# Constellations of Legacy and Possibility

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WHEN WE GATHERED ONCE AGAIN IN DAYTON, OHIO, IN OCTOBER 2024 for the *Bergamo Conference on Curriculum Theory and Classroom Practice*, the forty-fourth anniversary of this annual meeting, there was a familiar sense of return. The Bergamo Retreat Center has long been the place where curriculum theorists converge, not simply to present research but to reimagine together what curriculum theory is and what it might become. It is here that *JCT* was born, where traditions have been nurtured and renewed, and where generations of scholars have come to test the limits of what education can mean. The 2024 Town Hall, held in the Darby room, was a moment for pause, reflection, and recommitment. Entitled *Charting New Horizons: A Dialogue with the Future Stewards of JCT*, it marked a significant transition in our community, with new editorial leadership for the *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* and new leadership for the Foundation for Curriculum Theory.

More than an administrative update, the Town Hall was a collective ritual reminding us that *JCT* and Bergamo are not merely institutions but fragile and interdependent communities in need of care. In 2024, this felt especially urgent. As we stepped into editorial and organizational stewardship, the question was not only how to preserve a legacy, but also how to imagine future possibilities. We spoke about *honoring the radical edge* that has always defined *JCT*, about *sustaining community* as the true center of the work, and about *facing head-on the crises of our present moment*: climate collapse, rising authoritarianism, anti-trans and anti-immigrant legislation, the banning of books, and suppression of knowledge. The Town Hall reminded us that stewardship is less about guarding an archive than about cultivating conditions for new growth, more about possibility than possession. This sense of legacy intertwined with future-making is not new at Bergamo. From its founding, the conference has been characterized by traditions that braid past, present, and future. Among the most cherished of these is the practice of publishing keynote addresses in *JCT*. The words spoken in Bergamo's chapel do not remain bound to that room but circulate outward, becoming part of our collective scholarly record. These keynote essays, whether deeply autobiographical, urgent political interventions, or methodological provocations, have

shaped curriculum theory's trajectory. They demonstrate how theory here is not abstract detachment but situated, embodied, and dialogical.

Another tradition that underscores this ethos of intergenerational continuity is the publication of the award-winning Graduate Student Paper. For many emerging scholars, Bergamo is the first space where their voices are not peripheral but central, where their writing is not treated as a promise of future scholarship but as scholarship in its own right. Publishing graduate student work in *JCT* enacts what our Town Hall conversations called for: community at the center, renewal through recognition, sustaining a field not by conserving its boundaries but by inviting new energies. These traditions also remind us of the figures who first imagined Bergamo and *JCT*. Central among them is *William F. Pinar*, whose role in the reconceptualization of curriculum studies and in the founding of both the journal and the conference is inestimable. Pinar's (virtual) presence at the 2024 conference was a living reminder of this genealogy. His keynote, The Subjective Necessity of Nonviolence, published in this issue, is not a nostalgic return but a reinvestment in themes that continue to animate curriculum studies, such as interdependence, psychoanalytic detachment, and political urgency.

Pinar demonstrates the eclectic and omnivorous relationship between curriculum studies and theory in its myriad forms, weaving together Bayard Rustin and Judith Butler to conceptualize nonviolence not only as an ethical stance but a subjective practice, a way of inhabiting self and world amid violence. His address exemplifies how Bergamo and *JCT* insist that theoretical reflection is simultaneously personal, political, and pedagogical.

Placed alongside Pinar's return, the 2024 Town Hall took on an added resonance. We spoke about honoring legacy, not as mere preservation but as fidelity to the aforementioned radical edge of this scholarly community. We affirmed that *JCT* has always been a home for ideas too unruly for other journals, including arts-based inquiries, queer pedagogies, decolonial imaginings, and postqualitative inquiry. We recognized that these once-marginal approaches have influenced broader educational discourses precisely because *JCT* offered them space to grow. To honor legacy, then, is to keep that space open, to continue taking risks. We also spoke of community at the center. Bergamo and *JCT* have never been only about the circulation of articles; they engender relationships, nurture emerging scholars, and cultivate mutual aid in an academy that too often isolates and commodifies. This is why the Graduate Student Award matters, why Town Halls matter, and why we gather in Dayton year after year. Ours is a community that insists scholarship is not only the production of knowledge but the creation of conditions under which people can thrive.

And, inevitably, we spoke about looking ahead. We cannot theorize curriculum as if the world were not burning, as if books were not being banned, as if trans children were not under attack, as if fascism were not rising. The Town Hall named these crises *and* provoked generative questions. How can curriculum theory analyze *and intervene?* How can the field of curriculum studies align itself with, contribute to, or lead justice movements? How might it both imagine and enact liberatory futures? These themes and provocations resonate across the articles gathered in this issue of *JCT*, which themselves form a constellation of legacy and possibility.

Pinar's essay on nonviolence offers one anchor, reminding us of the subjective practices necessary for resisting violence. From there, other stars emerge. *Cathryn van Kessel and Kevin J. Burke*'s essay, "A Curriculum of Illusion and the Miraculous," invites us to consider illusion not as deception but as a mode of radical hope. Drawing on Baudrillard and Orsi, they suggest that amid dread and collapse, it is precisely illusion and the miraculous that might allow us to glimpse

possibility. Their essay extends our Town Hall theme: looking ahead requires not only critique but imagination, not only demystifying structures but conjuring miracles.

*Reyila Hadeer*'s "A Letter to a First-Year K–8 Classroom Teacher," whose self-portrait is the image for this issue, embodies community at the center, and the radical possibilities that come from embracing complex notions of curriculum. Written from a Uyghur scholar's transnational and autobiographical perspective, the letter challenges Eurocentric curriculum frames and models pedagogy as relational, dialogic, and caring. It enacts the very mentoring and mutual aid our Town Hall called for, transforming scholarship into a form of correspondence and companionship. Moreover, Hadeer's writing demonstrates how theory and practice are neither antagonistic nor antithetical. Instead, bringing the capaciousness of curriculum studies to bear on the seemingly quotidian experiences of classrooms serves to amplify, complicate, and reimagine the radical possibilities of teaching and learning. As educators who began our journeys in K-12 classrooms, Hadeer's letter reminds us how curriculum theorizing honors the complexity and joy that come from refusing the currents of standardization and dehumanization that so often accompany contemporary educational policies and the narratives that drive them.

*Rouhollah Aghasaleh and Zari Aghajani*'s "Not a Virtual Education" returns us to the entanglements of public and private, documenting Iranian women teachers' experiences during COVID. Here we see how patriarchy and neoliberalism converged in virtual education, producing new inequities. But we also see the refusal of women teachers, their persistence in caring and teaching under impossible conditions. This essay resonates with Pinar's theme of subjective necessity: survival itself becomes a pedagogy.

*Amanda M. Kingston*'s work on the Oklahoma Land Runs interrogates how curricular reenactments reproduce settler colonial memory and whiteness. By unpacking the ways schools stage colonial conquest as harmless play, the essay insists on a curriculum that confronts rather than reenacts violence. In conversation with Hadeer's decolonial critique, Kingston's essay shows how curriculum is always implicated in the reproduction—or disruption—of historical erasure.

Together, these essays extend the conversations of the 2024 Town Hall. They honor legacy by deepening long-standing commitments: to autobiography, to decolonial critique, to radical imagination. They place community at the center, modeling scholarship as relational, caring, and dialogical. And they look ahead by confronting our most urgent crises—patriarchy, colonialism, authoritarianism, climate collapse—while insisting that curriculum theory is not powerless in the face of them. To read this issue, then, is to see a constellation emerge. At one end shines Pinar, a founding figure whose voice continues to anchor our field. At another glimmer, the sparks of emerging scholars, graduate students, and early-career thinkers whose work refracts new light into our community. Between them stretch myriad other stars, each article shining on its own but also illuminating connections when read together. This is what Bergamo has always done: made visible the constellations that link legacy and possibility, past and future, analysis and imagination.

As we move forward in our stewardship of *JCT* and *FCT*, we are mindful that our work is not only about editing articles or convening conferences. It is about sustaining a constellation, cherishing the lights that have come before even as we remain open to new polestars and novel orientations. It is about ensuring that no one shines alone, that the sky remains open for future mapping. The 2024 Town Hall reminded us of this. The essays in this issue embody it. And the traditions of Bergamo—publishing keynotes, honoring graduate student work, gathering year after year—enact it.

We invite our readers, then, to see themselves as part of this constellation: inheritors of legacy, builders of community, and imaginers of futures. Together, we chart new horizons.

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# The Subjective Necessity of Nonviolence

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WHILE IT'S THE FIRST TIME JEFF TURNER—my partner for almost thirty years—has been in this room, it's not my first time. I've been here before, many times, and over several decades. You see, I started—but could not have brought off without the invaluable assistance of my co-director Janet Miller—the JCT-associated conferences (*JCT* a journal I also started but could not have brought off without Janet Miller, who served as Managing Editor). The first of these meetings was held at the Airlie House in Warrenton, Virginia, that location thanks to University of Virginia Professor Charles W. Beegle, a student of Paul Klohr, as is Janet Miller and Tom Poetter's mentor at Indiana University, Norm Overly. The year was 1978. Bill Schubert might have been there. James B. Macdonald was. At those first meetings, our conference wasn't large enough to occupy the entire place; maybe our second year there we learned that we were sharing the place with the CIA, a fact that prompted us to move the meeting. I think it was through University of Dayton Professor Joseph Watras that Paul Klohr learned of the Bergamo Center, as you know associated with the Catholic Church, not the CIA but another institution not all progressive people appreciate. Paul and I drove here in 1981—I was still teaching at the University of Rochester, where I'd met Janet Miller—and we decided it will do. The first conference was held here in 1982, the name JCT conference soon replaced by the Bergamo Conference (informally only, as the conference site director discouraged us from officially adopting the name).

Tonight, here, in this room where I've been so many times before, I am responding to the call of nonviolence, a call Hongyu Wang heard first and resounded to the rest of us in curriculum studies. What I'm presenting tonight is a course of study juxtaposing—a term Janet Miller brought to my attention, one also developed by Teresa Strong-Wilson—a series of fragments, a term Tom Poetter (2025) employs in his moving new book titled *Curriculum Fragments*. A literary-philosophical term, fragment is also a scientific, specifically geological term, as geologists reconstruct the past by "using mere fragments to tell a larger story" (Schulz, 2024). If you'd like a glimpse into Tom's curriculum fragments—before asking your university library to purchase a copy—go to www.curriculumstudies.ca—scroll down the table of contents on the left, click on our YouTube channel, and there—among other offerings—you'll find the book launches I've hosted, among them Tom's, but also others, including the launch of James Burns' (2023) important new book—*Curriculum and the Problem of Violence: Biopolitics, Truth, History and Fascism*—and

Hongyu Wang's 2021 *Contemporary Daoism, Organic Relationality, and Curriculum of Integrative Creativity*. Other curriculum studies texts I'd like to acknowledge as influential are Hongyu Wang's (2024) *Awakenings to the Calling of Nonviolence in Curriculum Studies* (preceded by her 2014 book *Nonviolence and Education: Cross-Cultural Pathways*), James P. Burns' (2023) aforementioned *Curriculum and the Problem of Violence*, Christopher Cruz's (2024) *Curriculum as Confession*, Molly Quinn's (2014) *Peace and Pedagogy*, and Kathy Bickmore's (2025) forthcoming collection *Constructive Conflict Pedagogies for Building Democratic Peace: Teaching Strategies from Around the World*. On Bickmore's (2024) essay "Schooling for Building Just Peace: Comparative and Canadian Perspectives on Facing Difference, Conflict, and Violence in Education"—which appeared in recently released *Curriculum Studies in Canada: Present Preoccupations*—I will comment now, fragment #1, a fragment telling a "larger story."

## Fragment #1
## Teaching Peace

Despite Canadian commitments to peace, pluralism and multiculturalism, Bickmore (2024) points out that Canadian schools are also shaped by their parent "patriarchal settler state" (p. 42). That painful paradox preoccupies Bickmore; she has focused her curriculum research on "persistent violence, disproportionately affecting marginalized people" (p. 42). She wonders how the curriculum might address "violence and social justice conflicts" (p 42), thereby enacting those very commitments to peace and pluralism to which Canadians declare allegiance. Such a curriculum of conflict encourages the "continuing expression of difference" (p. 42), as well as ongoing study of "un-peace" (p, 42). Bickmore asserts that violence is "*not* inevitable" (p. 42), that "its underlying conflictual causes can be satisfied, redirected, ended, or mended" (p. 42), that nonviolence can, in fact, be taught. (So did Freud, by the way, although not as confidently as Bickmore.) She shows that "meaningful peacebuilding education" (p. 42), while "challenging," is nonetheless "possible in public schools" (p. 42).

How, you ask? "Peace*building*," Bickmore (2024) explains, "involves multidimensional ongoing efforts" to "transform" the causes of conflict, then "to redress and repair their disproportionate harm to the most vulnerable" (p. 44). That occurs by "helping students to acquire language, concepts, skills, and relationships for recognizing, communicating, and deliberating about the cultural and social-structural causes and consequences of destructive conflicts, and about what people can do collectively about these problems," in so doing demonstrating that the school curriculum can support "youths' development of agency for transformative peacebuilding" (p. 45). What undermines peacebuilding is that the "curriculum tends to be skewed by unjust social structures and oppressive cultural beliefs and practices," often shifting "responsibilities for achieving just peace onto individuals, instead of enabling and inspiring them to probe social-structural, cultural and political factors that constrain as well as enable their agency" (pp. 45-46). (As we'll see, Judith Butler also demotes the role of the individual in nonviolence.) Despite the omnipresence of injustice, Bickmore (2024) remains "guardedly optimistic" that the curriculum "*can* help more young people, more of the time, to develop capabilities and motivating relationships for handling complex contemporary justice conflicts" (p. 46). In fact, when "multiple dimensions of conflicts and potential peacebuilding action options" are included in the curriculum, when "teachers find ways to listen and to support their self-expression and action roles," the

curriculum can create "space for young people to develop hope and capabilities, to build just peace in their own and others' lives" (p. 46). Building just peace in her own and others' lives was primary among Jane Addams' achievements, for which she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931.

## Fragment #2
## Conviction and Emotion

I take my title from Jane Addams' "The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements," published in 1893,[1] an essay in which Addams explains that that her social settlement—Hull House,[2] in Chicago—was an "effort to add the social function to democracy," an effort that rested "on the theory that the dependence of classes on each other is reciprocal" (Lasch, 1965, p. 29). Addams tells us the title refers to her analysis of the "motives which underlie a movement based not only upon conviction, but genuine emotion"[3] (p. 29). She parcels her motives into three, the first being the

> desire to make the entire social organism democratic, to extend democracy beyond its political expression; the second is the impulse to share the race life, and to bring as much as possible of social energy and the accumulation of civilization to those portions of the race which have little; the third springs from a certain renaissance of Christianity, a movement toward its early humanitarian aspects.[4] (p. 29)

"Race" here means the human race (or species), "social organism" implies that society is alive and, despite political, class, and ethnic divisions, is one entity; "civilization" implies the centrality of reason in the expression of emotion, and that "certain renaissance of Christianity" seems less doctrinal than communitarian in its insistence on the equality of human beings.[5]

In contemporary America, at least among left and left-leaning academicians, talk of Christ connotes not left-wing but right-wing political activism, and specifically Christian Nationalism,[6] a topic James Burns (2025) discusses in his new book. But recall that Christ has also been cast, even in America, as a left-wing internationalist, including in curriculum studies, in that sector of scholarship—understanding curriculum as theological text—we outlined in *Understanding Curriculum* (Pinar, 1995), a sector influenced by Liberation Theology as well as progressive Jewish thought and activism. I think of Pasolini's portraiture of Jesus as social revolutionary in his 1964 film. Obviously, Addams had access to none of that but there was in her time a progressive pulse to Christianity, even some association with progressivism, even socialism (Handy, 2009). That progressive pulse—what Addams' affirms as "social service"—led her to also pen "The Objective Value of a Social Settlement." Here, however, I focus on subjective necessity, not of social settlements but of nonviolence, itself also with "objective value," as the "problem of violence"[7]—as Burns (2023) puts it—plagues us all. It was racial violence that prompted Bayard Rustin's affirmation of nonviolence, the focus of fragment 3.

## Fragment #3
## Nonviolence as a Political Strategy

Rustin merits a central place in the "national memory," John D'Emilio (2003) asserts; he was a "key figure of his time" and, "more than anyone else, Rustin brought the message and

methods of Gandhi to the United States"[8] (p. 1). Indeed, it was Rustin who "insinuated nonviolence into the heart of the black freedom struggle," convinced that "violence could never bring justice and that war could never bring peace" (pp. 1-2). An "internationalist long before *globalization* became a catchword in American life," Rustin knew that "ordinary individuals could make a vast difference in the world, and he communicated this conviction widely" (p. 2). If Rustin is insufficiently recognized today—although there is Netflix documentary—it is, D'Emilio suspects, it is "because he was a gay man in an era when the stigma attached to this was unrelieved" (p. 2).

D'Emilio (2003) deems Rustin the "perfect mentor" for Martin Luther King, Jr., Rustin a subjective synthesis of Quaker, Gandhian, and Marxist perspectives that was "unusual, if not unique," enabling Rustin to become a "radical strategist able to combine vision, values, and program" (p. 2). Rustin's "mark"—on both the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott (when and where he first met King) as a nationally significant event. and on the evolution of King as the nation's foremost leader of nonviolent civil rights struggle—was "profound," D'Emilio concluding that "Rustin was responsible" for installing "nonviolence into the very heart of what became the most powerful social movement in twentieth-century America" (p. 237). But, D'Emilio adds, discerning that contribution isn't easy, as—despite being assertive in private—Rustin worked to erase himself in public, an ongoing effort he made in part due to his "Quaker" and "Gandhian modesty," but also due to his arrests—perhaps most prominently in Pasadena, California—for acting out his homosexual desire (p. 237). This self-concealment was not only self-focused but also conveyed his concern that his legal record might jeopardize the moment to which he had dedicated his life. In King's subsequent account of the Montgomery boycott, Rustin received no mention, and other accounts accord him only a marginal role (p. 237).

The truth is that King came to rely on Rustin almost at once, Rustin recalling that "my presence there was incommensurate and stimulating to Martin. I think he totally depended on me, not that I was always right, but I would tell him the truth" (as quoted in D'Emilio, 2003, p. 238). Rustin and King met secretly in Birmingham concerning the financial support that boycott required and, specifically regarding what funds those in the North might donate (p. 238). King, Rustin remembered, asked about nonviolent resistance, wondering what strategies might maintain the vibrancy of the protest (pp. 238-239). King also required a ghostwriter, since the protests left him no time for writing (p. 239). Rustin went to work right away, starting an article while in Alabama, finishing it the day he returned to New York, mailing it that same day to King. As he acted, so he wrote; sounding like Alain Locke,[9] Rustin wrote that the boycotts announced the arrival of a "new Negro" with a "revolutionary change in the Negro's evaluation of himself" and a heightened consciousness that "economics is part of our struggle" and, finally, that the protestors were employing "a new and powerful weapon—nonviolent resistance" (as quoted in D'Emilio, 2003, p. 239). He reassured King that he had accented the "moral aspects" of the protest, then he asked permission to publish the piece under King's name in the April issue of *Liberation*; it was King's first publication (p. 239). D'Emilio points out that King's acceptance of Rustin's writing implies his "trust" of Rustin, of Rustin's ability to characterize King's crusade in terms that the "novice activist felt able to embrace" (p. 239).

Rustin is most remembered as the organizer of the 1963 March on Washington, assembling 250,000 protestors (p. 354). As you know, King closed his address with an image of all Americans joining hands together, singing, in the words of an old spiritual: "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last" (as quoted in D'Emilio, 2003, p. 356). Rustin remembered "electricity in the air. Everyone who was there knew that the event was a landmark … one of the

great days in American history" (as quoted in D'Emilio, p. 357) and, D'Emilio adds, "perhaps the greatest of his life" (p. 357).

## Fragment #4
## Interdependency

That Rustin brought off—with the help of many others—"one of the great days in American history"—is my segue to fragment #4, interdependency, a term Judith Butler (2021) invokes as affirming the social necessity of nonviolence, its social necessity for me implied in its subjective necessity. Butler emphasizes that "one self is implicated in another self," rendering nonviolence an acknowledgement of that "prior social relatedness" (p. 9). Pinpointing "individualism" as the culprit, she critiques the concept, as nonviolence cannot, she insists, be "predicated" on individualism (p. 9). Even this defender of the individual wouldn't want to *predicate* nonviolence upon any asocial conception; neither nonviolence nor the concept of the individual is asocial.

Butler (2021) doesn't see the individual as asocial either, noting that "if" one is "constituted" through one's relationships with others, then "part" of self-preservation implies preservation of "social ties that define the self and its world" (p. 9). Here Butler is admitting the social ties aren't always let's say supportive, not even in peace time, certainly not during times of (as Bickmore puts it) "unpeace," admitting that "relationality is not by itself a good thing, a sign of connectedness, an ethical norm to be posited over and against destruction: rather, relationality is a vexed and ambivalent field in which the question of ethical obligation has to be worked out in light of a persistent and constitutive destructive potential" (p. 10). She continues by adding that ethical action is "never exclusively reflexive," meaning that it could never be reliant upon the self-self relation "alone" (p. 10). That's self-evident, as the situation—often if not always involving others, human and non-human—has embedded within it oneself. While obviously not dependent only on one's relationship with oneself, ethical action is also obviously dependent on the self-self relation: for example, childhood abuse can become internalized, becoming self-abuse (Cikanavicius, 2017) and the abuse of others (Lansford et al., 2009).

