

"I SEE THEM DIFFERENTLY—I GET THEM NOW:"

CURRICULUM, CHANGE, US

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The word imagination had a strong comeback in 2020. Calls to re-imagine the classroom, curriculum, and teaching rushed in with Covid-19 and increased with the murder of George Floyd and the powerful resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement. The 2016 and 2020 presidential elections changed the landscape of how my students see American democracy, social solidarity, and their place amid it all. It also changed how I see my students in the classroom, in my city, in the world. I see them differently.

This shift in vision calls for a shift in practices. The loud calls for imagination and re-imagination are exciting theoretically, but how do they translate to the work? Can curriculum, curriculum studies, my thinking, and my writing forge a stronger yet openly complicated connection to the work I do as a professor?

I have felt suffocated by this year in many ways, and I am sure many of you have, too. I have sought out pockets of air by asking myself how I can I reimagine my curriculum and my work. What would it mean for me to value new knowledge, different perspectives, and creativity in my courses? In order to re-imagine, I must interrogate my own curriculum, reading, and writing. I feel the need to examine why

I teach, read, and write what I do; what choices I make; and how I approach these layers of my work. They are all connected, all the time. This is a beginning of that. A re-imagination emerging from 2020.

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What is what I want from you is new,
newly made a new sentence in response to all my questions,
a swerve in our relation and the words that carry us,
the care that carries. I am here, without the shrug,
attempting to understand how what I want and what I want from
you run parallel—

justice and the openings for just us. (Rankine, 2020, p.11)

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September 11, 2001 was my second day of teaching high school in in Brooklyn, New York. When I greeted my juniors, the North Tower had been hit by a plane, but the word terrorism had yet to be spoken. As I wrestled the distracted class into an introductory lesson on *The Crucible* and the Salem Witch Trials, trying to assert some teacher authority I had no idea how to wield, I was unaware how historically relevant this curricular unit of McCarthyism, the Red Scare, scapegoating, hysteria, and Puritanical fervor would be.

How did we get to this historical moment of 2020? To this place of polarization, division, and fear in so many facets of life, from politics to mask wearing? In looking backwards, my first thought was the 2016 election. But in looking back even further, I realize that today's challenges began on 9/11.

After 9/11, my high school with largely Latinx and Black students, but a small yet significant number of Palestinian, Yemeni, and Bengali students, became a battleground of Islamophobia. To say we were all terrified feels like an understatement; I remember clearly how that day, that week, and the weeks after felt. That terror translated into incessant

verbal and sometimes physical abuse in our school from both students and teachers to any Muslim student. I was 27 years old and knew little about Islam, but I did know that my students did not deserve that treatment. I interrupted, stopped, and taught what I could, but it never felt like enough.

That day is a punctuation mark for me—my before/after—my full stop. That is the day when my job, my classroom, and my curriculum became overtly political spaces, and I had to make hard choices about where I stood among it all to best serve my students. I had to become an overtly political person.

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"To be political is to be alive." (hooks, 1995, p. 53)

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In the film, *I Am Not Your Negro*, James Baldwin states, "History is not the past. It is the present. We carry our history with us. We are our history. If we pretend otherwise, we literally are criminals" (Peck, 2016, 01:16:31).

His use of the first-person plural makes me wonder, who does Baldwin consider *we*? Who do I consider *we*? What does it take to make a *we* in the classroom? How does the *I* engage or disengage with the *we* in the classroom, both for students and faculty?

I was recently called a "settler" at an indigenous arts event. I had never before heard that word used to address a group of white people; however, I knew immediately what it implied, who it was meant for, and that it was meant for me. It stirred a vague recognition, almost as if it sparked generational fragments of DNA, as if I had heard this word before in relation to myself. I was uncomfortable—Not me! Yes, that me. What did my ancestors do? I have no idea. Do I even want to know? Could I even fully know if I wanted to? —And, I had to sit in that discomfort. It is not often that I have to sit in racial discomfort. I am the product of generations of white settlers in the United States. Even with its unknowns, that is the history I carry with me. It is present in my classroom and curriculum.

I can't pretend otherwise.

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Artifact: DACA card*

What is this artifact? This is my DACA card. If you don't know what it is, it's my Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals card that allows me to work even though I am undocumented.

