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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *Street Data* by Shane Safir and Jamila Dugan.

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**TABLE 5.1** Shifting From a Pedagogy of Compliance to a Pedagogy of Voice

	FROM A PEDAGOGY OF COMPLIANCE . . .	. . . TO A PEDAGOGY OF VOICE
<b>Primary Form of Data</b>	Tests and quizzes (traditional assessments)	Street data (formative assessments, performance-based assessments)
<b>Core Belief</b>	Hierarchy of power: teacher wields expertise and distributes "content"	Democratization of power: teacher and students build knowledge together
<b>Core Instructional Approach</b>	Lecture-style dissemination of information	Active learning through inquiry, dialogue, projects, simulations, etc.
<b>Roots in Critical Pedagogy</b>	Freire's banking model of education	Freire's problem-posing model of education
<b>Roots in Culturally Responsive Education</b>	Rests on invisible norms of dominant culture (quiet, compliant, task oriented, individualistic)  Views marginalized students through a deficit lens: <i>What gaps can I fill?</i>	Rests on foundation of collectivist cultures (collaborative, interdependent, relational) and includes students' cultural references in all aspects of learning  Views marginalized students through an asset lens: <i>What gifts do you bring?</i>
<b>Views Students as . . .</b>	Vessels to fill with information	Culturally grounded critical learners

If you are a teacher struggling to break free from traditional methods, breathe these ideas in and let them settle in your mind. If you are already living inside the pedagogy of voice and want to bring your colleagues along with you, use these ideas as an invitation to conversation. If you are an administrator working to transform instruction, adapt these ideas into an instructional vision, use them to structure coaching and adult learning, and shape them into a public narrative about where you want your school to go. Let's dig in.

## Simple Rule 1: Talk Less, Smile More

In Lin Manuel Miranda’s musical *Hamilton*, politician Aaron Burr is mentoring the young Hamilton, in a bar no less. His main piece of advice is to talk less, smile more, and not let people know what his beliefs and views are. If I could write the perfect lyric to capture the pedagogy of voice, this would be it! Colleagues, if you can change one thing tomorrow—whether you’re a classroom teacher, teacher leader, coach, or administrator—try to talk less, smile more, and design lessons and professional learning that allow learners to discover what *they* think and feel.

Why does this matter? As long as we do the talking and make knowledge deposits into the learner’s brain, we are carrying the cognitive load. We are doing the thinking. We retain power and inhibit the growth of agency. Shift the thinking and cognitive load to the learner by designing curriculum (and adult learning) around probing, reflective questions with ample time for discussion. My personal rules of thumb are as follows:

- Never talk more than ten to fifteen minutes without pausing for information processing and/or reflection.
- Design lessons and adult learning so that learners are engaged in conversation with *each other* at least 75 percent of the time.
- During that time, circulate, coach, and ask *more* questions. Model a culture of inquiry.

What about the “smile more” part of Aaron Burr’s advice, you might be wondering? Here, we turn to the power of nonverbal communication to foster or shatter a child’s experience of belonging. When we smile and use tone and other nonverbal cues to convey warmth, we signal to students that they are safe, welcome, and able to take risks. (Note: This doesn’t mean we never model *gravitas* or firmness in our demeanor.) For students who have been personally and educationally marginalized, this is crucial. Think about a classroom in which students have experienced trauma, including microaggressions by peers and/or teachers. The teacher’s emotional tenor will be at least as important as the content they share. Talking less and smiling more helps us communicate to every child, “You are seen and loved here.”

## Simple Rule 2: Questions Over Answers

Children are naturally inquisitive. A recent study led by British child psychologist Dr. Sam Wass found that children ask an average of

seventy-three questions per day (Steingold, 2017)! Good questions are important, interesting, and don't have a clear answer. Unfortunately, far too many students are still required to sit quietly and absorb information from their teachers. Those children who dare to ask questions risk being pathologized as “disruptive” and “off-task.” This is especially true for many Black students whose brilliance and curiosity is filtered through a lens of racism and bias.

