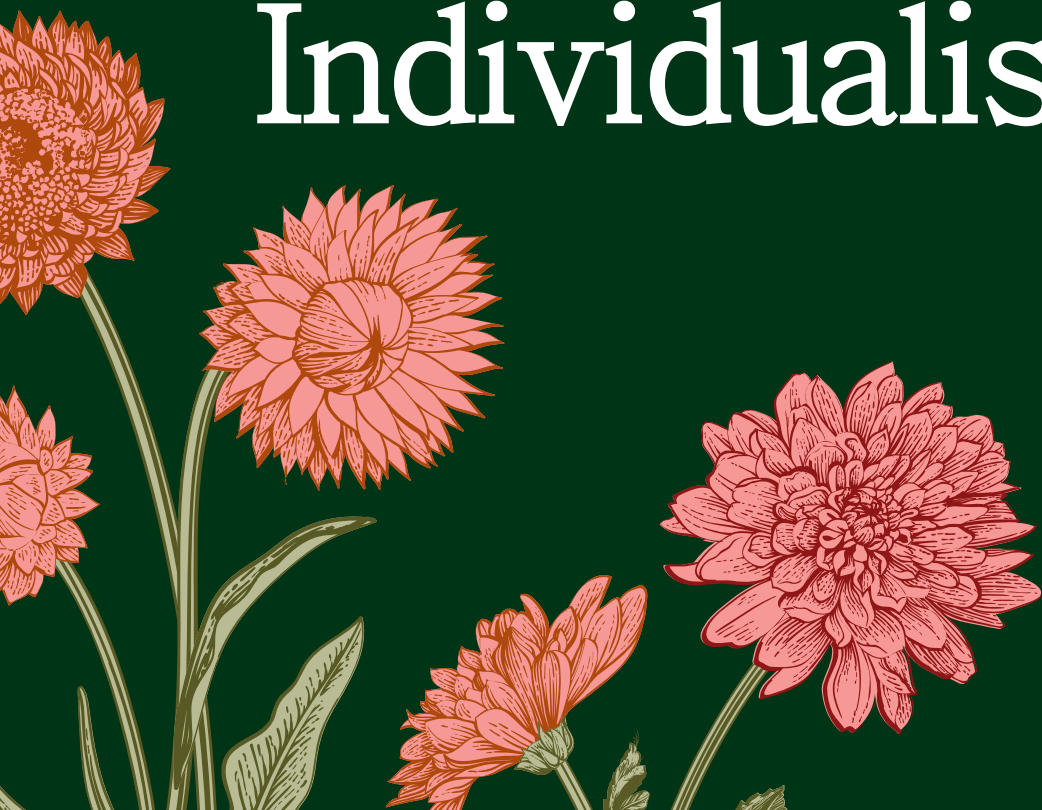


# Developing Collective Mindsets in A Hyper-Individualistic Culture

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# About Me

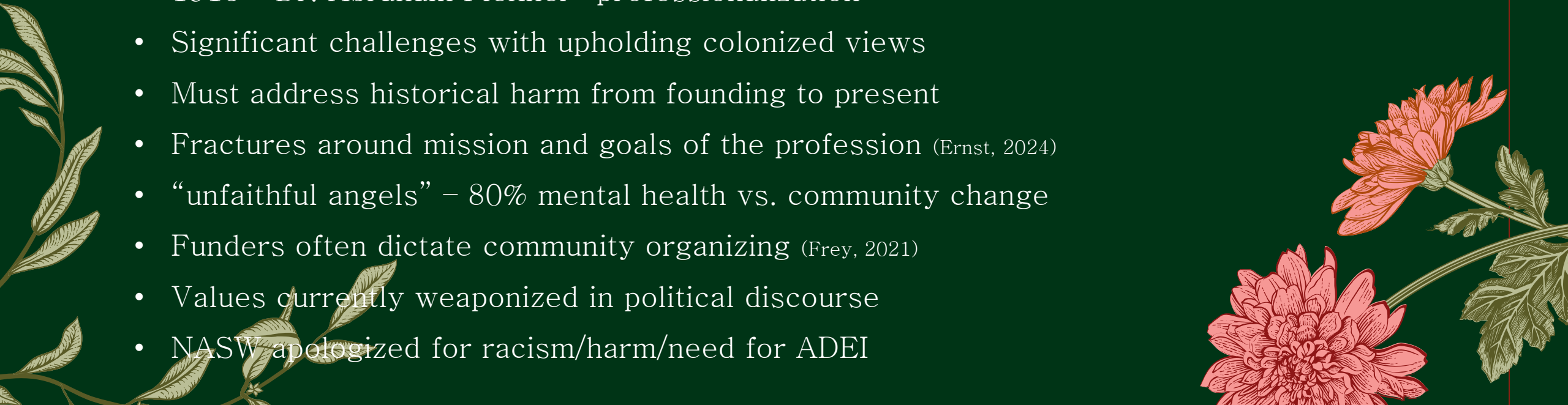
- Grew up in South Africa ages 5–12
- Influenced perspectives
- 3 degrees in social work
- Expertise: Refugee issues (MENA/SWANA), neurobiology of trauma, ethical integration of faith, holistic healing
- Transnational, anti-oppressive, liberatory praxis, resistance as justice
- Taught in higher ed for 7 years
- “Radical” feminist





