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# INVITING A CHANGE TO THE STATUS QUO IN EDUCATION: USING KEATING'S PEDAGOGIES OF INVITATION

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Kevin Gary argues that “battling against consumerism” is “part of our normative charge as educators.”<sup>1</sup> Philosophers of education have long contemplated how the normative charge of education might include disruption of the status quo. Thinking about our work as being in battle with the status quo, though, is problematic. Partly, I agree with thinkers like George S. Counts that education can be a vehicle for social reconstruction. But I am worried about the truth in critiques that say social reconstruction dismisses the individuality of the student. To save the individuality of students, I appeal to Harry Brighouse’s discontinuous ethos to promote the autonomy of students. In concluding, I turn to AnaLouise Keating’s pedagogies of invitation to find a place for the good of social reconstruction, its critiques, and Brighouse’s discontinuous ethos. This is not an essay in which I disprove Counts, then Brighouse, to show Keating the victor. Rather, I am trying to build upon and strengthen each of these thinkers to demonstrate another way of achieving change.

## DREAMING OF THE IMPOSITION OF A NEW WORLD ORDER

Writing in the midst of the Great Depression, Counts tasks schools with rebuilding society. “We hold within our hands,” he says, “the power to usher in an age of plenty, to make secure the lives of all, and to banish poverty forever from the land.”<sup>2</sup> He worries that this cannot be achieved unless schools radically

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Acknowledgements: I want to thank Dr. Gabriel Hartley, Dr. Mara Holt, and Dr. Ryan Shepherd for assisting and advising me as I investigated the pedagogy of AnaLouise Keating. I am extremely thankful that Dr. Hartley introduced me to AnaLouise Keating’s work and I am appreciative of Dr. Keating’s willingness to provide me with valuable comments on my project. As I began to think about using this work to talk to issues in education, I benefitted from conversations with Alex Nikolaidis as well as writing collaboration from Drew at The Ohio State University Writing Center. Anonymous reviewers and Dr. Amy Shuffelton provided valuable comments on a previous version of this essay that helped make this version clearer. I am also grateful for the wonderful editorial attention of Annie Schultz for drawing attention especially to confusing sentence structure. Any left-over short-comings are my own.

<sup>1</sup> Kevin Gary, “Presidential Address: Where Is My Mind? Consumerism vs. the Practice of Liberal Education,” *Philosophical Studies in Education* 49 (2018): 4–16, 4.

<sup>2</sup> George S. Counts, *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* (New York: The John Day Company, 1932), 36,

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uiuc.1264765;view=1up;seq=1>.

depart from students' home-lives.<sup>3</sup> A similar sentiment might easily be given today as the country continues to recover from the Great Recession. It seems that educators should not return to business as usual and sell an education for existence in a democratic capitalist society; business was much of the problem to begin with! What should they do instead? Counts argues that democracy and capitalism are incompatible, so part of the role of building a new world order would involve giving students the tools to find a new economic system, which could accommodate industry and democracy simultaneously.

This sentiment is fine, but how can the teacher go about teaching these words, much less their directive? Is she supposed to teach students that the trappings of capitalism are bad? How can this lesson be successfully communicated to children of business owners? And how can a teacher design such a lesson both for children of business owners as well as children of families who have lost their homes because of a bad business deal?

Counts proposes an indoctrination that breaks from each of these communities. Critics might interpret this kind of indoctrination as one of brainwashing—bringing students to appreciate a way of running society that teachers have decided will be the most fulfilling for future citizens. But this interpretation would be wrong. Counts describes it this way: “This does not mean that we should endeavor to promote particular reforms through the educational system,” says Counts. “We should, however, give to our children a vision of the possibilities which lie ahead and endeavor to enlist their loyalties and enthusiasms in the realization of the vision.”<sup>4</sup> This educational task prefigures Brighouse’s discontinuous ethos as we will see later.

