



Between hope and despair: Teacher education in the age of Trump

Carolyn Ali-Khan & John Wesley White

To cite this article: Carolyn Ali-Khan & John Wesley White (2019): Between hope and despair: Teacher education in the age of Trump, Educational Philosophy and Theory, DOI: [10.1080/00131857.2019.1654374](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2019.1654374)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2019.1654374>



Published online: 22 Aug 2019.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Between hope and despair: Teacher education in the age of Trump

Carolyne Ali-Khan and John Wesley White

Foundations and Secondary Education, University of North Florida, Jacksonville, FL, USA

ABSTRACT

We are teacher educators trying to recalibrate to the world of Trump. As we search to find our new bearings, we recognize that the markers of meaning that we relied on (such as civility and truth) have been washed away, and we must now redefine how to create meaning in our work, and hope in our worlds. In this article, we combine examples of student interactions from our classes with inner dialogue to chronicle our search for hope. Working in the context of the US South, we highlight how drawing from critical theory allowed us to reach for moments of hope in dark times.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 31 July 2018
Revised 1 November 2018
Accepted 22 December 2018

KEYWORDS

Critical pedagogy; dystopia; hope; autoethnography; The South; Trump

Feeling queasy: post-election dystopia, molasses and bad apples

In the days after the presidential election I felt like a woman waking from (or into) a bad dream. Unable to shake off a sense of foreboding, I carried it with me like some heavy, spectral, dead thing that had tangled inside my skin. Along with this came a sense of panic and a deep urgency. I knew that I was – suddenly and without warning – an academician undone; bleary, disheveled, disoriented, full exigency and wrong about the world. A poem from Ted Hughes rattled around inside me:

Once upon a time there was a person

Almost a person

Somehow he could not quite see

Somehow he could not quite hear

He could not quite think

Somehow his body, for instance

Was intermittent. (Hughes, 1972, p.65)

I peered (accusingly) at my syllabus, began researching election aftermath and walked into my classrooms feeling as if I were attempting to sprint in molasses...

Carolyne

We are teacher educators and we are struggling. We were not anticipating that we would face dystopia in 2019, but the last presidential election took us by surprise. The foreboding that we felt immediately after the election has warped into alternating phases of anger, energy, apathy, hope and despair. Like the 'almost person' in Hughes poem, we cannot quite see and even our

bodies seem intermittent. The world we thought we knew now seems surreal, half connected and nightmarish, and there are moments when we labour to engage. As we struggle to recalibrate and respond to this dark new world, we seem to be battling an ongoing case of spiritual indigestion. We have swallowed dystopia and it has swallowed us. Until recently we believed that our teaching and research needed to be focused on trying to figure out how to 'fight the good fight' and bring an awareness of social justice to our students. Now we find that our work also involves figuring out how to not lose hope in ourselves, each other, our students, public schooling and our nation as a whole. In this article, we share the rest stops and the uphill climbs on our journeys of vacillating between hope and despair. We highlight upon the importance of our theoretical grounding in critical pedagogy and share the ways that our students were able to reconnect us to hope. Our aim is to autoethnographically present and ground meaning as it materialized through situational and relational experiences. By sharing how hope emerged in situ and kept us 'woke' and awake in an increasingly nightmarish world we hope to resonate with others who are similarly struggling to see, hear and think in these dark times.