# U.S. Social Work Overview

- Two main streams – Charity Organization Societies (individualistic) and Settlement Houses (societal)
- Rejection of indigenous, BIPOC, and non-Protestant contributions
- Both founded by wealthy, white Protestant women and clergymen = BOOTSTRAPS!
- Views of poverty and charity deeply tied to US policy
- 1915 – Dr. Abraham Flexner “professionalization”
- Significant challenges with upholding colonized views
- Must address historical harm from founding to present
- Fractures around mission and goals of the profession (Ernst, 2024)
- “unfaithful angels” – 80% mental health vs. community change
- Funders often dictate community organizing (Frey, 2021)
- Values currently weaponized in political discourse
- NASW apologized for racism/harm/need for ADEI



# Recent Challenges



Disagreement on how to handle disparities

Social work beginnings in the U.S.

Pedagogy reinforces colour-blind lens

History of whitewashing

Decades of harm ranging from Orphan Trains to Eugenics to racial imbalances in CPS

# Ethics

## NASW Code of Ethics – 6.01 Social Welfare

Social workers should promote the general welfare of society, from local to global levels, and the development of people, their communities, and their environments. Social workers should advocate for living conditions conducive to the fulfillment of basic human needs and should promote social, economic, political, and cultural values and institutions that are compatible with the realization of social justice.

## IFSW Ethical Principles – 3.5 Building Solidarity

Social workers actively work in communities and with their colleagues, within and outside of the profession, to build networks of solidarity to work toward transformational change and inclusive and responsible societies.





# Student Perspectives

Currently more  
right  
wing/conservative

Self sufficiency  
focus justifies  
poverty

Critical thinking  
alone not enough  
(Fenton, 2020)

Many afraid to  
dialogue around  
alternate views  
(Pharris & Natale, 2020)

Uncomfortable  
without lecture

Many feel social  
work is biased  
(Sorenson et al., 2024)

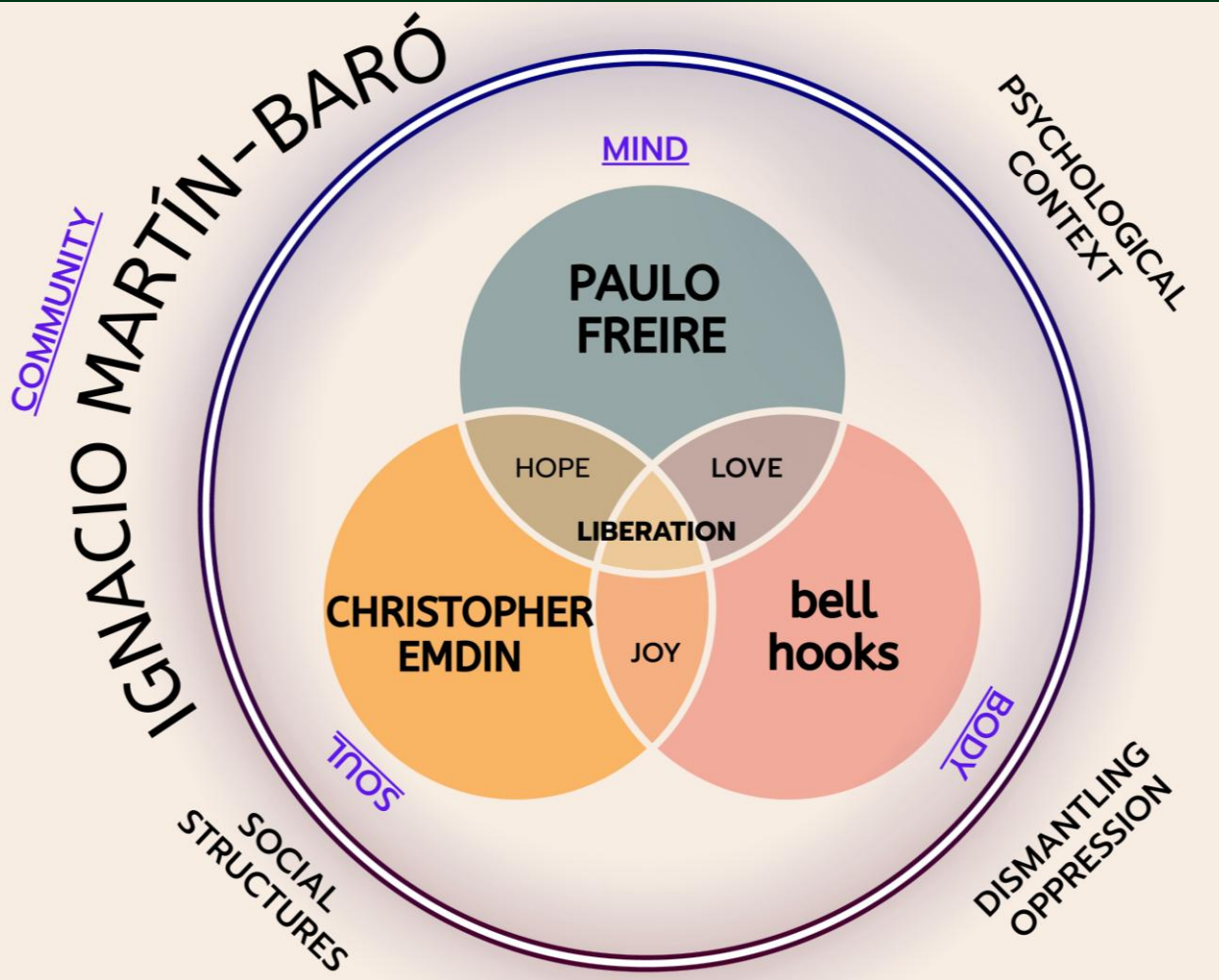
Must engage in  
power analysis  
around common  
problems (Fleming,  
2017)

