A Poet's Room:

Troubling Tolerance, Cultural Ruptures & The Dialogic Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

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Many high school communities across the United States grapple with issues of bullying, harassment and other forms of student conflict that are often the result of intolerance and misunderstandings across and among social identities (Griffin et. al., 2012). In an effort to rebuild tone and community, however, schools have focused predominantly on (1) addressing only antagonistic student behavior and (2) tolerance-based approaches that result in the superficial "choreography of civil speech" (Mayo. 2004). Both methods, in different ways, have struggled to meaningfully address many of the underlying issues responsible for intergroup and interpersonal conflict and the deterioration of community in schools (Dessel, 2010; Poteat & DiGiovanni, 2010).

This qualitative case study examines the impact of an innovative arts-based curriculum designed to center the construction and performance of student "creative authoethnographies" in the classroom as a way of proactively working toward dialogue about identity and social analysis. Conducted over the course of a single school year at a high school in New York City, this research looks carefully at the experiences of seven students. Through close analysis of student interviews, archived student writing, curriculum documents, student surveys and other qualitative data, this work strives to articulate what courses such as these offer students, and how their presence in schools holds the potential to directly address issues of bullying and conflict across difference.

Responding to the critical multiculturalist call (Banks, 1995, Morrell, 2007; Camangian, 2010) for a pedagogy that combines the successful but historically separate practices of autoethnography and the teaching of dialogue skills, this study introduces “cultural ruptures” and a “pedagogy of disruption” as part of a new approach to engaging young people in an of education that is explicit in it’s efforts to critique society and interrogate one’s own identity (Freire & Macedo, 1987). This research also advocates strongly on behalf of English classrooms (and English teachers specifically) as among the most important “actors” in the work of humanizing education, and offers tangible recommendations and strategies for practitioners toward that end.

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Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, I want to thank the students, school leadership and parent community of Kass Academy South (a pseudonym, but you know who you are) who allowed me to tell their stories, and gifted me their trust, their time, and their friendship. It is my sincerest hope that this work spawns new dialogue about the possibilities for this type of education, and that the young voices guiding this research reverberate on through those future efforts.

I. INTRODUCTION

"Get Them Excited or Something"

It is a rainy Tuesday morning in Brooklyn. A thick, knee-high film of fog snakes down Bushwick Avenue so all that is visible are the top halves of floating black gypsy cabs, orange and yellow umbrellas atop halal carts, the backpacked upper bodies of sleepy teenagers as they trudge toward the building for first period. Everything, its own tiny island amidst a strange sea of grey. It is, by most accords, the exact type of morning the snooze button was built for. Despite that, I am greeted by 12 of my 18 first period students nearly 20 minutes before the school day begins, all cyphered around my classroom door like a wagon circle.

"Is he here yet?" Anthony asks, half a breakfast sandwich hanging out of his mouth. "We're here early. Is he here?"

Two weeks prior, after a month of pleading, I was gifted a very small stipend to bring in "guest artists" to perform for and engage with my students for the semester. "Get them excited or something," I recall my principal encouraging. "And make sure everyone behaves." By most New York City standards, $200 is enough for an Uber to the airport and a cup of coffee on the way. As a 22-year-old writer and artist myself, however— constantly a twig-snap away from leaping into the nearest MFA program and getting on with my life's dream of writing the next Great American Novel or ghostwriting songs for Justin Bieber—I was sharply aware of just how far $200 could go. How, for example, if put towards things like buying artists' breakfasts in exchange for two hours worth of their time in my classroom, it just might last the entire year. This

particular morning was our second installment of what would become our "Live Literature Series," and students were, well…excited.

In the beginning, the idea was simple: I wanted to teach a creative writing elective that inspired young people around the possibilities of writing. Like most new teachers freshly ejected from the safe, synthetic cockpit of a graduate program and into the fire of an *actual* classroom, I was at once scrambling to sculpt a teacher identity that matched what all the textbooks told me I should be—a reluctant but capable disciplinarian, kind but critical, methodically organized, attentive to each and every student with knifepoint precision—while at the same time relying, as we all do, for better and for worse, on the selves and experiences that had driven me to the idea of education in the first place. Or, put differently, a kind of "fake it until you make it" approach, combining parts of Today's Teaching 101 into a personal pedagogy that utilizes everything but the kitchen sink in order to get the job done. For me, that meant structuring a contemporary creative writing course, with what "Get them excited or something" freedom I had, that placed Walt Whitman beside Kendrick Lamar, Lucille Clifton beside Willie Perdomo, Emily Dickson beside Justin Torres. It meant doing my best to create a course which students wanted to attend, one that validated experiences and voices often left outside the canon of the traditional English classroom, one that implored young people to take their writing seriously.

I patch-worked together a course loosely modeled after what Jeff Kass (2000), a former teacher and mentor of mine, refers to as the "Archeological Approach to Creative Writing"—a philosophy that emphasizes the importance of "slowing down the world" (p. 10) or, that is, the process of mining one's life for the personal stories that matter most,

and writing about them in rich, vivid ways. Amidst the vibrant artistic backdrop of New York City, we instituted a "live literature" component to the course, where every two weeks, I asked an especially electric guest artist—"electric" in proportion, of course, to (1) their availability to me via one of several writing circles that I socialized and wrote in, and (2) their interest in breakfast as compensation for their time—to come into my classroom for the day, meet with young people and perform their work in honest, uncensored ways.

Over the course of my first year or two in the classroom, I began to observe a deeply provocative and unexpected pattern in students' responses to these visiting artists, and in turn, to one another. Through small sound bites and gestures, I started to notice a shift in our "Live Literature Series" from basic performances and literary discussions to multi-directional interaction on the work, and sociological questions of race, gender and identity. Students began asking questions and sharing personal stories that transcended the work—questions and stories that would not typically have made their way within 100 yards of room 750, even if we've set out to build a curriculum *specifically* for that purpose: "Just because you were raised in a racist home, do you think that means you have to be at least a little bit racist yourself? The moment I came out to my parents, I wished I could have taken it back – they weren't ready to hear it and I wasn't ready to have them be so unsupportive. Sometimes I feel like the only thing people see when they look at me is my gender—it's as though everything else about who I am is an accessory."

While I could not put my finger on precisely what was happening in these moments—I was, in all transparency, too green of an educator at the time to structure my teaching around them in any meaningful way—my gut told me that *something* was

indeed occurring, and further, that it might be worthy of investigation. On the surface, it appeared that students were excited about not only the presence of artists in the classroom (they showed up early to set up, stayed late to break down, and scoured the city for writing workshops and performance opportunities), but also by the prospect of using that art as a vehicle to engage in dialogue about their lives and the social and political circumstances surrounding them. And while this small string of loosely curated curricular moments was hardly a thing to call revolutionary, they consistently stood, to me, in stark contrast to the sound bites we often hear and read about the political indifference of young people today, rampant conflict and bullying across lines of identity, and the general level of "nothing" that schools and teachers are doing to combat both (Furlong, 2009). In essence, I knew quite early on during my initial years in the classroom that it was these moments of dissonance and discord, these kinds of "ruptures" in the fabric of the everyday educational experience, that I wanted to push against as a student and teacher, an artist, and not-yet researcher—and that my students, perhaps moreso than I, would be fundamental in helping us understand their larger significance in our current cultural landscape.

When stepping back a moment to consider this brief anecdote—and my dissertation research more generally—from a distance, it may be tempting to see this work as education-specific, or designed to address only those issues that plague the imperfect science of teaching and learning. I couldn't be clearer, however, in insisting on its applicability outside the classroom as well. As I am writing this very chapter, on a grey day in March of 2017, the President of the United States has signed no less than four executive orders in a span of a single week in an effort to ban specific ethnic and

religious groups from entering the country, and in so doing fanned a familiar, divisive national rhetoric pitting rich against poor, black against white, gay against straight, Muslims against Christians, and immigrants against everyone (Falkner, 2014). Schools are often a reflection of the world we live in, and represent a kind of ground zero for interactions between and around cultures and ideas, and thus ripe to engage the world in constructive ways. By focusing specifically on one experiment at one classroom in one city, I want to underscore the political urgency of this story, which to me is more broadly the work of humanizing all people, and empathizing across differences.

Sharpening the Lens

In an increasingly pluralistic and politically divided society, the need for self-awareness, tolerance and communication across difference has never been more critical—and nowhere are the stakes higher than in the arena of public education (Van Dyke, 1998). Reflective of the culture we live in, many high school communities across the United States grapple with issues of bullying, harassment and other forms of student conflict that are often the result of intolerance and misunderstandings across social identities (Griffin et. al., 2012). In an effort to rebuild tone and tolerance, however, schools have focused predominantly on addressing antagonistic student behavior while struggling to address many of the underlying issues responsible for intergroup and interpersonal conflict and the deterioration of community in schools (Dessel, 2010; Poteat & DiGiovanni, 2010). This trend is especially concerning given research that finds that much of the violence in schools *is in fact* connected to conflict across race (Roberts, Bell, & Murphy, 2008), class (Weis, 2008), gender (Lee et. al., 1996), sexual orientation

(Brikett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009), ability status (Flynt & Morton, 2004), and religion (Zine, 2001). This research builds on the findings of these studies, and asserts as a core assumption that "bullying" as a concept is more of a symptom of than a problem—more a signal of deeper, cultural issues within a community and less a setback than can be solved by more hallway monitors or zero-tolerance policies—and strives to contribute a set of constructivist practices toward interrogating that notion.

Advocates of critical multicultural education (Banks, 1995) have long argued that young people need to experience education in ways that push them to think critically about their own identities and the identities of their peers, and to use that reflection to cultivate safer, more open-minded classrooms. Boler (2004) provocatively reminds us, however, that even while the encouragement of such instruction may make classrooms richer and safer places for the discussion of identity, "not all voices are equal" (p. 4), and that historically marginalized stories and voices warrant a kind of "affirmative action pedagogy" that prioritizes those narratives in curriculum and instruction, even at the minor cost of silencing dominant ones:

> Because our social and political culture predetermines certain voices and articulations as unspeakable, illegitimate and unrecognizable (Butler, 1997)…I propose an "affirmative action pedagogy" that takes measure to ensure visibility and critical analysis of expressions of racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, sexism, ableism, and classism. An affirmative action pedagogy seeks to ensure that we bear witness to marginalized voices in our classrooms (p. 4).

And while an affirmative action pedagogy is hardly an agreed upon approach (deCastell, 2001), entire fields of scholarship have emerged to support a larger shift toward a more critical education (McLaren, 1989), and more specifically, the English classroom as the ideal site for that work (Morrell, 2005).

Over the past two decades, many pedagogical approaches have emerged in an effort to curate and invite "critical analysis and expression" into the classroom for the purpose of engaging students in this type of education that is explicit in it's efforts to critique society and interrogate one's own identity (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Two of the more promising among those include (1) the use of autoethnographic writing (Carey-Webb, 2001) and performance poetry (Fisher, 2005) as methods for centering students experiences in the curriculum and fostering classroom community, and (2) the integration of intergroup dialogue practices and the teaching of dialogue skills as a way to explore issues related to social justice in school (Gurin et al, 2013). Separately, autoethnographies and the teaching of dialogue skills are becoming increasingly well-documented approaches within the realms of social justice and humanizing education (Freire, 1970). Few researchers, however, have explored their combined impact. My dissertation research will examine the impact of a pilot curriculum designed to integrate the structured practices of both approaches into the secondary English classroom as a means of engaging young people in this type of critical education. In essence, I aim to articulate what courses such as these offer students, and how their presence in schools hold the potential to directly address issues of bullying and conflict across difference.

This dissertation is arranged in six chapters. In the remainder of this first chapter I will provide an explanation of the study, my research questions, and my rationale for the study, including the subjectivities and biases that guide me to this work. In Chapter II, I present a review of the literature relevant to my study, including a discussion of my conceptual frameworks. In Chapter III, I outline my methodology. First, I present the methodological frameworks informing the design of the study. I then provide a brief

explanation of the curriculum at the core of this research and the data generated through students' participation in the course. This is followed by information about the research site and population, and then a comprehensive overview of the methods of data collection and analysis that I used to revisit the data collected during the time of this initial research. I conclude this section with a discussion about issues of trustworthiness, validity, and possible limitations of my study. In Chapter IV, I present my findings, largely through the sharing of students' own voices, which I organize into two interrelated themes and subthemes. In so doing, I offer some level of preliminary analysis and discussion, and provide a roadmap for deeper discussion to follow. In Chapter V, I extend that discussion with more nuanced interpretation, analysis and synthesis, and attempt to attach new meaning to my students' voices in the context of my research questions, and in the larger educational ecosystem in which this work may fit. I will use this section to restate some of the limitations of my study, and problematize some of my findings. And lastly, in Chapter VI, I summarize the most content and function of each chapter of this dissertation, and consolidate some of the more meaningful contributions this work makes to the field of teaching and learning. I will also use my final chapter to offer a set of recommendations resulting from my findings for both teachers and school leaders, and close with a contemplation of the possibilities for future research related to this work.

Explanation of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the impact of an arts-based curriculum designed to center the construction and performance of students' cultural narratives in the classroom as a way of working toward dialogue about social identity and

social analysis. While the larger context for this research is rooted in concerns regarding school culture and themes of bullying and student conflict, my dissertation is chiefly concerned with the more focused task of trying to discern what value there may be, if any, in allowing students structured time and space in school to examine and interrogate their own and others' social identities, and to engage in dialogue with one another about their experiences related to the various group memberships they hold.

According to Hirsch (2012), the culture of bullying in schools is the result of one of many reactionary "paths of least resistance" (Johnson, 2001) taken by school leadership in an effort to address antagonistic student behavior. I am interested in trying to understand how the sharing of cultural narratives in classrooms may disrupt those least resistant paths—albeit creating tension in the process—and potentially present a more proactive approach toward dissecting and addressing student conflict across differences. I take a critical and participatory approach to this case study. Rather than approaching this work with a fixed expectation for how students understand themselves and their social identities, I choose to let their reflections and responses to a specific year-long curriculum and course—featuring them directly in Chapter IV, as opposed to describing their experiences—drive what implications there may be for pedagogy and school culture.

My dissertation research entails the investigation of archival data that I collected as a high school English teacher during the 2014 school year at Kass Academy South.[1] In the fall of 2014, I was granted permission from my administration to build and facilitate a dynamic, year-long elective course that challenged students to think about their own

[1] Kass Academy south (KAS) is a pseudonym I have created to maintain the anonymity of the research site a the center of this study.

social identities, and positively addressed some of the issues of bullying that the school was experiencing. At the time of my teaching this course, the purpose of any data collection at all was solely toward the development of this pilot experience—including, most notably, students' participation in interviews about their experiences, and how to improve it for subsequent years. Since then, I revisited that data and conducted an informal pilot study in an effort to begin to organize students' reflections, and consider whether deeper research into them could generate new questions and new insights around the broader school-based implications of this work.

Joseph Maxwell (2013) contends while there are many reasons pilot studies are useful practices in working toward significant research, chief among them is that they allow researchers to enhance their understanding of the cultures they may be working in. "People's ideas, meanings, and values are essential parts of the situations and activities you study…if you don't understand these, your theories about what's going on will often be incomplete or mistaken" (p.67). In my case, teaching at KAS for five years *and* the added opportunity of conducting a pilot study with the same existing data that will guide my dissertation afforded me numerous insights into the cultures, people, and perceptions at the school, and both served as guiding headlights for my dissertation project and my corresponding research questions. It is my hope to now return to this existing data to analyze students' experiences no longer toward merely improving a curriculum but rather to better understand and assign value to the ways in which students grew during their participation, and what courses such courses might offer the field in 2018. I anchor my inquiry with the following questions:

- **RQ1:** How do students experience participation in a creative writing elective that combines the practices of autoethnographies and intergroup dialogue?
    - What benefit, if any, do students derive from exploring their social identities with other students?
    - How do young people navigate critical conversations and explorations of identity in school?
- **RQ2:** How might the sharing of conflicting and aligning cultural narratives in classroom spaces—those that work in service of and in opposition to healthy school community and culture—create meaningful learning opportunities for students?
- **RQ3:** How might English classrooms function as spaces to positively address and disrupt school cultures where student conflict across differences is prevalent?
    - What role, if any, can English teachers play in the process of facilitating in-school experiences for students toward the above purpose?

Approach

To conduct this research study, I used quantitative research methods that included artifact and document analysis, survey data, semi-structured interviews and participant observations. Because this is a case study focused predominantly on the experiences of young people themselves, I elected to employ participatory methods that cater toward their first-hand reports; methods that allow their voices to speak directly about and in

response to the course. For example, the predominant artifacts and documents that I analyzed for this investigation consisted of student writing samples, both creative writing as well as expository, opinion-based essays about their experiences in the class. Further, the semi-structured interviews constituted equal parts student-responses to questions I formulated and informal observations of students in dialogue with me and with one another about their writing and the class.

Anchored by the tenets of narrative qualitative research adopted by Ely, Vinz Downing & Anzul (1997), as well as a collection of conceptual frameworks such as portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) and Stock's dialogic curriculum (1995) which I will expound upon in Chapter 2, my predominant methodological approach to this work is through case study research. Case study research is an attempt to understand a contemporary phenomenon in a specific, confined setting, and is bounded both by time and number of participants (Creswell, 2013). While other methods such as phenomenology or ethnography hold the potential to generate equally relevant findings to case study research given shared their approaches to focusing on a particular population, issue, or context, case studies aim to analyze the impact of an event, or the experience of a group through a variety of data sources. The latter is what I aimed to undertake with this work.

Rationale and Significance

I am an educator with longstanding commitments to social justice education and anti-racist work; I am also a cis-gendered, racially and socioeconomically privileged male, and mean to be intentional in naming that as a relevant factor in the framing of this research, the collection of my data and the discussion of my findings—particularly as this

research is conducted with a largely non-white student population. In Chapter 3, I will offer several important personal anecdotes that fuel my commitments to arts education, identity-based research, and my passion for this work—which in no small way dictate the subjectivities and biases that I bring with me into this study. In this section, however, I wish to briefly describe the background that I bring with me as a student and researcher, the dominant frameworks that guide my lens as a practitioner, and perhaps most importantly, the contributions I hope this research is able to make the field.

My background as a researcher is situated most squarely in sociology and sociocultural studies of education, and as such my conceptual frameworks and literature review are informed explicitly by the field of critical studies. Critical theories and methodologies strive to name and combat institutional, social and economic inequalities of power in service of emancipating marginalized groups (Kincheloe, 2008). In the case of educational research, critical theorists understand teaching as a deeply political act that rejects the neutrality of knowledge, and an insistent belief that issues of social justice and democracy are inherently embedded in all teaching and learning practices (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2011). While this research aims to build directly on the tradition laid by those scholars, it does so with the additional consideration of the current state of "tolerance education"—which I will unpack in the next chapter—and attempts to reshape the critical practices guiding those principles. Specifically, it will introduce "cultural ruptures" and a "pedagogy of disruption" as new ways of imagining some of the goals and strategies around explicitly engaging notions of social identity in the classroom. Further, this research is intended to offer insight into a particular school space and culture for two significant purposes: the first is to establish a solid

methodology and set of practices that other educators might be able to integrate into their own teachings, both within and beyond the walls of traditional classroom spaces. The second is to provide Kass Academy South (KAS) with a collection of critical perspectives, tools, analyses, and interpretations of how the participants in my research understand identity in relationship to the conflicts they experience both in and away from school.

As a researcher with the unique "insider" and "outsider" status, I engage in this work in service of helping a school community better understand what it means to reimagine the possibilities around supporting young people in their efforts to proactively write and talk about their identities in school. I hope this study may also contribute to the growing body of literature regarding bullying, as well as anti-racist pedagogy—as it was designed, in part, as an effort to deemphasize the weight of white leadership in classrooms populated largely with black and brown students. By contributing to these bodies of work, I hope this research helps to spark more proactive conversations in general about what it means to draw discourse about identity and difference *into* the conversation around reforming school culture as opposed to pushing it to the sidelines, and further, about the role of storytelling and the arts in both reflecting and rethinking how to cultivate more inclusive schools.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the literature review that follows, I provide a brief discussion of the socio-historical moment that gave momentum to the "tolerance movement" in American life during the early 1990's, exploring it's specific implications for the field of education. I then dedicate the bulk of my discussion to the scholarship and research within that historical trajectory that I feel best anchors this study, which after briefly articulating my conceptual framework, I consolidate into three general categories of (1) Critical English Education, (2) arts-based pedagogies and storytelling in the classroom and (3) the dialogic curriculum. I elected to organize this scholarship as such because each area radiates both a provocative, contested past and a cutting-edge present, a birds-eye and a ground-level view; each embodies a rich, relevant political and theoretical history *and* holds powerful pedagogical implications for the on-the-ground teaching and learning practices enacted through the curriculum at the center of this research. In essence, I've highlighted the scholarship and culture-work in education that I believe has most explicitly guided me to this research—the thread lines between which I hope are apparent—and the work which I feel best outlines not only the historical urgency for dialogue across and about differences, but also the tools and strategies to enact them.

Troubling Tolerance: A Sociocultural Snapshot

Can't We All Just Get Along? In 1991, a young black man named Rodney King endured a brutal, roadside beating at the hands of four Los Angeles police officers, suffering multiple fractured facial bones, a broken ankle, and severe bruising and lacerations. When the officers were acquitted of any wrongdoing—despite video footage

of the beating that aired so constantly around the time of the trial that a CNN executive referred to it as "national wallpaper"—riots broke out across Los Angeles for a full week. While media circulation of the beating footage and the riots drew national attention to the dialogue surrounding race and police brutality in some urgent and overdue ways, it is difficult to revisit this incident with any degree of optimism, nearly 25 years later when young black men are dying at the hands of law enforcement at unprecedented rates (Alexander, 1992).

Perhaps it is no surprise then, that the legacy we associate with Rodney King and the LA riots has less to do with the details surrounding the event itself and more to do with the now t-shirt-famous plea that he uttered amidst the violence and news cameras of the riots: "Can't we all just get along?" Indeed, a powerful question amidst the most traumatizing demonstration of conflict across difference in the United States since 1965—but given our continued difficulties in this regard, it is also one that seems worthy of renewed interrogation. What happened? Were we not listening? Did we interpret the question in some misguided way? Either way, our efforts to respond to King's question and appeal for everyone "get along" and "tolerate" one another rippled through every facet of American life and came to classify, in many ways, what would be the underlying current in the national conversation around race and identity in the United States for the next 20 years.

