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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from
Pedagogies of Voice.

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Preface



Be a good Ancestor with yourself

Children become adults

Adults become leaders

Leaders become elders

*Elders become **Ancestors***

—Leona and Gabrielle Prince (2022)

Dear Reader,

This is an invitation. An invitation to exercise our power as educators. An invitation to center our humanity and awaken student voice rather than uphold oppressive systems that we know are harmful. An invitation to dream and imagine schools and classrooms that liberate us to do right by our students while reigniting the spark that led us into this profession in the first place. We won't pretend to ignore the decades of misguided policies and practices that have served to silence the voices of students and educators alike. At the same time, our desire to write this book is fueled by our shared belief that such barriers can and must be dismantled: We simply can't live like this any longer. Our students deserve better, and we have the agency to transform our classrooms and the systems in which we work.

The four of us who crafted this book see you, beloved reader. We acknowledge the work you do every day and the stamina required to keep showing up for children in these complex times. We also affirm the part of you that is seeking, always seeking, to transform your practice—the part that brought you to us. We four—Crystal, Marlo, Sawsan, and Shane—have ancestral roots that stretch across the globe, and we come to you braiding together personal legacies of truth-telling, justice, and hope. Our own voices have been hard-won. Each of us has struggled to articulate stories of possibility—counter-narratives that nurture a Pedagogy of Voice—while simultaneously honoring who we are and where we come from.



QR Code 1

<https://qrs.ly/iyg89s3>

Meet our *Pedagogies of Voice* Book Team, the collective that has worked closely together for over two years to produce this offering in your hands.

Before writing this book, our team led a series of listening sessions with 25 educators from across North America. We asked, “What needs to be said, right here and now, in a book about student voice and agency?” The answers cracked our hearts open. Here are a few.

- “The truth needs to be told to awaken people.” —Robert Liimiiuum Hala’ayt Clifton, superintendent, Nisga’a School District 92, British Columbia
- “I feel like teachers have to do the heavy lifting . . . often without the support of administration.” —Shikira Chang, Black Teacher Project leader and educator in New York City
- “Our youth are really scared.” —Caroline Han, director of Diversity, Equity, and Belonging and U.S. history teacher, Wayland Public Schools
- “You’re all my children.” —Stacey Coonsis, self-described Navajo matriarch, former fourth-grade teacher and head of School for Native American Community Academy (NACA)
- “If you see one Black teacher, you see 100. If I’m at an event . . . there’s a just an unspoken, like if we make eye contact, it’s like ‘I got you.’ It instantly makes you feel better.” —Roleen Demmings, Black Teacher Project leader, educator in Indianapolis



Awakening: Crystal's Corner

What do you believe needs to be said, right here and now? What truths does your voice carry that need to be spoken out loud?

These beautiful conversations helped to shape the book in your hands and reminded us that we are all, as Dr. Lisa Delpit shared on *Street Data Pod*, “elders-in-training” and future ancestors (Safir & Mumby, 2023b). The choices we make today will ripple out far beyond our classrooms and schools, planting seeds for the next seven generations of learners, a principle that originated with the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) people. To tend this aching planet and all its beings, we must create classrooms that honor and awaken the voices of our learners. Students are crying out to be heard. They are telling us—with and without words—that our existing compliance-focused pedagogies are silencing them and stifling critical parts of their identities. They are asking us to reimagine our classrooms and schools into liberatory, life-affirming spaces.

So many children feel invisible, unseen and unheard, but we have the power to shift this reality within our classrooms, to counteract the forces of oppression and harm. Co-author Sawsan Jaber writes, “Traditional school structures have functioned like factories, ‘spirit murdering’ (Love, 2019) students, assimilating their identities, invalidating their sense of self and contributing to a growing duality, particularly for marginalized students. The limitations of traditional pedagogical practices are creating dangerous prospects for our future. Adapting our practice to cultivate student agency will bolster every learner in our community, not just those at the margins.” Rather than simply being spoon-fed content and skills, our children deserve to be welcomed into beloved communities where they can learn to be human together along with the literacy, numeracy, and critical engagement skills needed to navigate a complex world. Cognition and emotion can’t be separated; they live hand in hand.

Think of your classroom as an incubation site for the next generation of leaders. Now more than ever, we need to create intergenerational learning spaces where young people have an opportunity to sit at the feet of elders to absorb their teachings and to lead by example as they mentor younger students. Today’s youth know what they are capable of and what they deserve! They are actively chafing against the outdated structures we seem so desperate to preserve: grades, traditional tests, punitive discipline, sit-and-get instruction. And they inhabit an increasingly interconnected world. Will we meet them where they are at? Will we “teach and lead to simply reproduce reality as it exists, or will we teach and lead to transform it?” (Safir & Dugan, 2021). The choices we make every day matter.

