

Reclamation, Resistance, and Curriculum Within the Tremors

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IN VOLUME 41, ISSUE 2, we invite readers to encounter scholars who locate themselves within a complex and contextualized present: educators and curriculum theorists who draw upon the past to make sense of curriculum while preparing us to imagine different futures. The articles curated in this issue emerge within a particular spacetime mattering, (Barad, 2007) one marked by profound violence, uncertainty, and struggle.

Across the globe, people continue to witness the televised genocide in Gaza, where the relentless circulation of images and testimonies has collapsed the distance between spectatorship and complicity while revealing the uneven value assigned to human life. The expansion of militarism, including the preemptive war against Iran and escalating regional conflicts, further exposes how fear and empire continue to shape geopolitical realities. Locally, these global crises reverberate through intensifying law enforcement violence against communities of color, the brutality of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids in the United States, and sustained political attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives that seek to make educational institutions more just and accountable.

These are not merely background events or historical conditions external to curriculum; they constitute the very spacetime in which educators, students, and scholars live, think, grieve, resist, and create. The contributions in this issue neither retreat from these realities nor presume to resolve them. Instead, they invite readers to consider how curriculum theory can remain responsive to the ethical demands of the present while cultivating the historical consciousness, relationality, and critical hope necessary to imagine futures that exceed the violences of our time.

DeLeon (2026), in “*Curriculum at the End of Time: Abjection and the Apocalyptic Body*,” suggests that even if we are living through apocalyptic times, the work of teaching, theorizing, and creating continues:

When we theorize and create at the end of time, we speak into a chamber of echoes, knowing what may return can be potentially distorted, partial, or even lost. Even despite this reality, something answers. Students breathe. Teachers theorize and create. Rituals repeat. The forms of silence in the margins gather new kinds of meaning. We teach and produce in the tremors. (p. 51)

Throughout this issue, we encounter these reverberating tremors in scholars’ examinations of themselves, their histories, and broader curricular possibilities—even within the constraints of the present moment.

In his 2025 Bergamo keynote address, King (2026) reminds us that continuing to theorize and create requires critical hope. He does not present critical hope as a singular solution for a moment in which “DEI, Critical Race Theory, ‘woke’—[are] all positioned as threats to society” (p. ##). Instead, King recounts his own experience of being targeted for supporting and using the Black Historical Consciousness framework (King, 2020) with partner school districts. Yet he argues:

While oppressed people may succumb to cynicism, hopelessness, or retreat, those who embrace critical hope resist despair and imagine their current conditions as temporary. They envision the possibility of a better—or at least more equitable—future. Critical hope is cultivated by historically oppressed groups that proactively and innovatively create spaces for hope to emerge. (pp. 12-13)

Spaces in which such hope may emerge are also illuminated by Porcher and Bertrand (2026) in “Honoring the OGs: Centering Black Educators as Theorists in Teacher Education.” Through Collective Black Feminist Currere (McNair-Lee, 2025), they draw upon their Black Gaze Framework (Bertrand & Porcher, 2023) to urge teacher educators to center the intellectual and pedagogical contributions of OGs such as Alice Dunbar-Nelson and Septima Poinsette Clark. As they explain, “Through collective Black Feminist currere, engaging the lives and work of OGs becomes a regressive act of remembering and a relational act of reclamation” (Porcher & Bertrand, 2026, p. ##).

While Porcher and Bertrand offer teacher educators frameworks for engaging with the lives and work of Black educators from the past, Murray (2026) uses Black Feminist currere to examine her mother’s educational journey alongside her own. From within an increasingly difficult educational context, Murray openly wonders about her capacity to continue: can she “stay”?

My mother’s journey through these multiple worlds, where navigating life as a single mother, an undergraduate student, and into teaching at the age of 50, was a living embodiment of the progressive phase. Her radical commitment to finish what she had started in 1973 at Nicholls State University is a model of what it looks like to choose education again and to restore what one may think is lost. Yet, as I move through my own educational career, I stand at a restless crossroads to continue in the K-12 sector, the urge to further my educational pursuits into higher education, or to leave the public school system as a whole. This painful tension exposes my accomplishments alongside my fears—

coexisting with my success as a teacher, the communities I participated in to sustain myself for 12.5 years, and the grief of what I believed education was supposed to be. (pp. 59-60)

Kraemer-Holland (2026) similarly offers readers a feminist currere journey through affect and emotion in education.

In creative communion with Adrienne Rich's poem "Diving into the Wreck," she traces the emotional contours of educational experience. Although Kraemer-Holland does not characterize her work as post-apocalyptic, her encounter with wreckage resonates with DeLeon's invitation to inhabit and examine the ruins:

This wouldn't be the last time that my—or other—voice would carry, upending educational and public spaces with displays of resistance, anger, or rage. While a small part of me now acknowledges how this formative moment might have (sub)consciously informed my decision to become a teacher—or informed how I teach—this moment also shaped how I came to initially understand emotions, especially my own, as seemingly entirely private, individually-dictated, and often unbecoming choices. In this case, I'd chosen the wrong one, a choice that contoured my stature in my tiny educational world; a choice that altered how my parents viewed me; a choice that damaged my personal and professional relationships with others, and with myself. I did not act angry; I was angry. And I found it, this label, disastrous—until I carved out an opportunity to "seize" (Greene, 1977, p. 284) meaning within the wreck(age) underneath these unspoken emotion-labels and emotion-rules, and (re)turned to see them differently up close. (p. 99)

DeLeon (2026), King (2026), and Schultz (2026) each ask readers to see education as it is, without surrendering the possibility that it might become otherwise. Schultz's essay, "Selling School Safety: Surveillance, Commercialism, and a Not-So-Hidden Curriculum," cuts directly into a lived reality of contemporary schooling. Students, families, and educators are increasingly told that surveillance is a necessary condition of safety. The systems Schultz examines may not initially appear as "ruins," but the questions they generate echo across the issue and help readers, in DeLeon's terms, "recognize the situation we are in" (2026, p. 41). Schultz asks, "Perhaps, in the spirit of curriculum studies, we need to keep asking questions. What can be done to keep young people and schools safe, given the urgency of the moment?" (2026, p. 36).

Although Schultz poses this question in the context of surveillance and institutional attempts to produce safety, it reverberates across the work of every scholar in this issue. What does it mean to create safety within conditions of abjection, censorship, exhaustion, grief, racialized violence, surveillance, and institutional abandonment? What histories and relationships help educators endure? What forms of curriculum make reclamation, resistance, and different futures possible?

As DeLeon (2026) writes:

As we embrace the ruins and explore the graveyard of what once was, we are not pulled towards a nihilistic conclusion, nor are we called to a vanity of hope that pervades much educational theory. Recognizing the situation we are in, is not defeat nor is it resignation. Instead, it becomes a productive force that animates our imaginations towards a radically different future potential. (p. 41)

The scholars in this issue neither minimize the conditions of the present nor allow those conditions to have the final word. They remember, reclaim, question, teach, and create within the tremors. Their work invites us to recognize what has been damaged or lost while remaining attentive to what still answers.

Onward toward a future of radically different potential.

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We Need Critical Hope

Self-Reflections on Cultural Wars, the Black Scare, and Black History

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WHEN I WAS IN GRADUATE SCHOOL at the University of Texas–Austin, one of the first classes I took was the history of curriculum. At the time, I did not know that my academic identity would evolve into curriculum history and theory, but I took a keen interest in class sessions that focused on the cultural wars of the 1980s and 1990s. I still remember reading articles by and about major actors such as Diane Ravitch (1990), E.D. Hirsch (1988), the New York and California state standards (Cornbleth & Waugh, 2012), *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), as well as the writings of Joyce King (1991), Gloria Ladson-Billings (1991), James Banks (1993), and Molefi Kete Asante (1991).

I was an elementary and middle school student during those cultural wars, so I had no personal references to those debates. But as I learned about the era, I was astounded by the lengths taken to misrepresent the purpose of multiculturalism and preserve a dying Eurocentric identity that I believed was coming to an end. From the communities I engaged with at the time, all we talked about was diversity and multiculturalism—often comparing the U.S. racial and cultural makeup to gumbo or salad. I thought it was both desperate and racist to demonize the efforts of multicultural education.

As I was preparing and deciding on the theme for this talk, I happened to stumble across some previous graduate school assignments in which I reflected on the 1980s and 1990s cultural wars. In one of those reflections, I wrote that cultural wars benefit White folks who, as Frantz Fanon (1952/2008) explained, often possess an unconscious fear of Blackness—especially when they believe that Western culture is being intruded upon. That fear, or what Carol Anderson (2016) classified as White rage, would prevent or stall any advancement that did not center Whiteness unless there was a keen convergence of interests with the dominant culture (Bell, 1980). Yet I believed that, at the very least, these cultural wars would always end in what Michael Apple (2014) noted as compromises—outcomes that mostly sided with Whiteness, but with minor accords to other people's cultures.

I never imagined that over a decade later I would become a subject in the most recent iteration of a cultural war during the COVID pandemic. In July 2021, during a virtual Zoom

meeting with potential authors for a book project, I received a text message from a former school superintendent who had hired me several times to conduct professional development for his district. He wrote, “Just thought you should know, there is an article about you in some conservative newsletter,” followed by a link. I was unfazed because I and other colleagues who do critical research were occasionally targeted by conservative activists who disagreed with our educational ideologies. I was already on the Professor Watch List as someone whom conservative activists believed held dangerous ideas and would indoctrinate students.

I did not immediately open the message and continued discussing the project. Then I received another text and an email from two different colleagues about the same newsletter. I wondered, *why are all of you getting these alerts?* I paused the conversation with my collaborators to see what was happening. The story addressed my involvement consulting with a school district that wanted to develop its first Black history curriculum and course. According to the article, the local school board had hired me to develop a curriculum to teach students Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Marxism. Again, I was unfazed—school leaders had already warned me about a parent group opposed to diverse education and told me to expect pushback. In response to those concerns, I suggested holding a public virtual meeting for parents who wanted to learn more about the curriculum. Understanding the polarizing nature of the course, I wanted to ensure transparency so parents and any interested community members could understand my approach to Black history. I felt that secrecy would only convey impropriety.

The Black history course emerged because Black students at the local high school demanded it. The students felt marginalized and ignored in the existing curriculum and within the school itself. They wanted to learn more about the national and local history of Black people, and they wanted to understand why things such as racism and police brutality continue to happen. They were acutely aware of the area and the district’s history of racial discrimination and recent tensions. Like many predominantly White suburban districts, Black students experienced anti-blackness from classmates and teachers and believed that certain policies were racist. They wanted a curriculum that told their story so they could better understand the anti-Blackness they experienced locally.

By 2021, I had consulted with dozens of school districts across the country on developing Black history curricula. This school district, like many others, sought to help their students make sense of systemic racism and anti-Blackness in the United States. These students came of age in an era where anti-Black violence was a constant fixture in media. They were profoundly shaped by documented police brutality and the public spectacle of racial violence. For example, high profile killings of teenagers such as Trayvon Martin in 2012 and Michael Brown in 2014 held profound significance for the students and their community (Berry & Stoval, 2013; Sciullo, 2014). The Ferguson, Missouri uprising, sparked by Michael Brown’s death occurred just miles from the students’ town. Along with subsequent killings of Black people by police officers leading up to the murder of George Floyd (Washington Post, 2024), these events created a major inflection point for both their local community and the nation. Millions saw the footage of Officer Derek Chauvin pressing his knee into Floyd’s neck for over nine minutes, causing asphyxia, all in response to a report that Floyd had used a counterfeit twenty-dollar bill. Chauvin later claimed he used the tactic because Floyd was resisting arrest. The aftermath led to massive protests across the United States (Ellison, 2021).

Black history education is deeply tied to U.S. social movements and Black civil unrest. One of the more popular solutions to quell Black dissatisfaction and appeal to “good White people,” (Thompson, 2003) have been calls for more Black history in schools. The premise is that

understanding Black history is essential to understanding Black humanity and their experience with racism, and anti-Blackness. To learn Black history is for Black folks to get acknowledgment of what has been done in the past, center messiahs who fought those circumstances, and to create a history that students can be proud of learning. For White folks, as James Baldwin (2008) surmised, history is for White people to learn about themselves. This pattern emerged after the Civil War, during the nadir of race relations, the lynching era, the Civil Rights Movement, and again during Black Lives Matter. My experience with the school district was no different.

The curriculum we developed was based on my framework, Black Historical Consciousness (King, 2020). I wanted a framework that would reframe how Black history is defined and taught. I studied more than a century of Black history textbooks written by Black educators who identified what they felt students needed to know (King, 2014; 2019). I also studied discourse from Black history teachers, Black Lives Matter activists, and Black history scholars to identify common Black History themes. This research spanned ten years, beginning when I was a graduate student in 2010. From this work, I first developed six principles, later expanded to eight, outlining what teachers and curriculum developers should emphasize when creating Black history programs. These principles include Power, Oppression, and Anti-Blackness; Agency, Perseverance, and Justice; Africa and the African Diaspora; Black Emotionality; Black Identities; Black Historical Contention; Black Social History; and Black Futurism. For additional readings on Black Historical Consciousness, I recommend Chapman-Hillard (2024), Falkner & Tills (2025), King (2020; 2023), Martin et al. (2026), Pitts & James (2023), Simmons, et al. (2019), and Wise, et al. (2023).

As a consultant, I do not write the curriculum; district employees write their own curriculum based on the principles of my framework. This ensures local ownership and allows each district to tailor content to their community. At that time, about a dozen districts had adopted my principles, and each curriculum looked different. The district's Black history curriculum team included administrators, teachers, community members, and students. They developed six thematic units focused on current events, local histories, Africa and the Diaspora, Black joy, the Civil Rights Movement, and a student-chosen capstone project. The semester-long course was personalized to the district and culminated in a research project using historical methods.

When I read the write-up in the conservative newsletter—later revealed as Turning Point USA—I noticed mischaracterizations of my words and even edits to a video. Still, I did not think much of it. But in the next few days, I began receiving voicemails and emails from supporters of the newsletter. While none used explicit racist slurs, the familiar tropes appeared: I was called lazy, unqualified, a Marxist, a communist, a socialist, and told I needed a real job. One emailer even wished me dead, which I interpreted as a threat.

I then received an email from the state legislature asking me to testify in support of Critical Race Theory at a hearing. At the time, I would have been the only person testifying in favor of CRT, while a dozen others planned to testify against. I decided to decline the offer because I felt that the hearing was a charade. After witnessing similar hearings in other states—and given the lateness of the request (the hearing was in four days)—I concluded that this particular hearing was not about education but about putting a face, a Black face, a villain of sorts, on CRT for the state.

In many ways, I was the perfect specimen to vilify: a big, dark-skinned Black man with a baritone voice. The fear of the “big Black man” is historic, rooted in myths that lead to stereotypes of Black men as aggressive, violent, or physically overpowering White people (Johnson, 2018). Such stereotypes often result in negative encounters with those in authority. This trope, combined with attacks on CRT, was a convenient recipe for winning a cultural war.

I had also seen many others attempt to educate the public about CRT, only to be dismissed. I felt the process would be an unproductive use of my time. If I am being honest, to participate in the hearing would have given that movement legitimacy. I would not have classified Black Historical Consciousness, Critical Race Theory, which would have legitimized this simplified narrative that opponents attempted to paint about the theories and its usefulness. I was not up to playing that game, especially as I was finalizing plans for my international summer conference, The Teaching Black History Conference, which was only a week away. That work felt like real equity work. In my opening address at the conference, I testified—on my own terms—about what was happening in the United States around CRT, educational equity, and Black history.

While some disagreed with my decision not to testify, including the local NAACP and several Black community members, I do not regret my choice. I later learned I had become a hot topic on the social media platform, Facebook. Based on everything that transpired—and on what conservative activists have since admitted—it became clear that the attacks on me and others around the country were orchestrated to embarrass, disqualify, and dehumanize us for political theater. I do not engage in politics that way. I do, however, regret informing my university administrators about the ordeal.

When I began receiving emails, I told my department chair, who then informed the communications person in the President's office. Initially, they seemed helpful and concerned. I received calls from both the President and the Provost checking on my wellbeing. The FBI even got involved and contacted the individual who had threatened my life, although campus police initially claimed they could not act because the person had only said he "wished me dead," which they argued was not technically a threat. Once the President's office became involved, however, the situation escalated beyond anything I had asked for. When I mentioned my decision not to testify, the President, through subordinates, attempted to force me to do so. When I refused, he initiated a conflict-of-interest inquiry, claiming I had violated university policy because I had been paid for the consulting work.

I received the request to update my conflict-of-interest paperwork while I was on vacation. Like many of us who work too much, I had made a concerted effort not to bring any work on my family trip, so I did not have my laptop. I told them I would complete the forms once I returned home, but they insisted that I fill them out from memory. Being inexperienced and naïve to what was unfolding, I took time out of my vacation to complete the paperwork on my phone.

As I attempted to rectify my paperwork and ensure compliance, the administration was never satisfied with anything I submitted. After several weeks, it seemed clear, in my mind, that the issue was not the paperwork but an effort to build a case against me. My suspicion was confirmed when two high level colleagues informed me that a university board member had allegedly stated that I needed to be punished for my work with the school district. As a tenured faculty member, there are formal processes and steps required to sanction or fire someone for violating university policy, and they began that process.

Throughout this ordeal, I received conflicting messages. I was told that one major concern was that I made too much money consulting. They wanted detailed accounts of how many hours I worked and how much I was paid by each entity, including school districts, corporations, nonprofits, and community organizations. They were also particularly concerned with my previous work and board membership with Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance), the educational arm of the Southern Poverty Law Center. I was confused about the interests with Learning for Justice, especially since I served on several other boards that they ignored. With the recent attacks on the Southern Poverty Law Center by the FBI, I think I have a clearer

understanding of the tactic (U.S. Department of Justice, 2026). Nevertheless, I felt all these inquiries were a waste of time because they were already documented on my records that I submitted annually.

I was also told the administration wanted to determine whether my consulting work caused me to neglect my responsibilities as a professor. For context, I had received excellent reviews from department chairs and deans since joining the university—and had even received a merit raise just weeks earlier. Those of us who consult typically work within our areas of expertise and rely on existing professional development materials or speaking topics, making the time commitment minimal once materials are developed.

Nevertheless, I was required to submit extensive paperwork detailing every consulting job, every board membership, and even each book I had written or coedited since 2015—all because they did not believe I could manage both my consulting and my university duties. While some might argue that this is standard in state university systems, I ask: Have you ever had to submit your tax returns? Because I was asked to do exactly that. At that point, my wife and I decided we had enough, and we hired an attorney.

Whether I was guilty of the Conflict-of-Interest (COI) policy or the process was legitimate is not the issue and requires different questions. I will point out, however, that even if I violated the COI policy, very few people, historically, in my department had ever submitted COI forms—a fact my department chair acknowledged in a meeting with higher administrators. To my knowledge, I was the only person asked to submit extensive supplemental paperwork. Additionally, none of the administration's stated concerns (money, time, etc.) appeared in the original COI policy documents until after they began investigating.

Throughout this ordeal, I was reminded that the process of procedural racism (Lim et al., 2022) has been used against Black persons who are seen as threats to the social order. I learned that many universities allegedly use the ambiguities of COI policies to punish, withhold pay from, or remove faculty they do not like. After refusing to continue with the investigation, the university and I decided to part ways. For five months, not only did conservative activists continue attacking me, but so did my employer—placing extreme stress on me and my family. All because I helped a school district develop a Black history curriculum for students who needed to see their own humanity reflected—or, if you believe the university, because of a technical policy issue.

Black History and The Black Scare

It is important for me to share this story as an act of reflection, not victimhood. I do not see myself as a victim, although I was victimized by a manufactured crisis and a system designed to appease Whiteness. While I experienced stress (and probably added a few more greys to my beard), others around the country endured far more severe consequences—including a close friend, a mentor, and numerous Black women, other women of color, and LGBTQIA faculty. During these witch hunts, which I refer to as the *Black Scare* (Burden-Stelly, 2023), our most marginalized and vulnerable scholars—because of their research or simply because of who they are—faced tenure denials, were removed from prominent positions, and suffered extreme health consequences.

I hurt mostly for my family, who had to uproot their relatively comfortable lives. I hurt because, while my wife and I attempted to shield our children from what was happening, they still understood what was being done to me and to our family. Neither of them ever mentioned it or made me feel guilty about moving. I hurt for my wife, who was finishing graduate school and

preparing for her faculty position at the institution; she ended up being treated unfairly because of her connection to me.

I hurt for other educators who were victimized through this Black scare and may not have had a severance package or the privilege of securing another job quickly, as I did. I believe that everyone involved in the curriculum development team no longer works in the school district. I hurt most for the students who experienced curriculum violence their entire academic lives and had the courage to request—and were granted—a Black history curriculum that could help them make sense of the world around them. Instead, adults betrayed their concerns and reversed the decision to offer the Black history classes, proving once again that their lives and histories did not matter, and likely never will, to those who maintain power and privilege. These students were the true victims, as this manufactured cultural war brings the greatest disruption and pain to the most vulnerable.

The irony is that the claims made by conservatives are fraudulent. For over a century, curriculum studies research has shown that school curriculum overwhelmingly favors Eurocentrism, Whiteness, and Western epistemologies, while denying the humanity of people of color (Berry, 2017; Reddick, 1934; Yacovone, 2023). K–12 teachers have historically had limited knowledge and have struggled to teach about race and racism (King, 2016). They either ignore these concepts entirely or, whether intentionally or not, taught them in ways that reinforce Whiteness (Ott & Kohli, 2023; Picower, 2009). Even when teachers are familiar with Critical Race Theory—and I mean its original and real definition—it remains virtually nonexistent in classrooms. According to the American Historical Association (2024), teachers do not indoctrinate students to hate the United States or White people; rather, most teachers focus on teaching historical thinking skills—teaching students *how* to think, not *what* to think.

Black history education, in particular, has a long and polarizing history in K–12 discourse (Brown & Au, 2014; Givens, 2021; Zimmerman, 2022). Since the nineteenth century, Black history and its content have been questioned and policed. The enduring question educators have wrestled with is whether Black people have a history and, if so, which aspects are worthy of study. Before the late nineteenth century, those in power largely answered no. In response, Black people—often Civil War veterans—began constructing historical narratives to prove Black history existed. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Black history’s existence was acknowledged, but debates remained over what content should be included. During this era, a second generation of Black history educators, typically teachers, wrote Black history textbooks for their students. We also began seeing Black people become professionally trained historians and earn PhDs, marking a shift toward a more systematic and scholarly approach to Black history education (Dagbovie, 2010, 2015, 2018).

In the early twentieth century, public schools began accepting Black history as part of the official curriculum, but only in predominantly Black schools and only with the approval of White school boards. This Black history could exist only if it did not disrupt the patriotic or progressive narratives taught in regular history courses. Controversial Black historical figures were not allowed. Zimmerman (2022) notes that historical figures such as George Washington Carver and Jackie Robinson were acceptable but not the likes of Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey. White school boards believed that critical or pro-Black narratives undermined patriotism and unfairly painted White people as bigots and racists. For the next century, the unwritten policy of Black history education could exist only if it did not challenge the status quo too deeply. Yes, Black history could mention racism, White supremacy, and discrimination—but only as the actions of a few “bad men doing bad things,” (Brown & Brown, 2010) not as systemic forces shaping the nation.

And these narratives were acceptable only when framed as problems that had been solved by good White people.

Since the 1960s, Black history and Black Studies offerings have grown in public schools. However, the narratives have largely remained stagnant, often mirroring traditional history classes but with more Black faces. While inclusion has increased, there have not been systematic changes in content, particularly content dealing with systemic racism or its contemporary implications. Teachers continue to struggle with providing this education. Although what I call *critical Black history education* gained some traction among teachers and districts during the Black Lives Matter–George Floyd era, it never approached a critical mass. The fear of Critical Race Theory in public schools has never been grounded in reality.

Despite evidence contradicting conservative claims, conservative rhetoric has successfully helped elect political leaders who restrict curriculum and teacher practice (Alexander et al., 2023). We have seen Black educators fired, books banned, and Black history and Black studies courses eliminated based on unfounded allegations of CRT, wokeness, or DEI. So why do these anti-Black tactics continue to shape educational policy and public belief? As scholars, we understand the history of anti-Blackness and how it influences White attitudes and actions. This is what Charisse Burden-Stelly (2023) calls the Black scare—a phenomenon that helps explain why cultural wars tend to favor conservative ideologues who fear losing racial and cultural power.

According to Burden-Stelly (2023), the Black scare is “the historically and contextually situated debasement, distortion, criminalization, and subjection of Blackness rooted in fearmongering about Black social equality, political domination, and economic parity on the one hand, and the displacement, devalorization, and devaluation of whiteness on the other.” The discourse surrounding Black history and racial literacy reflects these fears. Claims that Black history causes students to hate White people, or the invocation of replacement theory, (Evans, 2024) are manifestations of the fear that Whiteness is losing its cultural dominance. Social studies curriculum has always been used to extol societal values; therefore, simply proposing Black history courses has long been seen as a threat to Whiteness. Policing Black history has always been about controlling narratives—ensuring that Whiteness remains centered and Blackness remains subordinate.

A major limitation in past attempts to create sustainable Black history education is that practitioners tried to situate Black history within White epistemic frameworks. They wanted to keep Black history White. In other words, the Black history taught in schools was not truly Black history—it was White history in Blackface (King, 2020). The Black scare works by limiting Black perspectives and voices. Authentic Black history must emerge from Black perspectives, voices, and experiences. When history is centered on Black experiences, the narratives look, sound, and feel different. For example, *Brown v. Board of Education*, from Black perspectives, emphasizes the loss of community, schools, teachers, and administrators, as well as the racist experiences of Black students in integrated schools—far removed from the celebratory narrative that integration ushered in a harmonious society (Parham & Nadelson, 2025).

The Black scare is rooted in fear of Black radicalism. It presents a distorted world in which Black social, economic, and political equality—what some White people perceive as power—threatens racial hierarchy. The Black scare begins with Black people possessing a spirit of liberatory consciousness—the ability to imagine a more equitable society. This consciousness is precisely what makes Black history dangerous when taught through Black eyes: it can give voice to injustice, but it can also offer strategies for liberation. To preserve racial dominance, the state invents what W.E.B. Du Bois called witchwords to demonize those who imagine a new society

(Burden-Stelly, 2023). We are familiar with these witchwords today—DEI, Critical Race Theory, “woke”—all positioned as threats to society. Their purpose is to sow distrust of Blackness, a task made easy in a culture where curriculum subtly frames Black people as problems to be solved rather than problem solvers.

The Black scare aims to elicit violence—physical, epistemic, and psychic—against Black people and Blackness. We see this in the policing of Black bodies, the discipline of Black children in schools, and the cancellation of Black history courses. Students suffered this when their Black history course was eliminated; students across the country felt it when AP African American Studies courses were rejected. Academics feel it through harassment, loss of grants, and restrictions on programs supporting marginalized communities. The Black scare remains effective because society continues to harbor disdain for Blackness. Claims of colorblindness or racial neutrality collapse under the reality that policymakers understand race, understand how Whiteness reacts to Blackness, and understand the power of an education that tells the truth.

At this point in the talk, it feels appropriate to shift toward solutions. To be honest, I do not know if I have a definitive solution. I understand why many of my critical colleagues feel apathetic or pessimistic about the future of racial justice in education and society. I hesitated to center the Black scare in this analysis because I worried some would interpret it as hopeless. After all, we are nearly two decades removed from electing the first Black president and only five years removed from the so-called “racial reckoning” of 2020 (Dyson, 2020; Grace, 2026). It once seemed like we were moving—at least cosmetically—toward a more equitable society. Yet within a few short years, our institutions reneged on those commitments. Therefore, my answer—my offering—is *critical hope*.

Critical Hope and Black History Protectionism

Hope is a highly contested and polarizing theoretical construct. It is also an international and transdisciplinary field that recognizes the concept as ever-evolving and shaped by geography, time, history, and socio-economic relations. In other words, hope is experienced differently across cultures and social groups (Lopez et al., 2018). According to Webb (2013), the literature identifies twenty-six theories of hope and more than fifty definitions of the term. Webb notes that hope studies—what Eliot (2005) calls the *hope industry*—can be divided into five theoretical and pedagogical approaches: patient, critical, sound, resolute, and transformative. My approach to theorizing hope and its connections to Black history education centers on its critical dimensions.

Critical hope emerged from the ideas and frameworks set forth by critical theorists (Bozalek et al., 2014; Giroux, 2001). Scholarship often traces its origins to the Frankfurt School and Neo-Marxist critiques, but most credit Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of Hope* (2001) as foundational to its contemporary intellectual development (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Freire, 1970; Zembylas, 2014). Critical hope has been widely applied in education, particularly in educational leadership, higher education, and anti-racist/social justice education (Bishundat et al., 2018; Glass, 2014; Sutton, 2015).

Drawing from Freire (2001), I define critical hope as the ability to understand how power, oppression, and systems shape one’s life and material realities. While oppressed people may succumb to cynicism, hopelessness, or retreat, those who embrace critical hope resist despair and imagine their current conditions as temporary. They envision the possibility of a better—or at least more equitable—future. Critical hope is cultivated by historically oppressed groups that

proactively and innovatively create spaces for hope to emerge. They attempt to construct what Zembylas (2014) calls “a different lifeworld” (p. 13). Critical hope arises because these groups believe in building a better future grounded in critical education and historical understanding.

Freire (2001) notes that critical hope is an ontological need—one that recognizes human agency as shaped by struggle. He reminds us that hope alone accomplishes little, but the absence of hope breeds pessimism and disillusionment, aligning with the oppressor’s interests by maintaining the status quo (Apple, 2014). Webb (2013) cautions that there is “nothing inherently radical or subversive about hope” (p. 399). Hope, especially its pedagogical manifestations, can just as easily reproduce society as transform it. Thus, distinguishing critical hope from more palatable or superficial forms of hope is essential.

Boler (2004) and Duncan-Andrade (2009) identify several mainstream discourses of hope that function as false or enemies of hope: naïve hope, hokey hope, mythical hope, and hope deferred.

- **Naïve hope** (Boler, 2004; Freire, 2001) consists of platitudes that preserve hegemonic interests and believe that blind faith is only needed for things to get better (Zembylas, 2014, p. 13), hence there exist no analysis of structural power.
- **Hokey hope** relies on an individualistic, bootstraps philosophy: work hard, follow the rules, and you will achieve the American Dream. While hard work is valuable, this form of hope ignores structural barriers. Rooted in privilege and common-sense logic (Apple, 2014), hokey hope dismisses the voices of marginalized people by placing blame on individuals rather than systems.
- **Mythical hope** is premised on the false narrative of equal opportunity, detached from historical and political realities (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). It celebrates exceptional individuals while denying the systemic nature of oppression.
- **Hope deferred** allows critique of inequity but stops short of action. It assumes no pedagogical intervention can be truly transformative given broader systemic barriers (Duncan-Andrade, 2009, p. 182).

