

Walking Away

Refusing and Resisting Reactionary Curriculum Movements

A Volume in Curriculum and Pedagogy Series

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Walking Away

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LEAVING

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We, of the Global North, are born into extremely influential cultures tacitly bearing their own sociopolitical structures and institutions. By habituation and inculcation, through compulsion and threat of discipline, we are brought in line with the norms and best practices of the dominant Anglophone techno-industrial culture. Many of us imbibe this culture and see it as natural. Some of us learn to perform the culture's praiseworthy activities and, with good fortune, find vocational success and the ability to own assets. Generation after generation, the techno-industrial culture pervades, innovating and self-replicating. The technology and the mechanisms are refined and enhanced, but the culture is replicated on the same (acquisitive and environmentally plundering) norms and values. The neo-Stoics (and the titans of industry) among us would have us believe that our end is determined/fated. They would have you believe that some things (opinion, aim, desire, aversion, etc.) are within your power; other things (body, property, reputation, and office) are beyond your power (Epictetus, 1955, p. 17). They would have you believe that the trajectory and the end of the prevailing techno-industrial mode of ordering life lie outside of our manipulation. That wealth disparities are normal and expected. That this techno-industrial ordering of things is advancement, the standard by

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which modernity is assessed. And so, most of us mold our children with culturally salient proclivities and modes of comportment. Many send their children to school (ostensibly) to gain basic skills and intellectual habits; to acquire academic skills that will ultimately translate into marketable skills in the workplace. The (dominant) culture self-replicates (McKittrick, 2021, pp. 2, 125–126).

But this is a Eurodescended (racially white) settler-colonial narrative, a mythos. The dominant culture and its techno-industrial order of things was imposed and developed over time by colonizers from Western Europe (McBride, 2021a, pp. 20–23). The dominant narrative fails to mention the dispossession and erasure of indigenous peoples, cultures, and (non-industrial) ways of ordering life. It glosses over the transatlantic slave trade and the way colonialism, chattel slavery, modern phenotype-based race conceptions, and freedom from feudalism gave birth to capitalism. The narrative champions freedom and liberty, despite genocide, dispossession, chattel slavery, and the disenfranchisement of all women for centuries. It fails to discuss the degradation and plunder of the land, flora and fauna, women, and native others. It fails to recognize the environmental damage that is being afflicted by this postindustrial, fossil fuel-driven, climate-destabilizing, capitalist economic system (McKittrick & Wynter, 2015, p. 22).

What if the predominant culture and its educative institutions are of a piece with an acquisitive and environmentally plundering self-replicating system? What if we have been misled, thoroughly convinced that this techno-industrial ordering is the best, most advanced way of life? (McKittrick & Wynter, 2015, p. 22) Perhaps we should leave; defiantly break character and exit stage left (Harris, 2020, pp. 197, 206–208; McBride, 2021b, pp. 60, 114–115). Perhaps we should disavow the dominant mythos and its norms and values. Perhaps we will have to break from the established authority and its norms and create new values, alternative mythoi.

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HISTORIAN'S NOTES

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These notes are an initial contribution of the newly created Historian role within the Curriculum and Pedagogy Governing Council. Voted into the organization's bylaws in 2023, the Historian is tasked with charting the 25-year history of the group and elucidating the contextual factors that have shaped our work, our conference, our organization, and the axiological commitments that animate and undergird all we do. Honored to serve as the Council's first Historian, I see the work of this role best served by the dual processes of historical inquiry and curriculum theorizing; understanding the path we have taken over these 25 years requires that we also understand the *complicated* tangle through which this path has cut. Thus, it seems only fitting that these notes appear in a collection that takes up *walking* (away) as its central metaphor. As such, I hope to use these brief notes as a means of situating the idea of *walking away* as a political act, within both the history of the Curriculum and Pedagogy Group, as well as some historical and contemporary scholarship that I feel might illuminate what such a walk might mean.

The Curriculum and Pedagogy Group began as a process of *walking away*. In 2019, as part of the conference's 20-year celebration, founding members Susan Huddleston Edgerton, Jim Sears, Kris Sloan, and Patrick

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Slattery described this departure as emanating from fractures in the field—personal, political, and intellectual—that manifested into contentious words and scenes at multiple Bergamo conferences. Seeking both a more democratic organizational structure, as well as space for a more broadly articulated curriculum field, these scholars would *walk away* from Bergamo, from the deep, historical roots of that space, the early moments of which are articulated in Pinar et al. (1995). In walking away, they would form the Curriculum and Pedagogy Group, create organization bylaws that sought to privilege transparency and shared governance, and develop channels for academic work (the conference, the *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, and the edited book series that contains this volume) that would amplify voices and approaches that they had found absent in the conversation about education. Moreover, as the politics of American education entered a deeply regressive phase in the early 2000s with the advent of NCLB, Curriculum and Pedagogy offered the capacity for scholars, practitioners, and activists to walk away, as well: away from the deprofessionalization of teaching that emerged at the intersection of accountability and assessment (e.g., Taubman, 2009); away from rigid, scientific understandings of educational inquiry that sought to resolve the vastness of teaching and learning into the simplicity of testing (e.g., Slattery, 2012); and away from the racist, colonial, normative, ableist, and totalizing ideologies that these policies ultimately served (e.g., Au, 2020).

