

Beyond Dualisms

Interdependence and Possibilities in Education Today¹

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RACIAL SEGREGATION, COLONIALISM, GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION may, *de jure*, have ended, and we have been living for some time now in a digitized age of transnational flows of information and capital, gender fluidities, and cultural hybridities. While such interdependence and fluidities are not new, the present-day digital, global context puts us in unprecedented proximities with diverse individuals and communities, with bewildering rapidity. At the same time, as we well know (especially following the 2016 U.S. elections), *de facto*, we remain divided across race, gender, class, region (rural/urban, South/North, for instance) and nation, by physical and virtual borders, chasms and silences.

Over 30 years ago, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) so evocatively conveyed the power and possibilities afforded by a *mestiza* consciousness. And Thich Nhat Hanh (1992) invited us to consider “interbeing” on the path of mindfulness towards peace. Today, in 2019, in a context of extreme polarization in the U.S.—marked by such surreal, contradictory phenomena as Facebook and Nike activism and capitalism (Zirin, 2018); perennial and draining reports of violence in and out of school contexts; and an escalating discourse of exclusionary (and, I might add, entirely unrealistic) nationalism—the question of working through contradictions and dualisms; and engaging interdependence in order to arrive at new possibilities has gained new urgency.

I take up this question in four parts—Roots and Branches, Head and Heart, Here and There and Then and Now, and Present and Future. I draw on autobiography as well as illustrative examples drawn from literature, film, and other fields. I draw on curriculum, postcolonial, and feminist theorizing and work over time (history) and place (geography).

Roots and Branches

I trace the development of my intellectual work to-date via the following four sub-sections:

- (Post)-Colonial India

- Graduate School: Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, New York
- Towards and Beyond Tenure: Louisiana State University (LSU) and the Curriculum Theory Project (CTP), Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Bergamo and *the Journal of Curriculum Theorizing (JCT)*
- And now...: At the Intersections of Postcolonialism and Globalization

The roots and branches of my theorizing reveal my longstanding commitment to equity, justice, and the ongoing work of decolonization across different contexts.

(Post) - Colonial India

Born in postcolonial India in what was then Bombay (now Mumbai), I grew up hearing stories about struggle, loss, resistance, and resilience under British colonial rule. For instance, in an article titled “Writing Home/Decolonizing Text(s)” I wrote:

Although born in postcolonial India, I grew up listening to the stories of my mother describing the terror she experienced, as a little girl, seeing British soldiers running children over in their tanks, leaving them dead in the streets of Bombay. As a little girl, my mother saw her home burning when there was a massive explosion at the docks nearby. She describes how chunks of metal, ripped from ships in the harbor, went flying through the house—taking the plate off which one of her brothers was eating lunch at that moment but, miraculously, not touching him. My mother also talks about her mother’s courage and strength of character in gathering her children and a few items of clothing and getting them out safely, before the building was consumed by flames. These horrific and painful images her stories evoked are etched in my mind, as are the utterly delightful settings and events sketched in the scores of children’s books, written by English author, Enid Blyton, which friends and I devoured insatiably, as children. Yes, for me, home and elsewhere, colonized and colonizer, past and present, oppression and resistance are necessarily intertwined. (Asher, 2009, p. 6)

More recently, Nigerian-born author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2013) wrote in *Americanah*—a novel painstakingly crafted across multiple continents and countries and set in postcolonial, global times:

The wind blowing across the British Isles was odorous with fear of asylum seekers, infecting everybody with the panic of impending doom, and so articles were written and read, simply and stridently, as though the writers lived in a world in which the present was unconnected to the past, and they had never considered this to be the normal course of history: the influx into Britain of black and brown people from countries created by Britain. Yet he understood. It had to be comforting, this denial of history. (Adichie, 2013, p. 320)

And, seven decades prior—well before the mind-numbing, fruitlessly amplified, 24/7/365, digitized media cycle—African American poet Langston Hughes, able to “look deeply” (Hanh, 1992), spoke to oppressions across continents in his 1943 poem, *Gandhi Is Fasting*:

Mighty Britain, tremble!
Let your empire's standard sway
Lest it break entirely—
Mr. Gandhi fasts today.

