

Toward a Liberated Learning Spirit: A Model for Developing Critical Consciousness

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Abstract: Despite the popularity of social justice frameworks, today's polarized socio-political environments call for a justice-forward approach where educators blend equity and culturally-responsive pedagogies with experiential approaches to learning. The TALLS (Toward a Liberated Learning Spirit) model for developing critical consciousness infuses established equity practices with Indigenous approaches to learning and Martin Luther King Jr.'s Six Steps for Nonviolent Social Change. By re-engaging curiosities, TALLS guides learners from academic detachment through an unlearning process toward embodied liberation. In this reflective essay, readers will be invited to disrupt common misconceptions that reproduce postcolonial paradigms to foster learner development of critical consciousness.

Keywords: social justice; equity; experiential; critical consciousness.

“Let us avoid not only external physical violence but also internal violence of the spirit...”

—Martin Luther King, Jr., Durham, NC, 1960

Structural inequalities proliferate the socio-political environments that shape intellectual, physical, and social learning interactions in today's classrooms. The fashionable educational approach to these environments has been social justice-*seeking*, which can be ill-defined and lack full engagement with the direct action required for true social change (Hyttén & Bettez, 2011). In order for the academy to move the learning social consciousness forward to inclusive equity mindedness, pedagogy and teaching practice must shift the learning focus from merely identifying systems of oppression to a praxis-based model for developing critical consciousness. However, even adopters of critical pedagogies informed by Freire's (1974) commitment to reflective and action-oriented praxis can lack clarity on the principles and methods of direct action incorporated into the learning process. Therefore, educators could benefit from a clearly defined, justice-forward approach to teaching and learning.

In this reflective essay, the authors define a process of liberated learning that facilitates a shift from traditional practices of academic detachment through an unlearning process toward direct action and embodied liberation. This Toward a Liberated Learning Spirit (TALLS) model for developing critical consciousness builds on common characteristics of culturally-responsive pedagogies, including teaching and learning practices of Indigenous North American communities, as well as the adoption of Martin Luther King Jr.'s principles of nonviolent resistance to inform direct action. With specific examples from an undergraduate course developed and implemented using the TALLs model, the authors outline how this intentional justice-forward approach to teaching and learning can move social justice education from theory, ideology, or aspiration to praxis.

Establishing a Justice-Forward Approach

Limitations of Traditional Pedagogies

Traditional pedagogical practices in the United States were developed within systems defined by colonization, including the establishment of educational practices shaped by philosophies that privileged the education of some bodies based on racialized conceptions of an individual's value (Todd, 2018). Early American colleges were partially established by colonists for the purpose of religious development but remained small and exclusive, primarily supporting white Christian men. Women and Black individuals were denied access, and many of these colleges received some funding based on their promises to evangelize to Indigenous communities (Thelin, Edwards, & Moylen, 2013). Over time, access to higher education expanded, but the structures that shaped these institutions remained, reproducing colonizing philosophies into the modern era.

Only through decades of work by many to challenge traditional pedagogies of privilege has the academy been forced to consider change. These critical and liberation pedagogies (e.g., critical pedagogies, feminist pedagogies, Queer pedagogies, decolonial pedagogies, Indigenous pedagogies) have evolved in response to pivotal social change movements that have required intellectual resistance through consciousness raising.

Indeed in the authors' own experiences in teaching courses rooted in equity and inclusion, traditional pedagogies proved too limiting in scope and depth to examine topics fully and address how the educators' own identities shape student engagement with the topics. As traditionally and formally educated white, Christian, heterosexual, and cis-gendered women in the U.S. South, facilitating courses for undergraduate and graduate students as well as diversity, equity, and inclusion programming for university faculty and staff, the authors acknowledge the complications of, and the necessity of recognizing, the both/and nature of working to decolonize higher education while also owning personal histories (including benefiting from white supremacy and systemic injustice). Through this complication of simultaneously having power and seeking to disrupt hegemonic power structures, the authors identified some key limitations of the varying approaches to social justice education, including the lack of space in the teaching and learning process for educators and students, alike, to shift their understanding and embodiment of various positionalities.

For example, Pipe, raised in a white-coded household, has spent the past two years engaging in deep reflexive work related to her familial connections to the Tuscarora (part of the Haudenosaunee). This work has been essential in understanding her place in Indigeneity and the impact her Indigeneity has on the epistemologies she ascribes to her teaching. However, given the colonizing nature of education and U.S. society, Pipe, like many of Indigenous descent, rarely sees herself or her histories in the education in which she has participated. Or worse, she is asked to foreclose on her own Indigeneity because of historical policies of genocide and eradication. This creates a disconnect between the learner and the various positionalities that they not only occupy but that shape their very spirit as learners. The work of the TALLS model came into existence from a process of self-reflection and discovery as both authors sought to understand their own teaching praxis and identities as justice-forward scholars but also from places of authentic identities. Pipe's own journey developed from the realization that her teaching was a direct product of her learning and that her learning was the product of her ancestors and family. These ancestors are not only the visible white (German and English) familial ties, but also the very present ancestors of the Tuscarora whose beliefs in learning shaped her father's approach to educating his family.

Defining Social Justice Education

While seeking to decolonize educational practices, one of the challenges of shifting from social justice as conceptual study in the classroom to actionable change in society is the lack of clarity around the meaning of social justice education. While stated commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion are commonplace in mission statements and teaching philosophies throughout the educational landscape, moving from stated commitment to action requires shared understanding of what social justice is and what it looks like in practice. Yet, Hytten and Bettez (2011) found lack of cohesion among approaches to social justice education, instead identifying five main strands in their analysis of the literature foregrounding social justice in education:

- Philosophical/Conceptual: defines criteria for equitable access, recognition, and outcomes.
- Practical: provides practical and experiential conditions or competencies for socially-just practice.
- Ethnographic/Narrative: captures accounts of lived injustices and the justice-oriented practices to address these injustices.
- Theoretically Specific: centers around the “specializations, movements, and disciplines” (p. 16) promoting social justice.
- Democratically Grounded: situates education as promoting the types of knowledge and skills needed as a democratic citizen.