If conservative reactionary interests suppose that education should be used for an imposition of patriotism, says Counts, then progressive educators ought to impose something that helps students achieve the kind of vision for the future he imagines is necessary.<sup>5</sup> To achieve this end, Counts argues that children should be recognized as neither naturally good nor bad,<sup>6</sup> education must always be contextual,<sup>7</sup> teachers must necessarily be selective,<sup>8</sup> and the focus of the teachers’ power should be on society and not the individual child.<sup>9</sup> Let’s briefly analyze each of these arguments.

First, noting that anthropology and common observation provide no evidence to support that children are naturally good or bad at birth, Counts attributes goodness and badness in children to guidance they receive from social groups and communities. Counts takes a *tabula rasa* notion of human development here, supposing that human minds begin as blank slates and

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<sup>3</sup> Counts, 7–10.

<sup>4</sup> Counts, 37.

<sup>5</sup> Counts, 55.

<sup>6</sup> Counts, 15.

<sup>7</sup> Counts, 18.

<sup>8</sup> Counts, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Counts, 32.

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backing this supposition up with presumed scientific observation “from anthropology, as well as from common observation.”<sup>10</sup> For Counts, then, existing student knowledge, which primarily comes from their home cultures, is either wrong or unimportant and must be replaced with knowledge chosen by the teacher.

This discounting of existing student knowledge is confusing when placed aside the notion that education must be contextual. Counts says, “Any defensible educational program must be adjusted to a particular time and place, and the degree and nature of the imposition must vary with the social situation.”<sup>11</sup> Instead of using this statement to argue that the knowledge that is taught must be contextual, Counts argues that the *method* of teaching should be contextual.

Consistent with calling for differing methods for different contexts, Counts argues that educators should be concerned with teaching students in a way that results in the cultivation of democratic sentiments and an education should result in a “better and richer life.”<sup>12</sup> Doubting that nature can provide an adequate education to achieve either of these outcomes, Counts holds that educators should choose instruction that achieves them. It is hard to imagine that a single educational program would result in democratic sentiments and a better and richer life for every student even if its method of delivery was adjusted to cultural and environmental contexts.

Instead of being concerned with each individual student’s democratic sentiments and better and richer life, though, the educator should know that these will perhaps necessarily follow from an educator’s focus on society and not the individual child. Because of the fast-pace change of society, the educator has no time to reflect on the individual psychologies of individual children. Instead, the educator should focus on changing the socioeconomic conditions into which those individual children will develop and one day work.<sup>13</sup> Adding this argument to the others considered here, I take Counts’s idea of education to be the following.

There is no time to reflect on the nature of students, especially since it’s doubtful whether such a nature actually exists. Instead, education must necessarily be chosen to fit students into an economic context in which they will flourish. But the current capitalist economic system will not allow that flourishing for most students, so the teacher’s job should be to cultivate the sentiments in her students that will lead to the cultivation of ideas to overthrow and remake the economic system into something more democratic.

This reading of Counts casts students as foot soldiers that teachers must indoctrinate in a fight for a more equitable economic system. Scholars have noted

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<sup>10</sup> Counts, 15.

<sup>11</sup> Counts, 18.

<sup>12</sup> Counts, 20.

<sup>13</sup> Counts, 33.

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how this relationship is problematic for students' human rights to individuality.<sup>14</sup> If teachers are supposed to adopt this role, I do not see much of a difference in the treatment of children Counts seems to be trying to counter. He says that indoctrination always happens, if not by educators, then by parents and culture more broadly. There is no difference between Counts's imagined conservative reactionary culture which pushes patriotism on teachers except for the fact that Counts wants to arm the teachers with a doctrine that would create a more just and equitable society. Philosophers have argued that these ends do not justify the means of indoctrination.<sup>15</sup>

Education as indoctrination supposes an oppositional reality in which there is always conflict between the opposing views of the world. Like sports team managers, educators are supposed to recruit (indoctrinate) students onto their team and then the team wins their championship by convincing those on the other side that their way is better. This is a feature of what AnaLouise Keating calls an oppositional consciousness: "a binary either/or epistemology and praxis that structures our perceptions, politics, and actions through a resistant energy. . ."<sup>16</sup> The problem with Counts's call for a new world order is that it relies on a single conception of how society should be. If education is necessarily indoctrination, why can't there be multiple traditions into which to indoctrinate students? If there is only one best new world, then the risk is that there is substitution of one status quo for another.

