# Teaching Climate Change



A Reading Group Guide

Created by members of the 2024 ACS Virtual Summer Reading Group

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### Introduction

In [*Teaching Climate Change: Science, Stories, Justice*](https://www.routledge.com/Teaching-Climate-Change-Science-Stories-Justice/Singh/p/book/9781032278599)(2023), climate educator, physicist, and speculative fiction writer, Vandana Singh offers a framework for effective climate change pedagogy that highlights four key fundamental challenges of the climate crisis: “its transdiciplinarity, its spanning of large scales of time and space, its rich complexity, and its roots in injustice and power” (25).

This reading group aims to bring together an interdisciplinary group of educators to consider how Singh’s framework might inform the way we teach about the climate crisis. As Singh points out, “our siloed system of education does not easily allow space for a truly inter/transdisciplinary exploration of climate change” – our hope is that this reading group can create one such space for transformative exploration, collaboration, and co-creation (21).

We hope participants will leave our discussions with new tools and strategies for helping ourselves, our colleagues, and our students grapple with the complex and daunting reality of the climate crisis.

Our group met for a total of five meetings, each for one hour, on zoom. In each of our meetings, we discussed 2-3 chapters of the book. We supplemented our readings (see optional readings) with selections of Vandana Singh’s speculative fiction for those who wished to experiment with and explore the role climate fiction might play in their climate change pedagogy.

#### How to use this guide

Reading group facilitators are invited to use the prompts and activities presented within this document verbatim or to pick and choose from the activities to create a custom facilitation plan that meets the needs of their particular group, goals, and context.

For our reading group, we created a single shared Google doc as a repository for our meeting plans, discussion questions, shared reflections and documentation of our conversations. We also made use of the chat feature in Zoom. We chose not to use breakout rooms for our sessions; however, many of the activities included within this reading guide could be completed as paired or small group activities.

#### Considerations for future facilitators

In reflecting back on our own experiences in this reading group, here are a few of our recommendations:

1. **Consider reading the book more slowly or planning meeting times for longer than an hour.**
	* We have included all of our planned activities and discussion prompts within this guide; however, in practice we rarely were able to complete everything we planned in a single meeting. We had rich discussions, but we wished that we would have had more time to discuss and engage more deeply with the activities and exercises included within this guide. Facilitators should keep this in mind when deciding the length and number of meetings to schedule for their group and when selecting which activities to prioritize for their meeting plan.
2. **If possible, integrate opportunities for experiential learning and assignment design into your reading group meetings.**
	* If we were to design this reading group again, we would try to integrate more time and space for the participants to try out some of the activities described (e.g. physics theater; planetarium visit, etc.). We would also consider prioritizing more pedagogically focused activities that enable participants to leave with a practical deliverable (e.g. design (or redesign) an assignment, create an activity, etc.).
3. **Encourage participants to check out both the print and the e-book version of the book, choosing the format that is best for them.**
	* Some who ordered the print version of the book found the font size to be so small (especially for figures and graphs) that it interfered with their reading process and comprehension. We encourage anyone who might benefit from the ability to increase the font size while reading to purchase the electronic version of the book instead of the print version.

#### Possible Reading Schedule

For our reading group, we divided the book to be completed in five one-hour virtual zoom sessions. These sessions could be held weekly or bi-weekly, or a combination of both.

* Meeting 1: Ch 1 (pp. 1-14); *Optional:* “[Science Fiction in the Anthropocene](https://www.anthropocenemagazine.org/2016/10/science-fiction-in-the-anthropocene/)” (Singh, 2016)
* Meeting 2: Ch 2-3 (pp. 15-49); *Optional:* “[Mother Ocean](https://web.archive.org/web/20190626171844/https%3A//go.xprize.org/oceanstories/mother-ocean/)” (Singh, 2019) – Originally appeared within *Current Futures: A Sci-Fi Ocean Anthology,* but now can only be accessed via Internet Archive.
* Meeting 3: Ch 4-5 (pp. 50-103); *Optional:* “[Travelers’ Tales from the End of the World](https://www.lightspeedmagazine.com/fiction/travelers-tales-from-the-ends-of-the-world/)” (Singh, 2024)
* Meeting 4: Ch 6-7 (pp. 104-160); *Optional:* “[Three-World Cantata](https://www.climatealmanac.org/pub/ud2xkkx1/release/3)” (Singh 2023)
* Meeting 5: read Ch 8-10 (pp. 161-225); *Optional:*  “[Mina’s Dream](https://www.climatealmanac.org/pub/vdbicdpi/release/2)” (Singh, 2023)

