

AN ARGUMENT FOR PARTICIPATORY TEACHING PRACTICES

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Readers of this journal are likely no stranger to the effects of new national and university standards that are sweeping across higher education. These standards, while they vary across each institution, often include scripted models of understanding higher education as a business investment rather than as an institution that primarily provides a robust education for students (Pinar, 2019). These systems of standards and the business models of most higher education institutions have led both faculty and students to feel more isolated in their educational experiences. Tenure track reviews rarely support co-authorship or community-facing work and one in two students are likely to feel lonely on campus (Anderson, 2026). When faculty are only rewarded for individual work, there is less incentive to research and publish with other instructors or students, which then puts a great burden on educators to fulfill their research requirements alone. Similarly, when students are in classrooms that prioritize individual, banking model learning, they are less likely to experience more diverse perspectives and engage with material that gets them to think critically about their place in the world (Freire, 1968/2000). These two isolating experiences are only a fraction of the kinds of isolation that exist on a university campus, but they participate in a greater narrative of unhappiness with the state of higher education that is present across the nation today.

Education as a whole has been suffering, with primary education systems struggling under national testing and standards and higher education pushing up against individualized business-models of learning. So why even bring up a dreadful reality when the topic of this special edition is meant to imagine a future without the standards as we know them? I believe it is important to understand where we are today to envision where we could be and who we could become. Throughout this article, I return to my own early days of teaching through what Pinar (1994) would call a “regressive” movement of *currere* to show how my early understanding of teaching, students, and the classroom helped to shape my current understanding of education as a university instructor. From there, I move into analyzing that past moment with current research about our present education system and our experiences with the aftermath of scripted curriculum. Finally, I end the piece by looking towards a progressive understanding of higher education through a constantly reiterative process inspired by participatory action research (PAR) methods (Jason et al., 2004). Ultimately, I hope readers will feel empowered to connect with other educators and students to grow a reciprocal and collective understanding of our educational experiences.

MY FIRST (STUDENT) TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Despite training, very little prepares you for your student teaching placement. Though I do not remember the circumstances of how I was placed in the classroom where I would spend the next year, the fact remained that I was about a 45-minute drive away and had to be there by 7:00 a.m. every weekday. At 20 years old, the fall of my senior year was spent balancing my two majors, English and Secondary Education, and making trips to my teaching placement. While I slowly



adjusted to the early morning, I watched my mentor teacher, who taught Freshman and Sophomore English, and began connecting with my students.

I remember that about halfway through the fall, as I was preparing my EdTPA (teaching certification) portfolio for what I would teach in the Spring, I looked at the curriculum that we were teaching and asked my mentor teacher, “I mean ... these books are pretty old. Can I design a unit with a more recently published book?” She chuckled, looked me dead in the eye and said, “No. We have to teach the exact same books as every other class in our school and in our district. Otherwise, we might create a competitive environment where students want to be in one class but not others.” It wasn’t that I disliked the books that we were teaching. But as later experiences with teaching showed me, these books had been taught for decades. While they still hold great merit for readers, they are not as up-to-date with current issues and reflections of living life. My students needed a way to connect with their current realities and see depictions of their lives and cultures in the literature, but using those texts was out of the question for the district I was teaching in.

We had the same lineup as many standard English 9/10 classrooms: *The Great Gatsby*, *Lord of the Flies*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *Julius Caesar*, among others. These were the same books I had read in high school and the same books that my mentor teacher had read in high school. While we were fortunate that we didn’t have a scripted textbook that we had to teach from, between the novels and plays we had to teach and sticking to the newly established Common Core State Standards (CCSS), teaching was definitely standardized. Every lesson I wanted to plan that would engage students, mentally, socially, and even physically, had to be deeply scrutinized through the lens of the CCSS rulebook. I had to tie everything back to a standard, lest my administrator audit a class and discover I wasn’t teaching to the standards.