The research in each strand of social justice literature offers valuable insights into the language, conditions, frameworks, experiential strategies, and knowledge and skill development that, together, could offer a comprehensive and comprehensible approach to justice-forward teaching and learning.

Making Connections

Examining these bodies of research from the intercultural movement of the 1920s (Montalto, 1982) to the anti-racist approaches of the late 20th (Tator & Henry, 1991) and early 21st centuries, a common trend surfaces: social justice education evolves in response to the limitations of traditional pedagogies and the counter-responses that follow and in effort to disrupt the colonizing hegemony of educational structures. Within this commonality across the many and varied social justice movements and educational approaches, several pedagogical principles emerge:

- creation of an inclusive learning environment,
- recognition of multiple positionalities,
- balance between emotional and cognitive learning,
- recognition of learner expertise,
- encouragement of active engagement, and
- evaluation of personal awareness. (Adams, 2016)

Each of these principles is built on intrinsically motivated processes of consciousness raising, social learning, and attention to social and cognitive development, requiring that educators establish trusting and transparent environments where students (and educators) learn from one another and participate in experiential learning activities that challenge learners’ worldviews (Table 1).

Table 1. Pedagogical Principles and Activities in Social Justice Education.

Social Justice Education Principles	Learning Activities
<i>Create an inclusive learning environment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Utilize entry activities for immediate participation ● Be transparent about expectations and the purpose of social justice education ● Establish group norms and expectations ● Share ownership of knowledge with all students
<i>Help students acknowledge their multiple positionalities within systems of inequality</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Have students acknowledge their intersectional positionalities ● Have students identify their dominant and subordinate statuses
<i>Balance the emotional and cognitive dimensions of learning for social justice</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Have students metacognitively reflect on their social experiences using social justice concepts ● Include opportunities for social perspective taking ● Utilize small-group discussions, peer panels, caucus groups, concentric circles, fish bowls, etc. to encourage self-reflection, analysis, active listening and communication, and action planning ● Intervene when group norms are violated
<i>Draw upon students' expertise</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish personal relevance by borrowing from the students' knowledge, experiences, and personal narratives to facilitate a positive attitude toward social justice learning ● Use the intergroup dynamics in the classroom to illustrate and discuss social justice content ● Encourage student choice in content and assessment based on their experiences, values, needs, and strengths
<i>Encourage active engagement and collaboration</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Utilize fishbowls, common group or concentric circles, five faces, gallery walks, etc. to encourage students to engage actively with the issues and one another ● Create challenging and thought-provoking learning experiences inclusive of students' perspectives and values
<i>Foster and evaluate personal awareness</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Utilize self-reflection to assess growth in personal awareness ● Develop rubrics to measure knowledge and skills acquisition ● Include multiple methods through which students can demonstrate learning ● Have students develop action plans for change

Social justice education and culturally responsive teaching principles and activities found in Adams (2016) and Wlodkowski & Ginsberg (1995).

However, review of these common pedagogical principles and activities in social justice education highlights that while the various pedagogies founded on social liberation movements, social learning theories, and cognitive and social development theories address privilege and oppression with a goal of future social change outside of the classroom, the inclusion of direct action or embodied transformation is not a shared principle in social justice education. As the world faces ongoing struggles to address overt and covert human rights violations occurring within systems of oppression that continuously fortify the walls of privilege, leaving direct action out of social justice-oriented education fails to provide learners with the scaffolded support needed for personally or socially radical change. The TALLS model described in this essay addresses a need in pedagogical design to move learners from the development of individual self-awareness toward direct action and a liberated understanding of shared fate. Recognizing that the educational system sits precariously in the midst of the human rights struggle, the TALLS model attends to both the histories and hurts made invisible by colonial and postcolonial sensibilities as well as the hope essential for changing understandings of histories and applying equity lenses to a future of promise for all learners. The TALLS model is designed with the intention of disrupting traditional systems of teaching and learning and engaging learners in a process for developing their own critical consciousness.

Toward a Liberated Learning Spirit (TALLS)

Theoretical and Philosophical Grounding

The Toward a Liberated Learning Spirit (TALLS) model (Figure 1) blends the intentional establishment of shared language and conceptual understanding, the inclusion of narratives and reflective perspective-taking, experiential learning and application of knowledge and skills, and democratic engagement present across the strands of research in social justice education with the common principles of inclusive and culturally-responsive pedagogy in a focused progression. Anchored by Battiste's (2010) concept of the Learning Spirit, Tanaka's (2017) approach to trust and tender resistance, Yosso's (2006) model of cultural wealth, King's (1963) steps for nonviolent direct action, and Moon's (1999; 2001; 2004) process of learning reflection and meaning-making, the model charts a circular process for learning that disrupts traditional colonizing teaching practices and focuses the learning process both internally and externally for the learner.

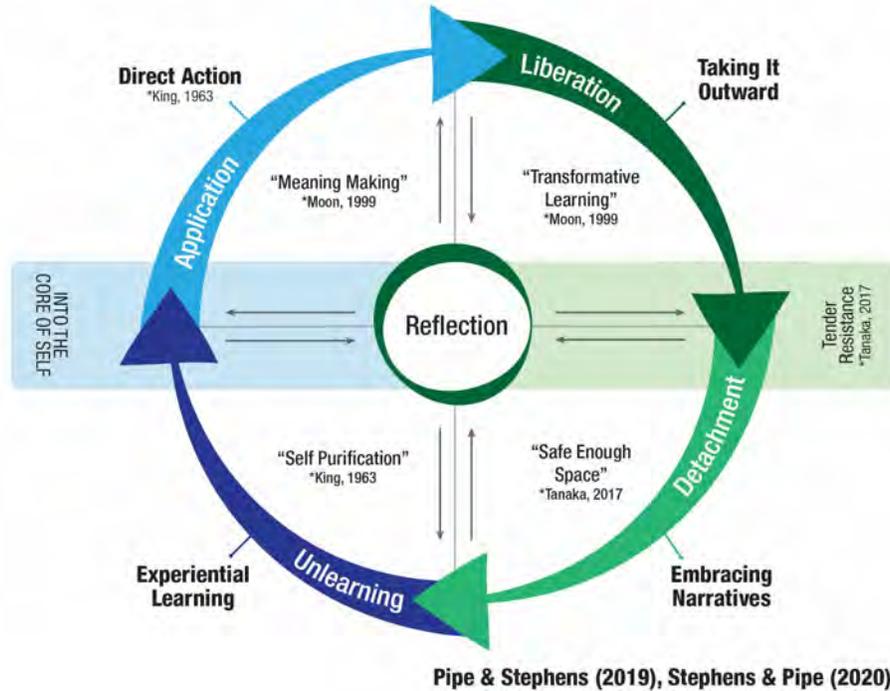


Figure 1. Toward a Liberated Learning Spirit (TALLS) Model for Developing Critical Consciousness.

