

INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL ISSUE:

PARADOXES AND POSSIBILITIES OF MOVEMENT BUILDING FROM THE IN-BETWEEN

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Liberation through education is a central goal of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy aims to raise awareness of inequities and injustices in schools and society while developing students' and educators' capacities to act towards transformation (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2011; Kumashiro, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009). As such, critical educators signal a paradigm shift away from traditional notions (and assimilative functions) of schooling towards forms of education that explicitly and intentionally advance justice, particularly for historically marginalized communities.

Critical pedagogy does not, however, proceed without complication and contradiction (Allen & Rossatto, 2009; Ellsworth, 1989; Lather, 1998; Yang, 2016). Such complexities range from tendencies toward singularity and the ignoring of the intersectional nature of social markers and related injustices (by race, gender, sexuality, ability, etc.), to tendencies toward binary ways of relating (in v. out, oppressor v. oppressed, etc.) and binary ways of knowing (rational v. emotional, disembodied v. spiritual, etc.), all of which risk reinforcing the very injustices being challenged. Therefore, critical educators are increasingly turning to cultural and conceptual tools to

forefront the liminal or third spaces in-between such binaries, or the contested and contingent and excessive and shadow spaces alongside them, that can allow for even deeper engagement in and with critical pedagogy. It is the messiness and fluidity of these in-between spaces (Bhattacharya, 2018) that we use as an organizing frame for this special issue of the *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*.

The five articles in this special issue explore living, working, and researching from the in-between and the tensions, paradoxes, and creative instabilities that emerge from our multiple locations as educators, scholars, and activists. In blurring the lines between knowledge users and knowledge producers, and in blurring the lines between epistemologies and methodologies, authors in this special issue reflect on the resistance, refusal, and subversion of hegemonic discourses, the legitimization of fugitive (Hill, 2004) and other marginalized knowledges, and the imagined possibilities (Bhabha, 1994) for the co-creation of new ways of knowing and being. In these times, we must continuously identify and refuse the structures within us, in our relationships, in our institutions, and in our society in order to co-create new solidarities with intention and persistence.

THIS ISSUE

In “Navigating the Shores: Troubling Notions of the Teacher as Researcher,” Brian Charest explores liminality in the context of teacher as researcher in his semester-long graduate research course. In engaging relevant research drawing on student interests, linked to larger socio-political contexts, students explored the contradictions inherent in traditional and colonial approaches to teaching and research. They were invited to trouble the divisions between research, the researched, and the researcher.

In “Calling in the Self: Centering Socially Engaged Buddhism in Critical Pedagogy Through Personal Narrative,” Vidya Shah reflects on the space in-between the rational, outward focused approach of critical pedagogy and the inner, embodied approach of critical, contemplative practice. The author explores the ways in which the unexamined ego, as understood in Buddhist onto-epistemologies,

centers and re-centers a separate self as opposed to an interconnected self, furthering individualism at the expense of collective liberation.

In “City of Wind, City of Fire: Education and Activism in Chicago 1966–1975,” Ann M. Aviles, Erica R. Dávila, and Richard D. Benson II explore liminality in the “borders” between political activism and educational spaces from 1966–1975 that drove the political awareness and action of Black and Brown youth in Chicago, IL. The Communiversity of the Southside and the Chicago Young Lords Organization (ChYLO) of the Northside of Chicago highlight the literal and metaphorical in-between spaces filled with dreams, disruptions, and imaginings of the possibilities for liberatory education.

In “Cultivating Racial Solidarity among Mathematics Education Scholars of Color to Resist White Supremacy,” Monica L. Miles, Patricia M. Buenrostro, Samantha A. Marshall, Ebony O. McGee, and Melanie Adams ground their analysis in Black, Latinx, and Indigenous scholars and communities. It is the in-between space of co-imagining a racial solidarity praxis in math education that the authors focus their attention on combating oppressive educational structures. In doing so, they explore ways of honoring and affirming Indigenous, Latinx, and Black students’ racial identities and cultural strengths.

