

SALVE REGINA UNIVERSITY

COMING BACK TO OURSELVES:  
TEACHER IDENTITY IN A DIGITAL AGE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES  
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PHILOSOPHY

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Setting the Table for Conversation	
Chapter One.....Exploring the Complex Nature of Identity: We are Unique.....	22
Chapter Two.....Creating a Framework: The “Whole Teacher”.....	47
Chapter Three.....Methodology.....	82
Considering the Issues: Coming Back to Each Other	
Chapter Four.....Outside Interests: Business, the Military, and Politics.....	88
Chapter Five.....Within the Classroom: What Role Technology?.....	120
Chapter Six.....Critical Digital Pedagogy: We Are Stronger Together.....	142
Reflections and Synthesis: Coming Back to Ourselves	
Chapter Seven.....Why It Matters: In Pursuit of Virtue and Joy.....	161
Chapter Eight.....Coming Back to Ourselves.....	181
Appendices.....	192
Bibliography.....	203

## Abstract

This dissertation argues that digital technology has profoundly and irrevocably shaped teacher identity in contemporary American culture. It is postulated that the narrative which educators tell about themselves plays a critical role in the art and science of current teaching praxis, in preparing students to be responsible digital citizens of a democratic society, as well as in the preservation of the value held for human dignity.

Educators, as beings in time, experience a modernity that is a dynamic interplay of both the past and the future. Teacher identity is relayed through language and a telling of story, both to oneself and to the world at large. Stories are not told in isolation. A sense of identity is also held in the stories that others tell about who we are. Through such narratives, one creates a sense of understanding, allowing for the creation of meaning and purpose. It is argued that a world that is saturated with digital technology significantly shapes individual and cultural stories, and the meaning of one's personal and professional identity.

This dissertation seeks to answer the question:

*In what ways are digital technology and the digital culture which surrounds the educational process, reshaping teacher identity in twenty-first century American culture and forcing a profound reshaping of the traditional paradigm of praxis?*

Through both research and interviews the influence of consumer culture and postmodern values are found critical. A wider picture is drawn of the stakeholders in American education, to include the military, business interests, politicians, and policy

makers. The benefits and drawbacks of screen technology and their impact on classroom praxis are considered, as are structures for best practices. The human need for metaphor and human flourishing in a culture saturated with informational and digital technology is emphasized. Visions for the future of teacher identity are advanced.

PREVIEW

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## Introduction

*Dynamic, developing societies depend in large measure on the maintenance of tension between the shortcomings of present realities and the promise of alternative possibilities, as well as on a willingness to close the gap.<sup>1</sup>*

The American educational system was originally designed to serve the needs of an agricultural society.<sup>2</sup> The need for capable children to be home helping with the crops and the livestock has dictated its calendar.<sup>3</sup> American culture evolved from this agricultural model to one grounded heavily in industry. The needs of American culture changed with the onset of the Industrial Revolution, and the educational system was adjusted to meet the needs of a blossoming population of immigrants.<sup>4</sup> In the second half of the twentieth century, at the dawning of the Information Age, school systems appeared to be struggling to meet the needs of the students and the culture at large,<sup>5</sup> yet no one could seem to put a finger on exactly what it was that held the institution back from bearing its intended fruit. It may be considered as a lack of ongoing fit between the institution and the evolving needs of American society.

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<sup>1</sup> John I. Goodlad, *What Schools are For* (Arlington, Virginia: Phi Delta Kappa, 1994), 19.

<sup>2</sup> Yuval Noah Harari, *21 Lessons for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York, New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2018), 268.

<sup>3</sup> Yuval Noah Harari, *21 Lessons for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York, New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2018), 268.

<sup>4</sup> Dana Goldstein, *The Teacher Wars: A History of America's Most Embattled Profession* (New York, New York: Anchor Books, 2014), 4.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Education, "A Nation at Risk, April 1983," accessed September 23, 2019, <https://www2.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html>, 2.