Butler (2021) considers interdependency a "condition" of "equality" (p. 47), an ideal without which she thinks nonviolence becomes unintelligible. (Recall Rustin's invocation of nonviolence in service to equality, at first racial then late in his life to gender equality.) Emphasizing equality's "relational" nature, acknowledging that our relationality can also the source of its self-destruction (p. 62), —an admission reminding me of Sartre's quip "hell is other people" (Binder, 2023) and Freud's pessimism concerning the control of human aggression, which Butler herself discusses later in the book—Butler again worries we overlook our interdependency and the vulnerability it installs if we dwell on nonviolence as an "individual mode of life" (p 61).

Toward the end of the book, Butler (2021) reaffirms her vows, insisting that "vulnerability" is no "attribute" of the human subject, but instead a "feature" of "social relations," although that abstraction she quickly genders, suggesting that skepticism toward nonviolence and its devaluation as only "passive" derives from another dualism, i.e. construing femininity as passive, masculinity as active (p. 201). Whether gendered or not, declining to act is not necessarily "doing nothing" (p. 202) Butler observes, and there times when simply surviving is sufficient (p. 201). Butler concludes as she began, calling for a "new imaginary," one that affirms our "interdependency" (p. 203). In my view, a curriculum emphasizing dependency, interdependency, and the nonviolence

these require, would be a social psychoanalytic one (Kincheloe & Pinar, 1991), cultivating reasoned interpretations informed by evidence, argument, and imagination, an effort to free us from the ongoing trauma of human history. Let's look to history for a precedent supporting an intrapsychic strategy for affirming nonviolence.

## Fragment #5
## Detachment

The historical precedent I have in mind is unfashionably Western, even British, in fact Victorian. What Amanda Anderson (2001) terms the "powers of distance" communicates the considerable benefits of distancing oneself from the norms and conventions that characterize the common sense of any era (p. 5), although, as with the Victorians (the subject of Anderson's study), there can be "ambivalence and uncertainty about the significance and consequences of such practices" (p 3). She uses "distance" interchangeably with "detachment," the latter term "meant to encompass not only science, critical reason, disinterestedness, and realism, but also a set of practices of the self, ranging from stoicism to cosmopolitanism to dandyism" (p. 7). (Yes, she has Oscar Wilde in mind.) Anderson acknowledges that "detachment takes many different forms, and produces many different effects," including "harmful" ones, but she defends the "progressive potentiality of those modern practices that aim to objectify facets of human existence so to better understand, criticize, and at times transform them," a practice, she reminds, that "marks the project of the Enlightenment and its legacy" (pp. 5-6). The "promises and dangers of distance," she notes, "were understood as practices having an intimate and profound bearing on moral character," the past tense because Anderson is studying the Victorian preoccupation with detachment (p. 9), an era now often denounced but, as her study underlines, still with powerful potential for the "cultivation of character, both drawing on and transforming the tradition of *Bildung*" (p. 6), and—I would add—*currere* (Pinar, 2011).

In affinity with concepts and traditions from which Wang works—*ubuntu*, Buddhist nonduality, and Taoist *yin-yang* dynamics (Wang, 2024)—Victorian conceptions on cosmopolitanism included "reflective distance from one's original or primary cultural affiliations, a broad understanding of other cultures and customs, and a belief in universal humanity" (Anderson, 2001, p. 63). Anderson notes that the "relative weight assigned to these three constitutive elements can vary, as can the forms of identification against which 'reflective distance' is defined" (pp. 63-64). In antiquity, for instance, in the early elaboration of cosmopolitanism by the Cynics and the Stoics, "cosmopolitan detachment" challenged confined perspectives and affirmed the perspective of the polis" (p. 64). During the Enlightenment, detachment was defined against the narrow allegiances of religion, class, and even the state (p. 64). It could include "both intellectual and ethical dimensions, with a prominent emphasis on the practice of self-cultivation" (p. 64). Not until the nineteenth century did cosmopolitan detachment become defined in relation to nationalism, although even then still conveyed the "ethos" associated with the Enlightenment (p. 64).

Of course we in the West must confront the past—including legacies of imperialism, colonialism, genocide—but it's also true that these hardly confined to the West, no exoneration but a reminder that the human capacity to become inhuman has not been segregated in one place, in no one (no matter how very long) time, among only one people or sets of peoples. "Western Civilization"—like Mac Sweeney (2023), I capitalise the term to indicate that "it is an invented

abstract category, rather than a neutral descriptive term" (p. ix)—can also inform our understanding of nonviolence, specifically late Victorian conceptions of detachment.

## Fragment #6
## Sisyphus

I close this fragmentary course of study with Camus' (2018/1955) consideration of Sisyphus, a myth that for Camus constitutes a call to life midst death, Camus writing the essay in 1940, Europe then submerged in the deadliest conflict humanity has ever undertaken (The National WWII Museum New Orleans). In contrast to Einstein's exchange with Freud, Camus ponders not world peace, ending aggression against others, but self-directed violence, the question of suicide (p. 3). This resounds in curriculum studies as the problem of being between hope and despair, first formulated by Roger Simon, that third in-between space being—I suggest—one of resolve, yes a form of synthesis (that final phase of the method of *currere*), but also a solidification of emotion, of what Jane Addams called conviction, the idea with which I started. No "solidification" or "conviction" for Camus; he is focused on the "worm" in the human "heart" (p. 5), suicide also a form of confession—recall Christopher Cruz's (2024) conception of curriculum as confession—confession that life lacks "any profound meaning," that there is no compensation for a daily life that can seem "insane," Camus calling it "that daily agitation," all topped off by the pointlessness of "suffering" (p. 5).

Understanding, Camus suggests—sounding phenomenological—is "not a matter of explaining and solving, but of experiencing and describing" (p. 94), but surely understanding involves all four. Where we concur occurs in his next sentence: "Everything begins with lucid indifference" (p. 94). Detachment, distance, non-attachment, indifference: each of these overlapping concepts implies non-coincidence with reality—what Camus terms "intelligence's refusal to reason the concrete" (p. 97)—in which the "I" registers what happens. The "concrete" may resist reason, but it welcomes the senses; the abstract in abeyance allows the "triumph of the carnal" (p. 97), for me not only an affirmation of aspects of nineteenth-century (and not only French) decadentism, not only a repudiation of modernity but to my mind a political project, an anti-racist shattering of racist subjectivity. "Today," Camus writes, "when thought has ceased to lay claim to the universal, when its best history would be that of its repentances, we know that the system, when it is worthwhile, cannot be separated from its author" (p. 100). We are of course interdependent—as Butler (2021) emphasizes—and yes, the individual can be considered a singularization of the universal, but neither insight refutes the fact that human reality is thought, in some sense even authored, by the libelously belittled individual. "Indeed," Butler writes elsewhere, "thinking, like other solitary and even private activities (distinct from actions), takes place between me and myself or in dialogue with one other" (p. 227).

For Camus (2018/1955), the "purpose" of being "human" is presence, to "maintain awareness," requiring "discipline" as well as "patience" and "lucidity" (p. 115). Key is "creation," for Camus the "staggering evidence of man's sole dignity: the dogged revolt against his condition, perseverance in an effort considered sterile" (p. 115). In this course we can't help but think of "revolt" against violence, "perseverance"—conviction for Jane Addams—and resolve for me, that makes our cause crystallize in thought and action, continuing against all odds, like Rustin, seeking peace and pleasure. Camus emphasizes the dailiness of our "effort," that effort dependent upon

"self-mastery," that following from and contributing to subjective coherence that enables lucidity, a "precise estimate of the limits of truth, measure, and strength," an "*ascesis*" (p. 115).

Camus (2018/1955) reminds us that the gods had condemned Sisyphus to roll a rock up a mountainside to its summit, at which point it fall back down, no punishment more "dreadful" than such "futile" and "hopeless labor" (p. 119). You've probably guessed already that Sisyphus is Camus' "absurd hero," his "passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted toward accomplishing nothing" (p. 120). For Camus, "this is the price that must be paid for the passions of this earth" (p. 120). Apparently, Sisyphus can afford to pay, as "he is stronger than his rock," his punishment at times bringing him "sorrow" but also "joy," Camus concluding: "This world is not too much" (p. 121). Indeed: "One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (p. 123).

More than inner peace, happiness may be the ultimate form of nonviolence, and not only subjectively, as happiness can be contagious. Happiness transcends hope—and despair—somehow suturing the wound between humanity's "basic absurdity" and "implacable nobility," Camus' two poles of the "human condition" (p. 127), for Camus meaning that once the absurdity of our all-too-human situation is "recognized, accepted," that once we are "resigned to it," the human condition "has ceased to be the absurd" (p. 135). Recognition and acceptance of, as well as resignation to, the ongoing metaphysical "revolution" that is our fate—these would seem to be (for Camus for sure) among the dynamics of hovering[10] between hope and despair, a subjective state of detachment that encourages coherence, synthesis, even resolve, these registering a specific reconfiguration of the self that swerves toward nonviolence. Instead of being whipsawed between opposites, the self can be restructured to accommodate ambivalence, dwelling in-between, hovering on that Aokian bridge that is no conveyance but a suspension, connecting us to neither this nor that but to both/and, self-suspended—detached, distanced—from what it experiences through the calm that is the "I"—yes, a figure of speech but also the source, entrusted with the gift of (my, your) life, a gift to be preserved, calling us to affirm the subjectivity necessity of nonviolence. And that is the larger story these fragments tell. Thank you.

## Notes

1. This and a second statement of her early settlement philosophy—"The Objective Value of the Social Settlement"—Addams articulated as two public addresses—at a conference in Plymouth, Massachusetts, in the summer of 1892, statements "so effective," Brown (2004) reports, that "these two speeches, and the published articles they quickly became, that they have acquired iconic status, frozen in time as Jane Addams's signature statement, quoted as though she never revised her thinking beyond the age of thirty-two. While, in truth, she was revising her thinking even as she delivered the speeches, they still serve as eloquent samples of the ideas and prose she had been rehearsing in Chicago gatherings since 1890" (p. 263).
2. https://www.nps.gov/places/hull-house.htm Elshtain (2002) explains: "Hull-House had been up and running for three years when Jane Addams delivered what was destined to become a famous essay on 'The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements.' This paper and its twin, 'The Objective Value of a Social Settlement,' provide a strong sense of Addams's passionate commitment, her ability to analyze social conditions critically, and her recognition that in hard, constructive work lay not only her salvation but that of many other educated young women…. Building a democratic culture was the heart of the matter" (p. 94). That resonates with Dewey's *Democracy and Education*—published more than two decades later. Seigfried (1996) sees Hull House as "not so much an example of Dewey's theory of education, as it was already exemplary of what Dewey sought to theorize" (p. 74).
3. Ibid. For Addams, "conviction"—an expression of ethics—derived from experience. Knight (2005, 330) explains: "In 'Subjective Necessity' she had embraced experience as a positive teacher in a practical way. Here she was allowing experience to shape her ethics." Seigfried (1996) notes: "For pragmatists, however, experience is not

simply uncritically reproduced; it is interrogated as to its value for a richer, fuller, more expansive life" (p. 57). So, there seems a voluntary even willful aspect to what otherwise would seem determined by need, i.e. "necessity." For Lasch (1965), "[i]t was her awareness of the complexity of her own motives that saved her from the reformer's habitual self-righteousness" (xviii).

4. Ibid. Brown (2004) tells us that Addams' "most familiar theme—young people's need to escape the deadening grasp of luxury—was incorporated here as the 'humanitarian' motive" (p. 264). For Elshtain (2002) "Addams's 'subjective necessity' essay displays the American Social Gospel movement at its most attractive: full-throated, open-hearted, filled with hope about human and democratic prospects" (p. 97). Concerning the American Social Gospel movement, see: http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/socgospel.htm
5. "Inequality," John Galtung theorized, is "one of the major forms of *structural violence*" (as quoted in Barash 2000, p. 43).
6. Christianity is hardly the only religion that has been harnessed to nationalism. Zionism – as enacted in Netanyahu's genocidal war in Gaza (Neier, 2024, p. 9) – and Hinduism - as yoked to the BJP, the political arm of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a paramilitary Hindu cultural organization founded in 1925 that has campaigned for "Hindu unity, expressing admiration for the national unity model advanced by fascism and Nazism" (Prakash 2024, p. 49). Even "Daoist personhood is vulnerable to being subsumed by hierarchical systems as Chinese history as demonstrated," as Wang (2021, p. 117) acknowledges.
7. Burns's book "does not prescribe a curriculum of non-violence," its intent being the enabling educators to "better understand violence and non-violence" (2023, 5).
8. D'Emilio 2003, 1. It is on D'Emilio's text I will rely.
9. See 1997 (1925). Stewart (2018, 451) points out that "Locke did not envision the Negro Renaissance as exclusively Black…. In that sense, African American renaissance would not reproduce the error of American racism but would evolve to its fullest potential if it was transracial and transnational." Rustin's commitments were likewise "transracial and transnational."
10. For Robert Musil (Peters, 1978), humanity hovers between reason and religion (or mysticism), the synthesis of which Musil termed "*das rechte Leben*," the creative or right life; in fact, Musil regarded the "synthesis of reason and mysticism had to regarded as the most urgent task facing mankind in the twentieth century" (p. 12).

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# "Oklahoma was empty"
## Storying Land in Oklahoma Land Run Settler Memory

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"YOU KNOW," THE STUDENT RESPONDED, "where we dress up like pioneers and line up at a park to run and stake our claim. Just like the 89ers." Prior to my teaching in Oklahoma, I was vaguely familiar with the history of the Oklahoma Land Runs in the late 1880s and 1890s. The federal government had brokered treaties of Oklahoma territory—or "Indian Territory"—at that time with Indigenous Nations such as the Cherokee Nation through the Treaty of Echota and the Choctaw Nation through the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek. While I knew pieces of these histories, I did not yet know about the widespread reenactment practices in elementary school in which school children lined up along a playground, dressed in pioneer garb with cowboy hats and make-shift covered wagons, waiting for the signal to run and claim a piece of the land. Nor had I considered the exact work schooling did in the United States to uphold particular structures of a settler nation-state society.

Schooling, as an institution, does particular types of work in the United States. This work, through policy and practice, includes the production of racialized and gendered subjects as well as the production of settler-migrant-Indigeneity subjectivity (Aladejebi & Fraser, 2023; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Pewewardy, et al., 2022; Rice, et al., 2022; Rudolph, 2023). Scholars have long looked to the ways in which schooling in the United States has and continues to exist as an institution in the service of settler colonial nation-state work (Sriprakash, et al., 2022). Part of this is the preservation and enactment of dominant narratives and dominant collective memory, including a collective amnesia of the nation's past and present sins (Sriprakash, et al., 2022). The reification of dominant narratives is not just a cognitive process, but also an embodied and affective process rooted in Whiteness in which some bodies can hold space within institutions comfortably and other bodies are Othered (Ahmed, 2007; McDermott & Simmons, 2013; Rice et al., 2022; Sriprakash, et al., 2022). So then, schooling, as an institution, reproduces and maintains settler colonial, heterocispatriarchy, and racial capitalism through affective and embodied engagements in Whiteness. The disruption of this requires an examination of collective memory as part of this reproduction and maintenance process. Further, as settler colonialism is a land-based project hinged on the elimination of Indigeneity (Wolfe, 2006), this work includes how land is

remembered and becomes a White space in dominant collective memory. As a result, *settler memory* is core to the functioning of US schooling, meaning that students undergoing schooling in the US encounter settler memory through various levels of adoption and refusal.

In collective memory studies, scholars primarily have focused on museums, memorials, and monuments, with educational institutions often under-analyzed or not considered part of memory production and transmission. Paulson, et al. (2020) argues that education must be considered as a fourth site that not only transmits but also shapes memories and makes them meaningful for young people. In education, memory is never static but produced through the labor of policymakers, educators, and young people, requiring active participation and production (Paulson, et al., 2020). Taking collective memory work in education seriously is to also consider how memory is "an instrument for achieving control, strategically utilising remembrance to legitimize political behaviours" (Paulson, et al., 2020, p. 434). If education is a site of memory making and settler colonialism relies on memory production to reify and perpetuate its structure, then education must also be a site of settler colonial memory making (Brown, 2019; Paulson, et al. 2020; Sriprakash, et al., 2022).

In this paper, I offer one qualitative study of how collective memory around land reproduces and maintains narratives and subjects of the settler-colonial nation state. I study how land is enacted, remembered, and contested through examining a yearly "Land Run" ritual across elementary schools in the state of Oklahoma. This study seeks to understand how adult participants remember this pedagogical practice in their own youth and how they make meaning of this event now. Currently, no studies exist examining how adults who participated in this event as children remember and make-meaning of their participation. While fewer schools participate in this event currently, a study of this focus matters to scholars and educators in understanding how *land* is articulated through pedagogical maintenance of settler colonialism. From participants' shared experiences, I seek to understand how this one practice embedded in schooling serves a larger conversation on the way schools participate in memory management of *land* for settler-colonial nation states. Drawing from Bruyneel's (2021) conceptual framework of "settler memory" I argue that settler memory maintenance and particularly *the storying of land* is key to schooling in the United States through affective and embodied practices. By storying of land, I refer to the ways in which land is narrated, infused with meaning and value, employed in settler memory, and physically enacted and embodied.

This paper will unfold in the following ways: first, I will situate the Land Run re-enactments in the context of the historical event. Then, I will provide an overview of scholarship on settler colonialism and scholarship on collective memory to situate Bruyneel's (2021) conceptual framework of "settler memory." Next, I will describe my qualitative inquiry and methods. I will introduce my participants in this study and how they shared and made meaning of their participation in the event. While all participants were critical of Land Run reenactments, complicated feelings and reflections arose. Finally, I will work through three key findings and the implications of this study as a whole. My aim with this paper is to contribute to the ways in which settler-colonialism is the core framework of US schooling as well as extend Bruyneel's (2021) framework to the ways in which settler memory gets taken up in the work of US schooling.

## 1889 Oklahoma Land Run: Historical Context

Initially—as with the entirety of what is now the United States—the land Oklahoma occupies belonged to Indigenous people of North America. With the passage of the Indian Removal Act of 1830, the US government forcibly removed sovereign Indigenous nations across the eastern United States, marching entire communities to treaties land west of the Mississippi, including land that is now Oklahoma (DeLyser, 2008; Maguire & Wiederholt, 2019). These forcible removals perpetuated cultural genocide, widespread disease, death, and devastation among Indigenous communities (Maguire & Wiederholt, 2019). By the late 1860s, as westward colonization continued across the continent, the US government forced Indigenous nations into new treaties which included ceding back part of granted lands to federal control (DeLyser, 2008; Maguire & Wiederholt, 2019).

One two-million-acre area in central Oklahoma territory became the "Unassigned Lands" through which the US government could grant land to other nations forcibly removed from other areas in the United States (DeLyser, 2008; Maguire & Wiederholt, 2019). In the decade that followed, a campaign known as the Boomer Movement developed. White settlers and several railroad companies began rallying for the federal government to release "Indian Territory" and "Unassigned Lands" to non-Native settlement and use (DeLyser, 2008). This included caravans of White settlers, fueled by sentiments of White deserving-ness to the land through political leaders like David Payne.

These individuals and families began encroaching on the land prior to the government's release of the land to White settlers, earning the nickname of "boomers" (Maguire & Wiederholt, 2019). By 1886—just three years before the first Oklahoma Land Run—there were already 36,500 settlers living in the territory through a series of legal loopholes, arrangements, and outright theft (Maguire & Wiederholt, 2019). Finally, in 1889, the federal government under President Hayes opened the "Unassigned Lands" under the Homestead Act of 1862, and the first in a series of Land Runs occurred on April 22, 1889, with 10,000 settlers lining up to claim land, primarily with participation from single White men or families with a male head of a household (DeLyser, 2008, Maguire & Wiederholt, 2019). Since Oklahoma became a state in 1907, the 1889 Land Run is often pointed to as the origin point of statehood and Oklahoma's becoming (Oklahoma History Society, n.d.b; Oklahoma History Society, n.d.c).

While land runs have occurred in other places where settlers have rushed in to claim land for the purposes of utilizing land as resource—the California Gold Rush for instance—the most famous are the Oklahoma Land Runs in which settlers could claim up to 160 acres of land. While Black Americans, women, and immigrants participated in the Land Runs, White male settlers—either single or as heads of households—became the primary claimants to acreage during the Oklahoma Land Runs. Following the 1889 Land Run, other White settlers followed in Oklahoma along with lottery allotments to primarily White settlers. In the first Land Run on April 22, 1889, settlers lined up along the boundary of the "Unassigned Lands" on horses and wagons. Settlers included farmers, businessmen, tradesmen, politicians, and more, eager to begin anew in Oklahoma territory (Oklahoma History Society, n.d.b). Many were desperate and down-on-their-luck, seeking a new home and fortune to be made, uprooting wherever their life began for something promising. Most often, White male settlers found a place at the boundary's starting line for a clear shot into the territory. Others rode trains into rail stations for more advantageous starting points when guns, canons, and trumpets sounded. Still others illegally entered the "Unassigned Lands" prior to April 22 so as to stake a claim more quickly—nicknamed "sooners"—and were

often prosecuted with legal action. At the sound of gunshots, trumpets, and canons at noon, the line of people rushed the "Unassigned Lands" to stake their claim. What followed was a chaotic and frenzied stampede of horses, wagons, and some settlers by foot running to claim a parcel of land. Cries and shouts from the settlers echoed and dust from Oklahoma's red dirt clouded the air as the settlers seized upon the land. The narrative echoes of these shouts and clouds of red dirt continue on in popular Okie memory.