The emotions driving these false hopes include fear, apathy, isolation, and despair.

Critical hope, by contrast, is action-oriented, purposeful, and political. It requires commitment to something greater than what is presently visible. It is messy, filled with honest emotions and contradictions. Critical hope demands historical and racial literacy, as well as a commitment to truth-telling. To hold critical hope does not mean possessing all the answers; nor does it demand perfection. In fact, the search for perfect messiahs is itself a problem within progressive spaces. Instead, critical hope is communal, offering belonging in difficult times. It recognizes the power of human agency—individual and collective—and understands that actions, not naiveté, drive social transformation. Critical hope is grounded in justice, reflexivity, and solidarity. It is the abiding wisdom that transformation is impossible without a vision of a more equitable society.

I like to think that I practice critical hope. During my ordeal, it changed me. I was traumatized, hurt, and tired. I stopped writing and thinking deeply. As a man, I worried about my family. I wondered whether my career would be damaged. Would I get my next promotion? Would consulting opportunities disappear? Would I be able to run my center? I questioned myself, my work, and my purpose. I did not stop

Everything I had built over my career felt at risk. We have seen Black institutions collapse in the face of such attacks. They target you—and whatever you value most. In my case, it was a

research and professional development center that I created in 2018. At the time, the center, an innovative space where Black history teachers and supporters could come to together to share knowledge and pedagogical ideas around Black history education was growing rapidly; nearly 2,000 educators from around the world had attended the in person and virtual conferences across four summers. The university wanted to stop those conferences. They wanted to remove me as director. They wanted to control the center's content. I did not stop.

When I left, I created a new center based on the similar principles. The Center for K–12 Black History and Racial Literacy Education was developed and we have extended our mission and soon will be entering a decade of service. A few people ask me, “Given what you have been through, why continue to consult, hold professional development, and direct a center around Black history and racial literacy in this political climate?” I owe it to the communities that I serve. All the students, parents, and teachers who want a culturally rigorous education that helps them see who they are. Plus, this fight is bigger than me. I understand the historical legacy of those who had fought for Black history education before me—many under far harsher conditions. That knowledge propelled me toward action and transformation.

Critical hope is difficult and often countercultural, but it is rooted in love for the communities we claim to serve. To those who write, teach, or research the very diversity issues now under attack: continue. They joke that no one reads or cites our work, that we do not matter in policy. But I have been around long enough to know that our research shapes discourse. If it did not matter, they would not be trying to dismantle higher education, destroy public schools, and silence critical history. We have lived through similar moments before. The lessons of the past will guide us. As we experience these times, we must document them—because our words will become hope for future generations, just as the writings of Carter G. Woodson, Joyce King, Gloria Ladson-Billings, James Banks, and Molefi Kete Asante were for me.

Can critical hope save us? Yes, but it is a collective effort that requires us to be patient and steadfast with our convictions. Critical hope rests on the belief that things will change. It requires continued support of each other and our needs. It is not about who is the most critical, say the most academically charged words, or these silly arguments and rivalries that serve as red herrings for us and our goals for liberation. Critical hope requires us to be strategic. Requires us to not be distracted by the academy, fame, and money. When one of us are attacked, we are all attacked. Those who attack us are not seeing differences or nuance. It can be humiliating, devastating, and embarrassing but as critical scholars, critical hope is our solution.

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Selling School Safety

Surveillance, Commercialism, and a Not-So-Hidden Curriculum

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I AM GRATEFUL TO TOM POETTER and the Board of the *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* for the honor of giving the keynote address at this Conference on Curriculum Theory and Classroom Practice. I am also thankful to my colleagues, especially my Miami University friends, who joined me in this conversation. This keynote provided an opportunity to explore a topic that has captured my attention and is rooted in my longstanding interest in curriculum studies. My goal is to begin a conversation with curriculum scholars about the phenomenon I have been calling *Selling School Safety*.

This article has been adapted from the keynote address presented at the Conference on Curriculum Theorizing and Classroom Practice. The keynote has been revised for readability as a manuscript and updated to reflect current policy developments and research.

Throughout this article, I use the term *selling school safety* to describe the growing commercialization of school safety through products, services, surveillance technologies, professional development, consulting, and policy initiatives that promise to make schools safer while simultaneously creating a new educational marketplace. The purpose of this critical examination is not to question or cast doubt on the good intentions of any company, organization, or individual discussed within this article, but instead to challenge the current conditions in our society through which the commodification of school safety has become both normalized and commonplace.



Since Alex Molnar's (2005) pathbreaking work, *School Commercialism*, curriculum studies scholars have examined how schools, schooling, and curriculum intersect with the marketplace. That publishers and corporations have long sought to profit from schools and school children is concerning enough, but now there is a new marketplace that has emerged, given the tragic ubiquity of school shootings: the selling of school safety.

This article examines the chilling new phenomenon of companies increasingly entering the schoolhouse with the purported purpose of keeping young people safe. From surveillance products and panoptical practices to on-demand mental health services from for-profit companies, and even the arming of teachers, schools continue to be places for commercialism to flourish. School safety has increasingly become a commercial marketplace in which fear, surveillance, and security are commodified, shaping the hidden curriculum of schooling and influencing how students, educators, and communities understand safety itself.

Acknowledgment of Land

I begin with a land acknowledgment and ponder the space in which I conduct my work, the indigenous people's land that Miami University inhabits. The same people, the Myaamia people, the Shawnee people, and other indigenous peoples, were on that land and the land where Bergamo sits, and they were forcibly removed because of the Treaty of Greenville (Miami University, 2023a). Those tribes are now mostly located in Miami, Oklahoma. I want to think about the space I occupy as I engage with a topic I hope is relevant to all of us, but complicated by the fact that I do so on land with a contested history.

I am inspired by the work of Daryl Baldwin and his colleagues, such as George Ironstrack at Miami University and the Myaamia Center, to revitalize the language and culture of the Myaamia people (MacArthur Foundation, 2023; Miami University, 2023b; NEH, 2023). It challenges me to acknowledge that although I am invested in decolonizing my curriculum, there is so much more work to do. I encourage you to check out the Myaamia website (Miami University, 2023b). It has many resources that I imagine would be transferable to the spaces where you work and live.

Acknowledgment of the Current Moment

I also want to acknowledge the chilling events that surround this profound debate about how to keep schools safe. We have Alex Jones and *Infowars*, with a jury awarding more than a billion dollars in damages for his fake news and conspiracy theories surrounding the Sandy Hook (Connecticut) school shooting (Hammond et al., 2022; Merlan, 2022). On October 13, 2022, a jury recommended life in prison without parole for Nikolas Cruz, the gunman in the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (Florida) shooting (Wamsley, 2022). And we cannot forget the children and teachers killed in the Uvalde, Texas, school shooting (AP, 2023), or the ongoing toll that school shootings continue to take on our country. I hope this work, at least in a small way, honors their memories and prompts us to consider what actions we might take in this moment.

Selling School Safety: Roadmap

In the fall semester of 2022, while teaching a senior capstone class at Miami University focused on social action curriculum projects, I presented my students with a draft of the keynote I delivered at Bergamo. I asked them for feedback, and they gave it. Hopefully, what I present here will be a little better because of my students' insights and ideas and their urging me to create a roadmap.

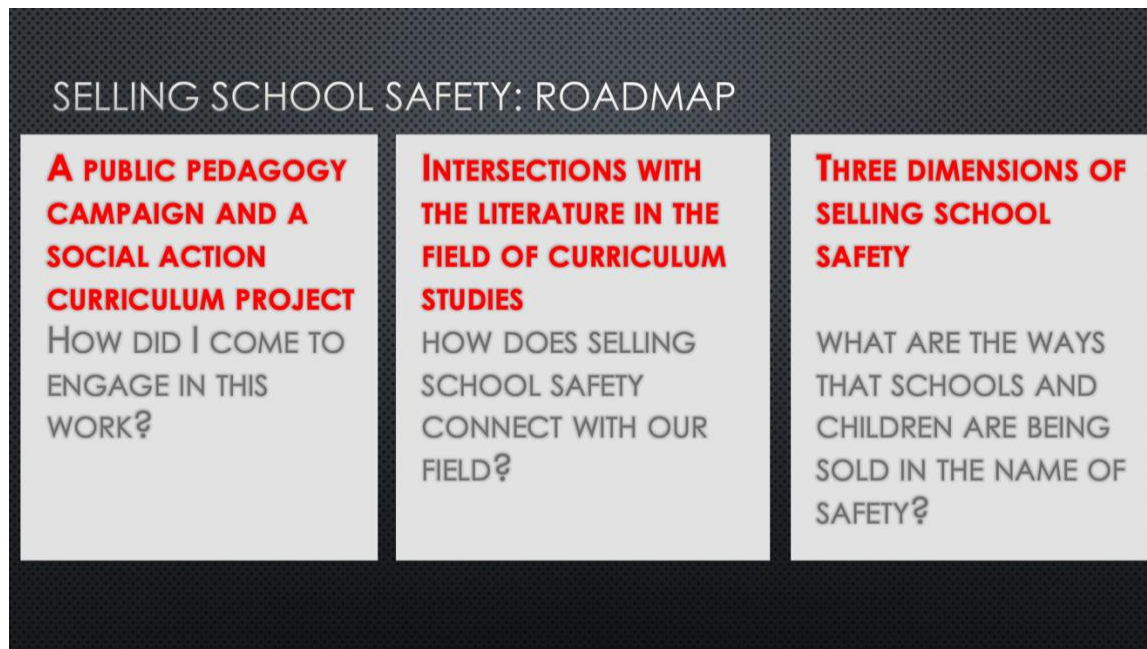


Figure 1: Selling School Safety: Roadmap

This article unfolds in three parts. The first part begins with a public pedagogy campaign and a social action curriculum project. Although I have explored public pedagogy with colleagues (Sandlin et al., 2011), this wasn't my public pedagogy campaign. Rather, it was a response to a public pedagogy effort, a resultant social action curriculum project in which I engaged, and how I came to be interested in this work. As a newcomer fascinated by this phenomenon, especially how it intersects with our field, the analysis in which I engage here is exploratory rather than definitive. The second part focuses on the intersections between selling school safety and the literature in curriculum studies. How does selling school safety connect with the field of curriculum studies? The third part of my roadmap is to consider what I am outlining as three dimensions of selling school safety. What are the ways that schools and children are being sold in the name of safety?

The first part centers on a particular public pedagogy (Sandlin et al., 2011) campaign. Those local to southwest Ohio might recognize Sheriff Richard Jones. Although I often disagree with the positions he advances, Sheriff Jones is a remarkably effective public pedagogue, particularly on issues of school safety. He has been featured on CNN (2017) and Fox News (2020) because of his polarizing ideas. Engaging with some of these ideas can prompt us to consider the phenomenon of selling school safety.

A Public Pedagogy Campaign and A Social Action Curriculum Project: How did I come to engage in this work?

In 2018, Sheriff Richard Jones responded to an opportunity. The opportunity was a local school district just down the road from Bergamo and close to Miami University: Hamilton City School District. Hamilton was embroiled in an alleged scandal concerning an upper-level administrator. Allegations centered around accusations of sexual harassment, creating a hostile work environment, and violating board policies (BieryGolick, 2018). Sheriff Jones went to work. As you can see in the photo in Figure 2, he took out billboards across town. Jones saw an

opportunity not to focus explicitly on the allegations, but to challenge the parents and citizens in Hamilton to consider whether their schools were safe and secure more broadly.



Richard K. Jones ✓
@butlersheriff

...

This went up today...think they will get the picture?



1:14 PM · Jun 25, 2018

Figure 2: Image of a billboard that was put up by Butler County Sheriff Richard Jones as part of a public pedagogy campaign to force parents to reconcile how safe Hamilton City Schools are. (Jones, 2018)

Since there had been a lack of transparency regarding this matter, Jones proposed that the district arm teachers to make schools safer and more secure. He leveraged a somewhat tangential issue in wondrous ways to challenge the community about school safety. Jones created a spectacle in many different ways. In this case, the literal spectacle of a billboard. He also prompted people to think introspectively about how safe their children were as they entered the schoolhouse. His public pedagogy campaign started this conversation about arming teachers. What could I do to challenge this idea?

It's important to step back for just a minute to take a tiny toe dip into the facts about school shootings. These are some pieces of information that might help us understand the context in which Sheriff Jones engaged in this public pedagogy campaign. In Figure 3, a blank covers the number of school shootings that the United States had in 2018 compared to other industrialized nations.

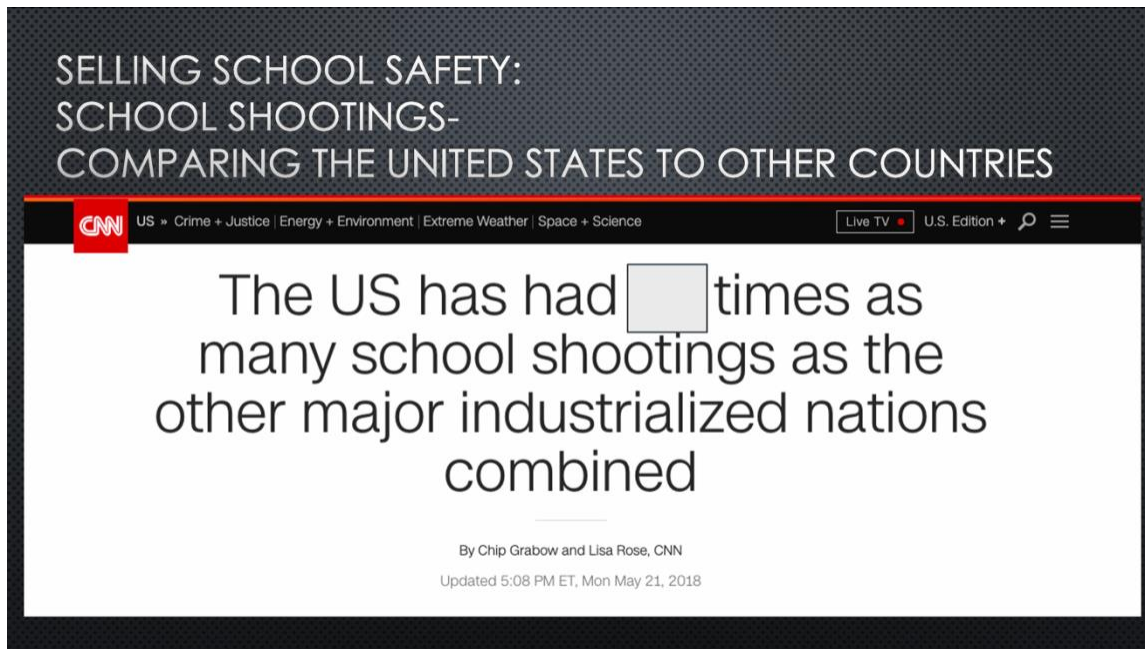


Figure 3: School shooting guessing game. (Gabrow & Rose, 2018; slide from Noltemeyer et al., 2019)

When I asked the audience to guess the number being covered, the answers ranged from 400 down to 12. The actual number is 57. Fifty-seven times more school shootings occurred in the United States in 2018 than in other industrialized countries combined (Gabrow & Rose, 2018). Other important questions concern whether empirical evidence supports arming teachers. Is there empirical evidence to support the effectiveness of arming teachers? Do professional organizations endorse arming teachers? Is there empirical evidence that arming teachers prevents violence? Based on current research, the answer is no. The first group of professional organizations includes the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2018). It is not surprising that this organization would oppose arming teachers, but perhaps more striking are the strange bedfellows, including the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO, 2018), which also opposes arming teachers.

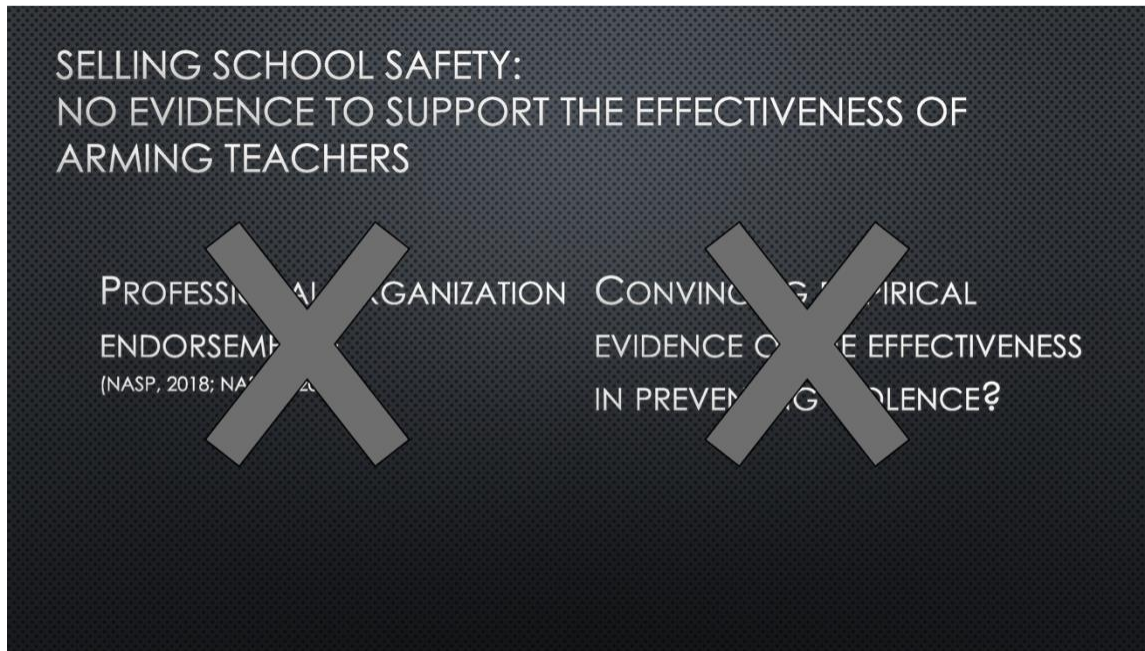


Figure 4: Selling school safety: There are no professional organizations endorsing the arming of teachers, perhaps because there is no evidence of its efficacy. (slide from Noltemeyer et al., 2019)

This raises another policy issue: Whether there should be school resource officers or police in schools. What we have here is particularly important evidence that paints a picture of what is happening with the arming of teachers. We do have some guidance and a framework for safe and effective schools from the National Association of School Psychologists (Cowan et al., 2013). We have very limited research on the effectiveness of arming educators. One study, a meta-analysis by the RAND Corporation (2020), examined studies that were at least tangentially related. The study found that evidence on the effectiveness of arming teachers remains inconclusive.

We do not have enough information, in part due to the 1996 federal spending bill which included the Dickey Amendment that effectively prevented federal funding for gun violence research (Rostron, 2018). For decades, obstacles prevented federally funded research into, for instance, whether arming teachers would be helpful. In 2019, after two decades without funding for firearm injury prevention, Congress reached a bipartisan compromise that restored \$25 million in federal funding, split between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health (Lin et al., 2024; Van Sant, 2019). Whereas this appropriation pales in comparison to other federally funded research, the fact that federally funded research is permitted at all offers some cautious hope.

What we do know is that when we arm teachers, we are taking resources away from other possibilities. That is an obvious thing. School budgets are finite. When we think about what we are going to spend money on in schools, if we start arming teachers, we're probably not going to be able to fund other things. It diverts resources, time, and other funds away from opportunities that have been shown to reduce school violence. For instance, there are significant resources and research on preventing school violence and bullying (see CDC, 2023; NASP, 2023; NCBI, 2023). A couple of promising options include mental health services and crisis prevention, restorative justice practices, and multi-tiered systems that can help support young people and teachers in

schools (see Cowan et al., 2013; Fronius et al., 2019; NASP, 2018). Again, when we think about arming teachers, what are we then taking those resources away from?

It is no wonder that people were paying attention to Sheriff Jones' public pedagogy campaign to arm teachers in a local school district. This attention made sense because of the significant increase in school shootings. The Center for Homeland Defense and Security (CHDS, 2023) maintained a database detailing K-12 school shooting incidents. The site provides charts and graphs documenting details about school shootings. For example, one chart shows where school shootings happen, and another shows the shooter's relation to the school, making clear that most shooters are students or former students at the school where the shooting took place. Another chart, provided as Figure 5, shows the number of school shootings from 1970 to 2022. In 2021, there were 250 incidents of school shootings. Pretty sobering, to say the least.

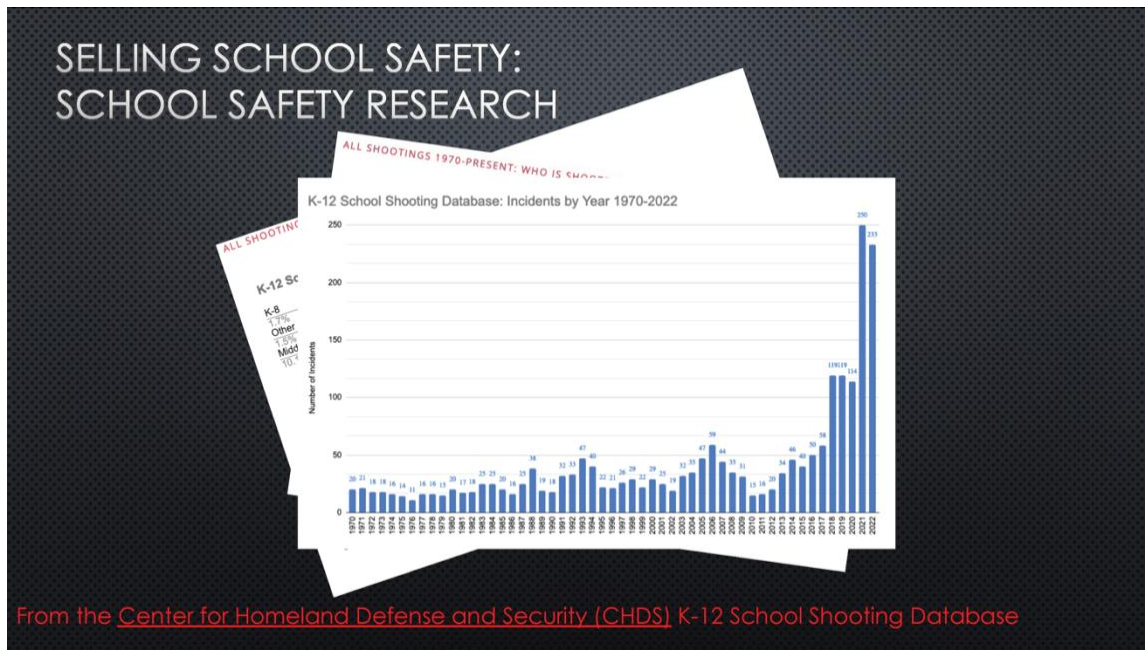


Figure 5: The Center for Homeland Defense and Security maintained a K-12 School Shooting Database documenting the massive uptick in school shootings over a 50-year period from 1970 to 2022. (CHDS, 2023)

While Sheriff Jones was doing his work in 2018, my colleagues and I had to figure out what to do. Some of you might be familiar with my work related to social action curriculum projects. This is when those with the most at stake in a particular context identify a problem and consider alternative solutions to address it. They engage in what Katherine Isaac (1992) has called “techniques for participation” (p. 155) to take intentional action in order to solve a problem.

Together, my colleagues and I engaged in a social action curriculum project. I did not want to be a department chair and professor placing students, our future teachers, into schools where teachers might be armed. We used many different ways of taking action. We wrote a fact sheet. We attended school board meetings. We tried to write collectively to board members. We navigated institutional policies as we took action. For instance, we had to ensure that our actions were not considered political activity but rather part of our work as professors. When we wrote a *Letter to the Editor* for a local newspaper (Noltemeyer & Schultz, 2018), we were concerned that we might run afoul of university rules because our university affiliations appeared in our bylines

rather than our being identified simply as private citizens. The point here is that we made a concerted effort to engage in techniques for participation to educate the Hamilton City School Board about the potential impact that arming its teachers could have on the community. And we had a small victory.

Our social action curriculum project, which focused on preventing a local school board from permitting teachers to be armed, prompted additional scholarship. We reviewed existing literature on the effectiveness of arming teachers (Olson et al., 2022). In addition, we surveyed pre-service teachers to better understand their perceptions about arming teachers (Wood et al., manuscript under review). We highlighted how some teachers were encouraging alternatives to being armed through their #ArmMeWith campaign, which focused on preventive strategies and resources (Noltemeyer et al., 2019).

Parents mobilized in the community. We would like to believe that, in a very small part, our efforts in organizing helped influence that, but I don't know that they did. When the school district voted, they voted unanimously against arming teachers. But importantly, a headline after the vote, grabbed from a local news affiliate, read: "Hamilton City School District Opts Not to Arm Teachers (For Now)" (FOX19 NOW, 2018) (see Figure 6).



Figure 6: A social action curriculum project may have, in part, influenced the Hamilton school board to not allow for arming its teachers. (FOX19 NOW, 2018; Levy, 2028; Parker & Harper, 2028)

The “for now” is key because when we fast-forward to 2021 and 2022, the Ohio legislature moved to allow teachers to be armed with a mere 24 hours of training (H.B. 99, 2022). When I was preparing my keynote, I was trying to put that amount of training into context. Prior to the legislation that required only 24 hours of training to arm teachers becoming law, and in part what prompted the legislature to take such drastic action, parents sued a different local school district in southwest Ohio because the district had armed civilians in their schools with what the parents argued was an inadequate number of hours of training required under the law at the time. In a victory before the Ohio Supreme Court, which agreed with the parents’ contention, their attorney

was quoted in a local news report. One highlight that stuck out to me was how the attorney framed the victory in the context of how few hours had been required: Little League umpires and manicurists needed more training than a teacher needed to be armed (Baker, 2021).

Obviously, Ohio is the belly of the beast for me, but what is happening in Ohio is not so distant from what is happening across the U.S. At the time of the keynote, 29 states allowed teachers to be armed. More recent data suggest that between 30 and 33 states allow school personnel to be armed (Giffords Law Center, n.d.; Rock, 2025). Because there is no federal registry of state laws allowing school personnel to be armed, we must look to organizations that aggregate these laws. The “Summary of State Law” section of Giffords Law Center’s (n.d.) *Guns in Schools* webpage and a review by *Campus Safety Magazine* (Rock, 2025) provide state-by-state analyses of who may carry a firearm on school property. Giffords Law Center provides this guidance to highlight what it views as the threat that guns in schools pose to children’s safety. Given this proliferation and the lack of movements opposing such laws and practices, how do we approach taking action?

One important feature of Ohio House Bill 99 is that it reduced the training requirement for non-law-enforcement personnel to be armed in schools from 700 hours to just 24 hours. There are some other interesting parts of the law. For instance, before the law, school districts could, in private session, decide to arm a teacher, and they did not have to tell anybody about it. Now, even though they only need the 24 hours of training, they must disclose to the public that they have armed civilians in their schools. There are other provisions in the legislation regarding obtaining a background check, holding a concealed carry permit, and other particulars.

In the summer of 2022, something told me to attend the Ohio Teacher Leader Summit in Columbus (ODEW, 2022). I am not sure what was prompting me. It certainly was not something that I was excited by, but I needed to go there, like a feeling inside me was telling me to show up. It turned out that Ohio Governor Mike DeWine was giving a welcome address at the Summit. I knew that House Bill 99, the legislation that would allow teachers to be armed with 24 hours of training, was on his desk. He had already agreed to sign it, but he had not yet done so. I waited for him in the hallway after he gave his welcome remarks to the teacher leader group. Mike DeWine attended Miami University and graduated with a degree in Social Studies Education, which would have been from the department I then chaired. That was my way in.

In the hallway after his greeting, I said to him, “When you were talking about celebrating teachers, your degree came from my department.” I continued, “Some colleagues and I have written about arming teachers. I know you’re considering this legislation.” After greeting him with the respect his position deserves, I asked the governor, “Would you be interested in reading [the research]?” He said, “Yes!” and referred to me by name after just a quick introduction, suggesting I share it with one of his handlers.

Three days later, Governor DeWine signed the bill into law, and here we are now, with Ohio having passed H.B. 99, which requires only 24 hours of training for a teacher to be armed. As a result, we see how this has created all sorts of openings and opportunities for the selling of school safety. At the Teacher Leader Summit welcome session, Governor DeWine discussed an event that would take place later that summer: the Ohio School Safety Summit (OSSC, 2022a, 2022b). He encouraged everybody in attendance to check it out. So, that is what I did.



Since I delivered the keynote on which this article is based in 2022, gun violence has continued to seriously affect schools. In 2022, the K-12 School Shooting Database's founder, David Riedman, transitioned the database from the CHDS website to the independent K-12 School Shooting Database, which is dedicated to "using data to prevent violence at schools" (Riedman, 2026). Without disregarding the overall gravity of the situation, Riedman's more recent analyses reveal some modest declines in school shooting incidents. According to his research, after hitting an all-time high of 352 shooting incidents in 2023, the next two years show 336 incidents in 2024 and 235 incidents in 2025. Now, halfway through 2026, 89 incidents have been recorded. Although these data demonstrate promising trends and Congress's renewed appropriations for research on gun violence prevention provide an additional reason to be hopeful, the situation remains sobering. This ongoing context helps us to understand the phenomenon of selling school safety through the lens of curriculum studies.

Selling School Safety Through the Lens of Curriculum Studies Literature: How does selling school safety intersect with our field?

Three major areas of connection exist between the literature of curriculum studies and the selling of school safety: the hidden curriculum, school commercialism, and school surveillance. Each of these provides an avenue for meaning making about the phenomenon of selling school safety. I have cited some foundational texts by scholars from our field who have engaged in this work. When we think about hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1968; Snyder, 1970) through the lens of selling school safety, we recognize that schools communicate unintended messages beyond the "official curriculum" (see Anyon, 1980; Apple, 1979). These are things that are not planned; they are not overt; there is constant messaging in schools. Overlaying the phenomenon of selling school safety raises some interesting questions. What is unintended in the school curriculum that students and teachers learn? What messages are sent and received by the selling of school safety?

A second area of curriculum studies literature that helps us understand the phenomenon of selling school safety is school commercialism. Because of school commercialism, schools have become marketplaces (Walker, 2015). Companies are making profits on the backs of children, particularly children in public schools, and especially young people in the most historically marginalized communities. Private corporations see many different opportunities.