Both the EdTPA and the CCSS required me to be incredibly explicit about the lesson plans that I wrote and submitted. I had been taught by my institution to follow the format and use precise language that would appeal to administrators and exam reviewers. This was the same model I used to create lesson plans for substitutes and my mentor teacher when I had to take sick leave. To give a taste of the kind of language that I used, here is an excerpt taken from one of my old lesson plans:

After engaging students with the learning target, instruct students to open to Chapter 1. Explain that the main character’s name is Scout Finch, for that information is not disclosed until later. Have the students turn to Supplemental 3, the Character Reference Guide, and take notes as they learn about main characters. As one reads aloud, stop on the assigned pages from Supplemental 4

The lesson plans themselves were informative, but critically lacking warmth, depth, and engagement with students. Reflecting back now, I am ashamed of the clinical way in which I wrote these lesson plans. Their design contributed to stilted teaching and less engagement from my students. I did not have the language for engaging the whole child, as I would later learn in my career.

While I prepared in the fall for which class I would use for my EdTPA portfolio (2nd period, 9th grade English), I knew that we would be teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird* in the spring, as every other 9th grade English classroom in our district would. What I did not prepare for was what my mentor teacher said to me when starting my spring semester of student teaching, “I leave next week for Hawaii. I will be gone for two weeks. You’ve got this!”

I was devastated. Not only would I not have the guidance of my mentor, but the semester had just started, and I was to be in charge of teaching all but one class period (which was already



co-taught with a Special Education teacher). I do not begrudge my mentor for taking a vacation, but I do still take some umbrage with her timing at the start of my student teaching semester.

Most of my peers only taught their EdTPA class (usually one class period) until the last month or two of the semester, when their workload would gradually increase as we waited for certification results. I, in the company of a district substitute teacher (who was largely there to observe), was now in charge of teaching four class periods without pay. My exam classes that I would teach were not until after her vacation, so that meant that I spent every night doing rigorous lesson planning, grading, and preparing for my exams. What should have been a shared teaching load during my exams now rested fully on my shoulders. Starting in mid-February, I spent most of my 45-minute morning commutes crying from stress, fear, and frustration.

These heavy emotions were due to a number of contributing factors. My traditional support networks of friends and family were out of reach at the time, which only contributed to the growing sense of isolation I experienced. Without an accessible network of teachers to connect with and learn from during my student teaching, the workload felt insurmountable. I was frustrated, and I could see that my students were frustrated as well. Their frustrations stemmed from a lack of connection to the texts that we read, a growing number of restrictions on student behavior from the school itself, as well as the average discontentment that high school students tend to experience around their age. While I cared deeply for my students and wanted them to succeed, I didn't have the language, support, or knowledge to help them through their high school journeys, something that I was aware of and also frustrated with.

The long drives every morning did not prepare my mind to teach, nor did the drive home settle my mind from the day's long teaching events. Instead, every drive was a reminder that I felt unsupported, alone, unprepared, and, ultimately, unhappy. This growing sense of negativity only skyrocketed one Wednesday. Ironically our school district was celebrating "Character Counts!" day to encourage students to be kind and supportive people when our school district received a school shooting threat. Another high school, about four miles away, was in sudden lockdown over a threat issued by an anonymous student, which in turn put my own school in lockdown. My students knew before faculty did. I remember being in the library and having my students gasp, huddle over their phones, and look around with panic in their eyes.

We cowered in the corner of the library, unfortunately up against a large glass window, for about 40 minutes while we waited for the loudspeakers to give us more information. We were all fortunate that the threat remained a threat and never was acted upon. This moment reminded me of an incredibly painful truth of teaching. Despite your love of the career and your desire for students to succeed, no one is immune from devastation, fear, and terror. We cancelled school the next day but returned on Friday. The mood from my students was different. They were stressed and anxious, something I was unable to relieve or even address. After all, there was work to be done and books to be read.

