

1 Towards an engaged Pedagogy Bell Hooks Manifesto and the
2 Teaching and Learning of Mathematics

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6

7 **Abstract**

8 The debate over what content and methods should compose the mathematics education of
9 children has been an omnipresent contested discourse in the mathematics education terrain.
10 In today's schooling regimes, the push for accountability and the movement towards a
11 culturally-coded, standards â???"based curriculum seem to cripple every earnest attempt at
12 rejuvenation and redemption of democratic access to educational opportunities and resources
13 for learners. The abysmal inequalities we witness in schools and societies worldwide have been
14 complicit in creating a rather apocalyptic vision of the future of education as a practice of
15 engagement and empowerment. With a longstanding history that imbued racial demarcation
16 and reductionist positioning, the quest for liberation through transformative education
17 endeavors appears as if a figment of pure imagination. In the face of intensified challenges that
18 transcend national geographic boundaries, we seek refuge and inspiration by revisiting the
19 works of crucial thinkers such as bell hooks who reminds us of the ultimate goal of education,
20 viz. praxis of humanization and liberation.

21

22 *Index terms—*

23 **1 Towards an Engaged Pedagogy: bell hooks Manifesto and the
24 Teaching and Learning of Mathematics**

25 The purpose of this paper is to shed light on the ideas set forth by bell hooks in her book *Teaching to Transgress*
26 and to further explore its relevance to the teaching and learning of mathematics. Additionally, we will expound
27 on basic issues that reflect her pedagogy including the role of the mathematics teacher and how she envisions
28 the classroom setup. Furthermore, we will relate hooks' work in this book to other discourses in critical theory
29 as well as propose potential impact on our evolving perspectives in critical pedagogy.

30 bell hooks is a teacher, a theorist, an activist, a cultural critic. She is an African American woman who was born
31 Gloria Watkins in 1952 in Kentucky. She lived through the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, and
32 experienced firsthand the upheavals following the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*.
33 The early part of hooks' educational journey took her from a childhood in a segregated Southern community, to
34 a high school experience dominated by the conundrums of courtordered integration, or desegregation, to the elite
35 college environment of Stanford University.

36 **2 Iman C. Chahine**

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48 **3 I.**

49 Introduction/Context: Who is bell hooks?

50 Inspired by the ideas of Freire and Buddhist philosophy, hooks proposes a pedagogy toward freedom, self-
51 actualization, and students'/teachers' empowerment. This she calls "engaged pedagogy". hooks' engaged
52 pedagogy is one that stands in opposition to that perpetrated by the dominant culture. Freire refers to this
53 dominant system as "the banking system of education" where "memorizing information and regurgitating it
54 represented gaining knowledge that could be deposited, stored and used at a later date" following set agendas
55 (hooks, 1994:5,7). Such a system dictates an atmosphere of boredom, disinterest and apathy. As a result,
56 boundaries are created, which neither students nor teachers are allowed to transgress. In this context, only
57 the teacher is responsible for classroom dynamics and is held accountable to the larger institutional structures.
58 envisions an engaged pedagogy as more demanding than conventional critical or feminist pedagogy. She asserts
59 that engaged pedagogy emphasizes wholeness, a union of mind, body, and spirit. Equivalently, students should
60 be seen as whole hooks

61 The learning process becomes then one that engages everyone. This way the privileged voice of authority will
62 be deconstructed by collective critical practice. Emphasizing the place of the experience of oppression, which can
63 be either of victimization or of resistance, in the learning process, hooks argues that experience can be a way to
64 know and can inform how we know what we know.

