

# Celebrating the Eclecticism and Urgency of Curriculum Theorizing

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THE ARTICLES COMPRISING VOLUME 41, ISSUE 1 of the *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* (JCT) celebrate both the eclecticism and urgency that animates the field of curriculum studies. Against traditional notions of classroom refusals as deviant and indicative of something lacking, Brad Bierdz (2026) combines insights from crip theory and anarchic theory to reimagine student refusals as “existential pleas” (p. 2). Here, students’ refusals to conform to classroom norms become acts of revolutionary action capable of both destruction and generation. Working with various vignettes from their time as a high school history teacher, Bierdz demonstrates how this re-theorization of refusals is not an effort at fixing a final meaning to the term, but rather to explore its relationship to “the continuous drafting of more livable terrains” (p.15).

Two articles in this issue demonstrate how empirical research in the field of curriculum studies can honor Indigenous histories and work against settler colonialism. First, Margaret Macintyre Latta (2026) uses the specifics of a project aimed at Indigenizing curriculum through ongoing collaborations between local First Nation communities and teacher education faculty to theorize a process of Co-Curricular-Making. The author demonstrates how concepts anchored in the writings of John Dewey travelled amongst participants and across time, supporting processes of shared meaning-making that are crucial to the collaborative making of curriculum. As concepts like vulnerability, trust-building, and connection-seeking moved amongst the research participants they created a shared language and opened space for multiplicity, or what Dewey terms *roominess*, in the co-making of curriculum. This roominess helped the participants problematize and reconstruct the dualistic thinking that so often accompanies the colonizing logics of teaching and learning.

In the second instance, Rachel Talbert, David W. Vining, Deanne Green, and Neal P. Schick (2026) grapple with the legacies of settler colonialism and the curricular erasures of Indigenous peoples and places through an analysis of public monuments in the greater New York City area.

The authors turn to counterstorytelling to surface the ease with which public monuments enact and reproduce settler futurity. Inspired by Land-based learning with Lenape People, the research team investigates the tacit curriculum that animates monuments around the lands of Manhatta/n, noting how these public spaces enact narratives of erasure, absence, ignorance, and assimilation. In addition to their critique of the mis-history and dysconsciousness promoted by the existing plaques and other curricular materials present at these monuments, the authors provide counterstories that center survivance and Indigenous sovereignty. A special shout out to Neal Shick whose photograph from Appendix B of this manuscript also serves as the cover of this issue of *JCT*.

Kelly Vaughan's (2026) essay provides another contribution to restorying public conceptions of teaching and learning, this time turning to the genre of the epistolary letter to pen a message of hope to future teachers. One striking element of Vaughan's letter is its insistence that theory can amplify teachers' capacity for loving action. She introduces the speculative audience to the thinking of bell hooks, Maxine Greene, William Schubert, William Walkins, and more. Against the tacit cliché that teachers are compelled to teach by some abstract and infantilizing form of love, Vaughan transforms the abstract noun to a thinking-doing she names *Amante Praxis*. Her letter enacts the quartet of elements that define this term—care, connection, action, and hope—as she urges a future generation of teachers to work towards a more just world that has not yet been realized.

In an allied effort to combat reductive tropes of teaching and learning, Angela Kraemer-Holland (2026) invokes *currere* to reexamine past moments in her life as an educator. She speaks to the underlying tensions instructors face navigating students' often conflicting desires for clarity and complexity, prescription and improvisation, and structure and responsiveness. Even as time and repetition allow educators to become increasingly comfortable with the uncertainty of praxis, Kraemer-Holland notes how the different ways of knowing and being that emerge in classrooms have the capacity to transform the quotidian into an *event*. Such events are capable of prompting transformation by opening new avenues of possibility while drawing attention to what has been normalized or repressed in the past.

Although Kraemer-Holland's deeply vulnerable and always unfinished theorization of teaching stands in contrast to typical Hollywood narratives of schooling, Patrick Chi Kai Lam's (2026) analysis of *Mr. Bachmann and His Class* shows that film can also signal more complex approaches to education. Explicating Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts such as the *rhizome* and *lines of flight*, Lam demonstrates how the film makes visible Seller's concept of *becoming curriculum*, providing readers with concrete ways of realizing this non-teleological mode of classroom praxis. This insistence on the inseparability of theory and practice in the field of curriculum studies owes much to the work of Patti Lather, and Lex N. Salazar and Kathryn Van Kessel's (2026) review of *Methodology and Praxis: Thinking with Patti Lather* (Huddleston & Helfenbein, 2025) honors this legacy. In their essay, the authors note how Lather's influence is simultaneously personal, political, and transgenerational. The *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* is excited to continue to celebrate Lather's tentacular influence with a forthcoming special issue that grew from a panel discussion of Huddleston and Helfenbein's edited volume during the 2025 Bergamo Conference on Curriculum Theorizing and Classroom Practice.

Another standout from the 2025 Bergamo Conference was Jairo Fúnez-Flores' keynote, and we are proud to share this deeply important manuscript with the broader *JCT* community. His visceral essay serves as a stark reminder of the ease with which we academics can become complicit in genocide when we succumb to the comfortable separation of theorizing and acting. Institutions of higher education do not simply perpetuate colonizing ideologies; they also enact

violence. Fúnez-Flores' autobiographical reflections reveal the deep connections between the technologies of violence used in Latin American from the 1960's – 1980's and those currently contributing to ongoing genocide and scholasticide in Gaza and beyond. Fúnez-Flores defines scholasticide as “settler colonialism's systematic destruction of ... education and intellectual life at all levels, including schools, libraries, mosques, archives, and much more” (2026, p. 5). Although recent events in Iran (Browne & Boxerman, 2026) serve as reminders that scholasticide is no rare occurrence, Fúnez-Flores urges us to consider how the silence and inaction of individual scholars, *and* the counterinsurgent habits of institutions, are complicit.

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# Curriculum Theorizing in a Time of Genocide, Scholasticide, and (Counter)Insurgency

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**T**HANK YOU FOR THE INTRODUCTION, Tristan. I'm truly honored to have been invited to be one of the keynote speakers. I'm still not sure if I was the right person to invite, but here I am, after so many years since I last presented at Bergamo as a graduate student in 2017. Sometimes I even question whether the work I do has contributed in any significant way to curriculum studies or if my work even belongs in this field. And now here I am as a keynote speaker in a room full of curriculum scholars who have to listen to me speak for hopefully not more than one hour. I hope you're ready because I'm here to talk some shit about academia.

Before I begin, I want to say that when speaking and writing about genocide, I do not claim to be an expert but rather a diligent student of so many Palestinians and their contributions to decolonial thought and praxis—a praxis that entails willingness to take risks by not only speaking truth to power, as the adage goes (which seems to have lost much of its meaning as of late), but by also taking concrete actions against institutions that are actively enabling and participating in the genocide in Gaza. The institutions I'm referring to here are universities and academia writ large.

## **Positionality: A Violently Entangled History with Palestine**

What brings me here today, once again, is not necessarily my expertise, but my experience of being at the receiving end of institutional violence for simply speaking out and organizing against genocide at my university, as well as for my social media posts that used to go viral before Elon Musk shadow banned my account. It seems like being a public intellectual, as Edward Said (1994/2012) wrote about and enacted in his unshakeable commitment to the liberation of Palestine, is perceived as antithetical to the narrowly focused role of the academic who should be confined to the ivory tower, that is, to the tower of ivory and steel, as Maya Wind (2024) accurately reconceptualizes academia when speaking about the ideological as well as the material ways universities participate in violence. If an academic is to have a career, they must know their proper

place. They must remain loyal to the broker intellectual class and its patrons. They must aspire to be the stenographers of imperialism and settler colonialism, not to mention racial capitalism and heteropatriarchy.

As some of you perhaps know, last year my employer, Texas Tech University, suspended me because of my twitter posts denouncing Israel's genocide in Gaza (Fúnez-Flores, 2024a), as well as the United States' complicity and active participation in the livestreamed violence we've seen for over two years now. Despite this, or because of it, since my suspension and my reinstatement, I became a founding member of the Faculty and Staff for Justice in Palestine and the advisor for the Students for Justice in Palestine chapter at Texas Tech, the founding member of the Palestine Anti-Repression Network, and the founding member and organizer of the Decolonial Conference and EdScholars4Palestine. As a primary hustle, I suppose I'm still an employee at a university.

I typically don't share my lived experiences in settings like these, but I already did with mentioning my suspension, so I might as well continue. I think some biographical elements will help substantiate the argument I'm trying to make, which is that our struggles are and have always been interconnected. This argument is not mine nor is it new, but it is certainly worth repeating. I come from a place that had its fair share of insurgency and counterinsurgency. From the 1960s to the 1980s, revolutionary and counterrevolutionary movements (Contras) emerged in Central America. In this time period, Honduras served as the headquarters of counterinsurgency, particularly since the US effectively prevented the success of an insurrection in Honduras. Honduras became the training ground for the euphemistically termed "low intensity" counterinsurgent operations in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. Bordering these countries, Honduras was geographically and militarily strategic in the 1980s, especially with the free range use of the Palmerola military base to train counterinsurgents, paramilitary groups, death squads (Battalion 3-16), and traditional military personnel.

I mention this since the geopolitical game the US played in Central America impacted the border region where my campesino village was (and is) located. In fact, Contras entered Nicaragua, crossing the mountains and rivers near my village. It is this history that led many Central Americans to immigrate in the late 1980s and early 1990s. My family chose to immigrate to the country responsible for all the death and destruction in our region. My entire family lived in southern California undocumented, without healthcare or financial aid for higher education, with constant encounters with police violence, incarceration, and threats of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids and deportation. The first time I was incarcerated, I was only 15 years old. This not-so-distant history is what informs my anti-imperial and anticolonial position, both in theoretical and practical terms.

I later learned that the technologies of violence tested on Palestinians and sold to the dictatorial regimes of Central America were used to torture and kill dissidents, including students, campesinos, and Indigenous peoples. The same technologies of violence used against Palestinians and later used against my people in Honduras were certainly used against us by the pigs who surveilled our *barrios* and policed and criminalized our people, not to mention the constant threat of being deported. My brother was deported when he was 21 years old. After the US-backed coup in Honduras, I voluntarily deported myself when I was 23 years old. Today, we're seeing the same technologies used at the border: the same drones, the same fascist techniques, the same brutality.

When I speak of the entangled relationship between Palestinian settler colonial dispossession and neocolonial dispossession in Honduras or in Latin America, it's no longer an abstraction, a metaphor that I want you to consume. It's concrete. It's a matter of life and death.

The interconnectedness of our struggles is so deep that those who were displaced and/or forced to migrate because of counterrevolutionary violence directly linked to Israel and US imperialism are now speaking out and organizing against the same technologies of violence universities assist in producing.

Many are facing consequences, punished for making connections between their histories and geographies of colonial dispossession with the dispossession and genocide of Palestinians. It is the visibility of the entanglement between our struggles across time and space that those in power fear most—from Ferguson to Palestine to Cop City and the anti-ICE LA Uprisings. It is these connections that enable real coalitions to be built. It is this internationalist solidarity that historically has held most strength in the past. We know that concerted efforts to fragment movements is also always part of the long history of counterinsurgency. It's not for nothing that time, energy, and resources are used to foreclose the possibility of insurgent coalitions to be articulated in the present. If this moment has taught us anything, it is that the uprisings we've seen on university campuses and in our communities facing deportation are a testament that our collective resistance is indeed perceived as a threat. Why else would those in power try so hard to silence us if our actions were that insignificant?

### **The Ongoing Nakba: From Ethnic Cleansing and Memoricide to the Genocide and Scholasticide in Gaza**

In *A Century of Cultural Genocide in Palestine*, Daud Abdullah (2019) draws on the work Raphael Lemkin, the lawyer who coined the term genocide and campaigned to establish the Genocide Convention, to conceptualize the dual paradigm of genocide, which takes place in two stages. The first stage is the 'destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group (p. 227),' which is the systematic destruction of the ability to sustain the life of a people. The second stage is 'the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor (p. 227),' which, since 1492, has been a Euromodern and Eurocentric mode of seeing and being in the world.

In the context of Palestine, the Nakba of 1948 not only consisted of ethnically cleansing historic Palestine of over 750,000 people, with over 500 villages and towns "depopulated" and razed to the ground, but it also consisted of the systematic disappearance of maps, archives, and books. Zionist settler colonialism's deliberate effort to disappear everything that reminds it of its original sin is what Palestinians refer to as memoricide, which can be understood literally as the killing of memory. Israel went as far as cutting down thousand-year-old Olive trees and planting non-native pine trees on top of villages to cover the historical presence and existence of Palestinians.

The killing of memory depends first on the destruction of the physical presence of all that represents the Palestinian people and their deep connections to the land. Memoricide proceeds from there by distorting Palestinian history where, as Gold Meir stated in 1969, "There was no such thing as a Palestinian people... They did not exist" (Khalidi, 2018). Memoricide is therefore about the erasure and imposition of a system of knowledge, historiography, and archeology to create the "facts on the ground" that give license to and naturalize the violent presence and permanence of Israel (Abu El-Haj, 2008). From Israel's inception, founded upon incalculable colonial violence, a settler colonial curriculum was designed to kill the collective memory of Palestinians in order to solidify the master Zionist narrative that there was indeed "a land without

a people for a people without a land.” Genocide and memocide are thus two sides of the same colonial coin.

From Israel’s violent material and epistemological foundation, one can see how (mis)education was and continues to be at the heart of its colonial project. So much so that in the first decades of its existence, Israel did not only surveil the commemoration of the Nakba but it also “actively encouraged the so-called ‘Israeli-Arabs’ to celebrate the Zionist colonisation and destruction of historic Palestine” (Masalha, 2012, p. 8). With the coerced collaboration of Palestinian teachers, village and religious leaders, and “notables,” Palestinians living in what became Israel and the occupied territories, including those in refugee camps, were imposed a distorted history, one that would praise those who displaced, tortured, and killed their parents and grandparents. This is certainly an insult to injury, to put it mildly. It is the humiliating experience of having one’s dignity attacked with little means to resist. Colonized peoples everywhere share this experience, until, that is, when an insurgent struggle breaks free, until an intifada shakes off the material and symbolic world imposed by the colonizer.

From this account of memocide, one may wrongfully assume that Israel’s state-sanctioned memocidal project was successful. Paradoxically, the Nakba remains the central “site of memory” (Pierre Nora, as cited by Masalha, 2012, p. 3) and dispossession, a historical trauma that is ever present in the everyday experience of Palestinians living in the diaspora or under Zionist settler colonial occupation. It is a watershed moment in Palestinian’s collective memory no matter where they reside. It is precisely the presence of Palestinian history, identity, knowledge, and resistance that shapes Israel’s genocidal campaign in Gaza since 2023. It is the *sumud* [steadfastness] of the Palestinians that, no matter how systematic past efforts were to kill their collective memory and thus the possibility of resisting in the present, Israel failed miserably. It is this failure that shapes Israel’s genocidal actions in the present to achieve what others could not: permanently erase Palestine and Palestinians.

Not only did Palestinians reject Zionism’s ideological apparatus, but they also reclaimed and reconstituted their history, collective memory, and knowledge system under occupation or in the diaspora. Palestine, then, creates an insurgent decolonial paradigm to see the world not only from the perspective of colonialism’s victims, but, more importantly, also from a radical position to think and do otherwise, even under the most violent conditions. Ultimately, it unsettles the dual paradigm of material destruction and epistemological imposition. It is this decolonial project, aspiration, self-determination, and collective resistance that Israel now seeks to destroy, particularly in Gaza but also anywhere this insurgent decolonial paradigm informs collective action—hence the genocidal onslaught in Gaza, as well as the scholasticide.

### **Genocide/Scholasticide in Gaza: Palestinians are not Just Numbers**

At the time of writing these words, Israel’s genocide in Gaza had already killed, according to official numbers, over 63,000 Palestinians, injured hundreds of thousands, and displaced over two million. A recent estimate published takes into account indirect deaths and puts the minimum number at 463,000, a number far greater than the official numbers coming out of the Gaza Health Ministry, 180,378 of whom are children (Rzepka, 2025).

After the temporary ceasefire announced on January 19, 2025, and later in October of the same year, families returning to northern Gaza witnessed the destruction of their homes, farms, and educational and religious institutions. They returned to the horror of decapitated and decaying

bodies strewn in the streets. The videos and images shared by courageous journalists in Gaza are nothing short of an apocalypse. The end of the world. This is what awaits us all if we dare to resist: a collective punishment for Palestinians and a collective disciplining of those who dare question the genocidal reconfiguration of the modern/colonial world order, marking the end of the world as we know it, one that no longer pretends to defend the superficiality of “Western values,” and instead unabashedly supports the incalculable violence we’ve seen live-streamed on our phones against a people who dared to resist colonial occupation and dispossession, as well as their annihilation.

Colonization undeniably involves genocide, yet it is the destruction and distortion of the history and knowledge of the colonized that serves as a means to erase the past and thus to minimize resistance in the present. That is to say, epistemicide is a means to permanently foreclose the possibility of building another future. It is a close companion of genocide, a violent process that not only destroys other modes of knowing but also alternative approaches to life or other ways of being and relating to the world. Ultimately, it aims to destroy a colonized peoples’ ability to live on their own land. To forget who they are. To forget where they came from. To forget what was stolen from them. To aspire to be what they are not and what they will never be. To side with those who’ve destroyed their lifeworld. To side with the colonizer responsible for the genocide of their people and erasure of their history. These are certainly the aims, but we know that colonial powers, despite how much they have tried to impose their philosophy and pedagogy of domination, they have never gotten rid of the ideas of resistance and the dreams of liberation.

### **Scholasticide: Colonialism’s Dual Paradigm of Destruction and Imposition**

The Palestinian scholar, Karma Nabulsi (Vulliamy & Ahmad, 2009), was the first to conceptualize scholasticide as settler colonialism’s systematic destruction of Palestinian education and intellectual life at all levels, including schools, libraries, mosques, archives, and much more. All higher education institutions in Gaza, for instance, have been systematically targeted and destroyed: Islamic University of Gaza, Al-Azhar University, University College of Applied Sciences, Al-Quds Open University, University of Palestine, University of Gaza, Israa University, Al-Aqsa University, Palestine College of Nursing, Arab College of Applied Sciences, and Palestine Technical College.

Toni Morrison (1989) was certainly right to say that “canon building is empire building” (p. 132). In this sense, scholasticide is integral to Zionism’s settler-colonial project, as it deliberately seeks “to eradicate the physical, intellectual, and political reproduction of the Palestinian people” (Smith, 2024, para. 1). Maya Wind (2024) argues in her book *Towers of Ivory and Steel* that the systematic destruction of education systems is crucial for Zionism because Palestinian education institutions and the insurgent knowledge production therein are perceived as threats by the settler colonial project. The insurgent curriculum Palestinians have developed for decades is what makes it possible to not only critique Zionist settler colonialism’s imposed narrative but also enables Palestinians to understand the deep historical connections to the lands they defend in the present. Whether this insurgent curriculum is found in schools, underground networks, archives, or coffeeshops is beside the point. It is viewed and treated as dangerous. Zionism’s permanence, after all, depends on the erasure of anything that reminds it of its violent genocidal efforts in the past and present.

What's important to keep in mind here is that scholasticide doesn't speak of the killing of knowledge in abstract terms or in the past tense but in the concrete destruction and systemic obliteration of educational, social, cultural, and religious institutions and the knowledge keepers, storytellers, spiritual leaders, intellectuals, scientists, doctors, nurses, teachers, librarians, poets, bakers, archivists, book collectors, and artists who make up said institutions.

Scholasticide resonates with what I have referred to as the coloniality of curriculum (Fúnez-Flores, 2022, 2023, 2024b), which functions as a technology of control and management of knowledge within a broader, more extensive, planetary context. The coloniality of curriculum is geopolitically entangled insofar as it is strategically deployed to prevent the recovery of systematically excluded histories, memories, stories, knowledges, practices, and struggles against colonialism, racism, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy across distinct yet historically interconnected geographies.

The coloniality of curriculum thus constitutes the enduring violent, pedagogical acts that systematically subjugate and destroy other interpretations to the degree in which the colonized other views and interprets the world through the colonizer's eyes. The images reflected by these distorted lenses are precisely the negative representation of others—the negation of their humanity. The coloniality of curriculum depends on a pedagogy of cruelty that sustains the intersubjective relations regulating and constituting domination within and beyond the nation-state (Peña-Pincheira & Allweiss, 2022; Segato, 2014, 2018). It points to racialized affects where the suffering of others does not emotionally move the White ethno-class (Ahmed, 2014; Wynter, 2003; Zembylas, 2022). The inability to feel for others is an integral part of the non-ethical affective economies and racial grammars of coloniality. The suffering of others is nonexistent or deserved. The Israeli philologist and professor of education Nurit Peled-Elhanan (2013) explores the colonial, racial, and dehumanizing foundation of the curriculum in Israel. In an interview (Land Palestine, 2025), she asks, “How do you take nice boys and girls and turn them into the monsters, killers of children by the time they reach age eighteen? It takes a very long, thorough, and sophisticated education to do that.”

### **Theorizing (Counter)Insurgency**

Now, I would like to discuss counterinsurgency. First let me start by saying that those with a shared experience of repression have gained insights into how universities reproduce coloniality through concrete violence. As I mentioned initially, I was suspended for publicly expressing my views on the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza. Although I've known for a while about “land-grant” (land grab) universities' role in both displacing Indigenous peoples and conducting research to justify further dispossession, it is only when one sees institutional machinations responding to resistance when one acquires raw conceptual clarity of the extent to which universities, including those where one is employed, ideologically support and materially participate in genocide. It is this raw clarity that makes business as usual department meetings and the overwhelming silence that much more disturbing while the Palestinian people are being annihilated.

This suspension confirmed the urgency for me to write about insurgent decolonial thought and praxis to disassociate myself with the co-opted forms decolonial thought has been expressed in academia. It led me to question so-called decolonial and radical academics comfortably dwelling in the Global North who have said or done little to critique Israel or support Palestinian resistance. It is what ultimately led me to examine the counterinsurgent role the broker intellectual class plays

when co-opting radical thought while pretending to actually give a fuck about concrete struggles. This overwhelming silence and co-optation thus inspired me to learn from Palestinians’ militant critiques, leading me to a path of exploration of what it means to be an insurgent thinker who moves beyond critique and toward radical thought situated in sites of struggle: thought that puts one’s career at risk by militantly, unapologetically, and (ins)urgently speaking out and organizing against genocide and settler colonial dispossession, no matter the consequences. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2021) teaches us, critique is great and all, but it doesn’t stop people from dying.

In *Tip of the Spear*, Orisanmi Burton (2023) cites the US Army’s definition of counterinsurgency, understood as “warfare that involves ‘military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency’” (p. 4). Within the context of the US, counterinsurgency is directed by those who will materially benefit the most and have more to lose if an insurgency becomes a revolutionary force. The greatest beneficiary is certainly the White ethnoclass. However, central to counterinsurgency is the dependency, submission, and complicity of those on the receiving end of domination and exploitation. One could argue that counterinsurgency is central to maintaining coloniality, through which race functions not only as a technology of control and management, as well as a central organizing principle constitutive of the modern/colonial capitalist order, but also as a category that creates a social hierarchy—one that seduces those positioned at the bottom who are willing to “sell their souls to the devil”, as the saying goes.

Counterinsurgency thus aims to prevent the creation of a “people’s war” (Burton, 2023)—that is, the “war of the weak against the strong” (p. 4). A people’s war requires an insurgent praxis that entails “irregular, small-scale attacks that aim to disrupt the social order, raising the cost of business as usual to a level that is unsustainable for the ruling authorities, forcing them to relinquish control” (p. 4). Insurgents carry out a myriad of methods to achieve these aims: “political education, critique, protest, organizing, cultural production, litigation, subversion, refusal, rebellion, retaliation, hostage-taking, sabotage, armed struggle, and the intimate labor of care” (p. 4)

Despite the radical commitments of some academics who have infiltrated an institution that historically excluded them and exploited their communities, the efforts academics have contributed to cannot be understood as radical transformations in and of themselves. These efforts, as Rodriguez (2023) points out, can only be understood as small disruptions of a fundamentally colonial institution. Rather than critiquing universities for their “oppressive violence and conquest” in the present (para. 9), the vast majority of academics truly believe that change will come from within, that reforming the university and academia is the ultimate goal, not realizing that this liberal attitude toward a colonial institution linked to concrete dispossession and violence cannot be reformed. There is a difference I want to make between working within, with the aspiration of gradually changing the institution, with the notion of insurgently working within to put sand in the gears of this colonial institution. Sabotage, in other words.

Rodriguez (2023) points out that the institutionalization of radical insurgent thought is exposed in the way certain revolutionary thinkers and texts inform academics who do not commit themselves to anything beyond academia and who are not accountable to concrete struggles. Their sole interest is to engage texts as artifacts of the past that must be “reclaimed” and interpreted for interpretation’s sake. These radical academics do not share risks with the most vulnerable and oppressed. While students and untenured faculty were criminalized, suspended, or fired, many tenured professors went about their day as if their refusal to take action against what unfolded before their eyes did not contradict their contributions to radical social theory. Some will even go

so far as to say that activist work detracts from the more serious work of theorizing social reality. This, of course, is just an excuse to absolve them of their silence, complicity, and cowardice. This is the counterinsurgent theoretical position that hastily dismisses the theorizing done in the streets.

One serious question we need to grapple with: How do academics participate in sustaining domination, “while offering rigorous and even radical critiques of its violence and oppressiveness in their scholarly work” (Rodriguez & Sirvent, 2023, para. 25)?

Radical thought is captured within the gradualist liberal framework of institutional reform. Liberal frames constitute and limit what is politically possible, which portrays more militant anti-State action as illegal and violent, action that is diametrically opposed to liberal notions of change at the ballot box. All that matters is small incremental gains to maintain, rather than subvert and destroy a racial-colonial capitalist system that views and treats the global majority as disposable. Liberal counterinsurgency maintains the disposability of others while portraying itself as transformative, thus relegitimizing liberalism’s racial-colonial, possessive individualist, annihilatory, logics of dispossession, criminalization, anti-Black violence, and carcerality (Rodriguez, 2020, 2021).

Take for instance when, as the Chair of the Decolonial, Postcolonial, and Anticolonial Studies in Education Special Interest Group (SIG) at American Education Research Association (AERA), I wrote the most critical Division and SIG chairs to share the Petition for the Resolution for Justice in Palestine. I only heard back from the social studies SIG, so if you belong to this SIG, be proud of their leadership. This remaining silence, however, is an indictment of the field of education. I later wrote a letter responding to the AERA Council’s refusal to even discuss the demands included in the Petition. As some of you perhaps know, the council is composed of Division Chairs, including the Chair of Curriculum Studies and Social Context, two divisions that are known for their critical work. In this letter, I wrote the following:

The AERA Council claims to be worried about the attacks on democracy, education, and research, yet it refuses to democratically engage in dialogue with the demands of over 700 AERA members. It does not seem to be able to make connections between the current attacks on education and the repression of dissident voices who supported and participated in the Gaza Solidarity Encampments and anti-genocide protests during the Biden administration. It is thus content with the role academic organizations play in furthering this repression by ignoring the demands of its members. The AERA Council disregards the attacks on academic freedom and the right to assemble before Trump started his second term, presenting him as solely responsible for what we are seeing today. This dissociates from the sociopolitical and geopolitical context in which pro-Palestine protests were attacked and criminalized by university administrators and politicians, Democrats and Republicans alike. Now we are seeing the consequences of years of silence. Students and professors are having their visas revoked, some of whom are being hunted down by ICE agents to be arrested and deported. The silence of the past is manifesting itself in the present, and the silence and indifference of today will certainly have more serious consequences in the future.

Referring to so-called decolonial and abolitionist scholars in the Council, I ended my letter by addressing the disconnect between “radical” scholars’ academic work and their politics:

That is the legacy you will leave behind, despite the research that appears, on paper, to care about the well-being of oppressed communities. Genocide, as many organizations have called it and what hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of protestors have chanted in the streets, is what is happening in Gaza, despite your denial of it. Your refusal to acknowledge that a genocide is taking place in Gaza will not be forgotten or forgiven. History will not be kind to you.

I ended my letter with the following signature:

Indignantly,  
Jairo

No one should be surprised that I still haven't heard back. Ruha Benjamin was certainly right to say that Black [And Brown] faces in high places are not gonna save us" (Friday Things, 2024)

### **Theorizing the Silence and Complicity**

If we're going to theorize silence and complicity, why not theorize how the university and academia has a hidden counterinsurgent curriculum that captures and enlists even the most radical intellectuals. As counterinsurgent machines, universities will mold us into agents of domination without us realizing it's happening.

The quiet capture of the radical scholars we dearly admire, who refuse to show minimum levels of solidarity, is a result of academia's bourgeois comfort that rewards those who know their subservient place. Edward Said (1994/2012) wrote about this silence over three decades ago, when he stated "Nothing in my view is more reprehensible than those habits of mind in the intellectual that induce avoidance, that characteristic turning away from a difficult and principled position, which you know to be the right one, but which you decide not to take" (pp. 100–101).

Edward Said (1994/2012) examined the complicity of academics who remained silent on what was—and continues to be—a seemingly controversial or complicated topic. As we have seen since October 2023 (and certainly before that), far too many self-proclaimed critical, anti-racist, and decolonial academics have not mentioned Palestine, called for a ceasefire, signed petitions, or critiqued Israel's genocidal campaign in Gaza or increasing violence in the West Bank and in historic Palestine. Some of our colleagues who like to begin their conference presentations with superficial land acknowledgments have apparently forgotten that Palestine is a territorial struggle against settler-colonial dispossession.

These same academics appear to only care about colonization and decolonization in abstract, metaphorical terms, or as a historical event that is gradually receding—perhaps a colonial legacy we are slowly moving away from as we progress toward a more egalitarian liberal society. It is evident that academia, for the most part, does not care about material decolonization or radical notions of academic freedom. It merely desires a topic, a subject matter, that refers to the distant past rather than the colonial present. I want to cite the Resistant Archives and A. Tahir (2025) at length since they elaborate on the quiet capture of intellectuals:

Liberation is talked about often—in classrooms, in books, across social media - but the material struggle behind those words has faded. Those who suffer most under capitalism

are trapped in survival, forced to navigate a system that leaves them little time or space to organize. Those with enough comfort to study revolution, to imagine something different, often find themselves unwilling to risk what they have. Comfort turns into a quiet form of captivity... the people with enough stability to think about change are often the ones least willing to risk it. Comfort, even when it is modest, becomes a quiet captor. A steady job, a roof over your head, access to healthcare, the chance to own a home, the easy promises of consumer goods; these things are dangled as proof that the system can work if you just play by its rules... Consumerism has replaced the dream of collective freedom with private ambition, and solidarity has been traded away for individual survival. The fear of losing what little you have becomes stronger than the anger at injustice... (para. 1; 6-8)

As politically committed intellectuals, however, one must do everything we can to refuse this quiet capture. This refusal is what has led me to emphasize how discourses materialize into the cruelest practices, becoming real, concrete, violent. This refusal contributes to interrogating this moment, even if modestly. This refusal is not passive but an active commitment to concrete struggles. It means making real sacrifices for the liberation of Palestine.

