Pedagogies of Voice

For our late elder, Tousilum Ronald Benedict George . . .

Sunrise: September 9, 1945

Sunset: October 5, 2023

Huy ch q'u*, thank you, for continuing to walk alongside us and giving us courage to say the things that matter, to speak the truth, and to cultivate the voices of the* ʻXe ʻxe smun'eem*—the sacred children in our care.*

For Solidarity . . .

Who stands as an unbreakable thread, woven through the hearts of teachers, students, and community leaders, fortified by our ancestors.

You are the soil that nourishes, the plants that feed us, and the sunlit trees that stand tall. You are the steady hand that bridges divides, the voice whispering, "We rise together," and the echo declaring, "In togetherness, we heal." You inspire courage in adversity, embody resilience in every shared story, and nurture empathy where hope and knowledge grow.

For the erased stories you elevate, the communities you unite around common causes, and the vision you sustain—a world where education is bridge, balm, and beacon.

May this book be a testament to your work and a seed planted in the hands of those who carry it forward, rooted in the legacy of those who came before. May it invite readers to join in the sacred act of uplifting every voice and building every bridge.

—Crystal, Marlo, Sawsan, and Shane (written by Sawsan Jaber)

Pedagogies of Voice

First Edition

Street Data and the Path to Student Agency

Shane Safir | Marlo Bagsik |
Sawsan Jaber | Crystal M. Watson

Foreword by Jennifer Gonzalez

CORWIN

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online resources

Visit the companion website at
https://pedagogiesofvoice.com
for downloadable resources.

Foreword

A sigh of resignation. That was the sound most of my fellow teachers made that afternoon in 2003.

We were gathered in the media center for an inservice, and we'd just been tasked with looking through lists of our students' reading scores and identifying the ones we might be able to push to the next bracket, kids who tested in the lowest two tiers and who might, with just enough intervention, move up a level. Once we'd made our list, our next step would be to create a plan for making that happen.

The five teachers at my table—our interdisciplinary team of middle school teachers—turned toward each other with a flatness that was palpable. It wasn't that we didn't want to see our kids grow. It wasn't that we were indifferent to the threat of our school being penalized for low test scores. The task just felt draining. At the time, had I been asked to explain why, I would have said we were pessimistic about any of it working, that people can't get motivated to do something if they don't feel like they'll be successful.

And that was definitely true in our case. Our plan for intervention certainly wasn't inspired; it included pulling the kids from extracurriculars for extra reading instruction and . . . wait, that was the whole plan. Just doing more of what we'd already been doing. And no one was surprised when our efforts barely moved the needle on our scores. More importantly, nothing we did turned any of those kids into people who love to read, who are forever changed by a book, who use their reading skills to build a better life for themselves and others.

Not once, not in this conversation or the many others like it over the years, did anyone ever suggest going to the source, that we try to solve this problem by listening to the very people who were most impacted by it.

No one ever said, "Why don't we ask the kids?"

Since 2013, I have been working to build an online platform that curates and shares what works in the classroom, the practices and mindsets that actually help students learn and grow. I have *always* prioritized the practical, the applicable—as a teacher myself, I often got frustrated when I heard an inspirational keynote or read some educational philosophy that grabbed me but left me without tools. I hated the feeling of knowing I needed to change *something* but not understanding *how to do it*. So at Cult of Pedagogy, I'm constantly asking, "What does it look like? Show us."

And I've found plenty to share. Often these are small strategies teachers can try right away. Other times, I've profiled larger programs that seem to be putting the right emphasis on the right things, positioning students to do more meaningful, authentic work. But even my best efforts usually feel fragmented—an instructional technique here, a classroom management strategy there—and I never quite came across anything that felt like it would actually get at the bigger systems or fix the deeper issues that let so many students fall through the cracks.

Then I read *Street Data*, and for the first time I thought, *This is it. This is what schools need to be doing*.

I loved that it was a little bit messy, that it didn't prescribe one specific approach to teaching but rather a path to *uncovering what students need*, a process that started and ended with going to those students who were in danger of falling through the cracks and listening to them. All schools are different, all kids are different, so one plan couldn't possibly work for everyone. What we need is a plan for finding out what will work for us. And that's what *Street Data* offers.

After interviewing Shane and Jamila for my podcast and loudly proclaiming that the *Street Data* approach was the best thing since sliced bread, I knew I hadn't done enough to get the word out, so I offered to document the process in a video series. Over the next year, I got a front-row seat as two teams of teachers did the work in their own classrooms. I got to listen to the voices of their students, witness each teacher's vulnerability as they processed the impact of their past choices, and watch them slowly shift toward practices that made their students feel like school was a true home for them.

I've also had the privilege of watching Shane Safir at work, and I can say these things with certainty: She cares deeply about making schools places where all students thrive, she is thoughtful and careful with her words, and she's a generous and humble collaborator, which is apparent in the way she has woven the voices of so many into this book and invited three

brilliant educators— Crystal, Marlo, and Sawsan—to help conceptualize and write this book. This layering of voices and perspectives gives this book a richness that wouldn't be possible from a single author.

I love two things about *Pedagogies of Voice*. The first is its vulnerability. The work we do as educators can be so incredibly raw, and any resource that attempts to help us do this work better has to embrace that rawness. It has to take it on and deal with it by sharing real, human stories. The authors of this book have done that by generously giving us their moments of vulnerability, their stories of doubt and hurt and, ultimately, connection with students. This is the real stuff you're faced with every day as a teacher, and in this book, you'll find four solid companions to walk alongside you.

The second thing I love about this book is its practicality. It offers dozens of actionable strategies and tools to put theory into practice, to go beyond understanding the importance of student voice and actually start centering it.

It's a book that answers the question "What does it look like when a teacher has listened carefully to students, centers their voices and experiences in the classroom, and teaches in a way that gives them agency? Show us."

It's the book my colleagues needed that afternoon in 2003. It's the book all teachers need now, regardless of setting, content area, grade level, or demographics. It's the book that will move us beyond half-heartedly pulling a few kids out of the cracks and instead, stand beside them and build something so much better.

Jennifer Gonzalez
Editor-in-Chief, Cult of Pedagogy

Preface

Be a good Ancestor with yourself

Children become adults

Adults become leaders

Leaders become elders

Elders become ***Ancestors***

—Leona and Gabrielle Prince (2022)

Dear Reader,

This is an invitation. An invitation to exercise our power as educators. An invitation to center our humanity and awaken student voice rather than uphold oppressive systems that we know are harmful. An invitation to dream and imagine schools and classrooms that liberate us to do right by our students while reigniting the spark that led us into this profession in the first place. We won't pretend to ignore the decades of misguided policies and practices that have served to silence the voices of students and educators alike. At the same time, our desire to write this book is fueled by our shared belief that such barriers can and must be dismantled: We simply can't live like this any longer. Our students deserve better, and we have the agency to transform our classrooms and the systems in which we work.

The four of us who crafted this book see you, beloved reader. We acknowledge the work you do every day and the stamina required to keep showing up for children in these complex times. We also affirm the part of you that is seeking, always seeking, to transform your practice—the part that brought you to us. We four—Crystal, Marlo, Sawsan, and Shane—have ancestral roots that stretch across the globe, and we come to you braiding together personal legacies of truth-telling, justice, and hope. Our own voices have been hard-won. Each of us has struggled to articulate stories of possibility—counter-narratives that nurture a Pedagogy of Voice—while simultaneously honoring who we are and where we come from.

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https://qrs.ly/iyg89s3

Meet our *Pedagogies of Voice* Book Team, the collective that has worked closely together for over two years to produce this offering in your hands.

Before writing this book, our team led a series of listening sessions with 25 educators from across North America. We asked, "What needs to be said, right here and now, in a book about student voice and agency?" The answers cracked our hearts open. Here are a few.

- "The truth needs to be told to awaken people." —Robert Liimiiuum Hala'ayt Clifton, superintendent, Nisga'a School District 92, British Columbia
- "I feel like teachers have to do the heavy lifting . . . often without the support of administration." —Shikira Chang, Black Teacher Project leader and educator in New York City
- "Our youth are really scared." —Caroline Han, director of Diversity, Equity, and Belonging and U.S. history teacher, Wayland Public Schools
- "You're all my children." —Stacey Coonsis, self-described Navajo matriarch, former fourth-grade teacher and head of School for Native American Community Academy (NACA)
- "If you see one Black teacher, you see 100. If I'm at an event . . . there's a just an unspoken, like if we make eye contact, it's like 'I got you.' It instantly makes you feel better." —Roleen Demmings, Black Teacher Project leader, educator in Indianapolis

Awakening: Crystal's Corner

What do *you* believe needs to be said, right here and now? What truths does your voice carry that need to be spoken out loud?

These beautiful conversations helped to shape the book in your hands and reminded us that we are all, as Dr. Lisa Delpit shared on *Street Data Pod*, "elders-in-training" and future ancestors (Safir & Mumby, 2023b). The choices we make today will ripple out far beyond our classrooms and schools, planting seeds for the next seven generations of learners, a principle that originated with the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) people. To tend this aching planet and all its beings, we must create classrooms that honor and awaken the voices of our learners. Students are crying out to be heard. They are telling us—with and without words—that our existing compliance-focused pedagogies are silencing them and stifling critical parts of their identities. They are asking us to reimagine our classrooms and schools into liberatory, life-affirming spaces.

So many children feel invisible, unseen and unheard, but we have the power to shift this reality within our classrooms, to counteract the forces of oppression and harm. Co-author Sawsan Jaber writes, "Traditional school structures have functioned like factories, 'spirit murdering' (Love, 2019) students, assimilating their identities, invalidating their sense of self and contributing to a growing duality, particularly for marginalized students. The limitations of traditional pedagogical practices are creating dangerous prospects for our future. Adapting our practice to cultivate student agency will bolster every learner in our community, not just those at the margins." Rather than simply being spoon-fed content and skills, our children deserve to be welcomed into beloved communities where they can learn to be human together along with the literacy, numeracy, and critical engagement skills needed to navigate a complex world. Cognition and emotion can't be separated; they live hand in hand.

Think of your classroom as an incubation site for the next generation of leaders. Now more than ever, we need to create intergenerational learning spaces where young people have an opportunity to sit at the feet of elders to absorb their teachings and to lead by example as they mentor younger students. Today's youth know what they are capable of and what they deserve! They are actively chafing against the outdated structures we seem so desperate to preserve: grades, traditional tests, punitive discipline, sit-and-get instruction. And they inhabit an increasingly interconnected world. Will we meet them where they are at? Will we "teach and lead to simply reproduce reality as it exists, or will we teach and lead to transform it?" (Safir & Dugan, 2021). The choices we make every day matter.