You may think it foolish—
That there's no truth in what I say—
That all of Asia's watching
As Gandhi fasts today.

All of Asia's watching
And I am watching, too,
For I am also jim crowed—
As India is jim crowed by you.

You know quite well, Great Britain,
That it is not right
To starve and beat and oppress
Those who are not white.

Of course, we do it too,
Here in the U.S.A.
May Gandhi's prayers help us, as well,
As he fasts today. (Rampersad, 1995, p. 578)

Here then is the first set of “and’s.” Colonialism and postcolonialism, oppressions then and now, there and here, circumscribe our lives, thought, and work. The work of decolonization has been long and arduous, *and* it remains so today.

Graduate School: Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, New York

It was as a doctoral student in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching at Teachers College, Columbia, that I had the privilege of working with strong, dedicated scholars (my major professor Karen Zumwalt, Celia Genishi, A. Lin Goodwin, Fran Schoonmaker, among others) who supported my excitement in engaging postcolonial theory to inform my dissertation research and writing—even if it was an area with which they were not terribly familiar. It was towards the mid-1990s and the discourse of postcolonialism was piping hot, following such other sizzling “posts” as poststructuralism and postmodernism which, in their turn, had also, of course, set the curriculum field abuzz.

For instance, it was Homi Bhabha’s (1994) book, *Location of Culture*, that offered me the exciting, generative concept of “interstices”—in-between spaces—as I theorized Indian American high school students’ negotiation of identities (their parents were immigrants from India) between home and school. And McCarthy & Crichlow’s (1993) edited volume—*Race, Identity, and Representation in Education*—was one of the early works that connected postcolonialism and

cultural studies with the field of education in the U.S. I still recall the “A-ha!” moment when, in my advisor’s office—discussing my “findings” as I grappled with the concept of interstitiality—I hit upon the title of my dissertation—*Margins, Center, and the Spaces In-between: Indian American High School Students’ Lives at Home and School* (Asher, 1999).

Towards and Beyond Tenure: Louisiana State University (LSU) and the Curriculum Theory Project (CTP), Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Bergamo and *the Journal of Curriculum Theorizing (JCT)*

It was at LSU—from 1999-2011—where, as member of the Curriculum Theory Project, I developed my scholarship in *and* across the areas of postcolonialism, feminism, critical perspectives on multiculturalism, and Asian American studies—in relation to curriculum, teaching, *and* teacher education—as I went through tenure and promotion to Associate Professor and eventually to Professor.

As the new Bergamo and *JCT* leadership team takes the journal and the conference further forward, I also acknowledge and thank the co-founders—Bill Pinar and Janet Miller. As this paper as well as my earlier writings reveal, Pinar’s (1995) conceptualization of *currere* and Miller’s (2005) conceptualization of worldliness in curriculum studies as well as explorations of autobiography via post feminisms have informed my work.

Indeed, in my chapter titled “Decolonizing Curriculum” (Asher, 2010) in the *Curriculum Studies Handbook: The Next Moment* (Malewski, 2010), working with Pinar’s (2004) concept of curriculum as “complicated conversation” that “keeps hope alive” (p. xiii), I wrote of the need to “ensure that curriculum work...does not become posttheory, postthought” (p. 398). And speaking to one aspect of decolonizing work ahead of us, I also wrote then:

Similarly, instead of yielding to its perennial preoccupation with penetrating the “mystery” of the East, the West can focus on emerging from its own Cartesian colonization, to break out of divisive and limiting binaries, and reach into its own past for its own stories. (p. 400)

