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Convening the Counter-Conversation: Critical Participatory Action Research Against Real-Time Repression

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Acknowledgments

CONVENING THE COUNTER-CONVERSATION

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CONVENING THE COUNTER-CONVERSATION

Abstract

This dissertation presents the anti-fascist *Critical Participatory Action Research* (CPAR) process of three doctoral student participants/co-researchers, *all practicing educators*, with varied experiences in public and private education at the middle school, high school, and collegiate level. This research examines the convergence of the participants/co-researchers in response to their shared concerns about *ascendent authoritarianism* and *rising repression* and the subsequent formation of this study's *in-process* CPAR *research collective* organized to critically *counter*, rather than reiterate, this repression.

Enacting the theoretical/methodological frameworks of *Critical Theory* and Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action*, the participants/co-researchers dialogically determined *contemporary fascism* to be the focus of this study and elected to conduct CPAR as a means to further investigate fascism within the collective *local context* of St. Louis schools. Seeking to put theory into practice, the *research collective* engaged the *emergent*, people-powered, *possibilities* of CPAR as a *counter* to fascism.

The *research collective* recorded and transcribed their CPAR meeting conversations as the primary source of evidence analyzed for this study. Implementing a *collaborative-polyvocal-autoethnographic* approach, *thematic analysis* reveals a Freirean-Fromm *counter*-frame of ***death or life***—*Fascist Necrophily* **problem**—*Anti-Fascist Biophil*y **counter**. Honoring the *anti-oppressive aims* of CPAR, implications for further *anti-fascist actions* are considered.

Critical Participatory Action Research Against Real-Time Repression

Yes—*the work*—which is this admittedly nebulous term I continue to use but also

something so deeply felt, deeply thought, something that maybe doesn't need to

be delineated in discursive excess—*is something that emerges in each*

conversation we have—which is why we continue to have all the conversations

we have.

—Marquis Bey, *Anybody, Everybody, All the Time*

Leo: I think a question that we're coming back around to—that we need to ask,

again, is—*why did we decide on fascism?* Why is that the thing that we're saying?

Not White Supremacy. Not racism. Not…?

Anne: Because for me, all those things are *a* thing—they're not *all* of them.

Leo: Go on—*say more.*

Anne: That it's the economics—the violence—the racism—the constant

dehumanization—time/capitalism—*it's all of it.* It's what happens to make us not

see the complex interconnections of systematic injustice. *The block is not seeing*

the blocks.

Leo: What happened to shift us so far away from seeing? Fascism used to be in

the air, speech, and art of every radical but now is rarely heard or exists except in

the most fringe spaces. So, *what happened to lead us here*—to Anti-Fascism?

Why are we pointing to this? *Why abolition?* Why insurgent intellectual/*anti-*

fascist networks? *Why fugitivity?*

Connor: Those things are all strategies which align with what we found

throughout this process, *right?*

Leo: Okay.

Connor: Insurgent intellectual networks align with what we found in terms of the need for solidarity. Abolition is aligned with what we found in terms of how all the shit is so fucking connected that you just have to abolish. And fugitivity, in terms of what we found on the pervasiveness of standardization and control, and the need for criticality, and how sometimes, because of standardization and control, it has to be done through fugitivity.

Leo: Fugitivity *also* because we're dealing with an irrational system, an irrational system that you have to work beneath its metric.

Anne: That brings me back to the—why—why do you have to go beyond what is? Why is [anti-fascist biophily/resistance] it a dynamic that seeks to—grow—and build—and include? When you think about who's in this with us—who are we trying to talk to—who are our people? How many times in my own journey—(of fucking up)—I didn't have the energy? Or I didn't even know where to look. I'm only here because I've made this mistake *900 times*. That I was finally like—I'm making the same mistake—I'm doing it by myself—and I'd better fucking find somebody to join me. I know—ALONE—I always end up back where I started. But let's be real, most people in teaching—or nursing—or social work—or counseling—or any other person in a public-facing gig, facing the shitbag of oppression, solo—leave the work way before then. Or, worst, becoming regressive and retrenched, feeling *so alone* against *everything* as an educator. It's too much. *And not enough.* People take their lives in public service work…

When you're stuck in survival mode, you need to not be alone, but you are

alone—but that's what fascism does, right? It keeps you out of power. *So—what*

does it mean to—bring the possibility of—connection and support—of mutual

aid?

Leo: A literal lifeline!—*like the Black Radical Imagination*—like Marquis Bey.

Connor: *Demand the impossible.* (2024, February 26)

There is a tendency for most to equate fascism to the horrors of the Nazis, gas

chambers, and the Holocaust, revealing how the "principal temptation for any

contemporary thought on fascism is historical analogy" (Toscano, 2023, p. x).

Furthermore, Toscano (2023) asserts, "Rather than treating fascism as a singular event or

identifying it with a particular configuration of European parties, regimes, and ideologies,

for the purposes of thinking in and against our own day we need to see fascism within the

totality of its process" (p. x). Would it be a stretch of the imagination to point to certain

currents in today's social and political climate and claim that we—*in the United States of*

America—are in the midst of the process of fascism?

Fascism was not a dreadful anachronism imported from the Old World; that

instead it might be as American as cherry pie, deeply enmeshed in histories of

enslavement and extermination, dispossession and domination that continue to

shape the US present, materially and ideologically. (Toscano, 2023, p. 26)

Fast forward a century later. On January 5th, 2021, speaking to *Moms for America* at a

conservative rally outside of the U.S. Capitol, Illinois Republican Congresswoman, Mary

Miller, heralded, "Hitler was right on one thing, 'Whoever has the youth has the future'"

(Tareen, 2021, January 6, para. 4). Shamefully, Miller is certainly not the only

conservative channeling the anti-critical atrocities of the past while attempting to lay the groundwork for the normalization of fascism in the present (Rasmussen, 2018, p. 684). Indeed, there are countless legislators and lobbyists paving the way toward an overtly fascist future. Perhaps one politician leading the charge, ahead of all others, is Republican Governor Ron DeSantis of Florida. DeSantis's administration has been responsible for numerous pieces of hostile legislation attacking anything DeSantis deems as a part of "woke ideology" (Cineas, 2023). From *Don't Say Gay* to the *Stop WOKE Act*, DeSantis's track record in educational policy "intensifies and expands a policy of erasure and manufactured ignorance that is endemic to the GOP which provides the driving momentum for a nationwide banning of books and restrictions on teaching about race and gender in public schools" (Giroux, 2023). In our own, local, context, this anti-critical shift is unmistakably present—and extremely active—here in the state of Missouri. In fact, the Missouri Senate just recently "passed a multifaceted education bill that includes barring the teaching of certain concepts that often have been cast under the umbrella term of critical race theory" (Kellogg, 2023). And, alas, only a month later, "Missouri's Republican-led House voted to cut all funding for libraries" (Hays, 2023). Unfortunately, what is happening in Florida and Missouri is not relegated to one particular state or region but rather part and parcel of a broader political project to control, as recent reports from *Education Week* (2023, June 13) indicate:

> Since January 2021, 44 states have introduced bills or taken other steps that would restrict teaching critical race theory or limit how teachers can discuss racism and sexism, according to an Education Week analysis. Seventeen states have imposed these bans and restrictions either through legislation or other avenues. (Schwartz,

para. 4)

Educational repression is a burgeoning threat.

We three—Anne Grass, Leo Jalipa, and Connor Maguire—came together over our shared concerns regarding rising repression and accelerating authoritarianism across all areas of life, particularly in the classroom. As practicing St. Louis educators and current EdD students at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, we welcome you into our ongoing critical conversation with ourselves, with each other, and with the wider educational community. *We extend this discursively disruptive dialogue and dissertation to any person, student, teacher, organization, and/or community willing to critically and collectively challenge—**to counter**—the censorship, coercion, and carnage of capitalistic plundering of people and planet.*

Description of Research Problem in Context: Fascism in Flux

Fascism exists as a force, phenomenon, and form in flux. Fascism functions at both the *macro* and *micro* levels of society (Eco, 1995; Evans & Giroux, 2020). Fascism infects politics, policy, places, and people—"omnipresent in the family, at the office, in the countryside, in the city. It is present before it manifests itself as what we normally speak of as fascism" (Rasmussen, 2018, p. 686)—the everyday fascism Hannah Arendt (1979) excoriated as *the banality of evil.* Found almost anywhere, fascism has many faces, for fascism is "as diffuse as the phenomenon of power itself" (Evans & Reid, 2013, p. 1), but, to most, fascism materializes solely as Mussolini, Hitler, and Franco, a familiar fascist facade that scholars refer to as *historical fascism* (Evans & Reid, 2013; Traverso, 2019; Zembylas, 2021). *Historical fascism*, however, *is not the only face of fascism.*

In the twenty-first century, fascism will not take the face of Mussolini, Hitler, and

Franco; nor (we might hope) will it take the form of totalitarian terror…Ritual

references to the threats to democracy…usually depict the enemy as external, but

they forget a fundamental lesson from the history of fascism: that democracy can

be destroyed within. (Traverso, 2019, p. 5)

To critically confront the ascendency of authoritarianism in today's society, we need to

deliberate the present-day face of fascism and how to discern its deviated disguises in our

day to day lives (Peters, 2020; Reitz, 2018). *To fight for freedom, we must reckon with all

the faces of fascism*—**including our own.**

Through this reckoning, we discovered the dissenting voice of the American-

Canadian cultural critic, Henry A. Giroux, who helped us solidify the anti-fascist focus of

our research, specifically Giroux & Evans's (2020) seminal treatise, "American Fascism:

Fourteen Deadly Principles of Contemporary Politics." In this weighty work, Giroux &

Evans (2020) find fourteen functioning forms of fascism in the United States of America

today, which they then categorize into four fomenting forces:

1. micro and macro fostering of fascism

2. annihilation of differences

3. economic exigency

4. criminalizing criticality.

As Evans & Giroux (2020) decry:

Fantasies of absolute control, racial purity, unchecked militarism, and class

warfare are at the heart of a political imagination that has turned lethal. This is a

dystopian imagination pillaged of any substantive meaning, cleansed of

compassion, and used to legitimate the notion that alternative worlds are

impossible to entertain. (p. 203)

Fascism weaponizes uncritical uncertainty. Even though fascism fuses its stranglehold on society within the public purview, it concurrently deteriorates daily discourse with misinformation and maliciously scapegoated misdirection in order to suppress citizens' capacity for conscious critique. Crucifying criticality, fascism systematically silences us, which can make its acknowledgment alone seem like a radical action. *But we must do more than name the nightmare.* To fight fascism, we must act. *To fight fascism, we must heed the honing of hope.*

It is here the power of critical pedagogy becomes all the more important as it draws from history and imagines a future that does not imitate the present. What protesters fighting against fascism today have made clear is that history is open, and it is time to think otherwise in order to act otherwise, especially if they want to imagine and bring into being alternative democratic futures and horizons of possibility. (Evans & Giroux, 2020, p. 203)

This research is thus an action—and a call to action.

Research Aims: Critical Participatory Action Research as Resistance

Fascism functions through fragmentation (Brown & Wisby, 2020; Giroux, 2017; Martínez Ruiz, 2019; Ross, 2020). By pitting *the people*—against—*the people*—against—*the public*—fascism fissures—*public participation*—fragmenting—*the people*—from their power. In "Neoliberalism and the Weaponising of Language and Education," Giroux (2019) elucidates:

Disposability, pollution, and dispossession…attempt through a range of cultural, social and pedagogical apparatuses to make people unknown to themselves as

potentially critical and engaged citizens. As public spheres increasingly become

sites where politics thrive on the energies of a racially coded fascist politics,

critical modes of subjectivity and identification are under siege. That is, new

powerful cultural pathways work to choke democratic values, modes of agency,

values and social relations normally rooted in the virtues of social and economic

justice, compassion for others, and also the public goods and institutions that

make such values and relationships possible. (p. 31)

As educators, we must radically resist the temptation toward resignation. Crisis can be

confronted. Critical consciousness comes from the courage to question. In order to act

against fascism, we must collectively inquire. If fascism fragments, what does anti-

fascism do? *Within the realm of research, how might anti-fascist academics act?* The

answer is in the question—*we must act*—we need the radical reflexivity of socially

engaged scholarship—*we need Action Research.* To quote Kurt Lewin, anti-authoritarian

activist and foundational scholar of *Action Research,* "No research without action—no

action without research" (Marrow, 1977, p. 10). *But how?* In a society dismembered by

disenfranchisement, individual intervention will not do—*instead, we need to organize*

and resist—we need a research process that is critical, participatory, and action

oriented—*we need* **Critical Participatory Action Research** (CPAR)*.*

In the Summer of 2023, as we concertedly codified this *Critical Participatory*

Action Research project, we asked ourselves what goals we would like to achieve. What

were our ends? *We agreed*:

- We seek to problematize the positivist assumptions underlying much of academia

  that requires product, outcomes, and set goals to justify itself in the face of

"imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (hooks, 2004, p. 18).

- We don't know where this process will bring us, but we contend that maintaining an open-ended—*dialogical*—process is itself a goal of our research.

We asked:

- What does the concrete, classroom manifestation of liberated learning look like?
    - Can a classroom actually reconfigure power, participation, communication, and curriculum to become a catalyzing community of critical inquiry, democratic dialogue, and liberated love?
- How can transgressive teachers convene to create a counter-public committed to community, conscientization, creativity, and collective action for cultural change?
    - Together, what can we do with each other, with our students, and with anyone and everyone else who is willing to actually animate our anti-fascist aspirations into academic action?
- How can we three—within the limitations of our own contexts as teachers and students in St. Louis, Missouri in 2023—publicly participate in education as the practice of freedom?

We allowed ourselves to dream.

Demand the impossible.

Review of Literature

Towards an Anti-Fascist Framework: Critical Participatory Action Research

Critical: Critical Theory and Pedagogy

Definitions of Critical Theory abound. Marcuse identifies it as "a theory which analyzes society in the light of its used and unused or abused capabilities for improving the human condition" (Marcuse, 2002, p. xl). *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Audi, 1995) recognizes it as a theory with the "ultimate goal is to link theory and practice, to provide insight, and to empower subjects to change oppressive circumstances and achieve human emancipation in a rational society that satisfies human needs" (pp. 278-279). Critical Theory comes out of the Institute for Social Research, more commonly referred to as the Frankfurt School, in Germany in the late 1920s and 30s, and, given the rapidly changing political landscape of the time, "insists that thought must respond to the new problems and the new possibilities for liberation that arise from changing historical circumstances" (Bronner, 2011, p. 1). Although not bound by traditional Marxist strictures, the distinguishing mark of Critical Theory can be summed up by Marx's famous critique of current philosophical study and call for something more: "philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it" (Tucker, 1978, p.145).

Critical Theory generated many of its seminal texts and formational writings during the run-up to fascist power and during or immediately after Nazi rule (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). Many of the scholars who made up the Institute for Social Research eventually had to flee Germany and re-established the institute in New York. Many of their writings and scholarship tried to address how and why fascism became ascendent in

Germany, as opposed to socialism, which they had previously believed would come to power. Their direct experiences with fascism forced them to re-evaluate a component of Marxist thought, the inevitability of socialism, and caused them to expand the tools available to Marxist thinkers to critically analyze material and social conditions to better understand the social systems which were developing. As such it is a theory that is well suited for any interrogation of fascism in the educational realm as it is sensitive to the maneuverings of fascism, at both a micro and macro level.

Critical Theory is a key framework of this study in that it has epistemological, methodological, and pedagogical implications. Its epistemology is one that regards truth not as something that resides *out there* divorced from social norms, values, and individual or community experience but recognizes truth as something that resides in community, understood through dialect and dialogical processes. This epistemology was articulated from the very beginning of Critical Theory by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (2002) connecting the "new kind of barbarism" (p. xiv) seen in fascism to the Enlightenment, Rationalism, and Positivism. *If Positivism and Rationalism lead to domination and ultimately fascism, how then to know the world?* Adorno and Horkheimer argue for a more holistic approach to knowledge, which is ultimately taken up by Jürgen Habermas' pragmatic theory of *communicative action* in the second generation of the Frankfurt School, a particular outgrowth of Critical Theory which we found particularly useful in framing our study.

The implications of a *critical theoretical framework* for a research methodology are clear, a positivist approach, which views truth as separate from lived human

experience, is *not* compatible with Critical Theory. In an introduction to Critical Theory, Bronner (2011) discusses the Frankfurt school, writing:

> Its members condemned the preoccupation with absolute foundations, analytic categories, and fixed criteria for verifying truth claims. They saw two main culprits: phenomenology, with its set ontological claims about how individuals experience existence, and positivism, with its demand that society be analyzed according to the criteria of the natural sciences. Both were attacked for treating society in a-historical terms and eliminating genuine subjectivity. Critical theory was intended as an alternative. (p. 4)

The antagonism towards Positivism and any system of thought or knowledge production which attempts to frame truth claims as totalizing, universal, and value-free is further highlighted by Groff (2014) when he writes, "Critical theory … ought to be attentive not just to the relationship between social theory and the organization of society at large, but also to the underlying epistemological, ontological and methodological commitments implicit in any given bit of thought" (p. xii). As such, our methodology of *Critical Participatory Action Research* was shaped by the theoretical framework of *Critical Theory* and its insistence that knowledge production be situated, dialectic, and mindful of its social impact.

In the educational sphere, Critical Theory has been used as both an analytical tool to critique and explore macro issues of education as an important factor in social reproduction and as an applied practice in more micro contexts to address issues of inequality and oppression within schools and the classroom. Critical Theory further influences our study by foregrounding the fact that education is always a political act.

Both Critical Theory, and its pedagogical outgrowth, *critical pedagogy*, have been applied to educational theory and practice in numerous ways, from disability studies in education (Erwin et. al., 2023) to course design (Lintott & Skitolsky, 2016), from environmental education (Gunansyah et al., 2023) to combating heterosexism (Rosen et al., 2019). *Critical pedagogy* was expressly shaped by Critical Theory (Govende, 2020). Critical Theory and *critical pedagogy* both function to illuminate the ideological underpinnings of education and seek to transform education into a tool for liberation instead of oppression. *Critical pedagogy* defies methodization; there is no one set method to implement a critical pedagogical approach into the classroom. While there are many ways a teacher could bring a *critical pedagogy* perspective to the school, some of the key commonalities evoked in critical research are:

- classrooms should be democratic spaces and authoritarianism should be rejected (Hurst, 2013);
- nothing is politically neutral, and those things which appear *natural* should be subject to critical inquiry (Vassallo, 2012; Wilson, 2014);
- there is no one, definitive way to know the world, a diversity of opinions and perspectives is important and should be recognized (Kelly, 2013; Morrell, 2002; Van Orman & Lyiscott, 2013);
- *education should lead towards liberation* (Freire, 1970, Freire, 1970/2006; hooks, 1994).

At its heart, *critical pedagogy* is Marxist and revolutionary, which may lead some classroom teachers to shy away from it, but the insistence of *critical pedagogy* that

teachers view *all of their students*, first and foremost, in all their humanity—*as fully humanized beings*—is a universal good and a necessary approach for all classrooms.

The tension between the reality of educational systems as oppressive and their potential to be emancipatory has long been recognized by *critical pedagogy* and lies at the heart of our research questions. Although key theorists of Critical Theory recognize that there are political underpinnings in any system of education that often function only to reinforce the worst aspects of our society—racism, classism, sexism, nativism, and imperialism—these same authors also advocate that *education can, and should be, emancipatory* (Freire, 1970; Freire, 1970/2006; hooks, 1994; Giroux, 2001; Giroux; 2003; Giroux, 2015; Giroux, 2019; Giroux, 2021; Zembylas, 2021; Zembylas, 2022). If, indeed, education can be "cultural action for freedom" (Freire, 1970, para. 2), a key question remains: how can hegemonically oppressive schools be transformed into sites of liberation? In the final paragraph of *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, bell hooks (1994) hearkens us back to hold onto this hope:

> The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of our-selves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom. (p. 207)

And so, even amidst the ascendency of authoritarian acceptance within academia, an inquiry ignites: *how can education as the practice of freedom take root today?*

We believe that Critical Theory can help us begin to address this question, as Critical Theory has been used extensively in studies of education, both as a direct

theoretical framework, and in a more practical, applicational model as *critical pedagogy*. What the use of Critical Theory in an educational study allows the researchers to do is center an understanding of oppression, marginalization, and power *while also* aiming to disrupt uneven power dynamics rather than reinforcing them or simply maintaining an oppressive status quo. The next key question, then, is, given a history of academic research being exploitive and harmful, *how do we keep in mind an ends that is liberatory and empowering while also centering a means that enacts these goals through the research process itself?*

Participatory: The Participatory Paradigm

The cracks of Critical Theory created the space to question the hegemony hewn from positivist publishing. Pivoting from the objective officiations of Positivism, activist academics critically inquire (Billies et al., 2010; Nabudere, 2008; Strega, 2005):

1. *How do we know what we know?*

2. *What do we value as knowledge*?

Action Research and all of its diverse variations arise from the transgressive embodiment of the right to respond to these questions as the *everyday researcher* researching *the research of the everyday,* "an 'extended' epistemology which encompasses experiential and practical knowing" (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 22). *Action Research* punctures the policed parameters of Positivism with the purposeful participation and perspectives of *the people,* which Orlando Fals-Borda posited as the "participatory paradigm" (Diaz-Arvelo, 2022). In his speech, "Research for Social Justice: Some North-South Convergences," Fals-Borda (1995) proclaimed:

> Do not monopolise your knowledge nor impose arrogantly your technique, but respect and combine your skills with the knowledge of the researched or grassroots communities, taking them as full partners and co-researchers. Do not trust elitist versions of history and science which respond to dominant interests, but be receptive to counter-narratives and try to recapture them. Do not depend solely on your culture to interpret facts, but recover local values, traits, beliefs, and arts for action by and with the research organisations. Do not impose your own ponderous scientific style for communicating results, but diffuse and share what you have learned together with the people, in a manner that is wholly understandable and even literary and pleasant, for science should not be necessarily a mystery nor a monopoly of experts and intellectuals.

Fals-Borda proffered the paradigmatic turn towards participation from the expressly political purpose of disrupting the hierarchical declensions—*and distortions*—of traditional research, "a processual shift from a participatory model *for* the people, to one carried out *by* the people, to one where the researcher works *with* the people" (Díaz-Arévalo, 2022, p. 344). The participatory turn sanctions a **subject-subject** *relationality* of researcher to researched that reflexively reconfigures the role of the researcher to that of co-researcher/co-participant and the role of participants to co-participant/co-researcher (Billies et al., 2010; Boog, 2016; Díaz-Arévalo, 2022; Rahman, 1985; Reason & Bradbury, 2008; Zeller-Berkman, 2014). The political possibilities of the *participatory paradigm* proceed from its purposeful repositioning of power and perspective. Díaz-Arévalo (2022) asserts this radical restructuring of research as Fals Borda's "ontology of participation" (p. 357) that pursues research "predicated on a horizontal subject-subject

relationship that spurs emancipatory transformation from the margins, contests

asymmetric micro-level power relations and breaks the dominant institutional monopoly

over knowledge production" (pp. 357-358). Participatory principles pry open the

political; participatory projects promote democratic dialectics and situated self-

determinism. From the collective countering of conventional coercion and control, the

participatory paradigm appraises the possibility of an anti-oppressive—*anti-fascist*—

academic positioning that purposefully pursues research as a *revolutionary*

reconfiguration of *power to the people.*

Participatory Paradigm in Practice. Paulo Freire's publication of *The Pedagogy*

of the Oppressed (1970/2006) is one of the most persuasive and powerful accounts of

enacting emancipatory education via participatory positionality. *The Pedagogy of the*

Oppressed exemplifies people-powered, dialogical disruption. To quote Freire

(1970/2006):

> We can legitimately say that in the process of oppression someone oppresses
>
> someone else; we cannot say that in the process of revolution someone liberates
>
> someone else, nor yet that someone liberates himself, but rather that human
>
> beings in communion liberate each other. (p. 133)

The Pedagogy of the Oppressed pushes against the passive and paternalistic processes of

hegemonic education. In "Paulo Freire and the Continuing Struggle to Decolonize

Education," Darder (2015) attests:

> For those who were betrayed by our schooling, Freire offered the possibility of an
>
> educational project for our children, tied to a larger democratic vision–one that
>
> resonated with our anti-colonial struggles for self-determination and our desire to

> control our own destinies. Hence, Freire's pedagogy was also a pedagogy of
>
> transgression–transgression of oppressive ideas, attitudes, structures, and practices
>
> within education that debilitate our humanity. (p. 41)

The participatory politics of *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* provides not only a

pedagogical path—but also a *decolonized methodology*—to critically and collaboratively

counter the cultural invasion of neoliberal capitalism and the ever-evolving educational

erasure that ensues. Take for example the *Yirrkala Ganma* Education Project, a project

that arose from the shared concern of the *Yolngu* community over the ongoing

oppressions of Western colonization of the Indigenous lands of what is now Australia.

> *Yolngu* children have difficulties in learning areas of *Balanda* [white people's]
>
> knowledge. This is not because *Yolngu* cannot think, it is because the curriculum
>
> in the schools is not relevant for *Yolngu* children, and often these curriculum
>
> documents are developed by *Balanda* who are ethnocentric in their values. The
>
> way that *Balanda* people have institutionalised their way of living is through
>
> maintaining the social reproduction process where children are sent to school and
>
> they are taught to do things in a particular way. Often the things that they learn
>
> favour [the interests of] the rich and powerful, because when they leave school
>
> [and go to work] the control of the workforce is in the hands of the middle class
>
> and the upper class. (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 137)

The *Yolngu* community came together—in collective critique—to counter colonial

curricular constraints through critical, *participatory* action. The principal of the *Yirrkala*

Community School, Dr. Yunupingu, expressed their emancipatory engagement efforts:

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> I am hoping the *Ganma* research will become *critical educational research*, that it
> will empower *Yolngu*, that it will emphasise emancipatory aspects and that it will
> take a side—just as the *Balanda* [white people's] research has always taken a side
> but never revealed this, always claiming to be neutral and objective. My aim in
> *Ganma* is to help, to change, to shift the balance of power. (Kemmis et al., 2014,
> p. 138)

In 1988, the words of Wurrthalminy Maymuru, a *Yolngu* teacher and *Yirrkala Ganma*
Education Project participant, precede *Critical Participatory Action Research*:

> Our work is not just for ourselves, but for all the people in this community…Our
> work is based here at *Yirrkala*, so therefore we are opening new paths marking the
> way for others to follow us and continue our journey. (Marika et al., 1992, p. 23)

Through the participatory *Praxis* of the *Yolngu* people—to protest colonial cultural
invasion—the *Yirrkala Ganma* Education Project embodied *Critical Participatory Action
Research* years before it even coalesced into a recognized research format.

Action: Anti-Authoritarian Action Research

Action Research is the research of the resistance (Huckaby, 2019; Martin &
Currin 2022; Richardson, 2018; Spooner 2020). *Action Research*'s foundational scholar,
Kurt Lewin, fled from Hitler's fascism as a persecuted German, Jewish intellectual;
Lewin developed anti-authoritarian *Action Research* in response. Actuating its anti-
oppressive origins, *Action Research* resists the closed constraints of conventional
research by contending the social construction of knowledge and culture (Dempsey et al.,
2011; Díaz-Arévalo, 2022; Fine et al., 2021; Fisher & Phelps, 2006). *Action Research* is
not a singular research strategy but rather an iterative inquiry into injustice that can be

conducted from a positivist, interpretivist, or critical standpoint (Willis, 2014, p. 36). *The*

SAGE Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice (Reason &

Bradbury, 2008) classifies *Action Research* as:

> a family of practices of living inquiry that aims, in a great variety of ways, to link
>
> practice and ideas in the service of human flourishing. It is not so much a
>
> methodology as an orientation to inquiry that seeks to create participative
>
> communities of inquiry in which qualities of engagement, curiosity and question
>
> posing are brought to bear on significant practical issues. (p. 1)

With the disintegration of democratic discourse in our day to day lives, *Action Research*

offers us catalyzing collaborations and co-generative contexts for community created

change, such as Freire's (1970/2006) famously authored counter-cultural concept of

participatory **Praxis**—*the critical practice of putting theory into practice.* Freire centers

the practice of *Praxis* on inquiry, "For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis,

individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-

invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings

pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (1970/2018, p. 38). *Action*

Research is anti-authoritarian in that it counters the positivist partitioning of research into

controlled categories by replacing the conventional constraints of traditional research

with reflexive cycles of participatory *Praxis* (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Fine et al.,

2021; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). As such, *Action Research* engages in research as

an iterative, dialectical, reflexive, recursive process, a "living, emergent process that

cannot be predetermined but changes and develops as those engaged deepen their

understanding of the issues to be addressed and develop their capacity as co-enquirers

both individually and collectively" (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 4). *Action Research* resists authoritarian coercion and control through radically inclusive participation (Díaz-Arévalo, 2022; Spooner, 2020; West, 2023). *Action Research*, particularly *Critical Participatory Action Research* (CPAR), socially engages scholarship by socially engaging in the struggle for social justice (Boog, 2016; Kemmis et al., 2014; López et al., 2021; Walton 2021; Zeller-Berkman, 2014). By enacting Critical Theory into embodied enclaves of collective change, *CPAR (re)activates the power of the people*:

> aims to help people investigate reality in order to change it and to change reality in order to investigate it…a deliberate process through which people aim to transform their practices through a spiral of cycles of critical and self-critical action and reflection…designed to help collaborating groups of people to transform their world. (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 567)

Purposefully political, *Critical Participatory Action Research* refutes the skewed power dynamics of traditional scholarship and provides our structurally stymied society a participatory path back to power by reconfiguring who has the right to research.

Research: Critical Participatory Action Research

As "imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (hooks, 2004, p. 18) conscript our country into a fully fascist future, it is our contention that there is a dire need to consider what strategies we—*the people*—can (re)explore for the renewal of democratic participation in public life. Foundational to our theoretical framework, as well as to *Critical Participatory Action Research*, are, German philosopher and social theorist, Jürgen Habermas's concept of the *public sphere* and accompanying theory of *communicative action*. Beyond the complex linguistic and philosophical jargon of

Habermas's writings, there lie ideas that are quite simplistic, realistic, and practical, which further promote their radical efficacy.