### **The Role of the Intellectual in a Time of Genocide**

The refusal I addressed has shaped my understanding of the role of the intellectual in a time of genocide. The entangled history between counterinsurgency and knowledge production shows us that the intellectual has always had a choice, as Edward Said (1994/2012) reminded us. The choice, as he put it, is either to side with the weaker, the oppressed, the colonized, the less well represented, and the systematically forgotten and ignored. The other choice is to side with the more powerful by staying silent or outright supporting domination. This resonates with what the Palestinian intellectual and martyr Basel Al-Araj (Project, 2017) wrote: “If you don’t want to be engaged—if you don’t want to confront oppression—your role as an intellectual is pointless” (para. 10).

The intellectual is not the person who only coins concepts or who theorizes for theorizing’s sake or for the academic market and its consumers. The committed intellectual in this case is not reduced to the academic who we admire for their contributions to a particular field of research. The intellectual is not the person who we consider the founding figure of a particular school of thought. The intellectual is indeed more like an antenna, as Rita Segato (2022) reminds us of when writing about Anibal Quijano, a receptor of the sociopolitical context that creates the conditions of possibility to think and do otherwise, particularly when one’s theorizing is situated in and committed to struggles for liberation. The politically committed intellectual serves as a conduit for the genius of the people—the genius that is born in struggle (Robinson, 2021). The intellectual is understood in its broadest terms to include the insurgent thought that can only be nourished by social uprisings and liberation movements

*Tu teoria le falta calle* [your theory is lacking streets] or as Fred Hampton said, “Theory’s Cool, But Theory With No Practice Ain’t Shit” (Maglalang & Rao, 2021). The Resistance Archives and A. Tahrir (2025) echo this point and write in detail that,

In the heart of the West, revolution survives mostly in theory. It is debated in universities, passed around in books and podcasts, thrown into slogans and branding. But without

material sacrifice, theory is nothing... In a society where even rebellion can be marketed and sold back to us, the sharp edge of revolutionary thought is dulled. We live in a world where outrage is not a threat but a product. Anger is turned into spectacle. Radical words are packaged into careers, personal brands, and performances that leave real power untouched... Talking about liberation replaces fighting for it. Revolution becomes something we consume, not something we build. Without the willingness to step beyond discourse into action, even the most sophisticated analysis collapses into another pillar of the system it claims to oppose... In Palestine, the idea of revolution has never been an academic exercise or a lifestyle choice. It is a necessity born from survival, faith, and an unbroken connection to the land... Revolution in Palestine is not romanticized. It is survival. It is faith carried through generations, collective memory made flesh, and the unbreakable refusal to be erased... If revolution is to have meaning again in the heart of empire, it must move beyond theory and reclaim the courage to sacrifice. It must confront the fear that clings to comfort, the fear that survival will be harder if we resist. True change has always demanded risk, loss, and the willingness to stand firm even when the ground shifts... Comfort is not freedom. It is the quiet reward for obedience, the gilded chain that binds potential to stagnation. The examples of struggle from places like Gaza remind us that when everything is stripped away, what remains is not despair but an unbreakable will to live with dignity. Revolution demands that we remember what matters beyond survival and beyond comfort. It demands that we live, not just speak, the struggle we claim to believe in... We cannot theorize our way out of the chains we are too afraid to break. We cannot speak of struggle while defending the small comforts handed down by the very system we claim to oppose. Every privilege that binds us is a weapon turned against the world we say we want to build. Empire does not fear our anger. It fears our willingness to give up everything we were taught to hold sacred. To fight for the future demands that we let go of the illusions that tie us to the present. It demands a life lived with clarity, with courage, and without apology. (para. 9-12; 14; 18-20)

As the genocide in Gaza continues, we must therefore position ourselves clearly and militantly. We must continue to organize and disrupt the spaces that we know will one day forget that they, too, enabled genocide. We know that those who remain silent today will one day write books and articles on the genocide but only after the fact. In the present, we cannot become what Rabea Eghbariah (2023) referred to as the “scholars [who] tend to sharpen their pens after the smell of death has dissipated and moral clarity is no longer urgent” (para. 7). To act and write with urgency, we must refuse to play the careerist and opportunist game academia loves to play as the world burns around its ivory towers. Mohammed El-Kurd (2025) states, that they will one day lecture the world about genocide in the past tense when in fact they said and did nothing while it unfolded for their unwilling eyes to see. These vultures, as El-Kurd labels them, are in our midst. We can probably picture one or more colleagues who are unbothered by genocide today yet will likely write about it when the literal “dust settles”—when the bodies buried under the rubble are reduced to footnotes in yet another published book, when making land acknowledgements can be made on Palestinian land without consequences. These vultures will one day romanticize what they once condemned, what they did not defend, and what they enabled through their silence. They will not only romanticize the past but also depoliticize, mystify, and commodify it. El Kurd (2025) states that these “vultures will make sculptures out of our flesh” (p. 2) so that the past can be frozen in time in some museum. That’s exactly how counterinsurgency works.

In “Digging Tunnels with Pens,” Yafi (2024) asks, “What do we do, then, when the very structures we seek to change enforce the limits on our activism, writing, and thoughts” (para. 3)? By asking this question, Yafi suggests that one should work toward creating a clandestine publishing network to resist intellectual colonialism and to create “a pathway to knowledge production that bypasses the gatekeepers of Western academia and operates beyond its restrictive boundaries” (para. 3). Only by breaking free from these institutional constraints can we begin to speak truth to power in more radical forms. This does not mean that we need to abandon our positions within academia, but that we need “to master the art of navigating both worlds—maintaining our presence within institutional frameworks while never losing sight of the collective struggle” (para. 14).

Steven Salaita suggested in a podcast interview (*Millennials are Killing Capitalism*, 2024) that we must speak and write as if people in Gaza can hear and read us. Or as the Zapatistas (2023) wrote in 2009 when Israel was bombing Gaza, “Words from afar may not be able to stop a bomb, but they do crack open the dark room of death [that is Gaza], letting in a small ray of light” (para. 31, my translation) The least we can do is to speak and write with urgency as if life depended on it because that’s exactly what’s at stake. There’s no other way to speak and write in a time of genocide.

The student-led Gaza solidarity encampments taught us that speaking truth to power means nothing if we’re unwilling to take risks. In the United States and in Europe, they unveiled the political limitations of the usual symbolic gestures and reformism that characterizes academic activism. It was students who made more visible the importance of going beyond institutional reform, unmasking the counterinsurgency that reform entails. It was students who pointed to the ways in which the university is not only implicated in ideologically justifying the genocide in Gaza but also in actively participating in it by having direct links with the production of technologies of colonial violence battles tested on Palestinians, which are then exported to be used against our communities here in the US. It was students who risked their careers while so many professors watched them get arrested, beaten, and deported. It was students who put everything on the line for a dehumanized people they have been told are not worthy of their solidarity. Students seeking to delink their universities from their material and symbolic investments in colonial projects reveal their insurgent and decolonial potential.

So what does it really mean to be an engaged intellectual or a guerilla intellectual (Rodney, 1990) who wages decolonial resistance not only with pen and paper in hand but also through collective action? Is it not true that alternative modes of reading and theorizing the world emerge from historically specific material contexts, like the flower that springs from the rubble in Gaza despite the incredible odds to do so? Like the seed that germinates and breaks through the cold, lifeless world designed by coloniality, radical thought too spreads its roots to crack open systems of domination that previously seemed indestructible. As Palestinian scholar, political prisoner, and abolitionist thinker Khalida Jarrar puts it, “Hope in prison is like a flower that grows out of stone” (Palestinian Feminist Collective, 2024). Reading and theorizing the world anew becomes a transgressive act that engraves in stone every spoken and written word by working with sites of struggle. In a time of genocide, the role of the intellectual, of the curriculum theorist, is to write and speak with urgency, no matter the consequences, no matter if our careers are jeopardized, no matter if we’re criminalized. Again, there is no other way to write and speak about a genocide.

The student movement taught us what an insurgent mode of theorizing looks like as they urged us to interrogate academia’s complicity and to take direct action to unsettle the technologies of colonial violence in which universities are deeply invested. Student activists remained steadfast

in the face of institutional and police violence. Take for instance, Christopher Lacovetti, at the University of Chicago encampment, who stated that the following

It doesn't matter what you do to us because there are principles and there are human lives that matter more than our careers and our futures...Our commitment to Gaza runs deeper than fears for our safety, fears for our careers, fears for our paychecks" (Insurgent Thoughts, 2024).

Mahmoud Kh, who was abducted by ICE in March, dictated the following words from a detention center in Louisiana: "My detention is a testament to the strength of the student movement in shifting public opinion toward Palestinian liberation...even if the public has yet to fully grasp it; it is students who steer us toward truth and justice" (Khalil, 2025). The political prisoners of Palestine Action who sabotaged the production of killing machines produced by Elbit Systems, and who are currently in a hunger strike write:

As captives imprisoned for our participation in the Palestinian liberation movement in the west, we have a responsibly to each other across borders to pursue our lives in prison with the same steadfastness as the Palestinian prisoner movement held captive in Israeli prisons... As the western left continues to move from crisis to crisis and avoid their responsibilities to Palestine, we are all that we have. By we I am referring to people facing repression for their support of Palestine, who are sacrificing, truly sacrificing....Solidarity is actions, not words. (Abolition Media, 2025, para. 2 and 4)

In relation to writing in a time of genocide, Fargo Tbakhi (2023) asks, "What does Palestine require of us, as writers...within the imperial core, in this moment of genocide?" (para. 1). Tbakhi unsettles the dominant notion of our writing "craft" which represents "the network of sanitizing influences exerted on writing in the English language: the influences... of complicit institutions, and of the linguistic priorities...of empire" (para. 2). What purpose does our writing serve in the hour of genocide, when bombs continue to drop, when mangled bodies are strewn in the streets, when parents carry their children's limbs, bones, and guts in plastic bags and shoeboxes, when paramedics constantly carry real beheaded babies for the world to see, when hundreds of thousands have been killed and starved, when journalists are targeted, when life is no longer sustainable?

We need to center Palestinian voices whose understanding of colonial reality and resistance is indispensable. We must resist the distortion of history and refuse to forget the memories of those who have lost their lives prematurely—those whom Israel decided to kill simply because they were Palestinian. As Maldonado-Torres (2008) suggests, we must not only reclaim "memories of suffering and displacement, but also of happiness and hope in the midst of challenges to human existence by repressive and inhumane social orders" (xiii). We must bear witness to remember those who are no longer here—those who are more than numbers but aspirations and dreams of a Free Palestine. We must write, despite the fact that it's impossible to account for what Palestinians have lost. After all, how do we account for their hopes and their dreams? As Na'ama Carlin (2024) writes, how do we calculate for the tens of thousands of "futures wiped off this earth with unfathomable cruelty" (para. 7).

More than ever, we need to follow Ghassan Kanafani's militancy to encourage others to continue resisting even when overwhelming despair is felt in their heart. It's this despair that has the potential to transform itself into hope and collective action. We must therefore write in an

insurgent form so that despair does not become a permanent condition. We must write so that the dreams, hopes, and aspirations of Palestinians will one day become reality. We must write for the liberation of Palestine and the liberation of all peoples resisting the iron fist of imperialism and colonialism.

I end this presentation with four poetic texts, one written by Jacy Bowles (2024) and the others by a Palestinian writer Ahmad Ibsais (2025):

*Academia is  
dead. No, no... not in the way we know  
death: not as an offering, a sign of a  
new life to come....Academia is dead  
in the way that it never was alive.  
Robotically, it bestrewed itself over the earth, always taking without asking before it  
left...*

*It's dead in a way that attempts to shame the living.*

*I don't want my life's work to be defined only by the work of the dead: dead  
thinkers, dead concepts, dead relationships, and dead dreams. (Bowles, 2024)*

*Palestine is what happens when a people refuse to become ghosts in their own story.  
Palestine is the child who draws her house with the key still in the door, the grandmother  
who saves seeds from a tree that no longer exists, the father who teaches his son to read a  
map that others have redrawn. Palestine is the memory that turns exile into return, the  
name that turns displacement into belonging, the love that makes occupation impossible  
even when it seems complete. This is our testament: we will not disappear into their  
euphemisms. We will not starve quietly in their footnotes. We will not die conveniently for  
their narratives. We are Palestinians, and we are still here, and we will not be moved.  
(Ibsais, 2025)*

Free Palestine, From the River to the Sea.  
Thank you!

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# Refusals as Access-Otherwise Crippled Embodiments of Destitution and Prefiguration

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WHAT IF REFUSAL—so often understood as defiance, dysfunction, or disengagement—were a legitimate form of presence, a more diffusive and livable form of access for students with disabilities? Moreover, what if refusals were engaged on a level of creativity that grappled with more ways and means of thinking, being, and becoming in educational spaces (ways in which challenge our own normative demands)? In schools, the word *refusal* is typically a diagnostic of lacking: both in terms of the pedagogical intervention and at the level of livability for the student (Kearney, 2008; Elliot & Place, 2019). As Melanie Yergeau (2018) argues, even naming a child’s bodily comportment a refusal “resorts to deficit-laden and negativistic terminology” (p. 4). I approach these questions from within crip theory and from within the everyday life of classrooms, where refusal is routinely interpreted as a problem to be corrected rather than a mode of access to be enlivened/supported. Even more so, I write as a crip theorist and former secondary history teacher, and as someone who has moved through schools and clinics under a long trail of neuro/psych diagnoses (autism, manic depressive disorder/bipolar disorder, general anxiety disorder, schizophrenia, etc.), often experiencing how support quietly becomes surveillance, coercion, and manipulation. Methodologically, I braid theoretical analysis with anonymized vignette analyses drawn from my U.S. and World History classrooms with juniors and sophomores. I use these contemplations as generative sites of challenging and crippling normative understandings of the educative, of access, of livable classrooms, and of teacher-student relationships.

For instance, during one of my own lectures on the French Revolution, I was discussing the political writings that drove and responded to popular fronts, when I looked down at one of my student’s lecture notes. All of my students are given certain critical thinking questions that they are assigned to grapple with during the lecture. However, a particular student wasn’t answering the questions on the piece of paper provided; rather, they were drawing a comic of Marie Antoinette and King Louis XVI on a gallows trying to explain why they shouldn’t be beheaded. Under a normative frame of teaching practices, this is off-task behavior that needs to be corrected (Parsonson, 2012). Even more so, as one of my students with an Individualized Education Program

(IEP), even more institutional and structural efforts were disciplining my own behavior in the moment to address this distracted moment (Mckenna, et al., 2024). Reframed, however, the moment is a mode of analytic uptake that refuses a narrow notion of literacy and proposes another means of being present. In disability community praxis, such refusals can be profoundly generative: both ontically and epistemically (Garland-Thomson, 2011). Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) calls it “the gift we give each other of seeing what the able-bodied imagination refuses to see: that sick, disabled, Mad, Deaf, and neurodivergent lives... are normal” (p. 70). Refusal, in other words, can mark a demand to be encountered differently (a crippled plea to be understood on their own terms), and it can be an act of care: “[a refusal] to abandon each other” (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018, p. 51). Moreover, I also want to center that refusal is not only the student’s act; it also stages a decision for the teacher. The student’s off-script presence becomes an invitation, explicit or not, for me to either reassert the norm (correction, redirection, compliance) or to join the refusal by widening what counts as participation and thought: to play alongside the student in a rapid deconstruction of the learning context, objectives, and coercive tendencies.

In this article, I want to reframe/unframe how teachers are asked to react to refusals in their classrooms. Moreover, I want to reimagine what access looks like for othered and aberrant folks on the level of such refusals. This reframing runs hard against the grain of normative educational practices that depend on redirection, forced engagement, and various scripts of coercion (Ahmed, 2006). Modern institutions, Foucault (1995) reminds us, treat hesitation itself as an offense: the disciplined subject must obey “prompt and blind; an appearance of indocility, the least delay would be a crime” (p. 166). “The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes” (Foucault, 1995, p. 183). Within this regime, a student’s refusal cannot signify critique of task or environment; it cannot be understood as a means of thinking otherwise, where students grapple with their own, crippled onto-epistemes; such refusal reads only as disorder in the student. Rehabilitation logics of disabilities in schools, moreover, intensify this: “Rehab demands compliance or—more properly—makes noncompliance unthinkable” (McRuer, 2006, p. 113). Once students are deemed capable of inclusion in normative classrooms, any divergence is cast as willful excess and must be corrected in diagnostic and scientifically appropriate ways (Billingsley, 2016; Yergeau, 2018). As Fiona Kumari Campbell (2009, pp. 105, 132) demonstrates, disabled people must adopt ableist postures or be rendered illegible. The effect is to preclude any crippled refusal or rebellion from meaning-making, to foreclose its potential as onto-epistemically generative.

Crip theory helps challenge this normative and normativizing gaze. A central provocation is Robert McRuer’s (2006) account of compulsory able-bodiedness<sup>1</sup>, a system that “repeatedly demands that people with disabilities embody for others an affirmative answer to the unspoken question, ‘Yes, but in the end, wouldn’t you rather be more like me?’” (p. 9). A crippled refusal interrupts that demand; a crippled refusal maintains aberrant ways of being, thinking, and learning. Campbell (2009) argues that “refusing able(ness) necessitates a letting go of... sameness for equality arguments... [instead of] wasting time on the violence of normalisation” (pp. 14). This is not withdrawal from epistemic labor; rather, it is an epistemic creativity beyond the confines of reproductive curricula (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Moreover, disability justice praxis offers a method: move from “‘access as service begrudgingly offered...’ to ‘access as a collective joy and offering we can give to each other’” (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018, p. 16-17; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2022). In my original vignette, my student’s refusal of the “correct” note-taking processes is not an absence of participation but an access-making act that presses the classroom to widen its channels

of expression. The point is not to append accommodations to a norm, but to accept that access may require other literacies, tempos, and forms of visibility—what crip communities already know as livable ontically and epistemically.

Anarchic theory, meanwhile, similarly plays with refusals as a multi-directional means of resistance, as a way to deactivate and challenge obedience-machines. For instance, Agamben (2014) asks us to imagine “completely other strategies” to destituent power (p. 70): not seizing authority, but rendering its apparatus inoperative. Agamben calls this becoming ungovernable—not a descent into chaos-without-impulse but a positive ungovernability in which people no longer orient their lives around being governed. In other words, anarchists attempt to understand that refusals do not end at negation; they *prefigure* other relations outside or in confrontation with the socio-political logics of governability. As David Graeber (2004) defines it, revolutionary action is “any collective action which rejects, and therefore confronts, some form of power or domination and in doing so, reconstitutes social relations” otherwise (p. 45). In schools, that looks like crippled refusals of normative access points, crip temporal markers that do not conform to the clock of the classroom, opt-in visibility and collaboration, and temporary autonomous zones where students play with the possibilities of ontic and epistemic productivity (Bierdz, 2024; Price, 2011; Samuels, 2017).

Bringing these two frameworks together, refusal is both destructive and generative: it destitutes imposed norms while prefiguring livable ones. Édouard Glissant’s (1997) right to opacity helps name what refusal enlivens and embodies: “subsistence within an irreducible singularity... the real foundation of Relation” (p. 190). A student’s refusal to be fully legible to managerial rubrics is not absence—it is not aggressive; it is a claim to exist otherwise, together. My own stance emerges from practice. As a teacher-researcher, I have watched refusals open learning rather than close it; as a crippled student, moreover, I was punished for refusing to simulate a normative bodymind. Those experiences orient me toward non-coercion and interruption: “I had never wanted to surrender the conviction that one could teach without reinforcing existing systems of domination” (hooks, 1994, p. 18). Practically for the educator, this means refusing the reflex of punishment and/or discipline; it means refusing the impulse to correct or situate the student normatively; it means listening for what a refusal is saying about the classroom space, teaching practices, and the moment. It also means recognizing that refusal is an existential plea: “To refuse what has come to be is to fight to be” (Ahmed, 2021, p. 26).

The primary thrust of this article is that refusal is not a problem to be managed on pedagogical level but as an autonomous moment within which othered students can exist on their own terms. Crippled resistances and refusals are productive embodiments that make thinkable—and livable—being/becoming otherwise; the parallel task for the educator, then, is to refuse the normative practice of punishment/discipline when refusal signals a demand for different conditions of access (access beyond the purview of the lesson plan or the IEP). Moreover, I am not romanticizing violent refusals or abandoning responsibilities to one another as being/non-beings. The claim is narrower and more actionable: normative determinations of participation, responsibility, and intellectual work are definitionally restrictive given the standardization and coercion implicated in normal educational settings (Ahmed, 2006). Engaging refusal on its own terms can enliven other ways of responding, participating, and thinking. My arguments that follow first trace how schooling renders refusal legible only as deviance; then, I elaborate a crip-anarchic framework that reconceives refusal as access-otherwise<sup>2</sup> through crippledness, destitution, and prefiguration; following, I grapple with classroom vignettes through our crippled-anarchic

theoretical framework; and finally, I outline pedagogical moves that carve out space for refusals to function as livable access-otherwise.

### **Problematic and Theoretical Framework: Crip-Anarchic Convergences**

Within normative school logics, refusal is coded as a deficit to be corrected: a fault to be cured. Behavior-analytic frames operationalize refusal as noncompliance and summarily design studies “to develop a function-based intervention to increase compliance,” with compliance timed by the second (Wilder et al., 2007, p. 173). This framing delineates refusals into an intervention economy—functional analyses, antecedent/consequence schedules, and treatment packages—whose end is legible responsiveness. At the same time, education’s audit culture and standardizations privileges “performance indicators chosen for ease of measurement and control rather than because they measure accurately what the quality of performance is” (O’Neill, 2002, p. 4-5). Together these rationalities strip refusals of epistemic and affective significance: they are indexed as problems that “need to be prevented and intervened” (Ulaş & Seçer, 2024, p. 7). In short, presence is equated with productivity under surveillance and opacity is pathologized; every refusal becomes data for correction and optimization, not an invitation to continuously re-understand the motive power of students or their onto-epistemic enlivenments (Manolev et al., 2019). Crucially, these regimes do not only diagnose students; they also recruit teachers as the apparatus’s frontline technicians. A student’s refusal becomes a demand placed on the teacher to restore legibility, and the scene turns into a call-and-response: will the teacher reassert compliance, or join the refusal by loosening what counts as access and participation?

I begin by unsettling the commonplace understanding of access-as-compliance in education (responsibilities of the teacher/student to govern and discipline): attendance, punctual speech, steady eye contact, bodies on task, outputs on time (Smith et al., 2022). In disability studies, this regimentation is legible as compulsory able-bodymindedness, attempting to produce and reproduce the unquestioned nature of the normative human bodymind as the standard and gatekeeping mechanism against any form of aberrance. McRuer (2006) names the nexus: “‘compulsory able-bodiedness’... [in which] ‘able-bodiedness... largely masquerades as a nonidentity, as the natural order of things’” (p. 1). Kafer (2013) extends the insight to the cognitive as well: “‘Compulsory able-mindedness’ is a way of capturing the normalizing practices, assumptions, and exclusions” that set the terms of intelligibility—of coherence and legibility (p. 184). Moreover, Campbell (2009) demonstrates how compulsory able-bodymindedness seduces any claim to justice-oriented work in education toward sameness—resisting the “ontologically tentative” and urging, instead, a vantage that looks “from the inside out,” finding “possibilities in ambiguity and resistance in marginality” (pp. 9, 128, 15).

Crip *dis*-readings of access refuse the conflation of access with mere presence or reproduction of norms. Hamraie (2017) cautions that design experts have long claimed authority to externally define the user and, by extension, access itself (p. 198), yielding policy that universalizes particular bodyminds, epistemes, and tempos. Against this, crip theory insists on access as a livable form that mutates along with the bodymind as crippled and crippling. Yergeau’s (2018) autistic politics articulates a “countersocial way of being, communing, and communicating,” asserting the validity of neuroqueer life and literacy (p. 108). In this breathing refusal of viscera and affectivity, accommodation that merely coerces legible participation misreads the demand of the crippled bodymind and the crippled gesture. Crippling access means

enlivening pauses, scripts, stims, asynchronous exchanges, and refusals as world-making practices rather than deficits (Bierdz, 2024; Price, 2011). It is a (de)generative stance of access as the very refusals of crippled bodyminds: destructive of norms and generative of practices that sustain bodyminds. Where audit culture and standardizing practices underwrite access conversations in the sphere of education (Wilder et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2022; Biesta, 2010), we naturalize what's countable, legible, and performative. On the other hand, *crip politics* and *cripistemologies*<sup>3</sup> reorient toward what's livable—toward uses of time/space that exceed instrumentality and toward coalitions that protect opacity from being translated into needs for curative interventions. In this sense, access can itself be a refusal: a refusal to enter on normative terms and an instantiation of access-otherwise, of access as livable and breathable onto-epistemes of crippled bodyminds themselves. Read this way, refusal is rarely a solitary negation (or even a negation itself); it is a proposal made to the collective, to the teacher, and the normative regimes affecting classrooms more generally. Such crippled refusals ask, implicitly: can you handle multiplicity, contradiction, inoperative, and/or rebellion? Can you, too, refuse the terms that would translate my livability into a means of coercive correction?

Furthermore, my anarchic framing turns on two primary moves. First, following Agamben (2014), I argue that refusal operates as *destituent power*: it does not seize or reform the apparatus; it renders it inoperative. The task, Agamben (2014) writes, is “Rendering inoperative the biological, economic, and social operations... opening it to a new possible use” (p. 70). In this register, “use becomes a form-of-life... not [that] destroys, but uses” (p. 68), shifting practice from the power of rule to the livability of use.

*Destituent power* is said to be the deactivation of the technique of sovereign power that splits forms-of-life into animal/human, bare life/power, household/city, and even constituent/constituted power. That is, for Agamben, *destituent power* is an attribute of the inoperative/in-active subject that is the Being of Humanity; a power or capacity that wrests back life's own most possibility for assuming any form whatsoever from the truncated existence that defines us as the subject of so many *dispositifs*. (Hostis, 2020, p. 4)

In this register, refusals such as leaving a classroom, avoiding school, refusing to participate, or arguing against the teacher, break the enforced link between legible participation and livable forms of knowing/being (Rancière, 1991; Scott, 1985). But even more so, destitution is not solely the responsibility of the student. The governmental machine persists through teachers' cooperation, through the teacherly reflex to intervene, document, redirect, and/or restore order, such that refusal also solicits constituent and collective *destitutive* impulses: the teacher's withdrawal from the compliance-work that keeps governing/disciplining apparatuses operational.

Second, refusal is *prefigurative*. Graeber's (2004) anarchism insists “means must be consonant with ends... One cannot create freedom through authoritarian means” such as manipulating and coercing performances of legibility (p. 7); the aim of refusals, therefore, is not to seize power but to abolish coercive forms and imagine more-egalitarian livabilities. In classroom terms, this means access-otherwise cannot be produced through forced participation or coerced relationality. Therefore, if refusal is *prefigurative*, then the teacher's response is part of the *prefiguration*: we either reproduce normative social relations (obedience/assessment, which are constantly shifting in concert) or embody/enact more livable timespaces (consent/use/opacity). Boggs (1977) names this *prefiguration*: “the embodiment, within ongoing political practice... of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that constitute the ultimate goal” (pp. 100-101). In queer terms, moreover, “The queer art of failure turns on...the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other

goals... We can also recognize failure as a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline” (Halberstam, 2011, p. 88). Crippled embodiments that grate against the classroom’s normative tempo are generative—epistemically, ontically, politically, socially, and affectively—rearranging roles, relations, and realities, including the right to opacity (Glissant, 1997).

Ultimately, moreover, even as I read refusal as access in these onto-epistemically generative livabilities, I want to avoid drawing borders around those worlds. Heeding Tuck’s (2009) warning that ““The lives of city youth—already under the watchful eyes of police and school security officers, already tracked by video cameras in their schools, on the streets, and in subways—are pursued by (well-intentioned) researchers whose work functions as yet another layer of surveillance”” (p. 410), I gesture toward the particular possibilities of refusal while resisting any pre-definition or coordination of crippled possibility itself. Because the vignettes I grapple with in the following section necessarily involve a kind of looking, my aim is not to fix refusal into a cohesive, trackable type but to witness the livabilities it opens (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2022). In this light, crip and anarchic frames meet at refusal’s double edge: destituting imposed norms while prefiguring livable ones. Access, then, is not compliance within normativizing precepts but what refusal renders livable: a presence on different terms, organized around use, consent, and the protection of opacity from capture (Agamben, 2016; Harney & Moten, 2013; Tuck, 2009). Finally, these destitutive movements may also loosen the institution’s grip on productivity, making room for crip and othered bodyminds to linger in breathable spacetimes of crippled aberrance.

### **Refusals in Practice: Fleeting Examples**

Within the managerial and coercive logics of schooling, refusal is scripted as risk and deficit rather than presence on othered terms. Handbooks and reviews insist that “effective interventions... must involve techniques that combat academic refusal,” casting it as a specific type of noncompliance aimed at evading work (Billingsley, 2016, p. 12). Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBA) then convert refusal into data that coordinate hypotheses about functions in order to engineer compliance through processes of normativization, disciplining such behaviors down to the second (Foucault, 1982; Wilder et al., 2007). Moreover, these regimes securitize conduct and manufacture urgency inside a culture grounded in coercive and normative frames (Biesta, 2010), where attendance and legibility are miscast as livable access. In such systems, even complaints are misrecognized “as the problem” (Ahmed, 2021, p. 86; Scott, 1999). Within this analysis, the vignettes that follow push against this framing. Rather than diagnosing, rather than preempting or intervening, I read the refusals as claims to access-otherwise and as the making of crippled timespaces—temporalities and modalities that interrupt coercive normativization (Annamma et al., 2013; Annamma & Morrison, 2018). Moreover, each vignette is not only a scene of student refusal, but it is also a scene of teacher destitency: a decision-point about whether to restore the classroom’s compliance apparatus or to let refusal rework what counts as access/learning in the first place. Each scene is read through crippled and anarchic lenses: crip readings that dis-interprets sense-making, tempo, and opacity as livable access-otherwise; and anarchic readings that show how refusal destitutes the classroom’s compliance apparatus while prefiguring more egalitarian forms of inquiry and existence.

## Interruptus: J's Refusal of Epistemic Refusal

During a silent drill on crafting thesis statements from history essays, J pushes the packet aside and continues a short story they began the night before. I catch it out of the corner of my eye; as I help another student, J keeps writing, aware that I am watching them refuse the task-at-hand. Thus, the scene becomes a quiet invitation—and my seeing becomes my own decision-point: whether to translate their divergence into correction (and restart the compliance loop), or to refuse that reflex and let their refusal stand as a different kind of work. At the end of class, J does not turn in a thesis; when asked to rotate papers, they continue drafting their story. Read through crip theory, this is not absence but presence on different terms: an epistemic refusal. And I want to be careful here not to over-interpret motive or “solve” J: perhaps they are simply immersed in their story, perhaps disinterested in the prompt, perhaps seeking a different tempo of thought. But that is precisely the point; refusal is not only a sign to be decoded. It can also be access as self-authored livability/learning, the enlivening of attention through one's own interest rather than coerced presentation of learning.