That chapter—which appears in the sixth section (“Cross-Cultural International Perspectives”) of the volume—is the published version of my keynote talk at the 2006 conference—Articulating the Present (Next) Moment in Curriculum Studies: The Post-Reconceptualization Generations—held at Purdue University. I was one of several keynote speakers at that conference, where “junior” scholars (such as myself) had been paired with “senior” scholars, one responding to the other’s paper. Grumet (2010) in her chapter, “Response to Nina Asher: Subject Position and Subjectivity in Curriculum Theory,” thoughtfully looked back, then, at the three prior decades during which curriculum theorists—drawing, for instance, on extant discourses of psychoanalysis and phenomenology—had critiqued behavioristic approaches to accountability and argued for “humanistic methodology” rather than “social science inquiries” (p. 403). Observing the absence of discourses of “diversity” and “equity and multiculturalism” at that time (p. 403), she situated my work between “subject position and subjectivity” (p. 404). But then—Isn’t all work? Indeed, Grumet noted that in the questions I was discussing were echoes of the questions curriculum theorists had asked before—only now they were different, for instance, focusing on decolonization of the colonizer and the colonized.

At the same time, somewhat puzzlingly—perhaps even contradictorily—Grumet described my analyses as “sociological moves” (p. 407) that “would have important affects on curriculum. But they are not curriculum” (p. 407). Indeed, the three works that I cited above— Asher (2009), Adichie (2013), and Hughes’ 1943 poem (in Rampersad, 1995)—speak to *currere* in (post)colonial contexts across the globe—be it the running of the course in terms of the life of the individual, the nation, or the larger human condition.

In concluding her response, Grumet thoughtfully noted that it requires persistence to “change habits of thought” (p. 409). I couldn’t agree more. Such persistence remains critical to our endeavors towards equity and justice today. At the same time, Grumet dismissed “affixing of the adjective *post* to structuralism, modernism, colonialism, reconceptualization,” as indicative of “an abrupt conclusion to thought and a repudiation of the lived world that spawns these theories” (p. 409). Nothing is that tidy—there are, in effect, no abrupt conclusions and there, indeed, are and have been through history multiple lived worlds that generate and are generated through multiple theorizings and representations. Only, some have been in the privileged foreground for some of “us” “here,” while others have been in the shadows, at a distance, or absent from “our” dominant frames of reference. Indeed, as a critical, postcolonial, feminist scholar, I remind myself that I—and “we”—may well continue to engage and learn from these multiple theorizings and representations as we persevere with the recursive work of restructuring the discursive landscape in generative ways, foregrounding multiplicities, contradictions, contestations, *and* congruence.

And now...: At the Intersections of Postcolonialism and Globalization

In recent years, continuing to draw on both humanities and social sciences, I have worked at the intersections of postcolonialism and globalization in relation to education. Indeed, in 2014-15, as a Fulbright awardee and a faculty member in the Culture and Teaching program in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities, I returned to India—a globalized, hyper-digitized, capitalism-driven India, at that—to conduct my first research project (*Examining the Intersections of Globalization, Privatization, and Education after two decades of Economic Liberalization in India*) there as a U.S. academic. This lived experience broadened and deepened my interrogation of questions of location (e.g., “here and there,” “East and West,” “Global North and Global South”), identity and culture (e.g., “insider” and “outsider,” “self” and “other”) as a researcher and a scholar.

Head and Heart

The autobiographical excerpt I included earlier in this article cites my mother’s childhood in colonial India. My mother was also a proud kindergarten teacher and unwaveringly committed, throughout her life, to equity and justice. Given this legacy, it is not surprising that my early introduction to Paulo Freire’s (1978) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*—when I worked on educational intervention projects in urban, rural, and tribal contexts in India from 1986-1988—shaped the questions that led me to travel the 10,000 miles to Teachers College. This was all, of course, before the internet era and the apparent ubiquity of cell phones.