Create shared  
vision!

Mutually reinforce  
diverse goals (Kania  
& Kramer, 2011)



# Framework



- Freire – Rejects banking model of passive student learning; pose problems for dialogue; critically analyze social structures
- hooks – Classroom becomes “location of possibility”; examination of power, bias, oppression; emphasizes joy, risk, and creativity
- Emdin – Authentic connection; belonging and shared responsibility; cross-cultural wisdom
- Martín-Baró – De-ideologizing understanding of reality; reconciliation as approach to healing; interconnectedness to sociopolitical structures

# Student Quotes

My perspective has definitely shifted toward a more collective, communal care mindset. Dr. Thomas' approach helped me see that healing and support work best when shared.

The environment created made space for open dialogue, real-life connections, and deep reflection – all of which emphasized the importance of community and shared care. Her willingness to go beyond the textbook and truly engage with us as people helped me see the power of collective support in both learning and life.

It is important to consider the whole of the equation and how it could impact a society as well as how a society can impact an individual.

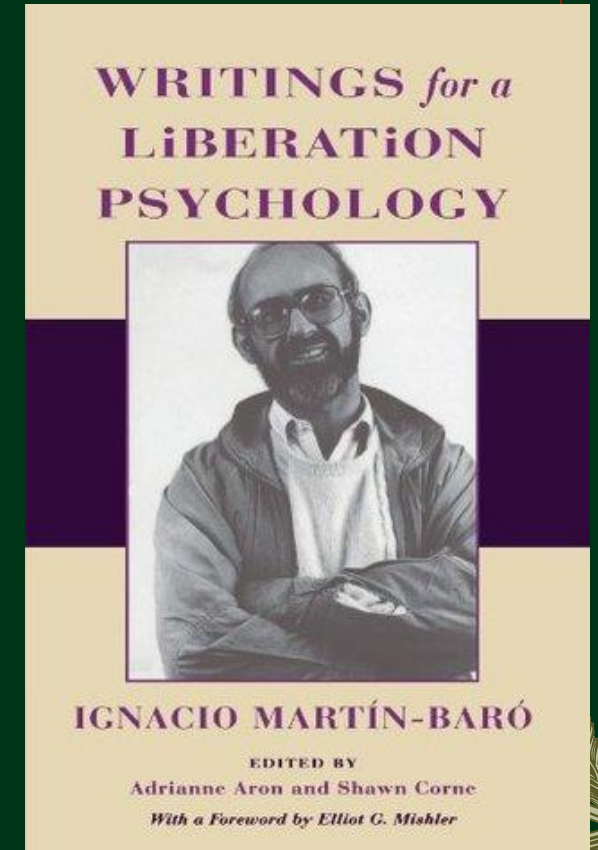
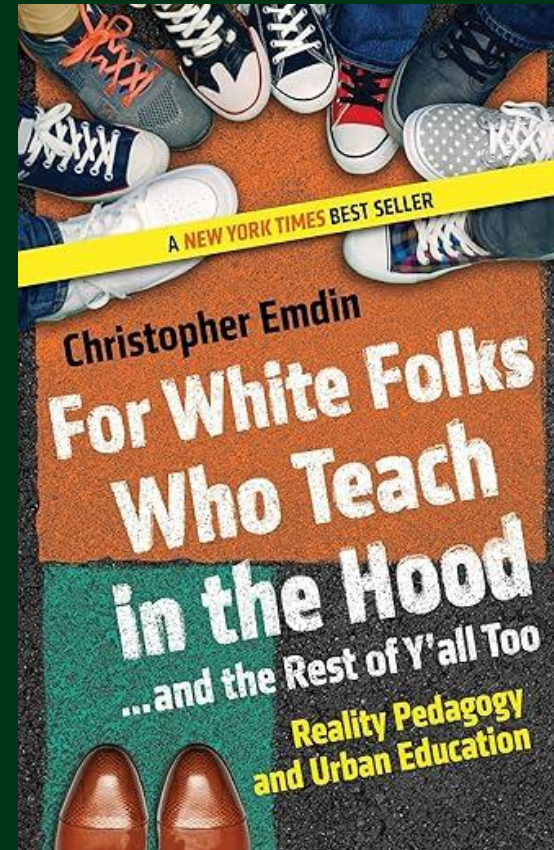
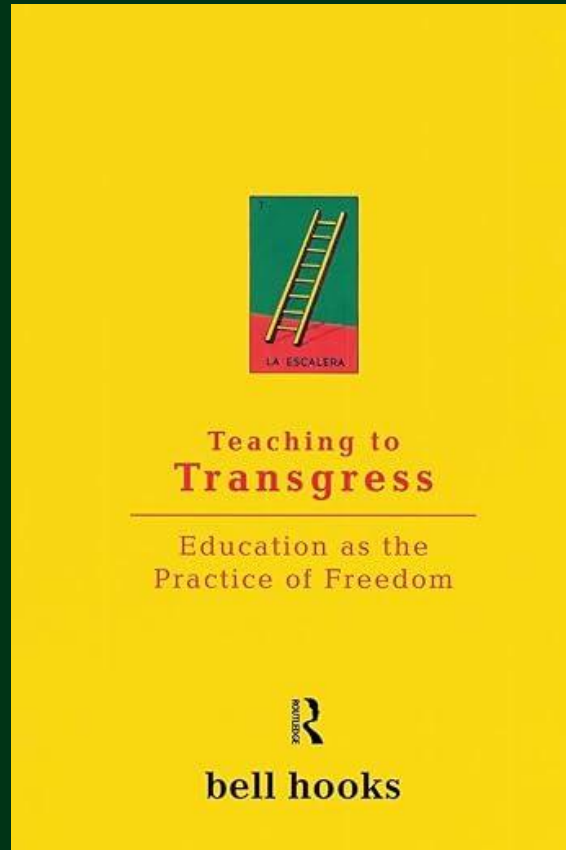
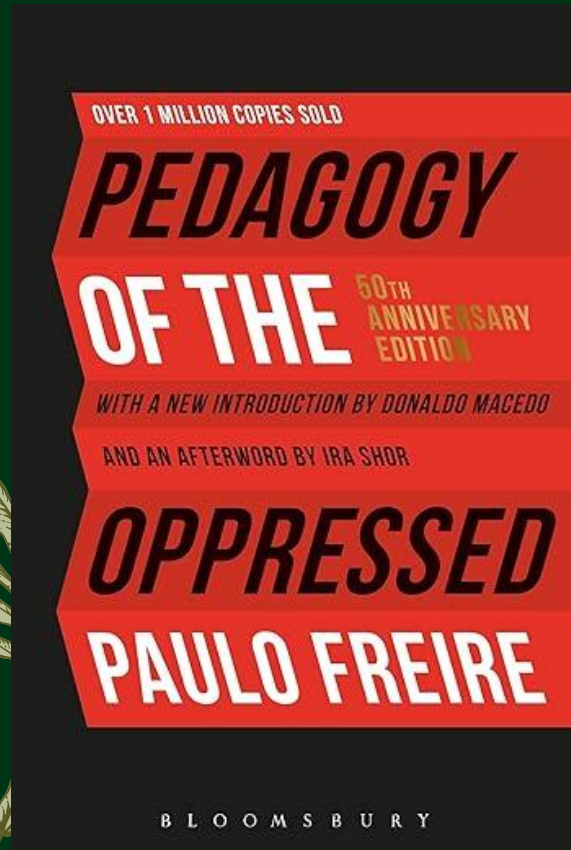
I have a better understanding of a family as a collective, the importance of individuals making up a whole unit, and the external factors that make up an individual.