During the decade between 1992 and 2002, the United States was catapulted into what historical scholar Michel de Certeau (1998) refers to as an "obsession with politeness and unity" (p. 162). Police forces across the country began instituting mandatory trainings for law enforcement agents in an effort to better equip them with

strategies for respecting and treating appropriately the various communities they engaged with on a day-to-day basis (Charles, 2000). In a similar spirit, "Museums of Tolerance" popped up in New York and Los Angeles to help visitors better understand the importance of a society living peacefully together. The push toward tolerance was also demonstrated through government legislation via policies such as "Don't Ask Don't Tell," which emphasized the right for *closeted* gays and lesbians to serve in the military, and protected them from discrimination and harassment. It was also during the years following the LA riots that sensitivity trainings and diversity workshops became required exercises for many professional spaces and earned the eye-roll-skepticism that we now often expect to accompany any mention of them (Michaels, 2006). Historian Elizabeth Lasch-Quinn (2001) describes the spike in workplace diversity trainings in the 90's as a central apparatus in the nation's larger attempts to remedy (or at least, not sit idly by and observe) the racial divide remade evident through the LA riots, but also argues that the mandated element of the trainings signified a kind of quota-fulfilling superficiality that participants (and eventually communities at large) grew to distrust and resist. Of all the spaces where Rodney King's question seemed to reverberate most—where the call to react and respond to issues of conflict and intolerance across identity seemed loudest—nowhere was more enthusiastic than America's public schools.

The Educational Response It is often the case that whenever young people are implicated in social or political issues, the stakes seem higher, the urgency greater—such as the D.A.R.E. prevention program's rapid and heavily funded emergence to combat the crack epidemic of the 1980s (Boler, 2004). Similarly, the nation's response to Rodney King's question positioned schools as a kind of "ground zero" through which to incubate

and implement strategies that advocated for tolerance, and did so in two distinct ways – first, a ramped up and intentional advocacy for the celebration of multiculturalism, and second, packaged curricula designed to literally "teach tolerance" through day-to-day lessons, units and activities.

Multicultural education (Banks, 2004) initially emerged out of political agitation of the 1960's to address the ways in which schools and school systems failed to recognize the needs of learners from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. And to be fair, its required infusion into statewide curricula and teachers' pedagogies forced overdue and unprecedented attention to the ways that students' identities and diverse lived experiences—particularly in America's cities—impacted the teaching and learning process. Overtime, however, Banks (2004) argues that school districts' efforts toward multicultural education became "hurried," and developed without the planning appropriate for full or meaningful institutional integration (p. 6). Despite the profound impact of a generation-long effort across classrooms and schools, the push toward multiculturalism eventually regressed into more of a political quota than an effort to meaningfully bring about change in the structuring of schools (Sleeter & Grant, 2005). Approaches to celebrating student diversity took on the "heroes and holidays" method—ethnic food days in the cafeteria, for example, or assemblies commemorating the life of Martin Luther King, Jr.—and quickly became seen as little more than exercises in box-checking instead of authentic efforts at changing school culture, curriculum and structure.

As critics such as Cameron McCarthy (1991) emerged to point out these flaws in schools' lackluster and superficial celebrations of culture, the march of the packaged curricula began—but again, to no prevail. In an effort to reverse the trend of vague,

nonspecific approaches to celebrating and tolerating identity into the classroom, campaigns and projects such as "Teaching Tolerance" and "Respect for All" surfaced to provide teachers with identity and issue-specific curricula to engage students around what it means to, as the mission of "Teaching Tolerance" suggests, "to accept and appreciate the rich diversity of our world's cultures" (1991). And while some of those initiatives pushed us closer toward allowing opportunities for students from different life experiences and backgrounds to "get along," high school communities across the United States continue to grapple with issues of bullying, harassment and other forms of student conflict that are often the result of intolerance and misunderstandings across social identities (Griffin et. al., 2012).

In many ways, the current conversation around bullying is one that is intrinsically connected to the tolerance movement, and represents an evolution more so in terminology than in the issues themselves. Our efforts to rebuild school communities in the wake of the "bullying epidemic" (Hirsch, 2012), for example, focus predominantly on addressing antagonistic, intolerant student behavior while struggling to address many of the underlying issues responsible for intergroup conflict and the deterioration of community in schools (Dessel, 2010; Poteat & DiGiovanni, 2010). And if it remains true that young people represent the most promising potential for addressing the blunders of previous generations, then schools and classrooms will continue to be among the penultimate spaces for that work. Boler (2004) argues that classrooms, unlike other shared places where issues of identity and politics might be discussed, "provide a public space in which marginalized and silenced voices can respond and be heard…where the messy issues that others cannot or do not want to address" are given voice and wrestled

with in constructive ways (p. 4). The question then remains, if classrooms under the right instruction hold the potential to serve as powerful laboratories through which to generate and experiment with new, creative ideas for responding to urgent societal questions such as the one posed by Rodney King in 1992, why are we dealing with such eerily identical patterns of death, cultural silences and miscommunications across lines of identity and difference almost a quarter-century later?

The Trouble with Tolerance While we may very well be "teaching tolerance" in our schools, the continued turmoil both within and beyond their walls would suggest that perhaps tolerance isn't something we need more of. There are two critical reasons why the tolerance discourse in school contexts struggled to take root in any transformative way. First, when one thinks of tolerance beyond the context of interpersonal and intergroup relations, not far removed might be the yuck face childhood moments of enduring burnt brussel sprouts, sitting through a Chemistry lecture or putting up with a younger sibling's television program. And while it seems absurd to compare those trivial examples to the very serious work that is rebuilding relations between social groups, it is nonetheless the very term we elected to embed in the fabric of our schools. As Tim Wise (1999) boldly points out in his essay "The Trouble With Tolerance," when taking a moment to deeply consider what tolerance actually means as a desired goal in the context of intergroup relations, "it is in fact no different than saying, 'I won't burn your church down, or tie you to a fence and leave you to die, or drag you down a dirt road behind my pickup.' It means I put up with your existence and little else" (So what is tolerance section, para. 5). In this sense, given the position of Wise and others that the root of the term tolerance has always signified little more than the absence of physical violence—the

ability to coexist without the real expectation of a deeper commitment to an examination of prejudiced thought or behavior—it's no wonder that relations seem to have done little to improve, and that young people continue to experience such conflict across identities. Further, the encouragement of such a false and passive sense of harmony does more damage to the potential for meaningful future discourse. Second, for many schools the adoption of the tolerance discourse became a subtle emphasis on what Chris Mayo (2004) refers to as "the careful choreography of civil speech" (p. 35), or, that is, a school-wide code of civility and conduct that because of its authoritarian enforcement does more to deodorize and mask differences in identity than it does to address the social and political inequities inherent in them that cause friction and conflict in classrooms. In cases of prepackaged curricula like the New York City Department of Education's "Respect for All" campaign—which I will address in greater detail and use as a frame of reference for my understanding of "cultural ruptures" later in this chapter—that "choreography of civil speech" does more to keep difficult dialogue at bay than it does to engage it.

And easy and disheartening it would be to continue the table-setting for this research with further discourse and analysis around the trouble with teaching "tolerance" in schools. Easier still, to cite one example after the next of botched policies and programs until educational institutions at large look less like the hotbeds of opportunity that Boler (2004) insists they can be for this work and more like gigantic clouds of bullies and conflict and pain and silence and failed policies and tensions across differences. Schools are easy targets. But to construct that rigid and pessimistic narrative would also be to fall victim to a separate pitfall in educational research that is the tendency to recycle blame-the-system narratives that do more to criticize than to rebuild, when in fact it is

that very cloud of friction and tension in schools that scholars are beginning to identify as an important nexus for reconstruction. If as poet Robert Frost (1914) reminds us, "the best way out is always through," scholars calling for a renewed attention to classrooms as potential sites for this work are indeed paving the way. This study aims to further that reinvigorated sense of hope for English classrooms in particular, and to contribute to the growing body of research that situates English classrooms as sites for revolutionary pedagogy.

Conceptual Frameworks

As alluded to in Chapter 1, this research is guided by a number of important critical conceptual frameworks. By employing the term "critical" in this context, and generally throughout this dissertation, I mean to signal "a move to question the naturalized assumptions of the discipline, its truths, its discourses and its attendant practices" (Janks, 2010, p.13). In this context, the frameworks that guide my investigative work strive to problematize accepted assumptions related to power and domination. As Maxwell (2013) articulates, conceptual frameworks—or, ways of seeing and entering a particular universe of data—are "*constructed*, not found…something that (one) builds, not something that already exists ready-made" (p.41), as they involve both a review and critique of the literature combined with the researcher's own insights (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). In this way, my conceptual framework draws heavily from critical sociocultural, sociolinguistic, and anthropological literature that reframes notions of identity, literacy, and dialogue as socially dependent and socially constructed ideas.

My research is rooted in the seven tenets of narrative qualitative research

developed by Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (1997): (1) There are many ways to come to know something and even then such knowing is partial; (2) There are numerous ways for us to report; (3) All of our messages have agendas; (4) Our language creates reality; (5) The researcher is deeply interrelated with what and who is being studied—research is context-culture bound; (6) Affect and cognition are inextricably united; and (7) What we understand as social reality is multifaceted, sometimes clashing, and often in flux" (p. 60). In my search to identify specific instruments aligned with these principles as well as my own personal experience, I utilize elements of the conceptual framework of portraiture to help me navigate, find patterns in and make meaning of my students' stories. While most of the strategies for portraiture that Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) outlines in *The Art and Science of Portraiture* are symptoms of strong qualitative research in general, those which apply most directly to my work include: (1) the focus on the convergence of narrative and analysis; (2) the goal of speaking to broader audiences beyond the academy; and (3) the inextricable link between this research and my own life, and my effort not to divorce myself from it but rather situate myself within it (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997).

Sociocultural Perspectives on Identity The ways in which we understand ourselves and others, Nukkula (2012) suggests, are fundamentally shaped by our daily interactions and lived experiences in the places, contexts, and institutions we occupy. Social identity is the portion of an individuals perception of self as derived from their membership to various relevant social groups (Tajfel, 1979). Scholar of psychology and race, Beverly Tatum (2003) contends that social identities, while fluid and unfixed and socially constructed by nature, are most commonly organized on the "basis of race,

ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, body size, and physical or mental ability" (p. 20)—and this research employs the term "identity" or "social identity," often interchangeably, by that definition. Building on Audre Lorde (1984), Tatum suggests that our perceptions of self in relationship to those categories rests somewhere in the contested space between how we perceive ourselves and how others perceive us, and that how we notice, understand and value various identities is contingent upon a litany of social possibilities, including how they are constructed and reinforced through mass media, popular culture and schools. Our "hybridity" in this way, Jocson (2005) suggests, means "that we contain a multiplicity of voices and selves, some of which may even be contradictory," and allow us to simultaneously be privileged and oppressed, seen and not seen (p. 50).

Noguera (2012) contends that it is during adolescence that young people begin to situate themselves in local and more global contexts, drawing from the discourses available—behaviors, beliefs, social cues, dress, gestures—to begin to quite literally perform identity. Because identities offer "different ways of participating" in cultures and institutions (Gee, 2005), it makes sense that when young people assert one portion of themselves or their identities, it may at times come in conflict with the culture of expectations around someone else's. From this sociocultural perspective, identity is both an internal understanding of self as well as perceptions of self based on the gazes of others, and it is a set of practices outwardly expressed through, among other things, various literacies. In the case of this research, literacy practices become the tools and modes of communication engaged when students construct and deconstruct notions of identity and difference, and communicate their experiences in the course.

Expanding Literacies If for the purpose of this study we understand literacy practices as various tools and modes for communication—and students' artifacts, reflections and participation in the course being studied are the predominant data guiding this investigation, which I will speak more to in Chapter 3—it is necessary to consider how conceptualizations of literacy in general have expanded in recent years. In much the same way sociocultural perspectives evolved to define identity development as a distinctly social process, the field of New Literacy Studies (NLS) emerged to expand the topography of traditional conceptions of literacy from it's narrow definition as the ability to read and write toward a more general practice that is multimodal, social and contextual. James Gee (1990) outlined the initial case for a NLS by situating literacy as a social and cultural achievement—not merely a cognitive skill—that allowed people to participate in cultural groups and activities and thus advocated for a field of study that looked more carefully at how social and cultural groups engaged with one another, and defined literacies from that vantage point. Through this recognition, the work of NLS initiated a dramatic shift in the field toward a more culturally-rooted understanding of literacy, an acknowledgement of multiple multimodal forms of text, and a deeper investigation into what Gee (2012) referred to as "discourse communities"—ways in which people "sociocultrually organize themselves to engage in activities" (p. 6)

Reimagining literacies as multiple, cultural, and socially constructed opens up new possibilities for pedagogy in that it invites students' lives inevitably into the curriculum, and allows for celebration of the different subjectivities that students bring to classrooms (Street, 1984). In terms of how expanded conceptualizations of literacy may serve as a framework and guiding reference for this study, Valerie Kinloch (2010)

eloquently articulates that "literacies involve questioning our roles in the world, assuming multiple identities to consider various perspectives and experience empathy…" (p.145) Understanding literacies in this new way, as enabling students to make sense of perspectives across differences, is a vital part of the framing around this undertaking. I use the terms literacy and literacies interchangeably throughout this dissertation.

Defining the Dialogic Curriculum The construction of the initial curriculum at the core of this research and my analysis of students' participation in it for this dissertation is deeply informed by Patricia Stock's (1995) distinguishing characteristics of "dialogic curriculum." Building both on the above perspectives regarding social identity and literacy, Stock contends that curricula ought to provide students "opportunities to reflect on the predicaments of their lived worlds in the context of the studies they are asked to undertake" (p. 16) in school. While Stock's scholarship is a guiding light for this research predominantly due to it's parallel inquiry and scope—the groundbreaking case studies that evolved from her teacher-researcher efforts will be explored later in this chapter—her delineation of "dialogic curriculum" also serves as powerful yet subtle framework through which to make sense of this work:

> A dialogic curriculum is introduced when teachers invite and enable students to join them in a broadly outlined field of inquiry.
>
> A dialogic curriculum is established when students ground the curriculum in topical inquiries—issues, questions, problems—that their prior experiences have prepared them to explore.
>
> A dialogic curriculum develops as learners enable one another to enrich and extend the understandings of each other, and to improve the competencies with which they entered the field of inquiry.
>
> A dialogic curriculum concludes when learners carry their enriched and extended understandings and competencies back into their home communities. (Stock, 1995, p. 24)

These guiding principles anchored the initial conceptualization and cultivation of the curriculum at the center of this study many years ago, but I also aim to employ them again in my efforts to make sense of students experiences, where and how their various selves and literacies may intersect and bring tension into the classroom space, and the implications for pedagogy therein.

Review of Relevant Literature: Promising Practices

Critical English Education Since the influential Dartmouth Seminar of 1966, many have identified and defended the English classroom as a particularly unique space in education through which to endorse explorations of identity, social justice and civic engagement (Morrell, 2005). Before delving into the English classroom in particular, however, it will be useful to briefly define and frame the larger development of what is meant by the notion of "critical education" in the United States, and to list a handful of vital assumptions emergent from that concept that this research is premised around. Both a philosophy and an educational movement, critical pedagogy is built upon an understanding of teaching as a deeply political act that rejects the neutrality of knowledge, and an insistent belief that issues of social justice and democracy are inherently embedded in all teaching and learning practices (Kincheloe, 2008). Although structured upon the validation of student experience, however, a true critical pedagogy is one that furthers that investigation by intentionally naming for and with students how systems of power impact their lives. The goal of a critical education is the awakening of one's critical consciousness in a way that allows for emancipation from oppression, and activates political and social critique (Freire, 1970).

Emergent from that perspective, the first critical assumption that this research is based upon is that the purpose of education is to empower students to think critically about themselves and the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). The Frankfurt School's Theodor Adorno was perhaps the most directly outspoken about the need for a synergy—a commitment, even—between the tenets of critical theory and the educational process. Following World War II, Adorno's reverberating essay, "Education After Auschwitcz" (1959), named explicitly the role that education must play if the world was to avoid another holocaust. Specifically, he issued a charge to the field to be more intentional in its efforts to teach social justice, center human rights in school curricula, and adopt a political stance toward teaching that prioritized the humanization of people across cultures and identities (Adorno, 1959). Responding directly to Adorno's call from the other side of the globe, Paul Freire's emerging work echoed a similar insistence for the purpose of education. Freire (1965) deepened critical theorists' call for an infusing of social criticism in education by offering a set of specific ideas, systems and tools through which to understand oppression and liberation, and to enact "critical consciousness raising" in the classroom (Freire, 1970).

The second critical assumption on which this research is built is that the acquisition of literacy is deeply connected to students' literal and figurative freedoms, and that teaching and learning are inherently political acts. Although well ahead of the conversation around critical pedagogy in American education, Fredrick Douglass' *Narrative of a Slave* (Douglass, 1845) was the first text that spoke both literally and symbolically to the linkage between literacy and freedom. Douglass' work represented a touchstone text from which Freire and others would draw their articulation of teachers as

"cultural workers" responsible for not only academic instruction and the teaching of reading and writing, but of the profound underlying social and political power that goes along with that responsibility as well.

The third and final critical belief is that education should engage the lived experiences of both students and teachers as academic subject matter worthy of exploration in the classroom—and should expand those perspectives through dialogic practices. John Dewey (1899) first articulated the importance of integrating student experience into curriculum, advocating for a break from traditional literature as the sole purveyor of culture in the classroom, but it was Freire (1970) who expanded that argument through a more explicit social justice oriented lens. While revolutionary in a number of important ways, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) introduced several key concepts that quickly became bedrock in the discourse about school reform and progressive education. Foremost among those are Freire's conceptualization and critique of the "banking" model of education, in which facts are deposited into the minds of passive students, and its contrasting "problem-posing" model, which positions knowledge as formulated through dialogue between teacher and student, and locates students as principal knowledge-holders about their own lives (p. 72). Similarly, Freire also introduced the notion of "critical consciousness" as one of the ultimate goals of critical pedagogy—namely, to help students achieve an in-depth understanding of the world, and to take action against the oppressive elements in one's life that are illuminated through that awareness.

Just as Adorno's "Education After Auschwitz" (1959) reminds us of the vital role that education must play in being explicit about social injustice in the world, Ernest

Morrell (2005) and others posit that the English classroom is the one discipline truly up to that task; to inviting into the learning process the sociological theories about inequities, and even the role that schools themselves play in reproducing them (MacLeod, 1987). Morrell's "critical English education" is one that rests its insistence on the political potential for the English classroom on its innate centering of language and literacy—tools that enable us to "construct ourselves" and speak back to the social circumstances around us (p. 2). Further, English instruction can, like few other disciplines, meet the increasingly rigid demands of standardization testing while simultaneously being explicit about the potential for language and writing to explore power relations in the world (hooks, 1994). Further still, it is one that privileges inquiry into the relationships between language, literacy, culture and power, and what Morrell calls "a pedagogy and axis of praxis and dissent," or, that is, a teaching approach that positions adolescents to at once achieve academically *and* engage civically with the world, move through the rigor of high stakes testing spaces *and* explore their own social identities and orientations (p. 5). This approach is rooted in the belief that the teaching of language and literacy is an inherently political act, and that to teach English in the 21st century is to recognize "literacy educators as political agents capable of enabling…academic transformation and social change" (12). This study responds to Morrell's call for a critical English education that provides spaces for students, particularly those from historically marginalized communities, to examine and talk back to their own social realities in writing.

Defining Cultural Ruptures One of the central ideas anchoring this research is the concept of "cultural ruptures" in classroom spaces that enable for dialogue within and across student identities. I am defining cultural ruptures generally as moments in the

classroom when student experiences around identity assert themselves in ways that create conflict or dissonance between the cultures and expectations of students' in-school and out-of-school lives (Gutierrez, 2008). More specifically, this research identifies cultural ruptures as moments where that conflict or dissonance around the assertion of student identity results in one of two specific behaviors: "Perspectivizing" and "Risk Taking Toward Connectedness" (Villanueva, 2013). Columbia University's Center for Studies in Educational Innovation developed a pioneering framework, as part of a global multiyear effort, for identifying and quantifying the most important global capacities for learning in the 21st century. Among the many areas and categories outlined through their work, the skills of "Perspectivizing" and "Risk-Taking" held particular value in my own consideration of how cultural ruptures presented themselves in the curriculum and classroom at the center of this research. As such, these areas have inherited a crucial role in how I will strive to identify such "ruptures" or moments in my data. While the larger impact of cultural ruptures on students and classrooms may far transcend these two categories alone, this research identifies the value of "cultural rupturing" as connected to these two specific capacities, and the ways in which they work to counter a culture of sterilized tolerance education, and bullying and student conflict across differences in schools.

While I contend that these specific behaviors pose a contrast to the environments of *many* classrooms, I believe they pose an especially unique contrast to classroom environments governed by teaching strategies and packaged curricula that are emergent from the tolerance education movement, as in the previous pages. In other words, while cultural ruptures in this case refer to moments where students' multiple conflicting

identities play out in and disrupt the normal ebb and flow of typical classroom life, they *also* refer to the ways in which those moments puncture through Mayo's "careful choreography of civil speech"—or, the hard-to-penetrate cloak of political correctness that drapes conversations about identity in classrooms anchored by tolerance-based programs.

As a way of sharpening my frame of reference for this type of classroom environment, the US Government's StopBullying.gov and the New York City Department of Education's "Respect for All" campaign are two such programs that I will refer to peripherally throughout my discussion of this research. Respect for All's mission "to promote a community of inclusion, and to combat harassment, discrimination and bullying in (NYC) schools" is of course meaningful in it's aim—and the inclusion of it in this discussion is to suggest nothing less. Both of these programs take up phenomenally important work, and save lives through the resources they provide and the communities they bring together. I mean instead to offer concrete, contemporary examples of how the tolerance education movement of the 1990s morphed to take up the trending issue of bullying in schools, to contemplate the unintended impact that these programs may have on the larger environments of classrooms, and most importantly, to consider my students voices as represented in the data in relationship those settings.

One lingering concern about the holistic school efficacy of these projects revolves around the question of whether or not the specific targeting of bully behavior overly diagnoses bullying as the problem, as opposed to merely a symptom of deeper, underlying issues. Another concern about the success of these programs is connected to the stringent policing and subsequent punishment around language in schools, and the

fear of "saying the wrong thing"—so much so that students and teachers may rather ignore difference and conflict altogether than attempt to address it and use the wrong word, the wrong tone of voice, make the wrong historical reference, and so on. Although in the course of my initiating this research I was at best uncertain around the role that cultural ruptures might assume in addressing some of these issues, my early observations of this curriculum at work suggested that there might be a few connections to be made.

