Dear New Teacher
A Note on the Power of Love and Praxis in Education

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> "If love is not the motivating factor in what you do, then why are you teaching?" (Belmonte, 2009, p. 13).

MORE THAN TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, I realized I wanted to become a teacher. I wanted to share my love of literature and history with students. I also understood teaching as a form of social activism. Over the last three decades, I have worked as a high school English and history teacher, the lead teacher for my grade level in a small arts-infused school, a popular educator in a nonprofit organization, a curriculum theorist, and a teacher educator. At this moment, when much of the work educators have done to create inclusive and welcoming classrooms is under threat, I have been reflecting on the strength and power of those preparing to become teachers. In this short epistolary essay, written as an open letter of encouragement to students of education or teachers new to our beloved profession, I argue for the importance of *Amate Praxis,* which I will describe below as a theoretically informed commitment to love-in-practice.

A Note About Form: Epistolary Essay

I want to acknowledge that an epistolary essay may not initially seem appropriate for an academic journal. However, essays that engage with the philosophical and autobiographical have a long history in curriculum studies. Schubert (1991) argued that philosophical essays have been "a major form of curriculum inquiry throughout the field of curriculum studies" and that within our field "[t]he writer often makes a personal statement, asserts some knowledge with conviction, treats a variety of different topics, develops an argument shorter than a thesis, and frequently writes in an informal style" (p. 61). While less common than a philosophical essay, multiple scholars have utilized epistolary essays to highlight the personal and dialogic nature of writing and to emphasize the relationship between the letter writer and the person to whom the letter is addressed (see Browell, 2017; Pensoneau-Conway & Cummins, 2016; and White et al., 2007, p. 206).

There is a tradition of letter writing in non-fiction essays. First published in *The Progressive Magazine* in 1962, Baldwin wrote a letter to his nephew expressing both love and care for his nephew as he grows up in a country built on racism and oppression. He wanted to tell his nephew the truth of the world, to help prepare him for the conditions in which he was born. Baldwin reminded his nephew that he has been loved since the day he was born. Baldwin asserted that the act of being loved can "strengthen you against the loveless world." Baldwin further explained that even when faced with oppression and fear, "if we had not loved each other, none of us would have survived, and now you must survive because we love you and for the sake of your children and your children's children" (n.p.).

More than 50 years after Baldwin published his letter to his nephew, Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) wrote *Between the World and Me,* a letter to his 15-year-old son modeled after Baldwin's essay. In this work of nonfiction, Coates explored our nation's historical and contemporary racism, "bridging what came before him and what's happening today to give his son some context and understanding of the black experience in America" (Diamond, 2016). In an interview with Jason Diamond (2016), Coates explained that the book was not initially written in letter form. After his editor thought that the text was "still missing something," Coates decided to reframe the entire essay as a letter to his son- a letter that was "bracing, direct, and aggressive, and at the same time reflect how I actually talk in my house" (Diamond, 2016, n.p.). In both examples, the writing was made better, more powerful, more urgent because the author is writing to a loved family member. The letter format allowed the writer to merge the personal and the political while expressing urgency, truth, and love. Outside of published writing, this sense of blending of the personal and political can also be seen in the ways community members write letters to the editor to "express their opinions and engage in public discourse" (Roach, 2023) and to share calls to action on issues about which they are passionate (see National Education Association, n.d.).

Within the tradition of epistolary novels in literature, we also see authors frame stories through personal letters. In fact, the first novel I taught as a secondary teacher was Mary W. Shelly's (1818/1998) *Frankenstein.* Told through letters from Robert Walton to his sister, we hear the story of a scientist and his creation. Through a series of letters from a lonely, but adventurous explorer, we are invited to learn not just about Victor Frankenstein, but also about Walton's own sense of isolation and ambition. This sense of storytelling-through-letters allows us to access the narrator's sense of truth as told to a selected recipient, often a loved one.

Similarly, in *The Color Purple* (Walker, 1982), the letter writer, Celie, wrote her letters first to God and then later to her sister. Through the letters, we learned about Celie's abuse and pain, but also her resilience and self-discovery. During an interview about the book, Walker explained that the novel is about "the struggle of someone who thinks she has no voice and has no place and writes letters to God because she has nobody else to write to" (Goodman, 2012, n.p.) In the book, Celie's decision to write to her sister in the latter sections of the book revealed her frustration with, as Walker explained (Goodman, 2012), "the Christian god that has been imposed on black people" (n.p.). In this way, the selection of the recipient of the letter provides an insight into the author's perspective.