The central metaphor of our book is the olive tree. Olive trees and branches are held symbols of peace across many different cultures, some of which date back thousands of years. They also are regarded as symbols of friendship, resilience, and resistance. Sawsan writes:

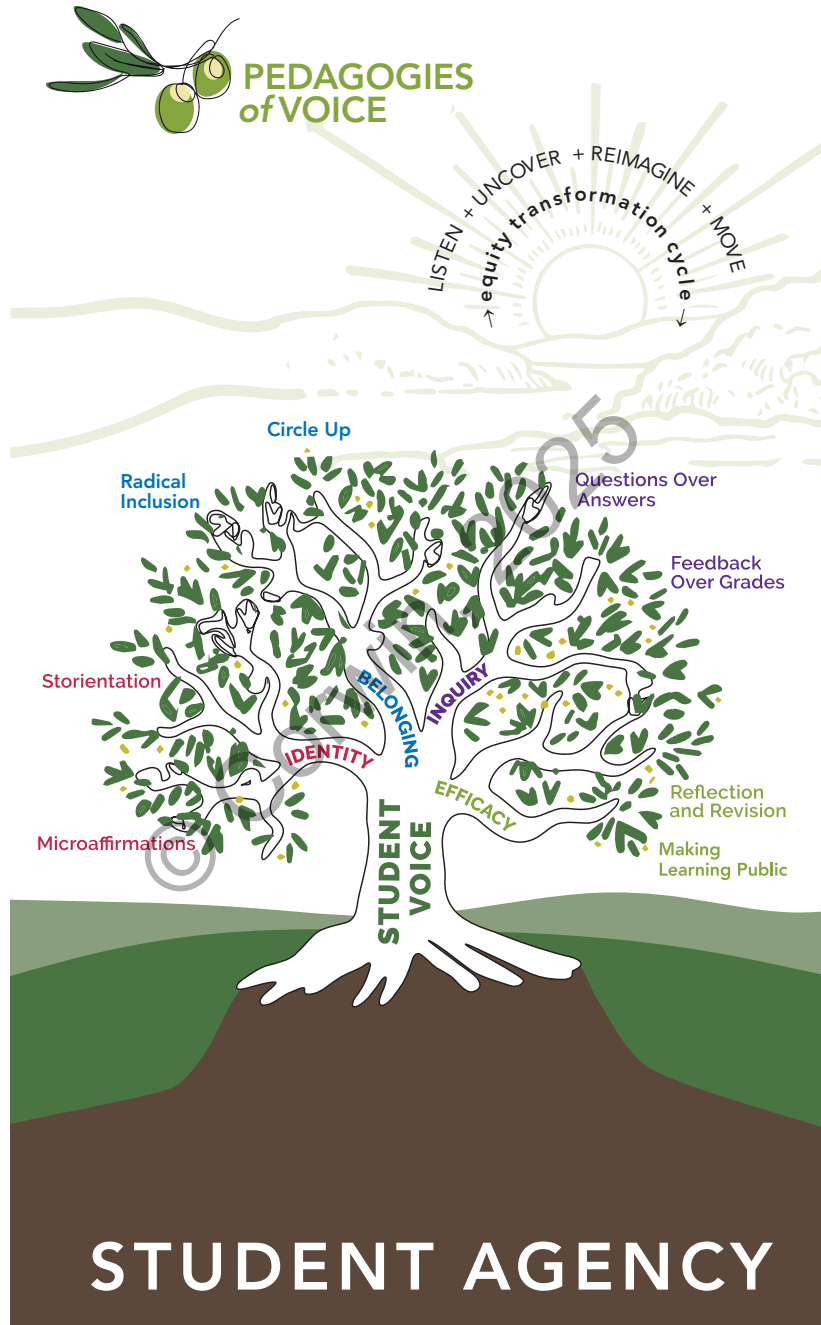
Rooted. Like a deeply grounded olive tree, a symbol of my Palestinian tradition and heritage, my ancestry has been an invisible hand guiding my existence, shaping my fortitude and resilience, carving out my life journey, and providing me with the strength and wisdom of how to move forward in life's joy and challenges, as both a human and an educator. As a symbol of resistance, peace, and connection to the land, the olive tree is a powerful icon in Palestinian narratives and oral histories. Like Native Americans, Palestinians have a deep-rooted connection to nature and the land that lives in our blood and veins. Olive trees are a staple of generations of Palestinian resilience, resistance, fortitude, and ancestry.