In order to shift the cognitive load, we have to create a culture of inquiry in our classrooms and professional-learning spaces. This means that we begin to prioritize questions over answers. I remember watching Danfeng Koon, a founding math teacher at the school I led, circulate around her ninth grade algebra classroom as students labored in small groups. When stumped by a new concept, a student would pop his hand in the air, sending out an SOS to Danfeng, who would slowly and calmly approach the table. The student would pitch a question, and Danfeng—without fail!—would respond with another question. *What do you think? Who else could you ask? What are different ways to approach that problem?* She held a firm belief: Never tell students something they can figure out on their own. A simple rule.

In the BALMA project that opened this chapter, we spiraled students through many layers of questions. On the project level, we asked, *What can we learn about equity in education through a private-public school collaboration?* As students from the two schools came together and witnessed extreme opportunity gaps in their respective experiences, we asked, *What are you learning and discovering? What thoughts and feelings are emerging for you? And what do you want to do about it?* We also had them apply the learning inside their own school buildings, exploring the question, *What types of pedagogy are happening down the hall, and how are students impacted?* As students learned about Freire's banking and problem-posing models of education, I arranged for them to observe other classrooms and take copious notes on what they saw (street data!). When they came back to my class, I drew a Freirean spectrum on the board and had each student ethnographer locate the pedagogies they had observed, justifying their responses with evidence.<sup>2</sup>

I think about questions through the lens of **fractals**—those never-ending patterns that replicate across different scales. When you embrace a pedagogy of voice, you commit to investing your energy in

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<sup>2</sup>To state what I hope is clear, do this activity with full transparency and permission from your colleagues.

developing sharp, intriguing, rich questions at every level of the learning experience. Table 5.2 outlines different ways to think about this.

The best learning is driven by students’ authentic questions—the kinds of wonderings that keep them up at night and light their cognitive fires. As an educator and instructional leader, you have the power to model relentless curiosity and the power of inquiry. Design learning experiences that allow students to begin to discover their own

TABLE 5.2 Questions as a Fractal Pedagogy	
UNIT OF INQUIRY	EXAMPLE(S)
Students pose their own questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Journaling: <i>What questions are coming up for you as we begin this unit study?</i></li> <li>KWL: <i>Jot down what you k(now) and w(ant) to know about our new area of study. At the end, we will write down what we l(earned).</i></li> </ul>
Students ask each other questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Small group or fishbowl discussions, centered around students’ questions (have them jot down questions on sticky notes first and take turns asking them).</li> <li>Reciprocal teaching model: A scaffolded discussion technique that incorporates four main strategies—predicting, questioning, clarifying, summarizing.</li> <li>Give one, get one: Have students develop questions, then stand, pair-share, and trade. Encourage them to find answers on their own or by engaging with peers.</li> </ul>
Students ask you questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cognitive apprenticeship/teacher-as-coach: Instead of answering student questions, respond with questions.</li> <li>Conferencing: Organize mini-conferences with students on a significant piece of work in which they come with their own questions.</li> </ul>
Teacher poses questions to the class.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Socratic discussion: Pose open-ended questions with no clear answer. Over time, have students lead the discussion.</li> </ul>
Teacher structures an assessment, task, project, or unit around an essential question.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiate a unit around an essential question that students revisit each week and do a final assessment around.</li> <li>Organize project-based learning or performance-based assessments around provocative open-ended questions.</li> </ul>

ideas. Stay tethered to our goal of student *agency* by ritually asking the following questions:

- “What matters to you about this content/project, and why?” (identity)
- “What is getting in the way of your learning/engagement, and how can I best support you?” (belonging)
- “What is the evidence for the claim you’re making?” (mastery)
- “What ideas do you want to contribute to this discussion/project? What action do you want to take?” (efficacy)

### Simple Rule 3: Ritualize Reflection and Revision

Centering student voice doesn’t mean we stop giving feedback, but it does mean we shift our role from expert lecturer to expert *coach*, charged with the cognitive apprenticeship of students. Reflection and revision are two of our strongest tools in this regard and help students at the margins accelerate their skills over time. Scholar Linda Darling-Hammond has written about a culture of revision and redemption that characterizes equitable classrooms:

Another important characteristic of schools with an adaptive pedagogy is a learning environment where teachers are aware of what students are thinking, and where the curriculum does not move on when students do not learn immediately. Unlike the traditional “teach, test, and hope for the best” approach, . . . adaptive teachers don’t say, “You got a C-” on this assignment and then move on to the next unit without looking back. Instead, they give students the opportunity to tackle difficult tasks without fear of failure by promoting a culture of revision and redemption that encourages students to attempt challenging work, provides continual opportunities for practice and revision, and supports students in developing the courage and confidence to work continuously to improve in their successive efforts. (Darling-Hammond, 2002, p. 28–29)

Reflection and revision can take place daily, weekly, and throughout a unit of instruction. Here are a few ways to operationalize this simple rule:

- Teach reflection and revision as explicit skills and processes. Consider this core content and model it in your instruction. Be vulnerable in sharing times when you have had to revise a piece

of work to make it better. Reflect publicly on instructional mistakes you make.

- Begin a class period with time for students to reflect in writing and/or a turn and talk: *What did you learn yesterday that stuck with you? What's a concept that still feels confusing?*
- Use the traffic light strategy for students to signal how well they understand the current content. Give each student a red, yellow, and green square of paper or mini-plastic cups. Have them put the color on top that indicates where they're at: green for "I'm good," yellow for "I sort of get it, but have some questions," red for "I'm lost! SOS!"
- End each week with a reflection protocol: *What did I learn this week? What's one thing I feel proud about? What's one thing I'm still struggling with?* Have them share their responses in small, ongoing peer groups and close with each student giving the peer to their left or right an appreciation.
- Provide students with graphic organizers and structured protocols for giving each other feedback on their work. Teach them to sandwich feedback! *"What I loved about this piece of work was . . . One question I had was . . . One suggestion I have is . . ."*
- Whenever possible, make time for one-on-one conferencing with students around their work. Conferences can provide the most impactful learning moments.

#### Simple Rule 4: Make Learning Public

*You were courageous to take some kids that were very city-oriented to other areas, trusting us. You trusted us to run a classroom of juniors as mentor seniors, right? You said, "Here's your parameters; now create your lesson plan."*

—Damien Padilla, BALMA graduate, union organizer, and grassroots safety lead, Pacific Gas & Electric

One of the quickest ways to embrace a pedagogy of voice is to put students in the driver's seat by having them design and teach lessons. On a macro-pedagogy level, you can build units and projects around culminating exhibitions and/or performance-based assessments. To cultivate agency, we have to stop being the only audience for student work. We must create authentic ways for students (and adult learners)

to *share* the knowledge they are building. Student work is the yin to the yang of student voice. Public learning, which contributing author Carrie Wilson will apply to an adult-learning context in Chapter 7, is most impactful when situated in a holistic performance assessment *system* that is based on common, school-wide standards and integrated into daily instructional decisions. Such a system shows students what they need to do by providing models, demonstrations, simulations, and exhibitions of the kind of high-quality academic work they need to produce. More on this in Chapter 6 when we discuss coherence!

Here are a few features of public learning that you can begin to experiment with in your classroom, grade-level team, department, school, or district:

- Portfolios of student work that showcase in-depth study via research papers, original science experiments, literary analyses, artistic performances or exhibitions, mathematical models, and more
- Rubrics that represent explicit, shared standards against which to assess student work and performance
- Oral defenses by students to a committee of teachers, peers, and, potentially, community members that allow educators to listen for in-depth understanding
- Multiple opportunities for students to revise their work, redeem their academic status, and grow their skills in order to demonstrate learning (Adapted from Darling-Hammond, 2002, p. 16)

### Simple Rule 5: Circle Up

The structure of compliant classrooms is painfully predictable: students in rows, plugged into individual desks like widgets, taking notes from a sage-on-stage up front. This scene implicitly communicates to students that their voices don't matter, their cultural schema and knowledge are tangential at best, and their job is to get “filled up” by the expert at the helm. By contrast, reshaping our classrooms and adult-learning spaces into circles communicates equality of voice and membership in the community. Circles represent the village coming together for dialogue and signal to the learner: “You belong here, just as everyone around you belongs here. I want to see your face and hear your voice.”