Situating Cultural Ruptures While the idea of cultural ruptures as defined in this way is fairly new, a recognition of the tensions that exist between students' home lives and the cultures of schools has been embedded in the conversation concerning educational reform since Vgotsky's (1934) research linking speech and cognitive development. Cole and Scribner's (1978) groundbreaking translation of Vgotsky's work reframed the conversation for the West around the acquisition of literacy as far more than strictly a reading and writing phenomenon—one cultivated in discourse communities outside the confines of school instruction—and created space for scholarship to problematize separation of students at-home and at-school communities (Gutierrez, Lopéz & Tejada, 2013). While pioneering linguists Sled (1968) and Smitherman (1974) advocated for the validation of students' linguistic diversities in schools, it was Moll (1992) and Gutierrez's (2008) more socioculturally holistic consideration of students experiences outside of school that paved the way for the discussion of students discordant, dissonant identities in classrooms—and thus it is that scholarship around which the notion of cultural ruptures emerges. Deepening Gutierrez's Third Space Theory, Moll's (1992) work sought to highlight the importance of the existing knowledge bases that students brought with them into their formal schooling experiences, and to

frame those "funds" of existing knowledge as essential building blocks for curriculum, management and other critical components of classroom pedagogy. Moll's conceptualization of "funds of knowledge" paved the way for this dissertation research, and its explicit effort to bring the lived experiences of students (and teachers) into the classroom space to act an instructional center piece.

In "Developing a Sociocultural Literacy in the Third Space" (2008), Kris Gutierrez argued for a reimagining of education to reflect a "historicizing literacy that privileges and is contingent upon student's sociohistorical lives" (p. 140). Building on Vygotsky, Gutierrez's Third Space is a nexus where the learning process in school merges with and connects students' experiences in the home and community. This research advances Gutierrez's work by not only embracing a kind of holistic pedagogy centered around students lived experiences, but attempts to name and learn from moments where those experiences create friction within the cultures of pluralistic classrooms and schools (Gutierrez, Lopéz & Tejada, 2013). Because there has been little research within the field of education that has attempted to name and investigate those precise moments, I turn to the fields of sociology and psychology research on which to build a foundation.

Cultural dissonance draws from Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance to explain the phenomenon that presents itself when individuals that participate in multiple cultures or subcultures (all of us) are faced with situations where there is a conflict between a set of expectations from one culture and the expectations of another—and the behaviors and actions we initiate to reduce those feelings (Heine & Lehman, 1997). Similarly, W.E.B. DuBois' powerful concept of double consciousness (Du Bois,

1903) comes to mind, in the internal conflict that Black Americans experience via membership to multiple groups, ever-straddling what Du Bois metaphorically refers to as "the veil" to describe the experience of "a constant sense of seeing oneself through the eyes of other" (p. 364). While Du Bois' work stems from a deep and powerful love and advocacy for African Americans, the concept of double-consciousness can in many ways be universally applied to many cultures and subcultures whose experience of multiple "selves"—self as self-perceived, and self as perceived by others—causes tension.

Sociologist Alan Johnson (2001) argues that one way of negotiating the friction created through our conflicting, multiple selves is to take the "path of least resistance" (p. 87). Paths of least resistance, he contends, are quite literally decisions we make when confronted with identity-specific conflicts that will minimize our discomfort—sometimes they are paths we take because we can not see an alternative and thus participate in an invisible cultural protocol, while others are paths we take because the alternatives before us make us scared or uncomfortable:

> What we experience as social life happens through a complex dynamic between all kinds of systems—families, schools, workplaces, identities, communities, entire societies—and the choices people make as they participate in those systems. Paths of least resistance are choices we make amidst those systems …to avoid the risk of being ridiculed or ostracized or challenged. (Johnson, 2001, p. 89)

In the context of this research and study, paths of least resistance might be easily understood as any one a number of fairly predictable behaviors when it comes to engaging in conversations around issues of identity and difference: to laugh or be silent through the telling of a racist or sexist joke, to avoid sharing aloud the stereotypical beliefs our families may have taught us when we were kids, to be aware of bullying and

not intervene. While it's clear why each of the above examples might constitute paths of least resistance for high school students (and adults, too), I wondered what it might look like to attempt to build a curriculum designed to purposefully create opportunities for this dissonance, to welcome it into the classroom space, with as much safety and structure as possible; to create opportunities and incentives for the careful interrogation of self and others—for students' to wrestle aloud and interpersonally with "their two-ness, their two reconciled strivings, their two warring ideals" (Du Bois, 1903, p. 365). These moments, these cultural ruptures, that presented sharp departures from the typical paths of least resistance in classroom and cultural protocol, were what this research aimed to interrogate. I wondered if the dissonance triggered in those cultural ruptures might open the door for new pedagogies and educational possibilities—specifically, if it might enable students to more readily demonstrate behaviors such as "Perspectivizing" and "Risk-Taking Toward Connectedness" which directly counter behaviors that might be prevalent in environments where bullying and conflict across differences are present. This research investigated students' experiences with a curriculum designed to center their dissonant selves and narratives in the foreground of instruction with the hope that by doing so, they might encounter the world and each other with greater connection and empathy.

Counter-Stories While this research argues a clear linkage between bullying and an underlying issues of difference and social identity, it is worth noting that the tension and alienation that some students experience in school isn't always connected to their identities—sometimes, it's just school. Schools as institutions often reflect a kind of culture in which not all people experience the feeling of belonging, regardless of who they are from a sociocultural perspective or what they bring with them into the space.

While this additional truth makes schools even more provocative sites through which to examine these moments of dissonance, it also means that there are multiple kinds of "counter-stories" that students' are being asked to engage in throughout this research process (Ayers, Dohrn & Ayers, 2001).

Solórzano & Yosso (2002) understand counter-storytelling as a way of sharing the narratives of individuals and groups whose experiences are rarely made visible. A pedagogy that centers "counter stories" is an element of critical race theory (CRT), a form of scholarship that that aims to eliminate subordination and inequity based on race and other identifiers like gender, class, sexual orientation, language, and ethnicity (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Counter-storytelling is a vehicle that CRT scholars engage to contradict master narratives. In this study, the master narrative is multifold: it is the dominant culture present in students own individual autoetnhographic narratives, which they respond and speak back to by defining and redefining themselves and their identities through language and storytelling and performance; and is it the *also* the dominant narrative of schools working in direct opposition to courses like the one at the center of this study—ones that challenge students to be vulnerable and take risks toward building relationships with others *in school*. In this way, it is worth noting that any analysis on the part of students and researchers regarding students' in and out-of-school lives is engaging multiple layers of a counter-storytelling pedagogy and praxis. Even more granularly, the cultures that "Perspectivizing" and "Risk-taking Toward Connectedness" may be "rupturing" are multiple, and meaningful not only to students' deepening understandings of themselves and each other—but potentially their relationships with school as well.

A Brief Argument for the Arts "The arts," Maxine Greene (2007) once famously said, "cannot change the world, but they may change human beings who might change the world" (p. 2). One of the most important philosophers of the 20th century concerning the value of aesthetic education, Greene believed in the transformative potential for the arts to enable us to see more in our day-to-day experiences, hear more on normally unheard frequencies and to become awake to what the mundane of routine has kept hidden. Green's belief in the power of art was contingent upon more than it's potential for enjoyment and worldly reflection but to render a heightened state of "wide-awakeness" in human beings—that is, to more fully perceive "the grass, the trees, the city streets, the abandoned ones, the homeless ones, the broken windows, the redesigned museum, what is absent, what is realized" (p.8). In her essay "Toward Wide-Awakeness: An Argument for Arts and Humanities in Education" (2007) Greene further articulates the application of this approach for the cultivation of imagination and empathy in classroom spaces:

> To be enabled to activate the imagination is to discover not only possibility, but to find the gaps, the empty spaces that require filling as we move from the is to the might be, to the should be. To release the imagination too is to release the power of empathy, to become more present to those around us, their stories, and perhaps to care (p.4).

Like Greene, Elliot Eisner's (2002) work relies heavily on the belief that meaningful encounters with art enable students to experience the world more fully, and to cultivate empathy for one another's life experiences—and in so doing, sometimes for entire groups of people. This scholarship speaks to the valuable role that literature, music, theater and dance could play in a curriculum designed to catalyze difficult dialogue around issues of identity.

Eisner (2002) and others suggest that the arts "insist on a celebration of multiple perspectives…and teach young people to make good judgments about qualitative relationships" (p. 72). The curriculum at the core of this research study subscribes to that belief by placing interpersonal connection and dialogue across differences as the goal of arts integration. W.E.B. Du Bois (1926) argues that "all art is propaganda" (p. 1001). In other words, an inevitable impact of art—intended or otherwise—is that it promotes a cause and serve a purpose. Through that lens, by centering the arts as the dominant vehicle for experiential sharing and communication in the classroom, this research study aimed to afford students the opportunity to speak about themselves, their experiences and the social and political issues that matter to them in ways they may not feel comfortable in traditional classroom settings.

Du Bois also reminds us in his insistence that all art is political of the role that educators play in opening spaces for students to interrogate some of those boundaries, and explore the distinction between the personal vs. the political, individual vs. group identities, and so on. Again recalling Adorno's (1959) urgent reframing of the sole goal of education in the 20th century—specifically, to prevent another Auschwitz, though more generally, to engage young people in a pedagogy of love, and justice and the interpersonal—it is essential that young people have, as Dewey (1938) puts it, the capacity to look at things and each other as if they could be otherwise, to imagine the world as it is not and has yet to be, which on it's own demands creativity and imagination that can only come through careful and committed arts instruction (Greene, 2007). These powerful philosophical underpinnings—DuBois' belief in the potential for art creation and instruction to inherently activate the political, and Greene's faith in the arts to

cultivate empathy and expand perspectives—anchor the curriculum at the center of this research.

Defining Autoethnography While I am a deep advocate of the aesthetic beauty and the political usefulness of art across all disciplines, it is a very specific vein within literary art, akin to storytelling, that this research zeros in on most particularly. Storytelling is the mind's first effort to make sense of experience, and good stories are as significant to understanding the human experience as good theory, tight analysis (and) logical proof are to science (Bruner, 1985). Among the many reasons that the process of exchanging stories is so central to human growth (and thus an important cornerstone of education) is that it is necessarily a social act; stories "demonstrate relationships between tellers, hearers, characters and others" (Shuman, 1986, p. 21) and have the potential to serve as webs that bind diverse groups into functioning units (Wanner, 2013, p. 22).

Building on the rich and layered foundation of storytelling as a historical practice, theory, and pedagogy, Allen Carey-Webb (2001) roots his development of the term autoethnography by defining and explaining it as an amalgamation of two separate terms: testimonial and ethnography. Autoethnographies are "cultural narratives that build toward critical social analysis, promote self and social reflection" (Camangian, 2010, p. 179). Put differently, they are "the literary art of the contact zone" (p. 181) where one finds cultural copresence, interaction, inner-locking understandings and practices" – and importantly, they are orally shared. Autoethnographies are stories in which an author locates him or herself as part of a larger social system, and seeks to explain, explore or speak back to the cultural group(s) in which he or she holds citizenship (Alexander, 1999).

As an instructional tool, centering autoethnographies in the curriculum holds to

potential to be especially valuable in schools with historically marginalized communities (Boler, 2004) as to "practice education in humanizing, caring ways… that normalize empathetic communication in the classroom" (Camangian, 2010, p. 201). Distinct from the general practice of storytelling in its narrowed focus to engage identity-based narratives in particular, autoethnographic writing is an ideal pedagogical tool for cultivating spaces where difficult dialogue about identity might be possible, like that called for in the program at the center of this study. According to Patrick Camangian (2010), autoethnographies are a strategic pedagogical tool for students to "examine the ways they experience, exist and explain their identities—who they are, what they stand for, and why—and to recognize their cultural, racial, and gendered social relations" (p. 183). Further, Johnson and & Freeman (2001) propose that by building curricula that encourage the sharing of these narratives—and by sharing their own alongside their students—teachers can create "a community of learners that might just overcome some of the boundaries that keep people apart or alone in the world of school" (p. 43). And while it might be enough to simply invite student autoethnographies into the classroom via traditional oral storytelling techniques, the curriculum's added emphasis on performance and "going public" with said stories makes even more feasible the type of dialogue and discourse from which cultural ruptures, or moments for dialogue, might emerge.

Why Performance Poetry? Karina Jocson (2005) and others argue that the art of "performance poetry," a style of poetry intended for onstage performance, rather than exclusively designed for the page, represents an engaging and powerful vehicle for drawing young people into critical, democratic educational experiences that strive toward social justice (Fisher, 2005). That is, in addition to it's ability to help teach critical

literacy skills and foster classroom community, performance poetry provides a dynamic platform for young people to share their stories—or autoethnographies, as it were—as a way of working toward social criticism and analysis in the classroom (Fisher, 2005). Frequently used interchangeably with the term "spoken word," performance poetry is cited as an especially valuable tool for engagement in the classroom in that it is, by definition, performative. In the same way that stories themselves need listeners in order for storytelling as a practice to be at work, so too is that true for performance poetry. It is in part this aspect of the form that Camangian (2001) again reminds us of the added usefulness of this form of work when invited into classrooms of youth "that are traditionally portrayed as threatening, menaces to society or marginalized from mainstream discourse" (p. 36).

"Critical poets," as Jocson defines them, are writers who "use the genre and medium of poetry for its personal and social transformative possibilities" (p. 48). By this definition, in its efforts to utilize as tools by which to enable in young people an awareness of self and social identity, the DAP curriculum strives to create "critical poets," though with a special emphasis on the autoethnographic stories that document their experiences as members of particular groups. Jocson continues: "Critical poets value and disseminate poetic expression to challenge asymmetrical power relations, or forms of oppression based on gender, race, language, culture, class, ability, among others" (p. 49).

Similarly, while Jocson (2001) acknowledges that both "critical poets" and "hybrid literacies" are not necessarily new terms (at least by her definition), she argues for their reentry into the discussion surrounding culturally responsive teaching as a symbiotic set of terms in which the impact of one becomes possible (or amplified) as a

result of the presence of the other. Maisha Fisher (2005) proclaims that by developing these critical poets and celebrating hybrid literacies in our classrooms, we are empowering youth to "make statements about the world," and in so doing, helping them locate themselves as "literate, civically engaged members of society" (p. 56). A brief note on terminology: in much the same way that performance poetry can be defined simply as "poetry that is written to be read aloud," the prelude "creative" refers to any writing—not merely poetry or spoken word—created with the intent of being shared audibly with others (Camangian, 2008). Creative autoethnographies, then, are individual cultural narratives written to be shared aloud for the purpose of celebrating and investigating social identity and difference in the classroom and in the world. Ultimately, the curriculum at the center of this study is unique not in that it advocates for the use of autoethnography, performance and dialogue skills as culturally relevant practices—but that it acknowledges the relationship *between* the three, and that it names the transformative potential of each practice when combined into a single, pedagogical approach.

Revisiting the Dialogic Curriculum If it is through the building and sharing of creative autoethnographies that young people may be able to articulate, criticize and speak back to their realities, it is in dialogue around those narratives and performance where cultural ruptures might take place (Schoem & Hurtado, 2001). While there are a great many ways to understand the concept of "dialogue," particularly as the term is used with such increasing colloquialism, it is a very specific amalgamation of definitions that this study draws from (Yankelovich, 1999). This study centers around dialogue resources built by the University of Michigan's Program on Intergroup Relations as part of a

national study now in it's 31st year and replicated at over 120 colleges and universities across the country. The program "blends theory and experiential learning to facilitate students learning about social group identity, social inequality, and intergroup relations" (Gurin, Nagda & Zuniga, 2013, p. 13).

Building on a range of existing philosophies and definitions from social and educational psychology (Bohm,1996; Bahktin, 1981; Allport, 1931), the Program on Intergroup Relations (IGR) defines dialogue as a form of communication designed not for the purpose of reaching conclusions but rather understanding multiple perspectives and building authentic relationships with others (Zuniga, Nagda, & Sevig, 2002). They define intergroup dialogue (IGD) as "the process of dialogue during which two or more groups of individuals engage in face-to-face conversation in an effort to explore, challenge, and overcome the biases they hold about members of their own and other groups" (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2000, p. 36).

Despite its promising outcomes and widespread influence, however, IGD has largely existed only in college and university settings (Gurin, Nagda & Zuniga, 2013). One study conducted by Griffin, Brown and Warren (2013) details one of the program's early efforts at integrating IGR's curriculum and basic dialogic practices into a series of high schools in southeastern Michigan to address an increasing concern of student conflict across difference. Conducted as an after school program for an entire school year, this study was designed in part to address one school's particular concerns regarding bullying and cross-cultural conflict. While balanced in detailing both its success and challenges, the study's ultimate findings were extremely positive. After their experiences in dialogue, students reported being less likely to engage in bullying and

discriminatory behavior, and more likely to build interpersonal relationships across difference. Further, they also reported "an increased critical consciousness of larger social issues" (p. 169). It is not only IGR's brand of dialogue that this research most closely identifies with, but many of their facilitation tools, resources and protocols assumed central roles in the construction and execution of the DAP curriculum.

Similarly, Patricia Stock's (1995) investigations around the application of dialogic practice in the classroom are also hugely influential to the shaping of this research. In *The Dialogic Curriculum: Teaching and Learning in a Multicultural Society* (1995), Stock explores the impact of a curriculum designed to "use reading and writing as a tool to investigate and situate the 'teenage stress' students faced in and out of school," both through the sharing of "growing up stories" and through dialogue (p. 2). Revisiting Maxine Greene (1978) on the potential for creativity in the classroom to hatch profound explorations of self and the world, Stock's work makes the case that it is the responsibility of curriculum to provide students "opportunities to reflect on the predicaments of their lived worlds in the context of the studies they are asked to undertake" (p. 16) in school:

> Students must be enabled, at whatever stages they find themselves to be, to encounter, curriculum as possibility. By that I mean curriculum ought to provide a series of occasions for individuals to articulate the themes of their existence and to reflect on those themes until they know themselves to be in the world and can name what has been up to then obscure. (Greene, 1978, p. 18)

In this way, curricula that intentionally presents opportunity for these "occasions" actively works toward blurring the line between students in-school and out-of-school lives—and constitutes what Stock defines as (and what the curriculum at the core of this study embodies) a "dialogic curriculum." Because the distinguishing principles of a

dialogic curriculum so fundamentally underscore the larger inquiry of this research, I will articulate them in in my discussion of the literature that shapes the framework for my work.

In this discussion of literature, I've attempted to name the scholarship that best outlines (1) the socio-historical legacy, both within and beyond schools, that this study reflects and responds to, (2) the lineage of work informing my efforts as a teacher-turned-researcher to engage narrative, performance poetry and arts-based pedagogies in the classroom, and (3) my definition of dialogue as it is used in this study, and the dialogic curriculum (and framework) guiding it. By introducing "cultural ruptures" and framing this discourse in the context of the "tolerance movement" in education—specifically, as an effort to disrupt, trouble and reimagine it—I aim for this research to further our understandings of English classrooms as sites for proactively engaging issues of student identity and difference.

III. METHODOLOGY

This critical case study uses qualitative research methodology to investigate how students at one particular school experienced participation in a creative writing course designed to center discourse and dialogue around issues of social identity and difference. More directly, I aim to explore how centering students' cultural narratives in the classroom—and the student dialogue generated in response to them—productively "rupture" school spaces typically categorized by an avoidance of issues of identity. To reaffirm, I define cultural ruptures as moments in the classroom where student experiences with social identity assert themselves in ways that create dissonance or tension against the backdrop of school environments. By allowing students to take the lead in several components of data collection and analysis, this study will reinforce the value of young people's voices when attempting to think critically about and reimagine the institutions traditionally designed to support them.

In the pages that follow, I will revisit my research questions, outline how they correspond with my data collection methods in Table 1, and expand on my positionality as researcher. I will then provide an overview of the dissertation study, including a detailed explanation of the Dialogue Arts Project curriculum at the core of this research. Next, I will present findings from an exploratory pilot study I conducted with the original data that informed the development of my research questions. I will then give an overview of the research site, population and participants, followed by an explanation of my data collection methods. Afterwards, I will explain the methods I chose for analyzing my data, and finally, I will consider some of the limitations of my study. My research questions, once again, are as follows:

- **RQ1:** How do students experience participation in a creative writing elective that combines the practices of autoethnographies and intergroup dialogue?
  - What benefit, if any, do students derive from exploring their social identities with other students?
  - How do young people navigate critical conversations and explorations of identity in school?
- **RQ2:** How might the sharing of conflicting and aligning cultural narritives in classroom spaces—those that work in service of and in opposition to healthy school community and culture—create meaningful learning opportunities for students?
- **RQ3:** How might English classrooms function as spaces to positively address and disrupt school cultures where student conflict across differences is prevalent?
  - What role, if any, can English teachers play in the process of facilitating in-school experiences for students toward the above purpose.

Table 1: Corresponding Data Collection Methods & Research Questions

Methods of Data Collection	Methods of Data Analysis	Research Questions Addressed
Participant Texts & Artifacts	Coding for themes, Critical artifact analysis	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
Participant Observations	Coding for themes	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
Semi-Structured Participant Interviews	Coding for themes	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
Participant Surveys	Critical artifact analysis	RQ1, RQ3

Positionality

Creswell (2013) contends that "how we write, and presumably what we write about…is a reflection of our own interpretations based on the cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics that we bring to research" (Creswell, 2013, p.215). In many qualitative disciplines, such as feminist and critical theories, it is paramount to recognize that the lived experiences and consciousness of the researcher will inevitably be involved in the research process as much as they are in one's everyday life (Alvermann et al., 1997). I have deep personal ties to this work, and feel it is important to offer the following as insight into my own subjectivities in this research.

First, as alluded to in Chapter I, I am a white, cis-gendered man from an upper-middle class family in the Midwest. What those factors have ultimately compounded to mean for me is that throughout my life I have been handed a plethora of opportunities and options. Among the many opportunities that have come my way at least in part by virtue of those privileges, none were more meaningful than the opportunity to participate as a dialogue facilitator and curriculum coordinator for the University of Michigan's Program on Intergroup Relations (IGR) as an undergraduate student. My introduction to IGR occurred very shortly after the school's landmark Supreme Court battle concerning the use of affirmative action in university admissions—a period of time when the cultural climate on campus was especially turbulent and volatile. Participating in IGR's dialogue courses about race on campus was an especially powerful experience, and illuminated to me, for the first time, the potential for students' individual lives and experiences to constitute concrete subject matter worthy of exploring in academic spaces. Further, that experience prompted me to delve deeply into lifelong critical reflection around my own

whiteness and privilege, the identities of others, and broader systems of oppression. It was that initial experience that enabled me to consider a testimonial-based approaches to exploring social identity in the secondary classroom as a way to build empathy and understanding across difference.

