philosophical Marxism and political Fascism, it allows for the control of the society through its ideological domination in whatever form the ideology takes in the process of defining and dominating the infrastructure, reorganizing institutions to reflect the dominant ideology, and using national and social policies that support the ideology and thwart opposing views. *Realpolitik* has been replaced by *Eigenutzpolitik*, the self-interest of the head of state. Marxist social thought

survives as the source of various Critical Social Theories focused on the impact of science and technology, hegemony and oppression, social media and popular culture, etc. Modern "interest in ethics, mind, and technology grows outside the academy through public philosophy, podcasts, and online forums" (Philopedia, 2026, p.xx) resembling Peirce's Normative Sciences of logic, ethics, and aesthetics. For Karl-Otto Apel, one of the functions of philosophy is the "mediation of theory and praxis" (1981, p. 3). Pragmatism and Existentialism having origins in Phenomenology suggest that individual thought and behavior is informed at different times by one or the other or both (1981, p. 2). James (1907) recognized this dualism of the possibility of interest in existential, if unprovable, truth and the pragmatic and scientific process of advancing knowledge. Peirce's Critical Common-Sensism (1998) agreed up to a point but, as was his way, his analysis developed a comprehensive system of logical characters that defined issues in Common-Sensism. Peirce considered his and James's conception of Pragmatism to be close, differing in the consequences attributed to its application. Ultimately, Peirce renamed his pragmatic system Pragmaticism to distinguish it from the form that he considered opposed to sound logic. While Peirce does not exactly spell it out, the difference between Pragmaticism and Pragmatism is wrapped up in the difference between the necessity of psychological and philosophical foundations. While much of twenty-first century philosophy has a number of new visages, pragmatic philosophy remains an important foundation in practical life. Other of Peirce's work informed the development of Analytic Philosophy, Logical Positivism, Linguistics, Philosophy of Science, and Semiotics.

Peirce, James and Education

Concerns with education took various forms with the pragmatic thinkers considered here. Peirce was concerned about the philosophy and practice of colleges and universities. Peirce viewed the American system as too focused on teaching and not enough on the advancement of knowledge. He viewed the necessity of the need to explore further the present state of knowledge without assuming that the existing state was adequate, what he termed the "Will to Learn," that schools become "institutions of learning, not institutions of teaching" (1958, p. 5.583) William James also viewed the reconstruction of education to be an important undertaking. James (1899), however, had a different perspective. He viewed the inclusion of a psychology of education as an important aspect of the training of new teachers, and the continuing development of the teaching professionals. James noted the role of the state school systems, their various

structures, their responsiveness to local needs, and their ability to innovate as a unique feature of the evolving educational system. He found merit in the manual arts training that was becoming a growing aspect of the common schools at the end of the nineteenth century not as a vocational track but as a different view of practical, perhaps avocational activity and the importance of applying theory to practice. For teacher training and improvement, James felt that “The desire of the schoolteachers for a completer professional training, and their aspiration toward the ‘professional’ spirit in their work, have led them more and more to turn to us [psychologists] for light on fundamental principles (p. 5).” James was realistic about the influence ‘the new psychology’ could have, suggesting there was little new in the new psychology and that fundamental psychological conceptions were most important to teachers. He wrote,

Psychology, being the science of the mind’s laws, is [not] something from which you can deduce definite programmes and schemes and methods of instruction for immediate schoolroom use. Psychology is a science, and teaching is an art; and sciences never generate arts directly out of themselves. An intermediary inventive mind must make the application, by using its originality (p. 7-8).

James noted that even the pedagogical art of Herbart, a psychologist, was informed by the science of psychology but was distinct, “congruent, but neither was subordinate” (1899, p. 8). Ultimately, for James, “the teacher’s attitude toward the child, being concrete and ethical, is positively opposed to the psychological observer’s, which is abstract and analytic” (p. 13).

As we consider the place of the thought of Peirce and James in contemporary circumstances, we must view the environment of schooling and learning. Domination of learning management systems like Universal Design for Learning in the 1990s and the plethora of technology-based systems have appeared since Covid-19 necessitated the evacuation of classrooms and dependence on distance learning. Teacher training and evaluation, dominated by uniform models, demand compliance with prescribed and fixed classroom taxonomy. Peirce's view of schools focused on teaching instead of learning must be kept in mind even with the technological revolution of the 2020s. We would do well to remember Agassiz's focus on the acquisition of knowledge through discovery and experience rather than controlled lessons increasingly conforming to predetermined standards. James sought to enhance the role of the teacher as nurturer, promoting the inquisitive nature of the student and the scientific process for obtaining

knowledge. Peirce focused on his own taxonomy of knowledge, tenacious, authority, a priori, and science, the first three being insufficient. Pragmatism with its acceptance of fallibility and assumption that knowledge is continuously reconstructed should continue to be recognized the basis of education.

References

- Apel, Karl-Otto, 1981, *Charles S. Peirce: From Pragmatism to Pragmaticism*, Translated by John Michael Krois, University of Massachusetts Press Amherst.
- Behrens, Peter J., (2005), The Metaphysical Club at the Johns Hopkins University (1879-1885), *History of Psychology*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 340.
- Brent, J. (1998). Charles Sanders Peirce: A life. Indiana University Press.
- Boutroux, Emile, (1912), *William James*, translated by Archibald and Barbara Henderson, Longmans, Green, and Co.,
<https://dn720507.ca.archive.org/0/items/b32862799/b32862799.pdf>
- Fisch, Max, (1986), "Evolution in American Philosophy," in *Peirce, Semeiotic, and Pragmatism*,
 edited by Kenneth Ketner and Cristian Kloesel, Indiana University Press. 19-34.
- Hall, G. Stanley, "Review of William James's Principles of Psychology," in *American Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 3, Issue 4, 1 Feb., 1891,
<https://dn790008.ca.archive.org/0/items/jstor-1412102/1412102.pdf>.
- Henig, Robin Marantz, (2001), *The Monk in the Garden*, New York: Mariner, 2000,
 Bateson, William, *Mendel's Principles of Heredity, a Defence*, Cambridge, England: At the University Press, 39,
<https://dn790004.ca.archive.org/0/items/b21937722/b21937722.pdf>.
- Houser, Nathan, (1992), "Introduction," in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*
 Volume 1 (1867-1893), edited by Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel, Indiana University Press. <https://ia600307.us.archive.org/17/items/the-essential-peirce->

[selected-philosophical-writings-1/The%20Essential%20Peirce%2C%20Selected%20Philosophical%20Writings%201.pdf](#)

James, William, (1892), "A Plea for Psychology as a Natural Science," in *The Philosophical Review*,

Vol. 1, Mar., 1892, <https://dn790005.ca.archive.org/0/items/jstor-2175743/2175743.pdf>

James, William, (1897), *The Will to Believe*, Longmans, Green and Co.