### Meeting 1

#### Overview for Facilitators

Before this session, group members read Chapter 1 of the book as well as an optional secondary reading that introduces participants to the author’s background as a science fiction (or speculative fiction) writer. Objectives for the meeting include:

* Getting to know each other and sharing motivations for joining the group
* Reflecting on our local context and how we might engage students with climate-related issues relevant to that context
* Sharing first impressions of the book
* Reviewing the schedule and answering questions

In our iteration of this group, we completed Activity 1 as a written exercise in a shared Google Doc. For activity 2, we completed this as a facilitated discussion with the facilitators adding the contributions of group members to our shared document. Activity 3 was completed as an independent reflection exercise with an invitation to share back with the group. Finally, Activity 4 was facilitated as an open discussion. Note: because of the length of time it took to complete Activities 1-3, we were only able to devote a few minutes to Activity 4.

#### Activity 1 & 2: Introductions to each other and our shared expectations

##### Activity 1: Getting to know each other prompt

1. Share with us your name, your pronouns (if you wish to share), and the context in which you teach and work most often (types of courses, level/discipline, etc.).
2. Something/s that bring you energy or joy
3. Share with us your goals / reasons for joining this reading group.

##### Activity 2: Co-creating community commitments

In our group, we spent some time co-creating community norms (or commitments) to establish expectations and guidelines for how we would communicate with one another throughout our group meetings. We found this activity to be helpful given that we were all entering our conversations with different disciplinary backgrounds and varying levels of experience with the topic. Since we were meeting on zoom, we also used this conversation to set some norms for how we would engage within one another on zoom. University of Michigan’s Center for Research on Teaching and Learning offers a great resource on [guidelines for classroom discussions](https://crlt.umich.edu/examples-discussion-guidelines) that could be useful for facilitators wishing to co-create discussion guidelines for their reading group.

#### Activity 3: Writing Prompt

##### Situating ourselves within our local context –

“The climate problem spans *vast scales of space and time.***The climate crisis is a global phenomenon, but we experience it in locales or climes. It manifests differently in Northern Alaska than in Jharkhand, but the local and the planetary are both important.** Temporally, it includes both the slow rise of Earth’s average global surface temperature since the time of the industrial revolution, and the dramatic annual shrinking of Arctic sea ice, or the suddenness of a storm made more likely by climate change, or a heat wave in Jharkhand.”

– Vandana Singh, *Teaching Climate Change,* pp. 6

**Take a moment to write** – by hand in a notebook or typing in a separate window – **about the locale in which you teach and work.** What are the most pressing climate-related issues in your neighborhood, in your city, at your institution, in your classroom? What story/s exist within one or more of those locales that could begin / inform your lessons?

#### Activity 4: Group Discussion

What were your first impressions of the book?

* Either verbally by unmuting, or by writing in the chat, share some of your first impressions and takeaways from your reading of Ch 1 of *Teaching Climate Change* and/or from the optional reading about “Science Fiction in the Anthropocene.”

Other questions to consider:

* What did you notice about how Singh sets up her discussion of teaching climate change?
* What are you most intrigued about?
* What questions were you left with?
* What surprised you about Singh’s approach?

### Meeting 2

#### Overview for Facilitators

This session addresses two chapters **Ch 2** - “What is an Effective Pedagogy of Climate Change?” (pp 15-34) & **Ch 3** - “Science, But Not Just Science: Whys and Wherefores of a Transdisciplinary Approach” (pp. 35-49).

Objectives for this session include:

* Reflecting on our individual journeys into climate education, including our own “aha” moments, apprehensions, and challenges.
* Considering which aspects (if any) of Singh’s transdisciplinary approach to climate education might translate to our disciplines and individual teaching contexts.

In our reading group, we began this session with another round of introductions and a very short ice breaker. The Welcome prompt was completed in the chat, but then we invited each person to share the story behind their emoji. (Turns out emojis function as pretty good storytelling prompts!) For Activity 2, participants completed as a reflective writing prompt and then were invited to share with the group. Activity 3 was facilitated as an open discussion. While we did not have time to complete Activity 4 in our second meeting, we include it here in case other facilitators wish to use it.