Second, I am a product of the course similar to the one I facilitated that is the basis for this research. As a teenager, part of my experience attending an overcrowded public high school in the Midwest challenged me to "try on" a number of identities in an effort to find myself as a maturing young adult: three-sport varsity athlete, musical theater nerd, hip hop artist, camp counselor and outdoor adventurer, a cappella choir soloist, school government secretary, experimental drug user, habitat for humanity organizer—the list goes on. While to be clear, the option to try on "selves" is an exercise in privilege, my participation in so many different spaces was also a way to defend myself from what I have come to recognize, many years later, as a distinct effort to avoid the shame and discomfort I experienced around my own identity development as a gay man. This "splitting" (Downs, 2012) of selves, while an effort toward protecting myself from both psychological and emotional (and physical) violence added to the isolation and secrecy I felt around my gayness. It was only through creative writing (and later, drama and music) that I was able to bring those many selves together, to give myself permission to embrace all of who I was, and to authentically exist in the world. This research is deeply tied to my own experience with art as a young, queer man, and its healing presence in my own life as I struggled to navigate a number of fractured identities—a process I continued to explore and write about alongside my students during the time this research was conducted in the form of two separate collections of poetry. I identify

deeply as an artist and writer, and my efforts as a teacher-researcher are situated amidst an effort to support my intuition that art and story have the potential to transform lives.

Third, my interest in education, from the beginning, has been fueled as much by questions of identity and inequity as by an interest in the science of teaching and learning—and classrooms, more than any lifelong dream occupation, represented for me an exciting space to deepen and complicate those concerns. I moved to New York City to accept a high school English placement as a New York City Teaching Fellow. At the time, the placement represented a comfortable salary, a free Master's degree, and an opportunity to work with teenagers in a remarkable city. Teaching fellowships like NYCTF and Teach for America, among dozens across the nation, incentivize academically capable college graduates to pursue the teaching profession in such a way that prepares them for the grind of lesson planning, but struggle to name the elephant in the room which is the demographic breakdown of the teachers they are hiring (overwhelmingly white and from upper middle-class backgrounds) and the schools and students they are serving (overwhelmingly non-white, often living at or below the poverty line). By their calculation, the former outweighs the latter—and admittedly, it may—but it does not account for the troublesome dynamic that persists in many classrooms in cities like New York, where each day thousands of over-privileged white teachers stand in front of classrooms populated by systematically oppressed black and brown youth. Over the course of my first five years in the classroom, my development as a teacher and my cultivation of curriculum was tied to an effort to minimize that problematic dynamic—to at once embrace my voice as instructor, while striving to highlight my students' voices, stories and opinions more than my own. In some ways,

such a feat is impossible.

I wish to make no effort in this research to appear objective or unbiased. My approach is decidedly value-driven and intentional in its aim to attach worth to the practices of autoethnographic writing and dialogue practices, and to offer my own experience in combining those two approaches as one potential model for educators to consider in attempting to address issues of student conflict in their own schools. My attachment to art as a teaching tool is underpinned by my own desire as a white teacher working in largely non-white contexts to "get out of the way," so to speak—to center voices and narratives other than mine in the teaching and learning process. In addition to the importance of storytelling and performance as a way to decenter and combat the unsettling demographic differences between teachers and students in urban schools, I believe that many young people today experience the pressure to "split" themselves along lines of identity, and suffer tremendously (and often quietly) as a result—torment that often results in the type of student conflict that this course aimed to address. Any effort toward enabling young people to claim all of their identities at one time, to courageously stand in the light and name their celebration and their shame, their desires and their fears—particularly when the culture of least resistance around them may be calling for the opposite—is a useful and even revolutionary practice.

Research Design Overview

This research seeks to explore and understand the impact of an arts-based, dialogic curriculum designed to engage young people in the writing and sharing of their own autoethnographies. I hope to determine if and how the structured sharing of students'

cultural narratives in an English elective at one particular school can be used to engage young people in dialogue about identity and difference, and if in so doing proactively work to address larger school-wide issues of student conflict. Specifically, this critical investigation will look carefully at seven individual cases, each representing a different young person's experiences, encounters and reflections in regards to the curriculum and the course, and seek to identify patterns and draw meaning from that information. More granularly, in the case of each individual student subject, I will also aim to identify instances in their experience of the course where the assertion of student identity made possible moments for enhanced, deepened or especially provocative discourse, and likewise strive to assign value of those moments. In order to conduct this research, I will examine students' various expressions of identity, and explore with participants through interviews, and surveys their respective processes around cultivating and sharing those artifacts.

Case Study Research Creswell (2013) describes case study research as a type of mixed method design in which researchers "explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case)…over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual materials, and documents and reports), and [produces] a case description and case themes" (p.97). I elected to employ case study as my research methodology because it most efficiently allows me to investigate a particular aspect of a culture toward painting, as Nunan (1992) maintains, "a portrait of what is going on in a particular setting" (p.532). In my efforts to understand students' experiences in one particular course, at one school, over a single-year period of time, a qualitative approach that emphasizes "description and analysis of a

bounded social phenomenon" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p.31) will enable me to meaningfully slow down and accountably portray the complexities of students' social identities, their expressions of and in response to them in class, and the bridges that their individual autoethnographies may represent between their in-school and out-of-school lives. Further, as I sought to locate and attach meaning to those experiences through interviews, participant observations, and artifact analysis, a case study approach afforded both depth and texture to the triangulated data that I collected and analyzed in this study.

Participatory Defined Too often in educational research are young people studied and written about without the autonomy to shape the ways in which they are viewed, understood and valued. Throughout this dissertation, I use the term "participatory" to describe the extent to which students themselves participated directly in the construction of the course being studied, and the kinds of data that I used for this research. Because my data collection for this research was initially conducted for the sole purpose of improving and bettering a class, I collected my data in a way that viewed students as the principal knowledge-holders regarding their own lives and experiences (Freire, 1970), including, where possible, conscious decisions to integrate their benchmark feedback into the shaping of the course itself. Young people possess the insight, experiences and knowledge to "shape what should count as education and to refigure the power dynamics and discourse practices" (Cook-Sather, 2002, p.3). Wissman (2015) posits that authentically involving young people in research requires intentionally "decentering the researcher's gaze [and] embracing uncertainty and humility" (p.195). This call for embracing a "fluidity" in research methods challenges researchers to make

firm commitments to re-seeing young people as knowledge-holders and creative meaning-makers.

In this tradition, as the teacher of the course, I did my best to begin the course with a loosely organized collection of exercises, texts, routines and rituals that I thought might enable young people to share their cultural narratives most meaningfully, and to engage in difficult dialogue about them with others. To ascertain which direction the course ought to go from there, which exercises and practices ought to be kept versus those that should be reworked, and which new texts ought to be considered for the class, students offered their feedback directly. Further, many portions of the data itself, such as the semi-structured interviews, were facilitated by students themselves without my presence with the understanding that I would listen to them later and attempt to integrate their suggestions into future iterations of the course. This informal gathering of information in service of improving the course several years ago now—formal response essays, curriculum artifacts, interviews—now constitutes the bulk of the data that I will be returning to with a new set of questions for this research. To understand how this data serviced our collective work in service of building a course several years ago, *and* to better understand how that same data may also serve as a powerful pool to return to for this research, a more nuanced explanation of the curriculum itself is required.

The Dialogue Arts Project Curriculum As indicated, the course I developed and taught at Kass Academy South during the 2014 school year was designed to use autoethnographies as a shared entry point into critical, safe(r) discourse around social identity and difference. At the time, I was a veteran high school English teacher who had taught in New York City public schools for more than six years—which in no small part

underscored the administrative support I receive in constructing such a nontraditional learning experience. The curriculum itself was divided into three distinct, several-month-long stages: "Writing as Archeology," "Social Identity & Dialogue," and "Dialogue Arts Projects." The first two sections of the curriculum were intended, first and foremost, to build community in the classroom and to routinize a number of essential practices and philosophies around writing and engagement in discussion. "Dialogue Arts Projects," then, built on those ingrained routines and philosophies to enable for several months of critical student dialogue and writing about identity, during which most classes functioned largely without direct instruction from a teacher. Like most curricula, each stage built directly on the next so that as the school year progresses, students amassed a set of critical skills and understandings that were constantly being practiced in the context of new units (See Appendix 1). In other words, the routines and practices at the base of the curriculum continued to cook, while new, critical ingredients were thrown in throughout the year.

Stage 1: Writing as Archeology In working toward the practice of writing and performing individual autoethnographies, the DAP curriculum emphasized Kass and Beal's "Archeological Approach to Creative Writing" (2000). That is, a belief in the importance of unpacking the most important stories in one's life, "peeling the onion" (p. 14) in rich, vivid detail as a prerequisite to writing about larger issues, themes or ideas. Further, it suggests that before we (student *and* teachers) can ultimately explore and empathize with the experiences of others, before we can learn about the world outside ourselves and feel licensed in how we discuss critical issues related to politics and identity, we need to identify the stories in our own lives that matter most. To this end, the

first several units of the DAP curriculum were designed to excite students about the possibilities of writing and to generate a sense of curiosity and self-empowerment concerning the writing, speaking and storytelling processes. In addition to the importance of storytelling alone, the curriculum created opportunities for those stories to be performed, shared and responded to. Every in-class exercise, homework assignment, argumentative essay, mini-research project, field trip, film screening and guest artist performance was in service of that basic goal to "fill up the classroom," as it were, with as many diverse, sometimes difficult and risky, personal stories as possible. The goal was to establish the classroom space as one where students expected to learn from and about each other's lives, where they expected their experiences to be reflected and engaged within the curriculum. During this stage of the curriculum, students also learned to participate in and lead weekly, peer-writing workshops, during which they developed appropriate language and lenses for consuming and responding to each other's writing.

Stage 2: Social Identity and Dialogue While maintaining and continuing to reinforce the abovementioned core practices and philosophies for creative writing, the second stage of the Dialogue Arts Project curriculum marked a departure from simply writing and sharing about personal stories and a more focused emphasis on the exploration of social identity and the rules and routines surrounding dialogue. In other words, the autoethnographic writing processes began. Students were introduced to the concept of social identity by completing a Social Identity Profile, a grid-like resource adapted from the Program on Intergroup Relations at the University of Michigan, which required them to consider the various group memberships they held in terms of gender,

sex, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, social class, religion, nation of origin, body size, and ability status (See Appendix 2).

This grid became a central resource for the remainder of the curriculum, as students returned to it multiple times throughout the year as a tool through which to reconsider and reflect upon (in writing and dialogue) their different social identity group memberships. Each unit in this section of the curriculum was structured around categories outlined on this grid, so that student writing and dialogue was organized around a diverse collection student identities. For example, the first unit dealt with an identity students' selected as being "Most Aware Of," while the second, an identity group that students had the "Earliest Memories Of." In this way, while all student writing began to focus on personal stories related to social identity, each student wrestled with a different identity so that the sharing process enabled for an especially diverse collection of experiences and voices. Also in this unit, students were introduced to the concept and practice of dialogue. Many lessons and projects during this section of the curriculum consisted of role-playing activities and games designed to explore the differences between dialogue and debate as modes of communication, and students were given multiple opportunities—at first in pairs, then in trios—to practice the habits and goals of dialogue (See Appendix 3). Initially, student "pair/shares" were low-stakes in terms of content so as to simply strengthen their comprehension and muscle memory concerning rules for engagement in dialogue, perhaps instructed to converse about their favorite musician or their favorite food. Ultimately, though, the routinized practice of the controlled sharing and listening process enabled students to engage in dialogue with one another about more complex issues related to social identity, the larger school community

and a range of issues present in their individual lives. Eventually, students engaged in small-group dialogues around some of the predominant identity-based themes present in their creative writing and were asked to self-assess their dialogic development on a rubric every two weeks (See Appendix 4).

Stage 3: Dialogue Arts Projects Evolving organically out the first two stages of the DAP curriculum, the third and final stage entailed students' participation in and leadership of Dialogue Arts Projects (DAP). DAPs were the combination and culmination of many of the skills, philosophies and routines students' acquired during the first two stages of the larger DAP curriculum. Lasting anywhere from 3-5 weeks, each DAP involved the following sections, each an iteration of a previous unit:

- First, students participated in a series of "active art" experiences designed to introduce students to visiting artists, prompt student interest and reflection around issues of identity. Often guest artists visited the classroom or students traveled outside of the school space to experience creative events in the community. Initial debriefing discussion in response to the live literature event ensued. (3-4 days)
- Second, students were then guided through a range of exercises and activities to enable self-reflection and identity exploration, and complete a number of creative writing assignments to reflect on their own stories in writing. Students engaged in peer-editing workshop model and prepare their writing for publication and/or submission. (7-10 days)
- Lastly, students shared their identity-centered stories and written-reflections in small groups, and used that process as a springboard into a

series of highly structured, student-facilitated dialogues around identity. Student dialogues were designed and routinized to feel less conversational, and more geared toward controlled, timed, sharing and listening-based exchanges. (3-5 days)

At the culmination of each DAP, in addition to continuing to self-asses the quality of their small-group's dialogue using the abovementioned rubric, students were each assigned a 5-paragraph *Reflection and Evaluation Essay* requiring them to argue whether or not they felt the unit was a valuable experience, and what if anything ought to be considered for future units (See Appendix 5). Through these essays, students were encouraged to reflect on their growth in a range of areas, including but not limited to skill acquisition and/or development, self-understanding, reinforced or challenged personal beliefs or opinions, and ability to communicate with others.

Additional Curricular Components In addition to focusing on developing students creative writing and speaking/listening skills, a strong component of the DAP curriculum also entailed the teaching of argumentative and persuasive expository writing. Once a month, guest artists (writers, musicians and actors) visited the classroom to lead a live literature event, generate discussion and student writing, and energize students around course content. In the final chapter of this dissertation, I will offer additional curricular artifacts that emerged through our development of the course as potential recommendations for other practitioners.

"**In Need of Some Serious D.A.P.", An Exploratory Study** As I have indicated throughout this chapter, this research will explore in depth how six high school sophomores experienced the curriculum described above, and will rely on the careful

analysis of many of the documents, interviews and artifacts referenced therein. My decision to return to that initial crop of data, however, was fueled by an informal exploratory exit survey that I conducted at the conclusion of that 2014 school year. The predominant purpose of this summative inquiry, unlike data I had collected up until that point which was collected for the exclusive purpose of improving the course for the subsequent year, was to evaluate my own performance as the facilitator of the course. Because I was not yet versed in the science of survey construction and what it means to formulate and target questions to yield information desired, I now recognized that the feedback I requested from students had significantly less to do with me and more to do with how they experienced each other through the course.

While I did structure questions that targeted specific skill development and my own role as the teacher of the class, it was an incorrect and in many ways novice assumption to assume—particularly after going to such lengths to engage students in participatory roles in the construction of the course—that I was the one responsible for their experiences, the skills they may or may not have been building, and so on. The survey itself utilized a Linkert-type scale for a total of 15 items. It was designed to gather students' opinions and evaluations in each of four major areas: Personal Skills, Academic Skills, Classroom Environment/Teacher and Dialogue/Communication Skills. An additional opportunity was also provided at the end of the survey for students to offer any written feedback. Each measurement scale used a series of questions with five response alternatives: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), and Strongly Agree (5) (See Appendix 6).

Poorly constructed research tool that it may have been, this survey experiment shed a profound light for me on the larger issues that the Dialogue Arts Project course may have been addressing, and in particular how students engagement with each other (rather than with the course materials, or with me as their teacher) were positively impacting their day-to-day experiences in school. In essence, the difference between what I expected and what I received, was what gave rise to the larger questions that now guide this dissertation, and my own hunger a researcher to return to the data.

My exploratory study allowed me to establish new and in many ways bigger questions beyond the course and the task of "experience improvement" for young people. It was this initial survey data that challenged me to stop and consider the larger potential impact that this course might be having at a class, grade and school-wide level—all of which was necessary before beginning my dissertation project. Furthermore, the findings from this initial survey also greatly informed the design and methodology of this dissertation project, the students I thought might be representative samples for study, and the artifacts from the course I thought might constitute the most meaningful data.

Research Site and Population

Kass Academy South Kass Academy South is a public secondary school in East New York, Brooklyn. Part of a small schools movement that began in the late 1980's and early 1990's in New York City, KAS is a network school with the Institute for Student Achievement, an organization that partners with public school districts attempting to improve high school education, particularly for schools situated in marginalized communities. KAS first opened its doors on the south side of Williamsburg, Brooklyn

during the fall of 2006 to 106 9th grade students, and graduated its first class in 2010. Since that time, the school expanded to serve students from grade 6 through grade 12, and relocated in the fall of 2014—the year this study was initially conducted—to a new school building in East New York, Brooklyn.

East New York, as proclaimed over a decade ago by hip hop legend and the neighborhood's very own AZ, is "rather unique." It is part of Brooklyn Community Board 5, a cluster of neighborhoods located in the far eastern section of Brooklyn that since the late 1950's has held some of the city's highest rates of crime, poverty, unemployment, and drug addiction (Austensen, et al, 2016). According to a 2016 report developed by NYU's Furman Center, East New York in particular had an unemployment rate of 31%, and a household median income of approximately $34,000 (Austensen, et al, 2016). To illustrate precisely how "unique" East New York felt in the summer of 1995, AZ further reminded the world that in the minds of New York City's politicians and it's then-mayor Rudy Giuliani, "we was already molded into peoples minds as muliganes," as criminals, as expendable in the larger effort to distribute resources. For many years, East New York, like many other low-income, predominantly black and brown communities in the United States, struggled to recover from generations of neglect, isolation from resources, criminalization and over-policing. As part of a more recent renewal effort to reenergize Brooklyn Community Board 5, KAS' ongoing story as a school—both to engage East New York and to thrive despite its complications—is deeply tied to the social, political and historical realities of the neighborhood itself, and is thus important context for considering this research.

In this context, it is essential to recognize two facts that make KAS, like East New York itself, "rather unique." First, at the time of this research, KAS recently relocated to this environment, and as a result had less exposure to the decades of inherited violence, poverty and isolation, which according to Fullilove et al (2003), had come to represent "key features of the troubled neighborhood" (p. 207). About 45% of the students that attended KAS at it's previous location already lived in East New York, Brownsville, Canarsie and other surrounding neighborhoods, while the remainder attended the school as an option local to South Williamsburg. Upon relocating to East New York, the local population shifted to match the new regional demographic, but KAS was already connected to many of the parents and families who had been attending the school for years prior.

Second, despite its relatively short tenure in the area, KAS' approach to the process of building family and parent community (even at its previous location) was particularly well-known—a reputation that undoubtedly played a role in the Department of Education's choice to award KAS it's state of the art building in East New York. Small, young schools are not a unique phenomenon in New York City. What is less common, however, are smalls schools that embody an early and steadfast commitment to integrating parents and families into the community-building component of the school. Each summer, for example, KAS' school leadership dedicated 3-5 intensive weeks to inviting new students and their families to the school to "informally interview," or more accurately, to talk with the principal and dean about the student's interests, any hopes and fears they may have had for the upcoming year, and so on. All students who attended those summer meetings with family members were immediately prioritized or "rostered,"

which in no small way contributed to the school's capacity to engage "the village" around a young person early during their tenure at KAS.

KAS was founded with a principal goal of using writing across all areas of the curriculum as a tool for generating comprehension and retaining knowledge. The school's mission conveys its commitment in this regard:

> Our primary goal is to create a college preparatory program for our students so that they have as many options after graduating as possible. To this end, we use writing across all areas of our curriculum as a tool for generating comprehension and retaining knowledge. While we do celebrate creative writing, our name derives from the belief that all forms of writing help a person to become better educated and more expressive. Writing is the vehicle through which students become critical thinkers.

While the school does celebrate creative writing, its name derives from the belief that a command over all forms of written and spoken language is essential to becoming better educated and more expressive.

KAS is by most accords a high performing district school. Since graduating its first class in 2010, they have graduated between 80-90% of their students and earned a score of "Well-Developed" on each of their comprehensive annual Quality Reviews, issued by the New York City Department of Education. According to demographic statistics from the most recent of those snapshots, the school consists of 544 students. The school population comprises 72% Black, 23% Hispanic, 4% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 35% of the students enrolled and girls account for 65%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 88%.

The research sample for this year-long study consisted of six 10th grade students enrolled in an KAS elective course called "Writer's Lab," later to be termed by students,

the "Dialogue Arts Project elective," or simply, the "DAP class," described earlier in detail. The Writer's Lab course, while termed an elective on paper, was a required course for every sophomore during the 2014-2015 school year, and was generated with three specific goals in mind, each anchored by the school's larger mission of centering writing as a way of fostering critical thinking. First, to provide students with increased opportunities to explore content that mattered to them in writing, and to experiment with writing style and craft in ways not possible through other required writing courses due to time, curricular requirements, state testing, and so on. Second, to create a writing-focused "hub" in students' daily programs that enabled for additional instruction and supported students' writing needs across disciplines. And third, to create a supplemental opportunity during the school day through which to address students' difficulties with the conventions of writing, including grammar, basic mechanics, vocabulary and spelling—skill areas in which many students have fallen so far behind grade level that the typical 10th grade English curriculum tends to avoid. Writer's Lab (or, the DAP class) was selected for this research because of its curricular emphasis on student writing and experience, the amount of autonomy that I inherently had in the curriculum development and facilitation process as the teacher of the course. All of the qualitative data that I collected for this research study came directly through my cultivation and facilitation of this course.

Participants A subset of seven high school sophomores were selected for participation in this study, each drawn from diverse pockets of the student body, and varying drastically in terms of their background, ability and interest in school. Mason,

Kai H., Tia, Fancy, Tashaun, Solice and Colby[2] were selected from a slightly larger pool of individuals who volunteered to participate. This research focuses specifically on those students, in an effort to draw some meaningful conclusions about how students in general may have experienced participation in the course.