It was also around that time that the Third Wave of feminism was rising—with the critical writings of women scholars of color (Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, Chandra

Mohanty, among others) talking back to the silences and lacunae evident in prevailing feminist discourses of the time. I found hooks' (1990, 1994) theorizing—including autobiographical theorizing across race, culture, gender, region, and nation—exciting and powerful, as I did Mohanty's now-classic essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1991). For instance, for hooks' (1994), theory was healing:

I came to theory because I was hurting—the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me.... I saw in theory then a location for healing (p. 59).

For me, theory continues to be work that speaks to head and heart; past and present; contemplation and transformation.

As a doctoral student, I also read—alphabetically listed here—Basil Bernstein, Pierre Bourdieu, Patricia Hill Collins, Teresa de Lauretis, Jacques Derrida, Frantz Fanon, Michel Foucault, Diana Fuss, Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, Lisa Lowe, Adrienne Rich, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Ron Takaki, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Paul Willis—among other scholars. Similarly, in education/curriculum, I also read Michael Apple, John Dewey, Cynthia Dillard, Geneva Gay, Henry Giroux, Maxine Greene, Dwayne Huebner, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Patti Lather, Peter McLaren, Bill Schubert... And many others. Their labors and ideas informed my own as they evolved. It was exciting and affirming to read Anne Hickling-Hudson, Julie Mariko Matthews, and Annette Woods' (2004) edited volume—*Disrupting Preconceptions: Postcolonialism and Education*—published in Australia.

Also in the 1990s—as I was working on my dissertation research project, I realized that even as publications on multicultural education had begun mushrooming, literature on Asian American education was practically non-existent. This seems hard to imagine today. Donald Nakanishi and Tina Nishida's (1995) edited volume, *The Asian American Educational Experience: A Source Book for Teachers and Students*, and Stacey Lee's (1996), *Unraveling the Model Minority Stereotype: Listening to Asian American Youth*, were in the vanguard.

Indeed, even at AERA 2019, Division B hosted a "highlighted session" titled "Curriculum Ignor(ance)e(s): Pan-Asian Identities in the Educational Industrial Complex." In their email note² inviting me to participate, session chairs M. Francyne Huckaby and Kirsten Edwards Williams thoughtfully noted:

This conversation also serves as a reckoning with historical absences of the Pan-Asian experience in curriculum, curriculum history, and curriculum studies. Unfortunately, Division B's community has not been as attentive as we need to be to who we ignore, to what traditions and life experiences are silenced. (2018, October 10)

The works of the theorists, scholars, writers that I have cited so far have spoken to my head and my heart. It is both the intellectual engagement and the personal commitment that have allowed me to integrate curriculum and pedagogy with research and scholarship over the past three decades, as I organically crafted syntheses across postcolonialism *and* feminism; Asian American education *and* multiculturalism *and* globalization in seeking answers to enduring questions of equity and justice. The humanities *and* the social sciences, the arts *and* popular culture, in the U.S. *and* beyond, continue to fuel my thought and work in curriculum and teacher education. Such engagement with contextual and cultural specificities *along with* a focus on identifying and

working towards common goals serves as one way of dismantling the confines of monolithic constructions and us-them binaries.

Thich Nhat Hanh (1992) wrote of the necessity of both contemplation and action towards social transformation. Indeed, in an early paper, “In Contemplation: A Curriculum for Healing” (Asher, 2001), that I presented at the Bergamo conference (Bill Pinar had kindly invited me to participate on a panel), I grappled then with this question in relation to multicultural teacher education. Subsequently, I published a revised version titled, “Engaging Difference: Towards a Pedagogy of Interbeing” in the journal *Teaching Education* (Asher, 2003).

Recursively then, I ask: How might we continue today the work of engaging specificities and at the same time focus on achieving common goals across our different, multiplex identities and locations?

Here and There and Then and Now

I turn now to three distinct *and* interrelated works—drawn from twentieth-century literature and film, across national contexts—that engage race, gender, nation, and class and serve to illustrate the relevance of these considerations today.

