HUMANIZING PEDAGOGY

COMMONGOOD

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper was written in collaboration with a diverse set of experts. These include scholars from a variety of disciplines, leaders of both established and new organizations, community leaders, and artists. Each contributed perspective based upon their expertise and experience. While the reviewers held diverse views they shared a commitment to the principle that all students are owed humanizing learning spaces, and the belief that teachers are the ideal agents of that principle.

Reviewers

Dan Cogan-Drew
Co-Founder & Chief Academic Officer
Newsela

Bailey Czupryk
Senior Vice President
TNTP

Heather Dahlgren
Cultural Integration and Education Specialist
The Liber Institute

Andrea Foggy-Paxton
Founder
Social Studies Accelerator @EdLoc

Stephanie Fitch
Design Lead
CommonGood

Wesley Hedgepeth
NCSS President 2023-2024

Chelsea Katzenberg
Academic Lead
Gates Ventures

John Lee
Associate Dean North Carolina State
Author of the C3 Framework

Linda S. Levstik
Professor Emerita
University of Kentucky

Christopher N. Maher
Superintendent In Residence
Cambiar Education

Stephane Manuel
TrueFiktion
Founder

Angelina Meadows Comb
Director of Education
Gates Ventures

Jonathon Santos Silva
The Liber Institute
Founder

Bror Saxberg
LearningForge
Founder

Ebony McKiver
Consultant

Authors

Evan Gutiérrez, Co-Founder, CommonGood
Dr. Carly Muetterties, Co-Founder, CommonGood

Special Thanks

To Dr. Fatima Morrell for her outstanding leadership and contributions to the field of practice
To Sam Kirk for contributing artwork. More can be found at www.iamsamkirk.com
To Carlos Jara for design. More can be found at www.esencia.design

Suggested Citation

Gutiérrez, E. & Muetterties, C. (2024). *Humanizing Pedagogy*. CommonGood. https://commongooded.com/humanizingpedagogy

“The actual strengths of methods depends [on teachers to] embrace a humanizing pedagogy that values the students’ background knowledge, culture, and life experiences, and creates learning contexts where power is shared by students and teachers.”

LILIA BARTOLOMÉ

Building a Humane Pathway

Innovators, reformers and systems leaders have poured resources and attention into reforming our education systems in order for that system to better meet the goals of modern society. Significant attention has been paid to the curriculum, and how high-quality materials can be a lever for improvement. With new models having been tested at scale and for some time, it is time for a critical consideration of the ideas about high-quality materials, particularly concerning what we believe to be best for students and teachers. Are there ways to center the needs of these two most important stakeholders, where they have been previously diminished? Is there a next iteration of high-quality instructional materials? What contribution might new research on approaches that yield outsized impacts make to our ongoing conversation about curriculum?

There is current and compelling evidence that centering students in the curriculum has transformative potential. Students feel recognized and respected, are positioned to do something relevant with their learning, and build complex narratives around the events of their lives. Because no two communities are alike, these benefits cannot be realized with a new product or set of materials. Rather, we need to reshape our thinking about curriculum in ways that provide educators with robust models and resources, which allow them to craft and contextualize the learning for their students.

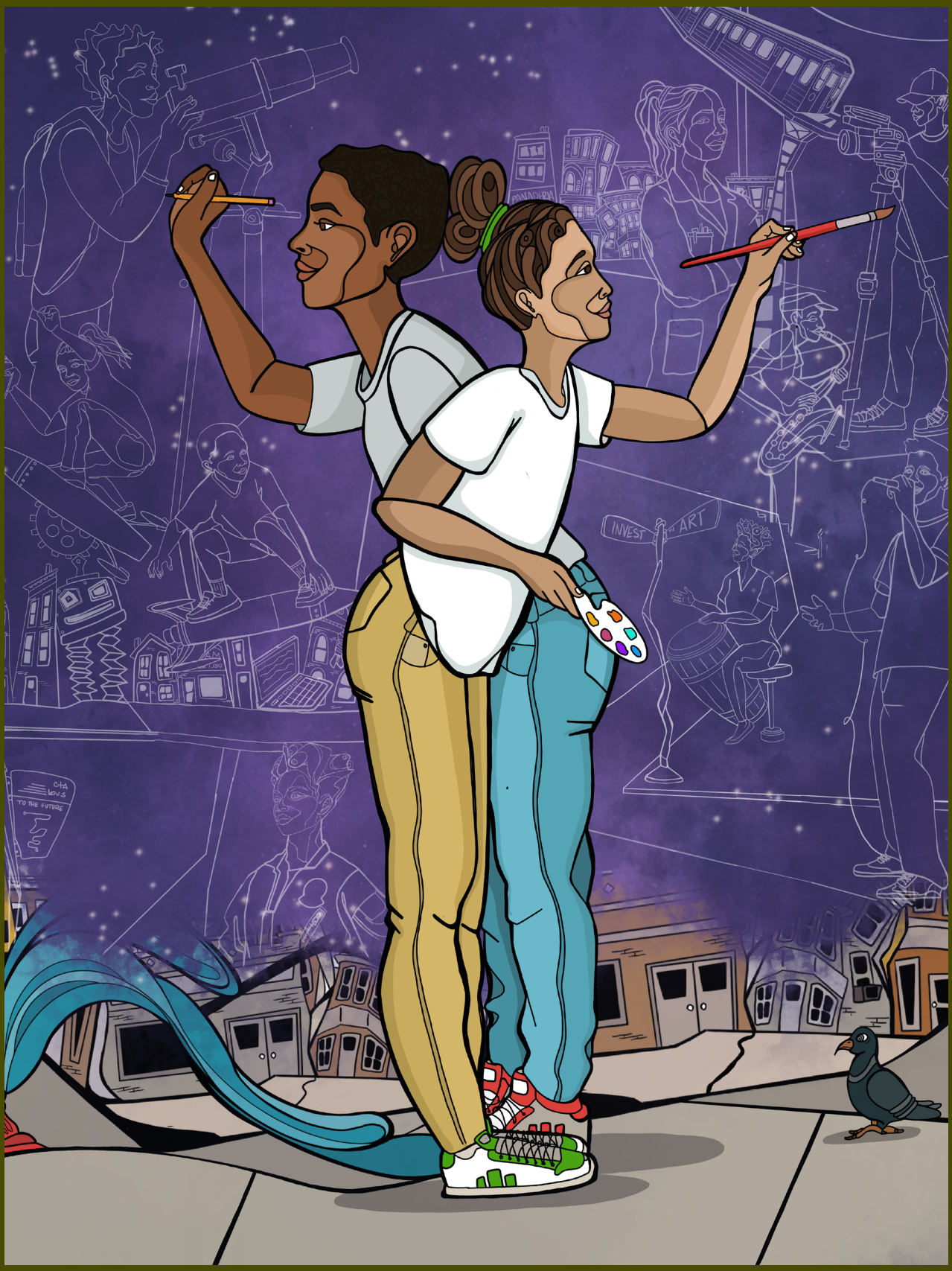
This paper seeks to illuminate, and give substance to, a pathway to realize these benefits. It is broken into four parts, describing both the current challenges and potential solutions. Sections one and two consider the importance of student relevance and representation within curriculum. When curriculum allows students to see and make sense of their (and their community's) experiences, there are dramatic academic and social benefits. However, we posit that there cannot be one singular curricular solution to that end. Instead, as is discussed in sections three and four, we need curricular models that allow teachers to engage in the co-creation of learning, requiring deliberately designed materials that purposefully cultivate teachers' own sensemaking, adaptation, and expertise.