Some of these young people were deeply connected to school and saw themselves as particularly capable learners—such as Kai H., an African-American female from a middle-class, two-parent household, who self-described as "intelligent" and "driven," and boasted one of the highest grade point averages in the grade. Others, such as Mason, a Puerto Rican-American young man who lived with his grandmother in the South Bronx, were considerably less connected to the grade-driven culture of school and struggled academically. Some students identified as "writers," such as Fancy and Solice, two young women (one white, one black, respectively) from single-parent households in Brooklyn, while Colby—who described herself as "hating school" altogether – hesitated to do so as willingly. Some students self-described as middle class, others as "poor" or living at or below the poverty line. Some of these young people, such as Solice, were popular amongst the student body and had deep-reaching relationships with students and teachers from across the school, while others, such as Colby and Kai H., were more isolated and tended to stick to themselves or a very small group of friends. To draw in the discussion of bullying, some of these students self-described as having bullied others during their time at KAS, while others self-describe as having been judged, made fun of, "pushed to the side" or made to feel isolated because of "who they are, what they're like, or where they come from." All of the students who volunteered for this study demonstrated

[2] Students in this research have been assigned a self-named pseudonym.

significant interpersonal skills and were capable of articulating their experiences in the course through language. Furthermore, they were also enthusiastic about doing so.

This research will not claim that the Dialogue Arts Project elective was responsible for any sort of monumental life changes in the lives of these already highly capable young people. Instead, I aim to discuss, through their voices and their work, some of ways in which these students experienced an arts-based, dialogic curriculum designed to engage young people in the writing and sharing of their own creative autoethnographies. I hope to explore and better understand the impact of an English elective designed to center the structured sharing of students' cultural narratives for the purpose of engaging in dialogue about identity and difference, and to discern how, if at all, those understandings may contribute to larger conversations in the field around issues of student conflict in schools.

Methods of Data Collection

As mentioned throughout this dissertation, because I am working with existing data collected during the 2014-2015 school year, my predominant methods of data collection are connected to the curriculum itself, and an effort to improve upon it. The most valuable data collected toward that end consists of student-produced artifacts and texts, course observations, student interviews and student surveys. Because tools toward improving the course were "baked in" components of the curriculum—such as student evaluation essays and periodic interviews—the data for this research was collected throughout the school year, typically during the presentation of Dialogue Arts Projects at the culmination of each unit.

Participant Texts & Artifacts During my facilitation of the course, I collected a variety of data in the form of student-produced texts and artifacts—most notably, (1) students' creative autoethnographic writing about their own multiple identities and their efforts to understand them in the context of in-school and out-of-school lives, and (2) students' analytical and reflective essays about the texts they produced, the dialogue they engaged in with their peers about those texts, and their experiences in the course more generally. As discussed during my explanation of the Dialogue Arts Project curriculum, written and oral storytelling played a significant role in the course—initially as a tool for building culture and community in the classroom, and then eventually, for identifying and interrogating significant personal stories around identity. Each of these types of archival text, produced by my research participants on a recurring basis over the course of the school year, will constitute a significant portion of the data I analyze in my efforts to attach meaning to students' experiences.

Participant Observations Another significant form of data that I collected as the facilitator of this course was through informal participant observations. As the creator and facilitator of the class, I was presented with countless hours and opportunities to engage with my students, observe my classes, and perceive the many small ways students participated in the curriculum and experienced the course. My ability to observe without intrusion were deeply tied to my established role in the KAS community as a veteran English teacher, and subsequent rapport with various constituents of the school including school leaders, faculty and students. Given that I conducted my observations while simultaneously teaching the course, my window for unobstructed time during which I could feasibly watch and listen to students (and record field notes) was limited to portions

of the curriculum that emphasized student-facilitation, where my own direct instruction was minimal. Ultimately, what that meant is that my observations of participants typically occurred during students' facilitation of small and large group dialogue activities, student performances and open mics, and the many small moments around and in between the normal ebb and flow of day-to-day classroom instruction. I also documented my own observations of students and the course through photographs of students themselves in dialogue and in performance, the classroom environment, and the school campus itself.

Again, because the purpose of my collecting any data at all during the initial iteration of this curriculum was to improve it, my field notes documenting students' participation were kept on a rolling basis, and usually connected to where the curriculum felt valuable and where it may have been falling short. Still, those field notes served as valuable pieces of data for me to revisit and analyze through a new lens in my efforts toward making sense of students' experiences. Given my closeness to the process of this work and my clear investment in its outcomes for the young people I worked with, it is reasonable to wonder whether or not there are ethical concerns regarding my facilitation of the course. However, because my role as researcher for these purposes is several years removed from my initial role and responsibilities (and goals) as my students' English teacher, I believe those concerns are minimal and will not influence my analysis. Nonetheless, it will be valuable for me to be aggressive in my reflective practices while weighing my multiple roles in this research, knowing that researcher reflexivity will be an ethical stance to take up and maintain.

Semi-Structured Participant Interviews Similar to the collection of students' critical texts and artifacts, I also conducted informal, semi-structured interviews with

students at the culmination of each 4-week unit. Interviews took place with many of my students—not just those I have elected as case study subjects for this research—and were audio and video recorded (and later transcribed) throughout the duration of the school year. Students who participated in interviews volunteered, or were solicited based on my own interest in their feedback, based on observations I may have made in my field notes about their participation in the course—all interviewees were active participants in in the Dialogue Arts Projects for each unit, meaning they all produced, shared and engaged in dialogue with other students about their own creative autoethnographies, and submitted reflective essays about the unit and the experience. The texts and artifacts that students created were centerpieces for our conversations. These interviews were all semi-structured and informal, so while a set of questions guided my interview process and protocol, it was important for me to allow students to take our conversations in any direction they wanted (See Appendix 7).

Participant Surveys As discussed briefly during my explanation of the exploratory study that was the impetus for this research, I also collected information on students' experiences in the course through survey data. The predominant goal of said summative inquiry, was to evaluate my own performance as the teacher of the course, and utilized a Linkert-type scale for a total of 15 items. Its chief purpose was to gather students' opinions and reflections as categorized by: Personal Skills, Academic Skills, Classroom Environment/Teacher and Dialogue/Communication Skills. Each measurement scale used a series of questions with five response alternatives (See Appendix 6).

Methods of Data Analysis

Coding for Themes The purpose of strong case study research is to deepen and complicate how researchers understand their subjects and the issue they are investigating, rather than to enable a kind of generalizability. In this way, the thematic analysis I relied on for looking at my data was designed to strengthen my understandings of how and where students' experienced culture ruptures through the course in ways that made room for "perspectivizing" and "risk-taking toward connectedness." I developed my own coding scheme that allowed me to identify those moments when they surface in student-produced texts and interviews, and I also created several mnemonic tools to help me organize, reference and retrieve data around those themes.

Critical Artifact Analysis In addition to creating tools for codifying and organizing student texts and interviews in accordance with themes of "perspectivizing" and "risk-taking toward connectedness," I will also analyze course artifacts through a critical lens. In much the same way that I employ the term "critical" throughout this research to signify "a move to question the naturalized assumptions of the discipline, its truths, its discourses and its attendant practices" (Janks, 2010, p.13), I mean use it as an analytical approach to more holistically situate the stories students are telling through their work amidst the sociocultural context of "school." More directly, because so much of the weight I invested in students' autoethnographic narratives was tethered to their potential to bring about "cultural ruptures"—to disrupt and cause productive tension amidst school spaces and classrooms otherwise categorized by silence and an avoidance of an acknowledgment of difference—it made sense to embrace an overarching critical approach to how I analyzed and attached meaning to my data.

I sought to examine students' artifacts from a perspective that accounted not only for what texts themselves did and did not say, but also for the spaces in which they were constructed, and the processes of their creation. Insisting on this framing to my analysis enabled me to consider the texts, as Vasudevan and DeJaynes (2013) articulate, as "…spaces in which to cultivate the self, to establish relationships with others, and to experience various forms of belonging" (p.4). In this case, the experience of meaning-making, the sociocultural factors swirling around students lives and the ways in which those factors assert themselves into school contexts, and general negotiation of students identity were all as important as the artifacts produced.

Ethical Issues

This research involves an investigation of archival data that I gathered as a high school English teacher during the 2013-2014 school year. At the time, the purpose of any data collection at all was solely geared toward the development of the course I was teaching—including, most notably, students' writing samples and participation in interviews. Because the research anchoring this study entailed the process of revisiting existing data, it involved minimal risks for participants. While students' were required to take the course I taught during the 2013-2014 school year, they were not required to participate in my evaluation efforts and their participation was solely voluntary. Further, their academic standing in my course was in no way connected to their willingness or (lack thereof) to provide evaluative feedback.

To reinforce this to students and families, all subjects in my course completed multiple parental consent forms at the time of the facilitation of this pilot course (See

Appendix 8). Consent forms articulated not only the nature of the potentially sensitive material of the course and students' agreements to uphold safe space but also my plans, as their teacher, to collect data toward better understanding how to shape the course for the following year. Students also completed general school-wide media-release forms that enabled them to be photographed, audio recorded and video-taped in the classroom for educational purposes (See Appendix 9). If at any point students did not want their work, their image or their words to be used for evaluative purposes, they were not penalized. Pseudonyms were used for the names of all participants. Data was kept confidential, stored on the researcher's password-protected personal computer and on an external hard drive in password-protected folders.

Returning to Creswell (2013), researcher reflexivity—the conscious and consistent recognition of one's biases, values, and experiences—is an essential part of the process of engaging in accountable research. First, the researcher must explicitly discuss his or her relationship(s) to and experience(s) with the phenomenon being explored. Second, the researcher should then acknowledge how these past experiences may shape his or her interpretations of the data during collection and analysis. Earlier in this chapter, I believe that I made clear my positionality in this regard—articulating not only the experiences and values that drive me to this work, but the biases that will inevitably color the conclusions I reach. Simply stating them up front, however, is insufficient and only a portion of what is required for meaningful reflexivity during this process. Specifically, the distance between who I am presently as a researcher and who I was as a high school English teacher at the time this data was collected—the anxieties and expectations I felt around my work, my own social identity my own politics—may also enter a

consideration of reflexivity. In this way, as I engaged with this data and attempted to generate my most authentic work, it was vital for me to continually acknowledge and negotiate my own identity, and maintain a commitment to questioning the many biased interpretations and assumptions I brought to this process.

Triangulation Because the archival data that served as the basis for this research was not initially collected in an effort to explicitly address my research questions, it felt especially important for me to engage multiple forms of data to help me make sense of students' experiences. Triangulation helps researchers corroborate the evidence and subsequent conclusions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012), and in the case of this research may be particularly invaluable given how my goals for and relationship to my data has changed over the course of the past several years. I hope that by paying attention to implications suggested through students' creative writing *and* the informal survey data, I will hold myself more accountable to the task of surveying the general impact of the curriculum on their experiences. Further, each method of data collection that I selected for this work carried with it certain limitations, and by triangulating my approach I hoped to mitigate some of those effects.

Limitations No research is without its limitations. In addition to the biases and assumptions that I have acknowledged and will continue to name as significant, the construction of the study itself, my chosen methods for data collection, my research site, my role as the researcher at that site and my subjects are not without drawbacks. I wish to conclude this chapter with a thoughtful recognition of a few of the drawbacks and limitations that I complicate this work, in part, in order to challenge myself to embrace instead of avoid the unavoidable messiness of the research process (Lutrell, 2000). My

hope is that by articulating some of these concerns up front—though new limitations will no doubt arise throughout the process—I'm able to be more accountable to my research subjects, the school community that I and conducting this research to serve, to myself as a researcher in terms of the reflexivity described above. Luttrell (2000) contends that a "good enough researcher" is one that is aware that they "have investments in research relationships…does not shy away from frustrations, anxieties, and disappointments that are part of any relationship; [and]…accept[s] rather than defend[s] against healthy tensions" (p.515). I strive to wholeheartedly embrace these ambiguities in my work with this research, and I am appreciative of the imperfections (and limitations) of qualitative research.

First, archival research, while useful in that it can allow researchers a critical perspective and distance from a sociopolitical context surrounding the data, can be problematic in that it is stagnant. It exists. It is not impacted by experimental design factors, sociopolitical urgency, or any number of other influences that sometimes create opportunities for dynamic qualitative research to "breathe" and change. The data I am working with for this research speaks to a moment in time, and it is confined to a single year, and single group of young people. Undoubtedly, some of the stories will contradict others, some students stories and their relationship to the course and to me will change over time—and as a researcher, now removed by some three years from the fact, there is nothing to do with those inconsistencies but embrace them and find a place for them in the larger narrative of how I'm articulating students' experiences. At the same time, many of my research subjects are now in college and/or pursuing other post-high school

activities, and it may be a powerful additional lens for this research to revisit these students' lives and integrate their continuing perspectives.

Relatedly, as is often the case in studies of this nature, we work the data we've been given. In this case, particularly concerning the importance of student documents and writing, I was left to investigate and shape a narrative around the voices of students from whom I had the most information to work with. My research inevitably tells the story of young people who demonstrated some form of engagement in the DAP class, and by default pays significantly less attention to youths who did not—which, one could argue, are perhaps the most important voices to bring to the table.

Third, given the way I elected to conduct and frame this research, I play multiple central roles (curriculum developer, teacher and facilitator, researcher) that span almost a half a decade in the life of this work. In each of those spaces, because my voice is a singular one, I inevitably assume a tremendous amount of control, access and authority in experiencing and accounting for the many stories at work in this research—those of my students, my own story as their teacher, then later as a researcher; some are that of insider, some of outsider. In as much as I am committed to the ongoing process of reflexivity and bias examination, my perspective is inevitably still that: *my perspective.* Chimamanda Adiche (2009) reminds us that the danger of any single story is not that it is "is untrue, but that it is incomplete."

Lastly, for as dynamic and powerful as schools are as research sites, they bring with them a tremendous amount of inevitable unpredictability. Indeed, schools are hot beds for the kind of sociocultural work this research aims to probe—and they are perhaps *the only* appropriate site through which to undertake a study with the context of student

conflict across difference and bullying. They are also, however, living organisms that are constantly changing, shaping, adapting: schedules can shift, opportunities or access points for data collection can surface, students and teachers are absent, class discussion corkscrews off the rails (sometimes productively) in response to a news headline. Aside from the basic restraints such as time, a grades-driven atmosphere, issues of attendance, censorship, etc., deCastell (2005) argues, that schools represent the most historically proven and undeniably efficient system for producing and reproducing "relations of hierarchy and subordination…and have provided a public space for the exercise of power and the legitimizing of racism and oppression" (p. 53). In other words, because the age-old tradition of schooling is so engrained in young people – it is an extension of every other system of government and space of public life, and contains the same violent silences and power imbalances—it seems possible that young peoples' voices become "extensions of official discourse" (p. 55) without their even being aware. Further, it seems a worthy concern that even my analysis of students' voices is deemed meaningful *in the context of school* and that even our expectations of what is possible are tailed by a silent governing of what we've come to expect from schools. I will return to many of these limitations at the conclusion of this dissertation.

I do intend for this project to grow beyond this dissertation study—likely, beyond schools themselves. The notion of continuing to build out this project is a deeply motivating factor behind this research. While my hope is not to develop generalizable conclusions, I do hope to develop transferrable ones that might enable insight into which of these practices and approaches could hold meaning, where they may be particularly

needed both within and beyond the context of schools and which populations across those spaces might be most in need of the discourse this research strives to illuminate.

IV. FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present students' responses to their experience of the course, organized into two interrelated themes: Perspectivizing and Risk-Taking Toward Connectedness. As indicated earlier, I am conceptualizing "cultural ruptures," as moments in classroom spaces where student experiences around identity assert themselves in ways that create conflict or dissonance between either the cultures and expectations of students' in-school and out-of-school lives (Gutierrez, 2008). It is important to note, however, that while this notion of cultural rupturing represents a plethora of rich possibilities for future research—defining and understanding it more comprehensively, perhaps building a framework through which to better attach meaning to conflict in (and even out) of schools—that is not the purpose of this study. Instead, this research is concerned with two specific behaviors that are representative of cultural rupturing as I have defined it, and exploring the ways in which those behaviors and capacities may work to counter the culture of silence around issues of difference in schools. I will discuss some of what I believe to be the potential for cultural rupturing as a framework later in the Conclusion section of this dissertation.

After spending a good deal of time with my data, I selected Perspectivizing and Risk-Taking Toward Connectedness as the themes to engage most directly because of their clear applicability to some of the underlying issues of student conflict across difference and bullying. These areas also seemed to be especially useful and manageable tools when attempting to make sense of how the cultural ruptures demonstrated through students' autoethnographies and dialogue manifested beyond the curriculum itself. In other words, wherever there seemed to be moments of cultural rupturing occurring in the

curriculum—either through the writing or sharing elements of the course—it was these areas that seemed to emerge most naturally. I have also chosen to present up front (below) the results from the initial survey discussed earlier. Throughout the presentation and discussion of this data, while I have interspersed some of these statistics where appropriate, I otherwise make an effort focus on them secondarily as they present, to me, a less comprehensive and textured snapshot of students' voices, experiences and interpretations of the course. (See Table 2).

Table 2: Abbreviated Pilot Survey Results (See Appendix 6) [3]

Enjoyed	*Grew as Writer*	*Felt Valued*	*Felt Safe*	*Listened w/ out Judgment*	*Engaged*	*Know Self Better*	*Self - confidence*	*Dialogue Skills*	*Address Conflicts*	*Empathy*
0 (2)	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	7
0 (3)	3	3	7	7	6	6	4	4	10	7
7 (4)	4	7	11	11	12	13	28	21	20	16
35 (5)	32	32	24	24	23	22	19	15	10	14
100%	**93%**	**93%**	**83%**	**88%**	**83%**	**83%**	**88%**	**86%**	**71%**	**73%**

Perspectivizing

The Center for Studies in Educational Innovation defines "Perspectivizing" as the ability to engage in an original empathetic response and to examine an issue from multiple perspectives (Villanueva, 2013). In other words, perspectivizing is the ability to

[3] The survey itself utilized a Linkert-type scale for a total of 15 items. It was designed to gather students' assessments of themselves and the course in each of four major areas: Personal Skills, Academic Skills, Classroom Environment/Teacher and Dialogue/Communication Skills. Each measurement scale used a series of questions with five response alternatives: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), and Strongly Agree (5). First, we calculated the breakdown of student responses for each scale/statement for all 42 surveys. Second, within each scale/statement, we computed the percentage of "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" out of the entire sample so as to identify a more general figure to represent positive attitudes and opinions. For example, of all student responses to the first statement on the survey – "This class improved my self-confidence" – 88% offered a response of either a "4" or a "5", indicating that the class improved their self-confidence. While not all students in the 10th grade submitted surveys about their experience, the percentage that did was substantial enough to present in concert with other data. This table is an abbreviated version of the full results (Appendix 6).

consider and empathize with experiences different from ones own—a humanizing behavior that I believe stands in stark contrast to other tolerance-based approaches to engaging difference in the classroom. To truly "perspectivize" with others means to actively attempt to engage and learn from differences as opposed to merely tolerating them, and to suspend judgment about the experiences of others.

While I am defining perspectivizing quite specifically, both in my presentation and subsequent discussion of these findings, some of the capacities targeted through the collection of student surveys were deeply relevant to how I am defining it here, and support the case for empathy-building in general as an important component in how students experienced the course. For example, 73% of students who completed the survey reported that the course helped them "have more empathy for other people," and 88% said that the class helped them "listen without judgment." Relatedly, though perhaps because the expectation of "hearing and being heard by others" became established as a working norm for the course, 81% of those same students reported having felt like their ability to "speak and share aloud with others" was improved through participating in this course, alongside 86% whom also said that they learned how to practice "dialogue as opposed to debate."

More narrowly to my definition of perspectivizing, however, the DAP elective pushed students to examine and reconsider assumptions they held about each other and various social groups—including their own. Through the pedagogical and curricular moves described in my Methodology section, students were given consistent opportunities—through sharing and listening to another's creative autoethnographies as well as through structured dialogue groups activities—to encounter cultural perspectives

and narratives distinct from their own. In my examination of students' abilities to perspectivize with others, two central themes emerged: perspectivizing *in school*, reconsidering the layered lives, identities and experiences of their peers, and perspectivizing *out of school*, reconsidering the experiences and opinions of their own families. It is important to note that the act of perspectivizing does not require (and often did not result in) agreement or tolerance, but the debriefing dialogues that students engaged in about their work within the unit often enabled them to find places of agreement about the experience.

Perspectivizing In School Colby, someone who self-identified as "hating school," reported in one unit-ending interview how hearing the autoethnographies of her peers prompted her to reflect on her own experiences, and consider new and different perspectives:

> I'm a really introverted person, and I don't like people that much. But it's really interesting to find out how other people see the world, and how different it is from the way I see it. I grew up really sheltered. And, like, I don't have a social life, but the way that people, like, see what I see, it's always so different from the way I expect it in this class. Like, I'm a big judger, but when we write in this class it gives us that freedom, that option to reconsider…

In this way, Colby's ability to consider the stories and perspectives of her peers through the DAP elective enabled her to "reconsider" her own tendency to judge other students. This type of self-reported "option to reconsider" was a common thread in many of the interviews I conducted with students. In a separate conversation with Solice, a young woman who wrote and spoke often about her gender, her age, and her relationship with her mother, reported that the dialogue portion of the course challenged her to think about parts of her identity that she did not typically think about—specifically, her social class:

> This unit gave me a chance to feel and experience how other people might view their social identities. In my group, there was someone whose social identity was being (of a certain) social class, and he shared about things he had to do for money. Being a young adult was the identity I focused on for this unit… but I really found myself feeling the same way…wanting things I can't have.

Similarly, in a reflection essay following a different unit during which she wrote and shared extensively about her relationship to her body size/image, Tashaun noted that the small group dialogues helped "rearrange her views." Most dynamically, she stated that talking to her peers helped her change her thinking about what it meant to her to have a "curvy" body shape:

> Whenever I would walk down the street, a boy would comment on my body size, (and) I would smile. I realized one day in group discussions that I don't want to be liked for my body or how I look—I want to be loved for the type of person I am…

While this excerpt is drawn from a larger piece of writing that articulates the types of interactions she had with students that contributed to her shift in thinking, it demonstrates the type of "perspectivizing in school" that felt to be so thematic throughout the data. More than engaging in a self-reflective practice, however, Tashaun also noted how the experience of having her perspective challenged and confronted by other students enabled her to "connect with her classmates in ways (she) never thought possible":

> In a group dialogue with two of my classmates, one of them talked about (how) when she was younger, her fellow classmates would tease her because she was a bit bigger than everyone else, and how she would just laugh it off even though it made her hurt inside. That really touched me. The most important aspect (of this experience) for me was listening without judgment to my classmate's stories…and trying to understand how it felt to be in their shoes.

