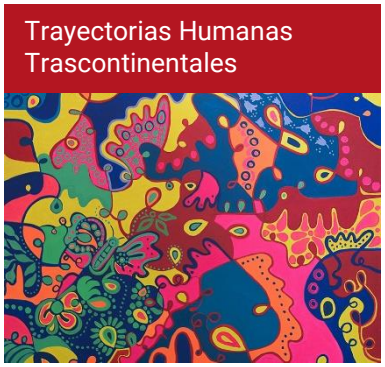

Foreword

Noah De Lissovoy

Professor, Department of Curriculum and Instruction. Dr. De Lissovoy is the author of *Education and Emancipation in the Neoliberal Era* and *Power, Crisis, and Education for Liberation*, and co-author of *Toward a New Common School Movement*. His work has also been published in many journals and edited collections, including *Harvard Educational Review*, *Curriculum Inquiry*, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *Journal of Education Policy*, and *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. His scholarship has been translated into Spanish, Portuguese, French, Greek, and German. He received his Ph.D. from the University of California, Los Angeles. He teaches courses in social and cultural theory in education, curriculum theory, and philosophy of education

University of Texas
Austin, United States

delissovoy@austin.utexas.edu

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3233-0904

The decolonial turn in the cultural field heralds an epochal change. It announces itself not as the latest in a string of intellectual fashions but as something more profound: the return, on the terrain of knowledge, of the "forever dead" (as the Zapatistas say) who have been refused and erased by Western science, modernity, and "development." The decolonial turn, which is a scholarly phenomenon but also a broad cultural shift with historical roots in global anticolonial liberation movements and with contemporary branches in political, artistic, and social struggles, demonstrates that the assault on the world undertaken by the European and North American capitalist core has not just been material but also spiritual, ontological, and epistemological—the effect of a dominant *abyssal thinking* (Santos, 2014) for which the non-Western world, at the level of culture and value, has existed only as a kind of exteriority (Dussel, 1985) against which the West has elaborated its own imaginary centrality and superiority (Wynter, 2006). Against that deadly imagination, which has subordinated the planet to its fantasies for centuries, decoloniality as a cultural-political-epistemological project asserts the *presence and value* of the colonized and oppressed, and in that assertion challenges the entire architecture of canonical knowledge. This constitutes a claim by the oppressed on the space of history and politics, a claim by Indigenous nations on the land and the Earth, and a claim by the refused and excluded on the very space of being and thinking (Fanon, 1963; Grande, 2004).

From a decolonial perspective, it is not enough to fight for access to liberal freedoms and inclusion in the horizon of Western modernity; these are ultimately just alternative forms of enclosure and assimilation. Decolonial thought has challenged us to recontextualize the catalogue of *inequities*—of race, culture, gender, and so on—onto the broad historical terrain of colonialism. This allows us to have a more systematic understanding of power and also a more dimensional one, since we can then see economic exploitation, racialization in society, and ideological judgments against civilizations as part of the same historical structure and sequence: a sequence that Aníbal Quijano calls the "coloniality of power" (2000). In this context, the process of decoloniality involves the recovery and innovation of *other worlds*: other practices, other understandings, other productions—as these are tied to ensembles of relations attached to diverse lands and peoples (Simpson, 2017). What is most threatening to the West in the decolonial project is not the latter's indictment of the crimes of colonialism but its insistence that Western knowledge is only one knowledge, and that the dominant sciences have to learn to live with others in a condition of *pluriversality* (Mignolo, 2011). This decolonial demand forces the West to confront a question it wants to avoid at all costs: What is left of Western knowledge once it is stripped of its pretentions to exceptionality and universality?