The central metaphor of our book is the olive tree. Olive trees and branches are held symbols of peace across many different cultures, some of which date back thousands of years. They also are regarded as symbols of friendship, resilience, and resistance. Sawsan writes:

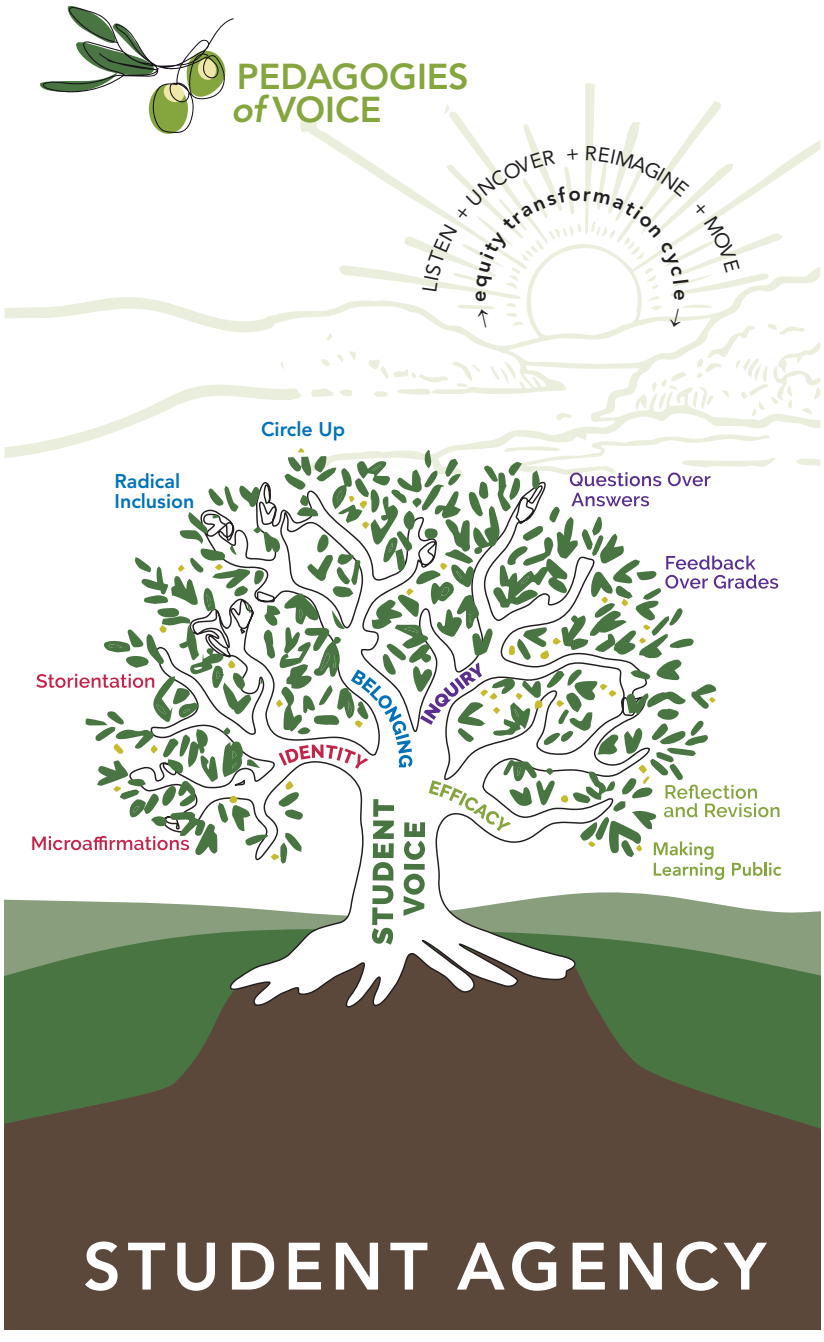
> Rooted. Like a deeply grounded olive tree, a symbol of my Palestinian tradition and heritage, my ancestry has been an invisible hand guiding my existence, shaping my fortitude and resilience, carving out my life journey, and providing me with the strength and wisdom of how to move forward in life's joy and challenges, as both a human and an educator. As a symbol of resistance, peace, and connection to the land, the olive tree is a powerful icon in Palestinian narratives and oral histories. Like Native Americans, Palestinians have a deep-rooted connection to nature and the land that lives in our blood and veins. Olive trees are a staple of generations of Palestinian resilience, resistance, fortitude, and ancestry.

The olive tree stands as a symbol of pride and the everlasting endurance of the human spirit. Our journey into *Pedagogies of Voice* begins in the DNA of the olive tree—its root system. We invite you to walk alongside us as we plant and fortify an expanding grove of trees under which future generations can take refuge. We will nourish this grove by providing you with Awakenings crafted by co-author Crystal M. Watson: reflective moments that activate your mind, heart, body, and spirit in service of pedagogical transformation. We will continually remind you of your power to transform learning: Not only are these practices liberating for learners, they will liberate *us* if we allow ourselves to be changed.

The Olive Tree: An Extended Metaphor That Informs the Organization of This Book

Part 1: In **Chapter 1**, we explore the case for a Pedagogy of Voice in these times of great social and political upheaval, tracing elements of the histories and pedagogical lineages that inform this project. In **Chapter 2**, we apply foundational concepts from *Street Data: A Next-Generation Model of Equity, Pedagogy, and School Transformation* (Safir & Dugan, 2021) to the classroom as point of impact, reflecting on what it looks like to "choose the margins" and gather Street Data. **Chapters 3 and 4** situate us in the soil beneath the olive tree by exploring *10 Toxins* that undermine a Pedagogy of Voice and *10 Ways of Being* that serve as antidotes. The toxins come to life through signature practices and narratives that keep us trapped in an incarceration of the imagination while

FIGURE 0.1 The Pedagogies of Voice Olive Tree



Graphic designed by Shane Safir with Emily Lewellen. In Figure 0.1, the element of Making Learning Public is inspired in part by research on **Public Learning** developed by Lead By Learning at Mills College, Northeastern University. For more on this organization's work, visit https://weleadbylearning.org/

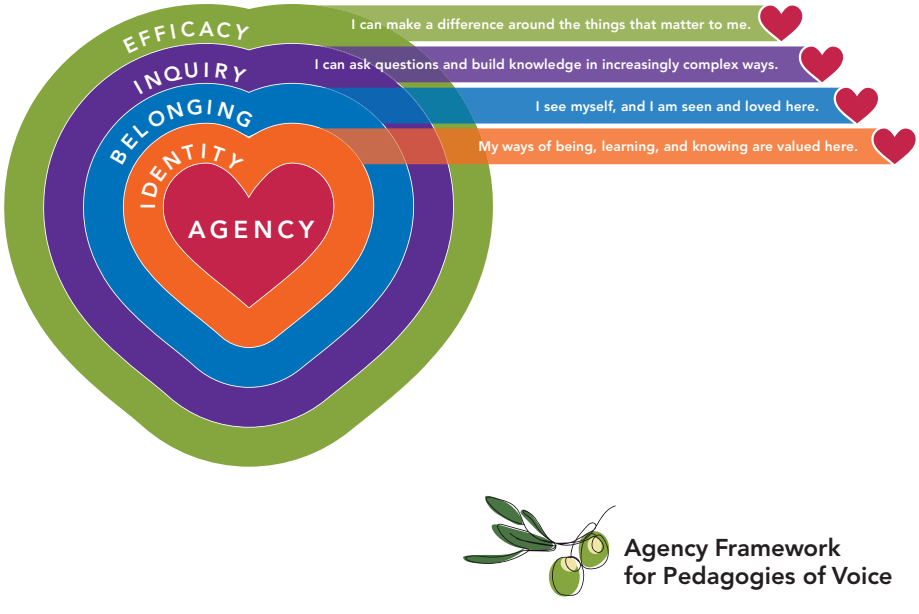
The Equity Transformation Cycle embedded in the sun was developed by Shane Safir for *Street Data* (Corwin, 2021).

the ways of being ground us in a sense of abundance and possibility. These foundational chapters will allow you to prepare the soil of your classroom and nourish a healthy root system for pedagogical shifts to emerge. Together, Chapters 3 and 4 scaffold us into what Sawsan call a "deep understanding of one's self-concept" and scholar Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz calls the "archaeology of the self" (Sealey-Ruiz, 2021).

Part 2: In **Chapters 5 through 8**, we grow the primary branches of our olive tree into four domains of agency as we construct the types of learning experiences that allow a learner to say the following:

- **Identity**: *My ways of being, learning, and knowing are valued here.*
- **Belonging**: *I see myself, and I am seen and loved here.*
- **Inquiry**: *I can ask questions and build knowledge in increasingly complex ways.*
- **Efficacy**: *I can make a difference around the things that matter to me.*

FIGURE 0.2 Agency Framework for Pedagogies of Voice



Source: Agency Framework developed for *Street Data* (2021) and adapted for *Pedagogies of Voice* by Shane Safir, 2024.

From these sturdy boughs, we grow 8 Pedagogies that stretch toward the sun and bear the delicious fruit of the olive, signifying moments of awakening in our learning spaces. Each of these practice-based chapters unpacks two pedagogies oriented to student agency. Chapter 5 (Pedagogies That Awaken Identity) features *Microaffirmations* and *Storientation* (Safir, 2017b); in Chapter 6 (Pedagogies That Awaken Belonging) we offer *Radical Inclusion* and *Circle Up*; the Chapter 7 (Pedagogies That Awaken Inquiry) pedagogies are *Questions Over Answers* and *Feedback Over Grades*; finally Chapter 8 (Pedagogies That Awaken Efficacy) includes *Making Learning Public* and *Reflection and Revision*. We hope that you walk away from these chapters feeling recharged, rejuvenated, and ready to try new things!