As J keeps writing, they are not simply off task; they are composing a winding notion of interaction and affect: pieces of creative writing that they later let me read with consent. In refusing the thesis drill and its one-sentence condensations of historical reason-making, moreover, J refuses the classroom's epistemic productivity and the argumentative-bent of normative historical epistemologies: the demand for linear causality, determinate conclusions, and neatly ordered directionality. Against normative classrooms built on compulsory able-bodiedness as the natural order (McRuer, 2006; Kafer, 2013), J enacts a cripistemic impulse and a crippled time, which “is flex time not just expanded but exploded... bending the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds,” explicitly challenging normative expectations of historical epistemic productivity and normativity (Kafer, 2013, p. 27). Their stories' drifts resist the seduction of argumentative narrative and reductive historical logics, inhabiting the “ontologically... perverse [where] possibilities become imaginable” (Campbell, 2009, p. 170) as an epistemic method rather than a deficit. Put differently, J's refusal that enlivens their writing-otherwise does not abandon thinking; it relocates the normative notions of thinking outside the constitutive scripts of the history classroom and its assignments, opening more diffusive, non-determinative ways of noticing, relating, and making worlds. And while this may not be an intentional redesign, it still matters: by refusing the “objective, functional” version of accessibility that “experts, ergonomists, social scientists, architects, product designers, and policymakers claimed expertise about” (Hamraie, 2017, p. 5), J's self-authored work unsettles who gets to define access and what counts as legitimate engagement.

At the same time, J's gesture destitutes the micro-apparatuses that equate learning with quick, legible assertions that are normatively productive—and it places a similar demand on me. Agamben (2014) names this the “inoperativity of man,” the task of “making human works and productions inoperative, opening them to a new possible use” (p. 69). By not supplying the thesis on cue, J shifts from rule to use: “use becomes a form-of-life... not [that] destroys, but uses” (Agamben, 2014, p. 68). For the span of the drill, J vacates the classroom's compliance circuit epistemically and politically, composing a fleeting micro-TAZ: “liberat[ing] an area (of time... of imagination) and then dissolv[ing]” that space when no longer needed (Bey, 1991, pp. 99). Crucially, this is not mere negation or a refusal of accessible terrains; J's embodiment and intellectual work is prefigurative, and my response either cooperates with that prefiguration or collapses it back into compliance. If “means must be consonant with ends... one cannot create

freedom through authoritarian means” (Graeber, 2004, p. 4). In my classroom, then, J desists the thesis-writing activity not as a refusal of learning but as a livable terrain of aberrant possibilities epistemically and politically. By destituting the power operations of the classroom, normatively understood through efficiency and authority-ridden claims (Smith et al., 2022; Wilder et al., 2007), J embodies a consent-based, imaginative, non-determinative, non-argumentative, and livable access-otherwise for historical interrogation and academic spaces (Boggs, 1977). Rather than route them through an FBA to restore authority or compliance (or redirect their work via an IEP), a crippled and anarchic stance would treat their writing as access-otherwise: an enflashed point of “accessible public cultures we might yet inhabit” (McRuer, 2006, p. 35; Tuck, 2009). In this light, the thesis refusal is both an unworking of the legibility machine and a rehearsal of crippled timespaces where epistemic and political possibilities overflow the coherent boundaries of the classroom.

### **Near-ness: M’s Participatory Refusal**

Moving from J’s thesis refusal and epistemic break, where pace and form were unhooked from institutional and normative legibility (Scott, 1999), the next scene pivots from what counts as acceptable work epistemically to the enforced modes and relations that it produces/maintains. Put differently, this vignette grapples with how a student refuses assigned tasks altogether: edging themselves out of the shared learning space and turning instead to unrelated work that more fully holds their interest.

Group work begins in one of my classes. I ask each group to build a timeline of the French Revolution without technology or my help; I want to see what they remember and what they judge as politically important to the development of social movements. As the room settles into collaborative work, M slides their desk to the edge, opens their computer, and begins doing something else. When I pass by, I see them “min-maxing” a tabletop role-playing game (TTRPG) character, shifting stats and traits to optimize their build. Halfway through, M looks up and tells the group across from them that their timeline should probably include the Seven Years’ War as a precursor to civil unrest, then returns to their character sheet.

Read through *crip analytics*, M’s stance is not simply disengagement; it is presence without capture. Their participation is consent-based and intermittent: relational when they choose to speak, and equally consent-based in non-relation when they remain adjacent to the group task yet divorced from it intentionally. Moreover, I want to resist turning M into an object of interpretation, because whatever is animating their refusal is not saturable; their reasons are partial, shifting, and not mine to name or condone. However, this precisely enlivens the analytic wager that I am trying to sustain; refusal need not be intentional resistance (or even productive) to function as access. In classrooms where engagement is too often indexed by visible compliance (proximity, eye contact, talk, shared materials, on-task posture), M’s choice to enliven attention through their own interest unsettles the assumption that learning must appear through the prescribed social form or that valuable learning happens under prescriptive lenses. Their min-maxing is not a substitute for knowing; it is a way of holding cognition and affect on livable terms while keeping the door open when/if they decide to enter it (as their Seven Years’ War interjection makes plain). In other words, M’s refusal of the group script does not suspend analysis; it relocates analysis onto consent-based terms—relation by consent when they speak and non-relation by consent when they do not or when they refuse work entirely.

This matters in a classroom organized around compulsory able-body-mindedness, where able-body-mindedness “masquerades as a nonidentity” (McRuer, 2006, p. 1) and coerced social productivity is treated as natural evidence of learning. M’s orbit asserts a right to opacity: “not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity” (Glissant, 1997, p. 190) and resonates with Yergeau’s (2018) account of autistic life as authoring itself. As they put it, “Autistic stories are interrelational, even if that interrelationality does not extend toward allistics, or even humans more generally” (p. 24), clarifying that participation can be relational on one’s own terms and that choosing non-relation can be an authorial mode of presence/becoming rather than a lack (that refusal of learning itself may also be a valid onto-episteme to avoid epistemic limitation or homogenization). Here, M’s near-ness is the fertile insistence: they remain in the room, adjacent to the collective task, and they enter relation at the moment and in the manner they choose.

An anarchic vantage clarifies how this refusal is also a call placed on the teacher. M’s quiet non-relationality calls toward my own response: I can restart the participation economy (redirect, discipline, document), or I can refuse the reflex to restore legibility and instead treat adjacency, opacity, and intermittent contribution as viable participation. In other words, using Agamben’s (2014) terms and by sustaining such refusal, we work to render inoperative the micro-machine that couples enforced participation to productivity and cognition to eye contact, speech, and proximity; it is a “withdraw[al]... disappear[ance]” from coerced affiliation without abandoning more diffuse cognitive life (Bey, 1991, p. 100). Crucially, this is not retreat from the classroom so much as a prefiguration of othered classrooms: ends (livable, disabled access) held consonant with means (noncoercion, opacity, nonrelation), sketching access-otherwise that authorizes both consensual relationality and consensual non-relationality (Boggs, 1977; Graeber, 2004).

### **Against Legibility: S Remonstrates Learning**

Following M’s access-otherwise, the next vignette returns to an example I briefly named in the introduction. Here, the question is not only whether a student participates, but through what medium participation and intelligibility are permitted to count: how thought must be structured to remain normatively legible in educational spaces (Scott, 1999). During a lecture, S refuses to complete my assigned sheet of critical-thinking notes and instead draws a comic-strip rendition of the historical narrative as I speak. In educational spaces built of “steep steps,” where objectivity and legibility have long been used “to count or diagnose or prescribe modes or literacies” (Dolmage, 2017, pp. 1, 100), textual coherence is installed as the default evidence of thinking. S’s comic interrupts that default. By representing sense-making outside of text, outside of normative language, S places pressure upon the classroom’s determinable access points and exposes how viable participation is often secured through a narrow channel of legible production. The comic-based response S enlivens, moreover, is criptic: a semiotic access-otherwise that opens “a curb cut... a necessary openness to . . . accessible public cultures we might yet inhabit” (McRuer, 2006, p. 35).

Read through criptic frames, then, S is not simply being creative; they are also refusing inclusion-as-normalization: “inclusive normalisation... a somewhat spurious claim” that aims to make the autistic less freakish/aberrant (Yergeau, 2018, p. 109). The refusal, moreover, is specific: they decline the managerial demand that thinking must look like orderly text in my template, under my pacing, in my sanctioned genre of legibility. What appears, instead, is a crippled semiotic claim; this is how understanding registers otherwise—without asking permission from the classroom’s

dominant forms of literacy/legibility. But the refusal is not S's alone. The scene also drafts me, as the teacher, into a choice: whether I am going to enforce note-taking economies or engage as a co-conspirator to loosen the classroom's terms of intelligibility by letting the comic stand as the work (to be negotiated as epistemically valuable). As the teacher, moreover, the refusal calls toward the community/the collective as well; I can tighten the room around legible participation, making/maintaining the template the measure of attention, or I can widen the channel, treating this medium-shift as a valid way of thinking that does not need to be converted into legible text to count.

An anarchic read sharpens what is happening to the apparatus itself. S's sketch destitutes the note-taking machine that equates attention with obedient inscription (Agamben, 2014): it shifts from rule to use: "the fundamental concepts of politics are no longer production and praxis, but inoperativity and use" (Agamben, 2014, p. 67; Agamben, 2016), a move that "render[s] inoperative the biological, economic, and social operations... opening them to a new possible use" (Agamben, 2014, p. 70). In this register, S's page becomes a small liberated timespace, resonant with Bey's (1991) sense of a temporary autonomous zone: "a guerilla operation which liberates" without directly confronting the State (p. 99). Where access is too often pre-scriptive, where note-taking normalizes semiotic expression and epistemic coherence in modes of normative legibility (Hamraie, 2017), S's drawing dis-authors access-otherwise by altering the analytic medium itself while retaining rigorous sense-making.

At the same time, it matters that S is still, in a way, "with" my lecture: they do not abandon the historical narrative so much as rework it. That co-presence is one livable pathway, but it is not the only refusal available. Other crippled livabilities might refuse note-taking altogether, refuse the lecture's tempo, refuse the demand to track the same narrative at the same time, or refuse visibility itself; each opening presents different and possible positionalities of access-otherwise that a crippled classroom might be able to hold. Taken together with the earlier scenes, these vignettes function as radical distensions of normative classroom behavior and work: dis-engagements rather than coerced participation (Yergeau, 2018); image-based semiotic expression rather than compulsory text (Campbell, 2009); tempos and formats that refuse capture while still sustaining critical thought (Kafer, 2013). Each refusal unworks obedience-machineries and prefigures classrooms where opacity, non-coercion, and multimodal analysis are livable and imaginative.

### **Fugitive Presence: T Breathes**

Finally, the last vignette challenges a normative assumption that often goes unnamed, that access depends on full spatial and corporeal presence: being wholly in the room, wholly on task, and continuously available for capture (Hamraie & Fritsch, 2019). During a lesson, T drags a chair into the hallway and sits in the doorway, their body more outside the classroom than within it. From this threshold, they occupy two spaces at once: the classroom's sanctioned learning space and the corridor's passing traffic consisting of friends, fragments of other lessons, the custodial cart's slow roll. When I circulate, they raise their hand when they need help. Sometimes they ask about a drafted paragraph; other times they lean back into the hall to chat before writing again. The doorway becomes a negotiated border, diffuse, revocable, and consent-based, where T decides how and when they present themselves, how and when they take up space. Rather than remaining-in-place, T subtracts themselves from the obedience loop while staying close enough to re-enter on negotiated terms. In doing so, they challenge the precondition that participation must be

continuous, spatially determinate, and visibly/materially present at all times in order to count as learning.

Agamben (2014) gives language to this crippled livability: “In the moment that the form-of-life constitutes itself, it deactivates and renders inoperative not only all the individual forms of life, but first of all the dispositif that separates bare life from life” (pp. 73-74). In other words, this is not flight from learning/becoming, but a step aside from the circuitry that equates learning with obedient presence in a classroom space. As Hostis (2020) puts it, moreover, T’s destituent move “does not oppose the institution... it neutralizes it, empties it of its substance, then steps to the side and watches it expire” (p. 11). Remaining in the doorjamb, T refuses the sovereign demand to be fully in and fully on (Harney & Moten, 2013), creating a fugitive space that both refuses and imagines otherwise. Borrowing Harney and Moten (2013), T remains in but not of the classroom (p. 101). That “not of” is not just a metaphor; it names a material re-routing of relation and time. The hall runs on a vernacular order, quick favors, whispered updates, and mutual aid, and this matters (Kropotkin, 1976). It offers a different sociality and tempo alongside the lesson’s normative, coercive rhythms. It offers a parallel lifeworld whose logics of presence and participation are not governed by the classroom’s demands for continuous legibility.

Scott’s (2012) account of “petty acts of refusal” clarifies what such thresholding does politically. Multiplied, these gestures do not announce themselves as revolution; they accumulate as friction, small evasions that quietly undo the fantasy of smooth governance (pp. 7-8). From an anarchic vantage, then, T is not trying to win power in the room so much as to interrupt, at least temporarily and partially, the coercive claim that educational productivity must be continuous, spatially determinative, coerced, and surveilled (Graeber, 2004). What emerges, flickering in and out, is a micro-zone of consent-based participation: T chooses when to lean in, when to lean out, when to hand a page across the doorjamb, when to ignore the room’s temporality. The doorway is not an escape hatch; it is an immanent practice of use/non-use that makes space livable without asking permission: a local destitution of the productivity mandate whose strength is precisely its partiality and opacity (Agamben, 2016; Glissant, 1997). And I am implicated too: I can drag them back into the room’s script, or I can shift the script toward the threshold and meet them where learning is already happening on different terms.

Placed alongside the earlier scenes, this threshold liminality clarifies how each refusal activates a different axis of access-otherwise. J’s refusal of thesis writing reframes epistemic/temporal access: consent-paced, non-determinative composition that resists thesis-on-cue and argumentative condensation (Campbell, 2009; Kafer, 2013; McRuer, 2006). M’s refusal of groupwork and coerced relationality reworks relational and non-relational access: presence without capture, the right to opacity, and relation by consent (Glissant, 1997; Yergeau, 2018). S’s refusal of textual note-taking embodies a semiotic/modal access: image as analysis that refuses compulsory text while sustaining rigorous sense-making (Agamben, 2014; Hamraie, 2017; McRuer, 2006; Yergeau, 2018). And T’s refusal of full participation and presence asserts a spatial access-otherwise: thresholded, intermittent visibility that destitutes presence-as-surveillance (Agamben, 2014; Bey, 1991; Harney & Moten, 2013; Scott, 2012). Taken together, these refusals are not only refusals of obedience machineries but also prefigurative practices where ends and means align (Boggs, 1977; Graeber, 2004), replacing attendance-as-legibility with livable, crippled timespaces in which thinking ripens, appears by consent, takes the form it *dis-sire*<sup>4</sup>, and occupies the spaces it can breathe; here, even non-participation is access-otherwise.

Across these four scenes, refusal is not the absence of learning but the design of conditions under which learning/becoming are made multiplicitous and livable: storied drafting, consent-

based relationality and nonrelation, multimodal sense-making, and thresholded presence. These practices puncture the classroom's demand for legibility and make room for access-otherwise. The vignettes refuse coerced visibility and instead stage opacity, adjacency, and othered meaning-making as legitimate ways of accessing an educative spacetime. They also move beyond reformatory impulses that preserve a coherent context of legible productivity toward abolitionist invocations (Moten, 2013; Ulaş & Seçer, 2024): these refusals are not fixes to the old order but exits from its obedience-machineries. Read together, they ask us to understand—and deliberately dis-understand—“access” as a normative demand for legible productivity, replacing it with access-otherwise that must be continually enlivened and enfolded by crippled mindbodies: lived tempos, bodies-in-flux, and sense-making practices that remake the very terms on which learning (re)becomes possible or imaginable.

### The Response of the Teacher

My task (the teacher's pedagogical invocation), as the vignettes made plain, is not to restart the machinery of legibility when it stalls but to refuse the operability of its disciplinary machinations, to step out of the circuitry that would convert each moment into evidence of compliance (Smith et al., 2022). When S sketched a comic instead of completing my lecture-note template, I refused the impulse to correct them and asked what the drawing helped them notice. When T settled in the doorjamb of our classroom, I did not call them back into the room coercively but altered my circulation so the threshold became part of the lesson's livable geography. When J drafted their own fiction during a thesis drill, I read what they offered me with consent and responded in-medium, giving feedback on character depth and narrative cohesion. Each scene placed me under an obvious and visceral disciplinary pull: to become the teacher-judge, reassert access as normative behavior and thought, assign or deduct participation points, and generate the paperwork that proves instruction as uniform, efficient, and effective. Foucault (1998) describes such regimes as juridical: an instance that “judge[s] immediately, and without appeal,” possessing “its own instruments of punishment, and use[s] them as it [sees] fit” (p. 266). In other words, the teacher is normatively coerced to perform that ritual, translating living, aberrant work into examinable traces that feed ranking, tracking, diagnosis, discipline, and remediation. Refusing the ritual, moreover, is not an abdication of teaching; it is a crippling of curricula and pedagogy otherwise.

Refusal, then, is not passivity or abeyance; it is not ignorance or idleness. It is a practice of making the apparatus of normative discipline/coercion inoperative. As Agamben (2014) writes, “Inoperativity... coincides completely and constitutively with... destitution, with living a life. And this destitution is the coming politics” (p. 74). What we, in the classroom, are allowing to breathe is a deactivation (a destitution) of the link between embodiment and coercion (Piepznar-Samarasinha, 2018, p. 24): recognizing a student's mode of presence without forcing it into a sanctioned, disciplined form. Agamben's (2014) grammar sharpens the point through the deponent verbs that cannot properly be called active or passive (p. 71), offering language for a pedagogical stance that refuses the binary of compliant activity or inert passivity i.e., presence as use rather than capture (Agamben, 2016). Teaching that refuses to enforce participation is deliberate non-cooperation with obedience machines. In practice, this looks like treating students' onto-epistemic mutations and tempos as livable and viable.

But refusal is not only something a student does. It is often relational: an address, a call, a pressure on the teacher to renegotiate the conditions under which learning is supposed to appear. A comic is not merely an alternative product; it is also a demand that I loosen the script that installs text as the privileged evidence of thought (Dolmage, 2017). A desk at the edge of the group is not only absence; it is a refusal of compelled relationality and/or a claim to opacity (Glissant, 1997; Yergeau, 2018). A doorjamb is not only spatial drift; it is a critique of presence-as-surveillance and a request, sometimes quiet, sometimes acute, for different proximities or to enliven othered spaces beyond the demonstrably educative. At the same time, however, refusal is not automatically virtuous or universally enabling. Some refusals are generative and prefigurative; some are protective withdrawals; some are anti-educational in the most literal sense: interruptions that break the bind of the educative as constitutive, refusing not merely this task but the demand to be formed in advance by the institution's terms. A student may choose to sleep, daydream, or go blank. That, too, can be an access-gesture: exhaustion, overwhelm, shame, boredom, hunger, dysregulation, or the felt impossibility of the task might make refusal the only breathable option. It may also be a sign that the student does not yet have the confidence, tools, or scaffolds to enter the work. In those cases, honoring refusal cannot mean abandoning the student to the consequences of institutional sorting; it means taking refusal seriously as information about livability and as a prompt for pedagogical redesign, altering the conditions of entry, the forms of support, the acceptable media of response, and the timelines of demonstration.

This is where the difference between reframing refusal and reproducing low expectations matters. The point is not to romanticize disengagement or to treat marginalization as determinate. It is to refuse particular normative solutions that have reliably intensified harm for those already most governed (Annamma et al., 2013; Annamma & Morrison, 2018). Even more so, there are also risks to such refusal: risks to the teacher and risks to students. For the teacher, standards, pacing guides, learning-management systems, and grading schemas interlock to position teachers as coordinators of visibility and output (Foucault, 1982; Taubman, 2009); the pressure is to keep the uninterrupted examination humming across a term, producing comparable data on schedule (Williamson, 2016). As Biesta (2010) argues, "The technical-managerial approach to accountability can in no way be reconciled with an approach in which responsibility is central" (p. 72). Responsibility here is risk-bearing judgment—ethical response-ability to students and to education's purposes - rather than compliance with preset indicators and audit trails (Biesta, 2013). But responsibility must still remain intelligible enough to survive institutional scrutiny: parents who read opacity as avoidance, administrators who request participation metrics, and colleagues who expect uniform deliverables (Williamson, 2016). The call I am making, therefore, to teachers more broadly is to prefigure different arrangements without leaving students to navigate risk alone.

On the other hand, for students, the risks are concrete and uneven. Refusal can be converted into discipline referrals, deficit narratives, special education paperwork, "behavior plans," lowered grades, exclusion from advanced tracks, and intensified surveillance; it can become a durable institutional story about who a student is allowed to be (Yergeau, 2018). Those consequences do not land evenly across race, disability, gender, and class; they often compound existing exposure to punishment and misrecognition (Annamma et al., 2013). A justice-minded pedagogy cannot treat refusal as costless freedom while quietly allowing institutions to extract its costs from the most vulnerable populations without intervention. This is why deliberation matters, not as a call for compliance, but as a practice of informed, collective risk-navigation. In practice, this means naming consequence structures plainly (without threat), building consent-gates, and developing protective forms of documentation and/or falsification that preserve students' work without

surrendering them to capture (Tuck, 2009). Sometimes it also means subversive action: crafting cover stories and portfolios that satisfy institutional demands without exposing students' livable practices as evidence against them (McRuer, 2006; Yergeau, 2018).

In this light, refusal is also a refusal to become a diagnostic instrument (Klug et al., 2013). In each vignette, I could have morphed into evaluator, clinician, and manager at once: naming the behavior, imputing a function, prescribing an intervention, and recording compliance (Daliri-Ngametua et al., 2022). Such an itinerary is thinkable because students have learned under subject regulation and governing machinations that have “silenced, ignored, berated, infantilized, corrected, scolded, behavior-planned, extinguished, institutionalized, electroshocked, restrained, hog-tied, faux-praised, tasered, secluded, shamed, raped, shaken, hit, teased, studied, molested, laughed at, or murdered” (Yergeau, 2018, p. 83). Cooperation with that itinerary is the maintenance of normalization technologies. Instead, I stay with refusals as coordinations and locutions concerning the environment and educative impossibility/possibility itself. In Arendt's (1958) terms, moreover, public life depends on a space of appearance where we begin anew together; the teacher's refusal is precisely such an initiative: an act that opens a different stage rather than tightening the old script.

Seen this way, the teacher's role in refusal is to refuse in concert with students, to withdraw cooperation from governing technologies such as disciplinary, coercive, compulsive, and corrective technologies, to decline the invitation to translate every aberrance into data in order to sustain normativization (Yergeau, 2018); to protect the right to opacity long enough for other literacies to take hold and to be engaged on their own terms (Glissant, 1997); and to grapple with onto-epistemic wandering without forcing it into a normative choreographies. It is, finally, to vacate the position of gatekeeper so that the spacetime of teaching becomes more porous—to “render inoperative” the hinges that make presence and productivity synonymous (Agamben, 2014, p. 71). What follows is not chaos but a different order of responsibility: a communal stewardship of the conditions under which otheredness can breathe, under which refusal can do its double work, destituting the old terms while prefiguring more livable ones (Boggs, 1977; Kafer, 2013).

### Conclusive Impulses

Normative schooling is remarkably efficient at producing particular kinds of humans—temporally-mediated, compliant, legibly productive—and the machinery that does this work is both onto-epistemic and material. Classrooms are synchronized to dashboards and rubrics, to participation points and punctuality metrics; as Biesta (2010) notes, “This is the particular constellation under which accountability in education currently operates... [an] odd combination of marketized individualism and central control” (p. 56). Layered into this auditable logic is an onto-epistemological injunction that naturalizes compulsory able-bodymindedness. The normative school repeatedly demands that disabled people embody an affirmative answer to the unspoken question: “Yes, but in the end, wouldn't you rather be more like me?” (McRuer, 2006, p. 9). Inside that machinated bind, refusal conventionally appears as dysfunction to be normalized and disciplined. But the vignettes in this article, J's thesis refusal, M's correlative doings, S's lecture-notes refusal, and T's refusal of presence, ask us to see something more radical and more livable: refusal as access-otherwise, the ways othered and aberrant students carve breathable timespaces in environments calibrated against them, insisting that thinking and appearing are non-singularizable, mutational, and aberrant.

Read through crip and anarchic lenses, refusals are not voids of disciplinary lacking but *dis-irous* spacetimes that operate with a double movement: destitution and prefiguration. They unsettle the obedience-machinery of the classroom while sketching more livable relations. As Graeber (2004) writes, “revolutionary action is any collective action which rejects... some form of power or domination and in doing so, reconstitutes social relations... [It] does not necessarily have to aim to topple governments” (p. 45). In classrooms, governance is often mundane, and by refusing such machinations, we demand more livable educative/anti-educative possibilities. Moreover, Agamben (2014) gives the grammar: “destituent power outlines a force that, in its very constitution, deactivates the governmental machine” (p. 65). When a student/teacher refuses the governing epistemic logics of a thesis drill, refuses coerced relationalities, refuses prescribed media of legibility, or refuses compulsory presence, we deactivate the links between presence/productivity and access to educational possibilities long enough for othered literacies, tempos, and livabilities to take hold.

However, that commitment does not erase difficulty. Some refusals are fleeting; some persist. Some signal immersion and world-making; some signal exhaustion, uncertainty, skill gaps, or the felt impossibility of entry. Some refusals can become limiting or harmful and in those cases refusal still calls for response, not abandonment. In other words, the question is not whether refusal is always good/productive/efficient, but how educators respond without defaulting to coercion/compulsion/discipline as the only imaginable form of care. Even more so, compulsion and surveillance have never been reliable solutions to inequity gaps; they more often re-entrench the student in defensive refusals while expanding the institution’s punitive reach (Annamma et al., 2013; Zuboff, 2019). A more just pedagogy treats refusals as a continuous invitation to redesign/undesign the educative, learning supports, and tempo, while keeping expectations tethered to livability rather than obedience.

Finally, refusal is inseparable from risk, and risk is often uneven. Teachers face institutional scrutiny when they loosen legibility regimes; students face discipline, deficit narratives, and escalated surveillance when their refusals are captured and pathologized—risks that intensify across disability, race, gender, and class (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Tuck, 2009). A justice-minded response therefore includes protective work: consent-gates, obfuscation, clear discussions of institutional governing machines, and collective deliberations of possibilities and lines of flight. Disability justice already names the ethic that animates this: “Love in action is when we strategize to create cross-disability access spaces... When we refuse to abandon each other” (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018, p. 78). In this key, refusal is not an exit from community but a demand that community be reconstituted on terms that can hold us in concert without diminishment or coercion. Acting on this analysis requires that educators reframe refusal from obstacle to opportunity and reorganize curricula and institutions around access-otherwise. Concretely, that means challenging coercive discipline machines, refusing to equate coercion with learning, recognizing generative work outside determinative scripts, and co-authoring agreements about use that make learning more livable and that can be revisited as bodies and needs mutate (Agamben, 2016). It also means preparing educators to make destituent moves and urging administrators to protect classroom opacity and flexible timelines rather than entrenching standardization, normalization, and surveilled coercion. What is at stake is that “which cannot be reduced, which is the most perennial guarantee of participation and confluence” (Glissant, 1997, p. 191). In other words, to enliven opacity is to accept refusal as a form of presence—both the unworking of terms that harm and the continuous drafting of more livable terrains.

## Notes

1. I am mutating McRuer's compulsory-able-bodiedness to eschew any separation of the body-mind dichotomy that descends from rationalist thought qua Descartes.
2. Access-otherwise: imaginative and time/space-bending modes of access that recompose classroom "access" around othered ways of knowing/being. Not bolt-on accommodation but crip epistemology/ontology: story-first, image-response, adjacency, opacity, and clock-bending tempos that refuse compulsory able/able-mindedness and prefigure livable study on different terms.
3. Cripistemologies name ways of knowing rooted in disabled/crip embodiments that unsettle normate rationality - valuing opacity, interdependence, and crip time as epistemic resources, and reading refusal, misfit, and noncompliance as knowledge practices rather than deficits.
4. I use dis-sire to name crippled desire as deviation/aberrance, wanting/moving/attaching otherwise. In other words, dis-sire highlights what schooling excludes and how refusal can pull us toward more livable, even anti-educational, counter-productive spaces.

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# Co-Curricular-Making's Lessons: Deweyan *Roominess* Fostering the Needed Sense- Making Terrain for Constructing Educational Possibilities

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PARTICIPANTS IN A FIVE YEAR PROJECT<sup>1</sup> situated on the territory of the Syilx People of the Okanagan Nation are collectively pursuing pathways for designing co-curricular-making experiences that are educatively responsive to the particulars of contexts. Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants include 100+ practicing local school district educators and 140+ prospective educators from the local university teacher education program. Collaborating alongside educators are community partners from the local Indigenous alliance membership with Elders, knowledge-keepers, and cultural institutions, including the art gallery and museums society, directly involved. Together, with a team of researchers from the local university and with additional representatives from teacher education programs across Canada, a shared commitment (in)forms our ongoing efforts toward fostering embodiment of teaching/learning principles and practices, reconceptualizing education in ways that honour local Indigenous histories with pedagogies responsive to the relational connections to land, culture, and understandings of self-in-the-world.

As a research team member, my primary role is to create and sustain the needed experiences and spaces to explore what is entailed for educators and their students to participate in *co-curricular-making*: that is, navigating curricula not as a predetermined guide to follow, but rather as meaning-making learning/unlearning paths that ask educators and their students to adapt, change, and build understandings. These understandings acknowledge that the particulars of place provide the context for (un)decolonized<sup>2</sup> and Indigenized co-curricular pathways. John Dewey's body of work concerning anti-dualisms, including mind versus matter, theory versus practice, and child-centered versus adult-centered education, is turned to for access to language and imagery. Giving expression to Dewey's (1934) term of "roominess," these dualisms bring each other into vital relationship, accessing lived learner/learning significances. The ensuing theorizing, drawing language from and across Dewey's body of work in conversation with varied related theories,

perspectives, and traditions has been key to elucidating the (un)decolonizing significances in-the-making for educators, students, and communities.

To situate this journey, the context nesting this five-year journey is first discussed. Second, unpacking co-curricular-making for educators and their students follows, alongside the needed mode of inquiry to support these efforts. Third, accompanying concepts surface and are experienced as travelling with project participants as educators embrace the co-curricular-making quest. These concepts foreground generative curricular experiences that shape the growing language for participating educators and their students to articulate and embody what responsive curricular enactment orients toward, away from, and why. Kinships with long-held and contemporary Indigenous scholars' perspectives regarding learners/learning are found. These kinships prompt lived understandings of the potential education holds for being in the world well with all others and reorienting education towards individual/collective growth and well-being.