Seeing in the dark: disarticulation, possibility and context

Disarticulation

In 2019, we have had little choice but to slowly become accustomed to a bombardment of troublesome and increasing bizarre news about the actions and words of the current President of the United States. As teacher educators – who see our work as a direct corridor to the future – we worry about the long-term impact on a generation of children who are growing up or coming of age during political era in which truth is spectral and hate is business as usual. We are concerned about the ways that the politics and ideologies of our day might work to shape the way our students (and youth in general) understand and interact with the world. Although we will discuss some evidence for our concern, we know that the landscape is not entirely bleak; we have each worked with youth on issues of social justice and through that work found solace in knowing that young people are not (as they are often portrayed) 'the problem' but are often powerful moral, ethical and political actors (e.g. Ali-Khan, 2013; Siry, Ali-Khan & Siry, 2014. Details omitted for blind review). With this in mind we would like to think that formal K-12 schooling has contributed to the moral and political sophistication of youth who engage in progressive causes. But to our dismay, the undergraduate and graduate students (who are mostly teachers) in our teacher education classes often recount how they had been encouraged (or forced) to regurgitate highly selective history, pseudo-science and white-washed literature in their K-12 schooling. Their stories highlight how schools have increasingly separated any form of progressive politics from formal education. They also shed light on the ways that instrumentalist paradigms and domesticating pedagogies effectively disarticulate *the word* – of decontextualized and simplified school knowledge, from *the world* – of social complexity and power struggles (Freire, & Macedo 1987). Students who have emerged from this kind of epistemological disarticulation provide evidence to us of the bruises left by a neoliberal grip. They have experienced an educational paradigm whose goals are not to help students fully understand – or much less question – the *status quo* but are, rather, to foster individualism while preparing new generations of workers (Bowles & Gintis, 1977; Liston, 1989). It follows that if the ultimate purposes of schooling are the financial and social success of the individual and the continuation of consumerism, there is no need to ask broader questions of how school sanctioned knowledge might also harm communities (in particular disenfranchised communities). Correspondingly, many of our students understand 'individual progress' as being synonymous with 'greater good'; to them, questions of equity and justice are simply questions about who has access to the highest paying jobs. This type of thinking fits perfectly with other popular neoliberal discourses that applaud market logic and support individualizing social problems. Long acculturated into such views, many of our

students are loathe to question the validity of meritocracy as a socioeconomic principle. To them, the U.S. is a place where – with enough talent and hard work – anyone can attain personal, social and economic success (White, Ali-Khan & Zoellner, 2017). (Details omitted for blind review.) For these students, the narrative of America as the land of opportunity (a close cousin of American exceptionalism) is sacred and untouchable even when evidence suggests otherwise. Through this lens, the very real cognitive dissonance one might otherwise experience when witnessing such things as grossly differential educational experiences, widespread poverty and mass incarceration can be avoided; Americans who have not found success fail not due to inequities in the system but because of lesser talent and flawed work ethics. In a similar vein, in class discussions our students also often assert that sexism, racism, homophobia and other forms of oppression are the exceptions that prove the rule (e.g. that these result from a few ‘bad apples’ in an overall fair system). Their understanding of the continuing power of oppression is tempered by relativism; in other words, they justify their belief in meritocracy by comparing overt oppression today to what it was in the past. To them, continuing social problems are not only lessening, they can be fixed by enlightened and forward-thinking Millennials.

Although we applaud the optimism of these students and recognize the power of their energy and vision as a force for good, we remain troubled. As critical educators, we believe that oppression is largely invisible, institutionally supported and, systemic. History is not always an indelible march towards progress and equality but, rather, moves in fits and starts. It takes detours and, at times, seems to retreat. We see evidence in our classes of the ways that the views of our students have been shaped by multiple strands of what we see as rhetorical disarticulation (word from world, individual from systemic, apple from tree). We are additionally troubled in that we believe that this disarticulation reinforces a positivist epistemic stance in which all knowledge (including social knowledge) is *a done deal*, objective, immutable, static and settled.

As we have reflected on our journeys in classrooms and implications of the views expressed by our students, the words of James Joyce resonate with us and we think of history as ‘a nightmare from which (we are) trying to awake’ (1986, p. 28). Our strategies for attempting this awakening have been different but aligned. One author focused on teaching how to ‘go rogue’ by encouraging students to become guerrilla teachers who understand and fight hegemony. The other created a teaching assignment in which students could create an artefact with the goal of responding to, resisting, re-educating and refusing hate in educational spaces. We shared a hope that these pedagogies, grounded in our shared critical theoretical orientation, might lead us towards hope by ‘transforming, rather than merely serving the wider social order’ (Giroux, 2009, p. 448).