This idea of writing letters as a way of making sense of the world around us is central in *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* by Ocean Vuong (2019). In this novel, the narrator wrote to his mother, even though she will not be able to read the letter, as he explored his experiences of and feelings about addiction, violence, survival, and love. When the author was interviewed and asked why he wrote in epistolary form, Vuong explained, "the form allows you to go on every detour and then come back, because no matter where you go with the plot, or the tangent, you're still

talking to somebody. That's the thread." (Haber, 2019, n.p.). In each of these examples, the epistolary nature of the letter highlights the relational nature of the story, as well as the viewpoint of the narrator.

There are, of course, many more examples of epistolary traditions in literature and nonfiction. According to Encyclopedia Britannica (2025), a defining feature of epistolary novels is a "reliance on subjective points of view" (n.p). By embracing the subjective, epistolary novels "presen[t] an intimate view of the character's thoughts and feelings without interference from the author and that it conveys the shape of events to come with dramatic immediacy" (Britannica Editors, 2025, n.p.) In this way, epistolary novels and nonfiction essays in the form of letters have some parallels in our field of curriculum studies. Casemore (2024) evoked the idea of "curriculum as subjective place" as "a problem of subjective emplacement in an emergent, temporally complex, socially and psychically bounded, yet porous and capacious sphere of meaning" (p. 2). In this description, Casemore drew upon Pinar's notion of place as "a cultural, historical, subjectively meaningful even spiritual location" (p. 4). Pinar, in an interview with Ying Ma, explored further his ideas of "praxis of presence," which emphasized "one's subjective presence as a response to the crises of contemporary culture --narcissism, presentism, technocracy" (Ma, 2025, p. 3). Both Casemore (2024) and Pinar (in Ma, 2025) emphasized the subjective nature of curriculum in ways that reflect subjective, temporal, relational and embodied nature of letter writing.

Within curriculum studies, there are many examples of scholars utilizing letters to emphasize the relational nature of letters and the power of letters to facilitate understanding of complex ideas and to express the author's emotion and feeling. For example, a character within Sameshima's (2007) *Seeing Red—A Pedagogy of Parallax* recounted that letter writing is a "means to communicate with the reader. Somehow this form brings the level of 'academia' to an approachable portal and dispels communication barriers because the language is much more casual, open, and uncertain. There can be heart in the work" (p. 68). Similarly, in his examination of the syllabus as correspondence, Rocha (2020) emphasized the relational nature of correspondences, which "must be written to and for someone; it must become a something that is for someone" (p. 90). For Rocha, though, the "something" also can include a feeling of love. He asserted:

> But the teacher who writes *to* the student in their syllabus offers something that is not only the object that emerges in the syllabus document. There is love there, I think, I hope, I pray. I know it is funny and ridiculous and precious and romantic to insist that the teacher must love their students. But I insist. We do not know what love is, so there is no need to pretend that we know what that means. The point is to love without knowing what it is to love or even to be in love. (p. 89)

In writing *to* students, Rocha (2020) noted, "There is something about the intimate voice and interval of correspondence that mirrors the university lecture. After all, there is no real dividing the love letter and the last lecture." (p. 89) As my letter is addressed to a *new teacher*, and as I imagine former students who are now new teachers as my audience, in many ways this essay is a *post-last-lecture* letter written to those particular students who have been part of my community. Even though many of these specific students have only been in my community for a semester or a year, I think about them often: cheering them on from afar; hoping they are still reading, grappling, and theorizing; and worrying about them as I imagine they are teaching in this current anti-education climate.

Drawing inspiration from Rocha (2022), this epistolary essay is a continuation of my teaching. Each semester, I end the final class meeting of my upper-level courses by asking students

to write notes of thanks to one another, acknowledging the ways our community has pushed, supported, and sustained their growth. After the letters are read aloud, I present each student with a quote I have selected for them, along with an explanation of why I chose it. Then, I remind them to keep reading and always to find a community that supports them emotionally and sustains them intellectually. I tell them I hope they leave my class with more questions than answers, and I thank them for all they have taught me. In my face-to-face classes and in this epistolary essay, I recognize that our curriculum is always incomplete and that any knowledge deemed of most worth cannot be mastered in one course, both because there is not enough time and because contemplation of significant ideas often requires engagement with practice and reflection on how those classroom lessons interact with, complicate, evolve, or change through praxis.