In the larger conversation about curriculum reform we believe the requirements of two important stakeholders should be revisited: teachers and students. When teachers and students are not appropriately centered in curriculum—or worse yet, are entirely misrepresented, absent, or positioned as a non-factor—the result is a system that perpetuates individuals' alienation therein. There are, however, convincing evidence and actionable models that will lead to more student-centered, more effective, and more humane classrooms.

Note on Scholarship

To develop the ideas presented here, we anchored on several distinct fields in and around education, considering how they speak to one another on core ideas of relevance, representation, and the respective roles/functions of teachers and curriculum. We leaned heavily on learning science, curriculum theory, and culturally sustaining pedagogy; while also incorporating relevant insights from brain science, motivation studies, and social studies curriculum research. Some of the principles put forth are universally applicable. Examples include well-established learning science on starting with familiar context to develop new skills, which then must be transferred to unfamiliar contexts; and ways that teachers respond to educative materials, built to expand the teachers' understanding of the learning design. There are studies cited that suggest learning experiences which are likely to benefit all students, but have particularities that are not applicable across all learning contexts. Notable, too, while some studies can be broadly considered, most of the cited scholarship is situated within secondary and post-secondary educational contexts.

The focus of the scholarship, and of the paper, is on curricular models and ways they can better serve teachers and students, particularly those decentered by current models. We acknowledge the importance of responsive instruction, and respect the large volume of high quality scholarship on that topic. The aim of this paper is to identify models which can bolster the excellent thinking on instructional practices.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RELEVANCE

A Rational Disengagement

If, according to George Washington Carver, "education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom," why don't more students reach for the key? Why are educators' efforts to provide students with access to a brighter future met with disengagement or skepticism?[1] Much of the conversation about engagement in education addresses surface level indicators and solutions, but fails to dig deeper and examine root causes. For those willing to look, the tools to surface students' motivating factors and strengthen engagement are already available to us.

While many factors impact motivation,[2] one tool to better understand an oft-overlooked facet of student engagement and motivation is through *expectancy theory*. Social psychologist Victor Vroom's *Expectancy Theory of Motivation* suggests that all people conduct lightning-quick analyses of tasks before deciding to engage or not. In a blink, people estimate whether they are capable of performance, if they value the offered reward for success on the task, and whether they believe that when they are successful, the reward will actually be given to them. For our purposes, these three factors can be thought of as *capability* (can I be successful?), the perceived *value* of learning (is the outcome of my learning worth the effort?), and *fairness* (will I get the benefits of learning promised to me?). Before deciding to engage in the classroom, students consider their *capability* relating to the task, whether or not they *value* the reward being offered, and lastly, the *fairness* of the system offering the reward. If a student perceives that any of these factors are in doubt, they are likely to disengage from classroom learning.[3]

While expectancy theory has been used to help us better understand student motivation generally,[4] such models of student motivation would do better to take students' social context into account. In service of that, consider how many students receive some version of the following message:

> *One must persevere in school, because academic success and a college education is the best chance at a prosperous future.*

Setting aside the degree of delayed gratification that most students must tolerate to realize any real benefit, students' social contexts can influence their expectancy of reward:

- *Capability*: Has the system been engineered for their success; and can they impact the system?
- *Value*: Is the reward something that they want or need?
- *Fairness*: If they do engage and leverage their best effort, will pathways to college and career open up to them?

The realities that could inform students' responses to these three questions demonstrate the challenges to piquing motivation. Despite two decades of reforms, so-called 'achievement gaps' (or opportunity gaps) are incredibly consistent across models and district profiles (i.e., public, charter, etc).[5] Gaps between global majority and White students in college admission and college persistence also prove difficult to narrow.[6] Those students that persist and graduate will have borrowed more in student loans and will enter a workforce where they will continue to be less compensated, with fewer opportunities for upward mobility than their White counterparts.[7] Students are not unaware of the different experiences—they can see the gaps by observing the experiences of their peers, but are also informed by the experiences of previous generations.[8] It is easy to imagine that these realities shape students' perceptions of school, college/career, and most importantly, their place in it.

A plethora of reforms have attempted to address student engagement, focusing on one element of motivation: *capability*. Such reforms, though well-meaning, are too narrowly focused on students' ability to be successful *within the current system*. However, viewing the question of student engagement through Vroom's lens suggests that students weigh more factors than just their own capability. Engagement may also be informed by students' perception of the value of the education's rewards, and the fairness of a disingenuous system that may withhold rewards even when they are earned. Why persevere through academic tasks if the only reward is more time within a dismissive system, leading to a career in which a person's merits are not fairly recognized?

Though some would debate this wisdom, this framing suggests that students' disengagement may be an entirely rational conclusion. Toiling away at academic tasks to gain access to college and career spaces that are similarly unjust is a poor value proposition to our students, and has rightly earned their skepticism. Thus, we may be misidentifying the root cause of our students' disengagement as failing the capability test, when in reality, our current systems may not be offering students something of value, or yielding the promised rewards, even when they are earned.

What if education reforms turned their attention to *value* and *fairness*, rather than just capability? Could education be reformed such that learning adds clear and immediate value to students' lives? How might the current system require less suspension of disbelief and delayed gratification by realizing value for students within their current, lived contexts?

Aims of Education

This question of the relationship between traditional educational models and the need for practicality and immediacy is not new. In a now famous address, mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead posed this same question to fellow pedagogues and scholars:

"But what is the point of teaching a child to solve a quadratic equation? There is a traditional answer to this question. It runs thus: The mind is an instrument, you first sharpen it, and then use it; the acquisition of the power of solving a quadratic equation is part of the process of sharpening the mind. Now there is just enough truth in this answer to have made it live through the ages. But for all its half-truth, it embodies a radical error which bids fair to stifle the genius of the modern world. Whoever was the originator ... I have no hesitation in denouncing it as one of the most fatal, erroneous, and dangerous conceptions ever introduced into the theory of education.