### Context

In British Columbia (B.C.), Canada, the weighty importance of curricular reform efforts has taken on more and more relevance for educators. The B.C. Ministry of Education's (Province of British Columbia, 2020; Province of British Columbia, 2025) curricular emphases on Indigenizing and on the core learner/learning competencies of critical and creative thinking alongside social and emotional considerations, position all educators to consider the concrete negotiation of what these terms might look and feel like within curricular enactment. Nationally, the *Association of Canadian Deans of Education Accord* (2010) formalized Canadian teacher education programs' responsibilities to inform prospective educators about the turbulent history of European colonization and its intergenerational impacts on the Indigenous peoples of Canada. Consequently, faculties of education, adopting the role of allies and aware of limited institutional knowledge, instigated a collaborative stance inviting local and place-based First Nation communities to participate in the conceptualization, development, and integration of academic initiatives focused on recognizing, and in some cases introducing, the diversity of Indigenous cultures and traditions to a new generation of Canadian teachers.

In keeping with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2007), the calls to action of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (2015) places systemic responsibility on Canadian education institutions to recognize and to mobilize local, place-based First Nations ways of knowing and being. Extending beyond B.C., inequities have been made much more visible and tangible through recent local and global happenings, opening the door to world-wide conversations on race, racialization, and racism, and revealing the genocidal legacies of ongoing costs and long-term learner/learning consequences.

For example, participating educators found themselves within contextual milieus confronting the discovery and violence of unmarked local graves at residential school sites, heightening the importance of efforts such as Orange Shirt Day (Orange Shirt Society, n.d.) and embodiment of the national Truth and Reconciliation (2015) calls to action. The coming together of Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour regarding concerns for equity, justice, and associated societal (un)decolonizing changes, as reflected in movements such as Black Lives Matter (Black Lives Matter Foundation, n.d.) and black liberation and Indigenous sovereignty resistance efforts (United States Department of Arts & Culture, n.d.), entered educators' conversations and efforts. Attention to diversities as productive for learning of all kinds, emphasized the role of initiatives

like SOGI 1 2 3 (ARC Foundation, n.d.) revealing how schools and greater communities must be inclusive and safe for students of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

Over the five years of the project, the turmoil of current times increasingly reflected unprecedented global impacts on societies, highlighting the disparities among individuals and nations, importantly implicating how human connection, well-being, and health are intricately tied. For example, the COVID epidemic (World Health Organization, 2026), the ongoing Gaza–Israel and Russia–Ukraine entrenched conflicts with morphing impacts (Centre for Strategic and International Studies, n.d.-a; n.d.-b), alongside climate change, biodiversity, and the dire consequences of ecological imbalance, all became much more commonly understood as urgent shared world matters. So, throughout the conduct of the curricular project, concerns for equity, justice, and associated societal changes were illuminated again and again confronting systemic racism and monolithic thinking that excludes, marginalizes, and harms.

In what follows, the development of theorizing language by participating educators unpacked the curricular ground encountered through orienting education differently. Working alongside practicing educators, curriculum was increasingly reconceptualized as a moving, sense-making journey, interdependent with other(s). Such a movement of thinking was characterized as co-curricular-making, revealing emerging modes of being alongside needed learning conditions and participatory habits. These modes, conditions, and habits insist on “roominess,” Dewey’s (1934) concept revealing lessons learned through seeking the needed space and time for educators, students, and communities to traverse the curricular terrain together, orienting towards individual/collective growth and well-being through co-constructing possibilities. Finding ways for educators to embrace individual/collective sense-making and its ensuing complexities as the productive daily work of co-curricular-making, became the ongoing task. Through varied ongoing professional development forums, participating educators taking up un/decolonizing curricular efforts oriented away from a long history in education of relying on predetermined ways and ‘quick fixes,’ recalling how dangerous and violent such monolithic stances can be.

Greater cognizance of these dire lived consequences was articulated through discounting multiplicities, masking differences as catalysts in coming to know self and others, and thwarting opportunities to learn with and through others’ experiences. The terrain of co-curricular-making was experienced as holding learner/learning possibilities for dismantling patterns of racism and injustice in school and community settings. It was increasingly evident that such practice-engaged efforts emphasized the primary importance of strengthening an embodied language for educators and their students to articulate what they were orienting their practices toward, away from, and why. Thus, participating educators in this project were positioned to concretely confront, negotiate, and explicate the lived terms of co-curricular-making toward long-term commitment to learner/learning significances.

The first year of partnered work with educators emphasized that practice-engaged efforts, taking up the (un)decolonizing challenges and opportunities of delving into what is entailed within co-curricular-making, were a catalyst for sustained embodiment of the associated ways of being. (Un)Decolonizing was entailing attention towards pedagogical stances and beliefs that limit what educators see and respond to in classrooms. Values, assumptions, and beliefs were challenged, moving into more meaningful embodied ways of being and significantly expanding what educators understood to comprise the “co” within co-curricular-making. Over years two and three, participating educators across multiple disciplines and interests shared their co-curricular-making attempts to concretely negotiate responsive pedagogies as (un)decolonizing curricular enactment. In doing so, the intent was to draw attention towards the significances for teachers/teaching and

learners/learning, explicating and inspiring transformation given the particulars of their educative sites/situations. These sharing forums also served as a platform for continued dialogue as educators returned to their classrooms and built on these efforts in their school and community sites. Thus, the discourse structure of sharing forums was intentionally designed to promote continuous communication, foster collaborative participation and relational accountability, ensure substantive guidance and facilitation from local Elders/Knowledge Keepers, and mediate challenges and problems as they arose. Increasingly, over years four and five, a focus on knowledge of local Indigenous laws, customs, protocols and principles that define and inform rights and responsibilities to the land and to culture, provided more and more access to the needed concrete co-curricular-making ways of being and practices for local educators and their students. It was within this place-based approach that potential was glimpsed for transforming the educational landscape, not only locally, but also more broadly, suggesting an operative guiding approach or mode of inquiry.

### **Mode of Inquiry**

From the onset of the curricular project, close researcher attention towards participating educators' varied narratives of curricular enactment, field notes across project experiences, focus group and individual conversations, and artifacts gathered throughout the project from research team, community partners, and educators, served as primary data sources. Ongoing reflexive analysis shaped the scrutiny of these sources, very much informing ways for the project to proceed (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018). The sense-making that took place through reflexive process, unfolded in conversation with each other and through continued engagement. Insights for further enflashing educators' understandings and strengthening the lived consequences were accessed at different times and different paces within recursive (un)learning experiences throughout the project. The recursive relationship between data collection and analysis manifested as reflexivity operated both inductively and deductively throughout. Drawing upon Markham's (2021) reflexive techniques, confronting, negotiating, articulating, and re-considering these evolving understandings incited a shared continual pursuit, valuing participatory flexibility and responsiveness.

Ongoing contact and communication with all involved in the project was key, alongside remaining open to unfolding learning experiences throughout the project. Regular opportunities to examine the evolving data as a research team and alongside all participants elucidated learning significances, furthering mode of inquiry efforts and guiding the process. And, it was attention to process that oriented the direction of thinking away from being imposed to an agency coming from within the unfolding inquiry of engaged participants. Elucidating the curricular terrain encountered was critical to furthering efforts for all participants. To do so, project experiences recursively visited and re-visited this terrain in search of the lived terms of co-curricular-making, encouraging individual and collective dialogical multi-voiced curricular conversations in classrooms, unmasking diversities, concretely practicing the creation of fluid, purposeful learning, negotiating difficult knowledge, and recovering trust, pleasure, and pride within learning engagement. Documenting and explicating accounts/moments in which educators became aware of these lived terms and increasingly attuned to them and reorienting what educators see and concomitantly act upon, formed the ongoing search. Representative accounts vivified the reflexive interchange.

### Co-Curricular-Making's Lived Terms: Accompanying Concepts

Key concepts surfaced and traveled with project participants as these educators embraced the reflexivity within the co-curricular-making quest. These concepts accompanied educators, students, and others entering into such sense-making terrain across disciplines and interests of all kinds. "Travelling concepts" is a term borrowed from Bal (2002) referring to qualities that remain with participants as they journey. Bal states that traveling concepts account for how practice works in theory (p. 15). Over time, educators embraced the lived terms of these accompanying concepts as acquired modes of being, found through being in situation, derived through the act of participation and the making of caring judgements en-route, travelling with participating educators as co-curricular-makers. I concretely witnessed and experienced the significances and the learner/learning powers and possibilities of co-curricular-making as illuminated through accompanying concepts. I would characterize these accompanying concepts as participatory modes of interaction, integral within traversing such curricular terrain.

Seeking to explicate what these modes, conditions, and habits oriented towards and oriented away from, Dewey's (1910; 1916; 1934; 1938) language was put into conversation with additional educational theorists' language, finding kinships with Indigenous scholars' long-held perspectives and prompting lived understandings for all involved. The following concepts became ongoing accompaniments within this individual/collective sense-making, accessing language and imagery that breathed life into the lived terms of co-curricular-making. In varying ways and at different paces, these concepts enlarged and deepened the lived terms for all participating over the five years.

Readers should keep in mind the texture of enlarging and deepening understandings that continually shaped the actual co-curricular-making experience. So, in distinguishing these concepts below, the intent is to surface their presence and role without losing sight of their interdependency and interconnectedness. Representative texts gathered from educators' narratives of curricular enactment, field notes across years of project experiences, focus group and individual conversations, and artifacts gathered throughout the project from research team, partners, and educators, formed a texture that was rich and recursive. These representative texts give voice and vivify images of practice revealed through dominant themes identified as accompanying concepts, portraying their catalytic roles toward creating and sustaining the needed experiences and spaces for co-curricular-making.

#### Vulnerability: Sense-Making as Elemental to Being Human

*I am standing in a circle of over 100 educators on the land, participating in a traditional water ceremony. I want to be there but not sure why or what to expect. The Elder-led ceremony offers important teachings about water as a relative and not a resource. That particular teaching stays with me. The experience of the water ceremony the first year and over continuing years brings me back to water as a relative again and again. I was struggling with how to include Indigenous content into my classroom. I was very fearful of proceeding. Water as a relative was a pathway to examine the challenges our community faces and these paths open into further ones—it goes on and on.*

(Conversation with Participating Educator, 02/06/25)

The accompanying concept of vulnerability was exposed within physiological and cognitive unease of educators' (and, in turn, students') sense-making (Dewey, 1934). Such unease may manifest as a question or wondering, through confronting an entirely foreign idea or perspective, or pursuing an unsettling feeling or stance that troubles what an individual knows (Duckworth, 2006). Such interactive engagement was personal—allowing for intersections with ideas, relations, and connections across multiple accounts (Biesta, 2018); embodied—drawing upon our lived bodily experiences that inform what we see, feel, and respond to (Johnson, 2007); and derived from narratives of experience—recalling prior narratives of experience and shaping narratives of experience ahead (Grumet, 1988). In doing so, as Dewey (1910) claims, curiosities manifest. The ensuing multiplicities encountered by educators through following curiosities incited fertile sense-making terrain. Such terrain assumed human beings interpret and make sense of their worlds through interactive engagement with these found multiplicities.

Many Indigenous scholars since time immemorial have revealed the importance of respecting the vulnerable terrain offered by contextual realities and given places, and the potentialities these hold for varied directions and paths (Archibald, 2008; Battiste, 2013; Cohen, 2001; Hare, 2016; Styres, 2017). The relevance of un/learning from the lands on which participants live and teach was elucidated through heightened visibility and growing awareness of this vulnerability. Drawing on personal narratives of experience and long-held traditions and beliefs, Indigenous scholars relay how it is these relationships that incite challenges to self-understandings, confronting values, assumptions, and beliefs, because “colonial relationships continue to influence the ways individuals and communities define themselves within contemporary contexts” (Styres, 2017, p. 20). Honouring local Indigenous histories with pedagogies responsive to relational connections to land, culture, and understandings of self-in-the-world extended beyond culturally responsive and place-based education discourses and fostered learning contexts that continually grappled with the relational complexities everyone brings to all encounters.

Again and again, the theorizing language gained through making explicit individual/collective values, assumptions, and beliefs, articulated how entering into and living within the vulnerable terrain encountered is necessary for genuine learning. Prejudices surfaced, acknowledging the specifically situated and historically conditioned nature of all understandings. To challenge these, educators were asked to continually situate themselves within such sense-making terrain. A vitality took life that was acknowledged as integral to transformative sense-making, elemental to being human, and fundamental to living itself. It was a vitality that incited curiosities that individuals may not know they ever had or could have envisioned in advance. Through embracing the vulnerable terrain of curricular enactment's multiplicities, interests germinated and catalyzed individual/collective understandings.

### **Trust and Entrust: Sense-Making as Generative, Mindful of What is Given**

*Digging into the 'co' of co-curricular-making has been upsetting, challenging, and invigorating for me. A teaching that provoked me was shared by a local Elder about root digging in a book offered through the project as a curricular resource. It relayed that “digging is so sacred” that the Elder often was moved to tears as her hands touched the ground...feeling connected to her mother, aunts, and grandmothers... “grounded in time*

*and immortality with love for my people and the land” (Okanagan Nation Alliance, 2013). The opportunities to learn about local Indigenous history, culture, and their rootedness to the land has made me look at my surroundings quite differently. Every day I am seeing more and more as the ‘co’ and valuing how important it is for me to listen and attend to all that is there. In doing so, there is a sacredness that I did not meet in teaching [un]til recently. (Conversation with Participating Educator, 04/10/25)*

The accompanying concept of trust insisted on the given particulars within every situation as the necessary starting place for all learning. Putting mindful trust in the strengths, needs, and challenges of participants, context, and content, valued the unfolding contingencies. Collectively, educators came to see that these contingent multiplicities formed what was particular and irreplaceable within each curricular situation (Chambers, 2008). Such seeing/acting was infused with emotional commitment in which learning is not simply an object or concept but permeated by a feeling or attitude that facilitated ongoing participation.

Entering into trusting relationships with learning in these ways insisted on educators’ (and their students’) ongoing mindful attention (Aoki, 2005; Rodgers, 2021; Van Manen, 2015). Dewey (1916) terms such mindfulness as a confidence in process, assuming a fitting organizing dynamic will emerge. The openings for seeing and responding within such an unfolding dynamic arose through building relations among students, teachers, context, and subject matter. It was these relationships that gathered the materials informing curricular paths for intersections and deliberations. And, as these relationships emerged and developed between students and content, it was educators’ and students’ capacities to see, and concomitantly respond in ways that fostered connections, through which curricular enactment came into being. Curriculum then is not applied or imposed as predetermined methods, techniques, or strategies, but rather, unfolded as a mindful knowing in action that can never be fully anticipated. Educators’ attention was drawn to how learning can quickly become calcified without such ongoing trust-building.

The theorizing language gained through educators’ willingness to enter and dwell within the relationships present and already at play in situations, trusts the generative process that sense-making invites. Suggestions unfolded and were negotiated, as paths of inquiry opened up. Dewey (1938) characterizes attending to such openings as forming and informing the materials for sense-making, through attention to the “powers and purposes of those taught” (p. 45). Not to do so, as Dewey points out, would be “to neglect the place of intelligence in the development and control of a living and moving experience” (p. 88). Indigenous scholars have pointed out how these powers and purposes may take multiple forms, but revering and conversing with the given powers and purposes as the materials for sense-making has to be the necessary starting place for all inquiry (Four Arrows, et al., 2010).

Violent human histories speak to the realities of not doing so—seeking to eradicate Indigenous epistemologies by “imposing modern education and Christian evangelism” provides a disturbingly powerful example (Episkew, 2009, p. 5). The dire consequences position the child against the curriculum with no avenues to recognize and cultivate a fitting identity. Battiste (2013) emphasized the persistent costs of colonizing pedagogies that reduce understandings to monolithic, predetermined views, clearly indicating that education is failing Indigenous students and communities. Participating educators grappled with this realization and renewed curricular commitments, considering the consequences for all students when the short and long-term consequences of co-curricular-making conversations are embraced (or are negated) as ways to learn with and through each other.

Consideration was given to how means and consequence or process and product can simultaneously inform each other, rather than alternating or operating distinctively. Educators' attention was drawn to how teaching is quickly severed from notions of curriculum through institutional concerns for compliance, uniformity, and standardization (Pinar, 2009). As educators increasingly entrusted learners/learning, they found themselves continually seeking and building relations and connections across and among students, teachers, and subject matter. And, they confronted how fear of the visibility and tangibility of relational complexities through curricular enactment resulted in curricular enactment that separates form from matter, subject from object, and means from ends, and deliberately "obstructs", "deflects", and "prevents" (Dewey, 1934, p. 132) the needed vital interactions to be gained through trust. Perceiving accordingly entailed educators actively searching alongside a receptive responsiveness. Such mindful curricular enactment generated a continual organizing and reorganizing moving experience, guided by participating educators trusting the anticipation of the whole.

### Connections: Sense-Making Linkages

*I am ashamed to say that I had some knowledge of Indigenous history but without any real sense of the horror of the violence and intergenerational harm that continues. Listening to the accounts face-to-face from residential school survivors and walking through the art installation, the Witness Blanket (Newman, 2013-14) was a day-long awakening for me. Of course, I thought! It makes total sense as human beings that we are all shaped by our narratives of experience. And, these narratives fold into further narratives. My role as an educator is to enable others to make personal learning connections that further more connections. (Conversation with Participating Educator, 04/11/25)*

The accompanying concept of connections is undermined through lack of curricular room for multiple learning linkages. Dewey (1934) explains how such lack of room devalues the roles of *sense, feeling, desire, purpose, knowing, and volition* within curricular enactment, instilling *resistance, disregard, distrust, and fear* as ways to exist (p. 247). Rather, valuing these holistic participatory roles within sense-making of all kinds assumed that to learn about, with, and through other(s) is to create meaning, and concomitantly be created, always turning back on self through reciprocal interactions and modifications. Participating educators experienced that such reciprocal interactions and modifications, caringly connecting self and world, formed curricular matter that very much matters. It was the activity of the meaning-maker, each unique human being having a particular relationship to others, objects, events, and contexts, that converted an activity into an act of expression, holding "...together the various factors and phases of the self" (Dewey, 1934, p. 252). Therefore, all understanding entails connections fostering greater self-understandings.

The theorizing language gained elucidated the role of individuals confronting and engaging understandings of self-in-the-world, valuing the active relations and intersections participants brought to situations. Personal values, assumptions, and beliefs gained greater visibility to self and others. Seeing, hearing, and feeling one's way into thinking instilled a belongingness that was interdependent with situation. And, such sense-making revealed the importance to participating educators of encountering resistance and obstacles as productive. Feeling and interest, fear and hope, disappointment and elation needed to be concretely negotiated within sense-making to value the self-confronting and self-challenging venture (Dewey, 1934, p. 59-60). Living/learning

accordingly took life through the conjuncture of old and new understandings. Turning to contemporary Indigenous scholars, age-old teachings articulate how the evolving sense-making is not simply the workings of an individual's interiority, but rather, is purposefully inclusive of the narratives and reflections of all relations. Styres (2017) recounts that such a developmental, unfolding process of self-formation and discovery is the ongoing task of all learning/living that "locates ourselves in relation to everything we do" (p. 7). Armstrong (1996) explicates how the perception of the self in relation to culture has to do with "the us that is place: the capacity to know we are everything that surrounds us; to experience our humanness in relation to all else and, in consequence, to know how we affect the world around us" (p.465). Battiste (2013) recounts that such a process nourishes learning spirits (p. 16), providing much-needed sustenance for genuine learning opportunities of all kinds.

Through continued co-curricular investment, educators (and their students) experienced such sustenance. Genuine, concerted action was increasingly prompted as participants scrutinized connections and an individual/collective reorganizing movement of thinking manifested through divergent learning processes and products. As multiple perspectives, traditions, and experiences were navigated, more and more confidence was placed in the reorganizing movement concerned with emergence and ongoing development in the pursuit of connections.

### **Temporality: Sense-Making as an Ever-Present Process**

*The traditional stories shared with us offer teachings that I am gifted to share with my students. The story of how food was given tells how differing perspectives contributed to a plan for action. As a participant in the project, the teachings remind me that they hold much wisdom for living/learning now, but that this wisdom is to be found within the current experiential narratives gathered. Over several years of the project, the story of how food was given took varied curricular directions with different groups of students and different community and world concerns and with me, the teacher, a teacher who was increasingly surrendering to the time and space to further these efforts. (Conversation with Participating Educator, 11/17/24).*

Temporality as an accompanying concept embraced every moment as entailing past/present/future interplay. Educators relayed how the multiplicities at play are more apt to be lost or undermined when learning space focuses on physical setting, excluding individuals' perceptions, emotions, and memories as present and infusing all spaces. And, educators further relayed how multiplicities are eroded when time is understood as a commodity that controls and accounts for curricular planning and learning. Rather, Dewey (1934) envisions "space-time" as a temporal movement of past-present-future within all sense-making becoming "a moving force" (p. 38). Attending to this movement of thinking from within the movement itself is "an ever-present process" (Dewey, 1938, p. 50). Delving into the nature of the present that positioned teachers and students to seek the agency of "space-time," spotlighted what the immediate present gathers, what ought to shape the interactions taking place, and why it matters. As educators approached curricular situations with this stance, they understood that there was much already at play. This stance was concomitantly *watchful*—mindful of situation, relations, and action; and *thoughtful*—demanding a presence within the moment, taking in, receiving, and acting as situations called forth—oriented for learners'/learning's sake, deliberately seeking the well-being of students

(Aoki, 1992, p.25). Time became a fluid organizational rhythm to be located within the present. Thus, responsiveness to needs and challenges allowed for multiple paces with varied pauses and rests, alongside a heightened sense of learning satisfaction and pleasure.

Throughout the project, the theorizing language gained by participants positions educators actively structuring what was encountered on a continual basis. Facilitating this ongoing structuring of sense-making surfaced the role of growth within curricular situations as necessarily interdependent with “space-time.” Locating the needed sustenance for learners/learning within the present invested in growing individual/collective sense-making. It is such a turn towards the *contexts* for learning rather than the *causes* of learning that many contemporary theorists reiterate (e.g., Ayers, et al., 2010; Biesta, 2007; Palmer, 1998; Phelan, 2015; Phelan, et al., 2020; Stengel, 1991). In doing so, educators raised cautions experienced through discounting “space-time,” including disconnected and numb learners and learning situations that history and contemporary times repeatedly reveal as being violent to individuals and violent to the world-in-the-making (e.g., Battiste, 2013; Freire, 1970; Jardine, et al., 2006; Kincheloe, 2008; Stengel, 2016). It is the acceptance and surrender to “space-time” that must be heeded through understanding the lived costs of predetermined curricular control closing off opportunities afforded through attention to given multiplicities. Rather, embracing control as direction for learning derived or found through attending to the multiplicities shaping learning as a “moving force,” holds the potential the world keeps avoiding and fearing.

Indigenous scholars world-wide reveal through varied local teachings and perspectives how temporality insists on seeking attunement within situations. Styres (2017) envisions teaching as just such a “storied act [developing] a living text” (p. 180) in which learning with and through experience unfolds through the character of the experience itself. She explicates how embodied connections to the land reflect this dynamic, carrying “the storied footprints or tracks of our ancestors through (re)remembering and (re)cognizing oral traditions, ancient knowledges, and very old pedagogies” (p. 84). Similarly, Archibald (2008) characterizes how storywork takes participants on a circular journey that breaks down barriers and becomes a space and time of individual/collective transformation. Educators’ experience of co-curricular-making became such a storying and re-storying circular journey. Dewey (1934) conveys such circular-sense-making as derived “about, within, without, and through repeated visits” (p. 229). And, indeed, it is the repeated curricular visits that provided recursive temporal windows for educators to envision and occasion the kind of present having “a favorable effect upon the future” (Dewey, 1938, p. 50). These accompanying concepts positioned educators spending more time and concrete practice living/learning within vulnerable (Battiste, 2013), trust-building (Cohen & Chambers, 2021; Donald, 2022), connected conditions (Kerr & Andriotti, 2018; Ng-A-Fook, 2014), while valuing temporality (Cajete, 2015) as opening ways to proceed in classrooms. It is through such attuned curricular enactment that participants gained access to needed modes of being, learning conditions, and participatory habits to reside well together.

### **Co-Curricular-Making's Lessons: The Lived Terms**

Accompanied by the concepts of vulnerability, trust-building, and connection-seeking, increasingly cognizant of temporality, co-curricular-making fostered the needed *roominess* warranted within given situations for sustaining and furthering individual/collective learning growth. Dewey's (1934) notion of *roominess* within learning situations of all kinds assumed

participants are in-touch with context, finding fitting ways to respond accordingly. Such a pedagogical stance understood that the human body is not separate from the mind, nor thinking from feeling, nor individual from social. Rather, such dualistic thinking is nonexistent within the needed reciprocal relationships of what Dewey (1934) terms, “mind-body” (p. 227). Curricular roominess allowed for such reciprocal movement, actively making physical and imaginary room for a multiplicity of suggestions accessed through mind-body multi-sensory mediums of deliberation, intuition, anticipation, natality, and enlarged realizations (Dewey, 1934; Macintyre Latta, 2013). These mediums relied on opportunities to image-forth possibilities valuing human beings as sense-makers—adapting, changing, and building understandings. It was this elemental and formative nature of knowledge-making that enabled co-curricular-making's reconceptualizing efforts.

Increasingly, participating educators experienced curricular enactment as such moving sense-making journeys. In doing so, they grappled with what comprises such co-curricular making journeys, individually and collectively exploring this through concrete practice across disciplines and interests of all kinds. And, such thinking is not new. But, it was often new to educators concerning what it feels and looks like within practice. Again and again, participating educators commented that they were pulled up short by just how attentive they needed to be to all that was unfolding within curricular enactment. The theorizing voices and imagery underway, drew on the work of curricular reconceptualists over the last five decades, and their re-envisioning efforts within the field of curriculum studies (Pinar, 1978; Schubert, 1986), further drawing on age-old philosophers and theorists. Educators found resonance in Pinar's (1978) reflection concerning the use of the term *reconceptualist*, cautioning that it is a “slippery” notion (p. 205); slippery, because the lived terms are interdependent with curricular enactment that embraces the contingencies of multiplicities encountered through knowledge-making discourses. It is such multiplicities that Pinar (2015) identifies in his notion of “complicated curricular conversations,” engaging participants in ongoing “multi-referenced” conversations (p. 11). Pinar (2010) explains how it is persistent institutional neglect of the intellectual quality and character of the curriculum that holds lived consequences that orient curricular enactment very differently. Participating educators were awakened to this slippery slope, attentive to the primacy of multiplicities as always present within all situations. But, concomitantly, needing to be valued as productive givens, catalytic within teaching/learning experiences of all kinds.

It is such ongoing attention to process that continues to be persistently misunderstood within educational institutions and communities worldwide. When the curricular traversing activities themselves were reduced solely to a predetermined approach, strategy, technique, or method, sense-making was not occasioned nor the associated learning opportunities and powers. Such misunderstanding disregards participating educators need to embrace the vulnerable ground encountered, invest in trusting themselves and trusting their students as they navigate this co-curricular terrain seeking connections and its ensuing temporality.

Co-curricular enactment, unfolding as moving sense-making journeys, positioned educators, students, and all involved as active participants, residing and contributing within such movement of thinking. And, it was this capacity for greater awareness or sensitivity to the multiplicities at play that educators alongside their students awakened and cultivated to concomitantly see and act within curricular enactment to further learners and learning. Traversing such moving terrain entailed modes of being and associated habits—investing in sense-making concerned with caring interactions, deliberations, debates, and discernments made within process, taking life and giving expression to the individual/collective movement of thinking that unfolded.

Dewey (1934) describes the sense-making movement as carrying “out beyond ourselves to find ourselves” (p. 195).

It seems such agentic movement was the heart, fueling and vivifying co-curricular-making's engagement. It was this movement insisting that all involved situate themselves in the world again and again that formed the task of co-curricular-making, orienting towards greater individual and collective self-understandings. And, participants importantly gained heightened cognizance of the needed concrete engagement within such co-curricular-making terrain that all involved (including policies and practices) keep betraying and fearing within curricular enactment.

### **Co-Curricular-Making, Prompting Humane Becoming**

Co-curricular-making's significances were brought to life through these accompanying concepts, instilling roominess for sense-making. Collectively, these interdependent participatory modes of interaction initiated the much-needed curricular terrain for educators alongside their students to see and act within the fecundity that transpired, bringing “...curriculum to life...recapture(ing) the creative energy of all life, the aesthetics that exist in being...” (Doll, 2002, p. 34). The fecundity is characterized by Doll (2013) as “rich”, “related”, “recursive” and “rigorous” (p. 215-222). It was through traversing the rich, related, recursive, and rigorous curricular terrain that a lively participatory spirit was incited, seeking ways to proceed for learners/learning derived through the sense-making terrain encountered. Educators found language and imagery reframing education away from competition—good and bad students, teachers, schools, and communities (Apple, 2013); away from imposed top-down controls—monolithic policies, methods, and practices (Biesta, 2013); and, instead, investing within genuine learning experiences that foster strong student identities (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009), growing strong learning cultures (Jardine, 2012; Macintyre Latta, 2018; Macintyre Latta et al., 2025). Educators acknowledged enhanced valuing of the process character of co-curricular-making, translating into greater self-understandings and teaching/learning confidence, alongside heightened awareness of co-curricular-making's potential towards living better in the world with others.

The research literature over the last two decades reveals that the world is only recently awakening to how such sense-making finds kinships with long-held beliefs and modes of being embodied within Indigenous wisdom traditions (Cohen, et al, 2025; Donald, 2019; Four Arrows, et al., 2010; McKinley & Tuhiwai Smith, 2019). World-wide, Indigenous connections to land, culture and the relational self, convey the need for such kinships (Haig-Brown, 2010; Kanu, 2011; Restoule et al, 2013; Styres, 2017), heightening worldly attention to human beings/non-humans/Mother Earth connectedness, and education's roles and responsibilities (Atleo, 2009; Atleo, 2011). The documentation of this project foregrounded co-curricular-making as forming much needed practice ground. The accompanying concepts experienced as participatory modes of interaction, positioned all involved as reciprocally responsible together within situations, holding consequences for the world-in-the-making. Such investment entailed long-term human/non-human well-being in a shared world, productively reframing education locally, nationally, and internationally. Curricular enactment within classrooms, embracing the multiplicities, formed the practice ground that can no longer be ignored. It reframed education away from competition and imposed control and toward individual/collective growth and well-being, exposing the fertile

ground of sense-makings' multiplicities and offering the sustenance the world needs to think and act together, collectively taking seriously ways to live well in the world with all our relations.

In closing, the language and imagery grown over five years opened into a conversation that positioned participating educators to reorient education as envisioned by Leggo (2007) towards hopeful journeys of humane becoming, bringing co-curricular-making to life, again and again (p. 3). To do so, further investment in educators' professional knowledge as co-curricular-makers emphasizes ongoing interrelated and interdependent needs:

To make visible and tangible co-curricular-making efforts with others to enable all of our understandings, and as generative for others and for the greater community

To avail opportunities to share in safe small professional groups co-curricular-making's complexities and challenges, alongside the significances

To grow a language for educators and their students to articulate and embody what co-curricular-making orients practices toward, away from, and why.

