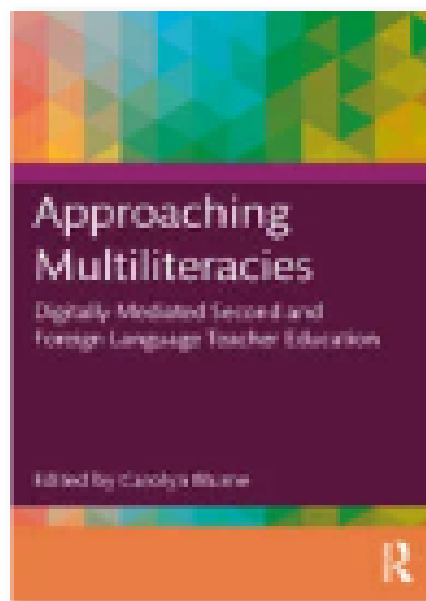


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Multiliteracies, third space theory, and the educational spiral: A model for student-teacher growth

Luis S. Villacañas de Castro
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4121-254X>
Universitat de València

Abstract

This chapter discusses the educational spiral in the context of contemporary pedagogical thought and describes its application in a teacher education context. After presenting a summary of John Dewey's philosophy, from which the construct was first derived, the chapter analyzes the educational spiral from the standpoint of Paris and Alim's critique of *asset pedagogies* and their claim that educators should move beyond *third space* representations of education to *culturally sustaining* ones. Next, the chapter justifies why multiliteracies and multimodality must form part of the model if the educational spiral is to fulfill its democratic goals. Finally, the text concludes with an empirical section that briefly describes how the educational spiral was successfully applied through three artistic, multiliterate, and multimodal projects in a teacher education university context.

The educational spiral: Dewey, the third space, and culturally sustaining pedagogies

“Education is by its nature an endless circle or spiral,” Dewey (1929, pp. 76-77) wrote in **The Sources of a Science of Education**, a short essay published in 1929. As the title of his work conveys, for Dewey *science* was one of the two key axes – the other was art – around which teachers could maximize learners’ growth. Inspired by Dewey’s proposal, I describe in this chapter the process and the outcomes of my attempt to realize an educational spiral in a teacher education context at the University of Valencia, by imbedding art at the heart of the curriculum of the course. Rather than merely following in Dewey’s footsteps, however, I expanded his model in dialogue with contemporary educational thought, especially in relation to two significant contributions. First is Paris and Alim’s (2014) critique of *asset pedagogies* and their claim that educators should move beyond *third space* representations of education to *culturally sustaining* ones. Second is the argument that (digital) *multiliteracies* must form part of any educational endeavor that wishes to fulfill a democratic goal (Pahl & Rowsell, 2012; Street, 2012). Thus enriched, Dewey’s educational spiral was applied in a teacher education university course through three artistic, multiliteracies projects that were aimed at setting off spiraling trajectories of professional development. In consonance with the topic of this volume, the focus of my inquiry was placed on the role of digital literacies in supporting this dynamic. Before presenting the outcomes of that course, the chapter reconstructs the theoretical relationship between the concepts that are articulated in my updated version of Dewey’s model.

Throughout his extensive oeuvre, Dewey saw artistic and scientific inquiry as the two main conduits for human beings to interact intelligently – not destructively – with their environment (Villacañas-de-Castro, 2023). By channeling their actions through art and science, individuals and communities would be able to expand their options for future transformation and control. These two conduits allowed individuals to “enlarge the range of action, and this enlargement in turn confers upon our desires greater insight and foresight, and makes choice more intelligent. There is a circle,” Dewey (2008e, p. 104) claimed, “but an enlarging circle, or, if you please, a widening spiral.” No wonder, then, that art and science figured also at the core of his educational program, as the two main activities that should structure school life. By envisioning education thusly, Dewey avoided the dualism that plagues educational thought to this day, namely: children’s interests versus subject matter. For him, the aim of education was not to bridge the gap that separated the child from the curriculum – to paraphrase one of his early masterpieces (Dewey, 2008b) – a dualism depicted in Option A of Figure 3.1. Rather than creating a transition between these two experiential or cultural realities, the spiral form suggested that, for Dewey, education was about learners expanding their experiences and family cultures at school, rather than replacing them – no matter how gradually – with academic forms of thought. This expansion is what he believed would happen should teachers give learners the chance to engage actively and meaningfully with the world around them through the frameworks of art and science. “The most

successful modern form[s] of encounter and control,” as Ryan (1995, p. 240) defined them, art and science were, in Dewey’s view, universal and mostly unproblematic. As forms of inquiry, they were compatible with any cultural community, which would be enriched through them without risk of losing its most valuable qualities.