In this regard, as these brief testimonies suggest, among the many important takeaways that students felt concerning their experience in the course, especially valuable was the

invitation to reflect upon their own identities and the identities of their peers, and to work toward better understanding perspectives different from their own. It is worth noting that while most of these students' reflections were confined to their experience of our specific course—and moreover, their individual section of the course in particular — some students even noted that the opportunity to engage with their peers in this way impacted their larger attitudes toward school itself. Colby, whose experiences opened this section and whose relationship with school could be described as tenuous, extended the importance of being able to "perpectivize" in our course by noting that various portions of the curriculum positively impacted her desire to *attend* it, and her feelings toward the overall culture of school.

> I usually hate school—like, a lot. I usually don't like school in general… (but) when I come to this class, and it's a free write I really wanna hear what people are saying, I wanna hear what they are feeling. And I'm not usually like that… I don't even ask how their week has been. But when I come to this class, it's really interesting, because, otherwise I wouldn't care. I feel like everything is sort of different when you come in this room.

Perspectivizing Out of School In much the same way that Colby felt her experience in the DAP elective challenged her to perceive differently not only her peers but her expectations around school itself, several students noted how various moments of "rupturing" through writing and dialogue challenged them to extend the practice of perspectivizing into their lives away from school. Mason—who, like Colby, similarly self-defined as "sort of a judgmental person"—reflected on how he was challenged to carry the notion of perspectivizing into his relationships with his family. Throughout his participation in the course, Mason wrote extensively about his complicated relationship with his father, and how his father influenced his sense of self as a man. In an interview,

Mason told me about how his experience in the DAP elective helped him to consider his father's inconsistent presence in his life in different, more humanizing ways:

> I end up writing a lot about my father. I might be working on a love poem or something and I then all of a sudden I just end up using a damn quote from (him). And it's like, ugggh, you're still in my head dad. I just talked to him the other day and we had a really long conversation, and it was cool 'cause he changed so much. And it was like… I mean, it was annoying, like, "Why didn't you change when I was with you?" And *now* you change? But it was still dope to talk to him, and I was proud of him that he's changing. And in that way, sure, I've grown as a person in this class. I was definitely was judgmental before this class. I definitely was. But I judge people way less, because now I try to put myself in other peoples' shoes…including my fathers.

Similarly, Solice thought the Dialogue Arts Project elective, particularly the writing process, deeply impacted her ability to reexamine and empathize with her mother. Solice and her mother were not, in Solice's words, "that close." She described her mother as being overly present in her life, and overly involved in ways that were "frustrating and really aggravating." Still, despite that strained relationship, Solice was well aware, even made anxious by, how central a role her mother plays in her life, and how influential she has been in Solice's socialization as a young female. "Whatever I do," she told me, "it goes back to my mother. Sometimes in positive ways, and sometimes in negative ways." Specifically, for one exhibition, Solice wrote a poem in the voice of her mother, in which she offered a set of instructions for "how to be a young lady." In it, she demonstrates many of the things that complicate their ability to see "eye-to-eye" on many issues. Below are several excerpts from that piece:

> Watch your hygiene.
> You are a young lady.
> Respect yourself.
> The first thing people look at
> is your hair, face and your smile.
>
> Life is not easy.

> I bought everything in this house.
> Depend on no man.
> You have to work to get
> what you want.
>
> You are a hoe,
> a fuck up in everything you do.
> You only bring problems to me.
> None of my other kids was like you.
>
> When people come over to your
> house they look around
> and if it's dirty they talk
> about you and it.
> (Sweep and mop everyday).
> You swear you know everything.
> You only get one mother.
>
> When you go out on the
> street, you are representing me.
> If your hair looks fucked up,
> the first thing they say is "Why her
> mother let her outside like that?"
> You are a reflection of me
> even when I'm not there.

Ultimately, the development of the poem—though it is in her mother's voice—captures Solice's own feelings toward motherhood, female sexuality and socialization. At the end of this unit, Solice shared that she felt the opportunity to write in her mother's voice helped her wrestle with her mother's perspective, and to imagine how and why she pushes her in the ways she does—particularly around what it means to be a young woman of color:

> Me and my mom aren't that close, but the things she does teach me is how to be a female… and that's her way of connecting to me, and I struggle (with that) as a young adult trying to grow; with how much of who I am stems back to my mother. And with this exhibition, it helped me realize and identify how she effects me, and how effective she is in my life.

In some cases, students not only reported being able to better understand and empathize with people in their life outside of school, but they shared their creative autoethnographies with their families and friends as a way to better explain themselves and their experiences. Fancy, who, like Solice, described her relationship to her mother as "difficult," said she was able to hold more meaningful conversations with her family by sharing with them the autoethnographies she produced through the course.

> I show my mom my writing, and then sometimes it kind of changes her opinion and makes her feel more open to me, and more accepting of me and we can have a dialogue with each other.

In this way, Fancy shared that by being able to bring her writing home, it enabled her to share a side of herself with her mother that she often wasn't able to—and in some ways, to reconcile the distance between her in-school and out-of-school selves. In the same interview, Fancy further contextualized the opportunity to share her work with her mother as a significant shift their relationship:

> Last year, I was kind of a wreck. I was failing a lot of classes and I was really disobedient with my mom. I think this class and therapy have really helped me mature as a person. This year, I feel more mature and level-headed…and like I don't have to do certain things for attention. I can just be myself.

In some scenarios, students reported not only extending the practice and behavior of perspectivizing to their families, but the larger world as well. In another reflection essay, Tashaun noted that by being challenged to better understand some of her classmates views through dialogue—particularly the views of students she did not know, or those she disagreed with—she felt herself engaging differently with the local headlines:

> I have learned… to look at society through a different perspective without casting as much judgment. On the news there was a man who was claimed to be mentally unstable who went to a school where his mother worked. The young man shot his mother, many children, a few teachers, and then turned the gun on himself. Before this exhibition, I might have immediately cast judgment on him without a doubt,

> but now I think more (about) the situation and…tried coming up with my own understanding. This exhibition improved my empathy skills by (challenging me to) step into his shoes…to understand where he is coming from.

While there were likely a range of factors that contributed to students' interests in and capacity for "perspectivizing," it was clear that when presented with critical then creative then dialogic opportunities in the curriculum, students were largely excited—even if not fully prepared—to explore their differences with one another. What became clearer only through more reflective and analytical components of our work was that students felt similarly moved to practice perspectivizing with people in their lives away from school as well—and that in some cases, their creative autoethnographies were the very tools that enabled them to bridge that divide. On it's own, highlighting the behaviors of "considering and empathizing with experiences different from ones own" may seem a bit rudimentary. To do so in the context of a deeply segregated school system burdened with issues of student bullying and conflict across differences, however, is what makes perspectivizing exactly emblematic of cultural rupturing, and thus a promising metric for this research.

Risk-Taking Toward Connectedness

To consider students' capacities to empathize and consider perspectives other than their own, it is also important to look at the other side of the dialogue—where students' own perspectives and experiences are the ones being empathized *with*. While SEI's AIM Matrix identifies "Risk-Taking" as a skill that is critical to collaboration and building relationships with others, it does not speak entirely accurately to how this research refers to the term. Brene Brown (2011) argues that connection, the ability to forge meaningful,

authentic relationships with other people, is the essence of the human experience. Further, Brown and others posit that vulnerability and the willingness to take risks in "showing ourselves" (p. 187) to others is the centerpiece toward hurdling many of divisive feelings of shame, guilt and conflict that result in bullying in schools.

For the purpose of this research, I examine risk-taking as related to students' willingness to step into some of their own vulnerabilities around social identity and share about their lives as pathways toward building bridges with others. Similarly to how the collection of student surveys shed light on capacities adjacent to my research-specific definition of perpsectivizing, so too is that true for some of the areas they illuminated in proximity to risk-taking toward connectedness. For example, some of the survey data points that felt related to notions of student "connection" included 83% of students who "felt safe taking risks while writing and sharing," and 93% who felt "valued and respected" in the class. While those statistics are related, however, I look more simply at risk-taking as the exercise of working toward and through personal vulnerability. The Dialogue Arts Project elective pushed students to take a number of risks, both through writing and sharing and through dialogue. In combing through student interviews and writing samples collected over the course of the year, I found risk-taking and vulnerability to be among the most memorable and/or important parts of the course for many students. Specifically, their responses largely fell into two basic themes: risk and vulnerability through the writing and sharing of autoethnographies, and risk and vulnerability through dialogue.

Risk-Taking through Writing & Sharing Tia wrote extensively about both her body size and her sexuality throughout the course of the year, both of which represented

difficult and "hard to talk about" topics for her. Self-described as "thick" and sometimes "really emotional" about the way others perceive her because of her physical weight, Tia reported that the course gave her the opportunity and the structure to write about those themes in ways that were ultimately healing and quite empowering. During a unit early in the year, Tia developed a poem called "Thick" in which she wrote about a series of isolated moments from her life when her body size deeply impacted her sense of self, or how she thought others perceived her. She wrote about early experiences in school where she was bullied because and treated poorly by others because of her weight, titling each chapter according to specific triggers connected to those experiences. Below are a handful of excerpts from some of those initial drafts of "Thick," after poet Jon Sands:

> …I walk through the halls, carrying
> books upon books upon books.
> I try to shut out the stereotypical
> thinking but I cant…
>
> I remember going up the stairs,
> struggling to find a breath.
> As I walk up the stairs, kids walk
> past and say, "Hahahaa Fatty."
> Yeah. Fatty McFatt. Yep, I got
> those occasionally. And all I could
> do was smile, like I'm not hurting.
> Mommy always said, "Sticks
> and stones will break your bones,
> but words will never hurt you."
>
> …I remember watching TV and
> I would see thick women and girls.
> I would sit down and wonder,
> "Why are they thick?" I wondered
> if they were born that way,
> or if they grew up like that. A
> young girl with cornrows and beads
> looking at myself in the mirror,
> and saying, "I think I'm gonna be fat.
> I think I'm gonna be like those women

> on TV." My mom walks past and says,
> "I would never let you get like that.
> Not me."
>
> …Mason makes me feel like nothing.
> Mason would say things like "You fat.
> You are really fat." He'd say,
> "No one will love you like me."
> And you know what? I believed him.

These excerpts exemplify the types of risks that Tia took more and more as the semester went on. In a follow-up interview about her experience in the course, she reflected on the unit through which she produced "Thick" and offered a reaction to how and why she made the decision to take those risks in her writing:

> This exhibition was challenging, a little bit, because like, the last unit I did about my sexuality—and it was just like, I knew I had no problem talking about that. But this unit, the identity that I chose—being "thick"— it was a touchy subject because I don't talk about it, I don't like talking about it, it hits a part that I don't wanna touch. And when I do, I either get upset or I get really emotional, or I'll just be like it's whatever, it's gonna be like that sometimes, you're gonna hit a part that you don't wanna touch – but you might as well take a risk, because it's writing and writing take risks. So I just wanted to take that risk, because I never talk about it.

It is this very culture of "never talking about it" that Tia's creative autoethnography—both its written development and it's oral performance for others—works to "rupture." Because the cultural silence around body image and weight, particularly for young women, permeates both in-school and out-of-school spaces, Tia found that by naming it in schoo*l*—where the stakes, for her, were especially high—she experienced some degree of resolve in her life away from school, specifically with her mother. Similar to Fancy, Tia observed that while she did not share her actual autoethnography work with her mother, the process of sharing it with her peers helped her reflect more on "who you are

and what you are and how people look at you," and made it easier for her to be patient with her mother's anxiety around her weight.

> My mom will be like, "It's really sad seeing you look this way because you didn't grow up being thick, you just.—were skinny…" And this has helped me… because when me and my mom are talking, I don't get upset. Because I would really get upset and storm out of the room, 'cause it's a really touchy subject. She'd be like, "Tia why are you so mad," and I'm like, "I don't like talking about it, can we please change the subject?" So this really helped me get things off my chest so I wasn't so quick to jump at my mother when we talk about it at home.

In this way, Tia's reflections on a few of the positive consequences she experienced through "taking that risk" and writing into vulnerability were suggestive of a kind of connectedness she was able to build with others. Ultimately, Tia also reported that by sharing about herself and "digging deep" into the vulnerable parts of her own identity as a "thick" young women—she was able to push her classmates into doing the same. Students' risk-taking approach to the process of building and sharing their creative autoethnographies fostered an environment for the course that enabled students to push one another toward compassion and empathy for one another's experiences.

Mason was one such student who responded to Tia's risks with a risk of his own. In Tia's same section, he wrote (and eventually, though not immediately, shared aloud) about the experience of being split between multiple homes as his father and stepmother negotiated what was best for Mason. He recalled "living in an unfurnished apartment with two beds and (a) TV, and taking a 45-minute cab from the corner of the Bronx to literally another corner in another borough." Mason's vulnerability in sharing with his peers details of his life that reflected such instability—and as he alluded to earlier, how that weighed on his relationship with his father, his understandings of gender, class, and more—similarly established risk-taking as part of the expected norm for the course,

which subsequently made possible the practice of dialogue, which I will discuss in the next section. It is important to note that while many students conflated the notion of "risk-taking through writing and sharing" with the divulging of an emotionally difficult experience or time in their lives, that was not the expectation of students' writing, and many young people found other ways to convey vulnerability in their work. Perhaps more importantly still, is the easily forgotten fact that risk and vulnerability are deeply subjective, and individuals experience and express both very differently.

Risk-Taking through Dialogue Though difficult to discern the point at which the sharing of autoethnographies and the exchange of personal stories around identity officially becomes "dialogue," I found that students experienced and discussed "risk in conversation" with one another a bit differently. Kai H. wrote a formal evaluation essay in response to a unit in which she explicitly named the types of risks she felt she observed in dialogue with her classmates during a year-ending Dialogue Arts Project.

> There I was, sitting with my group mates, talking about what I remembered from my earliest asthma attack, I talked about how frightened I was, and how it made me feel like I was more "at risk" than other people I knew who didn't' have it. I feared that death was ready to come and snatch my little soul out of my body. After sharing, I listened as my group mates talked about particular areas of their social identities. One of them talked about their body image, while the other one talked about gender. We each honored each other's silences, listened without judgment, and the air was filled with important but awkward uneasiness. This class demanded a lot risk on the part of us students.

Kai H.'s candid reflection captures the degree to which the dialogue process in particular enabled students to engage deeply with one another about difficult, personal subject matter. Later in the same essay, she also articulated how the sharing of some of those risks helped students' build connections with each other:

> Beyond just writing about our lives in very intimate ways, we also told the stories behind our pieces and how they made us feel, and shared about how those stories

> impact how we see each other at school. Those risks caused some of us to feel uneasy, and in certain cases, vulnerable, but when we opened up to our groups, we became invulnerable, because we let out the truth, told our stories, and felt more connected to each other as a result.

Similarly, Mason reported that engaging in the Dialogue Arts Project assignments enabled him to "just go for it" when talking about issues of identity that might otherwise make him feel unsafe or vulnerable. As indicated in the previous section, Mason wrote frequently about his father, and relatedly, notions of gender and social class. Over the course of several exhibitions, however, he shared with me that because he was growing more comfortable writing about those aspects of his life, he was avoiding other areas:

> These days, I'm most aware of my ethnicity, and my sexuality—not that I'm questioning my sexuality. But, it's like—you know. 'Cause I've gotten …um…I haven't been *called* gay but, I've always gotten, you know, "You dress kind of fruity" or whatever. At first it kind of hurt me, but it doesn't bother me know. This class let me try to take risks, I guess, in talking about some of those things. I don't care as much what people think about it me… but now I kind of put myself in other peoples' shoes. I don't know their life—so who am I to judge them.

While Mason continued to write about his father throughout the year, it was in dialogue with others—in some ways, a less permanent act that putting something in writing—that he explored other issues like those described above. In this way, expressing vulnerability in writing was, for many students, the first step in exploring themselves and their identities, while expressing it verbally followed. As our work together evolved, however, and students became more familiar with the curriculum model, many students like Mason felt equally if not more comfortable with the transient nature of small group conversation as an arena to express vulnerability—particularly as some students began to take seriously the larger-scale performative possibilities for their autoethnographies.

These examples, and more like them, illuminated how the risks students assumed through the dialogue portion of the course created opportunities for them to feel "more connected to one another." Of course, not all students experienced group dialogues in this way. Through the lens of these students' experiences, however, the practice of dialogue at its best served as a sort of fuel for connectivity, an opportunity for students to share stories around their differences not as easy fodder for conflict or bullying but rather as a way to develop more meaningful, holistic understandings about each others' lives, identities and communities. School contexts, for myriad reasons described in earlier chapters, are less-than-ideal incubators for this type of critical, humanizing education. That these moments and testimonies from students appeared so consistently and with such declaration throughout this research, however, is testament to the potential for practices like these to positively impact schools.

V. DISCUSSION

In the previous chapter, I presented my students voices as featured through a range of different data types, and organized their responses and reflections into two distinct themes—and within those themes, multiple distinct subcategories. I presented my data in a way that was in conversation with the defining behavioral characteristics I associated with "cultural rupturing," as defined during my Review of Relevant Literature and again below, and in this way, have already offered some level of preliminary analysis and discussion regarding a few of the recurring themes in my data. In this section, however, I will build upon that discussion with a deeper interpretation, analysis and synthesis, and attempt to attach new meaning to my students' voices in the context of my research questions, and in the larger educational ecosystem in which this work may fit. And lastly, I will use this section to restate the limitations of my study, and problematize some of my findings, particularly in terms of transferability. As a way of working toward that discussion, however, it will be useful to first revisit and redefine the notion of cultural ruptures, and the tolerance-influenced approaches to teaching that I am arguing these students' voices disrupt in healthy, productive ways.

Cultural Ruptures Revisited & Refined

As referenced throughout this dissertation, the notion of cultural rupturing is one of the key distinguishing components of this research, which I have defined in two related but distinct ways—the value of both of which I only became convinced of though spending more and more time with my data.

Cultural Ruptures: The Dissonant Selves The first way I have defined cultural ruptures in this research is largely as an internal process through which students experience tension around one of their social identities, and the conflict it creates for them as they juggle their in-school and out-of-school lives (Gutierrez, 2008). For example, Tia experienced this kind of cultural rupturing when she shared about her sensitivity to issues of weight and body image. By divulging to her classmates that it was a "touchy subject" in school because of the myriad ways in which her mother and past boyfriends made her mindful of it at home, Tia courageously wrestled with that tension, and in so doing "ruptured" two distinct selves that until then had been largely kept separate by the invisible (or not so invisible) line of school.

Many of the internal conflicts that students recalled feeling around sharing their writing or engaging in dialogue were emblematic of this type of personal, risk-driven cultural rupture: Mason's concern over being "called gay," Solice's uncertainty about inviting her mother's deeply critical voice into the room through her poetry, Kai H.'s vulnerability sharing stories with her peers around her life-threatening asthma, Colby's admission that she "grew up really sheltered" and "doesn't have a social life." Each of these moments were illustrative of students' desires to wrestle interpersonally with "their two-ness, their two reconciled strivings, their two warring ideals" (Du Bois, 1903, p. 365), and the predominant type of cultural rupturing that I believe makes this curriculum valuable—particularly in the context of thinking about student conflict and bullying across differences.

Exemplifying the Rupture: Beyond the "Choreography of Civil Speech" Because I am defining these ruptures as active moments that push back against an otherwise silent

set of expectations for cultural engagement in the classroom, it feels appropriate to offer a slightly more concrete example of what these moments may present alternatives *to*. Where more traditional approaches such as the NYC DOE's "Respect for All" program may work to specifically prioritize through posters and brochures a "safe and supportive learning environment free from harassment," these in-class ruptures are symptomatic of an environment where students being *themselves* trumped a respect for their being overly cautious of protocol or appropriateness. This is not to say, of course, that there is anything more important than students' physical and emotional safety in school, but rather that by over-celebrating "safety," school classrooms and hallways run the risk of replicating the same kind of lip service pageantry that "fast-food multiculturalism" represented in the 1990s.

More to the point of these specific ruptures, by celebrating student protection and precaution, schools disable themselves from engaging the possible benefits of talking openly and honestly about students' lives, including about issues of identity and difference. "Respect for All's" brochure, available in every DOE school and for download via their website, informs students in no uncertain terms that a violation of the chancellors regulations concerning bullying and discrimination will constitute "appropriate disciplinary action, including contacting the police if the behavior constitutes criminal activity" (See Appendix 10). It reminds students to refer to the program's "Respect for All posters displayed throughout (the) school…to report student-to-student harassment or bullying." They also sponsor themed weeks and days of celebration such as "No Name-Calling Week," "Kindness Week," and "No On Eats Alone Day."

To be certain, the efforts of this program and others like it are vital. Moreover, "taunting, exclusion, intimidating behavior, derogatory language, derogatory ideas, or making derogatory jokes about students' actual or perceived race, color, citizenship/immigration status, religion, creed, national origin, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation or weight. …" are all potentially dangerous behaviors and should not be tolerated in school, and I do not mean to suggest that the program itself is doing anything less than a commendable and necessary job by making this information readily accessible to students. Instead, I mean to also raise the question of whether or not the gravity of the language—and its constant written reminder throughout the school—also works to create a hypersensitivity to (and fear of) any real engagement with those issues, including from a pedagogical perspective.

Cris Mayo (2004) reminds us that "while prohibiting disrespectful speech is the quickest way for school districts to do something, those codes in and of themselves are insufficient. Too often the careful choreography of civil speech is the only action taken to change the school environment" (p. 35). Recurrent throughout my data, however, were instances where students brought to light, both through writing and dialogue, various insecurities and fears regarding their social identities. In so doing, their own stories—while not always taking on issues of bullying and discrimination directly, though often stories they could easily be bullied *for*—worked to puncture the veneer of "civil speech." Messy, imperfect and imprecise stories about "growing up sheltered" and feeling alone, stories about hating school, stories about "mothers who don't see eye-to-eye," stories about being called fat or being cat-called after, or cat-calling after others. Mason acknowledged to me during a unit-ending interview that among the multiple things he felt

like he may have valued about our course, he liked that there was an expectation that people "try to take risks. I just go for it, and I don't really…care what people think." In this way, students' stories about their conflicting and dissonant in-school and out-of-school selves worked to rupture an ingrained kind of precaution around language and appropriateness, and in so doing, challenged a quiet kind of disingenuousness that is sometimes associated with prepackaged approaches to this work.