Part 3: We close the book with two chapters that illustrate the awakening of *teacher* voice and agency. In **Chapter 9**, we walk alongside teachers from the Street Data/Cult of Pedagogy Collaborative Inquiry Project as they use the Equity Transformation Cycle (ETC) from *Street Data* to reimagine their pedagogies in ways that center learners from the margins. Through these one-inch windows into classrooms, we weave *Street Data* and *Pedagogies of Voice* with an understanding of the cycle as the sun that constantly rises and sets over our grove of olive trees to ripen the fruit of learning. **Chapter 10** speaks directly to teacher leaders, coaches, and administrators as we offer 10 microshifts and 5 structural shifts to professional learning that will activate collective teacher efficacy. Finally, we close with an integrative case study of land-based learning from British Columbia-based educator John Harris. We included this case, not because we expect every reader to implement land-based learning in their own settings, but to offer a striking example of just what is possible when we open ourselves to new ways of being and begin to enact the *Pedagogies of Voice*.

An underlying assumption of this book is that learners should have access to academic content through a variety of modalities, including, but not limited to traditional print. Since this book positions you, the reader, as a learner with agency, we have supplemented the print text with a plethora of online resources, all of which can be accessed via QR codes in the marginalia of this book. We also acknowledge that a key component of learner agency is the freedom to choose areas of inquiry that match individual needs and interests. Putting this principle into practice meant providing you with abundant opportunities to expand your learning with respect to the topics covered in this book. While you may not have the time or need to access every online resource we have provided, we hope that providing you with these options will fuel your passion as both a learner and a transformational educator and potentially help you design team-based and other professional learning experiences.

By the time you turn the last page of this book, we hope you will be planting your own learning gardens to cultivate identity, belonging, inquiry, and efficacy. You will be equipped with 8 Pedagogies of Voice, bolstered by a collection of tools to design lessons, units, projects, assessments, and/or professional learning modules that engender agency. Figure 0.3, from Crystal's geometry classroom, gives you a sneak preview of what this can look like. As a middle school math teacher in Cincinnati, Ohio, Crystal wanted her students to critically analyze the issue of housing insecurity in the downtown corridor. She also wanted to awaken their sense of efficacy to design solutions. This unit/project is the fruit of those intentions.

Geometry Transformations Unit by Crystal M. Watson

Essential Question: How can we use geometry and other mathematics to solve real-world issues we see within our communities?

Identity

Students share their experiences in our central downtown area with housing insecurity (their own, friends, and family) and construct stories around how gentrification has impacted the central downtown district via listening to the experiences of others.

Students critically examine past and present conditions within the central downtown area. Their stories and experiences are paramount and are protected within the classroom space. They are given sentence stems, the ability to opt-out from sharing, and permission to use resources (human and otherwise) for storytelling.

Belonging

My objective is to go beyond standards and curriculum to invite students' ways of being into the math classroom. Their stories, identities, values, and experiences are central to our understanding of the impact that gentrification has had in our city.

Students will actively create community through sharing and listening to others' stories and experiences and then co-creating a possible solution. While they will be working in small groups, the collective vision the class develops for housing security will tie them together in their work, allowing them to honor self and others.

Inquiry

Students will explore gentrification through the lens of their own experiences and the experiences of others (peers, family, etc.), along with the impact of gentrification in our city.

Students have multiple opportunities to cultivate their critical voices throughout the project as they will engage in research of the community, past and present, and uncover power and systemic dynamics within their city.

Using geometry and other math standards, they will engage in providing a solution to providing affordable housing options in central downtown.

Efficacy

Students will use geometric transformations to create, review, and revise a floor plan for apartments with amenities they see as important to their community. Complete creative control is given to students and their teammates.

Students will engage in giving and gathering feedback from peers and teachers to revise their plans. Grades are not discussed; instead feedback and inquiry are centered throughout the process. School community members (peers from other grade levels, principal, teachers) will listen to student presentations and ask questions to the teams. Students will self-grade based on their holistic experience in the project.

Storientation: Educator Voices

When I began teaching math, I committed to making it relevant and timely for the students I had the privilege of teaching. When we started our Geometry Transformations unit, I grappled with how to make the concepts come to life in meaningful ways. My students often shared that they were from parts of our city that their families could no longer afford to live in. I took this information as a gift and considered the ways that my students preferred to learn and show their work. They wanted to "do math" in community, *with* one another, and they yearned for math to be relevant and applicable to their lived experiences. With this in mind, we tapped into the power of intergenerational learning as I tasked students with asking their families about their housing experiences in Cincinnati. We held an abundance mindset because we knew that the cultural wealth of Black and brown communities was rich and had helped the city to thrive. Lastly, we learned geometry with our minds, bodies, hearts, and spirits as we peeled back the layers of gentrification and the impact of pushing out Black and brown communities from our city so that we could then construct a solution. Holism allowed all of us to bring our whole selves into the space.

—Crystal M. Watson

What does it mean to be a good ancestor? It is a gentle daily unfolding, woven into how we show up with students and each other. It's an understanding that our *micro*-actions in the classroom have a profound impact on the macro-landscape of the societies we inhabit. It's about being intentional with our words, thoughts, and ways of being. As the late Richard Wagamese wrote, may we remember that "we are all related, that we are all connected, that we all belong to each other. The most important word is 'all.' Not just those who look like me, sing like me, dance like me, speak like me, pray like me or behave like me. ALL my relations. That means every person, just as it means every rock, mineral, blade of grass, and creature. We live because everything else does. If we were to choose collectively to live that teaching, the energy of our change of consciousness would heal each of us—and heal the planet" (Wagamese, 2013).

May we remember that "we are all related, that we are all connected, that we all belong to each other. The most important word is 'all.' Not just those who look like me, sing like me, dance like me, speak like me, pray like me or behave like me. ALL my relations. That means every person, just as it means every rock, mineral, blade of grass, and creature. We live because everything else does. If we were to choose collectively to live that teaching, the energy of our change of consciousness would heal each of us—and heal the planet" (Wagamese, 2013).

We hope this book honors and illuminates the art of teaching, the brilliance you already possess, and the resilience of the olive tree that is firmly rooted in identity and ancestry. We hope the tools we have offered fuel your passion to continue growing and learning. Remember: Each of us is an elder-in-training, a future ancestor. Feel this in your bones: These pages are a call to action, a call to heal, a call to dream and work together toward a future so bright and expansive we have to close our eyes for a beat to see it. Take a slow, deliberate breath . . . can you feel the pulse of this future already emerging?

We need all of our voices to build the schools our children deserve. May we call into being countless classrooms in which every child feels seen, heard, and deeply loved.

Awakenings: Crystal's Corner

With these Awakenings, we offer generous and loving permission to make mistakes and fumble as you stretch into the mindset and practice shifts we are laying out before you. We encourage you to read this book slowly, intentionally, and in community with others.

What are your hopes as you begin this reading journey?

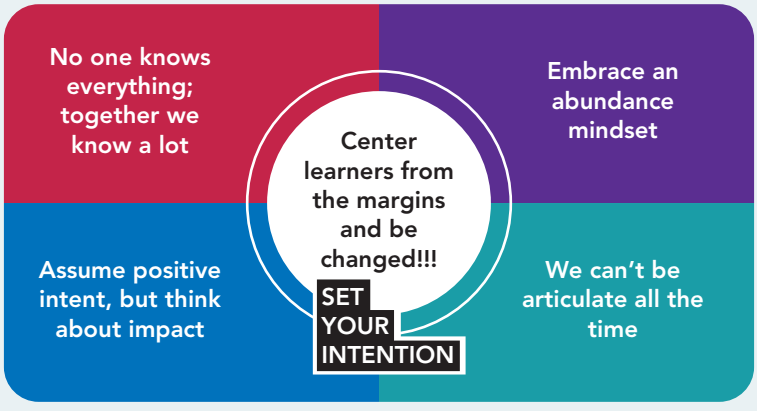
(Continued)

(Continued)

With whom can you read, explore, and apply these ideas to enact *Pedagogies of Voice* in your learning space?

To engage you in an active learning process, we offer five agreements adapted from AORTA (anti-oppression resource & training alliance), with which to navigate the text (AORTA, 2017).

FIGURE 0.3 Agreements: An Offering



Source: Agreements adapted from AORTA (anti-oppression resource & training alliance).

Please pause to reflect on these agreements and set an intention for yourself as a reader: Which agreement most speaks to how you want to approach this learning journey? What is *one* way you can embody this agreement as you read?

NOTES

Acknowledgments

Crystal

First, to all of the families that have trusted me in caring for their children within an educational system that was built to stifle their radical dreams, thank you. Collectively we will continue to push past barriers and see the desires of our children go far past our imaginations. To Antwan Lewis, my first principal, who allowed me to step outside of the box. To Dr. Dawn Williams, an amazing woman and scholar who continues to see possibilities far beyond our wildest dreams. One of my other mothers, a north star, and a voice of both love and action. . . . Thank you for belief, love, and high expectations.

To my mother, Tina, and my Mema (and ancestor), Joan, who both taught me that I can and should have the audacity to know that I am worthy, necessary, and meant to be in any room, thank you. Thank you to my stepfather, Ray, who pushed me to work and work hard. To my sisters Kasse and Raychel who make me feel like the world would be lost without me—I love you! To Cairo Maximus and Felix, incredible boys who I love deeply, who teach me so much, and push me to be great. Big up to those who always find time to check in on me and reciprocate love: Shannon- #G4L, Kisha, and Tricia.

To bell hooks, who taught me that nothing great is ever done nor written without love. And to Angela Davis, who showed me what agency truly looks like. To the ancestors that continue to guide me, I am forever grateful.

To my PoV Family: Marlo, Sawsan, and Shane. You all have become part of my fabric. The laughs, the tears, the experiences . . . I am forever grateful. I love each of you for who you are and what you add to this work and the world. Thank you to Dan, the Corwin team, and the amazing educators that contributed to this book.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, to Tywanna and Dorien. Tywanna, my person, thank you for being every part of who you are. Supporting my late night planning and writing, dealing with my "doing the most" attitude (which usually included some tears), and supporting my radical dreams were never too much for you. Dorien, my SonShine and the reason for all my seasons, watching you grow, learn, and become a young man keeps me steadfast in this work. You were ever present in spirit, body, and mind as I wrote this book. You deserve everything beautiful in the world. Thank you both for all of the check-ins, the hugs, and the unconditional love. I love y'all always and in all ways.

Marlo

To Lolo Lope Bagsik, Grandma Cecilia Urquico and all my ancestors: The deepest gratitude to you for trusting me with wisdom I don't carry lightly but instead carry as light. To my parents, Wilma and Marlo, & Ate Jesscel: Sharing your truths and humanity has created a home for my students to feel seen, heard and welcomed to share theirs . . . thank you for inspiring so many lessons. To Mike, this has been an ultimate healing journey and thank you for walking alongside with me. To my entire family, I love you to the moon and beyond! Bing, Vicky, Hanalei, Prime, 7+, and The Four Nations: Thank you for being satellites orbiting in my life that keep me at my center!