Context (keep moving folk, nothing to see here)

Before we share our strategies for hope, we need to explain our context (as context bears heavily on the stories we are able to tell about our teaching). We live and work in Jacksonville, Florida, a city brimming with examples of hate as current, structural and unnervingly close. Some select examples:

- Jordan Davis, an unarmed black teenager, put our city on the map in 2012 when he was shot to death at a gas station here for playing ‘thug music’ in his van.
- Jacksonville’s police force has chosen not to report any hate crimes to the FBI since 2014 (Schwencke, 2017).
- Jacksonville recently made national news for racial profiling in its citations for jaywalking, in a phenomenon that has come to be known as ‘Walking while Black’ (Sanders, Rabinowitz, & Conarck, 2017).
- A local chapter of the Klu Klux Klan (KKK) regularly distributes recruitment fliers on the lawns, porches and sidewalks in our neighbourhoods. When these recruitment fliers were papered

across lawns on Dr. Martin Luther King weekend (2018), in the neighbourhood of one author, it did not even make the news, apparently this activity in our city is 'business as usual.'

- A local school principal here was placed on leave (2017) after posting racist sentiments including song lyrics that made reference to lynching (*Action Jax News*, August 29, 2017).
- In a middle school close to our college, a white teacher recently made national news by referring to African American boys as 'n***s' and advising white girls not to date them (*Washington Post*, March 9, 2018).
- In March of 2018, a Jacksonville teacher made the news here when she was dismissed for secretly hosting a racist podcast (*US News*). Shortly before that, a local teacher in Jacksonville resigned after reports surfaced that she had referred to black students as 'rats' who should remain outdoors (*News4Jax*, September 29, 2017).
- Our university, the University of North Florida (UNF), made national and international news when one of our students was revealed to be a Grand Dragon of the KKK and posed a selfie on social media that showed him shirtless with his swastika tattoos clearly visible and holding a gun in order to threaten fellow students (Lieberman & Ali-Khan, 2018; *Spinnaker*, November 14, 2017; Details omitted for blind review). Not long after this was revealed in local press, UNF made news again when white students in a dormitory ridiculed a Black Lives Matter rally by posting video of themselves as participants jumping up and down on their hands and knees, while scratching under their arms and making monkey noises (*News4Jax*, October 13, 2017).
- In March of 2018, the university's Psychology Department was vandalized with racist and homophobic remarks scrawled on its walls.

It follows that in our classes, we are no longer surprised when students speak of their own childhood indoctrination into white supremacist organizations.

Possibility (and method)

We are tempted to assert that in order to engage in social justice work in this context we were able to realize and act on the realization that we need to connect to hope as philosophical possibility, as 'an ontological requirement' (Freire, 1998, p. 44) and as a material reality. But the truth of our struggle is that we desperately sought and continue to seek hope. Adrift in these dark times, we have struggled to find it. Like the half person in Hughes poem, at times we each shrink from confident intellectual to 'almost person' and although we teach with all the rage and passion we can muster, in our hearts we falter. We stop in hallways to commiserate; we try not to validate the despair in each other's eyes and we struggle not to lose hope. In what follows we document our strategies for hope and the ways that our teaching and our students have (sometimes) saved us.

We find it significant to share that as we have engaged in creating this text, we have also come to realize that the act of autoethnographic co-authorship is both epistemologically and ontologically significant to the creation of hope. Our method here (autoethnography) has a long history at the margins of educational research. Pioneered by theorists like Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011), autoethnography turns the research lens inward and takes seriously the idea that the study of self is legitimate. It allows for the exploration of reflexivity and encourages a journey that plumbs interior space. Co-constructed autoethnography and our inner dialogues (presented in what follows as italicized text) have allowed us join together to share insights from both our teaching and the dark crevices of our fears. We did not at first realize that the method itself would allow us to see our journeys as treading parallel paths and through that realization we would find hope. As we complete this article we recommend to our readers the type of subjective deep exploration that autoethnography supports. For us, it has functioned as both a methodology and a psychological life support. These are our stories:

Narratives

John.

