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Author(s): Jessi Lee Jackson and Erica R. Meiners

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## Feeling Like a Failure: Teaching/Learning Abolition Through *the Good the Bad and the Innocent*

By Jessi Lee Jackson  
& Erica R. Meiners

### Example # 1, from Jessi:

It is the 8<sup>th</sup> week of English class in our adult high school completion program, and we have just read a short excerpt from Angela Davis's *Are Prisons Obsolete?* As a class, we review vocabulary words, and then, piece by piece, work to understand Davis's argument for prison abolition. All of the students have firsthand experience of the system, and they agree that the prison system is clearly racist in its impact. But when we get to the point of discussing abolition—of shutting down prisons—the class quiets. The disagreements start. "I agree with abolishing the death penalty, but . . ." "But some people need to get locked up." "I agree we need to change the system, but getting rid of prisons entirely . . ." "It's too much . . ." "I don't think we need to go that far . . ."

I find myself in the awkward position of being the only person without direct experience of being locked up, and the only vocal abolitionist. By the end of our conversation, I perceive that students have

made up their minds and are united in their analysis: the prison system is messed up, but abolition is "going too far." I wonder to myself what went wrong in our conversation. Why was I not able to present abolition in a way that challenged people to go further or question their assumptions about the necessity of prisons?

### Example #2: from Erica:

I am teaching a Feminist Activism class at my public, urban, relatively open-access university. We are in the last third of the semester and the course has centered on anti-prison organizing. Students in the course all identify as women, many are mothers, and a few have named friends and relatives who are locked up. All are working full-time or part-time, most are the first in their family to attend college, and the majority are Latinas. They are women who enlisted in the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) in high school because it offered a way out of their neighborhood, and they are taking six years to complete an undergraduate degree. For me, our term together has been smart, often funny, full of good, thick conversations, and we have hosted a few guest speakers who are engaged in small-scale anti-prison work across the city of Chicago.

The course has included a range of

readings this semester—from Davis’s *Are Prisons Obsolete?* to “The Critical Resistance-INCITE statement on Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex” to selections from Bissonette’s *When the Prisoners Ran Walpole*—and while many admit that the system targets them and their families, and that it does not make their communities safer, the ending discussions, to me, seem to always fall flat. We circulate around “what about the really bad people?": the child molesters? rapists? those who *really* belong in prison?

I am the one sitting—yes in the front of the room, with my coffee cup, waiting, waiting, wondering. Yes, what about the bad people, Erica? Signing up as a card-carrying abolitionist and admitting there are no “bad people” seems hard for those of us that have experienced violence, or perpetrated violence.

As colleagues and friends involved in working and thinking through anti-prison engagements, we are motivated to write this article because of our commitment to resisting our nation’s punishing carceral logic and our similar perceptions of our failures in teaching and learning abolition. We offer these examples because they are immediate, and because, as the people in the classroom were closer to incarceration than most populations in the United States perceive themselves to be, we naively thought that conversations might be different.

We teach and learn about abolition in a variety of contexts. Both of us teach in a small community-based free adult high school completion program for formerly incarcerated adults (Erica for ten years, Jessi for three). Housed in a vocational training center that provides a variety of training and job placement

services, evening students are in class every week, often before and/or after their paid work. Male and female students range in age from early 20s to 60s, are predominantly African-American, and many are also in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction. Created as a pathway to earn a diploma for people pushed out of public schools, this school is also a space to honor various learning styles, allow students the opportunity to earn credit for life experiences and a space to provide education oriented towards liberation. In addition, we engage abolition in our “day jobs”—Erica as an educator at a public university, Jessi as a counselor working with individual families to protect their children from incarceration—and we have also taught and facilitated a range of free community-based workshops on the prison industrial complex, queer justice, and counter military recruitment. In all of these teaching and learning contexts, we have felt frustrated, foolish, and humbled by the way that abolition unfolds in classrooms. We raise the examples at the start of this paper out of a belief that there is always something to learn from the process and context of how things go wrong, and what we read as wrong.

This article briefly looks at a working definition of abolition and why we learn, teach, and organize about prison abolition. We review investments in *good* and *bad* people, who are often reframed as innocent and guilty, and interrogate how these dichotomies mask questions about complex relationships to violence. We also look at fear, especially the fear of “going too far” with prison abolition, a feeling we identify as linked to how experiences of trauma and social rejection can limit how much we are willing to ask for.