*"**Whatever interest attaches to your subject matter must be evoked here and now**; whatever powers you are strengthening in the pupil must be exercised here and now; whatever possibilities of mental life your teaching should impart, must be exhibited here and now."*[9]

Simply put, learning for learning's sake is a corruption of the goals of education, which should instead reflect both the practices of experts and be directly applicable to students' lived experiences. Generations of scholars in educational philosophy have called for models that allow students to see the immediate value of learning; rather than positioning them as merely passive receivers of what Whitehead describes as the discipline's 'inert ideas.' Paolo Friere's *social constructivism*,[10] Ladson-Billings' *culturally relevant pedagogy*,[11] González, Moll & Amanti's *funds of knowledge*[12] have all, in different ways, called for students to be positioned as co-constructors of knowledge. As co-constructors of knowledge, students draw upon their home and community-based knowledge and apply new understandings to their lived realities. Despite generations of scholars and practitioners' calls for fundamental shifts in how we value and add value to our students' lives, the prevailing models have proven as persistent as the aforementioned 'achievement' or 'opportunity gaps."[13]

Contemporary thought in social sciences echo Whitehead's suggestion that education should yield an "understanding of the events that pour through [a student's] life." Inquiry pedagogy, as operationalized by the *College, Career, and Civic Life* (*C3*) *Framework*—which increasingly frames social studies learning across different states' K-12 standards—asks students to use what they learn to *take informed action*. To take informed action, students apply what they learned to meaningful civic contexts within their own communities and, thereby, "influence institutions both large and small."[14] Subject-area disciplines that are organized around the histories of marginalized communities add emphasis and urgency to this civic mandate. Such disciplines demand that education "build upon the historical and current experiences of students, [and] to also interrogate and foster students' critical consciousness" and that students must be positioned to "take social action that models activism toward social change."[15] However, even where additional emphasis is placed upon community-responsive pedagogies, particularly for students of color, analysis suggests that "...high-quality opportunities for action are particularly rare in schools serving lower-income students, exacerbating a civic empowerment gap between historically privileged and marginalized youth."[16] Thus, despite the long-heralded call for practical and meaningful applications of learning, this educational aim continues to be an espoused value and not principally put into practice.

Education with a Social & Civic Purpose

Questions about how to enhance students' engagement are often answered with strategies to spark sufficient (but fleeting) student interest, shepherding them back to participate in the existing system. Within this line of thinking, civic education and engagement serve as a 'hook', designed to provide a short break from the overwhelming irrelevance of the traditional curriculum. But, if there is already a consensus that the civic and social purpose of education *is the purpose*, then how does schooling need to evolve towards that end?

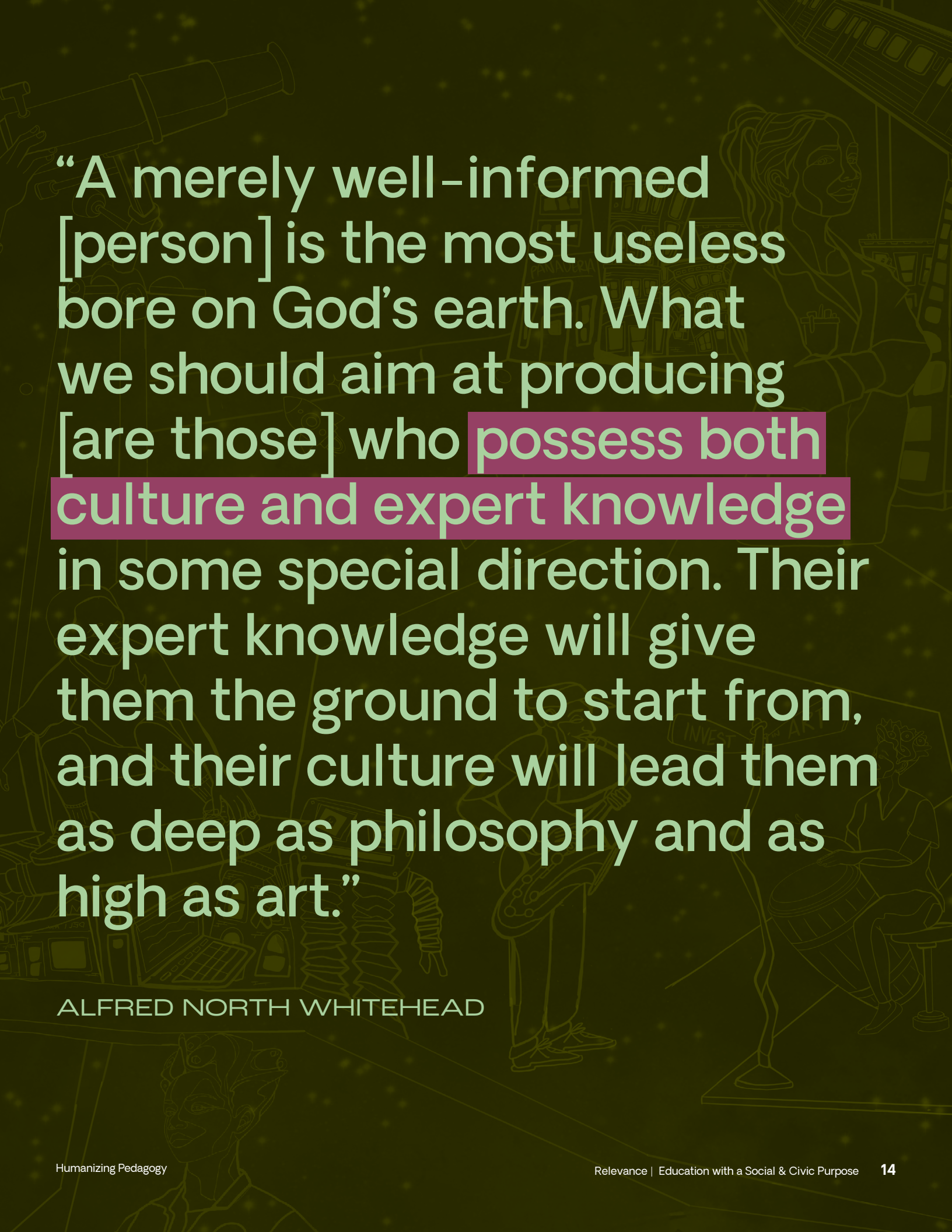
This shift would reposition social and civic education as both the means and the end of learning. As such, curriculum would regularly prepare students to engage in civic life, by applying their emerging understandings of social and civic principles to meaningful issues facing their communities. As students build their individual and collective capacity to 'take informed action,' those practices will overshadow the traditional and pedantic forms of civic education, demonstrating the latter's lack of relevance and utility.