Unlocking a Learning Spirit. While the TALLS model makes connections between various approaches to social justice education, the model also foregrounds connection between the learner and the learning process. From religious and spiritual teachings of endowed talents and gifts (e.g., Islam: Adam, 2016; Judaism: Dinner, 2020; Christianity: Ramsey, 2019; Hinduism: Sugirtharajah, 2001), to philosophical and psychological examinations of curiosity (e.g., Berlyne, 1954; James, 1899; Loewenstein, 1994; Oudeyer & Kaplan, 2007) and self-actualization (e.g., Goldstein, 1939; Maslow, 1943; Rogers, 1951), to the lifelong learning movement of the 1970s (e.g., Council of Europe, 1970; Faure et al., 1972; Kallen & Bengtsson, 1973), examinations of human potential and purpose have highlighted something intrinsic, epistemic, and innate to humans and their desire to seek and understand. Marie Battiste (2010) defines this essential curiosity and yearning for knowledge as the Learning Spirit:

In Aboriginal thought, the Spirit enters this earth walk with a purpose for being here and specific gifts for fulfilling that purpose... It has a hunger and a thirst for learning, and along that path it leads us to discern what is useful for us to know and what is not. (p. 15)

Though some scholars may struggle with the concept of a Learning Spirit while relating to concepts of curiosity, the TALLS model has been rooted in the deeply-centering concept of the Learning Spirit. The Learning Spirit moves beyond curiosity to personhood as a learner. It allows for the learning process to acknowledge and embrace the unique nature of each learner as essential aspects of the learning environment. It should be noted that the use of the Learning Spirit beyond the context of Indigenous communities is an important step in centering Indigenous voices as valid and valued experts in the academy. As Battiste (2010) noted, "...both nationally and internationally, Indigenous

Knowledge is being revealed as an extensive and valuable knowledge system that must be made a priority or mission in education, not just for Indigenous students but for all students” (p. 16).

Trust and Tender Resistance. Tanaka (2017) introduces the concept of “trusting the learner” as a process of acknowledging that students have their own learning journeys ahead of and behind them. The work of educators is often compared to providing medical care in that the students, like patients, may not always know or do what is best for themselves. However, this is a faulty perception of learning that disregards the students’ own awareness of themselves as learners. In the TALLS model, using Tanaka’s work, educators are called to shift from doctor-like roles to new roles more akin to wellness coaches, trusting the learners to arrive at their places of learning and completely disrupting traditional understandings of a linear learning process. Instead, educators help create the conditions for *tender resistance*, which attends to the traumas of the past and ongoing oppression in the present while including a forward-focused and hopeful call to action (Tanaka, 2017). This shift is fundamental in returning the learning power to the learner.

Cultural Wealth. Trusting the learner also requires acknowledgement of the strengths and various forms of capital learners bring to the learning environment. In Yosso’s (2006) Cultural Wealth model, there is an acknowledgement of six forms of capital that are often overlooked and discounted in U.S. learning environments: aspirational capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, resistance capital, and linguistic capital. In the TALLS model, these six forms of capital are valid ways of knowing that serve as essential building blocks for meaning-making. By acknowledging the whole learner and accepting the wealth of knowledge they bring, educators can begin to unlock a process of learning that connects meaning and self in transformative ways. In the work of honoring learners’ Learning Spirits, it is important that educators disrupt the Colonial Matrix of Power (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Quijano, 2006) by connecting individual understandings and a shared fate through the validation of multiple ways of knowing. In the TALLS model, all six forms of capital recognized by Yosso (2006) are acknowledged, honored, and valued as significant contributors to the learning process.

Traversing the Circle. In many cultures, the circle holds sacred significance, representing the interdependence of all forms of life (Stevenson, 1999), continuous and unending. By using the circle, TALLS is able to demonstrate the ongoing process needed for developing critical consciousness; one does not simply arrive at critical consciousness. The process of developing one’s full self in the space of a justice-forward approach requires an acknowledgement that developing critical consciousness is neverending labor. Additionally, the work of developing critical consciousness requires an understanding that this labor does not always correlate with academic timelines. Instead, the work continues in sustained ways, allowing learners to find their own paths. Therefore, the circle represents learning in process—ongoing, neverending, and not linearly bound.

Nonviolent Direct Action. Throughout TALLS, the learning process becomes increasingly embodied, as learners move from detached learning toward direct action and the development of critical consciousness (Freire, 2014). Adhering to King’s philosophy of nonviolent resistance, the circle of TALLS incorporates King’s (1963) six steps to nonviolent direct action. First, TALLS begins by meeting learners where they are: entering the classroom conditioned toward detached learning and privileging specific knowledge and information sources and intellect as the primary vehicle for learning. This aligns with King’s first step: *information gathering*. From there, students *educate others* (step two) by sharing personal narratives and engage in perspective-taking that demonstrates their *personal commitment* (step three). Continuing around the circle, TALLS engages learners in increasingly applied learning activities involving *negotiation* (step four), *direct action* (step five), and, finally, *reconciliation* (step 6) in the liberation stage.