Walking away—even *walking* itself—has served as an historical site of contestation. Ferguson (2017), in *Anarchist Women and the Politics of Walking*, describes the lives of Alexandra David-Neél and Lily Gair Wilkinson, two early-20th century anarchist-feminists, for whom walking was an opportunity to move oneself into the places that were previously proscribed via ideological, material, and temporal boundaries. Indeed, on one of her more expansive outings,¹ David-Neél “nearly died on the treacherous walk to Lhasa. Asked why she would take on such a daunting journey, she flippantly replied, because ‘it was there and the bureaucrats said not to’” (Ferguson, 2017, p. 710). Ferguson relates the women’s walking practices as intrinsic to their political thought, a synthesis that recalls the etymological branches of the term *movement*. She writes:

Lily and Alexandra were entangled in their walking, which, I am arguing, created certain conditions of possibility for their anarchism. One did not cause the other in any direct or simple manner, but their interactions resonate in politically suggestive ways. Similarly, physical and textual walking do not necessarily give rise to one other, but their repeated interlinking in these women’s bodies and texts suggests a lively reverberation of material and semiotic practices. (p. 709)

In particular, Ferguson reads Wilkinson's small body of written work as a sequence of invitations to walk and, in the act of moving, to engage in a simultaneous enjoyment of this act and a critique that calls one's freedom of movement into question as a freedom at all, turning to the aforementioned anarchist formulations of the communal requisite for actual freedom.

Bringing these ideas to modern anarchist scholars such as David Graeber (2011), I suggest that the walks that David-Neel and Wilkinson took, whether material or semiotic, like this text, invite us to *walk away* as a practice of freedom: "a matter of acting as if the existing structure of power does not even exist ... the defiant insistence on acting as if one is already free" (Graeber, para. 10). Walking away as "defiant insistence" occupies a similar space to what Firth (2014) relates as *critical cartography*—"instead of participating in the academic discipline of cartography's search for ever-more authentic, factual or meticulous representations of pre-existing reality, 'critical cartography' assumes that maps *make* reality as much as they represent it" (p. 158; Crampton & Krygier, 2006). Accordingly, "some maps, by their design, preclude empowerment because of the erasures, silences, and gaps inherent to that design" (Eades, 2011, as cited in Firth, 2014, p. 158). Firth's work centers on the utopic production of new means of mapping the world, rethinking concepts like borders and paths via attention to the affective bodies that inhabit these spaces, and the power flows that animate (and enervate) their movements. Moreover, these cartographies could, as a pedagogical practice, rethink the inert notion of time that prefigures maps and mapping—retracing, unnamng, and denuding the colonialist desire for mapping as a means of *dividing the world* (Willinsky, 1999) and reconstituting the meanings and bodies that have been overwritten by ostensible progress, concrete, and history. As O'Rourke (2013) poses: "With our feet we are continually writing the city, but can we read it?" (p. 6). I would add, if we read carefully, could we see all that gets trampled in our path? Moreover, where might we wind up if we *walk away* from the maps that always-already fail to apprehend the world?

The moment from which I write these notes—May of 2024—seems to beg these questions even more forcefully. The maps that we have collectively followed have led to the complementary apocalypses of an id-ascendant form of neoliberalism, an Earth on the verge of cataclysmic environmental change, and an increasingly rapid slide into authoritarian life, including the attacks on intellectualism and academic freedom that have sounded in Florida, Georgia, Texas, and my state of Indiana. Perhaps, like the founders of this organization, it is time for us to walk away, while there is still somewhere else to go. All of this said, I do not wish to voice a glibly heroic view of walking or make any attempt to substitute hagiography for history. *Walking away* is neither necessarily safe, nor is it always successful—and in our attempt at leaving behind the wages of domination,

we often recreate them. There are crucial, now absent, voices and bodies in the history of Curriculum and Pedagogy who have also *walked away*—at times due to the organization’s failures to content with its own supremacy, insularity, and normativity (one such failure is documented in Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernandez [2013, p. 84]). The project of history, as such, is finding pedagogy in these fallings and failings (Halberstam, 2011). It is an act of walking itself, charting paths to rethink critique as the quiet, slow boldness of a proposal. It is relating that we, like the defiantly insistent founders of this organization, can—*should*—walk away when spaces no longer serve our values.

NOTE

Given the colonial context of the British presence in Lhasa at the time of David-Neél’s walk, it is important to note that her presence as a white, European woman within the besieged space of Tibet is not without tension. Certainly, as power is defied, it is also enacted, and history should bear this doubled move.

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INTRODUCTION

**Alexander B. Pratt, Kevin Donley,
Sage Hatch, Staci L. Tharp, and Freyca Calderon-Berumen**

Walking Away From Where Things Usually Begin

As with many projects in academia, this book began in a bar. Sitting with colleagues and friends around a wide table in a dimly lit room in a university town the night before a conference, we passed from the work of conferencing (introducing ourselves and giving elevator talks about our recent projects and asking superficial questions about our new acquaintances' positions and departments) into the work of teachers. We began to tell stories. As the units of teacher knowledge, the sharing of stories is almost a reflex of educators who come together in one place, and we were no exception. We told of working with particular students and with archetype colleagues shaping and framing our stories to make our points. When someone wanted to make clear how their institution was failing certain populations, they told the story of a student who had been failed by that institution. When someone was pressed to talk about how they came to teaching, they shared their own story of growth out of one life and into another.