<https://dn790007.ca.archive.org/0/items/willtobelieveot00jameiala/willtobelieveot00jameiala.pdf>.

James, William, (1899), *Talks to Teachers*, 1899, Henry Holt and Co.

https://ia800304.us.archive.org/30/items/bwb_O9-AUH-997/bwb_O9-AUH-997.pdf.

James, William, (1898), "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results," Berkeley: *University*

Chronicle, Vol 1, September, No. 4, 287.

<http://archive.org/stream/philosophicalcon00jameuoft>.

James, William, (1902), *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, New York: Longmans, Green,

and Co. (1908),

https://dn790004.ca.archive.org/0/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.46316/2015.46316.Varieties-Of-Religious-Experience_text.pdf.

James, William, (1907) *Pragmatism*, Longmans, Green, and Co.

<https://ia600909.us.archive.org/32/items/157unkngoog/157unkngoog.pdf>.

James, William, (1909), *The Meaning of Truth*, Longmans, Green, and Co.

<https://ia601305.us.archive.org/24/items/cu31924032293213/cu31924032293213.pdf>.

James, William, (1909), *A Pluralistic Universe*, Longmans, Green and Co.,

<https://ia601208.us.archive.org/25/items/pluralisticunive02jame/pluralisticunive02jame.pdf>.

James, William, (1911), *Memories and Studies*, edited by his son, Henry James, Longmans, Green, and Co.,

<https://dn720301.ca.archive.org/0/items/memoriesstudies0000jame/memoriesstudies0000jame.pdf>

James, William, (1920), "The Chicago School," and "Humanism," in *Collected Essays and*

Reviews, collected and edited by James Barton Perry, New York: Longmans, Green, and Co.

<https://dn790003.ca.archive.org/0/items/collectedessaysr01jame/collectedessaysr01jame.pdf>

James, William, (1920), "Personal Idealism," *Collected Essays and Reviews*, collected and edited

by James Barton Perry, Longmans, Green, and Co., 443-444,

<https://dn790003.ca.archive.org/0/items/collectedessaysr01jame/collectedessaysr01jame.pdf>

Lurie, Edward (1960), *Louis Agassiz*, Phoenix Books.

<https://ia800301.us.archive.org/5/items/louisagassiz0000will/louisagassiz0000will.pdf>

Mendel, Gregor (1865), "*Versuche über Pflanzen-Hybriden*," (Experiments in Plant

Hybridisation), William Bateson, translator, in *Scientific Papers of William Bateson*, Edited by R. C. Punnett, Volume II, Cambridge at the University Press, 1928.

<https://dn720400.ca.archive.org/0/items/scientificpapers0002will/scientificpapers0002will.pdf>

Mind, 1891, Vol. 16, Iss. 63,

https://archive.org/details/sim_mind_1891-07_16_63/

Mendel, Gregor (1901), *Versuche über Pflanzenhybriden. Zwei Abhandlungen (1865 und 1869)*,

published by Erich Tschermak, Verlag von Wilhelm Engelmann.

<https://ia600801.us.archive.org/4/items/versucheberpfla00tschgoog/versucheberpfla00tschgoog.pdf>

Peirce, Charles, (1865), "Harvard Lecture 1," *Arisbe, The Peirce Gateway*,

<https://www.cspeirce.com/menu/library/bycsp/earlymss/ms94harvard1.pdf>

Peirce, Charles, (1883), "A Theory of Probable Inference," in *Studies in Logic*, C. S. Peirce, editor, Boston: Little, Brown, and Co.

<https://ia801309.us.archive.org/21/items/studiesinlogic00gilmgoog/studiesinlogic00gilmgoog.pdf>

Peirce, Charles, (1887-1878), "Illustrations of the Logic of Science," *Popular Science Monthly*, Vol. 12 and 13, Jan., 1877- Aug., 1878, in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings Volume 1 (1867-1893)*, edited by Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel, Indiana University Press.

<https://ia600307.us.archive.org/17/items/the-essential-peirce-selected-philosophical-writings-/The%20Essential%20Peirce%2C%20Selected%20Philosophical%20Writings%201.pdf>

The series included six articles: "The Fixation of Belief," "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," "The Doctrine of Chances," "The Probability of Induction," "The Order of Nature," and, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," and "Induction, Deduction, and Hypothesis."

Peirce, Charles, (1897,) "James's Will to Believe," in *The Nation*, Vol. LXV, No. 1671, July 8, 83-97. https://archive.org/details/sim_nation_1897-07-08_65_1671/.

Peirce, Charles, (1931-35 and 1958) *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, reproducing Volumes. I-VI ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, Vols. VII-VIII ed. Arthur W. Burks, Harvard University Press.

<https://ia600502.us.archive.org/17/items/collected-papers-of-charles-peirce/Collected%20Papers%20of%20Charles%20Peirce.pdf>

Peirce, Charles, (1982), *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition, 1857-1866*, Vol. I, Max H. Fisch, General Editor, Indiana University Press.

Peirce, Charles, (1992), *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings Volume 1 (1867-1893)*, edited by Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel, Indiana University Press.

<https://ia600307.us.archive.org/17/items/the-essential-peirce-selected-philosophical-writings-1/The%20Essential%20Peirce%2C%20Selected%20Philosophical%20Writings%201.pdf>
132.

Peirce, Charles, (1998), *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings Volume II, 1893-1913*, edited by Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel, Indiana University Press.

<https://archive.org/details/the-essential-peirce-selected-philosophical-writings-vol-peirce-charles-s>

The Philosophical Review, 1892, Vol. I, Number 3,
https://archive.org/details/sim_philosophical-review_1892-05_1_3/page/311/mode/1up?q=james

The Consciousness of Coloniality: A Phenomenological Inquiry

Roy Tamashiro, Webster University, St. Louis, MO

Abstract

This article presents a phenomenological inquiry into the consciousness of coloniality – the psychological, epistemological, and moral structures through which colonial domination is sustained, internalized, and contested in contemporary life. Distinguishing among *colonialism* as a historical system, *coloniality* as its enduring structural legacy, and the *colonial mindset* as its internalized psychosocial form; the study examines how these forces persist beyond formal colonial rule. Drawing on phenomenological reflection and decolonial scholarship, the analysis explores learned inferiority, identification with dominant norms, and experiences of interior exile as manifestations of coloniality in lived experience. Situating these themes within broader intellectual genealogies, the article examines rationales for both the continuation and dismantling of coloniality and outlines four recurring aims of decolonization. It concludes by framing decolonization as an open-ended practice of ethical witnessing, reflexive critique, dialogical humility, and historical responsibility.

Keywords: coloniality, phenomenology, decolonization, colonial mentality, internalized oppression, exile, epistemic justice, ethical witnessing

Introduction

Across academia, the decolonization movement aims to dismantle Eurocentric and colonial structures and biases. It seeks to create more inclusive and equitable spaces that accommodate diverse perspectives and knowledge systems. However, the movement reverberates in heated controversy. It is met with a mix of endorsement, advocacy, confusion, indifference, and resistance.