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About the Authors

Shane Safir (Author) has worked at every level of the education system, from the classroom to the boardroom, for over 25 years. In 2003, after teaching in San Francisco and Oakland and organizing in the community to launch a new school, Shane became the founding co-principal of June Jordan School for Equity (JJSE), an innovative national model identified by leading scholar Linda Darling-Hammond as "supporting the success of low-income students of color." Since 2008, Safir has provided equity-centered leadership coaching, strategic planning, and professional development for schools, districts, and organizations across the United States, Canada, and beyond. She facilitates learning on listening leadership, becoming a warm demander for equity, centering student voice, and the Street Data model for school transformation. She is the author of *The Listening Leader: Creating the Conditions for Equitable School Transformation* (Jossey-Bass, 2017) and the bestselling *Street Data: A Next-Generation Model for Equity, Pedagogy, and School Transformation* (Corwin, 2021), coauthored with Dr. Jamila Dugan.

Since 2013, **Marlo Bagsik** (Co-author) has dedicated his career to advancing equity and social justice in education, with a focus on ensuring the highest quality education for historically oppressed groups. His work, rooted in English language arts, extends to restorative justice, trauma-informed care, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), and adult learning. With degrees from UC Berkeley

and USC, Marlo has been a leader in transforming schools into anti-racist, inclusive environments. Currently, as the district professional learning coordinator in the SF Bay Area, Marlo continues to champion systemic change that honors the dignity and humanity of every student and educator. He's a forever educator, facilitator, equity strategist, author, and speaker.

Dr. Sawsan Jaber (Co-author) is a global educator, author, presenter, equity strategist, curriculum designer, and keynote speaker of 20+ years. She is currently a high school English department chair and a district equity leader. Sawsan founded Education Unfiltered Consulting and works with schools nationally and internationally. She completed her PhD in curriculum and instruction with a focus on inclusion and belonging of students from marginalized communities. Sawsan was nominated for Illinois Teacher of the Year for 2023, awarded the Cook County Teacher of the year in 2023, IDEA Teacher of the Year in 2022, and is an ISTE 20 to Watch Awardee for 2023.

Crystal M. Watson (Co-author) is an innovative, passionate, and authentic mathematics educator and life-long learner who you can count on to always ask "What do the students think?" Her work is centered around providing space for voice and identity development in order for everyone, particularly those most marginalized, to experience high quality, deep, and personal mathematics. Crystal has worked alongside other scholars to develop culturally responsive, reflective, and/or anti-racist curricular resources that center young people in every lesson. You might catch her at both local and national conferences, on podcasts, developing and leading professional development sessions, or having conversations about how we are cultivating youth-centered spaces.

We also invite you to view our Welcome Video on YouTube: https://youtu.be/yQ8JACNmhDo

Authors' Notes

A Note From Your Authors

Stay with us . . . This book is born of lives lived and stories told, a tribute to the vast landscapes of experience that shape who we are. It asks you, dear reader, to linger—especially if your journey has followed a different course leading to a story that is vastly different from those captured in this work. Here, we honor the beauty of diversity in all its boundless forms, the radiant thread of humanity that runs through us all, and the power that is born when we honor and uplift both. This book is not only *for* us, but *of* us. It is not only for the ancestors we honor but for the legacies we leave behind as future ancestors. It is a testament to the power of connection, a call to see ourselves in one another, and a reminder that our stories, though unique, are forever entwined. We are each the owners and experts of our own stories. This work is a reminder that our chosen profession is the thread that ties us together, binding us to the endeavor of elevating the stories of our ancestors, our own stories, and the stories of the communities we serve. To read these pages is to embrace the fullness of our rich diversity in its countless forms and to create spaces that tell a new story of our collective humanity in a healing world. This journey will be worth your while.

—Sawsan and the PoV Collective

A Note on the Awakenings (Crystal's Corner)

Throughout the book, you will find Awakenings—reflective prompts that invite us to critically examine our own positionality as we pursue spaces where students, particularly those at the margins, see themselves as active cultivators of and participants in their own learning. We hope these moments compel a deep excavation of self, because we recognize that racism, stereotypes, and bias live in the depths of our beings (Sealey-Ruiz & Mentor, 2021) and, when unchecked, can cause considerable harm to the youth we serve. Please accept our invitation

to experience discomfort in the quest to *know* better in order to *do* better. Some Awakenings are called "Centering the Margins," which signals prompts that are designed to support the reflection of readers who hold less power and privilege inside our school systems, including educators of color, queer and trans folx, neurodiverse learners, and other historically oppressed communities. If this centering of the experiences and learning of those who have been cast to the margins feels new or uncomfortable, we invite you to notice your discomfort and stay curious.

—Crystal and the PoV Collective

Part 1

Foundations of a Pedagogy of Voice

Student voice is the key to transforming education. When we center the voices of learners, everything changes: our hearts, our minds, our narratives, our sense of what is possible. Everything. Students don't need us to declare they *have* a voice. Every learner harbors a voice within—even those who are nonverbal. Every precious child carries into our classrooms their stories, hopes, and longings. They also carry big ideas for the world they want to inhabit. While they may have yet to express those ideas, it's our work to make space for their emergence. Students need us to *decenter* ourselves so that they can fully arrive in the learning space—hearts, minds, and bodies. They need us to share power so they can co-generate *with* us a vibrant culture of dialogue and **reflection** as they build essential cognitive and noncognitive skills. Shifting the arrangement of power requires first that we recognize the voices and experiential wealth of learners, which have so often been diminished and discounted.

A **Pedagogy of Voice (PoV)**—the focus of this book—will make such transformation possible by closing the knowing-doing gap that separates theory from practice and breaking the imagination barrier incarcerating classrooms across the globe. In this book, Crystal, Marlo, Sawsan, and Shane act as your guides; we invite you to center the power of student voices while harnessing the power of *your* voices. What skills, expertise, and cultural wealth do you carry that the system has marginalized? How can your agency and voice become a vehicle for systemic change?

What skills, expertise, and cultural wealth do you carry that the system has marginalized? How can your agency and voice become a vehicle for systemic change?

Many of us work inside systems that claim to pursue "equity" and "inclusion" while demanding that we adhere to outmoded or harmful practices that stifle children's voices. If this describes the system in which you work, take a moment to reflect on why you became an educator. Most of us entered the profession not simply to teach content but to awaken our students' sense of agency, to free them to use their voices to reshape the world around them. Now take a moment to think about the world they have inherited. As the planet buckles under the weight of climate change and socio-political divisions, our children need spaces that help them understand and think critically about this world. They need classrooms and conversations that help them discover shared humanity with other children and wrestle with their identities and purpose in a rapidly changing global context. Yet so often, they are muscling through six plus hours of schooling with little voice. As scholar Christopher Emdin says, "It's our fault that we're stuck . . . cause we are utilizing revolutionary language within a carceral framework" (Safir & Mumby, 2022b). It's no wonder that scholars as wide-ranging as Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) to Angela Davis in *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (2003) underscored the similarities between the characteristics of our rigid and compliance-oriented schools and those of our prisons. Part I of *Pedagogies of Voice* begins to dismantle that "carceral framework" while laying out a high-level vision of the liberatory classrooms that learners need and which we will co-create with you.

Chapters 1 to 4 are each undergirded by a Credo.

PART I: FOUNDATIONS OF A PEDAGOGY OF VOICE	
CHAPTER	**CREDO**
1	Student voice changes everything.
2	We listen at the margins and act responsively.
3	We decolonize the classroom at every level.
4	We create spaces of radical love.

Our team is so excited to be on this journey with you. Know that as you grapple with the ideas and provocations in this text, we are walking alongside you. You will get to know each of us in Part I of the book. Welcome to the journey!

The Case for a Pedagogy of Voice

1

Credo: Student voice changes everything.

Author Voices

Crystal: *I enter this work as a multiracial, queer, neuro-special, and loved Black woman. I am a descendant of the most beautiful and the most righteous fighters. Through the wisdom passed down to me, I write for those in an unwavering and unapologetic pursuit of liberation for all people because we all are deserving and worthy.*

Marlo: *My last name Bagsik (bug-seek) comes from a decision my late grandfather made in the early 1900s to ensure the generations after him carried a name with meaning. It means* fierce*—I'm a* fierce*, queer, Filipino American educator who, like many, is at a complex intersection fighting for a more just educational system and for the liberation of all. I move through this world believing, as my Lolo Lope once said, "A rosy tomorrow is just around the corner!"*

Sawsan: *I am the granddaughter of Nakba survivors. With the ongoing devastation in Gaza and the West Bank, my identity and voice as a Palestinian mother and scholar-activist feels more complex than ever. I find strength in my roots and the resilience of my ancestors, embracing my role as an educator to sow seeds of justice and critical awareness in the next generation. Through language and literacy, I empower all of my students to question, advocate, and craft a future that honors liberation.*

> **Shane:** *I join this journey as a queer white woman of Jewish and Irish descent. My last name, Safir, means scribe in Hebrew, inspiring me to narrate stories of possibility. I am a work in progress, striving to decolonize my writing, my work, my leadership, and my heart. It is an honor to walk alongside my coauthors as we commit to the liberation of every child and adult in our school systems.*

Let us begin by naming a painful truth: Learners disappear inside our classrooms every single day—into spirals of invisibility, self-doubt, fear, anxiety, and righteous anger. I (Shane) know because I was one of these learners and am raising two children who have faced racism, ableism, and other forms of marginalization in their K–12 experiences. Despite the unearned privileges of a white racial identity, I was deeply alienated and dissociated as a high school student. I didn't accept myself, nor could I conceive of a world in which anyone else would accept me if they knew who I "really was": queer, gay, other. A cast-off from society. I believed this because of the thousands of messages—subtle and explicit—that I received growing up in late-20th-century America.

Here is one piece of Street Data from my 10th-grade journal that demonstrates the impact of these messages on a young psyche:

Days in wells of darkness.

Far beneath the ground.

Life burns me with its fire.

I cannot make a sound.

To sleep in colorless peace,

Without the threat of pain.

To race no longer empty,

Another soul aboard the train.

No need to be accepted,

No defined normality.

Eyes closed and protected.

