

## Article

# The Hero's Journey as a Framework for Cultivating Resilience among Arts Educators in Turbulent Times

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**Abstract:** This essay explores how the hero's journey framework can foster resilience among arts educators and students facing political, social, and institutional challenges. Through autobiographical reflections and contextual analysis, it demonstrates how arts-based practices—such as storytelling, poetry, and bibliotherapy—serve as acts of resistance and sources of strength amid funding cuts, censorship, and policies restricting arts and social justice education. Personal vignettes, including visits to schools and encounters with bans on social justice literature, illustrate storytelling as an act of defiance and resilience. Drawing on literature in resilience, narrative psychology, and arts integration, the essay emphasizes that embracing the hero's journey nurtures hope, agency, and collective resilience. It highlights how arts practices can transform trauma into resilience, empower marginalized voices, and sustain cultural resistance in turbulent times. The critique of traditional hero narratives reveals how they often reinforce gender, racial, and class stereotypes, underscoring the need for more inclusive, culturally responsive frameworks. Applying the hero's journey as a pedagogical tool helps educators reframe challenges as transformative stages in their own hero's narrative, fostering perseverance and collective empowerment. Ultimately, storytelling and arts engagement are vital tools for navigating adversity, inspiring activism, and maintaining cultural resilience in the face of ongoing turbulence.

**Keywords:** Hero's Journey; Master Narratives; Arts Educators; Agency; Resilience

## 1. Introduction

This autobiographical essay reflects on the resilience of an arts educator navigating the challenges in higher education amidst policies threatening academic freedom, social justice, and cultural responsiveness. The landscape of higher education in the United States has been marked by unprecedented turbulence, characterized by severe budget cuts, book bans, and the erosion of academic freedom [1]. University administrators and faculty have faced firing over their advocacy for diversity and inclusion. At the same time, efforts have intensified to defund or dismantle public arts, the humanities, and social justice programs. These measures reflect a broader political climate threatening the core values of open inquiry and intellectual independence. Such actions not only undermine educators' ability to foster inclusive learning environments but also threaten the cultural and social fabric of academic communities. A climate of repression underscores the urgent need for resilience strategies rooted in storytelling, community organizing, and arts-based resistance—principles that underpin the transformative potential of the Hero's Journey [2] framework in cultivating hope and collective agency amidst ongoing adversity.

The author's autobiographical narrative highlights transformative processes in confronting systemic repression, censorship, and neoliberal reforms. Personal vignettes, such as a visit to a school and encounters with bans on

social justice literature, illustrate how storytelling serves as an act of defiance and resilience. Educators' resilience can ensure that the arts remain vital for inspiring communities and preserving cultural identities. Despite threats, arts education continues to be a venue to develop critical skills in creativity, problem-solving, collaboration, and perseverance that are vital for future generations. These circumstances demand resilience rooted in storytelling, community support, advocacy, and the hero's journey.

## 2. Review of Literature

The Hero's Journey [2] in **Figure 1** encapsulates themes of personal transformation, resilience, and meaning-making. Rubin and Berntsen [3] frame it as a universal storytelling pattern, applicable across cultures. Recent adaptations link it to mental health recovery [4] and increased perceived life meaning [4]. Recently, Sahin and Sahin [5] validated the reliable use of the Hero's journey elements with the Turkish culture. These studies affirm that viewing life as a hero's journey promotes hope, agency, and resilience across diverse contexts.



**Figure 1.** A visual depiction of our seven-element distilled formulation of Campbell's [2] Hero's Journey as both a classical myth and a modern life story. An ordinary hero (Protagonist) experiences a change in setting (Shift) that sets them towards a goal (Quest) during which they encounter friends (Allies) and obstacles (Challenges), but eventually triumphs and personally grows (Transformation), before returning home to benefit their community (Legacy).

Figure credit: Kevin House.

Note: Reprinted from "Seeing your life story as a Hero's Journey increases meaning in life by Rogers et al. [4], *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, p. 11, Copyright 2023."

