



# Reimagining the EdD in a Time When the Future of Public Schooling is at Stake

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## ABSTRACT

Given the current tumultuous education climate, we as EdD faculty seek to engage in critical reflection and reimagine the affordances—opportunities for action (Gee, 2008; Gibson, 2014)—provided by our program structures and our teaching practices. In this article, three faculty members (including one department chair and one interim program director) among the many who actively engaged in reimagining an established online EdD program to be launched Fall 2023 discuss their critical self-reflection experiences. Specifically, we discuss how our backgrounds and/or the current socio-historical climate influences our thinking as we, along with our colleagues, have grappled with redesigning an applied EdD program.

## KEYWORDS

*critical reflection, doing school, public schooling, reimagining, EdD*

*In memoriam: Our dear friend and colleague, Laura Quaynor, passed away suddenly on August 30, 2023. We will miss her insightful curiosity, deep knowledge, positivity, and generous heart. Laura was an exceptional scholar, beloved teacher, a true friend, and a fierce social justice advocate. We feel privileged to have known and worked with her.*

Even as they continue to work through impacts of the unprecedented COVID-related disruptions to their workplace, faculty and leadership in US K-12 and higher education face additional significant changes and uncertainties. Traditional faculty roles in curricular decisions are being circumvented by censorious legislation and greatly increased attempts to ban books (Garcia, 2023; PENAmerica, 2023a) while dramatic expansions in the availability of voucher options create worries about destabilized financial base for public K-12 schools (Povic, 2023). Supreme Court decisions in 2023 ended affirmative action in higher education ensuring upheaval in admissions routines and practices—to say nothing of what this may mean for students, the make-up of student bodies, and the future make-up of employment pools (*Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College*, 2023). Additionally, Supreme Court decisions over the last 20 years have effectively reversed precedent regarding the separation of church and state, including whether public money can be used to fund private religious institutions (Mystal, 2022). Cumulatively, such changes represent a sea of change which educational professionals must navigate. A

description of some contributing disturbances follows to set the stage for presenting critical self-reflections from several faculty who contributed to a deep reframing of an EdD program during these historic circumstances.

As the pandemic was still raging, a tsunami of state legislative and policy changes that have been referred to as educational gag orders were introduced that challenge established fundamentals of academic freedom and free speech and introduce chilling effects on open discussion of race, racism, gender, sexual orientation, and American History. During 2021, 54 separate education bills imposing restrictions on curricular content were proposed (Friedman & Tager, 2021). Since then, more than 250 such bills have been introduced, and as further documented by the PENAmerica (2023b) Index, more than 14 states now have passed censorious educational gag order laws.

Additional censorious activity is prevalent in the area of book banning. The American Library Association reported that while attempts to ban books hovered at around 450 requests a year from 2003 forward, in 2021 there were 1,269 attempts and in 2023 there were 2,571 (Garcia, 2023). In response, public concerns have been raised, and a related lawsuit has been filed arguing that book banning violates the rights of children who want to read banned material (Salam, 2023).

Stakes can be very high in Florida where teachers face a possible felony for having a banned book in their classroom



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(Natanson, 2023). Additional invasive and chilling concerns arise from Florida’s HB 233, which was passed and signed into law in 2021 (see, e.g., [https://floridapoly.edu/provost/assets/hb233\\_faq\\_poly-faculty.pdf](https://floridapoly.edu/provost/assets/hb233_faq_poly-faculty.pdf) for a relevant FAQ). It specifically allows students in Florida colleges and universities to record faculty without their permission and use such material in criminal, civil, or institutional complaint procedures. No such right to surreptitiously record without permission from all parties is allowed in any other setting within the state.

Further concerns about censorious legislation and book banning include that they are discriminatory, target members of marginalized communities, and are increasingly arising from the concerted actions of newly formed advocacy groups. A PENAmerica (2023a) report shows that among materials banned from July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2022, 41% featured LGBTQ themes, protagonists or secondary characters and 40% featured characters of color. The same report highlights another disturbing trend. Rather than being initiated by a concerned individual, newly formed (since 2021) parent and community groups operating at national, state, and local levels are responsible for up to 50% of the efforts to ban books. While this could be an indication that the will of the people is to ban deeply problematic texts, of the 2,532 bans, 96% were enacted without following best practice guidelines as outlined by the American Library Association and the National Coalition against Censorship.