To sleep, but not to be . . .

Reading this today, as an out-and-proud queer adult, my heart breaks for the little Shane who could not envision a way to live and breathe in my full humanity—who didn't feel "normal." The last sentence of this journal entry aches to read: "When each day ends, I realize once again that I am alone." (Note to readers: Opening and truth-telling lie at the heart of why we are writing this book. As you get to know the four of us behind the project, you'll understand our respective "whys" more deeply.) We wish we could tell you that today's marginalized children *know* they are beloved and divine, but the isolation and sense of "otherness" so many of us felt growing up is on the rise. White nationalism and xenophobia swell as efforts to ban "DEI" (diversity, equity, and inclusion) and "CRT"[1] (critical race theory) appear like Whac-A-Mole alongside book bans, education gag orders, and anti-LGBTQ assaults. The very right to *exist* lies in jeopardy for trans youth.

Black, Indigenous, and students of color/racialized students, as well as queer and trans students, are confronting existential questions: *Does anyone see me? Do I belong here? Are my questions and curiosities about the world valid? Can I impact the things that matter to me?* Yet instead of promoting a culture of safe and brave *dialogue* around the world young people are experiencing, countless school districts fixate on "learning loss" and test scores, rarely getting to the root causes of such metrics, including acute alienation from schooling as it exists. Meanwhile, many of our schools face a stark demographic gap between educators and students, including the United States, where roughly 80% of public school teachers are white, while over 50% of students come from communities of color (including approximately 27% Latine, 15% Black or African American, and 6% Asian or Pacific Islander). Amidst these tensions, districts craft lengthy strategic plans targeting incremental gains while ignoring the reality that learners long to have a voice in their education and yet are silent throughout much of the school day. And tragically, leaders often instruct teachers to *avoid* discussing the very issues that have contributed to an unprecedented mental health crisis among students.

[1]The current attacks on critical race theory (CRT) in schools are based on a distortion of the actual legal framework that CRT represents. Originating in the late 1970s among legal scholars like Derrick Bell and Kimberlé Crenshaw, CRT examines how racism is embedded in laws and institutions, not just individual behavior. It is primarily an academic framework taught in law schools, not a K–12 curriculum. The portrayal of CRT as widespread in schools is a political myth, used to stoke fear and divisiveness rather than reflect its actual academic purpose.

Language Matters *and* Language Evolves

We will be using the terms "students of color," "racialized students," "marginalized students," and "students/learners at the margins" throughout the book, with the intention of centering the experiences of learners (and sometimes educators) who have been relegated to the margins, signifying a lack of voice, power, dignity, and self-determination. By **racialized**, we mean the ways in which racial identities are socially constructed to define particular groups of people and then used to justify or reinforce systems of power, privilege, and oppression. It's important to note that being "racialized" does not imply that race is biologically real in a scientific sense; rather, it highlights the social and historical meanings *assigned* to race and how those meanings affect people's lives. Per our initial "Note from the Authors," we employ "centering the margins" as an expansive term that includes racialized, neurodiverse, queer, and intersectional experiences in our schools. We fully acknowledge that no one term speaks to every reader and that language is constantly evolving.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC, 2021) Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, in the 10 years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, feelings of persistent sadness and hopelessness—as well as suicidal thoughts and behaviors—increased by about 40% among young people (Abrams, 2023). Not surprisingly, this data has continued to trend upward *since* the pandemic. Clinical psychologist Robin Gurwitch, PhD, a professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Duke University Medical Center, asserts, "There's a growing recognition that mental health is just as important as physical health in young people's development, but that's happening just as mental health services are under extreme strain" (Abrams, 2023, para. 22). To underscore this point, the APA cites a 2022 Pew Research Center survey, which found that only half of U.S. public schools offer mental health assessments and even fewer offer treatment services (Schaeffer, 2022). Now more than ever, young people need classrooms that welcome their full humanity and enable meaningful connection with adults and peers. This doesn't mean teachers should become therapists; it indicates the need for a more humanizing pedagogy.

It's not hard to discern why so many young people with marginalized identities struggle with mental health. Black students are navigating racial battle fatigue in the face of anti-Black racism in schools against

a backdrop of police brutality, voter suppression, and other forms of systemic racism. Indigenous learners in Canada have had to wake up and "attend" school after the unearthing of *thousands* of sacred children buried unceremoniously on the grounds of Canada's residential schools.[2] Latine immigrant students in the U.S., whether undocumented or not, must confront waves of anti-immigrant sentiment along with other immigrant groups while Asian, Pacific Islander, and Arab children face racism and invisibility, often moving through their formal education without a single lesson centering their identities. (Shane's mixed-race Filipino children spent years without reading a Filipino or Filipino American text. In an egregious act of racism, Sawsan's daughter was asked by a teacher to stand before her class and apologize for 9/11 because she is Muslim.) Yet we chide learners to "do your homework," "get to school on time," and "get good grades," without giving them space to reflect on who they are, what they are experiencing in the world, and *why* education matters to them. No wonder so many of them are "failing" (or assimilating into dominant culture as Sawsan points out) by our broken standards!

How do we find hope in this landscape of contradictions? Why focus on a Pedagogy of Voice as a birthplace for hope? Because student voice is not just the latest buzz word.

> It is a path to *survival* for many young people.
>
> It is a path to *understanding* our shared humanity.
>
> And, when centered in communities of learning, it promotes *healing* for all students but especially those who have been disproportionately harmed by systems that were never designed to serve them in the first place.

As co-author Marlo Bagsik says, "Children want to feel a part of something. There's a sense that school is not a place to do that anymore. And students are so self-aware: They know what they want and need—to belong and feel seen. And they're just waiting like ducks to find those spaces."

Let us envision a proliferation of classrooms where . . .

- Children are greeted every morning with love, warmth, and care.
- Children are invited to explore their identities and affirmed as they do so.

[2]In the U.S., we haven't even *begun* such a process of uncovering the truth from the over 400 residential schools that perpetuated cultural genocide and murder against Native communities. Similar to Canada, the practice of ripping Native American children from their homes and sending them to "Indian Boarding Schools" in the U.S. under the assimilationist policy of "Kill the Indian, Save the Man" endured for many decades.

- Educators center learners' cultural wealth as the vein of gold running through curricula.
- Learning spaces are designed in circles that foster belonging and reciprocal listening.
- Teachers sit with students one on one and in small groups to offer coaching and wise feedback, ensuring that every child attains literacy, numeracy, and the capacity for self-expression.
- A culture of dialogue, rooted in rich and meaningful questions, permeates every learning space.
- Students take action around what matters to them, finding the efficacy to combat powerlessness.
- Classrooms incubate a sense of collective humanity through which students celebrate one another's similarities and differences.

This is not a pipe dream; it is a counter-narrative to the status quo that we can actualize through our daily pedagogical decisions. We have the agency to manifest such a vision together! Classrooms organized around student voice will allow the most marginalized learners to flourish while "lifting all boats." We recognize that so many of you find yourselves already subscribed to such a vision but sit inside school systems that don't value your knowledge and intuition. You may be asking a very reasonable question: How do I begin to actualize this vision? What is my locus of control? To move toward a Pedagogy of Voice, we must first consider a question raised in *Street Data*: *What is the purpose of education, anyway?*

Redefining the Purpose of Education

> *The purpose of education, finally, is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decisions, to say to himself this is black or this is white, to decide for himself whether there is a God in heaven or not. To ask questions of the universe, and then learn to live with those questions, is the way he achieves his own identity.* ***But no society is really anxious to have that kind of person around*** *(emphasis added). What societies really, ideally, want is a citizenry which will simply obey the rules of society. If a society succeeds in this, that society is about to perish. The obligation of anyone who thinks of himself as responsible is to examine society and try to change it and to fight it—at no matter what risk. This is the only hope society has. This is the only way societies change.*
>
> —James Baldwin, "A Talk to Teachers," 1963/1985

Voice and agency mean considering how you are finding your power so you can step into it to be the best version of yourself. Everything I did, like my poetry, was about self-identity and self-discovery.

—Lina Brown, college freshman, Sawsan's former student

In a prophetic talk to teachers in 1963, James Baldwin called educators toward a compelling purpose for education. Baldwin's words echo resoundingly today, in particular the need to "look at the world" for oneself, to "ask questions" of the universe, and to learn to "live with those questions" as portals to achieving an identity. Yet 60 years later, our societies still appear less than excited to have this kind of learner around. Instead of prioritizing student voice and agency, the mainstream education system hawks a narrative of "student achievement" that values compliance and tethers the purpose of education to indicators like test scores, grades, "good" behavior (who gets to decide this anyway?), and phrases like "college and career readiness." While there is value in being "college and career ready," is this really the fundamental purpose of an education toward which we should orient the entire system? Could we set our compass toward a more expansive destination, and what do we lose when we demarcate success in these ways?

PoV PD Resource

QR Code 2
https://qrs.ly/ttg8aue

In this clip from Episode 7 of the *Street Data Pod*, BC education leader Kʷ anilqʷ a? Perry Smith reflects on how we can expand our definitions of success.

Awakenings: Crystal's Corner

We have all been socialized into paradigms of "success." What have you been socialized to think success looks and feels like?

What might be missing from your vision of success? If you were to design a student "profile for success," what considerations would you want to intentionally include?

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In the preceding clip, educational leader Perry Smith asks a great question: "How do we consider other cultures and worldviews when considering a profile for success?" What would you need in order to engage in such a process with care, cultural humility, and respect?

Centering the Margins: Have your thoughts about what "success" might look like for your learners been denied and replaced by the dominant group's criteria for success? In what ways? How might you unlearn the dominant group's criteria and replace them with your initial definition?

Throughout this book, we offer you the opportunity to slow down, name the conditions in which you are working, and lean into an expansive and liberatory purpose of education. But first, we must address the *foundational* purposes of the education system, as well as the *rhetorical* purposes that can derail a Pedagogy of Voice.

Let's be candid: The historical purpose of education in America and the West has been to reinforce racial and gender hierarchies while producing a compliant and assimilated workforce in the interest of sustaining the existing structures of power. Pause and take a breath. . . . Whether you know this in your bones because of your own positionality or you're entertaining it for the first time, it hurts to acknowledge that the systems we work in were built for this purpose, and it especially hurts to acknowledge the ways in which many of us have been complicit in perpetuating educational oppression. This purpose emerged in the late 18th and 19th centuries, intertwined with the horrors of enslavement, the ideology of Manifest Destiny—which rationalized the dispossession and genocide of Indigenous peoples—the global project of Western colonization, and the racialization and dehumanization of immigrant groups, including Asian and Pacific Islanders. It became further entrenched as new apparatuses of racial oppression arose, such as eugenics, Jim Crow, and Native American "boarding schools" (a euphemism for institutions that enacted cultural genocide on Indigenous communities and death to thousands of Indigenous children in the U.S. and Canada) and as an agricultural landscape gave way to industrialism and a rising tide of immigration.