Why does it represent part of your education (analysis)? *At this point he chokes up, quietly. He is embarrassed by his emotion and tries to hide it. Students pass the box of tissues around the circle to him. Well, in 11th grade we had these people come into our English class to talk about college. They talked to us about financial aid, and they said that if you were undocumented, you could not receive any federal financial aid. He takes a deep breath. I was a straight A student, I did everything I was supposed to do, and then these people told me I couldn't get any financial aid for college, and I knew my parents couldn't pay, so I just gave up. Other students in the class say, "Me, too" and "I'm undocumented, too," to help him as he speaks.*

How does this connect to who you are as a student (auto-ethnographic analysis)? Well, this card is why I am here at community college. I ruined my GPA. I learned later that there are scholarships for undocumented students, but it was too late. Now I am determined to get scholarships to go to a four-year school, and I want to become a teacher or maybe even a professor. I don't know how I'll go to college or get a job, but I hope something will change.

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As per the syllabus, our lesson the day after the 2016 election in my Ethnography of Education course was an analysis of Jean Anyon's (1981) article, "Social Class and School Knowledge." I asked the class if they wanted to discuss the election, but, in exhausted pleas, they asked if we could just get to work. As a group of students presented the data from the middle-class schools and the theme of possibility, Lance interrupted: "Back then, if you were a middle-class kid, school prepared you for college *or* work. You could do both, right? So why are

* Artifact presentations were documented by author in 2016 when writing about teaching after the election.

we told we can *only* to go to college? Why can't we just go to work? Why do we have to be here?"

The class had answers: there were no more factory jobs; there were no more working class jobs that could earn you a middle class life; all jobs required college now; you used to be able to get a good job with a high school diploma, but you couldn't anymore; the meritocracy (a word taught and repeated in this course) had shifted; if you didn't go to college, you'd be poor forever.

Then Jasmine said: "This is why Trump won, right? Because people are angry about this."

The class quietly and unanimously concurred. For years I had taught Jean Anyon's work on hidden curriculum to community college freshmen, but the conversation had never taken this turn. Every year prior students experienced an "a-ha" moment when they realized that school is a system and that their K-12 schools had tracked them in certain ways via curriculum and instruction. Instead of being curious and furious about schools as sites of social reproduction, this year the students' focus was on the now-narrowed possibilities for the middle class, how a high school diploma now had little earning value, and how they had to attend to college (even if they had not wanted to) to secure higher earnings for their futures. In the end, they were all angry and concurred with the rage that had helped elect the 45th president. Something had shifted.

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The pendulum of curriculum development swings back and forth as determined by a country's historical and political climate. Curriculum is far from neutral; it represents the intersecting social constructs of its time (Apple, 2014). While teaching high school, I felt this in practice before I understood it theoretically. I felt my school shift after 9/11. It was filled with fear which manifested in rampant Islamophobia against the Palestinian, Yemeni, and Bengali students. Before 9/11, I didn't really know what Islam was. This ignorance was the product of my education and the curricular choices made for me.

Curriculum is two-fold in purpose. It explicitly delivers disciplinary content and implicitly delivers what society values as important for

study. I most likely learned about Islam at some point in high school during World History, but it would have been a very brief unit or more likely a lesson within a unit. I lived in Virginia, in the white suburban Christian American South. I was raised in the Catholic church by a moonlighting, evangelical mother. Learning about another religion was considered sacrilegious. We didn't need to know about such things.

...

“It is naïve to think of the school curriculum as neutral knowledge. Rather, what counts as legitimate knowledge is the result of complex power relations and struggles among identifiable class, race, gender, and religious groups. Thus, education and power are terms of an indissoluble couplet. It is at times of social upheaval that this relationship between education and power becomes the most visible.” (Apple, 2014, p. 47)

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Spirit-murdering.

This term has ricocheted in my brain since I first heard Bettina Love (2019) preach it at a conference in relation to her book, *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom*. To explain the term spirit-murdering, she lists violent acts against Black children in public schools and concludes with, “These school attacks also spirit-murder dark children. Legal scholar Patricia Williams argued that racism is more than just physical pain; racism robs dark people of their humanity and dignity and leaves personal, psychological, and spiritual injuries. Racism literally murders your spirit” (Love, 2019, p. 38).

I think about spirit-murdering and if/how/when I might have caused pain in my classroom by the quiet yet loud work of curricular choices, valuing certain ideas/experiences, not seeing or hearing certain students. I think about the times I was silent when spirit-murdering was happening in a school where I taught, observed, or consulted. I think about ways to ensure I am no longer silent.

...