We have no clear-cut teaching and learn-

ing solutions. Instead, we review some of what we know about abolition, and more importantly, what we don't know—the questions, issues, and emotions that leave us feeling stuck. We conclude with some of our ideas drawn from various fields for getting unstuck as we try to structure an abolitionist classroom.

### Framing abolition

We take a working definition of abolition from Critical Resistance: “the creation of genuinely safe, healthy communities that respond to harm without relying on prisons and punishment” (Critical Resistance, n.d.). Prison abolition, for us, does not mean that there will be no problems or violence. Rather, it acknowledges that prisons are not a just, efficient, or moral solution to the problems that shape violence in our communities. Prisons have been used, as Davis writes, as “a way of disappearing people in the false hope of disappearing the underlying social problems they represent” (Davis, 2005, 41). As we have reduced or eliminated social assistance programs, and criminalized the options that poor people possess to cope with untenable situations, the majority of those in prisons and jails *are* poor people. As Davis (and others) suggest, prison abolition is not arguing that crimes do not occur, or that people do not do “bad things.” Rather, the prison abolition argument says that our system of punishment, and who is most impacted by this system, is a result of surveillance. African-Americans, Latinas, gender non-conformers, and/or poor people are disproportionately scrutinized by a number of state agencies: schools, police, Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE). Directly connected to the histories of race and oppression in the United

States, it is impossible to understand and refer to our contemporary prison system in isolation from slavery, compulsive heteronormativity, immigration policies, and sovereignty for indigenous nations and Puerto Rico.

Working toward abolition means transforming our communities and creating structures that reduce the demand and need for prisons. Prison abolition means ensuring that communities have viable living wage jobs that are not dehumanizing. It means establishing mechanisms for alternative dispute resolution and other processes that address conflict or harm with mediation. It means ensuring that our most vulnerable populations, for example those that are mentally ill or under-educated, do not get warehoused in our prisons and jails because of the failure of other institutions such as healthcare and education. It means practicing how to communicate and to live across differences and to rely more on each other instead of the police. By necessity, building abolition futures is pedagogical work, and classrooms are one place to practice, engage, and circulate these ideas.

Abolition pushes us to ask more from the future and moves us to continue learning and considering the depth of how prisons and incarceration are naturalized in our communities. Rather than settling for better prisons, abolition challenges us to build and strengthen community-based alternatives that exist outside of the criminal justice system. Like other movements that counter the common-sense assumptions of “how the world works,” abolition points us towards a different vision of the future. Inside of wider and taller borders, more state resources channeled to detention and surveillance technologies, and the continued punishment of communities of

color and/or poor people, abolition asks us to reframe our material and ideological investments in locking people up.

Abolition is often explained through a contrast with reform: while prison reformers seek to make the current system better, abolitionists seek to eliminate the current system of policing and prisons. This contrast is instructive as it moves us to consider our goals, but we have two critiques of any simple division between reform and abolition work.

First, this division may focus on intellectual arguments to the detriment of considerations of how affect and emotion limit our political vision. Framing the discussion as an intellectual debate between the competing ideologies of abolition and reformism may leave little space for examining the feelings that are produced by and that reinforce the public safety system. In our teaching and learning experiences, engagements with abolition could also be described as an emotional struggle between anger at violence and injustice and the muting impact of shame and fear. While anger at injustices and desire for justice lead people to push toward an abolitionist vision, fear and shame (related to the traumas survived, appraisals of personal mistakes and failures, and the possibility of a future of intensified social rejection) can stunt desires for a more just future. This often-unacknowledged ambivalence leads to measured demands. For example, Deborah Gould describes AIDS justice work before 1986 as framed by a fear of intensified social rejection, and that due to this context, AIDS activism initially focused on lobbying, caretaking, and candlelight vigils. While clearly there is no static definition of what counts as activism, a fear of rejection “made anything more confrontational largely

unimaginable” before 1986 (Gould, 2009, 24). Sometimes, it is not *always* a commitment to reformism, but rather a tension between anger and shame, that can shorten political horizons and lead to tactical choices that are more socially acceptable, tactics that resist asking for “too much.”