In preparing for the keynote on which this article is based, I came across a 1979 book by Sheila Harty called *Hucksters in the Classroom*. It was published by the Center for the Study of Responsible Law. That is one of Ralph Nader's nonprofit organizations. This was from the abstract found on the Google Books site: "Public relations efforts by industries have extended into the school classroom, where corporate promotion and product advertising are cloaked under the guise of education." There is nothing particularly radical here, but it reminds us that this is far from a new phenomenon. Corporations have long seen the opportunities, if you will, to make money off schools and kids in schools.

I recall being at Bergamo in 2005, and just hot off the presses in the *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, Deron Boyles wrote an article titled "Would You Like Values with That? Chick-fil-A and Character Education" (Boyles, 2005). The article intrigued me so much that I contacted Chick-fil-A. I wanted their character education curriculum for my students in Chicago (Core Essentials,

n.d.). Chick-fil-A responded and said, “You just need to partner with a Chick-fil-A restaurant, and we’d be happy to get our character education program in your school.” They didn’t know I was a new assistant professor who would explore the character education curriculum in my social foundations class as we discussed school commercialism. At the time, there were no Chick-fil-A restaurants in Chicago. I wrote back. I said, “I don’t have a Chick-fil-A to partner with.” Then they told me that I could buy their curriculum for \$500. I said, “Oh, I don’t have that kind of money.” Then I fed into the tropes that I suspected were part of this kind of curriculum. I said, “I teach in a school that serves a housing project community.” As I recall, decades after the interaction, they said something to the effect of, “Oh, oh, yes. Those students *need* this character education,” so they gave it to me for \$25.

I never used it with my elementary students, but I did use it with my college students. Along with analyses of other corporations’ intrusions into schools, my students and I offered some critiques of the Chick-fil-A curriculum. Regarding Chick-fil-A, we focused primarily on its problematic Christian-normative character education curriculum. Their partner, Core Essentials, organized the curriculum by month. Like, what do you think the character trait for December was? Generosity, of course, because that’s when Christmas is, so you have to be generous.

I like what Alex Molnar (2005) captured nearly two decades ago, and, more recently, with Faith Boninger (Molnar & Boninger, 2015, 2020), regarding various appropriations of the schoolhouse. Whether a scoreboard is named or a Junior Achievement (n.d.) corporate “volunteer” enters the classroom, we see the many ways school commercialism plays out. This presents more questions. What are the ways that schools sell out? Commodities, ads, and other things that make schools, quote-unquote, “safer” have implications. What are the messages sent and received by the selling of school safety?

The third area of the curriculum studies literature concerns surveillance. The notion of surveillance in schools and the idea that children and teachers need to be watched is quite common. The premise of constant visibility is troubling, but it is a manifestation of power (Foucault, 1977). When those who are being watched don’t know whether they are being watched, or when they are being watched, that changes their behavior, of course.

This particular image in Figure 7 was shared with me by a pre-service teacher during her field placement. She snapped a photo with her phone that shows the output of the school’s surveillance cameras. What she also mentioned, which I found fascinating, was that teachers and students talked about finding places where they could whisper without being on camera. But what happens when we start to surveil classrooms in these ways?

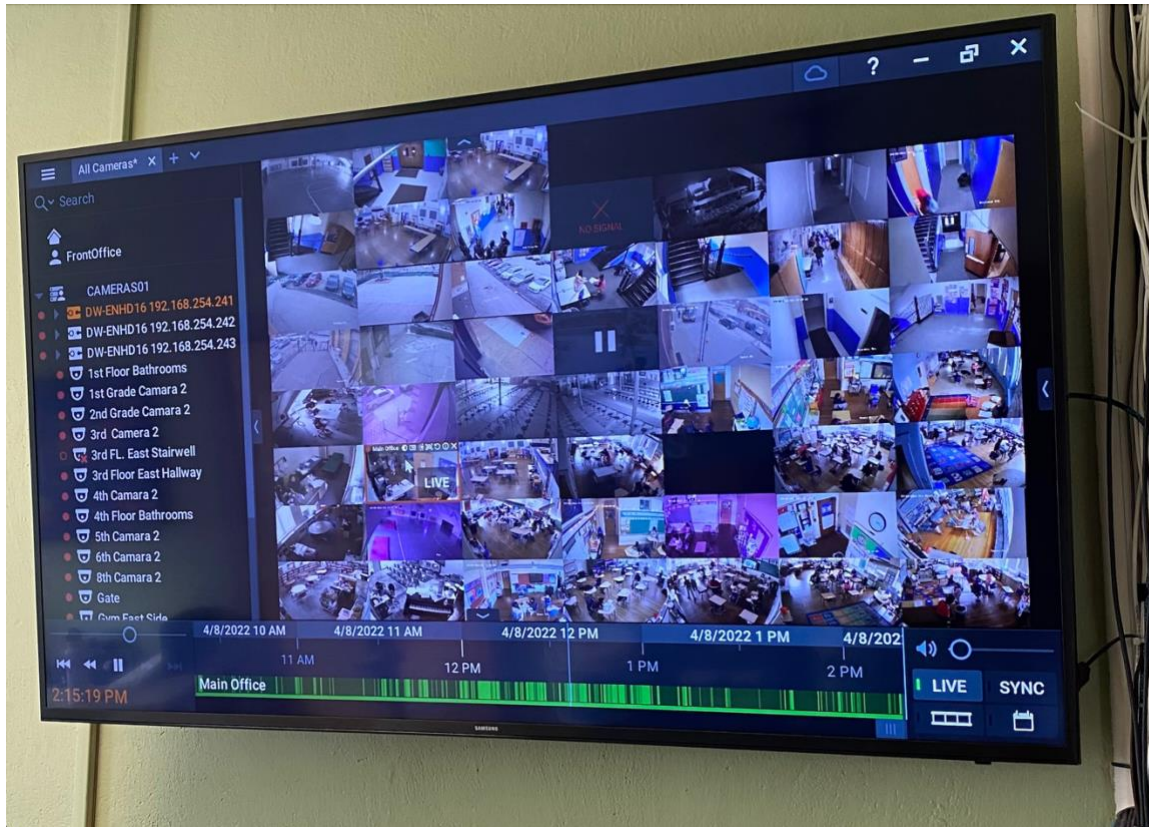


Figure 7: Photo captured by a student during her clinical field experience showing a ubiquitous surveillance panopticon on display in the school office.

This leads us to consider and trouble the idea of who is deemed good and who is deemed bad in school, and what about that false binary? It makes me think of Sheri Leafgren (2011), another curriculum studies scholar, and her powerful example in her book *Reuben's Fall* (2011), where the good/bad binary becomes particularly prominent. A boy named Reuben falls while walking in his kindergarten line, and his peer steps out of line to help him, only to get in trouble. What are the implications of how we think about the ways we need to watch children in schools? Further, what messages are sent and received when we watch students and their teachers, or need to watch them? What are the implications of selling school safety, particularly with the need to always know, in the name of keeping schools and children safe, of course?

Three Dimensions of Selling School Safety: What are the ways that schools and children are being sold in the name of safety?

Going back to my chance encounter with Governor DeWine and my visit to the School Safety Summit, three dimensions of selling school safety emerged from the exhibit hall. Although these examples come from the Ohio School Safety Summit, the ideas they represent extend far beyond Ohio. The first dimension involves mental health capacity building. I want to trouble this dimension because improving mental health is intrinsically good, yet when mental health becomes commodified, it can also have a nuanced and darker side. The second dimension encompasses surveillance, products, and the selling of items that promote safety in schools. The third centers on the arming of teachers, which returns to Sheriff Jones' public pedagogy campaign.

The First Dimension of Selling School Safety: Mental Health Capacity Building

This first dimension of building mental health capacity is complicated. Research shows that building students' mental health capacity in schools helps prevent violence in schools (see Cowan et al., 2013; NASP, 2018). We may be able to avoid some of the tragic events I opened with by focusing on what we need to think about in our current context.

A good example at the School Safety Summit of an organization working to build mental health capacity is ROX-Ruling Our eXperiences, from Columbus, Ohio. This nonprofit organization is focused on empowering girls (ROX, 2023). At the summit, I learned that the organization operates as an after-school program and is externally funded. I am not critiquing its work; it is evidence-based, fascinating, and encouraging. My critique is that ROX's work is not integrated into the curriculum. Instead, it is an add-on to the regular school day. This troubles me because school safety, mental health capacity building, and empowerment ought to be part of everyday school life for young women, in this case.

Mental health capacity building can be thought about in different ways. We might be in a better place if we invested in more school counselors, school psychologists, social workers, and therapists in schools, and if every kid had access to them as a right within the classroom. For instance, to meet the 2026 NASP Federal Policy Priorities recommendation of having one school psychologist for every 500 students, the country would need to double the current number of school psychologists (NASP, 2026), at a yearly cost of billions of dollars. Instead, nonprofits and for-profit companies are now entering this space and filling the gap left by the shortage of mental health providers. As this happens, the mental health supports can cross into that surveillance space. These companies are surveilling emails and Google Classroom to offer just-in-time counseling services that the school district can pay for because, for example, the district does not have enough social workers on hand. When they scan Google Classroom and detect that somebody has written down that they are going to shoot up the school or that they are contemplating suicide, there is an understandable response: "Okay, we don't want to let that go."

A colleague at Miami University runs a school-based mental health program. She secures multimillion-dollar grants that help schools and school districts provide mental health services. I would argue that she is in a good space to build capacity for mental health supports. But this kind of work, which is supported by external grants, raises some questions: Why do schools not have these as their normal practices? Why is it that grants need to be written for millions of dollars, but only work with a select number of school districts? How much capacity do she and her team have?

Because teachers cannot realistically monitor all student-written communication, some concerning things will likely be missed. But if a teacher has a tool that scans Google Classroom to flag problematic statements or comments, what else are they flagging? What are they determining is permissible and what is not okay? Who is getting targeted and who is not? This, too, is complicated because schools certainly do not want to miss red flags.

Technologies of all sorts have become more commonplace in schools for various reasons, but some that are used to support teachers and students can also create problematic situations. An example is the classroom use of Proctorio, a remote software platform that helps educators monitor academic integrity during computer-based exams. In recent years, Proctorio has been embroiled in lawsuits alleging its software disproportionately flags students of color compared with their white counterparts (Clark, 2021). Likewise, other similar technology-based platforms that use facial recognition algorithms have been featured in media coverage because the software is allegedly inconsistent in detecting skin tones across demographic groups (see Meaker, 2023). As

these tools and their associated practices become increasingly used in schools, we need to be mindful of how they are used and the consequences that may follow.

For instance, while walking around the School Safety Summit exhibits, I met some people working for a company called Gaggle. One commented to me, “At least we are in this space rather than in some of the other spaces,” referring to providing mental health supports and detection software, as opposed to the more product-oriented resources used to harden schools. Gaggle’s (2023) mission is “to ensure the safety and well-being of students and schools by leveraging people and technology.” I do think that Gaggle is providing a good service, especially if schools are unwilling to invest or lack the resources to build mental health capacity to ensure students have access to mental health care and people who can help them in moments of crisis, in particular.

The Second Dimension of Selling School Safety: Surveillance and Products

The second dimension of the phenomenon of selling school safety concerns surveillance and products sold to schools. One of the most memorable products at the exhibition was called Wingshield. As you can see in Figure 8, it’s a movable bulletproof whiteboard that can create a doorway barrier, as its handwritten sign stated: “Turn any room into a SAFEROOM in seconds.”

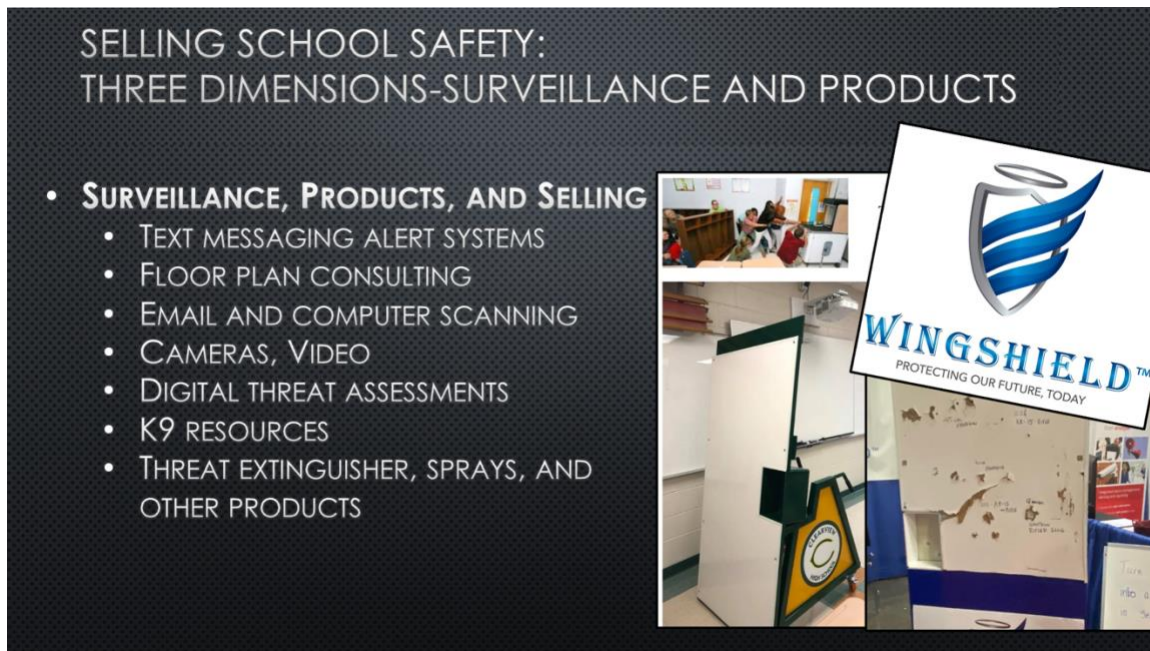


Figure 8: School safety surveillance products, technologies, and deterrents are commodified through products such as the Wingshield, a movable bulletproof whiteboard that serves as a door barrier and is marketed to enhance school safety. (OSSC, 2022a, 2022b)

The vendor who was demonstrating the Wingshield was eager to share it with me. He had tried out his product with his guns. The Wingshield could be added to any classroom for \$6,000 to protect your students and barricade them in. He had me use the wheel stop so I could move it around. It was easy to maneuver. I agreed with him that I could easily move it, but I was troubled by what it represented. Another vendor enthusiastically shared The Threat Extinguisher. It looks like a fire extinguisher with a bigger nozzle on the end. You use it to spray a school shooter.



Figure 9: School safety products displayed and advertised in the exhibit hall of the Ohio School Safety Summit illustrate the breadth of ways school safety is being commodified. (OSSC, 2022a, 2022b)

“Summertime is installation time!” When I saw this, it felt ironic, as if teachers are not spending their summers contemplating how they might engage young people with a rich curriculum, making, doing, building, and all those things that teachers do during the summer months.

In some ways, I found myself poking fun at some of their selling strategies that need critical examination. But my reaction, too, deserves to be troubled. I should not be poking fun at this because the underlying issue is that we, as a society, have to figure something out. If schools do not have those mental health capacity-building resources, students can be at risk. We are in a moment where we cannot have another school shooting, and we cannot allow people like Alex Jones to claim that victims were actors and that the school shootings were staged.

As parents, we get text messages about our children’s schools and what is happening. There are text messages. There are alert systems. There is floor plan consulting. There are canine services. There is bear spray for school shooters. There are all sorts of ways to surveil and watch, with cameras and videos.

The state of Ohio has made significant investments in school safety products beyond the legislation to enable schools to enhance their school safety infrastructure. Through its K-12 School Safety Grant Program, Ohio awarded over 3,400 grants to more than 2,700 schools between 2021 and 2023. Spending over \$215 million in state and federal taxpayer funds, “the program was created to help schools pay for physical security expenses such as new security cameras, public address systems, automatic door locks, visitor badging systems, and exterior lighting” (OFCC, 2023). More recently, in 2024, the Ohio Controlling Board approved the purchase of modular mobile “shoot houses” to be used by the Ohio School Safety Center, “with the goal of providing better tactical training for armed teachers and staff” (Crawford, 2024). Using public funding mechanisms to purchase products from the private sector to enhance school safety demonstrates the proliferation of this marketplace beyond legislative mandates. This again raises

many questions about how funds are being used, what strategies are prioritized, whether those strategies focus on prevention, and, in turn, what qualifies as prevention.

The surveillance dimension is particularly disconcerting. It's like, "How can we totally cover a specific area so that we see everything?" Just like my former student told me, "Everybody knows where you can go to not be heard or seen." What messaging is that giving to students as they are in those spaces where they are constantly being watched? I always have to ask: Who is also being watched more or scrutinized more?



Figure 10: Technology-based surveillance products marketed to schools show the significant expansion of commercialized tools designed to enhance school safety. (OSSC, 2022a, 2022b)

The Third Dimension of Selling School Safety: Arming Teachers

The third dimension of the phenomenon of selling school safety is the arming of teachers. I already provided the context on Sheriff Richard Jones and his push to arm teachers in Hamilton, Ohio. Although that failed, we now have this happening ubiquitously. With just 24 hours and the school board's approval, a teacher can be armed in Ohio. All a teacher needs to do the next year, after they get that certification, if you will, is only eight hours of renewed training. This, too, is a bit ironic given that keeping your teaching license in Ohio requires 180 hours of continuing education over five years, or 36 hours per year. *The New York Times* published an article in 2022 with the headline, "Trained, Armed, and Ready. To Teach Kindergarten" (Mervosh, 2022). It features a kindergarten teacher (Figure 12) who wants to keep her students safe.

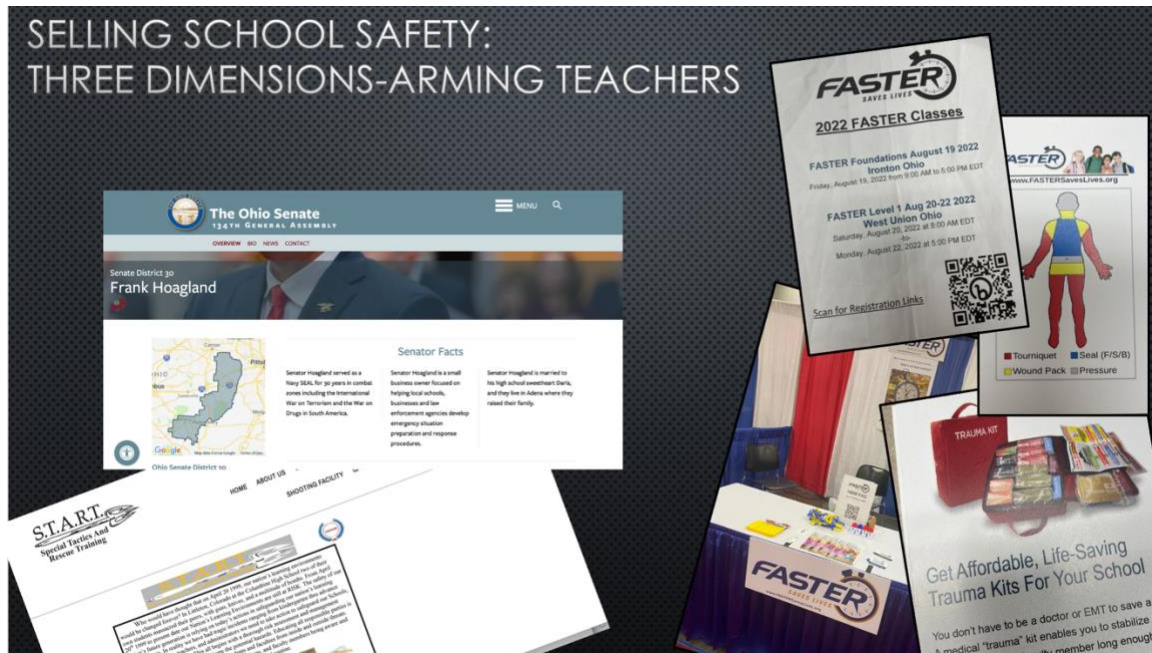


Figure 11: Organizations and legislators have turned to arming civilians, including classroom teachers, as a means to promote school safety. (Buckeye Firearm Foundation, 2022; OSSC, 2022a, 2022b; S.T.A.R.T., 2018)



Figure 12: Front-page image from the *New York Times* (Mervosh, July 31, 2022) showing how a controversial Ohio law has led organizations such as FASTER to train teachers to carry firearms in schools after substantially reducing training requirements.

Another organization that was selling safety, or at least featuring their work at that exhibition, was called FASTER, which was highlighted in the *New York Times* article. Part of the premise of FASTER, according to the gentleman I spoke to at the summit, who agreed that more needs to be done to protect children in schools, is in the name itself: If we can respond to an active shooter situation faster, we may save lives. FASTER is an affiliated organization of the Buckeye

Firearms Association, which is a state affiliate of the National Rifle Association. FASTER trains teachers to be armed for free. But Molnar and Boninger (2020) remind us that “free” is not necessarily “free” in the same sense. It might not cost anything for a teacher to complete that training, but resources are being diverted, and it is complicated.

The *Times* piece highlighted some pretty interesting facts. One line that caught my attention said,

That she was being trained at all spoke to the country’s painful failure to stop mass shootings and to the heavy responsibilities piled onto teachers. Catching students up from the pandemic; handling mental health crises in children; navigating conflicts over the teaching of race and gender; and now, for some, defending their schools. (Mervosh, 2022)

This article mentioned a data point I found fascinating. In 2018, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures, only 2.6% of schools allowed faculty to be armed. In more recent data published by the Institute of Education Sciences (2022), of 2,400 schools surveyed, 3% of all public schools and 6% of rural public schools reported that non-law-enforcement personnel carried firearms on their school property. Although I am unaware of more recent national data, in Ohio, one year after H.B. 99 went into effect, allowing school boards to arm teachers and staff, 46 of 611 (7.5%) school districts had authorized non-law-enforcement personnel to carry firearms in schools (ODEW, 2023; Otilie, 2023). Will the number of school districts continue to grow, given these new laws? As there is no statewide registry of school districts choosing to arm personnel, looking to local reporting helps answer this question. An article published in 2024 by *The Ohio Newsroom* reported that 67 districts had made provisions for arming school personnel (Crawford, 2024). In 2025, Spectrum News 1 and Columbus CBS affiliate WBNS 10TV reported that nearly 15% of Ohio’s 613 school districts (90 school districts) had authorized armed school personnel as a result of H.B. 99 (Harms, 2025; Landers, 2025).

Another organization, like FASTER, that was not present at the School Safety Summit but engages in similar work is the Special Tactics and Rescue Training (S.T.A.R.T.). Former Ohio State Senator Frank Hoagland, who owns this company, cosponsored H.B. 99. According to a local journalist, S.T.A.R.T. will charge your school or district to train your teachers to be armed (Trau, 2022). According to a local journalist’s reporting, when this went through the legislative process, there was no conflict-of-interest issue with Hoagland promoting the legislation because it was stated that this is the work he does, and the legislation does not require this particular company to be used (Trau, 2022).

Frank Hoagland, I don’t know him. I understand that he’s a storied Navy SEAL veteran. He’s likely done some good things defending our country. It’s no disrespect to him. We are all, indeed, trying to figure out how to create safer schools. This is the work he does, and this is what he is promoting, although it is troubling that this is one of the approaches being taken to address the current safety crisis. I have to wonder, though, whether arming teachers is the right way to keep schools safer.

Concluding Thoughts: Questions, Hopes, and Dreams

I am going to end with some concluding thoughts, but I dislike concluding thoughts as I find that our work is never finished. It is always in the making. Maybe these are less concluding

thoughts and more continuing questions. Where does this take us? I want to acknowledge that I am not a school safety expert. Rather, I am fascinated by how we are selling school safety, its implications, and how this phenomenon intersects with the scholarship that has influenced me.

What troubles me most is that schools are spending precious resources on unproven products and services in the name of safety, while this school safety marketplace raises significant questions and concerns about how we value children, safety, and curriculum. Perhaps, in the spirit of curriculum studies, we need to keep asking questions. What can be done to keep young people and schools safe, given the urgency of the moment? How can we increase mental health supports in schools? What is being lost when schools spend scarce resources on surveillance and safety products? How do these shape the hidden curriculum of schools? Where do we see commercialism playing out through the selling of school safety? How does surveillance change the relationships among teachers, students, subject matter, and the contextual factors affecting schools?

As curriculum scholars begin to wrestle with these questions, it becomes more and more evident that the phenomenon of selling school safety not only has an obvious marketplace aspect but is also a curricular one. Selling school safety informs students, teachers, and society what schools are for, whom they should fear, and the kinds of safety that are worth investing in. These lessons are inherent to schooling's hidden curriculum, and these lessons deserve critical attention from curriculum scholars.

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Curriculum at the End of Time

Abjection and the Apocalyptic Body

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“Let’s talk of graves, of worms, and epitaph...” – *Richard II*, William Shakespeare

THE AIR IS HEAVY WITH ROT. Paper, wood, metal, ideas. Nobody and nothing remain, “death is necessary” (Downey, 2022, p. 19). Mildew blooms like dark flowers, devouring what once seemed like certainties. A ruined school building stands as a last testament to the way things *used* to be. Textbooks and classroom materials mold and rot. Clocks tick away with nobody to perceive that time itself has ended. At this threshold, curriculum clings to its old certainties of progress, mastery, and the promises of a future already long dead. Beneath this decay, from students, teachers, to epistemologies, a festering exists that leaks and collapses into abjection. Learning has not just ceased, but it becomes an intellectual rotting, fermenting and falling back into previous sedimentations. A collectivity that exists at the margins exudes not hope, but a kind of terrible remembering that all the promises of different kinds of futures have failed to arrive.

We begin this paper in the rot, amongst death, and within the ontology of corpses to demonstrate that life can still create and thrive at the edges and hinterlands of various forms of existence: life, mourning, being, and death. We smell the grave and yet we will continue forward. Staying amongst these scenes of death conveys the dire situation we now inhabit. As we embrace the ruins and explore the graveyard of what once was, we are not pulled towards a nihilistic conclusion, nor are we called to a vanity of hope that pervades much educational theory. Recognizing the situation we are in, is not defeat nor is it resignation. Instead, it becomes a productive force that animates our imaginations towards a radically different future potential.

Theorizing in this way, this paper seeks to transgress and inhabit the middle grounds of collapse. From these experiences, I can begin to imagine a curriculum for the end of time. We find ourselves already inhabiting this end, although past realities continue to persist. These rituals haunt us like specters from a past already long dead, ghostly, and automated. Accreditation committees still convene, syllabi are still created, assessments are tallied, all with the failed promises that we are not already experiencing many different forms of ruin. Research is “held hostage to quantification” and research “is sized up according to market metrics” (Stables, 2024, p. 136). A sort of toxic positivity pervades mainstream educational discourses that insists everything will be

okay. Or that our job, indeed our duty as faculty, is to remain “positive” when higher education is collectively staring down extinction. We collectively reach the horizon and what we see there has crumbled. Within this ruinous present, curriculum that was once a promise of a future still to come cannot exist within promises of salvation. Decay marks this new architecture and before we can theorize, we must linger amongst the ruins, listening and hearing what the debris can possibly tell us.

With many diverse breakdowns currently underway, dominant ideas on curriculum still insist on coherence. Traditional realities found in institutional settings demand outcomes and standards, stitching together the remnants of lost futures with tenuous, brittle threads of accreditation. Demands of productivity emerge and knowledge that demands narrow forms of mastery triumph, even as the walls close in. There is no public mourning for education, and instead any sort of refusal of its logics and its own demise is disciplined into silence. In educational scholarship, we still insist on playing along with the notion that we can still act like we always have, begging for acceptance and forcing educational scholarship into reenacting some sick gesture of life. This demonstrates that current scholarly traditions need to be radically rethought in this current historical conjuncture. Calls for “relevance” still haunt educational conferences and reviewer comments, despite the blooming catastrophe that unfurls before us. Education becomes an elaborate preservation of denial across borders, a choreography of refusal to see the end is nigh (Heimans, et. al., 2024).

A refusal to see, the body already knows. It always remains entangled in various kinds of realities (Edber, 2022). The body trembles and resists, registering the apocalypse long before the institution admits defeat. In the body’s refusal to perform any longer, a new curriculum has a chance to blossom from the wreckage, what Hartman (2019) might call “waywardness”: a choreography of refusal that is improvisational, ungovernable, and bodily. We do not seek a curriculum of repair or salvation, but one of *abjection*: a pedagogical encounter that emerges from the spaces that remain after destruction has wrought its course. We stay where coherence unravels and we speak a language of the absurd. Before we can attempt in thinking how learning and creation happen within these spaces, we confront the rituals of expulsion that guard the boundaries of the collective educational body. We begin to ask what it means to study, to teach, to think, to theorize, and how to breathe once again at the end of time. In the corpses of standardization and mainstream education, we might yet find another kind of pedagogy that speaks to our current conjecture. This is a curriculum that studies with the dead, dwells with the broken, and learns to convey the language(s) of collapse. In the corpse of what once was traditional education, we might yet find a different kind of curriculum can potentially emerge.

Conjunctures of Hauntings

Thinking with and through curricular theory always begins in the residues of a historical/social/political conjuncture of unfinished conversations, institutional mandates, and syllabi composed for yet unknown futures, what Grossberg (2010) might have seen as a dynamic configuration of forces (p. 26). Grossberg wrote of the “unstable and changing set of discursive formations and configurations of affective regimes” that, “mediate and articulate” ways of being in the world (p. 222). Escaping abstraction, curriculum theory is thought/imagined/practiced through similar conditions that Grossberg argued existed for cultural studies. Beyond this, however, are the specters that continue to haunt educational theory and practices, specifically

curriculum theory, a recognizable atmosphere for anyone that has spent time within educational institutions that are often filled with exhaustion, crises, or rupture. Classes continue but something has definitely changed. Teaching and learning occur alongside that which cannot be fully acknowledged, circulating through a haunting that transcends mere metaphor. These are the conditions of a pedagogical life, experiences that materialize before theory attempts to understand or represent it.

Rituals of Expulsion: Curriculum as Abjection

A moment emerges that is silent, almost imperceptible, when institutions turn away. It does not happen with an explosion or with a spectacle of violence, but with slow decay. Abjection, as Kristeva (1982) notes, is not simply disgust but a visceral, psychic act of casting out that which threatens a coherent sense of self, what she called the “psychic economy” (p. 50). Meaning disintegrates in the spaces of abjection and boundaries fall apart that often frame dominant ways of thinking and being. The corpse and the filth of the grave is not a foreign experience, but one that is intimate. Underneath this notion of “I” exists a deep rot. The haunting residue of abjection continues to speak even after structures have failed. Voices remain and cry out through the cracks, only to continue the dark continuation of lives once lived, the abject whispers to us that we have always been created from wreckage.