## Remembering the Land Runs and Reenactments

In the years since, the Land Runs—and particularly the first one in 1889—are deeply romanticized and looked to for narratives of hardy pioneer resolve and self-sufficiency to begin a new life. Monuments commemorating the Land Runs exist across the state, and the event continues to serve as a core origin and identity-formation story to the present-day state of Oklahoma. In addition, re-enactments of the event became part of the commemoration of both the settlement of Oklahoma territory and statehood. Shook (2016) notes that these re-enactments as commemoration—also known as "89er Days" are first noted in a March 20, 1912 issue of *The Guthrie Star*, but are already referred to as "annual." Shook (2016) notes that the earliest records of school reenactments can be traced to 1964. Since at least 1964, elementary school students across Oklahoma participate each year in Land Run re-enactments to commemorate the 1889 Land Run and subsequent Land Runs in the 1890s that began the settlement of the territory now commonly known as the state of Oklahoma.

These re-enactments often coincide with units on Oklahoma history and typically take place during the month of April, as did the first Land Run. Students dress up as pioneers and settlers, wearing slacks and straw hats or long skirts and bonnets and bring with them Conestoga wagons made from toy wagons at home to pull along with them. Some bring stick-horses. Then students line up on playgrounds or recreation fields, and at the sound of a horn, they "rush" the playground or schoolyard to stake a "claim." They hammer stakes into the ground and often the rest of the day is filled with picnics or "pioneer activities." In some schools, students even form little families, often consisting of a mother, father, and children, to rush the land and stake a claim.

In recent years, through immense activism by Indigenous Nations in the state and allied community members, several districts—in particular Oklahoma City Public Schools and Tulsa Public Schools—stopped elementary school reenactments in the 2010s. Major media outlets have not covered Land Run re-enactments within the last five years; however, the practice still persists in 2025. Several public districts such as Guymon Public Schools, Hollis Public Schools, Marlowe Public Schools, and private schools such as Wesleyan Christian School in Bartlesville, OK still host elementary Land School Land Runs, as can be seen through school calendars, YouTube recap videos, newsletters, and details about field trip opportunities (Estes, 2025; "MES Students Host Land Run," 2025; PTCI, 2024; Wesleyan Christian School, n.d.). Each year, Facebook searches show several other schools hosting and posting images of elementary students in pioneer garb, rushing to stake their claim. Further, news articles written by Indigenous leadership, such as Chuck Hoskin, Jr., the principal chief of Cherokee Nation, continue to advocate against the practice in areas where the re-enactments continue on to this school year (Hoskin Jr., 2024).

Critical scholarship on the Land Run includes critical historical analysis (DeLyser, 2008; Shook, 2016), historical gendered analysis (DeLyser, 2008; Smith, 2010), statistical analysis (Maguire & Wiederholt, 2019), discursive monument analysis (Swain, 2008), critical media

analysis (Shook, 2016), and family narrative inquiry (Hess, 2015). While some of these scholars address elementary school reenactments as part of commemoration efforts, there is no scholarship that investigates the experiences of children as actors and participants, nor the way adults who participated in reenactments as children make meaning of the event now.

In the following section, I detail scholarship on both settler colonialism and collective memory to situate Bruyneel's (2021) conceptual framing of settler memory. By focusing on how adult participants remember engaging in Land Run reenactments, I seek to understand how they remember narratives of Indigenous dispossession, land as property, and discussion about gender roles, women, Black Americans, and immigrants as part of their experience and meaning-making of this event.

## Conceptual Framework

For my conceptual framework of this inquiry, I draw from Bruyneel's (2021) concept of settler memory. I situate this framing by drawing from settler colonial studies and collective memory studies.

### Settler Colonialism

Settler colonial studies is an off-branch of the larger colonial studies field. As European imperialism grew, colonialism became a process in which the empire held "outposts" to extract, control, classify, commodify, and subjugate land, plants, water, animals, and Indigenous peoples as natural resources (Smith, 1999, Tuck & Yang, 2012). In time, settler colonialism became an extension of this in which settlers forcibly displaced Indigenous people to claim and acquire land for a means of production. Wolfe (2006) argues that settler colonialism is an ongoing structure rather than event and at its core is the drive to "destroy to replace" (p. 388). The drive to destroy harkens to a "logic of elimination" (Wolfe, 2006) in which the dissolution of native societies is done via the settler invasion of land—a drive and logic still at work today. As a land-centered project, settler colonial structures use a variety of coordinated efforts, tools, and mechanisms to eliminate Indigenous peoples and Indigenous societies as a way to acquire and maintain territory in a logic of elimination (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wolfe, 2006). Tuck & Yang (2012) argue settler colonial work is done through internal and external modes. Externally, settler colonialism extracts animals, plants, and human beings for the consumption and wealth of the colonizers (p. 4). With internal settler colonialism, biopolitical and geopolitical management of these resources become central to the nation-state project that takes place in many forms of control—including schools (p. 4). Through these modes, the structure of settler colonialism operates to justify a logic of elimination and a logic of settler occupation through which bodies are also racialized, gendered, and co-constructed through social relationships with land as property.

### Settler Collective Memory

One of the ways settler colonial structures operate is the reproduction of a dominant collective memory to remember, forget, and disavow settler colonial histories (Bruyneel, 2021;

Khoury, 2023). Collective memory, or public memory, is most often rooted in sociology contexts and refers to "group-based frameworks providing context for individual memory" (Ritter, 2023, p. 192). Essentially, collective memory is a collection of narratives passed intergenerationally that structure belonging or communal sense-making for a particular group. This field of studies grew from memory-work of Holocaust survivors and post-war Germany in the way that individuals, communities, and the nation-state chose to remember the atrocities of the war and the Nazi regime. This includes the way in which histories are remembered collectively through curriculum, through public memorials and museums, and through the public stories told about events.

Collective memory is not only how we narrate history but is also "affectively laden and invokes habitual and even automatic responses" (Ritter, 2023, p. 195). Memories are constructed, narrated, and repeated for particular affective turns and cultural politics of emotion (Ahmed, 2014) not just rooted in understanding the past, but also in how a community makes sense and represents themselves presently. Collective memory sustains national character and determines the values of a nation-state as well as who gets to belong, be represented, and count as a citizen and member (Tanesini, 2018). And, of course, as collective memory is constructed, so then it can be abused (Ricouer, 2004) through colonial logics.

Bruyneel (2021), drawing from settler colonial and memory studies, offers settler memory as a conceptual framework in which memories habitually reproduce erasure of Indigenous history, violence against Indigenous people, and Indigenous dispossession. Settler memory undercuts political relevance of memory through disavowing Indigenous presence. Bruyneel (2021) offers the term *necro-Indigeneity*, drawing from necropolitics, to identify how Indigenous people are firmly situated in a paradox of absence and presence, both here but made to be in the past or unalive presently. Necro-Indigeneity occurs throughout settler memory as a way to firmly place Indigenous people in the past, mask settler presence with indigeneity (so often settlers will speak about a distant Indigenous grandparent) so as to justify settler occupation, and through the erasure of Indigenous people and dispossession when discussing racial capitalism and White supremacy in the United States.

## Settler Memory and Storying Land

One of the ways Bruyneel (2021) extends this conceptual framework is through examining how settler memory addresses and remembers land. In settler memory, memories of land position Indigenous people, settler colonial practices, and White settler masculinity in the background of political memories. Bruyneel (2021) argues the story of land 1) tells how land comes to have its political, economic, and cultural meaning and value; 2) is a story rooted in Indigenous dispossession consolidated with racial capitalism; 3) collapses the terms and definitions of land and property; 4) understands land as property through a construction of social relationships of gendered and racialized bodies; 5) presents land when it concerns what groups of people want but is absent in the story when informing about who people are in racial, gendered, classed, and colonialist terms, and what land means to them; and 6) positions settler identity and interests as shaping the meaning of Whiteness, anti-Blackness, and necro-Indigeneity (p. 90). Bruyneel (2021) posits that in understanding the story of land, one can see how land becomes property through a colonial logic:

> …shapes the meaning and treatment of bodies in gendered, racialized, classed, and colonialist ways. To draw out the story of land then is to draw out the story of people and life in relationship to the land, in stories that invoke oppressive experiences while potentially offering liberating alternatives about how to live in relation to one another and to land (p. 59).

Thus, the story of land in settler memory is an articulation of *how* land becomes property through racialized, gendered, classed, and colonial ways, as well as what land as property *means* to particular groups of people and how land as property constructs and is constructed by social relationships. The settler story of land is about a particular narration of land, enactment with land, and epistemological understanding of land to frame settler occupation, control, and subjugation of any beings who are not White.

Settler memory located in US schools then functions to tell the story of land over and again to reproduce narratives of land as property through gendered, racialized, classed, and colonialist terms. This can happen through textbooks, class discussions, field trips, or experiential and embodied learning such as re-enactments as several scholars discuss focusing on storying of land and land based curriculum (Bang, et al., 2014; Calderón, 2014; Lees & Bang, 2023; Lees, et al., 2021; Peweardy, et al., 2022; Sabzalian, et al., 2021; Shear, et al., 2015). For example, Sabzalian, et al. (2021) and Shear, et al. (2015) discuss the ways in which state standards across the U.S. present Indigenous people as existing in a pre-1900 context so as to justify continued settler presence and control of land, and Bang, et al. (2014) discuss the ways in which discussion of place in educational settings often begins with the erasure of Indigenous points of reference, histories, and cosmologies. These sorts of settler-land-based pedagogies continue to frame a particular story of land that leads to such curricular events as the elementary school Oklahoma Land Run reenactments. These curricular events work circularly to then reify stories and justify settler colonial occupation, ongoing Indigenous dispossession, and White settler belonging. Here, I take up this framing to understand how participants remember and make-meaning about Oklahoma Land Run re-enactments.

## Inquiry Framework

My interest in this issue stems from the eight years I lived and taught in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, between a private independent school and a community education program. In neither educational space did we reenact the Land Run, nor did we host an 89er celebration. Even still, my living within Oklahoma for an extended period with awareness and knowledge of Oklahoma history does grant me insider status with participants. I can connect to much of the language and terminology participants utilized in describing their experiences in Land Run re-enactments. However, I did not grow up in Oklahoma and thus did not participate in any sort of Land Run reenactment as a child—though I still did participate in elementary school activities celebrating pioneer spirit. Because I do not share this experience with participants, I hold an outsider status that both provides me space to question logistics, lessons, and practices of the experience for further clarity. Further, being a White, able-bodied woman with settler status and US Citizenship, I share various qualities with participants that can further emphasize an insider/outsider positionality throughout interview processes.

I utilized a qualitative inquiry approach through semi-structured interviews with adults who participated in Oklahoma Land Run re-enactments as children and who currently still reside in Oklahoma, and then analyzed data through a critical narrative analysis of settler memory (Bruyneel, 2021). This inquiry approach allowed me to depart from a prescriptive set of steps and provided space for the research to unfold and extend. I conducted five interviews with adults who participated in Land Run reenactments as children and who currently live in the state of Oklahoma through a snowball sampling beginning with emails to current contacts in the state. I hoped to speak with individuals who, through childhood participation and current residency in the state, could speak to the ongoing grappling with lessons learned within the context of their residency in the state of Oklahoma. My driving research questions were:

> How do adults who participated in Land Run re-enactments as children make meaning of these events now?
> How do adults who participated in the Land Run articulate *stories of land* as part of their remembering and/or meaning-making?
> What affective movement arises in the *storying of land*?

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using video conferencing software for approximately one hour. During interviews, participants responded to questions about what they remembered from the Land Run re-enactments; lessons that stayed with them from this experience; and what they remembered learning about Indigenous communities, land, women, and Black communities as part of this experience. In addition, participants also shared about what they wish they would have learned and how participation in the re-enactments continues to shape their views of Oklahoma and Oklahoma history.

I transcribed interviews into scripts for data analysis. Drawing from Saldaña's (2009) guidance, I also utilized extensive memo-ing throughout the project. In data analysis, I used a deductive analysis approach drawing from characteristics of collective memory studies and settler colonialism to engage how settler memory articulated narratives of land. I coded data through three categories: types of memory, characteristics of settler colonialism as articulated by Wolfe (2006) and Tuck & Yang (2012), and interpretations of participant emotions. After these three rounds of coding, I employed a thematic analysis of codes to examine collective memory engagement, narratives of land, and narratives of race, gender, and Indigenous presence/absence. In utilizing Bruyneel's (2021) conceptual frameworks of settler memory and storying of land, I analyzed how codes, categories, and themes exhibited *storying of land* in re-enactments as remembered by participants.

## Findings

The Land Run re-enactments for children as an experiential learning experience did more than just teach students about a historical event in the state's territorial past. The re-enactments did work to orient children in specific ways within their communities: these events teach about social and cultural life, produce particular types of knowledge and identify some actors as more knowledgeable than others based on the narratives most platformed, and teach about a specific way of being in the world. In my analysis, I am curious to understand how participants share these movements in their meaning-making and remembering, if these memories reflect settler memory

as Bruyneel (2021) articulates, and how they narrate land as part of this memory. I recognized that land may not be explicitly taught about in the reenactment curriculum; however, I wanted to know how participants might talk about land in recalling their memories. Further, this study works to contribute to the gap of research around Oklahoma Land Run re-enactments while also providing explicit examples contributing to the rich research and theory on land-based curriculum and storying of land research, including work from Bang, et al. (2014), Calderón (2014), and Lees, et al. (2021).

For this paper, I am choosing pseudonyms randomly selected to represent each of the five participants interviewed.

**Stephanie** is a White woman who lives in the Tulsa area. She participated in the Land Run reenactment through her public school, and her parents helped facilitate the re-enactment as public school teachers. Stephanie often expressed conflicting feelings throughout our time together. She remembered the Land Run reenactment being a fun week with other activities like candle-making, but throughout she expressed disappointment and frustration that a full story of the event was not told.

**Jean** is a White woman who lives in the Oklahoma City area. She participated as a student in the Land Run reenactment through her public school and later as an educator helped facilitate the re-enactments for other public school students. Jean expressed deep frustration and anger at Land Run re-enactments and the effect these events had on Indigenous students she attended with and who were in her own classroom.

**Mara** is a Black woman who lives in the Tulsa area. She participated in the Land Run reenactment through her public school. Mara was very critical of the Land Run re-enactments and schooling as an institution, and she also expressed a deep pride of being from Oklahoma despite the state's faults she named.

**Laura** is a Black woman who lives in the Tulsa area. She participated in the Land Run through her private school. Laura expressed a complex frustration and anger with the Land Run reenactment, particularly as her family immigrated to the US. However, she also expressed a deep love for her teacher to make history experiential for her and her classmates. Laura talked about feeling "other" during these experiences but not "othered."

**Sam** is a White man who lives in the Tulsa area. He participated in the Land Run reenactment through his public school, and his parents and brother participated in the day's event with him. Sam expressed his frustration with the Land Run in a matter-of-fact way, but often became more critical with the larger state of Oklahoma and felt more admiration for Tulsa as being "different" than the rest of the state.

Each of the five participants expressed a critical and often negative viewpoint of the Land Run re-enactments looking back. All explicitly named the erasure of Indigenous perspective and story as a central problem of the Land Run reenactments, and a few drew parallels to other historical events, such as the Tulsa Race Massacre. All participants were very forthcoming to share about their experiences. In all interviews, participants expressed some sort of frustration through pauses, looking off camera, or audible sighs as they recalled the events from the Land Run

reenactments from their schooling. Further, many of the participants struggled in how to make meaning of the event now.

Stephanie, for instance, felt that the experiential learning was important to engage students in history; however, she felt that the Land Run reenactment was not important. Mara also felt deeply upset about the Land Run experience, but she saw it as part of her experience as a burgeoning athlete to express how fast she could run versus other classmates. Laura seemed to express the most distaste and anger for the event, even as she spoke with a deep affection in how her teacher included everyone in the event. Jean, in particular, expressed a deep sorrow for how the event affected Indigenous students she taught and went to school with and the expressed desire for Indigenous voices to be centered as part of school curriculum. Sam, while less outwardly emotional than other participants, still expressed a disgust with the Land Run reenactment experience, though his criticality of the event and its structures did not seem to go as far as other participants.

When speaking about present day events, Sam shared his worries about the recent Supreme Court ruling on *McGirt v. Oklahoma* (2020), a landmark US Supreme Court Case in which justices ruled that land reserved for Muscogee Nation and nine other Indigenous Nations by the US government in the 1800s was never disestablished and thus still "Indian country," meaning that the state of Oklahoma cannot criminally prosecute Indigenous Americans for offenses within these domains. When asked what they remembered learning about land as part of their experience, all participants shared they did not explicitly learn about land during the Land Run reenactment or curriculum so far as they could recall, though the participants collectively used the word "land" 126 times in their responses across the 5 one-hour interviews, averaging 25 uses by each participant.

Throughout this study, several themes around settler memory and particularly those pieces Bruyneel (2021) refers to as the story of land emerged. As stated earlier, when I asked participants if they remembered learning about land as part of their experience, all participants said they did not. When I asked why they thought this was, Stephanie and Sam shared they did not know why. Mara shared that she did not learn about land as part of Land Run history, as it may have been a topic better suited for science. Only Jean and Laura offered corrections to their answer of no. Jean, shifting in her chair, shared that she learned about conservation through building log cabins in her class and expressed a gratitude that her teacher made space for this topic. Laura shared that she learned about land through a separate unit about Indigenous people such as how Indigenous people used all parts of land, naming how the unit described Indigenous people as resourceful. However, throughout the interviews, the word "land" was used 126 times: participants spoke about staking a claim on land, rushing the land, and settling the land. They spoke about what the land was like before White settlers arrived and what the land was like after settlers arrived.

Through Bruyneel's (2021) conceptual framing of settler memory, I understand these as part of the way *storying of land* happens through the reenactment's collective memory work. Here I discuss how storying of land appeared throughout interviews as participants articulated the collective memory of Oklahoma history, their personal experiences with Land Run re-enactments as children, and how they interpret both that experience and the larger lessons with which they were imbued through this activity. I will focus primarily on three themes that arose through coding: 1) land as place of White collective belonging, 2) land as settlerness through Indigenous dispossession, and 3) land as gendered, racialized property.

## Land as a Place of White Collective Belonging

Stories of land within Land Run reenactments and the historical event of the Land Run situate land as place for White collective belonging. This collective belonging was most often signified by the use of a "we" pronoun—by White participants—about who settled land, who was present, and who remains part of this collectivity. Throughout interviews with participants, the pronoun "we" was often used not just in reference to themselves and classmates but also to an overarching collective that spanned back to the original "89ers" of the April 1889 Land Run. Often, historical events curated by actors from long ago become part of the "we" from which participants spoke, or participants became part of these actors—even in cases where participants contested, questioned, or criticized the events of the Land Run. This speaks to the work that collective memory does through social groups to develop and reproduce belonging to these same groups. For participants in this study, White settlers in a particular geographic location—Oklahoma—serve as the social group from which they speak.

For example, Stephanie spoke about the lessons students learned about as part of the Land Run reenactment. As she spoke, she paused often and looked off screen in thought:

> *I would say (pause) just like (pause) everything that we did historically was in our right to do. And we were just going out to claim (pause) claim ownership of (pause) of things to like make (pause) make a better world and a more civilized world…*

While throughout the interview Stephanie shared her frustration and lament about the Land Run re-enactments and the lessons imparted from the experience, her use of the word "we" points to the ways in which lessons imparted from the Land Run speak about a particular group of people's "right" to land ownership. Bruyneel's (2021) conceptual framework of the *story of land* is important to understanding how participants learned about belonging through this school event.

If the story of the United States is that it is not just a White nation, but a White settler nation, *land* is central to developing this collective "we." The "we" utilized by Stephanie in the former statement reveals a specific way land is narrated by a dominant collective—even when members like Stephanie are critical of the dominant. Stephanie articulates this "we" as staking a claim for the sake of a better and more civilized world. The transfer of land to property— discussed as a later theme— and land as being claimed are central to the making of the "we." In the 1862 Homestead Act signed into law by President Lincoln and through which settlers made claims to the Unassigned Lands in Oklahoma territory, settlers obtained land through three phases: file an application for a claim, improve the land, and then file for a deed after five years (Potter & Schamel, 1997). Stephanie's phrasing of the lessons as "making a better world and a more civilized world" demonstrates how the settler ideology of land improvement is rooted both in White control of land as well as *who* still exists in the present day. Shear, et al. (2015) describe the ways in which the United States' learning standards state-by-state often situate Indigenous people squarely in the past as a practice of settler memory. The Land Run re-enactments, as described by participants in the study, demonstrate the way Oklahoma state standards played out do just this work—the *we* is still present; the *them* in the past.

Participants also spoke directly about the affective turn of the "claiming of land" as inspiring a pride in the state and thus the larger nation-state system. Pedagogically, they recalled learning as children to be proud of Oklahoma indirectly through the curriculum and experience of

the Land Run re-enactment. In my analysis, I understand this pride of Oklahoma being tied to the act of claiming land as White settlers. Jean shared about this lesson, saying:

> *I remember it, and you know part of Oklahoma history, and how proud you are to be in Oklahoma. And you know…when when you're a kid (long pause) and (long pause) you're good at something, and (smiles and shakes head) we were good at spreading out and taking the land and being in charge (emphasis on "being in charge"). And you know that. You know we—we were good at that. And I mean, Whiteness was good, you know*.

In this excerpt, Jean speaks to the attachment of pride and being good at taking land—and directly names whiteness as part of this implicit lesson. This speaks to the ways in which the Oklahoma Land Runs are framed in elementary education through a settler memory lens of "taking charge" of a space. This hierarchical work—of taking charge—is meant to be taken up with pride as part of this event inviting students to a belonging constructed by white settlerness.