Cultural Ruptures: The Environmental Shift The second way I have come to understand cultural rupturing in this work is more symbolic, and only occurs once the first form has taken place. It is an external process connected to the kind of environment that is created once Tia, for example, has taken the first intrapersonal risk, and the kind of classroom-based discourse that becomes possible on the other side. By naming aloud and *in school* the tension she experienced around her body image, other students were similarly challenged to consider and name tensions of their own in a way that represented more than a series of courageous risks but rather a shift in the expectations students placed on themselves for participation in the course. In other words, when type-1 cultural ruptures begat other type-1 cultural ruptures from other students, the class itself ceased to be one where the behaviors of "perspectivizing" and "risk-taking toward connectedness" were outlying anomalies, and started to feel like the norm. The reason I articulate this type of cultural rupturing as it own distinct form is because it signifies an evolution at greater scale, rather than in the participation of individual actors. Given that I have situated this study, at least in part, amidst the larger lineage of the tolerance education and anti-bullying movements, and some of the frequently-cited concerns about the efficacy of those programs, an evolution even at partial-scale seemed meaningful.

Exemplifying the Rupture: Beyond Anti-Bullying Similar to my earlier exemplification of how type-1 cultural ruptures work in opposition to some school and classroom environments guided by curricula emergent from tolerance-based practices, I would briefly like expand on the ways in which type-2 ruptures do the same. The United States Governments' leading anti-bullying program, StopBullying.gov, focuses overwhelmingly on strategies for identifying and preventing "bullying, cyberbullying and other aggressive behaviors." The programs' website is impressive in it's abundance of tangible resources and links for students, parents and teachers. What is noticeably lacks, however, is an acknowledgement of what this research is premised around: that bullying itself is as much a symptom as it is the problem. A central component to my argument for this work is that much of the "bullying" we seek to identify and eradicate in schools is connected to issues of identity, difference and fear—and that while our approaches to quelling bullying behavior are well-intended, they may not be reaching beyond the trending notions of that work to understand the school environments in which bullying and student conflict occur. I further premise this research upon the contention that much of the tolerance-emergent, anti-bullying approaches that have taken root in schools are reactive to bully behavior, as opposed to proactive in their efforts to cultivate environments rich with discourse about and across difference.

The notion of type-2 cultural rupturing presents an intriguing possibility alongside some of these anti-bullying approaches in that the result is not "fixing" or "resolving" the antagonistic behavior of particular actors, but rather the development of a more courageous and connected community around them. Over the course of our work together, it became clear that once students' vulnerable cultural narratives entered the

space either through performance, intimate sharing or dialogue, other students were similarly challenged to "just go for it." Tia's admission that she "wanted to take that risk" speaks to the ways in which some students' willingness to lean into vulnerability created an environment that fostered a desire for connectedness. Similarly, Colby's recollection that she "really (wanted) to hear what people were saying…to hear what they (were) feeling" suggests a kind of empathy that if imagined on a peer-group or classroom-level has the potential to redirect an environment that might otherwise breed student conflict across differences. As alluded to throughout this research, I am less interested in identifying one more way to "call out" or "call in" problematic actors and more committed to the underlying issues of identity-related conflict that I believe underscore instances of bullying in schools, and working to cultivate strategies for communities and classrooms to normalize discourse around difference in a way that works to preempt that conflict. The partial scale impact represented by the occurrence of type-2 cultural rupturing in this way could be evidence of one such space.

Further Emerging Themes

While many of the most interesting and potentially innovative elements of this research can be traced back to and explained through this lens of cultural ruptures, I would like to step back from that concept for a moment to consider some of the additional themes that emerged through this work. Countless hours spent looking through student writing and transcripts also revealed a number of interesting patterns. Each of the following themes, while connected in different ways to the notion of cultural rupturing—either they made possible an environment where ruptures could occur, they were the

symptom or result of ruptures having taken place, or perhaps both—they stood out of me as potentially significant elements for discussion.

Authenticity Amidst the Dissonance One recurring idea that seemed to present itself in much of my data was students' desire and ability to "be themselves" through our course—and the ways in which the semi-structured nature of the curriculum allowed them opportunities to "express themselves" in ways that overtime minimized the gap separating their in-school and out-of-school identities. Of the 45 evaluation surveys that I received from students at the culmination of the year, approximately 84% reported that the course helped them "get to know themselves better (and) be more reflective about (their) own (lives)." In one interview with me at the end of the school year, Fancy stated that she felt her time in our elective—particularly the opportunity to write—enabled her to "be herself" in a way that she struggled to be in other courses at school:

> Well, in this class, we kind of get to break away from what we do in other classes, where it's just "do this" or "do that," and we sort of get to explore topics that other teachers don't get to explore, like social identity and …other stuff that makes you "you." And we get to kind find ourselves in our writing, and it gives us a chance to, I guess, "vent" in a way. I feel like I don't have to do certain things for attention, and I can just be myself.

Similarly, Colby's acknowledgment that "everything is sort of different when you come in this room—you can relax you can breathe" further exemplified the kind of comfort and authenticity that Fancy told me about. Taking it a step further, Mason reflected on how that component of the course made his experience of it distinct from other classes:

> This is different because you can't express yourselves in other classes. You can't express yourselves in global history. Or math. I mean, even in English, 'cause everything is so structured. The mood is different because it…because it actually feels like a poet's room.

While Mason didn't expand on what "a poet's room" looked or felt like for him—or perhaps he did but I did not write it down because it was not significant to my goals for improving the course at the time—I now believe that this reflection was in fact quite profound.

My new understanding of what he meant by a "poet's room" is connected to two things. First, I believe he was referring to the course's routinized ritual of writing without craft or form or assignment-based expectation—and as a result, the opportunity it afforded students to look into themselves and their own lives as a first step toward sharping their writing identities. And second, I believe he was referring to the actual curriculum itself, and the ways in which it represented fluidity and structure, negotiation and organization, freedom and autonomy within a tightly bound set of expectations. How, for example, students weekly creative submissions entailed their modeling of a particular form or set of literary devices along with a minimum of three drafts of peer revisions. Or further, how unit-ending evaluation essays challenged students to write about their own experiences with the unit while demonstrating their mastery of how to make appropriate evidence-based claims within a six-paragraph regents-style expository essay. Or perhaps more importantly still, how to utilize a set of protocols and guidelines in order to share their writing aloud, and engage with one another. Did all of these devices toward cultivating "control amidst the chaos" work flawlessly all the time? Of course not—they were aspirational as they were practical. In this way, however, one way to understand Mason's perception of our class as a "poet's room," is as an observation that it strived to allow for what Walt Whitman describes as "containing of multitudes"*,* and in so doing, challenged students to lean more fully into being their authentic selves.

To stay within the metaphor for a moment, the course's effort to attach value to both fluidity and structure mirrored, in many ways, the work of a poet—to search for freedom within order and quiet amidst the chaos, and to prioritize the investigation of the self. Through Mason's lens, perhaps a new way of seeing and understanding cultural ruptures is less that they create opportunities for friction and tension between the in-school and out-of-school selves, but rather that they allow the friction and tension that already exists to emerge—and in so doing reflect moments of real authenticity. A nuanced thought, indeed, and a deeper way to frame this concept: internally, our "two (or multiple) warring selves" are constantly in tension with one another, splitting and competing for precedence, in a tug-of-war match to impact how we perceive ourselves, our social environments and those around us—and that cultural ruptures are not those constant tensions themselves, or even the small moments when they are forced to come in contact and create deeper tension, but rather moments that celebrate and recognize the unacknowledged pressure of the "splitting" experience. Returning to Gutierrez's (2008) notion of the "third space," the classroom for Mason represented not only an additional community that blurred the binaries between home life and school life, but also between his own self perceived identities in those spaces. In other words, it afforded him a kind of hybridity and fluidity. For Mason, being in a "poet's room" meant not only reading and writing and sharing and engaging in dialogue with his peers—it meant being in a space that allowed him to celebrate the messiness of who he actually was and who we was struggling to become, and not feeling lesser for doing so.

Venting Perhaps in the same vein as working toward a kind of authenticity and "being themselves" through our course, students also frequently expressed the

importance "being able to vent" through writing. While the data I collected for this research largely consisted of fully formed, revised and edited submissions of student work, there were frequent, low-stakes writing and sharing activities built into the class experience such as "Friday Free-writes," prompted journaling and informal open mics, that were not part of the data I considered. Often, it was these non-graded, self-driven elements of the curriculum that many students took most seriously, and used as initial spaces to explore themes they wished to write about with greater commitment and urgency in other parts of the course. Tia, for example, valued the free-writing exercises embedded in our course because they helped her think through issues that she wasn't ready to talk about yet. In one conversation with me, she noted that those spaces gave her a private opportunity to give name to some of the anxieties she felt about her body, and about celebrating her sixteenth birthday—and further, how she felt those private spaces helped her "talk" about it before speaking with her mother:

> When you let us do free-writes on Friday? That really helps me get little stuff… off my chest. Like, now this year…how everybody is turning 16, you know sweet 16 is coming up—I wanna do something different. Like, losing weight. Becoming back to the way I was, because that's what my mom wants. …and those really helped me to get things off my chest.…

In much the same way, Colby shared that Friday Free-writes helped her develop an "outlet" that she didn't have through any other opportunities at school. Nearly 75% of the students who returned the year end survey stated that the courses' informal writing opportunities helped them "address conflict in (their lives) in healthier ways." She also suggested that by building up an expectation for that outlet and the course, she also developed an expectation, a desire even, to encounter the perspectives of others:

> Having an outlet…it's different from just learning. When I come to this class, I'm like, it's a poetry day. I know it's a Friday Free-write, and I really wanna hear what people are talking about.

Listening to and experiencing the stories of others without judgment was a cornerstone part of this work. Less acknowledged, however, is the equally important element of articulating one's own story without judgment, and learning to tolerate and embrace our own complexities, insecurities, uncertainties and imperfections. I believe the elements of the course that decentered and deemphasized formal craft while privileging unassigned and uncensored "venting" empowered to be themselves in our course.

Audre Lorde (1977), in a now-touchstone speech she delivered three decades ago at the Modern Language Association's Lesbian and Literature Panel, argued the importance of being called to "articulate without craft," or rather, to speak and give name to the things we value. She argued: "I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruise for misunderstood. That the speaking profits me, beyond any other effect" (Lorde, p. 40). Like Lorde, I believe that the speaking "profits me." I believe unequivocally that by challenging students (and myself) to speak and give name to silences that hurt us, we are made richer and freer human beings, and more fully ourselves. As their voices have made clear, one result of this work was students' more deeply embracing themselves and their multiple silences in school—a small feat which, even amidst the lingering inconsistencies and limitations of this research, gives me great optimism for continued efforts related to this work.

Ambiguities & Inconsistencies

As noted earlier during a brief discussion of some of the limitations I expected to encounter through this work, there is an "unavoidable messiness" associated with qualitative research (Lutrell, 200). Beyond that inherent messiness, however, spending time with my data and revisiting components of the course—including an examination of the artifacts and resources that anchored it—ultimately challenged me to confront a number of clear ambiguities and inconsistencies. Tempting as it may be to ignore them, I am committed both to avoiding my own paths of least resistance in this research, and to the accountability any decent research ought to feel to the subjects and communities they serve through the work. As such, I wish to complicate this work slightly by discussing here my realization of some of those limitations.

Questioning Curricular Accidents Throughout this dissertation, I have referenced the notion of "curricular accidents" as my impetus for the construction of the course, and as the early building blocks around which students experienced what I am now defining as "cultural ruptures." While it is certainly true that experiencing "active art" with students in my classroom was what encouraged my imagination around the possibilities for the Dialogue Arts Project elective, I had a strong sense up front for what I was hoping would be students experiences in it—and many of the major curricular components of the course clearly stated that. While cultural ruptures as a concept is a term that surfaced through spending countless hours with my data and deeply contemplating the literature surrounding this work, I knew early on that behaviors of "risk-taking" and "perspectivizing" would play important roles in how we defined "success" in the course, and even in how students evaluated their own participation in it.

It was only through looking closely at some resources of the course that it became clear to me how directly I named those behaviors as desirable ways of participating in in multiple elements of the class. For example, in a curricular resource I discussed in Chapter III, in order to define and help students understand the defining characteristics of dialogue, I explicitly list "empathizing with others" and "broadening our own perspectives" as symptoms that distinguish dialogue from debate or discussion—and further, as behaviors to aspire toward in the course (See Appendix 3).

While there's nothing inherently limiting about how this intentionality may have shaped the experiences of my students, the reason I am electing to include it as a potential inconsistency in my research is that it makes it difficult to discern from the data if students are demonstrating vulnerability and empathy because of their day-to-day, happenstance experiences in the class, or if they're demonstrating those behaviors because the teacher and the curriculum clearly attach value and expectation to them. And, if the latter, does that challenge or draw into question the validity of how I am defining cultural ruptures? To broaden further, what is to suggest that the natural emotional development and maturation that many young people undergo as high school sophomores isn't related to the various behaviors they exhibited? To what extent if at all does not knowing for certain if the curriculum and course were solely responsible for these transformational moments compromise this study? These questions, while difficult for me to sit with as the researcher, are important ambiguities to allow into this reflexive practice.

Revisiting Trustworthiness Relatedly, though I alluded to issues of researcher reliability earlier in this dissertation, time spent with my data made more apparent how

difficult it may be to disentangle my role in this research from the findings themselves. That is not to say that this curriculum could not be facilitated by another educator or that this study could not be conducted by another researcher, but rather that my precise proximity to every component of this work makes my voice, albeit unintentionally, somewhat of an unreliable narrator. At every step of the way in this process, my subjectivities and biases have underscored this work—and because the data itself is archival by nature, and my role as the facilitator of the course at the time it was collected was not explicitly that of an objective researcher, there was nothing keeping those subjectivities from openly influencing my data. As the developer of curriculum, I desired to create a course that proved a hypothesis I had about what art had the potential to do in classrooms, and as the facilitator of the curriculum I more than likely did what I could in order support that intuition. And finally, as the researcher writing this dissertation, while I am clearly attempting to trouble and puncture whatever veneer of a victory narrative may be lurking in the shadows, I continue to be influenced by my confidence in the possibilities for this work. To this end, in much the same way my teaching of particular behaviors for dialogue creates some level of ambiguity around what impacted students experiences in my course, so too does my enveloping presence in this "single story." Still, it is my hope that the data and students' voices speak for themselves in a way that minimizes my inevitable subjectivities.

Troubling the Data Sample Perhaps as an extension of trustworthiness, the handful of cases that I selected as my data sample for this research was admittedly small—the limitations of which similarly challenge me to sit with a number of uncertainties about the cogency of my data. As acknowledged elsewhere throughout this

dissertation, while the young people at the heart of this study were diverse in terms of their life experiences and their social identities, their academic abilities and interests, and their proclivity toward the arts, each of them were present participants in the course. Enthusiasm for the course as demonstrated through attendance, participation and the submission of assignments was ultimately the first and most necessary selection criteria I used when deciding upon my data set. While I was grateful that it included enthusiastic participation (as defined above) from several students who struggled academically, such as Tia and Mason, my data still only represented the experiences of young people who were present and engaged. The survey data included in this research, while significant enough to make a handful of meaningful conclusions about the course's impact, only represented the portion of the class who submitted them for evaluation. A natural lingering question about this research in future contexts might be regarding its potential impact for participants who are less enthusiastic about the experience. There were certainly students in my classes at Kass Academy South who were resistant to the curriculum, whose attendance was under 50% and whose participation was minimal, at best—but precisely because of that minimal engagement, and because of the archival nature of this research, there was no feasible way for me to reengage the narratives and experiences of those particular young people.

Competing Perspectives

While Luttrell's (2000) "good enough researcher" is one that is aware of their own limitations, who works diligently to swat away compulsions with controlling the uncontrollable, it is equally important to also keep close-by a prismatic understanding of

competing perspectives—and in the case of this research, there are multiple perspectives to consider.

Heart Work in the Accountability Era Perhaps the clearest and most immediately available critiques of this research are perspectives anchored by demands of accountability in education. Arts-based curricula, poetry, identity and dialogue all represent red flags to accountability advocates more concerned with whether or not instruction aligns with state learning standards than with young peoples' growth in areas like "perspectivizing" and "risk-taking toward connectedness." ED Hirsch (2016), for example, argues that decentering the traditional knowledge base in education represents a threat to the good of society, and would contend that this research is ill-advised in it's efforts to equate the value of students' lived experiences to the importance of knowledge-based schooling and standardized exams. Hirsch is not alone, of course—and nor is he the most extreme—in his larger insistence that an accountability toward "base knowledge" be the fundamental principle underscoring not only how students learn in school, but how educators are evaluated.

Patrick Camangian (2008) contends, however, that while there is undoubtedly an urgency to bolster student performances on standardized exams, "more significant learning outcomes come in the form of students' connections to each other and their developing concern for their immediate realities" (p. 200). Put more compellingly, he argues that students must develop a kind of "critical literacy of caring"—namely, a kind of learning that prioritizes communication practices (literacies) that help young people cultivate relationships with others, and to get past the perceived tensions that often come from a sense of difference in school—before being expected to meaningfully engage with

the demands of test preparation, academic accountability, and so on. In this way, perceived through Camangian's lens of cultivating a critical literacy of caring, our work through the DAP curriculum pushed students to examine themselves, their relationships with others and the social systems impacting their lives in ways that set them up to experience academic success in other classes. In fact, while the survey data collected through this research was limited in the ways already briefly described, it did appear to suggest that this may have been true for a number of students. Of the 45 students that completed year-end evaluative surveys about their experience sin the course, approximately 88% suggested that the course "improved engagement in other classes." While promising, of course, it's difficult to discern from just a statistic whether or not that engagement was reflective of the writing instruction students received through our course (which perhaps propelled their capacity and willingness to engage) or reflective of the softer skills that the other data suggests may students developed through the dialogue and sharing processes. Either way, Camangian makes the case that fostering a critical literacy of caring "helps students worry less about what their peers think about them, which then eases their constant efforts to keep their guards up and maintain a constant state of self-protection from the perceptions of others" (p. 184). This affirms many of the themes recurrent throughout this data related to students' writing toward uncovering a deeper understanding of themselves.

While the arguments of Camangian and others contend that courses like these are pertinent largely because they help *prepare* young people for serious academic rigor, inquiry and engagement, it is vital that standards-aligned, accountability-driven classrooms and "critically caring" classrooms not be seen as mutually exclusive entities.

In fact, it can be argued that the latter is necessary for the former. bell hooks (1994) reminds us of the profound flexibility of the humanities curriculum, and its unique opportunity (if not responsibility) to meet the rigid demands of standardization while simultaneously being explicit about issues of difference and power relations in the world. In my description of the curriculum and the course structure, I outlined what was my intent—in fact, a requirement of my administration, given that it was an elective course—to create a curriculum that explicitly centered regents-based writing skills and filled a school-wide instructional void around other elements of writing and rhetoric. Student's unit-ending six-paragraph evaluation essays, for example, were at once opportunities for them to evaluate and reflect on our course *and* opportunities for them to demonstrate mastery (or a lack there of) of the tenets of meaning, development, organization and mechanics—the dominant areas of evaluation on the New York State English Regents exam. Because my students' annual performances on state exams were not remarkably influential factors for me in how I chose to tweak the course curriculum for the following year (nor were they what excited personally about the possibilities of this work), I chose not to include their scores on those exams as part of the data sample I considered for this research. It occurs to me, however, that had I elected to do so, their scores alone (by comparison to the city as a whole, as well as to the network of KAS' comparable schools) would attest to the possibilities for these types of courses serve both as critically caring "poets rooms" and skills-driven labs of academic accountability. Approximately 99% of students who returned the year-end survey for our course reported that they "enjoyed this class," and it is not lost on me that perhaps at least a portion of that "enjoyment"—

particularly for academically driven students, of which KAS has many—was connected to that consistent, ritualized emphasis on standards-based writing skills.

Questioning Criticality Another competing perspective that grazes unnamed throughout the various rooms of this research is its approach to the critical tradition of education, and whether or not the course and curriculum at the core of this work was explicit enough in pushing young people to think about systems of power in addition to their own and others' identities. Increasingly in the field of education, the term "critical" has become commonplace. As described earlier during a discussion of my conceptual frameworks, it is frequently employed as an addendum to existing subfields or bodies of literature to suggest "a move to question the naturalized assumptions about the discipline" from a social and cultural perspective (Janks, 2010, p.13). While it is accurate and appropriate that discourses around power and privilege and the political implications of teaching and learning take up more space in the field than they ever have, some remain skeptical of the trending use of the term, and suggest there must be a distinction made between work that is done in the critical tradition versus that which truly takes up the task of explicitly teaching toward an understanding of oppression and liberation in the classroom. A reasonable critique of this work is whether or not it goes far enough in its efforts to make explicit to students the connections between their individual and cultural narratives, and the various social structures of power surrounding them.

Of the many ways I perceived this curriculum to be situated within the critical tradition, the teaching and ritualizing of dialogic practices in the classroom was among the more central. Suzanne deCastell (2004) maintains that for as passionate as many progressive educators are about "defending the sanctity of the dialogue as the educative

method," the teaching of dialogue skills "does not in fact have the effect that it is presumed to have" (p.52). Similarly skeptical, Ronald David Glass (2004) contends that many North American interpretations of Paulo Freire's (1970) work mistakenly assume that the mere application of dialogue as a method of conversation will make classroom spaces "engines of liberation," and that "the inclusion of student voices…while the teacher avoids direct instruction for fear of reproducing oppressive relationships with students… is necessarily empowering" (p.16). While it was never my assumption that the teaching of dialogue skills would make my classroom an "engine of liberation," and while I do believe our direct engagement with specific issues of identity through creative autoethnographies represents more intentional ways of "including student voices" than his argument may be targeting, Glass' point is hugely valid. Simply put, not all stories (or autoethnographies) are created equal, yet all of them inherently carry with them moral and political implications. Glass suggests that in order to truly teach dialogue in classrooms spaces educators must "make choices in favor of justice, democracy, and the oppressed, and in opposition to inequity and dominant ideologies" (p.24). While it was not the predominant focus of this work, even from it's inception, to unpack and explicitly issues of address of systematic oppression, it is a valuable critique to suggest that perhaps it should have been.

It is also necessary to vocalize perspective that dialogue as a practice has a tendency to place an especially unfair burden on the more historically silenced or marginalized group or individual. Allison Jones (2005) contends that progressive educators engaging "democratic dialogue" in classrooms often do not account for what it truly means to ask students of particular identities to share, and others to listen, and the

troubling dynamic that occurs when members of dominant groups learn about themselves and the world at the expense of members of subordinate groups. In essence, unless carefully considered and facilitated—and sometimes even despite the care—this "dialogue of colonization" (p.64) woks to reproduce the same power relation it seeks to critique. In the case of my research, it is a well-received critique that perhaps there were multiple layers of reproduced "colonized dialogue" at work.

