The Journal of School & Society

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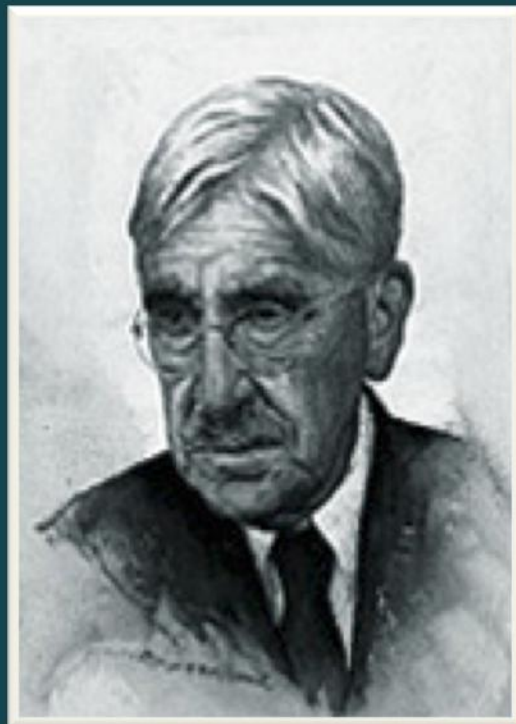
Illustration by Bernadette Tucker

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All contributions to this issue have undergone blind, external peer-review.

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Grit, Hope and the New Character Education

Kyle Greenwalt
Michigan State University

Jared Kemling
Southern Illinois University

Zane Wubbena
Texas State University

Welcome to this Issue

Along with my associate editors, Jared Kemling of Southern Illinois University and Zane Wubbena of Texas State University, I am pleased to share with you this editorial team's current issue of *The Journal of School & Society*. We continue to thank the many members of the John Dewey Society who have supported us in this project.

The John Dewey Society was founded in 1935. While the ideas and topics that interested Dewey are shared by all in our organization, as an editorial team, more than anything else, we seek to work in the spirit of the great American philosopher--and in particular, with his commitment to the use of the method of conjoint experience and communication for the enrichment of democratic living. We seek to help communities of like-minded interest—understanding that term in its most Deweyan sense, as that which leads us on to our shared aims and ends—find themselves.

The Journal of School & Society aims to speak to all those interested in the place and function of education in a democratic society--to aca-demics, certainly, but even more so to public school teachers, to parents, and to community activists—both young and old. To that end, we actively seek to highlight voices from diverse constituencies. We seek to be a journal of intelligent practice for creative and justice-oriented practitioners.

In this issue, with special creative assistance from Sarah Stitzlein—faculty member at the University of Cincinnati and co-direct the Center for Hope and Justice Education—we seek to explore the "new character education" that has swept over the country like a mighty wave. In the first section of the issue, we focus in particular on the affordances and limitations of grit—an idea that has come to define the public face of the current character education. Then, in the second section, we look to the idea of hope—understood here as a dynamic set of habits that are concomitants of truly educative experiences—as a counterbalance to static and measurable character traits that, at times, seem anchored in moral relativism and excessive individualism. Finally, in the third section, we see some examples of creative and tension-filled character education in action.

Our Contributors and their Experiences with the "New Character Education"

At least since the rise of the Common School movement, American educators have agreed that an important part—if not the essential goal—of a public education entails the development of character.

John Dewey recognized this, writing in the very last passages of *Democracy & Education* that:

> All education which develops power to share effectively in social life is moral. It forms a *character* which not only does the particular deed socially necessary but one

which is interested in that continuous readjustment which is essential to growth.

He goes on to add that, "Interest in learning from *all* the contacts of life is *the* essential moral interest."[1] There is perhaps no better rationale for the importance of character education: the ability to learn from all spheres of life the habits that will lead to a more just and beautiful society.

Over the past thirty years, the turn towards test-based accountability regimes and common academic standards eclipsed, to a certain degree, the focus on character. The emerging school marketplace initially led educational leaders to trumpet high test scores as the best guarantor of a quality education. They encouraged parents to vote with their feet—and some did.

But when educational leaders asked the next logical question—how do young children from such schools fair in college and career?—the situation became more complex. All of a sudden, character questions re-emerged, as it became clear that "success"—however we might define it—both requires and rewards perseverance as much as it does smarts.

Enter Paul Tough and the "new character education." Tough's writings reminded the public of the role of failure in learning and made a compelling case—at least to some—that schools should devote at least as much time to teaching the "soft skills" of grit, gratitude and zest as they do to academics.[2] While many schools remain wedded to math and reading test scores, others—most famously, the KIPP charter school network—are now increasingly focusing on the teaching and assessment of character traits as well. In short, our

current moment calls out for ever-more intelligent conversation around this timely topic. Our contributors to this issue do just that.

In our section on the affordances and limits of grit, **Karen Zaino** asks us to consider where we might find grit, given the many facets of her students and their lives. Indeed, she asks us to consider what many would consider the most unlikely of events: that Sam, a single teenage parent of a new child, might develop her character through discovering her calling as a mother.

Likewise, **Vicka Bell-Robinson** in her article about the "radical middle" of the new character education, provides a useful and elegantly simple test for the usefulness of the grit concept in any particular situation: if the situation is overly governed by a social injustice, talk of grit is, she argues, inherently unjust.

Finally, closing out our section on grit, we are fortunate to the feature the work of an exciting new scholar, **Anindya Kundu**, who shares with us stories from his larger study on children in the New York City public school system who have achieved great things despite facing some of the most daunting life circumstances. Combining a focus on agency with grit, we see the importance of helping all adolescents experience the truly transformative potential of social relationships in their lives—relationships that model personal aspirations, social visions, and affirmations of one's own roots.

Leading off our section on pragmatic hope, **Lori Foote and Sarah Stitzlein** clearly and powerfully help us to understand the way in which hope can be seen as a dynamic set of habits that leads students beyond rosy optimism. We see the potential schools might play in helping students to face not only the grittier realities of their current lives, but the moral and aesthetic possibilities of their futures.

Carmen James builds upon this foundation, showing us the way in which dynamic and intelligent habits might emerge out of the inter-

[1] John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1916/1997), 360. Emphases added.

[2] Paul Tough, "What if the Secret to Success is Failure?", *New York Times*, September 14, 2011, accessed November 4, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/18/magazine/what-if-the-secret-to-success-is-failure.html.

play between experience and reflection—all the while reflecting on the inherent shortcomings of any character education that is overly didactic or mechanistic in character. **Gabriel Brown**, likewise, shows us the overlap between hope as understood by both pragmatist philosophy and positive psychology—suggesting that teachers could empower a generation of problem-solvers that have internalized the role that failure and obstacles will play in our pursuit of individual and social goods.

Two final pieces round out our section on hope. **Theodore Michael Christou** gives us a fascinating glimpse into the life and work of the great Canadian progressive educator, William Blatz, whose work in psychology led him to the understanding that security, rightly understood, could serve as the basis from which hope arises. **David Militzer**, on the other hand, locates his understanding of hope in existential philosophy, urging us to help young people learn to find hope by avoiding the extremes of both fundamentalist notions of truth and complete moral relativism.

In our final section, we are fortunate to enter deeply into the "front lines" of intelligent character education in action. From **Becky L. Noël Smith**, we learn about how we, as teachers and parents, might gain greater moral clarity were we to more consistently attend to our "sympathetic data" and discuss, in a supportive community, the frustration that results when institutions stifle the very sources of our own moral reflection.

In a very special contribution from Quebec, **Anne-Marie Duclos** shares with us her success in helping teachers use Matthew Lipman's Philosophy for Children's program. As she rightly notes, opportunities for children to learn intelligent disagreement might counteract current trends in education towards neo-liberal ideas of accountability and efficiency.

Finally, in this issue, we are pleased to share the work of **Katie Fiorelli**, whose work in a community reading program founds ways to empower parents and children through a fascinating blend of technologies—both new (cellphones and #hashtags) and old (milk crates and books)!

John Dewey and Character

Ultimately, Dewey seemed to stand by a very "old-fashioned" notion of character: integrity. A person of integrity is usually thought of as someone who exhibits the traits of honesty and rectitude. These are no doubt important. But the more ancient sense of integrity is really what we are after: that which puts us in a state of wholeness or unity. What we are after is wholeheartedness.

Dewey argued that "were it not for the continued operation of all habits in every act, no such thing as character would exist. There would be simply a bundle, an untied bundle at that, of isolated acts. Character is the interpenetration of habits."[3] This might sound overly ambitious—as if our whole selves were to be present in everything we do. And indeed, as Dewey saw it, such an ambition is to be pursued: "The habit of walking is expressed in what a man sees when he keeps still, even in dreams."[4] In some sense, even our dreaming sustains as we move through the day.

Of course, the goal of complete interpenetration of habits will always remain just that: a goal. Character education, like all education, is interminable. A life-long process of becoming. "A weak, unstable, vacillating character is one in which different habits alternate with one another rather than embody one another."[5] Grit is important, no doubt. But so are other traits. Each must be taken up in the other, coordinated in a way of being in the world that is more skillful coping than routine application.

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[3] John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (New York: The Modern Library), 38.
[4] Ibid, 37.
[5] Ibid, 38.

Teachers and parents might take their cue from Dewey by attending to the relationship between disposition and consequence. We understand the children in our care through their acts. But it is not so much the act itself that should concern us, but its consequences—taken in the broadest possible sense.

The most heroic deed may rebound upon character and incite the child to an enduring love of excitement or the need to be consistently praised. It may mean the child learns to refuse help out of the mistaken belief that heroes do thing on their own. These are pedagogical conundrums from which no parent or teacher should excuse themselves.

Grit is good. But so is, as many of the contributors to this have noted, the ability to ask for help. To change course when the situation calls for it. To evaluate future goals in light of present circumstances. These are the character traits, as it turns out, of the democratic citizen. And they are only achieved through the habit of intelligent observation. Our pedagogical calling is to apply that observation to our own "speckled characters" and to help our children do likewise. This is a character education worth pursuing.

Always on My Grind: Passion and Perseverance Among Low-Income Youth

Karen Zaino
Holmes High School

Daniel[6] appears to be a case study in what happens when young people fail to develop grit: he has missed 31 days this school year and has been late to school on 17 other occasions. Daniel is in my advanced English class, but he never hands in his papers on time; in fact, the last paper he turned in was not only late, it was plagiarized. After starting the rigorous International Baccalaureate program last year, Daniel dropped it as a senior, saying it was just too much for him.

About to graduate, Daniel has no clear career path. Two years ago, he was into welding, but now he's planning to attend the local university with an undeclared major. His main hobbies are smoking weed and rapping. He has never joined an extracurricular activity at our high school.

But Daniel would probably be surprised—not to mention insulted—if someone told him he lacked passion or perseverance, the two defining qualities of grit—as theorized by psychologist Angela Duckworth. Daniel has spent the last two years of high school working full time at White Castle—as in, sixty hours a week. (He was promoted to manager last fall.)

Daniel works because he is single-handedly supporting his disabled mother. He also works alongside a producer to help him record his songs. He has uploaded 26 tracks to SoundCloud and four videos to Youtube. He works because he will be paying his own way through college. Daniel spends his time working and recording. And yes, he missed 31 days of school, and sure, he dropped the IB program, but he also graduated 16th in his class and

> ***So which Daniel do we evaluate when we evaluate his grit?***
> ***The Daniel who skips school, doesn't have a clear career path, and gets busted for smoking weed every few months? Or the Daniel who maintained his stellar grades while working full time and devoting himself to his family and his passion, his music?***

with a 3.6 GPA.

So which Daniel do we evaluate when we evaluate his grit?

The Daniel who skips school, doesn't have a clear career path, and gets busted for smoking weed every few months? Or the Daniel who maintained his stellar grades while working full time and devoting himself to his family and his passion, his music? Is Daniel "gritty"? I don't know if Daniel knows what grit is, but he knows what it is to grind.

* * *

Daniel and other former students frequently find me on social media once they graduate, and their pages share a common thread. Amidst the friendly banter, romantic drama, moody selfies, and silly photos, the word "grind" comes up over and over again:

> *Grind mode mentality*
> *keep grindin*
> *Rise & grind if I want to shine*

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[6] All names have been changed

> *practice tomorrow time to grind*
> *Studio, school, work #onmygrind[7]*

Though originally associated with money-making, "grind" is used by my students to refer to any number of activities to which they've committed: work, school, sports, music, building a family.

In my first few years teaching at this low-income urban high school, I was surprised to read these passionate posts. *Grind mode?*

These were students whom I had to threaten and cajole to complete a single worksheet during a reading class. How could they perceive themselves as hardworking? How did they stand a chance with any complex task if they failed to complete even the simplest assignment?

The answer was a long time coming, for me, but it was there all along, buried in the question.

I was measuring my students' perseverance based on their willingness to complete a worksheet that even I found boring and demeaning. *They* were measuring their perseverance based on their willingness to work hard for the people they cared about and the lives they envisioned for themselves.

I saw my students as students alone, as people whose psychological qualities and intellectual abilities could be understood solely and entirely based on the habits, behaviors, and attitudes they demonstrated in an educational context—in a single educational context—that is, my English class.

Similarly, Angela Duckworth's original definition of grit was located in very specific intellectual and physical contexts.[8] She has studied military recruits at West Point, high schoolers, Spelling Bee champions, and athletes, and she has found, over and over again, that grit is the quality that distinguishes those who succeed from those who do not. Achievement, Duckworth argues, is a product of one's "passion and perseverance" in the face of a long-term goal like winning the National Spelling Bee or completing a difficult military obstacle course known as the Beast.

> *In fact, none of us can be measured by our performance in a single context. Our best selves—our deepest passions, our strongest efforts— are revealed in any number of individual circumstances and challenges.*

Duckworth's studies were the origin of what is sometimes referred to as the "grit narrative"—the idea that success is not a matter of talent or environmental factors, but of particular social-emotional qualities that can be developed in very specific ways.

Whereas Duckworth's original theory was grounded in her own research, the grit narrative has taken on a life of its own in popular media. The grit narrative exploded across the country, potentially taking Duckworth's ideas beyond their original scope. In the words of Peter Gow, where he expresses his skepticism toward the idea, the grit narrative is founded on the notion that "anyone can succeed if they just work hard enough, try hard enough, keep their nose to the grindstone and endure whatever travails life throws at them."[9] An emphasis on qualities such as resilience, perseverance, and self-regulation, according to the grit narrative,

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[7] Sources include Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter; actual quotes have been fictionalized or paraphrased.

[8] Duckworth, A L., C Peterson, M D. Matthews and D R. Kelly. "Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 92 (2007): 1087-1101.

[9] Gow, P. "What's dangerous about the grit narrative, and how to fix it." *Education Week.* www.edweek.org. (retrieved October 29, 2016).

will lead to greater success in school, sports, and other activities.

But the grit narrative is premised on the notion that grit is an independent trait, not a trait that varies depending on the context and activity at hand. In fact, none of us can be measured by our performance in a single context. Our best selves—our deepest passions, our strongest efforts— are revealed in any number of individual circumstances and challenges.

Daniel's commitment to his rap might lack the prestige of military achievement, but it is no less important to him, no less deserving of passion and perseverance.

* * *

Like Daniel, Sam is a former student, but her academic performance in high school was decidedly lackluster. She graduated with a 2.6 GPA and multiple failing grades on her final report card. Sam's troubles in school were not only academic; her discipline record was quite lengthy, including references to skipping, fighting, and regularly disrupting class. Many of these behaviors were rooted in a traumatic childhood: her mother was addicted to heroin; her father died early; and Sam herself spent years in the foster care system before being reunited with her mother.

Although Sam enrolled in the nearest public university, planning to study nursing, she dropped out after a few weeks—this in spite of the fact that she had no other responsibilities and no lack of funding. She then enrolled in and dropped out of the local community college. By the winter after graduation, it seemed to me that Sam had no dream, no plan, and no future.

Sam's story is the kind that critics tell to highlight the problems inherent in the grit narrative. These critics argue that grit overemphasizes individual qualities at the expense of theorizing—and attempting to eradicate—

important structural injustices. Grit blames the student for what is really a problem rooted in context.

These writers and theorists point out that students do not lack grit because of an individual deficiency; they lack grit because of a complex web of social and economic policies and their accompanying psychological impacts. Mike Rose (2015) pointed out that, while grit may be an important quality, "if as a society we are not also working to improve the educational and economic realities these young people face, then we are engaging in a cruel hoax, building aspiration and determination for a world that will not fulfill either."[10]

In Sam's case, her erratic, failed attempts to attend college are not founded in personal flaws; rather, they are the result of her poverty and her traumatic past. Rose and other critics imply that Sam's problems cannot be fixed through character education; rather, Sam and those like her will find their lives bettered through changed socio-economic policies, an increased social safety net, and better mental health and substance abuse treatment. Sam may, indeed, lack grit, but it's not her fault—or so these critics suggest.

> *Ethan Ris, for instance, pointed out that "poor children…are not the ones who need to be taught grit… they are the ones who have historically taught it to the rest of us."*

While this argument locates the failure to develop grit in the environment, rather than the

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[10] Rose, M. "Why teaching kids to have grit isn't always a good thing." *The Washington Post.* www.washingtonpost.com. (retrieved October 29, 2016).

individual, another argument against the grit narrative points out that low-income students actually *do* demonstrate grit.

These writers claim that poverty-stricken students show their grit simply by surviving in such an obstacle-ridden community. Going to school via three busses is grit-in-action; doing homework when you are also caring for three younger siblings is grit-in-action; making dinner when your mother is disabled is grit-in-action. Ethan Ris, for instance, pointed out that "poor children…are not the ones who need to be taught grit… they are the ones who have historically taught it to the rest of us."

> **But Sam has become a different person with the birth of her son, Leo. She quit smoking, found a steady job, and provides Leo with love and stability—a model mother. Sam has located her passion and the will to persevere; she simply located them as a teenage mother.**

These points—about the importance of context and about the perseverance demonstrated in survival—are relevant and significant. Contexts simply must be taken into account. However, these arguments ultimately still rely on a deficit view [11]of low-income youth, however subtly: Low-income youth *lack grit* because of structural factors. Alternately, low-income youth *demonstrate grit*—through their coping skills, their survival mechanisms.

Arguments against the grit narrative—whether blaming a youth's lack of grit on structural or psychological elements, or, more likely, a combination of both—ultimately presume that grit is either inaccessible to low-income

youth or accessible only through the act of overcoming economic and social obstacles. But this view overlooks the fact that my students do, in fact, harbor deep passions and clear goals.

These narratives fail to acknowledge that low-income youth have passions that they pursue; they have goals; they persevere. Their passions are simply under-theorized. It is the role of education to help enact such theorization.

* * *

For months, I worried about Sam as she drifted from job to job. When she announced nearly a year after graduation that she was pregnant, I ceased to worry, and began to panic. I thought her life was over.

But Sam has become a different person with the birth of her son, Leo. She quit smoking, found a steady job, and provides Leo with love and stability—a model mother. Sam has located her passion and the will to persevere; she simply located them as a teenage mother.

Certainly, her life will be challenging, and access to sex education and birth control are serious issues in Sam's community. But it does Sam a disservice to deny the genuine love she has for her son and the powerful efforts she has made to raise him in a happy, stable home. Sam is not merely "surviving" poverty; she is dedicating herself to her passion, her son.

Move into our new place on the 26th, Sam posted on Facebook not long ago. *Hard work pays off. #grindtillweshine*

* * *

In "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," Eve Tuck writes about what she calls "damage-centered" research frameworks, often used when theorizing indigenous communities:

> Though connected to deficit models—frameworks that emphasize what a particu-

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[11] Ris, E W. "Grit: A short history of a useful concept." *Journal of Educational Controversy* (2015): 3, 1-18.

lar student, family, or community is lacking to explain underachievement or failure—damage-centered historical research is distinct in being more socially and historically situated. It looks to historical exploitation, domination, and colonization to explain contemporary brokenness, such as poverty, poor health, and low literacy. Common sense tells us this is a good thing, but the danger in damage-centered research is that it is a pathologizing approach in which the oppression singularly defines a community.[12]

It is easy to see, then, how the original grit narrative is a deficit-based theory, locating in low-income students a specific *lack* of certain psychological qualities.

The counter-narrative that has developed, in contrast, in damage-centered, pointing to political oppression and economic policies to "explain contemporary brokenness"—in this case, a failure to persevere—among low-income youth. Even those critics that point to survival in poverty as a demonstration of grittiness define low-income youth and their communities by their brokenness and what they make of it.

Tuck conceives a third way, a "desire-based" framework, one "concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives… [and] intent on depathologizing the experiences of dispossessed and disenfranchised communities so that people are seen as more than broken"(2009, p. 416). It is within this desire-based framework that I find the truest formation of my students' grit, their perseverance in pursuit of their chosen goals, their commitment to the passions

they have discovered within the confines of their challenging, exciting, and fascinating lives.

* * *

While Tuck argued primarily from the perspective of an indigenous researcher, her work nevertheless resonates for educators. As a teacher, I have come to understand, it is my obligation to eschew both deficit- and damage-centered frameworks in my classroom, and to embrace instead a desire-based education. A desire-based education will not ignore the structural inequalities that impact students; nor will it condescend to students as broken or unable to achieve. Rather, this framework views students, their families, and their communities as ripe for empowerment, as empowered, in fact, already in many ways we may not see.

> *As we seek out what students truly care for, we can, in turn, begin to develop schools that truly respond to these strengths—schools that are connected to their communities, schools that provide a range of vocational options and training, schools that rely on project-based learning.*

It is our job, as educators, to understand when, where, and why students demonstrate certain affects and to empower students to channel their energies and passions in healthy, positive ways. This does not mean that youth must be left alone to do whatever they want; rather, we must acknowledge the abilities and strengths they possess, and find ways to acknowledge and cultivate them.

Their strengths may not be in areas that are traditionally rewarded in schools, or even in society at large, but they exist. As we seek out what students truly care for, we can, in turn,

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[12] Tuck, E. "Suspending damage: A letter to communities." *Harvard Educational Review* 75 (2009): 409-427.

begin to develop schools that truly respond to these strengths—schools that are connected to their communities, schools that provide a range of vocational options and training, schools that rely on project-based learning.

In a similar vein, too often, teachers dismiss our students' caregivers as apathetic, unwilling to help, and actively interfering with their children's education.

> ### Simply acknowledging human complexity is a good start.

But caregivers, like students—like all humans—are complicated. Some work; some struggle with mental health issues or physical disabilities; some are disenfranchised from years of mistreatment by educational systems. Adults are involved in community groups, churches, families, or informal neighborhood watch groups; if they are not involved in school, we must ask why—and find new ways to reach out.

Finally, as with caregivers, low-income or urban communities—especially those home primarily to people of color—are often described in dismissive terms. We might call communities "broken," "ghetto," "poor," or "abandoned." And certainly, economically and politically, many of our communities suffer from neglect. But often, they remain vibrant and necessary to the people who live there, and while crime, drugs, and homelessness may be problems, they are not necessarily the defining qualities of someone's home.

Simply acknowledging human complexity is a good start.

And once we begin to recognize that *all* students, families, and communities must be viewed not with a single lens, but through a complex series of lenses, we can begin to effect the change we need: a change not in our students' characters, but in the way we recognize, honor, and develop the strengths they already have.

These changes matter for two reasons: first, because our students deserve to be seen as truly and fully human, as they really are; and second, because our society's continued strength—economically and politically—requires the investment of its citizens, which we cannot have without a mutual investment in them first.

* * *

My students find their passions in any number of circumstances. For Daniel, his passion is his music, and he works hard to find time to rap and record. For Sam, her son has inspired her to commit to a long-term job, to move into a new apartment, to look into school again as she considers what will make him happy, proud, and healthy.

Whether located in people or causes, hobbies or careers, my students' passions are wide-ranging and worthy. Their efforts cannot be ignored simply because they are not prestigious or lucrative; nor can they be degraded into mere "survival skills." My students' passions are real, and their efforts are intense.

Bout to get on my studio grind, school grind, work grind, Daniel posted on a recent Monday morning. But he's *been* on his grind, and he knows that. It's time for the rest of us to stop looking for grit and start recognizing—and honoring, and developing—the grind that's been there all along.

Karen Zaino earned her B.A. from Swarthmore College and her M.A. from Villanova University. Now in her eleventh year in public education, she teaches in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program at Holmes High School in Covington, Kentucky. She has published articles in Education Policy *and* American Journal of Education *and has contributed chapters to several books, including* Queer Voices from the Classroom.

The Radical Middle: The Limits and Advantages of Teaching Grit in Schools

Vicka Bell-Robinson
Miami University

We live at a time when we're constantly asked to pick a side: Public or Charter, Trump or Clinton, Black Lives Matter or All Lives Matter?

When thinking about the potential impact of teaching grit to students, it's easy to feel like one has to pick between teaching grit or sheltering students from the realities of adulthood. On the one hand, being able to demonstrate grit and resilience is an important component of adulthood. As such, it stands to reason that educators should spend time exposing students to opportunities for grit development. At the same time, it is important to recognize that grit is not always the best response when faced with a difficult undertaking. Quitting, dissenting, and seeking assistance may all be a completely reasonable reaction to a challenging task.

The conversation about whether grit should be taught in schools does not have to result in an *either-or* response–there is a radical middle ground that exist. That space is between teaching that every challenge can be overcome with the right amount of grit and the recognition that the obstacles students face may be the result of conditions that they cannot control. Choosing the middle, seeing the validity of both sides of an argument is a relatively radical notion.

The goal of this piece is to encourage the embracing radical middle through a dialogue about the complexities of infusing character education, focused specifically on grit, into the curriculum.

The Goodness of Grit

Grit is not a new topic, but it has gotten new life in part by research conducted by Angela Duckworth[13] and others who posit that the difference between those who are able to achieve their goals and those who are not is the willingness to apply the appropriate amount of effort and time to see their quest through to the end.

In many ways, Duckworth's work builds upon that of Carol Dweck who posited in her 2006 book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*[14] that people who believe in their ability to learn, grow, and develop, are better off than those who believe they are endowed with natural talent or disposition and decline to work hard. Both psychologists implied that those who are not successful in accomplishing their desired goals have not applied the appropriate amount of continuous effort.

> *We live at a time when we're constantly asked to pick a side: Public or Charter, Trump or Clinton, Black Lives Matter or All Lives Matter?*

Dweck argued that individuals with a fixed mindset quit when they encounter challenges where they feel inept. Instead of believing that applying more effort will result in a successful outcome, they assume that they will never be successful, and thus, continued effort is not worth their energy. Folks with a growth mindset believe that any difficulty they face is tem-

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[13] Duckworth, Angela. *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*. New York: Scribner, 2016.
[14] Dweck, Carol. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success: How We Can Learn to Fulfill Our Potential*. New York: Ballantine, 2006.

porary and that, with the right amount of time and effort, they will eventually be able to overcome whatever difficulty they are facing and successfully accomplish their goal.

> *This story provides a wonderful example of why grit is important. Of how past success can actually lessen grit in certain situations, when we haven't yet learned how to "fail well". Of how we can influence each other to keep going even when we want to quit.*

As both an educator and a mother, I see the importance of not only exhibiting grit for my children and students, but also encouraging the development of grit among children in the wider society. Duckworth and Dweck are not incorrect. It is important for everyone, children and adults, to have the capacity to start a task and stick with it–even it if becomes difficult. Particularly true in education, the confidence that comes with learning new material and can take both time and effort. Without grit or a growth mindset, individuals who are used to having the completion of tasks and the accomplishment of goals come to them easily, find themselves frustrated and disheartened about the difficulty associated with completing an especially challenging task. The difficulty can lead them to internalize their struggles and believe that they are fundamentally flawed.

Bandura[15] described *self-efficacy* as the belief that individuals have that their actions will produce their desired results. Since our self-efficacy connected to our ability to feel our actions can help us achieve our desired outcomes, when we

lack self-efficacy, or when we have low or no hope in our own abilities, we might not try has hard to be successful in our endeavors.

Hope is tied to grit and grit is tied to self-efficacy. Like self-efficacy, people develop the capacity to hope through their owned lived experiences, hearing about the experiences of others, and by being encouraged by others. Parents and educators should encourage the development of grit among the young people over which they have influence. We must encourage grit, while simultaneously acknowledging that individual differences and life circumstances do impact the level of grit one must exhibit in order to achieve desired outcomes.

I was recently speaking with an individual who is quite used to having most things go her way. Her personality and natural talent contribute to her ability to succeed in just about everything she tries to do. A slight change in her job description forced her to learn a new skill, one that she needed to show students in her class. After a few weeks without any sustained success, she felt dejected and disempowered.

As we were talking about her plight, she said "I'm just not made for this." With the topic of grit and hope in the forefront of my mind, I gently, but firmly, corrected her assumption. I reminded her that she had repeatedly demonstrated her ability to be successful. I challenged her to dig deep, and work just a little bit harder it produce the results she desired. I also provided her with a few small ideas about how to enhance her skill development as well as her confidence. I told her that I believed that she could do it; she just needed to believe it too.

A few days later she called and told me that the efforts she had put forth produced the results she wanted. She thanked me for encouraging her and for challenging her to be better than she ever thought she could be. This story provides a wonderful example of why grit is important. Of how past success can actually lessen grit in certain situations, when we haven't yet learned how to "fail well". Of how we can in-

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[15] Bandura, Albert. *Self-efficacy: The Exercise of Control*. New York: Freeman, 1997.

fluence each other to keep going even when we want to quit.

Grit in Schools

Elliott Eisner[16] famously argued that there were parts of the curriculum that were formal and obvious, like reading, writing, and math, as well as other topics that were more implicit or "hidden" such as rituals designed to produce competitiveness and compliant behavior. Indeed, there is a benefit to having schools socialize students into the behavioral expectations of society. Some level of conformity is helpful when it comes to order and safety.