On top of the mounting mental and emotional stress at work, I felt as if my hands were tied to make any serious impact with my students. A number of them would leave school and go to work to help support their families or go home to help care for their younger siblings. Other students struggled to connect with texts that, while incredibly important works of literature, often did not reflect their lived experiences, culturally, racially, or situationally. Following the CCSS, my students had to constantly complete worksheets and what I can now identify as "busy work" in order to show progress towards the standards. While I wanted to update the curriculum and provide more engaging activities for my students, the CCSS and the lack of a teacher network that would have otherwise expanded my repertoire left me stymied. I was creatively stuck due to the



CCSS, and I was unable to respond to my students' needs in a way that felt meaningful for their learning in my classroom.

I couldn't imagine a way out of the stress. I never managed to make connections with my fellow student teachers. We were friendly when in person, but I wasn't a part of their get-togethers and discussions about teaching. My roommate had moved out the semester before, and I was returning home every day to the toy-hauler trailer that I called home for two years, sad and alone. I was a senior, inches away from my certification and diploma, and mentally trying to prepare for this experience to be my everyday norm. Instead of the classroom rejuvenating my love for teaching, I began to feel resentful of the institutional boundaries that were caging me in. Every day was a reminder that I did not have a robust teacher network of support and that I was burnt out from trying to support my students.

Approximately two weeks after the lockdown incident, I drove one early morning as the sun was rising, crying and shaking, thinking about going to teach. It was in that moment of deep stress and unhappiness that a realization, a thought, a voice spoke to me and said, "You don't have to do this." I remember my hyperventilating instantly stopped, and I stared blankly out at the sun. "You don't have to do this. Not right now or not ever, if you want. Consider it."

I was baffled by the thought. I had spent the last three years preparing to be a high school teacher. My sister, my mother, my grandparents, and countless relatives were all teachers. Teaching was in my blood. But in that moment, my mind or God or some other cosmic presence extended something to me that I hadn't extended to myself in a long time. Grace.

I spent the next few weeks driving and considering the thought. It never felt like a real thought or a real possibility. When I went home for Spring Break, my parents were gone, so I spent the week baking, alone and thinking about this intrusive thought. My parents would be disappointed, my education gone to waste. I ran through every possible reason to continue with my teaching career and every consequence if I chose not to. Ultimately, when my parents returned home and everyone was preparing for bed, I approached them slowly. "I have something I need to tell you..."

I was honest, I cried, and I resolved myself to not apply for any teaching jobs that year and to go home and find work in my hometown. It was a brutal decision, one that my parents welcomed as they had noticed my unhappiness, and one that I had worked to accept. At the end of the semester, when I told my mentor teacher and my advisor, I endured a long lecture on, "You're making the biggest mistake of your life. You are losing opportunities. The field needs you." Two weeks later, I drove home, my diploma in the passenger seat, uncertain about my future but full of a peace that I hadn't felt in over a year.

RECKONING WITH STANDARDS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

My student teaching experience and the struggle I had with standards and feeling isolated is not an uncommon experience. Many of the issues that negatively impact beginning teachers are tied to issues with scripted curricula. Arising out of a particular fear in the 1980s that the U.S. was behind in terms of national education in comparison to other countries (Newfield, 2018, for higher education specifically; Pinar, 2019, for U.S. education generally), standards, assessment, and accountability became the path forward for curriculum design in education (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020, p. 200). Scripted curriculum often takes the power away from individual schools or school districts in determining the best education practices for their students and instead outsources the



responsibility to corporations or national organizations to determine what kind of learning opportunities students should complete.