As Mayhew and Edwards’ (1936) account of Dewey’s Laboratory School made clear, it was through *occupations* – Dewey’s (2008a, pp. 12-13) original pedagogical units – that the “practical activities in the school [were turned into] allies of art and centers of science and history.” This was Dewey’s alternative to the said opposition between children-centered versus curriculum-centered pedagogies that characterized his day. He favored neither the acritical affirmation of learners’ experiences, nor a blind race towards the attainment of decontextualized, curricular objectives. Rather, for Dewey, education was nothing if not a spiral, a process that lent continuity to, but also expanded and improved, the range and breadth of learners’ original experiences through the incorporation of subject matter (Villacañas-de-Castro, 2021). Often throughout his work, Dewey conceptualized this process in terms of *growth*, whose spiraling contours Ryan (1995, p. 28) recognized in the following quote:

To the extent that this process [of interaction between the society or individual with the environment] gives the organism more control over itself and its environment, more ability to rethink its problems, and the potentiality for fruitful changes along the same lines, we may talk of progress. Dewey’s preferred expression was always growth.

From the third space to the educational spiral: Culturally sustaining pedagogies

The concept of the educational spiral sheds new light on, but at the same time is both deepened and problematized by, current debates in education. Such is the case of the conversation inaugurated by Paris and Alim’s (2014) “loving critique” of asset pedagogies and their claim that their own *culturally sustaining* paradigm was one capable of overcoming the limitations of the former (Alim & Paris, 2017). Alim and Paris’s contribution actually implied conceptualizing education, not as a third space, but as a spiral, a development illustrated in the shift from Option B to Option C in Figures 11.1 and 11.2.

Stemming from Bhabha’s (1994) analysis of culture as inherently hybrid and impure, pedagogical applications of third space theory call for the conscious creation of hybrid and impure contexts capable of mediating between different and potentially conflicting cultural realities. This is the *third space*. Inspired by the idea, educational theorists and practitioners like Gloria Ladson-Billings, Luis Moll, or Moises Esteban Guitart have embraced the need to improve the experience of underprivileged and minoritized students in mainstream classrooms and hopefully improve, too, their rate of school success. As cultural third spaces, schools draw from elements coming from both students’ minoritized cultural backgrounds and the official curriculum, to organize them

in novel forms that function as steppingstones on which learners could build their learning paths.

In their work, Paris and Alim (2014, p. 93) describe third space theory as one of the three main instantiations of the wide range of asset pedagogies that came to the fore during the last decades of the twentieth century – the “golden age of resource pedagogy.” The other two were, precisely, Moll’s (2019) *funds of knowledge* and Ladson-Billings’ (1995, 2014) *culturally relevant pedagogy*. For analytical purposes, the chapter will henceforth use the third space as a trope covering asset pedagogies as a whole. For do not all of these approaches share the same overarching goal: namely, to validate the students’ community cultures as a realm that is filled with educative resources that schools and teachers could use to help learners succeed academically? The fact that all three approaches refer to “bridges” or “tools” as metaphors to describe their goals further reveals their shared view of the school as an institutional third space, and the need for education to bridge a cultural abyss (Alim & Haupt, 2017, p. 157).

<Figure 3.1 here>

Figure 3.1 From deficit perspectives to the third space

Revolutionary as the notion of the third space is, especially in comparison to the *deficit perspectives* illustrated in Option A in Figure 3.1, which either disregard both the intrinsic and instrumental value of students’ cultures or directly misread them through deficit or pathological lenses (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 4), Paris and Alim still take the former to task for keeping the cultures of minoritized students partially subordinated. In relation to what – they asked – were the learners’ cultures considered *assets*, if not a curriculum, a school system, and a society that oppressed them in manifold ways? If this was the case, why then judge these minority cultures from a perspective that was not only different from them, but altogether unjust and oppressive (Gutierrez & Johnson, 2017, p. 257)? Why take society’s structural inequities for granted, acknowledge the status quo, and accept that students’ minority cultures should just be a *means* to attaining an “idealized” rendition of the cultures stereotypically associated with the dominant White middle class (Lee, 2017, pp. 267-268), rather than value those minoritized cultures on their own terms, as an *end* unto themselves, and in their own right?

By interrogating asset pedagogy thus, Paris, Alim, and other educators for social justice have begun to supersede third space varieties of educational thought and explore new grounds for educational theory and practice. While asset pedagogies see the resources of students’ minoritized cultures as valuable tools or educational means, they still kept these cultures separate from the *ends* of education, even from society’s and life’s ultimate goals, all three of which remained unproblematically linked to stereotypical White middle-class values and norms (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 3). Option B in Figure 3.1 illustrates the lingering eclipsing of minority students’ cultures under the third space trope. As can be seen, it depicts education as a one-way, three-phase journey in which, thanks to the third space, schools are able to accommodate minoritized cultures, yet

only as a bridge to reaching a White curriculum that remains the only point of arrival. By contrast, Paris and Alim's (2014, p. 87) culturally sustaining pedagogy acts on the fundamental belief that "cultural and linguistic practices are of value in their own right and should be creatively foregrounded rather than merely viewed as resources to take students from where they are to some presumably 'better' place".