There is also, however, a disadvantage associated with implicitly teaching "common" values and expectations via the compulsory school system. That disadvantage occurs because the values presented are not always an accurate representation of the human experience, nor are they always moral or just.

The historical foundations of the educational system ignored the pluralistic nature of the United States. The current system of education also aims to move individuals from the margins or fringe sections of society by ignoring the uniqueness of each person's experiences and forcing them to assimilate to the dominant culture. Teaching students to simply demonstrate more grit when faced with any type of difficulty leaves no room for them to critically reflect upon and respond to situations in which a different response might be required.

We cannot teach students to demonstrate more grit without also giving them an understanding of the civic and societal responsibility we have for one another. Stitzlein[17] explained how new requirements for teachers in the areas of reading and math resulted in a reduction of time focused on social studies. Historically, social studies, government, and other civic content were where students were explicitly educated about their roles and responsibilities as citizens.

> ***Without any context or ability to discern what situations need grit and what situations need a different response, students may find themselves trying to overcome scenarios of systematic inequality that they were assigned to or inherited.***

The most disturbing part about less time being spent in civically-oriented classes is that some populations of students are more impacted by the reduced time than others. Stitzlein noted that students enrolled in underperforming schools–which typically face increased pressure to raise scores on standardized test–are disproportionately poor and of color. The lack of intentional transmission of knowledge about the power and promises of citizenship disenfranchises these already marginalized students and limits their ability to "access the skills and knowledge they need to secure their own justice and equality". Anderson[18] shared a similar sentiment when he articulated that "another generation will lack societal analysis that would provide them with the tools to defend democracy and work to ensure that our society is living out an authentic allegiance to its cherished ideals". Teaching children with marginalized identities that the key to success is to demonstrate grit

[16] Eisner, Elliott. *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs (3rd ed.).* New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1994.

[17] Stitzlein, Sarah. *Teaching for Dissent: Citizenship Education and Political Activism* (Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2014), 168.

[18] Anderson, Gary. *Advocacy Leadership: Toward a Post-Reform Agenda in Education.* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 47.

ignores the social realities in which many of them exist. In doing this we encourage students to believe that they and others are always personally and solely responsible for whatever negative occurrences they face. Without any context or ability to discern what situations need grit and what situations need a different response, student may find themselves trying to overcome scenarios of systematic inequality that they were assigned to or inherited.

When we consider teaching grit in schools, we assume that everyone is responsible for their own behavior and outcomes. This aligns with the flawed belief in a just world, which basically presumes that we live in a world where people get what they deserve. The just world belief rewards people for the good things that happen to them and punishes people for the bad things that happen to them.

The most quoted words from the Declaration of Independence are "all men are created equal." followed quickly by "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Many people in the United States, regardless of their political persuasion, love to recount both of these lines, and conveniently forget that each of these statements, when written, spoke of a very specific and narrow group: white men. Author Ta-Nehisi Coates[19] reminded readers that at the very time the country's founding fathers were promoting liberty, they were enslaving an entire race of people:

> Slavery is this same woman born in a world that loudly proclaims its love of freedom and inscribes its love on essential text, a world in which the same professors hold this woman a slave, hold her mother a slave, her father a slave, her daughter a slave, and when this women peers back into the generations all she sees is the enslaved.

Like the founding of the United States, the educational system made assumptions about who would be participating in schooling. Although the makeup of who attends school has changed, many of the assumptions and practices have not. It is no wonder that certain populations' tendencies align more closely with the expectations and experiences of schooling. Despite the flaws in the original design, the actions and behaviors of students from marginalized populations are frequently used as rationale for why the gap between them and white students persists. In education, we treat all students as if they have equal opportunity to be successful, and that is simply not true.

Marginalization excludes entire populations from access and opportunities specifically because of their membership in a social group. Young Black and Latino men have difficulty finding employment because of the stereotyping associated with their social identity[20]. The ability to marginalize a group of people is not restricted to negatively impacting their ability to access material possessions, as individuals can also be marginalized by restricting their ability to participate in social gatherings or other human experiences, which may require them to exhibit grit more frequently than their majority counterparts.

Not that long ago, I was engaged in a conversation with a Black colleague who was experiencing some difficulty in his workplace. He began telling me a story about how some basic interactions with his supervisor had gone poorly. He kept having interactions that seemed to be inconsistent with the treatment that his fellow team members were receiving, including being disciplined for everyday actions like asking questions and sharing his opinion.

When he spoke with his supervisor about his concerns, the supervisor explained that she had found his general demeanor aggressive and

[19] Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me*. (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2015), 70.

[20] Young, Marion. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990.

that he seemed angry all of the time. This feed-back alarmed my colleague. He feared that his supervisor was making racial assumptions about his motivations and demeanor. I explained to my friend that his experience sounded like this could be related to harassment and discrimination and that he might want to consult with people in his organization's equal opportunity office.

Situations involving harassment and discrimination cannot be redressed by having the harassed person try harder not to be harassed. It would have placed an undue burden for my colleague to try to tolerate unequal treatment on the basis of race from his supervisor. As we look to using the educational system to create a better present and a more prosperous future, we cannot promote the idea of infusing the educational system with grit development without acknowledging that sometimes the answer to a problem is not more grit—sometimes the answer is a much needed adjustment to inequitable practices.

The appropriate place to demonstrate grit is in a specific task, where the obstacle is more internal than external. Internal obstacles are barriers people put in place for themselves, like lack of motivation. External obstacles exist when systems and procedures give an advantage to certain populations, while disadvantaging another population, like discrimination.

In those situations, the disadvantaged population should not be just expected to demonstrate grit in order to get over the injustice. The inequities of the system must be addressed through making an adjustment to practices or allocating additional resources. A student who has the intellectual capacity and access to appropriate resources, but is performing poorly because of a refusal to complete the appropriate assignments, has created his own internal barrier to success. That student needs to exhibit grit in order to succeed.

> *Situations involving harassment and discrimination cannot be redressed by having the harassed person try harder not to be harassed.*

Simultaneously, a student who has the intellectual capacity, but does not have access to appropriate resources, and thus is limited in her ability to complete the appropriate assignments faces an obstacle to success that is external to her control. In that instance, she should receive assistance to address her lack of resources, and not be further disadvantaged because of something that is beyond her control. It is of the utmost importance that educators and policy makers be able to determine the difference.

Education as a Solution for Societal Problems

Our belief in the ability of the compulsory educational system to address and/or solve many of the problems we face in our society is the best demonstration of both grit and hope. We are hopeful for educational experiences that enhance the present and the future of the citizenry, and we demonstrate grit through our willingness to repeatedly address the flaws we identify in education.

It is much easier to ask the question about what we should be teaching children in school, and much harder to figure out the answer. Currently, we find ourselves dissatisfied at the latest approach of standardized testing. Despite all of the scare tactics, closed schools, and threats, the performance gap between white students and students of color has not been significantly al-

tered.[21] Faced with our continued disappointment, we return to a space where we once again began to think about what children should learn in school. As a nation, we stake the future of our civilization on how well our children learn what they are supposed to learn in school. When the results are not up to our satisfaction, we panic and change course.

> *… it is important for individuals to be able determine the difference between situations in which more effort needs to be applied and scenarios that are designed in an inherently unjust way.*

Whether we're talking about infusing grit, increasing standardized testing, or teaching cultural literacy, educational reform will never successfully accomplish goals associated with equality and inclusion simply by changing the curriculum. This is because our educational system exists in a society that regularly advantages some people while it disadvantages others.

The reality is that conversations about educational reform are a constant game of trying to design circumstances where some students, generally those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged and/or racially underrepresented, catch up with the rest of the group, without fundamentally altering the system. It is likely that students will benefit from the inclusion of character education, specifically focused on developing grit, into the curriculum. This addition must occur simultaneously with an understanding that the life many students have to navigate

outside of school requires a constant demonstration of grit.

Early exposure to violence, poverty, and injustice forces some people with underrepresented social identities to create grit in order to successfully operate in the world. The recent publicity on the shooting of unarmed Black men has had an effect on others holding a similar social identity regardless of their proximity to the victims and/or the location where the shooting occurred. When we refuse to acknowledge the different lived experience students have due to a variety of factors that are beyond their control, and insist that they need more grit, we do them a tremendous disservice while perpetuating system that are innately unjust.

Final Thoughts

It is important that those discussing the infusion of grit into the school curriculum fight the urge to decide between teaching grit and fixing the system–all while keeping a few ideas in mind.

First, educational reform, regardless of approach, cannot totally rectify the injustices that exist in our society. Attempts to address injustices must occur beyond the population of the citizenry that are ages 5 - 18.

Second, there is goodness in grit. Exhibiting effort to accomplish a task, even in the midst of that task being difficult is a good thing to do. People are not always able to complete tasks in an easy manner–sometimes they need to persist through to the end, even when it is hard.

Third, it is important for individuals to be able determine the difference between situations in which more effort needs to be applied and scenarios that are designed in an inherently unjust way. Educators and policymakers have to commit to not allowing grit to be used as an excuse to ignore the inequities that exist in our society and educational systems.

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[21] Ravitch, Diane. *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education*. New York: Basic Books, 2010.

There is a closely connected relationship between individuals and the society in which they live. People are responsible for the society that is produced and systematic environmental design makes society responsible for the people that are nurtured within that society. The nature of our school system does not give us the appropriate amount of time or access to know the unique circumstances for each individual student and adapt our expectations of them appropriately.

In lieu of being able to identify which students are not achieving academically because of internal barriers, from those students who are not achieving academically because of external barriers, we must create schools and systems that are designed with the goal of removing all barriers to academic success, while instilling in students the value of hard work and grit. We must embrace the radical middle.

Vicka Bell-Robinson, Ph.D. is an Associate Director of Residence Life at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Her research interests include dissent, self-efficacy, diversity and inclusion in educational settings, and organizational development. She is the mother of a three school aged children.

Roses in Concrete: A Perspective on how Agency and Grit can Foster the Success of All Students, Especially those Most Disadvantaged

Anindya Kundu
New York University

You see, you wouldn't ask why the rose that grew from the concrete had damaged petals. On the contrary, we would all celebrate its tenacity. We would all love its will to reach the sun.Well, we are the roses, this is the concrete, and these are my damaged petals. Don't ask me why…ask me how!

This poem by legendary rap-artist Tupac Shakur illustrates true resilience despite adversity. Tupac is right that such an extraordinary rose deserves recognition for beating the odds and flourishing amongst the challenges of the concrete. Instead of focusing on its damaged petals, we should celebrate its will to reach the sun.

In the United States this notion of "rugged individualism"[22] is accepted as a mainstream value believed to be linked to success. The longstanding concept implies that Americans reap what they sow and that individual effort is the key determinant for future outcomes. Recent research in psychology has reinforced these premises, bringing forward the idea of "grit" as a characteristic observable in successful stu-

dents.[23] Some popular interpretations of the grit framework have taken this concept further, supporting the ideology that the onus of academic achievement should rest upon the individual student.[24] However an overemphasis on this lens can also cause failures to be considered a result of a deficiency on the student or their culture.[25]

Surely individual aptitude, determination, and grit are important to scholastic success and mobility, but should they be viewed as the primary components necessary for greatness? If schools are gardens, such a narrow focus on American individualism might impede the process of growing as many roses as possible. Instead of standing alone, we may be surrounded by plenty of rosebuds which simply need more fertilizer to bloom. The American concrete is a formidable force that can stand in the way of many students' success. As such, it remains critical to acknowledge that systems of support are also needed for success.

To fully consider the possibilities of grit, one should also consider the social context and lived experiences of students. Grit research itself does not explicitly tout grit for explaining achievement by itself. Preeminent scholar of grit, Angela Duckworth, herself says, "Of course, your opportunities— for example, having a great coach or teacher— matter tremendously, too, and maybe more than anything about the individual."[26] Without also considering these outside forces, we may have a limited understanding of goal formation and social mobility.

This paper presents real examples applying the sociological concept of agency to complement grit, to offer a broader understanding of

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[22] A term first coined by Herbert Hoover during his presidency, also associated with "Social Darwinism."

[23] Duckworth, Angela. *Grit: Passion, perseverance and the science of success.* Random House, 2016.
[24] Tough, Paul. *How children succeed.* Random House, 2013.
[25] McWhorter, John H. *Losing the race: Self-sabotage in Black America.* Simon and Schuster, 2000.
[26] Duckworth, Angela. *Grit: Passion, perseverance and the science of success.* Random House, 2016.

factors that facilitate academic achievement, especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. In this paper I will first explain what agency is and how it can be a useful concept to increase collective responsibilities in education. Then, I will give a quick overview of my research on agency: an independently-conducted investigation which examines 50 exceptional students who exhibit agency *and* grit, through their success, despite immense challenges early in life.[27]

The American Concrete and the Marginalization of Students

In the American concrete, disadvantages are concentrated. Instead of an *achievement* gap problem, which reinforces individualism, acknowledging an *opportunity* gap could better address disparities that limit children's success. Schools and teachers are often left overburdened to effectively combat all of the social factors that influence underachievement—many of which come from outside the classroom. The U.S continues to have the highest rate of income inequality among first-world nations[28] with sociological research consistently showing that public school students from wealthier backgrounds attain higher and more quality levels of education than others.[29]

Today, one in five American children grow up in poverty; in New York, the number is one in every four. Out of New York's 1.1 million public school students, 80,000 children were homeless in 2013, and 11,000 kids were in foster care in 2014. Brown University's Annenberg Institute for School Reform found that in 19 of New York City's poorest neighborhoods, only 10% of seniors graduated from high school college-ready.[30] These neighborhoods are made up of close to 100% black and Latino residents. In contrast, in the wealthiest neighborhoods of Manhattan, the vast majority of students were college-ready. Less than 10% of residents in these neighborhoods are black and Latino. These roses need collective cultivation.

> *Through fostering both individual-level traits like grit, and taking into account social context through fostering agency, educators can work to holistically understand their students' situations and individualize pathways for their success.*

Poor students need schools to be the positive institutions where they can have their basic needs for food, shelter, and supervision met. In fact, policies that look to equalize opportunities, such as offering universal free breakfast for all students regardless of income, have been proven to increase attendance and increase academic achievement.[31] The problem with traditional "roses-in-concrete" stories is that they can keep us from realizing these collective responsibilities in education.

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[27] Kundu, Anindya. "Adding A Social Perspective To Grit: How Students Navigate Disadvantages And Gain Agency". (Ph.D. New York University Print, 2017).

[28] Marsh, John. *Class dismissed: Why we cannot teach or learn our way out of inequality*. NYU Press, 2011.

[29] Ransaw, Theodore S., and Richard Majors, eds. *Closing the Education Achievement Gaps for African American Males*. MSU Press, 2016.

[30] Fruchter, Norm, Megan Hester, Christina Mokhtar, and Zach Shahn. "Is Demography Still Destiny? Neighborhood Demographics and Public High School Students' Readiness for College in New York City. A Research and Policy Brief." *Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University (NJ1)* (2012).

[31] Leos-Urbel, Jacob, Amy Ellen Schwartz, Meryle Weinstein, and Sean Corcoran. "Not just for poor kids: The impact of universal free school breakfast on meal participation and student outcomes." *Economics of Education Review* 36 (2013): 88-107.

Education remains the arena with possibly the largest payoff for considering social context and fostering the success of all students. Underachievement harms economic growth. A McKinsey study showed that if America could narrow the achievement gap between white students and black and Latino students, G.D.P. would go up between $310 and $525 billion.[32] In our recent recession, more educated populations recovered faster than less educated communities.

> *While grit research does not explicitly tout grit as wholly accounting for the complexity of scholastic achievement by itself, popular applications of grit can fail to fully understand what causes the social mobility of students, especially for those who are disadvantaged.*

As the number of social problems in this country grows—the requirement of an increasingly expensive college degree to gain entry to the middle-class; the dwindling strength of social security where fewer active workers support the pension of recent retirees; the proliferation of mass incarceration and the amount of tax dollars spent annually on prison inmates—it becomes necessary to acknowledge that systems of support are needed for success. Only then will we be confident that subsequent generations will be well equipped to tackle the many challenges we leave for them, from a collective and unified front.

Through fostering both individual-level traits like grit, and taking into account social context through fostering agency, educators can work to holistically understand their students' situations and individualize pathways for their success. Without employing this type of comprehensive approach, the desire for children of all backgrounds to academically succeed may remain a vision unfulfilled.

The Perspective of Agency to Complement to Grit and Broaden the Scope of Success

From a sociological standpoint, popular *applications* of grit may have certain limitations in explaining academic success: First, they may not address the social contexts (families, networks, demographics) or structural challenges of the young people whose achievements they assess. Second, they may not necessarily be rooted in a dynamic understanding of these students' cultures, which can change and adapt under different environmental contexts.

While grit research does not explicitly tout grit as wholly accounting for the complexity of scholastic achievement by itself, popular applications of grit can fail to fully understand what causes the social mobility of students, especially for those who are disadvantaged. Without a more holistic approach to academic achievement, many issues students face can go ignored and students may fail to develop practical and challenging passions and goals to strive for.

Used by social scientists, the concept of agency, or the potential individuals have to enact free will and impact their own lives, is context-specific. It is related to the unique circumstances and social position of each person which helps to assess their specific capacities for change.[33] Thus agency also considers one's

[32] Auguste, Byron G., Bryan Hancock, and Martha Laboissiere. "The economic cost of the US education gap." *The McKinsey Quarterly* (2009): 1-2.

[33] Noguera, Pedro, and Kundu, Anindya. ""Why America's Infatuation with "Grit" Can't Solve Our Educational Dilemmas." *Virginia Policy Review*, Summer Issue (2014).

demographics, networks, class-position and race to assess their subsequent power.

My research on agency adds two dimensions to grit research. First, an observation of how individuals navigate opportunity structures (schools, higher education, and enrichment programs) and exhibit help-seeking behavior. Second, an investigation of the role of various support systems through identifying the role of social and cultural capital in these individuals' lives.

Successful students from troubled backgrounds benefit from both personal and social factors that facilitate their upward mobility and allow them to set realistic and challenging goals. Studying these exceptional cases can hopefully serve to generate hypotheses on the interplay between individual and social factors that can constitute educational success. We can then think about creating better-tailored pathways for disadvantaged students to take advantage of.

As such, my definition of agency stems from interdisciplinary considerations between the fields of sociology and psychology: Agency must be context-specific and understood as a function of the system of which it is a part.[34] While it can manifest through action and outcome, agency can be promoted by internalized qualities like self-efficacy.[35] Agency can exhibit resistance to express individualism,[36] but more importantly, *successful* agency benefits from critical thinking on one's social position and deliberate efforts taken to change one's circumstances for the better.[37] The cases presented in this paper work to exhibit how agency works dynamically through each of these characteristics.

Independent, Qualitative Research on Agency

My research, involving students in New York, asks a simple question: How have disadvantaged students, who experience levels of success, navigated obstacles to succeed? Within this question there are broader implications and sub-questions that may include: How have they obtained support and developed networks? What role can educators play to facilitate and help shift students' mindsets positively towards education? What pedagogical tactics can help to foster the realistic goal formation for disadvantaged students?

My analysis shows that success is possible over a wide range of disadvantages, including, but not limited to: students coming from very low-income and single-parent households; parents who have struggled with substance abuse, or participants who themselves have struggled with substance abuse; and subjects who have been previously homeless, incarcerated, or suffered from ongoing trauma.

Individuals included in this project also possess high levels of grit. However, because marginalized students experience greater threats to forming academic identities,[38] grit alone is unlikely to account for their surprising upward mobility. This research indicates that these students have also benefit from a range of support systems which enable them to think critically about disadvantages and act accordingly to overcome them.

[34] Geertz, Clifford. *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. Vol. 5019. Basic books, 1973; Sahlins, Marshall. *Culture and practical reason*. University of Chicago Press, 1976.
[35] Bandura, Albert. *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. Macmillan, 1997.
[36] Genovese, Eugene D. *Roll, Jordan, roll: The world the slaves made*. Vol. 652. Vintage, 1976.
[37] Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Continuum, 1968; Kundu, Anindya. "Adding A Social Perspective To

Grit: How Students Navigate Disadvantages And Gain Agency". (Ph.D. New York University Print, 2017).
[38] Ransaw, Theodore S., and Richard Majors, eds. *Closing the Education Achievement Gaps for African American Males*. MSU Press, 2016.

Interestingly, modern grit research has largely been quantitative in nature, based on surveys and datasets that monitor the achievement and persistence of students over time. At the same time, Angela Duckworth's early work on grit involved interviewing people in various fields about success, which eventually helped her to define and operationalize grit.

> ***Ultimately, by helping to increase students' capacities for positive change towards desired ends, their grit also increases as well.***

Similarly, my early work on agency has been serving to inform my own definitions of what agency can look like in real contexts. Putting these two investigations in conversation with one another allows for the type of mixed-methods, interdisciplinary approach necessary in understanding success more broadly, all while taking a holistic approach to education.

As agency is directly related to social life and one's ability to act within it, it can be fostered on multiple levels, by multiple stakeholders in children's lives. Ultimately, by helping to increase students' *capacities* for positive change towards desired ends, their *grit* also increases as well. Students become better suited to achieve specific, passion-related goals through tailored strategies they may not have formed earlier.

The following two themes from my research on agency highlight how certain considerations can either advance or impede agency. The manner in which students are treated, with respect to their individuality, can foster their growth and hope for the future. This can be accomplished through practical and replicable means, on different levels, by different influences in students' lives. These themes primarily showcase how youth must start with an understanding of their own position in the world to

then be able to improve their circumstances through gains in grit and other behavioral changes.

I am highlighting the stories I collected from my research participants—"Joe", "Imperial", and "Liz"—through addressing two themes uncovered in my work. These students were chosen because they exemplify how certain supporting structures and pedagogical relationships worked to increase their agency. That is to say, these individuals were not chosen because their stories were more colorful than my other participants'. The following data and analysis is a simplified, yet representative, of my findings in this project as a whole.

Theme 1: Strong Roots lead to Branching-Out: Passion is fueled when Origin meets Opportunity

Subjects in this research on agency have exhibited a strong sense of their roots and where they are from. These mindsets are found to be incredibly important, serving as strong foundations for individuals to stay grounded, but also as platforms from which to grow.

From a very early age, Joe learned what was important in life through necessity. The majority of his life before young adulthood was spent homeless, moving from place to place without a permanent address to call home. He described growing up without any kind of safety net, where basic needs like shelter were not always expected:

> I was in second, third grade and I had to miss two, three weeks of school to watch my sister whenever she got sick. That aspect shaped a lot of my sense of having to fixate on what's important. You had to pick between what's most important: Going to school or having a house to live in? Watching out for family. For those type of things.

I feel like I had a reality check much earlier than most kids. A lot of people don't usually have to go through that.

Having experienced this level of struggle, this early, fostered Joe's grit; he was determined to make something out of himself, but he also knew that hard that work was not necessarily enough to overcome these basic obstacles. In this case, grit alone could not level the playing field.

Joe knew that he also needed opportunities to take advantage of, to navigate between, which is an aspect not currently investigated in grit literature. Interestingly, though, since childhood, Joe has exemplified gritty behavior by seeking opportunities, which can increase his agency. His primary goal has been to better his situation and grow as a person. This background is perhaps the most influential factor, which allows Joe to be brave and engage in things like networking, a simple practice, but one which poor students are sometimes afraid of.

Imperial adds depth to this idea. Also having grown up in a very poor neighborhood, he credits his middle school's approach and academic culture for shaping his identity and mindset for success:

> I think, overall, what really helped me was the fact that I went to a school that was a small, all-black private school in the Bronx. It was the last one in New York City. It closed down. It really influenced me. We learned about black history, we learned about different black innovators. We were taught from a young age, "You need to be like these people. You need to be as professional as them." We had a headmistress who was pretty much on our ass—to be very straightforward—to be on our learning. So that helped a lot.

Through real-life examples, Imperial learned that while the odds may have been stacked against him, achieving goals was not out of reach. As Paulo Freire contended, students need to use schools as a place to critically reflect on their social positions so as to be liberated from them.

This type of acceptance and recognition helped to foster resiliency and grit, through identity and agency. His school crafted curriculum and relationships that were built upon this premise—not to be disheartening, but rather, to be motivational. It worked.

You had to pick between what's most important: Going to school or having a house to live in? Watching out for family. For those type of things. I feel like I had a reality check much earlier than most kids. A lot of people don't usually have to go through that.

The school's approach of identifying role models tied to identity helped immensely for goal formation, from an early age. Imperial started to formulate his goal to become his family's first college-goer. Today, Imperial is a U.S Fulbright Grantee and MPA Candidate, in Italy.

While Liz also came from a school and community with very few resources, she turned to her church for structure and to fortify her identity:

> A big part of my childhood or my teenage years, I was part of a church. I was helping [with] a lot of the stuff there. I helped teach an English class to Spanish-speaking adults. I did simple things, like plan menus, to sell [food on Sunday], to fundraise money for

different events that we had. Just being in that environment and being able to do something as simple as give up your chair for an older lady, and to see their smile on their face, that's nice

Here, Liz's church not only taught her moral and civic responsibility, they also taught her skills related to teaching, planning and fundraising. Upon seeing her efforts foster community and happiness, Liz's grit and passion for service increased.

> ***One of those groups was the Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition. They taught me how to organize, work in the community, how to properly protest. It gave me those civic values that I had not really known before, because growing up where I grew up, you're not necessarily taught how to organize or anything like that.***

The church provided her an explicit pathway that neither her school nor home could, but one that she was able to relate to academic success. Even though she lived in a building that she characterized as riddled with gangs, she was able to stay on a better path, eventually becoming the salutatorian of her high school and receive a full academic scholarship to attend NYU.

When such community-minded interests are able to intersect with career visualization, students can start to see themselves thriving in any situation. With slightly tailored opportunity structures, a person's origin can truly become a building block for excellence. Says, Imperial, on a community group that helped him in this fashion:

One of those groups was the Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition. They taught me how to organize, work in the community, how to properly protest. It gave me those civic values that I had not really known before, because growing up where I grew up, you're not necessarily taught how to organize or anything like that. So seeing this organization, organizing the Bronx, I think I did magnificent work, on school closing, on different development. It helped me out a lot. I was actively involved in these campaigns. It was very empowering for me, because I was taking a hand in my community, and I knew I could do something

This passage highlights the unison of grit and agency, a harmony that can develop deep passions. Building professional skills atop students' near-and-dear interests can allow these passions to serve as lifelong motivators. This takeaway can be applied to after-school programs or groups for youth: programs should be interest-driven, but they should also remain versatile enough to allow for students to pursue multiple activities and crafts to see what really engages them.[39] With routine support and structure, these initial interests can be reinforced and become expertise.

Students may be astutely aware when this type of community-minded approach is handled *insincerely*, causing them to possibly retract and disengage instead. An example of this can occur regularly in school settings, through a pedagogical tactic which is ironically meant to incite participation. This is an example of an

[39] Kundu, Anindya. "Digital After School Programming as Prevention: Positive Outlets for Youth Expression in an Increasingly Hi-Tech World," Published by Center of Applied Research Solutions, Prevention Tactics, February, 2014. http://www.cars-rp.org/publications/Prevention%20Tactics/PT09.11.14.pdf

incorrect approach that was intended to get Joe to participate in school, by making assumptions about his identity:

> In this new school, anytime something came up on Hispanics, my teacher would ask me for my opinion. I was like thirteen years old. They put me on the spot. While back home, in New York, I never had to worry about that, because everybody was Hispanic.

Joe seldom, if ever, told his teachers about the types of challenges he faced at home. As such, teachers at school could not always connect with him on a personal level.

> *… students can become grittier, if agency is cultivated by first embracing one's origin as a point for reflection. When one's roots and a sense of where they came from are fostered, failure might not seem like a viable option.*

Thus, without knowing his teachers out of the classroom, he felt that when they overreached, that they were pretending to care. In the above example Joe recounts how some teachers in New Jersey tried to interact with him on a superficial level, on the basis of race, making him feel like more of an outsider than being included. This type of cold-calling could easily dampen a student's immediate grit and subsequent agency, as it is not a genuine understanding and celebrating of origin. To use the Freirean term, this shows a lack of respect for a student's *praxis*, or their specific loci of action and reflection,[40] and would not serve to enhance their potential for learning.

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[40]Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* Continuum, 1970.

Liz is a good example of the power of praxis. She went to NYU bright-eyed and eager to excel, but found herself struggling to stay afloat once there. College felt like a desolate place; she tried to juggle commuting for hours between school and home, a full course load, and her own shyness towards asking for help. This was a low-point in her life and she was placed on indefinite academic probation. After losing her scholarship, Liz worked as a parking lot attendant in the Bronx. But that whole year off, she reflected on herself and the shortcomings that she saw in her community. She began to refocus on her goal, which was to go back to NYU and do things the right way. This shift in mindset, along with tremendous grit, eventually led her to reapply and receive back her entire, full-ride scholarship for a second chance.

When asked why she reapplied to NYU and did not consider other college options, Liz replied:

> I guess, I like to finish what I start—what I always start. So I just *have* to come! It wasn't an option for me to go anywhere else! I *had* to get this degree from NYU. I spent time thinking about what I wanted to do. Because what was the point, if I was just going to come here, and let the same thing happen again?

This passage embodies how students can become grittier, if agency is cultivated by first embracing one's origin as a point for reflection. When one's roots and a sense of where they came from are fostered, failure might not seem like a viable option.