Given this tumultuous education climate, we as EdD faculty seek to engage in critical reflection and reimagine the affordances—opportunities for action (Gee, 2008; Gibson, 2014)—provided by our program structures and our own teaching practices. For instance, do our programs provide affordances that support the development of skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary to identify, examine, and contribute to the amelioration of complex, wicked problems of practice? Will our students graduate prepared to analyze systems and to effectively engage with diverse stakeholders, leverage their strengths, and collaboratively improve those systems for the betterment of students who will need to go on to participate in a faltering democracy? Can we avoid the pitfalls of defaulting to programs that overly rely on templates and instructional approaches that routinize *doing school*—“going through the correct motions” (Pope, 2001, p. 4)—instead of fostering active and critical engagement?

In this article, three faculty members (including one department chair and one interim program director) among the many who actively engaged in reimagining an established online EdD program launched Fall 2023 discuss their own critical self-reflection experiences. We focus on how our own backgrounds and/or the educational climate and socio-historical forces relate to program design decisions including: 1) moving away from a five-chapter dissertation to a dossier format based on Boyer’s (1990) four domains of scholarship, 2) allowing students to articulate and disseminate their work through modalities other than scholarly writing, and 3) using an ungrading approach in key courses. As changes are rolled out new information is coming to light, and the importance of the ongoing critical self-reflection, and establishing norms within our program for sharing and discussing the implications of our reflections has become clear.

Table 1. Comparison of Original EdD Program with Reimagined EdD Program

Original EdD Program 3-Year Program	Reimagined EdD Program—EdD 2.0 4-Year Program
<p><b>5-Chapter Dissertation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chp 1: Literature Review of Problem of Practice based on a systems framework</li> <li>• Chp 2: Needs Assessment—examination of POP in student’s context</li> <li>• Chp 3: Intervention Literature Review</li> <li>• Chp 4: Intervention Design and Methods</li> <li>• Chp 5: Intervention Findings and Discussion</li> </ul> <p><b>All core courses graded.</b></p>	<p><b>Doctoral Dossier</b> (based on Boyer’s 1990 four domains of scholarship):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Project 1:</b> Scholarship of Integration—literature review of POP using the process of systems thinking</li> <li>• <b>Project 2:</b> Students choose one and may demonstrate completion in ways that include alternative modes of knowledge dissemination: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Scholarship of Application</b>—demonstrate the application of research to practice.</li> <li>○ <b>Scholarship of Teaching</b>—Development and improvement of pedagogical practices.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Project 3:</b> Students choose one: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Option for Year 2 Project that was not chosen</li> <li>○ <b>Scholarship of Discovery</b>—search for new knowledge via conducting evidence-based research.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Moving toward ungrading of all core courses.</b></p>

## REFLECTIONS OF DEPARTMENT CHAIR AND ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.

We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it (Roy, 2020).

In July 2019, I became part of The Johns Hopkins University School of Education faculty community and created a writing clinic imagined by an inaugural program lead. The questions that guided my job talk preparations included: How can I help create systems that support faculty and students to thrive? How can I help scholar practitioners use their writing to effect shifts in practice? These questions continue to shape my work.

I gradually became aware of what many faculty discussed as the rewarding yet relentless nature of the work experienced by faculty and students. One indicator of the time engagement that was assumed, a department visiting assistant professor gave students tips on screen filters for their laptop so the screen glow would disrupt sleep less. The academic schedule is not conducive to recharging and reflecting between terms as a total of five days, sometimes fewer, marked the changeover of semesters. Additionally, August was both the end of the summer semester and the time for most students to take comprehensive exams and engage in proposal defenses, on top of coursework. Further, students who could not complete the course of study in three years were on extended courses of study, and anecdotally reported a reduced sense of self-efficacy for needing that extension even though in fact, many of their peers were in the same boat due to situations outside of their control. In planning writing clinic work, I asked for the statistics about program completion, and there were some differences in outcomes

among students by ethnic group. During my first faculty meeting, before my contract began, the dean entered on Zoom from the 3rd floor to announce two decisions: first, the beginning of an external review of the program, as he phrased it, to kick the tires on this program that had been around for seven years. Second, the founding director was stepping down to focus on the research that had brought him to the school.