The research by Sahin and Sahin [5] and Rogers et al. [4] provides compelling evidence that engaging in the reflection and re-storying process based on the Hero's Journey framework can significantly enhance resilience and well-being. This may be particularly true for arts educators. Studies highlight that the Hero's Journey is a universal metaphor representing personal transformation through adversity [4]. Empirical validation of the Hero's Journey Scale (HJS) in Turkish contexts (demonstrates that perceiving one's life as a hero's journey correlates positively with life satisfaction and personal growth, underscoring the narrative's psychological and cultural relevance [5].

Intervention studies [6] provided evidence that actively constructing a personal narrative aligned with the hero's archetype is therapeutic. This can be done by reflecting on life events as elements of a hero's journey, causally

increasing perceptions of life meaning, resilience, and positive coping strategies. When individuals connect their experiences with the narrative structure, they reframe challenges as opportunities for growth, fostering hope, purpose, and perseverance. This process enhances positive emotions, self-efficacy, and adaptive resilience. These are key factors for navigating systemic repression, censorship, or reforms faced by arts educators.

Arts and culture are powerful tools in fostering resilience through social bonds, cultural identity, and collective purpose [7]. A quantitative study found that the use of biblio-poetry therapy was significant in improving resilience in undergraduates. Arts participation facilitates emotional regulation, mental health, and social cohesion. In education, arts practices, storytelling, poetry, and culturally responsive pedagogy support personal and community healing, especially during adversity [8,9]. The literature underscores the arts' role in transforming trauma into resilience, emphasizing the importance of narratives that empower marginalized voices. Engaging with stories of heroism, resistance, and perseverance models hope and encourages collective action.

The traditional concept of the hero, as depicted in Campbell's [2] monomyth, has historically been shaped by dominant cultural narratives that often reinforce gendered, racialized, and class-based stereotypes. Campbell's formulation of the hero's journey is rooted in Western mythologies, which frequently valorize traits associated with masculinity—such as strength, heroism, and individualism—while marginalizing or ignoring alternative narratives rooted in diverse cultural experiences [10]. Research has critically examined how the hero archetype often perpetuates gender stereotypes, particularly the valorization of masculinity and the marginalization of femininity. For example, Gilligan [11] challenged the traditional hero narrative by highlighting how women's stories of resilience and heroism are often overlooked or framed within relational and caregiving roles rather than individual conquest. Similarly, Brown and Gilligan [12] and Murdock [13] argued that the hero myth tends to reinforce a masculine ideal that emphasizes independence, dominance, and emotional stoicism, which can marginalize women and those who do not conform to normative gender roles.

In relation to race and ethnicity, scholars have pointed out that the hero archetype has historically been constructed through a lens of Eurocentrism, often marginalizing or stereotypically depicting racialized groups. Hooks [14] critiqued how mainstream narratives tend to exclude or distort the stories of marginalized racial groups, portraying heroes as predominantly white, male figures who embody Western ideals of strength and individualism. Conversely, marginalized communities have developed alternative narratives of resilience and heroism rooted in collective resistance, cultural survival, and community-centered identities. For instance, Delgado [15] emphasizes the importance of recognizing stories of heroes within Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities that challenge traditional Western hero archetypes by emphasizing collective strength, cultural pride, and resistance to systemic oppression.

Class also plays a crucial role in shaping conceptions of heroism. The traditional hero narrative often celebrates individual achievement and upward mobility, aligning with neoliberal ideals that valorize personal success over collective well-being [16]. However, critical scholars argue that this perspective can obscure the structural inequalities faced by working-class and impoverished communities, whose stories of resilience often involve collective struggles, solidarity, and resistance against systemic exploitation [17]. These alternative narratives challenge the dominant hero archetype by emphasizing social justice, community resilience, and the importance of collective action.

Understanding how the hero's journey has been shaped by gender, race, and class is vital for educators aiming to foster more inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogies. Recognizing the multiplicity of hero narratives allows for a more nuanced and expansive understanding of resilience, resistance, and agency that transcends stereotypical representations and celebrates diverse experiences of heroism [18]. This helps to understand the hero's journey for art educators.