Before her probation, Liz was simply following a path she thought was necessary without much attention to purpose. This caused her to burn out early. Liz was forced to reimagine her future and formulate her college goals on her terms. After reflection, only NYU would do for her. She was then able to exhibit an almost stubborn adherence to her previously set goals,

making for a keen example of how grit can be enhanced by agency-related considerations. As such, opportunity structures that are able to treat background and identity with respect tend to beget strong results.

Theme 2: Expectations Feed Help-Seeking Behavior: Positive Reinforcement Waters Growth

Still, without explicit structures and occasional social support, even the grittiest of individuals might not find a pathway to success. The American concrete is perhaps too rigid to penetrate by resilience and self-efficacy alone. Sometimes disadvantages can keep students from realizing their specific potential for success.

Generally, participants in my research project have all pointed to experiences where teachers, adults, or schools supported them towards forming their goals through setting high expectations. For instance, because Liz seemed naturally bright to her teachers early on, they often worked to scaffold her work and keep her challenged:

> My teachers had a big influence in shaping my growth. My middle school teachers really pushed me to do well. My experience was different compared to other people. They would give me separate projects to keep me engaged.

Liz highlights the importance that pedagogical strategies, specifically differentiated instruction, can have in fostering lasting academic mindsets. Liz is also aware that teachers could not necessarily give special attention to all students, especially in a school with less resources, like the ones she attended. Still, a level of individualization for students helps them to stay engaged and feel important.

When this basic push, built on a mutually understanding relationship is missing, there can

be negative effects. This is a primary factor that was missing for Liz when she got to college. She felt isolated, an aspect which seemed to multiply over time, as she became less and less able to reach out to her teachers for help:

> I was in a class called "Gentrification and the Inner City," and I really liked it. But I barely went and did the work. I had a group presentation and I let these two girls down. I was just so *angry* at myself. Everything happened so fast. When I asked for help, it was too late. I had to withdraw from two of my classes, and I got two F's in the other two. That's how bad that semester was.

Though it is difficult to speculate all of the reasons Liz failed this semester, this example highlights an instance where a teacher could have intervened. Though in college the onus is generally on the student to self-advocate, in earlier stages, teachers have various opportunities to step in by monitoring students' progress. Even simple efforts can help students avoid monumental failure, as academic success slips further away as mistakes built up. Non-existent or low expectations can be detrimental in fostering and maintaining academic cultures that are suited for success. If mentors are able to build time for semi-regular check-ins with students, as well as establish expectations early on, students feel the support they need to thrive.

And though many of Joe's teachers did not necessarily help him grow his own achievement mindsets, he was fortunate enough to learn from his friends' families, and receive structured guidance from them. When Joe went to New Jersey to live with his aunt, he was introduced to a wealthier community that exhibited different cultural values through different norms. They often had Joe over for dinner and included him in family activities:

> I learned so much about Indian and Asian culture, and their differences. One of my

friend's parents wouldn't allow him to watch TV. For every hour he watched TV, he had to study for two. I'm from a family where you can watch as much TV as you want if you get the homework done. With him, it's not like you can just get the homework done; the homework has to be done *correctly*.

Joe cites these experiences as monumental in conceptualizing success and how to achieve it. He sought to learn from these families and emulate their practices, almost by proxy. Even though his own home and school did not always hold the highest expectations for him, Joe held them for himself. He used these experiences as examples to push himself constantly, learning from other families how grit and agency were being instilled in children. Joe is currently majoring in International Business, while triple minoring in Philosophy, Economics, and Global Studies. It is safe to say that he is still interested in all things financial, philosophical, and cultural.

> *They were students of color; they looked like us, they sounded like us, and they were in college, they were doing big things, they were adults, and they were cool, they were suave, and we wanted to be just like them.*

High expectations and cultural capital can be provided to students from most role-model individuals: students benefit from seeing relatable success in action. In fact, when mentors are closer to mentees in age, background or race, their effects can be even stronger. This is a piece from Imperial talking about older students who had a formative impact on him, even though their high expectations were delivered softly and informally:

There was one program where we had students from NYU come teach us the SAT's. They were students of color; they looked like us, they sounded like us, and they were in *college*, they were doing *big things*, they were *adults*, and they were *cool*, they were *suave*, and we wanted to be *just like them*. And we didn't see that. I didn't see any kids from college or anything like that. So just seeing these kids was amazing. And they were really amazing individuals. And, at least for me, Mr. Smith would take me to this NYU event called The K.I.N.G.S. event, where it was students of color getting praised for doing community work. He'd take me every year. We would be right there, interacting with the students. They received their awards, they spoke to us and say things like, "I can see you guys coming here." And for us kids coming from kind of nothing it meant the world.

This example shows just how simple words of encouragement can go a long way, if delivered meaningfully and genuinely. Imperial even acknowledges that, at the time, he did not actually explicitly see that these older students were serving as examples to follow.

This highlights that these processes often occur invisibly, on a mindset level. The college students who came to Imperial's school to teach the SAT's also exhibited examples of kindness, determination and intellect, which the younger students absorbed. The other college students, who also impacted Imperial's life positively, were strangers he did not meet more than once. If a stranger can hold high expectations towards a student they do not know in-depth, and make such a lasting impression, a stable mentor can perhaps do even more.

And such is the influence of Mr. Smith, a great example of mentorship, mentioned in this passage. Mr. Smith, who was Imperial's principal at the time, still has a strong relationship

with Imperial today. According to Imperial, Mr. Smith exuded what could be considered visionary leadership, through relatively simple means:

> He's an amazing individual. The best principal anybody could have had—the type where he'd be in the main hallway, everybody coming in, and he'd be there. He'd know *everybody's* name. *Everybody's* name, this man knew, "You're supposed to be in the 8:30 class! I know where you're supposed to be right now—you'd better get there!" He knew everyone's schedule in his head.

While it is difficult for every school leader and educator to be held to these standards, the fact remains: when these influences are present in the lives of youth, they make immeasurable impacts.

Outside influences in children's lives are particularly critical because young students need to learn to take advantage of resources. Youth raised in lower-income households are found to exhibit less sense of entitlement than wealthier kids.[41] This means taking advantage of opportunities might be harder for them without some kind of push. In Liz's case, she had to learn the simple value in being allowed to ask for help:

> That second half of the year, where I was dismissed from the school— I don't know what led me to finally realize that I needed help, but I did ask, and there were so many people willing to help. To me, it's like, "Why didn't I do that before?" That's something that I definitely embody now. Also giving help. It's hard to be here at NYU for a lot of students. It's really emotionally-straining, for people of all backgrounds, here. I've learned that it's really helpful to be there for each other. Even talking. I've learned to reach out to my ad-

visor a lot of times, and let him know what's up, even though he would always be checking anyway.

In short, other students might find it more natural than others to reach out for help in college.

When Liz realized she, too, could ask, she started to do much better at NYU. The effects started to multiply. She started to leverage relationships with her classmates, professors and even her academic advisor to keep her accountable to succeed. College can feel like a foreign land, even for students who have been successful in their k-12 educations. Support to succeed is something that individuals need at all levels, but they need to be taught to seek it out as well.

> *If grit is the water that allows flowers to show bursts of growth, agency might be the sunlight needed to regularly nourish hope and fulfillment.*

If and when students are active in seeking help, their requests should at least be met with positive and pinpointed reinforcement, even if the help is not explicitly possible. In Joe's case, his high school was underfunded and could not help him apply for an American Ambassador's program. The program allows high schoolers to travel to other countries with peers from all over the country, for a lofty price. Joe decided to approach his principal and ask for help:

> "Is there any way the school, since I'm top of the class, can fund me or help me out?" My principal said, "Actually, we have a new affiliation with this program called Summer Search, and they're going to come here and interview students. They may select a couple of students. If you get accepted, they

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[41] Lareau, Annette. *Unequal childhoods: Class, race, and family life.* University of California Press, 2011.

have a similar program like that, where they'll send you to places over the summer. It may or may not be abroad, depending on the student and their circumstances." Then, I made sure I stayed in touch with them, I filled out the application, went to the interview, and then I ended up getting accepted. From there, I made sure I did whatever they asked of me, and then I ended up being able to go to Spain, and doing all that while I was in high school.

Joe's principal was both honest that the high school could not help him apply to the Ambassador's program, but also encouraging towards Joe's interests. Even though one opportunity was not possible, he offered another one. This initial spark allowed Joe to utilize his grit, shown through his determination to apply to Summer Search, get accepted, and excel in that program. This simple story highlights a simple theme: that if adults are receptive and even listen to students' requests, students can feel empowered.

If mentors—parents, teachers, peers, and educators of all kinds—can work to think of all students as rosebuds ready to soak up positive influences and experiences, the hope for growth can become unlimited. Agency and grit can be fostered, as long as attention is given to the vast realm of possibilities. Fostering the success of all students simply requires paying attention to who a student really is, while taking into account where they are from, to create opportunity structures for where they can go. Coupled with high expectations and structured encouragement, the sky is the limit for young scholars to tap into their potential to bloom.

Breaking the Concrete and Planting Flowerbeds for All Students to Thrive

So far embedded into American culture is the concept of "rugged individualism" that Tupac's "Rose in Concrete" poem was adopted as the narration for a Powerade commercial. The ad featured NBA-star Derrick *Rose*, and celebrated his coming out of Chicago's concrete, and eventually earning himself an MVP award.

There is something to be said about the sociological and psychological prowess of advertisers to tap into our mainstream values and make us buy things. And in this case, the message seemed to be that with enough persistence (and Powerade), immense success is possible for every kid. But when some roses grow from concrete, and others from nurturing flowerbeds, blanket approaches can be ideologically oversimplified with false advertisement.

Fortunately, through collective and individualized strategies, success for all kids is possible. The egalitarian hope remains that students will develop into contributing citizens through the means of their education. But for education to work for them, it must respect and try to understand their individual empirical realities, and the circumstances of their origin, to then be able to foster their unique growth. While grit is immensely necessary in the formula for achievement, its ability to fire on all cylinders is not fully possible without also considering agency. If grit is the water that allows flowers to show bursts of growth, agency might be the sunlight needed to regularly nourish hope and fulfillment.

With too much water, plants can be overburdened and drown, as their roots become bogged down and are therefore unable to take up the nutrients they need. Likewise, too much grit, without a strong sense of purpose and agency, can lead to overwork and eventual burnout. We see this in the case of Liz, who had spent her entire young life reaching for the goal of attending NYU, only to be immensely fatigued and confused when she got there. She needed to reevaluate her motivations, as most people need to, from time to time. People need

to retool and frequently self-assess whether their passions still stem from a genuine place and interest them.

In essence, this is the power of having a real passion in the first place. In her best-seller, Angela Duckworth states, "What I mean by passion is not just that you have something you care about. What I mean is that you care about that same ultimate goal in an abiding, loyal, steady way...Most of your actions derive their significance, from their allegiance to your ultimate concern, your life philosophy." The social dilemma is that for some students, being able to develop this type of deep passion, grounded in a life *philosophy,* is a luxury. Recall Joe, whose first concerns revolved around meeting basic needs, like food or shelter, for his family.

> *Surrogate grit, or the idea that a mentor can be gritty on behalf of a student and help push them towards excellence, is gaining validity in the field. On a basic level, this further highlights that the art of teaching and learning is fundamentally a social processes.*

Yet even in these cases, passion can still bloom as long as young people are provided simple support systems. His peer network of middle-class, immigrant families helped him receive a structure to which he applied his own grit—which he then honed into his interests. Interestingly enough, experiencing the different cultures and worldviews of these Asian families peaked Joe's interest in global affairs and international business.

Duckworth continues, "That said, I don't think most young people need encouragement to follow their passion. Most would do exactly that—in a heartbeat—if only they had a passion in the first place." Students can more easily find their passion if their needs and their circumstances are recognized, and then delicately and deliberately catered to. Then, it's off to the races.

Fortunately, agency and grit can each be fostered on multiple levels. Joe gleaned self-discipline techniques from his friends' parents. Then, through his own grit, he sought opportunities like Summer Search and advocated for himself on an individual level. Liz heavily relied on her church group for support and hope. At college, she was unable to find immediate replacements for that comfort and encouragement, factoring into her eventual probation. And Imperial benefitted from the influence of fellow students to whom he was able to relate as well as from the strong mentorship of his principal, Mr. Smith.

For young people taking cues for adulthood, the benefits of having examples to follow, along with guided expectations, can be immensely significant. Grit research itself recognizes the supplemental importance of outside influences—like parents, teachers and coaches—in children's lives. Surrogate grit, or the idea that a mentor can be gritty on behalf of a student and help push them towards excellence, is gaining validity in the field. On a basic level, this further highlights that the art of teaching and learning is fundamentally a social processes.

And when these social elements are acknowledged and the needs of students are taken seriously, all students can thrive. Policies which look to equalize opportunities, such as offering universal free breakfast for all students regardless of income, have been proven to increase attendance and academic achievement.[42] Last June, Baltimore took charge by putting its

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[42] Leos-Urbel, Jacob, Amy Ellen Schwartz, Meryle Weinstein, and Sean Corcoran. "Not just for poor kids: The impact of universal free school breakfast on meal participation and student outcomes." *Economics of Education Review,* 36 (2013): 88-107.

money where its mouth is, becoming one of the first districts in the country to adopt a universal free meals program that offered both breakfast and lunch to its students—everyday. These practical considerations allow teachers to better focus on teaching and build relationships without worrying about the factors outside of the classroom that affect their students' abilities to learn.

The hope remains that we continue to perfect our vision for public schooling, not simply relying on issues of access to create educational equity. We can work to have a system where volunteer groups and afterschool programs are better utilized to distribute resources to schools. We should work to send more counselors to poor schools where there is an increased likeliness that students suffer from trauma. And we can also work to one day have a system that encourages the best teachers to go into the neediest communities and lend their talents.

And in the meantime, homegrown efforts which address agency and grit can suffice. We can see the power of these strategies through students who have demonstrated unique triumph over disadvantages, and disseminate what we learn from them. Even though New Jersey was not a perfect situation for Joe, he explained why he chose to go: "I wanted to live there because my mom always expressed to me that education was the *only* way that I was going to be able to make it out of the ghetto and do something with myself. I felt that school was the only place I had control over." It is good to know that success is possible for anyone in schools. The school's critical function in society cannot be understated.

Thus, ironically, public education remains our nation's most egalitarian promise—with access mandated for illegal immigrants and homeless populations—but there remain challenges between the vision and its reality. Since schools work for some, we might not always question why they are unable to work for others. A clash continues in our classrooms between two of our most core American values: an idealization of democracy versus an idolization of the individual.

But if our options are between having to wilt separately, or learning to grow together, the choice should be an easy one. Hope is the best motivator to realize our collective responsibilities to try harder for each student.

Anindya Kundu is a Doctoral Candidate in Sociology of Education at New York University. He teaches the undergraduate course, "American Dilemmas: Race, Inequality, and the Unfulfilled Promise of Public Education," at NYU. His book, Achieving Agency*, is forthcoming.*

Teaching Hope: Cultivating Pragmatist Habits

Lori Foote
University of Cincinnati

Sarah Stitzlein
University of Cincinnati

Training students in non-cognitive concepts such as grit has gained attention as pivotal in explaining success, separately from intellectual capabilities. Grit research has associated highly successful people with passion and perseverance toward a long-term goal.[43] Gritty people understand the connectedness between their efforts and goal attainment; they are seen as focused and self-disciplined in the pursuit of their goals. This common sense logic seems reasonable: most people can point to a time in their life when they have utilized such skills to bring about a difficult to achieve outcome. We do not dispute tendencies related to grit are important, but we do believe they are not sufficient or the best approach to helping children succeed when facing substantial challenges.

This article postulates that pragmatist hope offers a more comprehensive framework than grit, since pragmatist hope not only focuses attention on outcome attainment, but concurrently develops the skills, dispositions, and values that will be leveraged toward those goals. Moreover, pragmatist hope frees students to consider changes not only for personal gains, but for the common good. As such, we explain how a pragmatist view of habits of hope can overcome shortcomings with popular accounts of grit, as well as make practical the call for instruction that builds in students skills associated with pragmatist hope.

> *... hope is not simply naïve optimism or a rosy outlook. Instead we employ a Deweyan account of habits to argue that hope is a set of habits.*

We will first turn our attention to more fully illuminating the definition of pragmatist hope, carefully uncovering specific meanings of key terms in that definition, which author Sarah has recently developed. Then, we offer more detailed notions on teaching for pragmatist hope, grounded in activities used by author Lori in her own classroom. In the end, we believe that teaching for pragmatist hope is an important aspect of instruction for educators to consider, since the habits developed provide the means to enact both personal and social goal-oriented activity.

What is Pragmatist Hope?

I, Sarah, have recently defined "pragmatist hope, as a set of habits … most essentially, a disposition toward possibility and change for the betterment of all."[44] We begin by unpacking several of the key terms in this definition. First, *hope* is not simply naïve optimism or a rosy outlook. Instead we employ a Deweyan account of habits to argue that hope is *a set of habits*. Unlike common understandings of habit as merely repetitive ways of doing things, for Dewey habits arise from our impulses and develop into demands for action. Habits compose us, including the ways we typically reason,

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1. Angela Duckworth, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (New York, NY: Scribner, 2016).

44. Sarah Stitzlein, "Teaching for Hope in the Era of Grit," *Teachers College Record* 120, no. 4 (in press).

move, and communicate.[45] They not only propel us to act, but also give us the thought, reflection, and bodily movement we need to fulfill those demands with ease. Further, hope is a disposition—a way of acting—that works toward improving outcomes for ourselves and others. In this we do not act in the same way over and over, but, conversely, have a predisposition toward inquiry, creative problem solving, action, and evaluation each time we encounter a new situation which requires our focus. Hope as a habit, then, embraces this notion of humans consciously and habitually engaging with the world around them to bring about change for the better. Developing these habits is what teaching for hope is about.

Having *a disposition toward possibility* highlights the human prerogative toward improvement instead of repeating past actions. Dewey viewed such a disposition toward improving the world as worthwhile in and of itself.[46] Seen as a productive disposition, such hopefulness orients us toward the possibility that change could occur as the result of intelligent action, thus engendering a tool for reconstructing oneself and the world around us.[47] So having hopeful habits means we are "living in hope,"[48] and perhaps even maintaining "hope on a tightrope,"[49] since such hope is necessarily positioned in tension alongside the realistic view of the world, requiring that we lean toward hope or fall into despair.

Hopeful people creatively imagine alternatives and work toward their attainment. Relatedly, Sir Ken Robinson[50] suggests that children are born able to imagine and take risks, but that this capacity decreases with years of schooling. Teaching for hope, then, taps into the need to reverse this trend by encouraging students to enact "imaginative operations:"[51] blending innovation and action in a "refusal to stand still"[52] when faced with challenging circumstances. Teaching for hope, then, is not wishfulness or just optimism, a vantage point from which one may dream or spectate from the side, imagining that a goal can be achieved without any effort on the part of the dreamers. Hopeful people eschew such a position as they actively struggle against what currently exists.[53]

> *Teaching for hope, then, is not wishfulness or just optimism, a vantage point from which one may dream or spectate from the side, imagining that a goal can be achieved without any effort on the part of the dreamers. Hopeful people eschew such a position as they actively struggle against what currently exists*

Hope is advanced and informed by action, often requiring steadfastness and sacrifice, and grounded in the complexity of real problems. Teaching for hope asks students to use "crea-

45. John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*. In *The Middle Works* (1899-1924), Volume 14, edited by Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1922).

46. Ibid.

47. Patrick A. Shade, "Habits of Hope: A Pragmatic Theory of the Life of Hope" (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1997), http://philpapers.org/rec/SHAHOH-3.

48. Stephen M. Fishman and Lucille P. McCarthy, *John Dewey and the Philosophy and Practice of Hope* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 4.

49. Cornel West, *Hope on a Tightrope* (Carlsbad, CA: SmileyBooks, 2008), 6.

50. Sir Ken Robinson. "Do Schools Kill Creativity?" TED video, 19:24, Filmed February, 2006, Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity?language=en

51. Shade, "Habits of Hope," 32.

52. Henry A. Giroux, *America on the Edge: Henry Giroux on Politics, Culture, and Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

53. Cornel West, "Prisoners of Hope," in *The Impossible Will Take a Little While,* ed. Paul Rogat Loeb (Cambridge, MA: Basic Books, 2004), 293-298; Shade, "Habits of Hope."

tive imagination in projecting a future"[54] that is grounded in present and historical reality, to assess the resources needed to put their plan into action, to define potential barriers to success, and then determine whether they are willing to pay the costs[55] associated with enacting that plan. Moreover, these flexible habits provide structure for ongoing hopeful action, offering us a means of directing emotions, such as frustration and anger, toward productive, intelligent action. While reality can present itself as overwhelming and unalterable, hope offers us the language of possibility, and alleviates the "stagnation of fatalism"[56] we may feel; emotions that tend to immobilize us can instead be channeled into creativity and forward efforts.

Visualization of hopeful end goals is not a simple process of laying out a long term plan about which one feels passionate and needs to draw upon personal reserves of self-determination to stay the course, as described in the grit literature. Instead, goals may be conceptualized as incremental, emergent and revisable, since the ultimate goal may not be clear in the beginning, and each step forward offers an enhanced view of the end. Dewey called such goals ends-in-view.[57] Every action and evaluation of the resulting experiences boosts the person to a new place from which to ask new questions and refine his or her vision of the long-range goal. Pragmatist hope, then, is necessarily action-oriented.[58] Courage is required as we move beyond assessment of a situation and prepare to act to alter the present conditions.[59] All outcomes of action—no matter the level of success—provide new information to us. Reflecting upon the outcomes of past action generates cognitive resources for improving the intelligence of our subsequent actions,[60] plus we gain confidence through the "hard work of generating hope within everyday circumstances."[61]

Finally, pragmatist hope includes yet moves beyond individual goal attainment, providing methods that allow students to advance goals *for the betterment of all*—those aims unlikely to be achieved alone. In this, pragmatist hope draws upon Dewey's notions of meliorism.[62] Meliorism is the belief, despite the realities we see around us, that people have the potential and the willingness to make the world a better place. Therefore, pragmatist hope based on meliorism entails working with others to improve the world's conditions for oneself and others.

Notably, grit has often been studied in successful individuals, such as spelling bee winners and West Point cadets, as a means of isolating characteristics, such as perseverance and dedication, of individuals who have achieved their pre-established individual goals.[63] Unfortunately, there has been a "worrisome correlation between family income and Grit Grid scores,"[64] meaning that wealthier students tend to have higher measures of grit. This relationship may suggest that wealthier students may have access to resources that better help them achieve their personal goals in a focused and timely way, while poorer students may lack such means or may have their goals thwarted or delayed by

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54. Judith M. Green, *Pragmatism and Social Hope: Deepening Democracy in Global Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 101-102.

55. West, *Hope on a Tightrope*. West responded to Obama's call for audacious hope, stating, "Well, what price are you willing to pay?" drawing attention to associated costs of hope; these should not be limited to resources on the ground, but also the cognitive and emotional resources required of those who opt to be willing to live in the coexisting tension between the hope and despair.

56. Stitzlein, "Teaching for Hope in the Era of Grit."

57. Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*.

58. Stitzlein, "Teaching for Hope in the Era of Grit."

59. Shade, "Habits of Hope."

60. Gert Biesta and Nicholas C. Burbules, *Pragmatism and Educational Research* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 108.

61. Akiba J. Lerner, *Redemptive Hope: From the Age of Enlightenment to the Age of Obama* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).

62. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*. In *The Middle Works*, (1899-1924), Volume 7, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980).

63. Duckworth, *Grit*.

64. Ibid., 237.

having to attend to pressing problems of lives that wealthy students are sheltered from.

> ***Habits of hope build on the lessons learned from past engagements, building capacity for future intelligence action.***

In contrast, pragmatist habits of hope may be a construct that is more amenable to groups of students from diverse backgrounds, because it contextualizes hope within current realities, acknowledging the conditions under which improvement efforts must be conducted. Students for whom basic living circumstances present a challenge may have less cultural capital around goal-setting, particularly goals typically aligned with school and work success. They may have encountered fewer positive outcomes, resulting in a weaker sense of correspondence between effort and positive outcomes, and in fact see luck as a key factor in success.[65] For such students, teaching pragmatist hope in schools provides a means to developing habits to which they might not otherwise gain access. As such, teaching pragmatist hope may be a missing component to improving outcomes for all students, as called for in current national educational policy.

While grit unites passion with perseverance to tenaciously achieve long-term goals,[66] its focus on individual goals tends to leave the world unchanged. Some critics equate the grit narrative with meritocratic thinking that says less successful people simply need to focus and

work harder to attain their goals.[67] Such critics have pushed back against grit because there is no acknowledgement of the impact of differing experiences—particularly those that are systematically unequal for some groups of people.[68] They feel the grit narrative may "overlook the persistence that many children have already demonstrated" under difficult life circumstances.[69] Moreover, we would not want to "place blame on the victim for not being gritty enough and urging him or her to just overcome structural hurdles that are often so significant that they cannot be tackled alone,"[70] such as "chronically underfunded education systems serving high numbers of linguistically, culturally, ethically, and racially minoritized learners… [who] cannot 'overcome' inequitable funding patterns and structural opportunity gaps through the adoption of the grit narrative."[71] Such structural inequalities possess the potential to shut down hope,[72] so it is vital for people to possess the methods of pragmatist hope with which to "wrestle with despair"[73] and to determine an alternative social vision upon which to focus united action. Pragmatist hope offers a framework for directing such creativity and action, and should be cultivated within the classroom where both growth and cooperative thinking should regularly occur.[74]

In summary, pragmatist habits of hope are not simply repetitive activities, but are instead flexible habits used to continuously seek im-

65. Bernard Weiner, "The development of an attribution-based theory of motivation: A history of ideas," *Educational Psychologist* 45, no. 1 (2010): 28-36.

66. Duckworth, *Grit.*

67. Noah A. Golden, "'There's still that window that's open:' The Problem with 'Grit,'" *Urban Education* (2015), 1-28. doi: 10.1177/0042085915613557

68. Ibid; Christopher C. Jett, "'I once was lost, but now am found': The Mathematics Journey of an African American Male Mathematics Doctoral Student," *Journal of Black Studies* 42, no.7 (2011): 1125-1147.

69. Stitzlein, "Teaching for Hope in the Era of Grit."

70. Ibid.

71. Golden, "The Problem with Grit," 5.

72. Shawn Ginwright, *Hope and Healing in Urban Education: How Urban Activists and Teachers are Reclaiming Matters of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

73. West, "Prisoners of Hope," 297.

74. Giroux, *America on the Edge.*

provement. Such habits build a disposition toward progress and an increased sense of agency, while still recognizing the complexity and barriers embedded in the situation. Habits of hope build on the lessons learned from past engagements, building capacity for future intelligence action. In the next section we further link the elements of pragmatist habits of hope to practical teaching ideas.

Establishing a Hopeful Classroom Culture

Teachers influence students' learning through both direct and indirect means. By choosing the specific materials and instructional methods for engaging students with the curriculum, teachers' decisions directly impact what students learn. But students also indirectly learn what is valued, what type of learning counts, and whose ideas matter through less obvious elements of the classroom environment. The classroom culture is constructed through modeled and accepted behaviors.

Teachers establish the classroom culture when choosing their mode of instruction and the ways students will interact with the subject material and one another. Establishing a culture that advances the development of the habits of hope embraces many of the teaching techniques regularly utilized in many classrooms. For example, many teachers now recognize the value of discourse and inquiry approaches to enhancing student learning. Such practices simultaneously support teaching for pragmatist hope, since they embrace the joint consideration of problems and allow students to determine moves to try out different solutions.

John Dewey believed that students should see school, not as a preparation for life, but as a mode of social life itself.[75] Developing Deweyan habits for hope, then, would embrace activities to address real, present, social problems. Instead of merely telling students to have and pursue dreams, teachers can actively support students through the problem solving process as a means to developing their own capacities toward hopeful living. Through discourse around real problems, teachers apprentice students into practices—habits—around group definition of the problem, possible solutions, and markers of success. Teachers can begin this process with very young learners, and deepen students' capacities to face more complex problems over time. With practice older, more skilled students are positioned to become part of the social force which jointly envisions and enacts a more just world for all. Problematic situations are discussed and taken seriously. Students are empowered to develop feasible, intelligent plans of action, and then carry them out. Students see not only the teacher, but also their co-collaborative peers with whom they act, as resources for defining and solving problems. Such an environment creates a space for students to view themselves as active agents and grow their disposition toward possibility—as opposed to apathy or defeat.

Importantly, teaching for hope empowers students with habits and methods to critically question how the world works, and why some problems seem inevitable and unalterable. Students with these competencies may use their creative imaginations to project a world quite different from the one in which we presently exist.[76] Yet simply working harder individually will not alter the current state of affairs. Thinkers who embrace notions of criticality[77] against

75. John Dewey, *Experience and Education* in *The Later Works* (1925–1953), ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1938): 12:1-62.

76. Green, *Pragmatism and Social Hope*.

77. Nicholas C. Burbules and Rupert Berk, "Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy: Relations, Differences, and Limits," in *Critical Theories*

the status quo work toward greater understanding of the complex systems within which we operate. Discourse and planning within a group of similarly-minded individuals, along with on-going habits of hope to propel us forward, will be necessary to make headway toward the goals of greater equity and justice.

Developing Communication Skills to Build Group Capacity

Using a problem solving approach to guide efforts toward developing a disposition for hope is a concrete means to understand this process. The problem solving model generally includes steps for defining a problem, determining possible causes of a problem, brainstorming various solutions, debating and deliberating over the merits of possible alternative actions, choosing and implementing a course of action, and ends with evaluating of the outcome. Several intersubjective skills are key in this process. Pragmatists view the intersubjective world as one in which "we live and act together and for which we have a shared responsibility." [78] Teachers can intentionally create situations to support students' skills for dialogue, deliberation, and evaluation, all necessary for collaborative problem solving.

