
Editorial

Contemporary Education Dialogue
19(2) 195–203, 2022

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DOI: 10.1177/09731849221111844

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In the editorial to the January 2022 issue of the Contemporary Education Dialogue (CED), Disha Nawani wrote a brief commentary on the relevance of the Brazilian educator (Nawani, 2022), Paulo Freire’s work to conceptualising education in a post-pandemic world, and particularly, to Indian contexts. School closures for extended period of time, highly inequitable access to online education and the limitations of those when accessed have led to widespread concerns about the learning losses endured by children during this time. Nawani asked poignantly if

...one (should) focus first on ensuring that every child has age-appropriate foundational skills of literacy and numeracy as enunciated in our latest education policy or should one address the socio-emotional needs of children who may have seen deaths and illnesses in their family, neighbourhood or community and may need help (p. 9).

Educators across the world (teaching at all levels of the education system) are noticing that as glaring as the learning losses, are losses to children’s social and emotional well-being. How can we address not either learning losses or socio-emotional well-being, but both together? Is this even a possibility? It is questions such as these that the current editorial picks up and expands upon. The intent of this piece is to open up conversations around possibilities (and to highlight gaps in our understanding of such issues), rather than to show or tell what practices that address both together might look like in-classroom contexts.

In addition to being Freire’s birth centenary, the year 2021 also marked the loss of a noted educator, one inspired profoundly by Freire’s thinking—the Black feminist, educator and activist, bell hooks. Given her profound impact on feminist and critical pedagogy, it seemed appropriate for Contemporary Education Dialogue to mark her passing and to consider the relevance of her ideas to current educational scenarios

in the Indian context. Born as Gloria Jean Watkins in 1952 in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, USA, bell hooks ended her long and storied career as a distinguished professor of English at the City University of New York, and the author of numerous books including *All about love* (2000); and *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom* (1994a). Being a black and a woman, she developed an early awareness of the degradation and violence of race and gender and the inter-sectionality of oppressive social structures such as class, race and gender. Drawing on Freire's critical pedagogy, feminist thinking and Buddhist philosophy, bell hooks wrote about an issue that is relevant to the topic of this editorial, but one that is rarely and reluctantly touched upon in education—love (hooks, 1994a; 2000).

When I talked of love with my generation, I found it made everyone nervous or scared... No one thinks she (the writer/speaker) is simply passionately intellectually interested in the subject matter. No one thinks she is rigorously engaged in a philosophical undertaking wherein she is endeavoring to understand the metaphysical meaning of love in everyday life (hooks, 2000, pp. xix–xx).

hooks attributed the insistent resistance to conceptualising and speaking about love to long-standing patriarchal influences on intellectual and academic thinking. Even while researching this topic, she found largely male voices and male thinking about what love is, what love means and what love does in our world.

Reviewing the literature on love I noticed how few writers, male or female, talk about the impact of patriarchy, the way in which male domination of women and children stands in the way of love.... Profound changes in the way we think and act must take place if we are to create a loving culture. (hooks, 2000, p. xxiv).

Working from this realisation, hooks suggested that resisting structures of societal domination requires us to work from a 'love ethic', else we may end up resisting certain structures of domination even while continuing our allegiance to other structures of domination. An example of such cultural 'blind spots' is of white feminists fighting against gender inequality even while upholding structures of racial inequality. A love ethic, hooks asserted, permits us to move out of compartmentalised self-centred actions against exploitative structures that impact us personally, and to care about the oppression and exploitation of others—a concern

also central to Freire's work. Love, hooks asserted, was not an involuntary feeling, but a voluntary choice to know, care about and participate in the well-being of self and others, to create not just one-to-one loving relationships, but entire communities and cultures that are loving.