The olive tree stands as a symbol of pride and the everlasting endurance of the human spirit. Our journey into *Pedagogies of Voice* begins in the DNA of the olive tree—its root system. We invite you to walk alongside us as we plant and fortify an expanding grove of trees under which future generations can take refuge. We will nourish this grove by providing you with Awakenings crafted by co-author Crystal M. Watson: reflective moments that activate your mind, heart, body, and spirit in service of pedagogical transformation. We will continually remind you of your power to transform learning: Not only are these practices liberating for learners, they will liberate *us* if we allow ourselves to be changed.

The Olive Tree: An Extended Metaphor That Informs the Organization of This Book

Part 1: In **Chapter 1**, we explore the case for a Pedagogy of Voice in these times of great social and political upheaval, tracing elements of the histories and pedagogical lineages that inform this project. In **Chapter 2**, we apply foundational concepts from *Street Data: A Next-Generation Model of Equity, Pedagogy, and School Transformation* (Safir & Dugan, 2021) to the classroom as point of impact, reflecting on what it looks like to “choose the margins” and gather Street Data. **Chapters 3 and 4** situate us in the soil beneath the olive tree by exploring *10 Toxins* that undermine a Pedagogy of Voice and *10 Ways of Being* that serve as antidotes. The toxins come to life through signature practices and narratives that keep us trapped in an incarceration of the imagination while

FIGURE 0.1 The Pedagogies of Voice Olive Tree



Graphic designed by Shane Safir with Emily Lewellen. In Figure 0.1, the element of Making Learning Public is inspired in part by research on **Public Learning** developed by Lead By Learning at Mills College, Northeastern University. For more on this organization's work, visit <https://weleadbylearning.org/>

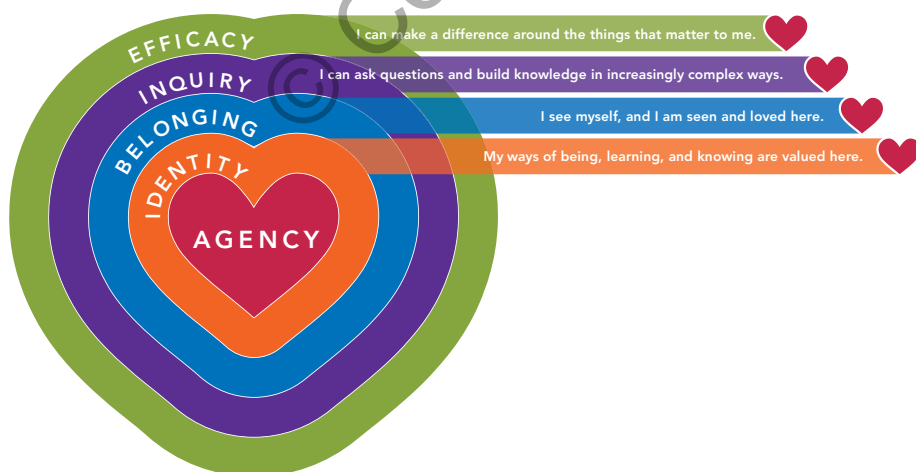
The Equity Transformation Cycle embedded in the sun was developed by Shane Safir for *Street Data* (Corwin, 2021).

the ways of being ground us in a sense of abundance and possibility. These foundational chapters will allow you to prepare the soil of your classroom and nourish a healthy root system for pedagogical shifts to emerge. Together, Chapters 3 and 4 scaffold us into what Sawsan call a “deep understanding of one’s self-concept” and scholar Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz calls the “archaeology of the self” (Sealey-Ruiz, 2021).

Part 2: In **Chapters 5 through 8**, we grow the primary branches of our olive tree into four domains of agency as we construct the types of learning experiences that allow a learner to say the following:

- **Identity:** *My ways of being, learning, and knowing are valued here.*
- **Belonging:** *I see myself, and I am seen and loved here.*
- **Inquiry:** *I can ask questions and build knowledge in increasingly complex ways.*
- **Efficacy:** *I can make a difference around the things that matter to me.*

FIGURE 0.2 Agency Framework for Pedagogies of Voice



**Agency Framework
for Pedagogies of Voice**

Source: Agency Framework developed for *Street Data* (2021) and adapted for *Pedagogies of Voice* by Shane Safir, 2024.