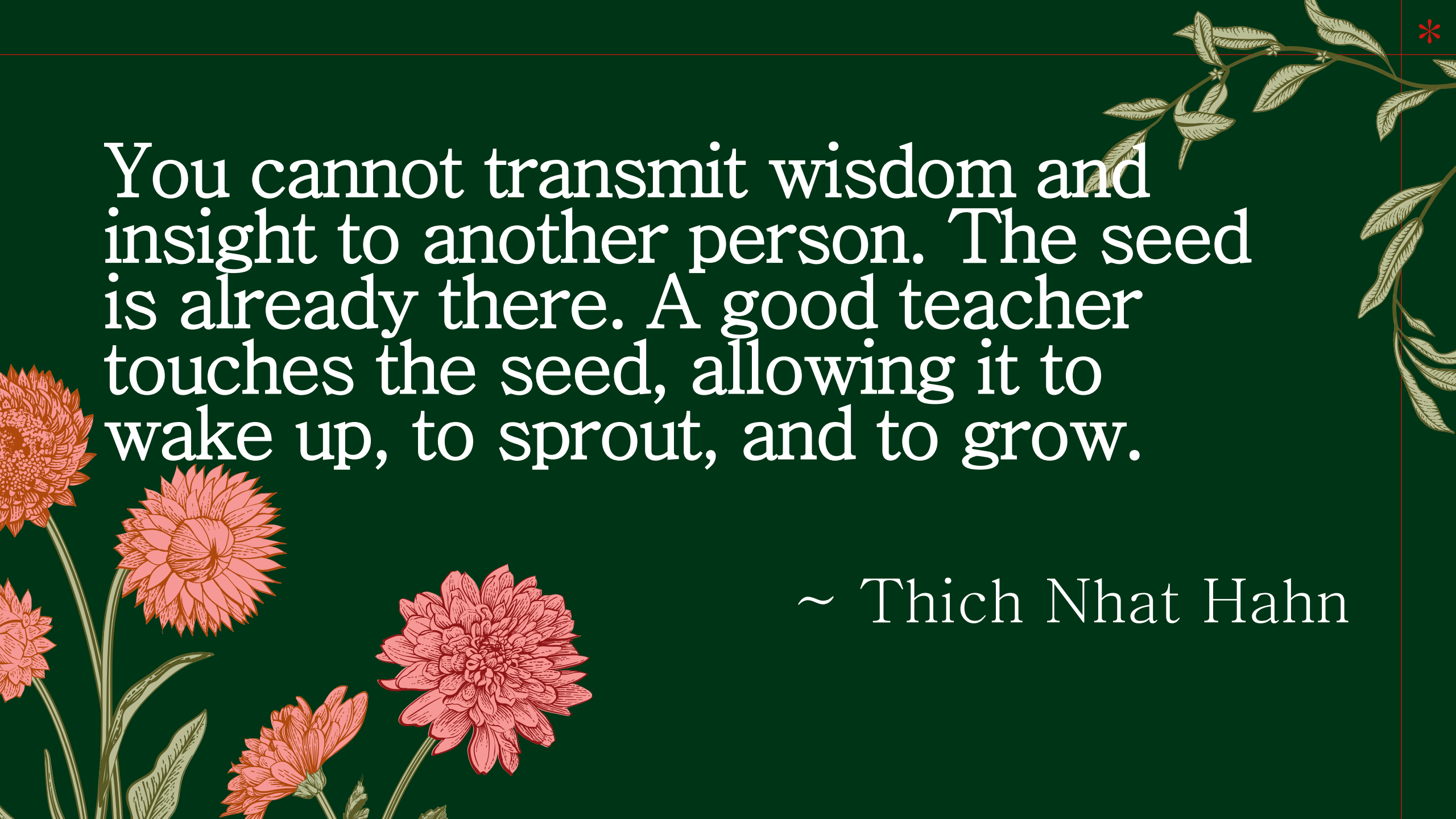
I have been given frameworks to support a collectivist approach.





# Book Recommendations



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You cannot transmit wisdom and insight to another person. The seed is already there. A good teacher touches the seed, allowing it to wake up, to sprout, and to grow.

~ Thich Nhat Hahn



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