#### DISCONTINUOUS ETHOS AND AUTONOMY

A theory that uses diversity to disrupt the status quo may be Brighouse's discontinuous ethos, which he describes as "an ethos that is substantially discontinuous with the character of the mainstream public culture."<sup>17</sup> Brighouse argues for schools to adopt a discontinuous ethos. Like Counts, Brighouse asserts that schools have a responsibility to offer alternatives to home life and mainstream culture.<sup>18</sup> Unlike Counts, though, Brighouse anchors this responsibility in what schools owe their individual students. Whereas Counts holds that educators should prioritize society over the individual student,

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<sup>14</sup> Ari Sutinen, "Social Reconstructionist Philosophy of Education and George S. Counts," *International Journal of Progressive Education* 10, no. 1 (2014), accessed April 30, 2019, <http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ehh&AN=94909562&site=ehost-live>, 27.

<sup>15</sup> Nel Noddings, "Education and Approaches to Evil," in *The History of Evil in the Early Twentieth Century, 1900–1950 CE* (London: Routledge, 2018), 32. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/lib/ohiostate-ebooks/reader.action?docID=5430826&ppg=5>; Sutinen, 27.

<sup>16</sup> AnaLouise Keating, *Transformation Now! Toward a Post-Oppositional Politics of Change* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 2.

<sup>17</sup> Brighouse, "Channel One," 546.

<sup>18</sup> Brighouse, 540.

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Brighouse promotes discontinuity because it is essential, he argues, for students to achieve autonomy. He writes:

All students have a compelling interest in being able to become an autonomous, self-governing person. An autonomous person, in this context, is someone who can make, and act on, her own judgments about how to live her life in the light of a wide range of reasons and evidence. Different people have different constitutions that suit them better for some ways of life than for others. Developing their capacity for autonomy enables them better to find ways of life that they can feel at one with or, to put it more cognitively, endorse from the inside. This in turn—endorsement from the inside—is a precondition of a person flourishing in her way of life.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, Brighouse holds that it is important that students be presented with many different ways of being in the world in order that they may choose a way of being that is best for them. This imperative may achieve the kind of new world order that Counts was thinking about. By presenting students with alternatives and developing their capacity to choose one of the alternatives, students might decide that capitalism is not the best economic alternative.

Brighouse argues that academic curriculum that teaches about alternatives and teachers who have diverse relationships to the mainstream culture are the conditions that might provide students with the ability to identify with alternatives to their home or mainstream culture. While I agree that these conditions provide the ingredients for identification with alternatives, I do not think they necessarily result in the outcome Brighouse suggests. If students are expected to reflect on the different identities they are exposed to, as Brighouse claims,<sup>20</sup> then students ought to be taught how to meaningfully reflect on the differences between their home cultures and the presented alternatives.

It seems that just as reflection needs to be taught, the ability to experience alternatives without feeling threatened would have to be taught if Brighouse's discontinuous ethos can promote autonomy in students. Strategies that AnaLouise Keating uses might be used to help students not feel threatened by radically different alternatives. She models for her students how to maturely navigate a change in thinking by telling her students how her thinking has changed after hearing their insights in particularly contentious discussions.<sup>21</sup>

Like the way in which Keating's work can be used to supplement Counts's new world order, her writing about her teaching experiences illuminates how to answer questions about Brighouse's formation of discontinuous ethos. Thus, we have come to a point where I have investigated Counts and Brighouse for education's ability to disrupt the status quo. Finding both Counts's and Brighouse's theories benefitting from exposure to Keating's educational thought, it is appropriate to consider it more in full.

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<sup>19</sup> Brighouse, 538.

<sup>20</sup> Brighouse, 544.

<sup>21</sup> Keating, *Transformation Now!* 186.

