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## Introduction

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## Introduction

It was a long time ago.  
I have almost forgotten my dream.  
But it was there then,  
In front of me,  
Bright like a sun—  
My dream.

And then the wall rose,  
Rose slowly,  
Slowly,  
Between me and my dream.  
Rose slowly, slowly,  
Dimming,  
Hiding,  
The light of my dream.  
Rose until it touched the sky—  
The wall.

Shadow.  
I am black.

I lie down in the shadow.  
No longer the light of my dream before me,  
Above me.  
Only the thick wall.  
Only the shadow.

My hands!  
My dark hands!  
Break through the wall!  
Find my dream!  
Help me to shatter this darkness,  
To smash this night,  
To break this shadow  
Into a thousand lights of sun,  
Into a thousand whirling dreams  
Of sun!

—Langston Hughes (*As I Grew Older*)

As the poem notes, we must break through the darkness of shadows and enter the light of dreams and possibilities. In the realm of public education, this means having the vision and courage to follow the road less traveled or even, at times, paving new roads into the future. For far too long, public education has been under that shadow of terms such as failing schools, achievement gaps, and poor economic management. Under the last president, *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) legislation was enacted to “cure” these ailments. While far from representing a cure, the law has resulted in schools, teachers, and most importantly, children thinking their worth is based entirely upon one score on a standardized test. While many, many publications have outlined the problems and consequences of NCLB, this is not the intent of this special edition; our goal is to move out of the darkness and into the light illuminated by our dreams for public education.

We feel that the time is right for sharing our dreams due to the historical event we are currently experiencing: the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States of America. This election signified for many citizens a change in direction for the country, a hope for a better future, and a break from past ways of “doing business” in Washington, D.C. The President’s own writings (2006) reminded citizens of the power of hope and how the audacity to hope can lead the nation forward. The authors in this edition articulate their hopes for public education. While some articles represent critical theory

and others do not, they all surely raise serious questions for discussion. This special edition is not about despair. Rather, it is about keeping hope alive. For this group of authors, having the audacity to hope for better public education means trusting teachers and children to engage in intellectual endeavors that advocate for the development of the whole person and active participation in a democratic community.

Lilia Monzo and Suzi Soohoo question the President's lack of public consideration of race. Opening this dialogue, they believe, will help to reveal the multiple, racialized frames and metanarratives through which citizens view the world. Moving the dialogue from public spaces into education arenas will result in more critical analyses of race and race relations for students and teachers, making race more visible for everyone, and greater accountability for improving race-relations in public schools.

Barry Kanpol investigates the contradictions of developing a public identity and working for the public good in a system that extols the virtues of democracy but in reality is dominated by competitive market logic and individualism. He draws comparisons between the larger public community in which Obama works and his experiences as a university dean as he opens spaces for dialogue and critical thought through raising some practical questions and concerns about building a renewed community and collective public identity.

Debbie, Ken, and Barbara Tye contend that teachers have been deskilled by educational policy for far too long and that the treatment will continue with Obama's *Blueprint for Reform* and "Race to the Top" funds. They then argue that listening, carefully and respectfully, and then reskilling teachers — returning to them the professional status they deserve — is reform whose time has come.

Ben Mardell, Lisa Fiore, Marina Boni, and Melissa Tonachel outline key policies for ensuring the rights of preschool children taught in public school classrooms in light of Obama's proposed educational reforms. To safeguard against preschool children suffering from

negative consequences of a system designed for older children, the authors identify three rights young children have in any classroom setting: 1) the right to be recognized and listened to; 2) the right to learn through play; and 3) the right to meaningful, purposeful, and reasonable evaluation.

Nancy Bangel, Jane Leatherman, Tracy Cox, Amber Merrill, and Rebecca Newsome inquire into the role collaboration, as outlined in Obama's *Blueprint for Reform*, plays for children all points on the learning continuum — higher to lower levels of achievement. They confront the discrepancy between valuing uniqueness and challenging our children to stand up for our value of democracy when our current educational practices in public schools actually push our children to be automatons.

In the last article of this edition, Penny Bryan and Olivia Hayes analyze how teachers' personal stories can be used to understand differences and commit to constructing classrooms, schools, and communities as social learning environments that are more responsive, inclusive, caring, just, and joyous. Educators must move beyond the audacity of hope by building such environments, the authors argue, if schools are to fulfill their vital role as the cornerstone of our democracy.

You may notice that some of the articles in this issue break with our journal's focus on authors representing partnerships between university and community members. All of the articles in this issue were invited because the authors are part of a larger project responding to President Obama's educational policies and practices to lead the field forward. Under the expert guidance and mentoring of Barry Kanpol (IPFW) and Don Cardinal (Chapman University), faculty from the two institutions have collaborated on writing projects that will culminate in a trilogy of books through Hampton Press.

We welcome you to this special edition and invite you to participate in our ongoing dialogue. We would ideally like to open up the dialogue so current authors can respond to your critique — send your thoughts, insights, and commentaries to [scholarlypartnershipedu@ipfw.edu](mailto:scholarlypartnership<u>edu</u>@ipfw.edu).

Only by expanding the conversation, we believe, will the audacity to break through the shadows of darkness into space lit by hope for a better system of public education become a reality.

Terri Jo Swim, Special Edition Editor

### **Reference**

Obama, B. (2006). *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*. New York: Random House Inc.