65 **4 III.**

66 **5 The Mathematics Classroom**

67 Needless to say, an engaged mathematics classroom should be one in which freedom is practiced, one that
68 enables and enhances our capacity to be "free". The body should be moved as the mind moves. For hooks
69 learning is most powerful when it liberates. The students should evolve as independent critical thinkers. In this
70 regard, the mathematics classroom should be an exciting place, where instituted boundaries are transgressed.
71 The setup is flexible and nonconventional. For example, students and teachers sit in circles where they can
72 see each other. This will help make sustained conversation among students and between students and teacher
73 possible. Agendas are flexible to allow for spontaneous shifts in direction for the purpose of deeper and more
74 engaged learning and problem solving. Students have to be seen in their particularities as individuals and
75 collectively interacting with each other. teachers meet to learn and exchange these learning experiences fully.
76 For hooks, learning in the classroom extends beyond learning a content knowledge to a process of deliberately
77 nurturing affective inclinations, emotions, and passions that surface out during intense dialogues. The classroom
78 that hooks advocates is that which challenges patriarchy and transcends the bourgeois biases of class, color,
79 and gender and thus moves toward humanization of individuals equally and collectively. In such a classroom,
80 the monocultural mathematics instruction will be transformed into more inquiry-based exploratory experiences
81 delineating trajectories of ethnic growth, hereof, asserting a mentality of equity and opening up spaces for
82 participation and inclusiveness.

83 IV.

84 **6 The Role of the Teacher**

85 In her outcry for renewal and rejuvenation in teaching practices, hooks insists that every engaged teacher must
86 be actively committed to a process of selfactualization that promotes his/her own well-being. She ()

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89 On another perspective, hooks delineates a vision of the classroom as a common ground where human beings
90 with complex lives and experiences rather than simply as seekers after compartmentalized bits of knowledge.
91 Furthermore, sharing confessional narratives in academic discussions of facts or more abstract constructs is a
92 very helpful approach employed in engaged pedagogy. It allows students to claim a mathematical knowledge base
93 from which to speak and fosters critical thinking as well. It shows how experience can illuminate and enhance our
94 understanding of academic material. But hooks stresses the fact that both the engaged teacher and her students
95 should be willing to share their stories and not the students alone. In the practice of engaged pedagogy, both
96 the teacher and the students must be able to critically listen and hear one another respectfully. hooks considers
97 the classroom as a place for joy as well as serious learning. She insistently shifts the focus from a traditional

98 perspective of a classroom as a place where content knowledge is being delivered to an environment where issues
99 are consciously and critically challenged and debated. hooks, also, persistently highlights the necessity for creating
100 a classroom environment in which students and teachers act responsibly and wisely toward the benefit of collective
101 commune and where knowledge is negotiated and constructed through the praxis of action and reflection.

102 Considering the classroom as the "most radical space for possibility", hooks challenges the idea of a "safe
103 harmonious" classroom and calls for trans-forming it into a communal "holistic model of learning" empowering
104 students as well as teachers toward the pursuit of truth. She insistently invites teachers to create free, flexible
105 and democratic spaces encouraging all students to face their fears and have a "voice" in their own learning.
106 Hence the classroom is the space where freedom of speech and daring ideas emerge and are nurtured by dialogue
107 among students and between students and the teacher. hooks explains that students' diverse experiences, religion,
108 language and culture makes it fundamental for them to have a voice in the classroom. Such perspective encourages
109 a rather humanistic aspect of mathematics as the creative expressions of human thought across cultures and
110 civilizations.

111 hooks views excitement as necessary to stimulate serious intellectual and/or academic engagement. Furthermore,
112 she asserts that excitement in the classroom does not mean that there should be no reciprocity and respect.
113 In order to create excitement in the classroom, the engaged teacher would need to build classroom communities
114 where everyone will show interest in one another, in hearing each others' voices. More importantly, in an engaged
115 classroom, everyone influences the classroom dynamic, everyone contributes and their contributions are resources
116 which if used constructively, enhance the capacity of any class to create an open learning community. Both the
117 teacher and the student will need to see the classroom always as a communal place so that the likelihood of
118 collective effort in creating and sustaining a learning community can be enhanced.

119 In an engaged mathematics classroom, the goal of the teacher is not merely to share information and content
120 knowledge but to contribute to the intellectual and spiritual growth of the students. The teacher must teach in
121 a manner that respects and cares for the souls of the students. In this respect, she/he provides the necessary
122 conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin, one in which both the teacher and the students
123 are active participants, not passive consumers. Everyone has to claim knowledge as a field in which we all labor
124 in order to be able to change the world.