This new paradigm would, then, more tightly weave the connection between classroom and communities: classroom learning flows into the community, but likewise, creates opportunities for community connections to flow back into classrooms. Lived experiences are inseparable from civic learning, as a general rule; however, the lived experiences of traditionally marginalized communities, notably Black and Latinx students, are tangibly distinct and often misrepresented, if represented at all. Black and Latinx students' daily lived experiences, including those of racial and socioeconomic inequalities, are inseparable from their civic learning.[17] When these realities are either treated opportunistically as a relevance hook or dismissively as a potential distraction, students are presented with a disjunctive experience, where the ideas and ideals presented to them in school are in direct conflict with what they know to be true through lived experience.[18] Put simply, attempts at relevancy are far from relevant, but also often manifest in unserious, superficial add-ons to a lesson. However, when analyzing, contextualizing, and interrogating students' lived experiences becomes central to the work in our classrooms, not only is the disjuncture between themselves and the classroom addressed, but also social and civic learning is enhanced for all.[19]

While the thrust of this argument relates to social and civic education, the demands for more student relevant pedagogies are school-wide. Across many subject areas, leaders are calling for the disciplinary skills and tools students gain through learning in math,[20] science,[21] art,[22] literacy, and others also build students' sociopolitical awareness, and that those same tools be applied towards addressing the very issues raised by that awareness. Like thought leaders in other disciplines, mathematics scholar Rochelle Gutiérrez acknowledges that there is a long way to go in terms of turning towards a sociopolitical purpose, in math or otherwise, but that we must embrace this change, saying that: "any resistance to the sociopolitical turn is a form of hegemony."[23]

When we reform our schools, and ourselves, towards providing students with regular opportunities to build, practice, and apply expert skills in connection with their cultural and communal identities, towards a social purpose, we will edge towards what Whitehead states as the true aim of education:

> *"A merely well-informed [person] is the most useless bore on God's earth. What we should aim at producing [are those] who possess both culture and expert knowledge in some special direction. Their expert knowledge will give them the ground to start from, and their culture will lead them as deep as philosophy and as high as art."*



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ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD

While calls for students to be better represented in the formal curriculum is not new, the notion that there is an overrepresentation of whiteness—and that policy proposals should address this imbalance—have increased in recent years. This representation problem is often characterized by descriptions of curriculum that lack non-white historical actors, characters, or authors. This characterization has been useful, as it has made the representation problem concrete and clear, allowing for diverse constituencies to support a call for change. It has also put education publishers in a position to address the representation problem by adding diverse characters and authors to their text lists, but substantively changing little else.

THE REPRESENTATION PROBLEM

Such oft-superficial changes do not address the issues posed by the representation problem. To better interrogate the challenge, we delineate between different types of representation: *descriptive* and *substantive* representation.[25] *Descriptive representation* refers to the extent to which an individual or group resembles, or shares a similar background to, those that they represent—or their constituents. *Substantive representation* refers to active representation of the individual or group to a community's needs and its most pressing issues. There is notable overlap with these two ideas. In civic spaces, a representative can both resemble their constituents and take substantive action on issues that are important to them. Likewise, sometimes descriptive representation can lead to, and make room for, more substantive representation.

Nonetheless, these definitions exist because it is important—and consequential—to know the difference and avoid conflation between the two. Put simply, though one may share identity markers or resemblance to a community group, that does not mean they are an appropriate representation of that group's prevailing needs or issues. In academic spaces broadly, and in curriculum specifically, it is possible to address a lack of descriptive representation without speaking to the issues, ideas, and interests of non-dominant communities' intellectual traditions.

A Centering Education

When academics, education, and community leaders discuss the motion towards enhancing descriptive and substantive representation in curriculum, they are increasingly using the term *centering*. Centering is the intentional focus and prioritization of the intellectual, linguistic, and cultural resources of communities, whilst also decentering white-normativity and hegemony.[26] As it concerns curriculum, the practice of centering and decentering includes recognizing that traditionally marginalized histories and narratives are both disciplines and intellectual traditions, in and of themselves.[27] Recognizing these histories and narratives as such requires that curriculum designs address the confluence of content knowledge, experience, and skills as connected to how we read, write, listen, speak, think, and perform in a way that is meaningful to the field of study.[28] In practice, centering in curriculum design means that when curriculum is written to center Latinx experience, for example, it must also be designed to build content knowledge and skills relating to reading, writing, and discussion of Latinx histories—*all as Latinx historians do*.

Curriculum that addresses Latinx history but fails to align designs authentically to the disciplinary practices—or that presents Latinx authors' writing, but positions students to analyze, discuss, and respond to those writings as they would any other piece of literature—has failed to decenter white-normativity.[29] When curricular designs center communities effectively, students can be connected to the histories, dialogical, and intellectual processes, ways of knowing, and means of sustaining their intellectual heritages. For example, having students read Márquez or Garcia-McCall is a start. It is better still that they analyze those authors' works as examples of magical realism, a prototypical Latina/o literary form[30]. How much better if they are prompted to compose their own narratives, utilizing characteristic literary techniques to suggest a super-natural underrent to everyday life. When classrooms connect students to their own resources and build the contexts for those resources to be applied, the benefits are tremendous.

What this does for students

A centering education is a better reflection of what the seminal scholars of asset pedagogy—those who termed *culturally relevant pedagogy*,[31] *responsive teaching*,[32] and *funds of knowledge*[33]—were calling for. Better, that is, than how much of the field has interpreted those works, their implications and applied them to the field of practice.[34] For example, researchers have identified ethnic studies programs as a place where these effects can be observed, as the ethnic studies classroom is a fulsome expression of these asset pedagogies.[35] Because of their scale, ethnic studies programs also offer a look into how students respond to a centering education. The observable effects are compelling. In one study, student attendance increased by 21%, grade point averages by 1.4 points, and students earned an average of 23 more credits.[36] These outcomes have inspired replication of ethnic studies programs across the country.

Ethnic studies programs are an excellent vehicle for centering educational experiences. However, one course should not bear the burden—and indeed, it is not the only way. Programs built on the same principles but of different sizes and shapes are demonstrating similar results. According to Dr. Fatima Morrell, Chief of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Initiatives for Buffalo Public Schools, "The district's *Emancipation Curriculum* was developed to integrate emancipatory pedagogy and holistically represent Black, Brown and Indigenous histories and narratives, across grade levels and content areas. These efforts have helped make huge advances. Over the years I've run these programs, we've seen a 20% increase in our 4 year graduation rate. We've seen big changes in how teachers talk about student success - We never had conversations about anti racism until we began this work in earnest. Now we have teachers speaking to the power of culturally responsive and antiracist practices. Our out-of-school time program Our Story Project provides culturally responsive learning through additional curriculum, field experiences and more. The ~300 middle school students participate in that program, and their ELA and math scores beat the district average by 10%. We don't take exclusive credit for district wide improvements, but as it concerns the impacts that this office and our programs have had, we stand on those gains - we believe it's directly tied to district wide culturally responsive programming."[37] When curriculum is designed to center students' identities, and teachers are prepared for and supported in that endeavor, there are breakthrough outcomes. Indeed, over the last 20 years few curriculum reforms have come close.[38]

Why it works

What is it about centering educational experiences that produce greater impacts on attendance, academic achievement, and overall engagement with schooling, as opposed to programs designed specifically to drive those changes?[39]

Members of the ethnic studies community state that a central component of their practice is presenting students with a *counternarrative*—presenting students with the voices and histories from communities like theirs that have endured and navigated an oppressive and racialized society.[40] If it is true that students' very sense of reality—and their place in it—is eroded when they are repeatedly presented with a world of which they are not a part, the dramatic response to counter-narrative that does center students makes sense.[41] For many students, these rare centering experiences may be the first times in their K-12 schooling that their lived experiences are recognized as valuable and educationally worthwhile. American essayist Adrienne Rich provides an apt description of how students might experience curricular erasure:

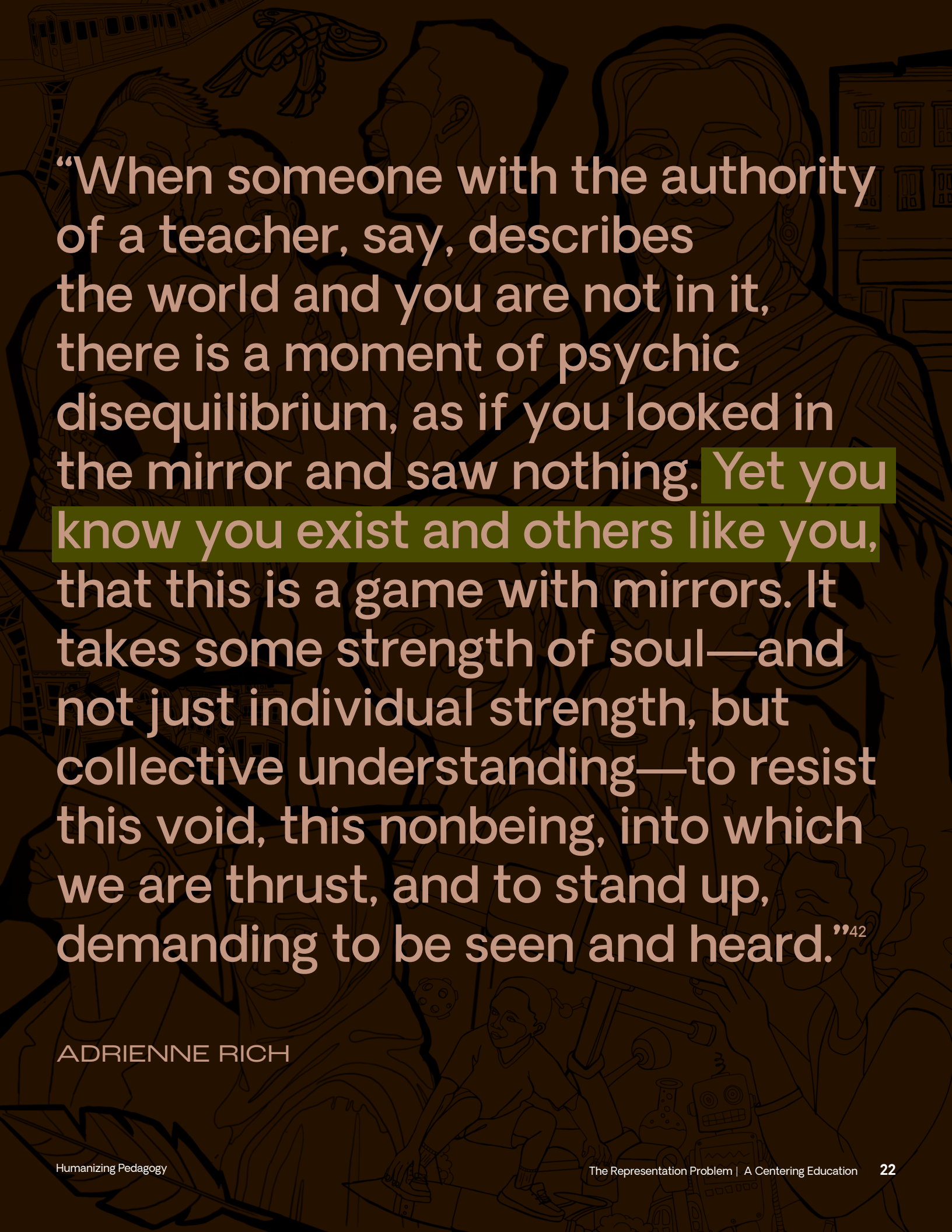
> *"When someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in the mirror and saw nothing. Yet you know you exist and others like you, that this is a game with mirrors. It takes some strength of soul—and not just individual strength, but collective understanding—to resist this void, this nonbeing, into which we are thrust, and to stand up, demanding to be seen and heard."*[42]

Let's imagine that one classroom, and one alone, is reality-affirming for a student, and suddenly their learning does not feel like Rich's 'game with mirrors.' There is, at last, respite from the message that the world students occupy is not real or valid. Students benefit from the counter-narrative because their daily experience, their ideas, and the lives that they may imagine for themselves are counter to the dominant narrative.

Indeed, there is growing acknowledgement that students whose identities are not traditionally promoted or celebrated in academic spaces *need a counternarrative to persist*. Where students have persevered in academic spaces that might willingly dismiss them for their femaleness, their Blackness, their Brownness, their Queerness, it often requires that they connect with others like them, and through social construction create a counternarrative where they do belong.[43] How unreasonable to expect that students must rely on one another to construct a worldview that includes them, where they too are scientists, writers, and historians before even setting foot in a classroom. As the United States education system enters our third decade educating a non-white majority,[44] crafting inclusive narratives must become the responsibility of the professionals leading that system, not the children that it serves.

There are compelling reasons for schools to ensure that students do not do this work on their own. Something special happens when students process their experiences and the events of their lives in a deliberate and supportive environment. There are pronounced differences between students' meaning-making when constructing *concrete narratives* (meaning around events and experiences, and their consequences) alone and when those are constructed alongside *abstract narratives* (their connections to systems, historiographies, and patterns). Researchers have found that students' ability to engage in meaning-making about their experience of the world—using both concrete and abstract narratives—impacts their self-concept and is shown to be a strong predictor of future academic success. In fact, brain scans of adolescents engaged in complex meaning-making that bridges personal concrete narratives to systems-thinking, abstract narratives have proven more predictive of future social and academic growth than either "IQ" or socioeconomic status.[45] We can presume that students will find ways and places to process the events of their lives. However, when they are able to process in an environment that supports complex meaning-making around those experiences (with the construction of a true counternarrative) the outcomes could be trajectory-altering.[46]

To that end, the efficacy of ethnic studies programs and similar centering educational spaces further demonstrate the power and real student impact of complex meaning-making and construction of a counter-narrative. If we will accept this lesson, the question becomes how we might provide students with narratives that validate their realities, rather than requiring that they find or create them on their own. How can the presentation of scenarios, where students see their people as powerful, become programmatic? What would learning look like that would not require young people to invest in a system that has lost their trust? Can learning engender agency and build useful knowledge in the here and now?



"When someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in the mirror and saw nothing. Yet you know you exist and others like you, that this is a game with mirrors. It takes some strength of soul—and not just individual strength, but collective understanding—to resist this void, this nonbeing, into which we are thrust, and to stand up, demanding to be seen and heard."[42]

ADRIENNE RICH

A Culturally Sustaining, Locally Relevant Curriculum

Progress towards reality-affirming and socially-purposeful learning becoming programmatic requires a partnership between those designing learning materials, those enacting them, and the communities where learning is situated. While the dominant narrative in education suggests that exceptional educators can realize this vision within the current model of schooling, we contend that the two are not complementary. Rather, this thinking ensures that culturally sustaining and locally relevant learning will remain the *exception*.