#### Activity 1: Welcome

**Prompt:**

1. Share with us your name, disciplinary background / teaching context
2. An emoji that captures something about how you are joining us today
3. (if you wish) a question, concept, or passage from Ch 2-3 that you’d love to talk about with others

#### Activity 2: Reflection/Writing Prompt

**Recalling our journeys as climate educators –**

“My journey of learning took me a few years later (2014) to the Alaskan Arctic. As I stood on the frozen shore near Utqiagvik, with the glittering plain of sea ice stretched before me, I had a visceral sense of displacement and decentering, which, along with multiple conversations with generous residents, would eventually result in a radical reorientation to consider *the climate as teacher.* In Alaska, I interviewed scientists, scholars, and community members, including Iñupiaq town officials and a whaler, and following that, read the research on Arctic climate change as well as scholarly work of anthropologists, economists, sociologists, historians, and others. It became clear to me that ‘just the science’ was hopelessly inadequate in understanding and conveying the reality and implications of the climate problem.”

– Vandana Singh, *Teaching Climate Change,* pp. 17

**Take a moment to write** – by hand in a notebook or typing in a separate window – **about your journey as a climate educator.** When did it begin (or do you anticipate it beginning)? Who and/or what have been (or could be) your biggest teachers? Supporters? Critics? Can you pinpoint a specific moment (or moments) as Vandana does, where your journey took a turn or you experienced a productive shift in your thinking or your practice? Or, perhaps a time when you experienced the *climate as teacher*? Write about that.

#### Activity 3: Group Discussion

**Open Discussion of Ch 1-3:**

* Either verbally by unmuting, or by writing in the chat, share some of your first impressions and takeaways from your reading of Ch 1-3 of *Teaching Climate Change.*
* Some other open-ended questions to consider:
	+ What did you notice about how Singh sets up her discussion of teaching climate change?
	+ What are you most intrigued about?
	+ What questions were you left with?
	+ What surprised you about Singh’s approach?

#### Activity 4: Pedagogical Exercise (if time)

**Possible steps for designing climate change courses in any discipline**

1. “Determine intersections between climate change and your coursework, including intersection with justice and ethics
2. Examine which of the four (or five) dimensions are covered through those topics, and which are ‘left out’
3. Find ways to integrate those dimensions through both inter/transdisciplinary approaches (elaborated in the next few chapters) and by designating some course time for ‘putting it all together’ through Climate Week and an interdisciplinary project
4. Plan an experience that from the beginning establishes the transdisciplinary nature of the climate problem and the centrality of justice
5. Design a visual tool that will serve as a holistic conceptual device to deepen understanding and prevent fragmented or piecemeal learning.”

– Vandana Singh, *Teaching Climate Change,* pp. 44

**Brainstorm** – by hand in a notebook or typing in a separate window – **a list of possible experiences (Step Four) and/or visual tools (Step Five)** that might serve to aid your students in developing a holistic, transdisciplinary, justice-oriented understanding of the climate problem. **After completing your list, choose one experience or subject-specific conceptual tool to flesh out in more detail.** You will be invited to share that idea with the rest of the group.

## Meeting 3

#### Overview for Facilitators

This session covers **Ch 4** - “Science and More than Science: Three Transdisciplinary Meta-Concepts” - (pp 50-79) & **Ch 5** - “The Power of Stories: Foregrounding Justice in the (Science) Classroom” (pp. 79-103).

The objectives for this session include:

* Thinking about stories and experiences that we might use to engage students both intellectually and emotionally
* Identifying aspects of our course/s that *entangle* our discipline with others
* Discussing ways that we might use Singh’s three transdisciplinary meta-concepts and/or justice-oriented storytelling to help us design or redesign learning experiences

Activity 1 was a popcorn activity (each person spoke to the group, and then chose someone else to follow them). For Activity 2, participants completed as a reflective writing prompt and then were invited to share with the group. Activity 3 was facilitated as an open discussion.