Reflection. Moving from academic detachment to liberation requires ongoing reflection and self-assessment, as the reflective learning process “requires linking existing knowledge to an analysis of the

relationship between current experience and future actions or application” (McAlpine & Weston, 2000, p. 374). Specifically, Moon (2004) argues that the reflective process promotes understanding, learner action taking, and the resolution of uncertainty in knowledge. Reflection is positioned at the center, or core, of the circular TALLS model and is used at least twice in each stage—at the beginning and conclusion. Each reflection point is an opportunity for the learner to pull content and knowledge into themselves (Tanaka, 2017) through a reflective process. While the form of the process varies, the act of pulling information inward and recalibrating, re-examining, and re-emerging allows the learner to find where content fits with their core selves. However, this is a linear description of a circular and ongoing process.

While traversing the circle, the TALLS model integrates increasingly sophisticated types of reflection aligned with Moon’s (1999; 2001) five-stage framework for the learning process through experiential learning. This scaffolded reflection begins with *noticing*, where Moon (1999; 2001) asserts that “you cannot learn something if you do not notice it at some level (which could be unconscious)” (2001, p. 6). Second, learners work on *making sense* by engaging with material without connecting it to previous knowledge. In stage three, *making meaning*, “there is a sense of meaningfulness but there is not much evidence of going beyond the given” (2001, p. 6). Stage four, *working with meaning*, begins the process of linking to previous knowledge or other ideas and experiences, with “a creation of relationships of new material with other ideas” (2001, p. 6). Lastly, in the *transformative learning* stage, current understandings are transformed by new material through reflection. “Representation demonstrates strong restructuring of ideas and ability to evaluate the processes of reaching that learning” (2001, p. 6). As a cyclical process, the transformative learning that occurs in the liberation stage of the TALLS model is both an end and a beginning, as learners are able to revisit the content they previously encountered in the earlier stages to consider these ideas from a fresh perspective.

Throughout this cyclical process, the TALLS model pulls together the aforementioned common principles of inclusive and culturally-responsive pedagogies and the foundational concepts of the Learning Spirit, trust and tender resistance, cultural wealth, nonviolent direct action, and reflection to move learning from academic detachment to direct action and liberated learning. In the remainder of this essay, the authors fully describe the stages of this model, with examples of the TALLS process in action.

The Process of TALLS

The TALLS model (Figure 1) is set up in four segments of a complete circle. Each axial intersection point between segments represents a defined stage in the learning process. Starting on the right and moving clockwise, the segments follow the progression outlined previously. In between the segments are fluidly defined transitional learning spaces. All of these segments and transitional spaces are anchored by reflection. At each axial intersection point, the learner returns to the core of the circle—an internal place to reflect on what they learned in the context of self-understanding.

Throughout this reflective essay, the authors describe the TALLS model, providing examples from a course developed using TALLS as a framework. The course, *Native Movement: Physical Activity in Native Communities*, was offered at the authors’ institution in spring 2020. The course provided a cursory exploration of physical activity in Native communities of the US and Canada, including the presentation of traditional sport and games, the use of sport for the act of colonization, the impacts of these histories on the health of contemporary Native communities, and the emergence of Native physical activity today.

Designed as a foundational general education course for first- and second-year students, the course was developed to move through the first three stages of the TALLS model (academic detachment, unlearning, and application; Figure 2). Throughout each stage, students were asked to

reflect on content and experiences through guided prompts provided in weekly reflective assignments. Weeks one through four focused on providing students with known academic literature (by Native or in affiliation with Native authors) on traditional Native sport and physical activity, the ways in which sport was weaponized for colonization, the evolution of Native sports and physical activity today, current health issues in Native communities stemming from these histories, and Native sovereignty in relationship to health. This was followed in weeks five through eight with a continuation of study of academic literature but with assignments, activities, and content focused on experiencing or exploring Native sport and physical activity—how stories are used and held in Native communities. In weeks nine through fourteen, the students continued their work in the area of unlearning (though this shifted from the original design due to COVID-19). The course concluded in weeks fifteen and sixteen with an opportunity to apply the academic and narrative experiences through presentations of traditional Native sports.

Overview of TALLS Developed Courses (Native Movement)

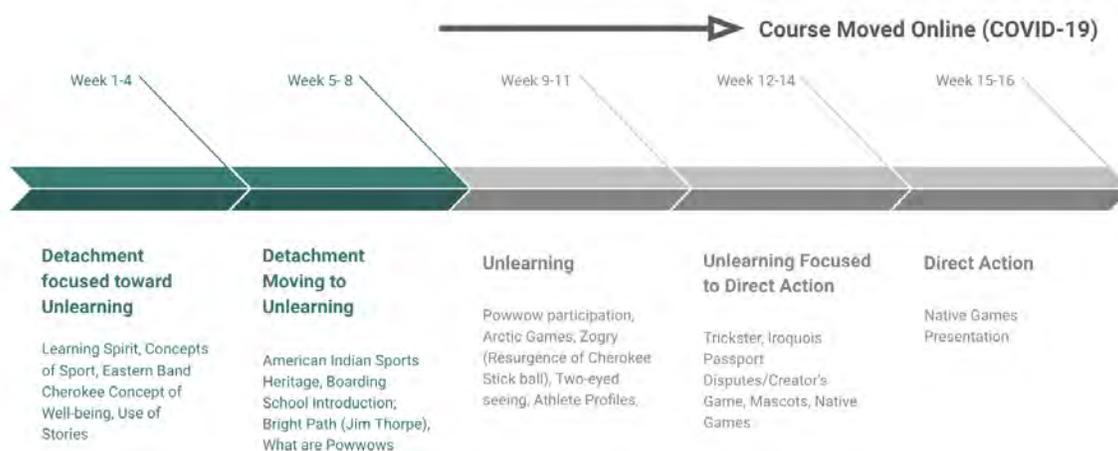


Figure 2. Overview of the Native Movement Course and TALLS Model.

Academic Detachment to Unlearning

The first stage of the TALLS model begins where learners come into higher education, as academic detachment is a fundamental pillar of the U.S. academy. Knowledge is validated when it is presented with appropriate citations, derived from carefully vetted research, and based on sound methodology as the basis of scientific and intellectual inquiry. The problem with this logic, other than the whole system being built upon it (including this reflective essay), is that it is a colonizing logic (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Quijano, 2000; Todd, 2018) that continues to sustain a power-over culture rooted in white supremacy culture (Okun, n.d.; 2016). The Colonial Matrix of Power developed by Mignolo and Walsh (2018) from the work of Quijano (2000) recognizes that colonization requires the creation of systems in which some knowledge is considered invalid because it does not follow the colonizer’s methodology. These “othered” knowledges are often the traditional ways of knowing for Indigenous and marginalized peoples. This process of validating knowledge is the first pillar of the Matrix, which feeds into three more pillars: how the economy is structured, how authority is derived, and how gender and sexuality are defined. These four pillars, then, fortify cultural structures rooted in larger systems of racism and patriarchy (Todd, 2018).