The idea of standards, assessment, and accountability as a priority in our education system means that schools, at all levels, are held “accountable” for so-called “student achievement.” On the surface, this sounds great. Schools should absolutely remain accountable for teaching their students equitably and responsibly. But the enforcement of that accountability has come through national standards and assessment tracking, meaning students taking more nationally-distributed tests on which they would need high scores for their schools to earn more funding. This type of assessment at a national or even a state level erases the nuance and unique situations of every individual school, let alone the students themselves. While national standards may appear on the surface to be equitable, they are often ensuring a quality of “sameness” that is not attuned to the lived realities of a given school district. This is evidenced in numerous research studies, including the study of the implementation of the scripted curriculum EngageNY in New York State by Timberlake et al. (2017), where their interviews with educators found that teaching to standards flattens curriculum to erase children’s background experiences. This ultimately results in tremendous gaps:

The silence around equity issues allowed users of the scripts to avoid having to consider the complexity of diversity and the many ways that instruction could be personalized in their classrooms. In fact, it encouraged teachers to view equity solely as sameness. (p. 49)

The turn towards national standards and assessments produced Common Core State Standards (CCSS), the No Child Left Behind act, and a growing overreach of bureaucrats in the making of educational policy without consulting teachers (Karp, 2013). As a result, K-12 schools and universities are placed in national competitions with each other, with whomever can get the highest test scores receiving the most funding and, thus, reinforcing the underlying assumptions in the system. The No Child Left Behind act enforced national testing of schools in order for them to earn government funding while the CCSS had schools “teaching the standard” rather than teaching the individual children they served.

The enforcement of standards, assessments, and accountability produced what we know today as scripted curricula. For K-12 teachers, it is easily recognizable as CCSS and boxed curriculum sets purchased from educational publishing titans like Pearson and McGraw Hill. At the university level, it shows up in assessment and accountability-based number games that universities use to justify programs and departments. I now teach in higher education, where I am seeing the ramifications of standards and accountability regimes not only reflected in higher education’s institutional practices but also in how my students come to understand their own education and learning experiences. My students struggle to identify what learning practices best suit their needs, as CCSS and scripted curriculum have guided their every move since kindergarten. This makes it difficult for students to fail upwards, assess their needs critically, and explore their passions through research. Additionally, because of the business models of higher education, students navigate college as individual consumers of a ready-made product, rather than as members of a learning community.

The arguments for scripted curriculum, standards, and test-based funding are similar across all education levels: scripts and standards focus on critical learning skills and student-centered teaching and raise expectations for everyone to the same level (Karp, 2013). Perhaps the most important reasoning in defense of scripted curriculum is that it creates a “democratic” view of



teaching designed to help every student succeed. However, this concept of scripted curriculum as democratic is a hoax, meant to lure in students, teachers, parents, and investors of all kinds. Raising the standards to be the same for every student is heedless of the unique cultural, racial, and socioeconomic situations that children grow up in and the ways they come to know the education system. As Bettina Love (2020) teaches in her book, *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, the standards, assessments, and accountability programs of the current U.S. education system adversely affect students of color in communities all over the nation. Democratic, standards-based education is largely built for white, male, upper-middle class students and is meant to enforce a white, colonized, and problematic education system.

When education and standards are designed for white, male, and upper-middle class students, marginalized students who have different access to societal resources and cultural capital cannot meet those standards. The system is designed so that marginalized students *cannot* meet those standards because they are not white, male, able-bodied, and socio-economically advantaged. Creating the same standards for every student means that the students who do not fit the mold and whose experiences are not represented in their learning turn inwards and “fall in line” with scripted practices in order to get out of education unscathed, diploma in hand. Dispassionate students and rigid systems of control lead teachers to be stymied, operating in systems of austerity and struggling to connect to their students, their colleagues, and ultimately to the love of teaching that drives a sense of fulfilling work in education.