Of course, in participant excerpts Indigenous erasure and dispossession largely frames the White settler "we" and Black and Indigenous communities as made "other" by this event. Participants spoke about how this "othering" is part of the erasure constituting the belonging to Oklahoma. Further, participants suggested the work the Land Run event does for children is to fold them into the White settler heritage. This pedagogical work of othering seemed to be the goal,—even if the children's ancestors did not participate in the Land Run. Mara spoke about this pedagogical work of cultivating state pride with children, saying:

> *We flipped a narrative and made something that was negative and turned it into something that was very positive by attaching it to kind of like state pride. (Pause, smiles.) And so and you do that by, you know, as a kid, having all the patriotic songs, and, and participating in these ritual-ed events, and saying, oh, these are things that our ancestors did (laughs), even if your ancestors weren't actually doing it, you know. But hey, I'm in Oklahoma. So, I can share in this pride*.

The work of settler memory the participant is describing here is: 1) the move to settler innocence (Tuck & Yang, 2012), and 2) the move to *be* an Oklahoman through reenactment of the Land Run, despite whether your own family participated in the event or were "original Oklahomans." Settler memory works to erase and dispossess Indigenous people so that White settlers are made indigenous or the original people of a particular place. By having children participate in settler memory, such as the Land Run reenactments, children are invited to also become part of the story of the "original settlers" or "original Oklahomans" through which Indigenous people are erased, displaced, and dispossessed from history. These curricular erasures are core to the reification of settler memory, bringing me to the next theme.

## Land as Settlerness through Indigenous Dispossession

In Bruyneel's (2021) settler memory conceptual framework, central is the practice of necro-Indigeneity, or the work to make Indigenous people, onto-epistemologies, cosmologies, and culture a part of the past, no longer of the present. In *storying of land*, participants described explicitly how Indigenous narratives and people were not part of learning about the Land Run

reenactments, even if other curricular units made learning about Indigenous people possible. Every participant spoke to the curricular erasures of Indigenous people from the Land Run history, addressing the ways in which Indigenous history became separate curricular "units," distinct from Oklahoma history. Bruyneel's (2021) concept of "necro-Indigeneity" is useful to understand how settler memory functions in US schooling curriculum to position Indigenous people solely in the past and separate from White settlers so as to justify settler occupation. The erasure and separation of Indigenous people into distinct curricular units functions as a dispossession of Indigenous histories and discrediting of Indigenous epistemologies as inferior to Eurocentric, White American histories and knowledges. Laura spoke to this distinction in her elementary school experiences:

> *So it makes me upset that they were erased. There was no context given like, these two things were held in separate pockets. (Holds hands up, to show separation) We learned the Native unit, and then we had the Land Run. They were separate. There was no intersection.*

The separation the participant names is part of the work settler memory does in US curriculum to ensure settler moves to innocence (Tuck & Yang, 2012) are part of how children *become* citizens of Oklahoma or citizens of the United States. Settler memory is about how land comes to have political and economic value (Bruyneel, 2021) as belonging to White settlers and justifying ongoing occupation. So then, Indigenous history must be kept separate to ensure a more uncomplicated, innocent narrative of White settlers claiming land. Sam shared about how interactions between White settlers and Indigenous people were represented:

> *The only intersection was Thanksgiving. Between, I mean White folks and and Natives, right? Which is before the Land Run. That was the only kind of intersection of theirs, of those two groups of people that I learned about as a kid, which was not what it was presented as, right? So yeah. Their history was more like United States history, and it being like (tone lifts) Oh, and you know, and we, you know, gave them blankets and stuff like that, or they gave us that (tone returns). But we exchanged these things, and then, um, we had Thanksgiving, and it was all great, like. No one ever talks about smallpox or anything like that.*

Again, the naming of Thanksgiving as the only intersection reifies a story of US triumph and unity through which White settlers are welcomed into North America rather than being invaders and committing genocide and land theft.

Stephanie spoke to what she wished she had learned as part of the Land Run experience:

> *I definitely wish I would learn more about the Indigenous communities, you know. And, and all the other groups that were involved, that was not something that was highlighted. It was definitely taught as like a, (short laugh) you know, Whites only event.*

Throughout these responses, there is a delineation of Indigenous people being solely in the past, erased, or separate from White settlers. In the last response, the participant speaks to the Land Run being a "Whites only event" which not only speaks to the belonging curated, but that the claiming of land and land as property—discussed in the next theme—is constructed through *White settlerness*.

## Land as Gendered, Racialized Property

By land as gendered and racialized property, I refer to how settler colonialism functions through a drive for territorial acquisition, collapsing land to property (Bruyneel, 2021, Wolfe, 2006) and in doing so is made accessible to individuals based on the intersecting lines of gender and race (and often class, ethnicity, religion, dis/ability, immigration status, and more). I specifically name gender and race here as land in the United States collapses into property for the service of patriarchal and racial capitalist enterprise. As I shared earlier, I directly asked participants what they remembered learning about land as part of the Land Run, and most participants shared they were not taught about land or nature as part of their Land Run curricular experiences, complicating my aims for this research. When I asked, "Do you remember learning about land or nature as part of the Land Run curriculum," their initial replies included:

> Stephanie: *Mmm. Um, not much.*
> Jean: *No.*
> Mara: *Absolutely not (shakes head.)*
> Laura: *(Long pause, looking up.) No, not much.*
> Sam: *Nope.*

However, throughout interviews, participants made mention to land 126 instances throughout their responses to questions about their experience in the reenactments, the lessons they did or did not learn about Indigenous people, and the lessons of how Oklahoma came to be a state. My understanding then is that the lessons about land from the Land Run were explicitly about land *as property* and not land as knowledge, nature, or ecology to be interacted with, which is why many participants said no. For example, Stephanie shared:

> *I remember thinking, like Oklahoma was completely empty, like it was just dust, (laughs) and there were no people, and there was nothing happening in nature really, and we like brought all of these crops. And you know it wasn't like all of these things were already in on the land, and we have, like, you know, figured out how to make more of it, or you know?*

This response clearly speaks to a learning about land as "empty" and devoid of any people or nature—a key feature of settler memory that scholars name (Bruyneel, 2021; Sabbagh-Khoury, 2023). Here we also see the collective belonging—we of the White settlers—bringing in crops as part of claiming the land to be worked for capitalist aims.

Mara described how she chose where to run as part of the Land Run reenactment, sharing:

> *…the land wasn't super like flat, like, there were areas that were like up high (hand signals high). Well, if you're into, like, farming, or like raising or ranching, and things like that, you want the land to probably be pretty flat, because it's easier to, like, tame or whatever. But as a kid you want a hill or something (hands signal high hill) like (tone lefts) King of the Mountain? (Tone returns.). Right? So there was like the thing where we wanted to get up there high on the hill, you know…[The teachers] didn't give us guidelines of which land you should choose, and which was the better the worst. The whole idea was being able to claim something as they did.*

Again, Mara is talking directly about land, but land as an object to be claimed as property, which is core to the framing of elementary Land Run reenactments. The whole idea, as Mara said, is to be able to claim something. In settler memory, learning about land is learning about an object to be claimed, which requires the erasure of Indigenous people. Further, being able to claim land is not just a lesson rooted in the past, but part of orienting students to ways of being a citizen. Sam shared:

> *[The lesson] was very like (pause) like a big emphasis on freedom and rights. And you know, like, right to ownership and land. And very American (pause, smile) sentiments like, yeah. Just like deciding that you can claim something that's yours, even if it belongs to somebody else.*

The collective belonging predicated by Indigenous erasure depends on the political, economic, and cultural meanings of land (Bruyneel, 2021). As Sam shares, students in this experience learn that claiming land is a part of exercising rights as a White settler in Oklahoma or the United States.

## Gendered Property

The collapse of land to property is not neutral and is orchestrated through social relationships that are racialized, gendered, classed, and on colonial terms. Meaning, who land as property is for, who gets to have land as property, and how land as property is controlled are deeply gendered and racialized in their conceptualizations and functions. For example, Jean describes these sets of social relationships by saying:

> *I think of it as like what I remember it being was just traditional White families in—I think (pause). We probably learned, a little bit about like homemaking roles. Or maybe there was an assumption there? But like, yeah, the moms doing all the candle making and making the cider. And the man is out hunting or working on the land.*

Laura shared how the lessons around gender, saying:

> *We learned a lot of women in those days may have become teachers, may have stayed home and raised their families, and tended the house. And could sew, and (tone shift) could make something out of nothing (tone shift). And the men were hardy. And they worked hard outside and and you know, tilling and working the land, hunting if they needed to.*

Important to the first excerpt is that the participant names Whiteness as being central to learning which families could claim land in Oklahoma. In addition, through the description of homemaking roles, they also described learning who worked, traversed, and used land most directly—men. Land as property is socially constructed through Whiteness and patriarchy, or what Bruyneel (2021) names as White settler masculinity which "binds racial status to heteropatriarchal claim to land" (p. 35). Settler memory in US schooling, then, such as in the case with Oklahoma's Land Run reenactments, implicitly works these lessons into teaching children who gets to own land as property and reinforces heteropatriarchal binaries and gendered enactments through social relationships to land: women maintaining the home, men working the land. However, we must

note that White women still did work to settle the land or "improve upon it" as read through the 1862 Homestead Act. The domicile place of White women to maintain the home and family is situated in settler notions of femininity and gender roles.

**Racialized Property**

Of course, the *who* is not just gendered, but deeply racialized and complicates the way in which erasure occurs. For example, Mara spoke about the parallels to Indigenous dispossession within the legacies of White violence against Black communities:

> *You talk about the Land Run, and it's like, Oh, wow! This is how statehood is established. This is about folks getting to get their land and area, and this, and it's like, Oh, this is great! This is great! And so it seems like super like (Tone lifts.) Yay, Oklahoma. (Tone returns.) Then you juxtapose that with, like, the Greenwood Massacre (pauses) where Black folks had this land and they were in this area.*

In situating the Greenwood Massacre, or the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, in which White mobs destroyed hundreds of Black homes and businesses and killed hundreds of Black residents, in the story of the 1889 Land Run, Mara points to the ways in which land in Oklahoma is deeply racialized. While the Greenwood District in Tulsa thrived and was known as Black Wall Street, land as property is deeply racialized, and land as property owned by Black residents is not legitimate or deserving of the same rights as White settler citizens. Bruyneel (2021) speaks to the ways in which settler colonialism and racial capitalism are mutually constructive in the creation of the United States—and therefore Oklahoma as well. As land is made property, so are Black, Brown, and Indigenous bodies made to be property that can be controlled, subjugated, and erased toward settler colonialism ends of White land ownership. Further, Bruyneel (2021) writes, Indigenous dispossession in settler memory works to reinforce a Black-White binary presently that obscures a full understanding of race in the United States and the nuanced ways land and people are made into property.

Perhaps this is why the Land Run is so central to learning about Oklahoma history as Mara continued:

> *I feel like maybe it's held up because it's a story of triumph (raises fist) and the start of the American dream, so to speak. But that's not everybody's American dream. And it's not inclusive, because whose backs was it built on? Whose land was it built on? Yeah, you know. So I don't know. Maybe that's why. Because it was like (pause) the first significant showing of ownership in this state of White settlers, White people's ownership in this state.*

Land as property through sets of racialized and gendered relationships allows us to understand how legacies of the Land Run still continue through materialist, legal, and economic ways within Oklahoma and the larger United States. In platforming the *first significant showing of ownership of White settlers*, the lessons students take away from this event are a collectivity of White settlers owning land as property through ongoing Indigenous erasure and dispossession. Settler memory is key to the functioning of schooling in the United States and in Oklahoma as a way of fostering ongoing nation-state systems of belonging settler occupation as justified for elementary school students to carry forth.

## Implications

Throughout this study, I have tried to highlight how settler memory becomes situated in US schooling by examining elementary school Land Run reenactments in the state of Oklahoma. Key to settler memory is understanding *the story of land* (Bruyneel, 2021) as land becomes property through necro-Indigeneity and constructing land through White settler masculinity. Further scholarship situates this work within educational and schooling sites, noting the ways in which settler storying of land and land education do specific work to continue cycles of Indigenous dispossession and erasure so as to situate land as an object to be claimed, owned, and controlled (Bang, et al., 2014; Calderón, 2014; Lees & Bang, 2023; Lees, et al., 2021; Peweardy, et al., 2022; Sabzalian, et al., 2021; Shear, et al., 2015). While my questions focused on the gendering and racializing of land, more questioning of how land is constructed through class and dis/ability would also prove useful to studies of the Land Run reenactments to further tease out Bruyneel's (2021) conceptualization of *the story of land*.

As mentioned in the introduction, larger districts in the state of Oklahoma have removed the reenactment due to the activism of Indigenous leaders in the state, but there are not yet any studies discussing the implications of the curriculum and activities districts now utilize in place of Land Run re-enactments. And still, Land Run re-enactments do continue in several smaller school districts throughout the state and many adults who grew up in Oklahoma participated in the lessons of the event. More research is needed to understand the roles, affective and embodied work, and motivation of educators who coordinate these enactments to address settler memory within teacher education and teacher preparation programs (Hatch & Rosiek, 2024).

Of course, with the Oklahoma government's passage of HB-1775 in 2021, which was part of the wave of critical race theory bans across the United States, along with the current state superintendent of schools' aim toward far right school curriculum such as PragerU, removing this reenactment from elementary schools has become more difficult and creates a microscope on public education with concerns to any topics along the lines of race, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, and citizenship. This means that incorporating a curriculum that does teach about land justice, racial justice, and Indigenous justice has become more difficult within the state, and instead settler memory that reifies White settler masculinity, patriarchy, capitalism, and land as property remains ever the norm.

While the Land Run reenactments seem to be a very visible enactment of settler memory within schooling spaces, the lessons of the Land Run reenactments around race, gender, Indigenous dispossession, a White settler citizenship, and land as property is certainly woven throughout curriculum in the United States and other settler nation-states (Bang, et al., 2014; Calderón, 2014; Lees & Bang, 2023; Lees, et al., 2021; Peweardy, et al., 2022; Sabzalian, et al, 2021; Shear, et al., 2015). The Land Run is just one contextual example of how much Indigenous dispossession continues at a much larger scale as the story of land is produced in particular ways to continue Indigenous erasure. However, Indigenous sovereign nations across the state—and across the world—continue to contest the practice and refuse participation of their children in settler memory, offering leadership and narratives through which teachers and district leaders might look to as a decolonized memory might emerge within Oklahoma schooling and elsewhere.

In addition, I would also like to suggest that in a state like Oklahoma where dominant public opinion has not yet taken up environmental justice as a crucial political issue, settler memory does work within the accepted curriculum to keep citizens from taking the climate crisis and environmental justice seriously. For example, Bang, et al. (2014) speak to the ways in which

the same settler epistemologies frame science education through which land is an object to be made a study of (rather than co-inhabitants, kin, and teachers) and knowledge of land is an extractive, hierarchical process. Further studies might look into the connections and correlations between how land is narrated within curriculum across subjects with the desire to understand how settler memory reinforces the structures that have made the current climate crisis possible and all the more escalating.

Ultimately, settler memory does not have to be the inevitable curricular practice in a place such as Oklahoma or the United States. Scholars point to the many ways Indigenous pedagogies make new futures possible through Indigenous storying of land and land-based education rooted in Native cosmologies (Bang, et al., 2014; Calderón, 2014; Lees & Bang, 2013; Lees, et al, 2021; Simpson, 2017). While many adults in the state still adhere to beliefs of settler memory, all of the participants in this study spoke to a critical take on this childhood experience, meaning that educational spaces—within or outside schooling—offered places for critique and pedagogical possibilities beyond settler memory for each of them at some point. As Calderón (2014) suggests, through land education we can teach and embody ways of speaking back through creativity, rather than control, toward different futures beyond settler colonialism's grasp.

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# A Curriculum of Illusion and the Miraculous During Dreadful(l) Times

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OUR CURRENT SITUATION CAN BE DESCRIBED VARIOUSLY as the *Necrocene* (Mcbrien, 2016) and/or *Plantationocene* (Haraway et al., 2016), among the many other names for this moment in time (Chwalczyk, 2020). The Necrocene points to the present and future ontological significance of the deaths of species, societies, and cultures, while the Plantationocene points back to the roots of this problematic: extractive biological and social practices (van Kessel, 2020). Given the ongoing inevitability of various forms of crisis both imminent and emergent as a result of climate change, education must seek ways through. Both authors of this article teach and research in the United States where gun violence in and out of schools, among other horrors, has become a form of mundane terror: ongoing, inevitable, devastating. Which is to say that, in spite of disaster that can poison the wellspring of hope—there is a need for invitations to feel, think, and act in ways that do not foreclose the future. We wonder here, then: *What might we do in order to "keep going," particularly from an ethical standpoint?*

Gun violence is the dominant underlying cause of death for children and teenagers in the United States: more than motor vehicle crashes, cancer, and poison (Goldstick et al., 2022). At the time of the final revision to this article, recently released statistics reveal that the situation seems even more bleak: in 2023, gun violence killed 301 children and 1,407 teens (Gun Violence Archive, 2024). This horrific situation in the United States is not the case in comparable countries: "Firearms account for 20% of all child and teen deaths in the U.S., compared to an average of less than 2% of child and teen deaths in similarly large and wealthy nations" (KFF, 2022, para. 6). While the United States has a child and teen firearm mortality rate of 5.6 per 100,000, the combined average of Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom is only 0.3 per 100,000. Canada is second place to the United States with 0.8 per 100,000 (KFF, 2022).

But of course, other crises, broader than U.S. gun violence, abound. Existing conditions right now in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom (and elsewhere) are not only

objectionable, but unsustainable; specifically, climate change as a result of "ecocidal" logics. While some of the global changes are subtle, others are not. Severe droughts, floods, heatwaves, wildfires, hurricanes, and tornadoes have sharply increased in frequency and intensity: "Over the past four decades, the United States has experienced an average of 7.7 billion-dollar disasters annually. But since 2017, the average has jumped to nearly 18 each year" (Dennis, 2022; see also World Meteorological Organization, 2022). Ecocidal logics "are not inevitable or 'human nature' but are the result of a series of decisions that have their origins and reverberations in colonization" (Davis & Todd, 2017, p. 763). This link to colonialism and colonial logics is vital because many humans hope for (and seek) a technological fix for climate catastrophe (e.g., carbon capture, alternative energy sources, etc.), but many of these "fixes" do not address the underlying problems of systems that rely on expansion and exploitation, such as corporate capitalism.

Similarly troubling, a recent manufactured crisis targeting transpeople has been routed through multiple state legislatures in the United States. Despite the fact that every single major medical association and world health authority supports healthcare for transgender people, many of these proposed laws not only ban gender-affirming care but also punish those seeking care or the people supporting those seeking care. In Florida, for example, providing such care is a felony offense and the state will strip parental rights from parents who support their transgender children. Across the United States in 2022 there were:

- Eighty bills aimed to prevent transgender youth from playing school sports consistent with their gender identity. Nineteen states now exclude transgender athletes in school sports.
- Forty-two bills to prevent transgender and non-binary youth from receiving lifesaving, medically necessary gender-affirming healthcare. Five states now restrict access to gender-affirming care.
- Seventy curriculum censorship bills tried to turn back the clock and restrict teachers from discussing LGBTQ+ issues and other marginalized communities in their classrooms. Seven passed into law. (HRC, 2023, para. 9)

Throughout the United States, state legislators have introduced more than 450 bills that target the LGBTQ+ community, and over 150 bills that specifically target transgender community members (ACLU, 2022), and these numbers will likely continue to worsen given the 2024 election.

As bleak as the paragraphs above are, some additional context is needed for a more complete picture. Nearly 70% of Americans support the United States shifting to become carbon-neutral by 2050; although, notably, concern about climate change is not as high as in peer countries, and within the United States such attitudes have strong partisan divides (Tyson et al., 2023). Meanwhile, the divide between public opinion and actions of politicians are particularly stunning for gun legislation and LGBTQ+ rights. A 2022 ABC News/Ipsos Reid poll revealed that seventy percent of Americans "think enacting new gun control laws should take precedence over protecting ownership rights" (Saric, 2022, para. 1), and HRC (2023) data indicate that:

> Support for LGBTQ+ rights is on the rise in Florida and nationwide: 80% of Florida residents support nondiscrimination protections, and 66% of Florida residents oppose refusal of service on religious grounds. About eight in ten Americans (80%) favor laws that would protect LGBTQ+ people against discrimination in jobs, public accommodations, and housing. This reflects a dramatic increase in the proportion of Americans who support non-discrimination protections since 2015, when it was 71%. (HRC, 2023, p. 11)

Given this disconnect between the will of the people and legislation (or lack thereof) present in the United States (and seemingly elsewhere in the world, such as Canada and the United Kingdom),

it is important that those of us concerned about each other and the planet persevere in our ethical stances toward societies that hurt less. There are, and will continue to be, numerous ways we might take up this task to "keep going." On our minds at present is a *curriculum of illusion and the miraculous*.

## A Curriculum of Illusion and the Miraculous

Illusion invites us to suspend, extend, or even negate our present situations in embodied ways. Similarly, Orsi (2016a) reveals to us what we've lost in abandoning a robust sense of the miraculous. Recovering the notion of *presence* (i.e., an emergence of the miraculous in our quotidian lives) means that we don't foreclose the possibility of a world that hurts less—in which change is always possible. The avenue explored in this paper weaves together *illusion* via Jean Baudrillard (1983/1990; 2004/2005) with Robert Orsi's (2016a) call to reclaim the language of immanence, the miraculous, in the social sciences.