Students can improve their ability to effectively dialogue around problematic situations with practice and feedback. Such skills are already a part of the curriculum in most subject areas, and can be leveraged toward real problems. To dialogue effectively, students must learn to explain their ideas using precise language and to justify their reasoning orally and in writing. They must also learn to actively listen, both to understand the speaker and to probe the logic of the ideas offered. Teachers can

support students' growth in these areas through small- and large-group discourse. As they facilitate discussions, teachers also model how to respectfully question, clarify, and summarize ideas. Teachers may also use think-alouds[79] to make meta-cognitive practices transparent, allowing students access into the decisions made during written communication. Teachers who prioritize dialogue and written communication improve students' abilities to explain and justify. Students working to jointly solve problems use such skills to define and address problems so that processing of important information is clearer within the group.

> ### *Defining success also reminds us that failure is a possibility.*

Students also need to practice deliberating over ideas before choosing a course of action. Teachers can support improved student capacities for considering alternative solutions. Deliberating over ideas often requires separating ideas from those who offer them. Putting time between the brainstorming of ideas and the decision making process is one strategy to reduce student reactivity. Additionally, allowing group discussion time for outlining the pros and cons of each course of action is helpful in generating more ideas than during a whole group discussion. Anonymous voting may allow students to vote their conscience instead of with their friends.

Students may be familiar with decision making based upon a majority vote, but teachers can extend their knowledge around other possible means for choosing a course of action. Using dialogue to uncover the merits of various options may help students creatively combine

in Education: Changing Terrains of Knowledge and Politics, eds. Thomas S. Popkewitz and Lynn Fendler (New York: Routledge, 1999): 45-65.

78. Biesta and Burbules, *Pragmatism and Educational Research,* 108.

79. Barak Rosenshine, "Principles of Instruction: Research-based Strategies that All Teachers should know," *American Educator 78, no. 3* (2012): 30.

two or more strong ideas into a new, better option. Another alternative may call for the enactment of a compromise position with which no one holds strong opposition, asking, "Can we all live with this course of action?"

Co-defining the end vision, as well as what results constitute success, should occur while considering which choice to enact. The end vision is negotiated and refined as students determine what embodies success. Informed decision making considers not only the best action, but the plan that can be accomplished with the resources available, and within the commitment level of the group.

> *Instead of viewing figures such as Reverend Martin Luther King or Nelson Mandela from the successful ending perspective, we must allow students admittance to the turmoil they endured.*

Defining success also reminds us that failure is a possibility. To curtail an immobilizing sense of failure later, teachers should discuss this possibility with their students, helping them to recognize that commitment and follow-through increase the probability of success in the endeavor. Acting while acknowledging the complexity of the situation and the barriers to success is an important component of pragmatist hope. "Even in situations where groups are defeated, the worthy act of trying to change something that is meaningful sometimes buffers the emotional low that comes from defeat."[80] Bolstering an ideal that forward movement in the face of an uncertain outcome is worthwhile is a core tenet of hope that builds

sustainable engagement around the possibility of improvement.[81]

Evaluation is the final stage in the problem solving model, signaling completion and the need for reflection. Students compare their results to the defined markers of success. Emphasis should also be placed on recognizing he knowledge gained through the solution attempt.[82] Evaluating outcomes provides useful knowledge for moving forward, "something we use in order to live, work, and act in the world."[83] Future intelligent action is founded on such knowledge.

Evaluating outcomes goes beyond a simple dichotomy of success or failure. A more nuanced reflection allows for deeper understanding that is valuable for future problem solving attempts. For example, if the outcome has brought about the desired outcome, but requires ongoing attention, students must determine whether they can continue to commit to such ongoing activity to maintain the positive outcome. Or if the outcome did not match with the measures of success fully, but additional efforts seem capable to bringing about success, students may determine to add more time and effort into the project. If the outcome was deemed a failure, students need to engage around possible influences in that failure, considering whether an unidentified barrier blocked success but may now be overcome in light of the new understandings generated. If the failure seems related to the lack of full implementation or follow-through, students may resolve to re-engage more fully or abandon the project as too costly. In the end, students receive new information as a result of their action, no matter the level of success. Moreover, developing such habits of hope changes the individual's sense of agency, allowing each to

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80. Shawn Ginwright, *Hope and Healing,* 24.

81. Shade, "Habits of Hope."
82. Ibid.
83. Biesta and Burbules, *Pragmatism and Educational Research*, 69.

see herself as possessing the potential to change their circumstances through focused action.

Course Material Selection: Avenues to Possibilities

School curricular expectations typically have flexibility in the material used to develop writing, reading, and critical thinking skills. By carefully choosing materials that align to the overarching goal of developing pragmatist habits of hope, teachers can provide students access to broaden their sense of agency and their vision of what is possible.

To support students' capacities to envision a different reality, one which they have never experienced, teachers should tap into the rich history of historic figures who have made a difference. Importantly, students need access to stories that have not been sanitized for happy endings, but instead should include accounts of struggle regarding decision making in the midst of the project and should include times when some of those choices have not worked out well. Some examples of this type of material can be found in the Zinn Education Project: Teaching a People's History.[84] Instead of viewing figures such as Reverend Martin Luther King or Nelson Mandela from the successful ending perspective, we must allow students admittance to the turmoil they endured. Creatively generating possible solutions, wrestling with the potential negative impacts of their choices on their and their loved ones' lives, and moving past bitter disappointments provide significant insights into the real thoughts and doubts with which hopeful people might engage. When reading such accounts, it is important for teachers to pause and allow students to consider and share how the historic

person likely felt in that moment. Allow the student to imagine himself as a participant alongside that figure. A similar example, located at The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, Ohio provides students with an immersive video experience that permits students to feel both the hope of escape and the fear of capture that a slave might have experienced.

> *Pragmatist hope embodies a set of habits and a disposition for possibility that may be developed in all students. As such, it provides a more comprehensive framework than grit, which situates goal attainment within one's capacity to persevere toward long-term, predetermined goals.*

Contemporary figures are also avenues for capturing stories of struggle and hope. Detailed television segments and newspaper articles provide stories of people who have worked to overcome dire situations.[85] Local figures and students' family members may be a fruitful source of stories of hope. For example, we invited the parent of one of our students in as a guest speaker to share the hope for an improved future that motivated moving his family from Nigeria to the U.S. This gentleman conveyed the detail of the difficulties of leaving his beloved homeland through words and artifacts. Additionally, he discussed the importance of working within a network of peers to provide mutual, ongoing support. Students were able ask questions related to his experiences and the decisions made. Fishman and McCarthy note that a key to living in hope is to look with grati-

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84. Zinn Education Project. "Teaching a People's History."
http://zinnedproject.org/teaching-materials/explore-by-resource-type/

85. Shade, "Habits of Hope."

tude to our ancestors who have enacted hope, recognizing the tradition of hope they have begun.[86] These biographical accounts widen what we conceive of as possible, but also contribute to building courage in ourselves; knowing what has been possible before gives us confidence.[87]

Finally, narrative texts whose protagonists must wrestle with problems is another means for generating discussion around problems and developing habits of hope in students. Students are able to witness the inner struggle that the characters go through, making this process transparent to the reader as well as creating a sense of normativity of such action. An example of a character who discovers a significant, hidden problem and determines to act to improve the situation occurs in *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. Jonas, assigned to become the new Receiver, discovers that the seemingly utopian world in which he lives regularly euthanizes individuals, and his foster brother, Gabe, is scheduled for this fate. Jonas moves toward hope by creating a well-conceived plan with a full awareness of the cost of failure. Thus biographical accounts as well as literature offer students a means to consider problematic situations in light of fear and possibility,[88] building habits of hope in students.

Conclusion

Pragmatist hope embodies a set of habits and a disposition for possibility that may be developed in all students. As such, it provides a more comprehensive framework than grit, which situates goal attainment within one's capacity to persevere toward long-term, predetermined goals. In contrast, teaching for the intentional development of pragmatist hope emphasizes involving students' capacities to define and

solve a variety of problems. Growing a disposition toward change alongside interpersonal communication skills further develops group capacity to affect change together. Practical experiences allow students to connect the relationship between their actions and improved outcomes. They come to view themselves as change makers who are confidently capable of envisioning alternative, superior ends that may alter the world in meaningful ways. Like grit, habits of hope have the potential to increase student capacity for reaching their personal goals, yet broadens the possible scope to include visions shared with others. As such, teaching for pragmatist habits of hope is an important and viable goal for educators to embrace.

Lori Foote is a doctoral candidate at the University of Cincinnati in the Educational Studies department. Having taught elementary education for nearly two decades, she has a passionate interest in uncovering systematic barriers to success. Her research agenda includes a combination of research approaches so as to illuminate conditions that limit students' potential, while simultaneously offering practical, relevant ways to address these barriers now.

Sarah Stitzlein is an Associate Professor of Education and Affiliate Faculty in Philosophy at the University of Cincinnati. As a philosopher of education, she explores and clarify key concepts within and purposes of education from the perspective of social and political philosophy. Additionally, she works to uncover problems in education and envision better alternatives. She is especially interested in issues of political agency, educating for democracy, and equality in schools. Her most recent book, Teaching Dissent: Citizenship Education and Political Activism*, investigates the role of political dissent in citizenship education. She also serves as co-editor for the journal* Democracy & Education *and co-direct the Center for Hope and Justice Education.*

86. Fishman and McCarthy, *John Dewey and the Philosophy and Practice of Hope.*

87. Shade, "Habits of Hope."

88. Judith M. Green, *Pragmatism and Social Hope.*

Dynamic Habits and Education: Intellectual and Ethical Dimensions

Carmen James
Columbia University

In the current era of high-stakes testing and accountability, there is an increased interest in habits. The focus, however, is often on habits that are regimented and repetitive. Lists of habits that we can widely recommend and repeat across countless contexts are deemed useful because they are easily measurable and facilitate assessment.

Yet, such lists lead to an education that fails to take account of the fullness of students' intellectual gifts. The neglect of a richer form of habit not only underserves students, but also creates a profession of teaching that is marked by growing attrition as teachers find little room for creativity, dialogue, and genuine learning experiences.[89]

Character education, which seeks to promote a student's ethical growth and intellectual achievement, is particularly attuned to the project of developing habits in education. Within the last ten years, there has been increased excitement about the importance of habits stemming from the work of psychologists such as Martin Seligman and Angela Duckworth.

This work has had a dramatic impact not only on private schools, but also on charter schools, most famously KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program), as captured in Paul Tough's *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character.* Duckworth herself is interested in character traits, such as grit, which she deems essential to engendering routines of success in students. Regardless, for our purposes here, we can see character traits as a kind of habit.

> *… habits in education have been problematically understood as means to the end of an individualistic kind of success, where success is narrowly determined, competitive, and few achieve it.*

Recent attention to the importance of habits in education has revived age-old debates about habit and character education. The enthusiasm for character education, however, is, as Kristján Kristjánsson writes, "a powerful, if as yet somewhat philosophically undiscerning and under-developed, movement."[90] Specifically, habits in education have been problematically understood as means to the end of an individualistic kind of success, where success is narrowly determined, competitive, and few achieve it. The renewed focus on habits has shown the need for more theoretical inquiry into these terms.

Contemporary Applications of Habits in Character Education Programs

[89] In 2003, up to 25% of beginning teachers left the teaching field before their third year, and almost 40% left the profession within the first 5 years of teaching. See Thomas M. Smith and Richard M. Ingersoll, "What Are the Effects of Induction and Mentoring on Beginning Teacher Turnover?" *American Educational Research Journal* 41, no. 3 (2004): 681-714; Mei-Lin Chang's, "An Appraisal Perspective of Teacher Burnout: Examining the Emotional Work of Teachers," *Education Psychology Review* 21, n, 3 (2009): 193-218.

[90] Kristján Kristjánsson, "Habituated Reason Aristotle and the 'Paradox of Moral Education," *Theory and Research in Education* 4, no. 1 (March 1, 2006): 101.

While attention to habits appears to be a positive development in current discussions about education, enthusiasm behind harnessing the power of habit in schools has resulted in a narrow view of academic, personal, and professional success.

> ***Arguably, there is no moral dimension to habits like grit, optimism, and self-control as presented in Duckworth's work.***

This narrowness is egotistical and untethered from community interest. The egotistical approach represents a narrow focus on the individual, as opposed to an understanding of the individual within community—a community where the success of the individual and the community itself are interwoven. Egotistical, as used here, is synonymous with self-interest, and leads to and an inward focus on personal gain.

Duckworth's work on grit exemplifies the egotistical perspective, as it is driven by the idea that we can harness habits of self-interest, such as grit.[91] According to Duckworth's work, character traits like "grit" and "optimism" can be engrained to ensure individual student success. [92] Accordingly, teachers grade students' habits of grit and optimism in character report cards, just as they assess students' academic performance.[93] This regimented take on habits as ensuring academic success and personal gain is instrumental and concerning.

An improvement to the egotistical view of habits is the community view, described in Scott Seider's book *Character Compass: How Powerful School Culture Can Point Students Toward Success*. Seider critiques Seligman and Duckworth's research, pointing out how "the latest iteration of character education seeks to foster in students the qualities possessed by entrepreneurs and politicians," thereby emphasizing a character education for, as he suggests, personal gain.[94]

Similarly, Jeffrey Aaron Snyder says of the character report cards designed by the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) charter schools and Duckworth: "Bernie Madoff's character point average, for instance, would be stellar. He was, by most accounts, an extremely hard working, charming, wildly optimistic man."[95] Snyder illustrates how the egotistical view of education is geared toward mastering pre-determined habits-as-means for personal gain. Arguably, there is no moral dimension to habits like grit, optimism, and self-control as presented in Duckworth's work.

Seider seeks to remedy the problem of habits-as-means by proposing what I call a "community model." He argues that community must play a leading role in character education programs, and that schools must embrace the charge that they are part of students' moral de-

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[91] Duckworth defines grit as "the tenacious pursuit of a dominant superordinate goal despite setbacks." She closely links grit to self control, which she defines as "the capacity to regulate attention, emotion, and behavior in the presence of temptation" She correlates grit and self-control with "high achievers." Duckworth, Angela, Gross, James J . "Self-Control and Grit: Related but Separable Determinants of Success." *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 23, issue 5 (October 2014): 319.

[92] Duckworth, Angela L. "The Significance of Self-Control." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 108, no. 7 (February 15, 2011): 2639-40.

[93] For more on the character report card, see Paul Tough, *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012).

[94] Scott Seider, *Character Compass: How Powerful School Culture Can Point Students Toward Success* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2012): 3.

[95] Aaron Jeffrey Snyder, "Teaching Kids 'Grit' is All the Rage. Here's What's Wrong With It." *New Republic*. (May 6, 2014,). URL: http://www.newrepublic.com/article/117615/problem-grit-kipp-and-character-based-education.

velopment. In his view, community creates the environment in which students and teachers cultivate and develop ethical and intellectual habits.

Seider's book is the result of a two-year study during which he and a team of researchers worked with Boston Prep, Roxbury Prep, and Pacific Rim—three charter schools in the Boston area. His premises are that the community is a necessary component of a successful character education program, and that character education must encompass moral development.

All of these schools held meetings to discuss character and community, all gave awards for students with exemplary "virtue," and all assessed students on their levels of virtue—positive techniques, in Seider's view. Seider also observes that, of the three schools, Boston Prep students showed the greatest levels of integrity and empathy—as measured by surveys that the students took at the beginning and end of their academic year.[96]

Boston Prep decided on a moral and intellectual program built on the five key character traits, or virtues. All incoming students first learned about the virtues during at-home visits.[97] They continued learning during a week-long orientation specifically dedicated to virtue. Every week, a student who exemplified one of the five key virtues received a W.E.B. Du Bois award. Students also attended ethics classes throughout the year.

Teachers, however, worried that the students heard the language of virtue so much that they "tuned out" and "the language of the virtue replaced genuine reflection rather than enhancing it."[98] Seider offered several examples where students read Aristotle's *Ethics* in class and examined the philosopher's views on topics

ranging from friendship to moderation. All lessons return to the five core virtues. This rigidity resulted in a narrow interpretation of classical texts in terms of the school's five virtues, thereby excluding critical reflection and the ability to develop an imaginative vocabulary to address ethical dilemmas.

Upon closer inspection, we begin to see that the community model's portrayal of habits is reminiscent of the fixed and instrumental habits found in the egotistical view, namely, the problem of habits-as-means. The five virtues at Boston Prep—courage, compassion, integrity, perseverance, and respect—received superficial treatment, and success became equated with a set number of outcomes that individuals might attain. The schools involved the whole community in the project of ingraining a set of predetermined and fixed habits in students that ultimately were removed for the dynamic and shifting reality of daily life and learning.

Taken to the extreme, behind the façade of character education and community is a culture that still retains the egotistical aims of success for its own sake, without reflective, intelligent, and ethical practices. Virtue remained problematically inflexible. Students were rewarded for virtue—where virtue had strict parameters. Thus, when supporting the values of a community and the shared benefit of the group, the school relied on fixed views of ethical habits, falling into troubles similar to those of the egotistical view. What emerged was a hollow notion of a community that did not fully support a diverse group of learners in the necessarily fluctuating demands of living and learning.

My concern is that in both Duckworth's and Seider's view of habits there is an emphasis on the "what"—what sounds like a good idea or a good program?—and less on the "how"—how do children learn? How do teachers teach? How do students and teachers engage in meaningful learning experiences in education that prepare students for professional and social lives?

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[96] These surveys used a five-point Likert scale. Seider and his team used a multi-level regression model to compare and integrate across the three schools.

[97] Seider, *Character Compass*, 53.

[98] Seider, *Character Compass*, 69.

Kristjánsson has written that "the underlying concern here is obviously how making young students into walking bundles of habit can avoid stultifying their psychological powers of critical reflection at a later stage."[99] Kristjánsson nicely summed up my own point: prescribed and rigidly applied sets of habits are not the answer.

How, then, can we come to think of habits in education in a way that supports human growth, shifting circumstances, reflection, and imagination?

Intellectual Dimensions of Dynamic Habits

Dynamic habits are habits that are constructed and reconstructed in light of changing circumstances and interactions with others. These types of habits are the backbone of a democratic society, but also essential in education. Schools, as cornerstones of the very idea of democracy—in the ideal sense—are the locus of teaching and learning the dynamic habits that can support a rich democratic life based in dialogue and growth.

The dynamism of habits comes from the enriching interdependence of our primary experience of the world and our secondary experience that reflects on that world. Dynamic habits alternate between sensitivity to immediate experience and intelligent response, where the latter is characterized by habits of reflection, observation, and thinking.

Primary experience cannot be taught. It is the *sine qua non* of our lives and is characterized by a "minimum of incidental reflection," whereas secondary experience is the "systemic thinking" or "intentional reflection" that *can* be taught and that shapes our ordinary life, think-

ing, and doing with others.[100] Secondary and primary experience affect and inform one another. In fact, secondary experience is the *way* we make meaning of our primary experience; it is the way our experience "gains an enriched and expanded force."[101]

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>
> *How, then, can we come to think of habits in education in a way that supports human growth, shifting circumstances, reflection, and imagination?*

In *Human Nature and Conduct*, John Dewey went so far as to characterize habits, themselves, as arts. "Habits-as-arts"[102]—in contrast with habits-as-means—signals that our habits are responsive to the aesthetics of experience. Art applied to habit means that, in the midst of our everyday lives, we are aesthetically attuned to experience—s sensitively, responsively, artfully adapting and re-adapting our habits.

To embrace the uncertainty of immediate experience is to be spontaneous. Spontaneity is an ability. It requires a cultivated sense of openness and a sensitiveness to immediate experience. Spontaneity as cultivated may sound like a paradox, yet it is the ability to draw intelligently on impulses and sense material. Where-

[99] Kristjánsson, Kristján, "Habituated Reason: Aristotle and the Paradox of Moral Education." *Theory and Research in Education* 4, no. 1 (March 1, 2006): 102.

[100] Dewey, John, and Jo Ann Boydston. *The Later Works of John Dewey, Volume 1, 1925 - 1953: 1925, Experience and Nature Revised Edition (Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953)*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008: 15.

[101] Dewey, LW1, 16.

[102] John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), in *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, vol. 14, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008): 16.

as children may be naturally spontaneous, as we move into adulthood, remaining so requires practice.

> ***Spontaneity is an ability. It requires a cultivated sense of openness and a sensitiveness to immediate experience. Spontaneity as cultivated may sound like a paradox, yet it is the ability to draw intelligently on impulses and sense material.***

An individual who embraces spontaneity is attuned to qualitative elements of experience—they sense problems and potential. The spontaneous self, sensitive to the material of immediate experience, draws on intelligence and organizes her impulses in an effort to solve a problem in view. These last two ideas highlight the role that secondary experience plays in making immediate experience enriching. These elements of primary experience are intimately intertwined with secondary experience, characterized by intelligent decision-making, actions, and reflections.

A habit must remain open to reconstruction. Developing a habit of patience with one's students so as not to interrupt them when they are answering a question can be an example of a dynamic habit that we can form. Yet, though it may sound like an indisputably "good" habit, it must remain available to call into question again. There may be times when the teacher must give orders, make demands, interrupt, and ask no one to speak, such as in the case of an emergency, or for some other circumstantial reason.

Becoming "aware" of our habits, then, is an important first step. For being aware of our habits is clearly the backbone of a democratic society and is also essential in education. These

are the intellectual dimensions of dynamic habits.

Ethical Dimensions of Dynamic Habits

In a shared life, which by definition is moral, reconstruction and modification of habits is a moral project. Habits of reflection, observation, thinking, and deliberation begin the modification and renewal process of habits. This process is both flexible and imaginative. Dewey writes, however, that all our actions, even the mundane ones, need not come "under moral scrutiny."[103] To know when to subject acts to moral scrutiny is part of moral activity. We learn to identify when ethical questions are at stake. On the other hand, ethical questions and activities are present in the classroom by dint of the socially shared aspect of the classroom space. That is, both in the classroom and outside of it, our lives are social, and so, imbued with ethical potential.

Dewey sees self-cultivation as a non-egotistical way of understanding ethics, where egoism is the cultivation of interests irrespective of others. Self-cultivation, as taken here, is done in light of the interest of others and the events outside oneself. Self-cultivation, moreover, is set-up against selflessness, where actions are done irrespective of the needs of one's self. That is, ethics demands of us deliberation and reflection because we are not, if we are to act ethically, forcefully plowing our way through the world without regard for either ourselves or others.

Despite changing circumstances, we tend to fall into "accustomed grooves" of behavior that are familiar, comforting, and (many times) necessary routines of our lives. Culturally, ways of perceiving ourselves become tracks, ways of acting and thinking we habitually rely on.

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[103] Dewey, MW 14, 32.

Dewey's moral self is a self that breaks from wrongly imposed societal norms into enriched interactions with others. The moral self is one balancing between self and interaction with an other or object, in an environment; it is one that is not self-interested or instrumental, but rather has an interest in learning from the rich variety of experience, or in Dewey's words, from "all the contacts of life."[104] Self-cultivation and outward interest, as Dewey makes clear, are the ethical foundation of the shared life and, in his view, of education and democracy.

And these habits, to remain intelligent and ethical, must be flexible and responsive—that is, dynamic.

The practice of inward cultivation fused with outward interest is a practice that defines teaching. Teaching requires an openness to the lessons of experience, and in this case, an awareness of the particular: the particular self (teacher) and the particular other (student). Cultivating such habits is not easy. In fact, the task I describe may very well increase the challenges of teaching.

Bringing the Intellectual and the Ethical Dimensions Together

A great part of teaching is routine and determined by culture, tradition, policy mandates and standards, even amidst the variability of students, classrooms, and teachers. As such, there are many habits teachers take for granted, and necessarily so; but there are times when a teacher's habits are called into question, they are no longer quite right, or, in a new context, they no longer serve a purpose or meet the outcome a teacher has imagined.

Minor shifts are always underway as teachers notice, think, and reflect. In such situations, teachers enact new and modified habits. A beginning teacher, under the pressure of time, may constantly interrupt students in order to move the lesson forward. Such a teacher may, in turn, notice the lowered morale and levels of engagement. As a response, after reflecting on the situation, he may seek to develop a habit of patience and a habit of modeling answers to questions.

> *… ethics demands of us deliberation and reflection because we are not, if we are to act ethically, forcefully plowing our way through the world without regard for either ourselves or others.*

Once we understand that habits are grounded in critical reflection, we begin to understand why the virtue commendations and the method of learning about friendship at Boston Prep fall flat for teachers—and why these teachers sense the curriculum is somewhat forced.

To see the two aims of ethical and intellectual as separate in education is an untenable premise for cultivating the moral life. For as Robert Boostrum writes,

> Dewey argues that "the school must itself be a community life in all which that implies," and part of what that implies is that we keep in mind that the "moral and the social quality of conduct are, in the last analysis, identical with each other." The moral is not something to be added to the other elements and demands of schooling, not another course or program in the curriculum. Education—"Discipline, culture,

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[104] Dewey, John *Democracy and Education* (1916), in *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, vol. 9, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008): 370. And David Hansen elucidates this idea in detail in "Dewey's Book of the Moral Self," *John Dewey and Our Educational Prospect* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

social efficiency, personal refinement, improvement of character"—is moral life."[105]

Therefore, we must see that there are important limitations to the view that morals can only be learned if explicitly taught through "direct moral instruction."[106]

> **A true project of character education in school would infuse all the work of teaching and learning together. Moral lessons would not be isolated or called out as a separate area of study.**

Educators who look at "school programmes, the school courses of study, and do not find any place set apart for instruction in ethics or the 'moral teaching' [and] assert that the schools are doing nothing, or next to nothing, for character-training" are wrong in their criticism, wrote Dewey.[107] These educators have failed to understand how children learn ethical habits. They treat morals as something separate, drawn upon at certain times, in certain situations. The fixed view of virtue fails to recognize the confluence of considerations confronting the individual.

A true project of character education in school would infuse all the work of teaching and learning together. Moral lessons would not be isolated or called out as a separate area of study. I believe that students and teachers need this different framework, a different philosophy of habits—namely, a dynamic view of habits—in recognition of the dynamic reality of shared experience that is the basis for teaching and learning. This is a richer theory of habit for education.

In seeking to understand dynamic habits, it is important that we do not create a rigidly prescriptive list—a new set of ten-best-practices-every-teacher-must-follow. While teachers must aim to improve their practice and the learning of their students, the answer is not found in creating new lists, ones that we thoughtlessly repeat: for example, stating "every morning I will start my class with fifteen minutes of reflective writing."

For the risk is, as Dewey wrote, that "an educational enterprise [might] end merely in substituting one rigidity for another."[108] Rather than turn to a new set of rigid tracks purportedly aimed at success, we can continue to cultivate "flexibly responsive"[109] routes, ones formed intelligently and reflectively. Cultivating dynamic habits can constitute a reliable way for teachers to enact in practice their philosophies of education.

Conclusion

Dynamic habits are necessary for a shared life, and especially for the shared activity of education that prepares us for such a life. Yet, cultivating such habits in our accountability-driven era has been pushed to the side—or even deemed detrimental to educational efforts. The picture I have painted here is one that is resistant to classrooms driven by high-stakes testing—where lessons are scripted, teachers operate in fear of saying the wrong word, and students are monitored. Conditions where the positive intellectual and ethical dimensions of schooling are stripped away foster teacher burnout.

[105] Boostrum, Robert, "The Peculiar Status of Democracy and Education." *Journal of Curriculum Studies* (2014): 11.

[106] Dewey, John, and Jo Ann Boydston. *The Middle Works, 1899-1924. Volume 4: 1907-1909. Essays, Moral Principles in Education:* 269.

[107] Dewey, MW4, 269.

[108] Dewey, MW14, 91.

[109] Dewey, MW14, 91.

Dewey asked: "who shall conduct education so that humanity may improve?"[110]

The answer, as I see it, begins with thinking about the development of dynamic habits that are, all at once, intellectual and ethical. A robust understanding of habits can humanize education in fundamental ways that our current system has failed to take seriously.

Carmen James received her Ph.D. from Teachers College, Columbia University, in May 2015 in the field of philosophy and education. In 2011 she received a master's degree from the same program; and in 2008 she graduated from Harvard University with a concentration in Literature. She has taught at Teachers College as an adjunct professor and assisted in courses at Teachers College, Columbia University, and at Barnard College. Her publications include "The Importance of Cultivating Democratic Habits in Schools: Enduring Lessons from Democracy and Education," co-authored with David Hansen and published in Education Theory *(July 2015). Along with her work teaching graduate courses, she has worked in K-12 schools in research and development and taught at the elementary school level. She worked for four years at Riverdale Country School, an innovative K-12 school in New York City that is committed to character education. There, she designed to professional development and curricula meant to foster creative character building experiences.*

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[110] Dewey, MW9, 101.

Bridging Definitions: Looking Across Research Paradigms to Cultivate Hope

Gabriel Brown

University of Cincinnati

Common use of the word "hope" gives it a feeling of abstractness. People casually toss about the word "hope" in daily conversation, and everyone seems to feel that they view hope in the same way. However, despite implicitly seeming to understand what hope is, people often struggle when asked to directly define hope.

Often, their definitions tend to be circular in nature and fail to meaningfully illuminate what hope is and how it functions. When they are more direct, they define hope in an abstract manner, one that gives it a nebulous sort of connotation and that fails to operationalize it in our everyday lives. In some cases, people speak of hope synonymously with optimism. With such definitions, it is difficult to understand where hope comes from, whether it is intrinsic or learned, and, if learnable, how it might be taught or cultured.