For the dramatic effects of a centering education to be made available to all students, we posit that designers, educators, and communities ground their collaboration in the following principles:

Curriculum is Not Culturally Neutral

Schooling has long served assimilative purposes,[47] and the notion that schooling could work towards cultivating students in the intellectual traditions of their communities of origins is fairly new.[48] Curriculum, as a function of schooling, has traditionally been designed to support students' engagement with dominant culture. There are curricula that are designed specifically to center non-dominant communities' ideas, experiences, and perspectives, but these are the exception, and far from the rule. Curriculum that is *not* designed with these aims in mind, by default, will inherently center dominant culture.[49]

Schools are a Function of the Community

The ways that schools are governed, staffed, operated, and evaluated are all specific to the communities that they serve.[50] While there is standardization of some elements in our systems of education, local priorities can inform the substance, the means, and even the aims of our schools. Proven models and evidence-based practices are a complement to, not a replacement for, local deliberation and leadership.[51] Decisions will be informed by the wider world of research, but educational leadership will always come down to the knowledge of students and the community.

Co-Design, Co-Operation, Co-Ownership

Community leaders, administrators, organizational partners, and educators all must contribute to education systems.[52] For these collaborations to be productive, it requires a high level of clarity. Co-design of tools, content, policies, and programs require input and ownership from different combinations of stakeholders in different phases. These collaborations are powerful when the process is well considered; disastrous when it's not. Models that elicit the most valuable input from the right constituents assign design, operation, and ownership responsibilities appropriately to put people in the right relationship both to the work and to one another.[53]

Humanize, Above All

Even while industrial, political, and well-intentioned community leaders have expectations for the outputs of the education system, those expectations can no longer justify the perpetuation of dehumanizing learning spaces. Teachers and students are ultimately the most demanding consumers of the education systems that we design. When those systems decenter or dehumanize them, they disengage and rightly so. Co-designers, operators, and owners of our education systems should both dismantle dehumanizing elements, and seek to deeply understand what is valuable to that systems' most valuable constituents.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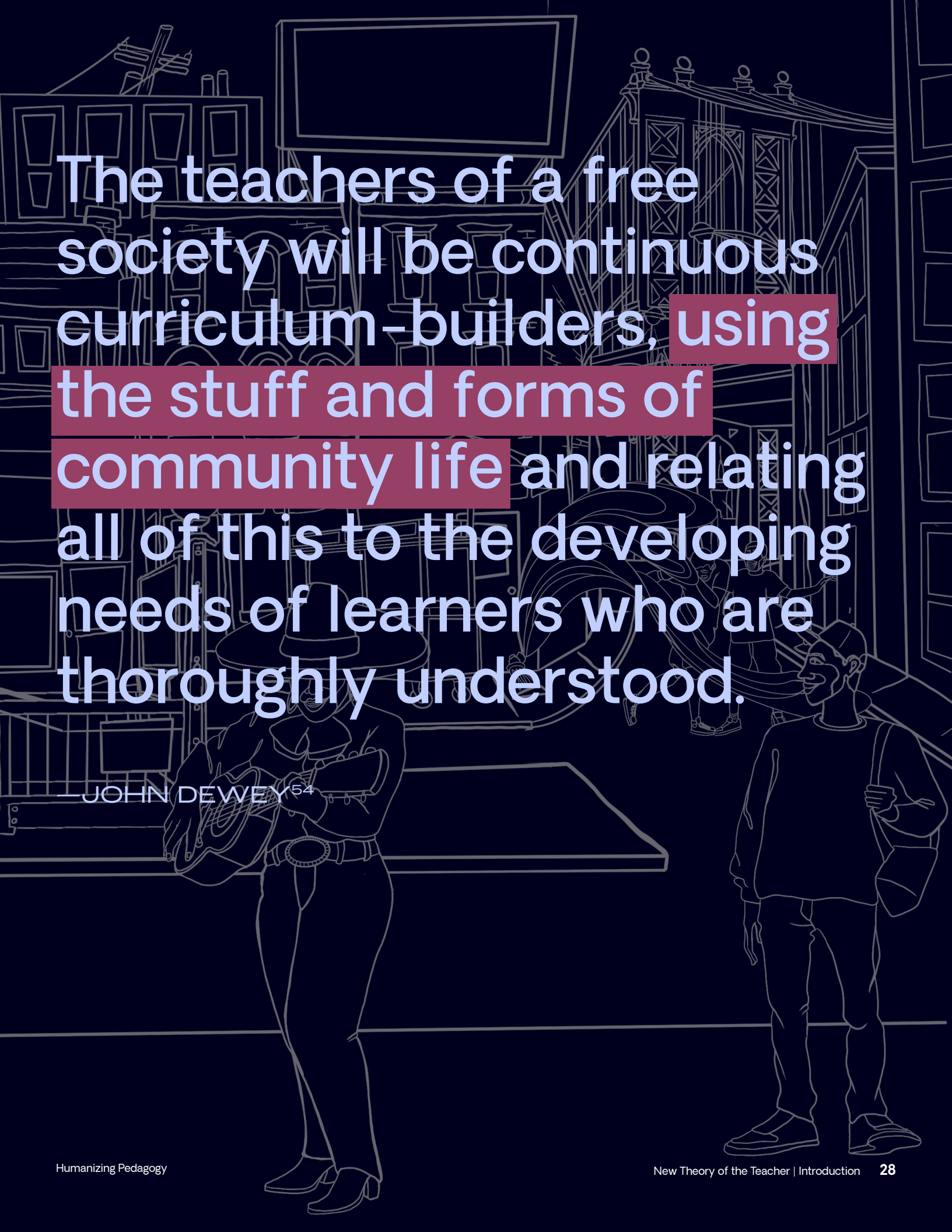
NEW THEORY OF THE TEACHER

In an era marked by rapidly advancing technology and shifting educational paradigms, teachers remain at the forefront of navigating both the new and enduring challenges of the classroom. Sometimes referred to as "curricular-instructional gatekeepers,"[55] teachers are the central means through which learning comes to life for students. To that end, if we seek to address the relevance and representation challenges facing schools, then curriculum should be in service of addressing educators' professional needs.

The prevailing (and enduring) landscape of curricular resources, however, has persistently tried to diminish this role of the teacher. In previous eras, the teacher has often been perceived as a deliverer of a predetermined curriculum—teachers' agency being solely in their instructional decisions, but not in shaping the curriculum.[56] Heavily-scripted curriculum, or "teacher-proof curriculum," has attempted to reduce the role of the teacher to a non-factor in learning. Despite their naturally central role, "efforts to improve schools by imposing 'teacher-proof' methods have continually run aground in the face of the unpredictable and unique features of individual teachers, students, and classrooms."[57] Teacher-proof designs are often cumbersome and inflexible, doing little to support teachers in building and applying their expertise in service of their students' specific learning needs.[58] Unsurprisingly, the same materials have been scrutinized for lacking representation of diverse communities, instead centering white experiences and perspectives.[59] What ideas do we hold about teachers and their relationship to curriculum that have led to this dysfunction? And what ideas or theories might pave a way forward and elevate educators?