As an English Language Arts and Reading methods professor, I have always endorsed Paulo Freire's notion that teaching is an inherently political act; what and how we teach cannot be separated from politics. Classroom literature – including nonfiction and current news – is part and parcel of the English Language Arts. Secondary ELA classrooms should, I posit to my students, be places wherein students are encouraged to discuss and debate the 'hot topics'. Thus, while I have over the past decade avoided overt political commentary in the classroom, I have instead infused much of my courses' respective content with politics (and with criticism of the neoliberal approaches to governance).

Further, I have over the past decade increasingly taken on a stance that encourages future English teachers to become what I have called 'guerrilla warrior teachers' or just 'guerrilla teachers'. I argue quite openly throughout each semester that to teach students well, educators must time and again break the rules forced upon them by the state and by local school districts, whose curricula takes great strides to be controversy avoidant. In their own classrooms, teachers must choose times and places to 'go rogue' and depart from that curricula. The guerrilla warrior teacher knows that to be able to act independently requires surreptitious action rather than overt force. Teachers are, within their classrooms and contexts, positioned so as to make truly meaningful contributions to student learning – to engage students in thinking deeply and critically about texts and about the world that texts represent – while outside of their classrooms they are positioned in ways that they must appear to be following the rules. The guerrilla teacher understands that she/he has an ethical obligation to supplement the official curriculum with texts and assignments that speak to specific students' cultures, values and beliefs.

Just as importantly, the guerrilla teacher recognizes and acts upon the belief that true liberation comes not from the accumulation of rote knowledge, but from learning to question that knowledge and to ask what other forms of knowledge have been excluded from the curriculum. Rather than trusting in textbooks and other mandated curricular materials, the guerrilla teacher asks how such materials perpetuate dominant and hegemonic views. These teachers seek to validate Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, which holds that those with power in a society maintain that power less through coercive force than through the control of ideas. The status quo – with all of its attendant power dynamics – persists because those with power are able to legitimize and perpetuate specific ideologies while ignoring or making illegitimate other possibilities. Guerrilla teachers envision schools as sites wherein students contest dominant ideologies rather than as places where students are coerced into accepting them as the 'natural order'. The former make liberation and change possible; the latter are hegemony (agents of hegemony).

Guerrilla teachers engage students in personal expression and empowerment with classroom writing, rather than beat the creativity out of them via formulaic and creativity-stifling academic prose formats (they teach the latter but not at the expense of the former). Guerrilla teachers engage their students in code-switching – to and from academic speech – rather than work to denigrate and annihilate different and diverse linguistic registers. They do not see themselves as the language police but as purveyors of the 'codes of power' (Delpit, 1995) that enable students greater chances at academic and social success. They create assessments of student learning that are themselves instructive (learning tools) rather than rote and decontextualized. Their assessments ask students to think critically and creatively rather than to regurgitate facts. The guerrilla teacher recognizes first and foremost – in creating, delivering, and assessing specific lessons – that students should use literature not just as a lens of our world past and present but as a means of critiquing that world and thus of seeing new possibilities for that world. Finally, the guerrilla teacher couches everything she/he does behind relevant ELA and literacy research.

In addition to my frequent reference to guerrilla teaching and my critical framing of dominant ELA curricula, I also engage my students in lessons on critical literacy and, with it, hegemony. These lessons are rife with politics. As the idea is framed as a kind of literacy – and is thus specifically related to the adolescent and young adult literacy that is at the heart of ELA methods itself – I feel free to delve into it in my teacher preparation courses. And as critical literacy is focused on unjust power dynamics, it lends itself easily to critiques of the neoliberal political agenda.