Extending Freire's critique of the 'banking model of education' by drawing upon Buddhist constructs of engaged living, hooks described 'engaged pedagogy' as a way for educators to 'transgress' and to create and interact in loving ways in classroom communities (hooks, 1994a). hooks was inspired by Freire's call to view education as the practice of freedom. She found resonances of Freire's emphasis on 'praxis'—conjoined action and reflection on the world in order to change it—in the Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hahn's elaboration of 'engaged Buddhism'. But, while Freire was concerned primarily with transforming the mind, Hahn was concerned with transforming the whole human being, '... striving not just for knowledge in books, but knowledge about how to live in the world' (hooks, 1994b, p. 13).

hooks has stated that she views engaged pedagogy as more demanding than traditional critical and feministic pedagogy, because it demands a 'striving for wholeness', a 'well-being' of body, mind and spirit—in both the taught *and the teacher*. Students should be viewed not as seekers after compartmentalised bits of knowledge, but as '...whole human beings with complex lives and experiences...' (Chahine, 2013). Likewise, every engaged teacher must be actively committed to *their own* well-being and self-realisation, such that the classroom is a space that engages everyone (teacher and taught) and promotes collective well-being. A teacher who is not aware of, or working towards her own liberation from oppressive social structures, is not likely to be a support to students in liberating themselves from the same.

It should be clarified at the outset that engaged pedagogy is quite different from how socio-emotional or 'holistic' education is often conceptualised in educational spaces in India. It is also not akin to how the 'happiness curriculum' of the Delhi government schools is conceptualised. Usually in our implementation of such ideas, we compartmentalise them from academic learning, such that 'socio-emotional' sits tidily in its own space, separate from the social studies or the language or the science curricula. Engaged pedagogy is an invitation to *not compartmentalise* the human being into 'mind', 'emotions', 'body', 'self', within curricular spaces, but to find new ways of teaching and learning that reach and engage the whole human being, and thereby open up possibilities for healing and transformation.

As a language teacher, I know from personal experience that it is possible to open up reading and writing spaces in dramatically different ways than is currently prevalent, that invites human beings (and not just minds) to participate rigorously, yet meaningfully. Within the language classroom, literature and writing provide powerful openings into considering our shared human condition (including the children's own lives and concerns) in rich and meaningful ways. This holistic engagement is transformative because it opens up spaces for active listening, relevant learning, reflection, empathy and empowerment. Love enters as the volitional framework supporting a commitment towards collective well-being for the individuals and the community. While such rigorous and transformative engagements should be possible in other domains (e.g., social science, science and mathematics), it would be beyond my expertise to comment on the specifics of whether and how this could be done.

From this perspective, the unified educational vision would be of communities coming together to strive for wholeness in the aftermath of a terrible and prolonged tragedy that has grotesquely exacerbated already existent pervasive inequities in society. According to hooks:

When wounded individuals come together in groups to make change our collective struggle is often undermined by all that has not been dealt with emotionally....Many of us have longed to see the union of our political efforts to change society and our efforts to be individually self-actualized (hooks, 2015, pp. xi–xii, in Low, 2021, p. 10).

The caution that hooks gives is of not moving forward to dealing with 'learning losses' in a compartmentalised manner without dealing with all that needs to be dealt with emotionally.

hooks nudges educators towards an affective turn to our theorising of curriculum and pedagogy as sites for social action; to finding approaches that address the totality of the human beings engaged in social action. Attending simultaneously to a unity of learning losses and children's and communities' social-emotional needs would be possible within the vision of this paradigm.

Working from other traditions, philosophers of education such as Judith Butler have also provided ideas that are germane to shaping our response in the aftermath of a widespread traumatic and grievable event such as the pandemic. Butler poignantly reminds us that the globe is divided into 'grievable' and 'ungrievable' lives, and that 'An ungrievable life is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it

has never counted as a life at all' (Butler, 2015). How many such 'ungrievable lives' are present in the Indian educational contexts, and how do we approach them as educators? Drawing upon Butler's work, Britzman (2013) considers how to make trauma pedagogical by enabling children and educators to engage with 'difficult knowledge'. 'Difficult knowledge' is used to signify both the representations of social and historical traumas in the curriculum; and the learner's encounters with them in pedagogy (Zembylas, 2014).