Every semester my Ethnography of Education course concludes with an auto-ethnographic artifact analysis presentation by each student. Each student brings in three artifacts from their educational journey for presentation and analysis. It’s an academic and analytic version of show-and-tell that not only allows for artifact analysis, a summative assessment of the course, and the practice of presentation skills, but it also builds community among students. Directions from the assignment state the students must answer the following five questions for each artifact:

1. What is it? (I know this might seem obvious but describe it from your point of view.)
2. When did you receive this artifact, from whom, how? (CONTEXT)
3. Why does it represent a part of your education? (ANALYSIS)
4. How does it connect to who you are as a student? (AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS)
5. How does it connect to something we studied in this course? (COURSE ANALYSIS)

During these presentations, the students’ stories become the curriculum. The presentations take days of class time and are worth every instructional minute. Through storytelling we become real to each other.

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“The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy” (p. 12), says bell hooks (1997), in *Teaching to Transgress*. The classroom is where we invent, experiment with, and perform different versions of ourselves. The classroom can be a place of becoming, a place of spirit-building, a place of change. I watch the metamorphosis of students in the room, how they shape shift across a semester, a year, two years into someone new. It is a privilege to behold.

I change, too, in the radical space of the classroom. I am not the same educator, woman, friend, wife, mother I was years ago—or even from last year. I need the classroom and the students in my life; they are my

catalysts, my soundboard—they keep my brain moving. They teach me.

After living through this time apart, will we handle the reconstruction of these academic spaces? We will have the rare opportunity of a restart button. How will we use it?

...

we are each other's
harvest:
we are each other's
business:
we are each other's
magnitude and bond.

(Brooks, 2005, p.133)

...

Can a curriculum be liberating when the politics of the country are increasingly oppressive? In the wake of the 2016 election, the carefully selected readings and lessons that had been the foundation of many critical and liberatory conversations about education rang empty and my students' enthusiasm for learning ground to an almost complete halt. Topics such as schools as the site of social reproduction, racial microaggressions in the classroom, the role of parents in teaching us about education and work all fell flat. In previous years, these were the weeks of seismic change for the students, where they connected theory to practice, where what we studied began to make sense. But in 2016, the entire curriculum flatlined. Every class felt deflated.

What snapped the students and me back to the classroom, learning, and each other was the personal stories and authentic reflection of their auto-ethnographic artifact analysis presentations.

Human connection resurrected my classes that semester. The presentations included here are from those students. "To be human is to engage in relationships with others and with the world" (Freire, 1974, p. 1). Relation-rich curriculum needs to be valued in higher education. As we struggle through a year in which we have all suffered multiple layers of trauma, we will return to the classroom as different people, and

we will need to learn each other again. Curriculum will have to make space for this.

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Hello, Reader.

Are you wondering about the non-traditional format of this piece of writing? It is called a collage, a different method of inquiry, a somewhat divergent way to write. I ask you to continue with me, to make your own connections, to wonder how you might ask students to do this type of writing and how you might do it yourself.

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Artifact: Photo of herself from primary school in Senegal

What is this artifact? Hi everyone. This is a photo of me from primary school in Senegal. I'm sorry. . . I am very nervous. *She speaks with a heavy French accent; she is very uncomfortable presenting, but the students assure her that she is okay. She takes a deep breath.* This photo was taken at my school, and we wore uniforms. My family had money in Senegal, so I went to a good private school, but it didn't work out. *She starts crying, and she gets up and leaves the room. Two students follow to make sure she is okay. They bring her back. I whisper-offer to let her present later or to me in private, but she says she wants to continue.*

Why does this represent part of your education (analysis)? School didn't work out for me in Senegal because I had a very bad stutter. *Students express surprise because she has never stuttered in class.* Yeah—it was very, very bad. The teachers believed that if they beat me, they could make me stop stuttering, so every time I had to recite a lesson, I had to stand with my hands out, and they would hit my hands with a ruler. My hands would cut and bleed, and once a teacher broke my bone, but my stuttering just got worse. I have scars on my hands still—see? *She holds up her hands; her dark skin interrupted by horizontal slashes.* That's why we moved to America. We moved here so I could get help for my stutter and so I could go to school and not be beaten.

How does this connect to who you are as a student (auto-ethnographic analysis)? I am here in college today because I made it. I learned how

to stop stuttering. I finished high school. I have to work full-time to pay my tuition because I have no financial aid, but I am doing it because we moved here for me, so that I could get an education. That makes me a serious student.