From these sturdy boughs, we grow 8 Pedagogies that stretch toward the sun and bear the delicious fruit of the olive, signifying moments of awakening in our learning spaces. Each of these practice-based chapters unpacks two pedagogies oriented to student agency. Chapter 5 (Pedagogies That Awaken Identity) features *Microaffirmations* and *Storientation* (Safir, 2017b); in Chapter 6 (Pedagogies That Awaken Belonging) we offer *Radical Inclusion* and *Circle Up*; the Chapter 7 (Pedagogies That Awaken Inquiry) pedagogies are *Questions Over Answers* and *Feedback Over Grades*; finally Chapter 8 (Pedagogies That Awaken Efficacy) includes *Making Learning Public* and *Reflection and Revision*. We hope that you walk away from these chapters feeling recharged, rejuvenated, and ready to try new things!

Part 3: We close the book with two chapters that illustrate the awakening of *teacher* voice and agency. In **Chapter 9**, we walk alongside teachers from the Street Data/Cult of Pedagogy Collaborative Inquiry Project as they use the Equity Transformation Cycle (ETC) from *Street Data* to reimagine their pedagogies in ways that center learners from the margins. Through these one-inch windows into classrooms, we weave *Street Data* and *Pedagogies of Voice* with an understanding of the cycle as the sun that constantly rises and sets over our grove of olive trees to ripen the fruit of learning. **Chapter 10** speaks directly to teacher leaders, coaches, and administrators as we offer 10 microshifts and 5 structural shifts to professional learning that will activate collective teacher efficacy. Finally, we close with an integrative case study of land-based learning from British Columbia-based educator John Harris. We included this case, not because we expect every reader to implement land-based learning in their own settings, but to offer a striking example of just what is possible when we open ourselves to new ways of being and begin to enact the *Pedagogies of Voice*.

An underlying assumption of this book is that learners should have access to academic content through a variety of modalities, including, but not limited to traditional print. Since this book positions you, the reader, as a learner with agency, we have supplemented the print text with a plethora of online resources, all of which can be accessed via QR codes in the marginalia of this book. We also acknowledge that a key component of learner agency is the freedom to choose areas of inquiry that match individual needs and interests. Putting this principle into practice meant providing you with abundant opportunities to expand your learning with respect to the topics covered in this book. While you may not have the time or need to access every online resource we have provided, we hope that providing you with these options will fuel your passion as both a learner and a transformational educator and potentially help you design team-based and other professional learning experiences.

By the time you turn the last page of this book, we hope you will be planting your own learning gardens to cultivate identity, belonging, inquiry, and efficacy. You will be equipped with 8 Pedagogies of Voice, bolstered by a collection of tools to design lessons, units, projects, assessments, and/or professional learning modules that engender agency. Figure 0.3, from Crystal's geometry classroom, gives you a sneak preview of what this can look like. As a middle school math teacher in Cincinnati, Ohio, Crystal wanted her students to critically analyze the issue of housing insecurity in the downtown corridor. She also wanted to awaken their sense of efficacy to design solutions. This unit/project is the fruit of those intentions.

Geometry Transformations Unit by Crystal M. Watson



Essential Question: How can we use geometry and other mathematics to solve real-world issues we see within our communities?

Identity



Students share their experiences in our central downtown area with housing insecurity (their own, friends, and family) and construct stories around how gentrification has impacted the central downtown district via listening to the experiences of others.



Students critically examine past and present conditions within the central downtown area. Their stories and experiences are paramount and are protected within the classroom space. They are given sentence stems, the ability to opt-out from sharing, and permission to use resources (human and otherwise) for storytelling.

Belonging



My objective is to go beyond standards and curriculum to invite students' ways of being into the math classroom. Their stories, identities, values, and experiences are central to our understanding of the impact that gentrification has had in our city.



Students will actively create community through sharing and listening to others' stories and experiences and then co-creating a possible solution. While they will be working in small groups, the collective vision the class develops for housing security will tie them together in their work, allowing them to honor self and others.

Inquiry



Students will explore gentrification through the lens of their own experiences and the experiences of others (peers, family, etc.), along with the impact of gentrification in our city.



Students have multiple opportunities to cultivate their critical voices throughout the project as they will engage in research of the community, past and present, and uncover power and systemic dynamics within their city.

Using geometry and other math standards, they will engage in providing a solution to providing affordable housing options in central downtown.



Efficacy



Students will use geometric transformations to create, review, and revise a floor plan for apartments with amenities they see as important to their community. Complete creative control is given to students and their teammates.