Second, reform work and service provision (access to resources) are required because there are real bodies who need immediate assistance. As longtime feminist prison activist and scholar Karlene Faith writes:

Every reform raises the question of whether, in Gramsci’s terms, it is a revolutionary reform, one that has liberatory potential to challenge the status quo, or a reform reform, which may ease the problem temporarily or superficially, but reinforces the status quo by validating the system though the process of improving it. We do liberal reform work because real women in real crises occupy the prisons, and they can’t be ignored. Revolutionary reform work is educative; it raises questions of human rights (and thereby validates prisoners as human beings) and demonstrates that the state apparatus, which is mandated to uphold human rights, is one of the worst rights abusers. (Faith, 2000, 165)

Faith reminds us of the necessity of doing the “both/and,” where everyday local work may involve service providing or working for reforms, but it is simultaneously vital to place, understand, and connect this labor to a larger movement.

In particular, for us a reform vs. abolition divide does not capture the complex landscape in classrooms where students have experiences with the prison nation. In our teaching and learning, students analyze and critique the class and racial

bias of the system, but are also quick to own their mistakes and to refuse pity or compassion for their own histories. In the adult high school, one discussion of the prison system can start out sounding like a parole board hearing as many recite the standard narrative of “going down the wrong path” and “deserving what I got.” But in the next moment, the discussion shifts from the personal to the structural, and everyone in class nods in agreement to the role of systemic racism in the absence of treatment on demand and how communities of color are targeted by police. The discussion turns again, back towards the individual, as students express their dedication to providing care: drug treatment, counseling, serving as a role model for younger family members, and connecting others to education and jobs. From these discussions, what we learn is that teachers need to work with the ambivalence in classrooms and, where possible, use individual student's service-oriented plans as gateways into discussions of abolition.

### **After “Which side are you on?”**

As the brief anecdotes that opened this article point to, we are interested in responses that turn to “what about the bad people?” While resisting the pedagogical urge to dismissively think that we “know better” than those in our classes, the prevalence of these responses moves us to question social investments in bad people and therefore, also, good people. What is a useful response to the persistently articulated feeling that there are evil people who need to be locked up?

In talking through our teaching experiences, we recognize that we have underestimated the power of dualism to shape every facet of our lives. Innocence requires

guilt, just as good requires bad, success also entails failure, ability is framed by disability, whiteness calls for blackness, masculinity needs “throwing like a girl,” and more. These constructs shape social institutions and corresponding life pathways. Prisons and the prison industrial complex (PIC) continue to flourish because of our ongoing investments in bad people and the public and private practices of tying fears to bad people. Rather than recognizing that lives are threatened by a wide range of threats and risk and violence—bus accidents, under-unemployment, environmental toxins, everyday gender, sexual, and racial harassment, self-destructive behaviors, state policies—threats of “terrorists” and “criminals” are framed as the real fears, and the public is informed that these bad people can be picked out of a crowd.

But as all violence and harm is not framed as crime (for example – the punishing impact of the anonymous “free market”), “bad” and “guilty” are not constructed in isolation. These are dichotomies produced and reinforced through state and cultural mediums that shape what is understood as common sense. For example, “bad neighborhoods” are identified for policing, and children in “bad schools” are targeted for increased policing and prison prep, not college prep. Prison practices and regulations punish both people incarcerated (not innocent) and the people who come to visit them (not innocent by association) with disrespectful treatment and invasions of their privacy. Inversely, innocents are framed as not responsible for the bad things that happen—not responsible for violence or poverty. Claims to innocence are publicly deployed in projects that work to free the wrongly convicted, to contrast hard-working undocumented

immigrants with criminals, or to clarify Muslim Americans as “freedom loving Americans.” Most centrally, for those with class, heterosexual, gender, race and other privileges, an assumption of innocence provides a protective layer easing their way through the world.

In our classrooms and conversations about abolition, even with a recognition that categories of good and bad people are actively produced and deployed, discussions frequently suggest that the answer lies in reforming the categories—recognizing the *real* bad people. Yet, working to identify all of the *really real* bad people distracts from the question of why this mission seems so important. What became clear to us as a result of our attempts to teach and learn prison abolition in classroom contexts is that we must name and work through our feelings and investments in constructs of bad people. While challenging these false dichotomies does not erase the concern at the root of this question, “But what about the bad people?” it may offer clarity. What is it that we are afraid bad people will do? When we ask this question in the classroom, the response is violence, often intimate sexual violence.