  The Public Sphere. Before considering the pragmatics of Habermas's theory of *communicative action*, we need to understand who is or what constitutes the *public sphere.* Fraser (1990) eloquently summarizes exactly how the term—*public sphere*— operates to ameliorate material consequences of the marriage between the state apparatus and capitalists:

  It designates a theater in modern societies in which political participation is

  enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate

  about their common affairs, hence, an institutionalized arena of discursive

  interaction. This arena is conceptually distinct from the state; it is a site for the

  production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the

  state. The public sphere in Habermas' sense is also conceptually distinct from the

  official economy; it is not an arena of market relations but rather one of discursive

  relations, a theater for debating and deliberating rather than for buying and

  selling. This concept of the public sphere permits us to keep in view the

  distinction between state apparatuses, economic markets, and democratic

  associations, distinctions that are essential to democratic theory. (p. 57)

Public spheres are, thus, forums of discussion and debate that act as staging points for the elevation of the political voice(s) of everyday citizens and their existence, which, idealistically, also changes how governments interact with the public (West, 2020). If it holds true that "[only] a revitalization of civil society outside the formal institutions of the state and party politics holds any possibility for new forms of effective public

participation" (Morrow & Torres, 2002, p. 78*), perhaps the (re)opening of public spheres can begin*—to counter—*fascism.*

Communicative Action. In Habermas's theory of *communicative action*, people within their own individual social locations, contexts, and experiences share an intuition that the free discussion of ideas—in inclusive public spaces—can lead to legitimately led, *local*, community-created, *consensus-based change*. Kemmis et al. (2014) describe the process of people engaging in *communicative action* as:

> when they make a conscious and deliberate effort to reach (a) intersubjective
>
> agreement about the ideas and language they use among participants as a basis for
>
> (b) mutual understanding of one another's points of view in order to reach (c)
>
> unforced consensus about what to do in their particular situation. (p. 35)

Communicative Action is essentially democratic, an egalitarian epistemological framework. Morrow and Torres (2002) describe how Habermas's "early epistemological writings [… are] used to legitimate both the hermeneutic foundations of knowledge and the introduction of a socially and politically engaged approach to education" (p. 4). The epistemology put forth by Habermas goes beyond traditional individualistic and positivist views of knowledge and instead emphasizes the importance of intersubjective communication and consensus in the pursuit of truth and understanding. While fascism seeks to close in on the citizenry with its unbending systems of tradition and law, the opening-up of the *public sphere* through *communicative action* allows for the authentic utilization of the (*under*)commons as a wealth of knowledge and resources. With intentionally iterative practices embedded in our daily interactions and social configurations, we maintain that people have the ability to create "institutional

spheres[...] characterized by dialogue and consensus generated through rational argumentation" (Morrow & Torres, 2002, p. 138). *We view communicative action as anti-fascist and applicable.* We argue that the process of *communicative action* is itself a process of *anti-fascism* because its central parameters all function to resist the four forces of fascism delineated earlier. *We believe that in order to revitalize the power of the public sphere, we must (re)commit to the dialogical and reflexive nature of communicative action.* We agree with Habermas' assertion that "[only] when certain domains of discourse are institutionalized to such an extent that under specifiable conditions a general expectation exists, that discursive conversations will be initiated, can they become systematically relevant mechanisms of learning for a given society" (Habermas, 1973, p. 25). *Ultimately, we assert that communicative action provides Critical Participatory Action Research with the much-needed Praxis to (re)mobilize and (re)institutionalize radical democracy.*

Methodology

Research Design

In this study, we enacted the transgressive tenets of *Action Research* through the critical, constructivist design of **Critical Participatory Action Research**. *Critical Participatory Action Research* (CPAR) "expresses a commitment to bring together broad social analysis, the self-reflective collective self-study of practice, and transformational action to improve things" (Kemmis & Nixon, 2014, p.12). *Critical Participatory Action Research* is an emergent form of *Participatory Action Research* (PAR). PAR activist and academic, Anisur Rahman (1985) proffered PAR's own pivotal positionality:

> Liberation, surely, must be opposed to all forms of domination over the masses…
> But—and this is the distinctive viewpoint of PAR—domination of masses by
> elites is rooted not only in the polarization of control over the means of material
> production but also over the means of knowledge production including, as in the
> former case, the social power to determine what is valid or useful knowledge. (p.
> 119)

Purposed with the participatory politics of PAR, *Critical Participatory Action Research* seeks to upend the myopic methodologies of the privileged and powerful. CPAR incorporates Habermas's theory of *communicative action* to accentuate the democratic dialectics of PAR towards expressly ethical ends. CPAR projects create situated spaces for everyday citizens to come together and critically dialogue towards collective agreement and action. Foundational CPAR scholars, Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) interpret *communicative action* as a *collective interruption* that pushes people to question the unquestioned.

> *What is happening here?* People frequently ask this question when they feel that
>
> something is not quite right about what is going on—when they encounter doubts
>
> or issues or problems about the validity or legitimacy of their understandings
>
> about what is going on. (Kemmis & Nixon, 2014, p. 34)

What is happening here? This question incited our study. *Is what we're seeing*—inside

and outside the classroom—*fascism?* From a social justice doctoral program of thirty plus

people, we three—Anne Grass, Leo Jalipa, and Connor Maguire—came together to

politically pursue this CPAR project because we agreed. ***Fomenting fascism is for real.***

Education in the United States of America today exists within the tension of a

paradox that is both authoritarian and oppressive due to its interlocked position with the

State *and, yet,* can also be a site for liberation and social justice. We—as activist-scholars

and educators—recognize education's institutional vulnerability to fascism and that

"[education] in the broadest sense has become a powerful weapon not merely of

propaganda, but a tool of power in the shaping of desires, identities and one's view of the

future" (Giroux, 2020, p. 8). In our dual roles as academics and educators, we have come

to acknowledge the reality that we, too, are embedded within the repressive reification of

educational hierarchy, and, from this acknowledgement, we were moved to anti-fascist

educational action in hopes of engendering "paths towards greater humanization and

away from dehumanization" (Herr & Anderson, 2014, p. 19). Endeavoring to conduct

educational research that can, indeed, incite social justice, we asserted that *Critical*

Participatory Action Research (CPAR) was an apt approach for us as educators and

scholars—in St. Louis 2023—to confront fascism's tightening grip in our educational

institutions and practices.

Activating *communicative action as anti-fascism,* this CPAR study critically and collectively inquired:

1. How can we three—Anne Grass, Leo Jalipa, and Connor Maguire—come together in response to a shared concern of *macro* and *micro* fascism in order to better deepen our understanding of it in order to ultimately disrupt it?

2. How do we expand into a new, permeable, *public sphere* that includes others involved in and affected by our educational practices, with the ultimate hope of building *intersubjective agreement* around fascism in education?

3. How can we convey the *communicative action* of our *public sphere* into actualized *anti-fascism*?

4. How can we develop—and sustain—*antifascist action* through *insurgent intellectual networks*?

Study Participants

In order to convene *communicative action*, **Critical Participatory Action Research** (CPAR) requires a *public sphere* (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Kemmis & Nixon (2014) highlight ten key features of a *public sphere* for CPAR studies:

1. Public spheres are constituted as actual networks of communication among actual participants…

2. Public spheres are self-constituted, voluntary and autonomous…

3. Public spheres come into existence in response to legitimation deficits…

4. Public spheres are constituted for communicative action and for public discourse…

5. Public spheres are inclusive and permeable…

6. In public spheres, people usually communicate in ordinary language…

7. Public spheres presuppose communicative freedom…

8. Public spheres generate communicative power…

9. Public spheres generally have an indirect, not direct, impact on social

systems…

10. Public spheres are often associated with social movements. (pp. 37-46)

Our anti-fascist *public sphere* arose from our ongoing communication within our Ed.D. *Social Justice in Education* learning community cohort at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, "*actual networks of communication among actual participants*" (Kemmis & Nixon, 2014, p. 37). According to the University of Missouri-St. Louis's website, "The Doctor of Education program (Ed.D.) with an emphasis in Educational Practice…is intended for practitioners who want to build professional connections and transform educational practice" (para. 1). As such, our Ed.D. dissertation was intentionally collaborative.

Even though we did not know it at the time, our social justice learning community cohort engaged in *communicative action* in the Spring of 2022 to find our research focuses and form our dissertation groups; "*Public spheres are self-constituted, voluntary and autonomous*" (Kemmis & Nixon, 2014, p. 38). Of the thirty plus people in our program, we three agreed. Fascism is a problem worthy of our focus; "*public spheres come into existence in response to legitimation deficits*" (Kemmis & Nixon, 2014, p. 39). As of today, the *public sphere* of this CPAR study consists of *the three of us*—Anne Grass, Leo Jalipa, and Connor Maguire—unified in our commitment to catalyze *anti-fascist communicative action* within our shared setting of the St. Louis educational

28

community; "*Public spheres are constituted for communicative action and for public discourse*" (Kemmis & Nixon, 2014, p. 40) and "*are often associated with social movements*"(Kemmis & Nixon, 2014, p. 46).

Even though there were only three of us who participated in our study's *public sphere*, we still contended with the horizontal communication constructs of *communicative action* and *public spheres* to be "*inclusive and permeable*" (Kemmis & Nixon, 2014, p. 41), "*communicate in ordinary language*" (Kemmis & Nixon, 2014, p. 42), "*presuppose communicative freedom*" (Kemmis & Nixon, 2014, p. 43), and "*generate communicative power*" (Kemmis & Nixon, 2014, p. 44).

Participant Recruitment

In this *Critical Participatory Action Research*, we implemented the purposeful sampling strategy of "Principles-Focused Sampling" (Patton, 2014). *Principles-focused sampling* seeks participants that currently engage in shared actions/beliefs based on existing principles; the emancipatory epistemology of *Critical Participatory Action Research* (CPAR) reflects the principled purpose of our study. Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon (2014) champion the purpose of educational CPAR:

> In the field of education, there is a constant struggle between the institutions of schooling and practices of education. For every historical era, we must ask, 'Is *this* way of doing schooling educational, or is it non-educational or even anti-educational?...We begin to recognise that, together with other practitioners of the profession, we share a moral, social, political and professional duty for the conduct of the practice of the profession in our time. (p. 79)

Our research collective first converged, in 2022, from our shared concerns regarding

rising authoritarianism in the United States of America. After a year of open dialogue and

critique, we three—Anne Grass, Leo Jalipa, and Connor Maguire—committed ourselves

to conducting anti-fascist *Critical Participatory Action Research* (CPAR) in the St. Louis

educational community and initiated this study in 2023 as its initial participants. We

adhered to the CPAR participant recruitment recommendations of Fine & Torre (2021):

> In critical PAR, researchers think a lot about, who is the *we?*
>
> - *Who holds the vision*: with whom and for whom is the project designed?
>
> - *Coresearchers*: who constitutes the research team?
>
> - *Recruiting an inclusive sample*: who is being interviewed, surveyed,
>   engaged in the inquiry? (p. 348)

Maintaining the expansive ethos of CPAR projects as purposefully "*inclusive and

permeable*" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 41), we continually pursued greater participation in

our CPAR collective and will do so even beyond the conclusion of this dissertation.

    All participation in this CPAR study was voluntary, and all participants retained

their right to withdraw their consent at any point. Any participant data included in this

study is done so with the full knowledge and consent of that particular participant,

assured, as well, through the "synthesized member checking" (Birt et al., 2016) of the

whole CPAR collective.

Data Collection

    Guided by Habermas's theory of *communicative action*, the data, or *evidence*, of a

Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) is derived from the democratic dialectics

of all involved, the *intersubjective agreement*—and action—of the entire research

collective (Fine et al., 2021; Kemmis et al., 2014). In order to coalesce this consensus, "CPAR requires processes that are integral to qualitative inquiry: careful and active listening, critical self-reflexivity; theoretical frameworks porous enough that narratives can be constructed in dialogue; ongoing analyses and negotiations of power, privilege, and vulnerabilities; and courage to offer interpretations of expansive material about living in the world" (Fine & Torre, 2021, p. 21). To catalyze and convey the complexity of intersectional *intersubjective agreement* amongst a plurality of participant positionality, CPAR studies rely on diverse *data collection* methods and ever evolving—emergent— designs. In this study, we utilized a mix of the methods Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2014) suggest for CPAR collective research:

1. diaries, journals, logs, and blogs

2. written records: field notes, anecdotal or running records, event sampling

3. interviews

4. audio and video recording, and photographs

5. dataplay and fotonovela

6. document analysis

7. questionnaires and surveys

8. interaction schedules and checklists (pp. 177-187).

To adapt to the dynamic aims of a CPAR project, we constantly questioned and recalibrated our data collection and analysis methods to more fully catalyze our anti-fascist *communicative action.*

Proposed Praxis Plan

Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) centers the research

community—*the collective*. Through community-based inquiry and action, CPAR seeks to transcend the superficial efforts of any single person to redress retrenched socio-political problems. CPAR connects concerned individuals/practitioners/community members/citizens into a critical collective of diverse perspectives, *communicative action*, and cooperative power, "Community-based action research results not only in a collective vision but also in a sense of community" (Stringer, 2007, p. 13). Since successful CPAR research revolves around community, creating community is where we commenced. Fine & Torre (2021) categorize the coming together of the CPAR community as *the participatory contact zone*:

> When we begin a research project, we usually engage in what McClelland and Fine (2008) called *methodological release points*—that is, methodologies that invite, release, and enable the expression of bold and quiet thoughts, experiences, and affects from a broad range of individuals about the topic of common concern, with the assurance that we are all learning and there are no right answers. (p. 27)

Table 1 shows our *proposed Praxis plan* for the initial phase of our CPAR study. Table 2 and Table 3 show our proceeding plans.

Table 1

Proposed Praxis Plan Part I

→ PARTICIPATORY CONTACT ZONE →		
"The point of departure of the movement lies in the people themselves." –Paulo Freire		
weeks 1-2	*Creating CPAR Community*	→ methodological release point activities
weeks 3-5	*Public Sphere Purpose*	→ investigating collective concern for intersubjective agreement
week 6	*Co-Constructed Communicative Ethics*	→ Acknowledging the existence of structural inequities, as well as our own positionalities within them, how can we engage in equal communication?
Critical Inquiry → *How can* we three *come together in response to a shared concern of macro/micro-fascism in order to better deepen our understanding of it in order to disrupt it?*		

Table 2

Proposed Praxis Plan Part II

→ PROMOTION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE →		
"In a process of enlightenment, there can only be participants." –Jürgen Habermas		
weeks 7-12	*Anti-Fascist Communicative Action*	→ investigating practices and the *practice architectures* that support them (see Appendix A) → identifying a *collective felt concern* (see Appendix B)
Critical Inquiry → *How do we expand into a new permeable public sphere that includes others involved in and affected by our educational practices, with the ultimate hope of building intersubjective agreement around anti-fascist education?*		

Table 3

Proposed Praxis Plan Part III

→ ACTUALIZING ANTI-FASCISM →		
"I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions – a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom." –bell hooks		
weeks 13-15	*Reading Freire and Habermas: Critical Pedagogy and Transformative Social Change* (Morrow & Torres, 2002)	→ activating and analyzing anti-fascist actions
Critical Inquiry → *How can we convey the communicative action of our public sphere into actualized anti-fascism?*		

Researcher Positionality

Critical Participatory Action Research disrupts the anti-dialectical dynamics of traditional scholarship. The participatory *Praxis* of CPAR contests positivist paternalism by pushing the CPAR researcher to cede power and control in order to become an equal participant in the *public sphere*. Radical and reflexive, CPAR refutes the positivist paradigm of passive objectivity in order to embrace the egalitarian engagement of emancipation (Kia-Keating & Juang, 2022; Lawson et al., 2015; Fine & Torre, 2021). CPAR shifts researchers away from the socio-critical sidelines and into the phenomenological fray.

CPAR projects are crafted within *participatory contact zones* (Torre, 2009): spaces where research teams of very differently positioned people bring distinct levels of power, lines of analysis, experience, and forms of expertise, and together

craft research questions and designs, gather and analyze qualitative and

quantitative material, always centering the perspectives of those most impacted by

injustice. (Fine et al., 2021, p. 345)

While in the *participatory contact zone*, our CPAR research required all three of us—

Connor Maguire, Leo Jalipa, and Anne Grass—to interrogate our individual identities

and personal positionalities.

Humbly, we offer our *percolating positionalities*.

Percolating Positionalities: Connor Maguire

August 23rd, 2019, St. Louis City, MO. She was seizing in the middle of the

street. Right there on the ground, in the right south-bound lane of Union Boulevard, just

two short blocks north of where the Hodiamont Tracks swoop briefly south in an elegant,

elongated, backwards *S*. One of my students was kneeling over her, and as the second

ambulance came rolling slowly down the street through the small crowd of high school

students, we waved it down and told the paramedics that there was a girl having a seizure.

They opened the back of the ambulance and lifted her in, and then continued to slowly

move down Union, their sirens joining the dancing lights just a few hundred yards away.

We didn't realize then that the shots we had heard only moments earlier resulted in 3

people dead, two of them young children.

 The drugstore where students were regrouping after being forced off the library

front lawn by the police seemed quickly in danger of bringing in a second police presence

as the manager locked the doors and refused to let anyone in after a group of 12 kids

sprinted out laughing. I didn't ask what happened; I didn't care. After finding and

speaking to all my students an hour ago in front of the library, I was solely focused on

making sure my students who needed rides were able to get one so they could get away

from a situation that had long past become dangerous. After I saw one of my students

into an Uber so he could get home, I began walking back towards my car, back towards

the sirens, and saw that a small crowd had appeared up against police tape that blocked

the road. To my left was another student of mine, K. He introduced me to his older

cousin and when I asked him if he was ok, he laughed and said that this was nothing.

Two years later, as one of my students was weeping in class in response to a part of an

Adrienne Rich poem that moved her—*to hear a mother say she do not have money / to

buy food for her children and to see a child without cloth it will make tears in your eyes. /

(the fracture of order / the repair of speech / to overcome this suffering)* (1971, p. 16)—

she recounted seeing the aftermath of the shooting and meeting K for the first time at the

football game before the shooting, and how that friendship came to a tragic end a few

months later in another shooting that killed K. Violence on violence. Trauma on trauma.

She said, *this is the oppressor's language.* We said, *I know it hurts to burn.*

> *…it will make tears in your eyes…*

March 6, 2024, Context Statement, St. Louis City, MO. I entered my first

teaching job as a student teacher hired on to a full-time position. The building was

transitioning into an Afro-centric school and the principal put out a call during one of our

beginning of the year PDs, any White teacher who wanted to learn how to move in Afro-

centric spaces should look into joining or attending meetings of the solidarity wing of an

Afro-centric socialist party that had a large presence in our city. So I did.

My political ideology and many of my experiences with fascism, racial

capitalism, and colonialism are deeply intertwined with the political education I received

and relationships I formed while working with the Black led socialist organization. Throughout this dissertation process this organization's materialist worldview shaped my thinking, responses, and understandings of how to respond to the fascism I saw unfolding in my school, and, importantly for this research process, led me to be skeptical of any intervention or response to fascism that didn't include an analysis of the material conditions created by racial capitalism or real, material rectifications to the conditions of racial capitalism.

Whiteness has invariably shaped the way I understood fascism and its impact on myself, my teaching, and my students' lives. The leader of the African People's Socialist Party, when confronting the growing talk around fascism coming from white liberals has often made the point that when conditions of oppression began impacting white people, suddenly it was fascism, but when those same conditions are impacting the lives of countless people in Black communities—well that's just life in America. Sitting for an interview with the Black Agenda Report, interviewer Kimberley (2021) wrote up Yeshitela addressing this issue:

> When capitalism turns vicious in its treatment of white people's rights, Europeans and Euro-Americans call it fascism, according to Omali Yeshitela, chairman of the Black is Back Coalition for Social Justice, Peace and Reparations. But "African people live under colonial domination all the time, and this thing" whites "refer to as fascism is simply an example of how colonial capitalism is seeping into the lives and experiences of the colonizers, themselves (para. 1).

So much of the fascism of American life I had remained blind to, despite spending my entire childhood growing up mere miles away from the community I now teach in.

Segregation breeds ignorance. As James Baldwin famously said, "That's what segregation means. You don't know what's happening on the other side of the wall, because you don't want to know" (Peck, 2016, 34:27-34:31). I still live *on the other side of the* wall, and even in my proximity to how racial capitalism hurts and exploits the community I now work in, I will never understand—at a rational or affectual level—the way fascism impacts my students, and I am eternally grateful to them for continuing to educate me, converse with me, show me, and be open with me about their experiences of the all-the-time-colonial-domination of life in America for them.

Percolating Positionalities: Leo Jalipa

May 14, 2022, Anonymous River Yacht Club & Marina, Sunset Hills, MO.
Ok, have fun! <3 Be careful around those rich white ppl. I received this precise text from my wife at 7:07 pm, but by 10 pm I had already made my exit from the rented-out yacht club marina and was heading back home to the city.

As a guest at the private party, I had every intention to celebrate my best friend's millionaire-dentist's 40th birthday all night long. I would be mingling amongst a cross section of affluent St. Louis to which I had little to no exposure, millionaires on a marina. The main selling point for me was the Grateful Dead cover band that was rented to entertain the attendants for the evening. It was in this bizarre context and intersection that counterculture would most assuredly clash with the dominant paradigm, and, judging by the number of cold glances upon arrival in concert with the conspicuously placed Confederate flag at the bar, I, despite my invitation, never felt welcome.

The incident that ultimately spoiled the evening for me involved a middle-aged white man who felt compelled to mockingly call me "Steve Aoki" in front of everyone.

Perhaps the man's need to crack a racial joke in front of all his friends at my expense was his best attempt at greeting a racial minority. For all I know, he honestly likely believed that he was being nice for even considering my existence in *their* space. The truth is that this white man, shrouded in his layers of privilege, believed he was entitled to colonize that space with his beliefs, words, and actions in that moment. My body just happened to be there.

As a person of color, as I'm sure is true with all marginalized identities, there is a split second moment when we have to decide whether or not we are going to take the path of resistance and confront our own oppression in real time or, with a smile on our face, put on the cloak/mask of resilience and pretend that either a) nothing occurred; it was a non-event worthy of disregard or b) this is normal, and it's okay that it happened. All forces pointed me towards movement and eventually towards escape. At that moment I decided to confront the man and say something: *Well, that was racist.* Just like that, my action stirred a reaction. The man became visibly agitated and escalated, for how dare I accuse him of being racist? As his temper and his volume grew, two of his friends must have caught wind and began to flank me. Now backed up with reinforcements, the white man continued to press me:

"Do we have a problem? What's with the attitude?"

As if he was one of my dysregulated students, my only reply was, "I don't know, man. You tell me."

Much more vitriol and gaslighting would be hurled my way. The threat of violence was always present. Luckily, one of my friends reminded me that we could leave, and we left.

Ironically, just before the anti-Asian microaggression that ended my night at the marina was directed at me, comforting yet fleeting feelings of belonging and nostalgia for the Philippines washed over me for a brief moment. Maybe it was the stringed lights against the dark night sky coupled with the lit green foliage of the burgeoning Spring and the water on either side of the dock.

The intuition that my wife's text touched upon about the intersections of class, race, and ideology and how that manifests as (un)safety in physical spaces provided fodder to an already volatile environment. The entanglement of racism, white supremacy, and fascism creates space and harvests moments for potential and real violence where "people of color are viewed in the dominant discourse of white supremacy as being outside of the bounds of justice; their existence occupies a space between invisibility and terminal exclusion" (Evans & Giroux, 2020, p. 201).

The question becomes then: how do I, as an educator within a traditionally and historically institution that upholds white supremacy and is governed by fascistic policy, combat "the unadulterated racism of a culture that looks away in the face of police violence against Black people but also a society in which a form of racialized domestic terrorism has become normalized" (Evans & Giroux, 2020, p. 201)?

August 12, 2023, An Epistolary Context Statement, St. Louis City, MO.

Dear Leo,

You occupy multitudes at your social location; y*ou wear many hats*. Because race is likely the first thing that people tend to recognize about an individual when encountering someone face to face, never forget that you're Asian. In part by your outward appearance, but more so in your experiences of being othered here in this

country. You feel a closer connection to your ethnicity, being a first-generation Filipino-American born just across the river at Scott AFB and raised in South St. Louis to hard-working immigrant parents who were never burdened with the task of self-realization, always in constant struggle with white-centric assimilation. Your mom always said. *Work twice as hard to get half as far.*

You went to private, Catholic schools your whole life, up through high school, but you are not religious, not for a long while now. Sometimes, though, you try to come to terms with your spirituality and what it means to live in this life, in this body. The biggest takeaway from this aspect of your upbringing is not tied to any dogma, however. It is that living a life of service to others is what brings the greatest joys.

Your belief systems largely shape how you navigate this world. Philosophy and politics have been very central to my approach and engagement to everyday life. Politically, you've always been ascribed to anarchism, ever since high school when Andrell, the mother of your son, exposed you to your first punk zines and Crimethinc. As these ideas percolate and mature, you have grown an acute passion for anti-capitalism, class consciousness, anti-racism, anti-fascism, intersectionality, and now, abolitionist teaching. These revolutionary dispositions stem from your years of involvement with community organizing within radical, DIY anarcho-punk culture and communities. You are extremely comfortable with the objective of dismantling systems of oppression using the diversity of various tactics. You are no stranger to the *politics of refusal*.

You have been drawn in/to/into this work as you approach your seventh year as a classroom educator. Remember, you became an educator after already having devoted

almost 20 years of your life to various fronts of social activism; education is now just an extension of this activism and radicalism.

Aware of the threat of Neo-Fascism and the perils that coercive authoritarianism breeds in our daily lives, let alone in the classroom, your desire and newfound task within this Ed.D program and dissertation process through Critical Participatory Action Research is to actively utilize the institution of education to affect social justice in solidarity with other educational practitioners in service of all K-12 scholars pushed against the margins of society. Good luck, and I'll see you along the way.

In service and partnership,

LCJ

Percolating Positionalities: Anne Grass

The fear in my mind is a warning.

–Tems, *Free Mind*

10:47pm, November 2, 2020, St. Louis City, MO. I type into Google, *what do I do if there is an armed militia at my polling place?* According to the ACLU post I read, "KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: VOTER INTIMIDATION,"

Federal law says that 'no person shall intimidate, threaten, coerce any other person for the purpose of interfering with the right of [that] person to vote or to vote as he may choose.

I cringe. *If only that were true.*

9:41am, January 7, 2021, Delmar Divide, St. Louis City, MO. Attempting to process the apocalyptic hypocrisy of the previous day with my sophomore English class—*at an HBCU-modeled high school promoting Black Excellence*—I project the

painful side by side photo comparisons of yesterday's capitol insurrectionists and

months-earlier BLM protesters.

> **Me**: What do you see?

> **My Students**: *If that was us, we'd be dead.*

Figure 1
What the F?

1:09am, January 9, 2021, St. Louis City, MO. Because my inner teacher can't

help but hope that somehow knowledge is still power, I cannot stop reading the news,

irrationally convinced that I can *inform myself* into control, when an op-ed in *The*

Guardian adrenalizes my anxiety, "A return to civility will not begin to quell the threat of

fascism in the US" (Seymour, 2021, January 8):

Fascism does not arrive on the scene with full uniform and programme. The Jewish socialist Arthur Rosenberg traced the origins of fascism as a mass movement to the period before the first world war, when millions were already infected by *volkisch*, racial-nationalist ideology, and by contempt for democratic government. It consolidates through experimentation, learning the ropes through episodes that, at first, appear amateurish and thuggish, from the beer hall (Munich) putsch to the demolition of the Babri Masjid. First as farce, then as tragedy…Trumpism is not an aberration, but a mass phenomenon…To hope that Joe Biden can defuse this by restoring civility and bipartisanship to Washington would be unforgivably complacent. The United States, and not just the United States, urgently needs an anti-fascist movement. We have not begun to see the end of this. (para. 6)

Seymour unveils the feeling I can't shake, articulates the dread I cannot read away.

Fascism.

12:45pm, June 8, 2022, Omaha, NE, Visiting a Lifelong Friend.

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—

Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.

—Martin Niemöller, *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*

DEAR ME, wow, *AG*, sounding pretty politically edgy, *but, let's be real*. What do these three moments miss? *All of the other days, months, and years of my White-lady life that my privilege permitted my indifference* (see Figure 2).

Figure 2
Everyday Evil

But, seriously—*apolitical to anti-fascist*—what's the story there? *The story, admittedly, is a story I'm still learning how to tell.* And that's okay. Be honest. Be patient. Be open. *Is the truest story not a question*?

Who am I?

Who do I want to be?

What do I question?

What do I believe (Rose, 1997)?

CONVENING THE COUNTER-CONVERSATION

This year, the principal of the Africentric St. Louis high school where I teach, reconnected our community to the concept of *Ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* arises from a *Zulu* saying that Archbishop Desmond Tutu signifies as *a person is a person through other people*. Relationality births being.

My name is Anne Grass. *I want to be a person through other people, and I want other persons to be people through me*. But how? *And with whom?* As an overeducated-38-year-old-White-woman-infected-with-Western-individualism, *where can I seek solidarity?*

March 13, 2024, An Epistolary Context Statement, St. Louis City, MO.

Nobody's free until everybody's free.

–Fannie Lou Hamer, *National Women's Political Caucus*

More and more aware of the limitations and liabilities of my own privilege, I came to this research in search of a critical community. Like Habermas before me, *I came to this research wanting to believe that even I*—as a White woman of relative economic stability and extreme educational privilege could seek out solidarity—*could commit to the collective struggle of liberation.* Through the enduring efforts of so many people I will never personally know, I came to this research, humbled and hungry—*radically requesting the right to be a person, to participate in education as the practice of freedom.* Thank you to every student, teacher, community, mentor, transgressive and artist who alighted my way here—***to hope***—even in hardness.