Isabel Wilkerson's masterpiece *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (Wilkerson, 2021) analyzes the invention of race in the West to justify a hierarchical power structure based on the dehumanization of entire groups of people. She cites anthropologist Ashley Montagu as among the first scholars to argue that "race is a human invention, a social construct, not a biological one, and that in seeking to understand the divisions and

disparities in the United States, we have typically fallen into the quicksand and mythology of race" (Wilkerson, 2021, pp. 24–25). Wilkerson goes further to explain the birth of *American* caste in the years after the first Africans were forcibly brought to Virginia in 1619, "as the colony sought to refine the distinctions of who could be enslaved for life and who could not" (p. 29). Over time, the need to justify the violent institution of enslavement led to the construction of whiteness as a racial category heretofore unknown. It also led to an ever-shifting and expanding definition of who "counted" as white, as waves of once-racialized immigrants from eastern and southern Europe gained admission into the ugly promise of racial supremacy. As James Baldwin once said, "No one was white before he/she came to America."

PoV PD Resource

QR Code 3
https://qrs.ly/7qg8auu

Listen to the prophetic author Toni Morrison deconstruct the construct of race.

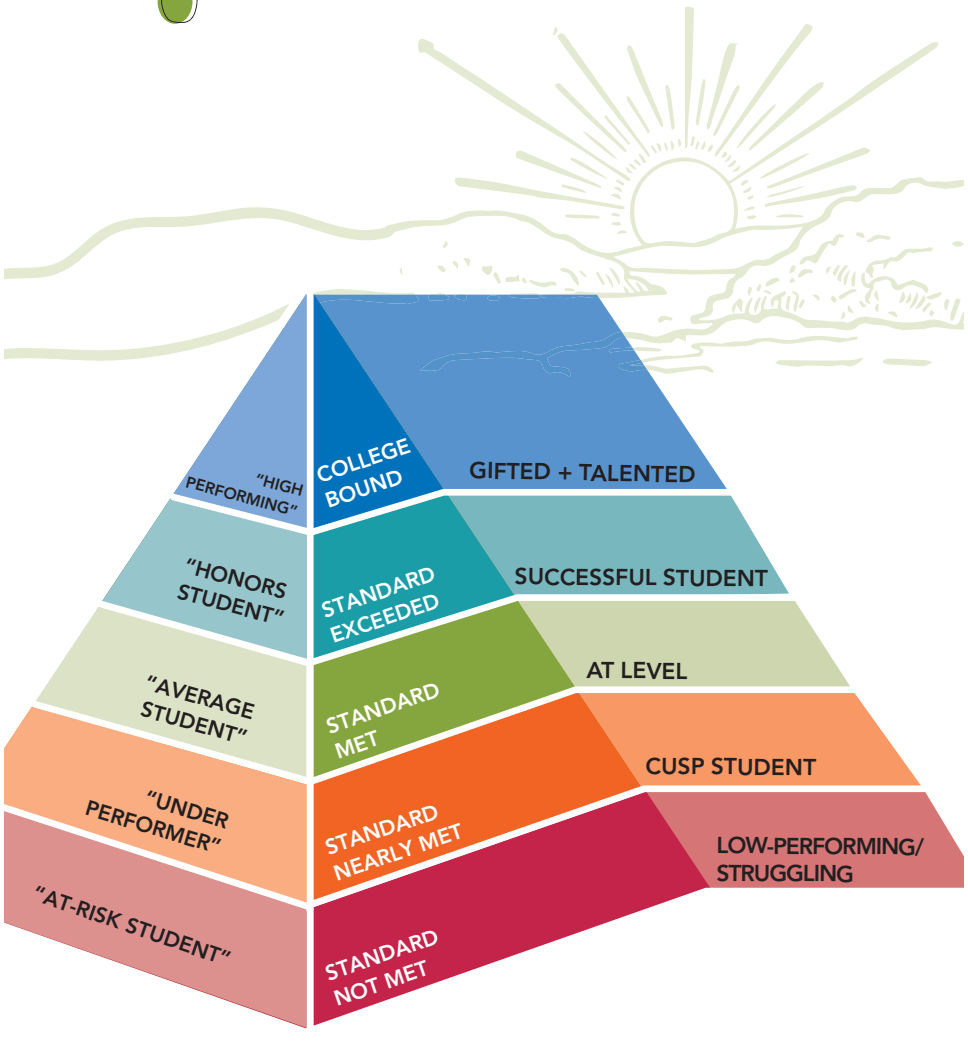
Awakenings: Crystal's Corner

What stands out to you from Morrison's framing of race?

How are her ideas relevant to a Pedagogy of Voice?

A caste mindset continues to permeate Western education. The language may be coded and veiled but only thinly so. Critical readers have long understood the racialized dog whistle embedded in phrases like "at-risk" students and "under-performers" as well as the brain priming for implicit racial bias activated by public reporting of standardized test scores, noted by john a powell and others. In his framing of a culturally sustaining pedagogy, scholar Django Paris writes, "It is brutally clear that current policies are not interested in sustaining the languages and cultures of longstanding and newcomer communities of color in the United States. English-only policies; narrow, decontextualized language and literacy programs in poor communities of color; and even one state's explicit ban on studying the histories, literatures, and struggles of particular ethnic groups (see Arizona House Bill 2281) are examples of the return of evermore explicit deficit perspectives, policies, and pedagogies" (Paris, 2012, p. 95). (Sadly, we can note the widespread proliferation of such bans in the decade plus since Paris's article.)

FIGURE 1.1 The Language of Caste in American Education



"A caste system is an artificial construction, a fixed and embedded ranking of human value that sets the presumed supremacy of one group against the presumed inferiority of other groups . . . A caste system uses rigid, often arbitrary boundaries to keep the ranked groupings apart, distinct from one another and in their assigned places."

—Isabel Wilkerson, Caste (2021)

Going back to the late 18th century, we witness the tendrils of caste begin to wrap themselves around the institution of schooling. Consider the following examples from the U.S. educational context:

1779 Thomas Jefferson proposes a two-track educational system, with different tracks in his words for "the laboring and the learned." Scholarship would allow a very few of the laboring class to advance, Jefferson says, by "raking a few geniuses from the rubbish."

1805 New York Public School Society is formed by wealthy businessmen to provide education for poor children. Schools are run on the "Lancasterian" model, in which one "master" can teach hundreds of students in a single room. The master gives a rote lesson to the older students, who then pass it down to the younger students. These schools emphasize discipline and obedience qualities that factory owners want in their workers.

1820–1860 The percentage of people working in agriculture plummets as family farms are gobbled up by larger agricultural businesses and people are forced to look for work in towns and cities. At the same time, cities grow tremendously, fueled by new manufacturing industries, the influx of people from rural areas, and many immigrants from Europe. During the 10 years from 1846 to 1856, 3.1 million immigrants arrive, a number equal to one eighth of the entire U.S. population. Owners of industry needed a docile, obedient workforce and look to public schools to provide it.

1864 Congress makes it illegal for Native Americans to be taught in their native languages. Native children as young as four years old are taken from their parents and sent to Bureau of Indian Affairs off-reservation boarding schools, whose goal, as one BIA official put it, is to "kill the Indian to save the man."

1877–1900 Reconstruction ends in 1877 when federal troops, which had occupied the South since the end of the Civil War, are withdrawn. Whites regain political control of the South and lay the foundations of legal segregation.

1881 California legislators passed Political Code 1662. After the phrase noting "infectious diseases," came the passage "and also to establish separate schools for children of Mongolian or Chinese descent. When such separate schools are established Chinese or Mongolian children must not be admitted into any other schools."

1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision. The U.S. Supreme Court rules that the state of Louisiana has the right to require "separate but equal" railroad cars for Blacks and whites. This decision means that the federal government officially recognizes segregation as

> legal. One result is that southern states pass laws requiring racial segregation in public schools (Applied Research Center, 2011).

Stepping outside the U.S., we can hop across "the pond" to England and find Sir Francis Galton, who invented the fake science called "eugenics" in 1883. According to national assessment leader and *Street Data Pod* co-host Alcine Mumby, "One of the most entrenched ideas and beliefs in education is rooted in racism—the belief that intelligence can be measured. This fascination with measuring human intelligence is rooted in **eugenics**, a totally discredited, racist pseudoscience founded by Francis Galton. He was related to Darwin, was inspired by Darwin's theory of evolution, and decided that those same principles could and should be applied to our society. He measured everything he could about humans, and from his studies, he concluded that intelligence is rarely found in the disabled, in the poor, in women, or in non-white humans" (Mumby, 2023). Galton was also an advocate of **phrenology**, the detailed study of the shape and size of the cranium as a supposed indication of character and mental abilities—another manifestation of his obsession with quantification and measurement. These insidious beliefs, far from esoteric and distant, paved the way for educational sorting mechanisms that persist today, from military aptitude tests to Stanford-Binet Intelligence Tests to the Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT). They also undergird the standardized testing hellscape that educators and students remain entangled in.

According to educational thought leader Linda Darling-Hammond, traditional, norm-referenced, standardized test questions are built to *prove* a hierarchy of intelligence and to discriminate against children at the margins:

> Those tests are also constructed so that the items produce an artificial Bell Curve. The thing they're looking for is whether the items have 'discriminatory power' which is a *double entendre* because . . . if too many kids know the answer to something, they throw that item out because it does not produce the Bell Curve and if the 'wrong set of kids'--those who don't normally score highly–know the answer, they also throw it out. So there's lots of ways in which tests are constructed to preserve the status quo and privilege that we have." (Safir & Mumby, 2023a)

In short, we have inherited an education system structured around the need to validate racial and gender hierarchies and sustain a docile workforce. No matter how many times we declare our commitment to "equity," approve an antiracism policy, or purchase "inclusive curricula," we are operating inside this carceral framework.