A significant critique of the portrayal of arts education as a sanctuary against repressive forces is that it overlooks the socio-political realities and historical power dynamics shaping the field. Critics argue that arts educators have historically failed to politicize their work, rendering arts education susceptible to instrumentalization by agendas that emphasize quantifiable measures of utility, such as resilience and creativity, as justifications for funding and policy support [19]. This failure to politicize arts education compounds its marginalization, as it allows the discipline to be framed as apolitical or purely developmental rather than as inherently linked to social justice and cultural critique.

Furthermore, the demographic profile of arts educators, which is overwhelmingly female, white, and middle-

class, raises critical questions about whose voices and perspectives are prioritized within arts education. As Giroux [19] and other critical scholars have noted, the historical positioning of arts educators also perpetuates the stereotype that art is spontaneous and unteachable, thus justifying the marginalization of arts education within broader curricula.

The critique also points to an important tension: that artists, by virtue of their innate talent, produce art regardless of pedagogical intervention, which diminishes the perceived importance of arts educators. This perspective ignores extensive research indicating that creativity can be cultivated through deliberate teaching and that arts education plays a vital role in fostering critical thinking, cultural awareness, and social agency [20]. The belief that creativity is solely spontaneous neglects evidence from arts pedagogy that underscores the importance of structured, reflective, and culturally responsive teaching practices in nurturing artistic and creative capacities.

Arts education, when politicized and critically engaged, becomes a powerful force for social transformation rather than a neutral sanctuary. Recognizing and addressing the socio-political dynamics, demographic realities, and pedagogical debates surrounding arts education is essential for constructing a more nuanced understanding of its role in fostering resilience, social justice, and cultural critique [19–21]. Acknowledging these complexities enriches discourse and strengthens the case for arts education as an integral component of a democratic and equitable society.

### 3. Applying the Hero's Journey

Art educators and readers of my journey are encouraged to frame their own professional and personal experiences within this hero's journey. As I reflect on my ongoing quest as an arts educator, I recognize that my journey is marked not only by moments of triumph but also by battles fought in quieter, more personal spaces. These struggles, hidden beneath the surface of my daily work, are the true tests of resilience that shape me into the hero I aspire to be. See **Figure 1**.

Here's a summarized version of an artist or teacher's hero's journey based on Rogers et al. [4], using their simplified elements (**Table 1**):

**Table 1.** Hero's Journey Elements.

Hero's Journey Element	Element Description	HJS Sample Item
Protagonist	A clear and defined character or identity. In the case of the Hero's Journey, protagonists must ultimately recognize themselves as the central hero of the story.	<i>I am a hero on a journey</i>
Shift	Every Hero's Journey begins with a spark, a change in setting or circumstance that makes the hero's prior life untenable and requires a literal or psychological journey to resolve it.	<i>I often have new experiences</i>
Quest	In all Hero's Journeys, the protagonist endeavors to complete a goal or <i>quest</i> , whether it is destroying an all-powerful ring or providing for one's family.	<i>My life has a clear objective</i>
Allies	Protagonists rarely travel the Hero's Journey alone; rather, they typically depend on others for a broad range of assistance in order to survive and succeed.	<i>I am supported by others</i>
Challenge	Hero's Journeys often feature seemingly insurmountable obstacles or rivals. These challenges help drive the protagonist's actions, providing him or her with purpose.	<i>I have had to overcome obstacles</i>
Transformation	In facing challenges on the Hero's Journey, the protagonist undergoes personal and moral growth and are transformed into someone wiser, more selfless, and self-actualized.	<i>I have become a better version of myself</i>
Legacy	At the end of the Hero's Journey, the hero's actions leave a positive impact on their communities and they become revered for their consequential deeds.	<i>I will have a lasting impact on others</i>

Note: HJS = Hero's Journey Scale. Reprinted from "Seeing your life story as a Hero's Journey increases meaning in life by Rogers et al. [4], *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, p. 12, Copyright 2023."