When we speak of stories, our understanding of them resonates with the work of Eva Garrouette and Anishinaabe/Cree storyteller Kathleen

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Westcott. While Indigenous storytelling has three levels: sacred, mythical, and personal (Wilson, 2008), we want to make clear that we are drawing no comparisons with sacred stores, the “higher level” (p. 98). Shawn Wilson explains that those are “sacred and contain the history of our people. I maybe shouldn’t even talk about them here, but it’s already on the page, so I’ll leave it” (p. 98). The second level of stories refers to the legends that many may have heard. “They can be shaped by the storyteller—drawing on the teller’s or the listeners’ experiences—but the underlying message of these stories does not change” (Iseke, 2013, p. 565). The third level relates to “personal experiences or the experiences of other people.... Elders often use experiences from their own or others’ lives to help counsel or teach” (Wilson, 2008, p. 98). When referring to the work of stories, Westcott, as described by Garrouette and Westcott (2013) explains, “A central function of stories, in her narrative, is to “position” hearers; they “shape consciousness and shape choices.” They engender “ways of being in the world” that attend to specific possibilities” (p. 68). It is important to emphasize the imparting of agency to the story itself is not rhetorical but ontological. Westcott continues,

The vital qualities of stories enable them to work “co-creatively” with hearers, Westcott continues, helping to mold the shape of the world. And they imply that stories do not reduce to their constituent parts. “I was taught ... that the story is a living being. It’s not an entity in the way that, say, a bear is—because it’s carried on the word. The story is able to procreate through the telling, but it is not identical with the words that people use to tell it.” The living nature of stories even enables modes of interaction beyond narration: “Even at times when my purpose is not to tell the story, I may enter the story; I watch it and listen to it. (p. 68)

The stories we told in that bar were by no means sacred, but elements may have been mythical and they were certainly personal. No matter their level, they shaped the consciousness of those present, worked “‘co-creatively’ with the hearers” and flowed with each other beyond the teller and hearer. Moreover, As Leslie Marmon Silko (quoted in Powell, 2002) advised,

[Stories] aren’t just entertainment. / Don’t be fooled. / They are all we have, you see, / all we have to fight off illness and death”; stories are carried in the body, in the belly where they live and grow (2). Stories are “more than survival, more than endurance or mere response”; they have the power to make, re-make, un-make the world. (p. 396)

Stories have a critical productive nature wherein the ways they shape consciousness and choices are not neutral but rather work to enact resistance. In her book *Recovering Black Storytelling in Qualitative Research*, S. R. Toliver (2022) makes similar assertions about Black storytelling. “[M]y

ancestors retained their stories, refusing to let whiteness destroy their connection to the past and to their homelands. [...] Their stories continue to teach, to heal, to bring life; therefore, storytelling is not a luxury for Black people, it is vital to our very existence” (p. xv). Further confirming the work of stories, one of the tenets of critical race theory (CRT) is the utility of counterstories. In his article “Legal Storytelling: Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative,” Richard Delgado (1989/1995) explained:

Ideology—the received wisdom—makes current social arrangements seem fair and neutral. [...] The cure is storytelling (or, as I shall sometimes call it, counterstorytelling). As Derrick Bell, Bruno Bettelheim, and others show, stories can shatter complacency and challenge the status quo. Stories told by underdogs are frequently ironic or satiric; a root word for “humor” is *humus*—bringing low, down to earth. (p. 65)

According to Delgado the stories in CRT co-create particular worlds, ones where the experiences of those in the outgroups are real and constitutive of their world. They also can create worlds where those of the dominant group can enter and experience the harm they are causing (though that is much harder to do).

In Latiné studies, “*Testimonio* writing has a long and varied history; it is most often seen as a voice from the margins or from the subaltern—a political approach that elicits solidarity from the reader” (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 364).¹ Building from the foundational work in *This Bridge Called My Back* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981; see also Delgado Bernal et al., 2012), the Latina Feminist Group (2001) “arrived at the importance of *testimonio* as a crucial means of bearing witness and inscribing into history those lived realities that would otherwise succumb to the alchemy of erasure” (p. 2). Editor of this volume Freyca Calderon-Berumen (2021) explained, “The stories entailed in *testimonios* are shared seeking solidarity with readers or audience, their purpose, carrying a political intent, is to call for action to bring about social change” (p. 265; see also Benmayor et al., 1997). *Testimonios* have a direct connection to CRT and counterstorytelling (Pérez Huber & Aguilar-Tinajero, 2024) in that, as a liberatory storytelling tradition, they have been incorporated as a methodology used by “Latino Critical Race Theorists or LatCrits, as they call themselves (see Arriola, 1998; Iglesias, 1997; Valdes, 1996). They are really deconstructing the Black-White binary as it applies to discussions about racism in the law” (Solorzano, & Yosso, 2001, p. 479). This volume centers on the stories of the contributors, including those we wish to share and those we choose to leave silent yet still press upon us to do more and to do better. These stories insisted to us that they be told and as they enjoyed the freedom of being

sent again into the world to do good work, we hope that they will resonate enough that you will participate in their reproduction.