#### Activity 1: Welcome

**Prompt:**

1. Remind us of your name, disciplinary background / teaching context
2. What are you reading now?
3. (if you wish) a question, concept, or passage from Ch 4-5 that you’d love to talk about with others

#### Activity 2: Writing Prompts

##### Writing Prompt (option 1):

“In the classroom, these stories and others like them engage the whole student: not just the intellectual but the emotional self. Students remember these stories each time I bring them up, even if weeks have passed. I also have a sense of student engagement on the basis of their responses in discussions and assignments. Transformative education theory indicates that true learning results in an epistemic shift–a cognitive-affective change in the way the student constructs the world such that the student cannot go back to being the same person as before.” – Vandana Singh (pp. 89)

**Recall your most memorable teaching and learning experiences related to the climate crisis.** What stories or experiences engaged you or your students most deeply – both intellectually and emotionally? Can you recall any memories of truly *transformative* learning experiences–either for yourself or your students? What were the conditions that made that transformative experience possible? Were there particular stories or concepts involved? If so, what were they?

##### Writing Prompt (option 2):

“**After all, the real world doesn’t draw hard lines between physics, poetry, art, and politics – these co-exist, interpenetrate, and entangle with each other**. It is for convenience that we divide the world into disciplines, and while the distinctions are important, it is equally important not to take them too seriously in certain real-world contexts. Consider sea ice: not sea, not land, it exists in a liminal zone, transcending the physics and chemistry of its formation, the biology of the lifewebs it supports through its intricate inner structure, the place it occupies in the hearts of the Iñupaiat as their metaphor of home and means of survival. Its role in the Earth’s glacial-interglacial cycles, the impact of its decline on global climate, and the geopolitics of the opening up of the Arctic for further oil and gas extraction are all inextricably entangled. **If an essential feature of the climate crisis is its inherent transdisciplinarity, then, surely, carefully curated stories have a central role to play in an effective pedagogy of climate change.**” – Vandana Singh (pp. 80)

**Brainstorm** – by hand in a notebook or typing in a separate window – **a list of concepts, topics, questions, or units** within your course/s that *entangle* your discipline with others. How might you curate a story or collection of stories to prompt your students to engage in a transdisciplinary exploration of that concept/topic/question/unit?

#### Activity 3: Group Discussion

**Open Discussion of Ch 4-5:**

* Either verbally by unmuting, or by writing in the chat, share some of your first impressions and takeaways from your reading of Ch 4-5 of *Teaching Climate Change.*
* Some other open-ended questions to consider:
	+ What did you notice about how Singh sets up her discussion of teaching climate change?
	+ What are you most intrigued about?
	+ What questions were you left with?
	+ What surprised you about Singh’s approach?

#### Activity 4: Pedagogical Exercise (if time)

* Throughout the book, Singh offers some possible principles to guide you in (re)designing a course. For instance,
	+ Chapter 4 introduces her three “meta-concepts”: balance/imbalance, critical thresholds, and complex interconnections (pp. 52-73). Imagine a course built around all three, or a sequence of courses built around each.
	+ In chapter 5, she observes that “while both local and global scales are important, starting with the local and tracing connections between local and global and back again prevents us from privileging the mainstream top-down discourse” (p. 81). How might you sequence your course so that it shifts from local to global and back again.
	+ Throughout the book, she emphasizes “the transdisciplinary nature of the climate crisis” (p. 88). What disciplines are you able to weave into your course—by yourself or with colleagues and community members?
	+ Early on, she introduces an experiential learning cycle of iterative experiences, reflections, and more experiences, such as the planetarium visit. What out-of-class experiences are available in your location, and how might you integrate them into your students’ learning?
	+ Her call for a mixture of science, social science, and story informed how she wrote the book— integrating essay and story, argument and narrative. What might such a multi-generic course look like?
	+ And more.
* Imagine redesigning one of your courses following one of these principles—or any other that strikes you as you read. What would that course outline look like? What would you need to prepare and teach such a course?

### Meeting 4

#### Overview for Facilitators

This session covers **Ch 6** - “On Thin Ice: Applying the Framework to the Cryosphere” (pp 104-132) & **Ch 7** “Critical and Ethical Thinking about Climate Solutions” (pp. 132-160).