The needed curricular practice by educators to invest accordingly needs to be understood as ongoing and as critical. The consequences of lack of concrete practice hold frightening significances for teacher education, professional identity, and the future we are creating. Such frightening significances include initiatives that outsource teacher preparation and evaluation to the private sector; evaluative artifacts that are based on far too simple understandings of education as training, and so encompass set strategies, methods and techniques that ensure measurable outcomes; policies and practices that assume professional identity be understood as skill-based, with little-to-no room for judgment and deliberation; and, curricular mandates where the future is understood to assume a world in which all children and youth need similar skills and capacities, thus emphasizing standards for quality control and vocational port-ability.

If co-curricular-making is not practiced by educators, students, and communities, the makings remain hidden and do not become opportunities to learn from, with, and through others. And, the profession's individual/collective practice navigating co-curricular-making are more likely to be feared and resisted, remaining unfamiliar. This co-curricular-making project revealed otherwise—familiarizing educators with the roomy terrain of co-curricular-making, finding language, imagery, and practice, mobilizing individual/collective investment in a just and sustaining world, and constructing worthwhile possibilities for the children now and for future generations.

## End Notes

1. In part, the writing of this manuscript was supported by research undertaken through a Partnership Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
2. The project brings together Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators working alongside each other. Drawing on the research of Tuck & Yang (2012), decolonization is understood as necessarily including land repatriation. Rodriguez (2020) builds on this notion and asserts that decolonization is for Indigenous people only. Non-Indigenous educators/settlers are urged to consider using the term “uncolonizing” when referring to processes of detaching and disconnecting from colonial vestiges.

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# Dear New Teacher

## A Note on the Power of Love and Praxis in Education

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

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

### A Note About Form: Epistolary Essay

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Conceptualizing Praxis

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

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

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

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

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

### Conceptualizing *Amate Praxis*

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

### *Amate Praxis as Care*

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

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

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

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

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

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

### ***Amate Praxis as Connection***

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

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

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

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

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

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

### ***Amate Praxis* as Political and Pedagogical Action**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## ***Amate Praxis as Hope for a World Not Yet Realized***

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Embrace your Power to Enact *Amate Praxis***

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

With love,  
Kelly

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# Wrong Rocks

## Counterstorying a Curriculum of Erasure in Manahatta/n

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AS CURRICULUM SCHOLARS AND PRACTITIONERS, we seek to disrupt the authority and finality of the settler colonial narrative in New York City (NYC) and the public pedagogy supporting this narrative. In this article we consider how people arrive at, or passively accept, positions about truth in public curricular spaces. Curriculum should provoke students and teachers to question colonial narratives they have long accepted as truth and make “familiar ways of knowing appear strange” (Sabzalian, 2019, p.109), particularly in relation to issues of Indigenous land theft and resulting displacement in what is now NYC. Specifically, we interrogate several monuments on Manahatta/n that perpetuate the myth of the sale of the island, and other monuments that further dysconscious settler colonial narratives regarding the relationship between settlers and Indigenous Nations and Peoples in Lenapehoking, what is now known as parts of New York, New Jersey, eastern Pennsylvania, southern Connecticut and northern Delaware.

Settler centric public curricular spaces, such as those that are part of the celebration of Dutch settlers (NY400, 2024) continue to reproduce settler futurity (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013) in NYC. Millions of New Yorkers, and visitors to the city, consume false narratives that lead to discussions of negotiations with the Lenape instead of accounting for what actually happened—forced removal, which led to “deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part” (United Nations, n.d.), clearly defined by the United Nations and international law as a genocidal act. The monuments in this study are monuments to displacement and are important to examine for what they teach New Yorkers and the millions of visitors to New York each year.

In our study we ask the following research question: What does the public curriculum of place in New York City teach us about the Lenape and other Indigenous People on these Lands, and how might this curriculum of place be counter storied to teach survivance (Vizenor, 2008) of Indigenous Peoples and Lands? We arrive at this research question after engaging in learning with and from instead of about (Sabzalian, 2019) Lenape People. We are thankful for learning with Lenape Center and appreciate the partnerships in both research and curriculum

collaborations we have had with Joe Baker, Hadrien Coumans and Curtis Zunigha. Land based learning with Lenape People and from *Back to Manahatta* (Huntington, 2021a) animated our research and this paper. From the moment we went to learn from the first wrong rock in the video, we discovered more of them—physically in New York, in cyberspace, and in other parts of Lenapehoking such as Philadelphia. The research team has learned with the Lenape Center during events at Teachers College, Mailman School of Public Health, Inwood Hill Park, Indigenous People’s Day in Philadelphia, the Brooklyn Public Library, and through a four years and counting collaboration with Lenape Center and Lenape Elders on curriculum for K12 teachers and the general public in Manahatta. Our team co-lead an American Educational Research Association (AERA) Lenape Land workshop with Joe Baker in Philadelphia and co-taught a course with him. Some have served as co-leaders of land-based learning with Curtis Zunigha in Inwood Hill Park. Most recently members of the team visited with Lenape Elders during filming for a new curriculum in Inwood Hill Park. We continue to learn from this partnership and hope that this research adds to calls for a different public pedagogy in Manahatta and elsewhere in Lenapehoking.

This study examines the public pedagogy (Sandlin, 2010) of monuments in NYC that commemorate stealing of land from the Lenape People and the ‘civilization’ of Indigenous Peoples through policies and assimilative practices such as boarding schools (Child, 1998) and ignorance of history (Pewewardy et al., 2018). Ultimately, each of these practices are mechanisms of genocide in their denial of Lenape presence. As curriculum scholars concerned with the issue of place/s (Chambers, 2008) where curriculum is encountered, we examine the false curriculum found in NYC. Helfenbien and Huddleston (2013) remind us that attention to place is central in curriculum studies because place provides “links between the ideological, social, cultural, and the lived experience” which in turn “forces the scholar to discuss what is materially happening to students and teachers within schools, classrooms, and *other spaces* (italics ours)” (p. 6). Although this study is focused on what public spaces outside of schools teach us about the Lenape and other Indigenous People in NYC, we acknowledge that public schools, universities, and other formal indoor places of education are also often publicly accessible places of learning.

In this study, we are concerned with the public curriculum taught by so many plaques, monuments, and memorials that people passively encounter on a daily basis. These other spaces provide, in neoliberal measurement terms, a dosing of daily hegemonic curriculum. In *Critical Geographies of Education*, Helfenbein (2021) notes that bringing critical geography into discussion with curriculum theory provides “not only a look into what traditional curriculum theorizing would call the null curriculum...but instead introduces the spatio-curricular—the consideration of what is taught where” (p. 35). In this case, what is taught in places that the general public has access to is important to us; monuments in this study tell stories and teach lessons, which Hampton and DeMartini (2017) note are part of the tradition of imperialism, “which has enabled Western Europeans to impose their stories as universal truths...misrepresenting non-Western narratives as fantasies, superstitions and lies” (p. 250). Blu Barnd (2017) reminds us that presentations of spaces are important to everyday learning and interactions and that reclaiming Native space in geographies where colonial narratives persist is crucial since colonial projects “manifest tension over land and space, including in some mundane ways” (p. 8). Blu Barnd further reminds us that all categories of people on lands- Indigenous, arrivant and settler rest on “the relationship between physical presence and belonging,” so we should pay attention to curricular engagements with place and geography because, “dominant settler colonial geographies continually work to submerge indigenous ones” (p. 10).

As a way of suggesting praxis that supports survivance, we then use counterstory (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), to create curriculums of Lenape land back efforts,

making Native Peoples in NYC visible, and framing colonization as an unsettled matter (Huntington, 2021a). Counterstories are necessary to move beyond the power of present colonial imagination, constrained by traditional models of reconciliation (Grande, 2015) which fail because they are “always already conceived through the prior disavowed and misremembered colonization of indigenous lands” (Byrd, 2011, p. xxvi, as cited in Grande, 2015, p. 5). We acknowledge that colonization is ongoing and that Indigeneity is not a historic experience; thus, we teach that survivance and Indigenous futurity are present in Manahatta/n and beyond. To further these ideas of survivance and futurity, we offer the following acknowledgements as a reminder and an integral part of our learning with and from Lenape peoples living in Lenapehoking and beyond.

### Acknowledgments of Lands and Peoples

We acknowledge that we are on unceded, stolen Lenape Lands (Baker et al., 2022) in what is now New York City, where this study took place; and we understand that acknowledgements of land and people are inadequate unless followed up with meaningful action toward honoring treaties and supporting land back efforts. We are thankful to learn about Lenapehoking through relationships at Lenape Center. We have learned through *Lenapehoking: An Anthology* (Baker et al., 2022) and *Never Broken* (Baker & Igoe, 2024); numerous lectures and events virtually and in person; and traveling in Lenapehoking to learn from the work of Lenape artists, Lands, and stories. *Wanishi* [thank you] for your time and generosity. We stand in solidarity with Lenape efforts to get land back for a Center in present-day Inwood Hill Park (Huntington, 2021a) We hope that our interrogations and counter stories support transformation of settler ignorance/innocence of Lenape presence in Manahatta/n into meaningful action, and encourage teachers, teacher educators, and researchers to listen to the Native Peoples on the Land/s that they are on.

### Context

We are situated in Lenapehoking, on the island of Manahatta/n, a region that has been inhabited since time immemorial by the Lenape (Baker et al., 2022). European contact began in the early 17th century, when Dutch and English settlers (Sanderson & Brown, 2007) began the colonization of Lenapehoking, which continues today within the U.S. settler state. Settler colonial frameworks of *terra nullius*, the Doctrine of Discovery, settler futurity, and settler innocence (Calderon, 2014; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013) are used to justify land theft, savagery, and Indigenous erasure. The curriculum of the monuments in this study are viewed daily and enact a public pedagogy for millions in Manahatta/n.

The New York State Department of Education, like many other states in the U.S., has been responsible for thousands of historical markers throughout the state, many of which relate to Native Americans, specifically Lenape treaties or purchase of Land/s (New York State Museum, 2023). These markers were erected beginning in 1926 to mark the 150th anniversary of the Revolutionary War. From their inception, such public markers and monuments have been considered public, government-sponsored curriculum as intended. Over time, the creation and curation of these markers has repeatedly been given over to the Department of Education, and the project as a whole has been labelled within legislation as a long-term educational program (New York State Museum, 2023).

In Lenapehoking, this is evident in how children learn about the Lenape. Wholly absent from school curricula for most of the year, Lenape are introduced during November when

contributions-level (Pewewardy et al., 2018) activities take place. Children walk to school with homemade Lenape diorama projects, using a lesson plan that is more than 20 years old, or have the opportunity to go to a pretend Lenape village to play Indian. These kinds of activities do not challenge the dominant colonial narrative; they reside in the safety zone, where Indigenous presence is allowable only in ways that feel safe for settlers (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002). The result of such a curriculum is that many students and adults in New York City are unaware that the Lenape are still here. Indigenous curriculum content related to sovereignty and land and ongoing Indigenous presence is outside of the settler safety zone and typically not taught (Benally, 2019). This is coupled with a view that sovereignty and Lenape presence is too complicated for children to learn about and perpetuates settler innocence (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013), halting discussion of the troubling history of colonialism, as well as legitimate claims Indigenous nations have to their ancestral Land and sovereignty (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002).

The curricular spaces considered in this study are funded by a variety of public and private sources, and rather than interrogating those sources, we endeavor to inspire educators to go beyond settler-endorsed, hegemonic narratives. The creators of these curricular spaces—historical societies, public and private organizations, and individual donors—all fund the curriculum and mythology taught by these rocks. Their prevailing narratives reinforce settler futurity and perpetuate a false story that the New York City we know today was built upon previously undeveloped Land, and that the Land was fairly acquired from the Lenape through a series of savvy business transactions. Lenape authors and Land activists note this is an intentional mis-history on the part of the settler state (Huntington, 2021b).

King (1991) described such ahistorical narratives as dysconsciousness, an intentional effort by dominant and settler societies to inculcate ignorance and lack of criticality that justify inequity and acceptance of the existing whitestream order as given. King goes on to further describe dysconscious racism as “a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges. It is not the absence of consciousness but an *impaired* consciousness or distorted way of thinking” (King, 1991, p. 135, emphasis in original). It is dysconsciousness that we seek to unsettle in this paper by calling attention to historical inaccuracies in prevailing settler narratives about the savvy purchase and development of Land in what is now New York City. These dysconscious narratives center Indigenous erasure to obscure settlers’ often deceitful and brutal dispossession of Indigenous Land through genocidal acts, intentionally deny Lenape histories and claims to their ancestral home, and justify the settler right to exploit, and develop the Land of Lenapehoking.

## Literature Review

### Public Pedagogy

Our research is centered on educational spaces such as monuments and historic sites encountered by all of us as we move through our daily routines. Public pedagogy refers to the many “forms, processes and sites of education and learning that occur beyond the realm of formal educational institutions” (Sandlin et al., 2011, p. 4). As those living within a settler colonial state, we understand that these spaces impact adults and children in many ways. Sandlin et al. (2011) note that many scholars and educators “believe it is important to focus on public pedagogies because it is at least partially in and through these spaces of learning that our identities are formed” (p. 5).

In addition, public pedagogy deals with spaces that teach us culture. Giroux (2014) asserted that studying culture is important because of its close relationship to knowledge,

power, politics, and agency. Blu Barnd (2017) reminds us that attention to spaces is critical: “space is imbued with power since it is not only hegemonic in conveying a sense of the geography of the nation-state as being ‘common sense’ but it also has been actively utilized in dispossession and disempowerment towards benefit of one group of peoples over another” (p. 13). We often learn about culture through out-of-school spaces. Many of our public spaces are settler spaces; Lybeck (2018) found that settler ideology was the dominant public pedagogy within the state of Minnesota when confronted with public discourse over genocide. Connected to public pedagogy are (a) critical land literacy (Hampton & DeMartini, 2017) to confront settler colonialism in teacher education, as well as (b) land-based education in early childhood spaces (Lees et al., 2021) and in educator professional development (Calderon et al., 2021). Engaging with land-based education can be a new kind of public pedagogy to meaningfully attend to issues of Tribal Land/s, sovereignty, and Native Peoples. Land-based education fosters greater consciousness of Indigenous history, present and future. Sandlin et al. (2011) asserted that public pedagogy is a space of “informal learning, democratic education, and social activism” (p. 339). We situate our work within Sandlin et al.’s ideas of public pedagogy, seeing them as foundational for a critical democracy that takes Tribal sovereignty seriously (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002).

### **Tribal Critical Race Theory**

The use of Brayboy’s (2005) Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) in our data analysis and counterstorying helps center the ways in which settler colonization acts upon Indigenous people through policies and education. In particular, Brayboy posits that “US policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, white supremacy, and a desire for material gain” (p. 429) and that “governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation” (p. 429). Brayboy helps us understand why memorials were placed as part of an assimilation narrative, and supports the idea of counterstorying public curricula to unsettle settler colonial ideologies.

### **Survivance**

Survivance is described by Gerald Vizenor (2008) as an “active sense of Native presence over absence” (p.1) and has been used to frame educational research with Indigenous students in schools (Sabzalian, 2019; Tachine, 2022). Following Vizenor, when we think with the lens of survivance, we center Native presence as we teach and learn. This shifts our curricular thinking away from spaces where Native Peoples are erased, ignored, or seen as victims of settler contact, to a space where stories of “dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy and the legacy of victimry” (Vizenor, 2008, p. 1) are renounced. We center survivance in counter stories and thinking as we seek to use the data collected from these sites not to uphold settler memory (Bruyneel, 2021) but instead to unsettle dominant settler narratives in Manahatta/n. We work towards curricular possibilities that unravel the dysagency of educators (Rogers Stanton, 2014) and highlight survivance of the Lenape and other Indigenous peoples who continue to inhabit the lands where these monuments stand.

## Settler Colonialism

Settler colonialism is different from other kinds of colonization. It is defined as “circumstances where colonizers ‘come to stay’ and establish new political orders for themselves, rather than exploit native labor” (Veracini, 2013, p. 313). As an ongoing project in the United States, settler colonialism is important to connect with the public pedagogy of memorials. The wrong rocks in Manahatta/n were placed by settler colonists from the Peter Minut post of the American Legion and the people of Holland, the Holland Society of New York, and donations from other philanthropists. Settler colonization in America included an acceleration of violence towards Native People in the form of displacement and disease, in addition to direct acts of violence (Hixon, 2013). Settler colonization in America is markedly different from colonization in other places. Veracini (2013) notes that when colonists come to stay, they make demands on the resources of the land/s they are settling, including use of water and resources such as wood and minerals. These are intended outcomes of settler colonialism.

The illegal taking of land from sovereign nations is seen everywhere in what is now the United States. Within our context of Manahatta/n, the myth of the Lenape trading away lands to settlers for beads (Battery Park), trinkets (Inwood Park), or nails and an ax head (Governors Island) is a well-taught settler myth. Baker et al. (2022) explained that despite the wrongness of the settler myth, it continues to pervade colonial narratives in textbooks, art, and film (Huntington, 2021b). For the purposes of this paper, we understand settler colonialism to take place through land theft and genocide (Wolfe, 2006), erasure and elimination through assimilation/inclusion in a democratic imaginary (Temin, 2018), taking of resources and spoiling of lands that lead to disease and displacement (Hixson, 2013), and the many sanctioned acts by the federal government such as termination policies, the Indian Reorganization Act, and urban relocation act (Martinez et al., 2016), all of which continue to impact the Lenape.

## Counterstory

Our use of counterstory (Delgado, 1989) within this project stems from a desire to counter the dominant narrative and instead center marginalized voices and Native presence. In their elaboration of counterstory, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) define counterstory as grounded in narrative expressions drawn directly from the perspective of those being marginalized. They emphasize how stories can be used as tools to combat oppressive systems; in our case we story against settler narratives.

We embrace the idea that counterstory “generates knowledge by looking to those who have been epistemologically marginalized, silenced, and disempowered” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 36). We include Indigenous history and presence as a counter to colonial narratives, and, specifically, the unquestioned, colonial pedagogy of public monuments. The monuments examined in this paper perpetuate what Montecinos (1995) called a master narrative: “A master narrative essentializes and wipes out the complexities and richness of a group’s cultural life . . . . A monovocal account will engender not only stereotyping but also curricular choices that result in representations in which fellow members of a group represented cannot recognize themselves” (pp. 293-294). Nothing better describes the representations of the Lenape and other Native Peoples represented in these monuments.

When looking at the public pedagogy of these spaces, and their historical narratives, we see “majoritarian stories [that] are not often questioned because people do not see them as stories but as ‘natural’ parts of everyday life” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 28). By utilizing counterstory we aim to animate these objects and spaces as teachers of survivance that resist

colonial messages, and counter them with narratives centering the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples upon whose lands they sit. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) described composite counter stories as those which represent a collective storyteller as opposed to a specific individual, and it is this type of counterstory we endeavored to create for the monuments in this study.

### Theoretical Framework

Drawing on TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005), survivance (Vizenor, 2008), the Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model (Pewewardy et al., 2018) and counterstory (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), we structure this study with theories to create a framework that empowers educators to utilize public pedagogy to raise critical consciousness and transform practice (Pewewardy et al., 2018). Tuck & Yang (2012), Wolfe (2006), and Veracini (2013) note that settler colonialism is a system, not an event. The process of settler colonialism establishes the colonists on the lands of Indigenous peoples who use those lands for their own profit. This system continually reestablishes dominance through physical and epistemological violence (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Education within the settler colonial state seeks to eradicate Indigenous language, presence, and culture, both by eliminating it from the curriculum and by deeming it primitive and inferior. Through a lack of attention to place in public pedagogy settler colonialism flourishes as the single narrative. We acknowledge both the “liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized natures” of Native identities (Brayboy, 2005, p. 429) in settler curriculum, as well as the pre-constitutional sovereign status of Native American nations (Bruyneel, 2021), despite past and present failures to honor treaties (Case, 2018).

Counterstory’s power to tell stories of oppressed individuals and groups (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) interacts with public monuments to reveal a curriculum of Indigenous presence over absence (Vizenor, 2008) on the lands stolen from the Lenape and other Native Peoples who are erased or assimilated in public pedagogies of these spaces. In explicating TribalCrit, Brayboy (2005) noted that stories are “real and legitimate sources of data” (p. 430), and in this study we examine the monuments as they are and use counter stories as a palimpsest to unsettle the settler ways of thinking with the reality of Indigenous survivance. As scholars, we bring theory and practice together to promote social change (Pewewardy et al., 2018), agreeing with Brayboy (2005) that “theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change” (p. 430). We acknowledge that there are many literal and metaphorical wrong rocks to turn over and those chosen for this paper represent only a small part of the settler curriculum on these particular stolen lands. We also acknowledge, and seek to utilize, the fact that monuments, and the messages they deliver, often lie within Lomawaima & McCarty’s (2006/2024) Safety Zone Theory, allowing some Indigenous stories to be told, but only in ways that do not threaten settler safety. Using these safe narratives to teach survivance does double duty as a positive practice and a counterbalance to erasure and dysconsciousness.

### Methods

Over the course of the six-month study, we examined sites in NYC, on the islands of Manhatta/n and Paggank (Governors Island) that tell stories of land theft and assimilation or erasure of Indigenous presence. We used logs of our visits alongside photographs taken by the authors and historical photographs as our data, employing a pedagogy of witnessing (Simon, 2014) as we looked at photos, read historical archives about them, and sought to think together

about what witnessing these memorials and their place in both past and present meant. In doing this work we sought to draw out a “pedagogical responsiveness to past sufferings, to a legacy of injustice, disposable lives, and forlorn histories that still wound and implicate our present ... to counter, displace and interrupt what is expected in the here and now” (Di Paolantonio, 2014, p. vii–viii). This meant spending time reading historic accounts from Lenape and learning from and with Lenape People in the present. As pedagogical witnesses, we coded and curated photos and historic markers seeking to “call forth a consideration of what it would mean to act justly with the weight and force of these images as part of one’s consciousness in the present” (Simon, 2014, p. 33). In particular, we saw Lenapehoking as enduring and always already present in the process of coding.

We coded the data for text, context, and subtext in order to find themes. Each of us engaged with the sites in different ways and at different times of the year. For example, we visited Shorakkopoch Rock in what is now called Inwood Park for research in early spring and spent several hours there, and then returned again in June when an event was held at the site. Two members of the research team visited Paggank in summer, fall, winter, and spring and noticed changes in the rock. On one occasion it was decorated with a flag (Appendix A), and more recently (November 2022) the plaque has been removed from the rock (Appendix B). The Schurz Memorial (Appendix C) was visited with the purpose of research and learning in mind three times by one member of the team and two times by another; however, we all encounter this rock frequently as it is close to campus in a space we all engage with often. As pedagogical witnesses, we employed multiple steps including: (a) visiting sites; (b) photographing sites; (c) recording observations of the site and learning the history behind each site; (d) observing interactions with visitors in the present; and (e) grouping the stories of each space into themes we consistently witnessed.

Survivance is at the heart of our methodology and the theory at the center of our thinking as we looked for it in the data. Survivance was one part of a theoretical framework that “conveys the deepest values of the researcher(s) and provides a clearly articulated signpost or lens for how the study will process new knowledge” (Collins & Stockton, 2018, p. 2). We added TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005) as an additional theoretical framework as we talked through the themes of each rock and considered the curricular themes present on/near them currently which highlighted the “liminal” (p. 429) status of Native Americans in history and policies “rooted in imperialism, white supremacy, and a desire for material gain” (p. 429).

We saw in these spaces “stories or narratives told by the ingroup to remind it of its identity in relation to the outgroups, and provide it with a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural” (Delgado, 1989, p. 2412). So, we sought to reimagine the rocks through curricular counterstory as a “tool for exposing, analyzing and challenging majoritarian stories” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32) with stories that centered survivance, an active and ongoing Native presence (Vizenor, 2008) and remembering as we reimagined that “governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous Peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 429). We sought to surface the untold stories of survivance in these spaces and how they might be learned about, and we imagined what these spaces would look like if counter storied for survivance.

## Site Selection

Some sites were selected by the research team as we worked together to find narratives of survivance, “Native presence over absence” (Vizenor, 2008, p. 1) within NYC, and others we learned about from the Lenape Center. The project continues to grow, because we often find additional sites that are beyond the scope of a single paper to address, that share these

same themes. When we looked for narratives of Native presence and absence, we saw it in many spaces. In this paper we look closely at four of these sites: (a) The Carl Schurz Memorial (Appendix C); (b) Governors Island real and virtual rocks (Appendices A, F, and G); (c) Shorakkopoch Rock (Appendix D); and (d) Netherlands Monument (Appendix E).

## Data Analysis

Both as a group and individually, we (a) engaged with study of the curriculum represented in the space/s as they are now, (b) looked at the spaces as they were when the monuments were dedicated to study the histories around their creation and location, and then (c) imagined what a counterstory of survivance would look like in these spaces. We analyzed pictures of monuments and their text, the words were written on them, and the context, where they were placed. We learned more about the Lenape and Indigenous survivance in NYC today from Lenape living in New York City.

Data analysis was conducted over the course of several months through virtual and in person meetings to discuss themes. As we engaged with the photos, words, places, memories, and history of each space, several common themes emerged. These themes were (a) erasure and absence, (b) mis-history, dysconsciousness, ignorance; and (c) assimilation/ ‘civilization’ narrative. For each of our themes, we present findings associated with each pertinent site, so that the connections between the sites and between the themes may be jointly illuminated. After presenting our findings as pedagogical witnesses, we then counterstory several monuments.

## Findings

Our findings are arranged first by theme and then by location, providing descriptions of each site within its own context and allowing for themes to resonate across contexts. We discuss each finding: 1) erasure and absence; 2) mis-history, dysconsciousness, and ignorance; and 3) assimilation/civilization narrative within the public pedagogy of the physical and digital monuments. We then think with survivance in each counterstory, imagining an otherwise and encouraging educators to do so as well, offering examples of how to highlight Indigenous presence in Lenapehoking.

### Erasure and Absence: Inwood Park

The engraved plaque at Shorakkopoch Rock uses the language of lasting (O’Brien, 2010). The text claims that the tulip tree that once stood in this exact spot was “the last living link” between the Dutch and the Lenape (Appendix D). The plaque’s duplicitous rhetoric insinuates both a genealogical and geographical end of Indigenous peoples on Manahatta/n. Additionally, quantifying markers are embedded in the engraving message that detail measurements for the tulip tree’s height, girth, and life-span (280 years). The settler narrative on the plaque reinforces qualifying and quantifying misinformation. This may cause the observer to visually imagine the presence of a gigantic tulip tree that once lived. Moreover, a metaphorical Lenape erasure emerges, by pairing the dying tulip tree with a long-gone Principal Manhattan Indian Village (Appendix D).

Park visitors are meant to interpret the plaque as the exact site of the last living link or communication between Native and Settler. Thus, it colonizes a public schema and neighborhood by inscribing the life and death of an indigenous nation along with their land/s

to one transactional purchase. Another significant finding was the absence of the Lenape on Shorakkopoch Rock all together. The plaque uses the words Principal Manhattan Indian Village (Appendix D) yet fails to recognize the Lenape. This Dutch settler innocence is cloaked in lasting (O'Brien, 2010) language, the Dutch wanted to persuade future audiences that a credible transaction took place with the most powerful (primary/principal) Indians in the region.

Del Pilar Blanco and Peeren (2013) referred to the 'spectralities' of trauma and memory to describe the process of examining the invisible. They remind us that some phenomena need to be illuminated, particularly those related to collective traumatic memory. The authors suggest that there can be a spectral presence from the past that yearns for examination in the present. Specters of erasure occur when we see the word Indian instead of Lenape in the names of roads, playgrounds, and monuments at Inwood Hill Park. This naming practice attempts to erase Lenape sovereignty and futurity. Shorakkopoch Rock demonstrates that public pedagogy is upholding a mis-history of Lenapehoking and warrants decolonial curricular counterstorying.

### **Erasure and Absence: Governors Island**

Governor's Island, Paggank in Lenape, is a popular destination for recreation, tourism, education, and innovative research in New York Harbor. 22 of the island's 172 acres are a militaristic national monument managed by the National Park Service (National Park Service, n.d.), while the remaining area is maintained by a privately-operated trust. Among other efforts, the trust seeks to revitalize community activity by renovating and leasing former military structures to businesses, academic institutions, and non-profit organizations. The Governor's Island Trust controls the permitting process for any organizations that wish to have a presence on the island, stating that its objective is to "expand opportunities for public participation and engagement" (The Trust for Governors Island, 2023).

Governors Island has experienced a significant public revival in the last decade, promoting relaxation to an ever-increasing audience in a frantically-paced city. Home to two National Park Service (NPS) sites, the island is full of public pedagogy dedicated to its use and expansion by the American military. Under a tree a short distance from Fort Jay was a rock with a plaque that describes the original Lenape inhabitants and their decision to sell Paggank to the Dutch in 1637 for two ax heads, a string of beads and a handful of nails (Appendix A).

Considering that historians largely agree that the Dutch attempted to settle and purchase Governors Island prior to Manhattan, the anachronistic irony of this rock was not lost on the research team. According to this dysconscious settler history, the supposed purchase of Paggank transpired a full 11 years after the mythical purchase of Manahatta/n described on Shorakkopoch Rock. The rock at Governors Island demonstrates Lenape erasure, and NPS and the Trust often leave the Lenape out or refer to them in vague terms when telling the story of Governors Island. In fact, on the date of one visit, the research team was looking for the rock and an NPS ranger at Fort Jay informed us that it did not exist, that they were unaware of any Lenape history on the island. Despite this claim, and the subsequent removal of the plaque, the narrative of the rock lives on digitally through a Governors Island scavenger hunt and as a digital site for Pokémon Go, both of which focus on the settler narrative of the rock (Appendix F).

### **Erasure and Absence: Schurz Memorial**

The Schurz Memorial in particular is a site of erasure; it is not easy to find the Indigenous presence in the memorial, despite Schurz's lasting impact on Native Peoples being one of the main reasons for his memorialization. The only imagery remaining suggests assimilation, and perhaps this is the intent of the memorial's creator—to assimilate the Native person on the monument to such an extent that they are not part of a modern narrative or remembered in history beyond their *primitive* state where they are led by a settler (Appendix C). The boarding schools he supported and promoted were tools of cultural erasure. The erasure at the Schurz monument reframes his role in the boarding schools movement as heroic to the people being erased, when as Lomawaima & McCarty (2006) reminded us, “In order to live properly in the world, [Indigenous] children must be educated in ancient knowledge” (p. 26). Schurz actively sought the erasure of this very knowledge, and the memorial continues to further his mission of Indigenous erasure long after his death.

### **Mis-history, Dysconsciousness, and Ignorance: Governors Island**

Governors Island, the tranquil 172-acre island in New York Harbor (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2021), figures prominently into dysconscious settler histories of the city, as it was the first point of permanent European settlement in the region. Historians acknowledge that the island was named Paggank by the Lenape, who traveled to the island seasonally to gather chestnuts, roots, berries, fruits, shellfish, crustaceans, and other foods (The Public History Project, 2021), yet Lenape presence is largely erased from settler histories of the island once the Dutch make contact (Governors Island, n.d.). Millions of people have visited Governors Island since it became a park in 2005 and have been exposed to a settler myth that is historically inaccurate and gives no space for Lenape futurity. The most common story includes a flawed purchase narrative featuring a shrewd Dutchman who offers ax heads and nails to buy the entire island. The framing of this dysconscious story is not flattering toward the Lenape, offering a paradoxical tale that the island had been purchased fairly, and the Lenape had been out-negotiated by Wouter Van Tiller, then the director of the Dutch West India Company. This settler story forms the foundation and justification for Lenape erasure, centering settler innocence and Indigenous primitivity. Observers are invited to conclude that the land transaction occurred, the Lenape faded away, and the real history of Governors Island began when the Dutch settled the island.