Before we rush to distance ourselves from these histories, let's think about their current incarnations:

- The emphasis in countless classrooms on control and compliance
- The unwavering obsession with measuring *everything* in schooling: student "achievement," grades, teacher "effectiveness," school and district "success"
- The presence of Bell Curve ideology expressed through systems of measurement and ranking
- The movement to literally ban books that speak to the truth of our histories and identities
- The aggressive narrowing of the curriculum, including a curriculum "White Out" in many places[3]
- The multiplication of policies that effectively narrow the circle of belonging in schools, targeting trans, nonbinary, queer youth, and youth of color

TABLE 1.1 Purposes of Education

FOUNDATIONAL PURPOSE	TODAY'S STATED PURPOSE	LIBERATORY PURPOSE
To produce a docile and assimilated workforce and validate racial and gender hierarchies in the interest of sustaining the existing balance of power	To teach foundational skills To develop "character" To cultivate "21st century skills" (e.g., communication, citizenship) To ensure all graduates are "college and career ready" To offer a side dish of art, sports, or leadership (if you're lucky)	To co-create learning spaces *with* students To cultivate a Pedagogy of Voice in which learners begin to: • *Skillfully ask questions of the society they live in* • *Develop critical literacy and numeracy to navigate a complex world* • *Grow agency to shape the conditions of their lives* • *Find the moral compass to discern right from wrong and truth from fiction* • *Witness and affirm one another's humanity*

[3]Writer Bree Picower describes the White Out tool in the following way: "In order to maintain racial hierarchies with Whiteness at the top, curricula using this tool (White Out) cement whiteness as normal, innocent, and ever present. . . . Most curricular tools of Whiteness function to avoid teaching the history of the formation of the U.S. accurately. The White Out tool specifically achieves this by simply not including People of Color" (Picower, 27).

If we concede that the system exists to preserve the status quo, then we must acknowledge the ways in which we are all conditioned to *uphold* the status quo through mindsets and practices that diminish student voice. What if the purpose of education were, instead, to unlock students' voices and awaken their agency?

Awakenings: Crystal's Corner

What is *your* view on the purpose of education, and how do your identities, ancestors, and lived experiences inform this sense of purpose?

Centering the Margins: Given the skin you're in, how well do your beliefs and intersecting identities align to those of the system in which you work? How do they differ?

PoV PD Resource

QR Code 4
https://qrs.ly/lpg8avt

Watch Shane's *Purpose of Education* video from the Student Agency workshop series she led with Abby Benedetto. Now, try creating and recording your own as an introduction to those you collaborate with and/or serve.

From "Teaching Content" Toward a Pedagogy of Voice

Nothing about them without them.

—Robert Liimiiuum Halya'at Clifton
Superintendent, Nisga'a School District 92, British Columbia

If we embrace a liberatory purpose of education, we will need a concomitant shift in **epistemology**—in short, our systems of knowledge and ways of being and knowing, including pedagogical approaches and mindsets. (We will take this topic up further in Chapter 4 on 10 Ways

of Being That Awaken Student Voice.) For students to inhabit the power of their voices, educators must discover the power of *our* voices and recover the deeper meaning of our vocation. A Pedagogy of Voice encompasses both our ways of being and specific "moves" we make to awaken student voice, agency, and intellectual development. It also serves as an approach to address inequities through centering learners at the margins (see Chapters 2 and 9). This definition applies at every level of the system: District leaders must shape a Pedagogy of Voice for administrators, teacher leaders, and coaches for the teachers you support, site admin for your staff and faculty, and of course, teachers for your learners. Every single adult matters—credentialed or not, classroom based or wrap-around. A Pedagogy of Voice can manifest in hallway conversations with safety staff, in one-on-one counseling sessions, in the lunch line with culinary workers, in the main office, and of course, inside every classroom. As we listen deeply and attune to the needs of our most marginalized learners, we prepare them to meet increasingly complex cognitive challenges both in the classroom and beyond. And as students grow a strong self-concept, they are increasingly able to engage in what Zaretta Hammond calls "productive struggle," which enables them to carry the cognitive load and leads toward self-efficacy. Every decision we make holds the seeds of liberation; every conversation, the potential for transformation. Ultimately, we are aspiring toward a new "mark" for education: the awakening of student agency through the interconnected domains of identity, belonging, inquiry, and efficacy.

A Pedagogy of Voice encompasses both our ways of being and specific "moves" we make to awaken student voice, agency, and intellectual development. It also serves as an approach to address inequities through centering learners at the margins.

A Pedagogy of Voice will cultivate a deep sense of agency in students and educators alike. When we reorient the system away from solely incremental gains in test scores and toward the expansive frame of agency, our pedagogies begin to breathe in dynamic ways, and our students find space for their voices. In the rest of this chapter, we nourish the root system of this book by honoring its pedagogical antecedents.

Awakenings: Crystal's Corner

What are some ways in which you currently provide opportunities for nurturing student agency?

What opportunities do you have in your current setting to use your voice in the interest of transforming the status quo?

Roots of a Pedagogy of Voice

Every book belongs to a textual lineage, acknowledged or not. We would argue that few ideas are wholly "original," and the pursuit of originality and newness is often tethered to an implicit capitalist agenda of branding the next best bright and shiny thing. We are not interested in branding a "new" curriculum or pedagogical toolkit. We hope to build and realize *with* you all a vision for the next-generation classroom, working in dialogue with contemporary texts like Chris Emdin's *Ratchedemic*, Zaretta Hammond's *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*, and Gholdy Muhammad's *Cultivating Genius*. Just as the impact of *Street Data* has demonstrated, this project will have a life of its own once published. Each of you who reads it will enact the ideas in beautiful, localized, culturally congruent ways. And while we hope to offer you new lenses and ways of thinking about your work, we humbly acknowledge the pedagogical lineages that precede this book. With respect, let us name several of those.

A Pedagogy of Voice grows largely out of three traditions: democratic education, critical pedagogy, and culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy. While we discuss each briefly, this is in no ways an exhaustive list and many other prolific writers and thinkers have influenced our collective. What these traditions have in common is an ethos of care for children and a belief in the power of their voices as core tenets of learner-centered pedagogy. A *Pedagogy of Voice* also weaves in foundational work from Indigenous education, such as the First People's Principles of Learning (First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2015), Marie Battiste's *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit* (2013), and Jo Chrona's more recent *Wayi Wah! Indigenous Pedagogies: An Act for Reconciliation and Anti-Racist Education* (2022). Indigenous pedagogies have existed and been passed down orally from generation to generation since time immemorial, and in the final, integrative case study, you'll see many of these pedagogies come to life.

Democratic Education

In the early twentieth century, John Dewey helped give rise to a theory of democratic education. For Dewey, democracy wasn't just a *political* system but an ethical ideal that allowed people to make intelligent, informed decisions that contribute to the greater good while learning to live together, share common interests, and adapt to complex situations. Dewey was an advocate for experiential learning and democratic engagement, and his works are often associated with the **progressive education movement**, which emerged in the early 1900s as a reaction against the rigid, rote memorization-based education systems of the time. Dewey is also known for his approach to *child-centered education*, believing that learning needs to be embedded in real-world experiences. He asserted that intellectual development is not just a "nice-to-have" aspect of education but is required to prepare young people to become life-long learners who live fulfilled lives and contribute to society (Dewey, 1916). Education needs to develop students' ability to adapt to situations—to learn how to learn—and rather than "empty vessels" to be filled, children are there to learn alongside us as adults. In Dewey's words,

> When we abandon the attempt to define immaturity by means of fixed comparison with adult accomplishments, we are compelled to give up thinking of it as denoting lack of desired traits. Abandoning this notion, we are also forced to surrender our habit of thinking of instruction as a method of supplying this lack by pouring knowledge into a mental and moral hole which awaits filling. (Dewey, 1916, p. 61)

Dewey started a conversation that has continued throughout the 20th century and into the 21st. In the late 20th century, educator and author Deborah Meier, who is considered the founder of the small schools movement and built schools that embraced many of Dewey's ideals, furthered the tradition of democracy in education. One of Shane's mentors for over 20 years, Debbie's thought leadership around democratic education and her emphasis on ideas like honing students' "Habits of Mind" and "Habits of Heart" over long lists of discrete standards continue to influence our work and the field. In writing about the purpose of education, Debbie said, "Rarely do we ask ourselves how much we have unintentionally silenced the playground intellectuals who come [to] us as four- and five-years old. What could say that is so important that it justified our incarcerating kids for 12 or 16 years?" (Meier, 2009, p. 21).

Critical Pedagogy

Freire's theory of **critical pedagogy**, outlined in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and other works, posits that the educator's role is to prepare the learner to challenge the status quo and the unequal power structures of the society in which they live. Antonia Darder, a scholar and friend of Freire's, explains that "Critical educators perceive their primary function as emancipatory and their primary purpose as commitment to creating the conditions for students to learn skills, knowledge, and modes of inquiry that will allow them to examine critically the role that society has played in their self-formation" (Darder, 1991). In Chapters 4 and 5 of this book, we will explore 10 toxins and 10 epistemologies that undermine or nourish a Pedagogy of Voice. These reflective chapters grow directly from Freire's provocation that educators should continuously examine our thoughts, opinions, and ideas in order to maintain curiosity and a stance of learning vis a vis practice. Such an orientation to **praxis**—the practitioner's engagement in cycles of *reflection* and *action* directed at transforming existing structures—serves as a model for students, empowering them to develop their own critical awareness and ability to challenge oppression.

Freire contrasted what he called the "banking model" of education with the "problem-posing" model. The banking model vests teachers with the power to fill students' minds with facts while positioning learners as passive participants or objects who memorize and regurgitate information. According to Freire, the banking concept perpetuates the misuse and hoarding of power, allowing teachers to "bestow" knowledge on the supposedly ignorant learner while silencing students' voices. By contrast, a problem-posing model of education invites students into shared inquiry *with* their educators, asking them to critically examine their experiences and positionality within society. In such a classroom, learners are positioned as active participants in their own liberation and not subjects in need of "teaching."

Lastly, Freire proposed a "humanizing education" as the path "through which men and women can become conscious about their presence in the world" (Freire & Betto, 1985). A humanizing, problem-posing education catalyzes learner voice, and ultimately learner agency, to impact larger socio-political constructs. In Freire's vision of the classroom, the teacher-to-student relationship is fluid and co-constructed, and the teacher moves from a stance of deep love and humility. The Freireian teacher must be willing and open to accepting the contribution of learners in service of authentic dialogue.