So, the external review happened. I joined the faculty, created a virtual writing clinic, taught myself how to use Panopto and record video announcements on Zoom. The pandemic happened. We were supporting educators who themselves were leading virtual learning environments for the first time, often positioned as leaders due to their experiences in our online doctoral program. Educator burnout, a topic before the pandemic, became an increasing topic of conversation.

### Part One: Carcasses

As I read and reflected on Roy's (2020) quote, above, about the pandemic, I considered what things I wanted to leave behind. Let me clarify that some of these (e.g., the culture of constant work) were values that I myself had internalized as the way to be successful in an institution.

- The dismissal of burnout as weakness. The culture of constant work.
- Education as a capitalistic and colonial enterprise that devalued some ways of knowing over others. My own complicities as a writing instructor in this enterprise.
- Anti-Blackness embedded in educational content and systems. Remember that the pandemic summer was also the summer that George Floyd and Brionna Taylor lost their lives. The words I can't breathe became a refrain.
- Lack of clarity regarding how to count advising work for faculty. Every advisee had to complete comprehensive exams, a dissertation proposal defense, and a dissertation defense, and had to find their own committee members. Committee membership was traditionally counted as service work but was extensive and undefinable.
- Having the one thing that seemed to be the biggest barrier to doctoral completion—the dissertation—shaped as a document destined for a library shelf, never to be touched by its contributors or users. I didn't want to spend my time helping people write something that was going in a library to be forgotten just to get done.

### Part Two: Luggage

Roy (2020) suggests moving through a pandemic with little luggage. Tools, mementos, precious necessities, carefully rolled and packed in a duffel bag. Essential core elements of the program that seemed important to me to carry through included:

- A focus on systems, on seeing problems expansively before focusing on solutions.
- The international and diverse range of work contexts of students.
- The collaborative work among faculty. Creating, revising, and thinking through major courses with co-instructors.

### Part Three: Imagination

Finally, what new worlds would I begin to imagine with others? My own academic training involved interaction with rich intellectual traditions discussing the power of the human imagination, including Robyn D.G. Kelly's (2003) *Freedom Dreams*; Paulo Freire's (2002) *Pedagogy of Hope*; Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot's (2016) treatise on parents and grown children, *Growing Each Other Up*. What did I bring, ready to co-imagine another world with faculty?

- Carter Woodson's (1933) definition of the purpose of education: to help take the world as it is and make it better.
- Knowledge of Sylvia Terry's use of systems at University of Virginia to elevate the 6-year graduation rate of African American undergraduate students to 94% between 1989-2009 (Williams, 2022).
- The study of professionals' use of digital tools to create community (Quaynor & Sturm, 2019).
- A value in democracy and in helping students amplify their voice through scholarly language.
- Experience using multimedia and multimodal forms of knowledge as pedagogical tools to engage students and expand the knowledges we were interacting with, a necessity in preservice teacher education for working with multilingual learners.

Outlining these experiences and positions is akin to writing the positionality statement I so often coach students completing qualitative research to complete. Curricular work is creative architecture in which the builders select particular blocks and discard others, with our own perspectives and intents. Sharing mine here has helped my own critical self-reflection, recommended as part of professional vibrancy for those considering equity work in predominantly white institutions (Abel, 2019).

### REFLECTIONS OF AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, AND PRESIDENT OF JHU AAUP ADVOCACY CHAPTER

... This is a perilous moment for democracy. And it is interesting that if one looks back over the years in the United States, whenever there has been a sense that democracy has been in peril— you know, whether it was during the Civil War, or the two world wars—the universities, with support from government, have really understood their role as bulwark institutions of democracy. And I fear in this moment, as much as we do to support democracy, there is an opportunity here to do more. And doing more with some urgency is really essential right now. We're not bystanders. We are indispensable institutions to democracy flourishing.