In “Understanding Stubborn Inequities: A Timeline History Lesson,” Leslie Ann Locke and Elizabeth Getachew explore the concept of critwalking in Critical Race Theory and the concept of movement building in a professional development exercise for K-12 educators. The exercise centers a timeline history of the United States that exposes the historical systemic oppression upon individuals from racialized and marginalized groups. Liminality is explored in the authors’ positionality as both participants in a system and educators aiming to transform the system from within.

We are excited to explore these ideas together. Our hope with this issue is to share in possibilities for resistance, co-creation, and community that arise from the ambiguity, discomfort, and transience of the in-between.

POST-SCRIPT: EDITING IN THE IN-BETWEEN

Editors who identify as critical scholars often negotiate the uncertainty and ambiguity of liminality throughout the editing process. On the one hand, there is an expectation and tendency to produce “academically rigorous” and “professional” scholarship, language that is often code for colonial and racist perspectives on legitimate knowledge in the academy. On the other hand, there is a desire to center theories and methodologies that are often silenced in academia because they are considered too radical or too practical. Those of us working towards equity in institutional and colonial spaces often battle an internalized oppressor/colonizer that is militant in its insistence on what we write, why we write, and how we write it. Scholars submit their writing to publications that often glorify very narrow notions of what counts as excellence. The writing is then judged on its poetic or prophetic contributions (despite being written in a language that is often inaccessible to the larger public), or on its ability to produce “evidence-based” knowledge that tends to reassert hegemonic interests and worldviews and discount Indigenous and non-Western ways of knowing.

We uncover further contradictions when we explore this liminal space with greater attention. Author, speaker, and renegade academic Bayo Akomolafe warns of an anti-intellectual fervor that plagues countercultural and decolonizing discourses, which he suggests is a legitimate response to the primacy of rationality in the West over intuition, morality, embodiment, and spirituality (Akomolafe, 2019). Akomolafe (2019) suggests that dividing the head and heart wrongly submits that intellect can be separated from affect, reinforcing the same Western technologies of binary thinking. He states:

Non-western people do not have the luxury of abandoning ‘good thinking’. We need to think powerfully; we need to think ethically; we need to think with an eye for our children and ancestors. We need to think well and carefully about how we think of these matters. The work of decolonization—of noticing other positionalities that trouble modern claims to singularity and stability—will need not just our bodies, Indigenous

technologies, songs and games. It will need ideas and powerful concepts, some of which will challenge us.

How unnecessarily partial is an onto-epistemology that does not identify and nurture the rational heart or the emotional mind? The sentiments above directed at non-westerners can also be applied to westerners who are committed to unlearning internalized and problematic ways of knowing.

As special-issue editors, navigating this liminal space was most obvious in how we conceptualized ‘voice’—the authors’ voices, our voices, and the collective voice. We questioned how our significant, consistent, and direct edits centered our voices and values as the editors, at times minimizing the voices and values of the authors. On the other hand, our reviewers encouraged us to reflect on how this type of feedback might further support authors in clarifying and strengthening their voices, making even stronger pedagogical contributions to our collective work. For example, how might we encourage authors to stand affirmatively in their own voices and place less emphasis on connecting their ideas to established scholars in the field? We were also encouraged to reflect on how we might view each piece as part of a larger collective movement for justice in education. We worked through the ambiguity of what collective scholarship might look like that does not recenter dominant, hegemonic worldviews and approaches to editing. It would necessarily include editing from the liminal, which questions the ways in which we have normalized colonial and neoliberal logics in the editing process. Our thinking centered on these three elements:

- Having high expectations across *multiple and contradictory criteria*, such as clarity in voice and complex, layered thinking or manuscripts that push the methodological and theoretical boundaries of what counts as scholarship while operating within colonial structures in the academy;
- Including several rounds of revisions for all submissions from the start and not simply those deemed “close to ready.” Given the multiple and contradictory criteria, each submission benefits from further complicating ideas; and,

- While each submission benefits from the collective wisdom of authors and editors, paying close attention to how a move to collectivism may serve to silence and erase local or marginalized knowledge(s).

As we name the moment that we're in, one in which we are grappling with decolonizing the academy and education systems that continue to operate as colonial structures, our thinking, writing, and movement building must necessarily occur in the ambiguity and contested space of the liminal.

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