In this broad context, education and teaching are a very special undertaking. The flat and authoritarian forms of official pedagogy and curriculum have been a crucial apparatus in the structure of colonial societies (Freire, 1970). This is not just the case with regard to the habits and orientations that schools seek to inculcate in students. It is also the case that education spins out the decisive stories, myths, and cultural laws that are the ground of consciousness in individuals and communities. Education sets out the orders and rationales of "good government" and also tells society's crucial origin stories, as Quechua thinker Guaman Poma demonstrated in his own decolonizing theses four hundred years ago. Teaching and curriculum can be a site of epistemicide, in refusing knowledges outside of the dominant as mainstream education does, or they can be the site of an affirmation of the *will-to-live* of the people (Dussel, 2008), and of the continuous production of beauty and meaning that grows from that determination and desire. In this way, teaching is sacred—not in the fetishized Western sense of the sacred as that which is removed

and mysterious—but rather in the sense of being located at the center of the collective project of culture. Something of that sacredness remains even in the corrupted forms of teaching that are reproduced in mainstream schooling, which is why people know that teachers deserve deep respect even when they are denigrated by the powerful.

In addition, decolonial thought directs our attention to the fundamental scene of power that underlies the teaching situation and which is the substrate upon which the visible contests of education are grounded. The drama and ordeal of teaching and learning, which become so normalized in the space of schooling, carry nevertheless always the highest stakes in that they sketch the outlines of what it is possible and permissible *to be*, and also in that they articulate what grammar will organize our *proximity* to others (Dussel, 1985). In that sense, decolonial teaching, in its attentiveness to this fundamental political scene, is an intervention against the coloniality of being (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) which orders identities and desires according to the violent logic of white and Western supremacy. Coloniality marks off valid and invalid traditions and values, but it also works at the very root of subjectivity—shaping its basic sense and organization. Decolonial teachers must be scientists of this submerged topography of the subject, navigating its impossible contours in order to accompany students in their *coming to be* against injury and abjection. Familiar practices of social justice education are always running behind the system, which knows how to exploit their innovations for its own ends; by contrast, decolonial teaching intervenes at the level of original meanings and purposes.

Finally, critical pedagogy tells us that teaching is inescapably political and ideological. There is no neutral position; whether actively or passively, as teachers we must take a side in relation to the struggle against oppression. But is it not also true that teaching is inescapably *epistemological*? And not only in the sense that teaching takes a position in the field of knowledge, but also in the sense that it always produces knowledge. The teacher, in collaboration with students, is *always a theorist and scientist,* whether the knowledge being produced works through the channels that have been approved and certified or whether it is a knowledge of/from the outside, a knowledge without permission. This fundamental creativity of teaching is sometimes overlooked by critical pedagogy in its preoccupation with the ideological work of the curriculum. But in fact, as Prof. Fregoso Bailón suggests in his crucial call for papers for this special issue, teachers (especially those from the Global South or from marginalized communities) labor under a double erasure: they are denigrated for the news they bring of the dignity, struggles and understandings of the oppressed, and they are also denied in the first place as indispensable and original thinkers. In this regard, decolonial theory itself perhaps needs to pay closer attention to educators and their truths.

The analyses, narratives, and testimonios in this special issue demonstrate these truths. They show that teachers are a global-philosophical force, not just a reservoir of labor-power to be exploited. The teachers and *normalistas* in this issue, in sharing their voices, honor all of us who read and listen. Furthermore, these narratives and expositions remind university-based scholars that the validity of our work is not different from the validity of "knowledge workers" in the school or in other informal educational spaces: in all cases that validity rests on a fidelity to the epistemological vocation of teaching and to the ethics of relationality that has to ground educational communities of all kinds. Colonial knowledge ties its investigations of the world to a slander of alternative understandings, and therefore the idea of the *decisiveness* of the inquiries-from-below that are undertaken by teachers, from their diverse geo-political vantage points, is deeply threatening to the powerful. For this reason, we

should listen to teachers and hope that they continue to play a significant role in the context of the present epochal transition to a world beyond coloniality, and we should be grateful to the authors and editor of this important special issue for pointing the way forward on this path.

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