...

Artifacts brought by students that I remember:

graduation caps, diplomas, necklaces, photographs of teachers, photographs of former friends, photographs from the student's country of origin, report cards from elementary school when they were "good students," report cards from high school when they were "bad students," letters written to incarcerated family members, memorial programs from funerals, photos of deceased family, friends, teachers, guidance counselors, Class of 20__ hoodies, sports uniforms, diaries, ID cards, Metrocards, Greencards, passports, plane ticket stubs, stuffed animals, pregnancy tests, ultrasounds, doctor's notes, insulin, epilepsy medicine, favorite books, papers they received good grades on, yearbooks, college acceptance letters, baby blankets, first paystubs.

Each artifact with a personal story about their educational journey.

...

won't you celebrate with me
what I have shaped into
a kind of life? I had no model.
born in babylon
both nonwhite and woman
what did I see to be except myself?
i made it up
here on this bridge between
starshine and clay,
my one hand holding tight
my other hand; come celebrate
with me that everyday
something has tried to kill me
and has failed. (Clifton, 1993 p. 25)

...

This format of writing is what compositionists call a collage. There is an invisible stitch between each section that makes sense in my mind, but you might have to work to find the stitch. You might be left with more questions. That is okay. Collage, as a form of writing, is meant to:

“Push past worn academic forms, such as the personal narrative and the academic essay, toward forms of writing that challenge students enough to disturb their sense of acceptable academic prose.” (Collins, 2017, p. 168.)

Assignments communicate messages of importance to students, but they are often under-examined in discussions of curriculum. When was the last time you assigned a type of writing that asked students to re-imagine how they put words onto a page, presented research, or constructed an argument? To break from rote formats and to think differently? When was the last time you, as an academic, tried to write something completely new? It is both harder and more rewarding than you might expect.

...

The week after the 2016 election, as planned per my curriculum, I introduced the students to the concept of racial microaggressions and the work of Derald Wing Sue. When teaching racial microaggressions the previous three years, a feeling of recognition moved across the room as the students discovered an academic term for their all-too-familiar experiences. The classroom would come alive with conversation as they read through “Table 1: Examples of Racial Microaggressions” (Sue et al., 2007, pp. 276-277), and individual students begged, arms wagging in the air, to share their experiences.

However, in 2016, those reactions were absent. The entire lesson fell flat. The class was painfully silent until Veronica raised her hand. “But Professor, hasn’t this switched back? I mean, Trump’s supporters had no problem using the n-word, he was endorsed by the KKK, and Trump said the word ‘pussy’ and made fun of a disabled guy. I have a disabled kid, and that pissed me off. Do micro-aggressions even exist today? It just seems like regular racism again.” The class agreed. Many said the overt racism had been there all along; others said now they get

to experience both microaggressions and blatant racism; others said racial microaggressions no longer applied because the country had shifted back to full-blown, open racism.

I have thought about this day in the classroom often the past five years. Why had racial microaggressions spoken to the students so loudly before? Was it the “post-racial” era of Obama that made us feel like racism had shifted from macro to micro? Weren’t they both present all the time? I question the time period, how I taught microaggressions as a concept, what was different. I have not taught this class since, but I’m curious how students will respond when I teach it and these concepts, again. I am sure it will be different.

...

“In one important sense, school curriculum is what older generations choose to tell the younger generations” (Pinar, 2004, p.185). As I re-imagine my curriculum, I have been thinking about assignments, even the word: *assignment*. In designing assignments, I assign meaning to what I feel is important to me as the professor. Just as much as texts and other curricular content, assignments are a representation of my academic self, my values, how I imagine my students learning through doing the work that I deem necessary and worthwhile. What does *assignment* mean in a re-imagined curriculum that values the self, relationships, community? What do my assignments say about me?

...

When education is the practice of freedom, students are not the only ones who are asked to share, to confess. Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks. Professors who expect students to share confessional narratives but who are themselves unwilling to share are exercising power in a manner that could be coercive. In my classrooms, I do not expect students to take any risks I could not take, to share in any way I would not share. (hooks, 1995, p.21)

...

Before the students present their artifacts, I bring in three artifacts from my educational journey to model the assignment: my doctoral dissertation, a paper I stole from my friend Heather Parks in 10th grade Honors English, and my dad's wedding ring that I wear on a chain around my neck.