Any wisdom shared, herewithin, my students co-witnessed, co-cogitated, and co-wrangled, and I credit all of my students—past, present, and future—for the proffered

possibilities of this project. *You are always in my head and heart.* Thank you. *Thank you for making space for me.* You are my best and beloved teachers. **I am because we are.**

Percolating Positionalities: We Three

We met today on May Day, May 1, 2023, and dared to ask. *What do we actually want to study?* What do we want to do? *What do we—the people—believe—as the people—is possible?* Amidst our Post-It points and possibilities, Connor cuts in with a question.

> **Connor**: So, do y'all watch Anime? I've been listening to this song, "Flower of Blood" by Big Thief (check it out), and, at the end, she, barely audibly, sings, *surrender your power.* Every time I hear that line, I picture an anime-like scene where some superpowered hero makes the choice, usually for the greater good, to sacrifice their power and give it to someone else. You can see their power flowing out of them and into someone else. *And it's that simple.* They just had to make the choice. *But, in the real world, how do we actually surrender our power?* What's the non-Anime version of this look like? (2023, May 1)

Can a critical, compassionate, collaborative classroom in the United States of America be conceptualized as more than a cartoon creation?

Findings

Evolution of Research Methods

> As a living creature I am part of two kinds of forces—growth and decay,
> sprouting and withering, living and dying—and at any given moment of our lives,
> each one of us is actively located somewhere along a continuum between these
> two forces.
>
> —Audre Lorde, *A Burst of Light*

As a research collective of English teachers, we frequently find ourselves talking about the writing process, but rarely do we reflect on what it means to approach writing as *a process*, or, perhaps, even more pertinently, as *in process*. What possibilities might materialize if we were to perceive writing—or anything for that matter—as *in-process?* Typically, when writing becomes published, *the process* is seen as *finished*, the writing as *final*. When writing research, conventional editing standards excise the emergent, deleting the undelineated, the *official record* redacts the reflexive revolutions of writing, of representation, of reality. In this dissertation, however, we wanted to lay bare the iteratively imperfect, *in-process*, nature of our research at every stage—the planning stage, the investigation stage, the analysis stage, and the writing/publication stage. Even here, this clear, delineative language, of truncated *stages,* separating planning from investigation from analysis from writing, obscures the very real, *in-process,* reconfigurations of our research as we frequently flowed back-and-forth, to-and-fro, and everywhere in-between. As tends to be the case with *Critical Participatory Action Research*, our overall project—its questions, scope, and methods—changed over the

course of 2023 and 2024, and, although we documented our best laid plans in Chapter 3, *the following is what actually unfolded.*

The first major deviation from our planned methodology was the move *to not* bring other people into the research process. We struggled with this decision, wanting to expand our public sphere to others, recognizing the importance of including other voices and perspectives, while we ran into time constraints. Ultimately, we decided that after reading, discussing, and reflecting for over a year together, it would be best for us to consider the knowledge we had co-constructed over our time together, and then, later, move to include others. Reverberating CPAR reflexivity, we, once again, found ourselves asking—*are we three enough?* This time around—*we chose to trust*—at this moment—*in our process*—at this point—*in-process*—yes—*we are enough.* **CPAR set us free from what should be to become what could be**; we realized our collective intention to create, and participate in, *a **counter-public-sphere** alive with actuated autonomy, intersectional intelligence, collective cooperation, and democratic development.*

In late October (see Appendix C), we began recording some of our meetings, and, by late November, we made the decision to record all our meetings together. The transcripts from these recordings ended up becoming the basis of the data we would analyze, along with teacher-practitioner journals, reflective writings, photographs, mind-maps, our own teaching artifacts, our CPAR collective text thread, reflections on postings to a closed Facebook group of similarly minded Ed.D. teacher-scholars—in sum—the totality of our lives for this past year. *We brought everything to the table,* reflected on everything, discussed everything. We collectively tried to weave meaning—*and solidarity*—out of the frequently fragmented occurrences of our lives (see Table 4).

Table 4

Evidence Sources

total CPAR Interaction Time *March 2023—March 2024*		Meeting Recordings (*time in minutes*)		Meeting Transcripts (*# evidence sources*)	
9,079 *minutes of CPAR interactions*		**3,369** *minutes collected*	**2,021** *minutes analyzed*	**25** *sources collected*	**25** *sources analyzed*
Meeting Agendas/Plans (*# evidence sources*)		Mapping/Notes_*photos* (*# evidence sources*)		Mapping/Notes *artifacts* (*# evidence sources*)	
11 *sources collected*	**11** *sources analyzed*	**8** *sources collected*	**8** *sources analyzed*	**31** *sources collected*	**15** *sources analyzed*
Collaborative Cataloging + Dataplay (*# evidence sources*)		Document Analysis (*# evidence sources*)		*participant-created* CPAR Materials (*# evidence sources*)	
17 *sources collected*	**12** *sources analyzed*	**12** *sources collected*	**7** *sources analyzed*	**15** *sources collected*	**9** *sources analyzed*
Monthly Calendars + Timelines (*# evidence sources*)		*Participant* Research Journals + *CPAR Collective* Text Thread (*source details/date range*)			
14 *sources collected*	**14** *sources analyzed*	*Connor's* **Research Journal** (digital)	*Leo's* **Research Journal** (digital)	*Anne's* **Research Journal** (artifact)	*CPAR Collective* **Text Thread**
		March 2023-March 2024			

Honoring the horizontal heuristics of CPAR, we collected all our evidence sources into a *shared space* so that *we would all have equal access to everything.* We then created a data organization log to share and keep track of everything we were planning to analyze as evidence for our research. As we began to collectively compile our sources, the dialectical nature of this data reminded us to revisit our key research regarding the real-time realities of fascism (Evans & Giroux, 2020; Giroux, 2023; Toscano, 2023) and revise our co-constructed questions and findings in conversation with our concursively current understandings of fascism and anti-fascist countering.

By mid-December 2023, guided by the intersectional, *in-process*, iterative intelligence of CPAR, we once again allowed ourselves—*to stop*—to take the time to—*reconnect, relate, reflect*—reflexively reconstitute—*what do we want to do*? How do we want to write this? *What is our participatory purpose?* Intentionally piercing the positivist pressures of academic research through reflexive relationality, we foregrounded the unfettered fluidity of following our own dialectical research desires rather than forcing ourselves to regress into some former, yet paradoxically purported as positively final, methodological pronouncement we posited more than a year past. ***We allowed ourselves to be in-process.*** We deepened our existing research questions and asked:

1. If fascism fragments, what does anti-fascism do?
2. Considering power and positionality in the public sphere, how do we create the conditions for solidarity?
3. How can CPAR activate education as the practice of freedom?
4. What is the connection/relationship between CPAR, Communicative Action, and Anti-fascism?

CONVENING THE COUNTER-CONVERSATION

To further explore the iterations of our questions and processes, we collectively revisited our methodology and deliberated on the dynamic direction of our dialectics. From these discursive discussions, we decided upon an *inductive analytical approach*, coding our transcripts first and then moving from those *codes to broader themes* (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We coded some transcripts together and some on our own, always coming back together to share and sort the codes collectively.

We then spent the rest of December 2023 to January 2024 recursively reading through our evidence, highlighting important details and repetitions we were finding within and across data sources (Hays & Singh, 2012) and sharing and discussing what we were noticing. We then felt we were ready to move to a *thematic analysis* (Braun & Clarke, 2006) given the similarities we were finding across the data sources we were analyzing. In February 2024, we began our *thematic analysis* and two overarching themes quickly emerged:

1. the maneuverings and impacts of fascism

2. the potential for resistance.

This basic framework of—*problem*—***counter***—became the structure through which we decided to sort our data. Within this framework we identified two *problem* themes:

1. Fragmentation and Disenfranchisement

2. Standardization, Technocracy, and Control.

We also identified two ***counter*** themes:

1. Criticality and Affective Alter-shocks

2. Solidarity.

Additionally, we discovered a comprehensive, ***counter***, theme—**process**.

After analyzing and describing the themes we found across our data, we continued our consensus-based-knowledge-creation process by discussing, deliberating, and continuing our reading to determine how best to write up and share our findings. We landed on a *collaborative autoethnographic* (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2017; Norris & Sawyer, 2012), *polyvocal* (Ortega, Passi, dela Cruz, Nii Owoo, Cale, & Sarkar, 2023) approach to sharing our findings around the five main themes we identified, as we found this best honored our individual experiences and perspectives while also conveying the collectivity of our CPAR community's ever-evolving understanding of these themes.

Structure of our findings: Necrophily, Biophily and Interconnecting Process

We name each of the themes within the two oppositional groupings of *Fascist Necrophily* or *Anti-fascist Biophily*, honoring the construction of these findings in lineage with Paulo Freire and Freire's own contemporary, and Frankfurt School scholar, Eric Fromm. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Freire (1970/2006) draws a deep connection between the way we do education, what he terms the *banking model of education* and Fromm's analysis of *necrophily* and *biophily*. Freire (1970/2006) writes, "Because banking education begins with a false understanding of men and women as objects, it cannot promote the development of what Fromm calls 'biophily' but instead produces its opposite: 'necrophily'" (p. 77). Freire then goes on to quote Fromm (1964) extensively, explaining just what *necrophily* is and how it operates, "the necrophilous person loves all that does not grow, all that is mechanical. The necrophilous person is driven by the desire to transform the organic into the inorganic, to approach life mechanically, as if all living persons were things" (p. 41). In Freire's connecting the *banking model of education* to Fromm's description of *necrophily,* we found the best articulation of how fascism

operates within educational spaces—to love and worship death, to want to keep all things static, controlled, inorganic, lifeless, to deny the humanity of the people in the room and instead privilege the inorganic pacing guide, the mechanical curriculum, the mechanistic drive to a standard—*Fascist Necrophily*. Freire (1970/2006) sums it up most aptly:

> The banking concept of education, which serves the interests of oppression, is also necrophilic. Based on a mechanistic, static, naturalistic, spatialized view of consciousness, it transforms students into receiving objects. It attempts to control thinking and action, leads women and men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power. (p. 77)

But we have a counter—all things biophilic. If the love of death best encapsulates the problems we are facing with fascism in education, then the love of life best encapsulates its counter. *Anti-fascist Biophily* is the term we use to share the actions and approaches we found to be rooted in a love of life that runs counter to the oppressive, necrophilous, nature of so many educational spaces today. Our first four themes alternate between *problem* and *counter*, culminating into our fifth and final, *all-encompassing counter* theme (see Figure 3):

1. **Fascist Necrophily I** (problem)

    i. *Fragmentation and Disenfranchisement*

2. **Anti-fascist Biophily I** (counter)

    i. *Criticality and Affective Alter-shocks*

3. **Fascist Necrophily II** (problem)

    i. *Standardization, Technocracy, and Control*

4. **Anti-fascist Biophily II** (counter)

> > i. *Solidarity and Collective Action*

> 5. **Anti-fascist Biophily III** (counter)

> > i. *Process*

Figure 3

Our Findings
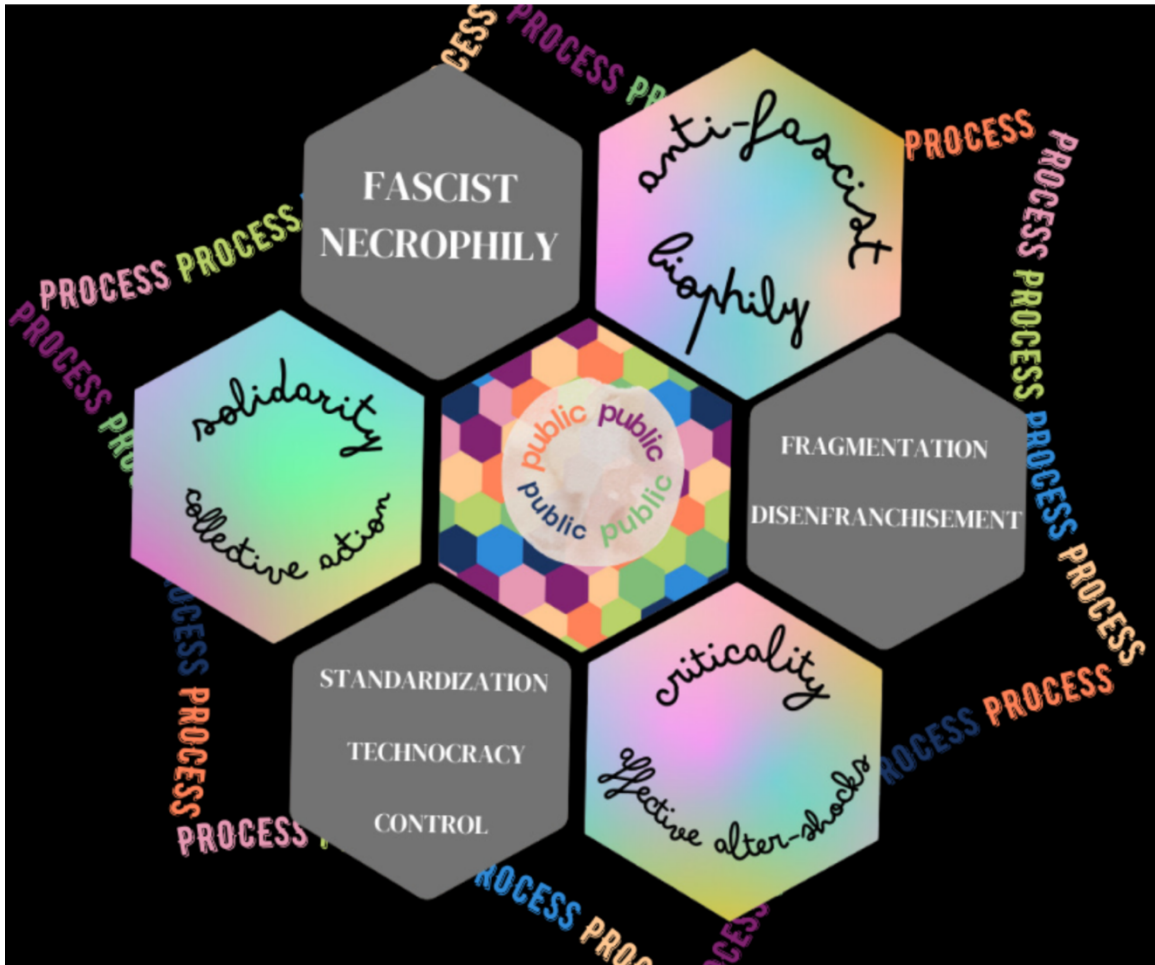
This structure was chosen for readability and is not meant to imply that the theme

explored in *Anti-fascist Biophily I* can counter *only* the theme in *Fascist Necrophily I.* In

fact, it is our belief that each of the themes explored under the heading of *Anti-fascist*

Biophily can help counter all manifestations of *Fascist Necrophily*. These clean

delineations between *Fascist Necrophily I* and *Fascist Necrophily II* are also not meant to

imply that they operate separately or independently of each other. As will be further

explored in each of the following sections, there is a great deal of fluidity and overlap

between the *fragmentation*, *disenfranchisement*, *standardization*, *technocracy*, and

control exhibited by *Fascist Necrophily*, just as there is a great deal of fluidity and

overlap between the two *Anti-fascist Biophily* themes we found: *criticality and affective*

alter-shocks and *solidarity*. The fluidity and processed-based nature of how these themes

interact became central to our understanding of how both fascism and anti-fascism

operate in education, hence, concluding our findings with the penultimate CPAR theme

of *Process*.

Reading our findings, you will find: the five aforementioned themes, an

introduction for each theme centered around excerpts from a transcript of one of our

meetings where we discussed that particular theme, and, lastly, a *polyvocal* exploration of

these themes by all three participants of our CPAR *research collective* where we share

our unique insights into these themes given our own *positionalities*, experiences, and

politics.

Emergent Design Darings

Anyone can fly, all you need is somewhere to go you can't get to any other way.

—Faith Ringgold, *Tar Beach*

When we first discovered *Critical Participatory Action Research* (CPAR), we

noticed—*we wondered*—how in the world would the writing happen? How would we

write a paper about a process—*that is always in process?* How would we defend the

intentional surrendering of the definitive? The more we participated in—*and practiced*—

CPAR the more we began to trust ourselves to *live* into learning—*unrestricted learning*.

In short, we dared. But we didn't dare alone. *Courage is a quilt.* The emerging graphic

designs you encounter throughout our dissertation celebrate the collectivities that taught us to quilt—*to counter*—to create. Just like we weaved together our polyvocal perspectives, *these designs center the quilt*—as both form and function—*to visually echo the interconnectedness of our iterative study as well as our participatory positionalities in the pursuit of educational freedom*. Particularly, Faith Ringgold's story quilts— alongside local St. Louis art–*ivist*, De Nichols, and her public-facing art project, "Sticky Note to Self—Social Justice, Identity, and Action"—inspired the design's concursive quilting of quotes. Riffing on the resplendent legacy of quilting within the African-American community, these graphics humbly attempt to honor the non-hierarchical, ingenious improvisation, innovation and jazz genius of these artists:

> American quilts elsewhere generally esteem perfection. Chance and improvisation seem to be operating principles here, the beauty deriving from inconsistencies played off against hierarchical form… The best of these designs, unusually minimalist and spare, are so eye-poppingly gorgeous that it's hard to know how to begin to account for them. But then, good art can never be fully accounted for, just described. (Kimmelman, 2002, November 29, para. 6)

The same can be said for CPAR, in that, CPAR is defined by what it defies to define, which is why so many CPAR studies *embrace art* in its antithetical*, anti-fascist,* ethos of organic openness—*adaptive magnanimity*—creative countering (Lozenski, 2016).

> *Art*—like CPAR—*is the embodied experiment of freedom.*

Fascist Necrophily I: Fragmentation and Disenfranchisement

> We live in the world… the whole world. Separating us, isolating us, that's always been their weapon*. Isolation kills generations.*

—Toni Morrison, *Paradise*

Our *Critical Participatory Action Research* study started with a *stop*. Two years ago, during our social justice cohort's collaborative dissertation proposal process, the three of us—Anne, Connor, and Leo—stopped. What is happening here? *Where did the political perspectives go?* Why did dissertation-doing collapse our cohort's intersectional critiques into singular topic silos? *What is happening here?* And why is it so difficult to try and name what's happening day to day? *Is what we're seeing—inside and outside the classroom—fascism?*

> **Connor**: One of the major limitations of education being the practice of freedom is fragmentation and disenfranchisement.
>
> **Leo**: *Am I the only teacher EYE-ROLLING, here?* With all the eye-rolling going on in our schools, how can anyone even be seen?
>
> **Anne**: *YES!* And if you're not seen, you're certainly not heard. *And no one knows the stifling of that silencing more than our students.* They say to us over and over again that nothing they do matters, so why try?
>
> **Connor**: Why care about the community when the community doesn't care about you? There's no point. *You're on your own.*
>
> **Leo**: *What is the counter to disembodied education*? What is the counter to fragmentation?
>
> **Anne**: *If fascism fragments, what does anti-fascism do?*
>
> **Connor**: How can we three–Anne Grass, Leo Jalipa, and Connor Maguire– converge our shared concerns of mounting macro/micro-fascism into researched resistance?

Leo: *And what say you, comrades?* How are your educational experiences? Catch yourself eye-rolling in a recent staff meeting? *WE GOT YOU!* (2024, January 21)

Fascism fragments us from life-giving forces. The first pattern, or repeated theme, we noticed in our research process catalyzed from a Paulo Freire quote (see Figure 4). In this quote, Freire (1970/2006) is speaking directly to the problem of authoritarian schools/society. Oppression–*fascism*–stifles the spirit and separates us from ourselves and each other.

Disconnections devolve into disenfranchisement. Our second finding directly relates to the first. In fascism, we are silo-ed in what seems to be our insurmountable struggles. Separated from the source of our power–each other–our problems morph into amorphous inevitabilities. Instead of doing, we dread. As Leo points out, we complain when we need to critique.

The system is not set up for you to care. Fascism, as a pathological need for power, intentionally enfeebles us. *The game is rigged for us to give up and grind on with the world as it is.* Equality and hierarchy don't go together.

Figure 4

Fascist Necrophily I

DECAY	DISCONNECTED	DISEMBODIED	DISCOURAGED	DESPAIR
DISILLUSIONED	DISENFRANCHISED	UNSEEN	UNSUPPORTED	BLAH

Because banking education begins with a false understanding of men and women as objects, it cannot promote the development of what Fromm calls "biophily," but instead produces its opposite: "necrophily."

WHILE LIFE IS CHARACTERIZED BY GROWTH IN A STRUCTURED, FUNCTIONAL MANNER, THE NECROPHILIOUS PERSON LOVES ALL THAT DOES NOT GROW, ALL THAT IS MECHANICAL . . . TO APPROACH LIFE MECHANICALLY, AS IF ALL LIVING PERSONS WERE THINGS . . . HE LOVES CONTROL, AND IN THE ACT OF CONTROLLING HE KILLS LIFE.

Oppression—overwhelming control—is necrophilic; it is nourished by love of death, not life. The banking concept of education, which serves the interests of oppression, is also necrophilic. Based on a mechanistic, static, naturalistic, spatialized view of consciousness, it transforms students into receiving objects. It attempts to control thinking and action, leads women and men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power...Education as the exercise of domination stimulates the credulity of students, with the ideological intent (often not perceived by educators) of indoctrinating them to adapt to the world of oppression.   ~Paulo Freire

FEAR	FRAGMENTATION	EXHAUSTION	ZOMBIE-MODE	APATHY

60

Connor: Focus on What You Can Control

> I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I
> cannot accept.

<div align="right">

—Angela Davis, *public talk*, 2022

</div>

One of the most common pieces of advice I received in my first two years of teaching was some variation of the refrain *focus on what you can control*. As in you can't control the level of skills or knowledge the students have when they reach your class, so focus on what scaffolds or supports you can give them. Sound enough advice for any teacher. But I found that often this advice would slip into other concerns—concerns about resources and time allocations, about standards and expectations we were told students must meet, about what we value and who we value. So, questions about why our building was lacking a literacy specialist when the district had promised that a literacy specialist would be embedded in every school were met with the same response—*focus on what you can control*. Never mind that the same district officials who made those promises, who failed to fulfill those promises, were the same officials saying that our students were *below basic*, needed to be placed in *intervention* courses, and then failing to staff those courses with teachers who had the training to deliver literacy interventions. Questions about the validity of the way we were testing and measuring standards and student skills, about the overreliance on standardized *reading level* tests and the complete silencing of any teacher knowledge or judgment when it came to evaluating what *level* their students were at, was also invariably met with that same refrain out—*focus on what you can control.* And when questions were raised about how resources were allocated, how kids were pushed out—*focus on what you can control.*

Leaving aside problems with the word *control,* the idea of f*ocusing on what you can control* quickly became shorthand for accepting that we as teachers have no power, no say, no input on the conditions surrounding our own teaching nor our students learning or development; it was the secular serenity prayer but without the hope for the courage to change what we can or the belief that we, as teachers, could have the wisdom to know what can in fact be changed. Acceptance became my mantra—acceptance of disinvestment, acceptance of the devaluing of my students, acceptance of deficit narratives around my students, acceptance of a white supremacist society that refused to see my students as anything other than *deficient*—acceptance of decay, degradation, death. *Acceptance.* Angela Davis was entirely missing from the conversation—nowhere was the idea of—*I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept.* We were meant to keep things fragmented, not ask questions, not pull the pieces together of disinvestment and deficit narratives. We were meant to be entirely disenfranchised, to never push for anything supposedly outside of our control, to simply accept conditions as they were.

Leo: Surveillance Makes for Sick Days Guaranteed

Disconnection is often equated with social rejection, social exclusion, and/or social isolation.

—Brené Brown, *Brené Brown: Atlas of the Heart*

Anne: It's the total stagnation of just letting them... punch you in the face day after day after day and never say, *STOP*.

Leo: I'm also just trying to forecast the different positionalities, how I think that teachers would react to different possibilities in that space. I mean, it's a short

meeting that's only like 30 minutes, but it's the only time that all eight of us can meet at the same time once a week...

Connor: Did you all, at the start of the year, did admin ever say at any point, a*lright, guys, we're meeting 30 minutes every week. What do we want to be meeting about? What do we want to be talking about*? Did they ever ask that? Why do we have to meet with them every week? (2023, November 1)

For some, the jump to name the normalcy and regularity with which we navigate these techno-mediated exchanges as fascism may be a stretch, but as Giroux (2023) suggests: "Fascism is not an abstract idea that is permanently located in the past, it is a definable set of attributes that people[...] know how to exploit and magnify" (p. 4). For others, it may not be so far-fetched that "many leftists, liberals, and even some conservatives have reached for the fascist label" (Toscano, 2023, p. ix), especially as we face "the worldwide proliferation, consolidation, and ascendancy of far-right political movements, regimes, and mindsets" (Toscano, 2023, p. ix). Anyone who seeks to name these conditions as mechanisms of fascism is quickly discredited if not demonized. For example, anti-fascism, instead of simply being the counter-ideology and strategy against fascism, has achieved boogeyman status as *antifa*—an imaginary, nonexistent organization. Undoubtedly reactionary, fascism wishes to eliminate "those protecting spaces that enable individuals to question, think, analyze, and hold power accountable" (Giroux, 2023, p. 12). This is similar to the notion that fascism takes "fundamentally a counter-revolutionary form, manifesting in the violence with which it meets any substantive threat to the integrity of the state" (Toscano, 2023, p. 33). In addition to the threat of pushback, punishment, or violence, why is it so difficult for some to name it?

How do we begin making the necessary connections between all of the dread of the world and in the news to what's happening in our school buildings?

At my own school, I've been trying to be hyper aware of the problem of micro-fascism this school year in ways that I may not have been before. This resounds from an assumption that many teachers, much like myself, withstand constant *eye roll moments* throughout their time in educational spaces; it's those times when we may feel overwhelmed by a feeling of powerlessness, feeling trapped in cycles of dehumanization and disenfranchisement. As teachers, we all have these moments, and they add up after a while, one after the other. There have been countless times when I find myself sharing workspace with colleagues, and we use the time and space to air our grievances of the day/week/month/year and complain about our *individual* experiences. Perhaps for many, these "social and systemic problems appear disconnected, individualized" (Giroux, 2023, p. 1) until we reclaim the time and space to move from helpless complaints toward critical self-reflection and communicative dialogue with others. There is a crucial urgency to be in dialogue with others who are also adversely affected by the *micro* and *macro* fascisms of the educational institution. As Giroux (2023) explains:

> The refusal to acknowledge that fascism can appear in many forms—often lying dormant in a society until the emergence of certain forces unleash it—reinforces the willingness of many to retreat into silence or ignore the seriousness of the emerging fascist threat. (p. 4)

Needless to say, we all—individually *and* collectively—have a lot on our plates. On any given day we might have to deal with a hundred different unnecessary obstacles or illogical hurdles that we're forced to navigate, making our job almost impossible. Most of

the time these obstacles have little to do with the kids at all. As a matter of fact, I would argue that the kids are the *best* part of the job. They are the reason I get out of bed each morning. And when I decided to join the profession, it was to serve *them*, not the standardized tests, behavior mod strategies, new scholastic initiatives, forced curriculums, and certainly not the admins who push all of the above. When I enter my building each morning, I'm there to serve the kids. However, the authoritarian hierarchies (including but not limited to the state apparatus) certainly force me to occasionally question my vocational choice to enter education every so often. I am certainly not the only one. There are already several colleagues who told me in confidence that they are not returning next year. I wonder, given these conditions, can learning even take place? And if so, what gets in the way of learning?

School. School is what gets in the way of learning.

Upon closer inspection of the manifestations of educational fascism, the institution of education emerges as one of capital and the state's most vital institutions. As suggested:

> The formal institutions of education tend to be premised upon domination and do not serve the interests of students or learners but rather those of elites [..., and] the American education system trains students for ends determined by the dominant social system, not the students' own interests. (Hawthorne & Elmore, 2017, p. 155)

Thus, it is clear why education has also always been an arena of focus centered within critical discourses for the advancement of more radical sociopolitical philosophies and

pedagogical approaches, but also as a site that plays a pivotal role for the advancement of the people or their oppression.

As educators we have to ask ourselves, *what the heck is really going on here*? How do we begin to approach "the urgent challenge of diagnosing the morbid symptoms that populate our present" (Toscano, 2023, p. ix)? Perhaps what makes this question so difficult to address is that "the long arc of systemic violence is rarely presented[...] in ways that connect it to a broader fascist project of disposability" (Giroux, 2023, p. 3). Maybe we need to start seriously contextualizing the intersubjective relationship between all those hundred different challenges and obstacles mentioned earlier and consider the mechanisms churning just below the surface. Where does the hesitancy in naming it originate?

What makes fascism such a perplexing phenomenon is the fact that it "thrives on the language of dehumanization, bolstered by a politics of disconnection" (Giroux, 2023, p. 12). Little by little we relinquish our humanity to its authority and inevitable violence. All the numerous individual collapses of autonomy seem bearable until all of a sudden, we find ourselves flattened with little capacity for criticality. In fact, "engaged and informed critiques and critical institutions that support a strong democracy are viewed with contempt" (Giroux, 2023, p. 2) under fascism. Therefore, we allow fascism to proliferate when the harms and damage done (local and social) are "decontextualized [...], treated as isolated issues, and as such [illustrating] the hegemonic power of a politics of disconnection" (Giroux, 2023, p. 5). Considering the interconnectedness of fascism as it percolates in my local educational context, I inspected a few of these *eye-roll moments* in

an attempt to string them together to expose "the landscape of disconnections and the fascist conjuncture it supports" (Giroux, 2023, p. 5).

One such moment occurred when I received an email from HR stating that they wanted *to bring awareness* to a sick day that I had taken two days prior, which just so happened to be on a full day of professional development. I was definitely not the only one to have received such an email. One colleague of mine received a similar email while on bereavement, while another received one for *taking more days off than usual*. On the surface, these kinds of *Big Brother is watching* emails are just another eye drop lost in a sea of eye-rolls. However, the context of the emails in relationship to each other shows a concerted effort of surveillance. The irony is not lost when considering that the PD on that particular day I was sick covered: 1) Swivl, the newly mandated surveillance technology; 2) an active shooter training.