We believe it is key to not rest with the *what about the bad people* questions or to ignore the feelings produced through and by the PIC, but to explore these fears by responding to the “bad” people statements with the question: “What would we do about violence without prisons?” We believe this is an important question, one that needs to be asked in multiple contexts. *What are we doing about violence, both interpersonal and state-sanctioned? What are we doing to confront and defuse racist fears?* This reframing renders visible how the original question, “what about the bad people?” masks

the reality that prison offers a false answer to the question of violence, and actually shifts resources and energy from meaningful and sustainable anti-violence work. Abolition frameworks point out that anti-violence work needs to be centered, not around identifying and caging bad people, but in responding to and preventing violence

### Feeling good, feeling bad

Although we are encouraged to view feelings as a personal and individual matter, feelings are also public and social, with political ramifications. From the second Bush administration's mobilization of public feelings—loss, fear, anger—in declaring a “war on terror,” or the further privatizations of the social welfare state through his “compassionate conservatism,” to the Obama campaign's evocation of hope, recent U.S. history highlights the ways that feelings are far from “private” but are instead linked to public practices and social policy. The U.S. criminal justice system is no exception, and teaching and learning about the PIC offers opportunities to explore varied emotional connections to and investments in the status quo. In this analysis of political feelings and the PIC, we are careful to remember how affect has also been used by justice movements with problematic consequences. For example, images of enslaved and beaten women (and children) were strategically used by abolitionists to challenge slavery, but this often collapsed a particularly gendered pity with abolition. As Davis most recently writes, we should not permit “emotions such as pity to foreclose possibilities of solidarity” (Davis, 2009, 36).

Carceral logic promises not just an appropriate response to harm, but “public safety,” a feeling of being safe for everyone

identified as an “innocent bystander” or an “upstanding citizen.” Therefore, we argue that anti-prison work is also a charge to create and sustain alternative ways of feeling both safe and deserving of safety. People are not just labeled as good or bad, they are actively schooled to *feel* like good or bad people, with the complex emotions that go along with that valuation. Rather than private and individual, these emotions are necessarily public and social. For example, after reading *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, Erica’s college class was able to intellectually organize the critique and analysis of the role of prisons in U.S. society, yet fear appeared to stay in the room. For the mothers, the fear of “stranger danger” and the child molester remained despite reviewing evidence that children are overwhelmingly likely to be assaulted by someone close or at least known. By not naming and excavating how emotion is a central spoke in the PIC, classrooms that seek to meaningfully address prison reform and build abolition can reproduce the very fears that are required to scaffold the PIC.

In addition to reproducing external fears, the categories that circulate within the PIC also work against abolition through the production of particular kinds of affect. For those schooled to identify as “innocent,” this dichotomous structure serves to produce feelings of pride, self-satisfaction, and safety; it feels *good* to know that you are “basically a good person.” Ostensibly, if one could identify all of the dangerous/bad people and lock them up, everyone else would be safe. The impact of this dichotomization on people who are able to claim innocence or goodness is a feeling of false safety. Being surrounded only by other “good” and “innocent” people translates into a false

assurance that the risks of violence are minimized. Challenging prisons interrupts this common sense logic.

The impact of this dichotomous labeling on people targeted for the “bad people” categories is permanent stigmatization, dehumanization, subjection to state violence, and termination of many civil rights or, in other words, social death, as many scholars identify. Those currently and formerly incarcerated, or even arrested or detained, are treated as a separate class of people, undeserving of basic privacy rights, who are not permitted to live with their families or parent their children, cannot vote, and who do not deserve market wages. People—often black, brown, red, poor, undocumented, disabled and/or non-gender conforming—who witness and experience this kind of structural violence have complex emotional reactions, including both anger and shame.

For those locked within the PIC, the system coerces affect. The pre-trial and trial phase compels expressions of guilt and remorse for specific acts, and the entire carceral experience attempts to dehumanize and shame. Being labeled as a criminal and incarcerated is especially shaming because the state explicitly condones violence to those in the PIC. Trauma scholar Judith Herman has discussed the traumatic experience of relationships of coercive control where one person is marked as a socially subordinate class: forced labor or prostitution, political tyrannies, and families marked by domestic violence and child abuse. Incarceration also functions as a form of violence in which a person is marked as a socially subordinate class. In such situations, “violence and threat of violence instill fear, while other commonly used methods, such as control of bodily

functions, social isolation, and degradation, primarily evoke shame” (Herman 2007). Both students and teachers carry experiences with shame into the classroom, and this knowledge informs how they establish the authority to speak, value the contributions of others, and imagine themselves as members of a learning community. In the classroom, we witness moments in which our students refuse shame and claim their education.