Through this turn, culturally sustaining pedagogy enacts, not "an incremental step," but "a paradigm shift, a resounding call to change tack and unsettle our practices" (Domínguez, 2017, p. 241). As a contribution to this discussion, I wish to argue that, Dewey's nineteenth century ethnocentric biases notwithstanding (Fallace, 2010), Paris and Alim's shift is germane to Dewey's vision of the educational spiral, and that a mutually enriching dialogue can be established between these two pedagogical schools. Essentially, both frameworks share the idea that education takes place entirely within the realm of the students' cultures and experiences, never outside of them. This would be true of every student regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or social class, and was as true in Dewey's time as it is today. Concerning minoritized students, understanding education as a spiral implies that schools should not force contents and competences upon learners whose cultures and life experiences are oppressed by a system that privileges precisely those same contents and competences. Nor can education consist of educators drawing upon learners' cultures to motivate them to embark on a journey that will soon lead them to cultural realms that are too distant from theirs. By contrast, "culturally sustaining pedagogies," Rosa and Flores (2017, p. 178) claim in focusing on language specifically, "can help us reimagine minoritized linguistic practices not simply as starting points but rather as central components of all stages of learning across contexts." From culturally sustaining and Deweyan perspectives, education proceeds by centering the cultures the students already possess and trying to enrich and expand them from within. "What if the goal of teaching and learning with youth of color," Alim and Paris (2017, p. 3) conclude, "was not ultimately to see how closely students could perform White middle-class norms, but rather to explore, honor, extend, and, at times, problematize their cultural practices and investments?"

<Figure 3.2 here>

Figure 3.2 The full model of the educational spiral (based on Beiler & Villacañas-de-Castro, 2025)

This is precisely the spiraling dynamic that Option C in Figure 3.2 puts forward. In the diagram two features stand out: First is the open-ended quality of the educational spiral, which conveys that the educational process is different from, and extends well beyond, the knowledges and competences included in the curriculum. In what amounts to a critical extension of third space theory, this option contends that the curriculum is never the aim of education, but rather a means to sustain and enrich students' preexisting cultures and knowledges – the only conceivable aim of education in societies that are worthy of being called democratic (Lee, 2017, p. 269). Secondly, Option C also implies that at no point should this goal be confused with the acritical affirmation of the learners' cultures. Following from his own account of science as a self-corrective form

of inquiry, Dewey's (2008f) educational spiral was made up of partial affirmations and likewise negations of students' habits and experiences. The measure for these affirmative and negative processes was not the proximity of said habits and experiences to the curriculum or to the assumed qualities of academic or non-academic language – which, according to Rosa and Flores (2017), is not an objective distinction, but one established from within the racial struggle itself – but their proximity to the frameworks of art and science, which Dewey (2008d, p. 78) did not completely set in opposition to common sense. And the same balance characterizes Paris and Alim's (2014) culturally sustaining program. At the end of the day, one of their main concerns with asset pedagogies is that they “[did] not critically contend with problematic elements in some youth cultural practices” (pp. 85-86); hence the need to “interrogate and critique simultaneously progressive and oppressive currents in [...] innovative youth practices” (p. 93). The dialectics of affirmation and negation, of sustainment and enrichment, of support, critique, and expansion remain at the core of culturally sustaining pedagogy, which not surprisingly has to learn how to negotiate with “ambivalence” throughout the entire educational process (Gutierrez & Johnson, 2017, p. 256).

As was the case in Deweyan philosophy, most of the chapters in the volume edited by Paris and Alim (2017) rely on art and science for said educational dialectic to be realized. Other than Irizarry's (2017) espousal of youth participatory action research, however, the rest of the contributors place less emphasis on scientific inquiry than on artistic forms of interaction with the environment. The contributors to the volume insist that educators should tap into the students' “epistemologies” (Domínguez, 2017, p. 233), draw on the artistic traditions most present in the learners' communities, and make sure that the learners have the chance to reconstruct their cultures and identities as they grow into artistic human beings (Wong & Peña, 2017).

Habits, culture, multiliteracies

While a similar spiraling structure underlies Dewey's philosophy of education and culturally sustaining pedagogies, asset pedagogies had already enriched the Deweyan notion of *experience* through a more nuanced understanding of *culture* that had taken place decades before Paris and Alim's reformulation of third space pedagogies. One might argue that the seeds of this transition already lay buried in the soil of Dewey's thought, as proven by his growing emphasis on culture after 1938, perceptible both in his book **Freedom and Culture** and his doubts as to whether he should have substituted *culture* for *experience* in **Experience and Education**. For all his hesitations regarding the degree to which his philosophy should integrate the specific characteristics of any given social context, Dewey's thought remained inscribed within the bounds of a naturalistic framework that possibly had its most sophisticated formulation in **Human Nature and Conduct** (Dewey, 1922), in which *habits* – the sedimentation of people's recurrent ways of interacting with their environment – acted as the heuristic cornerstone.