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## AN INVITATION

Keating's educational theory is one based on what she calls pedagogies of invitation. Pedagogies of invitation are pedagogies associated with non-oppositional, rather than oppositional, consciousness. This non-oppositional consciousness comes out of careful study of Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of *nepantlera*, or in-between space, as a space where either/or thinking can be rejected and where more transformative thinking happens.<sup>22</sup> Keating's pedagogies of invitation translate a view of the *nepantlera* into pedagogical interactions with students. Jessica Heybach has used these *nepantlera* to call for philosophers of education to think of their work occupying the borderland space between education and philosophy.<sup>23</sup> Keating uses pedagogies of invitation to think about how that borderland space can be wielded with students.

Students in pedagogies of invitation should never be accosted for their home knowledge. Instead, these pedagogies of invitation involve creating relationships with students so that any knowledge changes happen by invitation and suggestion rather than imposition.<sup>24</sup> This positioning away from teaching as imposition is a far cry from Counts's argument. Through my analysis of pedagogies of invitation, though, I want to argue that Keating achieves hope for the new world order Counts dreams of.

Keating says that "While pedagogies of invitation take a variety of forms, they are always based on three premises." These three premises are 1) all of existence is interconnected and interdependent, 2) transformation only ever happens by choice and often exceeds whatever expectations we have, and 3) educators ought to be "flexible, open-minded, and willing to be changed by what and who [they] teach" if they want transformation to happen.<sup>25</sup> I understand Keating to mean something similar to the disruption of the status quo when she says "transformation." After I analyze these three premises, I will think about Keating's relationship to the status quo a little more thoroughly.

The first premise of interconnectedness is responsible for Keating's demand for relational thinking. She notes, "While students are well-versed in self-enclosed individualism, they're less familiar with relational perspectives."<sup>26</sup> Instead of denying the value of individualism, Keating invites her students to broaden their conception of the self. If the self becomes a relational, interconnected concept, it is easy to see how our selves are dependent on the many interactions we have with others.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Keating, 12. Keating draws this concept from Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1999).

<sup>23</sup> Jessica Heybach, "Resisting the Apartheid of Knowledges: Borderlands and Busy Intersections in Philosophy of Education," *Philosophical Studies in Education* 50 (2019): 5–15.

<sup>24</sup> Keating, *Transformation Now!* 183.

<sup>25</sup> Keating, 183.

<sup>26</sup> Keating, 184.

<sup>27</sup> Keating, 177.

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Besides encouraging students to reflect on wider notions of self, the premise of interconnectivity suggests that issues are interlinked and should be considered in tandem rather than apart. To achieve a teaching strategy that communicates multiple issues as interlinked, Keating employs three techniques. In *Teaching Transformation*, she describes how she uses these techniques in the teaching of homosexuality. First, she refrains from discussing homosexuality alone and instead encourages her students to think about homosexuality as one alternative among different sexualities. Second, she teaches about sexuality in conjunction with other systems of difference. Finally, she carefully chooses texts for her classes which are consistent with the first two techniques—homosexuality is not isolated and exists alongside other systems of difference.<sup>28</sup> These techniques might be read as a way of practicing Brighouse’s discontinuous ethos, in which alternatives for living are given to students.

Whereas I have argued that Brighouse assumes that the presentation of such alternatives will be enough to make students autonomous agents of their own life-worlds, Keating considers transformation always only optional and exceeding expectations in her second premise for pedagogies of invitation. Keating admits that she invites students to understand the interconnectedness of everything because “it can fuel students’ desire to work for social change.”<sup>29</sup> Although her goal (like Counts’s and Brighouse’s) is transformation, she writes, “Transformation in the context of the classroom is even less within my control. I can neither predict nor direct it. I can’t even guarantee that it will happen! All I can do is set the intention, carefully self-reflect, thoughtfully organize each activity, and remain open to my students’ reactions.”<sup>30</sup> This optionality of transformation allows educators to navigate a critique that both Counts and Brighouse make about the American education system: that education is meant to cure all social ills caused by failures of other institutions.<sup>31</sup> Keating’s premise of transformation allows the educator to hope for transformation in her students, but it also recognizes failure to spark such transformation may be no fault of the educator.