Collapse is not a sudden event; it is a slow decomposition that delivers a fatal blow when it becomes too late to act. The biblical imagination saw apocalypse as one with signs that pointed toward destruction, angels heralding the end times (National Council of Churches, 1989/2021, Revelation 14:6–13). We do not hear the trumpets ring out across the varied landscapes of contemporary realities. Instead, we are mired in messiness, despite it being a potentially productive space of performative creation (Curtis, 2024). Curriculum performs this kind of expulsion in its own forms of ritualistic practices. It identifies the contaminated, the unassimilable, and the excesses that cannot be molded into a sanctioned future. These are all ejected beyond the threshold of belonging, becoming a resident of the absurd, hanging about like a specter (Crosby, 1988). Mainstream education demands a life that hides the rot, with little to no patience for any sort of leaking, weeping, or refusal to heal. We cannot bury the dead in peace because we are unable to mourn the loss. It becomes a chasm that cannot be traversed.

A curriculum at the end of time abandons the promise of inclusion. Confronted with institutional and existential horrors, it can offer only acts of rejection rather than incorporation. The abject emerges, however, not only in moments of failure, drop out, or expulsion, but saturates everything in its path, from practices and notions of assessment, to tracking, to disciplinary practices, to drop out, to expulsion. Like a restless specter that haunts the house on the hill, definitions of academic “rigor” or “standards,” under the neutral guise of “merit,” masks the relentless drive to hide and obfuscate apocalyptic experiences, an impending rot that cannot be assimilated. Curriculum becomes that system of borders that only want to contain and trap, a choreography of denial that aims to protect the dying world from the truth and experiences of its own demise. The apocalyptic body resists legibility, the apocalyptic teacher refuses the burden of offering false hope, and apocalyptic forms of knowing exceed the dominant logics that seek to contain them. All of these continue to haunt us. We want new ways of being, knowing, and learning that do not seek repair. Here we can give a much clearer example.

Curriculum enacts abjection, in many contemporary institutions, by continually casting students, and educators themselves, outside boundaries of what is considered to be “legitimate” learning. Standardized testing regimes, as just one blatant example, reduces complexity to measurable fragments. If it cannot be quantified in this hegemonic logic system, then it is considered excess or waste. Credentialing or accreditation processes reflect similar logics, where knowledge, creativity, or identity that do not seem to “fit” prescribed norms become epistemological debris. Instead, institutions seek to produce clean, authoritative images of learning by marginalizing anything that cannot, or does not, fit the mold. The unruly, the unassessed, and the nonnormative are pushed to the margins and the hinterlands of practices. This kind of expulsion is abjection in its curricular formation. It becomes a system that sustains itself by disavowing the very richness it claims to cultivate.

Kristeva (1982) wrote that, “the abject confronts us, on the one hand, with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal” (p. 12). This unstable borderland, between human and nonhuman, self and Other, materializes within an apocalyptic curriculum and finds its truest form in that what remains still disembodied and unknown. What this means is that traditional binaries that once help structure meaning and understanding no longer hold sway over understandings of what is considered real. The old promises of modernist education are but mechanisms to deny our connections to the Other (nonhuman or monstrous), to grief, to anxiety, and to anything it appears unable to track, monetize, or diagnose. The modern rituals of assessments, rubrics, graduation requirements, behavioral codes, or any other mainstream educational practice, are there to cleanse the social body, pathologizing anything that falls outside of the margins as waste to be managed, expelled, or made invisible. The abject student, those who cannot keep up or bleed in the margins or threaten the fantasy of progress, becomes the contemporary scapegoat, as the “victim is always the scapegoat” (Girard, 1986: p. 39), demonstrating that institutional promises are already broken. Kristeva (1982) argued that it is precisely...

Such a dynamics of reversals that makes of him a being of abjection...a scapegoat who, having been ejected, allows the city to be freed from defilement. The mainspring of the tragedy lies in that ambiguity; prohibition and ideal are joined in a single character in order to signify that the speaking being has no space of his own but stands on a fragile threshold as if stranded on account of an impossible demarcation. (p. 84-85)

Kristeva’s theorization of abjection indicates the violent expulsion of what threatens the boundaries of the self, casting out failure, grief, decay, and uncertainty in desperate attempts to preserve a hollowed identity.

With the abject already present in collapsing institutions, we see that curriculum becomes a tool in an attempt to stave off destructions that are already forming within the margins and borderlands. Curriculum is construed as a technical, epistemological, and ontological machinery of purification that sorts the useful and the useless from the worthy to the wasteful. Kristeva (1982) might have thought of curriculum as a sort of “purification rite... that essential ridge, which, prohibiting the filthy object, extracts it from the secular order and lines it at once with a sacred facet” (p. 65). Through the various mechanisms of assessment, grading, or credentialing, the institution stages a ceaseless exorcism of failure, and more curriculum will be created to exorcise this failure. Disorder is purged for a modernist dream of progress. Rigor becomes just another disciplinary test and the mirage that mastery will grant us passage into a promised future. Behind

the polished institutional rhetoric of forward momentum, there are affects that materialize. Fear grips the institution. It trembles with the reality that learning may leak, knowledge may rot, and bodies may engage in acts of refusal. Streamlining linear success becomes difficult as bodies resist. Every rubric or accreditation benchmark, every standardization becomes this quiet act of abjection, like an exorcist casting out of the possessed body and the messy, haunted realities that education was never equipped to deal with. Study within this system becomes a risk in turning into this institutional waste, what Lewis (2013) called “the capability for incapability” (p. 44), negating the potentials and fire that radical inquiry and study offers us.

If curriculum polices acceptable boundaries, then the student who cannot, or will not, perform as required by the institution becomes the undisciplined object. The student that refuses conformity becomes the abject body of the institution. Failure alone is insufficient, as it must also be embodied and made visible so that institutional systems can continually define itself against those that it expels. The abject comes in many forms, including the body that learns too slowly, that speaks the wrong language, or that carries histories and trauma that are unaccounted for in sanctioned scripts and spaces of learning. These students, as abjection embodied, disrupt linear time. They defer, they drop out, they refuse to advance to credentialed success, or they simply disappear. A systemic kind of violence further marks the outsider body, often the racialized, the disabled, the queer, or the mad. They serve as markers that institutions cannot fully sanitize or control. Because the abject both fascinates and repels, normalizing institutions continually generate rituals of exclusion, classification, and containment to manage the threat it poses to social order. Abjection is no accident and becomes an enduring feature of education’s pedagogical and curricular encounters.

If the abject is cast out like the lepers of old to preserve and maintain the illusion of normality, what is deemed different can never fully vanish. Institutions simply reframe the abject as parasitic and inhuman. Here we can turn to Michel Foucault’s (2006) work on the figure of the leper and how it is connected to the body of the outsider, the abject, and the mad.

At the edges of the community, at town gates, large, barren, uninhabitable areas appeared, where the disease no longer reigned but its ghost still hovered. For centuries, these spaces would belong to the domain of the inhuman. From the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, by means of strange incantations, they conjured up a new incarnation of evil, another grinning mask of fear, home to the constantly renewed magic of purification and exclusion. (p. 3)

The leper was the inhuman and others became like them in the schemes of European modernity, such as the mad or deviant. Michael Serres (1982) argued that the parasite is not simply something that intrudes but is a *necessary* element of any dominating system. “The parasite is the active operator and the logical operation of evolution, of the irreversible time of life” (p. 188). The parasite interrupts, diverts, feeds, and sustains the very systems it seems to threaten. The abject student is not merely expelled, but they become a parasitic presence within the curricular body, introducing noise (“the ultimate parasite” [p. 4]) into the smooth signal of progression and mastery. The struggles, resistance, delays, and departures of the abject create a sort of institutional rhythm against which “success stories” are measured and celebrated against. The parasite, Serres reminds us, transforms and is neither wholly external nor fully capable of assimilation. It forces adaptations, mutations, or ossification. The institution’s ceaseless rituals of assessment and exclusion are not evidence of strength but more like symptoms of its fragility: a haunted choreography that cannot escape the excesses it attempts to purge.

The parasite is always present within the space of the abject. It haunts the institution and the normalized curriculum with its failures, excesses, and disruptions, despite attempts to dispel them. Curriculum trembles under the weight of the parasitic organism it wishes to normalize, cast out, and discipline. It cannot fully erase dissent. Refusal becomes more frantic and elaborate. Seeking to preserve a future already slipping out of reach, abjection overflows the system's fragile boundaries. The parasite wreaks havoc on the system. When exorcism fails and legion still remains in its infinite multitudes, the parasite and abject can no longer be contained. We begin to glimpse curriculum at the ends of time, utterly unprepared for it, and realize that it is not an event or experience to transcend or move beyond, but a condition we have *always already* been living through.

A new kind of being comes into focus as we push towards a radically different existence. When a new self takes formation, we can no longer ignore what is forming on the horizons of thought and being. When the dust settles, moments begin to feel stretched and strange. Life pauses and reveals yet more fractures. Apocalyptic time emerges precisely in these moments not as some dramatic finale, but as a slow unfolding. A sense of the ordinary has shifted to something completely uncertain. In this next section, we can turn towards altered temporality that apocalypse can bring as it becomes the backdrop of new possibilities emerging.

Apocalyptic Time and the Politics of Ruins

Linearity has dominated our conceptions of time in the West and has often been seen as the modernist impetus towards mastery and order (Friedman, 2019). Now, time begins to fold back upon itself, fractured and littered with promises long dead. Apocalyptic time unmasks, revealing not the end but the moment when illusions of linearity and progress are shattered. What emerges from that spill is a different kind of history, a different kind of knowing, and a different kind of telling that splinters a self that is supposed to be stable and knowable. Every second quivers with revelation, but time feels suspended. The world appears to be continually collapsing into itself. Ruin does not follow catastrophe, but instead is the ongoing pulse that trembles in the present. Endings multiply, yet, impossibly, the world continues to turn.

In these ruins and amongst the wreckage, curriculum does not cease. Instead, it mutates, scavenges, and survives. No longer promised or a guarantee, the institution stumbles through a landscape of ruins, clutching at its broken rituals of learning, measurement, and standardization. Old performances fade away in the spaces haunted by unfulfilled promises. Curricular time once marched under the same kind of linearity that dominated modernist ontologies unfolding promises of mastery. Each lesson prepared grounds for the next and the shimmer of the future promised completion, success, and arrival. This is the kind of logic that has dictated our notions of educational possibilities.

But catastrophe unthreads and unfolds this fabric, an unfolding of the ends of history and time itself found in Christian and biblical texts (Volmering, 2019). Time begins to shatter into a debris that is unrecognizable. Recursive loops and stalled moments remake our ideas of time and rhythms of abandonment and deferred repair begin to dominate our perceptions. As education moves to the ticking clock of achievement, time finds itself out of joint. Broken chronologies arise and there are no more guarantees. Time dissipates along with its promise of everlasting life, saturated with the residues of what cannot be fulfilled. Apocalyptic time means to inhabit a slowing of time, surviving in the afterlife of modernity's grip on educational progress, what Stengers

(2015) called *refusal*: those, “who refuse what capitalism presents as rationalization and who seek to reclaim what it has destroyed” (p. 59). We no longer ascend through stages but become attuned to different ways of being in and with the world. Ruins break temporalities, no longer guaranteeing the future.

Curriculum is embroiled with disruptions of steady, linear driven, outcome-based education and semester schedules. Those in schools often find themselves caught within cycles of sudden policy changes, emergency interventions, and constant recalibrations. Week by week, outcome by outcome, expected progressions break down as new mandates, shifting priorities, or crisis-driven deadlines fragment rhythms of the academic year. Time begins to feel jagged, marked by interruptions and accelerations that displaces sequential progression. What counts as “progress” shifts and is untenable as a reachable concept or goal. Apocalyptic time bursts forth, replacing stable arcs of lesson planning with constant instability that demonstrates a different kind of world is possible. It allows a new kind of learning to be called forth, a politics of learning that rejects acceleration and mastery and points us towards a slowness that Stengers (2015) envisioned, one of attention and survival. To learn amidst the ruins means to resist the colonial tempos of progress (Hunfeld, 2022).

Apocalyptic time is not simply a stop or an ending of time itself. It becomes a slow unraveling of the assumptions that time moves forward at all. Its temporality is stasis and repetition, where the horizon of futurity points inward; each moment bears the sediment of deferred catastrophe. The annihilation fantasies of popular visions of disaster become a distant memory as apocalyptic time lingers, becomes drawn out, recursive, and marked by compounding ruins that remain unfulfilled. For curriculum theorists, apocalyptic time unsettles narratives of progress and development, exposing the assumption that knowledge advances humanity toward ever-greater fulfillment and completion. Learning becomes haunted practices, a sifting through fragments and a repetition of gestures that no longer have a temporal destination. Inside the hollowed shells of institutional lives, curriculum continues to operate, not realizing the rituals of its own destruction are being performed. Curriculum theorists continue to prepare for a future that can no longer possibly arrive.

In the wakes of these apocalyptic moments and within these kinds of temporal static, new kinds of epistemologies emerge. To know in and through the ruins is to practice acts of refusal, unwilling to meet the demands for mastery or completion as defined by dominant forms of curriculum. It remains fragmented, haunted, and resistant to any kind of assimilation or replication. The angel of history, that figure that haunted Walter Benjamin (1940), glimpsed these epistemologies of ruin. It saw back and forth, crossed time to see destruction in all its historical formations. Here, Benjamin is worth quoting at length.

His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (p. 5)

Propelled forward but facing backward, the angel of history witnesses a relentless accumulation of the wreckage. For curriculum theorists, ruin epistemologies become manifest as learning forgoes the promises of illustrious futures, but attends instead to the broken, forgotten, or the cast aside. We demand a slowing down, calling forth different kinds of social and pedagogical textures, and an openness to survival that emerges from different practices outside modernist notions of progress. We recognize that the institution itself is a site of ongoing ruin and that to know otherwise means inhabiting a brokenness without the illusion of repair.

Ruins are never neutral remains. In the slow violence of apocalyptic time, ruins are experienced differently. Some ruins are rendered visible, memorialized, remembered, and even romanticized, while others are buried, denied, or forgotten. The politics of ruins demands us to ask and reflect upon serious questions: Whose futures are mourned? Whose survivals are deemed possible? These kinds of questions force us to engage differently and agitate towards different possible futures still looming on the horizons. When we learn and commune with ruins it becomes a material encounter out of the realms of abstraction. Ruins demonstrate to us the pain of the past, such as histories of dispossession, systemic neglect, and racialized abandonment. Christina Sharpe (2016) reminds that to exist and live “in the wake” means to inhabit a temporality shaped by continuous forms and experiences of catastrophe. Survival itself becomes an act of lived resistance. Sharpe wants us to inhabit the wake of loss precisely because, “to mourn and to illustrate the ways our individual lives are always swept up in the wake” (p. 8). Sharpe demands we continually remember and recognize the horrors of the past, especially historical experiences like slavery. A curriculum of the ruins recognizes that apocalyptic time is unevenly distributed because for many, the end has already arrived again and again, stitched into the fabric of everyday life.

To exist within the space of ruins and to embody a different kind of curricular moment is to relinquish a fantasy of control. Classrooms or other spaces where pedagogical encounters may take place does not lend itself simply to transmission and recuperation. They become a space of attunement where attention is paid to breakdowns, silences, repetitions, and hauntings. We stay in the trouble of *Dangerous Pedagogies* (Giroux, 2012), intent on staying in the muck, the mire, and the catastrophe of apocalyptic time. Curriculum becomes a point of disintegration, challenging fragile collectivities amidst ongoing forms of endings. We become vulnerable to what remains. Apocalyptic time is a temporal disorientation that refuses curricular teleology that replaces them with curricular sediments. Stories do not always have resolutions and sometimes knowledge shows us the rot. We do not hope for modernist fantasies of progress or forward locomotion. We instead stay true to the fidelity of the ruins itself and we allow apocalyptic moments to become transgressive acts of radical hope. We want apocalyptic motifs to fester, to grow, and to materialize into other kinds of becomings.

Apocalypse leaves us with an aftermath, and I am still unsure at times how to tread. Curriculum becomes not a space for design but for residues that are unsettled, partial, and profoundly situated. It embraces the darkness and the uncertainty. It refuses to think in clean endings, that what usually remains is witnessing, grieving, and enduring (Zembylas, 2006). Despite these challenges, new ontological and epistemological formations will rise and inhabit the interstices of contemporary life. We listen for these echoes, of what was lost, and notice what begins to grow once again. Through these cracks life bursts forth, even with questions that linger with no immediate closure. This is a curriculum at the end of time that embraces apocalyptic realities. It is not a plan or a system but a haunting of realities from time long ago and still yet to come, hauntings that embrace the unknowability of the present even amongst the wreckage. What

kinds of life and what kinds of knowing are possible when we forgo a mapped out, replicable future that can no longer serve as the promise of silence within curriculum?

Abjection's edges reveal trembling boundaries of minor survival where our collective sense of self reckons with what cannot be fully expelled. If we crack, meaning becomes destabilized in those boundaries that form. We do not immediately reach for repair, but learn to exist and thrive within the fractures that will emerge. One begins to navigate a world where we rebuke the familiar for entirely new experiences and ways of being. Survival is no longer just the desirable outcome, but something more subtle materializes. We think and act outside of heroic endurance. What emerges is not repair but learning to live, and, dare say, thrive amid fractures. The radical imagination deeply embedded within each of us begins to see and navigate life worlds where the familiar and certainty fall away. We begin to set the stages for something smaller and more subtle, setting the stage for life in the minor key

A Curriculum of Minor Survival

When curriculum theorists strive to survive in the minor key (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986), we live and persist in the cracks. We embrace the strange once the grand narratives of modernity have burned out and curriculum studies follows without a triumph. Quiet, fractured, and improvised, we breathe amid the ruins in the minor key of life, refusing the becomings of, "lowering one's head and remaining a bureaucrat, inspector, judge, or judged" (p. 12). A minor life refuses the incessant call of the closure of apocalypse. Instead, we flicker, haunt, and endure within these margins. Survival is never simply an epic affair. Often it is barely visible, tucked within the folds of institutional fatigue and psychic exhaustion. Survival can limp, fester, and mutter under its breath; we cannot assume that "reality is equally distributed across the globe as if we are dealing with an objective world" (Baudrillard, 2010, p.74). It becomes a survival without sovereignty, a quiet persistence at the edges of decay. Curriculum takes on new forms of life. It contracts, flickers, and disguises itself in repetition and retreat. We do not seek some grand plan to rebuild the world but intend to survive, to scavenge, to remember, and to reconfigure into new life forms, "between steps on searing concrete, beneath the sterile office lights that hide nothing, rarely allowing a moment to breathe" (Chong & Nelson, 2022, p. 17). We do not want the logics of what once was and we do not seek a promise of arrival.

A curriculum of minor survival finds gravity in what Deleuze and Guattari (1986) called a "minor literature": how the minority constructs language within the context of the major (p. 16). The minor is always deeply political. "Minor literature is completely different; its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it" (p. 17). Minor does not indicate insignificance, but instead indicates an insurgent approach that can, and will, operate in the cracks of the major, or dominant, cultural and institutional formations. Through the minor, language strains, stutters, and escapes. Deleuze and Guattari specifically highlight Franz Kafka's characters trapped within bureaucratic nightmares and we can see the immediate relevance for educational scholarship as it takes on a "collective value" (p. 17). The glut of policy, standardization, and neoliberal time dominate life for the majoritarian. Jason Wallin (2010) argued that, "minoritarian lines...posit a belief in the future of the future, opening up a space for a people not yet seen, or a people in the process of becoming"

(p. 39). The minor becomes a strategy of subsistence amidst this bureaucratic glut. The minor may speak quietly, but it is intentional and dodges recuperative traps.

Minoritarian forms of resistance, art, or literature (creative practices writ large) hold multiple spaces for refusal without demanding an explanation. This might feel like an incomplete process but to exist within the cracks is to produce exactly what might feel incomplete. A syllabus that trails off into nowhere, a lesson that might dwell too much on mourning, a reading that wounds without resolution, the transformation of our body into that wolf that stalks the lamb. These processes are weird, bizarre, or stretch our understandings of what can possibly be. It might be the faculty member that no longer performs productivity but teaches through slowness, ritual, or fragmentation. It could be the student that drifts, bringing their own ghostly specters into spaces of learning. A minor curriculum unfolds in the margins of official outcomes through office hours that become vigils, assignments turned into altars, and shared silence that moves against standardization. Through a minority curriculum, there are no grand gestures of heroics.

Survival, however we choose to define it, comes with costs. Survival can be recuperated and co-opted too. It can be filtered through dominant forms of lenses, such as “resilience” or “productivity.” Institutional triumph is framed when the doors open for those within the cracks and the margins. But a minor curriculum wants to further expose these conditions of entanglement, offer refusal (even if symbolic) towards hegemonic realities, and offer a spectral presence of refusal when tasked by institutions to submit or comply. Minor survival is survival without the possibilities of redemption and without promises improvement will unfold. Persistence has no promise of reward because survival does not always offer moments of escape. We mark survival like a tattooed body, traces left in the voices of those of us in the cracks that disrupt the linearity of academic time. The minor thus remains a deviation, a necessary one, a persistence that is intimate with the realities of exhaustion, silence, and even disappearance. Curriculum theory, if it can or will reckon with destruction, must attend to the minor frequencies and listen deeply, especially when we have realized that education cannot look the same as it once was.

Conjunctures of Hauntings

Grossberg wrote of the “unstable and changing set of discursive formations and configurations of affective regimes” that, “mediate and articulate” ways of being in the world (p. 222). Escaping abstraction, curriculum theory is thought/imagined/practiced through similar conditions that Grossberg argued existed for cultural studies. Beyond this however, are the specters that continue to haunt educational theory and practices, specifically curriculum theory, a recognizable atmosphere for anyone that has spent time within educational institutions understand their systemic realities. Classes continue but something has definitely changed. Teaching and learning occur alongside that which cannot be fully acknowledged, circulating through a haunting that transcends mere metaphor. These are the conditions of a pedagogical life, experiences that materialize before theory attempts to understand or represent it.

Embracing a speculative and imaginative approach does not forgo the centrality of experience, but attempts to remain faithful to instability. Informed by scholarship that has challenged the metaphysics of presence, haunting exists at the fringes of experience, challenging what is not fully present nor fully gone. It becomes a temporal disturbance, one that exists within the ordinary rhythms of education. Dominant educational practices force outcomes, designs, rigidity, and measurement, even though educational realities often appear within the margins or

middle grounds of these types of dominant conceptions. This imaginative machine (Shukaitis, 2009) does not seek explanation but points towards a deep attunement to what may become possible when the disjunction between institutional and lived time open up new ways to think about, practice, and theorize new kinds of ways of understanding and engaging with life worlds. It is a joy that exists at the heart of radical practices (p. 145). Speculation is the methodological approach often deemed absurd and ridiculous precisely because they escape and exceed empirical forms of capture.

What is evoked in this imaginative speculation that runs like a current through this manuscript are ruins, abject bodies, and minor forms of survival. The point is not to form some kind of allegory that escapes a lived presence and experience within institutional realities, but instead as condensations of shared educational conditions, such as students navigating uncertainty, educators inhabiting exhaustion, and institutional life persisting beyond narratives of progress. The kinds of imagination conjured in this paper do not seek empirical verification of any kind. It is the serpent in the garden, the seeker at the crossroads, and the magician in the temple conjuring from the void. What emerges through that gate is the imagination summoned through theoretical fragments serving as echoes of lived experiences.

No After, Only Echoes

There is no after that finally emerges. The end refuses to deliver clarity or any type of closure. The only thing that remains in the silence of a future yet-to-come are echoes, fragments of thoughts, gestures, and hauntings that refuse to be buried. Curriculum lingers in this haunted space and cannot take a coherent form. It reverberates of what once mattered, in the spaces of abjection and minor forms of survival. We are left with no sort of clear answer, only with an atmosphere that hums above the ruins. It remains unresolved and unfinished. When we theorize and create at the end of time, we speak into a chamber of echoes, knowing what may return can be potentially distorted, partial, or even lost. Even despite this reality, something answers. Students breathe. Teachers theorize and create. Rituals repeat. The forms of silence in the margins gather new kinds of meaning. We teach and produce in the tremors.

As critical scholars connected to life worlds, our temptation will always be to respond. We want to try to repair, to reframe, to propose new architectures in the aftermaths. Perhaps, however, the task has shifted. Maybe curriculum theory must remain in the wreckage, in the ruins, and in the echoes of the angels of history. Instead of rebuilding, we instead choose to remain, tracing the contours of what has been systematically undone. Perhaps we listen to the faint curricular vibrations that continue to persist, the voices that emerge under the ruins and the wreckage. This is not a call for silence, but a call to slow down where we are more attuned to the residues of apocalyptic realities, where we attend to grief, interruption, and the minor keys of survival. We resist systemization and we let the ghosts continue to haunt us. Theorizing becomes an act of refusal, negating a grammar of positive futurity and actually addressing the temporality of aftermath. The smallest gesture—a pause, a look, or fragment—carry a new sense of urgency and a weight of new kind of worlds forming in the horizons and the borders of thought.

Perhaps we take a new strategy and we let it end without an ending. We let it fall apart and fall through the cracks. This is not failure, but a fidelity to the world as it is. We accept the fracturing, the unpromising, and the still murmuring. We do not need new futures, only an honest attentiveness to the lives that endure without them. The echoes that remain do not herald

redemption; they call us instead to a radical curriculum of relation. What we seek is not recovery, but recognition. Let this be our work now, to remain in the tremble, to speak as the world continues to unravel. We teach and we create in the tones of perpetual questions. If what remains are echoes, they refuse to disappear. Our curricular imaginations linger and ache and we survive in pieces in the wakes of apocalyptic imagination.

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Am I Truly My Mother's Daughter?

An Autoethnographic Exploration of Identity and Educational Legacy

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THE RESEARCH FOCUSED on the importance of the lived experiences of Black women in education across three frameworks: *currere* (Pinar, 1975/1994), Black feminism (Collins, 2000), and Womanism (Walker, 1983), which emphasizes the personal narratives within curriculum studies and qualitative research, particularly through autoethnographies. Dillard (2006) maintain that for researchers and teachers to reexamine their values, cultural understandings, and decision making, they must also come face-to-face with the contradictions of life and determine what aspects of these are most important to their being.

By revisiting the intergenerational narratives of my journey through education, I wish to locate my “*currere* of stay” or “curriculum of stay,” which McNair-Lee (2023), defined in two parts: (1) “creating a means for Black women to speak to other Black women about how and why we have remained teachers in urban school spaces despite *displacement* and other factors” (p. 7) and (2) “as the ability as Black women to create, sustain and pass on resources that allow us to remain in school spaces despite the concerted and intentional efforts of hegemonic power structures to remove us from those spaces” (p. v). Furthermore, by incorporating *currere* as the method and its application to Curriculum Studies, I hope to embrace my identity as the daughter of a Black woman and educator to explore if the lived experiences of my mother inform and shape my personal and professional journey.

Positionality Statement

As a Black woman scholar, my positionality is rooted and shaped by navigating spaces that were never built for me nor intended to prioritize and recognize the fullness of what makes me human. As I entered the ivory walls of my doctoral program, I had to learn how my presence was already an act of rebellion. Allowing Black women to speak to, write, theorize, and speak the truth of our lives is rebellious and important, as the work is critical to interrupting dominant narratives, removing the silencing systems, and asserting that our presence has always been vital in the disruption of the historical misrepresentation of our scholarly attributes.

A revolving theme of needing to embrace the rebel in me has long been a part of my empirical work of naming internal, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and political systems that limit

and dismiss the critical work that positions our behaviors as chaotic or defiant. Then again, maybe these behaviors are essential parts of our survival. It is with liberatory methodologies rooted in Black feminist tradition that the very act of telling my story and stories of other Black women educators became a way to push back against narratives that profit from our labor while hindering our struggles.

Black women in the field of educational research, such as Patricia Hill Collins, Cynthia Dillard, Lisa Delpit, Theodora Berry, Denise Taliaferro Baszile, Robin Boylorn, and countless others, have positioned their work in identity, memory, and the lived experience by situating the researcher's subjectivity as the lens to our truth, both inside and outside of the classroom. They remind us that narratives are forms of epistemic resistance, which becomes a stance against the reduction of stereotypes and tropes that negatively represent who we are and a radical act for the unknowing. To embrace my inner rebel, I will engage this work by removing the illusion of neutrality by reclaiming my stories, interrogating my experiences, and centering my positions. My perspective is guided by generational wisdom, collective responsibility, and lived curricula of sustainability. Therefore, there is no service without our truth, and there is no care without our critiques.

Literature Review

Autoethnographies and Memory Work

Madison (2011) argued that one of the most vital positions in critical ethnographies is the acknowledgement of power, position, and moral responsibility. As the fieldwork is situated in our lived experiences, the work becomes the site of our belonging and how others may take up that representation and interpretation. McDonald (2021) assert that ethnographies allow researchers "to study a culture's relational practices, common values and beliefs, and shared experiences for the purpose of helping insiders (cultural members) and outsiders (cultural strangers) better understand the culture" (p. 98). Boylorn (2016) defines the process of ethnography, locating the self, as:

Being at home with oneself requires that you take home wherever you go, that you carry it on your skin like the aroma of sweet perfume. You hold it on your tongue like a poem you fear will disappear when you speak. When you are at home with yourself, you feel at home even at somebody else's house. When I feel at home, I can make myself at home wherever I am, opening cabinets and drawers, making myself a cup of coffee, putting my feet up on the furniture, changing the channel without asking. (p. 45)

Ethnographies, both auto and critical, allow researchers to embrace their truths and negotiate these social and often politicized narratives to make meaning, resurrect memories, and reflect on the stories of our everyday lives and our storied legacies (Boylorn, 2014). Additionally, autoethnography or racial autobiography in feminist and womanist thought has the power to facilitate an interrogation of racism, power, and privilege (Pratt-Clarke, 2012, p. 85). Cooper and Lilyea (2021) describe elements of autoethnography within the family of traditions of narrative and ethnographic methods as a way to amplify the base unit of analysis of self as the author and

researcher. Therefore, with that responsibility, we must turn back to ourselves to harness the accountability for our own research paradigms and positions of authority in qualitative research.