Shortly after Dewey's death in 1952, the social sciences as a whole would experience the cultural turn that dominated the second half of the twentieth century, as anthropology, social psychology, psycho- and sociolinguistics, and literacy studies succeeded in teasing out the many dimensions of culture. Subsequently, Dewey's reference to generic habits gradually gave way to more concrete terminology that has decidedly enriched educational thought and practice. In education, asset pedagogies have possibly been the most significant outcome of this cultural turn. From the 1980s onward, classrooms started to welcome students' familial funds of knowledge (Moll, 2019), individual funds of identity (Esteban-Guitart, 2023), or cultural capitals (Lareau & Weininger, 2003) to design third spaces in education (Ríos-Aguilar & Gravitt, 2011).

The focus on culture is premised on the idea – summarized by Gutierrez and Johnson (2017, p. 249) – that “how culture is conceptualized varies and is consequential to how the practices of nondominant communities are understood, and how learning and pedagogical practices are defined.” This is true not only of the worth that educators assign to the cultural practices of the communities to which students belong, but also of the corresponding cultural artifacts and resources – be they habits, cultural capital, literacies, or funds of knowledge – that educators are willing to import into their classrooms and into the educational spiral, as stepping stones of student growth. Unsurprisingly, Alim and Paris are explicit about their pedagogy being founded on an inclusive, flexible, and democratic notion of culture (Lee, 2017, p. 267). Stemming from this anthropological understanding, dynamically sustaining and enriching the students' cultural repertoires is synonymous with dynamically sustaining and enriching the “languages, literacies, and cultural practices of students in our communities” (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 4).

Of special interest for this volume is the link between culture and literacy. First analyzed during the 1970s by the so-called *new literacy studies* (Pahl & Rowsell, 2012; Street, 2012), literacy became a basis for the New London Group (1996) to create a specific *multiliteracies pedagogy* that now frequently goes by the name of *learning by design* (Yelland et al., 2008). Both frameworks have extended their reach to the kind of practices encompassed by *digital literacy*, which has been defined as

the awareness, attitude and ability of individuals to appropriately use digital tools and facilities to identify, access, manage, integrate, evaluate, analyze and synthesize digital resources, construct new knowledge, create media expressions, and communicate with others, in the context of specific life situations, in order to enable constructive social action; and to reflect upon this process. (Martin, 2006, p. 19)

Underpinning all of these approaches is, first, the shared view that literacy is not a general competence that is acquired at school and once and for all, but one actualized across an infinite variety of social contexts and technologies. Second is the idea that different communities (and age groups) employ different kinds of literacy practices to express and reinvent their cultures, identities, and themselves, and, accordingly, that

culture could not be properly understood so long as it remains disconnected from the specific literacies (in the plural) that said communities use.

Furthermore, multiliteracies pedagogy and new literacy studies agree that, in order to analyze the variety of literacy practices existing in society, researchers have to look closely at their multimodal qualities. The salience that the term has experienced in the field of literacy and education can be explained mainly (but not only) by the proliferation of hypertexts (Bawden, 2001) and digital information and communication technologies whose multimodal platforms have rapidly become privileged sites where youth create and recreate their cultures (Blume, 2020; Reyes-Torres & Castellano-Sanz, 2023), on local and global scales (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 9; Gutierrez & Johnson, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2017, p. 147). Together with multiliteracies and multimodality, multilingualism has also become a key element in asset and culturally sustaining pedagogies (Bucholtz et al., 2017; Tsokolidou & Skourtou, 2020).

The final model of the educational spiral in Option D of Figure 3.2 brings together the full range of the aforementioned terms. In addition to relying on art and science to channel student activity and structure school life, Option D suggests that educators who aim to sustain and enrich their learners' cultures must embrace the multiliterate, digital, multimodal, and multilingual qualities that characterize the cultures through which they engage with their surrounding environments, in a process from which their cultures and their selves emerge transformed. To reflect the idea of the educational spiral, educators must welcome the multiple literacies through which learners' cultures are originally built and conveyed; this, in turn, demands that classrooms be multimodal (because home and community literacies clearly support themselves through multiple modalities), which, likewise, requires that the languages through which each of these literacies are originally built be accepted and incorporated in the classroom. The following section offers a description of how this was done in a teacher education university context, as part of a course aimed at helping student teachers understand how to integrate their future learners' cultures and literacies in the future.