In this epistolary essay, I build upon the example of other scholars (and community members) to embrace a letter format to highlight the embodied nature of experiences, the relationship between the reader and author, the emotion (or "heart") within the work, and the urgency in sharing strong opinions about an issue impacting our community. Within our contested, dynamic, and multidimensional field of curriculum studies (see Malewski, 2010), I also seek to use this format to signal an unfinished conversation or incomplete curriculum. While letters are situated within a relationship, the epistolary essay remains a singular text and, as such, remains unanswered. Yet there is a possibility of a future response. Like an acknowledgement of the unfinished curriculum on the last day of class, the space between what is said and what is not yet said creates a dynamic that invites further conversation. As such, I do not write *about teachers;* instead, I write a personal letter *to a new teacher,* inviting continued conversations about the unfinished or incomplete curriculum, and seeking to persuade the reader to embrace the concept of *Amate Praxis* in their work.

Conceptualizing Praxis

Dear new teacher, as you enter our profession, I hope you remember why you decided to become a teacher and take pride in being a caring teacher, a champion of our greatest democratic traditions, and a transformative intellectual. I hope you think deeply, act with intention, reflect, and then return to theory again. Engaging in theory, action, and reflection to enact change (see Freire, 2017/1970) is described as praxis, and this cycle of praxis will allow you to continue to grow as a practitioner and an intellectual. I hope you continue to read, dream, and grow. I hope you nurture your curiosity and continue seeking new ways to understand your work.

Dear new teacher, in a book I co-edited with Isabel Nuñez (Vaughan & Nuñez, 2023), we explored how practicing teachers, administrators, teacher educators, and artists interact with, apply, complicate, extend, and embody theories offered by our featured curriculum studies scholars. We argued that all actions, including pedagogical practices and curricular decisions, must be understood not as technical tasks but as decisive political tasks. *Dear new teacher*, our actions are always informed by our theory, even if we cannot cite theories or theorists who have informed our thinking. We know teaching is always both pedagogical and political, and some of the strongest teachers recognize their work as a political act.

Dear new teacher, I often tell my students that engaged learning occurs only after relationships are established, and relationships can only be established when we begin to know each other. As this is a letter rather than a discussion, I would like to take a moment to introduce myself. I am a White, cisgender woman, a mother, a first-generation college student, a curriculum

studies scholar working with theories from disability studies, and a human healing from cancer. I am an activist and a scholar, and I believe in the transformative power of education and its impact on individuals and their communities. I also believe firmly in embracing an ethic of love in all that I do. In this letter, I emphasize the importance of embracing theories, applying them in practice, and continually reflecting on your actions. Part of finding theories that resonate with you is considering who you are and how your identities and experiences influence your approach to teaching and learning.

Dear new teacher, we have seen many harmful theories in our schools, theories that are based on deficit views of children from historically marginalized communities, students who are multilingual learners, and learners with disabilities who experience the world in different ways. Yet, we have also seen theories and practices that empower learners and help create classrooms as spaces of belonging, community, love, and learning. *Dear new teacher,* I urge you to think critically and to embrace an ethic of love and praxis, which I describe as *Amate Praxis*.

Conceptualizing *Amate Praxis*

Dear new teacher, during college, I lived in a beautiful community called the *Amate House,* a place dedicated to simple living and a faith-based community that worked to *"*build a more just and loving society*"* (Amate House, n.d.). The term *amate* is the plural imperative of the Latin word *amare,* which means "to love." As a plural imperative, the term *amate* is a command or request to a group of people to love. Villapando (2010), discussing the history of the *Amate House,* explains the term *amate* as a command that "implies a sense of urgency demanding action" (p. 332). Drawing from the original meaning of *amate* and influenced by both the description of and my experience with "*amate*" as conceptualized by the *Amate House,* I define *amate* as a love not based on interpersonal feelings, although relationship building is essential, but rather an urgent action in pursuit of justice and care. In this letter, I call for an *Amate Praxis*, a cycle of theory, action, and reflection inspired by an ethic of love. Drawing from the work of many scholars, I will share with you four interconnected elements of *Amate Praxis*: care, connection, action, and hope. I encourage you to incorporate *Amate* into your praxis.