Most scholars who have engaged with curricular and pedagogical treatments of difficult knowledge have drawn extensively from the psychoanalytic tradition. Perhaps because of the impoverished state of other scholarly traditions in attending closely and rigorously to the treatment of affect in educational contexts and as sites for potential political and social action. Even those readers who do not align with the psychoanalytic tradition, cannot but be struck by the relevance of the educational questions that are being asked by these scholars: How can the curriculum be organised in a way that does not provide closure, but provides possibilities to repair traumatic experiences (Britzman, 2013)? How can we use the affective force of difficult knowledge to create a meaningful narrative from which could potentially emerge 'radical hope' (Farley, 2009, in Zembylas, 2014)? How can students learn from and engage in critical self-reflection without being led down a curricular/pedagogic path of sentimentalising or romanticising the traumatic experience, a 'feeling good about feeling bad' (Taylor, 2011, in Zembylas, 2014)? These are all pertinent questions for us to consider as educators as we move forward in the wake of a grievable and traumatic event such as the pandemic.

The pandemic is by no means the only reason why educators need to respond to the challenge of interacting *with* and *as* whole human beings. Teaching and learning are profoundly human encounters and to conceptualise these in reductive ways is always going to create unsatisfactory outcomes, in a lack or loss of collective well-being. Perhaps formal education's failure to engage with the whole person is in part responsible for the current socio-political contexts we live in. While schools might be but one of many sites of production and reproduction of contemporary social realities, they can by no means be exempt from reflection on how they might have contributed or might still be contributing to creating and sustaining pervasive climates of divisiveness and 'othering' in society. In the ongoing multidirectional movements from society to school and back, the onus is on us, as educators, to ensure

that schools serve as emergent sites of resistance and potential transformation—not just of minds—but of whole human beings. But you might ask, what has love got to do with it? As hooks reminds us:

When masses of black folks started thinking solely in terms of ‘us and them,’ internalizing the value system of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, blind spots developed, the capacity for empathy needed for the building of community was diminished. To heal our wounded body politic we must reaffirm our commitment to a vision of what King referred to in the essay ‘Facing the Challenge of a New Age’ as a genuine commitment to ‘freedom and justice for all.’ My heart is uplifted when I read King’s essay; I am reminded where true liberation leads us. It leads us beyond resistance to transformation (hooks, 1994b, p. 250).

This is where we, as engaged educators must lead—with our whole beings—if we are to have any hope of healing our society from its multiple traumas and ailments.

This volume of CED carries four articles including a piece on teacher education, four book reviews and an end note. Underlying most of the articles is a quest for equitable and high-quality education for all. Several articles reflect on the systemic violence that is antithetical to equity, what hooks might suggest emerges from a lack or loss of an imagination and a practice of love.

The volume leads with an article by Narwana and Gill on understanding parental school choices in a village in Punjab. The authors begin by establishing a fairly well-known fact—that the school-choice process unfolds differently for different parents depending on one’s position on the socio-economic ladder. The poorest section is excluded from the choice process while the upper strata indulge in the choice game freely. Interestingly, the authors establish that aspects of schooling that influence school choice, such as teachers, quality of education, learning environment, English education and private tuition, are each perceived and interpreted quite differently by parents from different segments of society. For example, being able to relate to teachers was more important for parents in the poorest segments of society, while aspects of teachers’ professional qualifications might be more important to parents in higher segments. Different ideas of what ‘quality education’ means are held by members of different socio-economic groups, raising interesting implications in planning for quality education for all. The continued interest of the poorest segments of society in high quality public schooling is re-established by these authors.

Elaborating on the idea that systemic violence underlies the power matrix of schooling in India, Anand and Dalal examine several kinds of everyday violence in the practice of schooling. They argue that it is important to study the ‘margins’ of society not just to understand what is happening there, or even to improve it by demonstrating the failure of the state, but to understand how the state functions and how it orders society. Using ethnographic data, the authors paint a vivid picture of the ‘gap between membership and belonging’ in a primary government school in Delhi. The ‘bourgeois gaze’ of the teachers and school result in varied practices that ‘other’ the children and their families; and focus on disciplining them through violence. The article highlights an essential quandary underlying the universalisation of formal education—with increasing pressure to include all children, many children are being included only to be further excluded by the system.