Our education system, as democratic as it may be, is deeply broken, and the shards of its existence continue to harm students and communities. The answer is not to dismantle education, not at all. The answer is to demand better of our administrators, our politicians, and our community leaders in creating stronger educational communities that are rooted in belonging, learning, and connection instead of creating schools that treat students like customers to be cycled in and out for profit. Standards must change constantly and be subject to the unique situation of every school and district, something that the CCSS fails to recognize and universities fail to acknowledge. Constant change is costly, both in an economic sense and in a risk sense. As our schools behave more like businesses, cost and risk are two things to be avoided. But as educators, abolitionists, activists, and scholars, we know that “all that you touch, you change. All that you change changes you. The only lasting truth is change” (Butler, 1993, p. 3). We must embrace the truth of change for our communities to grow and heal from this damaged and broken system. Our education system has prioritized maintaining profit over building communities of care with our students and surrounding communities, risking the education and creativity of millions of students in the process. While it is a risk to foster change in a system that has been in place for decades, the cost of creating a society that doesn’t trust education and doesn’t value individualized learning is too great to ignore.

A GLIMPSE OF CHANGE

It has been nearly a decade since my student teaching experience. In that time, I have been a public librarian for both children and adults, and I have begun teaching at universities. Through rich and diverse experiences, I have been able to understand what harmed me most from my student teaching experience: a crippling sense of isolation and a frustration with the inability to help support my students. My roommate had moved out, my teaching cohort was out of touch, and my advisors and mentor teacher were often absent in more ways than one. My students were also isolated, struggling to move through an education system that erased their diverse experiences, and



ultimately disconnected from their learning in my classroom. I was no saint then, nor am I a saint in teaching now. There was so much more I could have done to support my students and myself as a teacher, but without a system that supported me along the way, every attempt at change felt hopeless.

The grace I had to have with myself about my decision to stop teaching had to do with the fact that I could not see a future that was different from the isolation that I felt during that year. If I applied to teaching jobs, I would move away from home, likely to a county or state that I was unfamiliar with and hope that I could make connections along the way. If I am honest, I wasn't ready for that kind of unknown future. But I have never regretted my decision to step away from teaching when I did. Doing so allowed me to learn what supportive work environments looked like and how necessary they were to my growth as a person and as an educator.

Now, nearly a decade later, I want to imagine and bring forth a future where we resist standards, assessment, and accountability systems in education. Moving beyond my previous experiences in K-12 education, my focus here is on university and higher education. College campuses are sites of and participants in great change in the U.S., including resisting the war with Vietnam and the war in Palestine, fostering the Civil Rights movement and the Black Lives Matter movement, and fighting for free speech. Centering my future imaginings on higher education allows me to act immediately, while also impacting students who will go on to become teachers, administrators, and community members with vested interests in changing the education system for the better.

On college campuses, numerous degree programs across the nation are being cut, their funding reduced, and their faculty diminished. Often the reductions are in humanities programs, where anti-DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) and harmful rhetoric against marginalized identities are ravaging departments and erasing majors, minors, and classes focused on identity-based instruction. These cuts occur both as a result of national, state, and university rulings that identity-based education and the enforcement of diversity, equity, and inclusion programming reflect a politics of exclusion and create narratives that discriminate against certain groups and ways of thinking. The argument is that universities need standards that create safe learning environments for all students, regardless of belief, religion, political background, or cultural upbringing. Echoing CCSS beliefs in raising expectations for all students, this argument sounds good on the surface, but in reality, it makes space for accountability regimes to control narratives, dismiss historical events, and erase steps made towards national equality. This results in faculty and students who are silenced due to fear of employment loss or legal trouble for teaching and researching what five years ago would have been understood as basic human rights. When faculty do not get to name issues of equality for their students, we continue to create the "equity as sameness" narrative that K-12 is experiencing, where students are unable to see themselves represented in research and education.

Standards, assessments, and accountability as they currently exist in higher education are one-way avenues of control. There is some higher entity—usually state politicians but occasionally individual boards of trustees—that enforce standards upon colleges and universities. Conversations around the creation and implementation of the standards typically take place behind closed doors and rarely include departments, instructors, or students. The standards are created without the input of those who will do the teaching or the students who are meant to learn from them. This top-down approach to enforcing educational standards is designed to fall apart and benefit only the universities with the most power (i.e., predominantly white, centuries-established schools), similar to the way that CCSS affects K-12 education.