Amate Praxis as Care

Dear new teacher, hooks (1994) argued that we must "teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students" (p. 13). In *All About Love,* hooks (2018) wrote, "To truly love, we must learn to mix various ingredients—care, affection, recognition, respect, commitment, and trust, as well as honest and open communication" (p. 36). Love cannot be "hurtful or abusive" and must extend beyond individual care (hooks, 2018, p. 37). We know demonstrating care and establishing relationships are essential for teachers. Yet we also know that too many classrooms still have educators who are hurtful or abusive. I recently read Bettina Love's (2023) new book, *Punished for Dreaming*. Love shared examples of classrooms where Black children thrive. Love described, for example, bell hooks' early schooling experience with Black female teachers who "were committed to nurturing intellect so we could become scholars, thinkers, and cultural workers" (hooks, 1994, as cited in Love, 2023, p. 20). However, Love also discussed children who are ignored, neglected, and punished in our education systems. Love's (2023) book examined

policies that created "a new type of American Black bondage: The War on Black Children, in which [Reagan's] war on drugs worked in concert with school reform to pathologize and penalize Black children under school safety policies" (p. 8). We see other policies that cause harm, like an overreliance on standardized testing, unfair and overly punitive school discipline policies, overrepresentation of children of color in special education classrooms, a lack of inclusive spaces where children with disabilities are isolated or othered, and schools where LGBTQ+ youth cannot identify one trusted adult.

Dear new teacher, our classrooms must do more than resist harm—they must be places of love and acceptance. I hope you cultivate a classroom that is a place of peace, love, and belonging. I hope you remember to care not just for your students' intellects but also for their hearts and souls by building community, fostering self-discovery, reading great books, studying, creating the arts, and contemplating the mysteries of our world.

Dear new teacher, as you care for your students, I hope you remember the importance of caring for yourself. Brené Brown (2010) said,

> Love is not something we give or get, it is something that we nurture and grow, a connection that can only be cultivated between two people when it exists within each of them—we can only love others as much as we love ourselves. (p. 34)

Love can help us develop and become and become again who we are supposed to be. You cannot love and care for those in your community if you do not love yourself. *Dear new teacher*, I hope you care for and love yourself, and through your self-love and self-care, you can demonstrate love and care for all the students who enter your classroom and recognize that your future, your students' futures, and all our futures are connected.

Amate Praxis **as Connection**

Dear new teacher, hooks (2018) often critiqued the notions of love that focus solely on self-improvement, neglect the community context, ignore the connection between love and spiritual growth, or fail to align beliefs and actions (p. 109). hooks (2018) called for a love ethic which "presupposes that everyone has the right to be free, to live fully and well" (p. 119) and that we find a connection between ourselves and all others on our planet.

In his book *Love, Justice, and Education*, William Schubert (2009) presented hundreds of imagined Utopian characters responding to John Dewey's vision of education. Many Utopians discussed the role of love in education. For example, one Utopian stated: "In response to the question of the *what* and the *why* of social justice, I selected an everyday phrase *for goodness' sake. The sake of goodness*, I contend, a highly defensible prerequisite for social justice" (p. 3). This Utopian argued: "a prerequisite [for social justice] is loving relationships" (p. 3). Another Utopian commented, there is "little talk of love in educational literature. . . well, except for some teachers of young children who say, 'I really love children.' This turns out to be a kind of clichéd—the *how* and *why* is rarely clarified" (p. 30). Rejecting this cliché, a third Utopian evoked Mr. Rogers, an early childhood advocate and televised educator who discussed the importance of emotion, who asked the college students to whom he was speaking to remember "the persons who loved you into being" (p. 30). In this way, loving is a way of helping ourselves and others develop more fully. Like hooks' (2018) love ethic, the Utopian stated, "love is to live, perhaps, to live more fully" (p. 31).

Dear new teacher, we are all connected—to our families, communities, teachers, and students. I am a student of Dr. William Watkins, Dr. Pauline Lipman, Dr. Marvin Lynn, and Dr. William Schubert —I have learned to think critically, apply my analysis to specific policies in the cities in which I live, challenge my epistemological assumptions, and understand the theories embodied within our every action. As one of the Utopians in Schubert's (2009) text argued:

> Once again, Earthlings, particularly the scholars among them, are stymied by their epistemology— their ways of knowing. They want to reason, to marshal evidence, or to exert power. Again, they somehow have the sad propensity to forget about the power of love. (p. 152)

I appreciate this call to explore a variety of epistemologies or ways of knowing our content, our practice, and our students.