A variety of strategies have been attempted to fix the crisis in American education, and yet, none have worked to ameliorate the anxiety that is caused by what is reported to be a collectively mediocre performance on the part of the teachers.<sup>6</sup> This weighs heavily on policies and practices within educational systems, and has weighed heavily on the identity of many teachers who work in the public sector.<sup>7</sup> As educational statistics have become regularly shared with the population through the media, teachers have become the scapegoats for the damning data shared with those who seem unwilling to look more deeply into the meaning of those numbers.<sup>8</sup> Teachers struggle not to internalize the identity handed to them by the general populace.<sup>9</sup> In many ways, it has become a toxic identity from which many feel compelled to step away, as soon as opportunity allows.<sup>10</sup>

One might argue that educators have even become dehumanized in this factory style system of educating the students,<sup>11</sup> cast as simply another working part in a system that is largely consumer driven<sup>12</sup> and by and large, dysfunctional.

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<sup>6</sup> Dana Goldstein, *The Teacher Wars: A History of America's Most Embattled Profession* (New York, New York: Anchor Books, 2014), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Rhodes Island Educator, Anonymous Source, Phone Interview by Author, October 25, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Naomi Thiers, "Educators Deserve Better: A Conversation with Richard DuFour," *Educational Leadership*, May 2016, accessed February 22, 2020, [www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may16/vol73/num08/Educators-Deserve-Better@-A-Conversation-with-Richard-DuFour.aspx](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may16/vol73/num08/Educators-Deserve-Better@-A-Conversation-with-Richard-DuFour.aspx).

<sup>9</sup> Minnesota Educator, Anonymous Source, Phone Interview by Author, November 11, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Minnesota Educator, Anonymous Source, Phone Interview by Author, November 11, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Henry Giroux, *Education and the Crisis of Public Values: Challenging the Assault of Teachers, Students, & Public Education* (New York: New York, Peter Lang Publishing, 2012), ix.

<sup>12</sup> Nicholas Karadaras, *Glow Kids* (New York, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2016), 196.

As humanity enters into the twenty-first century, the gasoline on this fiery dynamic is digital technology. With unprecedented speed, digital technology offers its solutions, both real and imagined. It is profoundly changing the environment in which educators function--culturally, pedagogically, and personally.<sup>13</sup> Digital technology is such a powerful force in human relationships and experiences that it is *forcing* a new paradigm of educational praxis. The consequences for the misuse of such power are significant.

Thomas Kuhn speaks to the idea of changing paradigms in his text, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (2012). He describes paradigms as a “universally recognized scientific achievement that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners.”<sup>14</sup> His genius resides in promoting the idea that over time, paradigms change.<sup>15</sup> New elements emerge, new understanding is applied, new paradigms are continually created.<sup>16</sup>

The difficulty in moving from a dysfunctional paradigm to one that is more aligned with contemporary knowledge manifests when one has to accept the

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<sup>13</sup> Nicholas Karadaras, *Glow Kids* (New York, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2016), 196.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structures of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2012), xlii.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structures of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 3.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structures of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 3.

reorganization of thoughts along the way. Kuhn speaks to it as a crisis.<sup>17</sup> Yet, it is this change that takes us ever closer to authentic understanding:

The proliferation of competing articulations, the willingness to try anything, the expression of explicit discontent, the recourse to philosophy and to debate over fundamentals, all these are symptoms of a transition from normal to extraordinary research. It is upon their existence more than upon that of revolutions that the notion of normal science depends.<sup>18</sup>

The American educational system is facing the rapid creation of a new paradigm, and digital technology, applied correctly, offers compelling possibilities to reshape praxis to better meet the needs of a global society. The tensions within education are palpable. Testing scores are locked in lack-luster percentiles, and both students and teachers appear to be devolving toward new levels of anxiety, depression, and even violence. Discrepancies of access to quality education along socio-economic lines only increase the sense of division in the United States. Educational policy-makers have looked to industrial models, business models, even military models in achieving the educational goals for America's children, all to no avail. And in the process, the culture has fallen into patterns of blame and calumny for its teachers. This is helpful for no one.

It is true that digital technology presents an astounding array of problems (shortened attention spans, cyberbullying, truncation of social skills, differences in brain development) and solutions (distance learning in cases of difficult geography or

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structures of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 91.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structures of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 91.

pandemic, increased potential for differentiated instruction) within school systems. American educators across the spectrum are taking the opportunity to reflect, and weigh these in the balances of strong pedagogy. Conversations with educators themselves, reveal that solutions for difficult issues are most strongly couched in an individual educator's internal compass and guiding ideology, and that authentic vision depends on how teachers see and understand *themselves*; indeed, to their identity within the profession.