In this article, I offer reflections on the *consciousness of coloniality*, including both the impulses that sustain coloniality and the efforts directed toward challenging internal and external structures of domination. Employing a phenomenological approach, I examined how coloniality is experienced, internalized, and contested. Phenomenology seeks to understand how phenomena are experienced and interpreted in lived

experience (Husserl, 1982; van Manen, 1990). The phenomenon under examination in this study was the consciousness of coloniality. To investigate this phenomenon, I drew upon Donald A. Schön's (1983) methodology of *reflection-on-action*, which involves revisiting experience to examine how beliefs, values, and patterns of interpretation are formed, sustained, and transformed. Guided by scholarship on colonialism, coloniality, and decolonization, I asked how the knowledge structures of coloniality become learned, normalized, and internalized, and how they might be questioned and reinterpreted in light of decolonial critiques. Because phenomenological inquiry requires critical reflection on the meanings through which experience is interpreted, the inquiry remained attentive to how understandings of self, relationships with others, and epistemic commitments evolved through reflection and dialogue (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; van Manen, 1990).

The colonial mindset (or colonial mentality) refers to the internalized ways of perceiving, evaluating, and relating to oneself and others that emerge within colonial systems of power and continue to reproduce hierarchies of knowledge, identity, and social worth beyond the formal end of colonial rule (Fanon, 1961; Memmi, 1957; Quijano, 2000). Although often associated with a past historical era, these patterns are not confined to history; they continue to operate in contemporary social, economic, and educational life, frequently without being named as "colonial." They appear in normalized hierarchies of value, in uneven opportunities, and in the marginalization of communities whose access to education, economic mobility, or civic participation are structurally restricted. They are also evident in cultural and symbolic forms – what has been described as cultural imperialism or "coca-colonization" – in which dominant languages, media, and consumer practices shape aspirations, identities, and desires across contexts (Tomlinson, 1991; Wagnleitner, 1994). In these ways, coloniality persists not only in institutions but in the subtle conditioning of perception, expectation, and belonging.

To clarify, *colonialism* refers to the political system and historical era of direct political and economic control and domination. *Coloniality* describes the enduring structures of power, knowledge, and social relations produced by colonialism, and the *colonial mindset* refers to the internalized psychological effects of these structures on both colonizers and colonized (Quijano, 2000; Maldonado-Torres, 2007). While formal colonial rule may have ended, patterns of coloniality continue in reconfigured forms within economic systems, institutions, and everyday life (Mignolo, 2011). They may be observed in global economic arrangements that maintain dependency, in media and popular culture that privilege particular languages and values, and in educational institutions that treat some ways of knowing as more legitimate than others (Said, 1978; Smith, 1999). These patterns are also evident in everyday life: in communities with unequal access to quality education, stable employment, or safe housing; in experiences of surveillance, exclusion, or displacement; and in public narratives that normalize inequality or obscure its historical roots. Although no longer explicitly identified as colonial domination, these structures continue to shape lived experience through

restricted opportunities, cultural displacement, and ongoing struggles for recognition and dignity.

Genealogies and Rationales for the Continuation of Coloniality

Historians, political theorists, and postcolonial scholars have demonstrated that colonialism and related systems of domination have been sustained not only through coercion but also through powerful justificatory narratives. Historical, economic, and psychological arguments have repeatedly been used to portray hierarchy, dependency, and unequal power relations as beneficial, necessary, or inevitable (Said, 1978; Mehta, 1999). One enduring historical rationale is the doctrine of the civilizing mission, articulated in nineteenth-century European political philosophy and embedded in colonial educational systems. John Stuart Mill argued that despotism was a legitimate mode of governance when exercised over “barbarians,” provided it served their eventual improvement (Mill, 1998, p. 13). Mill’s claim that despotism is legitimate when exercised for the “improvement” of colonized peoples situates domination within a paternalistic moral framework, in which the colonizer assumes the role of tutor or guardian over populations deemed not yet capable of rational self-government. Within this logic, resistance or criticism is not considered a legitimate political claim; it is interpreted as insubordination, incapacity or irrationality.

Economically, imperial and neo-imperial structures have been defended as necessary engines of development. Classical political economy treated colonial trade and resource extraction as natural extensions of market expansion (Smith, 1776), while modernization theorists such as Walt Rostow portrayed hierarchical integration into global capitalism as an inevitable stage of progress (Rostow, 1960). Contemporary development discourse often echoes these assumptions, framing inequality as transitional and structural dependency as efficiency (Escobar, 1995; World Bank, 2000).

Psychologically and sociologically, hierarchy itself has been normalized through theories of natural stratification. Herbert Spencer’s Social Darwinism cast competition and dominance as evolutionary imperatives (Spencer, 1864), while functionalist sociology later argued that inequality stabilizes societies by allocating roles and incentives (Davis & Moore, 1945). These perspectives portray asymmetry and inequality as biologically grounded and socially necessary.

A further rationale operates at the level of subjectivity. Albert Memmi and Paulo Freire describe how colonized and subordinated persons may seek psychic safety through alignment with dominant norms, languages, and institutions – what Freire termed

“identification with the oppressor” (Freire, 1968; Memmi, 1957). Domination thus persists not solely by external force or threat, but through desire: the promise of status, belonging, protection from marginality, and relief from existential vulnerability.

Taken together, the historical, economic, and psychological rationales discussed above illustrate how colonialism and coloniality have been justified and sustained across different contexts. Whether framed as a civilizing mission, an economic necessity, or a natural feature of social development, these arguments have tended to portray hierarchical power relations as beneficial, inevitable, or morally defensible. As scholars such as Said (1978), Mehta (1999), and others have shown, such rationales help explain the durability of colonial structures and the persistence of colonial ways of thinking long after formal colonial rule has ended. They also illuminate why efforts to challenge or dismantle coloniality often encounter resistance—not only because material interests may be threatened, but also because established systems of knowledge, social identities, and cultural assumptions have become deeply embedded in institutions and everyday life. Precisely because these justifications have proven so resilient, anti-colonial and decolonial thinkers have sought to expose their assumptions and articulate alternative ways of understanding power, knowledge, and human flourishing.

Genealogies and Rationales for Dismantling Coloniality

Arguments for dismantling coloniality emerge from a long and evolving intellectual genealogy that spans political economy, critical theory, anti-colonial thought, and contemporary decolonial scholarship. These traditions collectively reveal coloniality as a persistent structure operating across material, epistemic, and psychological domains.

Early critiques can be traced to Karl Marx’s analysis of “primitive accumulation,” which identifies colonial expansion as foundational to the emergence of capitalism (Marx, 1976). Through processes of dispossession, forced labor, and resource extraction, colonialism functioned as a mechanism for organizing global labor and capital. Although Marx did not fully theorize race or colonial subjectivity, his framework situates colonial domination within systemic economic and political processes.