When people impacted by the PIC refuse to accept social death and shame, it is an act of both survival and resistance. However, like any reform effort, strategies used to challenge the production of feelings can also serve to reinforce the existing carceral system. People who refuse shame can reinforce the good and bad dichotomy by employing tactics that identify other (often more marginalized) people as the “real” bad people who should really be punished—felons, repeat offenders, violent criminals, rapists. When learning and teaching in classrooms with folks that we perceive as closer to the PIC, these negotiations are complex. Distancing oneself from criminalized populations is an understandable survival strategy, because family histories in the PIC, poverty, gender non-conforming, political activity, and/or racial profiling put many at risk for being labeled as “no longer innocent.” At the same time, the use of this survival strategy means that classroom discussions can quickly turn towards shaming and blaming of the “real bad people.” The emotional pull of these examples can be strong—contrasting the horrible drug dealer with the helpless addict, or the traumatized youth that steals with the evil sexual abuser. Notably, when these identities are deployed (in classrooms, casual conversation and mainstream media), the

bystanders are often framed as “innocent” and absolved of any responsibility or accountability to create a different kind of community.

These dichotomies are attached to real bodies with experiences of interpersonal and state violence. In our teaching and learning, our bodies and our histories with violence matter. For the woman who has been sexually assaulted, or the woman who has had her children removed by the state because she is “unfit,” rethinking innocence and guilt, or reframing good and bad people, is a process that requires engaging with deeply personal wounds and losses. Rather than shy away from these truths, we struggle to name these dynamics in the classroom, resisting the shaming and silencing impact of feeling like the “only one” by recognizing that experiences of both state and interpersonal violence are common. We also seek to carve out a path that challenges the myth of community and contextual neutrality, recognizing the role of all to challenge violence and to support one another.

People also challenge shame through participation in 12-step and other recovery groups (for example Narcotics Anonymous) and religious organizations. Yet, too often these models challenge feelings of shame by promoting a narrative of individual redemption. These narratives separate the past from the present, place responsibility for change with the individual, and minimize or erase larger economic, political, and other forces that shape lives and choices. Unfortunately, like tactics to point out the “real bad people,” dominant recovery models can reinforce the carceral logic of good vs. bad. While dominant recovery models can interrupt internalized shame, these structures and the recovery narratives they produce can

reify the idea of a clear divide between good and bad people and re-invest in the logical necessity of prisons.

We are interested in how the classroom can serve to challenge this dynamic and provide new models for refusing to bear stigma and shame. Unfortunately, formal classroom contexts present special challenges with regards to shame. As has been noted about participation in therapy, for example (Herman 2007), the teaching situation is in some ways inherently shaming. In traditional models of education, students are often framed in the classroom as less knowledgeable, and at the receiving end of the expertise of teachers. Classroom contexts can also prioritize mythic neutrality over personal experiences and feeling. In addition, for students returning after long absences, there are heightened feelings of anxiety and shame. In the adult high school program for men and women who have been incarcerated, students often express concern that their brains and ability to learn have been permanently damaged by their experiences of addiction and violence. In addition, they are acutely aware of their past difficulties with school and their status as “high-school dropouts.” Again, the classroom raises and heightens a feeling of being an inferior class of people. Failure and success—good and bad, smart and dumb—are preexisting pathways in every U.S. classroom, ready and waiting to frame students.

Despite the ways that the classroom situation can be shaming, we continue to teach and learn because we know that the classroom environment is not static. Teachers can use their role as experts to validate shame as a common human emotional experience and to challenge the individualization of responses to shared

trauma. In the next section, we discuss what we are thinking and borrowing from in our work to create classroom environments where people can access other ways of feeling—how people might manage, resist, and heal from the shame of being labeled as a “criminal” in ways that challenge carceral logic.

### **Moving abolition into the classroom**

We do not have any ready-made strategies for learning and teaching abolition the right way, but in examining the social and emotional charges connected to the idea of “bad people,” we do have some directions and questions that we are trying. We close our discussion drawing ideas from queer and disability studies, anti-prison activists naming political recovery, feminist trauma scholars, and others. We use these insights to navigate in-class discussions of abolition, to reframe anti-prison curriculum, to try to understand what to do with feelings of fear and shame, and to help us to move past the points that have felt like failures. With these examples, we both raise questions and point towards concrete resources and classroom practices that we have found helpful in our own learning and teaching experiences.