When we ask more questions—*inquiry*—through a critical lens, we come to different, more frightening conclusions. Could it be possible that something as seemingly trivial as an email is a symptom of more nefarious systems and structures at play?

Upon closer inspection, the aforementioned surveillance technologies are another example of the accumulation of collapsing freedom and autonomy. This year we have implemented two new surveillance-oriented administrative mandates. One is a digital hall pass system and the other is video recording technology with the intent to record teachers in practice to be shared and uploaded to an online cloud. The language of *safety, engagement, reflective practice,* etc. is distorted and rebranded into a logic and grammar of oppression.

Leo: It's not just the KIDaccount; it's also the Swivl. It's also metal detectors. It's one little thing plus this other thing, plus this other thing, and it's that trajectory of fascism. We get so used to the little things we're desensitized to, that the bigger picture, when you actually take a step away, is not, in fact, fragmented. It's not in isolation. *It's contextual.* (2023, December 2)

Anne: The System Is Not Set Up for You to Care

There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.

—Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*

If you looked at my resume, you would laugh. Who is this woman? *Teacher?* School bus driver? Farmer? Administrator? Writer? Caregiver? Social worker? Student? Teacher? *If you've left education that many times, can you really call yourself a teacher?* I became a teacher for the first time in 2008, and I left teaching for the first time in 2012. In the sixteen years since daring to deem to educate, my resume only boasts of eight years full-time teaching. *Teaching takes everything you have.* If you're a teacher, I trust you understand. *But what happens when you have nothing left?* As a Jesuit-educated educator who has read Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* far more times than years I've managed to teach, this isn't my first rodeo of reckoning with retention. My teaching career started in a school that hemorrhaged more than half of its teachers by the end of every May, and, even, at one point, somehow suffered the loss of six principals in five years. *We were bleeding people.* Surely, that struck someone, somewhere as shady, right? Surely, someone, somewhere cared. *I cared.* I cared-and-cared-and-cared because every student deserves a teacher that cares—*until I couldn't care*—and then quit—*because*

every student deserves a teacher that cares. Even more than that, through this Critical

Participatory Action Research, I've come to realize that every teacher—*also*—deserves a

school—a society—that cares.

        But the system is not set up for you to care.

        The last time I decided to become a teacher, in August of 2020, in the early days

of *COVID-19*, I came back to the classroom with something more than just care. Months

earlier, my spring break from the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis

began and never ended. I entered that break—*broken*—as a second-semester Master's of

Social Work student heartbroken by the faux progressivism of neoliberal social work.

Where were the transgressive troublemakers? Although the National Association of

Social Workers' (2021) Code of Ethics promises, "Fundamental to social work is

attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in

living. Social workers promote social justice and social change with and on behalf of

clients" (para. 1), in reality, however, prevailing social work pedagogy focuses almost

exclusively on individual—*client*—practice. As social work students, we were being

trained to intervene in the lives of individuals—*as individuals*—singularly socialized into

the silo-ed silence of the status quo—we paid for the privilege to become professionally

certified to sanction a(n) (anti-)social system that dehumanizes and disconnects. The

shadows of social work consumed me. *Disillusioned in the darkness of*

disenfranchisement, I doubted the possibility of turning on the light.

        Thanks to the universe, I met my *MSW*. mentor, Professor Jack Kirkland—my

school's only social work professor who was not actually a licensed social worker but

rather a Civil Rights strategist, East St. Louis leader, and avowed anti-institutional

rebel—just when I needed him most. In January of 2020, Professor Kirkland hosted me and twelve other social work students for a week-long, East St. Louis immersion course, *Poverty: The Impact of Institutionalized Racism*. The course kicked off in a church and culminated in a block-party barbeque. From glitter and sway at St. Paul's Baptist Church to Goldfish and Jenga at the Griffith Home to the neighborhood mom's magical bucket of beans that feeds everybody—*abundance radiated*—exposing me, for the first time in my social work studies, to the spirit and power of real social work. Professor Kirkland dispelled the M.S.W. myth of *individual* woke-ness by introducing my classmates and I to the community-based, empowering practices of Black social workers, past and present, participating in the undeterred struggle of Black Liberation to seek social justice for all. I learned the *Critical Race Theory* concept of *counter-narrative* by living it.

In *Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching*, Givens (2022) creates a *counter-narrative* of fugitive pedagogy centered around teacher-activist Carter G. Woodson while all the while celebrating the collective educational efforts of the entire Black community who always understood that education and freedom were "inextricably bound …Black people appropriated schooling in service of their freedom dreams" (34:33). *Professor Kirkland.*

Professor Kirkland taught me fugitive pedagogy, "part of a more expansive plot against the current configuration of the modern world," (Givens, 2022, 35:07) *and, in doing so, showed me how to turn on the light* (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Intersectional Intervention
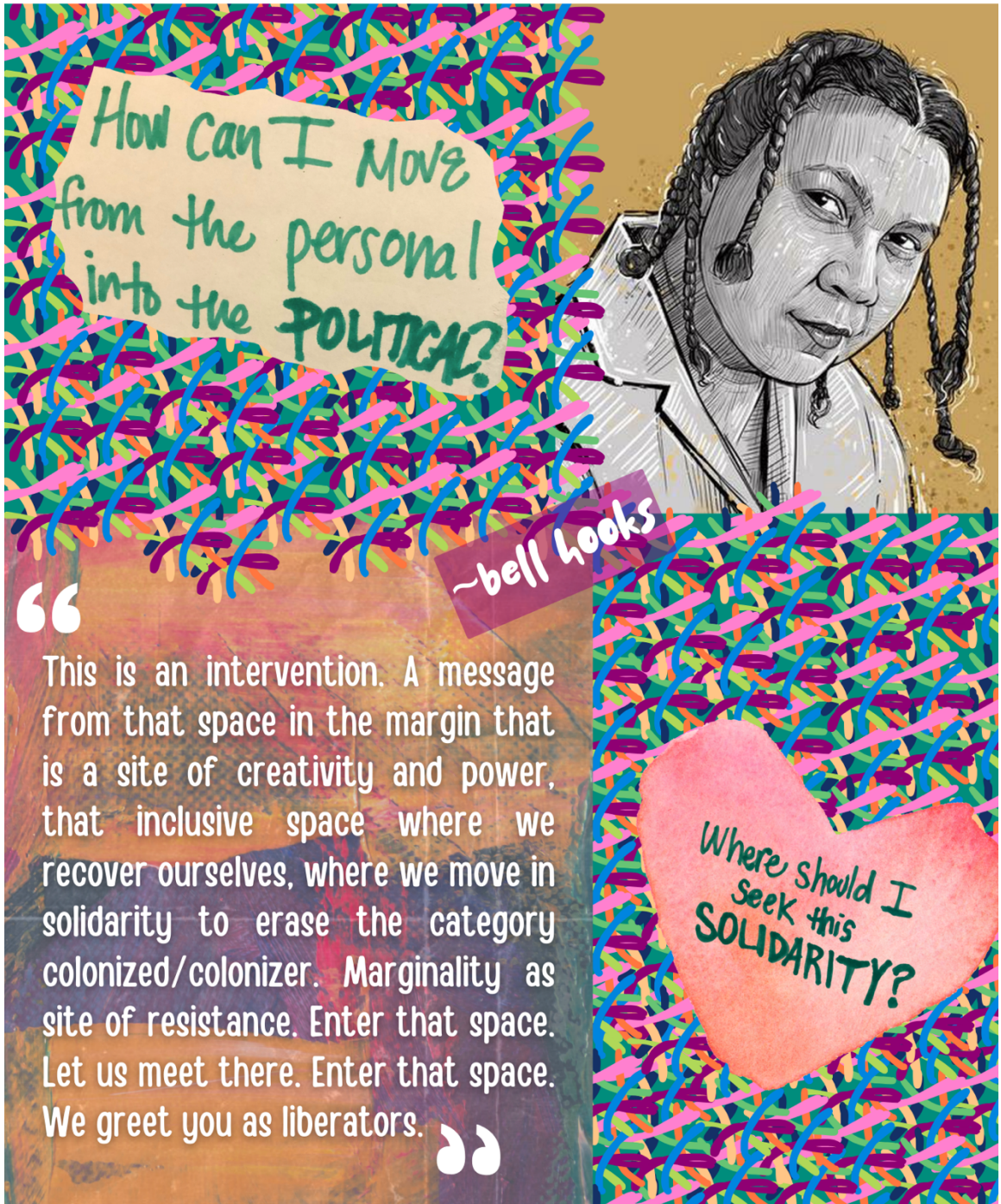
Anti-fascist Biophily I: Criticality and Affective Alter-shocks

> **Anne**: To Connor's point, criticality gets said all the time in schools, but that's not the criticality we're talking about. What are we saying about criticality, about critical theory, as the way forward? How can we name the power we have found in criticality?
>
> **Leo**: *I think the potency in criticality comes from communion and community.* Criticality in isolation, individualized, separate, is relegated to impotency. How effective can you really be? Without others, criticality is just theoretical, and remains theoretical, so, that communion with others, we're trying to seek power, right? *People who are disorganized, coming together through a critical lens, become power.* It upends the hierarchical structure of what we assume power typically is—the normalization of that hierarchical structure of power top-down. And then it really makes it possible for horizontal power.
>
> **Anne**: Makes me think of a Union bumper sticker I just saw. United we bargain. Divided we beg. Connor, thoughts?
>
> **Connor**: Leo, what you just said, points to the fact that these themes are very interconnected. Criticality is so connected with solidarity and also so connected with process, too. Right? Criticality is not this cookie cutter thing that you can just get out of some PD or workbook and present as a worksheet. Criticality has to be a process of this dialogue that we've talked about which breeds solidarity— [teachers and students engaged in learning as] SUBJECT to SUBJECT—which creates the conditions for solidarity that allows you to actually co-construct things

with your students. And that if we're talking about real criticality, that all of our different themes really work together and go hand in hand. (2024, February 24)

As Connor so clearly states, all of our anti-fascist findings fit together in what we categorized as our *LIFE* themes—*Biophily I*, *Biophily II*, and *Biophily III*. One of our central questions in this CPAR project inquires: if fascism fragments, what does anti-fascism do? *While fascism fragments, anti-fascism fashions.* We counter the disconnected decontextualization of fascism through embodied intersectionality. *In our first anti-fascist theme, Biophily I, we find collective criticality and affective alter-shocks to be a way forward—even through the fixedness of fascism.*

> **Anne**: Yes, and then, the question becomes, what, of everything we just said, is because we engaged in a Critical Participatory Action Research Process, right? That I think we should say, CPAR unlocked criticality in a way that we had not experienced before, yeah?
>
> **Leo**: I love that.
>
> **Connor**: Yeah, that the process is CPAR and there's a reason why the first word in the process is critical, right? And, Leo, what you were paraphrasing with Anne, right, this idea of power…the first thing in the process section that I wrote about is how this process [CPAR] does not seek to be objective. It does not seek to be neutral. *If something is really critical, it has a goal and that goal is the abolition of all systems which stand in the way of human flourishing, and the support of human flourishing.*
>
> **Anne**: Yes, and then that makes me think. We have our CPAR group. We have the ways we're taking this back to practice. We have the way we're thinking about

this as educators under the current political situation we're in. So, based on what you just said, Connor, CPAR is the *confronting* of the legitimation crisis; of stopping and being like what is actually happening here. Then, how do we, from what we've found, what does it look like to expand or promote collective criticality?

Leo: *What does it look like to expand collective criticality efforts?* That's a great question.

Anne: We've all said this. We've all had the experience of asking students to critically *do stuff*—like go make a difference—but it fails because we're still asking them to do it singularly. We haven't built up the collectivity in the classroom. You gotta have the shared language. You gotta have the shared concern before you turn them out to go *do things*. And I hadn't done that altogether with my class, through solidarity, until our CPAR process made me realize that was my project with my students.

Leo: And we've all spoken to this, and this is something that I've gotten through our process, and it really speaks to CPAR, is that you have to pause. The systems that we're navigating, they're kind of just churning, churning, endlessly, endless war, endless institutionalization, endless standardization, just churning and churning. *You have to literally stop–break–interrupt–and give space to people to actually take a step back and reflect.* How is anybody going to be able to effectively come to terms of agreement, or interpersonal agreement, without that pause, interruption, in literal space and time? How do you build that capacity for people to be able to feel empowered? To say—hey, no!— actually, I can pause—I

can stop. I don't need to just constantly be churning out and performing and

producing.

Anne: And your point reminds me of when you quoted Kuwasi Balagoon the

other day—*freedom is a habit*—right?

Leo: Building habits! I mean, I think if you were to actually stop and pause—and

give people that breathing room and space—they'll agree. When I paused with the

curriculum, this most recent time, I said to my students, hey, we need to stop, and

I need to know what you need. I need to know what WE need as a class.

Anne: And that's Freire. *Trust the people.* When you actually stop, the potential

for solidarity and for a shared cause is there, right? But it's not there if you do it

by yourself. (2024, February 24)

The transformative power of criticality catalyzes in collectivity—a community of people
committed to shared a struggle—in solidarity.

Connor: Right, how do you expand critical collectivity outward? The first step is

solidarity building, which again, just goes to the connection between these

themes. And how do you build solidarity? Through what we've talked about, this

question, what is happening here? You have to stop. And you have to ask that

question and have the time and the space to ask that question AND have the

people to ask that question with because you can't answer that question alone.

Leo: …And that goes back to affect. Pausing. Remembering you're in a body. We

have this habit of putting teachers through the grind. What are their breaks? What

are their chances to actually step back and assess—oh, I just gotta get through 'til

summer—and who wants to live like that? Instead, really reclaiming the space, in the space, the time, within the time, not just accepting the time that's allowed.

Leo: Can I read a quote real quick? It's Derrick Bell, he says, "Resistance is a powerful motivator precisely because it enables us to fulfill our longing to achieve our goals while letting us boldly recognize and name the obstacles to those achievements." Right?

Connor: It reminds me of Erik Olin Wright, the real utopias guy, he's talking about Marxism, but I think you can sub in the word criticality, as a tradition with two strands. It's both a critique of the current system and a vision for a revolutionary, utopian future. Right, there has to be both things, and I think that's what it is with criticality. Criticality is both—being critical, critiquing the current systems, but also freedom dreaming, of process and solidarity, and imagining and building and creating right there.

Anne: …which reminds me of something you wrote about Connor, that part of the trap, is a lack of trust, and, so, what can you trust? And how do you get people? That's part of the project of solidarity—how do you find a way forward? Well, if you believe that critical inquiry, that asking why, will get you a way forward, then you can build—you can trust the process and the people and—build that hope. (2024, February 24)

Trusting the collective criticality process bestows you with the anti-fascist affect that you need to transgress the total stifling of disenfranchisement.

Anne: And, so, let's talk anti-fascist affect. Part of the problem is the energy lacking, the time-bound stress, the discouragement. We're beyond rationality.

Fascism operates at the affective level of the crowd. There's so much hatred, disillusionment, and fragmenting fear. We didn't talk a lot about fear, which I think is something we're missing. For me, that's the last bit of criticality. You need the courage. Resistance, asking the questions we're asking, yeah, you kinda get in hot water, you get push back. There's risk.

Leo: And what alleviates the fear—the risk?

Connor: Exactly. Yes. Because that's what I was thinking when you mentioned that, Anne, we haven't talked about fear. When we were first embarking on this, we talked about fear a lot more. But it doesn't surprise me that we didn't talk about fear now. We have talked our way out of that. Part of this process gets you out of that fear. (2024, February 24)

Participating in CPAR cultivates courage.

Leo: Like the Audre Lorde quote we keep coming back to, "When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid."

Connor: And it's like what Walter Benjamin and Tyson Lewis talk about, we can't counter the irrationality of fascism with rationality. It doesn't work. You can't just reason your way out of fascism. You have to have this felt experience of freedom right.

Anne: Which I think goes back to process—and a vision beyond the binary—you have to have a vision of brokenness as part of life, right? That you need the space for all human processes to be there. Emotions are human. Let's be human.

Connor: Yes, because fascism depends on the facade of invulnerability. You do not have this brokenness. You don't need this freedom. You're a part of this block. It's a lie. But when you let people live into their reality, their individual experiences, accepting who they are, then, all of a sudden, you feel that—NO—this doesn't work. *Fascism is a lie because you can feel it in yourself.*

Anne: Yes, to Giroux's point, that one of the many ways fascism functions is through the collapse of difference. And so, for me, it's like, humility, hardness, forgiveness—like the shit you don't want to say—that's part of the project of solidarity. You gotta get people who are on the ledge—and threatened—to be who they are. The project of the space, and the world you're trying to create, has to bring people in, and welcome them irregardless, because until you show up, as you, that what you're talking about is only possible then, until people admit the cracks. *The cracks are part of the way forward.*

Anne: And I think that's something we should talk about in relation to education. Education doesn't want kids to fail at all. No mistakes.

Connor: Right, we do so much to try and hide the cracks instead of letting people live into them, like what you said, Anne, about *kintsugi*, how *kintsugi* highlights the cracks, how it celebrates them. (2024, February 24)

Radical authenticity—and acceptance—primes a more honest dialogue—which develops inclusive intersectionality—which increases connections—which strengthens the collective capacity for solidarity.

Leo: Yes, for example, a student would be more willing to share of themselves if they felt like they belonged, if they felt like that was a space they embody. Otherwise, it's like disassociation, it's like—

Anne: —spirit-murdering—

Leo: —self-consciousness, insecurity, fear—all those things that fascism feeds on—and I'm sure you've heard this before, but students don't remember half the shit that you say to them, or that you teach them, *it's not about the content, what they do remember is how you made them feel*—

Anne: —Maya Angelou.

Leo: That's Maya Angelou? *Well, there you go!*

      [Anne snaps.] (2024, February 24)

Through solidarity, anti-fascist affect radically accepts—and celebrates—people in the process of becoming.

Connor: Yes, we're blessed in these radical traditions—

Anne: —which goes back to something I read in *Teaching to Transgress*, where bell hooks shares how she found herself so disillusioned with education when she first started teaching and how she desperately held onto Freire for hope as the vision of something other in education—and then, in reading Bettina Love, you have—Bettina Love— pointing to—bell hooks—pointing to—Freire—*which brings us back to what we were saying about this process and jazz*—we're just dancing to a song that's already playing—

Connor: —*a trans-temporal solidarity, right?* That we get to stand in solidarity with all these—

Leo: —fucking badass scholars, dude, revolutionaries—

Anne: —and Octavia Butler and Afrofuturism—how it points to the truth of what is blocked—*our shared connection with humanity and the environment and with each other*—

Leo: —which reminds me of Toscano in Late Fascism, when he says, "I hope this book serves as an occasion to rediscover some path breaking anti-fascist thinkers, rooted in their turn, and largely anonymous collective practices of world-making against domination, traditions of the oppressed, which remain a source for those set on dismantling the hierarchies that the partisans of order and tradition seek to revive," so speaking to that idea that we do have all these badass, revolutionary scholars—bell hooks, Bettina Love, Freire—but also it's a tradition of the subterranean underbelly of the oppressed, too—you know—*ALL OF US*—

Anne: —yeah—*EVERYTHING*—

[Leo laughs.]

Leo: —yup—*AT THE SAME TIME*—

[Connor laughs.]

Connor: —mmmhhmmmmm—

[Anne laughs.]

Anne: —*LIFE*. (2024, February 24)

Figure 6

Anti-fascist Biophily I

Connor: Trust the Students

      Critical Theory. *Critical pedagogy.* Critical readings and critical thinking. Educational spaces and discourses have no shortage of ideas and practices around *criticality*. Despite this, in our experiences, occurrences of actual criticality in the classroom seem to be far from the norm. So, this question invariably came up, w*hat actual encounters with criticality have we had in educational spaces?* What did these encounters look like? Feel like? Why did we think *criticality* could *counter* fascist controlled, zombie-mode, schooling?

      As our group was meeting to discuss issues of affect, I noticed five separate students approach me, all independently of each other, and voice how being at school felt like being in prison, felt locked down all the time, felt absolutely constraining, restrictive, and unfree. A common theme that ran through the student's critiques was a feeling that

school staff and administration did not trust them, and that because of this lack of trust there was an atmosphere of constant surveillance, of always being watched, of their every movement being monitored, tracked, and controlled. One student mentioned the simple act of being able to go outside as one potential remedy to their feeling of constantly being locked down.

Some of these conversations arose out of PA system announcements from administration that we were in a *no-walk zone* and that no students would be able to leave class—a common occurrence. Some came about seemingly from interactions during passing time between students and teachers, administrators, or security yelling at them to stop playing in the hallway and get to class. Some resulted from students reminiscing on how excited they were to go to high school, how much fun it looked to them, and comparing that initial hope with the complete lack of fun they were having now. And one was a result of pushback a student gave me in our class as I pushed them to engage in group work with their peers instead of always working independently. It started with me telling students that we were going to work in random small groups to break up a reading and a number of students insisting that they would rather work by themselves or with the people they always sit next to. As I witnessed almost all of the small groups arguing about who is doing more work than the other, or refusing to work with each other, or becoming angry when one person came to a different conclusion than others in the group, I reminded them of how important it is to be able to work with other people, that these were communication skills and skills around navigating interpersonal dynamics that would be invaluable in college, in the workplace, on sports teams, etc. One of my students, Kay, then said:

"Why do teachers always do that?"

"Do what?" I responded.

"Assume that just because we don't do something in school that means we don't do it outside of school. I have a job and I work with other people there all the time. I just don't want to do it here."

"Ok—that's fair enough," I told her, "But is your argument then that you *can* do all these things teachers ask of you at school, you just choose not to?"

She smiled and emphatically said, "Yep!"

"Okay," I said, lightly chuckling, "explain to me why that's a good argument." We had been discussing rhetoric and argumentation that whole quarter.

She went on to talk about how at her job they 1) pay her—something that always comes up as an important distinction—but that they also 2) treat her like an adult—and that because they treat her like an adult, like a fully capable person who is on an equal footing with them—she is more inclined to work with others and do whatever needs to be done. But at school, she felt like the expectation of students is always that they are going to do something wrong, they weren't capable of behaving professionally, so why spend your time—*her time* — and energy showing otherwise.

"Fair enough," I admitted again, "What could make the situation better?"

One word that came up time and time again in my conversations with my students—*trust.* Trust enacted through freedom. You have to trust students in order to open things up, in order to give them freedom to work how they want to work, to move through the school as they want to. And without giving that freedom, it's impossible to claim that we are meeting our students with trust and respect.

When I raised this issue with an administrator, the fact that our students feel locked-down, like school is like jail, like we don't trust them the response I received was "I wonder if those students have ever responded to that feeling with self-reflection. Have they asked themselves, *well, what is it that we're doing that is causing them not to trust us*?" There were several things lacking from this response, but largely it made me think, once again, about Walter Benjamin and his insight that we cannot rationalize our way out of fascism. My students were describing a felt experience they had. They were talking about their affect and the school's affect, and, as such, what was needed was an analysis of the affective experience students are currently having and reflection on how to counter that affect by creating spaces which elicit a different affective response. Morrow and Torres (2002) discuss such a need when analyzing the overlapping nature of Freire's and Habermas's skepticism on the nature of positivist rationality, writing, "Rationality is not ultimately a property of an isolated ego or self…but rather the cumulative outcome of communities of inquiry and embodied social practices" (p. 116). To try and rationalize away student concerns of school feeling authoritarian, *exemplifying fascist repression on their being*, is a false rationality—it in no way engages with the cumulative impact a series of embodied social practices has on our students and how it creates them into a shared community who have a particular perspective when it comes to inquiring into the way the school makes them feel. What would be much more productive would of course be to work with our students, recognize them as a valid community of inquiry, listen to them when they identify embodied social practices which create the affective experience of fascism in the school, and work with them to change those practices.

Criticality works as a counter to the fascism in our schools because fascism fragments while criticality connects; fascism disembodies while criticality embodies and demands that both knowledge production and the construction of social space is communal; fascism standardizes and seeks control while criticality questions and demands multiplicity.

Leo: Taking Time to Shock the Body

I've been having a hard time making time for writing. My student life is greatly impacted by my teacher life because one of the innumerable limitations teachers face is rooted in time—e.g. meetings on top of meetings on top of PDs, curricular pacing expectations, deadlines, etc. The way that it has been playing out for me this semester, especially when I find myself with a little bit of *free* time, is that even though I know I should be writing when I can, it's been almost impossible to conjure a capacity to feel like writing. Honestly, as I grow older sometimes I just don't have the energy and focus to pump something out simply—and especially—for the sake of writing as compliance and/or completion of an assignment or task. The limitations and pressure of time affect my body. Of course, my student experience is not so dissimilar to that of my own students. Perhaps all stakeholders of education, *that is to say everyone*, deserves and ultimately requires "a full-bodied education capable of inducing alter-shocks to the fascist system" (Lewis, 2020, p. 20).

For me and other teachers, our time and thus our energy always seem to be focused on and split between trying to foster meaningful learning moments, meet the data-driven curricular expectations from above, while at the same time attempting to counter the spirit-murdering and dehumanizing condition of education as a state

apparatus extension. I really want to do what is best for the kids, but my job always seems to get in the way—especially now since my school is on *comprehensive status* with the state. This tension present in my own classroom is reflected in my own practice. There is a real pressure that threatens teachers who are interested in fighting the proverbial good fight, one that limits our ability to take a step back and really assess what is going on. We're either too busy, too stressed, or too dehumanized ourselves that we fall into a harmful pattern of complicity. That stress and dehumanization trickle down to the kids. Lewis (2020) articulates:

> The autonomy of a critically aware individual is the minimal subjective condition for resisting fascism. Once critical self-reflection is taken out of the equation, protofascist psychology becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy where social forces produce the psychological infrastructure (manipulativeness, hardness, and coldness) that is necessary to further perpetuate reification and standardization. Without the ability to critically reflect on one's self in relation to broader social, political, and economic trends, self-determination becomes an impossibility and democracy itself is put at risk. (p. 12)

Like their teachers, who are also subjected to the top-down grammar of objectification, students become mere vessels for import and "in the process of being narrated to become [as] lifeless and petrified" (Freire, 1970/2006, p. 71) as the content they are expected to metabolize. Even though I want to urge students to have more voice and choice and to learn through critical inquiry and problem-solving because it is best practice, the top-down cascade of professional tasks (both required and expected) asked of teachers reduces classroom time to the traditional scripts of practice. As Freire (1970/2006)

understood, the practice of "[banking] education resists dialogue; problem-posing

education regards dialogue as indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality"

(p. 83). How can our students learn the world if they are denied egalitarian discourse

about or with it? Don't they live in the same world as the presumed expert-narrators of

the world—teachers? Don't students possess the capacity to create and transmit

knowledge as well? Of course they—we—do. It is not as though I don't have plenty to

write about.

Coincidentally, at the beginning of this semester there was an administrative

mandate for teachers in my building to stress writing literacy across all content areas with

a building-specific *Writing Module* developed by one of the administrators. This attempt

to bridge the writing literacy gap may prove to actually widen it by removing any

authentic or organic relationship to writing. This speaks to how the rigidified historical

and current educational tradition of education that *what we in power say goes*, mirrors the

oppression that exists within society that Freire (1970/2006) explained:

> (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not
>
> consulted) adapt to it;
>
> (j) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own
>
> professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the
>
> students. (p. 73)

If there is one way to suck the joy out of writing—any kind of educational endeavor—for

students, it would be by making it mandatory and module-driven. On top of the soulless

and joyless workbook-centered ELA curriculum we are required to implement, both the

students and I, their teacher, are flattened under the pressure of authority. The optics of

this complicity-driven arrangement are suspect at best and to the detriment of all cast into its net. Lewis (2020) captures this sentiment:

> When responsibility toward authority as an end in itself dominates schooling practices, passivity and adaptability to conditions beyond one's understanding and one's control are elevated to the level of educational goods. Such relations then play themselves out in miniature between school children, who reproduce hierarchical relations of power. (p. 13)

How do I effectively inspire kids to love and grow a *desire* to write, let alone summon the will to write for my own scholarship? How do we create space for the organic growth of desire outside the realm of coercion when there is an "obscene underside of schooling, connecting teaching and learning to the kind of hardness and coldness easily susceptible to fascist proclivities" (Lewis, 2020, p. 11)? One potentiality may be found in being open to the Freirean idea that a dialogical process is a revolutionary process.

So, I attempted to infuse my dissertation scholarship into my practice. At the time, we three were tasked with a list of readings to inspire our writing of an upcoming assignment (this one). One of the readings was *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* I remember revealing how every subsequent time that I read *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, I get more out of it, some new connections or deeper understanding or insight. And the more time I spend in these sorts of liminal spaces of this antifascist research project endeavor, the more hyper-aware of how all the time and energy I have been pouring into this work has been shifting how I walk, talk, and think about my practice and even how I show up in my daily life in general, in how I use and value my time, how I write.

CONVENING THE COUNTER-CONVERSATION

The following Monday after our meeting, I decided for my advisory period—essentially considered *homeroom*—that I would suggest incorporating some form of movement or exercise to activate our mind-body before we wrote. I asked if they wanted to hold off on the writing module for the time being and get some exercise. We talked about our limited options, although few options are always more welcomed than none. I was curious if stood true that a "crucial testing ground for an anti-fascist sensibility in education is its capacity to cultivate a different feeling that dilutes the prospect of (micro)fascist behaviour and practice" (Zembylas, 2021, p. 10). What we bring into a space matters. What if I told you that a teacher's *affect* in their educational spaces (re)generates the capacity of the space itself? Would anyone believe us if it did?