The educational spiral in a teacher education context

Albeit briefly, this empirical section describes how the educational spiral was successfully applied to a teacher education context through a series of artistic and multiliteracies projects designed and implemented as part of a Masters course in English Language Teaching at the University of Valencia, Spain. The following experiences took place during the 2022/2023 academic year with the same group of forty student teachers. The guiding concern behind said projects was how to better teach the model of the educational spiral to these White, mostly middle-class, student teachers. This challenge involved the need to not only include the cultures, (digital) literacies, modalities, and languages of the minority students that they would encounter when they became teachers at Valencia's public schools; but also – and equally important – to help them identify their own cultural and literacy resources as crystallizations that took place

within an inequitable societal milieu (Ladson-Billings, 2017, p. 145). This double outlook characterized every project in the course.

Pedagogically speaking, the question concerning how to teach the educational spiral was formulated in terms of Shulman's (2005, pp. 52-53) concept of *signature pedagogies* – “the types of teaching that organize the fundamental ways in which future practitioners are educated for their new professions” – and also of Murray and Male's (2005, p. 126) account of the challenges and tensions that teacher educators face on account of being “second order practitioners” who educate “first-order practitioners,” i.e., school teachers. As a direct consequence of this difference, teacher educators have to do two things at the same time: address their students as future school teachers *and* current university students. “As second-order practitioners,” Murray and Male (2005) observed, “teacher educators induct their students into the practices and discourses of both school teaching and teacher education” (p. 126).

As a logical response to this challenge, Swennen et al. (2008, p. 531) present the notion of “congruent teaching.” They suggest that, through their signature pedagogies, teacher educators become “models of the kind of teaching they are trying to promote,” and hence “support their students-teachers’ learning” through their own practical example. Encouraged by Falloon's (2020, p. 2450) observation that the frameworks that teacher educators habitually use to promote digital literacy among their students may not be preparing them “adequately with the breadth of knowledge and capabilities needed in today's classroom”, in the projects that follow I attempted to induct the student teachers into the model of the educational spiral through the pedagogy included in the model itself. Not only should my course familiarize them with a theoretical understanding of deficit perspectives, the third space, culturally sustaining pedagogies, multiliteracies, multimodality, and the transition to the educational spiral, concepts which were all included in the syllabus; more than this, the student teachers should be capable of grasping the meaning of these concepts *from within* the educational spiral that the course created for them. In accordance with the final model shown in Option D in Figure 3.2, I designed three artistic and multiliteracies projects through which the student teachers' cultural selves and youth literacy practices would be driven upwards and outwards, as they interacted creatively with their surroundings in culturally sustaining ways.

My lessons applied the range of approaches that Swennen et al. (2008, pp. 532-533) identify with congruent teaching, such as “thinking aloud and stepping out” and “linking modelling to theory.” I also shared with the student teachers my commitment to “preach what I teach” and asked them to remain alert and warn me if at any point I deviated from the congruous path. Hopefully, the theory we would be discussing in class around texts by Lisa Delpit, Joe Suina, Lamila Lyiscott, Robert Phillipson, Alastair Pennycook, the New London Group, Brian Street, Django Paris and H. Samy Alim – and John Dewey, of course – would also be enacted in the activities that they would engage with during the projects. Insisting on congruency and the key role of signature pedagogies, I also emphasized that these projects offered pedagogical toolkits

and ideas that they would be able to transfer, in the future, to their secondary education classes, further bridging the first- versus second-order practitioner divide – an issue that we revisited at the end of each project.

The course drew on the structure of Deweyan *occupations* to plan three projects (each lasting for approximately eight two-hour lessons) that encouraged the student teachers to actualize the theoretical concepts in the syllabus along with their own personal youth cultures, interests, and multiliteracies. As in Dewey's (2008c) educational program, the projects relied on activity frameworks that were already present in the student teachers' daily lives, but whose artistic and reflective quality could be maximized in the classroom to liberate their full educational potential. Likewise, in consonance with the renewed emphasis placed on application and practice in Bill Cope's and Mary Kalantzis' (2015) model of *learning by design*, my aim was that the participants acted as cultural creators (not just consumers), so the pedagogy of the course included theoretical and practical phases. The readings, discussions, and lectures held in class were designed to equip the student teachers with conceptual underpinnings that they would transfer, translate, and adapt to the practical formats necessary for each project. Along the same lines, the student teachers channeled their work through media that already formed part of their cultural and literacy landscapes – namely photographs, videos, and podcasts. I will subsequently summarize the three projects, using evidence that includes – with their permission – the real names of the students.

