The essays comprising this symposium are tied together by a common thread: the argument that decolonizing theory provides a way of tracing the process of knowledge production that emerges in a context where thinking, theory, and logic are always already colonized by and within power relations. The application of decolonizing theory makes it possible to show how contemporary phenomena such as neoliberalism and multiculturalism are still very much historically grounded in the effects and continuing work of imperialism. By examining educational constructs and practice through decolonizing theory, this collection of essays demonstrates the need to critically re/examine the concepts and discourses of (1) neoliberalism, (2) social justice, (3) the politics of the global, and (4) empire. In other words, this symposium raises the question, how would educational theorizing be reconfigured if educators were to use decolonizing theory as the analytic lens for rethinking theory?

In response, this collection maps out the history, legacy, and ongoing operations of colonization and imperialism in quotidian discourses, structures,
and interactions. Decolonizing theory points to universalized concepts, such as truth, identity, and justice, imbued with Eurocentric values and meanings, and traces their inclusions, exclusions, and effects. It moves toward the critical directions of race, gender, class, and other markers of difference to locate local and global navigations of marginalization and resistance. By putting decolonizing theory to work, it becomes possible to challenge our ontological views, our epistemological standpoints, and our interpretive methodologies. Such challenges push us to reexamine educational concepts, commonsense understandings, and everyday practices in relation to various spatial, temporal, and affective contexts. Just as decolonizing practice must target both material and discursive conditions of life at local and global levels in historically contextualized power relations, the approach of decolonizing theory allows educational theorists to reframe contemporary educational discourse in radically different ways.

Each of the contributors to this symposium exemplifies such an approach. For example, Jeong-eun Rhee introduces the concept of a “neoliberal racial project” (NRP) and examines contemporary meanings and operations of race and racism. By examining the NRP through decolonizing theory, she demonstrates how racial neoliberalism builds silently on the structural conditions of racism while disabling the very categories that make racism recognizable.

Sharon Subreenduth’s analysis of social justice in the global South offers an alternative lens through which the binary of dominant/marginalized can coalesce, thus enabling us examine the discursive nature of race, power, and knowledge and the possibilities for rethinking whether dominant frameworks of social justice are relevant to all contexts and peoples, irrespective of location.

Stephanie Daza shows the potential of a Spivakian theoretical approach as an interpretive practice for education, and particularly for decolonizing the coercive training of our imaginaries in order to interrupt high-stakes learning and global competition as commonsensical policy practice at an elementary school.

The decolonizing curricular approach Binaya Subedi offers is concerned with colonial and neocolonial conditions, specifically exploring how questions of race and class cannot be silenced in conversations about the global curriculum. It advocates that educators promote an antiessentialist curriculum that provides more nuanced, complex, and contrapuntal readings of world events, and it asks that a more responsible curriculum be developed to raise critical questions regarding local/global formations.

Roland Sintos Coloma foregrounds the use of empire as an analytical category to intervene in mainstream educational research by developing and deploying a critical interpretive grammar and approaches that underscore transnationalism, intersectionality, hybridity, and indigeneity.

Through these analyses, we attempt to critique the commonsense production of theory that obfuscates the presence of imperialism.