



Call for Papers:

**Loving to Unlearn:
bell hooks, Critical Pedagogy and Affective Education**

**A Special Issue of
*Coils of the Serpent: Journal for the Study of Contemporary Power***

Guest Editors: Victoria Allen, Harald Pittel and Garret Scally

Where can love (or any other emotion or affect) be found in educational theory and practice? Should feelings be schooled or unlearned?

We have 'learned' that the European enlightenment followed a normative approach to affects, a notion that we can tentatively describe as 'affective education', with affects given dual attention in terms of content and methods of teaching. Philosophers like Spinoza, Rousseau and Kant were eager to single out 'good' affects that would support virtue, reason and ethics. Yet, contemporary affect theory, while shedding a fresh light on feelings, seems far removed from such normativity. Influential theoretical frameworks envisage affects as 'in-between' constituting bodies in various ways (Sara Ahmed), look at the 'structural' effects of feeling as experience in a theory of ideology and social transformation (Raymond Williams), and consider the political potential of 'ugly feelings' (Sianne Ngai). In this light, can there still be talk of affective education?

Some relevant cues concerning these questions can be gained from bell hooks. In hooks' sustained exposures of unequal power structures, her focus on critical pedagogy provided a crucial link between the study of conflicts and the promises of solidarity. "To educate is the practice of freedom," she wrote in *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), "a way of teaching anyone can learn." In this book and her subsequent *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (2003) and *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (2010), hooks advocated for an approach of radical 'unlearning'. Unlike other inflationary uses of the term, her understanding is based on social experience and is critical of cultural and educational norms articulated from privileged viewpoints. What is particularly intriguing is that she centred teaching-as-unlearning around an idea of 'love' – in fact, hooks went so far as to identify love as "the practice of freedom" as early as in *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representation* (1994).

hooks' teaching-as-unlearning implies an ethics of change, of doing-as-undoing – a project that is both critical and performative. Rather than excluding failure, hooks embraces its transformative potential. But how can such 'loving teaching' work, if fully realized as emancipatory practice? hooks' approach, while providing vital prompts in this regard, leaves ample room for further exploration in terms of methodology. What comes into focus here is the role of affects in unlearning/teaching, also considering the ways in which affects can be mutually entangled. If teaching is about challenging sexist, racist and elitist

hegemonies by putting love into practice, to what extent does it matter that love is (arguably) never completely free from the affective dimensions of larger cultural environments, including feelings like belonging (a culture of place), or a sense of community based on trust? What is the role of ugly feelings such as ‘killing rage’, as highlighted in hooks’ 1996 book of the same name – a collective emotion not simply centred around hate but directed at the “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” and thus promising a level of visibility and justice to the marginalized and oppressed?

How then can culturally embedded emotions as (seemingly) disparate as rage and love be practically implemented in teaching? And what further structures of feeling are at stake if we follow Sara Ahmed’s cue that emotions not just work ‘inside-out’ (from the personal to the social), but also ‘outside-in’, reflecting the lived reality of wider conjunctures? These questions seem especially relevant in increasingly affective cultures, as manifest in transforming media landscapes. Not only dominant cultures, but also emergent forms of representation and identity are prone to entail complex and conflicting affective dimensions – for example, digital social media which have become more participatory yet are often problematically put at the service of all-too easily consumable narratives around love, friendship and solidarity (think of dating platforms, Facebook, TikTok, X trends etc.). In plain words: where does ‘love’ end and consumption (or even hate) begin? And precisely what is the challenge for teaching and (un)learning when trying to intervene in such multifarious affective configurations?

The upcoming *Coils of the Serpent* special issue aims to apply and continue bell hooks’ work on education, exploring the ways in which her ways of thinking feeling can inform practices of freedom today. Possible fields of attention include (but are not restricted to) the following topics:

- bell hooks in the context of contemporary affect theory (e.g. Sara Ahmed, Rosi Braidotti, Sianne Ngai, Lauren Berlant)
- Affective education between performativity and performance (e.g. Judith Butler, Erika Fischer-Lichte, Jack Halberstam, Eve K. Sedgwick, Richard Schechner)
- bell hooks in the tradition of critical pedagogy (Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Jacques Rancière, Stuart Hall)
- The place of language, storytelling, arts and literature in (un)learning affects
- The role of media and popular culture in affective education (especially digital media post-Covid)
- Affective education and social inequality
- For the ‘love’ of bell hooks ☺
- Affects and education systems
- Teaching political emotions with bell hooks (e.g. Martin Luther King, Cornel West)
- Is there an affective cultural studies? (e.g. Lawrence Grossberg, Raymond Williams, Paul Gilroy)

Please send a **300-word abstract** and a **short bio (150 words)** to the editors Victoria Allen (victoria.allen@ovgu.de), Harald Pittel (harald.pittel@uni-leipzig.de) and Garret Scally (dr.garret.scally@gmail.com) by **15 August 2024**.

Abstracts should indicate the general theme, kind and projected length of the planned text. While traditional journal articles are most welcome, we also invite shorter, experimental and creative contributions.

The special issue on bell hooks is due to appear in late 2025. Please read the journal’s submission guidelines: <https://coilsoftheserpent.org/submissions/>