Three artistic, multiliteracies projects

<Figure 3.3 here>

Figure 3.3 Photovoice on the topic of English linguistic imperialism

In the first project, the approaches and goals highlighted in the previous paragraphs resulted in the student teachers creating a *digital photovoice* (Romera Iruela et al., 2023; Villacañas-de-Castro, 2017; Wang & Burris, 1997) on the topic of English linguistic imperialism. By taking photographs and writings accompanying texts, the participants analyzed the impact that English linguistic imperialism had on their social and educational realities as an essential component of neoliberalism (Phillipson, 2011). To fulfil this purpose, some groups photographed billboards that they found in their neighborhoods and analyzed how private companies had included English slogans as a sign of prestige. As shown in Figure 3.3, others focused on the boom that British schools and English language academies had experienced in their hometowns, or on how these institutions advertised themselves by problematically identifying mastery of the English language with middle-high class lifestyles and economic success. Another group of student teachers took a stroll around the *Barri del Carme* – a popular neighborhood at Valencia's historic city center where English had encroached as a result of tourist pressure, international apartment rentals, and gentrification. In their digital photovoice, Lucía and Joaquín (who knew the neighborhood well) treated the English language as a symbol of the radical transformation that the place had undergone

over the last two decades. From sophisticated sociological perspectives and academic literacies, the student teachers summarized the history of “*Ferretería Blas Luna*,” a hardware store located in the *Plaza de la Lonja*. What follows is their original text:

The establishment was founded in 1886 and had to close its doors in 2019. In an interview, the manager of the hardware store at the time [i.e., in 2019] stated that the long-standing customer no longer wanted to go there. Now, this historic hardware store has become just another hostel for international tourists [...]. The Carme neighborhood is full of hostels and Airbnb [apartments] for tourist consumption, with one out of every 10 apartments being used for tourist accommodation; there are fewer and fewer neighbors left and more and more people passing through the neighborhood who do not inhabit or contribute to the maintenance of its spirit, history and culture. The same goes for the language issue. Valencian is less and less heard, as it is eclipsed by English.

In addition to taking photographs of their environments, another group of student teachers made creative and critical use of ChatGPT’s image generator to imagine dystopian futures in which local Spanish traditions had either been replaced or completely distorted by the cultural dominance of English-speaking countries. The aesthetics and sense of humor displayed in these artificial photographs could be traced back to the students’ consumption and production of memes, which featured prominently in their youth cultures. Figure 3.4 shows one of the most successful and thought-provoking images included in their photovoice work.¹ It depicts an elderly woman who, instead of placing bouquets on the tombstones of her loved ones (as is traditionally done in Spain on November 1st, *El Día de Todos los Santos*), bends low to deposit large Halloween pumpkins on them, with her costumed grandchildren beside her. “Will our traditions change to fit in with English-speaking customs? [...] All of these photos symbolize the same trend: the impact of English-speaking cultures.” In their photovoice, the student teachers also drew conclusions about their role as future English language educators, emphasizing the need to implement culturally sustaining pedagogies: “By making language education inclusive and thoughtfully celebrating our traditions,” they concluded, “we can find a path that honors our past while embracing the opportunities of the future.”



<Figure 3.4 here>

Figure 3.4 Photovoice on the topic of English linguistic imperialism¹

Having analyzed how English linguistic imperialism shaped their city, their culture, and English language teaching, the scope of the phenomena that the student teachers investigated was widened through the second project. This time, their own lives became their subject matter of inquiry, for they had to create collective or individual digital educational autobiographies. The aim was to make their present understanding of education more complex and lead them towards richer pedagogical visions, hopefully ones that had a critical edge. Once they became familiarized, through a dossier of

¹ The original participants in my course were able to reconstruct the actual prompts given to ChatGPT on November 28th, 2022, to recreate their AI image. Like the original prompts, these are also in Spanish: “Hola ChatGPT: por favor, crea para nosotros una imagen sobria que mezcle motivos de la fiesta de Halloween con la del Día de los Difuntos tal y como se celebra en España, cuando las familias depositan flores en las tumbas de sus seres queridos. En el centro de la imagen, y más cerca del observador, recrea una anciana de cabello blanco y expresión muy seria arrodillada en el suelo, colocando una maceta blanca con rosas color salmón entre dos calabazas de Halloween, talladas con rostros sonrientes. Detrás de ella, que aparezcan sus nietos pequeños, uno a cada lado: a la izquierda, un niño vestido de negro, con máscara de esqueleto y capucha negra, y a la derecha una niña vestida con cuernos de diablo con un juguete morado en las manos. Ambos la observan. En el fondo, muestra un típico escenario de cementerio español: muchas lápidas alineadas y árboles de otoño.”