Gay, African American essayist, James Baldwin—whose collected papers the Library Association of America will maintain in publication in perpetuity—wrote in *The Fire Next Time* in 1963, “I love a few people and they love me and some of them are white, and isn’t love more important than color?” (Baldwin, 1998, p. 327). Approaching the conclusion, he wrote, “In short, we, the black and the white, deeply need each other here if we are really to become a nation—if we are really, that is, to achieve our identity, our maturity as men and women” (p. 342).

Some two decades later, British Pakistani screenwriter, Hanif Kureishi, wrote an essay titled “The Rainbow Sign”—the title a tribute to Baldwin’s influence and the essay itself a companion to the groundbreaking film *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Bevan & Radclyffe, 1985). He wrote:

And the separatism, the total loathing of the white man as innately corrupt, the ‘All whites are devils’ view, was equally unacceptable. I had to live in England, in the suburbs of London, with whites. My mother was white. I wasn’t ready for separate development. I’d had too much of that already. Luckily James Baldwin wasn’t too keen either. (Kureishi, 1992, p. 9)

Kureishi, who was born in 1954 and is biracial, is perhaps best known in the U.S. for writing the screenplay of *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Bevan & Radclyffe, 1985) featuring the unfolding of a gay, interracial love relationship—between a young, Pakistani, British man and a homeless, young, white man—in an England marked by heightened racial and economic tensions. In “The Rainbow Sign,” (originally published in 1986) Kureishi reflected on his own experiences in school.

Frequently during my childhood...When I was nine or ten a teacher purposefully placed some pictures of Indian peasants in mud huts in front of me and said to the class: Hanif comes from India. I wondered: did my uncles ride on camels? Surely not in their suits. (1992, p. 3)

Kureishi continued:

I read with understanding a story in a newspaper about a black boy who, when he noticed that burnt skin turned white, jumped into a bath of boiling water. At school, one teacher always spoke to me in a “Peter Sellers” Indian accent. Another refused to call me by name, calling me Pakistani Pete instead. So I refused to call the teacher by *his* name and used his nickname instead. This led to trouble: arguments, detentions, escapes from school over hedges, and eventually suspension. (1992, p. 4)

Further echoes of these themes in relation to the British national context also reverberate through Kureishi’s narrative about the decades leading up to the 1980s—Margaret Thatcher’s England. Referencing the conservative anti-immigration Member of Parliament (1950-74), Enoch Powell, Kureishi wrote:

As Powell’s speeches appeared in the papers, graffiti in support of him appeared in the London streets. Racists gained confidence. People insulted me in the street. Someone in the café refused to eat at the same table with me. The parents of a girl I was in love with told her she’d get a bad reputation by going out with the darkies.

Powell allowed himself to become a figurehead for racists....

Parents of my friends, both lower-middle-class and working class, often told me they were Powell supporters. Sometimes I heard them talking, heatedly, violently, about race, about “the Pakis.” I was desperately embarrassed and afraid of being identified with these loathed aliens. I found it almost impossible to answer questions about where I came from. The word “Pakistani” had been made into an insult. It was a word I didn’t want used about myself. I couldn’t tolerate being myself. (1992, pp. 6-7)

So, yes, once again, here are themes with which we are all too familiar within and outside of our school contexts, just over three decades and about four-and-half thousand miles away. Colonization, transnational exchanges, and globalization are intertwined. And they shape identities, cultures, and curricula. It is, at the very least, an irony that empire-builders—imperialists, capitalists—reject immigration, when they have relied on it for their own gain, not only in terms of production and consumption of material goods but also production, consumption, and appropriation of knowledge and knowledge systems. (For instance, the marketing of “ethnic” goods, yoga, and travel destinations, and even the transnational peddling of accents to maximize profits are all too familiar to us.) Indeed, Frantz Fanon (1952/1967) wrote about such occupation of the body, the psyche, the tongue, and language over 60 years ago. These are the roots of present-day democratic, multicultural nations such as the U.S. and the U.K. The reification of the mythic “us” and “them” belies our interdependence. Little wonder then that in the education field today, we encounter the commodification and packaging of discourses and practices of multiculturalism, service-learning, and remediation, among others.