These lessons begin with examples of the ways that teaching is political (age-graded classrooms, curricula chosen, criteria for becoming a teacher, school rules, uniforms/dress code, separation of different content, etc.). My first goal is always to get my students to see that schools are microcosms of the greater society and, as such, have as a primary objective not to change that society but to validate it. Unfortunately, this is not a hard point to reinforce; there are myriad examples of the ways in which schools validate our current societal structure, meritocracy, and even ethnocentrism (the continued if not newly renewed teaching of 'American exceptionalism' is a strong example). The lessons then turn to examinations of the active nature of critical literacy – that to be truly critically literate is not just to critique dominant power structures but to take action to change them. Critical literacy seeks to challenge the status quo first via an examination and critique of its inherent inequities and then by taking steps to rectify those inequities. Our collective goal for these lessons is to recognize the dominant system, whom it benefits and whom it devalues, and why, then bringing it around to how we – as teachers – might challenge dominant ideologies in what we do. At this point in the lesson, we move into an examination of hegemony.

Hegemony is a concept to which very few of my students have been exposed. This is not surprising considering how hegemony works (i.e. in the background). My students and I briefly explore what hegemony means in a general sense. I then go on to explain how I (and countless others) believe that hegemony works in world societies. I highlight the fact that people across the world are controlled less by overt force than they are by dominant ideas. Ideas are what truly shape cultures and communities and thus their norms. Similarly, the ideas held by those with power inevitably gain the most dominance in a society. These ideas, I point out, gain power as much if not more through repetition as they do through legitimate coherence and logic. I have found that George Lakoff's work on cognitive linguistics segues nicely with discussions of hegemony because it shows that facts are often subverted via the repetition of an idea from official and/or multiple sources (Lakoff, 2006). My presentation provides cogent examples of how people's minds have been changed (or their faulty ideas have been reinforced) by the careful and purposeful repetition on an idea.

These lessons lead to brainstorming activities in which I ask students to throw out ideas that, for good or for ill, control how we think and behave. Almost invariably, students begin to note how gender roles and expectations are conscribed rather than natural. Similarly, students also tend to start noting how capitalism – inherent with competition, growth, profit, and ubiquitous marketing – is presented virtually everywhere as the natural and 'right' economic order. From this we extrapolate to other ideas to include American exceptionalism and the supposed superiority of the American political system. Each of these things, we note, has become normalized (and thus goes largely unquestioned) because of the role of hegemony. Finally, we dive into a discussion about how schools too often serve to reinforce hegemony—i.e. they become hegemons. Finding examples of how schools promote specific ideologies is easy once students start to peel back the layers of dominant ideologies to examine whom they serve (and whom they disserve).

Carolynne.

Following the 2016 election, I created a PowerPoint of evidence of racism and sexism, violence, harassment, and bias that skyrocketed in k-12 spaces after the presidential election. Then I added a final project option in which students could create a pedagogical tool (artwork, poem, staff development, flier, piece of music,) designed to be used in k-12 spaces against the new waves of hate manifesting in schools. My efforts were met with mixed response. Trump-supporting students dug in; they saw my teaching as an act of aggression, refuted the evidence as 'biased news', and discredited my expertise as simply 'unfair' or 'opinionated'. Although these types of assessments by students were not new to me, the vitriol connected to them was. For example, I received the following student comment in my evaluations in an undergraduate class, 'She showed us all of the hate that came from the election because Trump was elected. However, all she did was hate on Trump.' This logic parallels that which equates pointing out racism with performing racism, a tactic long cherished by opponents of anti-racist work. Students who made these kinds of comments saw concrete evidence of the rise of hate crimes in schools as nothing more than a partisan attack. To them education was conceptualized as a neutral and politic-free space and any violation of this idea was seen as both a violation of objectivity and of their own personal emotional safety.