As we told our stories in that dimly lit bar, it was this last story of walking away from a previous life to become a teacher that birthed a new progeny of stories focused on violent and active refusals. Some were survivance stories, some were counterstories, some were *testimonios*, some wove between, but all taught forms of the productive acts of refusal. As the collection of stories matured and developed, the how-I-walked-away-from stories piled one on top of the last. What became clear was that in each case, the act of walking away was complex and entangled with dogmatic curricula enforced in both the micro and macro social contexts. When someone told their story of coming to the U.S. to enter a PhD program, they made clear that this was in direct defiance of their family and religious upbringing. When someone shared their story of leaving the classroom to pursue work in education policy, it was because they could not stand the dismissal of humanity inherent in their school's discipline policies. As they tend to do, the stories continued to beget other stories, and the conversation built.

Then, a senior scholar added their voice. "This should be a book. Who wants to make this a book proposal?" That was the moment when the conversation became the seed that would grow into this book.

This book is an extension of that (dis)cordant conversation where no one voice took a lead; where no one story was centered; where anyone who wandered into the bar, across the floor, and sat down at the loudest table to add their story was welcome. In the end, the stories of refusal and rejection of hegemonic dogmatism in education (Simpson, 2007) insisted we create for them their own platform. And as stories do, they exceeded our efforts at locking them into the simple categories that the organization of such a book usually requires. The chapters in this book are a conversation between a heterogeneous collection of scholars that one might find sitting around a table in the back of a bar at an education conference. The tellings bounce off each other, building and contrasting and creating. Sometimes a chapter resonates with the next like old friends whose lives have grown alongside each other. Other times, the stories pass each other, sharing a quick greeting on their way to someplace new. The chapters in this book, like contributions to a conversation, follow and depart the arc of the themes we attempted to lock them into. They "'position' hearers; they 'shape consciousness and shape choices.' They engender "ways of being in the world' that attend to specific possibilities" (Garrouette & Westcott, 2013, p. 68). As you read the book, we hope that it sparks your own stories of walking away.

What Is Walking Away?

“Stay the course.” “Trust the process.” “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” Given enough time, anyone can develop a list of idioms and catchphrases that describe a charge to accept the world as it is in the hope of a future that might be. Those who resist systems of oppression, violence, erasure, and forced indoctrination can create that list faster than most because, over the course of their activism, they have been subjected to a litany of those idioms. They are told that when the system is broken, there are systems to fix it.

“Democratic ends demand democratic methods for their realization” (Dewey, 2008, p. 187) Dewey asserted, and Jane Addams explained, “The cure for the ills of Democracy is more Democracy” (Addams, 1902/1964, p. 12). While these quotes focus on democracy, the sentiments can be applied equally to settler colonialism, capitalism, the prison industrial complex, fundamentalist religion, constructed sexism, systemic racism and, of course, education.

What is missing from these platitudes is the acknowledgements that they presume the immutable value of the oppressive system. This premise is undermined by Lee McBride (2021) in his book *Ethics and Insurrection*.

But conceiving of democratic methods in this fashion seems to lock oppressed groups into a tenuous position. Oppressed groups are expected to seek justice through “the proper channels,” to voice their concerns civilly, to remain calm and well-mannered (Anderson 1998, 36). Oppressed groups are compelled to engage in (oppressive) problematic situations with empathy, with compassion. If only the oppressed would show sufficient goodwill, or work through the proper channels in a truly good-natured fashion, the dominant group would then work cooperatively with them to ameliorate the situation. (pp. 2–3)

McBride’s point here that oppression dictates that resistance must be contained within the system it is resisting can be further complicated when we acknowledge that those forces enacting the oppression are always active and furthering their own ends. The tools of resistance are curtailed while the tools of oppression are unfettered. In some moments in the face of this reality, the destruction of the master’s house might require the enlistment of his tools, while in others a breaking point has been reached; a point where no more violence can be survived and the master’s house must be abandoned. This is especially true when the master is simultaneously using those same tools to fortify his (and it is predominantly “his”) defenses. It is upon reaching this point that some walk away.

We chose to title this work “Walking Away” while acknowledging that “walking” itself is an appellation that must be walked away from as it is,

at its most basic, ableist. Our efforts toward that resistance are guided by Sunaura Taylor who reclaimed the term “walk” in her discussion with Judith Butler in the film, *Examined Life: Philosophy in the Streets* (Taylor, 2008). When Butler asked about taking a walk together, Taylor, who is confined to a wheelchair, asserted, “Well, I think that I always go for a walk. Probably every day, I go for a walk, and I always tell people that I’m going for walks. I use that word, and most of the disabled people who I know use that term also.” When we refer to “walking,” we are similarly disconnecting it from its presumed reliance on bipedal locomotion.