The teachers of a free society will be continuous curriculum-builders, using the stuff and forms of community life and relating all of this to the developing needs of learners who are thoroughly understood.

—JOHN DEWEY[54]

Teacher as Co-Curriculum Maker

Curriculum may need to be designed differently, building on time-tested principles that inform what teachers actually need from their materials—both to apply their expertise, but also as a means to support and further foster expertise. To do so, curriculum organizations should look at how expert teachers constantly interpret and revise curricular materials to be responsive to their students, making the teacher a *co-curriculum maker*.[60] As a co-curriculum maker, educators apply their skills and knowledge to thoughtfully modify resources, so as to meet their own learning goals and meet the needs of their students. Modifications can reflect a variety of forms, from incorporating locally relevant content to applying various scaffolds/extensions to condensing or expanding tasks in response to the goings-on of the classroom. Positioning teachers as co-curriculum makers does not undermine the importance of well-designed curricular resources; rather, it reflects the dynamic relationship between the teacher, curriculum (including the original curriculum writer's purpose), and classroom enactment.[61]

If curriculum materials are intentionally designed to support teachers' expert modifications—by balancing space for teacher agency and curricular guidance—then building teachers' capacity and expertise becomes both the *means* and the *goal* of curricular materials. Well-designed curriculum invites educators into the co-creation of learning experiences by further cultivating their content and pedagogical expertise. When curriculum designers and teachers take this approach, teachers become more adept at meeting their students' needs, and the materials themselves become stronger.[62]

Why is it important for teachers to have room to modify curriculum? As any teacher will tell you, no two students are alike; and no two classrooms are the same either. Learning is dynamic—each day in each classroom presents a collection of opportunities and challenges. Rigid curriculum designs inhibit modifications to address this dynamism, making teacher responsiveness to the ever-evolving classroom difficult, if not impossible.

Creating space for teachers' to become co-curriculum makers requires curricular materials to intentionally support teachers' sense-making with curriculum, as well as build their capacity to

modify the curriculum. In return, curricular materials should be regularly revised in response to teachers' experiences and needs. This *curricular dialogue* requires a careful balance of teachers' individual autonomy and guidance.[63] Too much guidance erodes professionalism; too little guidance obscures purpose or direction—both of which hinders teachers' professional learning and effective enactment of materials.

To that end, we describe two elements, whose harmony supports a balanced curriculum: (1) professional space and trust; and (2) educative guidance to support meaning-making.

Professional Trust

When curriculum is designed to entrust teachers as co-curriculum makers, designs intentionally support their digestion, interpretation, and modification of curriculum to meet classroom needs. Professional space and trust is at the core of the curricular dialogue metaphor—rather than dictating every move a teacher makes in the classroom, a curriculum grounded in space and trust provides room for a back-and-forth between materials and the teacher.[64] Curriculum can be designed to reinforce teacher agency and their role as co-curriculum makers.

To inspire confidence and demonstrate trust in teachers to learn and enact a curriculum, the *process* of curriculum development should actively seek to win both the hearts and minds of teachers.[65]

- To *inspire confidence*, the materials' purpose, pedagogical grounding, utility, and adaptability are made clear to the teacher, showing how teachers can apply their professional wisdom to bring learning to life.
- To *demonstrate trust*, materials expect teachers' ability and desire to understand the purpose of materials, to internalize the intentions and pedagogical approaches in materials, and to enact it in a way that is authentic to the original and to their students.

Build Educative Materials

While professional space and trust are essential, it's also important to acknowledge (and account for) teachers' own range of experiences, contexts, and curricular design capacity. Building space for teacher agency—and positioning them as co-curriculum makers—does not mean curriculum designers should assume that teachers universally know how to make expert decisions in their curriculum enactment. There are a range of personal factors that impact teacher adaptations, including: their understanding of curricular options, pedagogical content knowledge, professional development, teacher training programs, the teacher's identity, amongst other factors.[66] Thus, curricular resources must be balanced with supportive structures that build teachers' curriculum design capacity and thoughtfully invite them into the design thinking process.[67] When teachers are invited into design processes, they are not simply deliverers of content, nor left to make any design decision they choose (no matter how well or misinformed). Rather, such a balance requires that design thinking be transparent and intentionally responsive to teachers—where it is made clear how effective pedagogical approaches connect outcomes to learning experiences; and teachers' decision points are likewise clear and constrained by the design.

Put another way, when curriculum makers create professional space and trust through their materials, they have an obligation to support teachers in making intentional, informed decisions when given that space.[68] To support the curricular dialogue, and to support teachers' as they make curricular decisions, materials should also provide guidance and instruction that supports teachers' sense-making. In this way, curriculum is not an instruction manual, but an opportunity for professional learning.[69] Materials that intentionally build opportunities for teachers' learning are often referred to as *educative curriculum materials*.[70] Educative materials are designed explicitly to help teachers better understand and apply the pedagogical rationale. This approach situates curriculum within the realm of professional development, orienting materials towards supporting teachers' growth in their own pedagogical practices and informed decision-making.[71]

Educative curriculum materials bridge the gap between designers and practitioners, and between intentions of the original materials' makers and how teachers enact them.[72] Supporting teachers' professional learning—and prompting teachers to flex their expertise intentionally—both empowers teachers and develops their professional judgment. In this way, designing educative curriculum supports the balance of trust and guidance, while also directly addressing professional needs. Coupled with professional space, teachers can then exercise their expertise within design and enactment.[73] Curricular materials that are intentionally educative—and position the teacher to be co-curriculum maker—equip them with the tools and mindsets to respond to dynamic classroom spaces.

Put simply, the overriding strategy for curriculum designers should be to construct a high-quality, pedagogically sound resource that is flexible to the teachers' design decisions. Their decisions should be supported so as to support the curriculum's intended purpose, rather than be in conflict with it. If done well, such resources not only allow for teacher creativity and expertise, but encourage it.[74]

If we share the assumption that learning improves when teachers are co-curriculum makers, then we must necessarily reevaluate how the curricular ecosystem can better respond to, and nurture, teachers' current practices towards those ends. Education scholar E. Wayne Ross posits that professional development and teacher education is the "most effective means of improving the curriculum."[75] While we agree that teacher expertise should be cultivated, we contend that curriculum providers must play their part by reducing the barriers to, and actively supporting, teachers' curricular improvements.

As such, rather than anchoring on singular curricular solutions whose designs minimize teachers' influence, curriculum should be designed for, and evaluated against, the characteristics that make them useful in supporting and fostering teachers' expert enactment. Specifically, we propose that curricular organizations reorient their offerings to better bridge expert curriculum development practices to teachers' current behaviors in the modern digital age.