Those students stood in sharp contrast to the students who used their creativity to resist the rhetoric of hate. They interpreted being asked to think about hate in schools as an act of care, they understood the concept of care as pedagogical, relational and situational (Noddings, 2002). They were mobilized and passionate in their responses. What emerged for me (in the examples that follow) is how these students saw themselves as political actors, invested (at least in these moments) in knowledge creation as resistance to the status quo. For example: one group of students created a scene from a play called, 'Snow White Rewrite'. Their script was written to be adapted and performed by elementary school children. It was highly interactive, as 'audience members' (students in the classroom) read or sang parts of the script, and competed to win prizes for answering questions about oppression as it manifested in their allegory. Snow White was renamed Sleet Grey who traded the imprisonment of gender biased domesticity (as they interpreted the original tale), for imprisonment under a classroom desk/makeshift jail for the 'woke'. The characters in their tale included two prison guards and seven villagers (instead of dwarfs), among them, Donald Grump, 'a reactionary who wants to weaponized and militarize all conflicts', Wheely, 'a woman who served in the army and lost her legs', and Itchy, 'who suffers from the stress of her non-legal immigrant status and is anxious, depressed and foreign'. In their play the seven villagers marched through the classroom, confronted the 'prison guards' and argued that fighting for justice and disturbing the peace is a right, not a crime, in democratic societies. They included in their script references to stereotyping, racial profiling and discriminatory incarceration.

In a different project, students designed and created fliers in which they listed university and community resources that anyone targeted by racism, sexism, homophobia, or anti-immigrant sentiment, might need (e.g. Counseling Center, University Police, Women's Center, LGBT Center), as well as local and national resources, hashtag information on groups fighting for social justice (e.g. #Black lives matter, #Yes all women), and quotes from leaders of anti-oppression movements. They printed this information on colourful fliers and posted them all across the university campus. Along with this they researched and created a presentation for fellow students about targeted groups ('women, Muslim communities, Black communities, Hispanic communities, LGBT

communities, people with disabilities, poor people'). Their presentation included research on the extent of incidents of hate, harassment, and violence that people from these groups face. They confronted their audience (of fellow students) by stating 'If evidence of this hate is surprising to you, it is probably because you are privileged.' Then they handed out their fliers. In a different project a Saudi Arabian student learned Photoshop and worked with his wife to make powerful visual posters that confronted stereotypes about the myth of the 'oppressed Muslim woman' and Islamophobia in general. A group of pre-service elementary school teachers designed a lesson plan that used music, song, and art to have children create material talking points in the form of provocative word-based keychains. In a different project, two white male athletic coaches created staff development informational fliers about understanding title IX, equity and sexual harassment. Another teacher education student created artwork by placing on a black canvas, silhouette outlines elementary students and surrounded these with quotes of all of the stereotypes that she had heard from those students about each other. A group of undergraduate students created an informational 'Know your rights' presentation for fellow teacher educators. They used the ACLU as a guide for student rights and paired these with news of students' protests and an analysis of where student rights have been violated.

Emerging from the dark: distilling hope from our experiences

Fear and hope

By creating counter-hegemonic knowledge in the examples we provide, our students have exhibited to us their willingness to engage in activities that contest some of the dominant narratives that surround them. As these young people rise up to be critical educators (at least momentarily), they embody and exemplify a willingness to shed years of neoliberal indoctrination both from their schools and their urban ideological landscape. Freire (2002) offers us a theoretical vision of education in which history and education in general is grounded in 'why?' decoupled from inevitability and instead linked to agency, subjectivity, the creation of cultural knowledge (p. x-xii). Our students make this vision real.

As we noted earlier, the politics of our context have made clear to us that students feel no obligation to please us. Thus, their willingness to participate in this way of understanding education lies at the very heart of the renewal of our own hope and energy. As we engaged in this work, we were struck by how often students confessed to us that our classes were the first formal educational opportunity they had to question 'why?' rather than 'how?' and to further engage in the creation of knowledge that honours that 'why?' as a philosophical and political principle. We are encouraged by these students, as we see them emerging as organic intellectuals who seek to 'make meaning by grounding their knowledge construction upon the ongoing social interactions and political events that transpire in their worlds' (Darder, 2002, p. 67). As they begin grounding what will be their praxis in social justice, they align with critical educators who struggle to change social reality through schooling (e.g. hooks, 1994; Kress, 2011; Peterson 2009).