In concluding the “The Rainbow Sign,” Kureishi wrote:

So there must be...a new way of being British after all this time. Much thought, discussion and self-examination must go into seeing the necessity for this,...

The failure to grasp this opportunity for a revitalized and broader self-definition in the face of a real failure to be human, will be more insularity, schism, bitterness and catastrophe.

The two countries, Britain and Pakistan, have been part of each other for years, usually to the advantage of Britain. They cannot now be wrenched apart.... Their futures will be intermixed....

This decision is not one about a small group of irrelevant people who can be contemptuously described as “minorities.” It is about the direction of British society. About its values and how humane it can be when experiencing real difficulty and possible breakdown. It is about...what it really means when it describes itself as “democratic.” (1992, pp. 36-37)

Yes, once again, all of this applies to us, here, today. And many others who are like us and different from us in many parts of the globe, I imagine. Yes, these are some of our persistent themes and they play out daily in our classrooms, communities, supermarkets, and airports; with our neighbors and on our television screens; and in our heads and hearts.

Present and Future

Following Frantz Fanon, bell hooks, Audre Lorde and others who have paved the way, we know that we continue to push against objectification, continue to talk back, and continue the work of dismantling the house of cisheteropatriarchy (to adapt from Audre Lorde). At the same time, so many of us—students, teachers, Southerners, Native Americans, refugees, immigrants, Dalits, those of us who are queer, of Color, rural, urban, suburban, socioeconomically marginalized, differently abled, white, and heterosexual—do go beyond this frame daily, through our writing, performing, teaching, in thought and action, through our very acts of living, surviving, working. To phrase it differently, we are both inside and outside the box—implicated, we resist and work towards transformation. As Kelly Oliver (2004) notes decolonization entails, along with large-scale resistance movements, “psychic revolts that can take place in the everyday lives of ordinary people who resist domination” (p. 35).

So, systemically then, why have we convinced ourselves that it is unrealistic, unaffordable to work through the binaries, the dualisms that divide us? To keep on breaking them down? Audre Lorde (1984) noted that a “profit economy” necessarily relies on an “institutionalized rejection of difference” (p. 115). And Peter Taubman asked us to consider how we have lost our way, having come to rely on “teaching by numbers,” by following the “advice of salesmen, financiers, corporate lawyers, accountants, and millionaires” (2009, p. 128).

So, we face a lot of questions...

- Why do we continue to reify inequalities and dualisms—including in our perennially beleaguered public schools—despite our stated commitment to democracy?
- Given the apparent global sway of capitalistic expansion, how can we focus on fostering a culture that recognizes our interdependence and engages the enduring themes of our shared human fate, across different contexts?

- How can we declutter our minds, lives, and work so that, we may engage both our interdependence *and* specific histories and struggles as, with a steady focus, we seek possibilities in education today?
- How might we humanize curriculum (across the disciplines/subject areas) through creative arts and sciences, literature, film, self-reflexivity, and contemplation of our human condition and our shared global, multicultural future?

Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) wrote, “Nothing happens in the ‘real’ world unless it first happens in the images in our heads” (p. 87). And artist Maya Lin (2009) has given us her stunning, interactive, digital project (found at whatismissing.net) of context-specific stories of extinction and conservation—“a global memorial to the planet” bringing together art, design, science, and activism.