It happened to be a beautiful, warm autumn morning, so we all decided that for a half hour we would go outside and walk the track for about 20 minutes. The kids were hesitant at first; I suspect the spontaneity, uncertainty, and taboo nature of the situation sent an ***alter-shock*** through their mind-body at 7:50 in the morning. The rationale was that making time for body activation rooted in movement and, essentially, fun would be an intentional disruption or distraction from the dread of *having* to write, that writing did not take priority in that moment. It was a reminder that we still had bodily autonomy. In an act of visible subversion to our routine, the experiment was an attempt "not to 'integrate' them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become 'beings for themselves.' Such transformation, of course, would undermine the oppressors' purposes" (Freire, 1970/2006, p. 74). The result of our experimentation with *activation* and *alter-shock* was the interrogation of what constituted an educational space and a celebration of "teaching that enables transgressions—a

movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom" (hooks, 1994, p. 12). In the face of a top-down, mandated collapse of time and space, communication, activation, and joy were the preferred countertactics. The track became the site of learning, the pre-writing activity that any writing module would espouse as a necessary component of writing. The embodied experience opened a new pathway to the task of school for the students, and for me as a teacher in a complex space that can "either promote or prevent the consolidation of protofascist, authoritarian personality types. But to fulfill the latter, teachers have to struggle against the rather barbaric history of the school, still latent within its structures, rules, and taboos" (Lewis, 2020, p. 11).

Anne: Where There's a Why, There's a Way

> Hope is essential to any political struggle for radical change when the overall social climate promotes disillusionment and despair.
>
> —bell hooks, *Talking About a Revolution*

Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) starts at a *stop*. CPAR collectives coalesce when someone, somewhere stops and says—wait, wait, wait—*what is happening here?* Rocked by the contradictions of individualistic social work, this question began to grow in me. What is happening—*here*—in the United States of America—*is the system as cannibalistic as it seems?*—and if so, does everyone know, and, if they know, do they care, and, if they know, and don't care—*what unimaginable antecedent could cause such a "banality of evil"* (Arendt, 1979)? When Professor Kirkland embraced these emergent entreaties of mine, he reminded me that *not everyone so contentedly surrendered to the status quo.* **Some teachers try to see**—*to be*—TO

BELIEVE—**another way exists**. In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks (1994) affirms the radical significance of such moments as she describes her own struggle to seek *criticality* as a student:

> My commitment to learning kept me attending classes. Yet, even so, because I did not conform—would not be an unquestioning, passive student—some professors treated me with contempt. I was slowly becoming estranged from education. Finding Freire in the midst of that estrangement was crucial to my survival as a student. His work offered both a way for me to understand the limitations of the type of education I was receiving and to discover alternative strategies for learning and teaching…My experience with him restored my faith in liberatory education. I had never wanted to surrender the conviction that one could teach without reinforcing existing systems of domination. (pp. 17-18)

What Freire was to bell hooks, they both are to me, the two most trusted voices I always return to when I want to flee. When the pandemic began—and my entire social work program did not immediately cease and walk out into the streets—I could no longer stomach the irrational indifference to such incontrovertible injustices. *Paulo Freire and bell hooks called me back into the courage to believe that I could do more than care.*

I could teach (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

Fields of Possibility
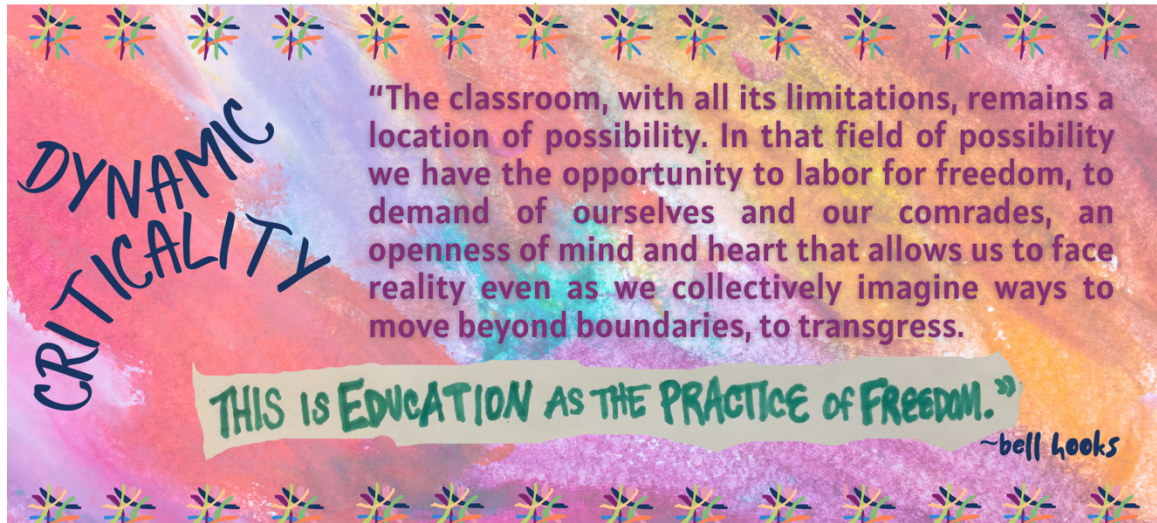
When Cori Bush's alma mater offered me a high school teaching position the summer I stepped away from social work, I accepted. Like Cori Bush, my social work mentor, Paulo Freire, and bell hooks, I believed. I returned to teaching on August 9, 2020 amidst pandemic-academic-pandemonium. Undeterred, I confronted the chaos of the classroom with my renewed convictions. *Schools as sanctuaries of resistance*—education as the practice of freedom—*teaching to transgress.* Contrary to expectation, the pandemic provided the perfect space to recommit to *education as the practice of freedom*. The pandemic exposed the extreme inequities in the United States of America, of which the classroom was the confluence, and so schools across the country attempted to question the unaffected state of education. The clearest voice of this critique, Dr. Bettina Love, challenged me to keep my criticality close. In *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom*, Dr. Bettina Love (2019) reflects—*through the liberatory lens and learnings of bell hooks*—on the light and legacy of theory:

Theory is a *location for healing* like the North Star. Theory does not solve issues–

only action and solidarity can do that–but theory gives you language to fight,

knowledge to stand on, and a humbling reality of what intersectional social justice

is up against. Theory lets us size up our opponent, systemic injustice. Theory is a

practical guide to understanding injustice historically, the needs of people, and

where collective power lives within groups of people. (p. 132)

Re-entering education in such a time of turmoil, I, too, needed a *North Star.* If bell hooks

could harken me back to teaching, could she—and B. Love—also send me back to school

as a student? *You already know!* I began this doctorate in education, with its social justice

learning community cohort, *Everyday Politics of Racial Injustice in Schools*, a few

months later. A year later, our dissertation team, this CPAR collective, came together.

Our Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) collective converged from

our individual reluctance to relinquish the hope of intersectional inquiry. We shared a

desire to confront the interrelated complexities of educational injustice. *We wanted to*

WHY everything! Giroux (2023) echoed back to us our intersectional inclination:

In a capitalist order that has turned dark and increasingly unable to deliver on its

promises, social and systemic problems appear disconnected, individualized,

reduced to personal narratives, and quickly disappear…Lost here are the

connections between the pending crisis of environmental collapse, rampant

inequality, the threat of a nuclear war, rising authoritarianism, the breakdown of

civic society, rising antisemitism, and the war on women's reproductive rights.

When disconnected, such events do not raise enough cause for serious

alarm…The long arc of systemic violence is rarely presented in the mainstream

press in ways that connect it to a broader fascist project of disposability. (pp. 2-3)

Through Giroux, our shared concern became named. ***Fascism.*** Giroux (2023) points out

the problem of *disconnection*—and—*disenfranchisement*. We lack the space/time/skills

required to resist fascism because we cannot even identify the interlocking oppressions of

fomenting fascism, and so *we cannot act against what we do not even understand exists.*

This was a point of divergence in our CPAR collective. Coming from a blue-collar

background, *I know how saturated ignorance can be*, especially when education is

becoming more increasingly critiqued as a toxic trait of the educated elites. This tension

came to a head with our IRB participant recruitment plan. *Do we only recruit participants*

who already possess the criticality to call out fascism? And even if we try to be more

inclusive when it comes to recruiting participants/extending our public sphere, doesn't

our niche focus of fascism already exclude based on pre-existing—bias, knowledge,

ignorance—educational privilege? *Instead of answering these questions, we dialogued*

into deeper ones. As we learned more about the fragmentary forces of fascism, we began

to wonder about its **counter**.

   If fascism fragments, what does anti-fascism do? If fascism fragments, how do we

cultivate communal capacity for criticality and complexity? What might anti-fascist–

horizontal rather hierarchical–processes/practices of intersectional inquiry look like,

especially in terms of education? *Considering the inequalities of power and positionality*

in the public sphere, how do we create the conditions for solidarity? Within the realm of

research, how might anti-authoritarian academics act? *What research resists the anti-*

critical constraints of the conventional?

Educators need a new language, vision, politics, and renewed sense of solidarity.

They need to bring truth out of shadows and create a space for critical thought and

civic action, while pushing at the frontiers of the social imagination. Most of all,

they need to acknowledge and fight for the centrality of education in shaping

modes of agency, identity, values, social relation, and visions of the future. It may

be too much to ask, but how might it be possible for those of us in various

pedagogical spaces, sites, and terrains in which knowledge is produced and the

future is re-imagined, contribute to inventing a politics that gives meaning to the

promises and ideals of a radical democracy…Can we invent a politics and system

of education capable of both operating and challenging a society defined by the

scourge of market values and the growing registers of instrumental rationality and

populist authoritarianism? (Giroux, 2021, pp.6-7)

What research renews radical democracy? We looked to our critical *North Star*—Paulo

Freire—for guidance:

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration

of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about

conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and

women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate

in the transformation of their world. (Freire, 1970/2006, p. 34)

If we wanted to transform—rather than conform—*we had to get critical and creative!*

Freire's concept of critical participation connected us to the people-powered politics of

the participatory paradigm and Participatory Action Research (PAR), which eventually

led us full circle into Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR). Originating from

the legitimation crisis of contemporary society/education, **CPAR***, as an* **anti-dialogical antidote***, is perfectly fashioned to fight the fragmentation of fascism.* Furthermore, our **Critical Participatory Action Research** affirms criticality—*Critical Theory*—as essential to *education as the practice of freedom*.

No single solution exists to the ever-contorting unfreedoms of fascism. Since fascism is not, in fact, fixed in the past, but rather, mutating and propagating in the present, *anti-fascism depends on dynamic criticality and the fluid freedoms of counter-creativity.* Even though fascism chokes out life, *criticality queries the decay to search out new and/or old, yet newly discovered, ways to sow the seeds of anti-fascist synergy* (see Figure 8). ***Where there's a WHY, there's a WAY.***

Figure 8

Why the World

Paulo Freire

"No oppressive, order could permit the oppressed to begin to question: WHY?"

TEACH THE CHILDREN THE TRUTH

"Problem-posing education, as a humanist and liberating praxis, posits as fundamental that the people subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation. To that end, it enables teachers and students to become Subjects of the educational process by overcoming authoritarianism and an alienating intellectualism; it also enables people to overcome their false perception of reality. The world—no longer something to be described with deceptive words—becomes the object of that transforming action by men and women which results in their humanization."

Fascist Necrophily II: Standardization, Technocracy, and Control

Anne: How do we explain this notion of when education is reduced to a script, to the transactional, how does that harm? Right? *Like you're no longer an educator. It's not a vocation of teaching.* You're an adult who's paid to supervise.

Leo: Thinking you're an overseer, you're not educating. *It's not formation.*

Anne: And education has been straying towards standardization for quite a while. *So what of it?* How has it intensified? Where is it right now? And what has technology done to that? *What about the pandemic?* I think again, the pandemic was an acceleration. Like you Leo being told he had to record his kids. *That's some next level shit.* And, remember, even *you* weren't taken aback by that right away, right? When we reacted with shock to your administrators telling you to record your classroom, you kinda were like, *well, what do you mean?* And it's important to admit that *even you* were tempted, right? Maybe not tempted, but…

Leo: *I had played off my fear instead of my power.*

Anne: And I just think that that's so important to highlight because, *if even you*, in all your resources and being in this with us, *are still sometimes afraid* to counter the cray, *it shows how easy it is for any of us* to fall into fear and comply *without stopping and reflecting with other people.*

Connor: I'm remembering how you first brought up your administrator's requirement to record the classroom. Part of what it seemed like wasn't necessarily that it was fear of like, *oh, I have to do this*, but it was you had been at school, you had been in that setting and that environment with those people, and it had been delivered to you in a meeting. And so the response to it was just of like,

yeah, this sucks, *but this is just something we do, right?* And so it's when you're in those places, when you don't have the time to step away to ask what is happening here, *it begins to feel normal*, right? Like it's just something that we do. And it becomes very easy to just go along with. *You have to have that time to step away. And the people to step away with.*

Leo: And that's what standardization and technocracy does. It doesn't allow people to do that. *It doesn't give people time or space to pause—and interrupt— and actually think—critically think.*

Connor: And what that does is like...

[Connor throws his hands up.]

Leo: Right—*there's nothing I can do*—this is normal—*and then you've unknowingly slipped into disenfranchisement.* So bringing all the death shit together now. (2024, February 23)

Figure 9

Fascist Necrophily II

STANDARDIZATION   TECHNOCRACY

| SURVEILLED | STIFLED | SCRIPTED | SUPERFICIAL | SOS |

| RIGID | HIERARCHICAL | TRANSACTIONAL | CYCLICAL CRISIS | SOULLESS |

"As higher education succumbs to a business culture and cult of efficiency, it removes itself from issues regarding the complex relationships among knowledge, power, and the acquisition of agency. Matters of purpose and meaning become fetishized within a discourse of hyper instrumental reason that serves to hermetically situate faculty and students within a fetishized discourse of efficiency." ~Henry Giroux

| STATIC | COLONIZED | PENALIZED | DEPOLITICIZED | INERT |

CONTROL   CONTROL   CONTROL

Connor: There Is No Standard for Liberation

> **Connor:** You can't reason your way out of it or away from it right…and it was very clear talking to them that it was an affective response. So, they were like, I feel it, right? It feels like we're locked down. It feels like we're in prison. It feels like our movements are constantly being controlled, like we're constantly being watched. We're constantly being told where we need to be when we need to be there. We're constantly being told to sit down to be quiet. We're, you know, just— we're constantly being controlled. (2023, December 2)

What's happening here? *Why are so many students enduring school in this way? Liberation is not on the agenda.* There is no Common Core, no state educational standard to be cited for emancipation. *If we are to enact an emancipatory pedagogy,* we must do so outside of, *counter to*, State standardization, control, and technocracy—*outside of the entire system.*

The standardization of education pushes educators away from engaging with their students about issues of real-world concern and instead strips education of all emancipatory potential by abstracting it from the actual lives of students. The growth of increasingly computerized cookie-cutter curriculum has allowed school officials to monitor and enforce the implementation of a *one-size -fits-all curriculum*, and the desire for those types of curriculums has been intensified by the fascist *crisis language* of *learning loss* and unreached benchmarks.

The enforcement of these standardizations has occurred through technocratic regimes of surveillance and control by monitoring teachers' classroom practices through videorecording and tracking teacher and student usage of the standardized curriculum

through administrative oversight of logins to these online systems (Kupchik et al., 2009). Leo's experiences with the *panopticon* in his school's push to require teachers to record themselves teaching and my own experiences with the standardization of educational practices by district-mandated-monitored, online curriculum illustrate this.

In each case, the language of equity and improvement is used to justify dehumanizing and technocratic measures which strip the students and teachers of any agency and individuality. Administrators attempted to justify to Leo the need for the video surveillance in the name of teacher reflection and personal growth, cutting out what should be an interpersonal process of conversing and reflecting with fellow teachers to a process that is highly individualized. The fragmentary and the standardized often go hand in hand. *For something to be standardized, it must be stripped of all contexts*—censored of everything the State certifies as extraneous and superfluous information about the people utilizing and impacted by the standardized process and the community in which the process is put in practice. If something is to be standardized across all contexts, it must first have no context. *Thus, the fragmentary and the standardized support each other.*

Leo: But the Email Said I'm Teaching in Isolation

> As the oppressor minority subordinates and dominates the majority, it must divide it and keep it divided in order to remain in power.
>
> —Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

Anne: The system is not set up for people to care. (2023, November 28)

Public education, as both subject to and an extension of, is not distinct from the State, which "orders, corrects, judges, assesses, assimilates, co-opts, indoctrinates,

executes, authorizes, and conducts a number of other functions that are in direct contrast to equality and community" (DeLeon, 2008, p. 126). So, it would make sense that public education's State-sanctioned implementation "has worked primarily in conjunction with the dominant social, political, economic, and cultural institutions to create a specific type of citizen/individual" (Hawthorne & Elmore, 2017, p. 3). The goal of the State is to mass produce an easily controlled, indoctrinated population very early on to produce a patriotic and obedient workforce. Education, then, is the institutional tool by which the experiment of indoctrination is exercised:

> As a governmental technology, education is all the more effective, it is argued, since coercive methods have been supplanted by, or at least articulated with, techniques for managing and manipulating the conscience of subjects. On this account, education is unredeemable and even radical educational experiments are complicit with its logic. Efforts to expunge power and authority from the classroom only serve to intensify regulation of pupils' bodies and behaviors. (Fretwell, 2020, p. 56)

I was recently observed in my classroom, and it didn't feel good at all. It didn't feel good when they walked in. I didn't feel good about what I was teaching that day, I'm certain the students didn't like anything about what was going on and could probably sense my affect change, probably in mid-sentence, as soon as the door opened and in walked two, for all intents and purposes, *strangers*. Concerning this idea of *affect*, Zembylas (2021) best describes the phenomenon as:

> the capacity of bodies in social space to affect one another and thus it is understood in terms of intensities, flows of energy and life forces that are not

contained within an individual as discursive meaning-making, but flow and

impact the social. (p. 6)

There is no doubt that the implications of the truly *school* moment reached farther than

the typical annoyance that a teacher might face or the uncertainty a student might grapple

with on any given day. I was especially disheartened when I read the feedback via an

email later that afternoon:

> *I would recommend that Mr. Jalipa adheres to the curriculum by using the*
>
> *lessons that are specified in SpringBoard and focus on* TA.1 Communicates and
>
> uses questions from SpringBoard Lesson to set a purpose for learning and drive
>
> inquiry. *The prepositional phrase assignment was taught in isolation and could*
>
> *have had more impact on their learning if it aligned to the Springboard text.*
>
> (2023, December 7)

What was so disheartening about receiving an email like this was that it came from a

decontextualized, authoritarian gaze that is so removed, so disjointed from the reality of

what's happening in education, in our building, and certainly in my classroom. The irony

is that I am one of the few ELA teachers who's even remotely close to implementing our

bland and irrelevant curriculum. It's as if wanting to teach about prepositional phrases

was somehow my idea! And therein lies a problem. Nothing that I do will ever make

sense in the irrationality of the micro-fascism underpinnings within my or any school

system. Schools have become self-sealing systems of complicity that sustain, if not

exploit, "the fascist tendencies that exist within all members of a society, that is, all of us,

i.e. *molecular fascism*, the yearning that all of us have to want others to conform to our

own rules and beliefs" (Zembylas, 2021, p. 2). Of course, I felt compelled to say

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something. In the first place, (in my mind) there is no possible way anyone in their right mind would ever believe that the curriculum we use is actually good for kids. Fearing who might have access to their email, I immediately sent this email and image attachment in response:

> Thanks for popping in today. This email is in reference to the feedback that I received. You wrote, "*The prepositional phrase assignment was taught in isolation and could have had more impact on their learning if it aligned to the Springboard text.*" Please refer to the attached image of the Springboard Teacher's Manual to which today's DO NOW was aligned.

Figure 10

Canned Curriculum

To give context, the DO NOW was NOT an assignment but an attempt to re-check for an embedded understanding of previous learning from the **Grammar & Usage** *feature of Prepositions and Prepositional Phrases* (**Activity 1.8, p. 42**) and

Non-Restrictive Phrases and Clauses *a.k.a "appositives"* (**Activity 1.12, p. 78),**

WHICH SPRINGBOARD SUGGESTS. After observing earlier periods

struggling with today's DO NOW, I decided to adapt instruction and made a play

call to review a previous mini-lesson from November 15th. Had the students

initially demonstrated understanding in today's DO NOW, I would have opted to

move on without re-teaching the concept. I am hoping to open a channel of

dialogue here and would love to have a face-to-face conversation about your

observations today. I'm certainly not trying to come across as upset. I am just

taking an opportunity to speak my truth. I sincerely mean that, AND

unfortunately, I truly believe that the observation feedback recorded in KickUp is

inaccurate, uninformed, given without context, and does not reflect my

professional integrity in implementing the curriculum. *Please advise.*

(2023, December 7)

Instead of trusting me, however, the admin doubled down. They asked to meet and

debrief the observation the next day, but when the next day and the scheduled meeting

came around, *I got stood up*. They later requested to reschedule for the following

Monday, to which I obliged. I was then tasked with a set of reflective questions in the

following email:

> *My apologies that we weren't able to meet today but I have shared a calendar*
>
> *invite for Monday during your 5th period class so that we can discuss. In*
>
> *preparation for Monday, please consider the following reflective questions*:

1. You shared that you observed other periods struggling with prepositional phrases. **What formative assessment was given to this class specifically to support a lack of mastery?**

2. Your agenda stated: 1. Do now, 2. Phones/4C's/Quotes 3. Prepositional Phrases Review 4. Independent Reading 6. Activity 1.12 (1&2) 7. U1EA1.3 in Canvas. **How were you intending on connecting the prepositional phrases review to the SpringBoard Lesson which was going to be taught after independent reading?**

3. Lesson 1.12 does reference nonrestrictive phrases & clauses. The mini-lesson/do now you provided were 3 sentences for students to identify the prepositional phrases. All three sentences were centered around you as the teacher. **My wondering is, what is the rationale behind using teacher created sentences vs Springboard aligned text in 1.12 to further their understanding of nonrestrictive phrases and clauses?**

Thank you and we look forward to partnering with you. (2023, December 8)

This situation brought several issues to mind. Now, I know my students well enough to know that when I am teaching *at* them, they very easily check out. This banking model of teaching conflicts with the idea that "human autonomy and higher levels of cognitive and moral reasoning can be realized only through interactive learning processes" (Morrow & Torres, 2002, p. 116). The more they are involved in the learning process, that is the more voice and choice in the content and curriculum, the more impactful the learning moments become, and perhaps the more frequent. Let's face it, *learning* is not necessarily synonymous with *school* because you can't—and shouldn't have to—trick kids into

learning. They need to agree to the terms. *Learning* cannot happen in passive spaces that stifle curiosity, creativity, and movement. *Learning* must dismantle systems that objectify teachers *and* students and move toward a *SUBJECT-SUBJECT* space of mutuality. Habermas also espoused the notion that democracy itself is a learning process in which "the evolutionary significance of mass education resides in its potential for facilitating the development of higher-level capacities for reflexive learning that open up new historical possibilities for change" (Morrow & Torres, 2002, p. 116). Just because I want to personalize the rigid curriculum, should my professional integrity be up for question? Perhaps subconsciously, any deviation from the script is perceived as a threat to the Kafkaesque nightmare of educational hierarchy because "critical literacy poses a danger for existing systems of power, however, elites have sought to actively attempt to manage knowledge for purposes of domination" (Morrow & Torres, 2002, p. 117). The most disheartening part of all of this is that we—the administrative observers, evaluators, and classroom strangers included—are all subject to these dehumanizing mechanisms, from the top trickling all the way down to our students.

> **Anne:** To me, that stuff, *those punitive, standardized things, always collapses energy in the classroom*... So to send students into the day after a standardized, mandated activity? *That's a horrible idea!* Instead of welcoming, being present, and animating students, activating learning, you're actually collapsing it… *It's counterintuitive, anti-dialogical.* (2024, January 23)

One evening over winter break, just about a month prior to writing this final paragraph, I was in my living room chatting with my wife and my best friend, who happens to be my closest comrade at the school where we both work, talking about our

jobs. Earlier that day, the three of us had spent the better part of the day in December outside hiking around, work being the last thing on our minds. It had been a chilly but sunny day. Now back home, trying to warm up with some tea and pork dumplings to replenish us, my wife posed a question, "Are you guys happy at your job?" Our friend replied, "Leo seems to be the only person at work who even smiles."

With the de-professionalization happening within education today, how do we generate the capacity to be able to push back?

Anne: Buried in Business as Usual

The true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us.

—Bettina L. Love, *We Want to Do More Than Survive*

When you want to believe in *schools as sanctuaries of resistance*—teaching to transgress—*education as the practice of freedom*—you come to realize, again and again, that you must do more than just believe, you must act—*and you cannot act alone*. For me, *this is*, and always has been, *the hardest part*. I was born in Thatcher-Reagan pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps times and *institutionally intentionally* (and yet individually ignorantly) *inculcated into the lie of I*—the neoliberal sensationalism of self-interested salvation. *If everyone takes care of numero uno, then everyone is taken care of*—everyone is covered. *Neoliberal ideology operates through the illusion of individual care*; capitalism and democracy supposedly empower you to take care of yourself. *And if you're not okay, that's on you*. Every time I quit education, I blamed myself (Thompson & Jones, 2021). *I wasn't enough.* And the truth is I wasn't, "Education as the practice of

freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of domination—denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world" (Freire, (1970/2006), p. 81). *Even though you believe it can be, a classroom is not free.* Freedom requires emancipatory engagement. **Freedom requires the people.**

When I re-entered education in August of 2020, amidst pandemic-academic-pandemonium, believing in *schools as sanctuaries of resistance—teaching to transgress—education as the practice of freedom—*I found myself in a totally topsy-turvy school scenario, *a somewhat level playing field.* Pandemic precarity upended the traditional school hierarchy into an all-encompassing fray of uncertainty. *No one knew anything about anything.* And I was no different. I re-entered the classroom knowing I knew nothing, and so I asked my students about everything. *My students and I were in it together—*like I wanted us to be—*like I believe WE SHOULD BE—*because we had to be—*the pandemic pushed us into partnership—*our classroom became a conversation—*and we did great things!* Until we didn't.

In August of 2021, in year two of my most recent return to teaching, my school, like so many other schools in the United States, shifted back to five days a week in-person school. *Business as usual.* Without a thought for how to maintain the newfound graces of non-traditional learning, nor the social-emotional labor of transitioning *back*, almost every school in the United States uncritically *acquiesced to normal*. And like a fool, I forgot to remember the regressive reality of the American educational system. *Schools today incarcerate rather than liberate.*

Refusing to promote the relationship between education and democracy, critical thinking and active citizenship, and rejecting the connection between education

and social and political change, the advocates of neoliberalism have weakened the

power of teachers, attacked teachers' unions, reduced teaching to training and

implemented a full-fledged attack on the imagination through methods such as

teaching for the test and cutting back on funding for the most basic necessities of

schooling. Public schools have been transformed into charter schools or sites that

aid in the criminalisation of poor Black and Brown students. Neoliberal leaders

have moreover sought to strip schools of their anti-authoritarian and egalitarian

potential to teach students to live as critical and informed citizens in a democracy.

(Giroux, 2019, p. 35)

Buried in business as usual.

In flux fascism foments fear, fragmentation, isolation, and desolation, *an*

academic anemia aptly articulated by Giroux (2023) as the "dead zone of the

imagination" (p. 55). Standardized, stifled, and surveilled—students—teachers—

schools—society suffers from decades of disinvestment, not to mention the proliferated

pains of the pandemic, and yet not even *essential*-ness evokes any systematic support.

Situated at the crosshairs of cannibalistic capitalism and weaponized ignorance,

educators individually bear the blame—and the burden—for eviscerating systematic

inequality. Teachers are just cogs who do their jobs, and joy be jailed. And if a teacher

wants to quit, quit. Anyone can read a script. *Alienated from all auspices of agency into a*

deindividuated despondency, educators dismay.

What's a weary-hearted teacher to do?

Hurled back into the hierarchy of hopelessness, I must admit that I, as a White-

Westernized woman, failed to communally support my classroom resistance. After a

normal year of *hope-holding-alone*, I started snoozing my alarm three weeks ago,

planned my next sick day two weeks ago, counted the weeks left in school last week, and

confessed to a co-worker I was thinking of quitting. I individually fought the

individualistic system and ended up, *unjustly*, crabby as hell, *exhaustion ejecting me from*

the inclusive liberation I re-entered the classroom to co-create. The problem with being

burned-out and being a teacher is that the problem perpetuates in cyclical perpetuity. *You*

give too much—because you teach and you care—*until you have nothing left to give and*

don't care until—and only if the school/students get lucky—*you no longer teach.* Amidst

the harsh reality of educational/racial/economic inequalities, the seemingly zero-sum

game of educational inclusivity discourages me (see Figure 11). If I let *you be* in the

classroom, *who*, then, c*annot be?* If I let YOU BE in the classroom, *CAN I BE?* I know

it's not rad pedagogy to proffer, but can I really be everything to everybody? *COME AS*

YOU ARE, amen, I hear you, *I'M THERE!* But the truth is, I'm not. I'm tired. I'm

struggling. I'm lost. *What's a weary-hearted teacher to do*?

      I'm tired. I'm struggling. I'm lost. *What's a weary-hearted teacher to do*?

      Rewrite the fight.

Figure 11

To Think Beyond the Bars

Perhaps most important of all, and this is so central to the development of feminist abolitionist theories and practices: we have to learn how to think and act and struggle against that which is ideologically constituted as "normal." Prisons are constituted as "normal."

It takes a lot of work to persuade people to THINK BEYOND THE BARS.

Angela Davis

WE SHALL OVERCOME

I think that this is an era where we have to encourage that sense of community, particularly at a time when neoliberalism attempts to force people to think of themselves only in individual terms and not in collective terms.

HOPE SCHOOL

It is in COLLECTIVITIES that we find reservoirs of HOPE & OPTIMISM.

Anti-fascist Biophily II: Solidarity and Collective Action

> Solidarity is not an act of charity, but mutual aid between forces fighting for the same objective.
>
> —Samora Machel, *Sowing the Seeds of Revolution*

In our CPAR process, our group attempted to ask if and how *solidarity* might be a potent counter to education's fascistic paradigm of dehumanization and disenfranchisement through fragmentation, standardization, technocracy, and control. What can solidarity look like in local contexts? How is it an antidote?