You might think that since I have presented these artifacts multiple times, I could model the presentation in a perfunctory fashion, but that's not how grief works. Sometimes, when talking about my dad, I cry unexpectedly. It is always embarrassing because it is always surprising, but every time it has happened the students show me tenderness as I awkwardly apologize and explain to them how though he passed in 1996, sometimes I am caught unaware by how much I miss him and how sad I still am. Even when I manage to keep it together, they still feel my grief and recognize it. After my presentation, something shifts between us. They have seen me be honest and emotional, and that changes our dynamic; it makes our classroom space more human. This is what I want more of when we return. More humanity.

...

"Curriculum ceases to be a thing, and it is more than just a process. It becomes a verb, an action, a social practice, a private meaning, and a public hope" (Pinar, 2004, p. 188).

If curriculum is a verb, an action, as Pinar says, then it should always be changing. It should change as we—the faculty, the students, the world—change. Curriculum should not be static but dynamic. Why isn't it discussed as such? Why don't we open conversations with, "How did you change your curriculum from last year to this year based on how you, your students, and the world changed?" Can we normalize this type of talk?

I can't help but think of Octavia Butler's (1993) prophetic novel, *The Parable of the Sower*, and the words of its protagonist, Lauren Oya Olamina:

“All that you touch, you Change.
All that you Change, Changes you.
The only lasting truth is Change” (Butler, 1993, p.1).

Curriculum is change.

...

Teaching during the peak of Covid-19 in New York City helped me re-imagine teaching, but not in the ways you might expect.

We were told not to hold synchronous classes, and no students came to virtual office hours, but the students and I texted via a Google Voice number I created for them. Texting became the classroom.

I texted a student home alone while both parents were on respirators in the hospital; I texted with students while they were sick; I texted with students about their love for *Kindred*; I texted with students about our common ache for the classroom; I texted with students about the uncanny connectedness of *Parable of the Sower* to our present reality; I texted to check in: Are you okay? I’m not sleeping either. What’s your temperature? How’s your mom? I’m so sorry you lost your dad/uncle/aunt/cousin. I’m sad, too. I cry a lot.

Messages about life and school blurred. We texted at 7am, 11pm, 4am. When I think about this intimacy we shared, I don’t want to go back to any other type of teaching. I want to keep that sense that we were in all in it together, that we were each other’s keepers, and life and school and you and I are inextricably linked. That we are here, together, for a reason.

...

When the rain washes us clean, we will know. We will feel so good. I believe that. If we find, however, that the rain has actually left more bruises, soaked us in more sour than we ever imagined, and if that bruised sour feels so good, it is then that the pleasurable work actually begins. Many of our hearts are stone. Much of the beauty here has been sacrificed, and most of it stolen. There is no commercial, doctor, or wellness regimen to smudge that truth. Home is gone, but there is responsible pleasure to be found in the wreckage, in the pathways of the wrecked, and in all the goodness beyond where we’ve been allowed to discover.

Everything, finally, is lost. (Laymon, 2020)

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Artifact: Brother's memorial service program

What is this artifact? This, well this is the program from my brother's memorial service. *She begins to cry, and the class is silent as they collectively search their bags and pockets for tissues. (Our box has run out.)* My brother was *my* person, you know—he was it for me. He was my best friend. When I was in 11th grade, he was shot. He was just a kid of the streets. . . You guys know what I mean. *She looks around the room, and students nod.* He could have gone to college, but he stayed back in Brooklyn because he felt we needed him. He held our family together. He was the best.

How does this represent part of your education (analysis)? After he was shot, I just, well, fell apart. I skipped class, I never went to school, I didn't do any of my work—I didn't know what to do without him. I felt I didn't have anybody. *She cries as she talks, and many in the class cry, too.* But in my senior year, my sister had my niece, and that little girl made me realize I had to graduate; she snapped me out of it. *She holds up a photo of a toddler, her next artifact.*

How does this connect to who you are as a student (auto-ethnographic analysis)? I wanted to drop out of college already. You all probably saw that I stopped coming in October for a bit. It's hard, but I need to do what my brother couldn't do, to be the first to graduate from college, because my niece needs me. And that's why I'm still here. *She is still crying, and the class erupts into applause, which makes her cry even more.*

...