President of The Johns Hopkins University, Ron Daniels, speaking during an interview about his book "What Universities Owe Democracies" (Greenberg, 2021).

My critical self-reflection about our EdD program changes draws partly upon my past formal educational experiences and shared governance roles, e.g., with the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). Additionally, recent dramatic actions have impacted my alma mater, New College of Florida, a public honors liberal arts college. Witnessing those ongoing changes motivated me to undertake a personally transformative, informal but



very intense, learning journey that I expect to last a very long time. The substance and character of that journey also informs my relationship to the EdD program changes. Here, I reflect on why I value an ungrading approach and how I came to be cautiously open to giving students options to share knowledge using alternative modalities—and to do so as part of their culminating doctoral work. I reflect that there may also be potential synergies between students' experiencing ungrading environments and their openness to becoming skilled in utilizing multiple or alternative dissemination modalities.

### On Using an Ungrading Approach

Instead of grades, since its founding in 1960, New College has utilized narrative evaluations. It also, currently at least, holds the rank of No. 1 public institution in the proportion of graduates who go on to earn a terminal degree. Additionally, it has historically produced 25% of the Fullbright scholars in Florida, which is particularly impressive as an institution that has never had more than 800 enrolled students in any given year. This is an institution that eschews grading and produces students who want to engage with ideas, data, and with the world. This is important for science and democracy.

For me, the narrative evaluation approach came to embody core acquired values of inquiry and individual responsibility. I found that New College faculty supported students to learn to rigorously defend their individually chosen academic path; we tended to respond by delighting in ever deeper inquiry. After New College, my subsequent graduate programs used grades. Compared to some peers, I had a minimal emotional reaction to anticipating or receiving grades. What drove me was anticipating substantive feedback I could use to improve my understanding, my ability to present my thoughts, or best of all my ability to ask questions that matter. When I was in high school, I was nerdy and cared about learning, but at that time I also sweated about grades in a way that was demotivating and antithetical to true inquiry. After my New College experience, however, I focused on inquiry despite the distraction of grades. It is true that graduate program GPAs are not going to be reported to employers the way that high school grades can be a factor in college acceptance. But I tend to discount this as the primary factor given both that graduate school peers and my current graduate students can exhibit a laser-like focus on the grade.

I want my students to value the process of learning to effectively challenge themselves and effectively communicate with others. In my experience, this is facilitated when I demonstrate my authentic interest in what they think and clearly communicate ways their presented ideas are compelling, clear, and coherent, or where they need improvement in those areas. In engaging with students in this way, I seek to model the respectful interrogation and communication of ideas and the developing of question-asking-that-matters. The feedback itself – and modeling genuine interest in thinking—is what counts. I try to make that clear even for courses that require me to also provide a grade. However, I have found that providing a grade can distract students from developing the relationship I want them to have with their learning. Just as important, the process of grading and assigning points can also distract me from providing rich and thoughtful feedback. I find myself worrying about student reactions to a grade rather than being solely focused on how to provide the most useful feedback. For example, I suspect a student who receives an A will not complain if I do not provide much feedback; while I have seen that sometimes students who

receive a B- will be initially focused only on that and not on the detailed information about why.

### On Using Alternative Modalities of Dissemination

Initially, as the program considered incorporating non-academic writing activities, I was concerned about introducing new modality options for students. I worried about how students would fare when I might not be able to independently support them to develop the requisite skills. However, I recognize that my ability to evaluate the underlying arguments would still be applicable and that many of our current and presumably future students are coming into the program with extensive skills in alternative dissemination modalities that they have previously developed. For example, one student is an accomplished playwright, and others have utilized other aspects of the arts in various professional capacities. It seems valuable to allow them to draw on such existing areas of expertise and/or seek new ones.