The vignette below offers a glimpse into one such battle: a visit to a school where my efforts to foster creativity and critical thinking are met with resistance. The experience embodies the core conflicts faced by many hero

figures of confronting adversity, navigating oppressive forces, and standing firm in the pursuit of a higher purpose. It highlights how perseverance in the face of repression, censorship, and indifference is vital not only for personal growth but also for inspiring change beyond oneself. This glimpse into my reality underscores why embracing these struggles is essential to recognizing that heroism often resides in the quiet, persistent battles that define our commitment to transforming adversity into a force for cultural renewal.

Using the third person, “the professor,” rather than “I,” provides a more objective, formal, and reflective tone, which is often preferred in academic or analytical writing. It helps to create a sense of distance that allows the reader to focus on the broader themes and insights of the narrative, emphasizing the universality of the experience rather than relying on personal anecdotes alone.

### **3.1. Sharing Shadows: The Power of Narrative**

The professor approached the school building, his footsteps echoing along the cracked pavement. Despite having visited this school several times before, today was different. As he neared the entrance, a uniformed security guard stepped forward, eyes narrowing as he held out a hand. The impending dark clouds and distant thunder foretold that it was time for the daily deluge. The fact that Florida has the highest number of people struck by lightning heightened the anxiety and urgency of the moment.

“ID, please,” the guard demanded, voice firm. “You can’t just walk in without showing your credentials now. It’s the new protocol.”

The professor reached into his bag, pulling out his wallet to present his ID. He noted the cautious look on the guard’s face—an understandable reaction in these turbulent times, when fear and suspicion have heightened around every stranger. Once his ID was checked and verified, the guard nodded, but with a wary glance. As the professor stepped inside the building, he carried in his hand a simple walking stick—an old, carved prop he used in storytelling and performance poetry. It was part of his teaching tools, a symbol of resilience and storytelling power.

Just as he was about to head toward the classroom, a loud voice interrupted from the hallway.

“Hey! Who’s that? There’s a man with a stick entering the school!”

Before he could respond, a second security guard burst into the room, eyes scanning him with suspicion. “Sir, what are you doing with that stick? Someone on the street reported a white man with a stick trying to get into the school. We need to verify you’re authorized.”

He raised his hands calmly, holding the stick up slightly. “This is just a prop. I’m here to teach, to support future teachers, and to share stories—nothing more.” He could see the tension in the guards’ faces, the suspicion rooted in the climate of fear that now shadowed every movement. The guards exchanged glances, and after a tense moment, one nodded slowly.

“Alright, but you’ll need to stay in the designated areas, and we’ll be watching. We’re just doing what we’re told to keep everyone safe.”

Relieved but mindful of the heightened scrutiny, the professor nodded. “Of course. I understand. Thank you.”

He moved past them, clutching his storytelling stick. Despite the suspicion, he carried with him the conviction that stories and culture are vital acts of defiance against the silencing policies that sought to mute voices. The hallway was lined with faded murals and peeling posters, remnants of a time when expression and inquiry once thrived here. As he approached the front office, the principal’s secretary looked up, her face strained, her eyes avoiding his.

“I’m sorry,” she said softly, glancing at her computer screen. “Because of the new book ban, we’re canceling your author visit on Friday. The district has issued new guidelines—no books that promote social justice. We’re just... following orders.”

The professor took a deep breath, feeling the weight of the moment. The prospective teachers sat stiffly, notebooks open but hesitant. He began with a performance poem about a young girl who used stories and words to find her voice—a narrative that had been recently banned. His voice, rich and rhythmic, filled the room with a pulse

of resilience. The students listened, some eyes narrowing, others reflecting a flicker of curiosity. He reached for a Hispanic folktale, “No Way, JOSE!” one that celebrated diversity, persistence, humor, and resilience—and held it aloft. The room tensed, and some brown skinned children’s eyes “were as big as tortillas!” as he began singing in Spanish. He translated to English the story’s significance, knowing it was now considered dangerous. As he finished, the curriculum specialist, a stern-faced woman with a clipboard, approached him.

“We do need to review all books before they’re shared in classrooms. The district mandates that all print material, especially in shows or lessons, must be reviewed for any ‘woke’ content. If any story is deemed too politically charged or socially disruptive, it can’t be used.” (Florida has banned over 4000 books, the highest in the country.)