Connor: This question of how do we define *solidarity*? What is solidarity and the different types? For me, for the vast majority of my time teaching at [name of school], my solidarity didn't come from other teachers. It was from the African People's Socialist Party. It was from a *political* group. It's not that I didn't feel connection or that I don't like the people I work with, but it was that movement and understanding of *common cause*, *common struggle*—

Anne: — is totally fucking devoid in education.

Connor: *Yeah.* It's different even just at an affectual level.

Leo: You would agree, though, Connor, that that solidarity you received or shared with the people's movement sustained you in your professional space?

Connor: And that's what I was talking about earlier, was that solidarity doesn't have to come from within the profession in order to sustain you in teaching.

Anne: Are we trying to say that teachers *need* to move to a project of solidarity with other educators?

Connor: Yes.

Leo: *Yes, dude!*

Anne: *I think that is the answer.*

Leo: And not even just limited to just teachers.

Anne: No, but that through that, then we can *join in solidarity,* like those teachers who in their union fights are talking about fair housing and the unhoused.

Connor: That is always how I have understood the word *solidarity.* My first understanding and exposure of solidarity that came from, I remember, being a little kid. We were in my neighborhood in South City. We were right next to Dierbergs and a Schnucks, and I think we normally went to Schnucks[...], but the Schnucks workers were out on strike when I was a kid. I remember us driving past the Schnucks and going to the Dierbergs. I remember asking my dad, *what's happening there?* What's going on? *Why are all these people [out there]?* And my dad said, *they're on strike and you don't cross the strike.* Right? And that has always been what *solidarity* means to me, that there is an understanding of *common cause* of workers coming together to better their life.

Anne: But it's *expressed*, right? It's an *expressed purpose*. It has language, and it has visible, embodied resistance in the world *together* that is, then, prompting other people to then do the action of joining in.

Connor: Yes, in whatever way they can.

Anne: *But I think that teachers, we're just lost in our little rooms.* Even me. *Yes*, me and my students joined together to change our classroom, but we're still trapped in a building, in a school, in a system, in a city, in a society. *We gotta be beyond.* We changed the space. *Now, what does it mean to change the system?*

Leo: It can start small, right? The three of us. Y'all having my back and us having this more intentional, political vision of what we're doing urged me to take that to my physical space and do the things… and that had greater impacts on the space. Any sort of small action, let's say you take an action with your kids. You pause with your kids, or you take them outside to activate them. Other people see that. It's like the picket line. Then they feel like, *oh, they're doing it with their [students]*. I can *see* their resistance. I can *see* them outside doing the thing.

Connor: And that the resistance, cause, and what you're struggling for is *shared* and *named*.

Anne: Without that, then you haven't reached the *participatory subject-subject*. It can inspire and go out. Other kids in our building can come to my room, but if you're not in my room and you weren't doing that with us, you aren't elevated to *subject-subject Subject s*ubjectivity is participant on participation. You have to be *doing*, and you have to be doing *equally*.

Connor: Yes! You're engaging in it *with* the kids, and the kids are engaging *with* you. And you both equally know and understand that you're doing it because you all *want* to do it. *And* because you're doing it to resist the standardization and the control and the lockdown nature of their lives. That they understand the reason behind it. (2024, February 24)

Solidarity is a pathway beyond surface professional empathy for disenfranchised educators toward collective political power through political conscientization. Criticality without connectivity is just theory. Action sets precedent. Collective action threatens hegemony.

Figure 12

Anti-fascist Biophily II
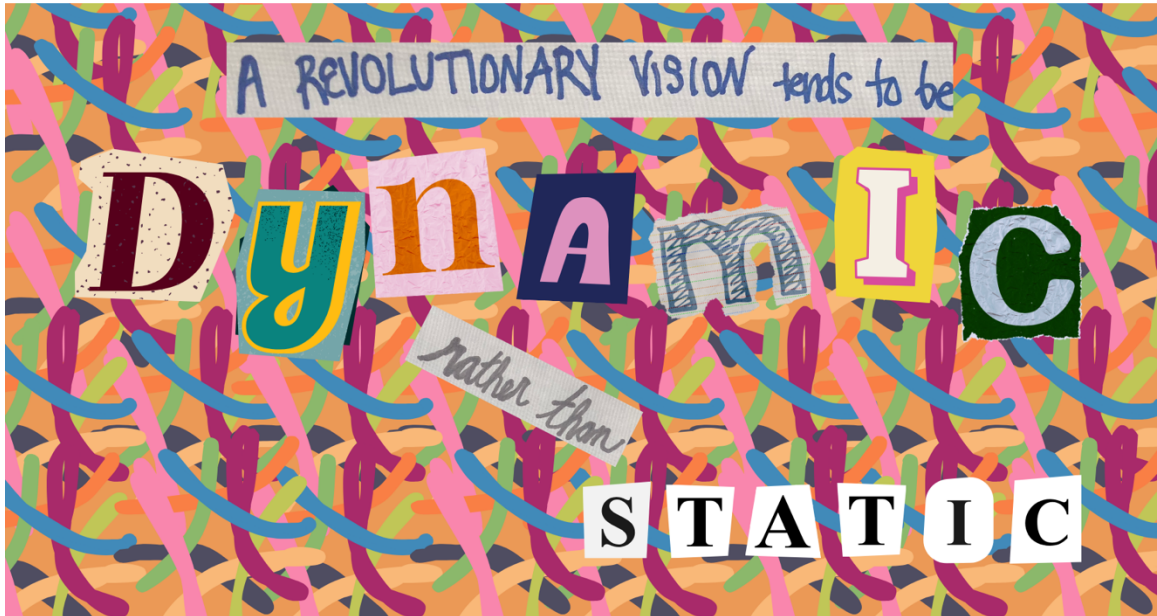
Connor: A Tradition of Generative Solidarity

We are blessed with a long history of solidarity, those of us who fight for an end to oppression, those who demand a centering of human flourishing, who believe, in the face of all their cruelty and apathy, in the power of *everyday people* to build a more just world, we freedom dreamers—we are blessed.

The leftist organization I have been privileged enough to be a part of for the past 6 years is fond of paraphrasing Che Guevara in saying that *solidarity* is not a matter of well wishing; it is a matter of sharing the same fate, in victory or in death. We on the left have a legacy, a tradition, and that tradition, at its best, is one of solidarity. *Solidarity* is what kept me in this job—the solidarity of fellow student-teachers my first year in the classroom, the solidarity of a leftist political movement for every year after that, and the solidarity of this research collective for these past few years.

CONVENING THE COUNTER-CONVERSATION

Solidarity operates against fragmentation and standardization on multiple fronts. We have solidarity with other teachers and co-workers which provides support, an affectual experience of the kind of classrooms and schools we would like to build, a generative encounter that allows us to continue resisting fragmentation and standardization, continue dreaming real utopias, continue building community and spaces of emancipatory education. We also have solidarity with our students—moving from dialogical instead of monological educational spaces—being *with* the students instead of talking *at* them. This is the only way to begin building educational spaces which are liberated from the fascistic zombie-mode reality of so much of schooling.

Solidarity also operates against standardization because it undercuts the very epistemological roots of standardization; it undercuts positivism and demands recognition that nothing can be done alone, including creating knowledge—no knowledge production in isolation! The context-stripping worldview of standardization cannot exist in spaces which center the importance of connection, community, context, and the solidarity between groups and individuals.

Solidarity counters fragmentation because it brings people together in a real, *felt,* way that pushes against the *affective inertia of fascism*. Walter Benjamin's work often focused on themes of history, memory, and the impact of technology in capitalist society, but another key aspect of his work that often goes unaddressed in other writings of Frankfurt School theorists is that of affect, of the felt experience of fascism, its grotesqueness and its allure. Affect, as emotional and bodily responses to these phenomena, is a crucial aspect of both the social pathology that is fascism *and* of the resistance to fascism, *of antifascism*, by shaping both individual resistance and collective

efforts to combat fascist ideologies and actions. These concepts align with broader

discussions in Critical Theory and antifascist scholarship.

Building on the writings of Benjamin, scholars today have noted that his writing

informs us that "emphasis… should be placed on the limits of love and/or reasoned

argumentation for addressing the problem" of fascism (Lewis, 2020, p. 17). Benjamin

himself writes that instead of focusing on how love or reasoning could somehow rid us of

fascism, "all the light that language and reason still afford should be focused upon that

'primal experience' from whose barren gloom this mysticism of the death of the world

crawls forth" (p. 17). Fascism is deeply felt experience, and it cannot be upended through

logic or reason, or even through love alone. It is based on this insight that today's anti-

fascist activists:

> call for a series of insurgent actions including (not limited to) a new "full-bodied
>
> politics" that heightens and expands receptive senses as well as new practices that
>
> generate "alter-shocks" to an already shocking system. Thus, changes in fascist
>
> politics demand a counterinsurgency located within, not against, the forms of
>
> affective communication fueling this social pathology. (Lewis, 2020, p. 16)

We cannot cede affect as one of the master's tools; we have to use it ourselves to

counteract the affectual blackhole of fascism, of power for the sake of domination, for the

maintenance of a false, and therefore fragile, superiority. *People can*, and must, *really*

feel relationality, solidarity, living in equality, in true communion with others, *a real*

freedom. Resistance to fascism cannot be simply abstracted and political, living only in

political parties or organizations, it must live within our own affect. Solidarity and affect

are conjoined. *Solidarity generates shared affect, and shared affect creates the conditions of solidarity.* If we neglect one, we do so at the expense of the other.

Leo: The Comrades Are Ready and Waiting

> **Anne:** *Solidarity* returns me to—*make it personal*—right? *Like what do the two of you actually want from this?* Do you have a need?
>
> **Leo:** In my local context, it's to build systems and structures within my own building to keep good teachers, you know, not lose them… It would be such a loss to the population... if we lost some teachers because they are completely burned out, miserable. (2023, December 22)

I have been fortunate enough to share professional space with my best friend and closest comrade. While I am in my seventh official year as an educator, he is just two-years-new to the profession, and he, much like me, sees teaching as a vocational extension of our activism, an avenue for revolutionary possibilities, which brought us to education in the first place. Our paths to education are strikingly similar. Perhaps, initially, recognizing the potency of education as a site for liberation stemmed from our common background experience of receiving a private Jesuit education. This privileged position then brought us both to the same Midwestern college town where we found ourselves quickly immersed in the subterranean underclass of wage labor, punk subculture, and post-leftist politics. Both of us tried our hand at music, at times even accompanying each other. Both of us eventually made it back to the city we grew up in. I went into education first, and not long after, so did he. We both wanted to teach high school, but here we are today; we still fight the good fight but instead in service of middle schoolers, albeit in the same building, our classrooms just down the hall from each other.

While I do understand that we are also just workers who provide our labor within an institution, teaching is also a way to live into our beliefs, values, and practices. It seems too good to be true, and in many ways it is.

The reason I begin here with the highlighting of our seemingly parallel journeys is because of how much I have gained by him just simply being there. There are no words to describe the sustenance I find and the will to be the best teacher I can be knowing that his unconditional love, support, and unwavering camaraderie is just a hallway down. All teachers deserve to have that, but in a selfish way, my desire for him or any other good teacher to want to stay may not be what keeps them around. What we're up against is a many-headed hydra, and the Kafkaesque nightmare of the institution is trying its hardest to break us all down.

In our building this year, the level of top-down administrative dysfunction has been trickling downstream through us teachers. Many of our colleagues/comrades-in-waiting would agree but are too disenfranchised to articulate the climate; it can be a toxic environment at times. Why should I expect anyone, myself included, to want to remain in a work environment that continually metabolizes our radical educational endeavors and re-trenches us back into a paradigm of institutional mechanisms of standardized education and vocational destabilization? So, in an effort to create a *counter-narrative*, to be open in the face of collapse, and to embrace criticality as a strategy, I find myself inquiring, *are there things that I can do to improve the experiences of my colleagues/comrades-in-waiting*?

Believe it or not, this line of work, being a classroom teacher, is not for the faint-hearted. Considering all that we face as teachers, both on the macro and micro levels, it

wouldn't be inaccurate to claim that this profession demands a very big heart from those of us who choose to enter a career in public education, let alone have what it takes to stay in the profession. Being an educator requires an immeasurable amount of *capacity* to withstand all of the demands put on teachers from every angle. In my building, the joke is you either stay for 20-plus years, or you're gone in two.

Of course, there is no shortage of reasons for leaving a career in classroom teaching behind, and as I've said to countless people throughout the years, *I* thrive in education because *I* am built for the job. Yet, as this doctoral pursuit has caused me to reflect on my beliefs, values, and practices, I am forced to ask myself: what exactly has sustained *me* throughout my tenure? Is what *I* need to see *my* vocational vision through transferable to others with whom the spaces I cohabitate space? More generally, what factors do in fact contribute to a teacher's capacity to push through the dehumanizing, flattened systems of fragmentation, disenfranchisement, standardization, technocracy, and control? Perhaps the single most impactful finding I've discovered about navigating within this institution harkens back to before I was a teacher. From my younger days of anti-globalization/anti-capitalist/anti-war activism, one slogan has resurfaced and resonates to this day more than ever. *Solidarity forever.*

We're What We Got: Solidarity Amongst Teachers. On various levels, one of the most important resources that teachers have is each other. On a material level, we may help each with lesson plans, share resources, and even cover each other's classes. Equally important, there are the intangibles. For example, we may lend perspective, advice, and concerns about shared students. We may also empower each other, despite harmful mandates and initiatives, to take much-needed risks to equitably serve our

scholars. We even have the uncanny ability to boost each other's morale despite the demoralizing conditions of education. Above all, these examples are part and parcel of teachers' ability to empathize with the struggles of other teachers; in the sense, we looked to a framework of *solidarity* that "implies a kind of mutuality" (Davis, 2016, p. 41).

Even if we believe that education can be the practice of freedom, none of the above benefits of solidarity can really happen without interpersonal connectivity and mutuality beyond the mere professional configuration that the institutionalization of education assumes and allows. I recognize that *I* am able to thrive in spaces where I feel (*affect*) a sense of interpersonal connectivity and mutuality. Coming to terms with the *generative* nature of joy through connection, this year began with intentionality toward building and nurturing interpersonal connectivity with colleagues, my *comrades-in-waiting*. Brown (2022) defines connection as "the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgement; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship" (4:32). *Who better to help a teacher feel seen, heard, and valued than another teacher?* What kind of educator would I be if it weren't for the advice, insight, encouragement, kinship, and camaraderie of other teachers?

A Counter to Disenfranchisement, Fragmentation, and Isolation. As classroom teachers, we are most effective when we feel supported and trusted as the certified professionals we were hired as. Through building and nurturing interpersonal connectivity and affinity, we may establish a crucial counter and possible antidote to educational fascism with *solidarity.* Building and growing *solidarity* with other teachers, especially in our own local contexts whether it be by grade level, content area, building-

wide, across the districts we serve, or even regionally is absolutely necessary to building and growing teacher capacity.

Throughout this school year, as I have tried to embed my scholarship into my practices as a teacher, I have noticed an emboldened feeling within myself to elevate my voice and share my insights into educational fascism. When we speak out against the things that don't align with our sole mission of service to the scholars, we are setting a precedent for all who witness that it is possible to be *critical* of the mechanics of fascism. The more we show up to and in the space, literally physically popping into classrooms, walking the halls, sharing smiles and fist-bumps, and articulating our shared hopes and grievances out loud at team meetings and PD's, the more we will see it emerging in others.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge how my intentional attempts of building a *culture of solidarity* with my colleagues/comrades has, in turn, provided me with more capacity to live into my beliefs, values, and practices. It is the kindling I need to sustain the fire of my vocational being. I can see it having positive impacts in our team meetings and dreaded PD's, and I'm even noticing other colleagues/comrades leaning into the *culture of solidarity.* This generative quality of *Praxis* in *solidarity* is best articulated by bell hooks (1994):

> When our lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice. Indeed, what such experience makes more evident is the bond between the two— that ultimately reciprocal process wherein one enables the other. (p. 61)

There is a reciprocal effect of *solidarity through connectivity,* and vice versa, that all parties involved may harvest; it is capacity formation, and it is a result of *Praxis embodied.* There can be no denying that connection is quite felt *in* the body and that *solidarity* is reciprocal because it gives back.

Without *solidarity*, we run the risk of reducing our educational roles to simply playing a part in the dehumanizing mechanics of just another state-adjacent institution. I can't recall the number of times I have heard my colleagues/comrades settle and negotiate the terms of their disenfranchisement, saying things like, *the best I can do is just close my door and teach.* However, we understand that both learning and knowledge production needs connectivity, that both are part and parcel of participatory and dialogical processes; hooks (1994) reiterates this crucial notion "that critical thinkers who want to change our teaching practices talk to one another, collaborate in a discussion that crosses boundaries and creates a space for intervention" (p. 129). A first step towards effective *communicative action* requires us to talk to each other and confront the fragmentary systems, structures, and aims of educational fascism, whereby education, then, is a maintenance mechanism of the capitalist state-apparatus and "[concepts] such as unity, organization, and struggle are immediately labeled as dangerous. In fact, of course, these concepts are dangerous—to the oppressors—for their realization is necessary to actions of liberation" (Freire, 1970/2006, p. 141). In terms of the rationale behind unity in *solidarity*, Freire (1970/2006) further explains:

> Every move by the oppressed towards unity points toward other actions; it means
> that sooner or later the oppressed will perceive their state of depersonalization and
> discover that as long as they are divided they will always be easy prey for

manipulation and domination. Unity and organization can enable them to change their weakness into a transforming force with which they can re-create the world and make it more human. (p. 145)

When the teachers of my building were met with a mandate to deploy the classroom use of newly acquired surveillance technology (Swivl), most proverbially threw their hands up at the absurdity of the co-opted language espoused to justify its purchase. As if we can't be reflective practitioners without recording ourselves teaching and uploading them to a cloud. The language was that we were *required* to film ourselves. I can't say exactly how many complied initially and just did the thing out of fear, coercion, manipulation, and/or powerlessness. I do know that there were enough of us who never intended to comply. And we didn't because we talked about it as colleagues and comrades and were loosely organized. Knowing that others were risking consequences empowered each other to hold off as long as we could. Needless to say, this situation became part of our *Critical Participatory Action Research* conversation.

It all came to a head with an afterschool Friday email. After two months of just avoiding the mandate in concert with a few others, administration sent out a Google Form seeking information as to whether and why we were not using the technology, but all of the responses offered somehow seemed to bind to a promise of implementing the tech. Feeling anxious and under the gun, I brought it up the next day at our Saturday meeting. *In our conversation, Anne and Connor reminded me of the power of collectivity and to get over my fear.* Anne suggested I contact my union to ask questions and ask about our rights, and so I did. I called immediately after the meeting. The union recommendation was to, in fact, not use the technology. At the following Monday afternoon meeting, the

administrative team quickly changed their tune and said that use of the surveillance

technology was now *optional.*

In a perfect world, all of my closest teacher comrades would feel supported and

emboldened to uproot the toxic power structure of capital and the state embedded in the

institution of public education. Ideally, we'd all start small and plant the seeds for that

larger abolitionist project locally in the same school building! Unfortunately, the reality is

that teachers everywhere are feeling the tensions rise, many questioning if they are cut

out for this line of work. For me to stay the course, I know that I have some work to

continue with building a culture of solidarity from the ground up. Moreover, what we all

need—*institutionally*—is a horizontal power structure that is part and parcel of a deeper

dialogical process based on mutuality and grounded in *solidarity*. To be dialogical is to

be inclusive and presupposes our willful participation.

Anne: A Teacher Is a Teacher Through Other Teachers

And what are radical social movements if not love letters?

—Robin D. G. Kelley, *Twenty Years of Freedom Dreams*

At 8am, the bell rings and brings students into the academic wing. Lockers creak

open. Cliques congregate. TikToks play. I plugin my twinkle lights, light a lavender

candle, restock my granola bar stash, sip my coffee and wait. Although I teach

sophomores, a senior shows up first and for the next fifteen minutes will stand by my

desk like a studious sentinel. *Hey, Ms. AG,* he greets me, and morning crew commences.

I invented the term *morning crew* in my first year of teaching to connote the kids that

curiously chose to congregate in my classroom rather than high school hallway huddling.

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What motivates some students to cheerily chat in a circle while some of their classmates soullessly stare at a screen?

I'm excited about today!

Did you catch the game yesterday?

I got into Missouri State!

What do you think about soulmates?

As the varsity basketball player proffers his hot-take on fate to the rapt peers around him, morning crew conversational magic mesmerizes—and mystifies—me yet again. *What moves the morning crew to start their day this way?* How do these impromptu dialogues summon such different students? *Why does this time together feel so real?* Evincing the relationality and relevance of the everyday, morning crew magnifies the mutuality of lifegiving learning and manifests community—*conversation and context*—as the location of liberation. *Liberated learning starts with solidarity.*

Considering the inequities of power/positionality in our country, and in our classrooms, *how do we create the conditions for solidarity?* How do we cultivate a communal capacity for complexity? What might anti-fascist, horizontal rather hierarchical, processes/practices look like, especially in terms of communication? *How do we build anti-fascist community?* We ask. *We listen.* We learn. *We ask.* We listen. *We learn*. We ask. We listen. We learn. ***We love.***

The moment we choose to love we begin to move against domination, against oppression. The moment we choose to love we begin to move towards freedom, to act in ways that liberate ourselves and others. (hooks, 1994, p. 298)

The community-organized, Afrocentric high school I teach at astounds me. It's the kind of place that makes you wish you were a poet. I can't claim to be a poet, so a love letter will have to do. *A love letter feels right.*

Dear SOUL-school,

 (You know who you are.)

I love you. I love you more than you could know. *I love you more than I could know.* And just like you taught me, I delight in the un-knowing! *Abundance defies articulation.* Which is really just me saying, forgive me for endeavoring to explain the inexplicable experience of *you*. Us. *Ubuntu.* You inspire me to try.

I love you. I love the glorious noise of you in the hallways. A four-minute manifestation of embodied emancipation. A raucous remix of reality. A staccato celebration. Uncertainty unplugged. *The glorious noise of you transfigures the hallways into hope.* I love how when I think of you, I hear you in my heart. *A joyful jive of freedom.* Thank you, *freedom-dream-family*, for teaching me to hear the sacred song of showing-up.

I love you. I love walking out the door with you. Sashaying through the school. Pushing past policy and punishment. *Daring to learn by living.* We step into the sun. *Finding freedom with our feet.* Thank you, *freedom-dream-family*, for teaching me to make MOVE-ments.

I love you. I love the familiar fit of our *Ubuntu* family t-shirts and the relaxed vibes of Wendesdays when we all wear them together. ***I AM BECAUSE WE ARE.*** A school softened and strengthened by solidarity. *The woven fabric of freedom.* Thank you,

freedom-dream-family, for teaching me how to clothe myself in the communion of collectivity.

I love you. I love the fresh beats of your brain. Stratospheric searchings. Pondering pop-offs. Striking insights. Looped lookings for light. *The visceral vibrations of freedom remembered, remixed, remobilized.* Thank you, *freedom-dream-family*, for teaching me to think with the rollicking resistance of jazz.

I love you. I love that we choose to trust each other. *Micro-moments of mattering.* Responsibilities respected. Buoyed belonging. Fluid formation. Authenticity aloud. *Engaged freedom feels like home.* Thank you, *freedom-dream-family*, for teaching me to undoubtedly trust the people.

I love you. I love the encircled sight of you all shaping our learning community through free-flowing questions, conversations, and co-creations. Consistently kind care ripples through our room like soothing ocean waves, the resonant comfort of connection. An animated acceptance. Through Ubuntu, we transfigured a traditional classroom into a sacred soul-space of an embodied equality. Horizontally fastened freedom. Thank you, *freedom-dream-family*, for teaching me that not only is a person a person through other people—*Ubuntu*—a teacher is also a teacher through other teachers, just like you are mine (see Figure 13).

Thank you. Thank you for teaching me to believe again in education as the practice of freedom. ***Ubuntu.*** I love you.

Figure 13

Teaching to Transgress
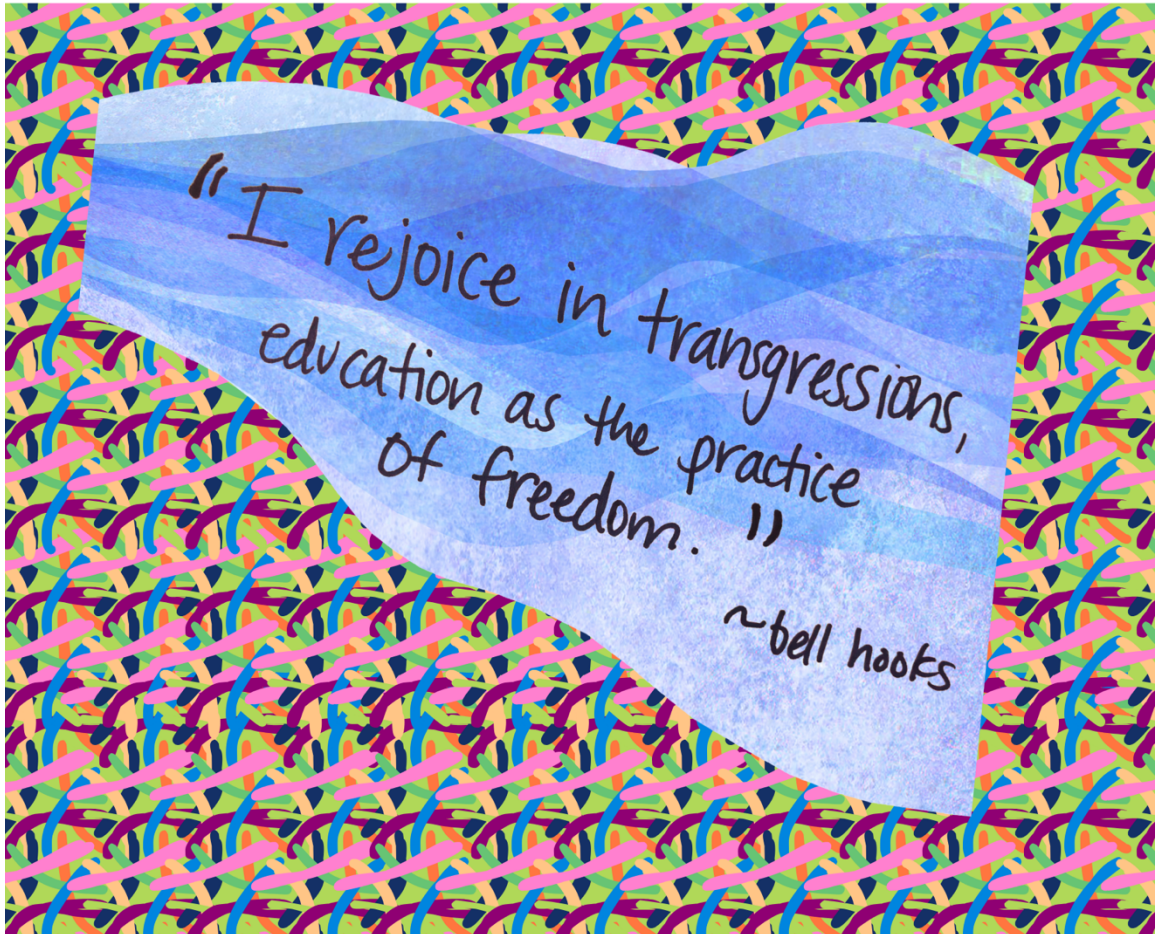
Anti-fascist Biophily III: Process

> *Problem-posing education is revolutionary futurity.* Problem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of *becoming*—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality. *The unfinished character of human beings and the transformational character of reality necessitate that education be an ongoing activity.* Education is thus constantly remade in the Praxis. In order *to be,* it must *become.*
>
> —Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

Anne: Through this CPAR process, *we found that education as the practice of freedom emerges from education practiced as a process.* Why?

Connor: When you insist that things are processed, when you keep things in process, it can't be reduced to standardization, it can't be standardized. It can't be controlled. *Process weaves together what fascism fragments.* With process, our two other *LIFE* themes become possible. *Solidarity is formed by being in process with people.* For communally-created-democratic knowledge production— *process is the way we embrace each other's humanity in that shared space*—to let each other be in flux—*to be free.*

Leo: I think process grounds us in the present. I think when we're—in the process—we're allowed to sit with the uncertainty, sit with the messiness and not worry about the unwritten, the future that's unwritten, that's where, for me, the learning happens, through the experiences, through the messiness… *The culture is telling us to focus on the product, the end, but the beauty is happening in the moments that we come together and are practicing*—in-process—*the process.*

Anne: *Process-based beauty*, I hear that, *but how do you pull off process-based anything within the heightened hierarchies of fascism?* Micro-measured, micro-monitored, and micro-managed, where—and when—can teachers and students shift from the stifling standardization of schools to the liberated learning of people-in-process?