The field of education draws on many disciplines; it leverages the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological features of those disciplines in the service of understanding, and sometimes addressing, phenomena that affect learning and teaching. Beginning in the late 1990s neuroscience became one of the contributing disciplines. When I began my doctoral training at Harvard in the late 1990s, there were no journals, grant opportunities, or faculty positions available that clearly and directly connected neuroscience and education. However, in part, I am sure, informed by my New College inspired-if-it's-needed-you-should-build-it approach to academia, I wrote my admissions essay exactly on my desire to make those connections. In the ensuing decades, the use of neuroimaging and the integration of brain and behavioral research to inform educational research has become *de rigeur*, even as questions about where it will have impact continues. Simply put – what counted as evidence and what counted as an appropriate question for educationally relevant research has shifted. Given this, why should it be off the table to shift the modes of communication and the value of supporting scholarly practitioners to communicate with a wider audience? We draw on multiple academic disciplines for methods and framing—why can we not explore using modalities outside of typical disciplinary bounds for knowledge sharing? Especially for an EdD which focuses on applied issues, considering how typical participants of our research consume knowledge and incorporating such modalities in our own dissemination began to make more and more sense to me. As discussed below, there are other reasons too that I adjusted my initial stance and came to value encouraging students to consider projects that leverage different modalities of dissemination, particularly those that draw on skills they brought with them to the program or those that they determine will help them in their next steps after graduation.

### On Embarking on a New Learning Journey

On January 31, 2023, along with hundreds of other wary members of the New College community, I watched as a newly appointed Board of Trustees (BOT) members fired the president, without cause, and effective immediately, to begin clearing the way to turn the public school into a Hillsdale of the South. Hillsdale is a private, religious, liberal arts college whose current President Larry Arn was quoted as saying: "Here's a key thing that we're going to try to do. We are going to try to demonstrate that you don't have to be an expert to educate a child because basically anybody can do it"

(Williams, 2022). This does not seem like a promising match for an honors college. The video of the January 31, 2023 BOT meeting (New College of Florida, 2023) is available thanks to the sunshine laws in Florida which require all BOT related business to be conducted in public forum. Notably, however, sunshine laws are under increasing threat (Goode, 2023). In the BOT meeting video, one can see starting at about 3:13, the meeting business moved on from the firing of President Okker to the naming of an interim President. The activities of the BOT members confirmed that an individual had already been contacted and potentially offered a job as interim President of a public college before the meeting had even begun. In fact, the individual had been publicly congratulated before the meeting had even taken place (Ogles, 2023).

To understand what led to these events and anticipate what might follow for the current students (including my niece), faculty, and staff, I sought understanding of the players and principles that might be involved. One of the first things I learned was that the new interim president, Richard Corcoran, had a connection to Hillsdale through his wife who has been associated with multiple Hillsdale affiliated charter schools. In fact, that relationship existed at the time that Mr. Corcoran held the position of Commissioner of Education of Florida and engaged Hillsdale or affiliated entities in multiple different ways. One way was through math textbook review (Kephart, 2022). Another was in the rewriting of Florida's civic standards as well as training teachers on how to teach to those standards (Najarro, 2022). Interestingly, a key person in writing those civic standards was the same Hillsdale associated individual who played a key role in cancelling 41% of Florida's math textbooks that were initially cut due to inclusion of socio-emotional learning references as described in the prior reference (Kephart, 2022).

All of this was just the beginning—things I learned in the first hour or so after President Okker was fired. Additional investigation in the months since and including reflective dialogue with many other valued colleagues and new connections among the New College community of students, faculty, staff, parents of students or alumni, and other concerned citizens, has helped me develop a picture of how what is happening to New College is related to other events in the American education system. It also introduced me to the value of drawing from a combination of scholarly, journalistic, and even social media or artistic resources to understand the facts of and impact of a new era in the politicization of American education.

I am hopeful that as our program moves to an ungrading approach, our students will find it easier to focus on finding areas of inquiry that matter and that this can work synergistically with their consideration of using alternative dissemination modalities. For more basic scientific inquiry and for more applied work prioritizing communication of knowledge to diverse audiences is important (Meredith, 2021).