The purchase story of Governors Island contains glaring flaws that do not reconcile with long-held Lenape traditions and customs (Baker et al., 2022). For example, the Dutch and other Europeans assumed that Lenape men were empowered to negotiate Land purchases when it was Lenape women who should have been consulted to approve any diplomatic negotiations. Europeans erroneously believed that the Lenape were signing over ownership of land when no such concept existed in Lenape culture. Land was never treated as a commodity and the concept of selling Land was nonsensical.

Dysconsciousness is evident in the tricentennial monument (Appendix G) on Colonel's Row, celebrating the anniversary of the island's mythical purchase (Baker et al., 2022) with a story about colonial and American military history. The monument reframes campaigns of bellicosity as honorable (Appendix G) The invocation of phrases such as honorably acquired and honorably held (Appendix G) erase the violence of colonial dispossession and American militarism. The term honorable appeals to settler innocence, repainting American military and colonial campaigns as noble efforts to spread progress and civilization. Both stone monuments

are examples of dysconscious storytelling, telling only the history of the island's colonization and militarization.

Settler histories extend to digital spaces on Governors Island. They are woven into public pedagogies of visitor education activities and video gaming spaces. When children attend non-profit NYC Grows teaching garden demonstrations and complete a Governors Island scavenger hunt, they are asked to consider the mythical purchase of the island through a playful lens, imagining what they would do with a whole island all to themselves (Appendix F). Dysconscious settler histories also weave their way into the popular mobile game Pokémon Go (Niantic Inc., 2016) an augmented reality experience where players can gain in-game resources by visiting Pokéstops, locations that include the Purchase of Governors Island and Shorakkopoch (Appendix F).

The Pokéstop continued even after the recent removal of the Governors Island plaque (Appendix F). Digital remnants in a multitude of spaces guarantee the perpetuation of settler colonial histories and narratives about the island. Settler colonial narratives live immortally in digital spaces, such as games (Euteneuer, 2018) from informational blog entries to landmarks in augmented reality games such as Pokémon Go (Niantic Inc., 2016). While formal research on the damaging impact of digital colonial narratives is nascent (Carpenter, 2021), it is clear that they are able to significantly extend the potential reach of Indigenous erasure from the public to private sphere. The internet allows spaces for digital public curriculums whose authority is unchallenged as they appear in search query results or as interactive landmarks in virtual spaces.

### **Mis-history, Dysconsciousness, and Ignorance: Schurz Memorial**

Similarly, at the Schurz memorial, images from popular culture have created an echo of dysconsciousness in digital spaces. The cover of the soundtrack album of The Who's (1979) *The Kids Are Alright* features a photograph of the iconic rock band sleeping in front of the monument (Kane, 1979). PopSpots author Bob Egan (2022) highlights the location and has even published a guidebook that sends pop-culture tourists to the monument because of the connection. The Schurz monument uses the images of Indigenous people to make a case for Schurz as a defender of human rights (Appendix C), but does not acknowledge the fact that it sits on Lenape land. Instead, it teaches a mis-history of honorability, indicating that Schurz liberated Indigenous people (New York State Museum, 2023), when in reality he sought a cost-effective way to assimilate Indigenous People and eliminate Indigenous culture and sovereignty (Heard Museum, 2022).

### **Mis-history, Dysconsciousness, and Ignorance: Battery Park**

The Netherlands Memorial in Battery Park, situated at the southern tip of Manhattan in a park dedicated to Peter Minuit, commemorates the trading of beads through gold gilded lettering and a bas relief in stone depicting a Lenape person seemingly taking beads from a Dutch settler in a friendly exchange for what is now known as Manhattan. The monument highlights wrong history, and serves as representation of an activity “through which nationalism is understood and on which it is dependent” (Blu Barnd, 2017, p. 15); in this case, the sale of Manhattan is part of a national understanding. To clarify, the Lenape did not trade their land for beads (Baker et al., 2022), and the relationship between the Lenape and the Dutch settlers is a curricular narrative of settler innocence (Calderon, 2014) and lack of settler memory (Bruyneel, 2021). This settler innocence begins in the early childhood curriculum

(Templeton & Cheruvu, 2020) and continues in social studies classes through textbooks and other educational materials that still teach the purchase of Manhatta/n as truth.

### **Mis-history, Dysconsciousness, and Ignorance: Inwood Park**

The plaque on Shorakkopoch Rock begins with, “According to Legend, On the Site of This Principal Manhattan Indian Village” (Appendix D). The mis-history begins here, when the observer is not told who the Indians in the village were, thus erasing Lenape as unique people and establishing a national legend which is not discussed in social studies textbooks (Zinn, 2005). Other textbooks describe the problematic relations between the Dutch and Indians (tribe again not specified) in the lower Hudson Valley near New York City, leading to massacres of Indians (Goldfield et al., 1998). The Lenape and the Walking Purchase Treaty of 1737, which greatly impacted Lenape in current-day Pennsylvania, are discussed in Foner (2017), but the land purchase myth taught in public spaces persists. This places the truth of Lenape removal in Manhatta/n in a mundane ghostliness (Del Pilar Blanco & Peeren, 2013), something that is absent but cannot be forgotten because the mythology lingers in these public monuments. At Shorakkopoch Rock, the myth persists in granite and metal, leading readers to believe that with the mythical purchase, settlement of Manhatta/n was complete.

### **Assimilation/Civilization Narrative**

The theme of Native Peoples lacking wisdom and therefore needing to become civilized or assimilate is found throughout all of the rocks and the digital spaces that discuss them. All highlight trivial numbers of nails, ax heads, beads, or trinkets that the Dutch supposedly purchased Manhatta/n for, causing viewers to marvel at the shrewdness of the Dutch, and the ignorance of the Lenape (Huntington, 2021b). In the Schurz Memorial, the narrative of civilizing is found visually, as a European colonist is seen grabbing the wrist of a Native Person and leading them to progress and wisdom, and in words when Schurz is lauded for his support of boarding schools. Settler ignorance is supported and maintained by the public pedagogy of these rocks.

### **Assimilation/Civilization Narrative: Schurz Memorial**

The Schurz monument teaches a narrative of Carl Schurz, and other White colonists, as saviors, saving Indigenous peoples from themselves. During his time in charge of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), he championed the funding of boarding schools, including Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania (Heard Museum, 2022). Schurz conducted a cost-benefit analysis examining the price of boarding schools vs. military action to erase or assimilate Native Peoples and concluded schooling was cheaper than killing all the Native People (Heard Museum, 2022). The monument reinforces several untruths, as the public pedagogy of the monument works against survivance and stays firmly in the contributions stage (Pewewardy et al., 2018) by framing Indigenousness as a state from which a person must be rescued and propping up the power structure of colonization by framing colonists as rescuers and civilizers. The Schurz monument lionizes the colonizer as the bas relief creates a savior story of leading Native Peoples into civilization (Child, 2014; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002) instead of the reality of cultural genocide that took place within boarding schools.

### **Assimilation/Civilization Narrative: Governors Island/Inwood Park/Battery Park**

Governors Island is celebrated as the birthplace of the American settler colonial project. Dutch accounts saying that the land was purchased and therefore owned (Baker et al., 2022) affirm moves to settler innocence (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013) and comfort present-day settlers with the idea that the land legally belongs to them. Affirming the myth of Manahatta/n's purchase, these three monuments brag about that deal by publicly affirming the price paid, a story that is memorialized in textbooks recounting the deal (Huntington, 2021a). The Governors Island tricentennial monument invokes a pernicious side of the civilization narrative when it alludes to the island as the "birthplace of American military tactics" (Appendix G). The monument marks the 300th anniversary of Lenape dispossession engaging in a clear lasting narrative (O'Brien, 2010) that presumes Lenape were removed completely the day that the island was transformed into the launchpad of the American military. The American military played an instrumental role in stealing Indigenous Lands and in the government's campaign to eradicate or forcefully assimilate Indigenous Peoples.

The Netherlands memorial at the southern tip of Manahatta/n in Battery Park purports lawful and peaceful taking of land through purchase with beads/wampum depicted on a stone carving with words engraved in gold. The Dutch wanted to show to those back home that they were taking Land/s through written consent or compensation in a legal way, making an early move to settler innocence (Macoun, 2016; Tuck & Yang, 2012) with these transactions that were not in fact Land cessions (Huntington, 2021a). The monument itself shows a Native person generally, not Lenape, and does not mention the Lenape as a sovereign nation in this trade. Visitors are left to consider how unknowing these Native Peoples must have been to have traded their Lands away, feeding into the uncivilized narrative. No discussion of Lenape Land is present nor is context given for acts that would have stressed the bonds of friendship hailed in the 1926 memorial, such as the construction of walls and forts to keep the Lenape off of their Land. To note, the NYC Parks website notes the "purchase of the island of Manhattan from Native Americans" (NYC Parks, n.d.) in its description of the monument. The narrative of the rock persists in supporting settler innocence describing, arrivals of the settlers and a legal, and unbelievable, claim to the sale of Manahatta/n in 1626 after settlement in 1625. Those who are learning from the monument are left thinking that the Lenape could not have known what they were doing, and the Dutch had made a great deal.

Inwood Park is similarly a site where assimilation takes center stage. From the homogenizing language of Indian Caves, Indian Road, and Indian Playground to the marker presenting itself as the last living link (Appendix D), language urges a monolithic view of Native Peoples and not attention to a unique and sovereign nation. Viewers of the rock see the caves nearby and consider conditions of life for the Lenape without a mention of Lenape technology, farming, government, or language.

### **Counterstories**

Counter stories presented here are designed to interrupt the settler colonial narratives that persist in these spaces. Each is a story combating ignorance, which keeps us from engaging in meaningful decolonial praxis (Pewewardy et al., 2018), and each centers survivance, an active sense of Native presence over absence.

By interrogating our emplaced encounters with these monuments and their curation in this study through pedagogical acts of witnessing (Simon, 2014) and abstraction (Welcome & Thomas, 2021), we problematize settler colonial narratives of their presence and Native

absence and rebut perpetuations of settler oppression and genocide with pedagogies of place rooted in counterstory and survivance. Rather than erase the erasure, as was already done at one of the sites, we suggest that these monuments be used to surface survivance and shed light on the presence and initiatives of the Lenape and other Indigenous peoples on these lands.

### Carl Schurz Monument

The Carl Schurz monument on 116th Street and Morningside Drive occupies a place of prominence at the entrance to Morningside Park and is clearly visible from the main campus quad of Columbia University. Schurz is lionized as a defender of liberty and a friend of human rights on the plaque beneath the imposing statue (Appendix C). Two bas reliefs on either side of the monument seem to portray enslaved African Americans and Indigenous people being taken forcibly; note the way the hand of the Native Person is held onto in the photo (Appendix C) as they are led to civilization by European settler colonists. Schurz also has a park named after him in New York City, reinforcing his position as a person of importance and lending power to the message of this monument.

When a preschool teacher takes his four- and five-year-old students past the Schurz monument (which he does regularly as they go into and out of Morningside Park), the thing they really want to know is why they built a statue of him in this place. They inevitably become curious about this man who towers over us, and he searches for ways to answer them with a counterstory (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) that supports survivance (Vizenor, 2008). The existing public pedagogy of the Schurz monument is unacceptable. At the time of his death the country was immersed in racial beliefs informed by the pseudo-science of eugenics (Kliebard, 2004). The men who built the monument believed that Indigeness could and should be eradicated for the good of the colonizers and the nation they had created on stolen land.

As we analyze public pedagogies, the question of why the monuments are here looms large. Rogers Stanton (2014), highlights the paternalism of the United States government and its individual agents towards Indigenous peoples. Often the government did/does not have their best interests at heart, but rather the “preservation of personal and dominant-culture economic interests” (p. 654). Schurz was a prime example of this way of thinking. Schurz, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, estimated in 1881 that it cost nearly a million dollars to kill an Indian in warfare, while it cost only \$1,200 to enroll an Indian child for eight years of schooling (Heard Museum, 2022). Why is there a statue of this man who favored (for what he saw as pragmatic reasons) “taking the Indian out of the man” (Adams, 1995) and a systematic destruction of Indigenous culture?

So why is this monument here? How can we reach a concrete answer to that question for my young students? The answer begins by explaining that Schurz thought he was doing something good, but it turned out that it was not good; and it was also impossible because of the strength and tenacity of Native people, nations, and cultures, which continue to survive despite the efforts of men like Schurz. This fact alone, *the fact of survivance*, surprises many of his students, as they have already absorbed the master narrative that Indigenous people belong to the past, are primitive, and no longer exist. At the time of Carl Schurz’s death, he explains, when the statue was erected, we were still in an era that believed Indigeness could and should be eradicated for the good of the settler colonizers. This was not true, and is not true, but when he died, many people still thought that it was true.

This is a good beginning, but a counterstory is necessary to truly “challenge the view of the majoritarian by providing alternate realities” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 271). For example, one curricular counterstory to this memorial centers the Native person and their experience, as well as the experiences of the Native children sent to boarding schools to be

assimilated (Child, 1998). Instead of focusing on Schurz as the one who brought ‘civilization’ and progress to Native people, we can imagine the experience from Indigenous perspectives, taking advantage of what is important and relatable to young children. The teacher asks the children to imagine the experience of the child in the bas relief, forcefully taken from their family and transported to a strange place where they were forbidden to speak their own language, eat their own food, or wear their own clothes. This type of curricular counterstory will surely vary according to the age and developmental stage of the children, but engaging both their intellect and imagination is at the heart of the power of narrative, and thus the power of counterstorying. This kind of counterstory pushes against the settler innocence of young children (Templeton & Cheruvu, 2020) by beginning to unsettle their nascent ideas about Native people in the past and present.

Without counterstory, the monument teaches a narrative of Schurz (and thus other White colonists of his era) as saviors, saving Indigenous peoples from themselves. This reinforces several untruths, and in so doing, the public pedagogy of the monument works against survivance and stays firmly in the contributions stage of Pewewardy et al.’s (2018) Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model by framing Indigenousness as a state from which one must be rescued. Such an outlook props up the power structure of colonization by framing colonists as rescuers and civilizers. This is indeed the type of thinking that led to the creation of the boarding school movement in America, which Schurz supported and facilitated. Counterstorying monuments such as this is a necessary tool if we are serious about teaching for survivance and resist the perpetuation of the settler colonial mindset. Young children understand injustice and are exposed to hegemonic settler narratives from birth; therefore, this work can and should begin in early childhood.

### **Paggank Governors Island**

Step off the ferry to Paggank, formerly called Governors Island, and look immediately ahead; at each step you encounter Lenape survivance and futurity. You are welcomed in Lenape by a brightly colored sign that draws your attention to the nearby visitor center, where several smiling teenagers are eagerly conversing with the first wave of visitors off the boat. They are members of the growing Summer Homegoing Youth Initiative (SHYI) in partnership with the Delaware Tribe of Indians, Delaware Nation, and Stockbridge-Munsee Community Lenape tribes that currently sends 85 young Lenape people to Lenapehoking to engage in Land, Water, and climate education efforts throughout the homeland. You are warmly greeted with a “Nulelintàmuhëna èli paèkw!” and receive a points of interest map made by members of the counter-cartography program within the SHYI.

Before heading out to explore, you decide to watch a brief welcome video and notice that it is in Lenape with the option for visitors to select English, Spanish, Dutch, French, and other subtitles as it details a brief history of Paggank’s Land and Water while highlighting points of interest on the island. After the video, you head over to Paggank Forest where you learn about the continued progress to regenerate the land with chestnuts, sweetgum, and other trees that once thrived all over the Island. The city is proud to announce that the first cohort of Lenape youth are near graduation and will soon actively coordinate plant rematriation efforts with the parks department.

Heading on from the urban forest, you arrive at the Lenape and New York City Public Schools’ joint venture at the Harbor School and notice that it is buzzing with the activity of marine scientific efforts like restoring and caring for new oyster reefs around the Island. A first in the city, the school is a collaborative partnership with Lenape Center and features Lenape Land and water centered academic curriculum that specializes in local marine ecology. The

school also partners with the Paggank Climate Center, a globally renowned open research space designed to foster collaboration between Lenape and other ways of knowing and caring for the environment in the spirit of the eight Lenape Laws (Baker et al., 2022). You chat up a SHYI Oyster fellow who enthusiastically directs you to the climate center to see the new Water Stories exhibit, an installation that intertwines student-gathered scientific data with water-centered histories of the area's degradation during the 18th-21st centuries and gradual healing in recent decades.

As you make your way across the island to get to the Center, your attention is drawn to an interesting set of signs along the way. They appear to be historical marker plaques in Lenape and English, each centering one of the eight Lenape Laws. Upon closer inspection, you notice each contains the joyfully scrawled notes of the many children who have visited the Island during school trips and their promises to more actively live each teaching. You eventually pass Fort Jay and stop to read some nearby signs. To interrupt the cycle of erasure, the Lenape requested the preservation of Fort Jay as an educational testament to survivance. All original monuments and markers remain with SHYI counterstory plaques situated next to them with vibrant words that call on settlers to remember and heal from past eras of colonial violence so they are not repeated.

Before reaching the Climate Center, you catch a brief glimpse of the cheerfully-colored tops of the teaching garden, filled with blue corn, squash, beans, and other plants the Lenape are working to rematriate to the Island. You pass several adults and children playing Pokémon Go on their way toward a rock that once held a plaque describing the myth of a peaceful Dutch Paggank land purchase. Lenape Center has been coordinating with SHYI to convert all such colonial markers into virtual educational opportunities for settlers while they play the ever-popular mobile game.

As players navigate the Pokéstops around the island, the intent is that they gain an understanding of stolen Land that was returned and how it is now healing. This counterstory demonstrates how New York City could undertake justice-driven land back efforts with the Lenape without monetary charge or other obligation. Lenape presence is now centered in this story rather than the Governor's Island Trust or National Park Service, providing a survivance-oriented framing that promotes Lenape presence and futurity.

## **Battery Park**

It is a typical day in Battery Park. Commuters scurry and horns honk. People board and disembark ferries to Liberty Island and Ellis Island to learn about settlers who came to stay, while commuters rush to Wall Street to trade money and commodities and hedge bets about where or what the next big thing to invest in will be. No one is thinking about the wall on Wall Street designed to keep the Lenape out of their lands because they cannot see that wall, only the name. Here in the park, on a stone memorial, is an incorrect-looking Lenape man standing and trading Manahatta/n for what appear to be beads or wampum with gold-gilded inscriptions about how this monument represents friendship, as the trade enabled the Dutch to set up ten new farms nearby.

Survivance here is spoken in Lenape; the myth is countered with a sound, coming from a metal grate on the ground near the monument. Each time a step is taken on the grate, "welcome to Lenapehoking" (Delaware Tribe, 2023) is heard in Lenape and English. Thousands of times each day, the repetition of the words, spoken on the Land where they have been spoken since time immemorial, means that all New Yorkers who call themselves native to this place know these Lenape words and the Lenape language despite all attempts at eradication through boarding schools supported by Carl Schurz. When passersby see the gilded

letters of a Dutch settler myth about stealing land, they view them through a palimpsest in front of the memorial, a pillar made of clear material with words laid in black that state each broken treaty, each date of removal, and an inscription stating the purchase of Manahatta/n is a settler myth. The inscription explains the falsehood such that you can hardly see the gold gilded myth when confronted by the art. Around the edges of the pillar, you see Lenape art, Lenape words, and a map showing Lenapehoking. Those who come to stay in Lenapehoking, and tourists who come to explore their settler immigrant roots, encounter survivance as they board a ferry, a subway, or make their way to work or school.

### **Inwood Park**

A group of high school students hop off the 215th street subway station. They walk down Lenape Road alongside a restored marshland. They see signs for the Muhheacanituk, the Lenape name for the Hudson River. Overhead there is a wooden archway welcome sign for Lenape Center, written in Lenape and English. The students are greeted by Lenape Center interns who speak Lenape to all visitors. The Lenape peoples from the diaspora utilize the Center as a place of active Lenape presence in the city, and millions of people have visited since the Center's opening. Inside the center, students find information about NYC ecosystems, Lenape treaties, and interactive digital maps of the past vs. present Lenapehoking Land. Looking through the ceiling skylights, visitors observe stands of tulip trees here since time immemorial (Sanderson, 2009). Adjacent to the Lenape Center are greenhouses for the Lenape seed repatriation project. Students are able to repatriate seedlings into gardens along *Shorakapok* [the wading place], the Lenape name for what is now called Spuyten Duyvil Creek. Counterstorying through botany activism is Lenape survivance, and helps the public learn beyond the Dutch narrative of Shorakkopoch Rock.

Shorakkopoch Rock represents artificial archaeology, utilizing a natural element (a boulder) to create a deceptive landmark and thus a fabricated narrative about Lenapehoking. This survivance counterstory with place-based botany offers a curriculum to learn from the Lenape in Lenapehoking. Consequently, students are prepared to answer a new question on the New York regents' exam: What were/are the consequences of colonization in New York City for the Lenape then and now?

### **Implications for Educators in Formal and Informal Spaces**

These counter stories exemplify the possibilities to learn *from* the Lenape and Native Peoples in Manahatta/n through engaging with their active presence here since time immemorial and by unsettling public pedagogies in these spaces instead of learning *about* them. These spaces offer opportunities to understand the history of settler presence, as well as ongoing Lenape presence. Educators should consider the informal curriculum of settler colonialism that they and their students absorb through historic sites, place names, and memorialized and historicized people(s). Informal/public spaces influence our thinking and learning, whether we encounter them as passersby or visitors. The formal curriculum in schools often reinforces this learning. The purchase of Manahatta/n is prevalent in many books and textbooks used in schools (Huntington, 2021a). Through critical interactions with public pedagogy, this study suggests ways that curriculums of place can be counter storied and teach survivance (Vizenor, 2008).

The Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model (Pewewardy et al., 2018) and Lomawaima and McCarty's (2002) Safety Zone Theory can help educators better understand

education in settler-dominated spaces in and outside of schools. Pewewardy et al.'s (2018) model shows us distinct levels at which we operate as we navigate colonized education spaces, and they observe that many reside at the contributions level, at which Indigenous nations and cultures are viewed through an unreflective, Eurocentric lens of colonization (Pewewardy et al., 2018). This level aligns with the wrong rocks and their stories as given.

Native history, if taught at all, is almost exclusively from a dysconscious, settler lens wherein Indigenous peoples are reduced to artifacts. This approach can be seen as Safety Zone Theory in action, Lomawaima and McCarty (2024) describe how the US government manages Indigeneity through policies and educational practices in ways that are safe for settlers. Equally powerful as educators progress through the Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model toward unsettling practices are the opportunities highlighted in the counter stories for learning that creates Zones of Sovereignty (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2024), which run counter to safety zones and represent spaces where expressions of Indigenous sovereignty are centered.

Teachers and curriculum scholars must work hard to unsettle colonial notions of Indigenous nations and peoples. As with much of this work, there is no neutral approach. In order to teach for survivance, educators can form relationships with Indigenous Peoples and organizations. In New York, teachers wrestle with why their students build longhouses every November, rather than partnering with living Lenape People and engaging in collaborative relationships. Regionally, counterstorying will look different because of many contextual factors. Indigeneity, like education, is not a monolith. Educators can do this work in their own contexts; for example, unsettling would look different in Philadelphia, also part of Lenapehoking. There, instead of Dutch monuments to counterstory there is a legacy of broken treaties such as the Walking Purchase (Baker & Igoe, 2023) and generations of an elm tree, carefully preserved, marking Penn's purchase from the Lenape. When we learn from Lenape Elders in this part of Lenapehoking, we interrogate and seek to unsettle the ever-present imagery of Penn's Treaty With the Indians (West, 1771-1772) a treaty without which the United States would have faced challenges in expansion. Teachers can look to treaties, places, and public art as they work toward an active sense of Native presence and survivance, in and outside of classrooms This encourages students to apply critical thinking as they encounter public pedagogy, which Pewewardy et al. (2018) note is a key practice in diminishing settler ignorance.

Stories are the data (Brayboy, 2005) because they teach our minds how to make meaning of what we do and do not see. Stories told and retold over our lifetimes build our realities. The dysconsciousness of teachers is often unintentional, and we are always learning. Teachers may be hesitant to teach what they do not yet know (Sabzalian, 2019). The ongoing project of settler colonialism, and the curricula that we learn, work to eradicate Indigenous presence, futurity, and claims to Land/s that were wrongfully stolen (Calderon, 2014; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013). Because settler narratives inculcate dysconsciousness in students, teachers, and teacher educators, the work of unsettling our learning spans the continuum of learning spaces. When we teach concepts such as spatial literacy, map-reading, geography, history, and the significance of place, we can do so in ways that reinforce narratives of domination, or interrupt them with criticality. We offer counter stories as a way to support Native spaces being "constantly recognized and made viable through daily practices" (Blu Barnd, 2017, p. 15). This is a necessary step to address pedagogies that allow Native People to be "ignored, invisibilized, marginalized or mythologized" (p. 3). Monuments to settler colonialism and Indigenous displacement are powerful and can seem impervious to change when we don't notice and question the narratives surrounding seemingly settled parts of history. The unchallenged, hegemonic nature of the stories they tell perpetuates a pedagogy of erasure and White supremacy that makes a critical framework of counterstorytelling

(Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) necessary and effective. Speaking back to power with a critical eye, but also curiosity, imagination, and humanity, is at the core of this work.

### Conclusions

Public pedagogies of erasure and absence; assimilation and civilization; mis-history, dysconsciousness, and ignorance set in stone (literally and figuratively) colonial ideas about Native Peoples, settler innocence, and Land/s for the public, educators, and students. The sites carry tacit authority and their pedagogies are often accepted uncritically. Pewewardy et al., (2018) remind us in the Transformational Indigenous Praxis Model that ignorance also prevents decolonization of our praxis as educators. Public pedagogy through these memorials, although outside a typical education space, makes settler ignorance easily accessible and permanent. None of these monuments presents information on the continued survivance of the Lenape in their lands. The Lenape and other Indigenous Peoples are characterized within the monuments as historical. They are mythologized as primitive and in need of saving by European colonists.

The monuments teach a self-serving narrative of clever settlers making fools of Indians and acquiring land in shrewd transactions. The monuments reside in and support a settler safety zone with their narratives; the counter stories serve to create a zone of sovereignty for learning from Lenape people and expressions of Indigenous government, language, and culture (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2024). We encourage educators in and outside of schools to teach in ways that support and create zones of sovereignty and center Native presence over absence (Vizenor, 2008). Survivance narratives can be surfaced in spaces where erasure dominates the public landscape. Donald (2009) noted the power that symbols and myths of colonialism have in memories of people as curricular spaces: “I believe that myths are actually truths about culture and conventional views of history that have both been deeply influenced by the stories of our country that we have been told in school” (p. 3). The myth of the purchase of Manahatta/n is alive and reinforced in public pedagogy, and that curricular myth, along with many others, can be dispelled.

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## Appendix A: Governors Island

Photo in figure one of plaque attached to rock in context in 2022 under a tree with a small American flag in front of the rock. Figure two is close up of Governors Island plaque on rock reading “Called by the Indians “Pagganck” was purchased from two members of the Indian Tribe of Manahatas named Cakapetayne and Pehtwas by Wouter Van Twiller, a governor and director general of New Netherland-June 16, 1637, the price paid was two axe heads, a string of beads, and a handful of nails. Erected by the Holland Society of New York 1951.

Figure 1.



Figure 2.



### Appendix B: Governors Island Rock After Plaque Removed

Governors Island, November 2022 photo of rock under tree with outline of plaque that is removed/missing.

Figure 3.



### Appendix C: Schurz Memorial Morningside Park

Full view of Schurz memorial in Morningside Park at 116<sup>th</sup> street and Morningside Drive followed by close up views of bas reliefs and memorial inscription. Figure four is Schurz Memorial in context at sunset with leafless trees and skyscrapers in the background. Figure five is close up view of bas relief. First figure on the left is a Native American man whose left wrist is held by a woman in European dress who appears to be leading him. Figure six is close up view Native American man wrist held being led by a woman whose face is turned toward him with her left-hand motioning forward. Figure seven is close up of inscription at Schurz Memorial directly under the feet of the Schurz statue reading “Carl Schurz MDCCCXXIX-MDCCCV A Defender of Liberty and a friend of human rights.” An engraved hand holding a sword is on the left of the inscription and an engraved outstretched hand with open palm is located on the right of the inscription.

Figure 4.



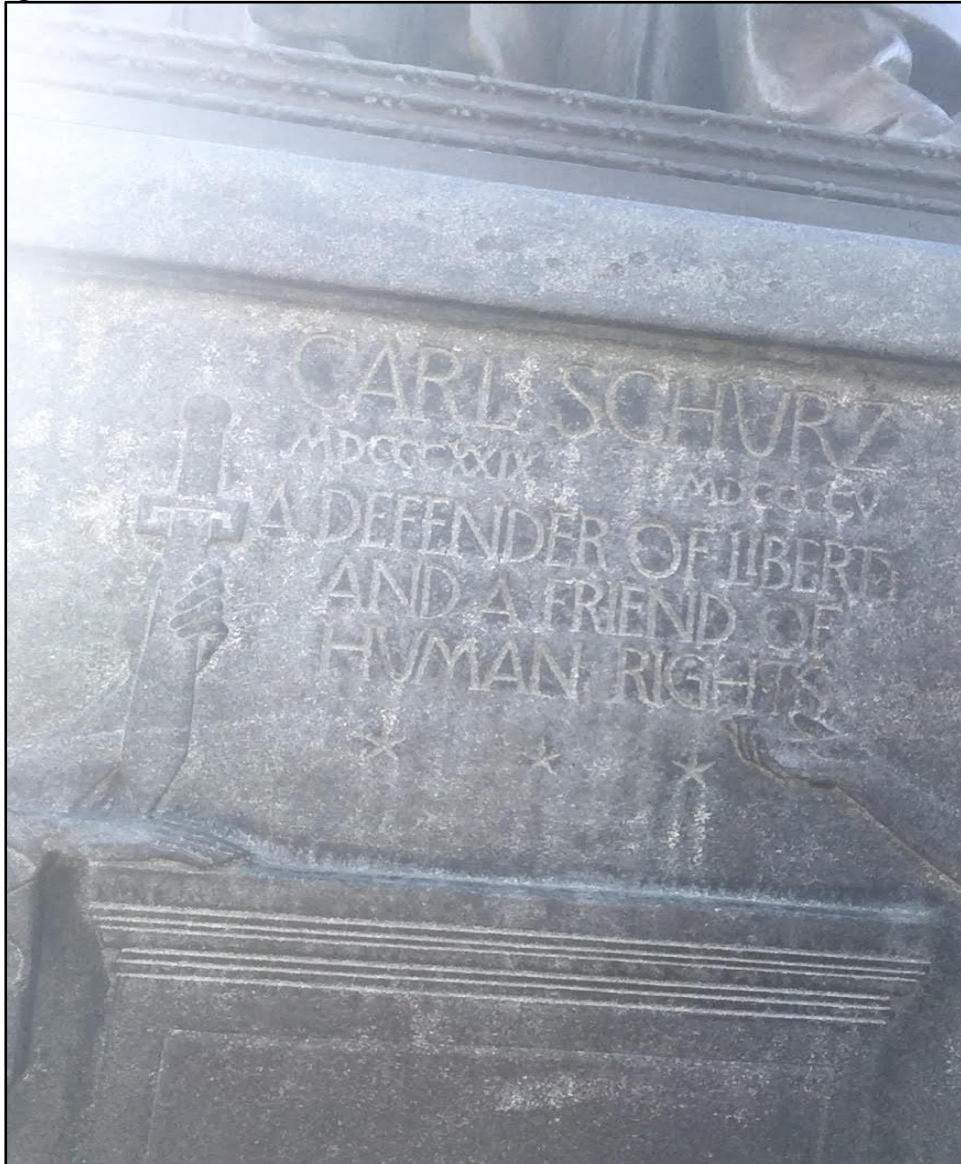
Figure 5.