TALLS does not suggest that academic detachment be removed from the academy, for it is a necessary foundation, but instead posits that academic detachment be critically examined and placed in proper context. Academic detachment has value when discussing difficult topics, giving students and educators the option to retreat to a place of comfort rooted in traditional academic resources. When discussing challenging topics about identity, power structures, oppression, etc., students need scholarly starting points. Additionally, if critical arguments of self are pushed too soon without this scholarly foundation, learners may quickly foreclose on any discussion in a fight-or-flight response resulting from being pushed beyond their growth zone (see Vygotsky's (1978) *Zone of Proximal Development*). In fact, where academic detachment is most needed is at the foundation of learning.

However, the problem occurs when learning is halted at academic detachment. By stopping here, educators continue to invalidate other ways of knowing, support the power-over culture of the academy, and prevent learners from connecting themselves to the learning process. Learners may be fearful of seeing themselves in what they are learning, because, in academic detachment, scholars are supposed to be objective. This silences the very narratives that connect learners to their Learning Spirits. There is a need for intentional pedagogical intervention and design that moves the learner from a foundational understanding in academic detachment to a lifelong learning process.

In the case of the *Native Movement* course, the authors intentionally included peer-reviewed articles by Native authors and listed the authors' tribal affiliations in the syllabus. It was important that, in this particular stage, the students' academic detachment was also rooted in Native representation. The articles chosen focused on histories, foundations of narrative knowledge, traditional Indigenous approaches to health, current local Indigenous perspectives on health, and overviews of commonly known Indigenous sports (such as the Creator's Game, or Lacrosse; Anetso, or Cherokee Ball Game; and Powwows). Approaching these topics through academic detachment and reflection allowed the students to gain confidence in their own narratives and provided a foundation for future work.

Establishing "Safe Enough" Ground Rules. Embracing whole selves in the classroom takes practice, patience, and planning, but most of all trust. Recognizing that learners will approach the learning environment from different perspectives informed by different dominant and subordinate experiences, the creation of an environment built on trust is essential. Creating this trusting and inclusive learning environment involves establishing expectations and practices that equitably value the knowledge and narratives of all learners. The collectively created and explicitly stated expectations and practices serve as group norms that provide a specific and mutually-agreed upon structure and processes that create a "safe enough classroom" (Roth, 2019, p. 103). Confronting injustice and sharing one's perspectives and hurt cannot occur in a completely "safe space," as each requires vulnerability and potential engagement with trauma better supported by the healing facilitated in healing circles, mental health support, or reconciliation ceremonies. However, a "safe enough classroom" (Tanaka, 2017), where one might open up about their experiences and hurts while also opening up oneself to challenging and alternative ideas, can be created through the establishment of group norms that are practiced and reinforced and for which all learners and educators are held accountable.

To begin establishing ground rules, learners might be asked to consider a question developed by the Sustained Dialogue Institute (2017) based on the priming research of Claude Steele: "What guidelines can we agree on now in order to create a learning environment in which we can ask each other anything?" As the facilitator of this process, educators should record all generated ideas while helping learners to reframe non-specific behaviors. For example, learners might suggest that a group norm should be to "be respectful." Since interpretations and behaviors of respect may differ by culture or individual, learners should be asked to provide specific, observable behaviors that may demonstrate respect (e.g., "look at the individual speaking"). Differences in cultural practice necessitate that

defining behaviors involves discussion and should be mutually agreed upon by the group. Additionally, educators should anticipate the types of group norms that might be necessary to create a “safe enough classroom” (like assuming positive intent and having check-in procedures) and pose questions that lead learners to the development of expectations and procedures that address these “safe enough” conditions. The agreed upon norms should be visibly displayed in the classroom throughout the course and should be monitored and referred to often.

Embracing Narratives as Valid Knowledge. Helping the learner move from their foundational knowledge in academic detachment begins with validating and encouraging narratives as part of scholarship. Learners must understand the power of narratives as valid ways of knowing. In his work *The Truth About Stories*, King (2005) presents the power of narratives to shape our identities and how we engage with the world, reminding readers that the stories we tell are often not about us speaking but us being spoken to by those who go before us. Narratives, the space where marginalized communities often maintain history outside of validated academic detachment, are complex. Perhaps the reason educators are nervous about shaping our classrooms through these narratives is in part about that complexity. As educators, we value controlling outcomes, and outcomes are hard to control when you do not know what narrative is coming. As King (2005) remarks, “For once a story is told it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world” (p. 10). Narratives are challenging but necessary. For many communities, these “stories” hold the strings connecting identities and contest the colonizing stories that are presented as fact.

The process of embracing narratives recognizes that learners’ lived experiences are influenced by and experienced in the mind, body, and emotions. Thus, learning conditions must recognize the embodied hurt and hope carried by learners as well as the resistance needed to interrupt the colonial cycle of retraumatization. In order for the learners to share narratives, hear narratives, and believe narratives, trust must be established. Throughout TALLS, learners are called upon to courageously and honestly speak of personal and collective hurt while keeping open minds and hearts to perspectives and experiences that may differ from their own. Learners are asked to suspend judgment and listen to understand before engaging in dialogic discourse that can put learners in vulnerable positions. Tanaka’s (2017) concept of *tender resistance* creates conditions for both resisting harmful repetitions (Kumashiro, 2002) and recognizing the hope present in learning that heals through social perspective-taking that is continuously self-reflective.