Dear new teacher, I am also a student of my students and my children. I have learned from Abbie, Jackson, LaWanda, Lupe, Riley, Terri, Emily, Mitch, Nancy, Denise, Jonathan, and so many others. In my work with colleagues, students, and teachers, I have learned a lesson best articulated by my dear friend and colleague Jamie Buffington-Adams. Speaking about disability justice, Buffington-Adams (2023) defined justice as providing opportunities for each other to "receiv[e] love in ways one wishes to receive it" (np.). *Dear new teacher,* I hope you will reflect deeply on who you are and how your identities, experiences, and beliefs influence not only your curricular and pedagogical decisions but also your epistemological assumptions about the purposes of education. I hope you live and work in communities that support you as you embody love, and that you find ways to act to oppose the injustices around you.

Amate Praxis as Political and Pedagogical Action

Dear new teacher, hooks (2018) defined love "as an action, a participatory emotion" (p. 197). This notion of love-in-action relates to an oft-quoted statement by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr (1967), who wrote: "Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love" (n.p.). An ethic of love, then, must always lean toward justice. This concept of love as action is further exemplified by dis/Ability scholar-activist Leah Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018), who explained: "We all deserve love. Love is an action verb. Love in full inclusion, in centrality, in not being forgotten. Being loved for our disabilities, our weirdness, not despite them. . .When we refuse to abandon each other" (p. 78).

Of course, at this moment, not leaving anyone behind means standing for all our students: our students with disabilities, our immigrant and refugee students, our students from historically marginalized communities, and our students who are part of the LGBTQ+ community. Pedagogically, standing for all our students means creating classrooms that are culturally relevant, inclusive, and accepting of each young person who enters our space, and, politically, standing for policies that embrace the promise of our classroom communities. We are called to love each student, not just those with whom we agree. In this way, *Amate Praxis,* defined as love-in-action, is always both pedagogical and political.

Dear new teacher, this love is critical today. A cluster of researchers at Leeds Beckett University called for a Pedagogy of Love (2025). They asserted,

> In precarious times, advocating for love in education may seem incongruous, yet it is precisely in moments of instability that love becomes a radical and necessary force. To teach, to lead, and to nurture are not neutral acts; they are deeply political. Love of

> humanity—understood as a collective, transformative force—encompasses social justice, critical pedagogies, and the democratisation of education. (np)

Of course, we are called to love each student, not just those with whom we agree.

Dear new teacher, Asif Wilson (2023) demonstrated the political dimension of love in a love letter about William H. Watkins' influence on his work. He explains that the letter illuminates love, which he clarified is:

> [n]ot a love between two intimate partners, but a political love. . .. Watkins helped me to visualize and actualize teaching that embodied this sort of love. His love brought forth a deep analysis of the structures that stripped love from us, and the loving pedagogical, curricular, and scholarly practices of Black (and other) people over time that ruptured those oppressive forces. (p. 68)

Wilson highlights Watkins' work as a critical scholar and embodiment of love. I think here, too, of Dr. Antonia Darder's (2011) description of a political love she learned with Paulo Freire as "unconstricted, rooted in a committed willingness to struggle persistently with purpose in our life and to intimately connect that purpose with what we call our 'true vocation'— to be human" (p. 180). Silverman (2022) quoted Freire (1970) when she argued that "as critical pedagogues, teachers aspire toward 'the creation of a world in which it will be easier to love'" and asserted a "[c]ritical pedagogy of love can exist because of the following characteristics and attributes of dialogue: humility, hope, and solidarity" (pp. 68-69).