Walking away is both refusal and production (Tuck & Yang, 2014), a seeming paradox taken up in work on fugitivity and marronage (Diouf, 2021; Grant et al., 2021; Harney & Moten, 2013; Hartman, 2007) and in survivance (Powell, 2002; Sabzalian, 2019; Vizenor, 2008). In other words, walking away presumes both the rejection of a form of status quo (walking away from something) *and* a new direction taken (a walking toward something else). In the context of education, many teachers and researchers have reached that breaking point where/when no more curricular/pedagogic violence can be survived, and it is in that moment that those researchers and teachers actively remove themselves from those systems and assert new courses with new possibilities.²

This edited volume is a collection of works engaging with acts of refusal that manifest as walking away. In some cases, what is walked away from is the erasure of experience in curriculum. In other cases, what is walked away from is a presumption of the purity of resistance. In still other cases, what is walked away from is the carceral nature of school discipline policies. In each case, walking away is resistance, refusal, and re/co-producing possibilities and agencies. What is walked toward is a new curriculum/pedagogy of resistance, sometimes within and sometimes without that place.

Summary of Sections and Chapters

What is particularly compelling about the topic of this collected work is that walking away is a culmination; an end like the creation of a new school. There are many different avenues that might bring about the construction of that school in the same way that there are many avenues one might take in coming to and enacting walking away. In light of that understanding, chapters in this volume think with a variety of literatures and frameworks as different avenues through which the authors and/or their subjects came to walk away.

Organization of the chapters included in this volume was difficult by design. The act of walking away is never one thing and cannot be engaged through one framework. Moreover, what is being walked away from is never

one thing. When racism, sexism, colonialism, linguistic imperialism, and/or intersectional violence and erasure infect our social, political, economic, geographic, and interpersonal systems on both macro- and microlevels, walking away can and does happen in any of those intersections and often at multiple intersections simultaneously. As we solicited contributions from scholars that might include the physical act of walking away from a violent or oppressive system, the removal of oneself and one's students from a particular school environment, the refusal to teach a formal curriculum that dehumanizes, or the active production of new curriculum that directly resists normative discourses of violence and erasure, we aimed to create a mosaic of the art and science of walking away physically, theoretically, and, maybe or, philosophically. Works solicited for this volume may think with a variety of literatures and frameworks including but not limited to decolonial and critical Indigenous studies (e.g., Coulthard, 2014; Grande, 2018; Tuck, 2009; Tuck & Yang, 2014; Vizenor, 2008), Black studies (e.g., Love, 2019; Shakur, 1987; Shange, 2019; Warren, 2021; Nxumalo, 2021), Latin@/Latinx/Latiné studies (e.g., Anzaldúa, 2007; Chávez-Moreno, 2023; García et al., 2021; Rosa, 2019), critical feminisms (e.g., Ahmed, 2017; hooks, 1994; Leavy & Harris, 2019), poststructuralism (e.g., Foucault, 1982; Wallin, 2010), posthumanism (e.g., Barreiro et al., 2020; Springgay & Truman, 2019), queer theory (e.g., Arrizón, 2006; Brockenbrough, 2016; Butler, 1990), critical theory (e.g., Freire, 2005, 2018; Horkheimer, 1975), and/or a combination of these and other engagements (e.g., Jackson & Mazzei, 2022; Toshalis, 2015; Wozolek, 2021).

With these criteria in mind, finding an organizational structure for the contributions was a challenge. We settled on a more narrative structure that centers on the projected goals of each chapter as opposed to organizing the work thematically. When we asked what the project of each chapter was, we were able to identify four groupings of those projects that proceeded from the presentation of problematics through theoretical engagements and the significance of identity and cultural autonomy and concluding with statements of resistance, refusal, and joyful renewal.

We will begin with a section entitled, "Resisting Through Representation." These chapters demonstrate the diverse ways educators and institutions can resist and redefine normative educational practices. In "Gathering No Moss: Walking Away from the Principalship to Improve Policy and Practice," Erin West reflects on her act of refusing the hegemonic entities in the school district where she served as an elementary principal, recounting her journey as a White woman using her positionality to catalyze change and disrupt gender and racial inequities in the school district where she worked. Galicia Blackman explores the concept of silence in classroom discussions, framing it as generative rather than problematic. Her chapter "A Joyful Resistance" uses poetic inquiry and a mythopoetic lens to reveal

the archetype of *flâneuserie* as a mode of joyful resistance that challenges traditional educational frameworks by embracing improvisation, flexibility, and relationality among instructors and students. In “Walking Away From Macro-Institutional Identity Through Curriculum as Activism,” Pin-Hsuan Tseng, Ling-yu Chou, Hung-Chi Chu explore how the use of art-based curricular projects as critical activism challenges stereotypes, class constructs, and other oppressive aspects of institutional dominance over curriculum pedagogy. In “A Discussion on How the Morning Announcements are Harming Black Children” Michael J. Seabury reflects on the anger and grief that result from addressing systemic issues that perpetuate harm towards Black students and opting to leave the traditional classroom setting to pursue educational activism and advocate for change. The Critical American Language Praxis (CALP) group is a group of multilingual scholars, teachers, and teacher educators, conformed by: Kevin Donley, Magdalena Madany-Saa, Fernando Milmo, Karina Oliveira de Paula, and Juliana Reichert Assunção Tonelli. Resulting from their work in a special issue of JCP, they offer the chapter “Critical American Language Praxis: Rechazar las lógicas de Global English & afastar-se da hegemonia monolíngue” in which they explain a critical analysis of CALP as an analytic lens for research and practice in language learning contexts, defining the four dimensions of CALP and examining their implications for further research and practice. The final chapter of this section is entitled “Pain and Paradox. A Diffractive Analysis of Refusal and Resistance in Urban Education.” In this chapter Alexander B. Pratt and Charles Lenoir delve into the paradoxical nature of walking away as a form of resistance, utilizing diffraction to juxtapose academic analysis with affective mediums like poetry, rap, and narrative ultimately reflecting on the imperfections and challenges of resistance within educational contexts.