In keeping with the idea of using alternative modalities you can learn more about what has happened at New College and how it may relate to larger concerns about academic freedom in these podcasts featuring Jeremy Young of PENAmerica (Palmer, 2023), and another featuring myself and Professor Sigal Ben-Porath that considers both New College and current conditions in the Florida K-12 landscape (Jacobs, 2023). And as additional evidence, that others are deeply concerned, there are tens of letters from organizations expressing their reactions to events in higher education as made available on the website of the United Faculty of Florida (UFF, n.d.).

## REFLECTIONS OF ASSISTANT PROFESSOR AND INTERIM DIRECTOR

Preventing conflicts is the work of politics; establishing peace is the work of education. We must convince the world of the need for a universal, collective effort to build the foundation for peace (Montessori, 1992, p. 24).

I came to Johns Hopkins University School of Education in 2013 as a student. I was part of the inaugural cohort of the online EdD program. When I started my doctoral journey, I was head of a Montessori school serving children ages 18 months through 15 years old. Never did I think I would eventually become faculty at Hopkins. I had no plans of entering higher education. Nor was becoming the interim director tasked with leading the program through a major overhaul on my life's bingo card. Yet, this is exactly where I should be, and I feel both fortunate and anxious.

### Montessori and Reimagining the EdD

Originally trained as a family systems therapist, I found myself drawn to Montessori education because its practices seemed to align with the research on optimal parenting. However, once I began working in the school with the Association Montessori International trained teachers, I realized something even more significant: the prepared environment seemed to provide the children the physical, psychological, and emotional space to know their own thoughts and feelings from those of others. More than merely treating children with the respect of a parent practicing authoritative parenting, these educators were fostering in students what one of the founders of family systems therapy, Murray Bowen (1985), referred to as differentiation of self—knowing one's own thoughts and feelings from those of others, which allows for healthier relationships, a healthier togetherness, leading to mental well-being throughout life. The research supports this claim, showing that self-differentiated people are "less emotionally reactive, better able to regulate emotion, think clearly under stress, and are more capable of remaining in connection with significant others while maintaining a clearly defined sense of self both in and out of relationships" (Skowron et al., 2009).

The Montessori prepared environment, which includes the teachers, fosters self-differentiation through choice, allowing the children to work on activities that interest them: through materials and furniture they can manipulate on their own, through processes, such as the peace fish, where students can communicate their feelings to other students with whom they are experiencing conflict (and they're generally taught to use I statements in those discussions), and through interactions with guides who consistently turn questions back onto the children. Should, for instance, a child ask the teacher what they think of their work, the teacher will first ask the child what *they* think about it. These questions can help the children develop their own internal barometer—to know when they're putting their best effort into their work, when they are not, and even the reasons why they are or are not.

In many ways, I see the changes we are making in the EdD aligning with Montessori's prepared environment. The new Dossier framework (Boyer, 1990) will allow students greater choice in what they do and allow them to explore more parts of the system in which their problems of practice are situated. Students can also choose how they communicate their work (written, oral, video, etc.) to the audiences they want to reach. As a faculty member, this latter option for students is particularly appealing as it allows me to feel I am



walking our social justice talk by not privileging one form of communication over another. Finally, we are moving away from providing templates in an effort to foster deeper engagement and thinking; this is similar to the Montessori prepared environment of not providing worksheets.

I feel extremely fortunate to be facilitating these changes at Hopkins, particularly since Dr. Montessori believed education could lead to a more peaceful society. Specifically, she believed that prepared environments that foster a strong sense of self in children can lead to adults who love and care for others and the environment. The need to control or possess others would be unnecessary for such adults. Given my therapeutic training and what I witnessed in the classrooms (and in even my own children who attended the school), I am hopeful she is right. And even though we work with adults in the EdD, my hope is that these changes lead them to further self-differentiate in their own work and allow them to experience school in a very different way, which may influence their own classroom environments and benefit their students. Perhaps this is Pollyanna of me, but given the current alarming political climate, I will take whatever hope I can get. At the same time, I also know our EdD program changes are going to be challenging for our students and us.