Baudrillard (1981/1983, 1983/1990, 2004/2005) has been part of curricular conversations as well as education more broadly for decades. These inquiries have added to how we might consider hyperreality (i.e., simulacra that are more real than real) and its very real effects on how we understand curricular foci (e.g., Ajeesh & Rukmini, 2022; Bulfin, 2017; van Kessel et al., 2025), the educational situation more broadly (e.g., Humphreys et al., 2022; Moran & Kendall, 2009; van Kessel & Kline, 2019), and the conceptualization of particular social identity groups such as youth (e.g., van Kessel, 2016) and Indigenous peoples (e.g., Steckley, 2003). Less frequently taken up is his radical thinking—Baudrillard's challenge to do something more than employ criticality. We're thinking here of Kline's (2016a, 2016b) and Liu's (2022) dive into aspects of fatal theory and Ramirez's (2017) challenge to the sociology of higher education. This article engages with radical thinking, particularly the concept of *illusion*, one of Baudrillard's fatal strategies. Illusion is more than a deceptive appearance; it is a philosophical challenge. Because reality is often far too wobbly than many of us care to admit (van Kessel et al., 2025), illusion can (and perhaps ought to) nudge us toward not what is, but what can be. Illusion is an imagining that ruptures what we take for granted as reality.

Robert Orsi's (2016a, 2016b) work similarly takes up a rupture of the commonplace. His concern, rooted in experiences of the divine (appearances of the Virgin Mary at Knock in Ireland; the healing dirt of the Santuaria of Chimayo; pilgrimages to Lourdes and their evident effects on the devoted) lies the loss of the cognizability of these experiences for the social sciences. That is, though there might be studies of a sense of the hóly in the world, there really isn't a frame—he calls it the immanent frame—for understanding cases where the real presence of the divine emerges into the world for people. An example of what this might look like is the doom-loop of prophesying chronicled by Matthew Taylor (2024) in his account of the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR). This manifests in independent charismatic Christian congregations in speaking in tongues, but more so in the constantly shifting, divine justifications for Christian supremacism and the divinely ordained political trajectory of Donald Trump. That is: calling Christians in the NAR hypocrites for asserting certain Biblical values while voting for a libertine authoritarian like Donald Trump precisely misses the point that leaders in the movement have received divine messages dictating the inevitability of his reign. Whether these apostolic assertions are true or not is beside the point; what matters is that, for believers, the divine has emerged to affirm the rise of a tyrant. And so now what? More mundane—for its familiarity though perhaps

not its implications—is the Catholic belief in Transubstantiation: that in the mass the Eucharist is transformed from bread into the literal embodied presence of Christ-in-the-world. Here, as for members of the NAR, God has broken into the world in ways that defy the reality structure of most critical academic understanding. What, we wonder, might be done in light of this reality for its possibility? Certainly we should worry about the political influence of leaders of the NAR like Sean Feucht who believe God is telling them to defy public health mandates; but we might also take heart in the invitation Orsi (2016b) offers that we "try the thought experiment of approaching [our] particular areas of inquiry in religion, history, and culture through a matrix of presence" (para. 9). That is: if the supernatural is present in ways we can't fully understand, what does that open up for us?

Taken together, Baudrillard and Orsi invite us to continue our lives and struggles with radical hope (Lear, 2008) instead of falling into denial or cynicism, and are synergistic with neoanarchist ethics: to cultivate our responsibility to others' existence and suffering as a philosophy of responsibility (Critchley, 2013). Feeling (and perhaps being) powerless within the State does not foreclose taking action in whatever interstitial spaces we can find and create together in our communities. Curriculum is the story we tell ourselves and others about the past and present that shapes our impressions of reality and possible futures, and consequently our proposition is that a curriculum of illusion and the miraculous helps tell a story that encourages persistence in the face of dread, but without being rigid in conceptualization or implementation.

## Recovering Illusion

Although it may be helpful to consider loss in terms of death and grief (e. g. , Christ et al. , 2021; Stylianou & Zembylas, 2021; Varga et al. , 2021), in this article we are considering what is *lost* in education when we neglect illusion during times that are full of significant societal dread: *dreadful(l)*. Change can be unnerving, and Power (here, abstractly referring to those people in positions to shape all of our lives, such as billionaires and the prominent politicians in their pockets) benefits from the rest of us being too tired and disheartened to imagine how things might be different. The loss of illusion, therefore, is a loss of possibility and, in the end, a loss of agency.

As the poet and playwright Oscar Wilde (1891/2007) stated, a "practical scheme" is too often considered to be one that either exists already or "could be carried out under existing conditions. But it is exactly the existing conditions that one objects to; and any scheme that could accept these conditions is wrong and foolish" (p. 1062). The activist and writer Emma Goldman (1917) expanded upon Wilde: When these existing conditions are objectionable, the only valid criterion for a practical scheme is sufficient vitality "to leave the stagnant waters of the old, and build, as well as sustain, new life" (p. 55). Failing to engage with illusion runs the risk of losing a way to persevere through death and grief. To conceptualize illusion, we are drawing from Jean Baudrillard here, but this concept lives in other traditions as well.

Baudrillard (2004/2005) articulated an energy of challenge, defiance, creativity, and renewal when we undertake "fatal strategies" to break harmful structures: *hyperconformity*, *enigma*, and *illusion* (Baudrillard, 1983/1990; Kline, 2016; Kline & Holland, 2020; van Kessel et al. , 2024). These strategies are creative—and perhaps at times even joyous—attempts to force systems (e. g. , the settler colonial, corporate, white supremacist heteropatriarchy) to reverse their course. Hyperconformity invites us to adhere to a system in a way that breaks it. An example of such a practice is malicious compliance, where people follow the rules so closely that it disrupts

the power structures of a particular context. A student at a school, an employee at a workplace, or others can follow an order or directive as it is articulated, but in a subversive way that undermines its intent (e. g. , following the dress code too literally). Enigma as a strategy makes what was once clear rethinkable. In this way, we make "the world even more unintelligible" (Kline & Holland, 2020, p. 68). From this perspective the goal is not necessarily to uncover a truth in a stable form, but to "make friends with chaos" (Berardi, 2019, p. 3; see also Kline & Holland, 2020). Against the backdrop of our dreadful(l) times (from a Baudrillardian perspective), it might be more helpful to have "a despairing analysis in felicitous language than an optimistic analysis in an infelicitous language that is maddeningly tedious and demoralizingly platitudinous, as is most often the case" (Baudrillard, 1995/2008, p. 104). This manuscript focuses, however, not on hyperconformity or enigma, but on the third strategy: *illusion*—how it can open up possible futures and thus help us persist through our dreadful(1) times.

## Illusion as a Practical Scheme

Illusion as a strategy helps us imagine other ways of being and thus can be a "practical scheme" in Wilde and Goldman's sense. Illusion may seem disconnected from reality, but according to Baudrillard (1981/1983), we have already swapped reality for hyperreality. In this way, "[i]llusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible" (p. 38). Without going into heavy detail, hyperreality is the situation we are currently in, whereby technologies (broadly defined) have developed in a way that divorces us from reality to the point that simulacra (i.e., copies that lack a core element of their referent) replace originals: "It is reality itself today that is hyperrealist" (Baudrillard, 1981/1983, p. 147). In terms of cinema, for example, "the magic and illusion of film disappear in an alluvion of perfect simulacra" (Kline, 2016a, p. 3). Technical perfection forecloses possibilities of discerning real from hyperreal and thus shuts down illusion. As Baudrillard (1983/1990) noted,

> That which is no longer illusion is dead and inspires terror. This is what the cadaver does, as does the clone, and more generally, anything that can be so confused with itself that it is no longer even capable of playing its own appearance. This limit of disillusion is that of death. (pp. 74-75)

Consequently, we need to remake and rediscover illusion, which was seen in the past in ceremonies (notably, we disagree with Baudrillard who thought that all ceremonies no longer have this power), and can be seen at present in art, theatre, and language that "maintain the tiny distance that makes the real play with its own reality" (Baudrillard, 1983/1990, p. 211).

Importantly, fatal strategies, including illusion, don't "succumb to being subsumed in the way that the negative is subsumed in the late capitalist code" (Kline, 2016a, p. 120). Our contemporary times demand strategies that cannot be countered easily by those accustomed to squashing dissent for: "illusion keeps its power without giving up its secret (there isn't any)" (Baudrillard, 1983/1990, p. 86). Illusion is slippery—not as easily recognized (and thus dismissed) as some more conventional critical strategies because it "is not false, for it doesn't use false signs; it uses senseless signs, signs that point nowhere. This deceives and disappoints our demand for meaning, but it does so enchantingly" (Baudrillard, 1983/1990, p. 75).

From Greene (1995), Saleh (2021), and other educational scholars, the process of imagining is itself an action upon the world: "storied, experiential, embodied, and enacted" (Saleh, 2021, p. 225). From a Baudrillardian perspective, this action is possible because of the energy of illusion, and how those involved are "in the process of being swept away" (Baudrillard, 1983/1990, p. 87). Illusion is an action, and we see the power of this fluid strategy in the process of science fictioning. Beier (2021), drawing from Fisher (2016), illustrated in how reading a "poor curriculum" (Pinar & Grumet, 2015) as science fiction can tap into the power of the "weird": "what the weird exposes is not only something out of place or out of time, but rather how the common-sense categories, delineations, and correlations through which we make sense of the world are themselves inadequate" (Beier, 2021, p. 153).

Perhaps somewhat ironically, we can attune ourselves to our existence as well as other entities (including the planet) by engaging in illusion. Although it may be hard to keep an open heart, using illusion may require an attenuation of the tendency to seek "truth" in the face of, for instance, the very real consequences of an era of deepfakes, AI generated misinformation, and fake news. What we fear, in other words, is a hardline return to the comfort of positivism (which can only provide a false sense of stability) in the midst of a revolution of new ways of producing (hyper)realities. Engagement with illusion allows us to think anew through the value of immanence and radical presence. Perhaps some might have (understandable) feelings of discomfort thinking with and through the language of religion/faith, but nonetheless here we find it helpful. We invite readers to "stick with us" as we engage with some religious language to explore the miraculous as a way of connecting deeply with illusion, but without foreclosing more secular approaches, or approaches couched in other religious or spiritual traditions.

## Recovering Presence: Transcendence and Secular Education

Robert Orsi (2016a) writes of the anesthetization of embodied religious experience through the creation of what we might consider an inevitable administrative imperative: modern Christendom responding and coming to shape through Enlightenment ideals. This mirrors work in secularisms from Jakobsen and Pelligrini (2008) who make the observation that "forms of secularism tend to vary with the religious formation in relation to which they develop" (p. 12). The point that follows, it should be clear, is that this is a dialogic relationship such that religions form out of and in response to the secularisms which they re/create over time. Taking a historical view, Asad (2003) makes the point that in "medieval theology, the overriding antinomy was between 'the divine' and 'the satanic' (both of them transcendent powers) or 'the spiritus' and 'the temporal' (both of them worldly institutions), not between a supernatural sacred and a natural profane" (p. 32). The denaturalization of the sacred as set in a wholly separate metaphysical plane from the profaned secular is, thus, as much a human construction as its progenitor rooted in processes initiated by anthropologists and later theologians who came to define the sacred as beyond the objective limits of understanding (p. 33). That which was considered illusory, in other words—over and against that which was concretized as "in" and "of" the world—was very much culturally and historically situated and thus remains contingent.

Thus, for Orsi (2016a) it makes sense not only to suggest that "Western Christendom existed as a map of bones before it became a legal and ecclesiastical entity" (p. 11) but also to chronicle the ways in which church authority came to assert control over the supernatural meanings tied to those healing saints' bones, fostering along the way an economy of acceptable immanence:

the Christian God exists in the world so we're going to need a process to distinguish His real presence from the ramblings of cranks or, heaven forfend, the words and embodied encounters of the insufficiently sympathetic poor. This process of administrative assertion is linked, always, with authority, a reminder of Althaus-Reid's (2000) caution that "every discourse of religious and political authority hides under its skirts suppressed knowledge in exile, which is marginal and indirect speech" (p. 20). Thus, one task to concern ourselves with lies in considering just what possibilities might be hidden in a reconceptualization of the sacred as it re-emerges into the world.

Wexler (2013) wonders about the "*possibilities of mysticism as a source for social analysis"* (p. 6), suggesting that in education in particular, a turn towards functionalist, empiricist and even (or particularly) in leftist circles, Marxist paradigms "led its practitioners to ignore or deny the appearance of newly important phenomena like religion" (p. 6) or its misty double, spirituality. There is an added irony here given the roots in educational Marxism as they run through, most prominently, Freire, a practitioner of religious analysis throughout his work. Still, the point is that educational research has too often ignored the possibility of the religious, mystical, theological, and, as we argue here, the paraliturgical and devotional as sources for theorizing different value into and from the dread of loss and promise of remembrance in schooling among other things. What we want to suggest with our work here, however, isn't necessarily in relation to a particularized loss related to, for instance, the grief that comes with death as it surrounds classrooms in the midst of tragedy. Rather our interest lies in what is *lost* in education when we fail to attend to the abundant, the transcendent, the miraculous theologically understood. It is, we should note before continuing, a character of our own impoverished sense of miracles in the world that they have largely been treated in education as rooted in the false narratives of turnaround schools, which have worked fleeting and produced misleading wonders in the test scores of students through pushout or brutalizing test preparation. In this sense, the legal ecclesiastical entity authorizing the irruption of the manifold possibility of the supernatural in schools has become the College Board and its ilk. And Jesus wept.

There are other ways forward of course, and loss can be a deeply cathartic process. And what this process of recovery will require is a kind of remembrance of a strand of curriculum studies past, before moving through various theological accounts of what becomes possible through a reconvention against the structured ignorance of a world closed to the miraculous. Indeed, MacDonald (1995) suggests that "the act of theorizing is an act of faith, a religious act" where "curriculum theorizing is a prayerful act" (p. 181) which he links back to a sense of the mytho-poetic work of desiring in education: seeking a better world through faith in something beyond our own individualized humanity. Heubner (2008) works similarly reminding that "various religious traditions" contain "veins of language about the spiritual" which "should be mined for the educator" particularly because they can draw from different "histories, stories, myths and poems [which] are symbols of moreness, of otherness, of the transcendent" manifest most clearly in creativity (p. 344). It is incumbent on us, then, in this work to acknowledge the ongoing structuring of educational possibility in the West, and especially in the United States, by specific (and mostly conservative) Christian conceptions of the good as they are read through language, ritual, and practice that normalize and make invisible religious/secular experiences of education (e. g. Burke & Segall, 2011, 2015, 2017). Which is to say: the loss in education and educational research has not been a loss of religion but rather an inability and unwillingness to attend to and remember just how religious supposedly secular education already is. But also, in its resistance to religious conservatism, much otherwise nominally progressive or radical educational research has

left behind a powerful tool of hope: the excess of possibility that comes with the emergence of the divine into the world. Let us, then, raise the dead here.

## Recapturing the Miraculous

Although so-called "secular" education in places like the United States is imbued with many aspects of Christianity (Burke & Segall, 2011, 2015, 2017), educational research generally fails to reckon with the possibilities of thinking theologically toward different ends. One of the central concerns that Orsi (2016a) raises in his work is a sense that the secular social sciences don't have a way to think about "when the transcendent breaks into time" (p. 111) choosing instead to assume that "what appears to be happening to the men and women to whom it is happening" is not, in fact "real" (p. 59). The second author (Kevin) is writing, specifically, of some certain Catholic experiences with great healing miracles: all those abandoned crutches at Knock, at Medjugorje; at Lourdes. There is no particular understanding in the social sciences of the affective power, which is to say the subjective reality that makes rational a belief that sleeping with a bag of dirt from Chimayo in New Mexico might just lead to remission of a particularly rabid cancer.

Some of this can be attributed to an overreliance on the kind of paranoid reading whose knowing chastisement Sedgwick (2003) warned against: that affective experience you're having isn't something you understand; let me explain it rationally to you and your false consciousness. What Orsi (2016a) sees as particularly concerning is the way in which interpretation can become "a refusal to listen" (p. 110) such that those of us committed to all the phantasy of the posts or the psychoanalytic or whatever post/qualitative tradition one might choose to list, forget that sometimes it might well be possible for the divine to irrupt into the everyday. What does it mean, in other words, to acknowledge that for some of the people with whom we work or alongside whom we might study, the miraculous exists, even paradoxically, in the quotidian but more so as a generalized orientation to the world and especially to education. What changes, in essence, if we allow for what Asad (2003) calls the "epiphany" or "the sudden showing forth of the spiritual in the actual" (p. 53)? It would require a sense that "whether everyone sees them or not, the gods are there" (Orsi, 2016a, p. 251) and we'd do well to consider what this might mean for the educational project.

## Devotion and Grace

It will be clear to the reader here the relative contours that limit the edges of the authors' archive: we are writing of presence from a very narrow Catholic (albeit feminist, queer inflected, but still very much American and too-White) tradition. The miraculous lost, then, in this tradition is necessarily limited and, especially with Marian apparitions, is inherently colonial and sexist/sexualized (Anzaldua, 1987/2012). Such is the nature of particularized interventions which, hopefully, ripple outward: What will we have to consider if we are to reapprehend the miraculous as possible for education? An exhaustive treatment is necessarily impossible, but we can gesture towards conceptual possibility. In that light, then, we offer two possible reads forward through devotion and grace.

In her book chronicling the dance of the Giglio in a Brooklyn Catholic parish, Maldonado-Estrada (2020) proffers an exhaustive account of the construction of the annual shrines wholly fabricated and then ceremonially lifted by (mostly) Italian American men, to be paraded through

the streets of Williamsburg as a sign of devotion to Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, another Marian manifestation. The scene is one of ritual masculine maintenance in the shadow of religious necessity: here is tradition engaged for fundraising at, in some senses, its most crass. Build the shrine, bring the masses—sell alcohol, funnel cakes, and pull tabs—fund the Church. This, at least in part, is so that the tradition itself can live on, but also so that religious and ethnic changes in the neighbourhood can be warded off—or elided—for another year. There's also a kind of "role maintenance" (p. 144) which allows men to sustain status in a religious sphere that might, otherwise, become coded as unacceptably feminized. An odd paradox in a hierarchical, explicitly patriarchal organization, certainly, but one which accounts very much for the physicality tied into building and then lifting the massive shrine as a collective all-male group. There's homosociality certainly. But there's also devotion: to parish, to history and tradition, to each other, and especially to the possibility of finding the divine in the joy of the Dance itself. While the men's "devotional lives" as they deconstruct, and reconstruct, and then play act the parade of the Giglio, "are very much entangled with their relationships with other men" (p. 41) they are also lifting, dancing, and walking a 72-foot, 8,000-pound shrine to the mother of Jesus. They are seeking, in this babbling tower, a connection to a remembered past, an as yet uncertain future, but as much as anything, the miracle of living on beyond their own lives.

In the stories of Giglios' past told ritually as they build and reminisce, they commune with the dead, the fathers, uncles, brothers, cousins, and friends who danced, painted, worshiped, and drank with them who are otherwise cordoned off from the secular world. The Giglio brings them back in their shared devotion to the shrine, certainly, but really to the miracle of transcendence through time: the Giglio is a miracle of presence. It connects them back in ritual and links them forward as they share with their own sons and nephews the tales of their encounters with the sacred, often inked in tattoo on skin, but also etched in hearts and souls through the bittersweet grief of passing time, past/passed mentors, secret lovers, dear friends.

Peter McLaren's (1999) book on schooling as ritual uncovers the tension of a Catholic school—in Canada—which serves in its Catholicism as a "chronic defender of capital" and ideological weapon against social progressivism, over and against the faith as a "practice of living critically and compassionately" while providing "a symbol of hope, resistance, and social and spiritual transformation" (p. xxxiii). This dual lens allows the author to attend to the hegemonic potential of educational ritualization, really the Taylorization of the spiritual while still holding space for the ways in which ritual can be used to forge a connection to the supernatural through, in one case, the acknowledgement that the cross might be both a call to take up the pain and humiliation inherent in Christ's crucifixion as told in the Christian narrative, but also as a symbol of joy and transcendence. Huebner (2008) would call this attention to the possibility and pain in ritual a kind of protest against form, in the sense that theologian Paul Tillich asserted: "form gradually loses its vocation, becomes idolatrous, and no longer points to the transcendent" (p. 413). Maintenance of the possibility of this continual emergence of that which crosses the boundaries between the sacred and profane that we have constructed is possible perhaps most saliently, through grace.

The second author, Kevin, spent 2010 conducting his dissertation study at a working class, mostly white all-boys Catholic high school in the Midwest (Burke, 2011). Every other Friday before classes started, in the massive, ornate chapel appended to the side of the school, he and a few others attended a small ceremony set off in a side alcove in the midst of flickering candles, in the shadow of imposing pink marble columns. A priest convened these quiet pre-dawn gatherings.

The author was there to write about the boys' participation, but also there to figure out the pull of this kind of thing on him.

> *We'd pray in a general way, and then Fr. Chuck would take up a truly bizarre gold contraption, a kind of modified chalice called a monstrance, which rather than culminating in the negative space below the rim as in a cup, was built up into an effigy of the sun topped by a smaller cross in filigreed gold in the centre of which, set against velvet and protected by glass, sat the shard of St. Rita's fingerbone. We'd ask for St. Rita's intercession in our lives and in the lives of others, and then, having spent fifteen minutes in reverent almost-silence, concentrating on a bit of calcified human remains left over from the 14th century, we'd head off to homeroom, incense trailing us on our way back to the secular present.*

It's impossible to know if the boys who were there on any given Friday were praying for miracles. This sort of practice has a kind of hierarchy in the Catholic Church. The bone itself is considered a relic and technically because it's a part of the former St. Rita, it's a first-class relic. Saints' possessions are second class relics and on down the line to objects that were merely *touched* by a saint. The glib interpretation is that this is saint worship or worse, some form of necrophilia, one might suppose. But the Catholic rite is about seeking intercession from a saint through prayer; in essence it's a kind of hotline to God where the saint is an emissary or, if you'd prefer, an old-fashioned phone operator working the switchboard. What we can know is that outside that alcove, the practice seems absurd, particularly at more than a decade's remove, but in the moment of reverence with those boys, in the flickering dark, something differently possible felt opened up. An emergence into time and another fixed point on Orsi's (2016a) map of bones.