Keating’s third premise for pedagogies of invitation can help students navigate what may be tumultuous explorations into questions of identity and strongly held beliefs. Keating writes, “Pedagogies of invitation require educators’ flexibility, open-mindedness, and willingness to be changed by what and who we teach.”<sup>32</sup> This flexibility is important because it allows educators to serve as models for change in thinking as I showed above. Flexibility from the educator can also provide a solution to a related issue I was troubled by in my

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<sup>28</sup> AnaLouise Keating, *Teaching Transformation: Transcultural Classroom Dialogues* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 113–115.

<sup>29</sup> Keating, *Transformation Now!* 176.

<sup>30</sup> Keating, 185.

<sup>31</sup> Counts, *Dare the School*, 3; Brighouse, *On Education*, 1.

<sup>32</sup> Keating, *Transformation Now!* 186.

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discussion of Brighouse’s discontinuous ethos: when students are socialized to be answer-getting they might experience the presentation of alternatives as a threat to their self-respect and autonomy.

Keating’s flexibility and openness allows for multiple techniques that I argue humanize Brighouse’s discontinuous ethos. Keating writes, “I assure students that I do not penalize them for their views, and I try to create an environment that values difference of opinion.”<sup>33</sup> This simple step acknowledges that her students already occupy different levels of autonomous individuality. This acknowledgement may reassure students that they will not be penalized for rejecting some of the shared alternatives if they so choose.

This respect for students’ beliefs can help us think about Keating’s relationship to the status quo. Central to her thinking, Keating theorizes “status-quo stories.” For Keating, status-quo stories are “worldviews that normalize and naturalize the existing social system, values, and standards so entirely that they prevent us from imagining the possibility of change.”<sup>34</sup> She considers individualism a kind of status-quo story. Thus, just as she is careful not to deny the value of individualism for her students, she is careful not to completely refute status-quo stories. Instead, she writes, “While it is tempting to entirely reject each status-quo story we encounter, I believe that adopting a nonoppositional approach might be more effective.”<sup>35</sup> She seeks to use students’ existing status-quo stories of individualism to develop a new transformational story about radical interconnectedness.<sup>36</sup> First, she orients her class to a story of interconnectedness.<sup>37</sup> Then she introduces her class to texts that offer nonoppositional alternatives to status-quo stories like individualism.<sup>38</sup> And last she invites her students to think about what kind of social change should happen if these new nonoppositional stories of interconnectedness were true.<sup>39</sup> This method seems to achieve the kind of accomplishments that Brighouse is hoping for with his discontinuous ethos and Counts is dreaming of in his new world order.

Even with this nonoppositional method of achieving a disruption of the status quo, some might wonder how a teacher can ever use pedagogies of invitation to actually change the thinking of students in the way that Counts or Brighouse want. If the suggestion that students’ thinking is wrong is never actually made, how can they ever see the error in their ways? It is on this question that Keating’s pedagogies of invitation can be supplemented by Counts’s and Brighouse’s thinking. It seems to me that an important unexplored reason that Keating’s pedagogies of invitation have a status-quo-disrupting effect is because

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<sup>33</sup> Keating, 110.

<sup>34</sup> Keating, 35.

<sup>35</sup> Keating, 170.

<sup>36</sup> Keating, 175.

<sup>37</sup> Keating, 176.

<sup>38</sup> Keating, 178.

<sup>39</sup> Keating, 179.

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of Keating's own amazing tolerance. It is not enough for the teacher to use pedagogies of invitation. She must also be oriented toward tolerant interconnected thinking into which she can invite her students. Counts and Brighthouse might be useful in thinking about how teachers can position themselves in order to take full advantage of Keating's pedagogies of invitation.