selected readings and my own explanations, with the theoretical and practical affordances of concepts such as cultural capital (Sokolower, 2014; Suina, 2014), funds of knowledge and identity (Schlessman, 2012), the hidden curriculum (Sayer, 2019), the third space (Kleiman & McGeehan, 2017), multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996), and asset pedagogies (Delpit, 2006; Truax, 2012), the student teachers applied these concepts to analyze their own experiences as primary, secondary, and higher education students. Their autobiographies included, but were not restricted to, English language learning. For their outcomes to have a narrative quality, they selected a few events with educational significance and, through them, examined the education they had experienced and how it had conditioned both their decisions to become educators and their beliefs concerning what the profession was about. Through a text accompanied by old photographs, for example, Georgia – a Greek student teacher who had registered in the course – storied an incident she had experienced as a primary student back home in Greece and turned it into the pivotal event in the narrative arc of her autobiography. She recalled how, while rehearsing for a school play, she and some of her classmates had bullied a girl of Albanian origin because of stereotypes associated with that child's nationality. Upon witnessing this, a schoolteacher intervened to positively highlight multiculturalism as an essential component of the school culture; among the measures she took was offering the leading role in the play to the Albanian girl. In a reflection that Georgia added as an epilogue to her autobiography, she said that this teacher remained "one of my favorite teachers ever, as well as one of the reasons I decided to pursue the teaching profession in my life. Because of her," Georgia added, "I had a lot of friends from Albania growing up" and, as a teenager, volunteered in a non-governmental organization that provided aid to immigrants who arrived in Greece.

Three other student teachers created a collective autobiographical video that consisted of three corresponding episodes and a final reflection stressing the differences and commonalities of their educational trajectories. María's episode centered on two of her aunts and her older sister being schoolteachers and on the cultural capital that she had inherited from this, since she was inducted into a teacher's view of education at home, through informal exchanges and family conversations. Ignacio's video, on the other hand, concentrated on his having experienced bullying as a teenager, and, in the video, he criticized his teachers for not addressing a situation that, among other things, led him to feel the physical distance between home and his high school as a traumatic, unbridgeable gap. In turn, preventing other children from undergoing similar bullying experiences became an essential imperative for becoming a schoolteacher: "I want to be the teacher that I needed but never had," were the last words in Ignacio's video. Finally, Luz emphasized the instrumental role that a high school teacher played in helping her feel part of the social, cultural, and linguistic landscape of the village she moved to as a teenager. Luz belonged to a Spanish-speaking family, but Valencian was the language most spoken in the new location. In her autobiographical video, she recalled feeling like a stranger until she stepped into the classroom of a teacher of Valencian who, apart from discussing the works in the curriculum, introduced her to "new books, songs, and video-poems in Valencian, and little by little I learned the language and I fell in love with Valencian culture, literature, and music." For her, the incident was a testament to the

power of educators to enlarge and expand students' identities, cultures, and senses of self. As captured in the fragment shown in Figure 3.5, in which Luz reads on the mountains that surrounded her village, "I would never have imagined that a teacher would help me find my place in the village, and my own identity. I began to understand how important the Valencian language was for my people and for me."

<Figure 3.5 here>

Figure 3.5 Fragment of Luz's educational autobiography

In the final project, the student teachers organized and recorded episodes for the *Radical Schools Podcast*, a program that I had created just for the occasion.¹ Before recording the episodes, the student teachers formed small groups and collectively chose a book from a list of eight titles that I had previously read and selected for their relevance to the transition from deficit pedagogical perspectives, to the third space, to culturally sustaining pedagogies, and the model of the educational spiral more generally. Apart from being engaging, these books offer first-hand accounts of the inner life of schools as seen by teachers who, for the most part, worked at those same institutions. Other than this common trait, the books fell into two distinct categories: Three of them had been written in Europe and dealt with schools that were radical for the alternative educational philosophy they espoused since their early days. This was the case of Alexander Neill's **Summerhill** (1991), of Lev Tolstoy's reflections on the school for peasant children that he founded as a young man in Yásnaya Polyana and which Reginald D. Archambault edited into the book **Tolstoy on Education** (1967), and also of the school that Lorenzo Milani opened in Barbiana, near Florence, whose class-conscious approach was recounted by eight of its students in **Letter to a Teacher** (1973). These three books offered lively illustrations of the impact of cultural capital and the hidden curriculum on education, and also of the way teachers can draw upon the students' cultures – including their teenage cultures, literacies, and cultures of childhood – to create third spaces or trigger the educational spiral.

The second group of books was more cohesive in terms of content and topics, and closer to the original concerns of culturally sustaining pedagogy. All of them were written in the late 1960s in the United States and revolved around the structural racism that permeated that society, its cities, and its educational system. **Our Children are Dying** by Nat Hentoff (1966), **36 Children** by Herbert Kohl (1967), **Death at an Early Age** by Jonathan Kozol (1967), **The Lives of Children** by George Dennison (1969), and **The Way it Spoiled to Be** by James Herndon (1968) all describe the plight of Black and other minority children in inner-city schools of major cities in the United States, but also the radical efforts – albeit often desperate, misguided, and isolated – that single educators made to address the education and living conditions of these children.