A possible activity for embracing narratives is a fishbowl activity where learners in the center of the circle (or fishbowl) share their narratives around a particular topic, with learners in the outer circle (outside of the fishbowl) taking notes and developing questions. This activity has varying structures, but, by using ground rules and defining the type of discourse that will occur (debate, discussion, or dialogue), facilitators ensure that learners are operating from shared understandings of the activity. Beyond creating conditions conducive to effective communication, the educator must give up control of knowing the outcome and embrace the narratives as they come. These narratives are the stories of our students and they are valid. Embracing narratives, then, becomes central to learners *noticing* (Moon, 1999; 2001) the similarities and differences between the perspectives and experiences of one another, aiding in the process of unlearning and setting the stage for reflection.

Returning to the Core for Reflection. Before unlearning, reflection is especially important as a place of comfort and retreat (Tanaka, 2017), as the learners engage with their previous understandings of what constitutes “valid” knowledge. One approach is to ask learners to “try on” content. This involves providing learners with the space to pull apart what they are learning, engage with it, and determine where it settles in their own learning process before deploying the content in summative ways. Another way to approach this is to provide learners with opportunities to construct their own narratives in safe ways, such as journals and logs that may or may not be shared with the instructor.

Academic detachment establishes a benchmark for the learners' own understandings and perceptions of content and their conceptions of learning. Then, the learner can use reflection to document their own incorporation of narratives into the learning process. These steps move the learner from a position of academic detachment to the deeper learning required of the unlearning process, allowing for ownership of personal learning (Moon, 1999), which is at the heart of the Learning Spirit (Battiste, 2010).

Unlearning to Application

In the next stage of the TALLS model, learning shifts from academic detachment to an intentional process of unlearning. In the United States, learning has largely consisted of knowledge acquisition and summative demonstration. However, this process limits the validation of learning and knowledge capital to philosophically "objective" colonized understanding with finite benchmarks. By expanding the validation of learning to include cultural and contextual ways of knowing and meaning making, the process of learning becomes a fluid space that acknowledges the necessity and reality of lifelong learning. In order for learners to embrace, or even participate in, expanded learning processes, the act of unlearning needs to occur. The unlearning stage requires that the learner "go through a process of unlearning what they have unconsciously internalized" (Battiste, 2010, p. 16). While the process of unlearning has been central to the work of scholars in the area of identity development, unlearning is also essential to undoing colonized learning processes.

The internalization of learning occurs early and is reinforced through a neoliberal approach to education that reproduces colonized methods for learning. Therefore, the act of unlearning has to be an internal process as much as a structural process. According to Henriques' (2017) character adaptation systems theory, human character develops in bio-physiological, learning and developmental, and sociocultural contexts within five systems of adaptation: the habit system, the experiential system, the relational system, the defensive system, and the justification system. Recognizing that learning filters through each of these systems, TALLS engages learners in unlearning activities that address these systems. In habit forming, a stimulus is met with an enacted response followed by a rewarding consequence. As habit formation happens at the subconscious level, individuals begin to make meaning by linking perceptions with motivations to either repeat or avoid particular states, which then results in behavioral responses that are either punished or rewarded within a social context of the self in relation to others. Based on these outcomes, individuals either feel threatened, thus becoming defensive, or legitimized, thus feeling justified in their beliefs and values. With learned responses thus automated, unlearning requires that learners be put into novel situations (such as experiential learning) that disrupt these subconscious responses and move them away from their natural defensive or justification states.

Experiential Learning. Though there are conflicting definitions of experiential learning, Moon (2004) uses intentionality as the distinction between experiential learning and learning from experience. We learn from experience daily, in both professional and personal arenas. However, in experiential learning there exists an intention for the experience to have a learning outcome. Moon (2004) notes that these experiences can be structured or unstructured, but the process of reflection is necessary. TALLS calls for the creation of intentional learning experiences that challenge traditional paradigms, past perceptions, and frames of reference by the learner and instructor to disrupt assumed sensibilities.

Self-Purification (King, 1963). In King's (1963) *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, he calls for an unlearning process of self-purification as a step in nonviolent resistance. According to King (1963), individuals must address their own internal issues before working to change the external world. Doing so often requires practice with new ways of thinking and responding to change one's automatic

reactions. For example, as a process of self-purification, King put his fellow activists through workshops on nonviolent resistance that trained them not to retaliate in the face of violence. King's self-purification workshops taught individuals how to act with restraint in order to achieve a broader goal.

In the classroom, self-purification through experiential learning also helps to interrupt learners' conditioned responses in order to shift to new ways of making meaning for social change. For example, individuals tend to respond to micro-aggressions with a natural tendency to either wonder about the person's intended meaning or to focus, instead, on the immediate impact of what was said. Through a "4 Cs" process developed by the Sustained Dialogue Institute (2017), learners can learn to approach these types of situations in a more inclusive way that promotes nonviolent resistance. In the "4 Cs," one asks the offending person to *clarify* their statement, potentially asking follow-up questions to get to the intended meaning of the statement. In the case that the offending person speaks in generalities, that person is asked to *change* their statement or example to speak from their own direct experience. Then, one should *create* space for others to share the impact that the statement had on them. Finally, one should *challenge* the original statement with a credible counterpoint supported with vetted data and/or direct experience.

One way to practice this with students in the classroom is to give the students a typical micro-aggressive statement like, "I don't see color," and have students break into "intent" and "impact" groups that come up with all of the potential positive intents and negative impacts behind such a statement. An effective way of getting students to take on a mindset that is atypical for themselves is to have them group according to their natural tendencies (those who tend to focus first on intent and those that tend to focus first on impact) and then give the intent-first group the task of coming up with all of the potential negative impacts and the impact-first group the task of coming up with all of the potential positive intents behind the statement. After sharing their lists, the students, then, practice how to intervene with such a statement by practicing with the "4 Cs." By utilizing this type of self-purification activity early in a course, students can practice social perspective-taking and intervention strategies that can interrupt their conditioned responses and improve their communication around challenging topics.

Making Sense of Meaning Making (Moon, 1999). Experiential learning activities, like King's self-purification, have the power to put a person into a different frame of mind by allowing one to engage with material separate from one's previous knowledge—*making sense* (Moon, 1999; 2000). In these types of sense-making exercises, learners engage with social justice themes without the personal attachment to their narratives that can lead to defensiveness or overjustification. While the sharing of personal narratives is critical to the unlearning process, moving from unlearning to application requires an ability to step outside of one's personal story and perspective to experience the world in a different way.