We problematized earlier Counts's call for teachers to practice imposition of a new world order. This call seemed to be committed to the same oppositional consciousness that the status quo seemed to be rooted in. So far our discussion of Keating's pedagogies of invitation, though, have assumed a kind of teacher neutrality in which teachers do not invite their students into more status quo oppositional thinking. But Counts said that such neutrality is impossible.<sup>40</sup> Instead, he wrote, "If the schools are to be really effective, they must become centers for the building, and not merely the contemplation, of our civilization . . . We should . . . give to our children a vision of the possibilities which lie ahead and endeavor to enlist their loyalties and enthusiasms in the realization of the vision."<sup>41</sup>

"A vision of the possibilities" seems less like brainwashing and more like Brighthouse's discontinuous ethos. Remember that an important part of Brighthouse's discontinuous ethos is for the teaching staff to represent a diversity of identities and ideologies in order to give students a range of alternatives to the mainstream culture.<sup>42</sup> I argue that Keating's pedagogies of invitation are most effective at disrupting the status quo when they are used by teachers who have an orientation to culture that does not represent the status quo. In this sense pedagogies of invitation might best be achieved by supplementing it with Brighthouse's discontinuous ethos so as to show actual alternative ways of living to students and with Counts's dream for a new world order so that educators have an idea of the kind of life they are inviting their students into.

#### A NONOPPOSITIONAL CONCLUSION

Before concluding, I should point out an important difference between these educational theories. Whereas Counts and Brighthouse certainly might include young students in their educational theories, Keating spends most of her time reflecting on young adult education. This difference may account for why Keating's pedagogies of invitation seem to regard students as already autonomous. In most epistemologies, young students are supposed to have very little knowledge of value to bring to teaching and learning. I would challenge such assertions,<sup>43</sup> but the differences between Keating and Counts/Brighthouse in how they treat student autonomy may be attributed to this difference.

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<sup>40</sup> Counts, *Dare the School*, 29.

<sup>41</sup> Counts, 37.

<sup>42</sup> Brighthouse, "Channel One," 544.

<sup>43</sup>I have challenged such assertions in my work on the transfer of learning. See my "To Build Maps of Writing and Critical Consciousness: Transfer in Writing Studies & Critical Pedagogies." Electronic Thesis. Ohio University, 2017.

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In this conclusion, I will briefly sketch what pedagogies of invitation might require for the teaching of young children. In his critique of Channel One in schools in which he theorizes the discontinuous ethos, Brighouse observes one problem of marketing in schools is that it tries to insert itself between the pupil and the pupil's parents and family.<sup>44</sup> This insertion necessarily affects the developing autonomy of the pupil. The pupil may think their desires for the newest toy are theirs alone, but a marketer will have intentionally placed it there. This seems like the wrong kind of invitation for young students. A pedagogy of invitation for young students should be concerned with protecting their burgeoning autonomy so they have the ability to be invited as equals into different ways of acting in the world. An educator might work to fend off unnecessary impositions for her students.

Further, in thinking about the premises of invitational pedagogies, educators ought to foster a relational perspective instead of an individualistic one. With younger students, this perspective may be easier to achieve since students have had less time to learn the status-quo story of individualism. If we are to take individualism as consistent with students' home-lives for the most part, then maybe on this aspect, Counts's call for a radical departure from home-life is beneficial. Having students reflect on their membership in community with others gives them readiness to start receiving and accepting invitations to other ways of thinking.

It will be necessary for teachers of younger students to keep themselves from believing that they can predict how transformation will happen for their students. This sure belief cuts down on the autonomy of students and disallows them from using their learning and relationships on their own terms. And finally, educators of younger students ought to keep the potential to be surprised by them. This potential for surprise allows the invitations they offer students to remain unique to particular students. If educators thought all students were the same, they could have a ready pack of invitations to help them, but this would only reinforce whatever status quo the educator brought to the classroom.

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Much of the work of this essay comes from my chapter there on AnaLouise Keating; see also Eleanor Duckworth, *"The Having of Wonderful Ideas" and Other Essays on Teaching and Learning* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1987), 6–13.

<sup>44</sup> Brighouse, "Channel One," 546.

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