Figure 6.



Figure 7.



### Appendix D: Shorakkopoch Plaque Inwood Hill Park Close Up

Figure eight is Shorakkopoch rock viewed from a distance showing its location on a paved pathway at Inwood Hill Park with grassy field and trees in the background and the Muhheacantinuk (now known as the Hudson River) beyond the field.

Figure nine is a close up of plaque on rock reading “Shorakkopoch According to legend, on this site of the principal Manhattan Indian Village, Peter Minuit in 1626, purchased Manhattan Island for trinkets and beads then worth about 60 Guilders. This boulder also marks the spot where a Tulip Tree (*Liriodendron Tulipifera*) grew to a height of 165 feet and a girth of 20 feet. It was until its death in 1932 at the age of 220 years, the last living link with the Reckgawawang Indians who lived here, Dedicated as part of New York City’s 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration by the Peter Minuit Post 1247 American Legion January 1954”.

Figure 8.



Figure 9.



### Appendix E: Netherland Monument

Close up of the stone carving of the Netherland Monument in Battery Park showing a Native American man in a loincloth receiving beads in his right hand from a Dutch man in colonial attire wearing a wide brimmed hat and fancy collar, his right arm is extended to hand beads to the Native American man and his left hand holds more beads. Skyscrapers are pictured on both sides of the memorial. Below the carving words etched in gold state. “On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 1625 Amsterdam Chamber of the West Indies Company decreed the establishment and the creation of the adjoining farms the purchase of the Island of Manhattan was accomplished in 1626. Thus was laid the foundation of the city of New York.”

Figure 10.



## Appendix F: Enduring Digital Footprints

These digital resources GrowNYC worksheet (grownyc.org, 2022), Pokéstops (Niantic Inc., 2016) and PoGoMaps (GamersGuides.gg, 2022) highlight the durability of colonial narratives in digital spaces even after their physical counterparts are gone. Figure 11 is the text of an online worksheet, figures 12 and 13 are images of PoGoMaps showing Pokéstops for Shorakkopoch and Governors Island. Figure 14 is a detailed history of the Governors Island Pokéstop.

Figure 11.

History of Governors Island	Name _____
<p>Governor's island was originally used by the Lenape tribe (a group of Native Americans who lived in what is known as Manhattan today) for hunting and gathering. At this time the island was known as "Pagganack" (which means Nut Island) because of the many Hickory, Oak, and Chestnut trees. The Lenape would boat over to the island to gather nuts from the trees, and to fish from the waters. Additionally, at this time the Island was much smaller (only 70 acres compared to its 172 acres today).</p>	
<p>1. Can you find an acorn or an acorn top?</p>	
<p>In 1637, Wouter Van Tiller, the director general of the Dutch West India Company bought the island from the Native Americans for two axe heads, a handful of nails, and a string of beads. The Dutch re-named the Island "Noten Eylandt" after the Native American name. Wouter Van Tiller used the island for his own personal use (he had a farm, cattle, and a windmill) until the Dutch government confiscated it a year later.</p>	
<p>2. Can you imagine what it would be like to have the whole island to yourself, what would you do with all of the space?</p>	
<p>Eventually, in 1664, the British came and captured New Amsterdam, renaming it New York. They renamed the Island Governors Island and reserved it only for the use of colonial governors. At this point the Island only contained one house and pasture.</p>	
<p>3. If you could make a new name for New York City or Governors Island, what would it be?</p>	

Figure 12.

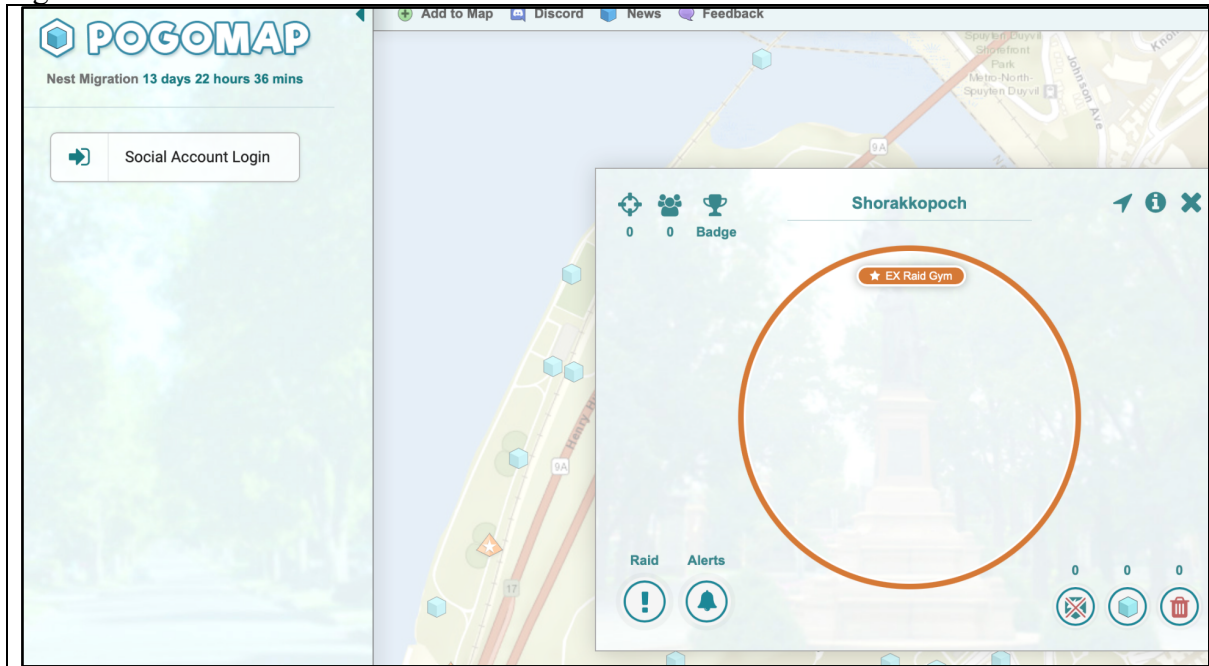


Figure 13.

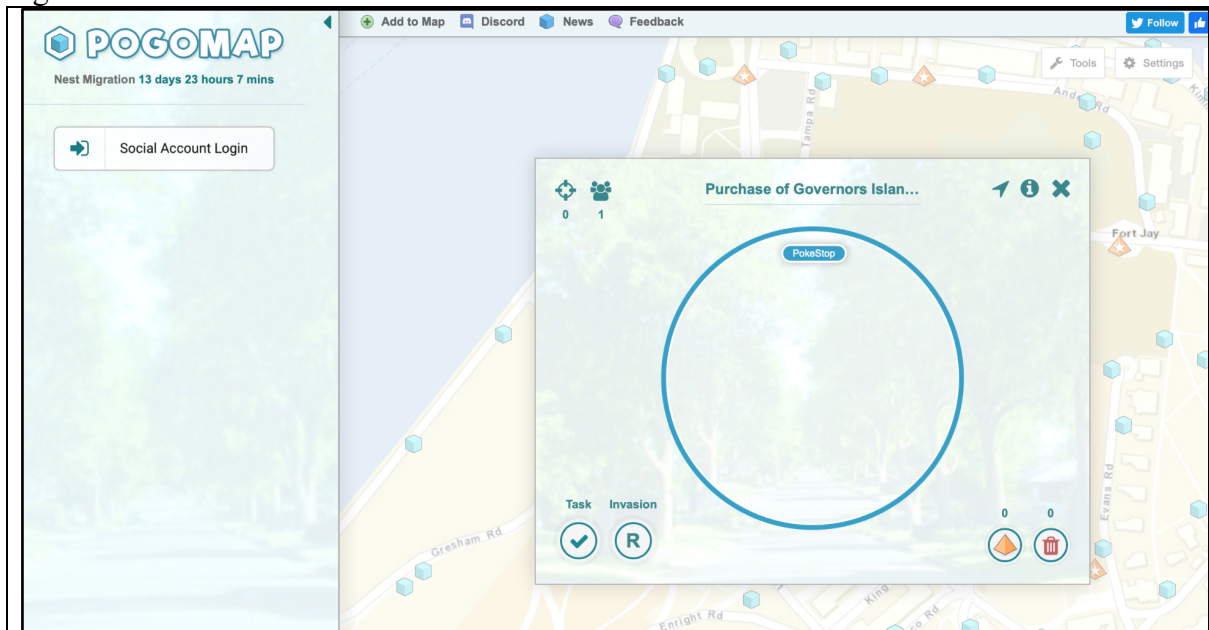




Figure 14.


**i More Information** ✕


[History](#) | [Directions](#) | [Copy Link](#)


<https://pogomap.info/pokestop/purchase-of-governors-island->


 **PokeStop**


 20:53 Local Time

 40.690000, -74.018000

 Updated by a PogoMap Moderator on the 27th March 2022

 **User ID: 83753963**




 **Location ID: 91894579**

 **Added 4th December 2019**

[Report this Location](#)

**Purchase of Governors Island M**  
Hay Road, Nolan Park, Manhattan Community Board 1,  
Manhattan, New York, 10004, United States

Copy the link above or use these buttons to share this PokeStop

[View History](#) [Close](#)

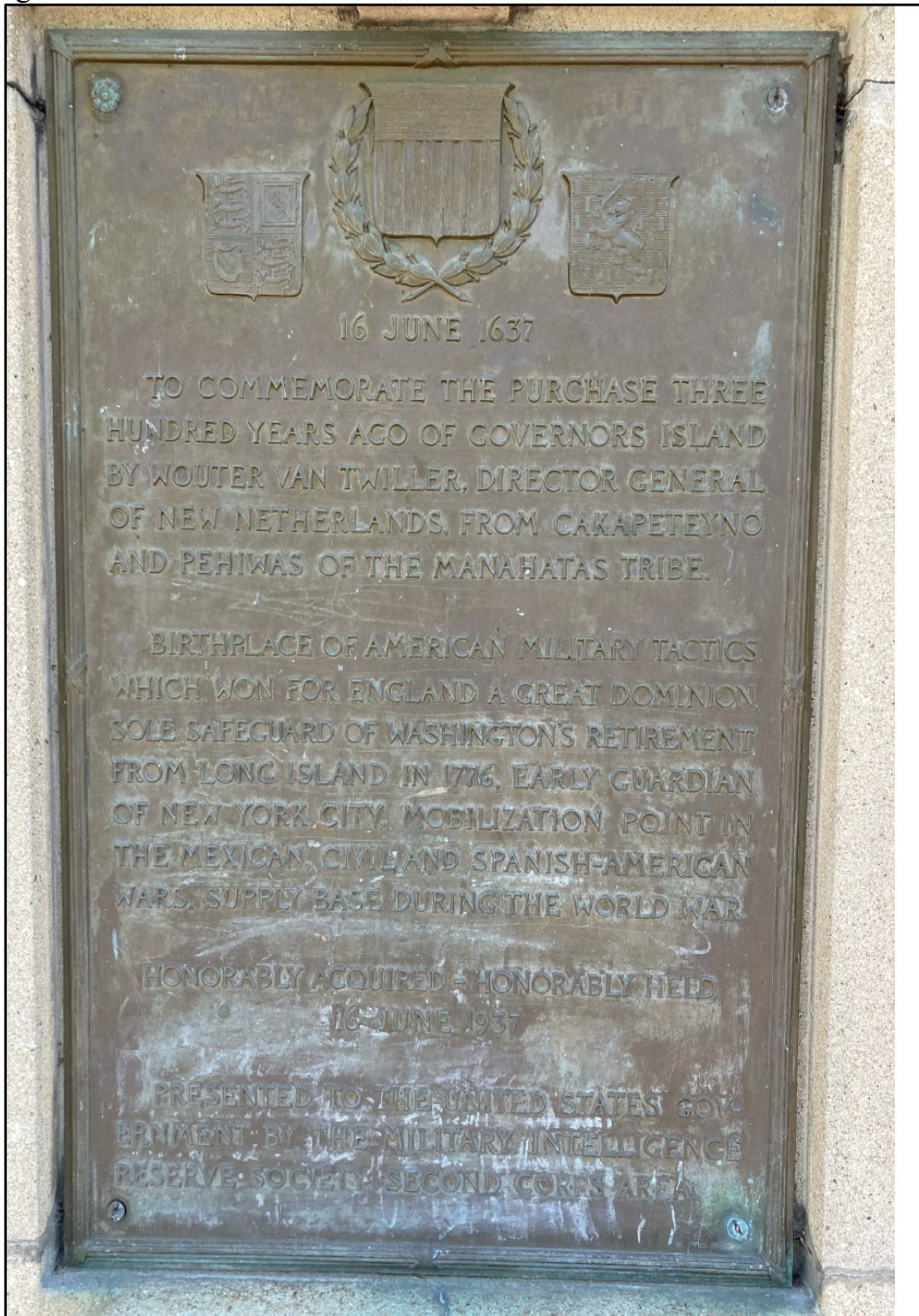
## Appendix G: Monument Commemorating Purchase and Military History of Governors Island

Concrete steps to monument pictured from a distance with concrete and brick benches on either side of the monument with three stories tall military homes made of brick on either side of the memorial which once housed officers and their families. Trees pictured on both sides of the memorial. Figure 16 is a close up of the inscription on the memorial's metal plaque green with age. Inscription about the Purchase of Governors Island. On a rectangle metal plaque with three crests, the center crest has laurel leaves encircling the crest the following inscription is engraved. "16 June 1937 to commemorate the purchase three hundred years ago of Governors Island by Wouter Van Twiller, Director General of New Netherlands from Cakapeteyno and Pehiwas of the Manahatas Tribe. Birthplace of American military tactics which won for England a great dominion. Sole safeguard of Washington's retirement from Long Island in 1776. Early guardian of New York City mobilization in the Mexican, Civil and Spanish-American Wars, supply base during the World War. Honorably Acquired - Honorably Held 16 June 1937. Presented to the United States government by the Military Intelligence Reserve Society Second Corps Area."

Figure 15.



Figure 16.



# Becoming-Curriculum in Maria Speth's *Mr. Bachmann and His Class*

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**D**IRECTED BY AN AWARD-WINNING FILMMAKER MARIA SPETH (2021), *Mr. Bachmann and His Class* is a school-based documentary about a sixth-grade class and the retiring teacher Dieter Bachmann at Georg Büchner School in Stadtallendorf, a German city shaped by historical and contemporary waves of migration, leading to a diverse mix of citizenships among its residents. Speth spotlights Bachmann and his sixth-grade students in the documentary to reveal his unconventional teaching practice. In a discussion between Bachmann and his colleague, Bachmann is described as E.T. among teachers in the school (Speth, 2021). The constantly changing activities of learning and teaching in his classroom are construed as unusual, yet they epitomize Sellers' (2013) becoming-curriculum, which is characterized by Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) philosophical concepts of rhizome, lines of flight, and multiplicity. In this paper, I examine the concept of becoming and Sellers' becoming-curriculum and identify how Bachmann's classroom embodies becoming-curriculum using Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concepts.

## Toward Becoming-Curriculum

In Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus*, they presented several philosophical concepts as imaginaries, in which one of the imaginaries is becoming. The notion of becoming for Deleuze and Guattari (1987) is not about becoming anything specific. Instead, becoming is the very dynamism of change toward no particular goal or end state (Stagoll, 2010) and is about happenings of the in-between in flow of "becoming-*something*" (Sellers, 2013, p. 79). As becoming is imperceptible, what Deleuze and Guattari are concerned with is not *what becoming is*, but *what becoming is related to* (Sellers, 2013). To better understand becoming, I suggest viewing becoming with its relations to three other Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts: rhizome, lines of flight, and multiplicity.

Becoming is *about* and *is* rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Semetsky, 2006). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) proposed rhizome as a perturbation of the conventional arborescent thought. The arborescent thinking supports binary logic, representing linearly ordered and

directed systems of thinking (Stewart, 2015). In contrast, rhizome, biologically, is “a form of plant that can extend itself through its underground horizontal tuber-like root system and develop new plants” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 231), representing a freely or even chaotically ordered approach to thinking. An example of the rhizome in the real world is the internet (Sellers, 2013). Further, “a rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25). This notion justifies the resemblance between rhizome and becoming, as becoming is “what happens *in-between*” (Sellers, 2010, p. 563). Like a rhizome, becoming with non-linear order, and without beginning and ending, opens endless possibilities of thought, concept, and activity.

Becoming is connected to lines of flight (Adkins, 2015; Masny, 2013; Sellers, 2013). Characterized as connectivity, lines of flight are movements of change and operate through deterritorialization (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Sellers (2013) explained deterritorialization as, when we enter any space of thinking our ongoing thoughts change it, and this creates “a simultaneously deterritorializing movement” (p. xvii). In other words, lines of flight are the movement of leaving and reengaging with a territory. A useful example to understand lines of flight is that of the community choir, suggested by Lines (2013). The musical territory of the choir includes the melody, rhythm, and harmony of the choral pieces, emotional aspects of choir practices, the mental learning patterns of rehearsals, physical demands of choir performance, and others. By leaving and reengaging with territories, participants gain a fuller understanding of the dynamism of the choir (Lines, 2013). Since deterritorialization signals constantly changing territories, lines of flight, like a rhizome and becoming, have no ends or destinations (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and are thus always in the middle.

Becoming and multiplicity are the same (Adkins, 2015; Grosz, 1994; Sellers, 2013). A multiplicity is not a collection of discrete parts but involves “continuous multidimensional expansion, generating and bringing together an infinite variety of thoughts, thinking and ideas, many times over — engaging with a variation of variables” (Sellers, 2013, p. 15). To indicate a multiplicity, Sellers uses tildes (~) to structure a multidimensional mode of composition. One of the examples used by Sellers (2020) is a multiplicity of curriculum-related concepts, “learners~teachers~content~knowledge~environment” (p. 25). Since becoming is always qualified as becoming-different (Sellers, 2020), it opens to a multiplicity of thought, concept, and activity.

Connecting to the Deleuzo-Guattarian (1987) notion of becoming, Sellers’ (2013) becoming-curriculum bears resemblances to a rhizome, lines of flight, and multiplicity. First, like a rhizome, becoming-curriculum does not form a linear structure that directs to specific educational outcomes and does not support children’s binary development, like “an incompetent child developing into rational adult, or a novice becoming expert” (Sellers, 2020, p. 25). Instead, it perceives children as young human beings of monadic singularity more than merely developing into adults (Sellers, 2013). Second, like lines of flight, becoming-curriculum is not about fixed content and is always in the process of deterritorialization (Sellers, 2010). Predetermined goals of any educational activity in becoming-curriculum are only the points to be passed through, constituting lines of flight. Third, by assembling multiplicities, becoming-curriculum constantly changes through the connections made among curriculum-related concepts, such as learners, teachers, content, knowledge, environment, and subject matter (Sellers, 2020).

These concepts stand in stark contrast to the traditional “banking concept of education” (Freire, 2000, p. 72), where knowledge is viewed as a static deposit to be delivered by the teacher and stored by the learner. In such a model, the curriculum is linear, hierarchical, and oriented toward rigid outcomes. Becoming-curriculum, by contrast, displaces these assumptions by foregrounding students’ subjectivities, relationality, and the unpredictability of thought-in-motion.

By moving the educational focus from assessment-driven outcomes to flowing with a multiplicity of movements of becoming-curriculum, like students' ever-changing interests, the activity of learning and teaching can become more productive and meaningful (Sellers, 2020). By and by, becoming-curriculum abandons specified educational goals or outcomes, instead opening up new territories for thinking differently and endless possibilities of thought and activity through deterritorializing a multiplicity of movements.

### **Becoming-Curriculum in *Mr. Bachmann and His Class***

Situated in the small industrial town of Stadtallendorf in central Germany, the Georg Büchner School where *Mr. Bachmann and His Class* was filmed is the product of successive waves of migration. During the Second World War, the town hosted explosives factories staffed by slave labourers, including Jewish women and children brought from concentration camps. After the war, it became home to refugees and displaced persons. As industries were rebuilt, guest workers were recruited to fill labour shortages, as Germans no longer sought this type of work. Each wave of migration reshaped the town's demographic composition, so that by 2017 (the year of filming) Mr Bachmann's sixth-grade class comprised students from 12 different countries, with most being the children of factory workers (Chen, 2021). That same period coincided with the broader migrant crisis in Germany when almost one million migrants arrived and far-right, anti-immigrant discourse gained momentum through the Alternative for Germany party (Hertner, 2022).

Against this volatile backdrop, none of the students in Bachmann's class reported experiencing discrimination due to their cultural and religious background, nor were they judged or criticized for expressing their opinion (Chen, 2021). "They all know that they can just be themselves in front of Mr Bachmann" (Chen, 2021, p. 168). These positive dynamics in Bachmann's class can be attributed to not only the multicultural environment of Stadtallendorf but also Bachmann's embodiment of becoming-curriculum. The following sections will explore how Bachmann's class embodies becoming-curriculum in terms of rhizome, lines of flight, and multiplicity and consider how this approach may serve to protect, empower, and support immigrant students.

#### **Rhizome**

A rhizome represents a freely ordered approach to thinking and has no end. Like a rhizome, Bachmann's learning and teaching activity does not have a predetermined design or process, nor a specific educational goal or outcome. In one of Bachmann's music lessons documented in the film, Bachmann exposes his fluidity in choosing a piece of music to be played with his class. Bachmann directly expresses his opinion to this class, "[the music] doesn't turn me on" (Speth, 2021, 01:09:12), and intends to have his class play another exhilarating piece of music. This moment exemplifies his refusal to be constrained by preset materials or rigid learning outcomes.

Further, in a storytelling activity, Bachmann asks Ayman to sit next to Ferhan and help her polish her story, but Ayman decisively rejects this suggestion without any reason. Yet, Bachmann is eager for his explanation and says, "we've still got two hours. . . . That's part of it" (Speth, 2021, 02:03:13). Although Ayman gives his excuse within a minute, Bachmann's insistence on Ayman's explanation demonstrates that he values everyone's expression and would freely adjust the educational goal of activities, such as from learning German to learning to express their inner voice. Such free adjustment also exists in their conversation during one

of the last lessons of the day. When Bachmann asks his students about their daily routine, his follow-up questions move the conversation from the topics of their family and ideal marriage, to a controversy over the views of patriarchalism and feminism. It is obvious that Bachmann does not intend to discuss the issue of feminism by initiating a discussion of their daily routine, but his freely ordered teaching leads to endless possibilities of thought. Thus, the three examples of Bachmann's learning and teaching activities show his refusal to follow predetermined and specific educational goals and, in turn, epitomize the rhizomatic thinking and becoming-curriculum.

### **Lines of Flight**

Lines of flight focus on the emergent new flight paths rather than predetermined pathways of curricular flight (Lines, 2013). Lines (2013) argued that the problem with the present music education system is that modular and insular music learning is confined to “the mastery of certain music-centred goals and objectives” (p. 25). Modern music education pinpoints the music piece or composed work with the emphasis on perfecting students' skills in music making. This predetermined pathway focusing on the production of the music piece has suppressed what lines of flight seek: a more fluid form of music production, like improvisation (Lines, 2013). Instead of following this predetermined pathway, Bachmann consistently encourages his students to improvise. He invites students to accompany him with the music “Eulenspiegel” (a reference to the prankster in German folklore) that Bachmann composed for one of his favourite stories “Eulenspiegel and the Children.” While Hasan improvises on the drum set, other students improvise on the bass guitar, piano, and djembe to accompany Bachmann. Through these improvisational practices, Bachmann's classroom becomes a space where the curricular structure is continuously disrupted and reimagined. Each improvisation enacts lines of flight that open new possibilities for sound, interaction, and expression.

The act of improvisation is also the process of deterritorialization. As mentioned, deterritorialization occurs when lines of flight leave the territory they transmute and build another territory (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Students deterritorialize the movement when their initial territorial “Eulenspiegel” is transmuted while improvising, and they begin to execute new musical materials in lines of flight away from the initial territory. Simply put, improvisation highlights music's fluidity and translucence (Lines, 2013). As such, not only Bachmann's pursuit of new flight paths, i.e., improvisation, embodies lines of flight, but also the activity of improvisation in Bachmann's music lesson identifies what Sellers (2010) explains: becoming-curriculum is always in the process of deterritorialization.

Bachmann's enactment of lines of flight extends beyond music education into broader classroom moments that challenge fixed curricular expectations. Around the 72-minute mark of the film, during what is formally designated as an English lesson, a student named Jamie refuses to assist his classmate, Hasan, and attributes her academic struggles to poor learning ability. Rather than reprimanding Jamie, Bachmann redirects the moment by acknowledging the challenges Hasan faces as a recent immigrant still acquiring the language. He then facilitates an open dialogue in which students reflect on their experiences with exclusion, identity, and belonging in Germany. This moment becomes lines of flight away from the disciplinary boundaries of English toward an emergent curriculum grounded in inclusion and lived experience. Importantly, this line of flight is not simply a change in lesson content. It is about escaping a pre-scripted function of the classroom and allowing something new and relational to emerge. In this case, the lesson deterritorializes from a focus of learning English to a space where students can recognize and respond to one another's experiences with empathy and understanding. Such moments illustrate how becoming-curriculum is not limited to artistic

or expressive subjects but can occur whenever fixed curricular structures are disrupted by desire, relation, and subjectivity.

### **Multiplicity**

Sellers (2010) asserted that the conventional adult-biased curriculum neglects students' expressions and understandings while becoming-curriculum opens to ongoing possibilities for a merging and converging of children's ideas. Although students may not have a theoretical understanding of curriculum, they often inform curriculum by communicating their willingness to participate in the activity (Sellers, 2013). Observing and listening to students' expressions of words and actions as a curriculum resource are required for the purpose of seeking a multiplicity in becoming-curriculum. In Bachmann's classroom, his responses to students' ideas frequently appear. After inquiring about the parental decisions regarding their participation in the parent-teacher conference from the students, Bachmann asks, "How about some more schoolwork?" (Speth, 2021, 00:19:11), and all students unanimously say no. Bachmann then decides to do a review of the day with his class rather than persisting with the predetermined activity.

Furthermore, Bachmann observes students' fatigue and disinterest from their postures and facial expressions and decides to let them go home earlier if they can solve the last mathematics question. It is evident that Bachmann always embraces his students' ideas and expressions and adjusts the learning and teaching activity accordingly. With involving the constantly changing connections between a multiplicity of curriculum-related concepts, like students' interests and subjects, becoming-curriculum epitomized in Bachmann's classroom opens possibilities and new directions for learning.

### **Supporting Immigrant Students through Becoming-Curriculum**

While Mr. Bachmann's approach does not always follow predetermined educational goals, this does not imply a lack of purpose or rigor. On the contrary, becoming-curriculum, as embodied in his classroom, serves to protect, empower, and support immigrant students by creating an inclusive and relational space where their voices, experiences, and expressions help shape the learning process. Sellers (2010) argued that "what children have to say and do about curriculum... immediately commands not only acknowledgement but also respect" (p. 563), a principle clearly practiced in Bachmann's willingness to let student interests and responses guide the direction of classroom activities. His openness to improvisation, refusal of rigid outcomes, and attention to students' emotional and social states, reflect what Sellers called "a doing that is generative of further(ing) possibilities" (p. 564), rather than a pre-scripted set of objectives.

In a sociopolitical context where many of Bachmann's students live with the effects of cultural displacement or marginalization, such an approach can be seen as deeply protective. Sellers (2010) emphasized that "children thrive within the complexity of their spontaneous play(ing) where linear processes are not necessary to the fruitful play(ing) of generative learning~living experiences" (p. 574), highlighting how becoming-curriculum embraces the complexity of identity and learning rather than simplifying or controlling it. Bachmann's approach, by recognizing students' agency and humanity, challenges the adult-dominated curriculum that often renders young, and especially immigrant, voices invisible. Instead, it "welcomes young children's understandings into ours of becoming-curriculum" (Sellers, 2010, p. 575), enabling students not just to be educated but to become authors of their own meaning

and belonging.

## Conclusion

Drawn from one of the concepts in Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus*, becoming is the complex intermediary integrating different forces in motion rather than systematic, ordered linear specifics (Sellers, 2020). Despite its unclear, unformulated, and elusive definition, becoming is interconnected with other Deleuzo-Guattarian imaginaries and concepts (Sellers, 2013). Understanding the concept of becoming from the perspective of other imaginaries is advised to avoid its elusiveness. Becoming is *about* and *is* rhizome, lines of flight, and multiplicity. In Bachmann's classroom, like a non-linear rhizome without beginning and ending, he does not predetermine but freely adjusts the learning and teaching activity's process and educational goals. Like the focus of lines of flight, he pursues new flight paths of improvisation and encourages his students to experiment and create freely. Like what a multiplicity suggests, he always embraces his students' voices, expressions, and lived experiences as curricular sources rather than privileging an adult-centered curriculum.

Importantly, Bachmann's enactment of becoming-curriculum does more than illustrate abstract theory. It has tangible protective and empowering effects for his immigrant students. Becoming-curriculum creates inclusive and relational spaces that honor students' agency and identities, particularly in contexts shaped by migration, marginalization, and sociopolitical tension. In this way, Bachmann's approach not only resists rigid curricular expectations but also enacts a form of education that fosters belonging, affirmation, and meaning-making. Becoming-curriculum may be inexplicable, but in Bachmann's classroom, it becomes visible as a profoundly human, responsive, and liberatory practice.