I would like to take a moment to reaffirm the idea that keeping schools of any kind accountable for the education they are expected to provide for students is not an inherently cruel endeavor. However, the issue is that the standards that are being enforced are standards that treat education like a business. Ergo, because one pays tuition, they must receive a service of equal value. This further reinforces banking models of education (Freire, 1968/2000) that treat students like automatons that are meant to regurgitate the same information rather than to critically engage with learning and become self-motivated in their education. This is contrary to research that shows that students who see their experiences reflected in their education and engage in critical analysis of the world are more likely to achieve academically (Gay, 2000).

There is no single fix for this complex problem. Eradicating education standards entirely could be harmful and particularly detrimental if the school-as-profit model continues to be the norm. Eradicating standards will not immediately result in strengthened communities or a belief in public education. Instead, beginning to create communities who have an actual voice in the education system around them is a positive step forward. Students, teachers, and community members who can actually contribute ideas and changes to how education is structured have a high potential for improving belief about public education as something valuable and useful.

Currently, most universities behave with a top-down enforcement model, meaning that the Board of Trustees, administrators, and occasionally politicians are the ones to create standards for universities. The standards that they create tend to be profit-driven, rather than goals that are attuned to growing student learning, relationships with the local community, and the skills, experience, and knowledge of the instructors, faculty, and staff who maintain the university. Profit-driven models of education contribute towards the history of sameness that comes with standards and scripted education, discouraging diverse and radical change and research from faculty and students. Additionally, profit-driven models are often derived from other universities or actual businesses and are not aligned with the specific geographic, economic, ecological, or societal makeup of the unique area that they serve. The unique and diverse nature of each individual university is something to be utilized, not for profit but for furthering equality and growth in education.

IMAGINING A FUTURE BEYOND TOP-DOWN STANDARDS

Our education systems are already flush with individuals with diverse skills and experiences. Every student, educator, community member, and administrator has unique assets that may assist change in our current broken system. But in order for us to access these skills and experiences, we need to reprioritize and reevaluate the needs and resources the education system has access to. This act of reevaluation, if connected to the community that surrounds our education system, has the potential to enact great change and movement away from national standards and profit-driven models of education.

One way to reevaluate our current system is through participatory-action research (PAR) methods for conducting public research. This form of research requires that all participants (or audiences) be involved in the research process, from design to implementation to reflection. PAR methods are laborious and require immense amounts of time and coordination to pull off. PAR requires constant check-ins and reassessments of progress and goals. Coordinating between so many different entities (administration, departments, instructors, students, etc.) is a job in and of itself that requires education, community goal-setting, and a commitment to institutional change.



This kind of work requires time and labor, two precious assets that are often in limited supply. However, when participants are invested in great change and analyzing the ways that our education system could change to benefit all participants, rather than primarily those profiting from universities, there is great potential for creating a robust system of support, community, and lasting change.

I believe that utilizing PAR methods to analyze our education system as a network of participants is one way that we can begin to heal and grow beyond standards, assessments, and accountability regimes as well as business models of higher education. Instead of politicians and boards of trustees being the sole creators of standards, there would be a more democratic process, open to public comment and inclusive of representatives of all participants in higher education. This form of research would also be iterative, requiring constant change and fluctuation dependent on the situations and audiences involved. But, as Octavia Butler reminds us, “The only lasting truth is change” (p. 3). Iterative PAR methods would allow constant conversations and revision of what is working and not working for an individual school, with a special attunement towards the needs of both the instructors who facilitate learning and the students the education benefits. PAR methods also have a way of improving community relationships, leading to a stronger sense of belonging and reciprocity. These methods can even move to create more student-centered classrooms and curriculum that support students’ passions and interests while still equipping them with the skills and knowledge they need to graduate.