As humanity moves forward into a new millennium, everywhere there are questions about who humanity is becoming while immersed in digital modernity colored with post-modern values. There is a sense of fractured identity, incomplete stories of identity which serve only to highlight a lack of meaning or purpose. As my college students often remark, it's a hot mess sometimes. Without a clear identity or a clear story of ourselves, it is difficult to know who we want to be or where we may be headed in this new, perpetually moving age.

Both personally and professionally, educators must contemplate their identity, seeking to be intentional about finding the answers. As cultural warriors, they must understand the amazing power that they have in shaping students into who they could be as their best selves. They must also accept the mantle of responsibility they have in wielding that power well. They are engaged on a hero's journey, not unlike the ancient adventurers of the past, unexpectedly seeking a new identity for themselves and their profession.

The answers to the questions of who educators are and who they hope to be as they move through this process of evolution in digital modernity, are still unclear.

This is in part because identity is rooted in story, identity stories are ongoing, and contemporary stories seem increasingly fragmented, rattled apart by the speed with which they must evolve. Also, teaching is an art of communication. With the onset of digital advancements, so many of the avenues for communication are experiencing their own metamorphosis. Some modalities are gained, and some are being cast aside. This change can be as difficult for the teachers as it is for the students. For some teachers, many of their old skills seem to no longer be effective. For students, they don't seem to know that there are some things that they don't seem to know.

Early in the twenty-first century, Henry Jenkins recognized that we were living in a time of communication transitions:

...we are in an age of media transition, one marked by tactical decisions and unintended consequences, mixed signals and competing interests, and most of all, unclear directions and unpredictable outcomes.<sup>19</sup>

Humanity is indeed transitioning. Technology now makes it possible to interface with others on a global stage and on a variety of platforms. As physical walls seem no longer to have a place in connectivity, community and communication are finding new meaning and new avenues of existence.<sup>20</sup> Even now, visionary educators have a keen understanding that this process is impacting education *today*. This reality is no longer coming—it's here.

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<sup>19</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York, New York: New York University Press, 2006), 11.

<sup>20</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York, New York: New York University Press, 2006), 16.

This truth is compounded by the fact that the rate at which such change occurs is breathtaking. It seems beyond debate that the speed at which the global culture is evolving in a digital fashion will decisively create new paradigms that, though they seem barely to be conceived, are powerfully shaping how humanity lives, works, plays, and finds connections with each other. Our own market demand for technology's powerful capabilities are relentlessly driving this transition.

There are, of course, positive and negative potentials for individuals, but Jenkins takes things one step further to speak to what it will mean in the larger arena of policies and practices for our culture.<sup>21</sup> He recognizes the convergence of old and new, the blend of grassroots and corporate media, and urges us to participate in such a way as to make our voices heard as discerning consumers of such a culture.<sup>22</sup>

As global consumers, we have been fueled by our post-modern values to own the latest and the greatest that technology has to offer.<sup>23</sup> We see ourselves as being unique and wonderful, and we assert our right to be who we want to be, pursuing happiness without reference to others.<sup>24</sup> Much as in William Ernest Hensley's poem,

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<sup>21</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York, New York: New York University Press, 2006), 17.

<sup>22</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York, New York: New York University Press, 2006), 8.

<sup>23</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York, New York: New York University Press, 2006), 18.

<sup>24</sup> Mark Mason, "The Ethics of Integrity: Educational Values Beyond Postmodern Ethics," *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 2001, v.35 n. 1, 48, check info, accessed August 14, 2019, <http://hdl.handle.net/10722/54293>

*Invictus*, each person sees themselves as the master of one's own fate, the captain of one's own soul.<sup>25</sup> Technology reinforces us in this belief, and we feel empowered.

The paradox in all this is that humanity expresses a greater sense of being overwhelmed and confused. For all humanity's sense of autonomy through the use of technology, there is the secret sense that we are adrift.<sup>26</sup> In many ways, we have become an anxious culture, compounded by a greater awareness of violence, terrorist activity, and other fearful events which only escalate these emotions. There seems nowhere to escape. We feed off the buffet of fear and anger offered to us by the culture of 24-7 media coverage and allow ourselves to be intimidated by slick marketing practices into purchasing things that promise us greater peace of mind.<sup>27</sup>

So, it is not surprising that in our hunger to control our post-modern anxieties mixed with the constancy of unpredictable life events, we demand ever more participation in shaping our daily existence.<sup>28</sup> Digital technology, much as other technologies of the past have done, has offered at least the *perception* of a sense of relative control and security.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> William Ernest Henley, "Invictus," in *Americans' Favorite Poems*, ed. Robert Pinsky and Maggie Dietz (New York, New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2000), 114-115.