Whereas walking away evokes an image of a physical act, as we laid out above, what is walked away from pervades our society, including our theoretical frameworks. The second section of this volume, entitled “Engaging With Critical Refusals,” includes chapters that explore those theoretical frameworks that support the act of walking away as a form of resistance and those frameworks that uphold the violence and erasure we are walking away from. Frameworks engaged with in this section include new materialism, queer theory, critical theory, critical literacies, decolonial theory, and *testimonios*.

The section begins with “Developing a Confluence of Identity: A Reflexive Ethnography of Reading Literature as Rhetoric” by Staci L. Tharp. This chapter explores Tharp’s experience growing up in a small Texas town with a limited educational system, highlighting the transformative impact of specialized English instruction for gifted and talented students, while also discussing the broader implications of curricular cen-

ship particularly regarding issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality. In “The Coloniality of Curriculum and the Silencing of Critical Literacies,” Erin Boiles and Jairo Fúnez-Flores discuss the banning of Ethnic Studies and the subsequent attack on critical race theory, linking them to the Black Lives Matter movement and the attacks on Capitol Hill. Their chapter explores the historical context of book banning and censorship and analyzes reactionary education policies and book banning in states like Texas and Florida. “Willful Refusal: Beyond the Illusory Guise of Diversity Work in the Neoliberal Institution,” by Alycia Elfreich & Kristen Robbins, explores experiences with diversity work within higher education institutions, implicating neoliberal ideologies and examining the impact of recent state bans on curriculum related to critical race theory. MaryJohn Adkins-Cartee’s chapter, “Queering Refusals: Walking Away From Curricular Purities” reflects on their journey as a graduate student and aspiring academic, grappling with the complexities of refusing normative aspects of identity and relationships in pursuit of living a feminist life, acknowledging their privilege while navigating the uncertain consequences in a landscape of systemic oppression and reactionary movements. “Dissenting Voices From Within: A Teacher Educator Account” by Freyca Calderon-Berumen uses poetic performance narratives, the chapter explores her inner conflicts and negotiations between personal identity and professional expectations within academia, shedding light on the influence of power dynamics and privilege in her decision-making process. The final chapter of this section is “Refusing Settler Grammars: Engaging Survivance to Create Possibilities” by Sage Hatch. Hatch examines how Indigenous presence is removed from U.S. curricula and school practices through “settler grammars,” and advocates for teacher education on survivance to counteract these erasures and promote Indigenous representation and futurities in education.

The third section, “Creating Spaces for Cultural Autonomy,” includes chapters that discuss the reclaiming and assertion of cultural, linguistic, and educational identities through resistance to dominant curriculums. These chapters illustrate how different communities assert their educational philosophies and practices against mainstream educational structures. “Curricul-Arte: Artist Acts of *Autohistoria-teoría* Within Borderlands *Espacios*” by Christen Sperry García, Andres Alejandro Rangel, Laia Ivanna Vite, Kim Sandoval, Nathaniel Cano, Michel Flores Tavizón, and Kimberly Grimaldo discusses the creation of a “walking away” curriculum of resistance, called *curricul-arte*, which used their lived experiences as border dwellers in South Texas to challenge their erasure through art and pedagogy. Employing various creative mediums to visually represent and generate new knowledge from our borderlands experiences, they emphasized community, Indigenous, and geographical wealth. Rachel L. Cushman’s chapter “Walking Toward Indigenous Pedagogies: *Kønim a*

Teaching Tool to Enrich” explores the development and refinement of a pedagogical approach called “Canoe as Pedagogy,” aiming to bridge Indigenous cultural practices with dominant educational settings through storytelling, contextualization, and shared grammars of Indigeneity and decolonization. In “For Us This Is Not New: Deliberate Black Educational Strategies in a Rhetorical Democracy During Jim Crow,” Miyoshi Juergensen, Sheryl Croft, and Tiffany Pogue outline the historical and contemporary significance of Black educators in the United States utilizing progressivist educational principles to challenge oppressive narratives and prepare students for societal engagement in a world that does not yet exist. In the final chapter of this section entitled “Standing In: A Pedagogy Built on Contemplative, Embodied, and Womanists’ Spiritual Practices,” Carla Wilson engages with the work of Freire and others to explore strategies for resisting reactionary curriculum movements in higher education, emphasizing the need to challenge dominant educational paradigms aiming instead to create inclusive and reflective classroom spaces that foster uncertainty, ambiguity, and conflict as opportunities for transformative learning and social change.