The professor’s brow furrowed. “You mean, every story, song, and poem have to be vetted for political correctness?”

She nodded. “Exactly, and beyond that, you’ll need to submit a standards-based reading lesson. The district wants to ensure that everything aligns with our science of reading curriculum, standards, and the FEAPS—Florida Education Accomplished Practices.”

As he tried to depart, he could not find the secretary to disarm the alarm and unlock the door. An irritated assistant intervened. The door opened to what felt like a sauna. After the rainstorm, stepping outside into the Florida heat with a heat index of 105 feels like entering a steamy, suffocating bath. The professor could barely see through his steamed glasses.

As he departed the school grounds, one of the security guards approached him again. The guard hesitated for a moment before speaking.

“Hey, doc... can I see that stick again?”

He turned, now a gentle smile spreading across his face. He held up the professor’s walking stick, its carved surface catching the light.

The guard exclaimed, “It’s a beauty, he said warmly. “My grandfather whittled walking sticks just like this one. Used to make them all the time.”

The professor looked surprised. “Really?”

The man’s guard was literally down, and he replied with enthusiasm, “Yeah. He used to volunteer here years ago, teaching kids how to carve and craft their own walking sticks. Said it was good for their hands and their minds. But... he eventually quit. Said the paperwork and forms to volunteer had become too much for him to fill out.”

The professor chuckled softly, a little more relaxed now. “Well, that’s a good story. Thanks for sharing. I feel like I’m out of the shadows now into the sunshine.”

“Amen. Brother!”

Despite the suspicion, despite the protocols, stories—like that walking stick—connect us to history, to hope, and to the enduring power of cultural memory. Even in these turbulent times, they remind us that resistance and resilience are rooted in the stories we carry and pass on.

### **3.2. Why and How Storytelling, Using the Hero’s Format, Supports Educators in Responding to Stressors**

In the face of mounting workload, institutional pressures, and external crises, storytelling—particularly through the lens of the hero’s journey—serves as a powerful tool for educators to process, reframe, and respond resiliently to these stressors. The hero’s format offers a narrative structure that allows educators to see themselves as protagonists in their own stories of perseverance. By framing their challenges as part of a larger journey—one marked by obstacles, allies, revelations, and transformations—educators can cultivate a sense of agency and purpose amid chaos. This narrative approach encourages reflection, enabling educators to identify moments of growth and resilience in their experiences. It also fosters a sense of community, as shared stories of struggle and success can build solidarity and collective strength. Furthermore, adopting the hero’s journey as a personal and professional



framework helps educators reorient their mindset from victimhood or burnout to one of active agency and hope, empowering them to navigate institutional reforms, workload demands, and societal upheavals with renewed resilience. This storytelling process not only alleviates feelings of helplessness but also reinforces the vital role of arts and narrative in sustaining wellbeing and fostering a culture of resistance.

### 3.3. Autographical Hero's Journey Summary (See Table 1)

The autobiographical framing of personal and collective stories through a new Hero's Journey Scale [4] has been validated by research [6], which is derived from Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey [2]. This is exemplified in the following descriptions.

#### 1. Protagonist:

I am a hero on a journey. I'm a tenured literacy and arts education professor at a university, which is an institution where knowledge is shared, and students seek guidance. Interestingly, the state department prefers the term "Reading professor," implying a focus on phonics and decoding rather than the broader arts of storytelling, poetry, and song. Arts education was largely eliminated years ago. "If it's not tested in high-stakes exams, it's not taught." I often wonder why narratives, songs, and proverbs are so central to storytelling, sacred texts, and dreams—universally vital forms of communication. I've established myself in academia, research, nonprofits, learned societies, leadership, union service, and as a visiting scholar in Alaska, China, Germany, and Vietnam. The beach is nearby, but as a professor, children's author, and artist-in-residence, I rarely have time to go. As an arts educator, I see myself on a transformative path to sustain and uplift the arts amid these turbulent times.

