

## **NEW TOOLS FOR A NEW HOUSE: TRANSFORMATIONS FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE IN AND BEYOND COVID-19**

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Dear *Perspectives* Readers,

This edition of *Perspectives* is unprecedented, like the times we are living in. Given the state of the world, and of our schools and of our lives, this special back-to-school issue of *Perspectives* foregrounds a range of voices, reflections, and experiences of teaching, learning, and leading in these mercurial and intense times. We hear and learn from the insights, ideas, and work of students, teachers, educational leaders, counselors, parents, and researchers. Each author shares meaningful reflections, hopes, ideas, concerns, resources, observations, and wonderings that ground and inspire as we enter into this new academic year that's sure to bring a multitude of stresses as well as possibilities for meaningful change.

The twin pandemics of COVID-19 and race-based structural genocide--with their attendant soul- and opportunity-crushing reverberations--are now back at school. Justice and Peace in schooling structures, policies, and pedagogies must now be the floor, not the ceiling, of education. This is a long time coming (400+ years and counting) and yet no one seems all that prepared to engage any of the intensity we are all bringing with us to school given the preponderance of stressors, unknowns, and moving challenges we each/all face, many of which we know we don't even know about yet. The world has changed. Our country has changed. Our families and our communities have changed. We have changed inside as individuals, we all feel it. Everything is still changing at a rate so concurrently too slow and too fast--it is hard to comprehend let alone to plan and design curriculum for, to lead and teach in. And, as we peer from the precipice of radical change into this new school year, we can see and feel--though we do not yet have the precise words to name it--that the rules of education and academia have radically changed. There's no blueprint but lots of opinions and intense emotions all around. We hope that some of the wisdom and insights herein will light your path to teaching, learning, and leading justice and peace in your spheres of influence throughout this academic year and beyond.

To be ethical, to be relevant, to be useful and sustaining for ourselves and each other in these relentless times of flux, with so much suffering that is out of our control, we must make a choice to name and disrupt the epistemological violence of the academy. This edition of *Perspectives* is a small step in that direction. Stylistically, this special edition had responsive guidelines to create the conditions for authors to authentically voice their twin-pandemic experiences through reflections, inquiries, photo essays, and empirical research, to explore their lived experiences and topics of relevance to educational practice, theory, research, and policy. Further, this was positioned for students to write as they felt inspired or moved to, as they felt might be useful or cathartic for them and those they wish to support. Moreover, these contributions have been only lightly edited to retain their authenticity and the integrity of each authors' voice since we endeavor to create a shared remit for social and educational transformation. Each author is in the midst of working to change the world within their spheres of influence. Each shares themselves and their experiences in ways that are personal, thoughtful, brave, evocative, and powerful. Lifting up and intentionally hybridizing the ideas, voices, and wisdoms of these amazing people as a distributed wisdom approach (defined in Flux Leadership article herein), is one way that we can engage this forum to build forward towards change and liberation in and beyond the academy and schooling.

Deep appreciation to each of you brave authors who chose, in an already-full and trying summer, to contribute to this edition of *Perspectives*, for your goodness as people, for your good work in the world, and for your sustaining pedagogies, leadership, and solid youthing (I made it a verb) in these times. To the School District of Philadelphia high school students who contributed your stories to this special edition, deepest thanks to each of you for your powerful insights and voices and for the gift of your ideas and feelings. I am inspired by each one of you, and grateful for your contributions to this volume, to your families, to our shared Philadelphia, and to the world. While it may not always feel this way, you are the center of the center of our hearts as educators, and we care deeply about you. We need to learn more from you about how to better support your generation, how to see and understand you with all that's going on. We are ever-grateful to you for your willingness and generosity in sharing your voices with us here and now so that we can learn to be better for you. Thank you for writing through your experiences of these past 6+ months so that educators, counselors, and educational researchers and policy-makers around the country and the world can hear your stories. A special thank you to Ari Burstein and Kate Ratner, high school seniors who worked side-by-side with me all summer to ensure we had a representational group of high school students from across the School District of Philadelphia sharing their stories. As well, thanks to Katie Pak and Chloe Kannan for your support of the ideas and processes of this edition. And thank you to new Penn GSE master's student Lourdes Cossich for jumping in to help as your school year begins!

At *Perspectives* we have always worked to reflect the values of the pulsating, complex, and ever-growing interdisciplinary field of education within an ethic of foregrounding values that academia often places at the margins. We have worked to identify and engage a cross-section of people in urban Philadelphia—students of Penn and students and alumni of Penn GSE, students, teachers, and administrators from the School District of Philadelphia—to share their individual voices and stories in these difficult times. Thanks to them we are able to offer this powerful compilation of COVID-19 teaching, learning, and leading narratives. This issue shares a range of perspectives, experiences, concerns, and ideas across lives, roles, identities, and perspectives. The guiding idea is to support each of us—and then all of you—as we all “return to school” yearning for a sense of connection, affirmation, for a clear sense of collective responsibility to change the world, as well as for critical hope and love.

This time in the world is many things, among them an odyssey, a search and discovery of who we each are and who we all are—an embodied examination of what inequality does to our health as individuals across generations. So much pain. So much healing to do. There is much work to do inside of all the work we have to do right now. As I contemplate this formidable reality at the start of this new academic year of 2020, I hear the ever-guiding echo of bell hooks (1994) who reminds us again and again that,

The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom. (p. 207).

Schools and classrooms, with all of their mounting limitations and constraints, are still locations of immense possibility. The possibility lies precisely in finding, creating, and recreating the deep love and desire to view working towards freedom and equality as an opportunity, as an ethic, as our reason for being. The work of demanding – from ourselves, for our students, and with our colleagues – an openness of mind and heart can help us to face the realities of our less-than-ideal society as we strive to move beyond the borders and confines that constrain our lives and our work, as we transgress. While the work of educational transformation requires considerable focus and energy, our freedom of minds and hearts, our survival now, is what is at stake.

I leave you for now with the words of Adrian Michael Green, in his book *Giver*, since we are all giving so much right now, and we need to take care of ourselves as we continue to give so much.

the year of the giver.

remember the time you cared so much it became too much for them to handle. and you tried to pull back and pull back and pull back just enough so that your caring and your hearting and your showing was downplayed for their benefit. for their comfort. for their ease. and for what. so they didn't have to try to match your effort. so they didn't have to tip into a zone they weren't familiar with. as you do )because you are you( you adjusted. and you cared. to provide them a version of someone they could stand. They could be on the same frequency with. but not anymore. no longer is this the time to play small. to downplay. To hinder. Now you don't apologize for how much care you are willing to express. It's on them to meet you where you are. Not because you are inconsiderate. but because this is the season of the giver. the season of the wanderer. the season of the lover. The season of the heart. Reclaim your super power and realize how necessary you always have been.

May we find ourselves deep inside of our own and each other's liberation. Wishing you a healthy and hearty school year. You are necessary, keep showing up, for yourself too.

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