The fourth and final section is a pivot of sorts. It is called “Walking Toward Transformation” and it includes chapters that focus on personal narratives, reflections, and transformative journeys that result from the decision to walk away. These chapters highlight the personal and communal impacts of these transformative acts. The section begins with “A Reflection on Walking Away From an Inauthentic Indigenous-Language Curriculum: Implications of Sustaining Linguistic Reclamation in Rural Hoche Community” by Jue Wang. The chapter examines the cultural heritage and challenges faced by the Hoche ethnic group in China, particularly focusing on the implementation and shortcomings of the Hoche language program within the context of multicultural education in a rural elementary school in Northeastern China. In “A Reflection on Colonial Classrooms and a Prayer for Messiness,” Anushri Rastogi and Manu Sharma engage in a dialogue to explore “Pedagogies of Messiness,” asserting that learning is inseparable from living, critiquing colonial classroom structures, and emphasizing the importance of embracing the messy, nonlinear nature of human existence in educational institutions. “Positionality Stories as Acts of Walking Away: A Critical Pedagogy in Academic Literacies” by Brian Sibanda and Dineo Babili explores how positionality stories in Academic Literacies serve as acts of critical pedagogy, challenging coloniality in higher education by spotlighting decolonial silences. This section concludes with a short poem by Samuel Jaye Tanner entitled “and we might be something else” that expresses the hope inherent in walking away.

As we concluded the planning for this book, the editing team wanted to include additional voices in this conversation. We felt that given the

topic of the book, we were more free to invite diverse voices in as anyone working in critical analyses and applications of education theory, policy, or practice will have at least one story of walking away. We made a list of the folks we wanted to hear from and invited them to contribute a short meditation on the themes of walking away, resistance, and refusal. We were delighted by the positive response and are proud to include here those meditations spread throughout the book. Our meditation contributors are: Wayne Au, Asalia Franklin-Phipps, Jairo Funez, Erik Malewski, Stephanie Masta, Lisa Mazzei, Lee McBride, Reagan Mitchell, and Fikile Nxumalo. We can't thank these scholars enough for their willingness to be a part of this project.

The cover of the book depicts a path through a world. As we enter the path, the surroundings are gray, dark, dull, and punctuated by the briefest flashes of what might be flames. This landscape that we know we must refuse and resist pushes us to walk away down the path toward something new. And while that which is new is vague and undefined, we see it as a mass of greens, yellows, reds, and whites. What we as educators and scholars know is that we must walk away from where we are: the parched and sterile systems that actively choke away the lives of students, families, and communities (Woodson, 1933). What we hope is that the vague greenness toward which we trek will prove to be the fertile places where communities and cultures, students and families can thrive and prosper. It is our hope that this book contributes to the field's understandings of both places and the work to move us all by walking away.

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ENDNOTES

1. In the literature the term *testimonio* is set out in italics.
2. We also acknowledge that there are cases where that active removal is only possible for those of privilege. The conversation about the privilege of walking away is included in several chapters in this volume.

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PART I

RESISTING THROUGH REPRESENTATION

MEDITATION

WHY IT IS SO HARD TO WALK AWAY

Wayne Au
University of Washington, Bothell

I must admit that, now that I am in my early 50s, I have thought about walking away from education much more than any other time in my life. It might just be the equivalent of an academic middle age crisis, but I find myself wondering more and more, *Why don't I just walk away from this mess that is institutional education?*

The answer, of course, is full of contradiction. I know why I'm here: My work as a teacher, scholar, speaker, writer, activist, and yes, even an administrator, does make some kind of difference in the world. However, I only know this from external validation—young scholars I meet at conferences, random emails from former students thanking me for my influence, invitations to speak at universities, sales of my books, and the like. It is an odd and probably unhealthy metric for anyone to measure their contribution to the struggle for justice.

I'm also still here for less altruistic reasons. I'm still stuck with trying to survive this settler-colonial, capitalist hellscape, and that includes not just exploitive economic relations, but all the asymmetries of race, gender, culture, sexuality, and environmental collapse that come with it. I've got

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bills to pay, life to live, love to share, food to cook, and physical health to manage, all of which means that to some degree I'm wedded to *not walking away* in order to just survive—even as I know the entire system of capitalist production and consumption literally has the blood of the people and the planet in its gears.

Walking away feels hard for me too in some ways because, despite my deep knowledge of the world's suffering, as well as the insufferability of educational politics in the United States, I am somehow still an optimist. The educator in me has witnessed too much personal transformation and growth, and the activist in me has seen too many social movements to not feel otherwise. Some part of me thinks that walking away would be giving in to the damaging pessimism that continues to feed the nihilist, vampiric tendencies that drive the entire capitalist enterprise—while also feeding the hyper-individualist, go-for-self, all-others-be-damned paradigm promoted by our institutions.

At times, and more so as I age, walking away also feels easier too. Between the systems of education in which I've worked and the institutions of education in which I've worked, I know as a matter of fact that they will find me replaceable if they decide it. This is true for all of us. Also, the more I work in systems of education, the more I see just how much of institutional transformation is wrapped up in the politics of respectability—working within the system. This would be all well and good, but in the process, I've seen just how much systems of higher education are built to conserve themselves. That is to say, they consistently seek to maintain their existing relations of operation, regardless of the ways they reproduce inequities and produce trauma for so many.

I think walking away also feels sometimes easier because I see the beauty of education activists creating their own institutions of mutual aid and support. For instance, I see it in the teacher for social justice conferences around the country, where for decades now groups of teachers have been convening, sharing resources, building community, and trying to heal each other within the difficult institutional and political confines they face daily. I also see it in student activism, like in the university encampments protesting the war on Palestine that were mostly full of students voicing concerns, educating each other, and, importantly, *creating systems of care for each other*. Such student and teacher activism is its own form of walking away because it is built upon a moment you decide to cut loose, institutional consequences be damned, and feel so deeply about justice that the need to take a stand outweighs threats of bad grades, detention, expulsions, job loss or other punishments. So, while I personally feel a strong pull to walk away, right now I'm staying so I can support those students and teachers willing to walk away through protest.