Later in the year a recent alumnus of the school died after a long bout with cancer. He'd been close with a number of the kids still enrolled at the high school and, bereft, the boys spent time outside of class just kneeling in the chapel, heads down, grieving. When Kevin wrote about this in his dissertation and subsequent book, he highlighted the possibility of a space for ritualized grief: a kind of release valve for the sort of emotions not allowed in other parts of the school for their coded femininity. What he missed, however, was the possibility of grace in this emotional collapse into the pews.

Grace, for Catholics, borrowing heavily from Michael Himes (2004) here, is manifest in the sacramental. Traditionally there are seven sacraments in the Church (Marriage, Last Rites, First Communion, etc. ) but Himes' point is that the sacramental is an attending to God's grace extended beyond the Trinity, which is to say, a sacrament is any time we recognize grace in the world. So, there are rituals that encode this grace and direct our attention to it, but in essence, anything in the world has the chance to be sacramental should it get us to apprehend grace in our lives. There is God, in this mode of belief, ever present in the world missed but for our attending to the divine's presence. Immanence is part of the quotidian in this way of thinking and thus, finding space to see the spiritual as it manifests in the actual, or the transcendent as it emerges into time, is really about paying attention to the possibility of it happening at any given moment in any given situation, person, space, text, pedagogical intervention, and practice. The miraculous, in other words, is always ever with us if we want it. We just need to figure out if we've lost our eyes to see it, the ears to hear it.

## What This Means

We'll need different lenses for thinking about educational possibility, certainly. This journey is very much underway in the work of Indigenous and decolonial scholars particularly made manifest in the ongoing acknowledgment and centring of notions rooted in a belief that "water is life" and "land is our first teacher" (Tuhiwai Smith et al., 2019, p. 1). This certainly doesn't contain all of the sacred cosmologies of Indigenous beliefs, but it seems synecdochic for an integration of precisely the concern about the way in which Western anthropology and subsequently theology failed in its interpretive capacities as it calved off the sacred from the profane. This is written about differently by Bentley Hart (2013) who, again, reminds philosophers and scientists in the premodern West, "no absolute division could be drawn between physical and metaphysical explanations of the cosmos, or at least between material and 'spiritual' causes" (p. 54). If there's a problem of separating the miraculous from the quotidian, in essence, and if that's linked to a kind of colonialism that seeks to ravage the sensibility that indeed we can be taught by land and that water itself is life, then some of the work of critical scholars in education might need to be a reconnection with immanence. Which means, we suspect, that we're going to have to start reading more theology and folklore and understand that the difference between the two is likely in terms of a category error: it's not so much that the transcendent occasionally breaks into time, but that we mostly fail to see the transcendent as it is woven through the very nature of our daily lives.

Education has an opportunity to do something different, to practice what Elizabeth Johnson (2011) calls "dangerous memory" (p. 66). The danger lies in the trouble of engaging with religion in educational spaces, but really it sits at the juncture of literacy and belief: what if the ululations of those taken by the spirit have educational value that is, by its very nature, immeasurable? What does that mean for the educational project and, in particular, for a field that preaches a kind of cultural sustainability that often stops right at the edge of embodied religious experience, indeed sees it as premodern, uncouth, immature, worthy of disdain?

One of the main points that Asad (2003) makes about grace is that from its theological genesis it was, similar to religious iconography, "both itself and a sign of what is already present…it points backward to…memory and forward to…expectation as Christians" (p. 34) and thus grace is the engagement of the Christian subject with what the eyes see alongside what they can't possibly see simultaneously. When something pulls aside the scrim that divides the sign itself—that monstrance; the Giglio; the collective practice of joy in a classroom moment—from its connection to past and present, the miraculous occurs. Time stops, turns over, and new possibility emerges. We've mostly lost the capacity to wonder about this in education, reducing it to the cloying of the teachable moment.

## Persistence in Face of Dread

It's a problem that many have separated the miraculous and illusory from the quotidian, in general as well as through many Western philosophies and theories translated into curriculum and educational theory. It is vital to consider the spirit of educational work as we "relationally imagine, co-create, and live a curriculum of rahma[1] whereby our already intact humanity is lovingly embraced, sustained and heartened" (Saleh, 2021, p. 223).

At times, writing this article was difficult; for example, it was difficult researching and writing some of the dreadful statistics in the introduction. Persisting in these contexts is difficult,

even with some tethering to ideas that help us muddle through them. Part of the point of this article is that our current milieu is heartbreaking. As authors, we wanted to share some of the theoretical framings that are helping us muddle through our professional and personal lives, without foreclosing other possibilities for thinking through these dreadful(l) times. Schwittay (2025), for example, formulated a pedagogy informed by Freire, Gibson-Graham, and Amsler that "articulates whole-person learning, design and arts methods, praxis, and critical hope in an interlinked, expandable practice" (p. 85). Of particular interest to us as authors is Schwittay's (2025) consideration of the sort of hope that urges action in the face of daunting situations, without falling into saviourism or into a pit of cynicism and despair.

What we're suggesting in this space is that there are losses—as we fail to attend to illusion and immanence, as we elide the possibility of imagination—that are significant, and they are an acceptance of the reduction of education to the concrete of schooling and our societal situations that are imbued with dread. This is part and parcel of the failure to acknowledge the very queerness of quantification (Greteman & Thorpe, 2015) itself just as it's an accession to the avoidance of the kind of beauty that comes with the risk that we just can't know all of what happens in the educational moment (Biesta, 2014). The difficulty here is that we can't backwards plan our way to the weird and the transcendent which, in the end, seems the best kind of argument for thinking them back into existence in our work.

## Notes

**1.** Rahma (رحمة ) is an Arabic word that usually is translated to mean "mercy", but educational scholar Muna Saleh (2021) has developed a *curriculum of rahma* as an embodied form of nurturance, compassion, and radical love against inequitable situations, drawing from the root of word (rahm) which means womb.

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# Not a Virtual Education

## The Entanglement of the Private and Public Spheres in the Lives of Women Teachers During the Pandemic in Iran

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It matters what stories tell stories.
It matters what thoughts think thought.
It matters what worlds world worlds.
Stengers & Despret (2015), attributing the spirit of the quote to Virginia Woolf

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC BROUGHT NOT ONLY A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS but also a moral, economic, and political reckoning—one that exposed and intensified existing inequalities across class, race, gender, and geography. In Iran, as in many parts of the world, women disproportionately bore the burdens of this crisis, particularly in the realm of education. As schools shifted to virtual platforms, the domestic space of the home was transformed into a site of professional labor, often without sufficient institutional support or acknowledgment. This study asks: *How did the move to virtual teaching during the pandemic entangle professional responsibilities with domestic expectations in the lives of Iranian women educators?*

The pandemic made visible what feminist theorists have long argued: the personal is political (Hanisch, 1969). In Iran, this entanglement manifested through intensified caregiving responsibilities, disrupted work schedules, increased emotional labor, and heightened vulnerability to gender-based violence. At the same time, teachers were expected to perform uninterrupted professional duties as if nothing had changed. These paradoxes lie at the heart of this study.

Grounded in feminist standpoint epistemology (Harding, 1991; Haraway, 1991), the project uses a feminist case study methodology to explore the lived experiences of ten women secondary school teachers in East Tehran. All participants were married with children and belonged to Iran's socio-economic middle class. Through informal yet focused conversations, the

study captures the complexity of their teaching lives during lockdown, not as isolated anecdotes but as politically charged narratives. The narratives presented here engage with storytelling as a method of environmental and ethical pedagogy, recognizing the interdependence of human and nonhuman agencies (Aghasaleh, Bishop, & Atsumi, 2020).

Nancy Fraser's (2017; 2019) concept of progressive neoliberalism offers a critical framework for understanding how the ideologies of empowerment and inclusion can mask deeper patterns of dispossession. This theoretical lens helps interpret how the language of responsibility, flexibility, and digital innovation in education often functions to privatize structural crises, placing the burden on women in ways that reinforce both patriarchal and neoliberal logics.

This paper proceeds with a literature review and theoretical framing, followed by a detailed description of the methodology and participants. Findings are presented in three thematic sections, with participant voices foregrounded to illuminate the emotional and material costs of virtual teaching. The conclusion argues that the crisis is not just logistical but moral, and that any educational reform that ignores the private-public entanglement in women's lives remains ethically insufficient.

Although the study centers on data collected in 2021, its findings remain profoundly relevant in 2025. The structural conditions that surfaced during the pandemic—particularly the fusion of domestic and professional responsibilities for women educators—have not disappeared. These narratives offer enduring insights into how gendered labor remains vulnerable under ongoing neoliberal pressures.

## Theoretical Framework and Background of Research

This study is grounded in feminist standpoint epistemology and draws on the work of Nancy Fraser (2017) to understand how power structures shape the experiences of women educators during the pandemic. Feminist standpoint theory (Harding, 1993; Hartsock, 1998) posits that knowledge is situated and partial, and that those positioned at the margins—such as women navigating both public and private demands—offer critical insights into oppressive systems.

The feminist slogan "the personal is political" (Hanisch, 1969) critiques the artificial separation of public and private spheres, a dichotomy historically used to devalue domestic labor and women's experiences (Arendt, 1958/2013; Weedon, 1987). Feminist theorists argued that caregiving, housework, and emotional labor—typically assigned to women—are not apolitical or incidental, but are central to how power operates in both households and institutions (Grumet, 1988; Walkerdine, 2003).

Nancy Fraser's (2017, 2019) concept of *progressive neoliberalism* further elucidates how neoliberal logics co-opt justice-based discourses to sustain inequality. She argues that neoliberal capitalism often aligns with the symbolic goals of social movements (e.g., empowerment, inclusion) while undermining their material foundations. This can be seen in education's push for digital innovation and teacher adaptability, which often shifts structural burdens, like infrastructure costs, time demands, and emotional labor, onto individual teachers, particularly women.

This framework allows us to read the pandemic not only as a logistical disruption but as a political moment in which the privatization of responsibility—and the entanglement of domestic and professional spheres—became glaringly visible. It positions women teachers as key informants on the gendered moral crisis of "virtual" education.

## Feminist Theorizations of the Political

Paolo Freire (1970) argued that "education is entirely political" and "never neutral" (p. 19). This foundational idea resonates strongly with feminist frameworks that locate power not only in public institutions but also in personal, domestic, and intimate life. Feminist theorists (Federici, 2012; hooks, 1984; Rich, 1976) have long insisted that the home, the family, and even the body are political sites, shaped by social norms, power relations, and systemic inequalities. In this context, the shift to virtual teaching during the pandemic did not depoliticize education—it intensified the presence of politics in everyday domestic routines. Schools and curricula play an essential role in curbing or making meaningful changes. That implies that teachers and policymakers should consider participating in the power structure.

In the public/private dichotomy, the political is defined as opposed to the personal. The position of politics is outside the home, and in the patriarchal axiology is typically considered masculine. Therefore, the equivalence of the personal and the political by Hanisch (1969) is regarded as a substantial deconstruction. The main message of this feminist critique and a major theory of the second wave of feminism is to interrogate the public and private spheres (Kelly, 2017). Many of those who fought for women's suffrage and liberation from legal oppression in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were aware of the connection between the personal and political domination of the patriarchal system over women. However, before the 1960s, a small number of feminist activists questioned the unique role of women in the family. When feminists fought for equal suffrage or access to education, many considered the prevailing assumption that the woman being in charge of the family's care was natural and inevitable (Crow, 2000).

The second-wave feminist movement demonstrated that what had previously been regarded as apolitical was, in fact, deeply political. Just as public authorities—through formal laws and the unwritten values of a patriarchal society—shape relationships, roles, and even intimate obligations within the home, feminist critique sought to expose and challenge these dynamics. Recognizing the political nature of the so-called "private" sphere of gender, housework, childcare, and family life revealed that what was once treated as natural is actually situational, socially constructed, and therefore open to critique. Across disciplines and perspectives, feminist scholars have examined how women's personal lives intersect with workplace inequality and with both the physical and psychological dimensions of subjugation (Hughes-Decatur, 2011; Pittard, 2015). Decades later, it is widely acknowledged that the connections between the private and public aspects of life are profound and pervasive.

## The Life of Women Teachers

In the field of education, many women have historically entered educational institutions as labor to escape domestic violence. This participation was welcomed because the patriarchal social structure continued to dominate the bodies and minds of women. Grumet (1988) asserted that although female teachers serve patriarchal values in schooling, they are still part of the workforce that can feel liberated by relieving themselves of personal responsibilities and gaining economic independence.

Walkerdine (2003) analyzed the role of women teachers within neoliberal systems and showed that their survival and advancement require serving patriarchal and class values—not only to succeed but simply to sustain their careers. Similarly, Pittard (2015) demonstrated that

patriarchal discourses place women teachers in perpetual competition with themselves, a contest that can never be won. The rules of this competition are constructed so that women are never "good enough"—never brilliant enough, beautiful enough, artistic enough, capable enough, housewifely enough, or child-loving enough—and thus are positioned to blame themselves and one another, both explicitly and implicitly. Some of these idealized traits are so contradictory that fulfilling them simultaneously is nearly impossible (Salazar-Parreñas, 2001).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, women were caught at once in two patriarchal systems, often within the same physical space. On the one hand, they bore the disproportionate burden of domestic labor within the private sphere; on the other, they were responsible for the care of others' children in the public sphere. At the same time, epidemic patients required care, older people required care, and children displaced from schools required care. This essential but unpaid work of "care" has historically fallen to women because of entrenched social structures. For single mothers, these overlapping demands translated into even more difficult choices and pressures.

In addition to Fraser's critique of progressive neoliberalism, it is important to situate this study within the broader body of research on the gendered effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Globally, scholars have documented the ways in which the crisis intensified structural inequalities, especially for women. Peterman et al. (2020) found that pandemic conditions increased women's exposure to violence and domestic instability, particularly when stay-at-home orders restricted mobility and isolated victims. These pressures were often invisible but deeply impactful, especially for women working from home.

Aldossari and Chaudhry (2020) emphasized that burnout among women intensified as the boundaries between caregiving, domestic responsibilities and professional work collapsed. Their findings mirror the emotional fatigue and self-surveillance described by participants in this study, who often felt compelled to uphold perfection in both their home and teaching lives without structural support.

Studies from other national contexts affirm this trend. Allen, Jerrim, and Simms (2020) reported significant declines in teacher well-being during the early stages of the pandemic, driven by uncertainty, lack of digital infrastructure, and increased pressure to adapt. Although their research is situated in the United Kingdom, the parallels with the Iranian context are clear. Across regions, educators—especially women—were rendered simultaneously essential and unsupported.

As Lewis (2020) put it, "The coronavirus is a disaster for feminism," not because it created entirely new inequalities, but because it stripped away the fragile scaffolding that had previously concealed them. This crisis revealed the enduring reliance on women's unpaid and under-recognized labor, both in education and the domestic sphere. The testimonies offered by the teachers in this study not only echo these global concerns but also contribute culturally and politically specific perspectives that deepen our understanding of feminist vulnerability under conditions of progressive neoliberalism.

## Research Methodology

This research employed a feminist case study methodology, grounded in feminist standpoint epistemology. Feminist case study approaches center the lived experiences of women within specific socio-cultural contexts and foreground issues of power, voice, and reflexivity (Bloom, 1998; Hesse-Biber, 2007; Reinharz, 1992). This methodological orientation resists the neutrality of traditional case study methods and instead emphasizes positionality, emotion, and

ethical relationality in knowledge production. It is particularly appropriate for examining the entangled personal and political dimensions of women's labor during the pandemic.

Thematic analysis was conducted through inductive coding, a process by which patterns and themes are derived directly from the data rather than imposed in advance (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). Initial open codes were clustered into categories that reflected recurring metaphors, tensions, and contradictions. These themes were then reviewed and refined. Member-checking involved sharing thematic summaries and selected transcript excerpts with four participants to verify the credibility of interpretations. This occurred after the initial round of coding but before final theme development. This study also aligns with post-qualitative and relational approaches to inquiry that resist rigid methodological formulas in favor of situated, ethical, and responsive research practices (Aghasaleh & St. Pierre, 2014; Aghasaleh, 2019).

## Participants and Site

Ten secondary school teachers were selected from East Tehran. All participants were women, married, had children, and self-identified as middle-class. This shared demographic allowed for a focused exploration of how gender, class, and caregiving roles intersected during the pandemic. Pseudonyms are used throughout to protect participant confidentiality.

## Data Collection

Data were collected through informal, open-ended conversations conducted virtually in Fall 2021. While not framed as formal interviews, these conversations followed a flexible guide rooted in feminist qualitative approaches that prioritize relationality, trust, and contextual relevance (Reinharz, 1992). The prompts were designed to explore participants' experiences at the intersection of professional and domestic life.
Sample prompts included:

**Table 1**
**Interview Questions**

| No. | Question |
|---|---|
| 1 | How has the breakdown of boundaries between home and work impacted your teaching hours and responsibilities? |
| 2 | What effect has your physical presence at home and remote teaching had on your relationships with family members (children, spouse)? |
| 3 | During instructional hours, how do family members support (or expect) you to perform your professional duties? |
| 4 | How have the expectations of being at home influenced your emotional well-being? |
| 5 | Can you describe the number and age of your children, your marital status, any eldercare responsibilities, and how domestic labor is divided (e.g., childcare, cleaning, cooking)? |

These open-ended questions were asked by both authors in Farsi, the participants' native language. The questions were tailored to each participant's comfort and context, encouraging storytelling, reflection, and emotional expression.

## Findings

The analysis of the conversations with ten secondary school teachers in East Tehran revealed three interrelated areas of tension that shaped their experiences of virtual teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. These themes illustrate how professional obligations, domestic responsibilities, and social expectations intersect, intensifying the emotional and physical demands on women educators.

### The Collapse of Work–Home Boundaries: Restructured Time, Relationships, and Emotional Balance

The shift to online teaching dissolved the spatial and temporal boundaries between professional and domestic life, fundamentally altering teachers' rhythms, relationships, and emotional well-being. The physical convergence of workplace and home led to rising expectations from family members, disrupted schedules, and intensified internal pressure to perform optimally in both spheres.

Participants shared that seemingly minor domestic issues, once manageable or overlooked, became amplified in the new work-from-home arrangement. Sarah, a math teacher, expressed the emotional strain of trying to meet household responsibilities while teaching remotely:

> *I feel sad and guilty that I have time to teach online and I cannot give breakfast to my little child, or sometimes I am so busy teaching that I do not have time to prepare lunch for my family.*

These heightened expectations, compounded by the internalization of responsibility for maintaining household harmony, undermined participants' self-esteem. Teachers were often grateful to be physically present at home but simultaneously felt burdened by the pressure to meet traditional gendered roles. Huriya, a geology teacher, illustrated this tension:

> *I am thrilled to be at home and physically present, but both online teaching and housekeeping have been difficult for me.*

The desire to be perfect in every role became a pervasive theme. Teachers internalized societal and self-imposed expectations to function flawlessly as mothers, wives, and professionals. Hosna, a biology teacher, confessed:

> *In the spirit of perfectionism, I try to take care of everything promptly.*

Although being at home was assumed to support work–life balance, many participants described emotional disconnection from their families, especially their children and spouses. Mehri, for instance, lamented how the intensity of remote teaching affected her relationships:

> *Teaching for hours and sitting in a separate room, as well as being constantly busy answering students' questions, has robbed me of opportunities to be with my family, and I cannot help but answer my students, and I feel so far away from my family.*

This sense of distance was intensified by the collapse of boundaries between work hours and personal time. Teachers became continuously accessible to students, with no defined off-hours or opportunity to decompress. Samaneh, a Persian language arts teacher, observed:

> *[In the past] I had a set time and a specific workday, a specific schedule, I could make time for my children, my partner, my home and get some rest, but now, although we are not physically present at school, we are available to students all day, and we do not have a regular schedule anymore.*

Manijeh, an Arabic foreign language teacher, echoed this experience:

> *My work schedule and timing are disrupted. With our access to phones and cyberspace, school officials and students expect teachers to be always online and available to answer questions, reducing the level of tolerance and patience for students and administrators. They expect their request to be answered immediately. Working hours used to be more orderly in person.*

She continued:

> *The working hours in the online class have increased for me because I answer children's questions in private chats. In addition, a large number of children send homework or questions every day and every hour, even at one o'clock after midnight, and expect prompt answers.*

Even within the home, disruptions and unmet expectations made it difficult to maintain a professional teaching environment or meet family needs without conflict. Mastaneh, a physics teacher, shared a particularly telling moment of frustration:

> *During my class, I get furious at the noise that my little five-year-old daughter makes; I have to argue with her, and I make my child and family members upset all the time.*

These accounts reflect how the collapse of the boundary between work and home created not only logistical challenges but also emotional conflict, leading to a daily negotiation of role strain, identity dissonance, and exhaustion.

Beyond the blurring of boundaries, these women also navigated persistent and often internalized gender roles that reinforced inequitable domestic labor expectations.

## Internalized Gender Roles and Cultural Expectations: Sustained Inequities in Domestic Labor

While many participants acknowledged receiving some support from their families, most emphasized that responsibility for domestic tasks remained largely their own. These dynamics reveal how patriarchal gender norms remained deeply embedded, shaping how participants interpreted their roles at home.