The objectives for this session include:

* Reflecting on ways that we might integrate outside expertise into the planning and/or design of our courses.
* Sharing strategies and assignment ideas that might encourage students to apply knowledge and skills from our courses in authentic or real-world contexts.
* Considering how (if at all) we might use Singh’s 5-questions framework for assessing proposed climate solutions in our teaching

We completed Activity 1 popcorn style; Activity 2 was a reflective writing prompt (with the option to share). Activity 3 was facilitated as an open discussion.

#### Activity 1: Welcome!

1. Remind us your name, disciplinary background / teaching context
2. Share a question, concept, or passage from Ch 6-7 that you’d love to talk about with others

#### Activity 2: Writing Prompt

“**Some of the central aspects of climate science that are outside the expertise of the educator can be taught through guest lectures from experts” (115).**

* “For example, I have relied on my colleague, Dr. Amy Johnston, a geologist, for explaining ocean currents and their role in climate. Similarly, two biologists, Dr. Aviva Liebert and Dr. Brandi Van Roo, have given guest lectures on ecosystems.” (p. 115)
* “For one class, Dr. Doreen E. Martinex, an Indigenous (Mescalero Apache) scholar and epistemologist at Colorado State University, gave a lecture on ‘Racial Indigeneity and Climate Justice,’ in which she spoke of Indigenous knowledge systems and the ethical insights they provide for engaging with the climate problem. She challenged us to not be passive recipients of the gift of Indigenous knowledge, but to take it forward into the world and into our lives.” (p. 115)
* “On several occasions, I have invited a colleague, environmental poet Sam Witt, to facilitate a poetry workshop. Many students, especially in the sciences, are initially resistant – they don’t think of themselves as potential poets and don’t see the value of the exercise. But, despite one or two resistant students, the overwhelming majority of students change their minds after the exercise. When they read their poems out loud, their grief is held in community, validated, and acknowledged.” (p. 137).

**Brainstorm** – by hand in a notebook or typing in a separate window – **a list of concepts, topics, questions, or units** within your course/s that would benefit from outside expertise. Then, **consider who in your personal or professional network might be able to bring unique experiences or expertise to your class**? Who in this reading group might be someone that you could collaborate with in the future? Also consider your own educational background and personal experiences – where might your perspective and expertise be an asset to other colleagues in your network? Who could you offer to lend your expertise to?

#### Activity 3: Group Discussion

Specific Questions/Passages to discuss:

* At the end of Ch. 6, Singh offers several examples of group work and projects that she assigns to students to help them bring together their knowledge and demonstrate their learning (see pp. 124-126). Most of these projects share characteristics of what [Dee Fink (2005)](https://www.ideaedu.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/IDEA%20Papers/IDEA%20Papers/Idea_Paper_42.pdf) calls “forward-looking” assessment – that is, an assignment that looks forward, beyond the end of the course and imagines or locates a context in which students will actually apply the knowledge and skills of the course in the real-world.
	+ **Would any of these projects or assignments work within your context?**
	+ **Can you think of other forward-looking assignments that you could assign within your class?**
* “There is such a thing as collective intelligence that arises when there is community, trust, caring, and a nonlinear coalition of minds” (Singh 140).
	+ **How do you build community, trust, and care within your classroom?**
	+ **What practices have you found to be most effective? What challenges have you encountered and what has helped you to respond to those challenges?**
* “In my experience, the use of the 5-Question test for proposed climate solutions has been immensely useful in enabling students to think critically, ethically, and holistically about climate action…But the 5-Question framework doesn’t just help with critiquing solutions, it provides a methodology for understanding how some solutions that fail the test might be salvageable and useful when emplaced and modified via a different socioeconomic-ecological context” (149).
	+ **What did you think about the 5-Question test proposed by Singh in Ch. 7? Could you imagine using this within your teaching? If so, how? If not, why not?**

### Meeting 5

#### Overview for Facilitators

This session covers **Ch 8** “Insights from Other Educators: Reimagining Formal Spaces” (pp 161-180); **Ch 9** - “Insights from Other Educators: Climate Education Outside the Walls” (pp. 181-200); & **Ch 10** - “Reflection-Diffraction: Endings and Beginnings” - (pp 201-224)

The objectives for this session include:

* Reflecting on insights, strategies, and intentions that we will take back to our own teaching
* Sharing strategies and resources with one another

We completed Activity 1 popcorn style; Activity 2 was a reflective writing prompt (with the option to share). Activities 3 & 4 were facilitated as open discussions. For Activity 5, we asked participants to share one takeaway in the chat.