125 Moreover, teachers should ensure that order is maintained in the classroom while allowing for useful
126 interruptions and digressions. An engaged teacher makes sure that the class does not perpetrate class biases,
127 elitism and other forms of domination. It is her responsibility to address tension in class. Only when students
128 share experiences in conjunction with academic subject matter will they remember each other. bell hooks (1994)
129 envisions the role of the teacher as that of a facilitator, celebrating education as the practice of freedom and urging
130 students, through dialogue, to go beyond boundaries toward self actualization and transformation. Capitalizing
131 on students' experiences as valuable resources for building mathematical instruction, she calls for open, active
132 engagement of students in the learning process. Highly inspired by Freire's work, hooks fiercely challenged the
133 "banking system" of education and perceived teachers as "healers" concerned with the well-being of their students
134 both spiritually and mentally.

135 In proposing her transgressive, engaged pedagogy, hooks addresses students' resistance to liberation in the
136 classrooms and capitalizes on the role of teachers as models daringly sharing their experiences with students and
137 thus paving the way for free, mature dialogue. Furthermore, hooks emphasizes the importance of having students
138 develop a "voice" in their writings as well as in arguments juxtaposed in the classroom. More interestingly, hooks
139 explains that it is the responsibility of the teacher to encourage those communication skills including listening
140 and speaking by enacting those same skills in his/her classroom. She calls upon teachers to respect and value
141 students' voices and to openly and critically reflect on their ideas so that they'll practice the same discipline with
142 their colleagues.

143 Perhaps one of the underlying messages that hooks addresses in her pedagogy of freedom and transgression is
144 the idea of a teacher as a learner. The teacher is no longer the sole possessor of knowledge, but rather a catalyst
145 that helps establish an atmosphere where students' thoughts and critical ideas continue to flow fervently and
146 incessantly.

147 Inherent in the idea of the teacher as a learner is the challenge that hooks sets forth against the routine use of
148 daily, laborious lesson plans. She explains that the fear of not covering enough material is what makes teachers
149 restricted as to what to offer in their teaching. However, she commends that teachers follow "the mood of the
150 class" in deciding how and what to do next. Engaged pedagogy and revolutionary practice: Relating bell hooks to
151 other critical pedagogues Bell hooks' engaged pedagogy is one approach to critical pedagogy and revolutionary
152 practice. The ideas embraced in the book, *Teaching to Transgress* resonate with readings in Grande, and of
153 course, Freire. Recognizing the political nature of teaching and learning, hooks' engaged pedagogy requires the
154 interrogation of culture, oppression, and committed action.

155 should be seen to help herself first so that she can in turn heal her students by bringing about enlightenment.
156 She will keep attending classes and will not miss any opportunity to affirm her students' quest for selfactualization.
157 By the same token, students in an engaged mathematics classroom should be able to expect that the mathematical
158 knowledge received in class will enrich and enhance their thinking it will address the connection between what
159 they are learning and their overall life experiences. They should assume responsibility for their choices of what
160 knowledge they want to have and should be able to discuss these choices freely with their teacher. This interchange

11 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

161 of ideas means that the teacher's voice should not be the only account of what happens in the class; students' 162 expressions and thoughts should be valued. In doing so, both the teacher and the students grow and are 163 empowered by the process. In addition, the engaged teacher's voice must never be fixed and absolute but according 164 to hooks, should always evolve in dialogue with a world beyond itself. hooks explains that teachers should be 165 wholly present in mind, body, and spirit while encouraging students to take risks. She further maintains that 166 students bring to the classroom a unique mixture of experiential and analytical ways of knowing which should not 167 be ignored. According to hooks, this complexity of experience can rarely be voiced and named from a distance. 168 hooks resonates strongly with ??rande (2004) with regard to what Grande calls "whitestream feminism." As 169 women of color, both hooks and Grande have experienced being marginalized by white feminists and also being 170 questioned/marginalized by members of their respective cultural community-Native Americans for Grande and 171 African Americans for hooks. While both hooks and Grande seek common ground with critical feminists who 172 are willing to honestly engage issues of race and culture, both have encountered others who cannot or will not 173 attend to previously marginalized voices and viewpoints. In the chapter entitled Holding My Sister's Hand, 174 hooks explicitly reaches out to white feminists, explicating the historical precedents that complicate relationships 175 between black women and white women, and offering a vision for reconciliation and solidarity.