In order to gain a greater understanding of hope, I will begin by exploring two prominent understandings of hope—that of positive psychology and that of pragmatist philosophy—elucidating their differences and similarities. In particular, I aim to show how these two frameworks codify hope into a series of concepts that, combined, might depict a hope that can be cultivated in children.

Defining Hope

Much of the research about hope comes from positive psychology, particularly from the work of C.R. Snyder, who is credited with developing hope theory and operationalizing hope. Positive psychology seeks to move away from focusing on the pathological aspects of illness. Instead, positive psychology endeavors to shift focus toward prevention of psychological illness by studying and promoting the ways in which people can live happily and successfully. It is therefore, in essence, a branch of psychology focused on helping people create conditions in their environment that allow them to improve themselves. According to Snyder, hope is defined as "the perceived capability to derive pathways to desired goals, and motivate oneself via agency thinking to use those pathways.[111]

> *To pragmatist philosophers, hope is both more action-oriented and social in nature.*

There are two key components to this definition. The first is the ability to derive pathways to goals. An individual must be confident that a way to the end goal either exists or can be constructed. The second component, equally important as the first, is that the individual must be motivated to use the pathways once they are discovered or created. This second component is particularly important in connecting the positive psychology definition of hope to the second definition, that of pragmatist philosophy.

To pragmatist philosophers, hope is both more action-oriented and social in nature. Pragmatists define hope as identifying end-goals, taking actions to achieve those goals, switching to a new strategy for achieving the goal if one fails, all while allowing for critical

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[111] C. R. Snyder, "Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind," *Psychological Inquiry* 13, no. 4 (2002): 249.

reflection and growth.[112] As a philosophy, pragmatism asserts that truth is based on empirical evidence (i.e. if it works, then it's true). Rather than using thought as a way to describe or reflect reality, pragmatism uses thought as a tool for action and change through problem solving and application.

The pragmatist definition of hope, while similar to that of positive psychology, differs in three key ways. First, the means of achieving goals, and the goals themselves, are flexible and can be exchanged for other pathways if they fail. Second, the goals an individual typically selects are not oriented only toward the self, but toward the betterment of the world as a whole.[113] Pragmatist hope requires an individual to look outside of the self and consider all aspects of their environment. Finally, pragmatism strives toward living in a state of hope, which gives one a sense of belonging to others and the world.[114] Most significant about this final aspect is that it allows individuals to start with small goals and gradually move on to larger and larger goals, demonstrating that hope grows stronger through repeated and habitual use, reflection, and experimentation.

The Role of Goals

As previously discussed, both the positive psychological and the pragmatist philosophical definitions of hope deal with goals and the ways in which they are attained. Where they differ is in the types of goals and how those goals are achieved. By examining in detail the types of goals each presents, it is possible to see how they can work together.

According to C.R. Snyder, humans are naturally goal-directed, and goals occupy much of our attention throughout the day.[115] Goal-directed thoughts are comprised of two components: cognitive willpower or energy to achieve a goal, called the agency component, and the perceived ability to create routes to achieve the goals, called the pathways component.[116] Carefully reading this description of goal-directed thoughts shows that it is remarkably similar to his definition of hope—and that one can therefore define hope as the employment of goal-directed thoughts.

The agency component is what actually motivates an individual to start acting to achieve a goal and to maintain the chosen path to that goal.[117] Agentic thinking is what helps individuals to navigate obstacles and continue along a path toward the goal. It can be instinctual or unplanned (e.g., the bed needs to be made, so I make it) or highly planned (e.g., I want to earn a degree and so I have to take these classes). Because the agency component is associated with navigating obstacles, it has also come to be associated, at least peripherally, with grit.

Grit is "perseverance and passion for long-term goals."[118] It involves working past obstacles and failures and maintaining the chosen path, no matter how long it takes to achieve the goal. In this sense, it is a "pick yourself up by the boot straps" mentality. Grit, however, is not usually used in reference to short-term goals or more subjective goals (e.g., being a good parent).[119] Despite this restriction, it is rapidly gain-

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[112] Stephen Fishman and Lucille McCarthy. *John Dewey and the Philosophy and Practice of Hope*. (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 4.
[113] Ibid., 95.
[114] Ibid., 4.

[115] C.R. Snyder. "Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Nurturing Hope." *Journal of Counseling and Development* 73, no. 3 (Jan 1995): 355.
[116] Ibid.
[117] David B. Feldman and C.R. Snyder. "Hope and the Meaningful Life: Theoretical and Empirical Associations Between Goal-Directed Thinking and Life Meaning." *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 24, no.3 (May 2005): 407.
[118] Angela L. Duckworth, Christopher Peterson, Michael D. Matthews, and Dennis R. Kelly. "Grit: Perseverance and Passion for Long-Term Goals." *Personality Processes and Individual Differences* 92, no. 6 (2007): 1087.
[119] Ibid., 1088.

ing a following as a necessary, non-cognitive quality of character—needed in order to be an active citizen in local and global communities, particularly for those in leadership positions.[120]

Note that, if the agency component is used alone, the individual is only thinking about the goal and the ways in which to achieve it. Hence, the need for the pathways component, which requires a perception that pathways to the goal do in fact exist or can be created.[121] However, it is also the action of working toward the goal along a given pathway.[122] Without this component, one might despair that there is no way to achieve the desired goal. These components are intimately connected and vital to the function of hope. Use of each in concert with the other is necessary to exhibit hope in a balanced, meaningful way.

According to pragmatist philosophy, each person works toward a series of goals called ends-in-view. These goals, which can range from complex and dynamic to fairly simple, create a space for critical reflection and self-learning. Ends-in-view are flexible and pave the pathway for the realization of larger and larger goals. Often, the ends-in-view may actually begin to shape larger goals before they are even identified.

For example, a person whose goal is to become a physician is not born wanting to be a physician. Throughout childhood, various events, environmental factors, and social factors lead to a series of smaller goals that eventually lead to the identification of the larger goal. As each end-in-view is attained, it becomes a means for wider and wider thinking about the future. Further ends-in-view are created in order to reach a larger goal. The realization of these ends-in-view in moving toward realization of larger goals results in a state of "living in hope."[123] Throughout life, an individual may create multiple larger goals, reflecting the flexibility and fluidity inherent in the pragmatist view of hope.

> *… a person whose goal is to become a physician is not born wanting to be a physician. Throughout childhood, various events, environmental factors, and social factors lead to a series of smaller goals that eventually lead to the identification of the larger goal.*

As noted previously, pragmatist philosophy defines a hope in which the goals, and the paths toward achieving them, are flexible. The key to goals, in this sense, is that they change—all based on the needs of the individual and their environment. In this way, goals can become more focused on social aspects and, in particular, social reforms.

To summarize, goals, according to positive psychology, require both the ability to see or create ways of attaining a valued end and the ability to actively follow a selected path toward attaining it. According to this conceptualization, individuals pursue their own goals in a way that maximizes the chance of attaining the goal—with little regard about how such actions might affect other individuals.[124]

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[120] Erik K. Laursen. "The Power of Grit, Perseverance, and Tenacity." *Reclaiming Children and Youth* 23, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 20.

[121] David B. Feldman and C.R. Snyder. "Hope and the Meaningful Life: Theoretical and Empirical Associations Between Goal-Directed Thinking and Life Meaning." *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 24, no.3 (May 2005): 406.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Stephen Fishman and Lucille McCarthy. *John Dewey and the Philosophy and Practice of Hope.* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 4.

[124] C.R. Snyder. "Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Nurturing Hope." *Journal of Counseling and Development* 73, no. 3 (Jan 1995): 359.

It is in this that we see the key difference between the hope defined by positive psychology and the hope defined by pragmatist philosophy: the former utilizes goals that are potentially ego-centric and almost narcissistic in nature,[125] while the latter seeks goals that are directed outward toward the community and environment—for the betterment of all as part of the betterment of the self.[126] Pragmatist hope relies on goals that build on each other and interact with one another on the path toward the building of a life's purpose.

Dispositions and Habits

Another key difference in the way in which hope is defined and facilitated according to these two views is whether hope is dispositional or a habit. A disposition is "the usual attitude of a person" or "a tendency to act or think in a certain way."[127] In contrast, a habit is "a behavior pattern acquired by frequent repetition."[128]

In general, positive psychology classifies hope as a disposition, because it is derived from goal-directed thinking which is, as previously stated, an intrinsic part of human nature. According to positive psychologists, hope is a natural part of the human experience and, consequently, we naturally fall into employing hope. Snyder describes hope as a sort of lens through which individuals can focus on achieving their goals.[129]

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[125] Ibid.; Stephen Fishman and Lucille McCarthy. *John Dewey and the Philosophy and Practice of Hope.* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 95.
[126] Ibid.
[127] "Disposition." Merriam-Webster.com. Accessed September 10, 2016. http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/disposition.
[128] "Habit." Merriam-Webster.com. Accessed September 10, 2016. http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/habit.
[129] C.R. Snyder. "Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Nurturing Hope." *Journal of Counseling and Development* 73, no. 3 (Jan 1995): 359.

When describing hope as a disposition, we accept that it is always present and employable as an intrinsic part of our natures. When one component is, for some reason, compromised, it functions less, but it never fails to function completely. Without even realizing it, we fall back on hope again and again throughout each day, endlessly employing it to accomplish even the smallest of goals.

> *… rather than being born essentially hopeful, one learns and develops hope over time. Hope is nurtured, requiring the development of a specific set of skills and outlooks to develop and achieve its potential. From this one derives John Dewey's idea of "living in hope" or "ultimate hope."*

However, using hope does not necessarily mean that it is used correctly or efficiently. When positive psychologists target hope as a source of treatment for certain conditions, they are focusing on teaching the individual to become aware of the activation of the hope process and to modify the process as necessary to achieve a desired outcome.[130]

In contrast, pragmatist philosophy classifies hope largely as a habit, implying that it is learned by repetition and trial-and-error, arising naturally from these processes. This means that, rather than being born essentially hopeful, one learns and develops hope over time. Hope is nurtured, requiring the development of a specific set of skills and outlooks to develop and

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[130] Ibid., 358.

achieve its potential.[131] From this one derives John Dewey's idea of "living in hope" or "ultimate hope."[132]

Fishman and McCarthy outline the aspects of hope as a habit comprised of three key components: "gratitude, intelligent wholeheartedness, and enriched present experience."[133] The gratitude here referenced is directed toward ancestors (history) and nature (the world around us). This gives us a sense of both belonging and of purpose, both a temporal and physical sense of who and what we are, and of who and what we might become. This component is how we identify what can be improved and how, based on the improvements that were brought about by our predecessors. This is particularly true, for example, of those individuals whose ultimate goal is some form of social reform.[134]

> *… despite facing tremendous barriers, African American adolescents tend to report higher hope levels than their White counterparts.*

Intelligent wholeheartedness may be thought of as a type of optimism, but it is a much more dynamic and supportive concept. It "offers the faith or reassurance that our goals are worthwhile and that we are doing our best to reach them."[135] It shifts focus away from what cannot be controlled (i.e., consequences of reform) and toward those things which can be controlled (i.e., planning, action, and critical reflection on our efforts).[136]

Put another way, it is our commitment to seeing a goal accomplished, and in this way is similar to the agency pathway described in positive psychology and, in some sense, to the concept of grit. Rather than being optimistic that events will work out for the better, intelligent wholeheartedness assures us that our efforts to see our goals to fruition are worthwhile and keeps us determined to work toward them.

The final component of hope as described by Fishman and McCarthy is enriched present experience. At first glance, this seems to contradict the other components by pulling the focus to the present and away from the past or future. However, it is in fact an integration of past, present, and future that results in us being "fully alive in the sense of being totally involved in present activity."[137] In this state, the future goal directs present activity. Present activity itself becomes a goal and thus results in a sense of fulfillment, while the past can be used as a way of observing efforts to achieve other goals, whether successful or unsuccessful, or in understanding how present goals are a continuation of a series of goals. As such, rather than contradicting the first two components, enriched present experience actually ties the other two together and illustrates how hope is a habit attained over time.

Once again, it is clear that, despite differences in definition, there are similarities to the ways in which positive psychology and pragmatist philosophy define hope. These similarities may serve to generate an understanding of how they might work together to create a form of hope that is of particular importance to the consideration of educators. If we are born with the ability to use hope to achieve our goals, as positive psychology says, and if hope can be learned, as pragmatist philosophy says, then it is important to identify the ways in which educators can take hold of our natural use of hope and develop it into something stronger. As a

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[131] Stephen Fishman and Lucille McCarthy. *John Dewey and the Philosophy and Practice of Hope*. (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 95.
[132] Ibid., 4.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid., 5.
[135] Ibid., 8.
[136] Ibid., 9.

[137] Ibid., 12.

habit, hope can be taught and developed, resulting in a generation of people dedicated to the betterment of themselves and society, equipped to tackle many of the issues that face both local and global societies.

Studies of Hope

As a science, positive psychology is driven to evaluate statements based on the evidence derived from observation and experimental design. Consequently, many studies have been carried out in an attempt to illuminate the concept of hope and to support or modify Snyder's hope theory. These studies also help to illuminate how hope functions at varying age levels and within varying social groups, and an analysis of such studies can help to emphasize the importance of introducing hope curriculum in schools.

Presented here are a selection of such studies that support various aspects and components of hope, each of which demonstrates that hope can, in the appropriate circumstances, be learned. These studies are representative of the body of research on hope, and allow a few generalizations to be made regarding the integration of hope into school curricula.

One of the core ideas of hope theory is that positive emotion results when barriers to a goal are encountered and overcome, and negative emotion results when barriers to a goal are encountered and not overcome.[138] The association of a positive emotional response to the overcoming of a barrier serves as a kind of buffer when further barriers are encountered. In fact, this phenomenon, called resilience, seems to serve as a source of strength and further success for

an individual.[139] Hope is often seen as a part of resilience, because the experience of hope helps to foster resilience in an individual.

Particularly in the case of students of color, barriers have been found to play a key role in the development of hope. Many such adolescents face a wide array of stressors, including community distress, poverty and economic inequality, and exposure to violence, discrimination, and racism.[140] Resiliency serves as a way of shifting focus away from these barriers and instead on the strengths of individuals and how they can overcome them.[141] Interestingly, despite facing tremendous barriers, African American adolescents tend to report higher hope levels than their White counterparts.[142] This may be related to a strong ethnic or racial identification, which has been linked to self-esteem.[143]

Other studies have sought to examine how dispositional hope affects coping mechanisms of adolescents, particularly among communities of color. In general, high hope individuals employ direct coping strategies, like problem solving, planning, and positive thinking, instead of

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138 C.R. Snyder, Jennifer Cheavens, and Susie C. Sympson. "Hope: An Individual Motive for Social Commerce." *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice* 1, no. 2 (Jun 1997): 108.

139 Jessica B. McClintock. "Hope Among Resilient African American Adolescents." (PhD Diss, Marquette University, May 2015), 3.

140 Ibid., 1.; Keri J. Brown Kirschman, Michael C. Roberts, Joanna O. Shadlow, and Terri J. Pelley. "An Evaluation of Hope Following a Youth Summer Camp for Inner-City Youth." *Child and Youth Care Forum* 39, no. 6 (December 2010): 385.; Scott C. Roesch, Kate M. Duangado, Allison A. Vaughn, Ariana A. Aldridge, and Feion Villodas. "Dispositional Hope and the Propensity to Hope: A Daily Diary Assessment of Minority Adolescents." *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 16, no. 2 (Apr 2010): 191.

141 Keri J. Brown Kirschman, Michael C. Roberts, Joanna O. Shadlow, and Terri J. Pelley. "An Evaluation of Hope Following a Youth Summer Camp for Inner-City Youth." *Child and Youth Care Forum* 39, no. 6 (December 2010): 388.

142 Ibid., 393.

143 Jessica B. McClintock. "Hope Among Resilient African American Adolescents." (PhD Diss, Marquette University, May 2015), 21.

avoidant coping strategies.[144] These individuals are highly fluid with the paths followed to attain their goals and therefore more likely to reach their goals.[145]

> **These studies suggest that high-hope individuals perform better academically, have greater social commerce, and are more apt to view competition or obstacles favorably than low-hope individuals.**

Another study focusing on hope among a general sample of college students sought to determine if hope could be increased during a single therapy session. Most interventions focus on fixing problems, rather than promoting the strengths an individual already has and developing them.[146]

In this study, students participated in a single session of 90 minutes, in which "the agenda of the session was as follows: 1) the choosing of a personal goal, 2) psychoeducation regarding hope, 3) a hope-based goal mapping exer-

cise, and 4) the hope visualization exercise."[147] Students who participated in the study showed increases in hope scores, sense of life purpose, and vocational calling. They reported significant progress toward their identified goals as compared to students who did not participate in the session and those with the highest hope scores demonstrated the greatest self-reported success.[148]

These studies suggest that high-hope individuals perform better academically, have greater social commerce, and are more apt to view competition or obstacles favorably than low-hope individuals. These individuals feel a positive emotional response in overcoming an obstacle on the way to attaining their goals, and are thus motivated to continue to overcome obstacles. In many cases, facing and overcoming more obstacles results in increasing levels of hope. Hope, it seems, can be taught—even in a 90-minute session.

These studies also suggest that individuals can learn to employ hope through guided goal identification and pathway-mapping exercises—and that these practices might be modified to suit younger students. For example, while it may not be feasible to conduct psychoeducation regarding hope with elementary students due to the complexity involved, it may be possible to introduce them to the process of goal identification and charting paths to achieve selected goals. In this way, students learn about hope without receiving explicit instruction in hope—and instead learn it through practical application of its concepts, in keeping with pragmatist philosophy.

As the students meet their goals, they will begin to evaluate their successes and failures, and begin to apply the process to goals both within and outside of the classroom. Efforts to educate parents about hope and the hope process will engage them in this facet of their chil-

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[144] Scott C. Roesch, Kate M. Duangado, Allison A. Vaughn, Ariana A. Aldridge, and Feion Villodas. "Dispositional Hope and the Propensity to Hope: A Daily Diary Assessment of Minority Adolescents." *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 16, no. 2 (Apr 2010): 193; David B. Feldman and Diane E. Dreher. "Can Hope be Changed in 90 Minutes? Testing the Efficacy of a Single-Session Goal-Pursuit Intervention for College Students." *Journal of Happiness Studies* 13, no. 4 (August 2012): 746.

[145] Scott C. Roesch, Kate M. Duangado, Allison A. Vaughn, Ariana A. Aldridge, and Feion Villodas. "Dispositional Hope and the Propensity to Hope: A Daily Diary Assessment of Minority Adolescents." *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 16, no. 2 (Apr 2010): 195.

[146] David B. Feldman and Diane E. Dreher. "Can Hope be Changed in 90 Minutes? Testing the Efficacy of a Single-Session Goal-Pursuit Intervention for College Students." *Journal of Happiness Studies* 13, no. 4 (August 2012): 747.

[147] Ibid., 748.
[148] Ibid.

dren's education. The practices can be encouraged within the home environment, allowing for further exploration and personal reflection. It may also be helpful to create workshops to support parents in the hope process and how they can facilitate it with regard to their children. Collaboration between educators and parents would result in an enriched and expanded hope experience and more quickly and strongly engrain hope as a habit.

Conclusion

Given that all of the above findings are supported by psychological research on hope, it is reasonable to conclude that hope is learnable and therefore, perhaps, teachable. By adapting the foundations laid out in the research of positive psychologists and merging it with the view of hope upheld by pragmatist philosophers, educators might seek to integrate hope into the traditional curriculum, starting at an early age. For by starting at an early age, we encourage hope to progress and grow naturally as the student grows, eventually resulting in an individual fully capable of employing hope to achieve their goals and desiring to better themselves and society as a whole.

Positive psychological hope, despite more recent movements, began largely as a construct focused on the self, with little regard for others. Conversely, pragmatist philosophy defines hope in a way that relates individuals to their social surroundings—that is, to the environment one lives in and the people with whom one interacts. It defines hope not as something that is always present, but as something that has to be learned through a process of trial-and-error.

We should therefore aim to include hope in the normal curriculum from an early age. Students need not even understand that they are learning to hope—they need only to be immersed in activities which allow them, with some guidance, to experience hope for themselves. As they age, this would naturally become increasingly complex and can be aided by educators.

The result of such action might be a generation of individuals that understands the importance of the part they play as one part of the world around them. They would envision goals and pathways to goals that radiate outward from the self and involve the other, creating more cohesive and powerful movements for social change.

Rather than crash unsuccessfully against barriers toward realizing these goals, individuals who have been educated on how to hope from an early age will flow around the barriers like water, constantly seeking new and innovative ways to reach their goals. One such goal might be the eradication of hopelessness and the promotion of an individual's strengths. This will mean learning to rely on individuals with complementary strengths in order to achieve individual goals and ends-in-view, but will result in a society, both locally and globally, that recognizes that an individual is only part of a dynamic system that can be improved from the ground up.

Recent social movements, particularly among college students, have begun to demonstrate a shift toward this kind of thinking. When Barack Obama first ran for president, he used the word "hope" as part of his campaign efforts. In the most recent campaign, we have seen elements of hope demonstrated in candidates such as Bernie Sanders. Despite failing to secure the Democratic nomination, he has continued to seek other ways to implement the reforms that he feels will result in a more humanistic, familial society. Student organizations appearing on university campuses across the US have focused on using the power of collaboration to seek social reform. As just one example, GlobeMed advocates on issues of social justice and health equity, and is student-founded and largely student-led. In short, the power of social entrepreneurism is great and feeds into this fo-

cus on cultivating hope through the attainment of pro-social goals.

Stirrings like these show that the time has come to seek the betterment of society. People are learning to use hope to achieve their goals, and this understanding is spreading. Educating people from a younger age to use hope empowers them to be change-makers and reformers. Learning from both positive psychology and pragmatist philosophy, educators can begin to integrate hope into lessons in any classroom in any school, perhaps catalyzing a wave of social and personal improvement.

Gabriel Brown is a 4th year undergraduate student at University of Cincinnati majoring in neuropsychology, with minors in psychology and medical sciences and a certificate in Italian language and culture. He will begin medical school at University of Cincinnati College of Medicine in August 2017, and hopes to become a child and adolescent psychiatrist. His particular focus is on holisticness in medicine, integrating information and ideas from varying disciplines to create both preventative and treatment programs that take into account the dynamic and multifaceted nature of the patient as a person.

'The Task Here Before Us Is Neither New nor Easy': William Blatz and Progressive Education at the Institute for Child Study in Toronto

Theodore Michael Christou
Queen's University

Hope has come on hard times these days.[149]

William Blatz, the founding Director of the Institute of Child Study (ICS) in Toronto, was one of Canada's leading progressive voices with a wide-reaching influence. He had a unique role in reformulating and interpreting John Dewey's ideas in the Canadian context. Blatz's development of a theory of human security is, in particular, a framework that can ground a robust articulation of character education.

In this paper, using Blatz's many writings on the subject of security, I seek to construct a working theory of character education concentrating upon hope. This theory interlaces first-order hopes (those that relate to one's personal and particular ambitions) and second-order hopes (which are related to the broader, social, and political spheres).[150] Security, I will argue, can ultimately best be understood as a second-order, pro-social, and democratic value.

John Dewey cast a long shadow on Blatz's work. Like Dewey, Blatz believed that democracy was a way of living that correlated personal and collective interests. Unlike Dewey, Blatz's primary lens for understanding democracy was through his notion of security. Human security, Blatz believed, depended on our collective ability to develop habits of mind and social practices that confronted the inevitable challenges of life. Blatz's understanding of democratic living closely paralleled Dewey's, who noted that one's personal well-being was inseparable from the well-being of the collective.[151]

> *Security, I will argue, can ultimately best be understood as a second-order, pro-social, and democratic value.*

Blatz' notion of human security was framed within the broader context of progressive education and a social context ripe with flux and insecurity, influenced by the two world wars, changing conceptions of human development and psychology, confrontations with despair and hardship on the battlefield and in the cities, and efforts to make the world a better place through education, while fostering hope in the world to come.[152] Canadian progressivists such

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[149] Stephen M. Fishman and Lucille McCarthy, *John Dewey and the Philosophy and Practice of Hope* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. xv.

[150] Stephen M. Fishman and Lucille McCarthy, "The Morality and Politics of Hope: John Dewey and Positive Psychology in Dialogue," *Transactions of the Charles S. Pierce Society* XLI, no. 3 (2005): 675-701.

[151] See John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, in *The Middle Works of John Dewey: 1899-1924*, vol. 9: *1916*, Eds. J.A. Boydston, P. Baysinger, P. Levine (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press: 1980). Here, Dewey states: "A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience," p. 93.

[152] See Theodore Michael Christou, *Progressive Education: Revisioning and Reframing Ontario's Public Schools, 1919-1942* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

as Blatz worked with the hope that their work would facilitate social reform while shedding light on developmental psychology and child study.

Blatz: Doctor, Educator, Progressivist, and Social Reformer

A medical doctor by training, Blatz turned to education after World War I and pursued a PhD at the University of Chicago in the time after the departure of John Dewey for Columbia University. While Blatz did not encounter Dewey directly during his doctoral studies, he was influenced by his writings and ideas. Blatz would turn his attention to the budding field of developmental psychology and become one of the leaders in Canada's adoption of progressive education during the interwar period.[153]

The ICS, which became both Blatz' laboratory school as well as a site for experimentation, exploration, and application of themes connected to education, democracy, and human security, stands as a Canadian counterpart to Dewey's own laboratory school at the University of Chicago. It is also a reflection of how Dewey's ideas travelled north of the US border and found root in Toronto.[154] The laboratory school, which includes a Nursery School, remains in operation as the Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study. 90 years after its establishment it is enjoying a renaissance of building construction and program expansion.[155]

The laboratory school currently has a teaching staff is comprised of more than twenty teachers along with the support of more than forty intern teachers, who are completing a two-year Masters of Arts program in Child Study and Education within the ICS. Its student body is comprised of fifty percent male and fifty percent female students with a total of approximately two hundred students along with an average class size of around twenty-two students per class; and it has an annual waiting list of two-thousand applicants.[156]

> *Whereas the increasing specialization of training and the demands for professional education had led to the isolation of subjects from each other and from actual life, the ICS represented a form of learning that was organic and whole.*

The ICS was a site wherein progressive education and developmental psychology were harmonized in the Canadian context.[157] It was heralded as an experiment in higher education that concentrated on studying human development apart from any "rigid departmental or faculty pattern."[158] Whereas the increasing specialization of training and the demands for professional education had led to the isolation of subjects from each other and from actual life, the ICS represented a form of learning that was organic and whole. Echoing Dewey, Mary

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[153] See Theodore Michael Christou (2013). "The Complexity of Intellectual Currents: Duncan McArthur and Ontario's Progressivist Curriculum Reforms," *Paedagogica Historica* 49 (5): 677-697.

[154] See Thomas S. Popkewitz, Ed. *Inventing the Modern Self and John Dewey: Modernities and the Traveling of Pragmatism in Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

[155] "Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study Laboratory School," University of Toronto, OISE, http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/ics/About_Us/New_Name_Future/index.html accessed September 2016.

[156] Ibid.

[157] Mary L. Northway, "Foreword," in *Twenty-five Years of Child Study: The Development of the Programme and Review of the Research at the Institute of Child Study, University of Toronto, 1926-1951*, Eds., Karl Bernhardt, Margaret Fletcher, Frances Johnson, Dorothy Millichamp and Mary Northway (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951), p. viii.

[158] Ibid, p. vii.

Northway, faculty at ICS, noted that if education is to "preserve its real character, if it is to be an organism and not merely an organization. We must constantly be on our guard against the forces which tend to destroy its unity."[159]

The development of the ICS came during the postwar period in Canada, a time of great change to the economic, political, social, and intellectual landscape of the country. More than 650,000 Canadians served in the armed forces during the First World War. More than a tenth of these, about 68,000, lost their lives—and approximately as many Canadians returned from the war with mental and physical traumas, all of which made any seamless resumption of life difficult, if not impossible.[160] The wounded survivors entered a vastly changed society, where "medicine, psychology, and related social services were ill-prepared to ease their civilian re-adjustment."[161]

The work of these services "intensified the interest in psychological studies that dealt not only with war veterans but with the development of individuals longitudinally through the whole span of life." [162] It also demonstrated a need for personnel educated and trained in meeting the needs of children whose home life had been disrupted by the war. How could injured soldiers and their families wrestle with such despair? In such a scenario, it is rather easy to see how Blatz's focus on the concept of security might emerge. Psychology's possible role in helping individuals develop the character traits needed for healthy re-adjustment in a quickly changing society is also easy to spot.

Understanding the larger social context aids in understanding how Blatz's work on human security can be seen as a unique interpretation of Dewey's conceptions regarding the relationship between democracy and education. Blatz never cited Dewey directly in his writings on the subject of security, but the influence of the latter upon the former is undeniable. Blatz wished to respect an individual person's striving for a better world while understanding that every person must attend to the collective world around them.

Blatz emphasized that developmental psychology, one aspect of progressive education, had a significant role to play in the facilitation of social progress, individual character development, and democratic life. Considering the interrelatedness of individual people with the social spheres of democratic living, deeper understanding of the development of individuals, across the lifespan and beginning with infancy, would serve a social purpose. As Blatz noted, "it has been a fascinating experience to have participated in the beginning of a movement which is wholly constructive; in which the future has far more hope of fulfillment than the past."[163]

Clearly, Blatz himself was hopeful that his own work might survive the chaos of the postwar era to sustain something more lasting. His work denotes an early articulation of positive psychology, even as it anticipates the challenges—epistemological, theoretical, and pragmatic—that mark the field today: "the task here before us is neither new nor easy; in fact it is extremely complicated, but extremely practical."[164]

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[159] Northway, 'Foreword,' p. viii.