In contemplating the challenges of teaching abolition, we look to other justice movements that have challenged attempts to divide impacted populations into innocent and guilty. For example, AIDS activists worked to shift the image of innocent (i.e. hemophiliac) vs. deserving (i.e. promiscuous or drug-using) people with AIDS, reframing the issue as one of government responsibility for inadequate responses to the epidemic. Feminists have challenged the idea of innocent

vs. provocative rape victims. These movements directly, and often successfully, addressed the fictions and limitations of “innocence” (and the feelings of pity and sympathy attached to this category) as a justice strategy. In addition, disability rights activists continue to push back on an entire paradigm that mythologizes ‘normal.’ These struggles offer tools—the importance of language, collectivism, and political education—to challenge the prevailing common sense that some people need to be locked up. In building our curricula, we look for opportunities to share examples of these movements. In our discussions we encourage students to consider tactics, especially the use of challenges to “innocent” or “normal” or “common sense” as a strategy to build effective movements. We pair these discussions with assignments and class discussions that encourage reflection on when and how students have been encouraged to feel “deserving of” harm or “not normal” and how that links to larger social injustice.

Exposure to theories and practices of *political recovery* can also challenge people's investments in the good/bad dichotomy and offer other paradigms for pathways out of drug or alcohol addiction. One such model was developed in Critical Resistance's project at La Casita in New York. In describing the project, Pilar Maschi (2004) challenged the dominant, largely apolitical and individualist therapeutic model of substance abuse recovery, as well as other treatment models that promote assimilation into society over trying to change society. “Being politically active is a form of recovery, and truly a form of resistance” states Maschi. This model of recovery pushes us to also name and challenge how classrooms can individualize

learning and obscure links between people and justice issues. Building first-person narratives of political recovery (such as Maschi's) into our curriculum provides alternative models of confronting the trauma of incarceration and providing care to others.

Engaging abolition in the classroom also means putting on the table historic and current examples of communities and organizations that are actively working to address violence and to reduce harm without animating the prison industrial complex. We can bring alternatives into the room by centering resources, organizations, and examples (that do not involve state agencies) that practice harm reduction and work to challenge violence. This work is happening in your community, and teaching and learning abolition requires making these pathways and examples concrete. For example, in Erica's Feminist Activism class people from local organizations came to share their “anti-violence” work—struggles for access to fair housing, organizing the dyke march, and providing legal services for those gender non-conforming and transgendered.

As incarceration and violence impact many directly, students must have opportunities to control the pace and format of these discussions. Rothschild (2000) discusses the importance of trauma survivors being able to “put on the brakes” and be in control of the pacing of discussions of traumatic material. When tension, shame, or fear is palpable in the classroom, take a step back to the small classroom practices that promote presence, mutual respect, and recognition by encouraging shared humor, seating students to face and make eye contact with one another, normalizing the expression of emotions in the classroom, taking breaks,

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and sharing food, music, and various life stories. And, rather than setting aside one class as “abolition day,” we are working to embed abolitionist ideas across readings and discussions, allowing students time to notice and track their various emotional and intellectual responses to the concept.

Being attentive to how power moves in the classroom can be instructive in moving forward discussions of how power moves throughout society. From *Rethinking Schools*, to resources from the New York Collective of Radical Educators (NYCORE), to articles in *Radical Teacher*, we continue to learn tools to build sustainable democratic classrooms. Part of this work includes building in exercises that draw attention to the operation of power in the classroom, especially the ways that disputes are resolved, knowledges are created and validated, and a sense of safety or security in the classroom is constructed.

Shifting power in the classroom also gives us, as teachers, space to explore our own mistakes, failures, and contradictory classroom feelings. Rather than getting stumped and feeling like failures, how can we turn challenges into group inquiries? How can we transform the questions raised in the context of struggles to build stronger and “safer” communities into collaborative action research projects that center an anti-prison analysis? Engaging learning communities in articulating and testing the assumptions on which the PIC operates is a way to build abolition futures. Together.

*Our work is a product of our communities. Many thanks to the comrades, colleagues, students, friends, and family who continue to shape our vision and action.*

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