In the *Native Movement* course, unlearning took place through activities that asked students to reconsider the histories they had previously learned. One activity, an exploration of the Carlisle Indian Boarding School archives (<http://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/>), was repeatedly referenced by the students as impactful. In this particular activity, students were introduced to the archives by reading the file of Iva Miller, who would become the wife of Bright Path (Jim Thorpe). In her file, students reflected on the notes kept about Miller during her off-campus labor assignment. The students analyzed the language used to describe Miller and her actions. Specifically, the patronizing descriptions used and the notes that defamed her character had impacts on the students' understanding of the period in history. Then, students were split into pairs of two and were asked to explore the archives. After their exploration, students were brought back together for a structured discussion about the experience, the stories and histories, and what connections could be made to their prior course readings and personal experiences.

Returning to the Core for Reflection. At this stage, learners engage in reflection that moves learning from *noticing* to *making sense* (Moon, 1999; 2001). The process of embracing narratives and multiple ways of knowing is combined with the action of pulling narratives and ways of knowing inward to shape how one makes sense of the learning process and knowledge. This action of pulling learning inward and internalizing the process is an essential step in creating meaning. Moon (2004) describes reflection at this stage as the “upgrading of learning” (p. 85), where ideas that were learned “in a relatively non-meaningful way are reconsidered in the light of more or different prior experience (i.e., are reviewed with different frames of reference)” (p. 85). The process is shaped by the learner rearticulating the content in their own voice while acknowledging that their voice developed through their experiences. This requires the learner to embrace other pathways of learning and to embrace the understanding that learning does not have finite boundaries. Therefore, the ability to retreat to an internal place of safety and comfort is essential to prevent the learner from foreclosing on the learning process (Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development). Reflective opportunities that allow the learner to demonstrate their new knowledge in conjunction with prior knowledge provide the learner with a space of foundational confidence as they take intellectual risks.

Application to Liberation

As the learner reflects on their evolving reconsideration of habits and self-justified beliefs, classrooms or service-learning sites become spaces for enacting new habits and trying on new beliefs. Just as the learner is asked to “try on” new content in the academic detachment to unlearning stage of the TALLS model, the learner is asked to “try on” new habits and beliefs in the application to liberation stage. In this stage of the understanding process, the learner begins actionable understanding by *working with meaning* (Moon, 1999; 2001). This is substantial development in meaning making, as the learner shifts from internalizing meaning to authoring *with* meaning. In this transition, applying learning and knowledge in actionable ways allows the learner to develop and enact their newly internalized knowledge. The learner is able to start the process of applying their meaning to other contexts through the integration of prior, new, self, and situational knowledges in activities requiring direct action.

Direct Action. Depending on the scope of the course, learning through direct action may occur through either the planning or implementation of an action project. While implementing an action project with the benefits of instructor and peer support is preferred for working with meaning, the realities of the hegemonic learning structures of U.S. academic environments may limit the ability of learners to carry out an action project from planning to implementation within a course. Additionally, carrying out any action project external to the classroom environment without appropriate trust-building and collaborative planning with relevant community partners could be harmful to the learner and the community. However, working through these considerations by planning an action project that addresses an issue, establishes a needed coalition, and/or identifies necessary resources for a specified change effort can still enable learners to work with meaning and enact their newly considered knowledge and skills.

Just as the educator has to create conditions that invite learners’ Learning Spirits into the learning environment, the learner has to consider the types of conditions that have to be created to invite others’ Learning Spirits into the environment where the action project is implemented. This consideration of inclusive and reflective practices, trust building processes, and opportunities for collaborators to share their stories becomes the first step in the planning-for-action process. From there, the learner plans for actions that impose a “creative tension” into the situation or environment in order to illustrate the need for change (King, 1963). The ultimate goal is for the learner to connect their evolving awareness, knowledge, and skills with meaningful action.

Though a course may or may not provide the learner with the opportunity to implement and reflect upon an action project, frameworks and rubrics for coalition building and action planning can help the learner identify the knowledge, skills, and partners needed for action; the human and material resources available within and outside of one's sphere of influence; the roadblocks to potential change; and the opportunities for small- and large-scale shifts (Adams, 2016). Even within curricula where direct action is infused throughout the learning process, such as in teaching and nursing licensure programs, templates and rubrics that prime the learner to look for opportunities for "creative tension" and to incorporate actionable plans and reflection into their in-service experience can further enable the process of working with meaning. Regardless of the course structure, planning for direct action provides learners with the opportunity to "try on" and apply their evolving knowledge and skills.

Applied Learning. Ovenden-Hope and Blandford (2018) noted that "[experiential learning and active learning] are linked to, and underpin, the ethos and approach of applied learning" (p. 11). Specifically, the linkage between an active approach to the transfer of knowledge in situational context leads to applied learning. In essence, it is moving the transfer of knowledge between situations that *working with meaning* (Moon, 1999; 2001) creates to a space of applying knowledge from multiple sources, across multiple-contexts, with the intentionality of practical use. Applied learning can be represented in numerous strategies, such as problem-based learning, work-related learning, and inquiry-based learning (Ovenden-Hope & Blandford, 2018).

One classroom example of applied learning is the Big City Project used by an instructor in a sociohistorical kinesiology course. This project is scaffolded in three major assignments that require third-year and fourth-year kinesiology majors to imagine the holistic health of their home communities. The first assignment requires the students, in groups, to select the hometown of one of the group members. Using C. Wright Mills's (1959) three questions from *the Sociological Imagination*—what is the structure of the society, where does this society stand in human history, and what varieties of people prevail in this society (culture)—students must investigate the state of health and wellness in their selected community. This requires the application of their kinesiological knowledge regarding physiological and genetic factors that impact health from previous coursework along with the application of knowledge on sociological, environmental, and historical factors that impact health learned in the current course. The second assignment requires the students to identify a social problem that impacts the health and wellness of this community based on the information derived in the prior assignment. This requires a direct application of sociological knowledge in terms that are realistic for their professions. Lastly, the students are provided with a mock request for proposals (RFP) that requires them to imagine a community and recreation-based approach to addressing the social problem they identified. The team then presents this proposal to their classmates and a panel of faculty members. Through the assignment, students have to explore creative solutions and examine aspects of community projects rarely talked about in the context of health: budgets, politics, community partners, and accessibility. Thus, learners receive a realistic crash course in neoliberalism, classism, and inequity that are not present in traditional coursework.