[160] Cynthia Commachio, *The Infinite Bonds of Family: Domesticity in Canada 1850-1940,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p. 70.

[161] Ibid.

[162] E. A. Bott, "Founding of the Institute of Child Study," *Twenty-Five Years of Child Study*, p. 15.

[163] William E. Blatz, *Bulletin of the Institute* (Toronto: Institute of Child Study, No. 50, 1951), cited in E. A. Bott, "Founding of the Institute of Child Study," p. 13.

[164] William E. Blatz and Helen MacMurchy Bott, *Parents and the Pre-school Child*, p. v.

The Institute of Child Study: Learning, Opportunity, and Hope

The ICS sought to cultivate meaningful learning opportunities that related to society in order to prepare students to engage students meaningfully with its challenges and uncertainties. One might despair about the social, political, and intellectual changes wrought by the various forces associated with modernity, or one might look to face them confidently and through the development of habits of mind and action that would seem reasonable in light of projections regarding the future. Blatz believed that intelligent shaping of the future could only be realized through the integrated learning, rather than dissecting it into particular subjects. Learning was only meaningful in its application within the scope of social and democratic life.

Readjustment, or adjustment, understood as the concentration of school work upon contemporary society, is a dominant theme of progressive educational ideology and rhetoric in interwar Ontario.[165] School life should mirror social, political, and intellectual life. In this case it meant engagement in a modern democratic society. Hope was not understood as an abstract concept. Rather, it was endemic to an active existence within an ever-evolving society.

Developmental psychologists' role was seen as one that ought to concentrate on societal needs even as it considered individuals' particular requirements and aspirations. W.C. Kierstead has framed this as the problem of "adjustment." Individuals were, he argued, "the centre of all intelligence, of initiative, of discovery, of creative thinking, and therefore the pivot of social progress."[166] Yet he asked: how might individuals contribute to the well-being of the democratic society in which they lived even as they improved themselves?

> *Hope was not understood as an abstract concept. Rather, it was endemic to an active existence within anever-evolving society.*

The practice of adjustment was necessarily an iterative one in which the learner learned to adjust his or her behaviours in order to "fit into the existing social system." This can sound like a variation on functionalism or even a form of indoctrination. But the Canadian progressives never lost site of the way in which the just society might work to adapt itself to the character of the individuals who composed it. As Kierstead note in this regard, "even the arrival of the infant soon produces a considerable readjustment in any home."[167] As the individual adjusts to the society in which he or she lives, the society in turn adjusts to that individual as he or she engages with it meaningfully. The relationship is transactional and is key to the production of a healthy and flexible character development.

Blatz's focus on the concept of security therefore calls attention to his grounding in the developmental psychology of the postwar Canadian context. The human security of each individual needed to be preserved, whilst each individual, in turn, had a responsibility to make the world a better place. Karl Bernhardt, reflecting on the work of William Blatz within the ICS, made just this point: "The evolution of methods of training is based not on a standard of mere adjustment to the world as it is but rather on the contribution an individual can make

[165] Theodore Christou, *Progressive Education.*

[166] W. C. Keirstead, "Indoctrination in Education," *The School* (May, 1940), p. 743.

[167] Ibid., p. 744.

to a better world in which the welfare of the individual is fundamental."[168]

In his own thinking, Blatz's "concept of security has a solid foundation not only in knowledge of human nature but in a clear conception of what is good."[169] A secure child was one who could face the uncertainty and mutability of the world courageously, with self-reliance and confidence. That is, in Blatz's understanding, security was the foundation for any worthy character education.

Security Theory: The Gospel According to Blatz

Security theory came to be known as "the gospel according to Blatz."[170] It gave primacy to the individual's right to make decisions but contextualized these in social and educational contexts that would help shape the consequences of those decisions. The individual was ultimately responsible for the role that they played in shaping both his or her future and that of the democratic unit, writ large.[171] Blatz noted that the security of any person rested upon their membership in a society and upon their socialization.[172]

The relationship between the personal and the social aspects of security were evident even in Blatz's first published statement on the subject.[173] In this statement, Blatz distinguished security from safety, noting that we may strive for the latter concept but not necessarily realize the former, as it is both "learned" and "earned."[174]

> *Security is earned insofar as it requires maturity and independence. These manifest themselves in a purposeful striving for improved conditions to their life circumstances, and the actualization of their vocation, their avocation, and the social relationships that sustain these.*

Security is learned to the extent that it depends upon the individual's socialization or "adaptation" to their social, physical, and intellectual environment.[175] Any person's security is dependent upon the security of the collective to which the individual belongs. Security is earned insofar as it requires maturity and independence. These manifest themselves in a purposeful striving for improved conditions to their life circumstances, and the actualization of their vocation, their avocation, and the social relationships that sustain these.[176] "There is never just social action but always social interaction," Blatz emphasized, stressing that the relationship between the individual and society is always dynamic and iterative.[177]

Blatz considered security to be "a first principle, the basis of social living and a means of unifying theory and practice."[178] Security concerns the general adjustment of individuals and society while always depending upon a person's

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[168] K. S. Berhardt, "A Prophet Not Without Honour: The Contribution of William E. Blatz to Child Study," *Twenty-Five Years of Child Study*, p. 6.

[169] Ibid., p. 7.

[170] Mary L. Northway, "Postscript," in *Human Security: Some Reflections* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1966), p. 123.

[171] W. E. Blatz, *Human Security*, pp. 103-111.

[172] Ibid.

[173] Richard Volpe, "Consciousness and Consequences according to Blatz," in Richard Volpe, Ed., *The Secure Child* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2010), p. 11.

[174] William Blatz, "The Importance of Failure," *Bulletin*, 45 (December, 1934), pp. 3-4.

[175] Ibid. See, also,

[176] Ibid., p. 4.

[177] William Blatz, "The Individual and the Group," *The American Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 6 (1939): p. 829.

[178] Volpe, "Consciousness and Consequences," p. 12.

ability to confront social life as it is, sometimes difficult and always complicated.[179]

Conclusion: Progressive Education, Character Education, and Engagement of the Citizenry

Progressive educators of various stripes have long argued that the purpose of education is to develop engaged citizens who are not only literate and numerate, but who would shape the world around them, even as they were shaped by the society they inhabited.[180] Cecil Charles Goldring, who would go on to serve as superintendent and director of schools for the city of Toronto, stated that the task of educators was to help students "learn to think independently and live co-operatively."[181]

An editorial in *The School*, a monthly journal published by the Ontario College of Education, corroborated this position in later years, noting that the life of the "school must spring from the life of the people. Freed from the encumbrances of traditional subjects and no longer pre-occupied with remote and meaningless abstractions, it must adapt itself to the needs of the community it serves."[182]

Progressive education in Ontario, as represented by Blatz, taught that we depend upon each other. We do not have sufficient individual intelligence to deal with problems that affect the collective. Our human security is sustained by our personal and by our collective identities. We may only be progressive insofar as we at-

tend to our selves and to *ourselves*, conceived of as a collective.

> *To demand, or to look for, hope, one must struggle with despair and cope with uncertainty. This confrontation requires courage.*

In his security theory, Blatz examined the challenges that individuals will face in life. With the trauma and destruction of World War One as the backdrop, Blatz understood the way in which re-adjustment and security shaped the lives of returning soldiers, their families, and the great social body. This context laid the ground for his distinct contributions to a vision of a progressive character education.

Blatz therefore confronted *in*security in human lives and in democratic living directly. He, as well as the general citizenry, experienced this insecurity first hand through the sheer act of living in the context that they did, even as we do today within our own worlds. To demand, or to look for, hope, one must struggle with despair and cope with uncertainty. This confrontation requires courage.

Blatz recognized that an education rooted in a vision of hope had to acknowledge that life was fraught with difficulties. From this point on, it could concentrate on developing strategies to cultivate happiness and perseverance. This pertained to life inside and outside of schools.

Today, security is a term of ubiquity, implicated in geopolitical, economic, and military discourses. It relates popularly to surveillance, terrorism, bioethics, globalization, immigrant, war and refugees, order and disorder. Yet Blatz rooted security in the individual, whom he understood to be situated within a democratic and social frame of existence. Security was "a state of consciousness which accompanies a willing-

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[179] See Mary D. Salter Ainsworth, "Security and Attachment," in Richard Volpe, *The Secure Child*, pp. 43-54.

[180] Theodore Christou, *Progressive Education*.

[181] C. C. Goldring, "Manual training or the general shop?" *The School* (February, 1935), p. 470.

[182] "Editorial: Two sides to a question," *The School* (October, 1941), p. 91.

ness to accept the consequences of one's own decisions or actions."[183]

This definition hinges upon two conditions:

(1) feeling adequate in the performance of an activity, and
(2) being willing to accept any intrinsic or extrinsic consequences which ensue.[184]

The first condition is associated with independent security, and it relates to any person's self-reliance, confidence, grit, and striving towards a satisfactory life in the world. The second condition is associated with dependent security, which acknowledges the precariousness of life, the uncertainty of social living, and the interdependency of people living democratically. [185] Any character education worthy of its title must attend to both of these aspects.

A theory of character education can be considered robust if it is appropriate for the context in which it is articulated. Blatz's security theory was developed in a world defined, not unlike our own, by flux, uncertainty, efforts to fight exclusion while at the same time defining meaningful citizenship at local, national, and international levels. What, then, does security theory offer educators today as they interact with the young?

First, Blatz's compels educationists to attend to the dependent and independent security of their students. Security theory requires the development of educational environments wherein controversial subjects, personal and political, are considered intelligently, sympathetically, collectively, and individually. Prejudices are challenged, even as difference of opinions is acknowledged and assessments of social and particular problems are respectful of the collective good.

> *… it is incumbent upon the young to attend to their private ambitions courageously and to seek ways to connect them to the common wealth.*

Second, it is incumbent upon the young to attend to their private ambitions courageously and to seek ways to connect them to the common wealth. Children and youth flourish in an atmosphere that permits them freedom and self-reliance, and yet permits of the type of collaboration and cooperation that facilitate self-regulation. As one editorial article from an Ontario journal noted in 1941, personal courage and social action are both required if students might "assume responsibility for [their] own welfare and the welfare of all."[186]

The demands that security theory makes upon the future character education are neither new nor easy. They are particularly pertinent in a world torn between the forces of modernity and tradition. Today, the historic challenges posed on educationists by William Blatz in the first half of the twentieth century are omnipresent and pressing.

Theodore Michael Christou is an Associate Professor of Social Studies and co-editor of the Canadian Journal of Education. *Theodore authored* The Problem of Progressive Education *(University of Toronto Press, 2012), awarded the Canadian History of Education Association's Founders Prize for best book in the history of education, and* an overbearing eye *(Hidden Brook Press, 2013), a book of verse and short fiction. He co-edited* Foundations of Education: A Canadian Perspective *(Canadian Association of Teacher Education, 2013).* The Curriculum History of Canadian Teacher Education *(Routledge), an edit-*

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[183] William Blatz, *Hostages to Peace: Parents and the Children of Democracy* (New York, NY: William Morrow and Company), p. 82.
[184] Michael F. Grapko, "Security Theory," in Richard Volpe, Ed., *The Secure Child*,
[185] Ibid.

[186] Ibid., 497.

ed collection, and byzantium, *a book of poetry (Hidden Brook Press) are forthcoming.*

Finding Hope in an Anxious Time: Education in the Age of the Great Acceleration

David Militzer

$\mathbf{T}$he middle of the 20ᵗʰ century marks the beginning of what has been referred to as the "Great Acceleration." Peter Ho uses this phrase in his brief yet insightful article, "Coping with Complexity," to describe our current period of unprecedented rapid change on a global scale. He observes that this process has resulted in greatly accelerating the global rate of change on all fronts—political, economic, and social— and is having a huge impact on the earth's ecosystems.[187]

It was during the early days of this period that I grew up. Looking back, the beginning of the Great Acceleration was a time of social, cultural, and political stability, progress and optimism, seasoned with a moderate case of adolescent angst and peripheral concerns about the Cold War and the threat of nuclear annihilation. Even though there was a great deal of public concern about the Soviets and Cuba, and the retired Navy Admiral who lived next door ran films instructing us on how to build a bomb shelter, I never had the sense that the worst would happen.

After President Kennedy's election and the country's infatuation with "The New Frontier," things seemed increasingly hopeful, and

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[187] Peter Ho, "Coping with Complexity," 1. Retrieved October 2012 from http://mckinsey.com/industries/public-sector/our-insights/coping-with-compexity.

although change was in the air (and on the radio), the world seemed upbeat. Then, on November 22 of 1963, something fundamental changed about how I and other Americans viewed the world.

John F. Kennedy's assassination rocked the aura of optimism and national unity, the sense that even with our differences, we all shared a social, political, and cultural identity—a common worldview. Things suddenly became more uncertain; there was a feeling that if this could happen, other things we took for granted could start unraveling.

> *There was a palatable sense that not only were we living at a turning point of history, we were actors in the process. This was often exhilarating, and I expect many of us who came of age back then share a poignant sense of loss deeper than the nostalgia for the music of our youth—a loss of potential unfulfilled.*

Within a handful of years, deep divisions in our society surfaced, multiplied, and grew. Assumed values, norms and rules of behavior were suddenly changing. The issues that emerged, including the anti-war movement, the rapidly growing impatience for achieving civil rights, as well as women's rights and broader economic reforms, growing awareness of environmental pollution, the growth of ecological consciousness, and declining trust in our political institutions, all burst into the nation's consciousness. Although each has evolved, they remain with us today.

My coming-of-age years, along with those of many of my contemporaries, were also a time for seeking an expanded perspective that

would give meaning to what we were experiencing, what we saw, who we were, and what we could become, encompassing both the personal and the universal. There was a palatable sense that not only were we living at a turning point of history, we were actors in the process. This was often exhilarating, and I expect many of us who came of age back then share a poignant sense of loss deeper than the nostalgia for the music of our youth—a loss of potential unfulfilled. It seems natural that my own search to find meaning in current times has intensified with the emerging sense, yet again, of being at another of history's crossroads.

On a daily basis we see evidence of how technology is shaping our present and future in ways that increasingly determine not only how we do things, but what choices we have about what we can do. In fact, with the loosening of our agreement about a collective sense of reality that began with the 1960's call to "question reality," it is the technological world itself that seems now to a be the designer of both our public and private spaces—our external realities.

> **It is not accurate to assume children are unaware of the challenges we face, as individuals, families, communities, and as a species.**

Yet, just a click of the mouse away, we are barraged with news about those "wicked problems:" growing numbers of problems that present intractable and overly complex challenges, seemingly impossible to get our collective minds around, and, worst of all, beyond our capacity to solve.[188] These include increasing economic insecurity and the polarization of wealth and income levels, pan-global terrorism, a mounting eco-crisis, unsustainable development, continuing threats of nuclear annihila-

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[188] Peter Ho, "Coping with Complexity," 2.

tion, run-away climate change, food and water insecurity, and the uprooting (literally and figuratively) of communities, populations, and cultures. And this is only a partial list.

In this world, there seems no limit on what reasonable people might find deeply troubling.

In the face of this, we don't seem to be able to find a center from which we could collectively address what is happening to our world. We lack a center from which we could begin to meaningfully stem the bleeding. We are caught up in conflicts about differing notions of fundamental beliefs while drifting in a sea of moral relativism. We seemed to have lost purpose, no longer having the need or interest to ask: why? Without asking, there is no answer. So we move through a world that looks helpless and apathetic, yet is also increasingly frustrated and anxious.

Children's Inner Questions

It sounds almost trite to say that children are the hope for the future, too much like the "we are the world" Pepsi commercials of the past. Yet, what if we take these words out of their commercial context so that we can see them for what they are, and stop to consider what this could mean for us today?

Who in good conscience would disagree that there are reasons for us as educators, parents, citizens, public officials, and humans, to do everything and anything within our power and limits of knowledge and creativity, to provide the most effective education possible: an education that is simultaneously engaging, empowering, honoring, humbling, and creative?

It is not accurate to assume children are unaware of the challenges we face, as individuals, families, communities, and as a species. Think back to your own childhood. Even now, years or decades past, those early memories are the most vivid. Children and youth have their own ways of knowing what is going on. In

1922, Rudolph Steiner argued that a good teacher helps her or his students formulate, or give words to, their internal unspoken questions, consistent with their stage of development. The teacher guides them with sensitivity in the discovery of insights that help them grow, developing more fully towards who they are and will become.[189]

Children and adolescents tend to think in and through their emotions, so we should resist assuming they don't feel the pressures of potential futures just because they may not talk about them. Children benefit when adults who care about them make it safe to enter into these questions, and if the adults in their lives don't facilitate the process, it not only negatively affects their learning, but it erodes their trust in the adults who are in caregiving roles. I experienced this phenomenon in my largely unsuccessful quest to talk to adults about feelings I was struggling with in my adolescents. I found an adult world that seemed disinclined to engage in discussions of inner tension related to external experience. Given the heroic tasks we are leaving to our children, this might be the type of engagement we would want to foster.

Today, schools don't work particularly well for the sizeable majority of our students. There is plenty of evidence that tells us this. In a national survey of high school students carried out earlier this year by the Center for Emotional Learning at Yale University, students were asked how they felt when in school.

The top three answers were tired, bored, and stressed.

There are many voices who are calling for deeper understandings about what kids really need to learn, and why. Without greater socioemotional supports and non-cognitive learning experiences that promote a feeling of belonging in school, children will continue struggling to master the academic core—a priority of most, if not all, schools. Paul Tough's work explores the effects chronic stress conditions have on children, whether related to their health or emotional well-being. We can ask what needs to be done to address this for these children to have the chance of succeeding in school and life.[190]

On the other side of the economic divide, it is increasingly being recognized that children living even in privileged families and communities also grow up with considerable risks. These students need more holistic educational practices that emphasize the healthy development of character traits such as decency and kindness as an antidote for community norms that are telling them that success hinges on gaining a competitive edge on their peers and the world at large. [191]

Whether rich or poor, children have inner questions that our educational environments are not cultivating.

The Need to See and Learn Together

Why is it that in the face of the evidence of our education inadequacies, many of our educators, policy makers, and schools cling to discredited notions of what the highest priorities should be? Martin Heidegger, the German philosopher and metaphysician, points to a closely related problem in a series of lectures he delivered late in his life, published as *What is Called Thinking?*[192]

[189] Rudolf Steiner, "Education for Adolescents," Stuttgart Lecture, June 21, 1922. Translated and published in the *Journal for Anthroposophy*, Spring 1979, 3. Retrieved September 22, 2007 from the Rudolf Steiner Archives: http://www.rsarchive.org/.

[190] Paul Tough, *Helping Children Succeed: What Works and Why* (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016).

[191] Suniya S. Luthar, "The Problem with Rich Kids," *Psychology Today*. Retrieved November 15, 2015 from https://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/201311/the-problem-rich-kids.

[192] Heidegger, Martin, "What Calls for Thinking?" In *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farell Krell (New York: Harper Collins, 1977), 371 – 372.

In these lectures, he went deeply into the idea that the most thought-provoking thing in this most thought-provoking time is that we are still not thinking. His words from a half a century ago, in the early years of the Great Acceleration, foreshadow our current challenges: that we. as human societies, made up of a collective set of individuals, act as if we are incapable of seeing and learning together—from history, from what is now going on in the world around us, and from how the increasing likelihood of horrible calamities.

Wicked problems—tired, bored, and stressed students. How can this be?

We seem to avoid or be unable to bring into clearer focus the existential threats that engulf our world. An obvious example is climate change. If we cannot even come to a consensus understanding that this is a life-threatening problem, what chances have we of solving it? What role do we have in helping our children deal with the world we leave them?

In a 2016 article on the "Spiral of Silence," the *New York Times* reported that around 70% of American adults are very or moderately concerned about climate change. And yet the article reported that more than half of these people rarely or never talk about it to friends or family. Similarly, less than half hear media discussions of climate change even once a month. The article suggests that there is a "spiral of silence" surrounding climate change "in which even people who care about the issue, shy away from discussing it because they so infrequently hear other people talking about it—reinforcing the spiral."[193]

George Marshall, a campaigner for action on climate change, proposed that the first step to addressing this avoidance is to "recognize,

even embrace, the essence of how humans work, including the faults."[194] Then the conversations and collaborations can begin, assuming we agree to pursue truth rather than reverting to conflict.

Wicked problems—tired, bored, and stressed students. How can this be?

In this approach, we set aside our tendency to see value as relative, where what you value about the world is primarily a matter of taste. Of course, perspective is not irrelevant, but should not be an impediment to moving beyond differences of perspective. Talking about climate change in these ways helps "boost capacities to innovate, empathize, to devise resilient responses to risks and more—to bend, stretch, reach, teach…."[195] It treats the subject of climate change as something critically important, deserving urgency; something that matters greatly, rather than something to be avoided.

Between a flat world of cultural relativism that defends the right to virtually any perspective, and the rigidity of moral fundamentalism, the above is an example of how we might elevate our discourse, recognizing that we do have choices—we are in fact making choices, even in our refusals—that are creating the world of the future. For as Rene Girard has said, "if we suddenly see reality, we do not experience the absolute despair of an unthinking modernity but rediscover a world where things have meaning." Given our challenges, this is an encouraging observation. Hope is possible only if and when we dare to think about the danger at hand."[196]

[193] Andrew C. Revkin, "As Warnings Build, Is There A "Spiral of Silence" on Climate Change?" *The New York Times*, September 30, 2016. Retrieved from http://www.dotearthblogs.nytimes.com/201609/30as-warnings-build-is-there-a-spiral-of-silence-on-climate-change/.

[194] Ibid.

[195] Ibid.

[196] Rene Girard, "On War and the Apocalypse," *First Things: The Journal of Religion and Public Life*, 4. Retrieved November 4, 2016 from

Education and Seeing Together

What should we consider as the most compelling questions of our time?

From the above, it seems that addressing our habit of avoiding questions is a promising place to start. How do we overcome our resistance to talk about undeniably critical topics, whether personal or social?

What are the questions that will help us better see reality? What new, more accurate and more helpful insights and understandings are waiting discovery—waiting, as Rene Girard says, to suddenly see an illuminated reality. and lead us away from the distractions and avoidances that obscure it?

Putting these insights together, Rene Girard says, first, we must look together.

But how can we do that if we are entrenched in our avoidance?

Second, then, is ending the spiral of silence. George Marshal suggests that we must get better at understanding ourselves, understanding why we are unable to look, which will provide clues to how we can overcome this impasse. We must hold each other accountable for looking.

We must see together.

The relevance of this for education is to ask: How do we teach our children well? What is essential for them to know that is lacking or missing in our world right now, and speaks clearly to a better, or any, future?

Our educational system expends great amounts of resources and attention on preparing students academically, the principle goal being entry to college. Mastering the academic core, with the rise in the importance of science, engineering, and technology, along with assessments and accountability, are the priorities in educational policy.

https://www.firstthings.com/article/2009/08/on-war-and-apocalypse.

Yet there is an old folk saying that reminds us that truths are like paint, they only have value in their application. Academic skills are only relevant in the context of our shared human world we live in. Therefore academic knowledge is only useful if and when it can be successfully communicated and effectively applied to society's needs.

> *We must hold each other accountable for looking.*
> *We must see together.*

The good news is that we have a vast amount of wisdom within our grasp as to what education should be doing. We also have the connectivity to network, share and converse, creating new avenues for discourse. And we already have many schools and communities where the puzzle pieces are coming together.

Indications are that a new generation of children and youth have a growing awareness of who they are—both as individuals and in relation to the rest of the world. We adults could provide them with opportunities to use this awareness to guide their decisions. This small shift can lead to a greater sense of personal power and accountability, of agency, and of purpose. With purpose comes the invitation, the opportunity, to grow hopeful about the future.

Many leaders in the field of education are telling us that there are insights, approaches, constructs, and pedagogies that can provide what students need to grow in knowledge and character.

Yet children and youth need to feel that what they are learning has value and purpose. They need to feel that what they are learning is personally relevant. They blossom when they are engaged. Students need to believe that they can change through intentional effort, learn by being persistent, and succeed with the help of

adults who will remind them that not knowing is an essential starting point for learning—not a indicator of lack of intelligence.

Because we were all once children, we can anticipate the internal unspoken questions. Addressing these questions is a core part of identity formation. They include questions such as: What and who is in the world? What do I like? What interests me? What am I good at? What in the world might I want to try or do? How can I contribute to solving the problems I see? What should I be learning now and in the future to help me grow into adulthood and have a satisfying life? How should I prepare for the certainty of change that will require me to be agile and adaptable as I go through life?

A good teacher or parent makes it safe for children to enter into these questions. Using Heidegger's formulation, these existential questions are truly compelling because they lead a student towards a more profound understanding of themselves as exceptional and unique, allowing them to understand they are a part of the unfolding human community. By expanding our understanding of what our schools need to be teaching, we are also learning, once again, that what is inside is as important as what is outside. It is time to take up the ancient command to "know thyself". We can hope that this will lead us on the path of discovering who we humans are meant to be.

Conclusion

In order to see the reality of the world, we must look together. To be able to look, we must better understand ourselves, including understanding why we are unable to look at what is happening to us and the world, and what is keeping us from looking. And we must seek to help each other to look, so that together we may see. In so doing we must keep focused, and avoid slipping into diversionary conflicts that distract us from our purpose, which is to

address the existential questions that are facing our species.

> *Because we were all once children, we can anticipate the internal unspoken questions.*

Yet, as the saying goes, one thing leads to another. Further compelling questions remain to be explored. Perhaps we do not care to look because we no longer believe in reality. If virtual environmental are pushing us deeper into a moral relativity, one that could to lead to nihilism, where will we find hope for a shared future? Can we together learn to see the wonder that is the gift of life?

David Militzer did undergraduate work in Philosophy and Education at Franconia College in New Hampshire. He has a M.A. in Psychology and a variety of experiences in fields and endeavors that range from career development, collective impact collaboratives, career education, and social/emotional learning, and more. He currently works in California state government on embedding 21ˢᵗ-century, career-ready learning into our schools. Three of his four offspring are secondary public school students. Their "tales from the front" help keep their father's feet on the ground.

Moral Oppression & A Vision for Outlaw Emotions

Becky L. Noël Smith
University of Alabama

> *Actual freedom lies in the realization of that end which actually satisfies. An end may be freely adopted and yet its actual working-out may result not in freedom, but slavery...Only that end which executed really effects greater energy and comprehensiveness of character makes for actual freedom.*
>
> —John Dewey[197]

A Reflection on Pedagogical & Moral Regret

My colleagues and I were required to adhere to a "research-based" reading program called Success For All (SFA).[198] At a cost of tens of thousands of dollars each year, SFA provided our school with structures for testing, labelling, and categorizing students so that they and the teachers could be filed "neatly" into daily reading blocks.

Like many prefabricated curricular programs, it scripted nearly every one of the ninety minutes that I shared with my students. The one exception to this rule took place in a ten-minute allotment called "Listening Comprehension." This segment was the only unscripted part of the entire reading block, and in hindsight, it was often the only period that actually equated to any real learning. Teachers were "allowed" to choose any book to read to the kids during this time, and it was permissible even to allow curiosities and conversations to meander into unforeseen destinations. But, it was mandated that we stick to the schedule—any question or idea that threatened to expand beyond the specified allotment was expected to be pruned sharply at the ten-minute mark.

> *My students were outspoken and quick-witted, and it became apparent by week two that they had reached the threshold of boredom, their faces and repeating voices numbed by tedium.*

This brief tease of autonomous bliss was, ironically, followed by ten minutes of mindless obedience to the Word Wall. SFA provided us with approximately ten words each week, and while one would assume that they were intended to challenge the children, they rarely did so. There was a ritual for the "learning" (or saying) of these words: teacher points to the word, teacher says the word, children say the word, and repeat. After all words had been said four times, there was a brief discussion on the definition of each word. This monotony was repeated with the same set of words for five consecutive days.

It is not difficult to imagine that children would rapidly lose interest in this process, especially if they already knew each word on the list. My students were outspoken and quick-witted, and it became apparent by week two that they had reached the threshold of boredom, their faces and repeating voices numbed by tedium.

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[197] John Dewey, "Outline of a Critical Theory of Ethics," *The Early Works, 1882-1898, Volume 3* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), 343. First published in 1891.

[198] To learn more about the problems the problems of SFA see Jonathan Kozol, *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America"* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2005).

As a way to entertain myself and them, I attempted to speak the words with an exceedingly sarcastic enthusiasm, but their monotone responses were unmistakable: this was meaningless, it was degrading to each of us, and we all knew we hated it.

> **We had about three weeks of luck before the reading coach's daily rounds brought her to our classroom. She was puzzled by what she saw: our class had strayed from the SFA structure. It was well known by every teacher that such a move was forbidden.**

Assessing the situation and the abilities of my students, I decided that the best we could do was to one-up the vocabulary words SFA had rationed out to us. I told each of the students to grab a thesaurus off the bookshelf. Most of them had no clue what the book was or how to use it, and so they curiously dug in and toyed with the synonyms they found from their random explorations. They giggled at the sounds of newly-found words, they playfully constructed sentences around their discoveries, and they awed at one another's abilities to sound out the "really big words." After we surveyed the alphabetical layout of the book, I asked them to look up the first word on the Word Wall. As they turned to the correct page, they found delight in the abundance of descriptive and lengthy alternatives to the drab and unanimated words that just stuck, lifelessly, to our wall.