The Frankfurt School extended this critique into the domain of knowledge and reason. Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) argue that Enlightenment rationality, while emancipatory in aspiration, also generates domination by reducing human and natural life to objects of calculation and control. In this formulation, reason becomes instrumental: it legitimates domination precisely by presenting itself as neutral, universal, and necessary. This insight anticipates later analyses of how epistemic authority sustains colonial hierarchies.

W. E. B. Du Bois offers a crucial bridge between structural and experiential analyses. His concept of “double consciousness” captures the internal division experienced by marginalized subjects who must navigate dominant frameworks that deny their full humanity (Du Bois, 1994). This formulation foreshadows later accounts of internalized inferiority and the colonial mindset, highlighting how systemic domination is lived as psychological fracture.

Building on these foundations, contemporary decolonial thinkers articulate a more explicit critique of coloniality as a global matrix of power. Aníbal Quijano (2000) conceptualizes coloniality as the enduring structure that organizes labor, race, and knowledge beyond formal colonial rule, while Walter Dignolo (2011) calls for epistemic disobedience and the recognition of a “pluriverse” of knowledge systems. Nikita Dhawan (2014) further demonstrates how Enlightenment rationality simultaneously enabled ideals of freedom and human rights while also producing the epistemic hierarchies that justified colonial domination.

These genealogical foundations inform contemporary rationales for dismantling both the external and internal structures of coloniality. Frantz Fanon (1961) emphasizes the ethical and psychological necessity of liberation from colonial subjectivity, arguing that domination produces alienation and self-division that must be overcome through processes of “reintroducing mankind into the world, the whole of mankind (Fanon, 1961, p. 106).” Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986) and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) locate coloniality in language and research, advocating for the restoration of Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies. Paulo Freire (1968) frames education as a site of transformation through *conscientização*, while bell hooks (2000) identifies internalized inferiority as a persistent obstacle to liberation. Liberation psychology (e.g., Martín-Baró, 1994) further situates decolonization as a process of collective healing and ethical reconstruction.

This lineage of thought reveals that dismantling coloniality is a multilayered and multidimensional project. It involves confronting material inequalities, destabilizing epistemic hierarchies, and addressing the psychological residues of domination. In this sense, decolonization emerges as both a historical inheritance and an ongoing practice—one that links structural transformation with the phenomenological work of reconstituting consciousness.

Learned Inferiority and Internalized Oppression

The colonial mentality refers to an internalized belief that the culture and values of the colonizer are inherently superior to those of the colonized (Fanon, 1967; Memmi, 1957).

Such beliefs are learned and reinforced through processes of socialization, education, and enculturation (Freire, 1968; Smith, 1999). Over time, individuals may come to view themselves, their communities, or their cultural traditions as deficient when measured against dominant standards of value and legitimacy (Fanon, 1967, pp. 18–27; Memmi, 1957, pp. 120–128). The result is often a hierarchical worldview in which some forms of knowledge, identity, and ways of being are regarded as inherently superior to others (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2011). These assumptions are frequently reproduced through everyday interactions and institutional practices, gradually coming to appear natural or self-evident. From this perspective, questioning or resisting dominant assumptions may be experienced as difficult or risky and may not always be readily recognized or supported.

This awareness of coloniality clarifies how it is reproduced and how it might be engaged. Recognizing how these patterns take hold within thought and practice directs attention to two interrelated sites of response: the internal, where habits of perception, interpretation, and judgment are formed through lived experience and socialization (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; van Manen, 1990), and the relational domain, where these habits are reinforced, negotiated, or challenged through interaction with others (Freire, 1968; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In this sense, the consciousness of coloniality points toward forms of *intrasubjective reflection* and *intersubjective dialogue* as ways of interrupting its ongoing reproduction. Such practices resonate with Freire's (1968) concept of *conscientização*, in which critical reflection and dialogue enable individuals and communities to recognize and question inherited structures of domination.

Internally or introspectively, decolonization involves sustained examination of one's beliefs, affective responses, habits of interpretation, and tacit standards of worth. This intrasubjective work is not merely cognitive but ethical and emotional. Scholars of decolonization have observed that dominant academic norms often present particular forms of knowledge, language, and reasoning as neutral standards of rigor, while alternative epistemologies are treated as supplementary, subjective, or less authoritative (Freire, 1968; Smith, 1999; Mignolo, 2011). Through critical self-reflection, educators and researchers may become aware of the extent to which they have internalized these assumptions and reproduced them in their judgments of students, scholarship, and intellectual legitimacy. The work of decolonization then consists in recognizing these inherited hierarchies and experimenting with alternative criteria of scholarly value. Such practices may include validating narrative forms of knowledge, embodied testimony, community-based expertise, and relational ways of knowing. In this sense, intrasubjective decolonization is a process of witnessing how coloniality lives within one's own perceptions and moral reflexes and gradually disidentifying from those inherited structures.

In intersubjective dialogue, decolonization unfolds through relational practices that expose how colonial assumptions are reproduced collectively. In this context, intersubjective dialogue refers to the shared examination of the assumptions, values,

and knowledge structures that shape educational thought and practice (Freire, 1968; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Decolonial scholars have argued that curricula are never neutral; rather, they reflect historical decisions about whose knowledge is considered authoritative, foundational, and worthy of transmission (Apple, 2004; Smith, 1999). From this perspective, dialogue among educators, students, and researchers can illuminate how particular intellectual traditions come to occupy central positions in curricula while others are marginalized or treated as supplementary. Such conversations encourage participants to examine the historical and institutional processes through which epistemic hierarchies are established and maintained (Freire, 1968; Mignolo, 2011).

Intersubjective decolonial practice therefore involves critically reflecting on the organization of knowledge, the distribution of authority within educational settings, and the assumptions that guide curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy. Through dialogue, these inherited structures may become visible and open to reconsideration. In working together, intrasubjective reflection and intersubjective dialogue form a recursive process: private recognition informs public critique, and collective transformation reshapes personal consciousness. Decolonization thus becomes a lived ethical discipline enacted within the psyche and between persons.

The colonial mindset is often internalized and operates below the level of conscious awareness, shaping perception, judgment, and self-understanding in ways that may not be immediately recognized (Fanon, 1967; Freire, 1968). Internalized coloniality often takes the form of learned inferiority – a persistent, often unexamined sense of inadequacy or self-doubt that shapes how individuals understand their place in the world (Fanon, 1967, pp. 18–27; hooks, 2000; Memmi, 1957, pp. 120–128). Rather than appearing as an explicit belief, it is lived as a quiet but recurring question of worth: whether one's voice, knowledge, or way of being is fully legitimate. This sense of diminished value may become attached to various aspects of identity, including culture, language, social position, gender, or bodily appearance. Although these experiences differ in form, they often have similar consequences: they constrain what individuals perceive as possible for themselves, influence how they evaluate themselves and others, and encourage the acceptance of dominant norms as natural, legitimate, or preferable (Du Bois, 1994; Freire, 1968; Quijano, 2000). In this way, internalized coloniality operates as a lived pattern of experience that shapes perception, judgment, and action in everyday life.