#### 2. Shift:

I often have new experiences. Watching colleagues being fired and resigning has been stressful. I attend free online lectures at MIT, Harvard, and the Yale Divinity School. I am a voracious listener of audiobooks. Mindshift [22] is a compelling invitation to reframe how I approach learning, creativity, and growth. She emphasizes that shifting our mindset—embracing curiosity, overcoming self-doubt, and welcoming challenges—can unlock hidden potential and help us navigate obstacles with resilience. Keynoting at addiction and mental health conferences might seem like a mindshift for an arts educator because it challenges the traditional boundaries of arts education, pushing me to address complex, often stigmatized issues that intersect with creativity, healing, and human resilience. Engaging with these topics requires me to adapt my perspective, embracing vulnerability and empathy, which ultimately enriches my work and broadens the impact I can have through art. Throughout my journey, I encounter new challenges—such as political opposition, age discrimination, and resource limitations—and respond with resilience and adaptability.

#### 3. Quest:

My life's objective is to empower others through poetry, music, storytelling, and filmmaking—fostering creativity, critical thinking, and cultural expression that can withstand societal pressures. I strive to find diverse ways to communicate and connect, including blogs, churches, concerts, libraries, magazines, Native American pow-wows, newspaper columns, military bases, museums, poetry events, political rallies, summer camps, storytelling festivals, and radio.

#### 4. Allies:

Nature, animal life, and the stars serve as powerful allies on the hero's journey, offering guidance, resilience, and a sense of connection to something greater. My membership in the Gopher Tortoise Council and the Audubon Society has been soul-nourishing, providing a community dedicated to protecting and celebrating the natural world. These organizations inspire me to see myself as part of a larger ecological web, where each species—like the resilient gopher tortoise—symbolizes endurance. Our family's six-acre farm deepens this connection through nurturing native plants, observing wildlife rhythms, and stargazing—reminding me of the importance of coexistence and the quiet strength of nature.

My advocacy extends beyond nature; my experiences demonstrate how collaborations—such as museum visits, filmmaking, and supporting authors—enhance literacy and foster resilience among students. In a restrictive policy climate, I’ve found alternative venues like faith-based schools to continue critical conversations on climate change through filmmaking. Partnerships with community initiatives offer opportunities for creative expression, community pride, and critical consciousness. Ultimately, the strength I find in my community—artists, students, colleagues, and supporters—reinforces my purpose and fuels ongoing collaboration.

## 5. Challenges:

I have had to overcome obstacles. I face autocratic mandates, censorship, huge funding cuts, suspension, and harassment of international faculty and students, apathy, and denial, which I must navigate and overcome to keep literacy and the arts alive and relevant. In recent years, government overreach has manifested in efforts to censor faculty syllabi, lectures, and even PowerPoints by mandating that educators omit terms like “diversity,” “inclusion,” and “culturally responsive teaching,” effectively silencing discussions on social justice and marginalized communities. Some institutions have faced pressure to purge curricula that emphasize multicultural and anti-racist content, risking the erasure of essential perspectives from teacher education programs.

The political landscape further complicates this struggle. Recent policies [1] have increasingly marginalized arts education and critical social discourse. Recent policies that often undermined arts funding and emphasized conservative narratives, including attempts to restrict access to certain educational content. Similarly, there has been the enactment of laws banning “divisive concepts” in classrooms, restricting discussions on race, gender, and social justice, and fostering a climate of censorship and ideological conformity [23]. Political figures publicly position themselves as heroic defenders of traditional values, framing their policies as efforts to restore national greatness or moral clarity.

Additionally, there have been reports of faculty being threatened or fired for advocating social justice issues, with some educators facing harassment or termination after incorporating “woke” language or critical pedagogy into their courses [24]. Gay and transgender faculty and students have been targeted through policies that restrict access to gender-affirming resources, and instances of harassment and discrimination have been documented across various universities, reflecting a broader climate of intolerance. Just as the Jim Crow laws and the civil rights movement of the 50’s and 60’s spawned the great migration from the South to the North, we in academia are experiencing a new underground railroad to communities of compassion and sanctuary cities.