Given the many inequities present in modern educational systems, it is unsurprising that paradigms of scholarship would emerge that would attempt to address certain aspects that are perceived to create or sustain inequity. Language in schooling is a key factor that keeps access to ideas and participation inequitable. A recent body of literature, ‘translanguaging’ has attempted to address these inequities by suggesting that multilinguals do not experience their linguistic reality as the possession of many different linguistic repertoires that they ‘switch’ between or ‘mix’ as needed; rather, they use a single, unified linguistic repertoire. The imposition of named language itself is a violence of sorts, and curricular, pedagogic and assessment practices need to shift to acknowledge and make room for this unified linguistic repertoire. In their article in this volume, Menon and Pallavi take a critical look at this emergent body of literature—both acknowledging its contributions in helping to understand multilingual capabilities, as well as critiquing its limitations, especially as a convincing source of curricular direction.

Shifting gears, Mythili Ramchand’s article on teacher education takes another look at pedagogical content knowledge, a foundational construct in teacher education research, Mythili’s piece reports on a small study conducted with prospective science educators in their final semester of teacher preparation to boost their understanding of chemistry and chemistry teaching. An implication that her study throws up is for the need for teacher education institutes to be situated within institutions for higher learning, and for active collaborations between university faculty, teacher educators and subject teachers in teaching prospective student educators.

This volume contains four book reviews. In the first of these, Vijitha Rajan reviews Annie McCarthy's book, *Children and NGOs in India: Development as Storytelling and Performance*. The book is a richly detailed yet nuanced study that revolves around children's experiences and performances in what the author calls as the 'media NGO'—an NGO that works with slum children to produce narrative and performance-based outputs. Rajan views this book as a worthy addition to the growing literature on children and childhood at the margins in India, even while pointing out that the book could have looked more closely and directly at dynamics related to schooling and the politics of development work—and how children negotiate within and between these sites.

The second review by Mythili Ramchand is of N. Mythili's book, *Women in School Leadership*, which presents biographies on women school leaders, their contexts and social locations. The study examines the participation of women in school leadership positions in India and interviews 20 school heads to identify themes. Ramchand's review of the book provides a nuanced picture of both its strengths and limitations.

This is followed by Suhail Ahmad's review of Jana Tschurenév's book, *Empire, Civil Society, and the Beginnings of Colonial Education in India*. According to Ahmad, the book is a well-documented exploration of the contours of colonial educational transformations in nineteenth century India, and shows the 'nuanced alliances and estrangements' among the colonial and Indian policy makers, non-governmental educational societies, prominent social actors, parents and children to expand the canvas of schooling. Though primarily written for those interested in the history of schooling in India, the book also would be of interest to those with an interest in South Asian history or sociology.

The final book review by Deepti Mehrotra, examines Farah Farooqui's, *Ek School Manager Ki Diary*. Farooqui bases her work on a school in a Muslim ghetto, which unlike several other ethnographies of schools in India, is far from well-provisioned. The book is written in Hindustani, and is a unique 'auto-ethnography' spanning 6 years, conducted by the manager of this school. According to the reviewer, Farooqui's book poses urgent questions about the paradigm of childhood that informs modern schooling for working class children, as well as questions of pedagogical import. Mehrotra views the book as offering a wide-ranging critique of school, society and state, and compares the current volume with other similar books, even while pointing out the distinctions.

The end page of the volume, *A Substandard Autobiographical Sketch in Three Chapters*, authored by Harshit Pratap Singh, is a brief

autobiographical account of being a Dalit student in the Indian educational system. It returns us to the theme of this editorial: on (lack of) love and of dehumanising, systemic violence. The author comments on the futility of his name, ‘Pratap Singh’—one that his parents invented to protect him from being targeted for his caste, but which did not ultimately save him from the violence of caste discrimination. What did work to his benefit were educational opportunities that opened up due to reservations based on a model of social justice that many of his higher caste classmates opposed. Written in a personal tone, this brief sketch highlights the ways in which the educational system denies a dignified (and loving) path to the underprivileged.

I have written this editorial with the hope that readers who are drawn toward Freire’s ideas in education, will be inspired to engage with the work of bell hooks, and to collectively create a space where ‘feminine’ ideas like love can be rigorously theorised and examined in contexts of working with human beings in educational spaces.

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