Using autoethnography as a methodology, the personal narrative can revisit, reinterpret, and reimagine the cultural complexities of Black womanhood in educational settings. Riddick (2022) argues that autoethnographies tell the story of the self and connect it to “outside” elements (p. 1087). Black women educators who apply Pinar’s *currere* provide themselves with an invitation to reimagine their lived experiences, making it a curriculum that centers their ways of knowing. When embracing Black feminist and Womanism frameworks, the researchers illuminate the complexities of their personal, professional, and political practices. Black women researchers then maintain these methodological spaces to share their stories that not only function as data sources but also as acts of rebellion, reclamation, and resistance.

Currere of Stay/Curriculum of Stay

Pinar (1975/1994) laid significant groundwork for understanding curriculum as a personal, social, and evolving body of knowledge. *Currere* is a process that allows one to use him/herself as a means of gaining a better understanding of him/herself within a four-point method:

- Regressive (One returns to the past, to capture it as it was, and as it hovers over the present)
- Progressive (The future is present in the same sense as the past is present.)
- Analytical (Make more visible of what is lived through)
- Synthetical (Underline the biological concreteness of being)

The concept of “curriculum of stay” is emergent in curriculum theory and teacher retention as it acts as a part of the reflexive journey that accurately allows Black women to explain our personal, professional, and emotional reasons to remain in K-12 spaces despite systemic challenges, neglect, and tensions that have historically existed in the educational system. While looking through the educational lens, Pinar (1975/1994) suggests that the use of autobiography narrows the focus on self which allows the space to open, to experience, to reflect, to learn, to critique and judge, to think, which establishes a space for agency (Strong-Wilson, 2017).

McNair-Lee (2023) beautifully described the “curriculum of stay” as providing Black women educators with “an anchor and with wings.” (p. ix). “We are enabled to stay and empowered to grow” (p. ix). By harnessing that power, we reconceptualize that all notions of our experiences with curriculum are social, historical, theological, cultural, racial, gendered, and aesthetic lived experiences of Blacks in the United States (Berry, 2015). The curriculum of stay converges and diverges from the steps of *currere* by using memory or reflection to locate why Black women sustain in K-12 education, which removes the race and gender neutrality of the framework, although the philosophical foundation does not strictly follow the four steps linearly.

Black Feminism and Womanism in *Currere*

Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) is a theory of empowerment and activism based on Black women's experience and legacy of struggle. Collins maintained that Black Feminism functions in two paradigmatic shifts: (1) understanding how we think about oppression by embracing race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression, and (2) addressing ongoing epistemological debates concerning ways to assess what is considered truth. According to Reynolds (2002), at the heart of Black feminist theory is the view that there is a specialized knowledge produced by Black women that clarifies a particular standpoint of and about Black women. Black feminism not only highlights the intersections of race, gender, and class but also suggests that self-determination is essential to our survival.

Womanist, a term coined by Alice Walker (1983), is defined as a Black woman who is "committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire people, both male and female" (p. xi). Womanism reflects an interchangeable and collective voice that validates the narratives of Black women. Lindsey-Dennis (2015) defines womanism as a social change methodology that stems from everyday experiences of Black women and their modes of solving practical problems (Murry, 2025, p. 15). Furthermore, both Black feminism and womanism emphasize the value and strength of Black women's culture, in addition to "embracing the commonalities of emotional relatedness, nurturance, empathy, caregiving, moral decision making, and other ways of knowing" (Haskins et. al, 2019, p. 9).

These theories allow Black women to define their experiences while also enabling them to challenge the hegemonic discourse of what Black womanhood is because "Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender" (Walker, 1983, p. xii). Black feminism and womanism seek to provide vital critiques to name and confront the multiple forms of oppression to re-center Black women's narratives beyond the controlling societal images, patriarchy, and structural oppression. Black women scholars have continued to push the boundaries of ethnographies to challenge dominant narratives that incorporate intersectionality, critical autoethnography, and endarkened epistemology as forms of advocacy of personal and home spaces (Pratt, 2023). Pinar's *currere*, as a methodology, and Black feminism and womanism, as frameworks, allow the autoethnography to be culturally anchored, historically informed, and grounded in survival, care, and healing.

At the heart of women's liberation in education, women have been confronted and are progressively continuing to dismantle the dominant societal narratives and the intersections of what Phelan et. al (1991, as cited in Mims and Williams, 2020) consider a "multiple worlds" microsystem setting: families, peer groups, classrooms, and schools. While navigating the multiple worlds, Black women educators' experiences have sought to produce literature that highlights the unique experiences of their contributions to literature, specifically in alignment with Black Feminism, Womanism, and the success and retention within the teaching profession (Regus et. al, 2024).

(Re)membering Regressively

According to Roofe (2022), human liberation and emancipation result from reflective explorations (p. 4). In the regression phase, I return to my earliest memories of education and identity. My first introduction to the harsh reality of school systems was in kindergarten. Since the age of five, I have had to negotiate space, wrestle with stereotypes, and also be comfortable with

who God created me to be. I remember when I was in kindergarten at Southdown Elementary School, during a parent-teacher conference, my teacher called me a “fat, lazy ass gal who would not amount to nothing.” My mama came home that night and whipped me. Years later, she explained that she was not only embarrassed, but she knew I could do better.

I contend that “my better” is situated in being considered a “sapphire.” Not the fancy, precious, and valuable jewel that comes in a wide array of crystal stones, but the one that Patricia Hills-Collins (2000) describes as a controlling image that is applied to Black women and their sexual beings (p. 156) or a woman who is stigmatized based on the perception of her sexual behaviors. However, who said “sapphires” cannot change the world? According to Butler-Barnes and Inniss-Thompson (2020), Black girls are exposed to negative messages about themselves based on their identities as racial and gendered minorities. These negative messages and/or stereotypes further dictate the disciplinary actions taken against Black girls for major and minor offenses based on society's notion of palatable feminine behavioral characteristics. Therefore, I learned at the age of five that my body would be “free and unfree, light and darkness, joyful and melancholic, beautiful and terrifying” (Guillory, 2021, p. 302).

Lorde (1984/2007) maintains that to evolve beyond the superficial shared experiences of Black womanhood, we must pursue empowerment through our service to others and our future selves. My mother was the first curriculum I ever learned, standing 6 feet tall at 280 pounds, with skin as dark as the night and hair white as snow; her mother nicknamed her “Moon.” My mother, a devout Christian woman, knew “love like a back street.” She would often open our home to anyone who needed a place to sleep and a meal. She would work two or three jobs, working days and nights at the Answering Service, a professional telephone answering and call center, to make sure that everyone ate. We never whispered in our house. Being loud and boisterous was a survival tactic; otherwise, you would get lost among the many people who frequented our modest three-bedroom home on Peter Street. Many of our visitors never left. I would refer to our childhood home as the “Motel 6;” we always kept a light on. All-Black neighborhoods, often referred to as “ghetto or hood,” were designed to foster political control and economic exploitation. However, these spaces were where ideas were crafted to refute oppression and provide oppositional knowledge (Collins, 2000).

Hall et al. (2025) suggests that stereotypes of Black women are socio-political and historically rooted in slavery. My mother and her sisters would call me “Saph,” which is short for my great-great-great aunt's name, Saphronia, who worked on a Louisiana plantation called Hollywood. Aunt Saph is described as a hard woman with no children, no husband, who wore pants in an act of rebellion, chewed tobacco, sat with her legs wide open, and took no s*** from nobody. My mother and her three sisters would lament through funny stories while filling in each other's lost memories concerning the dreadful visits to Aunt Saph's house on the plantation. She lived and worked on the land well into the 1960s-1970s (This information is strictly derived from family stories and has not been further explored.). Black women who embrace stereotypes, such as strength, resilience, fearlessness, aggression, or even anger, understand these implications as a duality, rather than a dichotomy, which provides spaces to redefine the adaptability of said identity.

bell hooks (1994/2015) confronts the fear of speaking out and the courage to speak “truth to power,” as she discusses the silencing of her youth to be “seen and not heard.” As a woman raised in the South, this Southern proverb is often spoken as a reminder to remain silent due to other people's perception of who you are. My mother, Michelle Wanda, did not totally believe in the thought. She often gave us space in our home to argue points that we believed were important. For example, in the late 90s, my brothers believed that my friend group and I did not need to listen

to a female group from New Orleans called the Ghetto Twins' 1998 album entitled *No Pain, No Gain*. She was the judge, our friends were the jury, and we were the attorneys who had to argue for or against the concept of young Black girls' "Responsibility" to hold our own. ("Responsibility" is a song on the Ghetto Twinz album that speaks about the roles of motherhood, despite the father refusing to step up as a parent.) Her way of parenting transcended the belief of being "seen and not heard." My mom's house was the place for "our relentless resistance to the continuous denial and dismissal of Black women's intellectual production and liberation" (Perlow et al., 2017, p. vii).

The need to embrace the rebel part of my "sapphire" allowed me to become a "woman of bold speech" (hooks, 1994/2015, p. x). The "sapphire" identity was also the description of my character in my late undergraduate professors' unfinished opera libretto entitled "The Vocal Competition." The "sapphire" character was described as heavy-set, hot-tempered, quick-witted, loud, and bossy but always fighting for the justice of her classmates. Bradley (2017) argued that multiple voices and perspectives are needed in the production of knowledge and the ways institutions respond to challenges of diversity and difference as the intersections of race, gender, class, sexuality, language, culture, and religion (p. 137). The libretto was loosely written about our undergraduate experiences at a national vocal competition as young Black students from a historically Black university (HBCU) and our journey to stay true to our cultural identities in classical music and the art of the Negro Spirituals. These moments were difficult, as we were often the only HBCU in the competition and were then judged more harshly due to our complexion. I believe that my professor was taking an anti-racism approach as he used multiple voices in his libretto to provide different perspectives on the same issues of oppression.

Progressive Potential of Right Now

"If only I could find her, then perhaps, I could find myself."
(Ferdinand, 2018)

Warren and Coles (2020) argue that "the future of Black education research and practice hinges on both documenting barriers to Black student success and identifying promising pathways to actively dismantle such barriers" (p. 384). These commitments rely on the documentation of persistent barriers that make Black women educators potentially unsuccessful, as well as identify and construct new possibilities to actively dismantle these barriers. The progressive phase focuses on the centrality of personal experience in understanding educational identity and its practice. With the United States school systems as the first introduction of societal norms, Black women educators make up only 5% of U.S. public school teachers and have the highest turnover rate amongst all other gender and racial demographics (Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2018). Black women scholars, at the heart of women's liberation in education, have been confronted and progressively continued to dismantle the dominant societal narratives and the intersections of microsystem setting.

My mother's journey through these multiple worlds, where navigating life as a single mother, an undergraduate student, and into teaching at the age of 50, was a living embodiment of the progressive phase. Her radical commitment to finish what she had started in 1973 at Nicholls State University is a model of what it looks like to choose education again and to restore what one may think is lost. Yet, as I move through my own educational career, I stand at a restless

crossroads to continue in the K-12 sector, the urge to further my educational pursuits into higher education, or to leave the public school system as a whole. This painful tension exposes my accomplishments alongside my fears—coexisting with my success as a teacher, the communities I participated in to sustain myself for 12.5 years, and the grief of what I believed education was supposed to be.

Samuels et al. (2021) considers the analysis of sensemaking as an intentional process for Black women educators who teach in either secondary or postsecondary settings. Through investigation or going back, the answers to their teaching experiences are used as a lens to cope. These individual experiences allow us to make sense of our educational journeys. McNair-Lee (2023) suggested that a “curriculum of stay” provides Black women autonomy in connection with the need for space that propels our growth beyond the American hegemonic power structures:

This curriculum is self-determined, that is, Black women take from it what is needed and add what they believe is missing. We know this curriculum without learning it in formal ways. It is, as the church mothers would say, “in our bones.” Our connection to the space and place of the urban classroom connects us to the specific histories and legacies of those who have gone before us, and we can re-member that which we have not been formally taught. (p. v)

My burning question, “how do the lived experiences of my mother inform and shape my personal and professional journey?” pushes me to reimagine the future and the transformation of systems for educators who look like me. My mother’s persistence to become a teacher after leaving college in her junior year to pursue a career in telecommunications offers me an example of how it is okay to leave, but never okay to not return to your purpose. At moments of contention or guilt, I remember my mother leaving home to drive an hour away to go to class, and then returning to work her night job at Chabert Medical Center from 10pm to 6am. While working the “switchboard” during the night shift, she would complete assignments or while working 8am to 8pm at Beautiful Beginnings, a women/family shelter in our hometown. All of those moments happened before she became a long-term substitute at a local junior high school. My mom found sustainability while reimagining herself in spaces to further craft and create a world that allowed her to reinvent her future.

The progressive phase of *currere* views the influence of the future as the present in the same sense that the past is present (Pinar, 1994). Dillard (2012) conceptualizes that knowing who we are and whose we are is embedded inside of us, and after years of forgetting, it is necessary to get back to the grounded energy of “(re)membering the things we have learned to forget” (p. 5). Alice Walker, in her 1983 book, *In Search of My Mother's Gardens*, contends that there is a belief in truth as an expression of maternal love. All theorists ultimately point toward the act of locating and making meaning once what is sought is found. My mother would consider the progressive phase, “nothing new under the sun,” which is a phrase that she often uses when attempting to recall relevant cultural memories to her sixth-grade ELA students or when hearing the same theme in a different story or considering how her past revisits her present in her children’s decisions, especially her only daughter and fellow educator.

In returning to the memories that shape my educational identity, I return to what Ferdinand (2018) considers a journey to “rediscover a point of cultural origin” (p. 56). These cultural origins are then rooted in Black Southern womanhood, where community is central to the children’s upbringing. We were not introduced to resilience as a haphazard notion; however, it was practiced, witnessed, and lived as if it were our collective responsibility. Our Southern, Baptist churches sit on corners of urban religious colloquialisms of “faith without work is dead”

(James 2:17) and “if a man doesn’t work, they don’t eat,” (2 Thessalonians 3:10) yet, in the two-hour drive to my hometown, my “sapphire” is still unsure of my responsibility to return to the classroom with no clear answer.

Analytical Antics

Sometimes, the power of my presence feels more like a burden than a blessing. Before I ever read the work of Patricia Hill Collins or Alice Walker, I was forced to maneuver through narratives and the weight of the “sapphire” stereotype. My voice, a weapon of audacity laced with unapologetic assertiveness, refused to shrink under unrealistic jargon in meetings, classrooms, or administrative spaces. Many times, my outspokenness made individuals who are uncomfortable with the volume of their oppression uneasy, yet those same qualities allow my students to feel seen, heard, and understood. I learned early that being a Black woman educator meant that I would have to constantly negotiate my cultural identity on a tightrope of being “too much” and “not enough” simultaneously.

The analytical phase juxtaposes past, present, and future, creating a subjective space that penetrates the lived past and grants freedom to return to the present. When I look back, I was “sapphire” by simply asserting boundaries when I was afraid or advocating for myself. For example, in 1992 I was five years old when my father died from complications related to diabetes at the age of 37. We traveled up to his hometown for his services and during the family viewing, my family members suggested that I touch him, and I refused. Then my twin brother touched his face and announced that he was cold. My family members chuckled through their tears. My refusal was misunderstood as defiance when my quiet grief attempted to rationalize through an internal conversation: “Why is my daddy cold and sleeping in a box?” Lorde (1977/2017) argues that death is a final silence, and maybe that is why nobody explained to me that burials are a part of life and that death mutes you from the inside out.

Motherhood in the African American community involves individuals who renegotiate the relationship between Black children and self (Collins, 2000). These individuals may be blood mothers, other mothers, teachers, church women, or any Black woman who operates in the reconstruction of oppositional and oppressive views in the definition of Black womanhood. Williams (2016) argues that “many stereotypes of Black motherhood are foreclosures and perversions of the relationship between mother and child wherein the ability to grieve is unrecognized or discounted should the relationship be broken or decimated” (p. 20). Their complex roles in the community contribute to various experiences of grief and loss (Al’Uqdah and Adomako, 2018). In Black feminism and womanism, grief is considered a political act.

It was the first semester of my master’s degree program that grief began to complicate my personal and professional life. For many years, I quietly observed my mother bury things. She would bury seeds as we attempted to grow a garden in the middle of a Louisiana summer. I saw my mother bury overdue monthly bills inside the drawer next to the microwave in our old family home. We lost our family home after my mother refinanced the mortgage to cover my twin’s mounting hospital bills. I would listen to her cry in prayer during the wee hours of the morning after the electricity was cut off, once again. I even stood as a witness when my mother had to bury my 27-year-old twin brother, when the aneurysm burst right after the doctor told us the surgery was successful. The doctor reassured my family that my brother would be cleaned up, awake, and ready for us in twenty minutes. He would reappear ten minutes later to deliver the news of his death.

Leong (2013, as cited in Williams 2023) argues that “the experience of loss [bereavement] may be universal, but responses to loss [grief] are widely variable, and there is no one clearly defined course or process of bereavement or grieving” (p. 20). Over the years, I have learned that my mother and I navigate grief in our educational and personal worlds differently. A few days following my twin's death, my mother returned to her classroom. Day after day, she would stand on her 6-foot, 300-pound frame at the front of her classroom, wiping her tears with random pieces of tissue her students handed her when they noticed her brokenness. My mother showing her vulnerability became a form of resistance, healing, and empowerment. These acts often amplify the responsibility of women of color to “interrogate our silences” and engage in critical self-analysis and self-transformation by remembering, speaking, voicing, and acting (Pratt-Clarke, 2012, p. 85). “A mother's grief can transform the marginalized, racialized, and oppressed person from an object bearing grief to being a subject speaking grievance” (Al'Uqdah & Adomako, 2018, p. 94).

The notion of Black mothers mourning, publicly, creates a community of healing and a sense of agency. My mother has always been a crier. Even as a young child, I would wake up in the middle of the night because my bedroom was right next to hers and lie in the crook of her arm to provide any sense of comfort. Although my physical touch provided love, I knew that no amount of “love” would pay the mounting hospital bills, heal a sick child, or restore employment, car and furniture repossessions and bad checks picked up from the District Attorney's office. Golden (2017) maintained that “cry becomes a synonym for being unafraid to admit to confusion, weakness, to plead for help, for the ability of mothers to say to their children, ‘I do not know what to do’” (p. 1921). When mothers allow the vulnerability of admitting having no answers, hooks (1994/2015) identifies this space as one where opportunities allow healing through testimony, through gathering everything available to you, and reconciling the financial and emotional challenges of parenthood.

Brown (2022) suggests “in the legacy of Black womanhood and Black girlhood, the survival of a loss—physical, spatial, ambiguous, or disenfranchised—remains in the blood memory of Black women's and girls' experiences” (p. 24). Throughout my journey, I could not find time to cry. I understood that “there is no expectation of immediate relief, only a willingness to submit to the darkness of the unknown and a determination to stumble through it” (Golden, 2017, p.1921). My “Saph” was full of anger, restlessness, and hopelessness as I began to navigate life without my twin brother. At the same time, I found myself struggling with what it meant to be a daughter while carrying the responsibility of planning my twin's funeral without the support of a burial policy. Al'Uqdah and Adomako (2017) contend that grief is a universal process that aids in people's healing from the loss of a loved one, and that loss changes significantly following the death of a significant loved one. Having to negotiate my feelings and emotions in a classroom was not an option for me; therefore, I subsequently failed my Fall semester of graduate school, withdrew from the counseling program, and enrolled in Educational Leadership in January of the following year.

Furthermore, in the analytical phase, I see that my grief was never in solitude. Black feminist thought provides a reinterpretation of community as a place of collective effort and will (Collins, 2000, p. 53). After the loss of my twin, I found myself in a state of disconnection, unsure of who I was or how I fit into my profession. The grief consumed me every day, and I thought my break from work would begin my process of healing. Throughout history, Black women's politics have been explored through unspoken experiences of hurt, rejection, faith, and a search for identity (Harris-Perry, 2011). However, upon returning to work, I faced the daunting reality of

rediscovering my professional and personal identity. In many ways, I was fragmented and unsure of my purpose. At the time of my return to the classroom and to my graduate school program, many of my students had been enrolled in my Choir/Vocal Music class for at least two years and were the driving force behind my return. Many of them also attended my twin brother's funeral, sent emails and text messages, and mailed letters during my weeks away. My students sensed that I had changed, and they softened their edges for me because they quietly understood that I had to figure out who I was moving forward.

Synthesizing Life as an Educator's Daughter

In the synthetic phase, I fully realize that to examine my stay, my journey, and my becoming is not to sit in memory, imagination, or critique. Instead, it wrestles with the moments and asks: Who am I becoming now that I know? Collins (1996) maintains that Walker's definition of womanism is committed to wholeness. In this phase, my intersections are braided together to form a roadmap from who I was to who I am now. For me, synthesizing my life as an educator's daughter, formed by my mother's late-life educational journey, formed by the effects of grief, and finding the balance within an institution that I once trusted, helps me reshape what I believe is possible in my purpose.

As a child, my educational journey started in my home and community; therefore, my mother taught me how to disrupt narratives before I knew the language. Moreover, motherhood in the African American community involves individuals who renegotiate the relationship between Black children and self (Collins, 2000). These individuals may be blood mothers, othermothers, teachers, church women, or any Black woman who operates in the reconstruction of oppositional and oppressive views on the definition of Black womanhood. By returning to my "point of cultural origin" (Ferdinand, 2018), rooted in Black womanhood, I was not introduced to resilience as a haphazard notion; however, it was practiced, witnessed, and lived as if it were our collective responsibility.

Black feminist thought taught me that self-definition is a political act. My "sapphire" is not defined by anger but to "make spaces something like freedom; spaces in which Black people can and do exist outside of and beyond subjection and abjection" (Reese & Cooper, 2021, p. 453). The "sapphire" label is often associated with the trope of the "angry Black woman," and even as a young girl, the label was imposed on me at various intersections by others. It allows me to operate in a duality of being both a subject of the stereotype and an agent of change within my educational setting. I turn my perceived anger from a destructive force into one that drives me to create a positive change in my environment. Bettina Judd (2019) maintains:

By thinking seriously about Black women's inner lives, we can shift the focus from the modes of knowledge by which the angry Black woman trope is meaningful to Black women's selfhood and contribution to knowledge. (p. 179)

The "sapphire" stereotype allowed me to intersect my experiences and the unrealistic expectations placed on Black women educators to become my fuel for action. Furthermore, Cooper (2018) maintained that Black women have the right to be mad as hell. Instead of retreating, my anger led to advocacy, a "hope-in-action" that sustains, particularly in how I approached the reclamation of

my identity. Within these memories, my story is no longer isolated; it is a pattern for Black women to claim ourselves in spaces that would rather have us fragmented.

Vickers (2007) reflects on sensemaking as a process of weaving together multiple meanings, and the problem being that there are often too many and never not enough. In this “space of tension” (Meier, 2016), I resolved that I am allowed to “bring [my] belongings with [me] by knowing that I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another” (Madison, 2011, p. 10-11) and through that location I find wholeness.

When I look toward the future, I do not wish to replicate my mother's journey. Yet her staying was an act of belief, persistence through promise, and sustainability for liberation. As an educator's daughter, her journey to become a teacher at 50 showed me that dreaming has no expiration date and that your purpose will haunt you until you fulfill it. Furthermore, her classroom is not just a workplace, but also an extension of her community, the destination for second chances, and the place where hope is wrapped in expectation. The lived experiences of my mother have informed my “Saph” refusal to accept school as it is without imagining the possibility of what it could be. With that, my future remains open enough for me to choose myself in all spaces.

End Note

This article is posthumously dedicated to my mother, Michelle Wanda White (1955-2025).
Because you were, I am.

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Honoring the OGs Centering Black Educators as Theorists in Teacher Education

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SITTING AT THE FEET OF DR. CHRISTINE KING-FARRIS and Dr. Gwendolyn Middlebrooks, as an undergraduate, double majoring in English and secondary education at Spelman College, was an honor. Spelman College is a Historically Black College that prepares some of the most brilliant Black women to change the world. What made Spelman College magical were the professors such as Dr. Christine King-Farris and Dr. Gwendolyn Middlebrooks. Both women are civil rights pioneers. However, if not a student in the education program at Spelman College, one would not know of their greatness.

There are two stories that stick out to me during my time as a student at Spelman College. First, Dr. King-Farris shared with us intimate details of her brother Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. She gave us a glimpse of not just his activism, but also what it was like to be his big sister. For example, she shared the story of when Mahalia Jackson, a famous Black gospel singer and activist, came to their house to visit Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. She knew who Mahalia was, but she couldn't believe she was coming to visit her brother.

She yelled through the house, "Mahalia is here! Mahalia is here!"

A lot of folx wanted to be connected to Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. because of his work on civil rights. But for Dr. Christine King-Farris, he was still her little brother. To have access to those intimate details of the giants in the Black community who shared space with the King family is an honor.

Furthermore, I could never forget Dr. Gwendolyn Middlebrooks. Her swag was impeccable even at 70+ years old and she expected the same of students. She would always say, "Walk with a purpose Ms. Woods (maiden name)! Don't drag your feet! I can't stand people who drag their feet!" She told our class a cardinal rule: "Smell good when you go to student teaching! Don't lean over students stinking! Kids won't want to be bothered with you!"

The advice that I carry with me often that she taught me is,

Don't ever embarrass children. Don't take their notes when they are writing back and forth in class. They have enough respect for you not to talk while you are talking. Don't argue with children and embarrass them in front of their peers. Always pull them in the hallway, and have a conversation with them. Respect their humanity. You are the adult in the room!

The wisdom and personal stories that Dr. King-Farris and Dr. Middlebrooks shared with me as a preservice teacher provided foundational knowledge about the importance of having a strong Black disposition and the importance of positive relationships with Black students. It is imperative that we elevate our personal stories as Black folx in our classrooms, so that students know our histories, ways of being, and ways of knowing. I will forever carry them with me.

Dr. B.

I did not take the traditional teacher education route because I did not know that I wanted to be a teacher until after I finished my bachelor's degree. A couple of years later, I completed a Master of Education and initial teacher licensure program. Then a few years after teaching, I began a Ph.D. program. Prior to getting accepted into the Ph.D. program, all applicants had to participate in an admissions interview. I remember sitting in the lobby and a Black woman walked out of the restroom and said,

"Hello, how are you?"

I responded, "I'm good thank you! How about you?"

She smiled and responded, "I am well, thank you."

Shortly after, I was greeted by that same Black woman. She shared her name and welcomed me to follow her to the interview room. This woman was Dr. Marjorie Hall Haley. She had on the baddest suit and exuded boss energy. By no means did Dr. Haley appear to be someone that you would play with; she had a certain level of sophistication yet did not appear to be unapproachable. There was a warmth to her and a Godly spirit that immediately connected to mine. She along with her colleagues asked me questions about my future and why I wanted to gain admission into the program. I remember during each response she would nod while I was talking and after I completed my sentences she would affirm my responses. I left the interview uncertain about whether I got into the program; however, I was thankful for the encounter that I had with Dr. Haley. I was inspired by seeing a Black woman in academia being her unapologetic self. That was not my last time seeing Dr. Haley. In fact, I got accepted into the Ph.D. program and she became my advisor, dissertation chair, and professor.

Dr. Haley always reminded me that all roads lead to dissertation. This was her way of telling me that I needed to be focused and strategic when navigating the program so that I could graduate and do the work that I was called to do in academia. She sacrificed her time to give me advice on the academic application process. When I started getting calls for interviews, she walked me through what I needed to say and to make sure I was prepared for the campus visit and interview. When it was finally time to defend my dissertation, Dr. Haley rehearsed with me and made sure that I was fully prepared. After I finished presenting and was told that I passed the

dissertation process, Dr. Haley held both of my hands and told me, “You are standing on the shoulders of giants and now you must allow someone to stand on your shoulders.” The support, love, sacrifice, encouragement, and realness that Dr. Haley extended was something that only a Black woman OG and elder could provide.

OG most commonly stands for Original Gangsta, but culturally and connotatively it has long moved beyond its literal meaning. In Black communities, it often refers to someone who has been around a long time (respected elder or seasoned saint), a person who is authentic and foundational to the Black community, and someone who has established something within the community. In the Black community, when we refer to someone as an OG, it establishes and signals credibility. We refer to our ancestors and elders here as OGs, under which title they are greatly respected and revered

Receiving intimate wisdom like this doesn't just happen for Black students in K-12 classrooms, and especially not in teacher education programs. Very rarely are we exposed to the brilliance and excellence of our OGs in Black education. More particularly, having OGs at our fingertips as our teacher educators was a privilege. Their wisdom, knowledge, and mere presence were essential to Dr. P.'s growth as a preservice teacher, and Dr. B.'s growth as a doctoral student. Furthermore, their knowledge, activism, and curricular practices, along with other OGs should be foundational knowledge in teacher education, to prepare students to disrupt and dismantle anti-Blackness in education writ large.

Centering Blackness in Teacher Education

Centering Blackness in teacher education is essential to disrupting whiteness that is prevalent in education (K-16) and miseducates all children (Wynter-Hoyte & Smith, 2020). Garvey (1921) posed the important question, “How many of us know ourselves?” (BlackPast, 2011 as cited in Wynter-Hoyte & Smith, 2020). Many Black folx do not know ourselves due to the history of anti-Blackness in this country, and especially in the U.S. education system.

Anti-Blackness is an antagonistic relationship between Blackness and humanity (Dumas & ross, 2016). It is socially constructed to render Black people as inhumane, disposable, and inherently problematic (Warren & Coles, 2020). Black people are denied the opportunity to know themselves, their histories, heritage, former languages, names, birthdates, families, drums, gods—anything that secured their identity, essence, and African being (Wynter-Hoyte, 2020). Even seventy years after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), anti-Blackness persists within U.S. curricula through the systemic erasure and misrepresentation of Black life and knowledge (Bertrand, 2025). Historically, schools have excluded curricular content that allows Black children to see themselves as human, brilliant, and essential (Bertrand, 2023; Cooper, 2003; Love, 2019). This curricular void is not accidental but rather reflects what Jenkins (2021) describes as spatial imaginary of anti-Blackness that constructs Blackness as deficit, non-human, or placeless.

Yet anti-Blackness in education is not sustained solely through the absence or distortion of Black content. It operates through multiple dimensions of curricula that function simultaneously: the formal curriculum (what is assigned and required), the taught curriculum (how instructors frame and model knowledge), the learned curriculum (what students internalize about race, Blackness, and teaching), and the hidden curriculum (the unwritten, unintended, unofficial, and implicit norms that communicate whose knowledge is legitimate, rigorous, and

foundational) (Cuban, 1992; Giroux & Penna, 1979; Jackson, 1968).