Dear new teacher, this dialogue, based on both activism and dialogue, is an expression of love. Some scholars discuss this as transformative or revolutionary love. For example, Lanas and Zembylas (2015) defined revolutionary love as premised on the idea, "When we build on anger, we get anger; when we build on love, love is what we get" (p. 32). Other scholars, like Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz (2020), discussed this as critical love, which she defines as "a profound ethical commitment to caring for the communities we work in" (np). Starks and Terry (2024) extended this to conceptualize a critical love praxis, defined "as actions and pedagogical strategies that demonstrate educator critical reflexivity, the promotion of collectivism, action in support of social justice and care and concern for the communities in which one works/serves" (p. 260). Like Sealey-Ruiz's definition, for Starks and Terry, critical love praxis is based in

> care and concern for the communities that educators serve, [and] can be used to create homeplace within school communities that transfer beyond the schools' walls," which pedagogically can include things like culturally relevant pedagogy and an emphasis on students as change agents." (p. 2)

Dear new teacher, schools are places where understanding our democratic practices and critical consciousness is often cultivated. In *Teaching Community*, hooks (2003) recounted, "Without ongoing movements for social justice in our nation, progressive education becomes all the more important since it may be the only location where individuals can experience support for acquiring a critical consciousness, for any commitment to end domination" (p. 45).

Dear new teacher, I hope you encourage your students to show care and love for one another as well. In so doing, you are encouraging students to pursue a just way of living, as education philosopher Maxine Greene described. Greene (1995) described teaching social justice as teaching "so that the young may be awakened to the joy of working for transformation in the smallest places, so that they may become healers and change their worlds" (p. xlv). *Dear new teacher,* I hope you find communities to support you as you embody *Amate* through political and pedagogical love-in-action.

Amate Praxis as Hope for a World Not Yet Realized

Dear new teacher, hooks (2003) argued, "educators who have dared to study and learn new ways of thinking and teaching so that the work we do does not reinforce systems of domination, of imperialism, racism, sexism, or class elitism" (p. xiv) was a pedagogy of hope. This idea of love as growth or progress is also discussed by James Baldwin (1963), who used the word love "not merely in the personal sense but as a state of being, or a state of grace. . . [and in] the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth" (p. 95). For Baldwin, love takes honesty and action toward growth. This is similar to Imad's (2024) focus on love as "the nurturing ground for virtue, character, and ethical citizenship," whereas teachers "foste[r] love as a dynamic force—a force capable of driving social transformation, promoting justice, and unveiling truth" (p. 4).

Dear new teacher, love-as-hope is crucial in moments such as these. Without hope, there is danger in falling into what Giroux (2001) termed *debilitating pessimism.* Yet we see many scholars and educators who resist hopelessness. hooks (2003) argued that education is, in fact, "always rooted in hopefulness" (p. xiv). hooks (2018) also acknowledged the healing power of love to provide hope:

> Love redeems. Despite all the lovelessness that surrounds us, nothing has been able to block our longing for love, the intensity of our yearning. The understanding that love redeems appears to be a resilient aspect of the heart's knowledge. The healing power of redemptive love lures us and calls us towards the possibility of healing. . .The persistence of this call gives us reason to hope. Without hope, we cannot return to love. (p. 251)

Dear new teacher, this call to love is rooted in hopes and dreams. Philosopher Maxine Greene (1995) challenged us to see dreams and imagination as helping to unlock just possibilities. For Greene, the creation of these other worlds requires passion, which she argued is "the doorway to imagination," and only through imagination can we feel empathy and begin to imagine that another world is possible (p.16). Greene's (1995) quest for justice is a source of hope or "thinking that refuses mere compliance that looks down roads not yet taken to the shapes of a more fulfilling social order, to more vibrant ways of being in the world" (p. 5).

Dear new teacher, Greene shared remarkable similarities with critical scholar Paulo Freire (2007), who argued that *daring to dream* is a prerequisite for becoming and acting. Freire (2007) wrote, "Dreaming is not only a necessary political act but also a connotation of men and women's social-historical form of being. It is part of human nature, which finds itself within history, in a permanent process of becoming" (p. 81). This idea of working in a spirit of hope and a radical transformation is also reflected in Buenavista et al.'s (2021) conceptualization of a "praxis of critical race love," which focused on scholarship that "acts and reflects on the world (praxis) in ways that are centered in a love we have for ourselves, our communities, and our collective struggle" and which included, amongst other tenets, a "a commitment to transition from hopelessness to a perspective that demands a willingness to build and create" (p. 241).