#### Activity 1: Welcome!

1. Remind us your name, disciplinary background / teaching context
2. Share a question, concept, or passage from the book that you’d love to talk about with others

#### Activity 2: Writing/Reflection

##### Prompt (option 1)

“A downside to working in isolation within a limited context is that the scholar must be careful not to generalize or universalize their experience. What works in one context in a particular spacetime interval may not work in another. Besides, learning through and with other educators and receiving useful criticism is necessary for one’s work and vision to develop.” (Singh 160)

**Brainstorm, freewrite, or mind map** – by hand in a notebook or typing in a separate window – **about any insights you’ve gained from the different approaches** that Singh, or the educators whose pedagogy she highlights in Chapter 8-9, utilize **for teaching about the climate crisis.** What “brave and thoughtful” ideas resonated most with you? What questions or concerns raised in Ch 8-10 (or throughout the book) provoked you to think more carefully or intentionally about your pedagogy? What action steps will you take to move your climate education forward in the coming semester or year?

##### Prompt (option 2)

We are introduced to several different pedagogical frameworks / approaches to teaching throughout ch 8-9. Here are a few:

* Estefania Pihen’s “hope-infused pedagogy,” of Hahami that takes a holistic approach to learning via four parts: Engage, Experience, Educate, Empower (163-164)
* Sonali Sathaye’s “indirect climate education,” where “climate changes comes into the picture as a part of a deeper, larger problem” (170-171)
* Yuvan Aves’ nature-based, outdoor education, which includes three foundational aspects: Direct participation, local relevance, and interconnectedness (181-182)

If you were to describe the key features of your own pedagogical approach to climate education, what would you say?

**Take some time to brainstorm, freewrite, or mind map** – by hand in a notebook or typing in a separate window – **about the core ideas and/or values that form the basis of your approach.** Then, see if you can distill your approach down to 3-5 foundational principles.

#### Activity 3: Group Discussion

##### Possible discussion questions:

* Reflecting on Estefania’s feedback about her pedagogical framework, Singh writes, “My pedagogical framework could use a greater connection to the local community, and more attention to experiential learning.” (166)
	+ Are there ways that your framework would also benefit from finding a local partner or integrating more experiential learning? If so, what types of experiences might benefit your students? Who are some local partners who you could reach out to?
* “Karen feels that the grief and depression that result from learning about climate change need to be addressed in the classroom. For that to work, teachers have to deal with these too, and in my experience, that can best be done collectively, through networks and collaborations” (179)
	+ In what ways might you proactively create structures to support students in your class should they need time or space to process climate-related grief?
	+ What networks of support or collaborations have you found to be helpful for yourself? Or for your students?
	+ How do you manage the challenge of continuing to teach about climate, while also acknowledging and processing your own climate-related grief?
* “He [Yuvan Aves] uses the term ‘Nature’ advisedly, he says; his sense of ‘Nature’ includes human beings and is not intended to reinforce the problematic human/Nature binary” (181).
	+ In your own classes, how do you address the human/Nature binary? Are there strategies you have found helpful for encouraging students to reimagine or conceptualize their relationship to nature outside of this binary?

#### Activity 4: Short Fiction (if time/desire)

* “[Mother Ocean](https://web.archive.org/web/20190626171844/https%3A//go.xprize.org/oceanstories/mother-ocean/)” (Singh 2019)
* “[Travelers’ Tales from the End of the World](https://www.lightspeedmagazine.com/fiction/travelers-tales-from-the-ends-of-the-world/)” (Singh 2024)
* “[Three-World Cantata](https://www.climatealmanac.org/pub/ud2xkkx1/release/3)” (Singh 2023)
* “[Mina’s Dream](https://www.climatealmanac.org/pub/vdbicdpi/release/2)” (Singh 2023)
	+ In what ways (if at all) did you notice one or more of these stories engaging with concepts, issues, themes, etc. related to the climate crisis?
	+ In what ways (if at all) could you imagine using these stories in your teaching?

####

#### Activity 5: Final Reflection

**Freewrite, mindmap, or make a list** in response to the following question: What will you take away with you (from this book, from others in this group, from our meetings, from the reflections above, etc.) into the other spaces in which you write, teach, and/or work?