My colleague Perry Smith, an education leader in British Columbia, notes that circles are an Indigenous structure used for thousands of



years across North America and the world. Rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing, circles surface in ceremony, gatherings, events, the cyclicity of verses in songs, and even the shape of the drum. In Perry's words, "All the power in the world comes from the circle. When we sit in a circle, there is no head. Everyone is equal" (P. Smith, 2020). Disrupt the pedagogy of compliance by reshaping your classroom around the circle. Use circles to design the following:

- Socratic seminars
- Concentric circle activities: An inner group of learners faces outward, and an outer group faces inward, forming discussion pairs. One circle rotates each time the teacher offers a new prompt or question for dialogue.
- Science lab experiments or mathematical modeling where students huddle around a table
- Design-build projects where students huddle around materials and a design challenge
- Literature circles where students engage over time in academic discussion of a shared text, with their questions driving discussion

Circles are an adaptable shape and the signature structure of a democratic classroom. They transform power, allowing each student to find their voice and including the teacher in a non-hierarchical community of learning and practice.

### Simple Rule 6: Feedback Over Grades

Finally, a pedagogy of voice requires us to break the stranglehold that grading has over classrooms across the country. As a parent and educator, I see teachers lost in algorithms, equations, and formulas that strip critical judgment out of teaching and learning. Grading echoes the econometric framework of testing, presuming that we can encapsulate learning in a number or a letter. Street data reminds us that our primary task as educators is to provide regular feedback to students so they can grow, not to evaluate them in order to anoint them academically capable or not.

Feedback can be its own equity trap and trope, contributing to distrust or diminished confidence for BIPOC students if not delivered with care. Claude Steele and his colleagues coined the term

**wise feedback** to describe a way of providing students of color with structured, empowering explanations that mitigate stereotype threat and reduce the possibility that feedback is experienced as biased (Cohen, Steele, & Ross, 1999). This process includes three instructional elements: Describe the nature of the feedback being offered; emphasize and explain the high standards used to evaluate the student work, and organize the feedback; explicitly state a belief that the student has the skills needed to meet those standards.

Feedback helps us remember that learning is messy, in the best possible way! Every moment in the classroom is an opportunity to gather street data on the cognitive complexities of learning—the aha moments, the stumbling blocks, the bursts of creativity, the spirals of self-doubt and shame, the neurological effects of stress and trauma. Rather than contribute to our understanding of what's getting in the way for students, grades often create added stress and emotional pressure, particularly for children with learning differences and those struggling to catch up to grade level.

My colleague Joe Feldman's masterful book *Grading for Equity* (Feldman, 2018) takes up this topic in-depth (I highly recommend it), but I'll offer a few tips in the spirit of simple rules:

- Stop grading homework. Homework should be framed as low-stakes practice on new skills, not a hammer to promote compliance or punish children who struggle to get it done.
- Stop measuring participation. Participation grades are rife with bias, inviting unconscious discrimination against students with attention challenges or cultural/communication styles that don't mirror the teacher's. Participation is notoriously hard to measure, so just don't. As a footnote, reimagine all behavior charts. They are often punitive, shaming, and biased.
- Allow late work. One principal I know established a three-day grace period for every student for every assignment. He explained it like this: "The penalty for not doing the assignment is *doing* the assignment!"
- Allow redos and retakes. Any student should be able to retake a major assessment for a full new grade as long as they are coming to school and putting in basic effort. This tacks to the culture of revision and redemption we discussed earlier.

- Use descriptive, criterion-based rubrics instead of points. Points promote a culture of bean-counting and competition, whereas rubrics, when well-crafted, promote reflection.
- Use grades to summarize student achievement over time, after the child has had ample opportunities to redo and revisit, not to punish or change student behavior.
- Eliminate the zero. It severely disadvantages learners who are struggling for a variety of reasons and breeds hopelessness.
- Make time for narrative feedback and student conferencing, whenever possible. If your student load is too high, teach students to do this with each other in structured peer conferences.

The six simple rules cut across micro- and macro-pedagogies, from small moves at the interpersonal level to big moves in curriculum and assessment design. Put together, they will help you shape a pedagogy of voice that generates rich student data and cultivates the most important measure of all, student agency.