Within the formal curriculum of teacher education programs, whiteness often remains foundational, with Black scholarship positioned as supplemental, elective, or diversity-oriented rather than theoretical and generative (Mayorga & Picower, 2018). Textbooks and classroom materials continue to center whiteness as the norm, positioning Blackness as problematic or peripheral (Woodson, 2017). The absence of Black educational history and Black scholarship in curricula and textbooks (Muhammad et al., 2020) signals to teacher candidates that Black knowledge is additive rather than epistemologically central. The taught curriculum reinforces this hierarchy when instructors present white ways of knowing, being, and epistemologies as the only true form of knowledge while treating Black perspectives as situational or objective. Through this enactment, preservice teachers often learn implicitly that Blackness is a topic rather than a framework.

The learned curriculum includes internalized deficit ways of knowing, seeing, and teaching Black students; narrow understandings of Black language, culture, and history; and limited exposure to Black traditions. Language policing and the enforcement of white mainstream English (Baker-Bell, 2020), respectability politics demanding Black assimilation (Baker-Bell, 2020; Porcher, 2021), and the centering of white texts, white authors, white epistemologies as “the standard” (Porcher, 2021) for what must be learned and what constitutes professionalism further solidifies these norms. Simultaneously, the hidden curriculum disciplines emotional tone, critique, and expressive practices that deviate from white normative standards, making anti-Blackness acceptable (Cuban, 1992). As Mathias and Mackey (2016) argued, teacher education programs recycle and retain the hegemony of whiteness through faculty, students, and curricula, enforcing pedagogies that fail to affirm Black students' identities or cultivate intellectual agency.

Addressing anti-Black curriculum solely at the K-12 level risks patchwork reform that leaves intact the epistemological foundations shaping teachers' practice. Transforming isolated lesson plans or adding representative texts cannot fully disrupt anti-Blackness if educators have been prepared within their teacher education programs to normalize whiteness as the standard of knowledge and professional practice. Teacher education represents a critical intervention point. This is why we focus on centering Blackness in teacher education and within this curriculum design itself.

Fanon (1967) posed the questions, “Who am I? Am I who I say I am? And am I all I ought to be?” Without the centering of Blackness in education spaces, it is challenging for both Black students and educators to answer these questions. More specifically, the call from Black scholars (Asante, 1991; Bertrand & Porcher, 2023; Du Bois, 1915; Kirkland, 2021; Porcher, 2020) to recenter Black perspectives, ways of being, knowing, learning and teaching, guided us to propose curriculum within teacher education (specifically English and Social Studies Education) that centers Black ancestors, elders, educators, activists and/or folx as theorists and knowledge bearers in teacher education programs. Centering Blackness is aligned to our rich history of educators in the Black community.

Mead (2001) highlights that during the three decades after emancipation and the first six decades of the 20th century, teaching was one of the few occupations open to college-educated Black folx. One of the primary leadership roles available to Black women was a teacher in their community. More specifically, Black teachers were employed in segregated states where there were larger numbers of Black students (Foster, 1997). With the high numbers of Black folx in education, there is a lack of research on the work and impact of these Black teachers.

The wisdom, experiences, and work of our ancestors, elders, educators, and activists demonstrate Black cultural and educational principles that have been passed down through generations. These principles are effective for teaching Black students and preparing educators. Delpit (1997, as cited in Foster, 1997) argues that we must look at the past through new eyes in order to determine what we must learn to provide an excellent education for Black children. Dillard (2022) encourages us to re(member) as a spiritual experience, who we are—our history, culture, and contributions—that honors the history of Black life, resistance, knowledge, and culture. These principles were instilled in us by Dr. King-Farris, Dr. Middlebrooks, Dr. Haley, and so many more Black folx.

This curricular choice is an act of resistance to existing hegemony (hooks, 1992). This act of resistance is an example of our unapologetic love for Blackness. This article creates a space for Black folx (educators and students) to know themselves and their histories, be empowered to love Blackness by developing positive Black racial identities (Foster, 1997; Porcher, 2024), and for white students to learn the truth and not be educated in the social construct and harm of white superiority (Wynter-Hoyte & Smith, 2020). More specifically, utilizing the life history and curricular approaches of our Black OG educators, has the power to provide a Blackprint of how we can best educate Black students (Bertrand & Porcher, 2023; Foster, 1997; Ravitch, 2000). This curricular work and disruption is guided by the Black Gaze Framework (Bertrand & Porcher 2023; Porcher & Bertrand, 2023).

Collective Black Feminist Currere

Our approach to theorizing curriculum that centers Blackness in teacher education is grounded in collective Black Feminist currere (McNair-Lee, 2025). Currere is an autobiographical reflection of one's educational encounters and lived experiences (McNair-Lee, 2025; Moore, 2013). Currere provides a deeper understanding of lived curricular experiences through a recursive process of remembering the past, imagining the future, and then analyzing emergent themes (Pinar, 2004). At the same time, we extend currere through the concept of curriculum of stay, which situates curriculum as a praxis of endurance and belonging, particularly in spaces such as teacher education where Black women educators have been historically marginalized as educational theorists. Rather than framing curriculum solely as becoming, curriculum of stay foregrounds persistence, relationality, and rootedness in the face of anti-Blackness (McNair-Lee, 2025).

Importantly, currere disrupts dominant principles and narratives within curriculum that are predetermined and established by institutions (Le Grange, 2021; Roofe, 2018; Tyler, 1949). It resists linear models of learning by positioning learning as ongoing, reflective, and communal; asking how educational experiences shape not only the individual but also their communities (McNair-Lee, 2025). Collective Black Feminist currere is rooted in the work of Black Feminist Thought (Hill Collins, 1996), which recognizes Black women as knowledge producers whose lived experiences, relational histories, and intellectual labor, generate theory. We center our lived experiences as Black women students and educators. Furthermore, we propose Black women educators as educational theorists whose work, and knowledge must be foregrounded in teacher education (McNair-Lee, 2023).

Currere is traditionally framed by four stages of autobiographical reflection:

- Regressive: Looking back at past experiences that shaped who you are (especially as a learner and teacher);
- Progressive: Looking forward to hopes, dreams, and possibilities for the future;
- Analytical: Examining the present moment, making sense of tensions between past and future, and analyzing influences; and
- Synthetical: Bringing together past, present, and future into a more integrated understanding of self and curriculum (Pinar, 1994).

In theorizing curriculum through collective Black Feminist currere, we engage in these stages while also extending them. In practice, specifically in theorizing currere curriculum, we have reflected on our own educational journeys in teacher education (regressive stage). We open with a regressive moment by reflecting on our own educational journeys in teacher education; specifically, experiencing Black teacher educators within our programs yet not seeing them represented as foundational curriculum theorists.

We connect these reflections to our personal histories as former K-12 educators and now teacher educators. Our engagement with the progressive stage considers the persistence of anti-Blackness in teacher education and imagines possibilities for centering Black women theorists, not merely practitioners. In the sections that follow, we engage in the analytical and synthetical stages by offering a framework to center Blackness in teacher education through our OGs; those whose intellectual, relational, and communal labor has long shaped curriculum, even when unacknowledged.

More specifically, we focus on two Black educators, Alice Dunbar-Nelson and Septima Poinsette Clark, who we strongly believe should be taught as educational theorists for best practices to prepare preservice teachers to teach Black students. Their work, and the work of Black educators are imperative, as Black folx have always valued literacy and many learned to read despite being forbidden to (Foster, 1997). Organizationally, we highlight the Black Gaze Framework (Bertrand & Porcher, 2023) that grounds our work, providing background history of each Black woman, history of their time as Black educators, their activism, and their curricular practices. We conclude with what the OGs left us with that can be used in teacher education right now.

Theoretical Framework

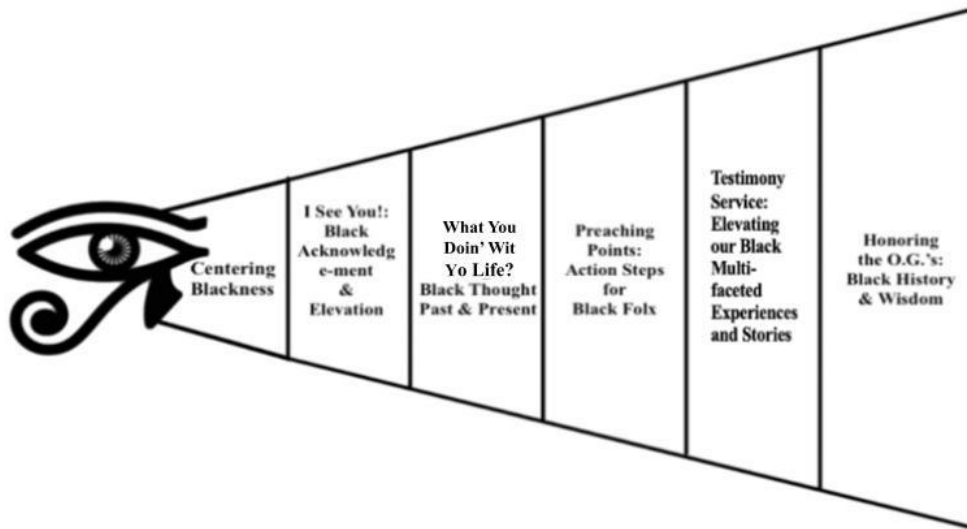
The Black Gaze Framework (BGF) is a theoretical and practical model that centers Blackness in teacher education by shifting the focus from the white gaze to the Black gaze (Bertrand & Porcher, 2023; Porcher & Bertrand, 2023). BGF insists on the specificity of the Black, a focus that refuses the erasure of Black experiences within broader “people of color” narratives (Dumas & ross, 2016). The framework comprises of five tenets:

- Honoring the O.G.s: Black History & Wisdom;
- Testimony Service: Elevating our Black Multifaceted Experiences and Stories;
- Preaching Points: Action Steps for Black Folx;
- What You Doin’ Wit Yo’ Life?: Black Thought Past & Present; and
- I See You!: Black Acknowledgement & Elevation (Bertrand & Porcher, 2023; Porcher &

Bertrand, 2023) (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

Black Gaze Framework



While BGF emerged from teacher education, it is not discipline-bound. Rather, it offers an adaptable, cross-curricular framework that can inform all areas of educational practice by providing a liberatory model for reimagining pedagogy, curriculum, and learning spaces through a lens of Black history, love, wisdom, and brilliance (Bertrand & Porcher, 2023).

There is an overwhelming presence of theories created by white men and Eurocentric approaches to teaching and learning in teacher education programs (Muhammad et al., 2020). The limited experiences of Blackness are often presented in surface level diversity and multicultural literature courses. BGF is rooted in the work of the OG, Morrison (1993), who urged us to shift from the white gaze. The future of Black education research and practice hinges on documenting barriers to Black teacher and student school success and identifying promising pathways to actively dismantle such barriers (Warren & Coles, 2020).

BGF is a promising pathway for actively disrupting anti-Blackness in teacher education. BGF builds upon Critical Race Theory (CRT), Black StoryWork, and BlackCrit that conceptualizes the experiences of Black people. CRT has four tenets:

- race as a normal fact of daily life,
- theory of interest convergence,
- historical contexts and
- counter-narratives (Taylor, 2009).

CRT highlights the importance of counter-narrative storytelling, through the lived experiences of

minoritized groups (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and it is a “tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 29).

BGF leans upon elevating the stories of Black folx through counter storytelling; more specifically, Black Story Work (Coles, 2023). Coles (2023) defines Black Story Work as the individual or collective stories that emerge from the lived experiences of Black people and communities. It uses Black knowledge(s) as a tool to extend and author oneself beyond the conditions of anti-Blackness. Black Story Work is a direct response to overcome society’s “refusal to acknowledge Black peoples as human, and worthy of regard, recognition, and resources” (Dumas & ross, 2016, p.8). As Muhammad (2020) argues, Black people do not wish to merely exist in this country but to exert our presence and make our mark on history by sharing, elevating, and amplifying our own narratives. BGF encourages Black folx to share their multifaceted stories of love, pain, joy, genius, brilliance, culture, experiences of social constructs, hope, and liberation in education. Collective Black Feminist currere deepens BGF by examining how Black educators’ pasts, presents, and imagined futures actively shape curriculum, reframing it as lived, embodied, and collectively theorized through Black women’s experiences. By centering relational histories, endurance, and belonging as forms of curricular knowledge, it moves counter-storytelling beyond narrative expression into curriculum theorizing.

Dumas and ross (2016) argue that CRT cannot fully employ the counter-narratives and/or Black Story Work of Black peoples’ experiences of structural and cultural racism, because CRT on its own does not capture how anti-Blackness constructs Black subjects. It aggregates the experiences of Black people into the experiences of people of color. This act has made Black people unnamed, and our experiences denied and forsaken (Kirkland, 2021; Noguera, 2003). Kirkland (2021) argues, the opposition to whiteness requires people of color to work together but the cost of this collective action has been the forced abandonment of our unique differences and histories. Furthermore, the equity, diversity, and inclusion work that typically focuses on ensuring white people understand their role in racism, sidelines Blackness, and thereby centers whiteness yet again. Black people require different treatments for our challenges (Kirkland, 2021) and specific frameworks to elevate our experiences and dismantle anti-Blackness. Many of us have not considered who we are outside of the standard of whiteness, and BGF provides the space for us to do so.

The framings of BlackCrit are:

- anti-Blackness as endemic to all dimensions of human life;
- Blackness existing in tension with the “neoliberal-multicultural imagination”;
- creating space for Black liberatory fantasy; and
- resisting revisionist history that erases whites from a history of racial dominance (Dumas & ross, 2016).

BlackCrit emphasizes the specificity of Blackness and loving Blackness. BGF builds upon BlackCrit and CRT which conceptualizes the experiences of Black people. BGF is an act of political resistance of loving Blackness (hooks, 1992) to counteract the unrelenting attacks on Blackness (Dumas & ross, 2016). Many Black theories focus only on critically theorizing race, which is imperative; however, we focus on centering Blackness, amplifying the voices and experiences of Black people, and offering next steps to disrupt anti-Blackness.

BGF is a pathway for engaging self and historical identity while moving toward action that elevates those who have long centered Blackness in their work. This framework answers

Kirkland's (2021) call for a pedagogy for Black people, rooted in freedom, committed to developing consciousness, and grounded in valuing Black life, and builds upon BlackCrit and Critical Race Theory to move toward concrete practices that center Blackness and liberation. Grounded in an unwavering love for Blackness that resists ongoing violence (Dumas & ross, 2016), this article focuses specifically on Tenet One of BGF: Honoring the O.G.s.

Tenet One: Honoring the OGs: Black History & Wisdom

Black OGs paved the way for the ongoing liberation of Black folx. We recognize and honor those who have come before us. Our elders and ancestors were on this journey of liberation longer and understand what to expect, especially in the face of anti-Blackness. They have done the work for us to do the work, especially in education. By honoring the OGs we elevate and study their Blackprints (Bertrand & Porcher, 2023) for Black liberation in teacher education. This tenet is essential because in most teacher education programs and K-12 education, Black students are denied the histories of Black authors, advocates, educators, and activists who have come before us in content knowledge. We focus specifically on English and Social Studies education. This tenet allows teacher educators and students to reflect, research, and respond by sharing those Black people who have paved the way or made strong contributions in education, specifically curricular practices.

Teacher educators should use texts (widely defined) that are written by OGs, watch speeches or interviews featuring OGs, and/or evoke the presence of an OG in teacher education courses. One area that is most important, is studying the curricular practices of these OGs as models to prepare students to effectively center Blackness in their courses. Through the lens of currere curriculum, this is not simply an additive practice; it is regressive. For example, engaging the words and works of OGs invites students to look back and situate themselves within historical, intellectual, and cultural lineages of Black educational thought. Rather than beginning curriculum with dominant, institutionally sanctioned theorists, teacher educators can prompt students to reflect on whose knowledge has shaped the field and whose has been omitted. OGs function as anchors of collective memory and intellectual inheritance.

By returning to the sources (Wilson, 2023), the foundational pedagogical and curricular practices of Black educators, we provide a Blackprint (Bertrand & Porcher, 2023) for Black educators (and others who recognize the necessity of centering Blackness in teacher education) to reimagine, enact, and sustain pedagogical and curricular practices shaped through the Black Gaze Framework (Bertrand & Porcher, 2023; Wilson, 2023). While educational theorists are defined as someone who develops ideas about the explanation of events (Cambridge Dictionary, 2026), we define theorists as pillars and giants in the Black community who have made an impact in their selected career fields, more specifically, in education. We unapologetically disrupt dominant assumptions about who counts as a knowledge bearers in teacher education. These OGs centered Blackness in their classrooms and curricular practices, disrupted anti-Blackness, and engaged in practices that have the power to free Black folx.

Below are examples of Black OGs, Alice Dunbar-Nelson and Septima Poinsette Clark, who should be taught as educational theorists in teacher education curriculum, along with their pedagogical and curricular practices as models for centering Blackness in teacher education.

Alice Dunbar-Nelson

Figure 2

Photograph of Alice Dunbar-Nelson in a Hat



Note. From [Alice Dunbar Nelson Photography] Paul Laurence Dunbar Gallery, 2022, Ohio History Connection P70, https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/dunbar_photos/26/

Alice Ruth Moore Dunbar-Nelson (Figure 2) was born on July 19, 1875, in New Orleans to Patricia Wright, a washerwoman and formerly enslaved woman (National Park Service, 2021). She graduated from Straight University, now Dillard University, in 1892 and became a prolific poet, critic, journalist, activist, and educator. Dunbar's writing spanned poetry, essays, and newspaper columns (Erickson, 2024; National Park Service, 2021). Her literary career began with the publication of *Violets and Other Tales* in 1895 (Figure 3), which drew the attention of poet Paul Laurence Dunbar and led to their marriage in 1898 following a courtship by letter (*Violets and Other Tales*, 1895/2017)

Figure 3

Violets and Other Tales Cover Page



Note. From *Violets and other tales*, by Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson, 1895, Daniel Murray Collection (Library of Congress), <https://lccn.loc.gov/95233207>

Dunbar-Nelson endured four years of abuse during the marriage and left Dunbar after an assault in 1906. She later relocated to Wilmington, Delaware, where she continued her intellectual and activist work (National Park Service, 2021). She married twice more, maintained relationships with women, and died of heart disease in Philadelphia on December 18, 1935. Her ashes were scattered in the Delaware River (National Park Service, 2021).

History as a Black Educator

Alice Dunbar-Nelson was widely recognized as an outstanding English teacher who cultivated in her students a love of learning, academic excellence, and pride in Black identity. After graduating from Straight University, she began teaching in the city schools of New Orleans, Louisiana (National Park Service, 2021). She was committed to helping her students understand both their ability to compete with white students and the importance of promoting positive representations of Black people in the United States (Gibson, 1997). In 1902, she began teaching at Howard High School (Figure 4) in Wilmington, Delaware, where she served for 18 years, including as head of the English Department (University of Delaware, 2023). In addition to her secondary teaching, she also worked as a teacher educator, directing and teaching summer sessions for Black teachers at Delaware State College for seven years (Gibson, 1996).

Figure 4
Howard High School



Note: From the new Howard High School building, circa 1930, Delaware Historical Society, <https://library.udel.edu/residency/gallery/>

Activism

Alice Dunbar-Nelson served as secretary of the Peace Committee of the American Friends Service Committee and was deeply engaged in social and political activism. In September 1920, she was dismissed from her position as head of the English Department at Howard High School by Principal Ray Wooten after attending Social Justice Day in Marion, Ohio. Principal Ray Wooten cited “political activity and incompatibility,” and the central administration upheld his decision (Gibson, 1997). Beyond the classroom, Dunbar-Nelson worked to secure women’s suffrage, advocated for anti-lynching legislation, and advanced civil rights, serving as a field organizer for the women’s suffrage movement and on Delaware’s State Republican Committee. In 1924, she actively supported the passage of the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill then under consideration in Congress (The Rosenbach, 2010).

Curricular Practices

In Alice Dunbar Nelson’s papers, there are detailed outlines of her courses of study for first, second, and third year English courses at Howard High School (see Figure 5). For example: First year, first term students studied the following classics: Irving’s *Sketch Book*, Coleridge’s *Ancient Mariner*, and Kingsley’s *Old Testament Narratives*. For rhetoric, Howard High freshmen studied Scott and Denney’s *Elementary Composition*. Poems freshmen memorized included Lincoln’s Gettysburg speech; Wordsworth’s *Sonnet on Milton*; “The Holy Supper” from *The Vision of Sir Launfal*, “He Prayeth Well” from *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, *Up From Slavery*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Those venerated classical works were followed in subsequent years by *The Odyssey*, *Lady of the Lake*, *Idylls of the King*, *Twelfth Night*, *As you Like It*, *Julius Caesar*, *Beowulf* (in translation), and *Macbeth*; then works by Spenser, Chaucer,

Milton, and Macaulay. (Gibson, 1997)

As stated above, Dunbar-Nelson ensured that her students would be able to compete with white students. So the texts selected for students to read are from the white gaze, and considered the ‘literary canon.’ However, Dunbar-Nelson still exposed students to Blackness, Black scholars, and Black texts. One of the most renowned legacies of Howard High School—and of Dunbar-Nelson’s leadership as head of the English Department—was its successful integration of classical educational objectives with the study and appreciation of works by and about Black people across the curriculum. For example, in *The Dunbar Speaker and Entertainer* (1920), Dunbar-Nelson provides a variety of poetic and prose selections. In the foreword of *The Dunbar Speaker and Entertainer* (1920) by Leslie Pinckney Hill (president of Cheyney University), he states:

Colored boys and girls have not been reading about heroic black warriors and statesmen, martyrs and saints. They do not ponder enough the pages of the black man's romance written by the black novelist. They have not stored their minds with the poetry that has sung its way out of the black man's sorrow and travail and made a place for itself among the lasting monuments of the world's music (Gibson, 1997, Alice Dunbar Nelson Section, para 21).

Dunbar-Nelson's *Speaker* was one of her successes in addressing the issue of a classical education while honoring the importance of centering Blackness. This challenge that Dunbar-Nelson had as a Black educator, is still one that is prevalent in contemporary curriculum for Black students. Whiteness (people, scholars, texts, ways of being, ways of learning, and ways of teaching) are centered in curricular practices. Furthermore, white ways of being, learning and teaching are centered as the standard for academic excellence (Porcher, 2023). Black educators have consistently had to create ways to incorporate Black ways of being, learning, and teaching into their curricular practices; even when those approaches were not recognized as academic excellence or deemed worthy of inclusion in formal curricula. In addition to the ‘literary canon’ and works of Black people, Dunbar-Nelson also required her students to be knowledgeable of current affairs and to participate in oratorical contests. Not only did she prepare her students to think critically and to speak in an articulate manner, but she also was one of the teachers who made famous the programs and graduation celebrations for which Howard High was renowned for. While Black language (Baker-Bell, 2020) is important to Black culture and ways of speaking, when Dunbar-Nelson was an educator, Black students were taught to be “articulate” which is also a white way of being. Black language was not appreciated or not seen as legitimate language.

Alice Dunbar-Nelson should be understood as a theorist in teacher education curriculum because her life and work model a pedagogy rooted in Black intellectual excellence, literary rigor, and social responsibility. As a teacher, writer, poet, and activist, she demonstrated how curriculum can simultaneously cultivate academic rigor, cultural pride, and critical consciousness. When preservice teachers encounter Dunbar-Nelson’s work as foundational, not supplemental, they gain models of how to design classrooms where Black histories, literatures, and ways of knowing are central rather than peripheral. This benefits Black students who see their identities and intellectual inheritances affirmed, and it benefits all students by expanding whose knowledge is recognized as authoritative. Her curricular practices offer guideposts for

teacher preparation, while her poetry and prose can serve as core texts in the ELA classroom, shifting the center of literary study away from a white-dominant canon and toward a Black literary and pedagogical tradition that has always been rigorous, expansive, and transformative.

Figure 5

Alice Dunbar-Nelson's English Curriculum at Howard High School

COURSE OF STUDY		
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH		HOWARD HIGH SCHOOL
Wilmington, Del.		
FIRST TERM, FIRST YEAR.		
Classics:	Irving's Sketch Book,	English Sketches
	Lowell's Vision of Sir Launfal	
	Coleridge's Ancient Mariner	
	Kingsley's Old Testament Narratives	
Rhetoric	Scott and Denney's Elementary Composition	
	Part I to Page 87	
	Narration PP 129 to 176 (Selecti	
Poetry to be memorized	Lincoln's Gettysburg Speech	
	Wordsworth's Sonnet on Milton	
	Advice of Polonius to Laertes	
	June Passage, "Better to meek" "The Holy Supper" from The Vision of Sir Launfal.	
	"He prayeth well" from The Ancient Mariner	
	The Lark Song, from Cymbeline	
	Shakespeare's Epitaph from Stratford on Avon.	
Themes.	Based on Classics Imitation of "A Country Church" from Irving. Imitation of The Stage Coach, etc.	
	Selected narratives from Rhetoric.	
	Oral narratives	
	Themes based on stories of Samson and Ruth.	
Required Reading	Pilgrim's Progress	Tom Brown's School Days
	Up from Slavery	Treasure Island Robinson Crusoe
	Uncle Tom's Cabin	
	Any others selected by pupil.	
	The above insisted upon.	
Current Events throughout the year.		

Note. From MSS 0113 Alice Dunbar-Nelson papers, <https://udspace.udel.edu/handle/19716/24346> [Fair Use and Education Use]

Septima Poinsette Clark

Septima Poinsette Clark was born on May 3, 1898, and was raised in Charleston, South Carolina, as the second of eight children to a mother described as “fiercely proud” and a father who was gentle and tolerant (SNCC Digital, n.d.). Although her parents had limited formal schooling—her father having been formerly enslaved on the Poinsette Plantation and her mother educated in Haiti—they deeply valued education and ensured she attended quality schools, including Avery Normal School, from which she graduated in 1916 after passing the teacher’s examination (SNCC Digital, n.d.). In 1920, she married Nerie Clark; after his death five years later, she moved to Columbia, South Carolina, where she continued teaching and pursued further education during the summers. In 1937, she studied under W.E.B. DuBois at Atlanta University, later earning a B.A. from Benedict College in 1942 and an M.A. from Hampton University in 1946. Clark died at the age of 89 on Johns Island on December 15, 1987 (SNCC Digital, n.d.).

History as a Black Educator

Clark was a community teacher, activist, and human rights leader who viewed education as a tool for Black liberation and advancement (Hall et al., 2010). Because Black teachers were initially barred from teaching in much of South Carolina, she earned her license and began teaching on Johns Island, one of the few places where Black educators were permitted to work (see Figure 6). After joining the NAACP, Clark returned to Charleston and organized Black students at Avery Normal School in 1917 to collect petition signatures demanding that Black teachers be allowed to teach in the city's public schools (Foster, 1997; Lake, 2013). Throughout her career, including her work in Columbia at Booker T. Washington High School and her later return to Charleston, Clark used education and activism to help Black communities claim their rights and transform their lives (Lake, 2013).

Figure 6

Septima Clark at First Teaching Job on Johns Island, SC (1919)



Note: From Education: Septima Poinsette Finds Her Calling, 1912-1919, 1919, Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC. <https://discovering.charleston.edu/files/show/514>

Activism

Clark dedicated decades to Black women's organizations, including the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), mentoring Black girls, and improving the lives of Black South Carolinians (Lake, 2013). As a leader in the Charleston NAACP, she helped secure the hiring of

Black teachers and principals in Black public schools and participated in a class action lawsuit that achieved pay equity between Black and white teachers in South Carolina (Charron, 2012; Hall et al., 2010; Lake, 2013). After 40 years of teaching, her contract was not renewed in 1956 because she refused to resign from the NAACP, as required by a state law banning public employees from membership (Lake, 2013). Undeterred, Clark worked with civil rights leaders to establish Citizenship Schools beginning on Johns Island in 1957, a literacy initiative, first sponsored by the Highlander Folk School and later the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), that used accessible, community-centered materials such as the Citizenship School Reading Booklet. During an oral history interview with Clark (July 30, 1976), she shared,

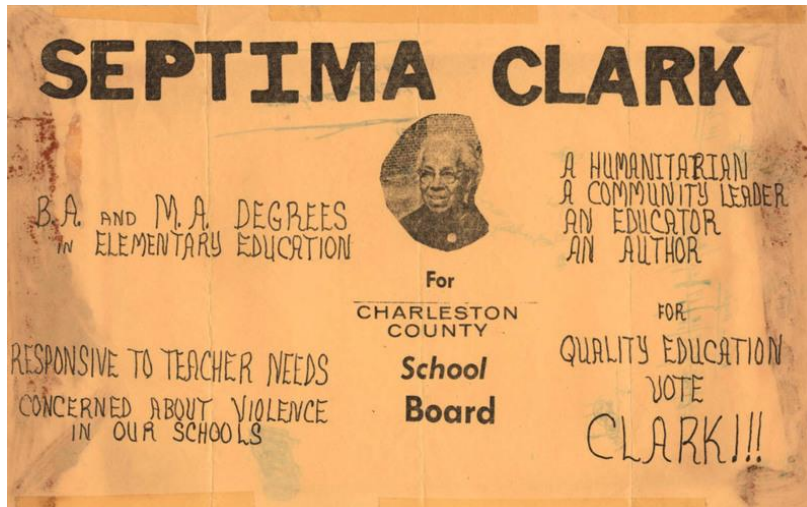
I started working at the Highlander Folk School in 1954, and we had a court case in 1959. I was arrested, and padlocks were put on the doors at Highlander Folk School. And Dr. King said that he would like to have the program that we started at Highlander come to Atlanta. So I was sent to Atlanta to carry out the citizenship education program, a program designed to eliminate illiteracy and get people ready to register and vote. When Dr. King took it over, we worked at a center in Liberty County, Georgia, a center that was owned by the American Missionary Association (Clark, 1976, Oral History Interview, para. 2).

After the Highlander Folk School was closed, funding from the Marshall Field Foundation was transferred to the SCLC, where Clark continued leading the Citizenship Education program. Her leadership in this work earned recognition from numerous civil rights leaders and public officials, including former President Gerald Ford (Clark, 1976).

In 1970, Clark retired from the SCLC but remained active in political and community advocacy, focusing on women's rights, the needs of African American children, and elder care (Hall et al., 2010). In 1972, she was elected to the Charleston County School Board, becoming its first woman and first Black member (see Figure 7). She also served on the local Advisory Council on Aging and collaborated with clubwomen to establish a daycare center, continuing her lifelong commitment to community uplift (Hall et al., 2010).