Former U.S. Surgeon General, Vivek Murthy (2017, June 2), provided useful illustrative examples about transformation through meditation in a school. His own as well as the students’ original skepticism notwithstanding, he described how Visitacion Valley Middle School, “hard hit by social circumstances in a tough environment,” on the outskirts of San Francisco saw itself change:

More than half of the kids had at least one parent that was incarcerated, rates of violence in the community were high, and in one year alone, before they started their program, they had 50 people that were murdered. They tried so many things to address the well-being of the students in school and they had a hard time. Suspension rates were high, grades were low, teacher burnout was through the roof. And they started a meditation program there, almost on a whim by chance, but there was a researcher who was focused on meditation, looking at the impact on children, and he began this program called “Quiet Time” at this school—twice daily meditation, it was approximately 15 minutes, twice a day. (Murthy, 2017, June 2)

He described how, a few weeks into this program, the volume in the hallways started to go down, the list of teachers calling in sick started getting shorter, until one day no teacher had called in sick. In two years, the school had reduced the suspension rate by over 70% and students’ grades went up.

Further, the Surgeon General cited some specific instances of students’ own experiences. For instance, he said:

When I talked to the kids I asked them, “Tell me what this actually did for you.” And these two girls turned to each other, and they were actually on the basketball team, one of the girls said to the other: “You know after you started meditating you became a better teammate.” And the other girl looked at her kind of offended and said: “I was a pretty good teammate before. What was wrong?” And she replied saying, “You know you used to kind of hog the ball, towards the end of the game. You were worried about not getting enough points up on the board, so you would try to shoot them yourselves instead of passing them to others. But after you started meditating, you seem calmer and more grounded, and you didn’t get as flustered when things got as difficult in those basketball games.” (Murthy, 2017, June 2)

In another instance, the Surgeon General described the background of a boy who bullied others, knew himself to be an “angry person,” and encountered a “lot of discrimination in school.” The boy’s mother struggled with addiction and left when he was a small child, his father worked three jobs. Dr. Murthy noted:

After he started meditating, he was skeptical in the beginning too, but he had this moment of calm, and it was very brief and lasted only a second, but it made him pause. It was his “aha” moment where he realized that he kind of felt good. He thought: “If that felt good, maybe I’m not an angry person, maybe I’m actually a calm person.”... Eventually he found the kids he bullied and apologized to them, and today he’s actually teaching meditation to other kids. (Murthy, 2017, June 2)

Towards the very end of the hour-long conversation, when asked to share his 60-second idea to change the world, Dr. Vivek Murthy responded:

We have to teach our children to be moral leaders. That will transform our country and our world. We teach our children about arithmetic and writing, but we do not teach them to be moral leaders—to live and stand up for the values that make our society work. Values of compassion and generosity, values of kindness. (Murthy, 2017, June 2)

More broadly in terms of curriculum and pedagogy, for some decades, the non-profit U.S.-based publisher, Rethinking Schools has been publishing critical, equity-focused works useful in K-12 classrooms as well as in curriculum studies and teacher preparation programs. There is, in recent years, a push to humanize technology (Parry, 2014; Turkle, 2011) and science (Bailey, 2016) and approach curriculum through creative, multidirectional, de-centered networks (Williamson, 2013).

Per Thich Nhat Hanh’s concept of interbeing, when we “look more deeply,” we are able to see how we “inter-are.” Learning from the experiences and narratives of others inevitably expands, deepens, enriches our knowledge and understanding. Kureishi speculated 30 years ago that a “new way of being British” might be difficult to attain. If we are going to take up the charge of embracing our interdependence and seeking new possibilities—if no individual is ever to use again the phrase “I couldn’t tolerate being myself”—then we need to commit anew daily to looking deeply, healing the splits—including the splits between theory, research, practice, and policy—and forging new ways of interbeing.

Notes

1. The original version of this article was presented as the opening keynote at the Bergamo 2018 JCT Conference on Curriculum Theory and Classroom Practice, held in Dayton, OH. I thank Ebony Adedayo, first-year doctoral student in the Culture and Teaching Program at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, for her assistance as I worked on the keynote talk. Please address correspondence regarding this article to nasher@umn.edu
2. I thank M. Francyne Huckaby for confirming approval (via e-mail on October 30, 2018) for this citation of electronic correspondence.

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