One of the most significant challenges for literacy arts educators has been navigating the implications of the No Child Left Behind [25] legislation and subsequent policies that emphasize standardized testing and accountability measures. These policies have often led to a narrowed curriculum, prioritizing reading and math at the expense of the arts, social studies, and creative and scientific literacy. The emphasis on the “science of reading,”—which advocates for phonics-based, skills-driven instruction, not science, has resulted in the banning of children’s books and the restriction of diverse, culturally rich materials in classrooms, including the banning of second language speaking and instruction. Such mandates can stifle creativity, promote racism, marginalize alternative literacy practices, and diminish opportunities for students to engage with literature and even the scientific method that fosters inquiry, innovation, critical thinking, empathy, and cultural understanding [16,19]. Educators often find themselves caught between complying with policy directives and maintaining a holistic, arts-integrated approach to literacy education.

## 6. Transformations:

I have become a better version of myself. Through these experiences, I develop resilience, a deeper understanding, and a renewed commitment to my craft and teaching. Each challenge I faced revealed hidden strengths and expanded my capacity for empathy, patience, and advocacy. The hero’s journey has reshaped my perspective, shifting my sense of purpose from individual achievement to collective empowerment. I now see setbacks not as failures but as vital steps in my ongoing growth, inspiring me to persist in the face of turbulence. Ultimately, this journey has transformed my identity as an educator and activist, equipping me with the courage and conviction to continue fighting for arts education and cultural resilience.



## 7. Legacy:

I will have a lasting impact on others. My work inspires future generations, leaves a cultural imprint, and contributes to a more resilient and vibrant artistic community. The Hero's Journey framework highlights how the artist or educator's journey embodies heroism—marked by growth, community support, overcoming adversity, and ultimately leaving a meaningful legacy.

The Implications for artist educators are that their role is transformational, inspiring communities and nurturing new generations of empowered artists and thinkers. In essence, viewing artist educators through the Hero's Journey lens emphasizes their vital role as agents of cultural resistance and renewal, embodying heroism in the ongoing struggle to preserve and advance the arts in turbulent times. As I reflect upon these experiences, I am reminded that resilience is not a solitary endeavor. It thrives in community, in shared narratives, and in our unwavering commitment to fostering an educational landscape where all voices can be heard and valued. As we turn the pages of this ongoing story, may we continue to uplift one another and champion the ideals of justice, equity, and empowerment through the transformative power of literacy education. Resilience in the context of higher education refers to the ability of faculty members to endure challenges while maintaining their effectiveness and well-being. It encompasses personal, social, and organizational factors that interact to shape how professors respond to stressors, including workload, institutional pressures, and external crises.

### 3.4. Biblio-Poetry Therapy Helps Build Resilience into the Hero's Journey

"I have a dream." You have heard the line, but what you may not know is that the poem, "Dreams" [26] by Langston Hughes, influenced many leaders, including Martin Luther King Jr.'s best-known speech, which he delivered during the 1963 March on Washington. Poetry influences children, too, not only to learn to read, but it can also make them feel more resilient because it often contains themes of strength, perseverance, and the ability to overcome challenges.

Martin Luther King's March on Washington can indeed be viewed as a profound culmination of the hero's journey. He responded faithfully to the call to adventure, facing trials, receiving aid, experiencing a revelation, and ultimately transforming through the journey. The "I Have a Dream" speech served as a transformative epiphany, inspiring millions and propelling the Civil Rights Movement forward, mirroring the hero's transformative realization that fuels change.

Similarly, the poem "Moses Lee Jones" [27,28] reflects an epiphany within the hero's journey. Moses's personal story—his struggles, emotional pain, and eventual triumph through poetry—mirrors a hero's path of adversity, revelation, and resilience. His performance of Hughes's poem symbolizes an awakening—an internal realization of strength, hope, and perseverance.

#### **Moses Lee Jones**

by Nile Stanley © [27]

Moses Lee Jones  
came to poetry club today  
wearing a black tie and white shirt.

I say. "Moses, what is it? A special occasion?"

"No sir,  
las' night they took my daddy away  
and I don't want it to git in the way  
of the poetry."