Identification with the Oppressor

On the other side, the colonial mind manifests as *identification with the oppressor*. Freire argues that the oppressed often adopt the oppressor's mindset and values. This leads to the oppressed being "sub-oppressors" or showing an "irresistible attraction towards the oppressor and his way of life" (Freire, 1968, p. 45). Similarly, Memmi describes how one may simultaneously hate and admire the colonizer, thus leading to a profound psychological confusion (Memmi, 1957).

In feeling inferior to the colonizer or oppressor, one may come to prefer the colonizer's language, customs, and values while devaluing one's own. This process of identification may occur consciously or unconsciously and does not necessarily depend upon occupying a position of overt superiority. As one illustration, consider a professor who occupies a position of authority within the classroom. In many academic settings, instructors rely on traditional lecture formats and assume the role of primary source of knowledge and subject-matter expert. Such practices are often shaped by longstanding institutional expectations and inherited educational traditions rather than by individual intention alone (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Freire, 1968). At the same time, these role performances may reflect and reproduce assumptions about knowledge, authority, and expertise embedded within academic culture (Apple, 2004; hooks, 1994). From this perspective, identification with the oppressor need not imply conscious domination; rather, it may be understood as participation in institutional norms that sustain asymmetrical relations between teacher and learner.

From a phenomenological perspective, internalized inferiority and identification with the oppressor may be understood as recurring patterns of experience through which coloniality is reproduced in everyday life. They shape how individuals perceive themselves, evaluate others, and navigate systems of authority and belonging. As Fanon (1967), Memmi (1957), and Freire (1968) each suggest in different ways, structures of domination persist not only through external institutions but also through the internalization of values, assumptions, and hierarchies that come to feel natural or inevitable.

Coloniality and Exile

The mindset of coloniality, marked by the persistent, often unarticulated feelings of unworthiness and inferiority, is "of the same cloth" as the affective states of alienation, banishment, dismemberment, and exile. Edward Said's (1984) depiction of exile reflects

an enduring existential imprisonment within the machinery and mentality of colonial power. Exile, like coloniality, is not only geographic displacement. The mindset and mentality of coloniality, like Said's construction of exile, "is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted" (Said, 1984, p. 157).

This condition of interior exile also resonates with earlier accounts of divided subjectivity and colonial consciousness. W. E. B. Du Bois's formulation of "double consciousness" describes the experience of seeing oneself through the eyes of a dominant society that denies one's full humanity – a "twoness" that fractures the sense of self and complicates the possibility of belonging (Du Bois, 1994). Fanon also showed how colonial domination produces a lived experience of alienation, in which the colonized subject internalizes inferiority while simultaneously striving for recognition within the very structures that negate that recognition (Fanon, 1961). Similarly, Memmi (1957) observed that the colonized individual may oscillate between resistance and identification with the colonizer, resulting in a persistent psychological tension that destabilizes identity and self-worth.

Read alongside Said's depiction of exile, these accounts reveal a shared phenomenological terrain: a condition in which the self is divided, displaced, and compelled to inhabit a world that does not fully recognize it. What Du Bois names as double consciousness, Fanon as alienation, and Memmi as ambivalent identification may be understood as variations of the same underlying structure that Said describes as exile – an enduring gap between one's lived experience and the social norms, institutions, and expectations that define who is recognized, respected, and allowed to belong. In this sense, coloniality is both a system of external domination and a way of living marked by estrangement, in which individuals take part in dominant institutions while still feeling out of place within them.

Echoing Fanon's (1967) and Memmi's (1957) analyses of the colonized subject, this tension may be experienced by individuals educated within institutions that privilege dominant cultural traditions and forms of knowledge. Although formally included within educational and social structures, they may encounter implicit messages that their histories, languages, and ways of knowing are secondary or lacking in legitimacy. Participation and achievement may therefore coexist with a lingering sense of estrangement and unbelonging. In this sense, coloniality may be lived as a form of interior exile, anticipating the condition that Said (2000) described as a separation between the self and a place of genuine belonging.

Said's (2000) account of exile can also be understood as a description of the everyday phenomenology of colonial subjectivity – a condition in which one lives divided between outward participation and inward estrangement. One is not expelled from the homeland by force of geography alone, but from symbolic belonging, epistemic legitimacy, and moral worth (Said 2000). The individual learns to speak in borrowed

vocabularies, to reason through inherited categories, and to narrate the self through conceptual frameworks that do not originate in lived cultural memory. The interior exile is the ongoing fracture between one's inner life and the world that names it. Individuals may achieve recognition within dominant institutions while still sensing a distance from the cultural assumptions, histories, or standards through which recognition is granted (Du Bois, 1994; Fanon, 1967; Memmi, 1957). Coloniality sustains this tension by normalizing displacement as adaptation and by presenting estrangement as the cost of advancement. The result is a form of interior exile in which inclusion and achievement coexist with a lingering sense of unbelonging (Said, 2000). The sadness Said describes is therefore structural and persistent: a quiet, enduring grief that is experienced even in moments of apparent inclusion, success, or mobility.

Coloniality and 'The Enlightenment'

The genesis of the colonial mindset and of coloniality may be traced to the rise of dichotomous/dualistic thinking, scientific rationalism, and the philosophical architecture of the European Enlightenment. From the perspective articulated by Dhawan (2014), the Enlightenment cannot be understood simply as a historical movement that produced universal reason, emancipation, and moral progress. Rather, it must also be recognized as the epistemic condition of possibility for colonial domination itself. Dhawan argues that the same conceptual apparatus that generated human rights discourse simultaneously generated hierarchies of humanity – distinctions between the rational and the irrational, the developed and the primitive, the fully human and the not-yet human. The Enlightenment's promise of freedom through reason has ironically resulted in domination by reason itself. Along with progress and emancipation, it has brought colonialism, slavery, genocide, and crimes against humanity (Dhawan, 2014, p. 9). Rationality here functions as a moral sorting mechanism: those who embody its standards are positioned as legitimate subjects of history, while those who do not are rendered objects of governance, education, and "improvement."

This critique echoes earlier concerns articulated by Horkheimer and Adorno (2002), who warned that Enlightenment reason, in its drive toward mastery and certainty, risks collapsing into what they termed "instrumental reason" – a form of thinking that reduces the world to objects of control. What appears as rational progress thus becomes inseparable from domination, as the same cognitive structures that enable scientific advancement also justify the subjugation of nature and human difference. Dhawan's analysis extends this insight into the postcolonial condition, demonstrating how the universalizing claims of Enlightenment rationality continue to organize global hierarchies of knowledge, humanity, and value.