Our definition of hope is anchored in a commitment to and belief that it is possible to struggle against dehumanizing forces to shape (not only be shaped by) history. We see hope as able to recreate itself in new forms as it is recursively and discursively reproduced. In addition, for us, hope is not merely an ideological and emotional construct, it is material and tangible; it comes into being through physical actions and concrete manifestations. Hope lives in our own teaching against hegemony, in conceptualizing and promoting guerrilla teaching, and in student projects that forcefully critique the world as it stands. The actions in the aforementioned examples are acts of rage against the machine; therefore, for us, they are acts of hope. Through our work with our students and our collaborations with each other, we have learned that hope is sticky, and it attaches to us in classroom space despite our ambivalence.

We began with a poem about a zombified and alienated 'almost person' which spoke to our feelings of being almost paralysed by fear, and to the malaise, disconnect and hopelessness that threatened to engulf us post-election. Freire (2005) reminds us to not back away from our fear but to recognize it and in that recognition to note, 'the issue is not allowing that fear to paralyse us' (p.

50). As we fight to not be paralysed, fear and hope coexist in us. Breathing in fear, we are forced to create spaces of hope; breathing in hope, we are sustained and buoyed against increasing fears. By teaching and learning in ways that confront dystopia and the nightmare of history in the making, we are able to reanimate the ways in which hope can be materialized and operationalized.

Trust

It would be unjust to speak of hope in this context (and in Florida in particular) without acknowledging the students in Parkland who have mobilized a form of youth resistance that goes far beyond inspiring. One of the many lessons that those students have taught us is that guided by their youthful visions and energy we need to renew our hope by trusting youth and facilitating more opportunities for them to lead the way. All of these young people have been conduits of hope as they have ‘come to terms with their own power as critical agents’ (Giroux, 2007, p. 2). The current moment has, for us, frequently led to feelings of failure and hopelessness; the more equitable world we had hoped to foster through education has instead been co-opted towards a radically different direction. Our students, however, have reminded us through example that the battle is not lost. They have made the road by walking (Horton & Freire, 1990) as they forge forward into minor but meaningful acts of political resistance. They make possible the idea that we can be the subjects of a different history as we move from this political moment to the next. They have been able to conduct an analysis of harm and have responded through their bodies and from the heart. For us, these stories are of philosophical significance as they provide us with a means by which we can live Freire’s ontological requirement of hope.

Heeding Freire’s caution to avoid both mechanistic *and idealistic* interpretations of the world (2005), we conclude by pointing out that our intention is not to make broad (idealistic) claims. Although we have written here about the ways that hope can be sustained, we know that we could just as easily have focused on those other moments and journeys of pedagogical and philosophical darkness. We also do not claim that our students are exceptionally insightful or that we have ‘the answer’ to the stultifying inertia that comes from immersion in dystopic landscapes. What we are offering is a few insights and instances where our hearts were less burdened, when hope was able to circulate despite deeply oppressive environments. Our efforts and the efforts of our students to resisting/reframing dominant and oppressive narratives and pedagogies have offered us a pathway through our own nightmares to a place where ontologically, philosophically and ideologically we can begin to see again. Despite living in a dystopic and at times overwhelmingly bleak landscape, we have learned that we can still participate in an economy of hope. As we participate in this economy our vision returns, we hydrate back from ‘almost personhood’ and we begin to believe that a better world can be our history.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Carolyn Ali-Khan is an Associate Professor of Education in the College of Education and Human Services at the University of North Florida. In her work she focuses on issues of equity in education and exploring representation. Prior to joining UNF, she spent 20 years as a high school teacher in New York City.

John W. White is an Associate Professor of Education in the College of Education and Human Services at the University of North Florida. His areas of expertise are English Language Arts and content area reading; academic and social discourse processes; cultural and linguistic hegemony; and urban education.