In the *Native Movement* course, the application activities were delayed or truncated due to COVID-19. However, the students were scheduled to attend the campus Powwow offered in mid-spring. In the two prior phases, students engaged in activities that cultivated a deep understanding of Powwows: their meaning, their histories, the stories of each Powwow dance, ways of engaging and interacting in the Powwow space, and the significance of Powwows to modern Indigenous health. Attendance at the Powwow and engagement in the Powwow experience would have allowed the students to apply what they had learned across the course in a structured space. Specifically, students were asked to engage with various levels of observation and participation that would require them to articulate how health and movement are intertwined in Indigenous communities.

Returning to the Core for Reflection. Reflection at this stage focuses on moving the learning process from *working with meaning* toward *transformational learning* (Moon 1999; 2001). This process is shaped by the learner continuing to rearticulate content in their own voice while acknowledging that their voice is shaped by their experiences *and* by the cultural systems and structures within which they exist. Taylor and White (2000) argue that this is a move from reflection to reflexivity, thus “[suggesting] that we interrogate ... previously taken-for-granted assumptions” (p. 198). By providing the learner with space to envision themselves with this newfound knowledge, the learner is able to investigate ways of incorporating this knowledge into their being. The trust built in earlier stages allows the learner to also trust themselves as authors of knowledge. Without their willingness to participate in shared authorship, learning is reduced to transactional, not reciprocal. Reflection at this stage moves the learner to a liberated space of seeing and knowing that opens new possibilities. The learner begins to see the possible inequities in systems and structures that exist, even if they do not fully understand the potential impacts that these inequities (re)produce.

Liberation to Academic Detachment

With the transformation of understanding that occurs during this part of TALLS, learners are able to represent how ideas have been linked to create a new worldview that shifts the ways that learners engage with society and how they engage with ideas for future learning. This fundamental shift in how the brain interprets the world is not confined to formal learning environments, as learners take their new perspectives into future interactions inside and outside of the classroom. As TALLS is incorporated into the classroom, final projects that ask learners to reflect upon and demonstrate their shifts in mindset, connecting current perceptions and actions with specific social justice topics and course activities, can serve as concrete representations of this transformative growth in understanding. For example, learners could complete a Creative Autobiography assignment that asks them to utilize a creative format (e.g., video, song, painting, collage, photographs, poem/spoken word/rap, other artwork/craft or multimedia project) to demonstrate how their developing awareness of self and society connects with course concepts and activities and influences the ways they inhabit multiple social spaces and identities. However, it is important to remember that the academic calendar is time-bound, so this type of course project provides just a snapshot in an ongoing transformative learning process.

Critical Consciousness (Freire, 2014). Putting aside the hegemonic expectations of being able to fully capture learners’ shifting worldviews through a single concluding assignment, learners might be able to express (though not necessarily in verbal or written ways) the aspects of their learning that were once absent from their consciousness but are now are a part of the lens through which they view the world. According to Freire (1974), this ability to “perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (p. 4) constitutes a critical consciousness in which individuals’ awareness of personal and structural oppression leads to action that can combat the oppression. In other words, critical consciousness is a way of *seeing* the world that cannot be unseen, thus changing one’s *being* in the world. For example, a commuter may spend hours each week passing thousands of cars on the highway while never being conscious of the makes and models of nearby vehicles. However, once that person goes through a process of researching, test-driving, and purchasing a new vehicle, suddenly, the commuter becomes aware of the many similar makes and models on the road. Once the car is “seen,” it can never be unseen, and the driver can never commute to and from work without the awareness of like-vehicles on the road. Likewise, once an individual develops critical consciousness around a societal injustice, that injustice can never again be made invisible to the individual. Thus, participation in any action or inaction around the injustice

becomes a conscious choice. This new consciousness, then, influences the ways in which the individual re-reads previously encountered texts, situations, and experiences.

In the *Native Movement* course, it was not intended for students to move through the full TALLS model. An important aspect of the TALLS model is the understanding that students will approach each stage in their own timing. A course semester does not provide an adequate length of time to fully engage with Liberation for first- and second-year students around the topic of Native Health. However, over the course of the semester, the students can build the foundations to arrive at critical consciousness on their own once the semester is complete. In fact in the *Native Movement* course, students demonstrated the initial sparks of critical consciousness in their final reflections. One student noted, “I view sports differently; I now realize my view was totally Americanized and understanding there’s a manner to understand the inner workings of a sport and the relationship between the players.”

Returning to the Start. This segment is unique, for once the learner has traversed the learning space of taking their learning outward, the learner is faced with re-engaging with an academic detached understanding of their learning. This is a necessary step that allows for the learner to reflect on academic literature and resources in new ways that were not possible in their prior existence as the learner (see Moon’s (1991; 2001) *transformative learning*). And thus, the learner begins the process again, continuing to investigate and negotiate personal identities, understandings, and meanings within the academy. This journey begins by once again returning to the core to reflect on what this new process means for the learner.

Concluding Call

In the non-linear and cyclical process of teaching and learning in the TALLS model, the learner’s development of critical consciousness is met with a liberated understanding of shared fate and the disruption of colonizing teaching and learning practices within and outside of the classroom. Such an approach invites educators to disrupt common misconceptions that reproduce postcolonial paradigms with the aim of developing new strategies for nonviolent intellectual resistance. With a justice-forward teaching approach, educators may consider potential teaching choices that create spaces of curiosity for resistance and resilience while deconstructing personal teaching philosophies with an eye toward liberated learning. Leaving with some *tender resistance* as articulated by Dr. King invoking Saint Francis of Assisi:

All the darkness in the world cannot obscure the light of a single candle.

–Martin Luther King, Jr., Durham, NC, 1960

Go be that candle that lights the flames of your students’ Learning Spirits.

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