This epistemic structure embeds coloniality at the level of cognition itself. To reason “properly” within Enlightenment frameworks is already to inhabit a world divided into binaries – reason/emotion, civilization/barbarism, progress/backwardness, subject/object – where domination appears as necessity and hierarchy as common sense. Enlightenment rationality and the Scientific Revolution’s mechanistic view of nature thus “served to sanction and legitimize the domination of nature and, by mutual association, women and social classes and groups who are seen as threatening or peripheral to reason and progress (Eckersley, 1998, p. 183).”

Read phenomenologically, Dhawan's critique, together with the earlier insights of Horkheimer and Adorno (2002), discloses why coloniality proves so resistant to dismantling. What appears is not merely a political ideology that can be consciously rejected, but a deeper structure of intelligibility that quietly shapes how reality is perceived, evaluated, and rendered meaningful. One may explicitly repudiate colonialism and yet continue to rely upon inherited habits of thought that privilege abstraction over relationality, control over reciprocity, and universal categories over situated forms of knowing. In this sense, coloniality reveals itself less as a set of doctrines than as a background orientation that often remains unnoticed precisely because it appears reasonable, normal, and self-evident. Even efforts directed toward decolonization may inadvertently reproduce these assumptions when they seek definitive solutions, totalizing explanations, or singular visions of justice.

From this perspective, the colonial mindset appears not simply as something learned, but as something inherited through the categories and distinctions with which modern subjects interpret themselves and the world. The phenomenological insight drawn from Dhawan and related critiques is that coloniality persists not only in institutions and explicit beliefs but also in the tacit structures that govern what counts as knowledge, rationality, and legitimacy. Consequently, reasoning otherwise requires more than intellectual critique. It involves the difficult and unfinished work of loosening one’s attachment to assumptions of cognitive mastery and epistemic certainty and remaining open to forms of knowing that modernity has often rendered marginal or unintelligible. Coloniality thus appears not merely as a historical residue but as an ongoing epistemological condition whose power lies partly in its ability to make domination appear reasonable, inequality intelligible, and alternative possibilities difficult to imagine.

Decolonization: Aims, Agendas, and Methods

The preceding discussion has traced how coloniality persists as a lived condition – shaping perception, identity, and belonging through experiences of division,

internalization, and exile. If coloniality operates not only as an external structure but as a mode of being-in-the-world, then the question of decolonization cannot be exclusive to political change or institutional reform. It must also be understood as a response to these lived conditions: an effort to recognize, interrupt, and reconfigure the historical, epistemic, and psychological patterns through which coloniality is reproduced.

The aims and agendas of decolonization outlined here draw from a range of intellectual traditions previously discussed, including Marxist critiques of political economy, Frankfurt School analyses of instrumental reason, and decolonial and postcolonial approaches to knowledge, identity, and power. These traditions are reflected in the work of thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Paulo Freire, Aníbal Quijano, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, among others. While differing in emphasis, they converge in identifying coloniality as a multidimensional structure – material, epistemic, and experiential – that calls for equally multidimensional responses.

The four core aims presented here are not exhaustive, nor are they prescriptive solutions. Rather, they are synthesized from these overlapping traditions as recurring orientations within decolonial thought and practice. They are included here as a way of connecting the phenomenological inquiry of this study with broader educational and institutional contexts, illustrating how the consciousness of coloniality may be engaged reflectively, pedagogically, and relationally.

1. Exposing the Coloniality of Knowledge: U.S. History Textbooks and National Narratives

A first core aim is to expose and critique the coloniality of knowledge. This means challenging Western epistemology and disrupting the hegemonic narratives that portray Western knowledge as superior. Decolonial critique involves destabilizing the authority of Western rationalism, objectivity, and progress narratives and revealing their historical entanglement with empire, extraction, and racial hierarchy.

One way to critique the coloniality of knowledge is to analyze textbooks and school curricula. Historiographers and historians of education have noted that U.S. history textbooks have often organized the national past around narratives of discovery, settlement, independence, westward expansion, and democratic progress. For example, James W. Loewen (1995) argues that many U.S. history textbooks present a celebratory narrative of exploration, settlement, democratic development, and national progress while minimizing the roles of conquest, dispossession, slavery, and Indigenous resistance. In this conventional narrative, European settlers establish colonies, create democratic institutions, secure independence, expand westward, and gradually realize the ideals of freedom and opportunity. In the same vein, Frances FitzGerald (1979) observed that American history textbooks have traditionally narrated the nation's development through stories of discovery, settlement, expansion, and democratic achievement, often treating conflict, dispossession, and inequality as secondary themes.

The following paraphrased and synthesized textbook summary illustrates how the celebratory character and progress-oriented themes have been narrated in traditional U.S. history textbooks (FitzGerald, 1979; Loewen, 1995).

Europeans arrived in North America seeking opportunity and freedom. Colonists established settlements, developed democratic institutions, won independence from Britain, expanded westward, and built a nation dedicated to liberty and opportunity. Although challenges and conflicts arose, the nation gradually extended freedom and prosperity to an ever-wider circle of citizens. [*Synthesized textbook narrative based on FitzGerald (1979) and Loewen (1995).*]

When read through a decolonial lens, this familiar narrative foregrounds exploration, settlement, and progress while backgrounding Indigenous dispossession, slavery, and the structures of coloniality that accompanied nation-building. By projecting this idealized worldview, the narrative functions as one of the nation's primary *origin stories* (*aka*, creation myths) that explain how the community, nation, or world came to be. Like Loewen's celebratory narratives and FitzGerald's progress-themed histories, origin stories often function as foundational narratives that provide communities with a sense of shared identity, purpose, and historical continuity (Campbell, 2008; Eliade, 1963). This decolonial reading highlights the extent to which coloniality functions as an organizing theme within familiar American origin stories and traditional narratives of national progress (Loewen, 1995; FitzGerald, 1979). The following intentionally hyperbolized summary illustrates how U.S. history would be told to highlight the thematic coloniality embedded in the knowledge structure.

During the European Exploration era, explorers like Christopher Columbus made voyages to the Americas to prepare for the colonization of the New World. In the Colonial Period, the English, Spanish, Dutch, and French established colonies in North America. The American Revolution (1775-1783) was pivotal in "coloniality" as the European Americans reversed their roles from the "colonized" to "independent" and soon morphed into becoming the colonizers of the American West, of Indigenous peoples, of racially different others, and of the International Economic Empire. [*Author's decolonial rendering*]

This author-constructed rendering is intended to foreground how coloniality can function as an organizing narrative within national histories. Its purpose is to make visible a pattern that is often backgrounded or normalized in conventional narratives and existing historical accounts. From this perspective, coloniality can be seen as part of how knowledge in history and education is structured, shaping how expansion, settlement, and national development are often narrated and understood (FitzGerald, 1979; Loewen, 1995). The centrality of coloniality in the American origin story and in U.S. history textbooks reflects its importance in the American national consciousness and identity. Those who identify with, and subscribe to, the colonial themes would

understandably doubt, resist, or oppose the aims and agendas of the decolonization movement. Their voices call for acknowledging, recognizing, and preserving the national legacy and cultural tradition of a colonial social order.