Figure 7

Flier for Septima P. Clark's Campaign for the Charleston County School Board, Charleston, South Carolina, ca. 1970s



Note: From Remembering Individuals, Remembering Communities: Septima P. Clark and Public History in Charleston, Lowcountry Digital History Initiative (LDHI): A digital history project hosted by the Lowcountry Digital Library at the College of Charleston, https://ldhi.library.cofc.edu/exhibits/show/septima_clark/local-and-national-leader

Curricular Practices

When Clark lost her job in Charleston, she left South Carolina to work at the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee. At this school, she taught adult students and visitors from the South how to read by reciting the U.S. Constitution. The Highlander School held workshops for Civil Rights activists that covered union organization, human rights discussions, voter education, and basic skills like money management. Clark's work at Highlander led to the birth of other citizenship schools across the South (Payne, 1995).

Working alongside her cousin Bernice Robinson and community leader Esau Jenkins, Clark helped develop the concept of Citizenship Schools to cultivate grassroots leadership and political empowerment. She described their purpose as discovering and developing creative leadership within local communities (Clark, 1976). Beginning with the first school on Johns Island in 1957, the program focused on literacy and South Carolina election laws to help African Americans pass voting literacy tests, particularly following the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (SNCC Digital Gateway, n.d.) (see Figure 8). The model proved successful, leading to additional schools on nearby islands and resulting in more than 600 African Americans registering to vote in Charleston County within three years (Charron, 2012; Lake, 2013).

Clark can be viewed as a theorist that intertwines literacy, citizenship, and activism. Clark has created a Blackprint (Bertrand & Porcher, 2023) of how to teach curricula such as the U.S. constitution, policies, laws, citizenship, etc., which classifies as Social Studies content. Her work also focused on helping people learn to read and gain life and basic skills. In addition, she

is a model for teacher educators on how to enact social justice for Black students and community members. Oftentimes, teacher educators believe that they are unable to cover their course curricula while centering Blackness.

Figure 8

Table of Contents from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference Citizenship Workbook, mid-1960s

Table of Contents	
	Page
The Purpose of the Citizenship School.....	1
History and Philosophy of S.C.L.C.....	2
Our America.....	2A
Georgia Election Laws.....	3
Summary of State Government.....	5
Making Words from the Alphabet.....	6
Making Little Words from One Big Word.....	7
Using the Words in Stories and Sentences.....	8
Your Social Security.....	9
How to Write my Name and Address on a Mail Order Blank.....	10
Writing a Friendly Letter.....	11
Practice Lesson.....	12
Beginners' Arithmetic.....	13
Advanced Arithmetic.....	15
Good Manners.....	17
Be Polite.....	18
How to Fill in a Money Order Blank.....	19

Note: SCLC Citizenship School Workbook for Georgia, 1962 Table of Contents.
https://www.crmvet.org/docs/cit_schools_ga_workbook62.pdf

Curriculum in Action

Sharing the life and experiences of OGs such as Alice Dunbar-Nelson and Septima Poinsette Clark, creates opportunities for teacher educators to introduce preservice teachers to Black educational theorists while simultaneously engaging essential content in literacy and Social Studies methods courses. It is important to recognize the opposition that Dunbar-Nelson

and Clark endured as educator activists. The violence of being fired from their positions for centering Blackness in their classroom spaces and advocating for the rights of Black folx parallels the opposition educators face today for teaching texts written by diverse authors, telling truthful histories of anti-Blackness, racism, oppression, and discrimination in the US, and challenging white supremacy.

In both historical and contemporary contexts, efforts to affirm Black life and knowledge are framed as disruptive, inappropriate, or politically charged. The punishment may look different across time, but the underlying impulse to regulate and silence transformative teaching remains strikingly consistent. These patterns reveal how centering Blackness in education continues to be treated not as intellectual rigor, but as resistance. Looking to the wisdom, knowledge, and actions of our OGs helps us to navigate these tumultuous times while developing curricular practices that intentionally center Blackness. Through collective Black Feminist *curre*, engaging the lives and work of OGs becomes a regressive act of remembering and a relational act of reclamation.

Below we provide practical applications by offering curricular practices that teacher educators can utilize in their courses. The Black Gaze Mini-Lesson Template (Table 1) serves as both a resource and a starting point for honoring Black OGs as foundational and essential to being, learning, and teaching in education. Using BGF, the template guides educators through a reflective and justice-centered process that aligns directly with lesson planning.

The framework begins with Honoring the OGs, where educators identify a Black figure whose testimony and service ground the lesson and provide necessary historical and cultural context. Within traditional lesson planning, the honoring OGs element of the lesson plan is aligned with the lesson topic or content knowledge that an educator would select to ground their lesson. The second tenet of the Black Gaze mini lesson plan is Testimony Service. This tenet expects the educator to provide background knowledge that students should be exposed to about the OG. More specifically, this aligns with the traditional section of lesson plan where educators are expected to provide background knowledge and a rationale for the lesson plan.

With the Preachin' Points tenet, educators explore what the OGs teach about centering Blackness in teacher education, community, and liberation—and how those lessons can inform pedagogy today. This is aligned to the traditional element, mini-lesson, of the lesson planning. This element requires educators to provide direct instruction, which lends itself to Preachin' Points. The tenet, What You Doin' Wit Yo' Life moves theory into practice, prompting teachers to integrate readings, videos, and media that embody the OGs' wisdom and work, and connect directly to course content. This requires educators to identify course content, materials, and resources that align with the course topic. Finally, the tenet, I See You bridges the past and present, linking the work of the OGs to contemporary educators, artists, and activists who extend their legacy. Within traditional lesson planning, educators are expected to make real world connections, and this tenet aligns purposefully. Finally, there are guiding questions within the template to support teacher educators in centering Blackness in teacher education and engaging in lesson planning.

Together, these BGF tenets and lesson plan elements help educators design lessons that honor Black brilliance and make centering Blackness an intentional and integral part of curriculum design, not an afterthought. This lesson planning process moves *curre* curriculum from theorizing, to actualizing the curriculum in the classroom, through all of the four stages. The Black Gaze Mini-Lesson Template transforms traditional lesson planning into an act of remembrance, reverence, and resistance—cultivating classrooms grounded in Black ways of

knowing, being, and doing.

Table 1

Black Gaze Mini-Lesson Format

Honoring the O.G.s	Who is the OG you are centering and exposing students to?
Testimony Service	What is important background knowledge that students should be exposed to?
Preachin' Points	• What is this person preachin' and/or teaching us about the importance of centering Blackness in our classroom and curricular practices? • How do you implement what they are preachin' into your course/classroom? • How do you center their ways of being, learning and teaching as foundational to teaching and learning in education?
What You Doin' Wit Yo' Life	• What readings, videos, podcasts, and other forms of media will you explicitly teach in your course? • How will you connect to the content knowledge of your course as the knowledge that students "must" know?
I See You	• What readings, videos, podcasts, and other forms of media will you explicitly teach in your course that connects to contemporary folx work? • How will you connect to the contemporary folx and their work, to the work of the OG?

Alice Dunbar-Nelson

In this mini-lesson (Table 2), teacher educators are provided with an example of how to expose students in English Education to the background knowledge of Alice Dunbar-Nelson. Within the testimony service, teacher educators are exposed to general information about Dunbar-Nelson. This is essential for English Education, as Dunbar-Nelson was an English teacher, in the state of our teacher education program specifically. This provides a real-world example of English educators in our community, who taught at the only high school for Black folx in the state.

For the Preachin' Points, teacher educators will expose students to a major challenge that occurs in curriculum in districts. Many school districts adopt prescribed curricula that position whiteness as the normative standard. This often becomes a justification for teacher educators to refrain from centering Blackness in their courses. However, Dunbar-Nelson confronted a similar constraint. Despite institutional limitations, she intentionally created opportunities for her students to engage with Black authors and texts, demonstrating that centering Blackness in

curriculum is possible, even within restrictive systems.

This mini lesson provides examples of how to use her work as a poet, in their Teaching of Reading and/or Writing course. More specifically, “I Sew and Sit,” (Dunbar-Nelson, 1895/2017) and “You! Inez!” (Dunbar-Nelson, 1921) can be incorporated into teacher education courses to help preservice teachers learn how to engage critically with literary theory, especially gender criticism, while analyzing Black women’s voices and experiences. Teacher educators are also exposed to contemporary scholars who may critique, expand, and build upon Alice Dunbar-Nelson’s work.

In this mini-lesson plan, teacher educators engage with the work of Morris (2016) and Nyachae et al. (2024) in alignment with the work of Dunbar-Nelson. More specifically, exploring the essential questions: How do these texts help us examine how gendered and racialized expectations limit Black girls’ identities, expression, and learning experiences? How can teachers create classrooms that disrupt these limits? Please find a more detailed example of the mini-lesson below.

Table 2

Alice Dunbar-Nelson Black Gaze Mini-Lesson

Black Gaze Framework: Mini Lesson “Bout That Action”	
Honoring the O.G.’s	Alice-Dunbar Nelson
Testimony Service	● Poet, Novelist, Journalist, Teacher, Diarist, Women Suffrage Organizer, Civil Rights Leader, Lecturer, Political Leader, Survivor of Domestic Violence ● Former Secondary English Educator & English Teacher Educator for Black Folx
Preachin’ Points	● Ensure that you unpack & explore who you are, and all of your identities --then expose students to your greatness. Dunbar Nelson cultivated her Black identity. She also worked to develop the positive Black identities of her students. ● If you “must” expose students to non-melanated folx in your state’s curriculum, you betta’ expose them to Black folx too! Dunbar Nelson, taught literature that centered whiteness, because that was considered the standard; however, she exposed her students to the greatness and work of Black folx. ● Center Blackness in the face of opposition. She too received opposition because of her activism work, but she kept going to fight for freedom of Black and marginalized folx.

What You Doin' With
Yo' Life

Teaching of Reading Analysis and Writing: Gender Criticism

- “I Sit and Sew:” Dunbar-Nelson (1988/2019) challenges the idea that women belong only in the home. The poem shows how doing only domestic work can be both limiting and emotionally draining. The speaker’s frustration makes clear how gender expectations can restrict women’s freedom and participation in society. This connects to gender criticism theory (Butler, 1990) because it helps preservice teachers analyze how society creates and enforces roles for men and women, and how those roles can limit women choices and freedoms.
- “You! Inez!:” Dunbar-Nelson (1921) explores feelings of desire, longing, and closeness, and challenges the idea that women must only love or express affection in ways approved by society. In a lesson, preservice teachers can guide students to notice how the speaker expresses love and emotion, and then invite them to discuss how gender norms and expectations shape who people are allowed to love and how they are expected to show those feelings. This helps preservice teachers practice gender criticism by examining how society influences personal relationships and emotional expression.

I See You

Contemporary writers & activists whose work stands on her shoulders:

- Nyachae et al. (2024) teaches preservice teachers how to engage gender criticism by showing how Black girlhood is shaped through social expectations, power relationships, and the regulation of identity expression.
- Morris (2016) documents how Black girls are disciplined for their ways of being and are required to labor emotionally and behaviorally to be deemed acceptable.
- Discussion Question: How do these texts help us examine how gendered and racialized expectations limit Black girls’ identities, expression, and learning experiences—and how can teachers create classrooms that disrupt these limits?

Septima Poinsette Clark

In this mini-lesson (Table 3), teacher educators are provided an example of how to expose students in Social Studies education to the background knowledge of Septima Poinsette Clark. Within the testimony service section, teacher educators are exposed to the life and legacy of Clark—an educator, civil rights activist, and founder of Citizenship Schools. This context is essential because Clark modeled how teachers could be both educators and activists within their own communities. Her story demonstrates how teaching literacy can also be a form of liberation.

In particular, her work on Johns Island and with the NAACP offers students a framework for examining how educators can challenge inequitable systems while maintaining deep commitment to their students. For Preachin' Points, teacher educators are encouraged to highlight Clark's insistence that collective success is non-negotiable and her use of the U.S. Constitution to teach literacy and rights simultaneously. This positions Clark's pedagogical approach as a model for integrating civic engagement, critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1994), and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000) into the social studies curriculum.

The What You Doin' Wit Yo' Life component provides opportunities for students to study Clark's oral history interview with Eugene Walker and her handwritten essay "Good-bye to Jim Crow?" as core texts for understanding education as activism. These materials help students see how Clark's work embodied Black Gaze Framework principles—centering Black ways of knowing, teaching, and organizing. The I See You section then connects Clark's legacy to contemporary educators such as LaGarrett King, Asif Wilson, and Tiffany Mitchell Patterson, whose scholarship and pedagogy extend her work on citizenship, justice, and critical historical inquiry. Teacher educators can use this lesson to explore the essential question: How can teachers today create classrooms that honor the liberatory practices of Clark—spaces where literacy, history, and activism are intertwined to advance freedom for Black students and communities?

Table 3
Septima Poinsette Clark Black Gaze Mini-Lesson

Black Gaze Framework: Mini Lesson "Bout That Action"	
Honoring the O.G.'s	Septima Poinsette Clark
Testimony Service	● Educator, Civil Rights Activist, School Board Member, Advisory Council Member, Advocate for Black women; Mentor of Black girls, Founder of Citizenship Schools
Preachin' Points	● If all Black teachers ain't winning then I ain't winning. Septima Poinsette Clark had a teaching position on John's Island, SC. She heard about what was happening in Charleston with Black teachers getting fired and joined the NAACP. Her contract was not renewed because of the work that she did with the NAACP making sure that Black teachers were paid equitably and hired in Black public schools. ● As long as we know our rights, the law, and constitution... We gonna be alright! Clark used the U.S. Constitution to help Black folx learn how to read. While they were learning how to read they were also learning their rights as citizens. Clark did not allow Jim Crow to stop her from this good work. She responded to Jim Crow by preparing Black folx for the literacy tests that non-melanated folx created to keep Black folx from voting.

- Greatness can't be stopped. Clark was fired while working at the Highlander School because non-melanated folx were hating. The Black folx at the school were accused of being served alcohol and they didn't have a liquor license. The closing of the Highlander School did not stop Clark from working. She joined Southern Christian Leadership Conference where she led citizenship education courses and eventually started opening citizenship schools throughout the South. Non-melanated folx couldn't stop this great work that Clark was doing around teaching Black folx their rights, laws, and how to read.

What You Doin'
With Yo' Life

Teaching Citizenship Education and Activism

- Students listen to Septima Poinsette Clark (Clark & Walker, 1976) share her journey of creating citizenship schools and working to get Black folx registered to vote. Students gain insight into the strategy and organization of the Civil Rights Movement. In addition, they gain an understanding of how many people worked together to push Black people forward.
- After students read this handwritten essay: "Good-bye to Jim Crow?" (Clark, personal communication, 1910) by Septima Poinsette Clark they gain first-hand knowledge of the historic differences between Black and white America during Jim Crow. They can even explore why Clark titles this essay good-by to Jim Crow, but uses a question mark.

I See You

Educators & activists whose work stands on her shoulders:

- Black History Nerds Saturday School (King, 2025)
- Black Teachers Centering Justice with Black students in Chicago Public Schools (Wilson, 2023)
- The Black Gaze Podcast (Bertrand & Porcher, 2022)
- Discussion Question: In what ways do these educators and activists expand on this work of citizenship, activism, and using education to help Black people move forward?

Conclusion

Alice Dunbar-Nelson and Septima Poinsette Clark are two of many Black OG educators who have used education as a tool to cultivate Black minds and transform the lives of Black folx, and work against systems of oppression (Bertrand & Porcher, 2023) for how to center Blackness in teacher education. Like Drs. Christine King-Farris, Gwendolyn Middlebrooks, and Marjorie Hall Haley, they have provided knowledge, correction, direction, wisdom, love, and hope that continue to guide this work. Within a collective Black Feminist *currere* framework, their lives and pedagogies are not simply historical references; they are curriculum. Their lives are

reminders that centering Blackness is not new, but deeply rooted in our ancestral practices of teaching, learning, being, and becoming.

Collective Black Feminist *curre* requires more than individual autobiographical reflection. It calls us into relational remembering; into examining how our identities, commitments, and pedagogical practices are shaped by Black women’s ancestral knowledge and lived experiences. Returning to the OGs is therefore a regressive act of remembrance, but it is also communal and political. It requires us to look back, examine our lived experiences, reflect on what shaped us, and deliberately reimagine how we move forward. More specifically, it requires us to locate ourselves within a lineage of Black women educators whose work has often been omitted and erased from teacher education. Through this remembering, we moved into the analytical and syncretical stages: interrogating how anti-Blackness continues to structure teacher education while deliberately reimaging curriculum that affirms Black life.

Honoring the OGs through collective Black Feminist *curre* transforms biography into theory. Their resistance, endurance, and pedagogical innovation become analytical tools for understanding the present and guides for constructing liberatory futures. It is because of these OGs that we can stand unapologetically in our Blackness and introduce teacher educators and students to Black educators they may have never encountered but need to know. Honoring these OGs is not merely an act of respect; it is curriculum work grounded in Black feminist commitments to relationality, community, accountability, and knowledge production. It is a moral and pedagogical responsibility. Too many teacher educators and preservice teachers have never learned about Black people’s intellectual, cultural, and political labor. And too many teacher educators still feel pressure to “add” Blackness instead of centering it.

Through collective Black Feminist *curre*, our Blackprint and accompanying mini-lessons are not supplemental resources; they are acts of curricular reorientation. We have let Eurocentric knowledge, whiteness, and colonial ways of being, learning, and teaching guide the field of teacher education since its inception. Now, it is time for a shift. Collective Black Feminist *curre* calls for a return, a re(remembering) (Dillard, 2016), and re-centering—that positions Blackness as foundational rather than peripheral. The OGs have already shown us the way. We are simply honoring them by telling the truth and teaching their stories.

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Aesthetic Wreck-Diving “Outlaw Emotions” as Curriculum

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First having read the book of myths,
and loaded the camera,
and checked the edge of the knife-blade,
I put on
the body-armor of black rubber
the absurd flippers
the grave and awkward mask. (Rich, 1973, p. 22)

IN AN INTERVIEW WITH AUTHOR BOB WOODWARD, former-now-re-elected President Donald Trump asserted, "I bring rage out. I do bring rage out. I always have... I don't know if that's an asset or a liability, but whatever it is, I do. I also bring great unity out, ultimately" (Pengelly, 2020). The first election of Donald Trump upended the political and public spheres both nationally and globally, ushering in grievance-fueled demonstrations and practices of anger and rage—emotive dimensions that now contour U.S. political and social life often as the rule, rather than the exception. A quick Google search unearthing the most impactful images from the January 6, 2021, insurrection and siege of the U.S. Capitol reflected particularly striking images of not only politically-inspired collective public rage (Luger & Miller, 2025), but also the uneven racial and gender representation of the crowd. While non-White and female-identifying rioters were undoubtedly in attendance, aggression from White male-identifying insurrectionists dominated many of the images (a sample below) of the now-absolved and pardoned rioters (Pres. Proclamation, 10887, January 20, 2025).

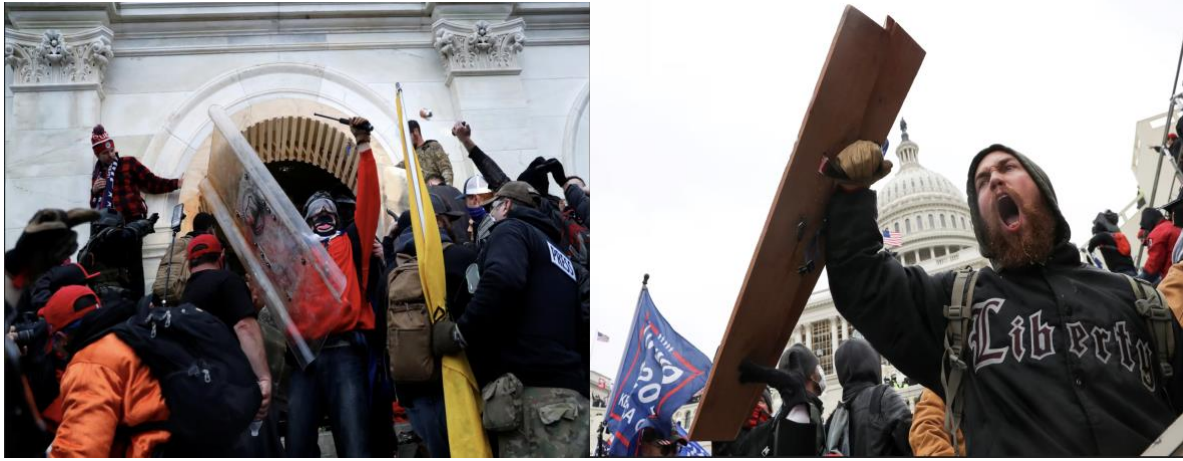


Figure 1. first photo via Shannon Stapleton (2021); second photo via Leah Millis (2021) (both for Reuters).

Politically-exploited difference and disagreement and politician-inspired collective anger have underscored swelling public violence (Cheladyn, 2025; Luger & Miller, 2025)—manifesting the masses’ enduring fears surrounding the ramifications of anger and rage in public life. From suggesting that rally-goers assault protesters, to amplifying White supremacists, to utilizing racial anti-Black and anti-immigrant configurations (Maher & Boyette, 2024), manifestations of xenophobia, racism, and sexism can and have efficaciously mobilize(d) anger toward oppressive and destructive ends. Further, proliferated media and public discourse buttress conditions for emotional outrage through mis/disinformation, overgeneralizing, and partial truths about people, organizations, or groups (Bangstad et al., 2019; Gualtieri & Pedretti, 2025; Sobieraj & Berry, 2011). While public displays of anger and rage—whether tethered to political or social issues or not—often warrant(ed) widespread public rebuke, these rebukes remain unevenly levied onto certain groups over others, illustrating how overarching power structures inform collective responses to publicly displayed affective and emotive dimensions. Individual and collective emotions can acquiesce, flout, or challenge these overarching social norms that govern what public emotions are seemingly acceptable—and by whom.

Organizing the Journey: A Solo Pursuit of Parable

I am having to do this
not like Cousteau with his
assiduous team
aboard the sun-flooded schooner
but here alone. (Rich, 1973, p. 22)

While we might claim to know ourselves, that knowing is both incomplete and contextually dependent, particularly since we are obliged to (re)form ourselves within prescribed social norms: socially, politically, educationally, and emotionally (Applebaum, 2014). Below is my third-grade school picture (Figure 2.), embossing an ear-to-ear grin proudly displaying my newly forming adult two-front teeth, hair sun-kissed from a summer spent outside with friends at the many community pools around Madison, Wisconsin. This picture captured a care-free yet fleeting

moment-in-time, immediately followed by a parent-teacher conference that Fall, when my parents learned that I was an “angry” child—a label that altered my relationship to education, and to myself, forever.



Figure 2. My grade 3 school picture.

During the conference, the teacher recounted an incident in the school library where I loudly demanded another girl “get back here” [to where I was standing] after she had called me a bitch. I wish I could remember the reason for the initial name-calling, as I’m sure there was one (although, like many women, I’ve borne that label-myth-truth more times than I can count). But the name-calling rationale wasn’t what remained salient for me; rather, it was the shame I was “supposed” to feel for a public emotional display, for challenging unfairness in the “wrong” way. Although the just-above-a-whisper name-calling reverberated through ears and heart, it was my response, *my* voice that carried: its disruption of the conventional and acceptable decorum of a library, of educational spaces, and of young girls like me.

This wouldn’t be the last time that my—or other—voice would carry, upending educational and public spaces with displays of resistance, anger, or rage. While a small part of me now acknowledges how this formative moment might have (sub)consciously informed my decision to become a teacher—or informed how I teach—this moment also shaped how I came to initially understand emotions, especially my own, as seemingly entirely private, individually-dictated, and often unbecoming choices. In this case, I’d chosen the wrong one, a choice that contoured my stature in my tiny educational world; a choice that altered how my parents viewed me; a choice that damaged my personal and professional relationships with others, and with myself. I did not *act* angry; I *was* angry. And I found it, this label, disastrous—until I carved out an opportunity to “seize” (Greene, 1977, p. 284) meaning within the wreck(age) underneath these unspoken emotion-labels and emotion-rules, and (re)turned to see them differently up close.

Descending, Motivated by [the] Purpose

There is a ladder.
The ladder is always there
hanging innocently
close to the side of the schooner...
I go down. (Rich, 1973, p. 22)

Emotions like anger and rage, increasingly framed as necessitating control, are often linked to destruction and violence, best relegated to “the realm of the unspeakable” (hooks, 1995, p. 12). Amid emotionally-charged and emotion-laden political trends and increased discussion of emotions’ (non)presence within and beyond educational spaces (Boler, 1999), I wonder(ed) what exists within this “unspeakable” [emotional] realm? At what stages, occupying what spaces, bodies, and discourses, must we manage our “affective displays” (Alexander et al., 2023, p. 551)

and suppress our emotions, ignoring their potential instructiveness by hiding them underneath the label of “unspeakable”? These questions demonstrate the importance behind exploring bodily responses to evolving intensities and forces amid broader climates of affective, emotional, and bodily modulation, oppression, and erasure. While both enlightening and informative, affect and emotion reflect distinct categories of thinking-feeling potentials and capacities. Short-term reactionary expressions or affects illustrate body-to-body “felt-sensibilities” (Seigworth & Shomura, 2025, p. ii) or responses to moving social forces—responses that inspire emotions—the consciously focused and socially constructed sentiments fueling and fueled by social context and conditions. Fusing embodied ontology and gendered social conditions, this work primarily engages with the latter: emotions.

Consequently, I [academically] tug at the stubborn boundaries around and the instructive possibilities of “outlaw” or unwelcome emotions of anger and rage (Jaggar, 1989), reframing these seemingly unsavory emotions into less volatile, more vulnerable, and didactic collective constructs shaping and shaped by overarching gendered, social, and political structures. Positioning the embodied-as-legitimate knowledge (MacLure, 2016) and emotions-as-curriculum (Greene, 1995), this paper examines anger and rage as legitimate and enlightening unifiers that represent instructive opportunities in/to the relationship between the self, gender, and social systems. Employing aesthetic engagement with anger and rage from a feminist poststructuralist orientation, this paper utilizes Adrienne Rich’s (1973) poem “Diving into the Wreck” as both anchoring organizational tool and feminist allegorical gateway into the “wreck[age]” of forgotten or unexamined anger and rage across aesthetic formations to illustrate the layered and fluid contours of emotions-as-curriculum. Finally, this work repositions emotions as necessarily instructive, collective, and systemically and socially contingent; representing a rejection of Anglo-patriarchal emotion rules that aim to render emotions as irrational, individualized, incorrect choices.

Sinking In[to] a Feminist Envisage of Emotion-as-Curriculum

Rung after rung and still
the oxygen immerses me
the blue light
the clear atoms
of our human air.
I go down. (Rich, 1973, pp. 22-23)

Although scholarship guides me into the depths of existing thought on curriculum, emotion, and gender, obstacles—the prevailing myths and assertions—arise as I descend into theory and wreckage. As I navigate deeper, I pursue provocations that illuminate a path toward outlaw emotion-wrecks. I pursue challenges to the myth that emotionality signals inferiority and irrationality. I find glimmers, instead, in the expansiveness and instructiveness of emotion down here, knowing-opportunities all their own. Greene (1977) frames curriculum as “opportunities” to “seiz[e]” and create meaning (p. 284) from conscious engagement with the social world. As a counter to the often institutionally and socially framed, evaluated, and contested notion of tangible and narrow scripts characterizing “curriculum,” curriculum is expansive, flowing within and beyond the walls of formal institutions, books, or bodies. Always present and heuristic, even when unacknowledged, the layered and fluid conceptualizations of curriculum empower its straddling

of in/tangibility. Curriculum in all its manifestations *provokes* emotions (emphasis mine) (Marcolina, 2024) about topics, issues, and processes; and these emotions can mutually shape curriculum. And yet, *emotions* are also curriculum, instructive in their contouring, promoting, and informing how we understand and engage with ourselves and the social world. Emotions *as* curriculum intertwine perception, experience, social practices, and gender. However, emotions and curriculum, emotions *as* curriculum, especially within enduring discourses that conceptualize curriculum as tangible, instructional, finite; reflect an unlikely educational pairing. Emotions might hinder learning, objectivity, rationality, or educational processes and procedures. Despite their enlightening capacities, emotions in education are sometimes framed as obstructive, unwelcome intruders. Like sound (Gershon & Wozolek, 2024), I wonder(ed) how emotion could function as a conduit between the self, gender, and education; namely, how “outlaw” emotions like anger and rage provide information related to the relationship between gender and the (non)presence of emotions in education—especially outlaw(ed) ones—but I haven’t sunk that deeply, yet.

I first make an affective, embodied turn in my thinking, disrupting the binaries that often divorce reason and embodiment (Boler & Davis, 2018; Jaggar, 1989). From a feminist orientation, the body, then, represents an ontological, curricular source through which to make meaning, inclusive of sensations (affect) and sentiments (emotions). Affect and emotion float through temporal and relational dimensions (Boler & Zembylas, 2016), and both can be imperceptible. Affect(s) arise outside of deliberate consciousness, reflecting bodily capacity/ies to [affect and be affected] in their encounters with the social world (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010; Seigworth & Shomura, 2025). Often not a “logical move” (Helfenbein & Roziek, 2025, p. 243), affect is always *on the move*—fleeting, immanent responses to social forces and intensities. Swimming between emotion and discourse (Boler, 1998), affect harnesses social, political, and identity-driven dimensions (Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009), particularly through its surface-level manifestations (e.g., skin sensations, language variation, tonality shifts). Although we try to generalize—and gender—affect, its fluidity keeps it unboxed and moving.

Emotions, however, linger. They are about something; they sit with(in) us as effects of the contextual factors, conditions, triggers, and affect(s) that sometimes precede them. Emotions are focused; they manifest our values, beliefs, and the sociocultural and historical dimensions in which they occur (Ahmed, 2004; Boler & Davis, 2018). So, emotions are relational, intentional, and deeply dependent on context, as deliberate embodied feedback to existing social conditions. Far from the myths undergirded by beliefs of emotion’s role in irrationality, emotions cultivate nuanced perceptions of behaviors, social practices, and decision-making; they expand understanding of the social world—emotions *as* curriculum. However, prevailing viewpoints rarely frame emotions as instructive. Instead, our collective inattention to and myth-circulation about emotions underscore our struggles to name, express, and welcome them. More often, we seek to engulf, capture, and manage emotions, especially in public spaces. Inspired by what Hochschild (1979) calls “feeling rules,” we abide by these (un)spoken racial, gendered, and class-driven rigid armor-norms that govern how we “should” or “deserve” to feel about something—privately, and especially publicly. These feeling rules reify our confining emotion-myths, myths that more poignantly and unevenly apply these feeling rules to certain groups over others (Ahmed, 2004), perpetuating beliefs that some emotions remain socially unacceptable to publicly exhibit.