MEDITATION

WORRYING, WORDING, AND WORLDING

Lisa A. Mazzei
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My rumination is of a worrying, wording, worlding sort. I am troubled with the way we name students, communities, and school districts in sometimes careless and unthinking ways that produce ontologies of both promise and peril. We name a school as failing, or a school district as stellar, or a community as working class, or a group of students as falling behind. While grouping and naming is what we have been taught to do as educators to facilitate the development of curriculum and pedagogy that “fits” for a classification of those who are named, we aren’t always taught to consider the potential lasting effects and the worlds that such naming brings forth.

Words matter, and their mattering matters even more. The words that we choose, or those that we fail to consider, produce material effects. I refute the second part of the childhood rhyme that declares that “words will never hurt me.” These namings do hurt. Not in a physical sense that the “sticks and stones” might, but in a more lasting sense in that these categorizations are the basis on which students are viewed and measured as having potential and are thus served up a curriculum that challenges them and that fosters creativity. Or are seen as working class, and thus uninterested

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in further education, or the arts, or many of the things that as educators we value and seek for our own children and our own selves.

I am reminded of my early days as a teacher educator, placing the words urban, rural, and suburban on the board and asking preservice education students, mostly white and mostly female, to brainstorm as quickly as possible the ideas and sensings conjured by these words. The purpose of this exercise was to make visible the absent presence that haunted and informed their ideas of specific communities and groups of students. For some of the white students with rural or suburban upbringings, urban signaled blight, and trepidation. For the few minoritized students who lived in the urban community where our university was located, urban conjured creativity, energy, and vibrance. And rural for some not from a rural community was expressed as backward and unsophisticated. The trace of these signifiers spoke worlds into existence for their students to inhabit that they could neither outrun nor outlive.

What if we were to so carefully choose the words that we use to name students and communities as if their lives depended on it? Because in fact, they do.

CHAPTER 1

GATHERING NO MOSS

Walking Away From the Principalship to Improve Policy and Practice

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Gathering No Moss: Walking Away From the Principalship to Improve Policy and Practice

I grew up in a very small town and lived in the same house until I left for college. I always felt like there were bigger and better things out there, waiting to be discovered. I had wanderlust, dreaming of seeing the world. I pursued many adventures and traveled far after I left college. As an adult, I related to the adage: “a rolling stone gathers no moss” (Publilius Syrus, 85 B.C.). This adage resonates with my personal and professional journeys, which were characterized by years climbing the career ladder, sprinkled with frequent relocations due to family work assignments. Adapting my life and career to support our growing family, I sought stability after many moves. I thought I finally found a way to stop being a “rolling stone” professionally when I believed I had found a suitable job and location to cultivate professional growth.

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After taking a hiatus from my role as a school administrator to raise my young children, I re-entered the workforce as a newly minted Doctor of Education. Despite anticipating challenges due to a resume gap, I pursued a principal position. To my delight and surprise, I was selected to lead a public elementary school—an opportunity I deemed my dream job. I thought the time was right because my youngest child had finally started elementary school. I loved my job, and I devoted myself wholeheartedly to enhancing the students' lives. I worked tirelessly to address historically low expectations in the district and make school better for both staff and students.

Faced with the challenge of overturning entrenched traditions, I approached my role with determination, striving to elevate expectations for both educators and learners. I focused on providing teachers with resources and training on educational best practices, such as student engagement (Bodovski & Farkas, 2007; Fredricks et al., 2004; Archambault et al., 2020; Martins et al., 2022) and formative assessment (Lee et al., 2020; Schildkamp et al., 2020). My educational philosophy has consistently emphasized the importance of leaving every door of opportunity open for children, allowing them to shape their futures. This commitment fueled my efforts over a year. Despite encountering resistance from some stakeholders accustomed to a culture of minimal effort and negative discourse, I persisted in my mission. Positive changes emerged, with students expressing satisfaction and many staff members displaying increased dedication to their roles. However, I found myself targeted for the very actions that were considered educational best practices in many schools. I followed the rulebooks and earnestly sought to improve every aspect of the school. I was successful. However, my sincere wish to make the learning environment better for the students was impeded by systemic barriers, and the entrenched status quo prevented me from creating change for children. Advocating for student needs often resulted in being overlooked and perceived as disruptive by male leaders who did not fully grasp my approach, even though they were well-considered educational best practices. Disappointed, I wondered why I, a committed and capable female principal, had been unfairly treated by male authorities who had never held my position or seen my methods. Life at their hands was miserable, and I realized I had to walk away.

After much reflection, I concluded that systemic change cannot be instigated from within. The prevailing culture proved insurmountable, forcing me to confront the reality that certain systems resist transformation even from those who earnestly seek positive change. Walking away, for me, provided me the opportunity to fight for equity for female school leaders, and in turn, for students. If we can't change the system from the inside, perhaps we can fight to change it from the outside. That has been my goal. This chapter outlines the issues I and many female principals faced in