Despite contributing economically and professionally, women teachers often viewed housework and caregiving as inherently their duties. Husbands, when involved, were typically described as reluctantly or minimally supportive. Nastaran, an English foreign language teacher, commented on this imbalance:

> *Usually, we do things together at my request; I just wish it could be done without an argument and dispute.*

The participants' social and professional roles created a dual identity: while their labor granted them a degree of emancipation, it also introduced new layers of guilt, fatigue, and emotional fragmentation. Hamta, a teacher of Religion and Life, highlighted this tension:

> *I became a teacher to have social relations outside the house; being with students and interacting with my colleagues gave me much energy. Now I feel tired and isolated.*

Some participants expressed satisfaction with staying home and fulfilling traditional roles, reflecting a degree of acceptance—or even embrace—of dominant cultural norms. Khadijeh, a writing teacher, stated:

> *I am pleased with the new situation and being at home because I can take care of my house, my children, and my spouse and not worry about traffic and arriving late.*

Others described the psychological toll of performing domestic labor alongside professional responsibilities, even while being physically present in the home. Nastaran remarked:

> *It is difficult to accept that family members are not available while at home and that the present is indeed absent.*

These narratives illustrate how internalized patriarchal values shaped not only behavior but also emotional responses. The women were not only expected to fulfill multiple roles but were also conditioned to view these roles as natural and non-negotiable. Their social presence in the labor market did not diminish household expectations but rather added a new burden, layered with invisible emotional labor.

In parallel with the persistence of gendered domestic roles, participants also described the devaluation of their profession as an extension of feminized labor.

**The Devaluation of Teaching as Feminized Labor: Amplified Feelings of Isolation, Insecurity, and Stress**

The undervaluation of teaching as a profession was a recurring concern among participants, particularly in how it intersected with their identities as women. Many expressed that teaching was perceived by others—including their families and communities—as easy, underpaid, or nonessential work, compounding their sense of invisibility and undervaluation.
Huriyah, a geology teacher, captured this sentiment:

> *Unfortunately, a teacher is understood only by a teacher, and our family members and spouses do not understand us. I feel lonely.*

In addition to social devaluation, teachers faced practical financial burdens related to online instruction. Participants reported covering expenses for laptops, phones, and internet packages themselves—costs that were not reimbursed by employers. This led to additional stress and tension within families. Huriyah explained:

> *Providing equipment for virtual classes such as laptops, cell phones, and Internet packages is all the responsibility of the teacher, and this is an additional expense for the family. This in itself causes concern and anxiety, the consequences of which are transmitted to students during teaching, and it goes back to the family.*

The constant digital exposure required by remote teaching created anxiety over privacy, home appearance, and interpersonal dynamics. Many teachers feared the long-term implications of students having access to their domestic environments. Tahereh, a math teacher, reflected:

> *My partner is a retired and very hard-working veteran and has a second job, mostly having phone calls with a thunderous voice which sometimes sounds harsh for people around him. Unfortunately, this tone of voice has affected our sons as well. Of course, I do my best to respect and keep a distance, but well, I am constantly under the stress of leaking noise into my class.*

Leila, too, expressed concern about background noise and disruptions caused by young children:

> *Most of the time, my problem with the noise around me is from my little boy; he cannot understand and cannot be silent for several hours until I finish teaching.*

Teachers described the need to mask their stress, fears, and fatigue during online sessions to preserve authority and classroom rapport. This performance of professionalism while managing household chaos led to a state of emotional dissonance. The tension between appearance and reality—between teacher and woman, worker and caregiver—was persistent and destabilizing.

Taken together, these themes show that what appeared as a temporary shift to online teaching in response to crisis actually exposed—and exacerbated—deep, ongoing structural inequities. The convergence of domestic and professional spaces under progressive neoliberalism and patriarchal expectations magnified women teachers' vulnerability while obscuring the magnitude of their labor.

## Conclusion

These narratives, though situated in the early years of the pandemic, continue to resonate in 2025. Their temporal specificity is precisely what gives them critical force. By capturing women's voices at the moment when the boundary between the public and private spheres was abruptly erased, these narratives document not only a crisis but also a rupture in everyday life. That rupture made visible the gendered architecture of labor, responsibility, and institutional neglect that long preceded the pandemic and persists in its aftermath. Listening to these stories now is not about looking back with nostalgia or closure. It is about recognizing that crises illuminate what is always already there. The lived realities of these women remain essential to ongoing conversations about care, labor, and justice in education (Acker, 1995; Blackmore, 1999).

Neoliberalism has reconstructed human experiences at all levels of society in many parts of the world. Although there is considerable variation in the definition and understanding of neoliberalism, there is widespread agreement among scholars that neoliberalism once again has contributed to the enhancement of economic rationality in social life, the inverse redistribution of income and wealth in favor of the rich, and the commodification of almost all things (Brown, 2015; Fraser, 2017; Risager, 2016).

The scope and depth of neoliberalism's influence have been greatly enhanced by the opportunistic and flexible potential to blend in with other powerful social ideas, practices, and movements to advance goals. In particular, Nancy Fraser (2017) argues that progressive neoliberalism has successfully served the powerful currents of social justice movements by redirecting their movements' efforts. This bloc of hegemonic forces, by shifting and rearticulating justice-oriented ideals within a post-capitalist political economy, has come to support liberal goals such as empowerment, inclusion, LGBTQ+ rights, post-racialism, multiculturalism, post-feminism, and environmentalism. This has reduced struggles for equality to the demands of meritocracy, the transformation of emancipation into efficient, personal responsibility and personal participation (Kumashiro, 2012), and the manifestation of environmental care as a support for the carbon trade.

Although the concept of progressive neoliberalism has been debated for analytical and ideological reasons, a series of emerging studies trace Fraser's (2017) concept of progressive neoliberalism in various disciplinary areas, such as media studies, women's studies, and the social sciences. These insights deepen our understanding of the paradoxical, diverse, and potential manifestations of neoliberalism, while at the same time inspiring hopeful spaces for theoretical innovation and social change in feminist struggles and social welfare.

The increasing participation of women in the labor market and the expansion of their employment in the world is an important indicator to assess the extent of women's social presence in today's societies. It is widely said that women's employment in the global labor market has never been more significant than it is today. Although increasing women's employment helps reduce poverty and economic growth, gender discrimination and injustice to their rights in the labor market and many other social areas continue. Thus, the two neoliberal and patriarchal capitalist domination systems intersect and limit women's lives.

The COVID-19 pandemic, as an unprecedented event in the political and economic history of the world and the repulsive interference of the workplace and the home, has made working women even more vulnerable. In this case study, we have conducted conceptual and empirical analyses of women's lives at the professional and personal levels (now co-located).

Finally, while emphasizing the multifaceted nature of the current crisis, we argue that as long as women remain more vulnerable than men, it is unethical to regard the situation as "normal." In light of these inequities, it is also unjustifiable to celebrate or accelerate the shift to online education without scrutiny. We call on education decision-makers and leaders to create safe environments where women can share their experiences without fear of judgment, in the hope of raising awareness and contributing to meaningful change in the lives of women—and men.

Revisiting the thematic concerns of this study—the entanglement of duties, internalized gender roles, and the devaluation of teaching—we see that these are not just individual struggles but structural manifestations of patriarchal neoliberalism. In this sense, the study contributes to broader conversations about methodological response-ability in times of crisis and disruption (Aghasaleh & St. Pierre, 2014; Aghasaleh, 2019). As Virginia Woolf's quote reminds us, "It matters what stories tell stories." These charged narratives not only document the crisis but urge us to rethink how we value care, labor, and pedagogical justice in post-pandemic education.

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# A Letter to a First Year K-8 Classroom Teacher

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AS A UYGHUR TRANSNATIONAL TEACHER FROM NORTHWEST CHINA, I came to an important realization during my PhD studies. I discovered that my understanding of "curriculum" had been shaped by a Eurocentric and colonized perspective. This insight didn't come to me until after I had already stopped classroom teaching and begun my doctoral journey. Looking back, I wish I had recognized this sooner—particularly during my first year of teaching. Had I understood this earlier, it would have helped me navigate the complexities of teaching with a deeper awareness of the relational and cultural dimensions of education.

After completing my PhD in Education, I decided to write this letter to my past self, reflecting on how my views on curriculum have changed over time. My hope is that by sharing my journey, I can offer some helpful insights to other first-year teachers, especially those like me who are navigating the complexities of teaching in the U.S. while carrying a transnational identity shaped by different cultural and educational experiences. In this letter, I return to my early, basic understanding of curriculum—the one I held as a brand-new U.S. K–8 classroom teacher trying to do everything "right." I then bring in ideas from American scholar Madeleine R. Grumet, whose expansive and poetic view of curriculum helped me see teaching as something more relational and alive. Along the way, I also began to notice how non-Western ways of knowing offered wisdom that wasn't named in my formal training but felt deeply familiar. As I reflect on whether broadening my view of curriculum has made teaching clearer or more complicated, I want to tell my past self—and others like her—that there is always another way forward. Even in moments of exhaustion or disillusionment, there's a path that leads back to meaning, to connection, and to the heart of why we teach. In this paper, I adopt the format of a letter rather than a conventional academic essay. This choice is not merely stylistic but is methodologically and philosophically aligned with my argument: curriculum is not a fixed body of knowledge but an evolving, relational, and interpretive experience. Traditional academic structures often impose rigid, impersonal modes of communication that risk alienating the very human and dialogical nature of curriculum. Instead, the letter format performs the idea that curriculum, like conversation, is an invitation, an engagement, and a space for reflection rather than a transmission of predetermined knowledge.

Drawing from hermeneutic traditions (Gadamer, 1989; Pinar, 1994), I position the letter as an aesthetic text—one that is open to interpretation, responsive to context, and shaped by personal

meaning-making. Just as Pinar (1994) describes curriculum as a subjective, autobiographical process (currere), the letter format enables a personal yet scholarly exploration of curriculum as lived experience rather than as a static object of study. This approach challenges the notion of curriculum as something external and standardized, instead embracing it as a text to be read, written, and rewritten within the relational spaces of education.

In choosing the letter format, I also recognize its disruptive potential within the academic landscape. As a form that has historically been used in philosophy, education, and critical theory (e.g., Rilke, 1929; Freire, 1994), the letter resists the authoritative, impersonal voice of conventional scholarship in favor of a relational, situated, and reflexive mode of inquiry. It acknowledges the reader as a co-participant rather than a passive recipient, enacting the very principles of participatory and dialogic pedagogy that I argue should inform curriculum itself. For example, as Nieto and López (2019) demonstrate in their mother-daughter dialogue, meaningful engagement with teaching and curriculum emerges from relationships, stories, and intergenerational reflection. Also, Paulo Freire's writing (1994) serves as another methodological inspiration. His use of a letter-like tone and structure embodies his philosophy of dialogic education, where knowledge is co-constructed through relational exchange rather than imposed through hierarchical authority. Similarly, Lynn Fendler (2012) presents "Edwin & Phyllis," a dialogue that delves into the motivations behind choosing a career in teaching. This exchange provides valuable perspectives on the multifaceted nature of the teaching profession. Aligning my inquiry process with the spirit of works by Freire (1994), Fendler (2012), and Nieto and López (2019)—educators who use dialogic engagement as a methodological choice in educational inquiry—I have chosen to write in the format of a letter. This decision allows me to move away from conventional academic writing structures and instead embrace a more relational, dialogic approach to curriculum inquiry. Below is my letter/inquiry:

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Dear Rey,

You're about to begin your journey as a K-8 Classroom Teacher in a U.S. urban school, and I know how excited you are to step into the classroom. I remember that feeling well—the anticipation, the hope, and maybe even a little nervousness. I'm writing this letter to gently invite you to pause for a moment and reflect on what curriculum truly means before you start your first year of independent teaching in your own classroom. I know you bring valuable insights and experiences to your teaching journey, and I also recognize that academic discussions about curriculum can sometimes feel distant from the realities of the classroom. That's why I am writing this letter in a conversational tone—to create a space where we can think together, exchange ideas, and explore curriculum in a way that feels meaningful and relevant. As the philosopher Jacques Rancière (1991/1987) suggests in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, equality is not merely an end goal—it is the foundation from which we begin. I hope that the conversational tone of this letter reflects that spirit, inviting both writer and reader into a shared process of inquiry.

Rancière (1991/1987) reminds us that "reasonable communication is based on the equality between self-esteem and the esteem of others. It works toward the continuous verification of that equality" (p. 79). In this same spirit, I want to affirm that as you step into your classroom, you are not only teaching toward equality—you are teaching from a place of equality. In the very process

of teaching and learning, your students bring knowledge, perspectives, and experiences that position them as co-learners alongside you and each other.

In the sections that follow, I first explore foundational understandings of curriculum—its Latin root, common public perceptions, and contemporary scholarly definitions. I then introduce the work of American scholar Madeleine R. Grumet and her expansive view of curriculum. From there, I consider whether broadening our understanding of curriculum clarifies or complicates the work of teaching, particularly in terms of logic and practicality. Finally, I take a step back to offer alternative perspectives, highlighting why embracing an expansive view of curriculum can be both a challenge and a gift for teachers.

## Curriculum as a Journey: Where Do We Begin?

Curriculum is a Latin word carried over into English. The Latin root of *curriculum* means a running race (Egan, 2003). It is a noun. In other words, based on its Latin root, the least expansive notion of curriculum is this: if a group of people are in a race, the course is the same for everyone. As a noun, *curriculum* refers to this fixed and structured running course.

Historically, this structured and standardized view of curriculum shaped much of early curriculum theory in the Western academic discourse. Franklin Bobbitt (1918), one of the first American curriculum theorists, saw curriculum as a scientific process—one that should efficiently shape students into productive members of society. His work laid the foundation for Ralph Tyler (1949), who developed what became known as the "Tyler Rationale," a model that continues to influence curriculum design today. Tyler's approach emphasized clear objectives, measurable outcomes, and a structured sequence of learning experiences. While this systematic approach helped establish curriculum as a formal field of study, it also reinforced a view of curriculum as something planned, delivered, and assessed—a predefined course much like the original Latin meaning of the word.

However, not all scholars agreed with this structured and efficiency-driven approach. In *The Struggle for the American Curriculum*, Herbert Kliebard (1995) argued that curriculum has always been a contested space, shaped by competing ideologies. He highlighted how different groups—administrators, humanists, social reformers—have fought to define what knowledge should be taught and why.

William Pinar and Madeleine Grumet challenged the idea of curriculum as something static and prescribed. Pinar (1975) introduced the concept of *currere*, shifting curriculum from a noun to a verb—something lived and experienced rather than simply followed. Grumet (1988) expanded on this idea, emphasizing personal narrative, subjectivity, and the lived experiences of teachers and students as central to understanding curriculum. Their work invited educators to think beyond fixed courses and standardized objectives, instead considering curriculum as an ongoing, deeply personal, and even poetic journey.

Outside academia, many people still tend to think of curriculum as textbooks or prescribed guidelines for teachers. But scholars in this field remind us that curriculum is ultimately about fundamental questions that shape human decisions, both individually and collectively. As William Schubert (1986) writes, "What knowledge is most worthwhile? Why is it worthwhile? How is it acquired or created?" (p. 1

This letter is an invitation to think about curriculum not just as a structured plan, but as something more expansive—something that evolves, that is shaped by the lives and experiences of those who engage with it.

## Curriculum as "*Currere*": Running the Course of Lived Experience

There are many different expansive notions of curriculum. In this letter, I want to introduce you to one scholar who has proposed an expansive notion of curriculum: Madeleine R. Grumet (e.g., Pinar & Grumet, 1976; Grumet, 1980). Grumet is an American Curricular theorist. Grumet taught high school English in the New York area for 12 years before she started her academic career in the field of education.

Instead of using the noun version of curriculum, Madeleine Grumet intentionally uses the verb version of the term, *currere*. For Grumet's expansive notion of curriculum, we are not looking at curriculum as the course that people are on, but their experiences on the course. So *currere* is different for everyone on the course. By using the verb form of *curriculum*, she emphasized the action, the experience, and the individuality of each runner. Based on Grumet's works and other educational literature in the field of curriculum, I have conceptualized Grumet's use of the term based on three key elements in curriculum: individuality (Kolb, 2015; Schwab,1969), autobiography (Grumet, 1990; Grumet, 1999; Kridel, 2013), and emancipation (Grumet, 1987; He, 2003; Freire, 1970). *Currere* allows Grumet to see these three elements and allow her to relate them to a larger curriculum reform. Each of which will be discussed below.

One of the first things that stood out to me in Grumet's (1980) work is how *currere* brings attention to the individuality of each learner. She draws from Pinar's definition, which describes *currere* as "my existential experience of external structures" (Pinar & Grumet, 1976, p. vii). That phrase—*existential experience*—really shifts the way we think about curriculum. If we stick to the noun form, *curriculum* sounds like something set in stone, a fixed course that everyone follows in the same way. But when we think of it as a verb—as *currere*—it suddenly has movement. It becomes the act of running the race, where each person's pace, path, and experience are uniquely their own.

This perspective has made me reflect on my own teaching. When I ask myself whether I'm honoring the individuality of my students, I'm really asking: To what extent does my teaching recognize each student's uniqueness, even within the constraints of standardized schooling? And beyond that—how am I honoring my own individuality as a teacher?

This is where Pinar's (1994) work on *currere* as a method of self-examination becomes intriguing . He describes it as a process of looking inward—retracing our educational past, making sense of our present, and imagining what's possible in the future. In *Autobiography, Politics, and Sexuality (1972–1992)*, he explores how personal and social histories intersect within curriculum, showing that teaching isn't just about delivering content; it's about navigating our own identities and relationships to knowledge. Thinking of *currere* as a roadmap, not in a rigid "follow these steps" way, but as a tool for reflection, has helped me make sense of my own journey as a teacher.

This brings me to the second key element: autobiography. Schubert (1986) traced the experientialist view of curriculum back to Pinar and Grumet's *Toward a Poor Curriculum* (1976) and Grumet's (1980) article *Autobiography and Reconceptualization*. Their work emphasizes the idea that curriculum isn't just something external—it's something we live, something we make sense of through our own stories. Grumet's view of curriculum "emphasizes the individual's own

capacity to reconceptualize his or her autobiography" (Schubert, 1986, p. 33). In other words, reflecting on our past experiences isn't just about looking back; it's about actively reinterpreting what those experiences mean and how they shape our understanding of teaching and learning.

Going back to the race metaphor—if we see curriculum only as a noun, it suggests a standardized path that's the same for everyone. But if we embrace it as a verb, we acknowledge the movement, the flow of past, present, and future, that shapes each person's journey. This way of thinking aligns with the idea that students aren't empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge; they are already knowledge holders (Greene, 2000; Levine & McCloskey, 2012; Shalaby, 2017; Freire, 1970). *Currere* reminds me that curriculum isn't just about what's taught—it's about the lives and experiences of the people in the room.

The third element I consider when thinking about *currere* through Grumet's work is emancipation. This idea of movement—the verb form of *curriculum*—naturally connects to the concept of liberation. For Grumet, curriculum isn't just about absorbing knowledge; it's about actively shaping one's own path. She writes, *"I choose . . . who it is I aspire to be, how I wish my life history to be read. I determine my social commitments; I devise my strategies: whom to work with, for what, how"* (Pinar & Grumet, 1976, p. ix). There's so much power in that statement. It's about personal agency—the ability to decide who we become, how we engage with the world, and what kind of change we want to make.

Grumet (1987) has written about the liberating function of curriculum, but she's not alone in this thinking. Paulo Freire's work, especially *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), is a cornerstone in conversations about education as a tool for emancipation. Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher, saw education not as a means of depositing knowledge into passive learners but as a practice of freedom—one where students and teachers engage in dialogue to critically understand and transform their world. Since its first English translation in 1970, Freire's book has inspired generations of scholars to think about education in terms of grassroots intellectual emancipation and the critical literacy of marginalized communities (Barros, 2020; Freire, 1970). His ideas, much like Grumet's, challenge the notion of education as a static, top-down process and instead frame it as something living—something shaped by the people engaged in it.

However, Freire's vision of emancipation is not without critique. Bowers (2015), in *Rethinking Freire*, raises important questions about the unintended consequences of framing education purely through the lens of liberation. He argues that Freire's emphasis on critical consciousness and individual emancipation often overlooks the deep ecological and cultural traditions that shape knowledge. In other words, the push for liberation can sometimes come at the expense of local, intergenerational wisdom—replacing one dominant narrative with another rather than truly decolonizing education. This critique makes me pause. While I believe in the power of education as a tool for personal and social transformation, I also wonder: In my own teaching, do I leave enough room for students to see value in the knowledge that already exists within their family history? Does my approach to curriculum recognize not only the need for change but also the importance of sustaining students' most familiar ways of knowing within their families and communities?

Thinking about *currere* in this way—as an ongoing process of shaping and reshaping not just knowledge, but also identity and social engagement—reminds me that education, at its core, is about movement. But perhaps this movement isn't always about breaking free; sometimes, it's about returning, re-rooting, and holding onto what grounds us.

## How Expanding Curriculum Clarifies the Work of Teaching

An expansive view of curriculum, while it may seem overwhelming at first glance, ultimately clarifies the work of teaching. By focusing on curriculum as a verb—an ongoing, dynamic process of engagement with students—this perspective helps teachers see beyond a fixed, standardized approach and understand teaching as an active, relational experience. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing each student as a whole person with unique backgrounds, needs, and experiences, which allows teachers to more clearly identify how to support and guide them.

Rather than merely following a rigid set of guidelines or predetermined content, an expansive view of curriculum enables teachers to focus on the lived experiences of their students, providing a roadmap for personalizing instruction. It frees teachers from the constraints of simply transmitting knowledge and instead highlights the art of teaching—fostering deeper connections with students, and making the process of teaching feel more meaningful and authentic.