Seeking Clarity through [the] Aesthetic

Despite emotions' historically integral roles in information-gathering and cultivating social movements (Curnow et al., 2021; Rico et al., 2017), contemporary tribalism and siloed media ecosystems heighten awareness, gendering, and racializing of public emotional displays (Boler & Davis, 2018; Sellar & Zipin, 2019). These silos intersect with overarching feeling rules to not only govern notions of reality, but also the emotions we [publicly] direct toward broader social issues and which emotions we deem socially acceptable. Increased avoidance of emotion-triggers from opposing information silos also underscores the belief that such encounters would stimulate public displays of taboo, unsightly, and unbecoming emotions meant only for private toiling; however, employing a feminist politics of emotion brings some scholarly lucidity: By positioning emotions as instructive and socially-constructed curriculum, I observe the connection between emotion, aesthetic, and social systems, how the emotion-aesthetic constitutes a curricular chance to grasp meaning underneath emotion-myths (Greene, 1977, p. 284). As I descend, I recall what I felt forced to pursue underneath the emotion-surface(s).

The act of inquiry expands perspectives, troubling what one sees versus what one is *taught* to see (Boler & Zembylas, 2002). Inspired by the intersecting collective volatility and the legislative and discursive control of non-White, non-heteronormative males in the United States, I framed this inquiry pursuit as an opportunity to dive into and immerse myself in public displays of volatility at the intersections of gender, race, and the aesthetic. I wondered how “refusals,” “recreations,” and “reconstructions” (p. 283) of emotion-myths and feeling rules might expand and welcome the feminist conceptualization of emotions-as-socially tethered-knowledge, buoyed by potential implications for education. So, I sought to trouble gender-race-emotion intersections beyond academic scholarship and beyond the classroom—aligned to Greene’s (1977; 1995) conceptualizations of curriculum as opportunities to capture meaning and to facilitate a “wide awakesness” that transcends physical and pedagogical limits. With Dewey, (1934), I positioned the aesthetic broadly to examine manifestations of anger and rage through these art(ful) entry points, buoyed by the hope that such displays of outlaw emotions could foster such “wide awakesness” (Greene, 1977) to previously unknown or ignored dimensions of emotion-myths in the social world, myths-to-truths lying just below the surface of what we often take for granted. It is through varied representations of the social world—through art, literature, music, and movement—that we can progress myths to truths lying just below the surface of what we often take for granted, whereby emotions and the aesthetic as curriculum represent gateways into expansive conceptions of the self, gender, and education. Therefore, our listening, reading, and seeing shape and are shaped by emotion-provocations from the aesthetic work; we become *immersed* in its edges, stories, and depth(s), challenging what we witness against what we’re *taught* to witness (Boler & Zembylas, 2002).

Luminosity to Darkness: Plunging toward the “Outlaw(ed)”

First the air is blue and then
it is bluer and then green and then
black I am blacking out and yet
my mask is powerful
it pumps my blood with power... (Rich, 1973, p. 23)

From their formative roles in emancipatory social movements (Applebaum, 2014; Boler, 1999; Reifen Tagar et al., 2011), to their involvement in oppressive identity-focused exclusion, to their contributions to unfettered U.S. gun violence not limited to educational institutions (see Borchard, 2015), we cultivate anger and rage within and beyond the aesthetic and political—even as we collectively ignore their escalation or chastise their public renderings. Conventionally associated with hostility and aggression, we classify anger and rage as “outlaw emotions” (Jaggar, 1989) deemed inappropriate or disruptive to the status quo, even when they’re warranted. Outlaw emotions diverge from dominant perceptions and cultural norms of what’s publicly acceptable behavior. Inspired by desires to restore situational control or escape, anger in particular, evaluates injustice, harm, and sometimes facilitates punishment of others (Boler, 1999; Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009). Anger manifests as both affect and emotion: Affective sensations mirror those of excitement (e.g., adrenaline, heartbeat), while context and emotion rules inform anger’s emotive dimensions.

A related but seemingly more sinister, darker “outlaw emotion,” existing in a state of “rage” involves an uncontrollable tumult, drawn from intense feelings, most often contoured by wrath and anger (Merriam-Webster, 2024). Rage can be an individual and collective expression often stemming from disappointment over broken promises (Ahmed, 2010). Broadly, public displays of anger and rage, regardless of moral underpinnings, retain widespread skepticism and neglect. We shame and shun anger and rage because they can collectively swell from individualized offense, become mainstream, chided-yet-normalized, always living with/in bodies and relations, and capable of provocation. We focus attention on their unruly, exclusionary, and seemingly extreme undertones that stem from individual grievances to collective exclusionary practices. So, our attention skips forward to anticipated, more terrible, oppressive consequences of anger and rage. Augmenting these fears, current conditions remain susceptible to the seductiveness of rendering anger and rage as political tools to coalesce social and political grievance(s), exacerbated by siloed ecosystems and narrow feeling rules, further demonstrating how rage and anger remain mobile, nebulous, and systemically and socially contingent.

We often describe these outlaw emotions through binaries, obscuring their complexity: We separate the “good” moral anger from the “bad” destructive anger (Linklater, 2014), often premised on feeling rules (Hochschild, 1979). The overarching civility discourse increasingly admonishes public outlaw emotions along racialized and gendered feeling rules. Inspired by settler colonial perspectives equating measured behavior with modernity and rationality (Linklater, 2014), anger’s portrayal in media and public discourse pressures the masses into displaying an ill-defined “correct” anger narrowed by dominant groups who seize feeling rules to demonize and other norm-deviant anger displays such as labeling Black Lives Matter, anti-genocide, or Women’s Rights protesters as too angry (Sandlin & Snaza, 2018).

Consequently, dismissing outlaw emotions disrespectfully reinforces existing hierarchies (Applebaum, 2014). As a result, widespread feeling rules premised on alleged civility govern public and private anger and rage. Knee-jerk instincts to pressurize and muzzle outlaw emotions further universalize the belief that these emotions are individualized, biological, impulsive, and worth controlling. If we relegate these outlaw emotions to the underbelly because we view their mobility as what makes them so shadowy and cataclysmic, we perpetuate the emotion-myth that socially constructed emotions remain abhorrent, internal instincts to suppress and fix. As this emotion-myth blurs my inquiry journey, I remember that outlaw emotions like anger and rage are relational (Lorde, 1984)—they, like the aesthetic, thrust and squeeze us in closer, constraining us to face what we uncover with/in the social world.

(Re)Orienting: Girls Shouldn't Get Angry! And Other Gender(ed) Emotion-Myths

the sea is another story
the sea is not a question of power
I have to learn alone
to turn my body without force
in the deep element. (Rich, 1973, p. 23)

As I struggle against the scholarly elements contouring this continued inquiry, I return to the journey, knowing I haven't gone deep enough—that there's more to this story. Outlaw emotion-myths perpetuate anticipatory fears of anger and rage germinating, ballooning, and irrationalizing. And yet, to (re)position outlaw emotions as instructive, as curriculum facilitating extended consciousness, we are called to examine the “deep element[s]” (Rich, 1973) of our individual and collective outlaw emotion-myths. Feminist approaches to embodiment embrace the nuanced relationship between knowledge and emotion, where emotions represent mobile, socially contingent, and cognition-intention mediators (Ahmed, 2004; Boler, 1998; Sandlin & Snaza, 2018). A feminist approach to emotion disrupts the myth that emotions represent individualized choices—they're rational and knowledge sources (Boler, 1997). With roots in the women's liberation movement challenging patriarchal structures, a “feminist politics of emotion” (Boler, 1998; 1999) conceptualizes emotions-as-knowledge that intersect with social structures.

Nevertheless, enduring misogyny and rigid distinctions between rigor and feeling fuel the deep-seated bias chiding feminist-emotion scholarship and emotion work. Blanket assumptions that men and women are innately and fundamentally different entrust rigor and reason with the men-dominated public sphere and emotionality and irrationality with the private, women-dominated domain—illustrating gendered feeling rules at work. These rules and contrasts consequently perpetuate myths that women's public emotion displays render them “too emotional” (Boler & Zembylas, 2016, p. 3), promoting admonishment of women's public anger (Boler, 1999) and fixed discourses framing women as nurturers or ball-busters (Fischer, 2016). Such gendered myth-scripts encourage women's emotional self-policing, social subjugation (Lorde, 1984), and perceived inferiority.

Medusa—the most infamous yet sinister Gorgon—possesses a fraught mythical history as person/possession/powerful force and protection source. She's retained formidable mythical and transcendent notoriety through her capacity to turn others—namely men—to stone (Morford et al., 2018). An early sculpture depiction renders her not as conquered by Perseus, but as a tormented monster: A bodiless head whose contorted face conjures a mixture of anger, anguish, and fury (see Figure 3.), whose snake hair twists and twirls, careful to keep her face unmasked. However, Garbati's (2008) more recent sculpture flips this myth-script with Medusa holding Perseus's head (see Figure 4.) in one hand, and a weapon in the



Figure 3. Medusa sculpture by Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1644).

other. Her open, naked, unbridled stance exudes power; her face is unconvinced and unmoored, as she stares down spectators (or skeptics).

Both portrayals convey emotion-stories that we can only speculate, as their emotional displays suggest deeper wells that intersect with the social, potential challenges to emotion-myths. And yet, these renderings offer opportunities to entrench Medusa's polarity—of weakness or power, agony or authority—and to reify women's emotional depth. While Carol Ann Duffy (1999) opens her poem "Medusa" by reifying the title character's potent, terrifying qualities as a reflection of arguably both sculptures.

A suspicion, a doubt, a jealousy
grew in my mind,
which turned the hairs on my head to
filthy snakes
as though my thoughts
hissed and spat on my scalp.
My bride's breath soured, stank
in the grey bags of my lungs.
I'm foul mouthed now, foul tongued,
yellow fanged.
There are bullet tears in my eyes.
Are you terrified? (Duffy, 1999, p. 40)



Figure 4. Medusa sculpture by Luciano Garbati (2008).

Her work slowly subsides into humanizing Medusa, who reckons with her public and private emotional complexity.

And here you come
with a shield for a heart
and a sword for a tongue
and your girls, your girls.
Wasn't I beautiful?
Wasn't I fragrant and young? (Duffy, 1999, p. 41)

Women are similarly dichotomized: monsters or saviors, ball-busters or nurturers (Fischer, 2016), reasonable or [too] emotional (Boler & Zembylas, 2016), while continually struggling against the aphorismic assertion that girls should never get angry (Boler, 1999). Consequently, understanding women's emotions-as-curriculum means understanding how gendered feeling rules sustain women's emotion-policing and broader emotion-myths, cultivating opportunities to engender meaning. Gendered feeling rules govern perceptions of women's anger, sustaining myths that women's anger remains "unfeminine" (Applebaum, 2014, p. 133) instead of instructive, legitimate, and status quo-challenging. Amid pressures to be accommodating, silent, and compliant (Curnow et al., 2021; Rodriguez & Boahene, 2012), women's anger scrutinizes and disrupts

existing hierarchies, forms of oppression, and privilege (Reifen Tagar et al., 2011). Anger empowers, dares, and remains useful for social change and pursuing justice. Anger builds coalitions by combating racism and sexism (hooks, 1995; Lorde, 1984), disputing the myth alleging only its destructive foundations. Women's anger is cathartic through public displays of unhappiness (Ahmed, 2010), clashing with fallacies that assert its enduring harm. Despite struggles against women's anger conventions, traditions, and falsehoods, I'm beginning to recognize the complexity, depth, and courage in our anger.

[Discursive] Exploring: Permissible “Outlaw[s]” Shrouded in White

I came to explore the wreck.
 The words are purposes.
 The words are maps.
 I came to see the damage that was done
 and the treasures that prevail.
 I stroke the beam of my lamp
 slowly along the flank
 of something more permanent
 than fish or weed. (Rich, 1973, pp. 23-24)

Despite skepticism of its productivity (Applebaum, 2014) and myths of its repulsiveness, women scholars, political figures, and artists have sought to reclaim rage, in particular. Arguing its distinction from hatred, rage can sprout political consciousness (Reich, 2020), remedy experiences of oppression (hooks, 1995; Lorde, 1984), and illuminate shifting tides across dimensions of the social world. Alongside its increased presence in U.S. political discourse and the American cultural zeitgeist, musicians, like sculptors, commenced wielding elements of rage to enlighten sociopolitical conditions (Lewis & Bock, 2018) in their music, illustrating the nuanced intersections between music, emotion, and the social world. Historically, music holds a long tradition in the mutual shaping of social, cultural, and political shifts in the U.S. Artists, and their songs convey particular purposes and stances, sociocultural message-carriers irradiating contemporary circumstances, controversies, social movements, or systemic issues that encapsulate target emotions meant to enrapture the listener.

Alongside illuminating sociopolitical conditions, artists and their songs similarly embrace and encourage particular emotions, including rage, in their music and their listeners. Sounds, songs, and musical genres might convey joy, hope, or counterhegemony in conjunction with outlaw emotions (Lewis & Bock, 2018), charting the masses' attention toward social systems, sentiments, or symbols. Over the last few decades, female artists have increasingly espoused and engendered anger and rage in their music (e.g., Courtney Love, Tina Turner, Alanis Morissette, Shirley Manson, among others), depicting the potent relationship between emotion, gender, and music—laying groundwork for future female artists to exhibit emotional complexity (e.g., Chinchilla, Olivia Rodrigo, Brittany Howard, Sophia Urista). Mapping this music-emotion blueprint meant desecrating gendered feeling rules governing social systems and mainstream music genres.

And I'm here, to remind you / Of the mess you left when you went away / It's not fair, to deny me / Of the cross I bear that you gave to me / You, you, you oughta know! (Morissette, 1995)

While many came before and after her, Alanis Morissette's (1995) album *Jagged Little Pill* was and remains an anthological anthem of female outlaw emotion in music, famously inspired by a man's broken promise(s). Morissette's work represented a groundbreaking aesthetic public demonstration of female anger. However, Morissette's album did not occur in a musical and cultural vacuum and wasn't spared public scrutiny and hesitation to [mainstream] acceptance. Alongside artists like Courtney Love, Morissette's emotional rawness similarly allowed *White* women collectively to demonstrate the same, and mirrored broader sentiments reflected in the late 1990s American experience—trickling into, germinating, and taking hold of wider social, political, and cultural swells at the intersection of music, gender, and public displays of outlaw emotions. While Morissette's work offered a blueprint for challenging gendered feeling rules and mainstream sense-making of women's emotional complexity, stubborn emotion-myths around rage remained—especially the myths' racialized contours.

It's just one of those days when you don't wanna wake up / Everything is fucked, everybody sucks / You don't really know why, but you wanna justify / Rippin' someone's head off! (Limp Bizkit, 2000)

Released a few years after Morissette's album, Limp Bizkit's (2000) single "Break Stuff" rose to prominence within the genre-fluid Nu-Metal orientation, but not without significant controversy. Nu-Metal's explicit welcoming and wielding of anger and rage in lyric, sonic, and stage presence drew demonstrable scrutiny from mainstream media, and political circles swooped in to establish discursive connections between Nu-Metal rage (e.g., Marilyn Manson, Limp Bizkit, Slipknot, Linkin Park, among others) and its role in social wreckage (Borchard, 2015).

Amplifying public consternation emerged following Limp Bizkit's performance of "Break Stuff" at the Woodstock '99 festival, which cultivated widespread violence and arson. Petrusich's (2021) connections between the riots and arson of the Woodstock '99 festival and the January 6, 2021 insurrection on the U.S. Capitol illuminate the racial similarities of the rioters: Both instances involved "out-of-control White people foregoing decency and rectitude in order to express a kind of deep, nameless, long-festered anger" (Petrusich, 2021, p. 1). However, the predominantly male participation in both events remains salient, too. Widespread arson, rioting, and death—and swift public condemnation of anger's destructiveness—contoured both Woodstock '99 and the 2021 insurrection. Nevertheless, what rose to prominence were the efforts to gradually sanitize, rationalize, and normalize the physical, racial, political—and sexual, in the case of Woodstock '99—damage at the hands of White (and overwhelmingly, male) rage (Petrusich, 2021). The well-documented violence and rioting in both cases found fuel from White male orators (Fred Durst and Donald Trump), whose calls-to-attention resonated with predominantly White attendees who dared to embody the sentiment that "Everything is fucked / Everybody sucks" (Limp Bizkit, 2000). Gendered feeling rules emboldened White male public spectacles of unrestricted slow-but-permissible and boundless anger at the continued and continuous expense of women's and Black people's emotion-truths and personhoods—itsself a curriculum that demonstrated the enduringly racialized and gendered feeling rules governing U.S. social structures (Luger & Miller, 2025; Seigworth & Shomura, 2025).

Angry [and] Black: Oscillation, Racialization, & (Re)clamation

And now: it is easy to forget
 what I came for
 among so many who have always
 lived here... (Rich, 1973, p. 23)

As discussed, poetry, song lyrics, and sound can both impair and repair (Gershon & Wozolek, 2023), illustrating how the relationship between art, sound, and emotion reflects nuanced social knowledge. Poetry, sound, and song lyrics *do* things: They hold instructive, social functions in their capacities to act upon people (Jarvis & McKenzie, 2024), fostering opportunities to capture meaning undergirding the intersections between emotions, art, and the self. However, poetry, sound, and song lyrics are produced within overarching social, political, and cultural structures, illuminating how these systems of power consequently shape our meaning-seizing of the structures governing the public and artistic displays of emotion—what emotions are allowed as “art,” and what emotions remain unwelcome—and from whom.

While anger and rage broadly draw ire, Black people’s public displays of outlaw emotions receive augmented rebuke. Our privileging of White outlaw emotions coincides with the pathologizing of Black anger and rage (Applebaum, 2014), reifying stereotypes of Black people’s susceptibility to violence and irrationality (hooks, 1995; McCann, 2013). Such pathologizing mirrors public obfuscation of the deep relationship between Black power, outlaw emotions, and oppressive sociopolitical conditions (Applebaum, 2014; McCann, 2013). Consequently, framing Black outlaw emotions-as-knowledge represents a seemingly inconceivable possibility when up against emotion-myths that Black outlaw emotions necessitate widespread control. It is no coincidence that many of the aforementioned artists pioneering the complexity of outlaw emotions through music are White. Nevertheless, hip hop and rap music genres—in their fusing of racial pride, social consciousness, and issues of Black morality and precarity—reflect nuanced performance(s) of the historical, enduring entanglement between the aesthetic, [outlaw] emotion, and the racial/ized self (McCann, 2013). Captivated as I am by artful, timely lyrical brilliance, feeling rules continue swirling.

And not the other color so police think / They have the authority to kill a minority / Fuck that shit, 'cause I ain't the one (NWA, 1988).
 Instead of war on poverty / They got a war on drugs / So the police can bother me (Shakur, 1992).

While artists like NWA (1988) and Tupac Shakur (1992) (among others) facilitate(d) similar outlaw emotions as White, Nu-Metal and grunge counterparts, we tend to obscure the socially conscious and emancipatory contours underscoring the genre (McCann, 2013). As a result, our collective instinct to admonish Black rage—and to consequently villainize Black artists for their public display of emotional complexity—remains an enduring and widespread outlaw emotion-myth that coalesces meritocracy, emotion dismissal, and White supremacy. Artists’ exploration of racialization, commodification, and calls-to-action within difficult sociopolitical conditions evokes an expansive emotional depth for artists and listeners, demonstrating the genre’s boldness and bravery illuminated through the intertwining of Black outlaw emotions, the aesthetic, and a wide-awakeness (Greene, 1977) via social commentary. Black artists, scholars, and literary luminaries, therefore, courageously reclaim outlaw emotions, publicly demonstrating their

capacity to not only heal and challenge oppression; but also, that Black outlaw emotion—the aesthetic and resistance—remains a fundamental, enduring entanglement contouring the American experience.

“The Angry Black Woman” as Myth—or Allegory

...swaying their crenellated fans
between the reefs
and besides
you breathe differently down here. (Rich, 1973, p. 23)

White creators have historically relied on both racial privilege and the “Africanist other” (Morrison, 1992, p. 16) to navigate complex emotion-dilemmas, employing essentialist characterizations, tropes, and half-truths about the Black experience and Black emotions. These renderings frame Black outlaw emotions as destructive, divergent, and socially unintelligible impulses that warrant restraint, entrenching racialized feeling rules. The suppression and shaming of rage and anger—Black rage especially—remains prevalent and coincides with sanitizing and constraining broader discussions of race (hooks, 1995). However, emotion-myths suffocate Black outlaw emotion displays, especially so for Black women. The “too emotional” and irrational gendered emotion-myths still afford White women some privilege of public, literary, and lyrical anger displays, an entitlement ruptured for Black women. For example, Toni Morrison’s legitimate literary accounts of racism inspired Right-wing manufactured outrage (PBS, 2024) —illustrating the very point she, and others, wish(ed) to make about gendered and racial feeling rules that transcend the page, absolve White men, but pathologize Black women. Race-to-rage-talk begets public scrutiny and sociocultural rebuke, as Black women’s outlaw emotions are only tolerated when relegated to “the realm of the unspeakable” (hooks, 1995, p. 12). Black women, then, are caught between rigid reefs of gendered *and* racialized feeling rules governing their public emotion displays, a dimension of this wreck that warrants additional depth-diving.

Slipping in[to] [a] different portrayal of Black women’s outlaw emotions involves embracing the instructiveness of snark as an integral dimension to this aesthetic-emotion voyage. The mutual relationship between outlaw emotions, snark, and humor empowers the public practice of outlaw emotions through a seemingly more digestible display (Curnow et al., 2021). For example, inspired by a White male flight passenger who unjustly took her Black companion’s seat, hooks (1995) explains her “killing rage” contouring the moment’s racist and sexist undercurrent: “I wanted to stab him softly, to shoot him with the gun I wished I had in my purse... I would say to him tenderly ‘racism hurts.’” (p. 11). Although snark makes it to the page, it’s often confined there, as hooks (1995) chose not to act on her rage. Others, however, take their snark to the airwaves, calling attention to their outlaw emotion-displays *and* the myths that seek to restrain them.

Cunty, country, petty, petty, petty / All the same to me, Plain Jane, spaghetti / No sauce,
no sauce, ugh / Too soft, too soft, ugh / They salty, they shootin', like Curry / One hand on
my holster, then pass it to Hova / Thought it was sweet when they was walkin' / In the
backdoor of the kitchen past the dirty dishes / Now we on a mission / Tried to turn me to
the opposition / I'm appalled 'bout the proposition / Y'all been played by the plagiaristic /

Ain't gon' give no clout addiction my attention / I ain't no regular singer, now come get everythin' you came for! (Beyoncé, 2024)

As critically acclaimed, genre-bending, transformative, emancipatory—and snarky—as Beyoncé's (2024) *Cowboy Carter* album proved to be, she was—once again—snubbed from Country Music Award (CMA) consideration in 2024. As one of the Whitest music genres, country music in the U.S. similarly rebuffs its Black roots—one of many social issues that *Cowboy Carter* tackled through intertwining snark, outlaw emotion, gender, and the aesthetic. While the album's release narrowly missed the nomination window, slighting Beyoncé's 2024 album mirrored the spurning of her performance of “Daddy Lessons” with The Chicks in 2016 (Romano, 2024).

Despite Beyoncé reaching #1 on the Billboard country chart with *Cowboy Carter*—the first Black woman to do so—the limited country radio promotion of the #1 debuting single “Texas Hold ‘Em”—further demonstrated the narrow confines of racial and gendered aesthetic structures for Black women in a White-dominated industry. “This ain't a country album, it's a Beyoncé album,” Beyoncé herself keenly asserted, as she distanced herself from designating her work as exclusively country (Romano, 2024). Because the country—and the music industry generally—are friendlier to male genre-bending artists, *Cowboy Carter* and its country/CMA snub(s) illustrate enduring exclusion of Black women from White-dominated spaces, positions of power, and, as Beyoncé herself notes—from places where they feel or are unwelcome. More than anything, *Cowboy Carter*—as a country/pop/Beyoncé album—represents a deeper exploration of what lies beneath an oft-ignored legacy of Black people in country against a backdrop of misogynoir, a backdrop that transcends country, music, and the cultural zeitgeist. But not all was—is—lost: Aesthetic, scholarly, social-world discovery forces us to reckon with the emotion-myths confining or excluding aesthetic representation, as the aesthetic can cultivate a wide-awake opportunity to make meaning, to witness emotion-wrecks up close.

Arriving Where I Started...

the thing I came for:
the wreck and not the story of the wreck
the thing itself and not the myth
the drowned face always staring
toward the sun
the evidence of damage
worn by salt and sway into this threadbare beauty
the ribs of the disaster
curving their assertion
among the tentative haunters.
This is the place. (Rich, 1973, p. 24)

I was twelve years old at the time of the 1999 Columbine High School shooting—a grim hallmark that ushered in the intersecting, incredulously-enduring school-gun violence era—a demonstrable swelling of destructive anger and violence within and beyond educational spaces. Its gruesome notoriety even inspired a video game: *The Super Columbine Massacre RPG!* (Borchard, 2015) that illuminates the aesthetic relationship between music, philosophy, and

emotion repudiation in educational spaces. By allowing the player to bear [emotional] witness to an actual massacre, the disastrous game upends the emotion-myth that emotions are private, individual choices. Instead, we learn how emotions reflect collective manifestations inspired by intersecting environments, discourses, and social forces necessitating acknowledgement and interference, layers that—although not producing a deadly massacre—in some fashion, reside in ourselves, buried so deeply until something in our educational or social worlds forces us to speculate and remember.

Educational institutions represent sites that perpetuate existing practices of emotion management, and outlaw emotions reflect especially unwelcome, unsavory intruders. Our obsession with student dysfunction inspired seemingly common-sense educational concepts like “emotional intelligence” that discursively mask emotional self-policing (Boler, 1998), or that educational success depends on meritocracy, success divorced from the nuisance of emotion (Sellar & Zipin, 2019). Although we sometimes signal to the presence of emotion in education—namely, how emotions in education reorganize relationships and institutions (Boler, 1998)—we largely obscure or ignore them, unwilling or inconvenienced by what might lie beneath our surfaces. Our complicated history concerning emotions in education emerges through taming the seemingly labile student who disrupts emotional conformity. The labile student, theorized decades ago, demonstrates perceived behavioral lapses and instabilities that disrupt conventional emotion and social norms (Boler, 1997). We shame, blame, or constrain the labile student’s emotionality, amplifying the practices of [emotional] control and surveillance in schools, resulting in unhealthy and misguided emotion-myths that we hold related to the self, affect, emotion, and the social world (Reich, 2020). To enact a curriculum of outlaw emotions, we must reckon with the emotion-myths we (sub)consciously perpetuate, and how these myths amplify oppression through gendered and racialized feeling rules. A feminist politics of emotion (re)situates emotion as central to making meaning of one’s place within discourses of gender, race, and how these shape the self and manifest in educational environments.

...At Uncomfortable Stillness: The “Third Response” (Morrison, 2009)

We circle silently
about the wreck
we dive into the hold.
I am she: I am he...
We are, I am, you are
by cowardice or courage
the one who find our way
back to this scene. (Rich, 1973, pp. 24-25)

Morrison (2009) notes that “naming and violence” represent just two possible responses to wrecks. The other response is stillness. Stillness isn’t the latter fight-flight-freeze, but rather, stillness “can also be art... [for those] who construct meaning in the face of chaos must be nurtured, protected” (p. 4). When we engage with the aesthetic, we cultivate our “social imagination” (Greene, 1995), and the opportunities to coalition-build, empathize, and acknowledge our individual and collective wrecks as art(ful), instructive, curricular beginnings. However, to enact this aesthetic-emotion curricular ontology, we must consider how emotion-myth-feeling-rules

contour what we see and what we are *taught* to see. How could education and our educational practices evolve if we positioned outlaw emotions-as-knowledge as socially embedded, constructed, and art(fully) instructive? Through an aesthetic “pedagogy of discomfort” (Boler, 1998; Zembylas & Boler, 2002), we can enact a feminist politics of emotion that invites students to explore settled emotion-myths—not as wrecks, but as instructive, luminous opportunities to explore the intersections between education, the self, and feeling rules governing outlaw emotions. An enduring challenge in educational environments is to provide space for open inquiry toward witnessing our myth-wreck(s) up-close, to acknowledge how we’ve supported racialized and gendered emotion-myths, but to embrace the residual emotive currents propelling an aesthetic pedagogy of discomfort. So, the aesthetic in education offers an instructive opportunity to examine others’ grappling with and challenges to our settled emotion-myths. Doing so expands our understanding of our individual and collective roles within larger systems of emotive oppression (Curnow et al., 2021) and how these shape our educational and social experiences. While still human-driven and language-dependent, the socio-relational dimensions of emotion can disrupt education’s preoccupation with knowledge and rationality divorced from embodied ontology, embracing students’ emotionality, rather than constraining it.

Rather than suppressing and ignoring our emotion myth-wrecks, I invite us to witness them up-close, to make them visible, public, and to sit within the uncomfortable stillness. However, I acknowledge how my privileged status as a cisgender, White, native English-speaking, documented citizen of the U.S. authorizes particular emotive displays—although maybe less so now (see Seigworth & Shomura, 2025). Nevertheless, I remain swept in the ever-growing current of gendered feeling rules seemingly more widespread and entrenched than previously acknowledged. Instead of resting in the misguided belief that outlaw emotions—especially women’s public demonstrations of these—create(d) wreckage, I think alongside Lorde (1984) to situate outlaw emotions as useful, playful, even. For this work, I sought lively aesthetic and public representations of outlaw emotions across race and gender, salient, timely, and instructive examples that demonstrate how the aesthetic tugs at the edges of, performs, and dares emotion rules to compel us to believe that emotions are flaws, blemishes, or private hindrances to be remedied individually.

Selfishly, but vitally, I chose anger and rage to challenge my—our—collective misgivings and misinterpretations about our misunderstood emotion-companions, at a time of particularly acute and tangible anger and rage that’s still believed to be best rationalized privately. Because outlaw emotions cut across time, disciplines, genres, political divides, discourses, and bodies, I no longer seek to manipulate emotions and affective displays (Alexander et al., 2023). Instead, I return to the library, to the aftermath of that parent-teacher conference, and I implore my younger self to question her settled, gendered emotion-myths; and to continue speculating and acting upon relational, embodied, and affective knowing in service of discomfort and cultivating [anti-fascist] sensitivity (Cheladyn, 2025) that recommits to our capacities to feel and attune. I invite her—and us—into artful(ly) disrupting conditions governing our emotional experiences, to swim alongside the fullness of our capacities to emote publicly, to affect, and to be affected (Seigworth & Shomura, 2025).

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