In early June, as New York City was alive with racial protests, Covid-19 cases were declining for the first time, students from our community college staged a coup during a Wednesday afternoon weekly online student council meeting. Classes were wrapping up, finals were upon us, graduation was set for mid-June, and the valedictorian and salutatorian were set to speak at this meeting. Instead, a group of BIPOC women, students took the helm, called out college leadership, faculty, and staff for lack of explicitly addressing the murder of George Floyd

and subsequent racial uprisings, and demanded our college do its work differently. WAKE UP! They shouted at us. WE ARE HERE AND WE ARE HURTING. SOME OF THIS HURT HAS COME FROM DIRECTLY FROM YOU.

...

The playwright and poet Samuel Beckett once said that writing *Waiting for Godot* was a way of finding ‘a form that accommodates the mess.’ Are conversations accommodations?

Perhaps words are like rooms; they have to make room for people. Dude, I am here. We are here.

You are here. She is here. They are here. He is here. We live here too. He eats here too. She walks here too. He waits here too. They shop here too. Dude! Come on. Come on. (Rankine, 2020, p. 253)

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Claudia Rankine (2020) talks about meeting her biracial daughter’s white teachers and wonders what do they think regarding her daughter’s race, their whiteness, the complicated racial history of schooling? She can’t bring herself to ask them directly, so she asks the text, “What do you think? More importantly, what do you think when you are not thinking?” (p. 97).

What do I think? I finished five years of undergraduate studies at a top-ranked state university with a double major in French Literature and Cultural Studies having never read a novel by a Black woman. Many degrees and years later, these massive holes in my education are constantly emerging, and I work, like that little Dutch boy sticking his finger in the dam, to plug them up through self-education so that I can bring books, theory, and ideas to my students through my curriculum. I think about who I am, my education, who my students are, what I should teach a lot.

What do I think about when I’m not thinking? I am trying to figure out how to be a different kind of white person in the world, in my classroom, in the academy, in my largely white social circles, as a mother of white tween/teen children. I think about this so much it’s like I don’t

even have to think about it to think about it. I will work on this my whole life. Is it even possible? It is worth trying.

...

With collage, organization becomes experimental: when ordering and re-ordering elements of a collage, we can ask: 'What does this draft now mean? How has my meaning changed?' Collage may read like casual offhandedness, random selections of loose affiliation. But make no mistake: this work requires meticulous architecture. A collage offers readers the illusion of control, while pushing buttons the whole time. (Collins, 2017, p. 178)

I wanted to experiment with this type of writing because this past year has felt so fractured, yet it is through those cracks and breaks that a new clarity crept in, and I realized I missed a part of myself that used to make art, to think more creatively, that cultivated an imagination up until, honestly, my doctoral work. Since that terminal degree, my teaching and writing have focused on skills and test prep and horizontal and vertical alignment and publication and tenure and promotion. . . I am tired and a bit uninspired.

I find inspiration in new formats of writing that questions, push, resist boundaries. In poetry. In texts and mash up words and visual images. Why can't we present ideas and research in ways that go beyond the traditional? Who created those traditions anyways? Can't we question, manipulate, break them a bit?

...

Each year the final presentations in my Ethnography of Education class are emotional, but in 2016, the shared stories were met with more compassion and more empathy from their peers than ever before. There were hugs, words of encouragement, tissues passed, pats on the back, hands held, and shared tears over their struggles in the education system and in life after the election, after four weeks of lackluster classes. My curriculum had failed to engage students after the trauma of the 2016 election, but this assignment brought life back into the classroom; it was the release and time we needed. We needed to feel grounded again, to feel literal hands on our backs.

After the presentations ended and class concluded, a student who had been particularly challenging all semester approached me as she walked out of the room and asked, “Why didn’t we do these earlier? Now that I know what everyone is going through, I see them differently—I get them now.”

...

Again, like on 9/11, I feel the world and my profession shifting beneath my feet. This time the shift isn’t a dramatic cleaving that will rearrange life in one day, it is a slow burn that simmers around and within me. Do you feel it, too? I’m not sure how many more opportunities I will have to shift professionally, using historical momentum as my slingshot, but I am feeling like it’s time for some sort of radical upheaval in my life as a professor. What that will even mean, or look like, is a curriculum and a classroom with more radical possibilities for relationships and self-exploration and democratic storytelling and creative writing assignments. I am examining my curriculum, my thinking, my reading, my writing. I am looking for and working to make change.

...

“A reckoning. A judgement or evaluation. An accounting of or calculation. An estimation or settlement. Collage asks students to contend with both experience and words. Collage asks students to reckon with their topics and make something of them” (Collins, 2017, p. 171).

Let’s ask the same of ourselves: a reckoning with these years to make something new.

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