Students will engage in giving and gathering feedback from peers and teachers to revise their plans. Grades are not discussed; instead feedback and inquiry are centered throughout the process. School community members (peers from other grade levels, principal, teachers) will listen to student presentations and ask questions to the teams. Students will self-grade based on their holistic experience in the project.



Storiation: Educator Voices

When I began teaching math, I committed to making it relevant and timely for the students I had the privilege of teaching. When we started our Geometry Transformations unit, I grappled with how to make the concepts come to life in meaningful ways. My students often shared that they were from parts of our city that their families could no longer afford to live in. I took this information as a gift and considered the ways that my students preferred to learn and show their work. They wanted to “do math” in community, *with* one another, and they yearned for math to be relevant and applicable to their lived experiences. With this in mind, we tapped into the power of intergenerational learning as I tasked students with asking their families about their housing experiences in Cincinnati. We held an abundance mindset because we knew that the cultural wealth of Black and brown communities was rich and had helped the city to thrive. Lastly, we learned geometry with our minds, bodies, hearts, and spirits as we peeled back the layers of gentrification and the impact of pushing out Black and brown communities from our city so that we could then construct a solution. Holism allowed all of us to bring our whole selves into the space.

—Crystal M. Watson

What does it mean to be a good ancestor? It is a gentle daily unfolding, woven into how we show up with students and each other. It’s an understanding that our *micro*-actions in the classroom have a profound impact on the macro-landscape of the societies we inhabit. It’s about being intentional with our words, thoughts, and ways of being. As the late Richard Wagamese wrote, may we remember that “we are all related, that we are all connected, that we all belong to each other. The most important word is ‘all.’ Not just those who look like me, sing like me, dance like me, speak like me, pray like me or behave like me. ALL my relations. That means every person, just as it means every rock, mineral, blade of grass, and creature. We live because everything else does. If we were to choose collectively to live that teaching, the energy of our change of consciousness would heal each of us—and heal the planet” (Wagamese, 2013).

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We hope this book honors and illuminates the art of teaching, the brilliance you already possess, and the resilience of the olive tree that is firmly rooted in identity and ancestry. We hope the tools we have offered fuel your passion to continue growing and learning. Remember: Each of us is an elder-in-training, a future ancestor. Feel this in your bones: These pages are a call to action, a call to heal, a call to dream and work together toward a future so bright and expansive we have to close our eyes for a beat to see it. Take a slow, deliberate breath . . . can you feel the pulse of this future already emerging?

We need all of our voices to build the schools our children deserve. May we call into being countless classrooms in which every child feels seen, heard, and deeply loved.



Awakenings: Crystal's Corner

With these Awakenings, we offer generous and loving permission to make mistakes and fumble as you stretch into the mindset and practice shifts we are laying out before you. We encourage you to read this book slowly, intentionally, and in community with others.

What are your hopes as you begin this reading journey?

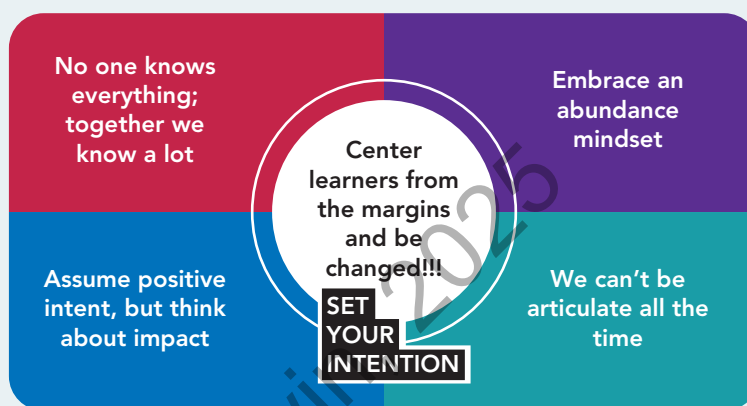
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With whom can you read, explore, and apply these ideas to enact *Pedagogies of Voice* in your learning space?

To engage you in an active learning process, we offer five agreements adapted from AORTA (anti-oppression resource & training alliance), with which to navigate the text (AORTA, 2017).

FIGURE 0.3 Agreements: An Offering



Source: Agreements adapted from AORTA (anti-oppression resource & training alliance).

Please pause to reflect on these agreements and set an intention for yourself as a reader: Which agreement most speaks to how you want to approach this learning journey? What is *one* way you can embody this agreement as you read?

NOTES