We decided to adopt a new and seemingly innocent activity to fill this ten minute segment each day: I would say the word on the wall, the students would look it up in the thesaurus, and then they would each share a favorite or more extravagant synonym for SFA's word. Their vocabularies were expanding, they were reading and decoding new words, they were honing their abilities to alphabetize, and we were all finally content with, and engaged in, that small portion of reading class.

We had about three weeks of luck before the reading coach's daily rounds brought her to our classroom. She was puzzled by what she saw: our class had strayed from the SFA structure. It was well known by every teacher that such a move was forbidden. In fact, we were reminded numerous times each year by the principal, "SFA is not going anywhere. If you don't like teaching it, I'll help you find another job."

Needless to say, I was not terribly surprised when I found myself being reprimanded by the reading coach at the end of the school day. I defended myself and my students by detailing the educational value of our activities, the rationale for my straying from the structure, and the hypocrisy of SFA's claims regarding growth and learning. I finally abandoned the conversation with the reading coach in complete disgust.

The absurdity was disorienting: how could she ignore the fact that my students were not learning from the materials I had been required to use? Most disturbing was that she refused to acknowledge that her adherence to the structure was not only sacrificing the growth of my students, it was sacrificing my own, as the teacher. My argument and my logic went to waste, and I was ordered to return to the routine of stagnation.

Like many teachers who find themselves in similar situations, I shared this story with only my closest colleagues and my family as a way to vent and seek empathy for my frustrations. Then I closed my classroom door, went about my work, and found other ways to silently resist the system that was restraining my students' growth and my own development.

Moral Oppression

As should be obvious from the story shared above, this piece considers character education from a somewhat unconventional angle. It is my contention that the stilted atmosphere that abounds in too many of today's classrooms harms not only the learning and moral growth of students, but the professional learning and character development of the teacher as well.

The above story is one example of the many infuriating institutional contradictions that have gnawed at me and my colleagues. Looking back on it now, it is much easier to isolate the problems and identify their ties to the power of oppressive technocratic and bureaucratic mentalities. Of course, expensive and hollow programs like SFA are reserved for schools with low-income and high-minority student populations—they and their use are inherently racist and classist.[199]

The ridiculousness of the technocratic and positivistic mentalities was underscored by the school's belief that the term "research-based" actually meant something of value. The flaw of the bureaucratic mentality was present in the dogmatic worship of structure, protocol, and hierarchy. How could professional educators ever be led to believe that a corporation (like SFA) was best equipped to tell the teachers and students how to act, interact, and how to think? The existence of scripted curriculum like those put out by SFA convey the belief that anyone *but* the individuals engaged in the learning process should be guiding and validating it. And again, the foundation for this belief is the drive to outsource the construction of knowledge, experience, and morality to someone or something else.

The example I provide above is clearly different from the blatant injustices of school closures, resegregation, and the disproportionate attrition that has been forced upon teachers of color. When we consider the many injustices our society now suffers under, this problem may seem harmless. But scenarios like this are prevalent in schools, and they are significant and problematic because of a common, defining quality: they occur *silently*.

> *In short, the intersectionality of this cage is so overwhelming that it is difficult for teachers to speak of this type of institutional oppression, to understand it, and to feel it as anything other than just plain wrong.*

That is, because these types of contradictions and exchanges occur between individuals and within an increasingly controlling public institution, those on the outside rarely hear about the detrimental restrictions that occur within. And if one desired to speak about the epidemic of this problem in general terms, what language could one use? Such a problem is related to so many forms of power – class, race, gender, and the oppressive corporate and techno-bureaucratic mentalities – that it cannot necessarily be named in any simple way.

In short, the intersectionality of this cage[200] is so overwhelming that it is difficult for teachers to speak of this type of institutional oppression, to understand it, and to feel it as anything other than just plain *wrong*.

Altering the environment to the benefit of one's students and to the best of one's abilities seems right and good. In fact, it seems morally

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[199] This was the case across my school district, and it was a point well made by Kozol also. Jonathan Kozol, *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America"* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2005).

[200] For further explication of the components of the cage metaphor utilized here, see Becky L. Nöel Smith, *The Moral Oppression of the Teaching Profession: Learning to Transcend*, Masters Thesis, STARS Electronic Theses and Dissertations at the University of Central Florida (#2693), 2013, http://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd/2693/.

obvious, and as Doris Santoro[201] has argued, such a practice is the exercise of Deweyan *intelligence*. But the story above details how easily a teacher's drive to do the right thing can be set in tension by both the institutional structures and the reactions of those who hold positions of power in schools.

These mechanisms, these ways of thinking about and running schools, these ways of raising the nation's youth, have all latched onto the institution in ways that are *morally oppressive*: they encourage one to ignore and suppress her morality, her moral impulses, and her moral way of knowing. In doing so, they invalidate the teacher's moral knowledge and her professional and personal character development. And by restricting a teacher's moral growth, these mechanisms and mentalities inevitably restrict students' growth.

This, then, is the essence of moral oppression. But what does it actually mean for a teacher to be moral? And how might she construct moral knowledge?

Perceiving Emotion as a Moral Way of Knowing

The reflective process transitions into a phase of deliberation when the individual must determine *what* to do.[202] According to Dewey, deliberation typically focuses on choices which are primarily quantitative: "The value is technical, professional, economic, etc., as long as one thinks of it as something which one can aim at and attain by way of having."[203] For instance, one might deliberate over alternative routes to work while she is sitting in rush hour traffic. She weighs the benefits of one alternative against another as she considers the meeting that cannot be missed and the impact her potential lateness could have upon her relations at work and upon her livelihood.

> **One's actions are merely the external expression of one's internal attitude, meaning that only conduct can provide evidence for the character that lies within.**

The route of a person's daily commute may not say much about the individual; it could be said to lack moral value. However, the transportation the person chooses to utilize in getting *to* work might suggest something entirely different. It might hint at the inner workings of the agent, at the individual's emotional and intellectual disposition, or at the conscious and active concern for one's own health or one's impact on fellow beings and the earth's environment. In this way, values surrounding quality and "the outlook for something better" enter into our deliberations.[204]

Deliberation ranges in complexity and import, of course, but the process acquires a moral property when the weighing of values related to the self is combined with concerns about quality. In other words, morality is qualitative; it deals with the quality of one's self and one's concern for others. As such, moral deliberation is tethered to a question that seems both personal and simple: Who *am* I? The answer to such a question, though, is neither simple nor entirely personal, and an understanding of the relationship between character, conduct, and consequence play an integral part in such an inquiry.

In *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, Dewey stated that character is "an *attitude* of the agent

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[201] Doris A. Santoro, "'We're Not Going to Do That Because it's Not Right': Using Pedagogical Responsibility to Reframe the Doublespeak of Fidelity", *Educational Theory*, Volume 66, No. 1-2, (2016): 263-277.

[202] John Dewey, "Ethics," *The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 7* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), 273. First published in 1932.

[203] Ibid., p. 274.

[204] Ibid., p. 273.

toward conduct, as expressing the kind of motives which upon the whole moves him to action."[205] He went on to explain that character and conduct are not just intimately connected, but that they are essentially one in the same. One's actions are merely the external expression of one's internal attitude, meaning that only conduct can provide evidence for the character that lies within. As an individual's character is born through conduct, it inevitably makes its way into the world in the form of consequence.

The tendency in many situations is to judge consequence as good or bad, as either positive or negative, but the weight of one's actions is often revealed in ways which land on both ends of this spectrum. This factor undoubtedly lends toward the inherently unpredictable nature of consequences. Consequence manifests differently throughout every environment, and it extends for distances and in ways that can certainly overwhelm the imagination of someone who attempts to envision its reach and impact.

Thus, a person seeking to answer the question, "Who *am* I?", must take notice of consequence as it unfolds in and around her. Ultimately, she must examine whether her conduct and its resulting consequences align with her moral self-perception or the way *she* perceives her own sense of character. Through observation and attentiveness, through tweaks and adjustments, she comes to feel the ways her actions affect herself and her state of well-being.

A teacher, for instance, might see herself as a loving person. She feels intrinsically gratified by her work and prides herself on the affection and concern she feels for her students. The qualities of pride, affection, and concern can be very beautiful to the one who experiences them and attempts to express them. However, they are also very complicated ways of feeling.

Without periodic reflection and attention, these expressions can evolve into ways of acting that can mean over-protective, restrictive, or paternalistic consequences for others.

This potential is the very reason why it is not enough for an individual to only tend to the feelings as they are revealed, intuited, and interpreted within oneself. The teacher who desires to grow in a sense of love and care must check those feelings and her moral self-perception against the evidence that can be gleaned from those in the surrounding social environment.

By surveying the quality of human interaction as it occurs in, through, and around oneself a person can seek out the most basic moral element to character and conduct: emotional consequence. Mood, posture, facial expression, tone of voice, inflection, and even breathing patterns or sighs are the medium through which emotional consequence resonates. This resonance is influenced and shaped, of course, by the limitless variations of the people involved. Personal experience, selective attention, and conscious and unconscious judgements all blend and intertwine to create an infinite array of emotional timbres and connections: a unique kinship may develop between a student and a teacher, or an indescribable energy might congeal suddenly among the people who fill a classroom.

The emotional consequence that emerges from such relationships and interactions amass into patterns and tendencies, and they provide educators with what Jim Garrison called "sympathetic data."[206] As such, emotion (as it is felt in oneself) and emotional consequence (as it is perceived in the responses of others) are tools which are crucial to learning and to honing the craft of teaching.

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[205] John Dewey, "Outline of a Critical Theory of Ethics," *The Early Works, 1882-1898, Volume 3* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), 246. First published in 1891.

[206] James Garrison, *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997), 35.

As Dewey's[207] work attests, emotion provides the foundation for learning: it provides the feeling that urges inquiry, and it is the fuel that sees learners to the intermitten resolutions of their intellectual quests. Thus, emotional consequence is vital to the learner, but it is equally important to the teacher as well. It can be interpreted by teachers to help them better understand their students, to meet their needs, to anticipate their developing questions, and to channel their energies and inquiries toward productive and beneficial ends. In some respect, working with students and the act of "conducting class" are really very similar to conducting a group of musicians: it is the art of reading, shaping, and working with the sounds, motions, and emotions that are created by a group of individuals in a given setting.

Verbal and written communication can certainly aid in the interpretations and conclusions a teacher draws from the perceived palette of sympathetic data. For instance, there are occasions when students are so emotionally and linguistically attuned that they articulate their thoughts and feelings with a bluntness that is both endearing and shocking. In such cases where little is left to the imagination, a teacher's reliance upon her emotional perception might relax somewhat.

However, one's emotional intuitiveness is particularly useful when interacting with neurodivergent students, with children who are very young, or with individuals who have endured traumatic experiences. This is because the persistent willingness to tinker with the emotional environment – to extract nuance out of it and to inquire into the interpretations one derives – can serve as a primary tool for discovering the aversions, sensitivities, needs, and desires that

impact a student's comfort level and, thus, her or his ability to flourish in that space.[208]

Moreover, emotional consequence can help one sense the sometimes subtle difference between *struggling* (a necessary and beneficial component of learning) and *suffering* (a cruel infliction of pain and frustration). The ability to distinguish between these two states is no doubt most important in school settings espousing the need for more "grit" and "rigour."

> **Moreover, emotional consequence can help one sense the sometimes subtle difference between struggling (a necessary and beneficial component of learning) and suffering (a cruel infliction of pain and frustration). The ability to distinguish between these two states is no doubt most important in school settings espousing the need for more "grit" and "rigour."**

However, as a teacher cultivates an openness to sensing emotional consequence and the courage to interpret the sympathetic data that arise, the emotional timbre becomes much more than just an instrument for facilitating the growth of students. It becomes the resource for testing and experimenting with the effectiveness of one's own conduct, and in this respect, emotion contributes to a most basic human

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[207] John Dewey, *How We Think* (Washington D.C.: Dover Publications, 1997). First published in 1910.

[208] See the case study of Anne and Sally for a good example of how one's perception of sympathetic data – instead of serving as a means of casting judgment – can serve not only as a catalyst for inquiry; it can be used to improve the living and learning conditions for the individuals in a teacher's care. Thomas Owren & Trude Stenhammer, "Neurodiversity: Accepting Autistic Difference", *Learning Disability Practice,* Volume 16, No. 4, (2013), 32-37.

understanding. As Dewey said, that is, "*Emotional* reactions form the chief materials of our knowledge of ourselves and of others."[209] In other words, the emotions which flow from interactions *with others* come to provide some of the most fundamental evidence for gauging the quality of *oneself*. Thus, human interaction and emotional consequence are both essential to the development of an individual's moral self-perception and moral growth.

This does not imply, however, that a person becomes morally self-determined by seeking the answers *from* others. Agency certainly plays its part, and thus morality cannot be outsourced anymore than it can be wholly individualized. Instead, the existing understanding of who I am is made clearer: it is shaped or validated, and it is set into question through the connections one makes and the actions one carries out *with* others. Through those interactions, emotional consequences provide the glimpses that allow a person to see and feel the accuracy of her or his own moral self-perception as it is reflected back through the communications, perceptions, expressions, and actions of others.

> *This means that while outlaw emotions are the fuel for change, there is a moral calling to learn from these feelings, and that makes the act of closing the door incredibly problematic.*

This means that the teacher who tends to the social and emotional environment with some element of conscientiousness, sympathy, and passion cannot help but see and *feel* the ways her or his own conduct affects oneself and one's students. This is the case when the environment and interactions are healthy and thriving, as well as when they are toxic and damaging. It is unavoidable: "The admiration and resentment of others is the mirror in which one beholds the moral quality of his act reflected back to him."[210]

Therefore, a teacher's moral well-being—the understanding of who that teacher is—is unequivocally tied to one's students and the status of *their* emotional and intellectual well-being. The system that expects teachers to suppress their own moral and emotional understanding—the one that coerces them to persist with practices they know to be meaningless, "mis-educative," and harmful to their students—is actually asking them to engage in self-mutilation.[211] And sadly, there can be little doubt that such an environment also teaches the children to do the same.

Outlaw Emotions & the Other Side of the Classroom Door

What many fail to realize is that the morally oppressive structures have created an entire culture wherein educators frequently feel compelled to break the rules for the *good* of their students. In such schooling climates, Garrison explained, the best teachers come to "violate the intent if not the letter of institutional laws, regulations, and rules of policy to actualize the values of their vocation."[212]

[209] John Dewey, "Ethics," *The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 7* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), 269. First published in 1932.

[210] John Dewey, "Ethics," *The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 7* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), 246. First published in 1932.

[211] "Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience." John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 25. First published in 1938.

[212] James Garrison, *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997), 163.

These actions and desires comprise a moral underworld, so to speak: I say "moral" because many teachers are attempting to right injustices, and "underworld" because their methods are deemed unacceptable inside the corporate and techno-bureaucratic cage. For instance, the public does not hear about the teacher who, despite threats from her administration, refuses to write-up students for tardies and dresscode indiscretions because she knows classroom learning time is far more beneficial to her students than the zero tolerance policies that remove them from their classes. The public also does not hear about the teacher who risks being fired because, instead of letting the day's uneaten yet perfectly edible food go into the dumpster as district protocol demands, she sneaks it out of the school and into the hands of hungry and homeless families.

Behind the classroom door, in the shadows, and under the radar, countless educators attempt to fight against the cogs of the massive social and economic system that seems set on subordinating, failing, and disposing of the human beings for whom teachers care. Thus, closing the door is a way to protect one's students. It is a way to shield oneself from retribution and the institutional disapproval of their moral intelligence; and because a teacher's moral self-perception is tied to the well-being of one's students, breaking the rules is often the easiest way for an individual to engage in moral self-preservation.

The driving force behind the actions in this moral underworld is what Alison Jaggar called "outlaw emotions."[213] Simply put, outlaw emotions are unconventional ways of feeling and perceiving the world. These are the feelings of smouldering outrage elicited by institutional policies that refuse to value children and their uniquenesses, or those policies that restrict student growth, reserve the worst curriculum for the neediest learners, and attempt to hold children accountable for society's neglect.

However, as Jaggar pointed out, by acknowledging "irritability, revulsion, anger, and fear," and then seeking the meaning behind these feelings, teachers can "bring to consciousness our 'gut-level' awareness that we"—and, I would add, those we care for—"are in a situation of coercion, cruelty, injustice, or danger."[214] These nagging feelings—what might otherwise be called states of Deweyan disequilibrium—beg us to acknowledge and question the existing state of things, and in doing so, they urge individuals to envision and create a more humane world.[215] The catch, however, is that such visions can only come into being when pursued and realized *with others*.

This means that while outlaw emotions are the fuel for change, there is a moral calling to learn from these feelings, and that makes the act of closing the door incredibly problematic. For when intense feelings of personal conflict are "experienced by isolated individuals, those concerned may be confused, unable to name their experience; they may even doubt their own sanity."[216] Because of this, expression, inquiry, and joint response are absolutely necessary to both understanding and resolving these feelings. In contrast, if one remains isolated and alienated, then healthy human interaction becomes constrained, muted, and thereby stifling to moral growth and personal character devel-

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[213] Alison M. Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology," *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 145-171.

[214] Ibid., p. 160.

[215] John Dewey, *How We Think* (Washington D.C.: Dover Publications, 1997). First published in 1910.

[216] Alison M. Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology," *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 160. For a further explication of outlaw emotions and breaking the rules for the good on one's students see James Garrison, *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997), Chapter 5.

opment. This means that the potential energy of outlaw emotions is rendered inert when the teacher closes the door, and as a result, this allows the bound and intense feelings to begin working on and harming the individual and, inevitably, her students.

So, to some, it may seem like closing the door is a silent and dignified act of resistance—it may seem safer and easier than open resistance or cooperative civil disobedience, and in some cases, it may seem like the only option. But, while closing the door might help relieve one's own feelings of frustration, one person's resolved feelings will never resolve institutional injustices.

Resorting to this tactic means that we actually *closet ourselves*, and in doing so, we also shield the illogical and harmful realities of the institution from the outside world and from the citizens who are most capable of helping us teachers change it: fellow educators, family and community members, and education activists. Thus, by hiding in silence and isolation, we take an active part in the oppression of our own moral knowledge and our abilities: we suppress the power to help ourselves and others, and we stunt the potential to struggle together against the misery and the unjust state of things.

Conclusion: Outlets for Outlaw Emotions

> *We wish the fullest life possible to ourselves and to others. And the fullest life means largely a complete and free development of capacities in knowledge and production—production of beauty and use. Our interest in others is not satisfied as long as their intelligence is cramped, their appreciation of truth feeble, their emotions hard and uncomprehensive, their powers of production compressed.*

—John Dewey[217]

As an educator comes to examine the work done by her own hands, one must hope she finds the courage to ask of herself, "*What* am I doing?" "Why am I doing *this*?" Such questions indicate that she has stumbled upon a most personal and deeply felt problem. These questions and the emotions that encompass them, while devastating in the moment, are saturated with an amazing and beautiful potential.

It is a loving and moral way of knowing that yearns to be reunited with a loving and moral way of acting because one's soul can no longer ignore the mass quantities of sympathetic data she has collected from students' tears, groans, boredom, and restlessness.

Such questions reveal the birth of a harrowing awareness that one has very nearly severed from herself the power and humanity that extend from her core. And this is a key step in learning to move beyond moral oppression because it signifies the desire to trust and utilize one's innermost power: a type of knowledge that finds its value and emergence in love, compassion, and the passionate connection that comes with shared human growth.

It is a loving and moral way of knowing that yearns to be reunited with a loving and moral way of acting because one's soul can no longer ignore the mass quantities of sympathetic data she has collected from students' tears, groans, boredom, and restlessness.

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[217] John Dewey, "Outline of a Critical Theory of Ethics," *The Early Works, 1882-1898, Volume 3* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), 246. First published in 1891.

The teacher's ability to use these data is rooted to her or his desire to care and to inquire, both of which are indespensible to a teacher's work.[218] But in the case of oppression, to care and to question is simply not enough.[219] Liberation commands love, and true love demands risk.[220] It begins with the risk of being honest, with oneself and with others, about what is perceived inside the institution: the unwarranted pains teachers sense in their students and the ways teachers are frequently coerced to go against their own moral grain.

Love also demands the risk of letting go of oppressive ways of knowing, which of course also means taking the risk of replacing those broken beliefs with a faith in the expressions and perceptions of others. It demands the restoration of faith in our own experience, knowledge, and moral growth.[221]

And, finally, building the bridge between a moral way of knowing and a moral way of acting involves the risk and vulnerability associated with seeking help in solidarity and shared struggle *with* others. Moral oppression necessitates finding ways, wherever possible, to join others in stepping out from behind the door—all so teachers, students, and communities can unify feeling and productive action.

Fortunately, outlaw emotions are common within the schools, and so is the moral underworld. Thus, there are many constructive directions in which to channel these energies. Many families, for instance, share teachers' frustrations with the corporate and techno-bureaucratic mentalities that view their children as test scores and as financial assets or liabilities. And, of course, students are also very much aware of the harms inflicted on them by institutionalized practices.

Even though this awareness may be present, many people may not have the language to articulate the frustrations they feel and observe. Therefore, one thing teachers can do to better understand these mechanisms is to join and direct their allies to the vast networks of students, teachers, families, and communities who are actively advocating to free public schools from those practices that are so detrimental to humane learning environments. Many of these people coalesce in grassroots organizations, state-based opt out movements, and local teachers and students unions, which can be found online and in social media.

Through a range of modes—via blogs, online discussion groups, internet radio shows and podcasts, e-newsletters, webinars, and conferences—these organizations provide concerned citizens with information about the structures that bind the public schools. They also provide members with support spaces where they can share their stories. But more importantly, perhaps, they serve as networks for discussing what has been done and what types of direct actions might be pursued next.

Some national and grassroots organizations that provide excellent information and a variety of actions related to education are Journey for Justice Alliance, Forward Together Movement,[222] the Badass Teachers Association, Save Our Schools March, Network for Public Education, and Fund Education Now. State-based opt out movements are another great place to channel outlaw emotions. While opt out

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[218] See M. F. Belenky, B. M Clinchy, N. R. Goldberger, & J. M. Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); James Garrison, *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997), 29-56.

[220] Ibid., p. 41-42. Garrison argued, "People learn to grow in relationship with others, but only if they are vulnerable...The deeper and more intimate our relationships, the greater the potential risk and the greater the potential for growth."

[221] Becky L. Noël Smith, "Teaching in the institutional cage: Metaphor and collateral oppression", *Critical Questions in Education*, Volume 5, No. 2, (2014): 76-92.

[222] This organization is also known as the Moral Mondays March or HkonJ.

movements have primarily been geared toward resisting high-stakes testing in the past, they have recently started turning their efforts toward resisting competency-based education models and the push to technologize teaching and learning, assessment, curricula, and behavior management.

Thus, teachers, students, and families are increasingly putting their outlaw emotions to work in these networks to help support one another and cooperatively devise opt-out strategies and localized political and legal actions. United Opt Out National, The Opt Out Florida Network, Save Our School NJ, and NYS Allies for Public Education are a few recommendations for readers to contact if they have an interest in finding or starting their own localized groups.

> *… current schooling practices have grown so controlling and technologically-oriented that teachers are increasingly blocked from this important source of moral reflection.*

Finally, whether educators like to admit it or not, teaching is a political job on both macroscopic and microscopic scales: pay raises, job security, school funding, how we teach, what we teach, and who runs our workplace—all of these come down to politics, broadly understood. Teachers can certainly put their outlaw emotions to productive use by participating in their local teachers union, but another effective use might be running for local office or school board. In fact, the recent growth and support of social media networks committed to democratic participation in school politics has made this option much more feasible for family members, educators, and academics.

Another way that teachers can maintain political action in their communities is by offering support to a local students union. Some students unions around the country—Newark, Boston, Providence, and Philadelphia to name a few—have done some amazingly progressive organizing in the last couple of years. When approached with an open mind, adults stand to learn much from the insights of these youth movements and the ways they utilize their outlaw emotions.

Ultimately, what I have attempted to pursue in this paper is the idea that a teacher's professional and personal growth develops through close attention to the lives of her students. In this respect, the "sympathetic data" of students and colleagues urges teachers to reflect on their practice. Yet current schooling practices have grown so controlling and technologically-oriented that teachers are increasingly blocked from this important source of moral reflection. Perhaps, by reconnecting with youth and communities *outside* the school doors, teachers can regain the energy and support that is deeply needed if we are to turn our schools into humane places.

As it often does with the act of teaching, the energy we use in supporting spaces for student growth and agency very often comes back around to rejuvenate us in our own desire to keep pushing onward.

Becky L. Noël Smith is a former public school teacher, a mother, and a doctoral student at the University of Alabama. She has the privilege of putting her teaching and learning experiences to use in her work with future teachers in her university's undergraduate program. Becky advocates for democratic policies and practices in the public's schools through her work as a board member of Save Our Schools March and as a co-founder of The Opt Out Florida Network. Her research interests focus on philosophy of education, history of education in the U.S., social theories, and the persistent struggle to make public schooling more humane.

Éduquer à la démocratie et au militantisme

Anne-Marie Duclos
University of Montreal

La Philosophie pour enfants de Matthew Lipman (PPE) est un programme pédagogique et philosophique pour lequel je me passionne depuis près de quinze ans. Aujourd'hui doctorante en psychopédagogie et superviseure de stage à l'Université de Montréal, j'offre des animations en Philosophie pour enfants dans les écoles et centres à la petite enfance, ainsi que des formations aux éducateurs et enseignants. Alors que d'autres auront un bagage davantage axé sur la discipline de la philosophie, la mienne est plutôt ancrée dans la pratique et la formation avec les élèves, les enseignants et futurs enseignants. Savoir concilier la philosophie, mais surtout la pédagogie me semble être idéal pour animer des séances de Philosophie pour enfants. Dans ce texte, je présenterai brièvement la Philosophie pour enfants de Matthew Lipman (PPE) ainsi que le néolibéralisme en éducation pour ensuite expliquer en quoi la PPE s'inscrit dans la nouvelle éducation au caractère.

La Philosophie pour enfants

Le programme lipmanien[223] se compose de quatre principales étapes. Il s'agit de 1) lire un conte philosophique; 2) collecter les questions des enfants par rapport à l'histoire; 3) réfléchir et discuter ensemble sur la question choisie; 4) s'autoévaluer. Le conte philosophique, con-

trairement au conte non philosophique, possède des tensions, des dilemmes, des conflits non résolus qui laissent place à la réflexion et qui provoquent les pensées critique et créatrice. La période de questions permet de mettre en évidence ce qui a marqué ou touché les enfants par rapport à ce conte. Ils sont alors invités à voter pour la question de leur choix puisque la discussion leur appartient.

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On vise à ce moment une discussion philosophique qui est caractérisée par la recherche commune d'un objectif à atteindre, soit de tracer des propositions réfléchies en lien avec le questionnement de départ. Lors de ces discussions à visée philosophique, l'enseignant est un guide qui amène les participants à pousser leurs réflexions et à s'enrichir des idées des autres selon l'approche socioconstructiviste. Finalement, les participants sont invités à s'autoévaluer sur des habiletés sociales et/ou intellectuelles qui auront été préalablement déterminées en groupe. Avec mes élèves du préscolaire jusqu'en sixième année du primaire, j'ai longtemps animé des séances hebdomadaires selon la méthode Lipman. Voici un court extrait d'une séance de PPE sur le thème du partage avec des enfants de 5 ans :

> *À qui est la nourriture dans le réfrigérateur et dans le garde-manger à la maison?*
> Enfant de 5 ans*: à toute la famille.*
> *Est-ce que vous partagez la nourriture?*
> Enfant*: Oui, mes parents partagent avec moi et me donnent la nourriture dans une assiette.*

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[223] Matthew Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, 2ᵉ éd. (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Et est-ce que toi, tu partages la nourriture avec eux?
Enfant*: Oui, quand je n'ai pas fini mon assiette.*
Est-ce qu'on peut partager ses vêtements?
Enfant *: Oui, quand on devient plus grand et que l'autre est resté petit.*

Plusieurs paroles des enfants me font rire, mais elles sont aussi parfois très profondes, simples et tellement honnêtes:

Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire « être courageux » ?
Enfant de 5 ans*: Ça veut dire s'entrainer à ne pas avoir peur.*
Ou Quand papa maman n'ont pas le temps d'écouter leur enfant qui veut leur demander quelque chose, qu'est-ce qu'ils devraient faire?
Enfant de 5 ans : *Ils devraient lui dire doucement « attends » et après revenir le voir et dire « maintenant j'ai du temps ».*

Malheureusement, la plupart de ces discussions n'ont pas laissé de traces écrites, mais elles sont souvent surprenantes et très enrichissantes pour les enfants (et pour l'animatrice) qui sont fiers de partager leurs réflexions sans qu'un adulte leur fasse la morale. Pour moi, l'expérience de la Philosophie pour enfants l'emporte sur les connaissances théoriques de cette méthode. Il en est sûrement de même pour l'expérience de la démocratie, voire du militantisme, que je tenterai ici de relier à une notion d'éducation au caractère.

En effet, je pense qu'il est possible de réaliser des séances de Philosophie pour enfants (PPE) qui mènent à une expérience démocratique plus grande et à une nouvelle éducation au caractère plus ancrée dans l'action critique. Par expérience démocratique, j'entends une expérience où chacun et chacune participe activement à la rencontre d'un lieu ou d'un but commun en respectant, dans la mesure du possible, ses désirs et aspirations, tout en considérant l'autre et la collectivité dans son ensemble avec empathie et sensibilité.