<sup>26</sup> Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of talk in a Digital Age* (New York, New York: Penguin Books), 77.

<sup>27</sup> Marianne A. Larsen, "North American Insecurities, Fears and Anxieties: Educational Implications," *Comparative Education*, vol. 44, No. 3 Special Issue (36): Insecurity, Desire and comparative Education: North American Perspectives, August 2008, 275.

<sup>28</sup> Marianne A. Larsen, "North American Insecurities, Fears and Anxieties: Educational Implications," *Comparative Education*, vol. 44, No. 3 Special Issue (36): Insecurity, Desire and comparative Education: North American Perspectives, August 2008, 267.

Technological tools offer us an easy solution to human angst. That we use these tools in an addictive manner bespeaks unsettling things about the nature of the objects and the state of our inner existence.<sup>30</sup> This is perhaps one of the most upsetting trends impacting young people and those that work with them. These addictions stand to define an entire generation,<sup>31</sup> and they stand to reshape the identity and roles of those who share in the responsibility their well-being.

In his text, *Glow Kids* (2016), Nicholas Kardaras offers insight into the following disquieting trend in research data:

Brain-imaging research is showing that glowing screens—like those of iPads—are as stimulating to the brain’s pleasure center and as able to increase levels of dopamine (the primary feel-good neurotransmitter) as much as sex does. This brain-orgasm effect is what makes screens so addictive for adults, but even more so for children with still-developing brains that just aren’t equipped to handle that level of stimulation.

What’s more, an ever-increasing amount of clinical research correlates screen tech with psychiatric disorders like ADHD, addiction, anxiety, depression, increased aggression and even psychosis. Perhaps most shocking of all, recent brain-imaging studies conclusively show that excessive screen exposure can neurologically damage a young person’s developing brain in the same way that cocaine addiction can.<sup>32</sup>

Sherry Turkle, Abby Rockefeller Mauzé Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, offers her own voice to the concern for this disconcerting phenomenon, in her text, *Alone Together*:

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<sup>29</sup>Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York, New York: Basic Books, 2011), 157.

<sup>30</sup> Nicholas Kardaras, *Glow Kids* (New York, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2016), 3.

<sup>31</sup> Nicholas Kardaras, *Glow Kids* (New York, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2016), 3.

<sup>32</sup> Nicholas Kardaras, *Glow Kids* (New York, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2016), 3-4.

*Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (2011). She observes:

These days, insecure in our relationships and anxious about intimacy, we look to technology for ways to be in relationship and protect ourselves from them at the same time. This can happen when one is finding one's way through a blizzard of text messages; it can happen when interacting with a robot. I feel witness for a third time to a turning point in our expectation of technology and ourselves. We bend to the inanimate with new solicitude. We fear the risks and disappointments of relationships with our fellow humans. We expect more from technology and less from each other.<sup>33</sup>

Advancements in digital technology, and the communication platforms for which it allows, are mind-boggling. Yet, for all its offerings, technology also has its limits. It communicates only the literal level.<sup>34</sup> It is a powerhouse in the mastery of data. Yet, it is a rookie at metaphor.<sup>35</sup>

There is more to life than just our physical existence. We have an invisible dimension to ourselves that cannot be expressed only through data. The beautiful essence of our human life is often found in the language of the metaphorical. Through it, we find transcendence and can glimpse, in a Heideggerian sense, the better part of ourselves. Richard Rohr speaks to the idea this way:

We live and move in an entirely symbolic universe. Symbols are in fact the only solid way to experience substance. (The Greek root *sym-bolon* means “a throwing together.”) True symbols somehow are the thing itself. Our mind throws together meanings largely without realizing we are even doing it. Poets, artists, and storytellers have always known this, and now scientists are

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<sup>33</sup> Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York, New York: Basic Books, 2011), xii.

<sup>34</sup> Kai-Fu Lee, *AI Superpowers: China, Silicon Valley, and the New World Order* (New York, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018), 14.