In their podcast episodes, the student teachers approached one of these books from a variety of perspectives, using both informal and academic literacies. In addition to interpreting the content in the light of the course's concepts, the episodes examined the value of the books themselves as analytical prisms to analyze Spain's current

educational system, despite being written decades (or over a century) ago in a different context. The student teachers drew on the entire range of ideas they had explored in the course and through the previous projects to interpret the problems and pedagogical solutions that the books presented. They explored, for instance, the following issues: How does racism dovetail with English linguistic imperialism, cultural capital, or the hidden curriculum? To what extent did the educators whose efforts the books examined succeed in creating third spaces? What were their ideological and pedagogical stances vis-à-vis students' cultures, languages, and literacies? Could any of their efforts be understood as lying within the scope of culturally sustaining pedagogies? Through which activities did the educators succeed in setting off educational spirals? Other than answers to these questions, which they also addressed by reading specific quotes from the books, the episodes also included sections in which the student teachers recalled their educational autobiographies, past events they had experienced as learners or as teacher trainees during their internships, and which resonated with the stories the books described. They reflected on whether they had met children or teenagers from cultural minority backgrounds whose talents, languages, and literacies had gone unnoticed, or who had not received the education they deserved. More optimistically, they also recalled positive instances of institutional and pedagogical innovation or creativity in terms of multiculturalism, multimodality, multiliteracies, and multilingualism.

For the most part, the student teachers addressed these issues and questions through reflective and lively conversations which struck a balance between their youthful forms of expression and academic literacies, and also between their individual (often personal) contributions, the books' serious subject matters, and the collective project that the podcast episode represented. The student teachers shared and thought passionately about education as if they were already teachers having these kinds of intelligent conversations inside school walls. To this extent, the *Radical Schools Podcast* clearly allowed the student teachers to develop valuable professional skills through a digital media.

Finally, so that they could articulate the emotional and aesthetic responses that the events in the books also elicited from them, the student teachers agreed to write poems that dramatized specific situations, conflicts, or characters, and to read them out loud as part of the podcast episodes. As guidance for these poetic exercises, we relied on Linda Christensen's (2009, pp. 50-58) outlines. The following poem by Gloria was included in the episode "Podcast to a Teacher" and provides evidence of the dynamics of student teacher growth set off through the model of the educational spiral, in this case by poetically channeling the student teachers' expanding insights. In her poem, Gloria contrasted the school and life experiences of Pierino and Gianni, two names that the young authors of **Letter to a Teacher** used to symbolize children from two opposite social classes in Italy – the affluent city children and the poor peasant youth whose cultures the school in Barbiana recognized, sustained, and transformed. In Gloria's poem, these two names came to represent the destinies of privileged and underprivileged children in societies in Spain and across the world.

Giannis and Pierinos

When two different worlds are put together
there is always a clash.

I am not him, I never will.
He is not me, he never ever will.

So many times have I been put back
that I have lost count.

One, two, three...

So many times has he been pushed forward
that he has lost count.

... four, five, six...

So many times have Teachers given up on us:
“I did not help them, I just failed them.
Put him to work, the boy can’t make it.”

So many times have Politicians ignored us:
“Leave school to those who know their way round,
peasant children will feel lost wandering the course.”

Daddy’s boys belong to University
while the stupid and the lazy work for them.

Teachers say this is the way God separated us,
that the lazy and the stupid are born in the house of the poor,
that Pierinos master the pencils and Giannis the shovel.

But all citizens are equal, says the Law, without distinction
as to race, language, or social condition.
But Giannis are left out, given up on,
while Pierinos are the gifted children.

“All citizens are created equal,” says the Law.
But so many times have I been put back,
so many times has he been pushed forward...

“Why should we punish the most gifted children
by confining them in a school that would clip their wings
to adjust their flight to that of the slower children?”

So many times has Teacher given up on us,
so many times have Politicians ignored us...

“To pass a bad student is unfair to the good ones.
To pass a Gianni is unfair to the Pierinos.”

... seven, eight, nine ...

Due to its artistic quality and the critical awareness that Gloria displayed in it, the poem constitutes the chapter's concluding words. Her lines illustrate the success of these projects in developing an educational spiral whereby the student teacher's ideas about education became expanded and enriched at the same time as did the digital and multimodal literacies they engaged with in their daily lives. As expected by Dewey's original model, the youth cultures, experiences, and literacies of the student teachers involved all acted as stepping stones in their spiraling trajectories of professional growth. By the end of the podcast, not only had these student teachers been able to understand the theoretical implications behind the transition from deficit pedagogies to culturally sustaining ones. and hence become better prepared to negotiate cultural diversity in their future schools; more than this, they had experienced the educational spiral themselves, as they scaled up their expressive resources to reach artistic heights.

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¹Readers can find *The Radical Schools Podcast* on Spotify or wherever they get their podcasts.