Je pense que la démocratie est impossible si certaines personnes sont laissées pour compte et où l'individualisme et l'intolérance règnent. Cela rejoint d'ailleurs les fondements de la méthode Lipman, soit de réfléchir à une question commune par l'engagement de tous et toutes, en faisant preuve d'empathie et d'entraide. Loin de vouloir promouvoir la conformité aux normes déjà établies par nos sociétés actuelles comme peut le suggérer une forme d'éducation au caractère, je désire plutôt, par le biais des séances de PPE, que soient contestés les conditionnements, les mythes reçus et la pensée unique. Cette expérience démocratique se reflète aussi dans l'action puisqu'elle peut guider les conduites et influencer nos choix citoyens.

> **En effet, je pense qu'il est possible de réaliser des séances de Philosophie pour enfants (PPE) qui mènent à une expérience démocratique plus grande et à une nouvelle éducation au caractère plus ancrée dans l'action critique.**

Mais plaçons-nous d'abord dans le contexte global du néolibéralisme, logique dominante, si ce n'est qu'unique à l'échelle internationale, ainsi que ses implications au niveau de l'éducation. Cela permettra de mieux comprendre pourquoi je perçois les pensées critique, créatrice et empathique que suscitent les discussions à visée philosophique comme une expérience contestataire.

Le néolibéralisme en éducation

Le néolibéralisme serait l'idéologie du capitalisme radical contemporain utilisé pour légitimer la supériorité de la logique de marché sur la

démocratie au nom de la liberté individuelle et économique. Cette idéologie dominante s'immisce dans toutes les sphères de la vie humaine, y compris l'éducation.

À cet effet, selon Nico Hirtt,[224] les effets pervers du néolibéralisme attaquent notamment les fondements démocratiques de l'éducation, soit de 1- garantir l'égalité des chances en vue d'une émancipation sociale, 2- favoriser le développement intégral de la personne et dévoiler son potentiel maximal et 3- former des citoyens et citoyennes critiques, responsables et libres, aptes à participer à une société démocratique.

Bien que les conséquences désastreuses du néolibéralisme en éducation soient moins prononcées au Québec qu'aux États-Unis, par exemple, elles sont tout de même suffisamment présentes pour que nous soyons très inquiets de l'avenir de notre système éducatif. Par exemple, la déresponsabilisation de notre gouvernement provincial envers l'éducation se constate à plusieurs points de vue : coupes importantes et drastiques, modification de la Loi sur l'instruction publique sur laquelle repose notre système éducatif qui établit des objectifs mesurables à atteindre et responsabilise (dans une moindre mesure) les enseignants des résultats de leurs élèves, large financement de l'état aux établissements privés, augmentation des élèves à besoins particuliers sans service dans les classes régulières, fermetures de classes afin de maximiser les ratios d'élèves par enseignant, précarisation de la profession enseignante, et j'en passe.

Ayant des répercussions sur le système éducatif, les réformes éducatives et le travail enseignant, les conséquences du néolibéralisme en éducation ont aussi un grave impact sur les élèves d'aujourd'hui et les générations à venir. En effet, en plus du désengagement de l'état envers l'éducation, on constate une reproduc-tion des inégalités sociales à l'intérieur des murs de l'école dues à la compétitivité et la logique de marché, ainsi qu'une économie du savoir où le gouvernement supprime les cours qui ne correspondent plus aux besoins des grandes entreprises.

> ## *les enfants et adolescents se retrouvent devant une perte d'humanité,*

Par exemple, au cours des dernières années, un nombre alarmant de cours universitaires ont été retirés des programmes puisque leurs impacts économiques n'étaient pas assez importants. Ces cours se rattachent principalement aux disciplines des arts, des langues, de la littérature, de la musique et de la philosophie. On retrouve un constat semblable aux ordres primaire et secondaire où les arts plastiques et dramatiques, l'éducation physique et la musique sont graduellement éliminés. Bref, les enfants et adolescents se retrouvent devant une perte d'humanité, comme le mentionne Martha Nussbaum,[225] au profit de l'individualisme et de la logique managériale. Ici, non seulement les droits et libertés de la majorité des citoyens et citoyennes ne sont pas pris en compte, mais ils sont bafoués par cette pensée hégémonique qui ne profite qu'aux plus puissants. De plus, le droit à l'épanouissement de son potentiel personnel et à l'affranchissement social qui constituent les fondements humanistes de l'éducation sont complètement méprisés par le néolibéralisme qui prône plutôt la liberté individuelle économique, c'est-à-dire le droit de s'enrichir sans contrainte en faisant fi de la dignité humaine et environnementale.

La méthode de Lipman représente une forme d'éducation au caractère, vu ici comme

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[224] Nico Hirtt, "Markets and Education in the Era of Globalized Capitalism," in *Global Neoliberalism and Education and Its Consequences*, ed. D. Hill and R. Kumar (Routledge, 2009).

[225] Martha Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

« toutes activités éducatives implicites et explicites qui aident les jeunes à développer des forces personnelles positives appelées vertus. »[226] En effet, plutôt que de devenir des moutons noirs qui reproduisent les effets néfastes de nos sociétés en perte de sens, la Philosophie pour enfants nous apprend à penser par et pour nous-mêmes, comme le dit Michel Sasseville.[227] Elle permet de développer la capacité à questionner la pensée dominante, à réfléchir à de meilleures options et à participer ensemble à un projet significatif commun. Pour moi, c'est une forme de militantisme. En discutant ensemble d'un idéal à atteindre basé sur des valeurs universelles et, dans sa forme, sur des habiletés sociales telles que le respect, la solidarité et le partage, les participants sont activement impliqués dans ce qu'on appelle une communauté de recherche philosophique. En ce sens, les participants sont des militants qui arrivent à appliquer en paroles et en gestes des valeurs à défendre au moyen et à la suite des discussions à visée philosophique. Et, de par ce dont j'ai été témoin durant les années où j'animais régulièrement des séances de PPE avec mes élèves, ces résultats sont bien tangibles.

Un garçon qui règle ses conflits différemment sur la cour d'école, une petite fille qui ira parler à une amie pour lui dire ses sentiments et lui demander les siens à la suite d'une chicane, un élève qui dénonce une situation d'intimidation ou une autre qui devient particulièrement touchée par les enjeux environnementaux tout en étant en mesure de justifier ses positions. Apprendre à élever sa voix, s'opposer à ce qui nous semble être contre nos valeurs, propager notre empathie et sensibilité aux autres ; ces paroles et comportements ne sont-ils pas empreints de caractère?

Mais pour arriver à cela, il faut avoir pensé, il faut avoir pris du temps pour réfléchir et discuter avec les autres et c'est ce que permet de faire la PPE. Par le développement des habiletés sociales pendant les séances de PPE (écoute, respect des idées des autres, entraide, etc.), les participants apprennent à prendre soin des autres. Tandis que par le développement des pensées critique et créatrice, ils deviennent de plus en plus aptes à nuancer leurs propos, questionner les sources d'informations, ériger un argumentaire qui respecte les règles de la logique, etc. À mon avis, tout cela fonde le caractère de citoyens et citoyennes qui cesseront de se faire berner par les détours intellectuels qu'utilisent les médias, politiciens ou firmes de relations publiques de ce monde.

Apprendre à élever sa voix, s'opposer à ce qui nous semble être contre nos valeurs, propager notre empathie et sensibilité aux autres ; ces paroles et comportements ne sont-ils pas empreints de caractère?

Pour moi, les exemples cités précédemment ne sont pas uniquement dus à la maturité naturelle, mais surtout aux compétences de sens critique et empathique développées par nos communautés de recherche philosophique. Mon mémoire de maîtrise sous la direction de M. Michael Schleifer et Mme Marie-France Daniel, avait d'ailleurs montré qu'un groupe d'enfants de 5 ans ayant expérimenté la PPE pendant 8 mois à raison d'une fois par semaine avait connu une amélioration de la compréhen-

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[226] Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, *A framework for character education in schools*, (traduction de A.-M. Duclos), http://jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/character-education/Framework%20for%20Character%20Education.pdf

[227] Michel Sasseville, *La Pratique De La Philosophie Avec Les Enfants*, 3 ed. (Sainte-Foy, Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2009).

sion des émotions significativement supérieure à celle d'un groupe contrôle.[228]

L'interdépendance entre les émotions et la cognition, démontrée notamment par les recherches du neurologue Antonio Damasio,[229] est bien présente en PPE. Autrement dit, lorsqu'on ressent mieux, on pense mieux, et vice-versa. Les discussions à visée philosophique impliquées dans l'approche Lipman contribuent à ces deux aspects intrinsèquement reliés. J'ai aussi noté de mon expérience sur le terrain que les élèves en difficultés de comportement et/ou d'adaptation sont très réceptifs aux séances de Philosophie pour enfants. Je n'ai pas trouvé de recherches sur cet aspect précis, mais je soupçonne que ce soit parce que ces élèves en difficultés possèdent une sensibilité particulière que les autres n'ont pas toujours. Étant donné leurs réalités parfois plus dures, ils peuvent peut-être développer davantage leur empathie. La principale limite que j'ai pu observer durant les séances de PPE est la suivante : un nombre d'élèves souvent très élevé en classe fait en sorte qu'il est difficile de donner la chance à tous et à toutes de prendre la parole. L'expérience générale des séances de PPE demeure toutefois bénéfique à mon avis.

Éduquer à la démocratie et au militantisme par la PPE

Finalement, comme je l'ai souligné, l'éducation dans les filets du néolibéralisme ne peut plus se baser sur des valeurs aussi vides de sens que la financiarisation de l'économie au profit d'une classe dominante. Il devient maintenant nécessaire de développer les pensées critique et em-

pathique qui s'opposent à l'endoctrinement et l'individualisme. Pour une nouvelle formation au caractère critique, je souhaiterais une éducation aux vertus qui implique l'engagement social dans l'espoir d'une reconstruction démocratique plus combative. Habiliter les enfants à remettre en question la pensée dominante, se méfier de la pensée unique et chercher des alternatives qui respectent la dignité humaine et environnementale est primordial. En plus d'éduquer au développement d'habiletés sociales, nous devons donc éduquer à la démocratie et au militantisme. Je propose que la PPE soit un moyen pour le faire afin de contribuer à un dépassement nécessaire de l'idéologie dominante dans nos sociétés. La PPE est une pratique en soi qui peut amener des changements de pensée et d'action dont nous avons grandement besoin aujourd'hui.

Anne-Marie Duclos est enseignante de formation. Elle a enseigné pendant 10 ans au préscolaire et primaire et supervise maintenant des futurs enseignants au Centre de formation initial des maîtres de l'Université de Montréal. Doctorante en psychopédagogie à cette même université, elle offre aussi des animations et formations en Philosophie pour enfants.

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[228] A.-M. Duclos, *La Philosophie Pour Enfants Comme Outil De Compréhension Des Émotions* (Sarrebruck, Allemagne : Presses Académiques Francophones, 2012).

[229] Antonio Damasio, *Spinoza Avait Raison* (Paris : Odile Jacob, 2005); Antonio Damasio, *L'erreur De Descartes : La Raison Des Émotions* (Paris : Odile Jacob, 2006).

PDSA in Education: Creating the Home Library Project Using QI Practices

Katie Fiorelli

Literacy Lab at Rees E. Price Academy

The realities of life in Price Hill necessitate a degree of grit unfathomable to many around our community in Greater Cincinnati. While a beautiful day on the east side of town connotes visits to the park and walks to an ice cream parlor, in Price Hill it often means violence, and possibly, a deadly shooting.

A recent review of crime statistics shows that District 3, the region in which Price Hill is located, reported 19 homicides, 53 rapes, 286 robberies and 152 aggravated assaults between January 1 and September 3 of 2016.[230] Addiction is also rampant in our neighborhood. Over the course of two days in August, 78 overdoses were reported in Hamilton County, fourteen of them were concentrated in District 3, seven of which were directly attributed to West Price Hill.[231]

Additionally, Rees E. Price Academy, a neighborhood school in Price Hill and the location in which I have the pleasure of working, had the highest rate of homelessness in all of Cincinnati Public School in school year 2015-2016.[232] All our students qualify for free breakfast and lunch, based off of CPS's Community Eligibility model.

I am the director of a program that works to close the achievement gap in my school. My program is known as the Literacy Lab, and I believe we represent a beacon of hope within our community.[233] We use Dibels, MAP data and teacher recommendations to recruit fifty students from kindergarten to fourth grade, clustering students in scaffolded groups that offer the most stimulating and supportive environments. The Literacy Lab focuses on reading and math enrichments and interventions for ten hours per week after school, with time for snack, fitness, and social-emotional support. Our mission is to help counterbalance some of poverty's effects by creating a warm place for engaging education, with a low adult-to-student ratio and plenty of hands-on lessons.

As a grant-funded program, I diligently address all requirements of our proposal. Yet there is one phrase in our grant that particularly jumped out at me—that the Literacy Lab is charged to "help youth develop an intrinsic love of reading." This line reflects my core belief that the greatest gift you can ever give students is not only the skills, but also the enjoyment of, reading.

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[230] This is in stark contrast with District 2 on the east side of town, which reported 3 homicides, 21 rapes, 70 robberies and 44 aggravated assaults in the same amount of time. Cincinnati Police Department STARS Meeting Profile, Reporting Period: 08/07/2016-09/03/2016. Pulled 09/06/2016

[231] Patrick Brennan and Kevin Grasha, "Region Continues to Grapple with Spike in Overdoses," *Cincinnati.com*, August 25, 2016, accessed September 03, 2016, http://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2016/08/25/police-woman-found-possible-overdose-victim/89338930/ and Tom McKee and Greg Noble, "Police Hunt Heroin Dealers behind Cincinnati Overdose Spike," WCPO, August 25, 2016, , accessed September 03, 2016, http://www.wcpo.com/news/local-news/hamilton-county/cincinnati/police-hunt-heroin-dealers-behind-cincinnati-overdose-spike.

[232] As reported by Project Connect, the Cincinnati Public Schools program to support homeless families in the district.

[233] Our program was made possible by the Community Learning Center model in Cincinnati Public Schools, in which individual schools partner with outside organizations to increase access for improved "recreational, educational, social, health, civic and cultural opportunities for students, families, and the community." Though I work in the school, I am employed by the YMCA of Greater Cincinnati, Rees E. Price Academy's CLC partner. "CPS' Community Learning Centers," accessed October 21, 2016, http://www.cps-k12.org/community/clc.

Though I value the potential of Common Core to increase the analytical reading skills of our children, I continue to search for mandates that emphasize the components of exploration, discovery, and delight--experiences that made my own schooling a positive experience and that continue to motivate me as an adult. I accepted this one phrase as a ray of hope, a sign that our current system holds some of the intangibles of education in enough esteem to fund them.

In addition to our daily practices, which include reading beautiful books, increasing phonemic awareness and fluency, and reinforcing components of the STEM studies, we also support reading in the home. Originally, I thought that meant one objective: get more books in our kids' houses.

Whenever we had a parent engagement event, we handed out books. We gave away books as prizes for behavior. We distributed books as part of our holiday celebration. The stark statistics in Neuman and Celano's study, that a middle class home was likely to have 13 books per child, while in impoverished communities there may only be one book for every 20 children, spurred my drive to distribute as many texts as possible.[234]

It took a few attempts at this strategy for me to conclude that simply *sending* books with students was not going to lead to a love of reading. Both parents and children thrilled at our book giveaways, eagerly choosing books that fit their interest. However, when I would check in with the recipients, asking whether or not they enjoyed the narrative, I would often hear that they could no longer recall where the book was. The answers to the follow-up question, "Well, where do you keep your books,"

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captured the crux of the issue. "In the toy chest," "On the floor," or "I don't know."

This immediately drew me back to my experience in third grade, when sundry papers, assignments, and folders would disappear into my cavernous backpack, never to be seen again. It took the dedicated instruction of my homeroom teacher to demonstrate not only the importance of organization, but exactly how to do it. She labeled tabs in a binder, taught me how to use a planner, and checked in with me frequently until the practices became ingrained. I decided that to increase reading at home, educators may need to intentionally teach skills around organizational habits in addition to increasing book ownership.

While this discovery unfolded, our principal invited me to join a workgroup focused on increasing the rate of third graders reading on grade level, the line in the sand selected by the state of Ohio to determine whether a student is promotable. Through this workgroup, we met with experts in Quality Improvement (QI) from Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center and StrivePartnership, who explained the revolutionary concept of the PDSA.

PDSA stands for Plan, Do, Study, Act, and represents a QI model with similar qualities to pragmatist hope. It acknowledges that many industries, including education, identify issues in need of change and then attempt to boldly, rapidly, and unilaterally change them through new initiatives. However, these proposals often lack consideration of the human element in the actual process, and while solid in theory, in practice leave something to be desired. PDSAs disrupt this model by offering a different way, one of small changes frequently analyzed, which allow agile adjustments, timely feedback, and an end product that reflects and adapts to the realities inherent in rolling out a new program. The PDSA model provided a framework with which to tackle our guiding question: how do we get students to read more, and enjoy doing so?

Our first task was to help our student designate a dedicated space in their homes for books to nurture their organizational skills. Our theory was that once the habit of book storing was established a student would be more likely to choose to read for pleasure, as they had both access and personal ownership of the books. The question of a proper receptacle with which to organize the books answered itself easily when I looked around my office and saw that many of my own books were stored in milk crates. They were sturdy, lightweight, and most importantly, portable.

Having the highest rate of homelessness in Cincinnati Public Schools means that a number of our students move multiple times per year, and many of their possessions are left behind. Providing a convenient, ready-to-move container was critical. I guessed that decorating the crates with ribbons, stickers, and oil-based pens might get students invested in these containers. If they felt pride about the exterior, there was an increased probability that they would care about the contents in the interior.

Two steps remained, creating parent buy-in and designing accountability measures. A solution that addressed both components was inspired by the concept of #shelfie day, a hashtag and movement originating in 2014 from the New York Public Library, in which selfies captured in libraries were encouraged to promote a love for and exploration of libraries.[235] I knew that most of our parents had smartphones and enjoyed sharing pictures of their children. Weekly photos of a student with their home library would offer timely data points and could serve as a conversation starter for me and the students about the care and maintenance of a

space that was their own. For each picture I received, students earned a brand new book of their choice.[236] By rewarding students for their efforts, we also hoped to engage any students who may have lost previous books as a form of resistance, as they may have been interpreted as a "hand out."

> *Weekly photos of a student with their home library would offer timely data points and could serve as a conversation starter for me and the students about the care and maintenance of a space that was their own.*

Our first family was selected using guidelines from the PDSA model—the idea was to approach participants who may be more likely to persevere through the snags associated with start-ups. Two sisters, who had been abandoned by their mother a few years prior and were currently housing-unstable, expressed an insatiable eagerness to read and desire to be the masters of their own small domains. They eagerly embraced the milk crate as a legitimate medium, decorated them with ribbons and

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[235] In one day over 3,000 photos were tagged, from fourteen different countries. Morgan Holzer, "20 Ways to Make People Fall in Love With Your Instagram: A Guide for Libraries and Other Cultural Institutions," The New York Public Library, December 23, 2014, accessed October 1, 2016, https://www.nypl.org/blog/2014/12/23/20-ways-make-people-fall-love-your-instagram-guide-libraries-and-other-cultural.

[236] The project was made possible by incredibly generous donations from across our community and the country. Jane O'Brien, a retired nun and teacher who volunteered with our program acted as our champion. She requested that I create an Amazon Wish List of everything I could dream of, from Caldecott and Coretta Scott King award-winners to oil based markers and ribbons, and ultimately posted it on her Facebook page and put out an appeal to her former students to donate. The response we received was overwhelming, and even included a check that funded our first purchase of milk crates. Their generosity underpinned my desire to offer bright, beautiful, new books as part of this process. This stemmed from a belief that simply because someone lacked something (in this case, funding for a home library) it did not mean they desired the beauty or value of new books any less than someone who could afford them. Privacy between the parties was protected by remind.com, a communication platform that allows text messages to be sent without either party knowing the other's phone number.

stickers, and selected their first book.[237] Their father sent the first photo the day after the milk crates went home. From this first PDSA I realized I wanted the pictures right away, and that I should focus on engaged parents as much as interested students.

> *The teachers and administration appreciated the culture we were building around reading, and they were caught up in the spirit of the families' accomplishments when they viewed images of their students grinning in front of their own libraries. Not only did this project develop hope, it created joy.*

Our next family was chosen due to the mother's interest in discussing her children's academic progress and delight in taking and sharing photos.[238] They took four days to send their initial pictures, but once the brother and sister realized that each photo earned them a new book, they enthusiastically pursued me each time they knew a photo had been captured. Their mother sent creative pictures, which sparked a whole new trajectory for the project. The kids might be reading to younger siblings, or recreating scenes from the book with their toys, or drawing their favorite picture from within. This type of engagement was beyond my aspirations and reinforced the potential of the project to change how our students interacted with, and understood, reading. I took

this mother's direction and created a "shot list" to encourage other families to interact with the books in numerous ways.[239]

Our third family had excellent attendance and a mother who I knew she had the necessary technology. They ended up with the quickest turnaround time between the family receiving milk crates and sending a photo: a thrilling two hours! Later, a clear correlation between the day of milk crate receipt, sending the first picture, and overall project participation developed, as we can read from the chart: the sooner the picture was sent, the more likely it was that the family would send a picture on a weekly basis (see Figure 1).[240]

Over the following weeks, this mother and I developed our relationship when discussing the state of the home libraries and her children's reading level. We identified that one child was significantly more reserved about reading out loud than his younger brother. It also became apparent that their mom thought the apex of positive reading habits was having her kids read to her, and not the other way around. It felt gratifying to suggest to her own value—value that could be realized through her reading aloud to her children, and see how that impacted her children's love of books.

Based on her feedback, I started encouraging other adults to read to their children, in addition to being an engaged audience when their children read to them. When the school year started again in August, one parent asked for new crates because his sons had filled their original two—which I was thrilled to supply. The older brother is now officially on track to be reading at a promotable level by the end of the year, and is devouring books like *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*.

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[237] I had been concerned about the possibility that the milk crates would be seen as substandard in some way.

[238] She had borrowed learning games from our program to help her daughter learn CVC words and attended all our family events, making sure to show me all the photos she captured of her kids.

[239] Potential pictures ideas included "Child with home library and reading to their pet," "Child with home library dressed up like a character in a book," and "Child with home library and acting out a part in the book."

[240] Many thanks to Gowri Madhavan, Senior Analyst at Cincinnati Children's, for transforming our numbers into a clear narrative.
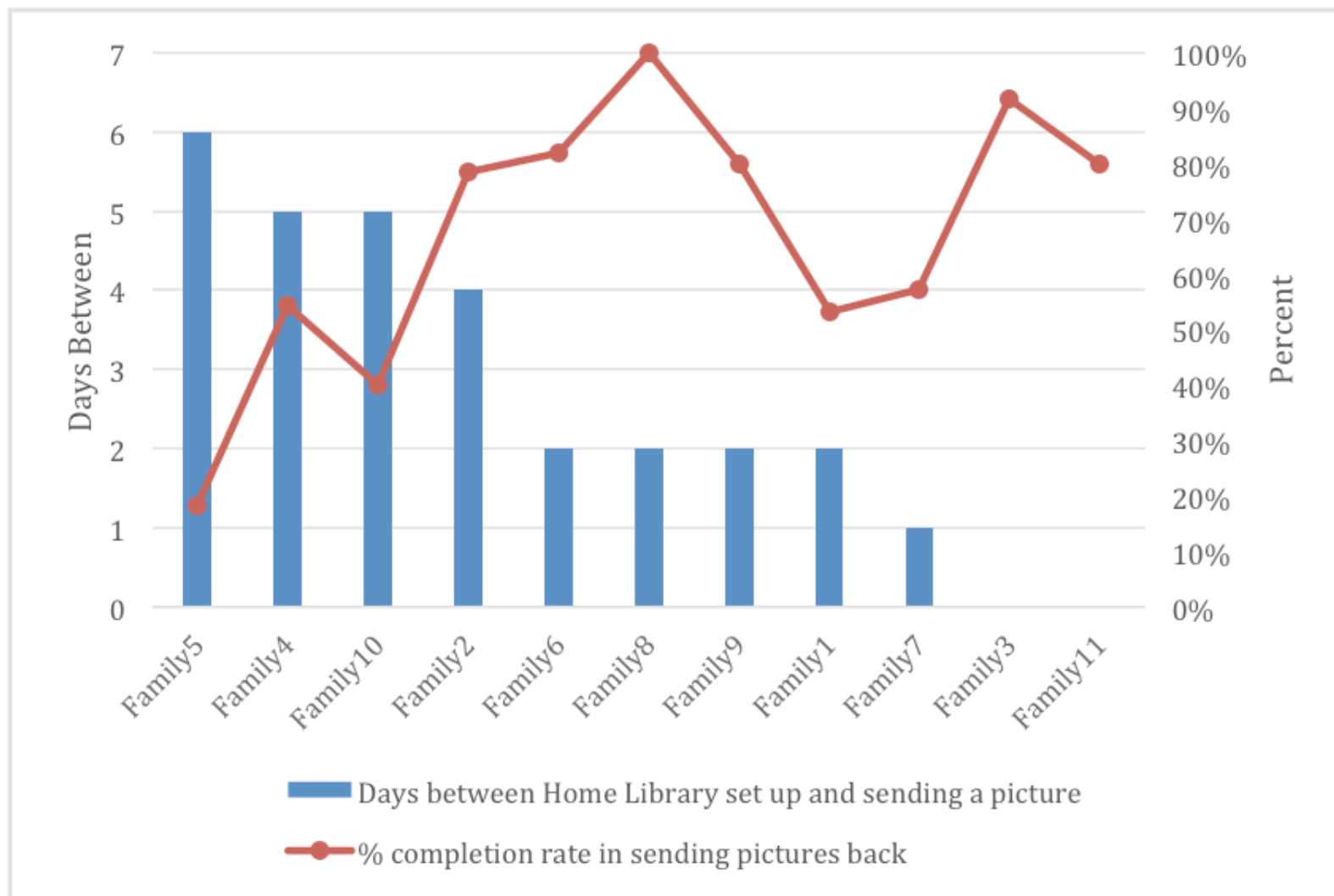
Eventually we added eleven families, with varying degrees of response rates. I found sending a reminder text to one family always resulted in a new picture, and adapted my process to send out weekly prompts to all participants. Over the course of fourteen weeks, about 50% of the families sent a picture each week. Of course, this rate is more indicative of how busy our lives can become than interest in our project. Some weeks parents may have been exhausted from a taxing work schedule. Another family might be fixing up their house and therefore did not want to capture their domicile in less than optimal conditions. Occasionally, a child's primary caretaker was out of town. One family missed two weeks because the mom had just given birth.

This project impacted our community in big and small ways. Our students learned that their organizational efforts generated rewards. 83 percent of our parents strongly agreed that since starting the Home Library Project their children were more excited about reading, and 100 percent either agreed or strongly agreed that their children spent more time reading.[241] One parent commented, "Now they can actually find their books and ask to read." Another noted, "She reads out loud more to herself and others."

The teachers and administration appreciated the culture we were building around reading, and they were caught up in the spirit of the families' accomplishments when they viewed images of their students grinning in front of their own libraries. Not only did this project develop hope, it created joy. The children proudly showed their weekly Home Library photos off to fellow classmates and teachers, and excitedly chose their next book. They created thoughtful habits around book selection, organization, and discussion.[242]

I find the PDSA process to share comparable origins to pragmatist hope as it focuses on concrete, rather than wishful, ways in which change can be wrought. The process is agile enough to meet the needs of those involved, rather than blaming them if and when a procedure does not succeed. It can capture the best ideas of those participating, therefore honoring the experiences, ideas, and insight of all involved.

The people we serve are not asked to fit to our expectations. Rather, we, the organizers of this project, are tasked to legitimately create workflows and projects that meet people where they are, not just where we expect them or would like them to be. The onus is on those in positions of power and privilege to adapt and persevere, incorporating timely feedback from the people they intend to serve—feedback which should ideally impact not only means, but ends.[243]

Though hopeful, the PDSA, by necessity, must embrace the realities in which it is situated. So, of course, should any worthy educational project that takes seriously Dewey's notion of an "end-in-view." The model identifies an issue or injustice and systematically applies hypothesis, trial, error, feedback, and reflection until a solution is found (or it is determined that this particular approach should be abandoned).[244]

As an educator, I found that the permission to fail was incredibly freeing. This permission felt like a rare gift in our current climate of

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tracking element. To earn a new book, families will need to send two pictures: the first charts their reading each week, with a minimum of sixty minutes to earn the book, the second shows the home library.

[243] This is in contrast to grit as defined by Angela Duckworth, in which the "singularly important goal" to increase reading levels could be set and gritty families would be assumed to be capable of figuring out how to execute the necessary steps with enough "stick-with-it-ness" and passion. "About the Book," Angela Duckworth, accessed October 01, 2016, http://angeladuckworth.com/grit-book/.

[244] The "Act" part of the PDSA can either mean a decision to adapt the plan based on reflection, adopt the plan, or abandon it, in order to start a new PDSA fueled by a different idea.

[241] Of the eleven families involved, six chose to complete our survey.
[242] Per the request of our parents, we will continue the Home Library Project in November of 2016. This time, the project will include a

high-stakes education. It enabled me to generate a more creative approach to tackle a problem. I am hopeful that others, particularly those in power throughout the education field, explore this model's potential to positively change their viewpoint and community, and that myriad students and families are empowered by innovative and evidence-based solutions generated by educators across the country.

Katie Fiorelli is the director of the Literacy Lab at Rees E. Price Academy, employed by the YMCA of Greater Cincinnati. She earned an M.A. in History with an education policy focus from the University of Cincinnati in 2015. She considers it her life's mission to increase children's love of reading.