<sup>35</sup> Kai-Fu Lee, *AI Superpowers: China, Silicon Valley, and the New World Order* (New York, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018), 195.

honest enough to realize that they too need metaphors to point to reality (for example, black holes, string theory, and the big bang). Without new symbols, which are sometimes also words, unconscious meanings never break through to consciousness, and the invisible has no way of becoming visible. We remain bored and boring. *We do not experience our experiences*—and there is surely no knife edge to our experiences that cuts us open and lances our wounds or refines our happiness.<sup>36</sup>

If Rohr is correct, then human beings are hard-wired for metaphor. We are driven by our very nature to pursue understanding and to make meaning, and we cannot do so *without* metaphor.<sup>37</sup> If technology cannot provide humanity with the means to unlock the very best parts of who we are and our deepest levels of knowing, then surely it has limits on a very critical point to our humanity and our learning.

It is also true that metaphorical language takes practice.<sup>38</sup> It requires an investment of time and energy to reflect on experiences and develop critical thinking skills. It requires nurturing through a freedom from rigid structure so that it may grow in its own directions and become inspiration.<sup>39</sup> As Walter Benjamin tells us:

This process of assimilation, which takes place in depth, requires a state of relaxation, which is becoming rarer and rarer. If sleep is the apogee of relaxation, boredom is the apogee of mental relaxation. Boredom is the dream bird that hatches the egg of experience.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Richard Rohr, *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2013), 72.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Rohr, *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2013), 72.

<sup>38</sup> Daniel Pink, *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future* (New York, New York: Riverhead Books, 2006), 51-52.

<sup>39</sup> Nicholas Kardaras, *Glow Kids* (New York, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2016), xxi.

<sup>40</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, (New York, New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 91.

Tied too heavily to our devices in digital modernity, we do not become bored. We rarely relax, or seek sabbath, always being ‘on’.<sup>41</sup> The language of metaphor loses its power for us, as for many it is a tool left unused in the toolbox, one with which we rarely practice, never truly developing our skills to their potential. It may be argued that without an intentional pedagogy that nurtures a balance of screen use with metaphor, we risk not being able to communicate on this symbolic level—neither able to give or receive beauty—diminishing our capacity to perceive this facet of who we are as human beings.

Yet, despite this, the reality is that the art and science of teaching is moving to become ever more digital in nature. From desktops, to laptops, to iPads and even online public schools, Americans find themselves moving along the conveyor belt of technological progress and market imperatives. The agendas of those in politics, business, and in the military, all drive products and curricula, so exerting a powerful influence on educational directions.<sup>42</sup>

Sadly, their objectives are often not primarily in the best interest of the students or school community.<sup>43</sup> Educators come to realize that in teaching themselves to be able to speak the language of digital modernity and meet the technical demands of their craft, they must also take a stand to seek the balance of

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<sup>41</sup> Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York, New York: Basic Books, 2011), 163.

<sup>42</sup> Henry Giroux, *Education and the Crisis of Public Values: Challenging the Assault on Teachers, Students, and Public Education* (New York, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2012), 117.

<sup>43</sup> Henry Giroux, *Education and the Crisis of Public Values: Challenging the Assault on Teachers, Students, and Public Education* (New York, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2012), 117.

metaphor, helping their students (and themselves!) to navigate the currents of educational change in American culture.

Policy-makers and politicians do not always recognize the building blocks of authentic human flourishing as part of the mystical connection between teachers and the families in their care. The linear paths that facilitate corporate goals obstruct a broader vision and may not necessarily allow them to see beyond the pragmatic.<sup>44</sup>

To offer an example of this premise, it is argued that efficient productivity has been a hallmark element of simplistic, one-size-fits-all educational scenarios.<sup>45</sup> However, superficial solutions tend to beget superficial results.

In educational settings, this can lead to a sense of dehumanization, as educators are forced to efficiently practice what Brazilian teacher turned educational theorist, Paulo Freire (1921-1997) would describe as a “banking” model of education:

Narration (with the teacher as narrator) leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them into “containers,” into “receptacles” to be “filled” by the teacher... Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor... This is the “banking concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits... But in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in the (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful

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<sup>44</sup> Henry Giroux, *Education and the Crisis of Public Values: Challenging the Assault on Teachers, Students, and Public Education* (New York, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2012), 119.