Dear new teacher, I hope you find the theories that will ground you and empower you to dream and create more just conditions for yourself and your community. In an article I wrote during my cancer treatment, I (Vaughan, 2023) shared:

> I imagine a school system where support services, untethered from damaging labels, are provided because they benefit children, not because parents with social, cultural, or professional capital know how to work the system. I envision a focus on culturally sustaining and inclusive practices instead of accommodations after the fact for children who aren't expected or welcome. I dream of collaboration between students, teachers,

> families, and leaders of disability justice movements striving to create more inclusive schools and communities. . . As a parent, my dream includes building a world where young people can bring their whole selves to schools and communities without having to shield their spirits from ideologies entrenched in racism, ableism, and sexism. (pp. 65–66)

Dear new teacher, the dream of creating just and welcoming schools has centered my work even (or especially) in these contentious times. *Dear new teacher,* praxis will be instrumental as you serve as educators, because day-to-day, unit-to-unit, and year-to-year, you must read and think deeply, act with integrity and theoretical grounding, reflect on your actions, find a community to support and challenge you, and dream with courage and urgency. I hope you remember to dream and act to sustain your hope for a future worth building with love.

Embrace your Power to Enact *Amate Praxis*

Dear new teacher, in today's climate, it is essential to both theorize and dream. You will encounter many critics who devalue our work, who expect teachers to simply deliver pre-packaged or scripted curricula, who seek to remove the power to select books and materials, and who devalue and defund federal agencies and departments that support our most vulnerable children. Some may also minimize the importance of the work you are preparing to do.

Dear new teacher, I am so glad you are here, preparing to teach our young and help heal our world. Our world and our classrooms need you. We know from research and experience that teachers can profoundly impact children's academic growth and social-emotional well-being, sense of belonging, and disposition toward the community and the world. Teachers are professionals who offer so much to their students and their communities. Bill Ayers (2001) described teachers as: "Teaching is instructing, advising, counseling, organizing, assessing, guiding, goading, showing, managing, modeling, coaching, disciplining, prodding, preaching, persuading, proselytizing, listening, nursing, and inspiring" (p. 4). Teachers can serve as storytellers, guides, philosophers, and even, as Irvine (2002) suggested, "other-mothers" (p. 145). *Dear new teacher,* I hope you bring a praxis of *Amate,* care, connections, action, and hope to your students and community.

Dear new teacher, you are also a protector of our democracy. There has always been a democratic purpose for schooling—schools were designed to do more than just prepare students for academic success. Schools are meant to serve as centers of community where many of our children learn about what it means to live in a democracy. In 1904, Chicago teacher Margaret Haley emphasized the importance of teachers and schools upholding the "ideal of democracy" (Berger, 2024). In 2024, National Education Association president Becky Pringle echoed and extended Haley's words by calling on teachers to:

> reclaim education as a common good, as the foundation of our democracy, and transform it into something it was never designed to be—a racially and socially just and equitable system that prepares every student, everyone, to succeed in this diverse and interdependent world. (Berger, 2024, n.p.)

There are many ways to do this—by focusing on culturally relevant literature, by embracing Universal Design for Learning to create more inclusive classrooms, by helping students develop civic literacy or media literacy or both, by teaching STEM education so all students can develop skills to understand how our world works and to be innovative, by teaching environmental justice, by creating classrooms where students can practice living and working in democratic

communities. *Dear new teacher*, you have the power to nurture our youth, prepare students for all other professions, and reinforce the value of each individual you teach. *Dear new teacher*, you have the power to nurture the common good and strengthen our democratic tradition.

Dear new teacher, what a moment to choose this profession—what an opportunity to impact your students and our world. To be clear, this is a challenging moment in education, but it is also a critical one for teachers to show up, demonstrate care, and teach and influence our world. During contentious political times, we can teach civics, practice democratic decision-making, and help our students engage in courageous dialogues and cooperation across differences. *Dear new teacher,* I hope you know that you have a community of teachers who love you, not only as a sentiment and feeling but also as a political commitment to support you in creating caring communities. We believe in you, and we love you. I hope you read deeply—hooks and Freire, Greene and Montessori, Love and Ladson-Billings, Dewey and Goodley, Annamma and Anzanlúa, Schubert and Watkins. I hope you dare to oppose those systems and oppressive practices including racism, sexism, ableism, and heteronormativity, that harm. I hope you embrace your power to act as caring pedagogues, curriculum theorists, and public intellectuals. I hope you are proud of the work you will do in your classroom, and you take your responsibility seriously.

Finally, I hope you find ways to enact praxis, embrace your power, and embody an ethic of love.

With love,
Kelly

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