A pedagogy of Hope

in the time of monsters
‘It Feels Like I’m Pouring Energy Into a Void’

Faculty members share their thoughts on trying to reach disconnected students.
Not great, Bob!
“The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.”

Antonio Gramsci

“The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters.”

Slavoj Zizek’s (loose) translation of Gramsci
Without an unflinching honesty about where we are, we cannot discern where we need to go.
Hope.
“Hope is a discipline.”
Mariame Kaba
It’s work to be hopeful. It’s not like a fuzzy feeling. Like, you have to actually put in energy, time, and you have to be clear-eyed, and you have to hold fast to having a vision. It’s a hard thing to maintain. But it matters to have it, to believe that it’s possible, to change the world...So what’s the next best thing you can do from where you are? For you, in this moment, in this possibility space that you have, what’s the next best thing?

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“Hope...is an enduring disposition that is subjectively defined as people assess their agency and pathways related to goals.”

Snyder, et al. 2011
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Snyder, et al. 2011
Hope = Agency + Pathway(s)

(McGowan & Felten, 2021; Snyder, et al, 2011)
Where is your agency? In what spaces, places, conversations, or initiatives does it lie?
On what pathways can (should?) you use that agency?
We have no shortage of wicked problems in higher education.
The current state of student atomization and disconnection is unsustainable.
Current faculty and staff workloads are unsustainable.
Current funding models for higher education are unsustainable.
The current rate of adjunctification and the increasing precarity of the faculty are unsustainable.
Higher education co-existing with authoritarianism is unsustainable.
Dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human.

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, ch. 1
Presence
At its fundamental level, learning is a social endeavor.
Two Key Concepts from Lev Vygotsky:

“Inner Speech”

- Students learn from not only articulating thoughts and ideas themselves, but in readying that “inner speech” for sharing with peers and others (as well as reflecting on that sharing).

“Zone of Proximal Development”

- “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers”
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Truly meaningful learning is social, contextual, and collaborative
Community of Inquiry model: There are three types of presence that are vital to maintain in blended and online courses: Instructor Presence, Cognitive Presence, and Social Presence.
Whiteside’s (2015) Model of Social Presence in Online Learning
Belonging

DOOR OPEN
How do our students know they belong here?
“Belonging Uncertainty”  
(Walton and Cohen, 2007)

Students frame the hypothesis: “People like me do not belong here.” Then they look for evidence to support that hypothesis.

They usually find it.
“In fact, Walton and Cohen found that even a single instance of isolation or rejection can undermine sense of belonging.”

Strayhorn, 2019
The Hidden Curriculum: “those unstated norms, values, and beliefs transmitted to students through the underlying structure...those norms and values usually not talked about in teachers' statements of objectives or goals, even though such norms and values are implicitly and effectively taught in their classrooms.”

(Giroux, 1978)
Google Image Search Results for “Philosophy Professor”
WHITE DUDES

WHITE DUDES EVERYWHERE
Whose voices get to be heard in our scholarly conversations? Who gets to create knowledge?
“It’s startling as a young person of color to stare down the spines of literacy and note the neat annihilation of most of the world.”

Felicia Rose Chavez
Belonging: “Mattering is Motivation”

What imparts a sense of belonging for students? One study of first-year students identified these factors:

- A perception of “valued involvement”
- “functional” [of assistance during times of difficulty or adversity] peer relationships
- “the belief that faculty are compassionate and that the student is more than just another face in the crowd.”

Hoffman, et al. (2002)
Employ pedagogical tools that foster relationships of trust with students.
“People who have a trusting relationship with a teacher or mentor are better able to take advantage of critical feedback and other opportunities to learn.”

Walton and Cohen (2007)
Keeping learners at the center means not marginalizing them.
The first revolution is when you change your mind.

Gil Scott-Heron
“Just as objective social reality exists not by chance, but as the product of human action, so it is not transformed by chance. If humankind produce social reality, then transforming that reality is an historical task, a task for humanity.”

– Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed
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Commit radical acts of hope.