<sup>45</sup> Rebecca Garte, 2017, “American Progressive Education and the School of Poor Children: A Brief History of a Philosophy in Practice”, *International Journal of Progressive Education*, 13, (2), 11-12.

inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.<sup>46</sup>

Paolo Freire and many scholars like him assert that there is more at stake than just individual humanization; enlightenment thinking and the concepts of a democratic reality also hang in the balance.<sup>47</sup> Given the nature of their competing agendas, to allow corporations to control classrooms could have far-reaching, and likely unfortunate ramifications.

One may argue that digital technology is only a tool, with no additional agenda beyond making our lives easier. However, along with the evolution of the tool, humanity is coming to experience a cultural evolution within ourselves. To whose benefit?

In casual conversations with colleagues who specialize in working with the very young of one lower-middleclass community, I have heard some very significant things. Teachers are experiencing children who come to preschool with very poor communication skills. They feel that this is so because at home, not only are parents not talking to their children as often because they are interacting more often with their own mobile devices, but also because these interactions are done via text, which produces no audible speech. These children do not even overhear conversation to be able to assimilate patterns, contexts, and pronunciations. They do not have as much experience with reading tones of voice or body language associated with generating

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<sup>46</sup> Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York, New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1993), 52-53.

<sup>47</sup> Jeremy Adams, *The Secrets of Timeless Teachers: Instruction that Works in Every Generation* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), xxxvii.

emotions. And this creates a further dynamic; this lack of experience creates a lack of development amongst the synapses of the brain. Characteristic of autistic children is the difficulty they have in reading the social cues of others.<sup>48</sup> Metaphor is a difficult concept. It takes practice to master.<sup>49</sup> If the window for language development closes before these skills are acquired, we may be creating young adults who have functionally autistic social skills!

The pervasive use of texting by others appears to be depriving children of being in a language rich environment, filled with tone of voice, body language, appropriate use of language syntax, eye contact, and even laughter. They then go on to engage in behaviors which could just as easily isolate them from, rather than connect them to, others. They lack the opportunity to interact not only on a personal level, but also with the concepts that are informed by metaphor.

It is commonly estimated that between 80-90% of all communication is nonverbal.<sup>50</sup> If this is so, then the children of digital modernity, in comparison to those of previous generations, run the risk of finding themselves caught in a profound language deficit, both in verbal and non-verbal skill sets.

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<sup>48</sup> Kirstin Brown Birtwell, Brian Willoughby, and Lisa Nowinski, "Social, Cognitive, and Behavioral Development of Children and Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder," in *Primer on Autism Spectrum Disorder*, ed. Christopher J. McDougle (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 27.

<sup>49</sup> Janet Emig, "Children and Metaphor," *Research in the Teaching of English* 6, no. 2 (1972): 167, accessed September 10, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/db07.linccweb.org/stable/40170802>.

<sup>50</sup> Jeff Thompson, "Is Nonverbal Communication a Numbers Game?" *Psychology Today*, September 30, 2011, accessed July 4, 2019, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/beyond-words/201109/is-nonverbal-communication-numbers-game>.

Without exercise, these very human skills would go unused, unpracticed, and without even realizing it, these elemental abilities could eventually be regarded as superfluous. Like the Eloi who had abandoned their books in H. G. Well's *Time Machine*, they simply would not see the need for such forms of knowledge and skill.<sup>51</sup>

Dynamic educators understand that they have a profound ability to influence this outcome.<sup>52</sup> They can help to expand students' capacities for the transcendental and the transformative that Abraham Maslow defined it in his research, describing the nature of self-actualization.<sup>53</sup> They have the power to create a praxis of critical pedagogy that shores up the human spirit and builds richly human communities rooted in respect and dignity for each human person.<sup>54</sup>

There is more on the horizon and the vista of the digital future of education is still hidden in the mist. Artificial intelligence is poised to have a profound impact on classrooms and curricula.<sup>55</sup> It may be argued that many educational communities glimpse only a hint of what will be available in the years ahead.

The technology of artificial intelligence is available for classroom use in some parts of the globe. Already, kindergarten students in China are learning basic skills

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<sup>51</sup> H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017), 64.

<sup>52</sup> James H. Stronge. *Qualities of Effective Teachers* (Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2007), 26.

<sup>53</sup> Abraham Maslow, *A Theory of Human Motivation* (New York, New York: Start Publication, 2012), Kindle edition, loc 199.

<sup>54</sup> Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York, New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1993), 164.

<sup>55</sup> Kai-Fu Lee, *AI Superpowers: China, Silicon Valley, and the New World Order* (New York, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018), 121-124.