2. Centering Diverse Knowledge Systems: Re-authoring the Curriculum

A second agenda of decolonization is to center and validate diverse knowledge systems. This aim challenges the assumption that legitimate knowledge originates primarily in European intellectual traditions, and instead affirms the coexistence of multiple epistemologies, as Mignolo (2011) terms it, a “pluriverse” of expertise rather than a single epistemic center. This agenda may be illustrated by the redesign of a teacher-education or social-foundations curriculum. Instead of organizing courses around a linear canon that begins with European Enlightenment thinkers and treats Indigenous, African, Asian, or diasporic traditions as later “additions,” a decolonial curriculum might be structured thematically around shared human questions (Mignolo, 2011; Smith, 1999) – such as land, justice, kinship, or learning – drawing from multiple traditions as co-equal sources of theory. For example, a unit on education and moral formation could place Confucian philosophy, Haudenosaunee teachings, African Ubuntu ethics, and Freirean pedagogy in dialogical relationships rather than hierarchical sequence.

Such curricular re-authoring does more than diversify content; it challenges the tacit assumption that Western traditions constitute universal knowledge while other intellectual traditions are merely local, cultural, or supplementary (Smith, 1999; Mignolo, 2011). In this sense, centering diverse knowledge systems becomes a practical means of unsettling inherited epistemic hierarchies and broadening the range of perspectives available for understanding human experience. Rather than replacing one canon with another, the aim is to cultivate intellectual humility and foster more dialogical and pluralistic forms of inquiry within educational institutions (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1968).

3. Addressing Ongoing Harms: Collective Memory, Dialogue, and Pedagogies of Repair

A third aim of decolonization is to address the enduring psychological, cultural, and social consequences of coloniality through practices of remembrance, dialogue, and repair (Fanon, 1967; Freire, 1968; Smith, 1999). Decolonial thinkers have emphasized that colonialism leaves effects that extend beyond political structures to include damaged identities, fractured collective memories, and unequal social relationships (Fanon, 1967; Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Consequently, decolonization entails not only exposing systems of domination but also attending to the injuries and silences inherited from those systems.

Collective memory and historical consciousness play important roles in this process. Roger Simon (2005) argues that remembrance constitutes an ethical encounter with the past that can open possibilities for responsibility and learning. Similarly, Freire (1968) viewed dialogue and critical reflection as necessary for confronting inherited structures of oppression. Practices such as oral history, memorialization, and truth-telling can therefore serve as pedagogies of repair by enabling communities and students to acknowledge past injustices and reimagine relationships shaped by coloniality. For example, a university course on national history might incorporate testimonies from Indigenous communities displaced by settler expansion, descendants of enslaved peoples, or migrant laborers shaped by imperial economic systems. Students would be invited not only to analyze these narratives historically but also to consider how official histories have normalized silence, erasure, or moral distancing. In this sense, the classroom becomes a space where marginalized memories are brought into conversation with dominant narratives and where students are encouraged to understand contemporary inequalities within their broader historical contexts.

Such practices are not intended to erase painful histories or impose reconciliation prematurely. Rather, they seek to cultivate what Ricoeur (2004) describes as a responsible relationship to memory in which acknowledgment, interpretation, and ethical responsibility become possible. Although such educational practices may not resolve historical wounds, they foster ethical attentiveness to injuries and injustices that remain active in the present. In this sense, pedagogies of repair are directed less toward closure than toward sustaining conditions for dialogue, recognition, and renewed relationships.

4. Social Justice and Institutional Transformation: Reconfiguring Academic Power

Finally, decolonization seeks to link intellectual work with social justice and institutional transformation. Freire situates education as a dialogical practice through which learners uncover the historical construction of oppression and become agents of change (Freire, 1968). In higher education, this agenda translates into curricular reform, shared authority in knowledge production, community-engaged research, and policies that seek to redistribute epistemic and material power (Freire, 1968; hooks, 2000; Smith, 1999).

This aim may be illustrated by changes in how universities design research partnerships. Rather than treating marginalized communities as sites of data extraction, decolonial approaches to research emphasize collaborative relationships in which community members participate in defining research questions, selecting methods, interpreting findings, and determining how knowledge will be shared and used (Smith,

1999; Kovach, 2009; Tuck & Yang, 2014). Such approaches seek to reposition communities as co-creators rather than merely objects of inquiry.

For example, scholars of culturally sustaining pedagogy have argued that educational research addressing school inequality should be responsive to locally identified priorities, including language revitalization, cultural continuity, and community aspirations (Paris & Alim, 2017). Collaborative partnerships among educators, families, and communities can therefore help shape research agendas and educational practices that are grounded in local histories and forms of knowledge rather than externally imposed assumptions. Similarly, community-based participatory research emphasizes shared authority and reciprocal relationships between researchers and communities (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008).

Institutionally, this orientation may also be expressed through revised criteria for promotion and tenure, recognition of community-engaged scholarship, and support for collaborative forms of knowledge production that extend beyond traditional academic metrics. In such cases, commitments to social justice influence how universities recognize expertise, define scholarly value, and share authority in the production of knowledge. These efforts seek not only to diversify participation but also to broaden the forms of scholarship considered valuable within higher education and to redistribute epistemic authority in more inclusive ways (Boyer, 1990; hooks, 2000; Smith, 1999).

Taken together, these four aims suggest that decolonization is not a discrete reform or a destination to be achieved, but an ongoing ethical, epistemological, and pedagogical undertaking. They call for critical attention to inherited narratives, openness to diverse ways of knowing, responsible engagement with historical harms, and the transformation of institutional practices that shape how knowledge and authority are organized. Such work requires intellectual humility and historical accountability, while inviting continual reflection on what it means to know, to teach, and to live responsibly in the enduring aftermath of empire.

At the same time, the resistance and ambivalence surrounding decolonization reveal a deeper difficulty. The effort to question colonial assumptions must itself proceed through habits of thought, languages, and institutions that have been historically shaped by coloniality. This tension does not render decolonization impossible, but it does suggest that the work remains incomplete, reflexive, and necessarily open-ended. These considerations point toward the concluding reflections that follow.

Conclusion: Dwelling within the Question

This study began as a phenomenological effort to observe how coloniality is perceived, rationalized, resisted, and reproduced within consciousness itself. Rather than treating decolonization as a program to implement or a doctrine to defend, this study

approaches it as something people experience in everyday life. It looked at how decolonization shows up in consciousness: how we make sense of events, how we understand others, and how we decide what is right or just – often before we are fully aware of it.