In this way, an expansive curriculum view doesn't complicate teaching, but rather simplifies and clarifies it by encouraging teachers to focus on the human elements of education, where each student's journey is valued, and their stories become central to the teaching process.

## Logic: Thinking Deeply About Teaching

Recognizing expansive notions of curriculum before stepping into your first year of teaching will be a real asset to you. The hidden and implied curricula are always at play in schools, whether we acknowledge them or not. With an expanded understanding of curriculum, you'll be able to see these dynamics for what they are—rather than letting them go unnoticed. By conceptualizing them, you gain the ability to reflect on their impact and how they shape the classroom environment. In the following sections, I'll explore how an expansive notion of curriculum can provide clarity in your role as a teacher and in understanding your students, making the complexities of the classroom more manageable and meaningful.

### *Teachers as Intellectuals: Beyond Just Delivering Content*

As you begin to step into the role of a teacher, it's important to consider what it truly means to be an educator. In the context of American schools, a series of historical and systemic factors have often placed teachers in a role that feels like that of a worker within a larger social engineering project (Labaree, 1997). Policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) have brought about significant efforts to standardize education, which has, in turn, increased the accountability placed on teachers (Lasky, 2005; Steinberg & Donaldson, 2016). This accountability often takes the form of scripted lesson plans, which are encouraged through professional development workshops, school cultures, and textbook publishing companies (Apple, 2013; Crowley, 2017). Teachers are frequently expected to follow strict rules and schedules, and while these structures are intended to ensure consistency, they sometimes have the unintended effect of diminishing the professional autonomy and morale of educators (Hoyle & Megarry, 2005; Santoro, 2011). In such a setting, teachers might feel they have fewer opportunities to embrace their roles as intellectuals and creative thinkers. This more rigid, standardized approach to curriculum can make teaching feel more like overseeing a set of procedures, rather than engaging with the deeper, individualized learning experiences that make teaching truly transformative.

However, imposing various top-down standards and putting teachers in a surveillance role negatively impact the quality of the teaching in a classroom (Biesta et al., 2015; Vaughn, 2013). One of the key ways to improve teaching quality is to restore power and agency to teachers (Robinson, 2012; Sannino, 2010; Sexton, 2008). As Mahony and Hextall (2000) eloquently put it:

> I think if your ultimate model is a profession which is of very high status, and achieving very high standards by any kind of international comparisons, then the only appropriate model for that is a very high degree of self-government and self-regulation. But you know, that also requires a very high level of political trust and I don't see any politician around at the moment who is willing yet to hand that over. (Mahony & Hextall, 2000, p.139)

The heart of Mahony and Hextall's (2000) argument is that improving the quality of a profession begins with trust. The solution lies not in imposing external standards or rigid accountability measures, but in entrusting teachers with the autonomy, respect, and responsibility to shape their practice. When we embrace the expansive notion of curriculum, we move beyond viewing teachers as mere technicians who transmit knowledge. Instead, we recognize teachers as intellectuals who engage with students as whole individuals—each with their own stories and knowledge. In this expanded view, teachers become artists working alongside creative individuals in pursuit of emancipation. Such a framework honors the body and voice of the teacher (Freedman & Holmes, 2012; Grumet, 2010) and activates their human agency (Bandura, 2006). Expansive notions of curriculum, therefore, not only challenge traditional views of teaching but also offer a pathway to improving the quality of education itself.

### *Students as Human Beings: Learning as a Lived Experience*

Just as it is essential to recognize teachers as intellectuals with agency, it is equally important to see students not just as vessels for knowledge, but as human beings with rich, lived experiences. In this section, we will explore how the expansive notion of curriculum honors students as individuals and emphasizes learning as a deeply personal, transformative journey. In the simplified and less expansive notion of curriculum, students become vessels of knowledge. In the United States, the goal of schooling has been *to secure gainful employment.* Hence, teachers have to teach for job markets. (DeMarrais & LeCompte, 1999; Labaree, 1997) When teachers enter a school to teach, they are entering an institution whose main purpose is not intellectual expansion but job markets. Therefore, vertical and horizontally aligned pedagogies value the universal curriculum over the individual experience (Schwab 1969; Schwab,1973) Inside this framework, teachers are forced to ask, how can I improve students' scores and let them behave well? When such question guides the work of teaching, it is very easy to ignore the wholeness of students as human beings and students may be less willing to participate in a dehumanized experience (Shalaby, 2017).

On the contrary, expansive notions of curriculum invites teachers to treat each student as a whole human being. In this way, teachers will not merely see students as a person who is detached from their context. When we see a student, we see a person coming from a particular family, culture, and community. We see their friends, hobbies, emotions, hopes, and fears. We know that this is a person with stories, agency, and future. Through the expansive framework, as teachers, we might ask ourselves: what kind of human being do I cultivate through my work of teaching? What is worthwhile to know for these creative human beings in my classroom? Such humanity-oriented questions will guide a teacher to treat each individual student as a whole person.

Freire (1970) challenges the banking model of pedagogy and refuses to treat students as the vessels of knowledge. He calls for a pedagogy that starts from students' own passions and concerns, which works toward liberation of students as well as their communities. Similar ideas have been represented by many grassroots community activists. For example, Mike Rose (1996) quotes Frances Lucerna, co-founder of El Puente school, who says

> Look what's happened to reading, writing, and arithmetic … these "basics". We don't see them any longer as life skills. They're subjects to be taken, subjects outside our experience. They're not seen as essential to our knowledge of the world, but that if young people know that if they can read, if they can write, if they can understand algebraic codes-if they see that they can use those skills, use them to bring about change in their own lives or in the lives of their families, or in their communities-well, then, there's no stopping them. (p. 211)

El Puente is a school in Williamsburg, New York City. This school focuses on the development of the whole human being as well as students' community. Frances Lucerna challenges the separation between subject learning and the purpose of education. She believes in the power of a whole human being mindset, as well as the emancipatory potential of education.

## Utility: Making Curriculum Work in the Classroom

In this section, I want to reflect on how the expansive notion of curriculum can come to life in the classroom, moving beyond the constraints often placed on teachers. Drawing from my own experience teaching in an urban school in Phoenix, Arizona, I'll share how an expansive view of curriculum isn't just a theoretical concept, but a practical tool that can transform teaching and learning. By embracing a broader understanding of curriculum, we open the door to a more inclusive, responsive, and meaningful educational experience for both students and teachers.

This section will explore two essential aspects of this approach: culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and genuine parent involvement. These are interconnected strategies that allow us to see and honor every student as an individual and build lasting, supportive relationships between schools and families. Through these practices, the expansive notion of curriculum becomes a living, breathing part of the classroom, making teaching clearer, more compassionate, and more connected to the communities we serve.

### *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Seeing and Honoring Every Student*

When we acknowledge students as whole human beings, situated in their families and communities, we recognize that the knowledge and resources tied to their cultural backgrounds should be deeply valued. Levine and McCloskey (2012) affirm, "Cognitive development, academic development, and language development are all related to the extent to which individual students and their cultures feel valued by the school community" (p. 41). In essence, they argue that academic success is closely tied to how well a student's culture is embraced within the school environment. If students' family and community cultures feel excluded, their educational progress becomes more challenging.

Ladson-Billings (1995) further strengthens this argument by stating that curriculum must move beyond content-focused efficiency models and actively affirm, sustain, and build upon students' cultural identities. Unlike the traditional, limited version of curriculum—which often positions curriculum as a neutral, technical process—Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) sees

curriculum as a culturally embedded, relational, and dynamic process. CRP, in contrast to more rigid, technical models, acknowledges that curriculum plays an essential role in shaping students' learning experiences and identities. It emphasizes that a truly responsive curriculum is one that not only respects but actively incorporates students' cultures into the learning process.

During my time teaching in an urban school in Arizona, where nearly all my students were from immigrant families and many did not speak English at home, I made it a priority to foster a welcoming environment. At the start of each school year, I created a bulletin board outside my classroom door with the phrase "All Are Welcome In This Classroom," written in the various languages spoken by my students. Many of them expressed their excitement upon seeing this display, a small but meaningful gesture that acknowledged the diverse backgrounds they brought into the space.

However, while the visual representation of languages and cultures was an important first step, I soon realized that inclusion must go beyond decorations and phrases on the wall. In their book *Teaching English Language and Content in Mainstream Classes*, Levine and McCloskey (2012) cite a table from the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence (CREDE) outlining principles for effective classroom organization. One of these, Principle Five: Contextualization, emphasizes that "in contextualized classrooms, activities derive from the experiences of the learners" (p. 45). This aligns with Grumet's (1980) perspective on curriculum, where she describes autobiography and lived experience as the seeds of pedagogical practice.

In my classroom, I strived to create an environment where students' cultural practices and native languages were not only recognized but also celebrated. I encouraged students to brainstorm their writing responses by blending their first language with English, drawing on a translanguaging approach (García & Wei, 2013). According to García and Wei, translanguaging is "the act of using one's full linguistic repertoire" to make meaning, learn, and communicate (p. 39). To honor and build on this linguistic richness, I invited students to teach me phrases in their native languages (Seltzer, 2019; Riley, 2015), positioning them as language experts. I also brought cultural artifacts into the classroom to decorate our space, making it feel like *their* classroom, too (Catapano & Thompson, 2013).

When we treat students as "knowers," it empowers them to see themselves as such. A powerful example of this mindset comes from the video *The Multilingual Classroom* (Teaching Channel, 2011), where one student proudly says, "I speak English as another language, and I'm very lucky that I can speak two languages." This simple statement captures the essence of how our mindset as educators shapes students' self-perception. I often witnessed how this asset-based approach resonated with my students. When I mentioned something related to their culture or spoke a simple phrase in their native language, their faces would light up with pride. It was in these moments that I was reminded how deeply intertwined knowledge and identity are; students bring their own wisdom and experiences into the classroom, and as educators, it is our privilege to honor and celebrate these assets.

### *Genuine Parent Involvement: Building Bridges, Not Walls*

In practice, teachers should become a bridge between parents and schools because parents' role in the curriculum is vital. I have talked about culturally responsive instruction in the section above, but this cannot become our excuse for generalization and essentialization of culture and language (Jaffe, 2008; Jonasson & Lauring, 2012; Nozaki, 2000). Sometimes it is easy to make

assumptions about students' family culture based on the countries they are from or the native language they speak, but as Paratore et al. (2010) remind us, "the particular ways parents interact with children is not a function of language or culture, so we cannot make assumptions about home practices or routines on the basis of the dominant language or culture" (2010, p. 308). Seeing students as a whole is not only about valuing the larger community they are from; it is also about a genuine friendship with their parents toward the common mission of education.

In a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association in Los Angeles, California in April, 1981, Madeleine Grumet has suggested that some parents feel that they have little control of school curriculum because they are usually given a last-minute chance to get involved in school policy by superficial opportunities (Grumet,1981). Similarly, Apple and Beane (2007) describe Bob Peterson, a fifth-grade teacher who helped create a two-way bilingual school with a group of critical educators and parents in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. They explain that, within a progressive educational approach, parents' roles involve fully engaging in curriculum design and being actively present in the classroom. Apple and Beane argue that parental involvement should go beyond traditional activities like organizing pizza picnics or field trips, aiming instead for meaningful collaboration in the educational process.

As Apple and Beane (2007) summarize Peterson's view on parents' essential role in curriculum, "The central issues are power, presence, and resources" (p. 52). They suggest that parents hold the power to design and influence the curriculum and to be actively present during students' learning processes. Additionally, parents can contribute valuable and cost-free resources from the community to enrich students' learning. This involvement is not only theoretically justified but also financially practical. When parents' knowledge and wisdom are welcomed and valued, they can provide meaningful contributions that enhance the curriculum.

One lesson I have learned in my classroom teaching experience is that how one communicates matters. At the beginning, I was shy and chose to reach out to families with email or written letters instead of phone calls, but I noticed that there was little engagement from parents. Then, to improve parents' genuine involvement in the conversation, I started to use a personal phone call, which was more successful than one-way communication mode. Another important lesson I learned about communicating with parents is that phone calls should share success stories. (Levine & McCloskey, 2012). At the start of my independent teaching, most of my communication with parents was reactive, focusing on behavior problems, concerns about grades, or notifying them of a student's illness. Over time, I realized that this approach might have felt more like watching and judging their children to parents rather than truly connecting with their families. I noticed a lack of sincerity in these interactions, something John Dewey (2005) describes as essential for genuine connection in *Art as Experience*. I often felt uneasy and stressed before making these calls, and I could sense similar anxiety from parents. In such exchanges, parents were not seen as equal partners but rather as passive recipients in the curriculum process. Reflecting on this, I knew I needed to change how I communicated—shifting toward more sincere, collaborative, and empowering conversations with families. . Then, in my phone calls, I tried to make sure that I included detailed compliments and success stories of the student. Also, I would ask parents' opinions, suggestions, and insights on student development. Gradually, I started to feel a positive atmosphere in my classroom that parents wanted to participate in. It is a slow process to learn about the communication styles of students' parents. However, in order to build a bridge connecting students' lives at home and participation at school, the time and energy are necessary and worthwhile (Levine & McCloskey, 2012).

In short, in the current section named "Utility," I have given some pedagogical suggestions in terms of 1) culturally responsive instruction, and 2) genuine parents' involvement. These are only two detailed examples of how to apply an expansive notion of curriculum to practice. Looking at curriculum as *currere* and recognizing students' whole experience also relates to many other pedagogical strategies. For example, another pedagogy strategy can be *frontloading.* When we use an expansive notion of curriculum and recognize students' individuality, we need to consider students' prior knowledge. For example, in a reading class, we can start a reading activity by a warm-up exercise activating students' prior knowledge. This pedagogical approach of building background knowledge before reading a complex text is called "frontloading" because a teacher is intentionally loading key knowledge that students will need to understand a text.(e.g. Neuman et al., 2014) Overall, even though the practical examples I have shared in this section seem small, please do not ignore the impact of these seemingly small steps can have, not just on one individual student's academic development, but on the empowerment of their family and larger community as well.

## Beyond *Currere*

### Non-Western and Critical Perspectives

I want to take a moment to acknowledge something important. The way I've been talking about curriculum—starting with its Latin roots and drawing on ideas from a White scholar—comes from a Eurocentric knowledge system. This isn't accidental; when I began my graduate studies in the U.S., I was immersed in Western academic traditions, where dominant voices shaped my understanding of curriculum. Even as a Uyghur, I had to start with these Western theories as my entry point into the field, navigating their frameworks before I could begin to find my own perspective. But I also want you to remember that curriculum is not just a Western concept. It exists in other knowledge traditions, too—within Black communities, Indigenous cultures, and the lived experiences of immigrant families.

So, I invite you to ask yourself: What does curriculum look like in these communities? What knowledge is considered meaningful and worth passing down? These are questions that deserve space not only in our teaching but in the way we move through the world. I hope you carry them with you, both inside and outside the classroom. As a transitional teacher from the Uyghur ethnic community in a U.S. classroom, I hope you'll remember that your voice—your experiences—are part of the broader curriculum you are engaging, too.

Know that for scholars, teachers, parents, and students from non-Western cultures, it can often feel like the concept of curriculum doesn't quite reflect their own ways of knowing (e.g., Johnson et al., 2017; Shahjahan, 2005). When I first entered this field, I felt that, too. But I also want to reassure you that academia is shifting—slowly, but meaningfully. More scholars of color and grassroots communities are entering these conversations, expanding what we mean when we talk about curriculum.

Even back in 1986, the White scholar William Schubert acknowledged this gap, writing, "It would be desirable to have more perspectives drawn from the Eastern, African, Latin American, Icelandic, and other non-Western educational histories, but this goal awaits further historical research in education" (p. 55). Decades later, this work has begun to unfold as scholars from

diverse backgrounds bring their lived experiences into curriculum theory, making space for different perspectives..

For example, Mingfang He (2003), a Chinese American curriculum theorist, offers a beautifully personal take on curriculum. Having lived through China's Cultural Revolution, she doesn't see curriculum as something confined to national histories or abstract theories. Instead, she understands it as something deeply personal—woven from real stories, real experiences. In *A River Forever Flowing*, she uses the metaphor of a river to describe curriculum, showing how it moves, bends, and reshapes itself over time, just like the lives of the three Chinese female teachers she writes about. This reminds me that curriculum isn't fixed. It isn't owned by a single tradition or way of thinking. It flows, carrying with it the voices, histories, and lived experiences of those who step into its current.

Another powerful example of a critical perspective on curriculum comes from the book *Reclaiming the Multicultural Roots of U.S. Curriculum* (Au et al., 2016). In this work, three scholars from different ethnic and racial backgrounds come together to challenge the dominant, Eurocentric history of curriculum. They argue that curriculum has always existed within communities of color; it doesn't need to be validated through a Western academic lens. Instead, they highlight how knowledge is embedded in oral histories, folk songs, and the everyday interactions of Indigenous and Black communities. Curriculum isn't just what's written in textbooks; it lives in the traditions, stories, and cultural practices that have been passed down for generations.

A similar perspective emerges in Sandra Gonzales' (2015) *Abuelita Epistemologies: Counteracting Subtractive Schools in American Education*. Through an autoethnographic inquiry, Gonzales reflects on her childhood and the deep well of knowledge carried by her grandmother. She argues that Indigenous women are not just knowledge holders—they are the keepers of curriculum itself, passing down ways of knowing that are just as systematic and intentional as any formal education. Her work reminds us that curriculum is not always something designed in institutions; it is something lived, embodied, and shared within families and communities.

These perspectives expand the conversation, reminding us that curriculum isn't only what is sanctioned by the academy. It exists wherever knowledge is nurtured, wherever stories are told, and wherever learning happens in ways that are meaningful to the people who carry it forward.

## How Seriously Should You Take an Expansive View?

You might be wondering—how seriously should you take this idea of an expansive notion of curriculum? My answer is simple: nothing is more serious when it comes to being a teacher. After all, what could be more important than recognizing students as human beings who have the capacity to shape their own lives? What is more essential than seeing them as knowers rather than passive recipients of information? And what could be more urgent than approaching the future of our society with a humane and thoughtful lens? To be a teacher is to be at the forefront of this responsibility—to see each student not as a machine to be programmed, but as a person navigating their ever-evolving journey.

That said, embracing an expansive notion of curriculum doesn't mean imagining an idealized, utopian version of schooling. Rather, it means recognizing the real constraints that exist in classroom teaching while still finding ways to move forward with agency and purpose (e.g., Bandura, 2006; Biesta et al., 2015; Moje et al., 2004). Some might argue that focusing on a social

justice mindset is the key to being a teacher for change. While I deeply value the importance of social justice in education, I still believe that an expansive notion of curriculum is essential for sustaining teachers in the profession.

The reality is that even teachers who are trained in leadership, advocacy, and systemic reform often find themselves feeling powerless within the structure of schools. As Fendler (2012) points out, schools have historically functioned as institutions that reinforce social stratification, despite the best efforts of reformers. Teachers may enter the profession with a strong sense of purpose, but they are still working within a system that isn't designed to give them the power to create large-scale change. As Fendler (2012) puts it, "there's no evidence to suggest that teachers can have that kind of system-wide impact" (p. 465).

So where does that leave us? If schools are built in a way that often limits teachers' influence, then what can sustain us in this work? This is where an expansive notion of curriculum becomes more than just a framework; it becomes a form of faith. It is not just a roadmap for respecting students; it is also a vital source of strength, one that allows teachers to hold onto their own humanity and dignity, no matter how difficult the system may be. This is especially true for early-career teachers, who are often the most vulnerable to burnout and disillusionment (e.g., Burgess, 2012; Malmberg & Hagger, 2009; Paris & Lung, 2008).

In the end, teaching is about more than just delivering content or mastering pedagogy. It is about holding onto the bigger picture—about knowing that even within a flawed system, we can still find ways to honor our students and ourselves.

## A Closing Reflection

Dear Rey, thanks for giving me space to talk about my growth, my reflections, and my opinions. If curriculum is to be inclusive, lived, and evolving, then our very mode of writing about curriculum should reflect these principles. A letter is, by nature, unfinished and open-ended. Unlike conventional academic writing that seeks to arrive at conclusions, a letter extends an invitation to further conversation. Ultimately, the choice to embrace expansive notions of curriculum is yours. To accompany these words, I have also included a photograph (figure 1)—a self-portrait that I displayed during my doctoral graduation art exhibition. In this image, I stand in the here-and-now, gazing at the railroad that connects me to the past, the far away, and to home. At my PhD graduation, this image stood as a reminder of the journeys we take—not just those mapped out for us, but those we create through every challenge and discovery.

*Figure 1: Self-portrait*

As a Uyghur child who left my homeland to attend a boarding school on the far side of the nation, the railroad in this image carries with it layers of meaning far beyond its physical form. It symbolizes exile—the uncertainty of departure and the weight of the unknown. It echoes the quiet surrender that often accompanies change, yet it also represents the search for something more: belonging, understanding, and a way back to a place that feels increasingly distant. In many ways, the railroad mirrors the course of my lived experiences, tracing a path where identity, history, and memory collide. The rails, though stretching toward an uncertain future, are also a bridge to the past—a past rooted in the homeland I left behind. This image is more than just a reflection of the journey I've taken; it's a reminder that the roads we walk, whether chosen or thrust upon us, shape us. Each crossing, each turn, brings us closer to understanding who we are and where we come from.

Yours in learning,

Reyila ( راهىلە)
03/25/2025
East Lansing, Michigan

I acknowledge that I write this letter from the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary lands of the Anishinaabeg—Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples. This land was ceded in the 1819 Treaty of Saginaw, and I recognize the ongoing presence, sovereignty, and resilience of Indigenous communities.

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