176 that supports this in personal and societal realms. Her pedagogy radiates hope and love, envisioning learning 177 communities in which people are capable of transformation.

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180 Volume XIII Issue X Version I hooks acknowledges Paulo Freire as one of her most influential teachers. Early 181 in life, hooks came to the knowledge that education was fundamental to liberation. This is a central theme of 182 Freire's work, and provided an almost instant spark of connection when hooks first encountered Freire's writings. 183 Because of the close affinity between hooks' work and that of Freire, many parallels exist between hooks' pedagogy 184 as described in *Teaching to Transgress* and Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). In *Teaching to Transgress*, 185 hooks responds to Freire and relates his ideas to the experiences and situations that are central to her workfeminist 186 theory and practice, and critical consciousness with respect to race, class, and their respective "isms."

187 The title *Teaching to Transgress* refers to transgressing the boundaries that these concepts have placed on 188 theory, classroom discourse, teaching, and learning.

189 In an era of "accountability" and isolation, mathematics teachers more than ever need support and motivation 190 to strive toward transgression, change, and self-actualization. In the cause of humanization and liberation, an 191 engaged pedagogy calls for radically revolutionizing space, content, and approaches to mathematics education 192 ??Chahine, 2013). As an organic model of communal learning and mathematics-identity building, an engaged 193 pedagogy emphasizes the role of the classroom as free, flexible and democratic space for reconfiguring history 194 empowering students as well as teachers toward the pursuit of truth. In such a space, the privileged voice of 195 authority is deconstructed by collective critical practice and where students are seen as whole human beings with 196 complex lives and diverse experiences, sharing their daring voices in continuous dialogue among each other and 197 with the teacher.

198 Perhaps the hope that hooks talks about in her engaged pedagogy can inspire and empower us as mathematics 199 educators to transgress boundaries and rediscover the joy and excitement inherent in the teaching and learning 200 of mathematics. Reading hooks, we feel ourselves opening up to making possibilities real, saying, "yes, we can 201 do this!"

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203 Like Freire, hooks is passionately committed to praxis, the active manifestation of learning as social justice 204 oriented change in the world. She enthusiastically writes about the intertwined relationships of learning and 205 empowerment. hooks also extends Freire's work by exploring the importance of love and joy in learning, even in 206 classroom environments.

207 hooks writes for a wide and varied audience. While she explicitly addresses critical theorists, she also writes 208 for more of a lay audience than do many critical theorists. The use of language itself contains many questions 209 addressed by critical pedagogues and theorists; how can one utilize the "tools of the oppressor" in non-oppressive 210 or at least less oppressive ways? By consciously writing with a voice that is conversational and that tends 211 toward simple words, hooks explicitly disrupts conventions by carefully explicating her densely textured texts 212 as she decenters her language and opens new spaces for critical inquiry. While intensely personal in delineating 213 her theory, hooks explicitly connects her personal story to her critical theorizing. She carries this approach 214 forward with her students; for hooks, this becomes her way for effectively interweaving the lived experience of 215 marginalized people, the development of critical consciousness in teacher and student, and the connection of 216 teaching and learning to committed action.

217 V.

218 11 Concluding Thoughts

219 Bell hooks is a sister-in-spirit and a teacher for us. Her pedagogy is grounded in a deep knowledge of the lived 220 experiences of oppressed and marginalized people. hooks sees transformation as essential to the project of being

221 human and has developed a pedagogy 1. Unearthing the mathematical practices of African cultures. In D.
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