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NEW THEORY OF CURRICULUM

Curriculum organizations, policymakers, and education leaders would do well to consider the demands of curriculum based upon teachers' real world practices in curriculum supplementation. In the new virtually-connected environment of education, while the centrality of the traditional textbook may be fading, other structures have become the backbone of curriculum building.[76] More than 90% of teachers practice some form of curricular supplementation even when facing strict district-level curricular requirements.[77] This behavior suggests that teachers' are inclined to act as co-curriculum makers, even when they are not positioned to do so.

The market demand for supplemental materials reflects the very real needs of teachers and students. For example, many teachers supplement to fill holes in their existing curriculum. These 'holes' stem from a variety of needs, including deficiencies in the provided curriculum, need for extensions or gaps in teachers' own perceived professional learning needs. Teachers describe their reasoning with language like "overwhelmed", "desperation", and simply lacking time to create everything their students need (particularly when it comes to differentiation).[78]

Such analyses point to the importance of teacher agency (as curricular-instructional gatekeeper) in crafting learning experiences, but likewise a reconsideration of supplemental materials. A casual and opinionated posture to the quality and utility of supplemental materials has led to a proliferation of for-profit and user-generated approaches. This trend has raised concerns from scholars, who note quality varies greatly, with discernible gaps in quality teaching of disciplinary literacies for different subjects.[79]

Just like any learning resource, supplemental materials—and teachers' use of them—vary in quality. Some supplementation can improve learning outcomes, while others do the opposite.[80] Furthermore, piecing together supplemental materials can easily lead to incoherent curriculum[81]—a scrap quilt of disconnected ideas and concepts pieced together, rather than a carefully designed learning progression of content and skills. Teachers may piecemeal together curricular resources (of varying levels of quality), but for the materials to contribute to desired learning outcomes, teachers need the skills, knowledge, and experiences in modifying said resources to meet their classroom needs.[82]

While many things in education have evolved in the last several decades, it's clear that the tense relationship remains between formal curriculum requirements, student needs, and teacher enactment. Rigid, teacher-minimizing curriculum, paired with a grab-bag of supplemental resources on a wide spectrum of quality only exacerbates this tension. For teachers to work as co-curriculum makers, they will require both educative and flexible curriculum, as well as thoughtful processes to produce high-quality supplements.

Rather than anchoring on singular curricular solutions whose designs minimize teachers' influence, curriculum should be designed for, and evaluated against, the characteristics that make them useful in supporting and fostering teachers' expert enactment.

Characteristics of Quality Curricular Resources

To that end, we offer five characteristics of quality curricular resources that work in concert with teachers' expert adaptations. These five characteristics are not exhaustive of everything a curriculum would need in order to be high-quality, but rather reflect important themes across curriculum theory in supporting learning, with particular attention to elements in a supplemental materials context.

Purposeful

For educators to be able to teach effectively with supplemental materials, those materials must provide clarity of purpose and desired learning outcomes, aligned to state or national standards. Clearly articulated learning goals around content, skill development, and outcomes allow teachers to see the core components of materials, their relationship with one another, and apply their professional development to bring them to life in the classroom.[83] In other words, clarity of curricular purpose shows how learning goals connect to teacher and student actions, so as to ensure that teachers' enactment does not disrupt the overall design, but rather allows them to flex into their professional judgment.[84] As such, when curricular adaptations are made to purposeful materials, they are made *more* coherent in students' learning progress.

Authentic

To be authentic, learning should not only reflect the authentic work of experts (in developmentally appropriate ways), but also demonstrate to students how what they learn in the classroom has value beyond school.[85] To that end, materials should have students engage with source material—gathering, reading, analyzing evidence—in order to answer the real world questions disciplinary experts ask; while also engaging in rigorous analytical tasks that allow them to use evidence in response to compelling questions. Inquiry-based learning stands as a strong example of authentic learning in that students probe disciplinary topics by engaging in rigorous analytical tasks and employing relevant sources in order to answer compelling questions, in much the same way that experts do.[86]

Adaptable

Scholarship is clear that students learn best when the curriculum and instruction is responsive to their needs and interests.[87] Such responsiveness requires that teachers make modifications to reflect their diverse classroom contexts. Overly-scripted curricular materials strip teachers of their autonomy and agency, reducing their role to task managers, unable to apply their expertise and create student-responsive learning environments.[88] To that end, resources must be flexible enough for teachers to make adaptations—becoming co-creators of curriculum—that meet students where they are, rather than attempt to create a one-size-fits-all script for teachers to deliver.[89]

Relevant

Effective learning frames students' resources—or their funds of knowledge—as an opportunity for learning, rather than an obstacle to overcome.[90] To that end, teachers are the most well-positioned individuals to make learning relevant and responsive to their student community.[91] Instructional resources should empower teachers to not only make adaptations to curriculum, but set them up to make adaptations that are the most relevant and responsive to their students and community.

Trustworthy

While search engines and various teacherpreneur platforms may make content readily available, these materials reflect inconsistent quality and frequently employ outdated pedagogical approaches.[92] Teachers should be able to source rich instructional content from trustworthy, reliable sources—content that is developmentally appropriate and vetted for the classroom. To that end, teacher and student materials should demonstrate clear alignment to effective pedagogical approaches and disciplinary expertise. Likewise, materials must be responsive to students' ever-evolving socio-historical context, requiring curriculum be viewed as dynamic, evolving resources.

CONCLUSION

A more humane and centering approach to curriculum is manifesting in the edges and pockets of our systems now, but could be attainable for all.

CONCLUSION

Authors and contributors to this piece drew on time-tested philosophy and contemporary research from a wide variety of fields. These represent combinations of practical and ethical arguments on the harm our education systems can cause as we *get it wrong*, and how things ought to be. Also presented are pieces of evidence for the impacts and level of change possible where our colleagues have *gotten it right*. Practitioners and researchers from a variety of fields (including learning sciences, curriculum theory, brain science and more) have tested, described, and measured the efficacy of a concept from a variety of vantage points. Not only do these learnings reflect the perspectives of some of our most trusted educational philosophers—confirming what we believe should be true—but the outcomes are among the most promising within their respective fields.

Taken together, these learnings from various fields point towards a model that could be revelatory. Within the paper we posit what we believe would be true of such a model. That curriculum theorists, brain scientists, and economists describe a phenomena in our classrooms that has both had more impact on engagement and attainment than any similar curriculum reform—one that is more predictive of future success than socio-economic status and is more affirming of our educational ideals—bears further exploration to say the least.

In sum, when a number of academic disciplines point towards the same phenomena and credibly suggest that it could be trajectory-altering for our students, that opportunity warrants our collective investment. It could be that working towards a model that delivers value for students and inspires teachers will not only humanize our systems but may better deliver the outcomes that we crave.

Across the education sector we experiment with versions of that model now. *We should experiment together*. We consider systemic and contextual factors that would make such a model scalable. *We should consider these together*. We invest our resources in approaches that optimize the current system, and those that hold the potential to transform it. *We should commit to transformation together*.

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