Connor: *Fugitivity and the politics of refusal*—you have to SAY NO to make the space to SAY YES—*you must make a conscious choice to counter*—to take the time and space to practice the process of being in-process—*Praxis.* I can stand at the front of the classroom and give all the assignments I want, telling my students whatever I want to tell them about whatever it is they have to do, but that won't push them to participate. W*e need to come to the consensus to learn together.*

Leo: That reminds me that the root of the word consensus is consent. Education as process—*education as the practice of freedom*—education as the process of being in-process—*seeks students' consent*. [...] In this process, we're trying to expose, coercion and standardization, the mechanisms of the fascist machine, but we're doing so in such a way that we're modeling the alternative. *We counter fascist control with embodied consent.*

Anne: What we do in this [CPAR process] isn't the consensus of an established norm or point but rather the continuous pursuit of consenting and participating in the process. [...] There's energy and possibility in our classrooms even, and maybe even, especially, if we're not perfectly participating because we haven't forced the flowing fierceness of our collective truth into the rigidity of righteousness—and coerced conformity—of hierarchical hegemony. *When we*

collectively consent to the process of being in the process, of being in-process, *of*

becoming, we give ourselves freedom and fluidity. (2024, February 29)

Together we reclaim the right—and the space—**to be human.** *To live.*

Figure 14
Anti-fascist Biophily III

Alma Thomas, The Eclipse, 1970, acrylic on canvas, 62 in. × 49 3/4 in. (157.5 × 126.4 cm), Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the artist, 1978.40.3
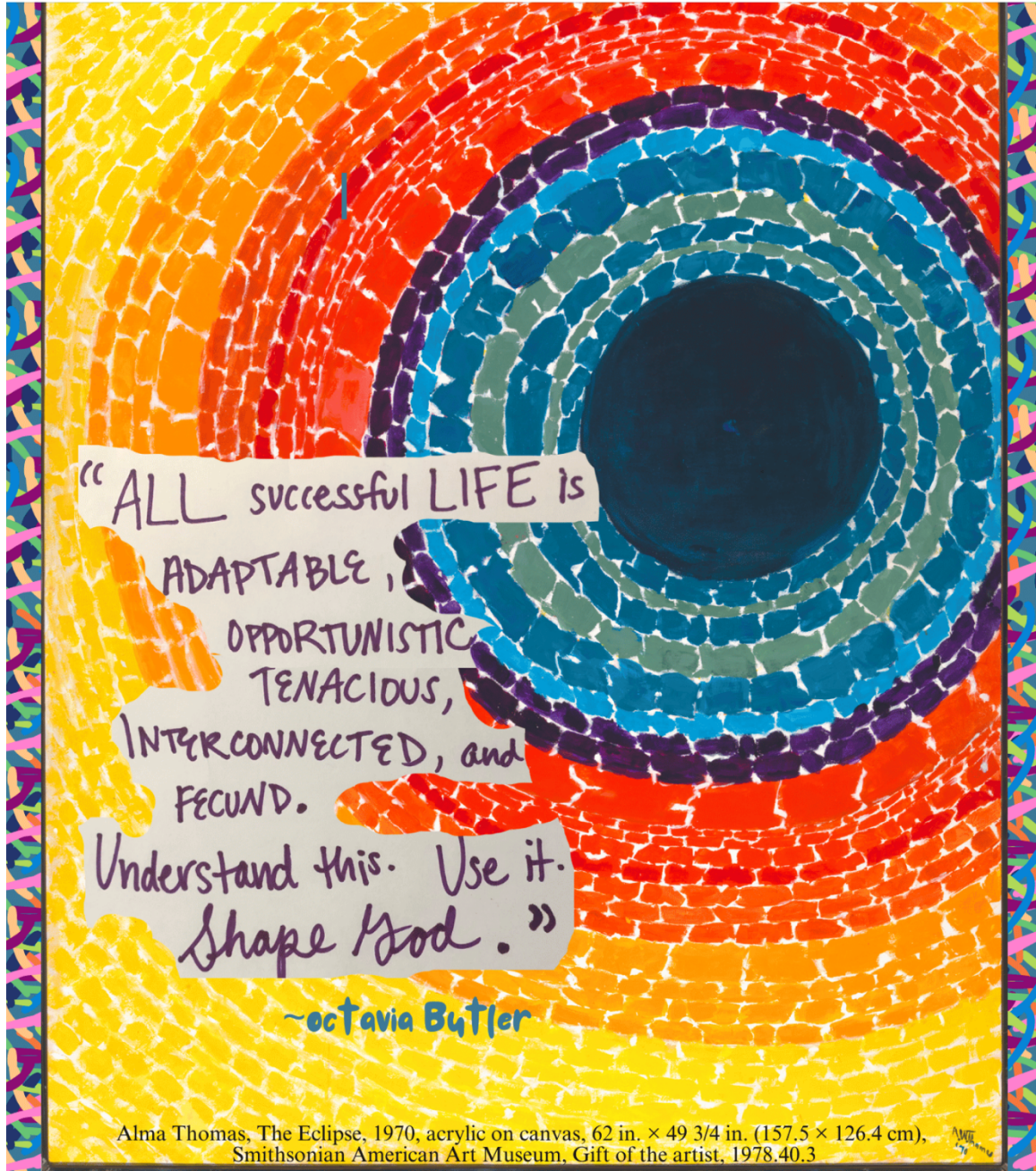
Connor: Words Are Maps

What is there to say about this process? More important than anything became the people in it. I could not imagine ever putting the *work* of this research above the *wellbeing* of the people involved in it, *not because this research isn't important*, but because that would run counter to the very vision of this research. *This research is not objective.* Its outcomes are not neutral. *This research has an objective*—a clear goal—*to advance the cause of human flourishing and abolish all systems that stand in the way of that flourishing*—systems of white supremacy, of ableism, of patriarchy, and yes, of capitalism. That is not a limitation of this process; *it is its greatest strength.* We must live into what we seek to create. *The process itself is a finding.*

Process is what allowed us to engage in true criticality.

Process is what helped create and strengthen our solidarity.

Process refuted standardization.

Process weaved together fragmentation.

The process itself is a finding.

When we began this research, we set out to explore ways fascism impacts schooling, both at the macro and micro level, to explore ways teachers and schools could resist fascism in education and in their classrooms. But as many CPAR researchers have said before us (Kemmis et al., 2014), we quickly came to understand the CPAR process not simply as a process by which to explore or achieve something else, but the process became the very thing we were exploring and hoping to achieve; it became an answer.

The process itself is a finding.

Sure, we had read that this would be the case. We read other researchers explaining how the process and the collective became the most important question and answer; that part of CPAR research is always research into CPAR itself. But as we began to move through this process, we began to feel it:

The words are purposes.

The words are maps.

I came to see the damage that was done

and the treasures that prevail…

…the thing I came for:

the wreck and not the story of the wreck

the thing itself and not the myth (Rich, p. 23, 2013).

No one could give us the thing itself—we could only read our way into the myth, until suddenly we were there, submerged in it, and we found the thing itself. *So, what are you sitting here for?* What more invitation do you need?

Go revel in the thing itself.

Explore the damages that were done.

Find the treasure that prevails.

Go.

These words are merely a map.

Leo: The Freedom in Emergence and Uncertainty

When we first started to come together, we hoped to co-create practices that were counter to the fascist tendencies of coercion and manipulativeness. The emergent nature of our collective process allowed—and will continue to allow—the three of us to come

together "as beings in the process of *becoming*—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality" (Freire, 1970/2006, p. 84). Our CPAR *process* reminded us that in our coming together as our group *became,* there needed to be a certain level of revocation of the traditional positivist modalities of research, which are based in hierarchy, power, and control. Allowing us to be vulnerable with each other, we partook in decolonial practice of relinquishing the conditioned desire for control. That our ideas and practices were formed in *dialogue* with each other gave us permission to connect as a collective of individuals from varying contexts.

    Anne: So, J6?

    Leo: I mean, January 6 is an easy one to pick apart. Charlottesville is another one.

    Connor: Yeah, that one's easy, too, since there were literally open, self-avowed Nazis. Like, they weren't hiding. They weren't trying to.

    Leo: It's hard to pick what stories to highlight because those are the easy ones, and I think people will have already seen enough of that for making…

    Anne Grass: No! Because there's so much *other* crazy now, right? *No, dude*. We *should* be talking about that and thinking about that all the time, but we're not. That's why fascism is steamrolling all of us.

    Connor: And it's making the connection, too, right?

    Anne: It's bringing together all the pieces. (2023, November 14)

    Forming a *public sphere* to experiment with CPAR *process,* with Anne and Connor, with its emergent and iterative nature at the forefront of that process, has been more than I had hoped for. If I told you that this journey had gone exactly as I expected, I wouldn't be telling the truth. The truth is that I had no idea what would emerge over the

course of the two years and hundreds of hours we would spend with each other familiarizing, bonding, learning, laughing, grinding, collaborating, encouraging, and challenging each other. Challenging, in the sense that they have challenged me to continually live into my beliefs, values, and practices of being a critical educator. Time and time again they reenergized me and reminded me to bring what we study and practice in our group meetings into my professional space, my school building, and my classroom. A burgeoning twofold, collective goal emerged for me: 1) wanting to expose the mechanisms by which coercive authoritarian power and necrophilous fascism manifest and actually exist in education/the world and 2) *doing it* in such a way as to model and *embody* our vision of an alternative approach. Moreover, our CPAR process was centered around *trust,* trust in each other, *trust in the process.*

I think a lot of academics are afraid of the concept of *uncertainty*. School has indoctrinated us to believe that there are certain expected, positivist, ways to approach knowledge construction, that there are experts who know the thing and the lowly student, who doesn't know the thing, needs the expert to transmit the knowing to her, the empty vessel. What the CPAR process allowed for us was an opportunity to *not* know and to grapple with the messiness of not knowing, that the *not-knowing* is a crucial part of our process. In fact, we intentionally leaned into the messiness and uncertainty.

The feelings I associated with our process are akin to my past life as an anti-globalization activist: street demonstrations and protests of spontaneously taking to the streets—unscripted and without permission, daring the powers that be to stop us. It felt scary at first because there was uncertainty. *Are we supposed to be doing this? Is this okay?* You would feel the fear in your bones, in your *affect*, but then, as you looked

around at those who walked in step *with* you would quickly realize that, *in* those moments and spaces, the feeling was not fear at all. It was the burgeoning feeling of freedom, a freedom that has been fought over to be taken away, hidden, or covered but may be triggered to be awakened inside of us. *Process* allowed us to act as if freedom is here and non-negotiable.

Anne: Trust the People, Trust the Process

In a non-linear process, *everything is part of the learning,* every step.

—adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy*

Dear Critical Community. I could reflect on our CPAR *process* for the rest of my life, but, alas, only a month remains in this study. *There's never enough time!* Right? *There's never enough time to do it RIGHT!* Our CPAR crew talked about time a lot, how teachers are time-bound. Capitalism shackles schools to the pandering pace of profits rather than the peace of people. Curriculum companies even go so far as to sell us our servitude as our salvation. *The pacing guide!* One of my favorite episodes of *Abbott Elementary*, a television show written by the daughter of a Philadelphia public school teacher, Quinta Brunson (2022), satirizes the *teacher-time-trap* in a highly relatable scene between first-year teacher, Gregory Eddie, and veteran teacher, Barbara Howard:

Gregory Eddie: This first-grade curriculum is nuts. *They expect us to get through all this in one school year?* Are they for real? (7:37)

Barbara Howard: Sweetheart, it happens like this every year. The school district decides what we are capable of if we use every minute of the day. *It is completely theoretical.* (7:49)

Gregory Eddie: I don't want my students to fall behind. If this is what they expect of us, then it can't be unrealistic. (7:52)

Barbara Howard: Welcome to the Philly public school system, *where you never have what you need.* (7:58)

Later in the episode, Barabara finds Gregory in his classroom, now completely covered in color-coded time tables, class schedules and to-do lists (Brunson, 2022):

Barbara Howard: *What is this?* (10:29)

Gregory Eddie: I mapped out the entire school year so I can meet every one of the district's mandated goals. *I scheduled everything down to the hour.* Now, I didn't allot for this conversation, so if we could wrap this up in the next two minutes, that'd be very helpful. (10:32)

Barbara Howard: Gregory, what if something goes wrong and you get a millisecond off of this very impressive map? (10:47)

Gregory Eddie: *I accounted for that.* Imagining the worst thing that could possibly happen is one of my best qualities. (10:55)

Barbara Howard: *But what if one of the students understands the lesson and another one doesn't?* What if a cold runs through the classroom and several students are out for a few days? *What if there's a snow day?* Oh, and I see that you are getting Samir. I had him last year. *Lovely student.* Very intelligent. *Have you allotted for the nosebleeds he gets when he's excited?* (11:01)

After a few frenetic scenes, Gregory capitulates:

Gregory Eddie: *Everything is chaos.*

And we all lose (Brunson, 2022,17:49).

Gregory echoes the failure all teachers feel when trying to maintain the manic

expectations of profit-paced policies and practices. *There's never enough time!*

In our CPAR conversations, we find ourselves inquiring. *If fascism fuels the*

teacher-time-trap failure, how might anti-fascism address this anxiety? What can we do

to counter zero-sum scarcity? *How can education become the practice of freedom rather*

than the punitive policing of productivity? Process-process-process. *Trust the people,*

trust the process! In our CPAR study, nothing is more powerful than process. Like Freire,

we found that education as the practice of freedom emerges from education practiced as

a process, "Authentic liberation—the process of humanization—is not another deposit to

be made in men. Liberation is a Praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon

their world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1970/2006, p. 79). *Liberatory learning*

occurs through Praxis, through the people-powered processes of problem-posing

education.

> When people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the
>
> world, *they come to see the world*, not as a static reality but as a reality in process,
>
> *in transformation.* (Freire, 1970/2006, p.84)

Education as the practice of freedom does not have a fixed ending point. *Liberatory*

learning is the labor of our lives. It is life itself. *The open-ended process of problem-*

posing education pushes us, as educators, to relinquish our curricular chokeholds. In

education as the practice of freedom, participatory *Praxis*/process replaces repressive

mandates and monologues with community-created questions and discursive

development, "This movement of inquiry must be directed towards humanization—*the*

people's historical vocation. The pursuit of full humanity, however, cannot be carried out

in isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship and solidarity" (Freire, 1970/2006, p. 85). *Revolutionary educators embrace the process of their own becoming.*

> From the outset, [the revolutionary educator's] efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization. [The revolutionary educator's] efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this, they must be partners of the students in their relations with them. (Freire, 1970/2006, p. 75)

As revolutionary educators, we must equally engage our students in education as the practice of freedom. *Trust the people, trust the process!* How can you trust that you're practicing *Praxis*/process in partnership? *You stop thinking of yourself as the teacher.* It's like I tell my students. **I'm a learner,** *just like you.*

> Transformation doesn't happen in a linear way. At least not one we can always track. It happens in cycles, convergences, explosions. If we release the framework of failure, we can realize that we are in iterative cycles, and we can keep asking ourselves—how do I learn from this? (brown, p. 105)

> **Dear We-Three.** *Thank you.* Thank you for showing-up. Thank you for the 150+ hours we spent together. Thank you for sharing you and for letting me give me. *Thank you for your gentle dignity.*

> *Thank you.* Thank you for Tower-Grove-walk-talks, saying hi to strangers, and Leo looking for birds. Thank you for not taking things too seriously. Thank you for playing catch in the park. *Thank you for finding the fun in freedom.*

> *Thank you.* Thank you for pondering the world with your perspectives. Thank you for Uhuru critiques, Rhianna radicality, and all things Angela Davis. Thank you for

your critical consciousness that encourages me to continue to confront. *Thank you for naming pain.*

Thank you. Thank you for sprawling out on my living room rug with me. Thank you for comforting closeness and reassuring risks. Thank you for the kindergarten throwback of storytelling circle-time. *Thank you for listening with love.*

Thank you. Thank you for waking up every morning and choosing to teach. Thank you for laughing when you don't feel up to it. Thank you for whatever you do that goes unseen. *Thank you for laboring for life.*

Thank you. Thank you, Connor, for conducting the trust train. Thank you for translating our spiraling, three-hour sessions into sense. Thank you for acting saltier than your age. Thank you for your steadfast spirit. *Thank you, Connor, for committing.*

Thank you. Thank you, Leo, for living your life. Thank you for making music. Thank you for being a friend to everyone. Thank you for thinking the thoughts only you could think. *Thank you, Jolly Jalipa, for healing us with your joy.*

Thank you. Thank you for holding me in hope. Thank you for hello hugs, van-pooled adventures, and looking each other in the eyes. Thank you for collective coffee cravings, our labyrinthine GoogleDrive folder, and your moving magnanimity. *Thank-you-thank-you-thank-you for this process-process-process.*

Thank you for our becoming. Thank you, CPAR counter-crew*,* for forgiving me for what I'm still learning how to say. ***Thank you, and I love you.***

See you Saturday?

Dear Me, Hear Me, February 18, 2024. *Writing letters in academia, again, annegrass?* Of course you are! *Freirean full circle.* I wrote my undergraduate thesis,

epistolary style, imagining myself and social justice mentors, dialoguing back and forth. *I wrote to Freire.* I read *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire 1970/2006) an embarrassing amount of times and tried to talk to me, to write letters to me, as Freire, and, fifteen years later, I'm looking to letters for answers again. *Process-process-process.* Trust the process. *But HOLAY!* I'm tempted to accuse Freire of forgetting the part about the PAIN of the process, but, of course, he didn't. *His heart was too open for that.* I'd like to skip this part, so it's probably where I should stay, or start, or be.

> Another issue of indubitable importance arises: the fact that certain members of the oppressor class join the oppressed in their struggle for liberation, thus moving from one pole of the contradiction to the other. Theirs is a fundamental role, and has been so throughout the history of this struggle. It happens, however, that as they cease to be exploiters or indifferent spectators or simply the heirs of exploitation and move to the side of the exploited, they almost always bring with them the marks of their origin: their prejudices and their deformations, which include a lack of confidence in the people's ability to think, to want, and to know. (Freire, 1970/2006, p. 60)

Process-process-process.

I've been crying a lot these past weeks, but that's not really the truth. I haven't been crying. I've been moved to tears–and laughter. As a cradle Catholic, I remember a particularly telling parish school of religion lesson where we were asked about the gifts of the holy spirit, and, if you've ever been Catholic, or been around Catholics, you'll know that's not an open-ended brainstorming invitation. *There's a right answer.* My classmates start calling them out—wisdom, knowledge, understanding, piety, fortitude—

but we're two short. I think of my mom, hear her laugh, and know I've got it. *Laughter and tears!* I beam, but my teacher takes offense. A book appears to prove me wrong, but I protest. I know that my mom knows what my mom knows. I know her life. I know my life. *Was I wrong?* I was eight. *Process-process-process.* These days I'm thirty-eight and thought I'd offer you up that grass family favorite anne-gaffe as a counter-balance to my uncomfortable crying confession–only problem is–I'm not laughing. Too many traps, too few gifts—even then. The traps were always there. I'm moved to tears. Process-process-process—*PAIN*. But that cannot be the end. I hear my mom in my heart, and I remember how, just this week, my mom and I bestowed some unexpecting shoppers in a store parking lot with a public display of unsanctioned giggling. *We are the gifts we give.* I laugh. *We are the gifts we need.* No individual I evades the traps, no I escapes them. Like the fierce Fannie Lou Hamer knew long before, *nobody's free until everybody's free.* And, although, god knows, White women need no more air time than what we already take up, *I ask for your patience and help with this next part.* I need you. *Process-process-process.* I am a White woman. A stinging sentence. A joke? A warning? An excuse? A trap. According to my grandfather, whom I loved dearly despite him preventing my mother from attending college because she was his daughter and not his son, I am what the old-timers would call an overeducated whistle-_ _ _ _ (*male genital slan*g). But even though I've been in school for twenty-eight years of the thirty-eight years I've been alive, I've never once studied feminism. By the time I finally heard a woman say first-wave versus second-wave, I was already drowned. And oppression doesn't mind if you misinterpret it. *Process-process-process*—PAIN.

The last time I tried to tell this story–my story–I was still dreaming of dead kids. Nightmares of nooses, shotguns and my students. Whenever I went to open the door to a single use public restroom, all the dread I'd ever felt in my life metastasized into a black hole of fear. I choked. My body felt what my mind desperately did not want to see but could also not stop seeing—everywhere. Suicide behind every door. For six years, I lived and taught–as a White woman citizen of the United Sates of America–at a school haunted by genocide. This school is in what most people in our country would call South Dakota. A Reservation. A Massacre. An operating Prisoner of War Camp. The Badlands. Home. How did I get there? The last time I tried to tell this story I didn't do that question justice. I was more worried about what I should or shouldn't do in the now, which was then. I was a White woman teacher who couldn't stop thinking about dead kids, so, in typical White woman fashion, I stopped teaching and started shouting about dead kids. All of oppression existed in a single knotted rope in my mind. I was trapped by a horror I did not know how to hold.

> Accordingly, these adherents to the people's cause constantly run the risk of falling into a type of generosity as malefic as that of the oppressors. The generosity of the oppressors is nourished by an unjust order, which must be maintained in order to justify that generosity. Our converts, on the other hand, truly desire to transform the unjust order; but because of their background they believe that they must be the executors of the transformation. They talk about the people, but they do not trust them; and trusting the people is the indispensable precondition for revolutionary change. (Freire, p. 60)

I was stuck at the side of the grave with a shovel I could not move. Warped by my White-woman-woundedness, I struggled so much to shift the shovel I thought was mine to use that I did not learn to hear—or sing—the song that surrounded me. I held the immutable shovel of White Guilt. I was praying for a resurrection that I couldn't see I was trying to be. *Process-process-process–PAIN.*

I became a teacher for the first time on August 20, 2008, but have only full-time taught eight of the sixteen years since then. Every time I leave teaching, I do so looking for life. *I need to quit, so I can go and get a life.* When you grow up with privilege and power, as I did, you think life is something you can get, , "Attempting *to be more* human, individualistically, leads to having more, egotistically, a form of dehumanization" (Freire, 1970/2006, p.86). I am what Freire would call a convert. At 38, I have spent the same amount of years going against the grain of my upbringing as I did living it, but freedom is not as simple as changing your address. *What's a weary-hearted-white-woman-warped teacher to do?* Basement-scavenge-hunt-books, of course! I find it in the fourth box I open, its gaudy red undiminished. Cross-legged on the cold cement of my parents' basement, my chest tightens, "*To the oppressed, and to those who suffer with them and fight at their side*" (Freire, 1970/2006). A tear hits my t-shirt before I even finish reading the dedication. *Do I dare?* The fact that I had to find my Freire in my parents' basement speaks for itself, don't you think? *Process-process-process–PAIN.*

Whenever I pick up the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, I am usually lost, but, in all those times, I have never been so lost and lonely as I was two summers ago, at the end of a school year that started with my own school burying a recent alumna murdered by

gun/gang violence and ended with another twenty-three more souls robbed in the Uvalde

school shooting. More dead kids. Why do I keep doing this to myself?

> Those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine
>
> themselves constantly. This conversion is so radical as not to allow of ambiguous
>
> behavior…*Conversion to the people requires a profound rebirth.* Those who
>
> undergo it must take on a new form of existence; they can no longer remain as
>
> they were. (Freire, 1970/2006, pp. 60-61)

Cyclical crucifixion gets old. *Can't a girl get a profound rebirth ASAP?* Unfortunately,

from one convert to the next, it's never gone down like that for me. Instead, it looks like

reading Paulo Freire aloud to your friend's two-year-old on your summer break, begging

the universe to save you from oppression, which, as a convert, more often than not,

usually just means me. *But self-loathing isn't a solution that's ever worked for me either*,

so I read on:

> Education as the practice of freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of
>
> domination—denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to
>
> the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from people.
>
> Authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without people,
>
> but people in their relations with the world. (Freire, 1970/2006, p. 81)

I think of the morning after Uvalde and how a certain child of god showed up at my side.

Ms. AG, if I was you, I wouldn't even be here today. I don't know how you all do it. Of

the litany of tragedy I could contemplate from that year, it was this comment, from this

student, that shook something loose in me. *School is killing us.* The first time I risked this

thought I was thinking of me, teacher-me. *School is killing teachers.* Two teachers lost

their lives in Texas, but were they really the only casualties to this career? *What does teaching—in such a fractured time—take from teachers?* Why do we permit the plundering of people in our profession? *Process-process-process—PAIN.* On that morning of gutting grief, my student showed-up and stood by my side. She made space for me to see myself alone at the gravesite fighting with death. I felt my death-grip on that unchanging shovel. *What was the cost of my White-woman clutching?* Why couldn't I see the distortion of zero-sum dignity? Guilt and shame and unprocessed pain cannot redeem a life. *Trying to keep everybody alive was killing me.* When my student stood by my side on that mournful May morning, she disrupted this distortion. *Named for a flower of rebirth, how does a teenaged sophomore save you from yourself?* They see the true fight. *School is killing US.* They hum the hope of our shared struggle for humanization. *They teach me to forfeit my solo fight with death for the collective sewing of freedom-dreams.* They invite me, as a White woman, not to initiate but rather participate in freedom as a constant struggle, "the cloud of witness, the endless teaching, the long road home."[1] *They sing the song of solidarity I'm still learning to hear.* As Fred Hampton (1969) heralded, "Power anywhere where there's people" (para. 1).

Process-process-process—*POWER.*

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[1] Alice Walker, "Whatever We Have, We Have to Work With It"

Figure 15

Called to Counter
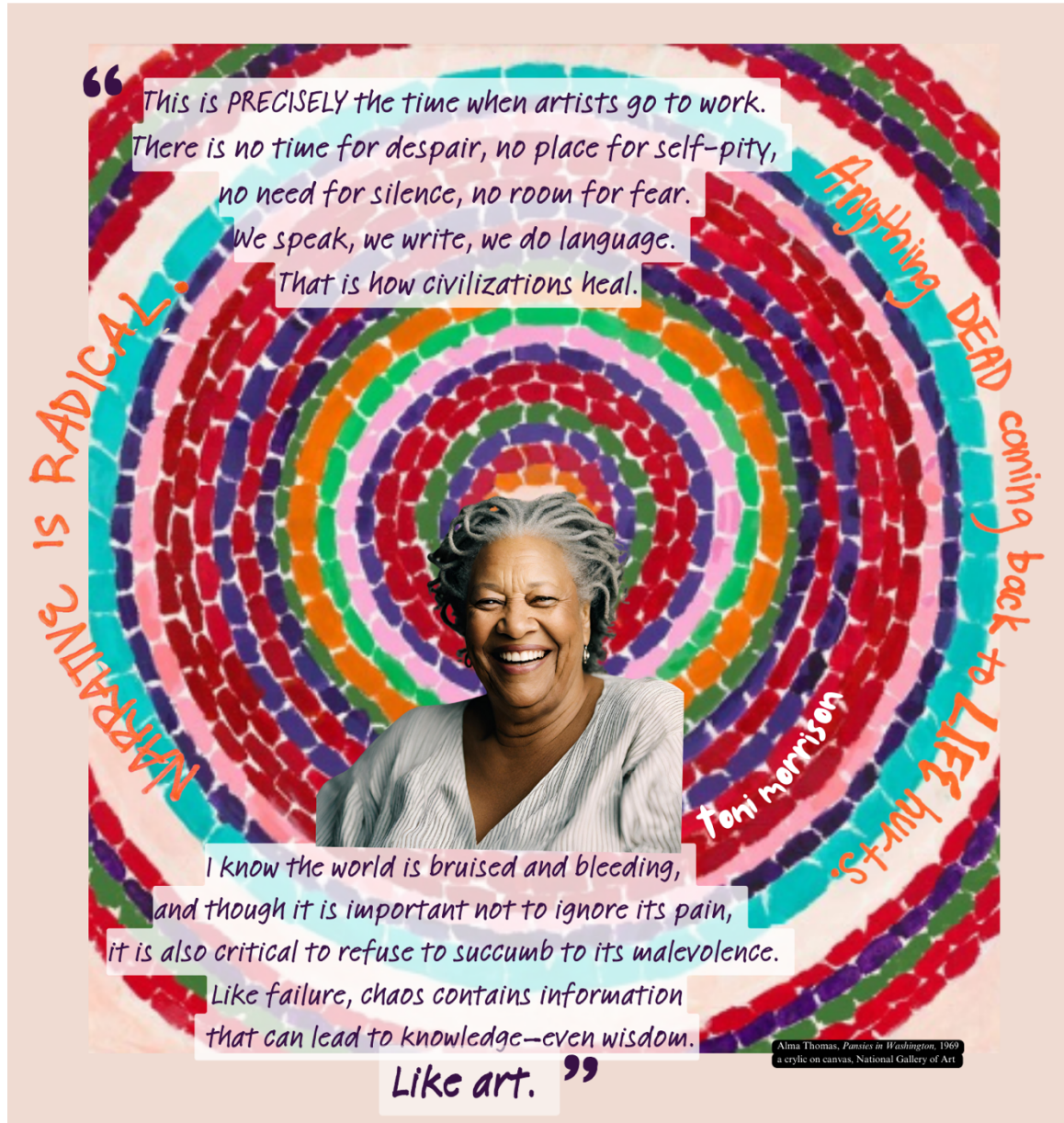
Discussion

The most important things in life I cannot make happen on my own.

—Heather McGee, *public talk,* 2024, *St. Louis*

"Wanna roll together?" As always, Leo kindly offered to carpool, and so we showed up to Heather McGee's talk like we normally do. *Together.* Afterwards, we found the few other members of our doctoral learning cohort that were there and circled up, marveling at McGee and debriefing all things dissertation. After a while, one of our learning-community-comrades-classmates commented, "Looks like we're the last ones left." Connor, Leo, and I laughed. *We always seemed to be the last three to leave.* After hugging everyone goodbye, we headed back to the car, accompanied by this same classmate, "Can I say something to y'all?" *Sure*—of course—*feel free.* "When I look at y'all—when I'm around y'all—I can't help but think—*you're the dissertation dream-team.*" Agreed? **Were we the dissertation dream-team?**

> **Leo**: When I heard our cohort member explain what he meant by that comment, in terms of group dynamics versus the scholarship, the dynamic, in his opinion, was the hope, the goal, and that the scholarship played second fiddle to that. *And for us, it's both—academic scholarship and nurturing relationships—we're in tandem.*
>
> **Anne**: And that's a misunderstanding of CPAR, that it's not academic. *But we don't play when it comes to theory!* CRITICAL *THEORY* led us to CPAR, and our CPAR process, which constantly creates and conveys our democratic dynamics, *PUTTING* THEORY *INTO PRACTICE.*

Connor: When someone who has been around us so little remarks that we're the dissertation dream-team, that points back to communicative power. *Did the social change we intended transpire?* Yes!

Anne: W*e are the way we are because of the hundreds of hours we've committed to equal engagement.*

Leo: Part of the call to action then, beyond radical politics, becomes a call to carve that out—*to take the time, to make the space*—TO TAKE THE TIME, TO RE-MAKE THE SPACE.

Connor: Totally. *Fascism makes us feel time-bound.* Pitted against the pacing guide, we hurry along to a prescribed point without pause.