From this perspective, the persistence of coloniality does not mean moral failure as much as cognitive and historical inheritances. The categories through which academics and scholars think – progress, development, rationality, merit, civilization, expertise – are not neutral instruments but sediments of a particular intellectual genealogy. To become aware of this inheritance is already to encounter a tension: one recognizes patterns of domination while simultaneously relying upon the very frameworks that made such recognition possible.

The phenomenological method employed in this study does not resolve this tension. Instead, it highlights and clarifies it. It shows how coloniality is sustained not only through institutions and policies, but through habits of perception, standards of credibility, emotional reflexes, and tacit hierarchies of value. The *undecolonized* mind, in this sense, is not an accusation directed outward to others, but a condition disclosed through phenomenological reflection – a shared situation in which critique and complicity coexist.

The preceding analysis suggests that decolonization is neither a final achievement nor a program that can be completed once and for all. Rather, it calls for sustained attentiveness to the ways coloniality continues to shape systems of knowledge, institutional arrangements, and everyday practices. Because these inheritances are often normalized, recognizing persistent structures of domination – external as well as internal – is necessary but not sufficient. Equally important is remaining attentive to the ways the dynamics of domination may be reproduced through language, curricula, professional norms, and even well-intentioned reforms. In this sense, decolonization becomes an ongoing practice of ethical witnessing and historical responsibility.

If a direction emerges from this study, it is not toward certainty but toward practice: the cultivation of sustained reflexivity, dialogical humility, and epistemic restraint. Decolonization, phenomenologically understood, becomes a manner of inhabiting uncertainty responsibly. It is about remaining open to being unsettled by others' knowledge, by historical wounds, and by contradictions within oneself.

Such an orientation does not promise liberation from coloniality in any final sense. It suggests, rather, the possibility of living more attentively within its shadows: naming its movements in thought, interrupting its automatic reproductions, and creating modest but meaningful spaces where other ways of knowing and belonging may appear. In this light, the task remains incomplete. It is ongoing, fragile, and relational – a form of ethical witnessing in which the work of decolonization begins with sustained attention to how patterns of exclusion, learned hierarchies, and identification with dominant

norms take shape within lived experience, and how they are reinforced or unsettled in relation with others.

References

- Apple, M. W. (2004). *Ideology and curriculum* (3rd ed.). Routledge Falmer.
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Doubleday.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.C. (1977). *Reproduction in education, society and culture*. Sage.
- Boyer, E. L. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. Princeton University Press.
- Campbell, J. (2008). *The hero with a thousand faces* (3rd ed.). New World Library
- Davis, K., & Moore, W. E. (1945). Some principles of stratification. *American Sociological Review*, 10(2), 242–249. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2085643>
- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education*. Macmillan.
- Dhawan, N. (ed.) (2014). *Decolonizing Enlightenment: Transnational Justice, Human Rights and Democracy in a Postcolonial World*, Verlag Barbara Budrich.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (1994). *The souls of Black folk*. Dover. (Original work published 1903).
- Eckersley, R. (1998). The death of nature and the birth of the ecological humanities. *Organization & Environment*, 11(2), 183–185.
- Eliade, M. (1963). *Myth and Reality* (W. R. Trask, Trans.). Harper & Row.
- Escobar, A. (1995). *Encountering development: The making and unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton University Press.
- Fanon, F. (1961). *The wretched of the earth* (C. Farrington, Trans.). Grove Press.
- Fanon, F. (1967). *Black skin, white masks* (C. L. Markmann, Trans.). Grove Press. (Original work published 1952)
- FitzGerald, F. (1979). *America revised: History schoolbooks in the twentieth century*. Little, Brown.
- Freire, P. (1968). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.
- Horkheimer, M., & Adorno, T. W. (2002). *Dialectic of enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Stanford University Press.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.
- hooks, b. (2000). *Feminism is for everybody: Passionate politics*. Pluto Press.
- Husserl, E. (1982). *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy—first book: General introduction to pure phenomenology* (F. Kersten, Trans.). Martinus Nijhoff. (Original work published 1913)
- Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts*. University of Toronto Press.
- Loewen, J. W. (1995). *Lies my teacher told me: Everything your American history textbook got wrong*. New Press.
- Maldonado-Torres, N. (2007). On the coloniality of being. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2-3), 240–270.
- Martín-Baró, I. (1994). *Writings for a liberation psychology* (A. Aron & S. Corne, Eds.). Harvard University Press.

- Marx, K. (1976). *Capital: A critique of political economy* (Vol. 1). Penguin. (Original work published 1867)
- Mehta, U. S. (1999). *Liberalism and empire: A study in nineteenth-century British liberal thought*. University of Chicago Press.
- Memmi, A. (1957). *The colonizer and the colonized* (H. Greenfeld, Trans.). Beacon Press.
- Menakem, R. (2017). *My grandmother's hands: Racialized trauma and the pathway to mending our hearts and bodies*. Central Recovery Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of perception* (C. Smith, Trans.). Routledge & Kegan Paul. (Original work published 1945)
- Mill, J. S. (1998). *On liberty* (S. Collini, Ed.). Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1859)
- Mignolo, W. D. (2011). *The darker side of Western modernity: Global futures, decolonial options*. Duke University Press.
- Minkler, M., & Wallerstein, N. (Eds.). (2008). *Community-based participatory research for health: From process to outcomes* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. (1986). *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. James Currey.
- Quijano, A. (2000). *Coloniality of power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America. Nepantla: Views from South*, 1(3), 533–580.
- Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (Eds.). (2017). *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world*. Teachers College Press.
- Ricoeur, P. (2004). *Memory, history, forgetting*. University of Chicago Press.
- Rostow, W. W. (1960). *The stages of economic growth: A non-communist manifesto*. Cambridge University Press.
- Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.
- Said, E. W. (1984). "Reflections on exile." *Granta* 13 (September), 157–172.
<https://granta.com/Reflections-on-Exile/>
- Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books.
- Simon, R. I. (2005). *The touch of the past: Remembrance, learning, and ethics*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Smith, A. (1776). *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*. W. Strahan & T. Cadell.
- Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. Zed Books.
- Spencer, H. (1864). *Principles of biology* (Vol. 1). Williams and Norgate.
- Tomlinson, J. (1991). *Cultural imperialism: A critical introduction*. Continuum.
- Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2014). R-words: Refusing research. In D. Paris & M. T. Winn (Eds.), *Humanizing research: Decolonizing qualitative inquiry with youth and communities* (pp. 223–248). Sage.
- van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. State University of New York Press.
- Wagnleitner, R. (1994). *Coca-colonization and the Cold War: The cultural mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War*. University of North Carolina Press.
- World Bank. (2000). *World development report 2000/2001: Attacking poverty*. Oxford University Press.