### Reflections on Doing School Habits of Students

During my tenure as head of school, several elementary students transferred to our Montessori school from conventional schools structured by the grammar of schooling wherein students are segregated by grade and age, subjects are taught in isolation, and an expert teacher at the head of the classroom assesses and assigns grades (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). These children spent the first three to four months in our classrooms waiting for the teacher to tell them what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. Their parents would call and complain that their children were bored, and the Montessori teachers were not teaching. In response, I re-explained how our environments worked and encouraged them to be patient. Right around month four, these children would suddenly be fully engaged in work—self-initiated work—and they seemed to be, as one parent who came to observe in the classroom said, “transformed.”

Interestingly, the initial behaviors we witnessed in those transfer students were behaviors I saw in myself at times as a doctoral student, and behaviors I see in many of our students now. To be clear, this is not the fault of the students. Environments provide affordances—opportunities for action (Gee, 2008; Gibson, 2014)—and those actions become habits, which are hard to break (Poldrack, 2022; Shaw, 2023). When your student experience is being told what to do, when to do it, and how to do it, you create doing school habits wherein you are “going through the correct motions . . . instead of thinking deeply about the content of [your] courses and delving into projects and assignments” (Pope, 2001, p. 4).

### Reflections on Doing School Habits of Faculty

Students, however, are not the only ones engaging in doing school habits. In his 2019 commentary, Windschitl described doing school as “the structuring of and engagement in rote and shallow learning performances, which students and teachers give to each other to signify that they are accomplishing normative classroom tasks” (p. 8). Thus, as faculty, we must ask ourselves: how are we engaged in this structuring? Have our programs fostered

independent and critical thinking? When we provide templates to students in response to their requests for examples and exemplars and questions about exact steps to complete any task, what habits are we fostering?

When a recent cohort of students showed confusion about how to write chapter one of their dissertations, I didn’t respond by posing questions back to them (as a Montessori guide would have done) to promote their own thinking about what information should be provided and why. Instead, I wrote a detailed outline of every single section for them. All they had to do was fill it in. Did I foster the habit of independent thinking? Or did I just do the thinking for them? Clearly, I have my own doing school habits.

It is difficult, however, not to do school when there’s so much to do—for both faculty and students. In addition to teaching, faculty need to publish so we do not perish, and we need to provide service to show we are contributing to our universities’ growth and development. (And if you’re faculty with administration duties, that’s a whole additional load of work!) In addition to being in a doctoral program, our EdD students are professionals in their contexts with families. There is only so much time in the day, and doing school allows us to act automatically, without the effort of conscious, intentional, thought.

Given the current political landscape, however, the transactional nature of education some of us have fallen into will no longer do. Authoritarian leaders are working to dismantle public education and with it, democracy. Since the pandemic, this is how education is being reimagined (Joyce, 2021). If we foster doing school habits—our own and those our students—are we preparing students to solve this wicked problem, or even to recognize and tackle it? Are our students, regardless of political affiliation, able to question narratives being deployed so they can see the true intent of those narratives and who is really being served by them?

We have the responsibility as educators of educators to move beyond doing school. The changes we are making to our EdD program will, hopefully, provide different affordances that create habits of independent and critical thinking, overriding our doing school habits. But these changes are going to be painful—for all of us. We have to learn different ways of being in this space as the habits we relied upon to make us successful as faculty and students will no longer work, and this makes me anxious.

But the pain and effort, I am hopeful, will be worth it. Should our students graduate our new program embodying a different way of being a student, perhaps they will be inspired to truly reimagine school rather than just perpetuate education’s tinkering with it (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Perhaps they will create new educational structures wherein students of all ages are provided with the affordances to self-differentiate—to be independent thinkers with a strong sense of self who can also engage in a healthy togetherness with others. Maybe that will lead to a more just and peaceful world.

### Our Concluding Thoughts

Collaborating on this article has pushed us to value the habit of sharing critical reflections. Faculty meetings often prioritize discussion of logistics—we are busy and determining the how of things. However, particularly at a tumultuous period, taking time to engage in the practice of sharing critical self-reflections can support our different ways of being in this new space. Used strategically, this practice can also help us examine what is working within the new



program and what is not. We do not want to get caught up in our own narrative and not realize that our behaviors are not matching our intentions or that the affordances are not leading to the outcomes we hope to see in our students.

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