Leo: *We overlook the tiny transgressions we could make if we just stepped back and stopped.*

Anne: And we're full-circle—***CPAR starts with a STOP.*** (2024, February 26)

Even for us, as this group that people pointed to as the ideal dissertation crew, we struggled against time, which is why, with the wisdom of CPAR, *we have come to view time not only as a limitation but also a call to action.* In the people-powered processes of CPAR, the collective intentionally iterates its limitations as invitations to extend the inclusivity and participation of the public sphere. In CPAR, you participate honestly— and imperfectly—celebrating the ceaseless struggle for solidarity. *In CPAR, your limitations lead you on.* Limited by time, we were not able to extend our CPAR public sphere to include participants beyond ourselves. *But we also learned that the work of a public sphere never ends.* For us, writing this dissertation will not conclude our work together. *This dialogue is by no means final.* It is imperfect and in process just like we

are. *Collectively, in-process, we resist the zero-sum scarcity lie of fascism through the fluid futurity of freedom-dreams.*

In the words of the author of *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, Robin Kelley (2022), "Freedom dreams are born of fascist nightmares, or better yet, born *against* fascist nightmares" (para. 9).

Honoring Theory

Theory does not solve issues—only action and solidarity can do that—but theory gives you language to fight, knowledge to stand on, and a humbling reality of what intersectional social justice is up against.

—Bettina Love, *We Want To Do More Than Survive*

Connor: Good theory should never be disconnected from *the people*; good theory comes *from* the people. (2024, February 26)

As teachers, we are so often urged to go back and rediscover *our professional why.* No doubt, coming to terms with why you chose a career in education can be integral to maintaining a level of motivation to keep going. And yet, just as often, to be posed that reminder, say at a professional development, can be reducible to a manipulative administrative ploy meant to invigorate more top-down professional compliance in service to a data-driven bottom line centered on test scores and general productivity. Under those terms of order, where do we *as people* fit in? How many teachers would confess, if you asked them, that even with naming and knowing their *why*, they still felt so overwhelmed by the daily demands and pressures of the job? That our motivations are articulated does not alleviate the potentialities of coercion and oppression, especially in educational spaces. This is all to say that perhaps knowing our *why* may not be enough.

To maintain the energy and momentum it takes to (re)direct—moving beyond teaching as merely a career—our *vocational* visions under threat of falling out of focus (Lamberti, 2001), we also need to know our *what ifs* and *whereby(s)* and *how might(s)*.

For the three of us—Anne, Connor, and Leo—***theory*** has been the staging point and "North Star" (Love, 2019, p. 132) for the aforementioned energy and momentum, throughout this CPAR process and research endeavor, a beacon that has helped guide our vision of what education can be, a home base where we can return to reinvent ourselves and our practices. We recognize that for many, theory can be a site of alienation, seen as something of an elitist barrier to the project of liberation, and sitting with that uncomfortable understanding, we acknowledge our privilege as part of our path to theory. *Theory armed us with the frameworks to access, unlock, grapple with, contextualize, and embody knowledge.* For, what use is theory without its redemptive application by the people? *Therein lies the power of CPAR—providing people with a process to make the power of theory accessible, relevant, and real.* These past two years, it has been more than just researching and reading theory. *We have become living theory—moving toward the mutual vocation of humanization.* Through this embodied cognition emerged an embodied resistance to that which we oppose.

A cognitive and concrete counter.

What theory has taught us is that the words and wisdom of the truth in and of liberation are here—*in us* and the *spaces we find ourselves*—and it is our task to recognize it. But it is not enough to just recognize and think about it. Returning to the process of *Praxis,* and the *Praxis* of *process,* we've learned that the *recognition* and *knowing are* but a staging point for *movement* and *action*. When knowing moves us *to*

feeling—we can begin *to embody* the theory, words, and wisdom *of freedom*—as we confirm our active *participation* in a transformative *process*—the process demands we *communicate* with each other—in our *communicative action* arises a *shared language* and *vision*—now in *solidarity* with each other—we *become* the struggle *for freedom.*

We **organize.**

In terms of the vital relationship our group has with *theory*, part of our vision is to depart from the commodified grammar of neoliberalism and capitalism—e.g. giving *credit* to, what we *owe*, how we are *indebted* to—when talking about our group's communion with any radical or critical social theory, theorists, writings, and ideas. Instead, we choose gratitude to acknowledge, honor, celebrate, and participate in the radical traditions that came before us. *We enter this dialogue to continue the dire conversation.* By no means are our findings groundbreaking but are instead in tandem with and belong to a longstanding radical—*COUNTER*—tradition and lineage dedicated to the "largely anonymous collective practices of worldmaking against domination, traditions of the oppressed which remain a resource for those set on dismantling the hierarchies that the partisans of Order and Tradition seek to revive and impose" (Toscano, 2023, p. xii). In these darkening times, *we have sought the light and have found our North Star in folks* like Freire, hooks, Giroux, Lewis, Lewin, Lorde, Love, and countless others. *Through these guiding lights*—**we encounter a path back to life**—*affectionately connecting us to people, passion, and purpose*—**to love**.

Call to Action—All Roads Lead to Abolition

It is in collectivities that we find reservoirs of hope and optimism.

—Angela Davis, *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle*

The most important gift we have is time, but, like freedom, time is not a gift that any one person, authority, institution, or state can truly give; we must seize it for ourselves. And along with our time, we must reclaim our spaces to make do with our time. This *public sphere* that we three—Anne, Connor, and Leo—have conceived in this CPAR process essentially explored and experimented with what carving out time and space *could* look like. As we reflect on this iteration of our CPAR process, *we will take all that we have learned about ourselves, each other, our collective, and our world and carry it with us into new iterations*, moving to new arrangements and new actions. Channeling Jarvis Givens's (2021) notion of the *intellectual insurgent network* for our next iteration(s), we envision expanding our anti-fascist collective to anyone who is open to learning, growing, collaborating, and co-conspiring *with us* toward the transformation and abolition of all oppressive institutions.

Freedom is a constant struggle.

Hearkening back to the beginning, while this dissertation serves as an occasion to name what is happening here and now, it also serves as *a call to action.* And like all actions, it begins with a conversation. If the embers of discontent smoldering within you just need a little oxygen, may we three provide a breath of life, as we wish to re-extend an invitation for participation to you, the reader. *It is an invitation to join us in this conversation*, in dialogue *with us* and *all those in solidarity*—past, present, and future—who have sought and continue to seek respite from systems of domination, *all who dare to dream of what a collective transformation of those systems could look like.* We three have certainly felt the burn of liberation engulf our hearts and believe that to share in those feelings *with others* is part and parcel of a larger *ongoing critical project of the practice of freedom.* Like a

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wildfire, feelings are generative, *in shared affect and solidarity,* and meant to spread—

perhaps our stories may fan the flames.

    And hope.

Whatever your vocation is—whether it is in education, social work, counseling, health

care, or the arts, or anyone seeking solidarity in the struggle, in excitement—*we call to*

you with curiosity, imagination, and openness to dare to demand the impossible. Along

the way, we will undoubtedly face fear, uncertainty, and certain risks involved with this

journey toward transformation, yet we also must acknowledge that compliance has never

guaranteed humanity, dignity, or life. What we *will* have is *each other.* We are not trying,

nor has it ever been our intention, to create a prescriptive grounded theory or pedagogy of

anti-fascist education; we don't need to. Most oppressive systems, education included,

breed their own antagonisms, and with those antagonisms come the limitless potentiality

of resistance and its movements. We are not going *to tell you how* this is *going to go* nor

would we be able to; it'll be for *us*—with *you*—to decide. What we are offering is our

why, our *story*, our authentic extension of *support*.

    And joy.

Dare to join us on this journey?

    And love.

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Appendix A

Analyzing Practice Architectures
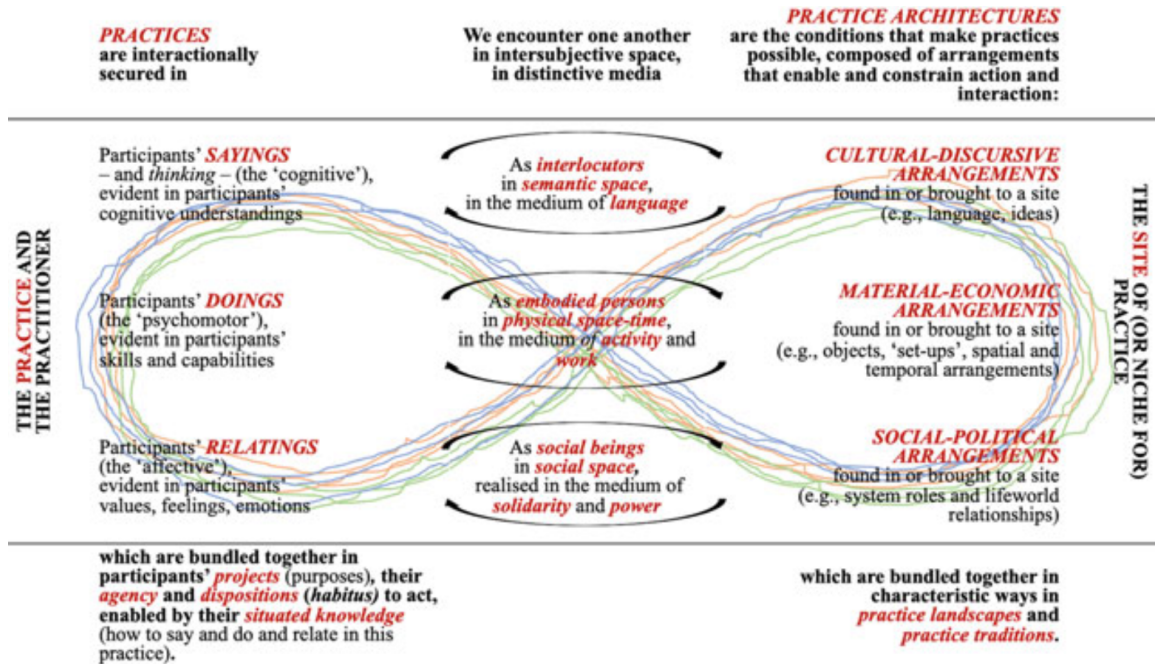
Note. From "Education for Living Well in a World Worth Living in" by Stephen Kemmis, 2023. 10.1007/978-981-19-7985-9_2.

Appendix B

Identifying A Shared Concern

Participatory Action Research is a framework for creating knowledge that is rooted in the belief that those most impacted by research should take the lead in framing the questions, design, methods, analysis and determining what products and actions might be the most useful in effecting change.

Assumptions of PAR	Commitments — Conditions for Collaboration-At best-PAR Collectives Agree:	Methods/Practices — A Sampling PAR Methods & Practices:	Questions Worth Asking Throughout the PAR Process:
All people have valuable knowledge about their lives and experiences.	- To value knowledges that have been historically marginalized and delegitimized (ie, youth, prisoner, immigrant). - To value traditionally recognized knowledges (ie, scholarly). - To share across the various knowledges and resources within collective so members can participate as equally as possible.	Qual/quantitative research methods trainings; Knowledge building sessions relevant to research from youth, elders, historians, statisticians, judges, etc.	- Who should be a part of the research collective? - Does the research necessitate same-only focus groups/research teams? Is there a need for purposefully diverse inclusion?
All people have the ability to develop strong critical analyses (of the world, data, social experiences, etc.).	To collaboratively decide appropriate questions, research design, methods and analysis as well as useful research products.	Develop concepts and theory from rounds of "rough drafts" of methods/analyses that the group creates and re-creates; Discussions of/and theory of change exercises.	- What needs to be in place within the collective to facilitate participation? - How do different collective members and allies to the research use the data in distinct ways?
All people have multiple identities, and carry important histories, connections and responsibilities to various communities.	- To create a research space where individuals and the collective can express their multiplicity and use this multiplicity to inform research questions, designs and analyses. - To creative risk-taking in the interest of generating new knowledge; that individuals and the collective are "under construction" — that ideas, opinions are in formation, expected to grow, etc.	- Methods that allow for multiplicity: Surveys with scaling and answer strategies that are less likely to box people into restricted responses; Identity mapping; Focus groups; Graffiti museums. - Vary activities to allow members to excel in some and fumble in others to highlight within-group diversity and encourage risk-taking.	- How does the research/project connect to ongoing struggles for social justice? - Who owns the data?
All people and institutions are embedded in complex social, cultural and political systems historically defined by power and privilege.	- To interrogate and engage power relationships within the collaborative and throughout the research. - To excavate and explore disagreements and disjunctures rather than smooth them over in the interest of consensus (as they often provide insight into larger social/political dynamics at play in the research). - To strategically work the power within the group when necessary to benefit both individual and collective needs/agendas.	- Re-member that which has been excluded, forgotten (bodies, knowledge, histories of resistance, oppression). - Seek outlier data – the strange, transgressive "cases" to understand how margins are created and defined. - Surface counter stories – i.e. probe social injustice *and* resistance, damage *and* possibility, conditions/experiences of neglect *and* privilege.	- In whose voice(s) will the work be written/performed/published? - How will both the coherence and rich difference of the collective be represented? - What is the purpose of the research? - Whom does the research want to reach, educate, provoke to action?
The production of knowledge is not objective, or value-free.	- To think through consequences of research and actions. - To attend theoretically and practically to issues of power and vulnerability within the collective and created by the research.	Create multiple research products; Seek audiences who will respect and engage research findings.	- How might research be used/misused? What warnings/cautions against misuse be inserted?
Social research is most valid using multiple/triangulated methods to help capture interconnected individual, social, institutional and cultural layers.	To use a variety of approaches best suited to address the questions being asked. (This requires strong awareness/honesty about what types of data/knowledge can and cannot be derived from certain methods.)	Surveys, Interviews, Focus groups, Archival data, Maps, Oral Histories, Photo-voice, Participant observation, Cross-site visits, etc.	- What other disciplines/discourses might be useful for communicating the data? - Who is made vulnerable by the research? - How can supports and protections be created for people sitting in institutions under scrutiny during/after the research?
Participation is not automatic.	To ongoing negotiation of conditions of collaboration; building research relationships over-time.	Think through project beginnings/endings and consider multiple (meaningful) ways of participating, entering and/or exiting the research.	- What is the audience being asked to do?
Change is an ongoing process.	To conceive of action on multiple levels over the course of the PAR project – some of which occur in one project, some of which link multiple projects over cross-sectional moments over time (past and future).	Scholarly/popular/youth articles; Presentations; Community feedback sessions; Symposiums, Performance/theatre; Data postcards; Campaigns; etc. Sometimes simply conducting research in a closed institution is subversive.	- What is necessary to shift collective responsibility into collective action? - Where does the collective want to incite change?

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Appendix C

CPAR Analysis Parts & Process

DATE	*CPAR Analysis* **PARTS & PROCESS**
11/18/2023	- Created evidence collection organization process: CPAR EVIDENCE LOG + sorted existing data - Organized shared Google Drive Folder with study elements/evidence - everyone has access to everything related to our study - Discussed an iterative CPAR plan/timeline for next few months
11/28/2023	- Reflected on process/reviewed our data to collect emergent research questions and sort - Decided to start recording all meetings with Zoom, even when in-person - Transcripts used for coding and themes - Re-Read, reviewed Giroux research for forces of modern day fascism
12/12/2023	***Reeling us in–PAUSE–putting all our dialogues together*** "How do we want to write about this?" "What do we want to move to next?" - Constant reclaiming of purpose, options, freedom → WHAT DO WE WANT TO DO? - Crafting our analysis calendar → open space on Tuesdays, grind time on Saturdays - How do we narrow?—so many findings—so much interaction *Intentional focus to move from problem to COUNTER + RESISTANCE* - How do we move to our first finding? **"We need to agree on the how."**
12/21/2023	- Investigated data collection and analysis techniques, read two model dissertations, - Will we use AI? - How do we keep "it" in dialogue–keep our process human and authored by us (with increased positivist pressures of dissertation writing)? "Is it codes to themes or themes to codes?" - Reviewed skills/technology to "clean-up" audio recordings for transcription - We started coding together in real-time meeting to "practice" to give model and make sure we were all on same page - Talked about how to break-up tasks/responsibilities based on interest and skills - Agreed to code same transcript and meet next day to share about process
12/22/2023	Reflected on initial experience of coding/troubleshooting

DATE	*CPAR Analysis* **PARTS & PROCESS**
	○ What's our capacity? What was it like for you? What do you need? Insight/help to offer group? ● Set next goal to clean-up and code two more transcripts a piece ○ What do people want to do? —interest/choice in what to transcribe— Do people feel good about that plan?
12/28/2023	● Aggregating and discussing individual codes, sorting, mapping ○ Sorted our questions into problem—counter—both ● Next step, individual clumping of codes into categories to bring back to the group for larger thematic analysis discussions/negotiations

12/29/2023	● Read action research writing design samples for ideas/inspiration → learn from others doing the thing → gave us permission to experiment and be creative
	● How to collect TOPICS + QUESTIONS – put into DIALOGUE?
	  ○ What are the shared/repeated THEMES/topics from ANALYSIS/coding?
	  ○ WHAT ARE OUR QUESTIONS as of NOW (add from DIALOGUE clean-up, notes)?
	    ■ How to TRACK/label/SORT all iterations/changes/variations?
	      ● Where to store/keep QUESTIONS (ongoing)?
	● QUESTION COLLECTION time/space/task + TOPIC COLLECTION

1/6/2024	● Group check-in → how is everybody doing?
	  ○ Recalibrate iterative plan and pick dates/goals to put on the calendar
	
	● **How can we MOVE to ongoing WRITING of FINDINGS with ACCOUNTABILITY** (agreed upon structure/plan, helpful, supports individual needs) **+ balance of OPENNENNES, continued ACTION/change/new FINDINGS**?
	
	  ○ *How can we create a more set/structured process for DISSERTATION DOING DAYS that balances openness/accountability/individual capacity/needs/gifts* (Freire's point of moving to traditional eventually)?

1/11/2024	● Read and reviewed thematic analysis techniques ○ Decided on → rich description of data set → inductive thematic analysis → latent thematic analysis → constructivist thematic analysis ● **How do we structure/model/"assign"/form/fashion our process in a way that honors VALUES of CPAR/communicative action/openness AND readable/realistic/helpful?** *How can we NAME/agree/STRUCTURE our process in a way that would also work for our students* (approach from solidarity)**?**

DATE	*CPAR Analysis* **PARTS & PROCESS**
	■ See Appendix D for emergent themes.
1/13/2024	● Trying to clump up codes into working themes–focus on emergent questions 　○ Post-it brainstorming and sorting all together ● Rough-draft of themes 　○ Life and Death emerged, in relation to Freire and Fromm, dynamics of fascism 　　■ Also, where to put process? ● How to take time to sort evidence and harvest wisdom of group with so much evidence compiled 　○ **CHALLENGE → TIME →** time of iterative process, *"Wrangling in" openness for readability/use/clarity to larger audience–to what ends?* ● chart to sort quotes/evidence out→ into conversation with codes + emergent themes
1/16/2024	● Individual evidence sort into same template/chart and shared with group before meeting 　○ **How to center SOLIDARITY** (*as a selection guide in NARROWING of time/task*) + **ACCOUNTABILITY of RESEARCH** (*to whom do we hold ourselves accountable*)**? Who is our research for/helpful?** *How to narrow + explain for READABILITY, larger IMPACT/purpose?* ● **How to narrow from a place of freedom** (not constraint/control)**? How to maintain RESISTANCE-counter while "doing"/writing/dissertation-ing?**
1/20/2024	● **HOW TO WRITE OVERALL "FINDINGS"??? →** *How do we explain our overall PROCESS? Clear, concise overview of whole CPAR process/findings?* 　○ **NARRATIVE ANALYSIS? AUTOETHNOGRAPHY?** (other forms of QUAL RESEARCH writing?) **POLY-VOCAL** (from Connor)? 　○ Decided to all experiment with writing on theme 1, death/decay 1
1/21/2024	● Discussed experience/feelings/questions/ideas from Death 1 individual writing experiment ● Shared on collaborative auto-ethnography techniques

DATE	*CPAR Analysis* **PARTS & PROCESS**
	○ Connor shared anchor article ■ "Beginning the Quilt: A Polyvocal and Diverse Collective Seeking New Forms of Knowledge Production"

1/23/2024	● Discussed experience/feelings/questions/ideas from Death 2 individual writing
	  ○ Collected notes/themes of group findings on Death 2
	  ○ Identified emergent questions and quotes/evidence

1/30/2024	● Discussed writing interests/responsibilities ● potential writing structure/format based on experiment of writing/discussing Death 1 ○ Revised timeline/calendar/topics/tasks to emergent format

2/4/2024	● Discussed experience/feelings/questions/ideas from Life 1 individual writing
	  ○ Collected notes/themes of group findings on Life 1
	  ○ Identified emergent questions and quotes/evidence

2/10/2024	● Discussed experience/feelings/questions/ideas from Life 2 individual writing
	  ○ Collected notes/themes of group findings on Life 2
	  ○ Identified emergent questions and quotes/evidence

2/13/2024	● Discussed experience/feelings/questions/ideas from Process individual writing
	  ○ Collected notes/themes of group findings on Process
	  ○ Identified emergent questions and quotes/evidence

2/21/2024	● Decided upon structured discussion format for synthesis/focused findings

2/24/2024	● Read group member's individual perspective pieces on each theme before meeting
	  ○ 30 minute timer to discuss findings of each theme
	    ■ Each theme has a point person
	● Harvest transcript and dialogue for theme group findings and introduction

2/25/2024	● Discussed process for final, discussion, chapter
	  ○ How can we illustrate with metaphors?
	● Groups of people—co-participants in the struggle–feel compelled to address—how?
	  ○ Call to action format

2/26/2024	● Discuss overall findings in terms of research questions, intended outcomes, limitations, and next steps

Appendix D

Emergent Research Themes

NECROPHILIC ZOMBIE-MODE - blah APATHY UNSEEN + UNSUPPORTED FRAGMENTATION + FEAR + ANXIETY EXHAUSTION - BURNOUT DISILLUSIONED - DESPAIR DISCOURAGED	ISOLATED - SILO-ed DEINDIVIDUATED + DEPOLITIZED DISEMBODIED DISENFRANCHISEMENT DISCONNECTED from DAY to DAY needs/hopes	LEGITIMATION CRISIS POINTLESS - IRRELEVANT - UNJUST privileging of few NORMALIZED (unquestioned) SURVIVAL-MODE passivity/COMPLIANCE susceptible to sanctioning/participating in MICRO-FASCISM	ANTI-DIALOGICAL ADMINISTRATION - DYSFUNCTION, disordered priorities INDIFFERENCE to all stakeholder NPUT HELLSCAPE of HIERARCY STANDARDIZED - STAGNANT CONTROL - SURVEILLED - STIFLED MONITORED - MEASURED - TIMED SPEEDY + SUPERFICIAL	TECHNOLOGY - TRANSACTIONAL COLINIZATION- capitalism- PRESSURE to PRODUCE (or prson) PANDEMIC PRESSURES + ACCELErATION FASCISM as ACCELERATION of VIOLENT DISPOSABILITY - destruction- dehumanization - DEATH	
AFFECT + *ANIMATING ANTIFASCISM*	**CREATING COUNTER SPACE STARTS W/ SOLIDARITY**	**COLLECTIVITY + CRITICALITY + COMMUNICATIVE POWER**	**PUBLIC SPHERE PROCESSING SPACE + POLITICS + PRAXIS**	**DYNAMIC DIALOGICS (democracy?) – LIFE–GIVING LEARNING as PROCESS not product**	**LOOKING FORWARD (chp. 5)**
FASCISM as FELT (emotions/energy of crowd) ALTER-SHOCKS ENERGIZING (exhaustion) EMBODIED ENCOUNTER	collective encountering + expression of FELT FASCISM into SHARED STRUGGLE of ANTI-FASCISM	CRITICALITY + COMPLEXITY collectively asking ??? confronting irrationality/ injustice normally stifle CONFRONT LEGITIMATION CRISIS	space to ENCOUNTER, process as EQUALS OPEN SPACE + TIME (anti-algorithm)	learning as PRCESS OF BECOMING more HUMAN FORMATION HUMANIZATION AS VOCATION OF THE PEOPLE	Who/how to connect to ongoing social justice movements? (local opportunities)
CHAOS - CREATIVITY - CURIOSITY PLAY - FUN - JOY CHOICE + AUTONOMY	ANALYSIS OF POWER + OPPRESSION (individual,, structural,, historical, current)	BUILDING CAPACITY for CRITICALITY, COMPLEXITY + COMMUNICATIVE ACTION	POLITICS OF REFUSAL (challenge of time-task-standardized mandates) TO MAKE ANTIFA COUNTER SPACE FUGITIVITY	*FREEDOM IS A CONSTANT STRUGGLE* models of continued, committed counter-culture/collective resistance	ANTI_RACISM + ABOLITION ANtI-CAPITALISM DECOLINIZATION
FEELING of POSSIBILITY, awakens IMAGINATION FREEDOM DREAMING comes from FREEDOM BEING	COLLECTIVE CARE (community relationships, interactions, story sharing)	HORIZONTAL SCTRUCTURES/ situations/spaces	FREEDOM of INQUIRY - RISK - EXPLORATION - CURIOSITY - leads to CONSCIENTIZATION	wisdom - witness Interconnected striving/struggle BIBLIOPHILIC examples/models INSPIRATION + IDEAS + PRACTICES	
COURAGE TO CRITIQUE - collective COURAGE to QUESTION stifling STATUS QUO	COMMUNAL WITNESS + MUTUAL AID/SUPPORT (courage to critique)	ECOLOGY of ENGAEMENT- egalitarian environment - intersectional space - space to catalyze CONNECTION	CONSCIENTIZATION + collective action, democratic intervention - - PRAXIS	fruits of our own CPAR PROCESS - consienziation-praxis ANTI-FASCIST MENTORING INTELLECTUAL INSURGENT NETWORK (legacy of Black Liberation)	

Appendix E

CPAR Interaction Table

Interaction **DATE** *(reverse chronology)*	*Interaction* **TIME** *(total time in minutes)*	*CPAR Interaction* **DESCRIPTION**
3/2/2024	307 minutes	In-person meeting: collaborative revisioning
2/29/2024	100 minutes	Zoom meeting + *Recording*
2/26/2024	202 minutes	In-person meeting + *Recording*
2/25/2024	119 minutes	Zoom meeting + *Recording*
2/24/2024	220 minutes	Zoom meeting + *Recording*
2/21/2024	174 minutes	In-person meeting
2/13/2024	113 minutes	Zoom meeting + *Recording*
2/10/2024	129 minutes	Zoom meeting + *Recording*
2/4/2024	95 minutes	Zoom meeting + *Recording*
2/1/2024	154 minutes	Heather McGee "Field Trip"
1/30/2024	161 minutes	In-person meeting + *Recording*
1/23/2024	143 minutes	In-person meeting + *Recording*
1/21/2024	144 minutes	Zoom meeting + *Recording*
1/20/2024	54 minutes	Zoom meeting + *Recording*
1/16/2024	91 minutes	Zoom meeting + *Recording*
1/13/2024	61 minutes	Zoom meeting + *Recording*
1/11/2024	173 minutes	In-person meeting + *Recording*
1/6/2024	45 minutes	Zoom meeting + *Recording*
12/29/2023	182 minutes	In-person meeting + *Recording*

Interaction **DATE** (reverse chronology)	*Interaction* **TIME** (total time in minutes)	*CPAR Interaction* **DESCRIPTION**
12/28/2023	212 minutes	In-person meeting: coding
12/22/2023	106 minutes	Zoom meeting + *Recording*
12/21/2023	85 minutes	Zoom meeting + *Recording*
12/12/2023	116 minutes	In-person meeting + *Recording*
12/2/2023	169 minutes	Zoom meeting + *Recording*
11/28/2023	163 minutes	In-person meeting
11/18/2023	203 minutes	In-person meeting
11/14/2023	137 minutes	In-person meeting + *Recording*
11/11/2023	197 minutes	Dr. Davis Research Symposium
11/10/2023	168 minutes	In-person "hive" poster making + *Recording*
11/7/2023	192 minutes	In-person meeting
11/4/2023	141 minutes	Zoom meeting + *Recording*
11/1/2023	139 minutes	In-person meeting + *Recording*
10/31/2023	145 minutes	Supported Leo at his show!
10/28/2023	64 minutes	Zoom meeting + *Recording*
10/26/2023	167 minutes	In-person meeting
10/24/2023	207 minutes	In-person meeting
10/18/2023	145 minutes	In-person meeting
10/11/2023	168 minutes	In-person meeting
10/7/2023	176 minutes	In-person meeting
9/28/2023	147 minutes	Zoom meeting

CONVENING THE COUNTER-CONVERSATION

Interaction **DATE** (reverse chronology)	*Interaction* **TIME** (total time in minutes)	*CPAR Interaction* **DESCRIPTION**
9/26/2023	188 minutes	In-person meeting
9/21/2023	70 minutes	Zoom meeting
9/18/2023	91 minutes	In-person meeting
9/2/2023	135 minutes	In-person meeting
8/13/2023	129 minutes	In-person meeting
8/10/2023	204 minutes	In-person meeting
7/15/2023	136 minutes	Zoom meeting
6/9/2023	275 minutes	In-person meeting: AG school "field trip"
6/7/2023	289 minutes	In-person meeting: project planning
6/5/2023	104 minutes	Zoom meeting: project planning
6/2/2023	254 minutes	In-person meeting: project planning
5/31/2023	198 minutes	In-person meeting: project planning
5/24/2023	143 minutes	In-person meeting
5/4/2023	115 minutes	In-person meeting: visited Dr. Mayes
5/2/2023	85 minutes	Zoom meeting
5/1/2023	142 minutes	In-person meeting
4/24/2023	165 minutes	In-person meeting
4/12/2023	152 minutes	In-person meeting
4/3/2023	155 minutes	In-person meeting
3/27/2023	135 minutes	In-person meeting

9,079 *minutes* **TOTAL** *CPAR* **INTERACTION TIME**