The importance of PAR or PAR-inspired practices lies in the iterative process of the research. When research is done in tandem between researcher and participant, it means that there are constant check-ins, re-evaluations, and changes made so that the research moves towards a mutually agreed upon goal. In higher education, PAR practices for determining course outcomes, department goals, and even university guidelines would mean that changes in needs and resources are frequently addressed and that all participants have a voice in those changes. A constant iterative process keeps outcomes and goals from becoming standardized in ways that are stagnant and harmful to those involved. All participants are in frequent conversation with each other, pushing against hierarchies of control, and working with and for students instead of asserting control over them, a move urged by Paulo Freire who also influenced PAR practices (Campos & Anderson, 2021, p. 45).

What PAR could look like in practice would vary from classroom to classroom or even across institutions. At an institutional level, it would mean creating democratic environments where Boards of Trustees are in constant conversation with faculty and students about what the needs of the university are. This would require administrators to actually value and uphold the needs of their faculty and students, something that can be tricky when universities are run as businesses trying to turn a profit, not educate the next generation. Within classrooms, it could result in implementing more choice in courses for students to pursue topics they are passionate about. PAR has already been successful in classrooms through community partnerships. Given that students are headed into communities for their careers, students have the potential to make an impact on their communities even as they are learning. These partnerships allow students to make immediate change in the community while also allowing community members and organizations a direct stake in the way that education shapes their communities.

In my own classroom, I work to implement PAR-inspired methods to trouble standardized systems across the university. This includes implementing “ungrading practices” that push against standardized grading assessments for evaluating students (Stommel, 2021). Instead, I work to evaluate a student’s current skillset and find ways to expand and grow their skills where they are



rather than standardizing every student to the same level of skill and experience. This means that I am constantly shifting my understanding of evaluation in tandem with my students to discover ways that they can grow, what their needs are, and how my teaching and curriculum can support them while still pushing them to engage with new and challenging material. Processes like this are hard to standardize and require constant revision, two things that push against my original beliefs and practices using scripted curriculum in my student teaching days.

Some of these ideas may seem similar to current practices or it may seem like they would not impact a standards-based accountability system. However, because the nation currently distrusts the value of higher education, building relationships with communities, with students, and within institutions to create a stronger sense of belonging and impact can help pave the way for making national change. A community that believes in the value of their local university provides opportunities for students and faculty to engage and make a direct impact while also strengthening a sense of belonging and stewardship towards that community. In turn, belief in the value of higher education grows, which means that people can feel empowered to raise their voice and advocate for their needs as an institution. Coupled with a sense of reciprocity and community, PAR methods would allow for constant, iterative change within the greater community that is invested in the value of higher education, the real lives of their students, and the faculty who teach them. Moreover, a turn towards community enforces collective learning and teaching, something that can change higher education for the better.

Again, I fully acknowledge this to be a lengthy and costly process. However, in practicing *currere* and envisioning a future that grows beyond our declining education system, this is the future I would like to participate in—one where instructor and student voices are not only heard but valued and necessary for research and change and where our education system ceases to be a business model that discourages difference and actively harms the majority of those involved to best benefit those at the top.

I became radical once I learned to give grace to myself and stop living in narratives of punishment and isolation. I *know* that my future as an educator is not one where I will be locked in my office conducting research on my own and teaching students who do not know their neighbors. I also know that the education system I seek to serve deserves more than sameness disguised as equity through accountability standards. My freshmen and sophomore students in 2018 deserved better and my college students deserve better from the education systems that we have developed and deliver today. So, as I look towards the future, I look towards the education of communities, of people who are involved in their learning journeys, and of systems that support diverse educational growth. I look forward to having lunch with other learners, my office door open, and the sun shining down on the campuses that I call home.

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