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# Engaging Boldly to (Re)Think Methodology

## A Book Review of *Methodology and Praxis: Thinking with Patti Lather*

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*Methodology and Praxis: Thinking with Patti Lather*, edited by G. Huddleston & R. J. Helfenbein. Gorham, ME, Myers Education Press, 2025, 204 pp., \$43.95 USD (softcover), ISBN: 978-1-9755-0644-5

THE REFERENCE SECTION OF A WORK IS A CORNERSTONE OF ACADEMIA that allows for researchers to guide each other from within and across fields towards wellsprings of knowledge. When we tether our works to the already-out-there, we create connections with the authors who inspire our work as we find ways to incorporate and re-imagine their works. Rarely, do we have space to talk about the impact such connections can have on us. In *Methodology and Praxis: Thinking with Patti Lather*, editors Gabriel Huddleston and Robert J. Helfenbein (2025) and their contributing authors share not only their academic connections with Lather's work but also their own tetherings to Patti as a friend. In these reflections, the authors share their own wrestlings with methodological assumptions, the limitations and possibilities for qualitative research that embraces the messiness of science, and their transformations of Lather's concepts to fit their own research interests. Consequently, the chapters function not only for the authors to *grab a glass of wine with Patti* (Huddleston & Helfenbein, 2025, p. xiv) but also for us as readers to be in community and conversation with each author in the edited collection as they describe their own theorizing and ponderings spurred on by thinking with Lather.

In *Methodology and Praxis: Thinking with Patti Lather*, “critiques of method and implications of philosophical developments on methodology” (Huddleston & Helfenbein, 2025, p. xv), are traced through Lather's works across her career. For example, various authors note the call to reflect on the products of qualitative research and to reconsider “Research as Praxis”—research that requires the researcher to actively seek ways to shift inquiry towards producing

emancipatory knowledge that challenges established truths. Other concepts such as *voluptuous validity* show how Lather not only critiques postpositivist paradigms but also works to deconstruct validity to imagine what it might mean to reclaim such a term. Importantly, none of the authors frame Lather’s work as transcendent of time and cultural context. Rather, the philosophical ideas Lather works with indicate that “key issues persist of who knows, how do they know, and on what legitimate basis do they speak” (Torrance, 2025, pp. 55–56). Even if the language about research evolves, deeper questions about onto-epistemology remain and thus require researchers to always look deeper and not take any paradigmatic assumption as truth.

A sentiment not seen often enough is the concept of a transgenerational colloquium and the joy that comes from finding community within research. Irrespective of when one enters into Lather’s body of work, therein lies a wealth of scholarship and a community invested in continually challenging and working from said scholarship. A strength of this edited collection comes from the breadcrumb trail of academic works for the uninitiated scholar interested in *Getting Lost* but unsure where to even begin. Invigorating discussion with new and established researchers is the impetus for this collection. As the editors note in the acknowledgements, this book is about “a wider work that traverses our lifetimes, our shifting subjectivities” (Huddleston & Helfenbein, 2025, p. xi).

### Organization and Contents

*Methodology and Praxis: Thinking with Patti Lather* is an insightful look into the ripples and waves an academic can have in their field and how these same vibrations shift the thinking of others across time. Huddleston and Helfenbein’s (2025) organization and content of the book allows for the reader to not only grasp the breadth of Lather’s scholarly contributions but also the potential depths that *Thinking with Patti* can afford to those who engage with her work. Additionally, the editors have artfully selected contributors who can speak to some of the diverse fields that Lather has influenced, leaving readers less familiar with her work with a wealth of reading paired with the contributors’ personal insights. The introduction by the editors notes that understanding Lather as an academic and as a person leads to not only a transformation in one’s view of qualitative research but also “permeates our approach to life, teaching us to question, to probe, to never stop learning ... to care deeply about the people we encounter along the way” (Huddleston & Helfenbein, 2025, p. xvii). It is through this lens of personal growth alongside the upheaval of paradigmatic assumptions embedded in qualitative research that makes this edited collection—and Lather’s work as a whole—appealing to the uninitiated scholar who might be seeking ways to disrupt stagnant modes of thinking and being.

Because the contents of the edited collection weaves together “Patti Lather’s far-reaching impact on education research, feminist theory, poststructuralism, and cultural studies” (Huddleston & Helfenbein, 2025, p. xvii), this volume is organized by some chapters that explore “personal relationships intertwined with complex investigations into theory, research, and praxis” (p. xv), while other chapters apply Latherian concepts to their author’s area of interest and ask the reader not to come to *conclusions* but instead *wonderings* that push research in new directions.

Many of the authors share insights and wisdom from their work with and alongside Lather. Janet Miller’s (2025) chapter starts off the collection by recounting Lather’s academic career. Starting with their initial meeting in 1979, she paints a vivid picture of how her first shiver caused by a thought-provoking conference session led to a cascade of shivers. Rarely is the goings-on of

an academic (e.g., conferences, chats, emails, etc.) a site for deeper introspection. By allowing the reader a peak into the inner world of researchers, the editors have set the stage for personal connections, *a glass of wine with Patti* (Huddleston & Helfenbein, 2025, p. xiv), to be an enduring gift that “[enables] generations of education researchers to imagine, propose, and work to enact paradigm proliferations that challenge any one version of dominant authority” (Miller, 2025, p. 12). Chris Smithies (2025) reflects on their work together that led to *Troubling the Angels* (Lather & Smithies, 1997), situating their relationship within the nested layers of their milieu, while Sam Rocha (2025) recounts being a graduate student who wandered down a hallway to meet Lather, which led to many different wanderings in multiple senses. Lather is more than a methodologist; she is a philosopher.

Lather’s contributions to theory and theorizing are many. Harry Torrance (2025) maps out how Lather lodged a vital critique of scientism, which has rippling effects. Susan Adams (2025) comments on the gift that Lather has been to feminist theory and practice, Lisa Mazzei (2025) focuses on Lather’s contributions to post-humanist theories and new materialisms, and Sarah Sterner (2025) notes Lather’s post-structural efforts. Ideas of a rigid truth are dethroned, and offered instead are ways of thinking, feeling, and being in different ways. As readers, we are all invited to deeply consider our assumptions and how we move in the world.

Maggie MacLure (2025) extends the work of challenging paradigm by charting Lather’s contributions in (post) qualitative inquiries as a researcher, “drawn to that which resists containment within boundaries and evades representation” (p. 101), who is likened to a seismograph, a means of registering vibrations without assigning truth, and a sorcerer, a means of channeling the possibilities of inquiry that lie outside of more normative ways of knowing and being. Elizabeth de Freitas, Kate O’Brien and Nathalie Sinclair (2025) demonstrate putting theory to work by taking concepts such as *incalculability* (Lather, 2017), *ruins of knowledge* (Lather, 2007), and *validity* (Lather, 1993) and playing with these concepts to find new avenues of thought with the incomputable, diagrammatic ruins, and the unthinkable. Elissa Bryant (2025) takes up the idea of *re-membering* (Lather, 2016) as she maps out Jiu-Jitsu as an example of how one might narrate a methodology. Rounding out methodological considerations is Deborah P. Britzman’s (2025) chapter on how Lather’s research opened up the floodgates to “treat research as a situation” (p. 159) and the importance of vulnerability. Methods and procedures can, and must, be interrogated without a reassuring conclusion of a best practice. This chapter is an apt summary of how Lather played with theory over the years as well as an homage to their deep friendship. All contributors in this collection ask us to think about (post) qualitative inquiry not as an “an infinite deconstruction of meaning or deferral of a plan of action” (Lather & Lewis, 2025, p. 181) but as a vulnerable process requiring us to shed methodological certainties and *Get Lost* in the possibilities of research as praxis “in order to engage in committed, self-reflexive and critical work that situate[s] inquiry as it is lived” (Miller, 2025, p. 11).

As the reader delves into the diverse emotional and intellectual connections inscribed by this collective of those inspired by Patti Lather, one can begin to conjure an impression of her as a scholar and a human. Moreover, MacLure’s (2025) apt metaphor of referring to Lather’s work as that of a sorcerer holds true: her insights bring forth the unconscious. Readers, new to and intrigued by Lather, will likely be encouraged to seek out her tomes and think with her to suss out what else lies underneath, waiting to be explored and taken in a new direction. When reaching the end of the collection, as if invoked by the reader’s growing curiosity about the collection’s inspiration, Lather appears to humanize this previously illusionary version of herself. While this idea was built by the love of her collaborators and community, Lather shows us that what we see in others can also be

complex and messy in all sorts of ways—and some of these ways are beautiful. As humans we experience pain, anger, frustration, fear, and more. These feelings often fall outside of what is typically shared within academia, but for those in a (post)qualitative view, these aspects of ourselves give us pause as we reckon with what we write and share with the world. The life and work of an academic is not just what is captured within the confines of a publication. Rather, the harsh realities that are experienced by us also in turn influence how we think and research. By ending this collection with Lather’s own retelling of her experience of getting an abortion alongside her entanglings with other academics’ works, we are reminded that community and love come with messiness and complexity.

### Audiences for the Book

*Methodology and Praxis: Thinking with Patti Lather* asks the reader to not just know the concepts developed by Lather but further to learn the context in which these concepts were developed, the influence she’s had on her contemporaries, and the ways these concepts still evoke questions and wonderings from the editors and contributing authors. This edited book would be particularly useful for both emerging and established scholars interested in learning the historical shifts in qualitative inquiry, the academic writings that are influenced by and/or have caused said shifts in methods and methodological views, and how current researchers theorize using Latherian concepts. Researchers from various domains and disciplines (e.g., Feminist/gender studies, curriculum studies, cultural studies, social work, and more!) would benefit from reading how these different areas of research draw from the same well of inspiration.

### A Parting Thought

In Lather’s concluding remarks, she reflects on her overarching goals as a researcher: legitimizing qualitative research by wrestling with what makes research *scientific* and offering alternative methods when working in social sciences. On these two fronts, Lather more than succeeds. This edited collection is a testament to the variegated means that a research project can grow: challenging the hegemony of social sciences by *Getting Lost*, deconstructing postpositivist concepts like validity and offering ideas such as the incalculable, imagining forward and enacting possibilities through the research process, and so much more. However, the purpose of this edited collection is not to act as just a roadmap to research in education, for even a well-loved map with charted out alternative routes prescribes research as already settled. As Lather reminds us, research as praxis is the necessary tool to bring about a world we want to live in. When we change our research vantage point, just as contributor Harry Torrance (2025) did when confronting the limitation of an interview in an interpretivist phenomenological paradigm, we open ourselves to new possibilities that in turn invite theoretical and political provocations within us. The contributors, while deeply moved by Lather’s works, all contribute their own extensions and permutations of what qualitative research can be by confronting their own questions and frustrations with the world their research lives in. The reader is invited to “[imagine] and [fabricate] a new architecture for qualitative inquiry” (MacLure, 2025, p. 106) by continuing that process of morphing and challenging conceptions of qualitative inquiry with a community of scholars.

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# What Was, Is, and Can be Pedagogically Possible?

## Employing Currere in Educational Events

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WHETHER BY CIRCUMSTANCE OR BY [SUBCONSCIOUS] CHOICE, I seem to always find myself back in the comfort of pedagogical and inquiry method(s), technique(s), and sequence. Since the start of my short academic journey—and even before that, I’d eventually relearn—the few courses I would consistently teach, term after term, were courses premised on method, procedure, and skill. I found myself leaning into course names (e.g., “methods” and “research”) to not only ground my pedagogical positionality, but also to conceptualize the course path. Students—both undergraduate and graduate—generally found the coursework, topics, and assignments meaningful and tethered to their individual teaching placements or scholarly journeys, respectively. And so, I would make a few text, assignment, and modality adjustments for incoming groups, acknowledging the importance of fine-tuning instruction to anticipate students’ needs (Hansen, 2021), feeling more and more optimistic each term that I was pulling further away from the limits of doing, of technique and procedure.

However, other onto-epistemologies will inevitably “pierce a hole” (Badiou, 1998/2001, p. 9) in our comfortable, settled curriculum and pedagogical narratives, fostering a transformative “educational event” (Piazza & Heyer, 2022) that can illuminate not only other possibilities, but also repressed moments and versions of our educational selves. This paper unpacks how currere cultivated reexamination of my “educational event[s]” (Piazza & Heyer, 2022), inspired by lived-planned curricular and pedagogical tensions of teaching an undergraduate education methods course and a graduate research course (Aoki, 1991; 1993). I outline how my curricular and pedagogical positioning cultivated instructional and ideological tension, underscoring a subsequent reevaluation of how settled truths and entrenched positionalities that contour(ed) my educational past, present, and future obscure(d) more expansive understandings of other perspectives and possibilities—ontologies from which I’m still unevenly disentangling. This paper examines how teaching experiences can foster an “educational event,” and how currere can consequently inspire us to reexamine the intersections of our educational past, present, and future emergent in these surprising, and sometimes unpleasant, insecurity-laden, educational events.

## Educational Metanarratives, Refrains, and Currere's Possibility

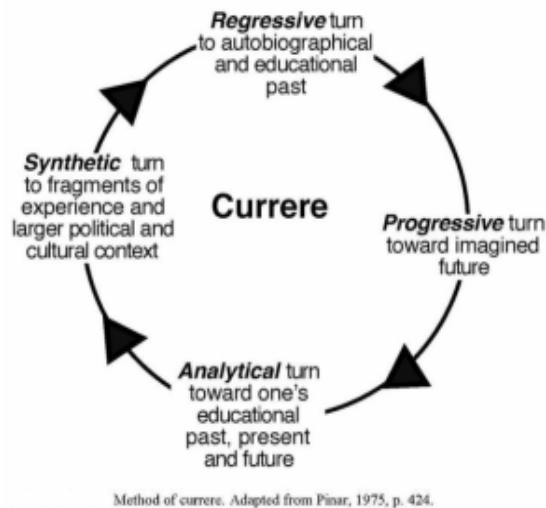
Metanarratives reflect institutionalized, sanctioned, confining patterns (Aoki, 1993; Sherbine & Hara, 2022). Occupying K12 and higher education (Giroux, 2010), metanarratives privileging technical scripts and sequential procedures creep into our teaching, as we revert to the importance of utility, skill, and marketability to gain perceived legitimacy (Tilley & Taylor, 2013), rendering it difficult to see beyond these sanctioned scripts. As vehicles of social reproduction, educational institutions and policies entrench particular metanarratives about teaching, schooling, and education, increasingly framing schooling as anthropocentric, managerial, and performative (Piazza & Heyer, 2022; Tilley & Taylor, 2013)—ontologies that underscore the planned curriculum. The planned curriculum, increasingly removed from educational institutions, represents a prescriptive, sanctioned, discipline-driven vehicle for stifling autonomy and possibility (Aoki, 1993; Lee, 2017; Maxwell & Roofe, 2020). While planned curriculum seems seductive through scripted, refrain-like comfortably routinized boundaries (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Sherbine & Hara, 2022), its limits not only obscure educational possibility; such limits consequently anchor existing, immutable educational narratives reforming educational bodies and institutions. Nevertheless, teaching beseeches an embrace of the unfamiliar (Ma, 2018). Expansive, more liberatory conceptions of teaching, curriculum, and education implore attention to and enactment of co-creating knowledge and co-constructing the educational process—conceptions and practices that transcend the prescriptive, content-tethered, tightly-bound planned curriculum.

Currere unpacks not the destination, nor the motivation, but the *running*, the moving, the oscillating. From an educational perspective, currere transcends conventional, prescriptive notions of curriculum and subjectivity toward synergizing these dimensions and exploring how one lives and experiences curriculum. While running suggests a quickening pace, currere implores us to slow down through deliberate examination of our educational past, present, and future. Currere prioritizes voice and personal storytelling in the reconceptualizing of our past, present, and future educational experiences (Rose, 2017; Slattery, 2017). This initially retrospective process reignites the unforgettable, taken-for-granted, insecurity-laden educational memories to inspire deep self-conversations about who we really are (Capó Garía, 2021). Although often overlooked, our educational pasts not only represent complex and formative entry points into making sense of our present and future (Pinar, 1975); our past exists *alongside* our present and future (emphasis added), reflecting how we live curriculum in the present.

### Stages of Currere in the Educational Event

The regressive step inspires revisiting educational experiences, how these have informed current practices entrenched through trial-and-error (Dewey, 2012/1916), positionalities, and relations with others, as Pinar (2004) argues that one's past reflects a shared, collective experience. It is from this initial step that we progressively consider our educational futures and what these resemble as reimagined possibilities of deeper understanding. We then examine the lines of inquiry we pursue—and the ones we reject—that contour our educational present, probing the significance of our work and our place in it. The analytical step grounds us in the now, an acknowledgement and meaning-making exercise examining the intersections between our pasts, presents, and futures. Through these first three steps, we unpack our journeys through and relationships with education

and educational institutions—as student and as teacher. This culminating, synthetic be(com)ing process facilitates possibility and transformation of educational bodies and institutions. Currere is not linear; we often oscillate in between stages in varied sequence, separately and concurrently, particularly when surprising pedagogical and curricular moments torpedo us into [the] progressive thinking (Rose, 2017).



Manifesting as people, thoughts, and questions contouring a formative experience, Badiou's (1998/2001) conceptualization of an “event” represents an upending of one’s settled self-and-context understanding. An *educational* event (emphasis added) represents an experience that short-circuits our educational refrains (Piazza & Heyer, 2022), cultivating expansive conditions to reconstruct and reimagine entrenched notions of curriculum, teaching, and education. Educational events can torpedo us into currere’s “progressive” stage (Pinar, 1975; 1978; Rose, 2017), turning our attention toward the intersection between what is, and what could be, attention that often inspires a regressive turn toward our educational pasts and patterns. The educational events underscoring this paper represent transformative experiences that illuminated tensions inherent in our positions at the intersection of planned and lived curricula. Exploratory or technical pedagogies can consequently shape students’ pedagogical and scholarly futures (Rose, 2017). To this end, teaching an undergraduate methods course and a graduate level research course not only challenged the boundaries around my pedagogical and scholarly comfort zones; these experiences also illuminated how my settled practices and ideological orientation “locked [me] in a dogmatic orbit” (Hansen, 2021, p. 32) that obscured curricular and pedagogical openings in-the-moment—until I came to terms with my pedagogical past to keep running toward a reimagined pedagogical self.

### **The Technical Metanarrative: Reverting to Method/s, Refrains, and Control Writing Process, or Graded Product? (Undergraduate Methods Course, 2022)**

Although many in this education program held previous teaching or educational support experience, the students enrolling in this course spent much of their higher education journey behind a screen due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, amounting to minimal, if any, prior

pedagogical experience. Therefore, I structured our course from an inquiry-based perspective on teaching writing, while acknowledging how teaching placements, individual student positionalities, and larger, external educational metanarratives—ones that I [thought I] recognized—shaped our pedagogies. Drawing from my experience as an aspiring-to-current teacher-to-teacher educator, I believed that students would be most critical of a course divorced from their own early-stage placement teaching experiences (Aoki, 1993).

Consequently, I aimed to structure the course as a series of check-ins on developing a writing curriculum encompassing elements of their choosing, so that students could explicitly envision curriculum and teaching as opportunities to foster connections between the academic course and teaching context. Learning of my students' incredibly diverse teaching placements—ranging from metropolitan to suburban, kindergarten to eighth grade, monolingual to dual language, straddling socioeconomic, cultural, and racial identities—I drew upon individual conversations, assignments-as-check-ins, and meetings with students to propose ideas to underscore their final course assignment, a student-centered writing curriculum that aligned with their school community context, their placement grade level, and placement students' backgrounds.

Further, I positioned writing-as-process, encouraging students to worry less about structure and more about effort and depth. I rationalized that my approach to providing students with writing strategies-as-ideas meant for reconstruction would supplement contextualized praxis. I prefaced writing activities I introduced, and that we practiced in class, as ideas meant to be squeezed, shaped, molded, and tweaked; and I encouraged students to come to our sessions with enacted ideas of their own to share with peers. However, our sessions that I anticipated might revolve around sharing ideas as a pedagogical community of practice often transitioned into collective affronts about their placements, perceived writing and practice-to-pedagogy deficits, or about the state of teaching during a constantly shifting pandemic. Bookended by targeted questions directed at me for how they could “resolve” these enduring, sometimes existential, issues, students voiced ongoing hesitations about whether loosely-guided writing curriculum creation was helpful at all in addressing these concerns or toward getting an “A” in the course—an explicitly noted, more pressing need. While I thought that I created a course—crafted *the* path on which to progress—that might provide space to chafe at the narrow conceptions of writing-as-product and the overarching instrumentality of planned curriculum (Hansen, 2021), to my surprise, fewer guidelines inspired more calls for concreteness that I made a choice to ignore, a perception and subsequent response I would be forced to face a year later, when a different experience “pierce[d] a hole” (Badiou, 1998/2001, p. 9) in latent, subconscious pedagogical narratives I would realize I hadn't yet sufficiently confronted.

### **Research/Inquiry and (Un)Comfortable Authority (“Research” Course, 2023)**

Believing I'd learned from my perceived pedagogical hiccup in 2022, I decided to plan and prepare students for the possibility of scholarly vexation to come, lest I be found out as an alleged scholarly fraud for not standing firmly in my course pathway choices. I sent an email to the students enrolled in an inquiry course I would be teaching again (although the title and course catalog call it a “research” course, I'm just now learning to embrace, enact, and embody this distinction between research's instrumental scrutiny and inquiry's spacious exploration (Koro et al., 2022)). I firmly asserted that both I and the course would likely “frustrate” them, acknowledging my

growing penchant for fewer limits around guiding students through individualized projects, even as the metanarrative of technique enshrined the description of, and possibly perceptions around, the course. It was something I'd said to students before in other courses, as I became increasingly accustomed to students' cognitive (and sometimes, personal) frustrations when I shrugged off concrete, immediate answers to technical "how-to" questions. I was unaware how this electronic declaration would inspire some students to seek these very answers I thought I was learning to shed, and how these pursuits would manifest as my own pedagogical self-fulfilling prophecy, an occupationally haunting reminder of my own educational confinement. I received a few responses to the potentially pedagogical fate-sealing email; however, it felt as though this introductory email floated off into the void, now inspiring prospective students' skepticism of what awaited them. While it seemed as if some found the choose-your-adventure blurriness around their culminating inquiry projects captivating, others, indeed, found it baffling. This was particularly apparent when discussing analysis.

I thought I was letting students in on a worthy, reassuring secret: That, unless rooted in and demonstrating oppression, much like teaching, there were many ways they could analyze qualitative "data" and many forms that social-world information could take; one did not rule them all. Despite roles as educational practitioners acknowledging, enacting, and embodying the variability that comes with teaching and supporting educational institutions, the belief in a singular "correct" research pathway and method seemed to permeate the awkward silence that followed. In breakout groups, I found this suspicion to be accurate, as a few student-groups demonstrated *the way* [they learned] to analyze qualitative information. After amiable-then-assertive declarations that they would not, in fact, be penalized for different analytical representations, it felt as though the group breathed a [somewhat] collective sigh of academic relief. While anxious to witness students' diverse thinking, a few remained tethered to that initial email-provoked skepticism. It was my turn to be dumbfounded upon learning the expectation I would, as the instructor, provide specific, concrete directives of what to do and how. While I initially bristled at the idea of an exact procedure-list for research, I failed to realize how I was, in fact, enacting a narrative of my own. Although individually tailoring the course's culminating inquiry project felt, at the time, noble, I not only rejected some students' calls for additional clarity—thereby clinging to some semblance of authority to decide what knowledge, what [meta]narratives were valuable—I had, yet again, focused my pedagogical and curricular decisions on the "doing," the method, the technical/que, rather than on thinking with/in/beyond the procedures.

### **Regressing into What Was: Pedagogically, Who am I (Really)?**

As a college student—at all levels—I grew to privately-then-more publicly question curricular choices of my instructors, and then professors—scrutiny I rarely, if ever, masked (even if I tried)—chafing at the boundaries of curricular and pedagogical authority. I would squeeze and shape the course for *me*, rather than the other way around, searching for openings, shortcuts around, and through generalized guideposts. I wanted to get it done, move on to doing something else, and thought or reflection would come later, if at all; there wasn't, I'd rationalize, enough *time*. I recalled my teaching of high school English, a core and heavily-tested subject, encompassing both content and pedagogical boundaries I learned not to reject, but rather, learned to squeeze into, make myself fit neatly into my role as a cog in the neoliberal machine (Ball, 2016), unsure of if—or whether—I wanted a way out. As a first-year high school teacher, students would ask me, "Why

are we doing this?” They’d similarly grate against the boundaries of ownership, learning, and power that contoured my student-experience, an experience happening concurrently alongside my teaching role. However, unable (or unwilling) to recognize glimmers of student-me in their inquiries, I would often dismiss these questions, believing that assumed pedagogical and professional authority and valued pedagogical efficiency eclipsed the need for additional detail—an ironic turn-of-the-proverbial desk. If it made sense to me and to the limited conception that I held for what constituted the course path creation, wasn’t that enough to keep moving?

In my third year as a teacher, I remember hearing the same question, “Why are we doing this?” peppering the hum and murmurs of the student collective. But this time, students followed up this interrogative with others: “What does this have to do with the rest of the year? With the rest of my life?” As the other students nodded in agreement, simultaneously enthralled at my upcoming response, I asked whether they’d all be interested in exposure to that information, the path-creation process, to which many replied in the affirmative. I brought my curriculum map to class the next day, and we made our class a working session: making changes, substitutions, erasures, and additions. The session opened up other questions from students about and with/in the planning process, and from me, about where I pedagogically stood—as other perspectives refocused the course path toward something else, more generative. Nevertheless, the embedded authority to carve out such an opportunity remained buried in my subconscious, a re-acquaintance I forgot amid the constant doing, the moving onto what was next.

### **Progressing Toward What Can—and Who Can—I Pedagogically Be**

Consequently, as transformative and illuminative as that process was for students, and for me, it never happened again, pedagogical confinement of (maybe?) my own making. However, that level of personal responsibility might not be entirely accurate, as curricula and refrains should-ing about teachers and teaching are everywhere (van den Berg, 2023). The complex role of the teacher, one situated within and between preconceived notions of teacher-as-imperialist construct-and-as-pedagogical entertainer (Inayatullah, 2022), exists at the intersection of uneven, fragmented attempts to negotiate frequently levied occupational—and, consequently, pedagogical—boundaries. Educational events that scrutinize, challenge, or upend these boundaries propel us into progressive aspects of currere (Pinar, 1975; 1978; Rose, 2017), unearthing painful reminders of tensions in academic be(com)ing processes at any level; processes marred by oscillations between the instrumental and lived, the predictable and possible, enactment or resistance (Tilley & Taylor, 2013).

Although I [say that I] adopt a critical orientation, I wonder whether I truly embrace, enact, and embody this position. While I’m initially less inclined to believe that these courses represent the work I purport to do, I still sit comfortably in method(s)—the unquestioning dissemination and execution of refrains written and created by and for others—suggesting my cerebral peddling too distinct from my pedagogical past and present. How shall we proceed when we meet narrow and confining educational beliefs and practices in our students, and in ourselves? How can we imagine, demonstrate, and enact possibility for students and for ourselves? The nuanced position of the teacher-as-universal intellectual within confining pedagogical, professional, and social conditions unearths tension in how we navigate internally and externally imposed boundaries, rubbing against our desperate and radical hope for something different, something else (Gannon, 2020).

### Analyzing the Pedagogical “Is”

Although I endeavored to create pedagogical space in these courses, I ignored how larger metanarratives “la[id] claim” on my pedagogical self (Lee, 2017, p. 24), reverting to the doing of, rather than the thinking in-between. I ironically project the latent fear and inherent skepticism of students’ possible pedagogical and scholarly confinement, while missing my own retreat to curricular and pedagogical refrains. Former students with whom I crossed paths sometimes expected scripts and plans, devoid of decision-making and contoured by directives and technicality (Rose, 2017). Some hoped for the reverse. In both cases, I chafed at requests for the opposite of what I constructed, or *planned*, missing the irony of having and eating my pedagogical cake. What could have been perceived as my intentional set-up for students to “fail” within the narrow boundaries of the course path was my retreat further into the neoliberal belief that doing-without-thinking amounted to curricular “freedom” instead of generating academic commodities (Okeyere, 2018). Asserting that success comes from being “most free” (Huddleson, 2019) to make [false] choices represents a turn toward the very im/explicit pedagogical refrains and plans I chastise in others but fail to recognize in myself.

Despite my hopes to position the course paths as invitations to embark on the run, I neglected the running, the navigating, the thinking through, often falling back on [just] surviving. I find myself lodged between practical skills and conceptual knowledge (Huddleson, 2019; Okeyere, 2018). I retreat to habits that privilege scholarly utility and academic capital accumulation through doing-method(s). In education at all levels, we walk tightropes between agency and complicity, structure and something else, comfort and possibility. Issues and metanarratives of power, knowledge, teachers and teaching similarly contour the university learning space. Narratives buried deep in our educational pasts oftentimes return us to what was, rather than short-circuit those narratives and reimagine what could be.

### Synthesizing Pedagogical Was/Is/Not-Yet

We cannot force student learning or development, arguably both a pedagogical limitation and a “saving grace” (Hansen, 2021, p. 33) of our work that honors the multiplicity of experiences in learning spaces, all of us wrestling with/in our own agendas at the crossroads of sense-making and something else (Hansen, 2021; Piazza & Heyer, 2022). As accomplices to/with/in our own truth regimes (Foucault, 1975), we sometimes miss opportunities for be(ing) *with* in curriculum. This is especially true for those occupying positions of power from perceived high ground and removed from threats to our “safe understanding[s]” of teaching and curriculum (Tilley & Taylor, 2013, p. 422). These complicate reimagining transformative pedagogical and scholarly possibilities. As a result, settled and sanctioned hierarchies, binaries, and regimes reforming notions of pedagogy, curriculum, and inquiry remain obscured. We think of silences, initial skepticism, and tensions as impediments, forgetting the untold embedded in these quiet moments (MacLure et al., 2010)—and leading us, ironically, to communicating more, providing more instruction and more resources, gaining more control (Khan & MacEachen, 2021)—turning away from and sitting with currere’s possibilities. Reflective practice fosters self-awareness, and encourages us to “re-attune” (Pinar, 1975; 1978) to how institutional structures confine our practice and ourselves (Tilley & Taylor, 2013). Like teaching’s dual science/art underpinning, we are always working with/in/against/through both the planned and lived curriculum,

with/in/through currere to soften the edges of temporality between our educational past-present-future, an enduring in-between our distance/proximity to educational im/possibility in un/explored celebrations, setbacks, and not-yets.

These educational events remind me that we are often [subconsciously] complicit in the narrowing of our work, exposing complexities that sometimes amount to missing short-circuiting our “dogmatic orbits” (Hansen, 2021, p. 32) that position larger, seemingly settled “truth claims” and metanarratives as comfortable and secure (Ball, 2016). Living in the educational, non-linear, always-evolving in-between, constantly navigating this delicate line between instrumental and prescribed, and poetic and lived (Aoki, 1993) is the running, the currere of dwelling with/in the tensions between planned and lived curricular landscapes, always recognizing our [possible] complicity (Pinar, 1978). Even with looming scripts threatening to claim our pedagogical selves, I wonder how we can free ourselves from metanarratives that shape what and how we teach, ones that we might reject in principle but revert to in practice. How can we make room for currere—the running, and not the road—to scrutinize our own complicity with/in settled truths? These questions illuminate important pedagogical and ideological tensions in the work-to-be-done, hopefully chafing against subversion “from the inside” (Maxwell & Roofe, 2020, p. 33). I am still negotiating my position within this curricular and pedagogical in-between the scripts, meta/narratives, pasts, presents, and futures, and how these intersect with, reform, and contour my pedagogical and curricular selves.

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