In *Teaching to Transgress* and other works, bell hooks outlined an **engaged pedagogy**—extending Freire to argue that educators must center the lived experiences of marginalized groups and teach students to transgress the societal boundaries of race, class, and gender. In hooks' words, "Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also have a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process" (hooks, 1994, p. 21). hooks viewed education as the "practice of freedom"—a place to empower students to question, challenge, and disrupt unequal power structures—akin to Freire's problem-posing model. However, for learners to engage in these ways, classrooms must become "safe spaces" in which students can both contribute and question the teacher and one another, allowing for deeper reflection that leads to change. Speaking of the design of curriculum, hooks argued for the centering of marginalized voices and perspectives; otherwise, the dominant culture prevails and silences those at the margins. The teacher's conscious inclusion of diverse perspectives creates the space for students to challenge oppressive ideas and structures.

In hooks' view, an engaged pedagogy would center student voice, honor student experiences, and invite students to determine their own learning. Central to this pedagogical frame is the importance of learner *self*-reflection—similar to Freire's notion of praxis—to actively analyze one's own beliefs, biases, and relationship with the world. Equally important is the idea that teachers must use their power and privilege to disrupt the status quo, openly challenging power and privilege in the classroom as they arise in a process of teacher self-actualization. We will visit these important themes throughout the book.

Teachers must use their power and privilege to disrupt the status quo.

Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Pedagogy

Gloria Ladson-Billings' framed a theory of **culturally relevant pedagogy** (CRP) in the 1990s, linked to a tradition of *resource pedagogies* that had sought to resist deficit thinking about marginalized groups throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In Ladson-Billings' theory, teachers must help students become academically successful, culturally competent, and socio-politically critical. She links these three principles

of learning with the call for deep understanding and appreciation of students' cultures and frames of reference. Like Freire, Ladson-Billings viewed students as *subjects* in their own learning stories, not objects to be managed and "taught" in a reductive sense. She offered nuanced analysis of how teachers can support learners to maintain their home language and/or culture while learning to access dominant languages and cultural norms (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

While Freire saw teaching as a process of "mining," or pulling knowledge out of the learner, Ladson-Billings wrote about pedagogy as an art that facilitates a "process of becoming." In this way, her work offers a bridge between the identity and inquiry domains of the agency framework at the heart of this book. Like Freire *and* hooks, Ladson-Billings saw teacher–student relationships as fluid and **reciprocal** and the classroom as a community of learners, not based on competition or individual achievement. In this community-based conception, she invites educators to view knowledge critically and to be transparent with students about the curricular materials they use and why.

In an interview for *Street Data Pod*, Dr. Ladson-Billings reminded Shane and co-host Alcine Mumby of the importance of Septima Clark, an educator and civil rights activist who Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called "The Mother of the Movement" (Safir & Mumby, 2024a). Beginning at the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee and later across the Deep South, Clark developed literacy and citizenship workshops that played a crucial role in the campaigns for African American voting and civil rights—still so profoundly relevant today. In fact, a few months before launching the Montgomery bus boycott, Rosa Parks had attended one of Clark's workshops. Most famous for creating "Citizenship Schools" focused on adult literacy, Clark saw literacy as a means to uplift Black communities, and her pedagogical approaches centered learner voice and agency as she sought to nurture self-pride and cultural pride alongside literacy and citizenship skills. Her pedagogy deftly wove the politics of the civil rights movement together with the lived experiences, stories, and needs of adult learners in ways that reflected Freire's theory of critical pedagogy. We salute and honor her powerful legacy! (You can visit https://qrs.ly/7tg8b5j to listen to this episode of the *Street Data Pod*, Episode 27, titled "A Good Theory Always Starts with a Good Question.")

When Language Is Power: Multilingualism and Translanguaging

Acclaimed fiction writer Jhumpa Lahiri, who is fluent in Bengali, English, and Italian, knows a lot about language. In Lahiri's words, "*Language and identity are so fundamentally intertwined. You peel back all the layers in terms of what we wear and what we eat and all the things that mark us, and in the end, what we have are our words*" (Ghose, 2016).

More than 10% of public school students in the United States have been labeled "English learners," but far more are multilingual learners—an assets-based term that includes all students with a primary (or "home") language other than English. Assessment expert Margo Gottlieb writes that "*when teachers adopt multiple languages as a multimodal resource for instruction and assessment, multilingual learners benefit immensely, not only academically, but also in helping to shape their identities*" (Gottlieb, 2022). From this, it stands to reason that students who have the opportunity to access and express themselves in their home language can not only better show "what they know" but also are empowered by a greater sense of self-efficacy.

Translanguaging, as defined by scholar and researcher Ofelia Garcia, "*represents an approach to language pedagogy that affirms and leverages students' diverse and dynamic language practices in teaching and learning*" (Vogel & Garcia, 2017). If you have observed the manner in which multilingual speakers of the same home language can move fluidly between the home language and English, then you have observed translanguaging as a natural phenomenon. Garcia and others have underscored the distinction between translanguaging and "code-switching," Translanguaging, in Garcia's words refers to "*multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds*" (Vogel & Garcia, 2017).

Until recently, the use of translanguaging by students was frowned upon and even banned in most American classrooms—particularly in states that upheld "English only" instructional policies that served to suppress and extinguish students' home languages and—by extension—their core identities. In addition, these policies, which were fueled by *linguacism*—the belief that one language is superior to another—failed to promote the higher levels of English language proficiency that their backers had promised.

Fortunately, these monoglossic policies have, for most part, been overturned. Moreover, an increased awareness of the benefits of home language has led some teachers to provide ample opportunities for

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students to engage in translanguaging in the course of assessment and instruction. Gottlieb extends this reasoning to the next level by suggesting:

> *If translanguaging is viewed as a natural flow between or among languages, then bilingual/multilingual learners should have the advantage of language choice in classrooms and schools, irrespective of the language(s) of instruction and assessment. Co-constructed classroom language policy by teachers and students should shape the parameters of language interaction for specified contexts.* (Gottlieb, 2022)

Finally, a Pedagogy of Voice is informed by Django Paris's framing of **culturally sustaining pedagogy** (CSP) as an extension of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy (CRP). (Note: Ladson-Billings has written about and supported a "remix" of CRP in this vein.) CSP demands that our pedagogies be more than "responsive of" or "relevant to" the cultural experiences and practices of young people—"it requires that they support young people in *sustaining* the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence" (Paris, 2012, p. 95). Paris calls on important theories, such as Moll and Gonzalez' *funds of knowledge* (Moll et al., 1992) and Gutiérrez and her collaborators' *third space* concept, both of which elevate the importance of "home and community practices, histories, and activities of students and communities of color" (Paris, 2012). The explicit goal of CSP is to support the values of multilingualism and multiculturalism as crucial to the democratic project of schooling. In other words, to sustain a democratic, pluralistic society, schools must not just "tolerate" or "respond" to cultural difference but explicitly teach, value, affirm, and uplift difference. We hope Chapters 6 and 7 on Identity and Belonging respectfully join this current.

It's important to note that Paris positions both culture and pedagogy as dynamic, shifting, and ever changing—not static or essentialist. CSP acknowledges the ways in which pedagogy shifts, changes, adapts, recycles, and recreates to ensure marginalized students are repositioned as subjects. If systems and cycles are to be disrupted, then pedagogies meant to address the complexity of social inequities must continue to evolve.

Students Voice!

To fully embrace a Pedagogy of Voice, we must transform our underlying mental models about our work—from the technical notion of "teaching content" to an embodied concept of *pedagogy* as both a holistic philosophy (integrating heart, mind, body, and spirit) and a social

theory that "sits at the intersection of understanding the systems of oppression, one's location within these, and one's agency in negotiating such experiences" (Villaverde, 2008, pp. 128–29). If the deepest purpose of education is to liberate the hearts, minds, and spirits of learners, then we must transform our *language* for teaching and learning: "instruction," "lessons," "interventions," "tasks," even "teaching" simply will not do. Such terminology falls far short of depicting the types of experiences that will enable a young person to develop their sense of identity and **critical consciousness**—the process of "learning to perceive, social, political, and economic, contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 1970, p. 17) in the world as it exists. We need a next-generation pedagogical language that attunes us daily to what children want and need. What and how do *they* believe we should be teaching? What does student voice mean to *them*?

In this chapter, we have laid out the assumption that all children have a voice, and it is our responsibility to create space for their voices to emerge and reverberate in our classrooms and beyond. Embracing a dynamic Pedagogy of Voice will break the imagination barrier incarcerating classrooms across the globe. As we free students to speak their truths, we free ourselves to become the educators we long to be, and as Sawsan notes, we call on the voices of our ancestors in service of our wildest dreams for education.

Awakenings: Crystal's Corner

Knowing ourselves is pivotal to cultivating a Pedagogy of Voice. Think about your own identities and those of your students.

Choose 1–2 identity markers that *differ* between you and your students, and make a plan for how you might better learn about who they are and what they care about.

Choose 1–2 identity markers that are *similar* between you and your students, and make a plan for how you might approach building on those commonalities.

What do you notice about your students' many ways of learning and being in the classroom? What assets do they bring to the classroom that impact the culture of belonging and learning?

How can we honor students' many ways of being in macro and micro ways? How do you view your responsibility in the classroom to honor students' many ways of being?

Centering the Margins: In what ways have you been kept from bringing your own assets into educational spaces? What will you need in order to give yourself permission to reject deficit ideals about your marginalized identities and those of students that share them?

NOTES

Storientation[4]: Student Voices

What does student voice mean to you?

Student voice means everything because growing up I never got to have a say in how I was educated or what was going on around me so now, having this opportunity to help students around me and myself and potentially generations is honestly very meaningful.

—Ishi

Student voice helps students feel as though they are truly important and that they are able to truly make a change to the education system and to help them and their classmates learn better

—Shayla

I hope that student voice is just a way for everybody to gain empathy and to clear roads for those who are less fortunate and it's just such important work to me personally so I've just been dedicated to it ever since

—Ari

NOTES

[4]*Storientation* is one of the 8 Pedagogies at the heart of this book, linked to the Agency domain of Identity, which you will learn deeply about in Chapter 5. It is also a leadership stance in Shane's first book, *The Listening Leader: Creating the Conditions for Equitable School Transformation* (John Wiley and Sons, 2017), defined as careful attention to stories told as a vehicle for social and organizational change. You will see this term used throughout the book to signal the inclusion of student and educator voices.