With a smile a mile wide  
and teeth gleaming

Moses recites from “Dreams” by Langston Hughes:

*Hold fast to dreams  
For when dreams die  
Life is a broken-winged bird  
That cannot fly.*

*Hold fast to dreams  
For when dreams go  
Life is a barren field  
Frozen with snow.*

Moses Lee Jones  
Is holdin’ fast.

He’s holdin’ fast  
to dreams!

Recounting stories, folktales, and poems builds resilience [28] because they serve as vessels of shared human experience, strength, and hope. Poetry distills complex emotions into powerful language, helping individuals connect with their inner strength and collective history. The narratives of heroes overcoming adversity—be they historical figures like Martin Luther King or personal stories like Moses—offer models of perseverance, inspiring others to dream and persist despite obstacles. Poetry and storytelling reinforce the belief that resilience is possible, that dreams can be held fast, and that transformation is achievable. Ultimately, poetry acts as a tool for nurturing resilience, empowering individuals, and communities to envision and work toward a better future. Just as MLK’s speech and Moses’s performance exemplify, stories of perseverance serve as a rallying cry—reminding us that through faith, hope, and inner strength, we can overcome adversity and realize our dreams.

#### 4. Transformations and Future Directions

Through adversity, the educator evolves, deepening understanding, honing advocacy skills, and reaffirming the importance of cultural resistance. Personal stories serve as a testament to resilience, inspiring others to find their voice and navigate turbulent landscapes. The legacy of arts educators lies in nurturing resilient communities, fostering cultural pride, and inspiring future generations. Embracing the hero’s journey, they embody heroism—transforming repression into renewal, silence into voice, and adversity into collective strength. Future research should aim to understand how people experience the hero’s journey in their lives. Additional research should critically explore how traditional hero narratives have been shaped by cultural stereotypes related to gender, race, and class. How different people experience different hero’s journeys should be explored. It is important to recognize and incorporate diverse, culturally responsive perspectives on heroism that challenge dominant stereotypes and highlight collective resilience, resistance, and community-based strengths. Increases in understanding of the hero’s journey may help develop inclusive frameworks to foster a deeper understanding of resilience and agency across different cultural and social contexts, guiding more equitable and responsive pedagogical practices.

#### 5. Conclusions

Framing personal and collective stories through a new Hero’s Journey Scale [4] offers a compelling and practical lens for understanding and cultivating resilience among arts educators. From my experiences, I see it as more than a narrative device; it functions as a transformative tool that can bolster educator wellbeing by framing challenges as essential steps in a hero’s path, culminating in growth, purpose, and legacy. Storytelling, poetry, and arts engagement are not merely acts of creative expression but acts of resistance that reinforce hope, agency, and cultural renewal in environments under threat. These acts serve to challenge systemic repression, silence, and censorship—

transforming adversity into collective empowerment. In my view, the hero's journey fosters a mindset that encourages educators to see themselves as agents of change; heroes overcoming systemic obstacles, fostering community, and inspiring future generations. The act of narrating personal and collective stories cultivates resilience by helping educators process trauma, find meaning in their work, and maintain their mental health amidst ongoing crises. Arts-based practices, especially storytelling and poetry, provide vital spaces for reflection, healing, and activism. They serve as enduring symbols of cultural resistance, reminding us that hope and perseverance are rooted in the stories we tell ourselves and others.

Embracing the hero's journey equips educators with a resilient mindset—one that sustains their wellbeing, nurtures collective hope, and affirms the transformative power of arts and storytelling [29] as acts of resistance and renewal. It underscores that heroism in education is often quiet, persistent, and rooted in the shared narratives that bind communities and inspire activism in turbulent times. These findings affirm that questions and reflections centered on the Hero's Journey can serve as powerful tools for fostering resilience among arts educators. By encouraging them to see their struggles as integral to a heroic narrative of growth, this framework promotes meaning-making, emotional strength, and transformative adaptation—crucial for thriving amid turbulence.

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Not applicable.

## Informed Consent Statement

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## Data Availability Statement

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## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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