References

- Action Jax News (2017, August 29). Retrieved from <https://www.actionnewsjax.com/news/local/duval-county-parents-upset-about-principals-controversial-facebook-posts/597555368>
- Ali-Khan, C. (2013). Challenging inexorability: A Journey of critical optimism. In R. Lake and Kress (Eds.), *We saved the best for you: Letters of hope, wisdom and imagination to 21st century educators* (pp. 7–10). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (1977). *Schooling in capitalist America: Educational reform and the contradictions of economic life*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Darder, A. (2002). *Reinventing Paulo Freire: A pedagogy of love*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York, NY: Norton.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12(1), 1–18.
- Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of the heart*. New York, NY: Continuum.
- Freire, P. (2002). Making history: Education for the future. In D. Antonia (Ed.), *Reinventing Paulo Freire: A pedagogy of love* (pp. ix–xii). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Freire, P. (2005). *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who dare to teach*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Freire, P., & Macedo, D. P. (1987). *Literacy: reading the word & the world*. South Hadley, Mass: Bergin & Garvey Publishers.
- Giroux, H. A. (2007). Democracy, education, and the politics of critical pedagogy. In P. McLaren & J. L. Kincheloe (Eds.), *Critical Pedagogy: Where are we now?* (pp. 1–5). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Giroux, H. (2009). Teacher education and democratic schooling. In A. Darder, M. P. Baltodamo, & R. D. Torres (Eds.), *The critical pedagogy reader* (pp. 438–459). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Horton, M. & Freire, P. (1990). In B. Bell, J. Gaventa, & J. Peters (Eds.), *We make the road by walking: Conversations on education and social change: Myles Horton and Paulo Freire*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Joyce, J. (1922/1986). *Ulysses*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Kress, T. M. (2011). *Critical praxis research: Breathing new life into research methods for teachers*. Springer.
- Lakoff, G. (2006). *Whose freedom? The battle over America's most important idea*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Lieberman, J. L., & Ali-Khan, C. (2018, April 5). Retrieved from <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/constructively-responding-to-hate>
- Liston, D. (1989). *Capitalist schools: Explanation and ethics in radical studies of schooling*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- News4Jax (2017, September 29). Retrieved from <https://www.news4jax.com/news/local/jacksonville/jacksonville-teacher-resigns-after-complaint-that-she-called-students-rats>
- News4Jax (2017, October 13). <https://www.news4jax.com/news/local/jacksonville/unf-investigating-snapchat-mocking-black-lives-matter-rally>
- Noddings, N. (2002). *Educating moral people*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Peterson, R. (2009). Teaching how to read the world and change it: Critical pedagogy in the intermediate grades. In A. Darder, M. P. Baltodamo, & R. D. Torres (Eds.), *The critical pedagogy reader* (pp. 305–323). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Sanders, T., Rabinowitz, K., & Conarck, B. (2017). *Walking while Black*. Retrieved from <https://www.propublica.org/series/walking-while-black>
- Schwencke, K. (2017). *Why America fails at gathering hate crime statistics*. Retrieved from <https://www.propublica.org/article/why-america-fails-at-gathering-hate-crime-statistics>
- Siry, C., Ali-Khan, C., & Siry, D. (2014). Political engagement as a child: Rethinking, reseeing and reinvesting boys in political participation. In K. Tobin and A. Shady (Eds.), *Transformations in urban education: Urban teachers and students working collaboratively* (pp. 377–387). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Spinnaker (2017, November 14). Retrieved from <https://unfspinnaker.com/62804/news/facebook-comments-lead-to-at-least-one-class-being2/>
- US News (March 5). Retrieved from <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/florida/articles/2018-03-05/florida-teacher-accused-of-operating-racist-podcast>
- Washington Post (2018, March 9). Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/education/wp/2018/03/09/a-teacher-used-the-n-word-and-told-students-dating-black-people-was-not-worth-it-district-says/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.4d2d071675ba
- White, J., Ali-Khan, C., Zollner, B. (2017). Deconstructing meritocracy in the college classroom. *College Teaching*, 65(3), 115–129.