The first way in which this problematic dynamic may have played out during our work was between my between my students and I—they, predominantly black and brown, disproportionately economically disadvantaged teenagers, and I, their white, cis-gender, New York City-transplant of an English teacher. By Jones' critique, our dynamic was one that was ripe for the kind of dialogue of colonization that undermines democratic classrooms—and in many ways, it is more than likely one that to some extent played out. It was I, after all, who was hearing my students' stories (not the other way around), and making the assumption that this was the first time they unveiled them, when perhaps it was the first of many times they'd shared along these lines with one another. In essence, one way of looking at our work could be that my experiences of their often vulnerable and personal autoethnographies did less for them, and more to shape my own perceptions of myself and my role as their teacher, and the curriculum I was building for our course.

Seen a bit differently, a second way in which Jones' (2004) "dialogue of colonization" could play in role in the interpretation of this research is connected to the identities of students themselves, and how they impacted the sharing and listening process in small group settings. In other words, by having students name and write around their own various social identities without explicitly articulating the differing

values of social and cultural power attached to them, students may have replicated the dynamic of learning about themselves at expense of each other. It would not be an inappropriate skepticism to wonder if Kai H.'s admission that she learned a lot about her self, for example, by listening to one of her classmates "talk about their body image, while the other one talk[ed] about gender" wasn't reflective of this dynamic. Or in another example, how Tashuan described the experience really being "touched" by one of her fellow classmates autoethnographies about "being teased for being a bit bigger than everyone else, and how she would just laugh it off even though it made her hurt inside." This example similarly demonstrates the possibilities for dialogue in classroom contexts to amplify, and at worst reinforce, many of the same inequities that it may have been designed to deconstruct—and as the teacher quite literally at the front of the room for these and other small failures, these valid interpretations are difficult for me to accept. Still, I strive to trust that Luttrell's (2000) "frustrations, disappointments …and tensions" are symptoms of healthy research, and to embrace Glass's optimistic reminder that "when our aim is large, no task is too small" (p.31).

This discussion section has served multiple purposes. First, to organize and deepen my discussion of cultural ruptures as demonstrated through my data, and to contextualize those moments as usefully disruptive amidst several popular tangible, tolerance-emergent programs in schools in New York City and nationally. Specifically, I define what I recognized as two distinct forms of cultural rupturing—the "dissonant selves" and the "environmental shift"—and made an effort to demonstrate the concrete ways in which centering those behaviors from a teaching perspective represents a kind of "pedagogy of disruption." Second, I extend my analysis of the data to account for some

for some of additional themes that emerged beyond what I was categorizing as cultural ruptures, and consider the ways in which those new realizations (in concert with the rest of my data) speak to my initial research questions. Third, I return to a handful of the lingering ambiguities and inconsistencies of this research, problematizing issues of the curriculum, general trustworthiness and data sample. And relatedly, I close with a narrowly defined but careful tour of some of the competing critical perspectives that exist around this research. Amidst this entire discussion, however, while each lens provided a new and unique avenue for understanding and troubling my research questions, no element stood out more to me than Mason's reflection that our course felt to him like "a poet's room." With that in mind, I would like to close this discussion with a deeper meditation on what that may mean for this work, both in terms of it's transferability and replication and it's larger contributions to the field.

"A Poet's Room" Revisited

Mason's powerful contemplation of our class as "a poet's room" resonated with me for a number of reasons. In addition to what I initially interpreted his remarks to mean concerning of the course's curriculum—what it ritualized, somewhat poetically, in terms of both structure and fluidity, rigor and play—I also mentioned that I thought he was reflecting on his ability to more fully be himself in our class. Like Colby, who recalled being able "to relax and breathe" a bit more easily in our class, Mason noted feeling "different" when he was present in our room—and while that feeling could of course be attributed to a number of factors, I choose to consider in concert with the similar assertions of Fancy, Tia and other students, to suggest that in fact there *was* something

unique about the opportunities students received in our course that enabled them to be more fully themselves—and to suggest further, that the small act of being yourself in a space that for many students represents a gauntlet of incentives to "split" (Downs, 2012) and be anything but, is slightly radical.

From Mason's perspective, being a part of "a poet's room" was less defined by the potential for meaningful cultural ruptures like "perspectivizing" and "risk-taking" to take place, and more defined by being able to simply be himself. For him, I could argue further that culture ruptures themselves were defined less by the friction and tension of the in-school and out-of-school self, and more by an allowance of that already existing friction and tension to emerge authentically through writing, through sharing and through conversation with others. Further, by Mason's definition, the normalized culture being disrupted through his authentic assertion of self in our class was less the lineage of tolerance-rooted silences as I have described them here, and more the adjacent (still related) culture of "splitting," and the pressure to perform in school. "A poet's room" for Mason meant being able to celebrate the messiness of who he actually was and who we was struggling to become in a way that other cultures outside our room pressured him not to.

Could it be that perhaps through another lens, this kind of authenticity—this sense of relief by the dissolved responsibility to "split"—is an even deeper way of understanding the purpose of cultural ruptures in classrooms? Could it be that while perspectivizing and risk-taking represent behaviors that counter Mayo's avoidant and silent cultures of (2004) "careful choreography of civil speech", they are only made possible through what Mason names as the most important component of this work for

him? Put differently, could it be that "perspectivizing" and "risk-taking toward connectedness" are merely different, perhaps more granularly identifiable symptoms of being able to "express ourselves" authentically, even if it comes out imperfect or without craft?

Among the larger arguments this research has attempted to wrestle with, the notion of space as a contested resource has figured prominently. School is contested space. Home is contested space. Classrooms, among the few in-between alternatives between school and home, are fraught with myriad expectations and histories coloring whose stories can and can not say out loud, toward what end, by whom, in what tone, according to whose cultural values—the list goes on. This recognition that students hunger desperately for spaces to be more authentic versions of themselves, while hardly revolutionary, speaks deeply to our initial framing of this work as in response to a call for more bountiful examples of third space pedagogies (Gutierrez, 2008). Perhaps this work's most useful if not accidental contribution to students' day-to-day lives in school was that it gave them "a poet's room," or rather, a hybrid space to be more courageous actors in their lives and to give name to their various warring selves—the ones they are told they can only be in certain places, and the ones they both running from and hoping to become simultaneously.

VI. CONCLUSION

Beyond using this final chapter as an opportunity to consolidate the many learnings, encouragements, and cautions that have surfaced for me throughout this research, this work is also for me about replication, development and scalability. Perhaps more simply, it is a call to teach with a different set of assumptions, a different set of creative tools, different ways of seeing and knowing both students and school spaces, and the possibilities therein. In this chapter, I will first briefly summarize some of the more significant contributions that this work makes to the field of teaching and learning. I will then review the content and function of each of the previous chapters so as to provide a brief synopsis of the main components of this research, followed by a deeper explanation of the contributions of this study by offering a set of concrete recommendations—or, rather, practical implications resulting from my findings—for both teachers and school leaders. And lastly, I will close with a meditation on the possibilities for future research related to this work.

Summary of Significant Contributions

To be sure, this study like many rests at the perfect center of a Venn diagram of many fields and subfields, and makes the question of "contributions" a layered one. While firmly planted in the work of English Education, this research borrows from and builds upon scholarship from a multitude of areas, and highlights the convergence of historically isolated practices and ideas—more so perhaps than it suggests the invention of something new. To this end, I believe that the most significant contributions that this work may make to the field of English Education are the result the ways in which it

engages previously existing theories and practices outside of English Education in conversation with some of the more contemporary themes within it. Among the handful of contributions that this research makes to the field of English Education, summarized below are what I feel to be the most significant.

Troubling Tolerance This work offers a unique perspective on the sociocultural history of the "tolerance movement" in the United States from 1990 until the present, and situates anti-bullying efforts in education as an extension of those approaches. Specifically, I argue that by adopting a tolerance-centered narrative, schools have hindered authentic discourse around difference and deodorized any meaningful efforts toward addressing many of the issues of identity and difference that underscore student conflict. This research conceptualizes bullying not as the problem but rather as a symptom of a larger underlying concern regarding school tone and culture, and proposes a set of arts-based pedagogical approaches toward productively troubling that milieu.

Cultural Ruptures Building loosely on sociological theories of cultural dissonance (Festinger, 1957), this study introduces the term "cultural ruptures" as a way of identifying and understanding student behaviors that counter or puncture the culture of silence and avoidance around themes of social identity and difference in schools. Specifically, I frame cultural ruptures are moments in classrooms where student experiences around identity assert themselves in ways that create conflict or dissonance between the cultures and expectations of students' in-school and out-of-school lives (Gutierrez, 2008). I argue that it is through these cultural ruptures—the moments of pronounced and sometimes messy authenticity—that deeper discourses around identity can become possible. Further, because there are likely a great deal of identifiable

behaviors that cause or result in the kinds of moments I am describing, I look to the particular behaviors of "Perspectivizing" and "Risk Taking Toward Connectedness" to anchor my initial exploration of them (Villanueva, 2013).

Roadmap for Hybrid Curricula The Dialogue Arts Project curriculum at the center of this study braids together the efforts of other practitioners and multiple existing pedagogies and theories. Many of those efforts, while the bedrock upon which this work lays it's scaffolding, focus on one particular area of practice, and call for a deeper exploration and innovation. Maisha Fisher (2005) and Patrick Camangian (2008, 2009, 20010), for example, brilliantly describe and lift up the practice of centering of performance poetry and autoethnographies in classrooms as powerful ways to help students "examine the ways they experience, exist and explain their identities" (p. 183). The Program on Intergroup Relations and Patricia Stock's (1995) groundbreaking work around a "dialogic curriculum" that allows students "opportunities to reflect on the predicaments of their lived worlds in the context of the studies they are asked to undertake" (p. 16) are in many ways the very essence of this work. While each of these scholars and programs praise and invite the others' practices into their own research as a way of extending and deepening their work, however, few educators have responded explicitly to that call by building a hybrid approach anchored by each of their best practices. This study contributes one such effort to the field to provide a look at the possibilities contained in a model that engages each of these unique approaches.

Chapter Overview

Revisiting the Frame In my opening chapter, as a way of situating this study in the site-specific context of Kass Academy South and my role there for many years as high school English and Creative Writing teacher, I began, quite fittingly, with story. The personal narrative that opened this dissertation depicted a provocative moment in my teaching during which the centering of performances by a spoken word poet sparked student interest in sharing their own narratives around sociological questions of race, gender and identity. I described these "loosely curated curricular moments" as "provocative and unexpected patterns" that came to represent, for me, the initial spark for this research—namely, the contrast they presented to the discourse in education about the political indifference of young people, student conflict across differences and the unexceptional efforts of schools to engage students in meaningful conversation about both.

Departing from the personal, I sharpened my lens to locate these types of moments amidst the larger cultural need for self-awareness and communication across differences in schools (Griffen et. al., 2012). In particular, I discussed that need as amplified through contemporary discourses around bullying, and what I perceived to be flawed efforts by schools to target antagonistic student behavior as opposed to engaging underlying issues of intergroup and interpersonal conflict (Dessel, 2010). As a way of introducing my study, I named (1) autoethnographic writing and performance poetry and (2) the teaching of dialogue skills as two of the more promising and well-documented pedagogical approaches that *are* engaging deeper issues of culture and difference in schools—and identify the uncharted research opportunity that is the investigation of their

combined impact. To this end, I offered an initial explanation of this study and it's rationale and significance, including an introduction to my archival data and my research questions, and offered a brief outline for the organization of this dissertation.

Revisiting the Literature In my Literature Review chapter, before engaging the lineage of relevant scholarship that this study is standing on, I offered a brief discussion of the sociohistorical evolution of the "tolerance movement" in American life during the 1990's, exploring it's implications for education specifically. Within that discussion, I explored the ways in which contemporary efforts to build anti-bullying programs in schools are anchored by a cultural of silence and a passive avoidance of issues of difference—which in turn makes authentic discourse around identity in classrooms quite difficult. I then dedicated the bulk of my literature review to three especially relevant subcategories of research within that historical trajectory I felt best anchored this work: Critical English Education, arts-based pedagogies and storytelling in the classroom and the dialogic curriculum. I defined cultural ruptures, and introduced two sample campaigns as emergent from the kind of tolerance-based movement as described above, which I revisited in greater depth in my discussion chapter.

Revisiting Methods & Findings In my Methodology chapter, I carefully presented all elements of this study, including my research design overview, an introduction to Kass Academy South and my participants, my methods of data collection and analysis and a note about some of the ethical issues connected to this research. I presented my data in a way that attempted to view my students as the principle knowledge-holders about their experiences in the course, and thus featured them prominently and often in long-form. I organized my presentation of their voices

according to the two predominant behaviors I initially used to code the data for signs of cultural rupturing—"perspectivizing" and "risk-taking toward connectedness." Within that organization, I categorized their responses further into subgroups of "perspectivizing in school/out of school" and "risk-taking through writing and sharing/through dialogue."

Revisiting Discussion Similarly, I initiated a discussion of my data once again in alignment with the behaviors of "perspectivizing" and "risk-taking toward connectedness." Through so doing, I identified a number of more granular patterns in student responses that helped me reach several meaningful conclusions about the various ways in which cultural ruptures functioned in the classroom—and specifically, the ways in which those behaviors stood in contrast to environments endorsed by two leading programs designed to target issues of bulling in schools. In addition to adding further definition and nuance to the notion of cultural ruptures, I also identified a handful of additional emerging themes that were recurrent in students' responses and attempted to explain those in the context of my research questions. And lastly, I ended this section with a meditation on some of the ambiguities and inconsistencies that complicate an understanding of this data and research study, and a brief survey of some of the perspectives that may challenge or oppose this work.

Recommendations

As alluded to during my cursory acknowledgement of some of the contributions of this work, this research study by nature exists at quite a profound intersection of ideas and fields. It traces multiple lineages of literature in education and sociocultural studies, and builds directly on a select handful of contemporary classroom practices. It repurposes

concepts and theories from the fields of sociology and psychology to better understand the culture of classrooms, student engagement and the pedagogy designed to support both. It is a curricular experiment in the arts whose small successes in the classroom have planted a great many seeds in my own consideration for it's potential outside the classroom—beyond the walls of education, for example, where the need to access conversations around issues of identity has perhaps never been greater. I offer this litany not to conflate or confuse ideas concerning the predominant purpose of my research but rather to draw attention to the very different potential audiences for which I believe this study may also hold meaning. As I move to think about potential recommendations, however, I am reminded that this work is above all else an invitation to teach and engage students differently. As such, while I will explore the possibilities for this work in other spaces during the next section, I wish to focus my recommendations here for other classroom practitioners working in contexts similar to mine.

Although cultural rupturing is a concept that is significant to this research both in terms of the lens it provides for understanding this work, and the larger contributions it makes to the field, it was Mason's recognition of "a poets room"—or at least my interpretation of it—that enabled me to more fully understand the value of the pilot curriculum for the DAP class, and our year-long experiences with it. Put differently, cultural ruptures and notions of troubling tolerance, while valuable research tools that helped me make sense of our experiences at KAS, were ways of seeing and organizing the emotional responses and behaviors that students demonstrated through our work—and not the other way around. As I explained in the previous chapter, although the behaviors I used to anchor my definition for cultural ruptures were useful, they were

limited in that other powerful themes emerged through our work that couldn't be categorized under the umbrella of "perspectivizing" or "risk-taking toward connectedness." Those behaviors, as Mason and others alluded to, were equally as important in building a "poets room" wherein students felt freer to "be themselves." As such, the recommendations I would like to make for pedagogy and practice are in service of the cultivation of cultural ruptures as I have defined them, but they are also in service of creating "poets rooms" that foster behaviors that fall outside of my definition of cultural ruptures. I will revisit this need to expand the definition of cultural ruptures in my final section.

Ritualizing Outside Art To revisit Maxine Greene's observation (2007), "the arts may not change the world, but they may change the people who may change the world" (p. 2). Performance (and perhaps the arts more generally) can be an incredibly effective and disarming tool for bringing, as Tia put it, "hard to talk about topics" into the classroom. Research has shown that many people hesitate to engage in difficult dialogue around identity, culture and diversity because are they feel they do not know how to engage appropriately, or that they are not informed enough to do so in the "right" ways (Singleton & Linton, 2007). This fear of "getting it wrong"—and the subsequent unwillingness to engage—has contributed, in no small way, to the counterproductive narrative of tolerance that is prevalent in many school communities across the country. It is certainly easier to tolerate than it is to engage deeply with one another in ways that challenge our discordant selves to come in contact. A shared experience pushes us to ignore the mantra that suggests there is a "right" vocabulary with which to engage around

these issues, and enables us to give credit to (and find connection through) our emotional responses.

Philosophically speaking, the curriculum at the center of this work was guided from its inception by Greene (2007) and Eisner's (2002) faith in the arts to cultivate empathy and expand perspectives, and Adorno (1957) and DuBois' (1903) belief in creativity in education to inherently activate the political. More practically to the science of integrating art in classroom spaces, however, I came to several powerful realizations about process and content, and wish to offer some of those insights here. In many ways, the "Live Literature Series" about which Anthony was so excited at the beginning of this dissertation provided the early framework for how we would learn to meaningfully engage art (and a specific form, at that) in our classroom, and should serve as a reference point for the following recommendations.

It's Got To Be Live The school day is long, and for most high school students, it is fairly mundane. A large portion of the excitement that students like Anthony demonstrated for this component of our course was connected to the mere fact that it provided an outside disruption to the ebb and flow of an otherwise uninspiring, repetitive school day. Teachers often make the assumption that by peppering our curricula with art and culture that we perceive to be relevant (either to our course content, or to students' lives), we are doing enough to engage students in the life outside our classroom doors—and while those things were necessary for us to do in preparation for each of our guest artists, there is no replacement for live performance. Live performance as a ritual in the classroom identifies the learning space as one with possibilities beyond the curriculum that the teacher cannot fully curate or account for, and one where students and teachers'

roles are less fixed, less defined, and less enforced (Freire, 1988). In my case, and in the case of other white teachers working with largely black and brown students, the presence of another engaging, creative adult voice who by design was often not white themselves, allowed me to soften the dynamic of my whiteness in the room, and place other voices as content experts—particularly when our content was lived experience.

I recognize that it is one thing to theorize about the value of engaging outside artists in classrooms, and another thing altogether to actually find, communicate with and curate their visits. As such, I have taken the liberty of compiling a comprehensive list of arts organizations across the country that work in schools whose approach to youth work and creative expression are uniquely in synch with the kind of live performances in classrooms that I am describing. Through my work with Urban Word NYC, one of the largest and most comprehensive youth literary arts organizations in the country, I have come to know intimately many of these organizations and the artists they work with. In compiling this list, I prioritized those that employ predominantly writers, poets, actors and musicians or color, and also serve as sites for more comprehensive (and mostly free) after school programing for teens (See Appendix 11). And lastly, it is also vital to note that while I came into contact with many of the artists I initially worked with through specific arts organizations like Urban Word NYC, I pursued relationships with those artists (and their organizations) individually. For teachers attempting to engage in a pedagogy that centers outside art and the voices of local artists, it is important for them to pursue relevant opportunities for professional development and engage in the culture and community around those artists as opposed to merely plucking them off the vine for classroom entertainment. The reason I was able to engage artists with such consistency in

my classroom was in part because I knew or was connected to artists personally—but it was also because my classroom gained a reputation within my community of colleagues as a space where artists were valued.

It's Got To Be Consistent Too often, we educators treat art and its' presence in our curricula as window-dressing to supplement more important projects and assignments, or as a catchy entry point into a new unit. While there is certainly nothing wrong with infusing art into our work in these ways, when we restrict the use of creativity and expression in our classes to these limited roles we communicate the message that they are stepping stones toward more important content. It is when we embed live performance (and all it entails, as described above) as a built-in ritual of the learning experience that we convey to students that creative expression matters. Part of what Mason's reflection on "a poet's room" signified was an understanding that no matter what the curriculum in our course called for or whether he had completed his homework or whether he felt like being in school that day, he could reliably anticipate that live performances—typically by someone that looked like him—would be a woven in part of the fabric of our classroom.

It Can't Be Censored & There Must Be Stakes Another significant component to the success of the "Live Literature Series" involved my insistence that my classroom be a censorship-free zone so as to encourage the telling of stories that mattered, stories that risked something, stories that had stakes. As a staple for the course itself, the notion of language and censorship was one that referred more to the content of students' writing, but it was of the utmost importance to me that the stories and personalities of our guest artists not be censored or curated—and more importantly still, that my students knew why I felt that way. I believe that asking a writer to tell a story that is meaningful about

their lives without using certain words or exploring certain themes is akin to asking an artist to paint a landscape without using certain colors. It places a value judgement on language, and the different socializations that individuals encounter that name, to varying degrees, it's "appropriateness.'"

By that same accord, language is powerful and language can be hurtful. Scarcity is what gives it power. Thoughtless recycled overuse is what drains it of it. If educators wish to do this work—that is, utilize their classrooms as incubators for the kind of critical English education that Morrell (2005) calls for—they must articulate for themselves a manifesto, of sorts, that explains their "value of language," and a set of expectations that govern it's sensitive but nonetheless free use. In that, of course, teachers are also responsible for upholding whatever code and conduct is expected of their school—which is also perhaps another way of offering that these courses should not exist in complete isolation from the rest of a school and its administration, as much as we sometimes might wish otherwise. It is appropriate for teachers who to take on curriculum that prioritizes open and honest creative expression to be transparent through their syllabi so that both families and school leadership have a clear understanding of the work taking place (See Appendix 12).

Balancing Chaos With Control One particular realization that surfaced for me in the process of this work—perhaps even while facilitating the course itself—was a recognition that in order for students to experience freedom, choice and independence in our class, they could only do so meaningfully with a set of appropriate structures, routines and clearly defined expectations. In the same way that many teachers superficially engage art and creativity as appetizers for the real content, so too do we

often approach the cultivation of soft skills in classrooms, such as communication or critical thinking or creativity, as an afterthought that will be addressed simply by reading a cutting-edge piece of literature, watching a scene from a film or a TV show, talking about a hot topic debate issue in small groups, drawing maps of our neighborhoods. It was only upon my teaching the course for a year that it became clear to me (and it is clearer, still, upon looking at student data in hindsight) that the less traditional my pedagogy and my assignments became, the greater the need for structure to support those unique approaches.

During my initial interpretation of Mason's reflection on our space as "a poet's room," I posited that part of what I felt like he and other students responded to in the course were the ways in which the curriculum represented equal parts "fluidity and structure, negotiation and organization, freedom and autonomy within a tightly bound set of expectations." In the previous section, I stated that one of the contributions of this research was a potential "curricular roadmap" it provides for other educators seeking to imagine hybrid approaches toward this work. While there are many ways to view that, my hope is that the various curricular artifacts interspersed throughout this dissertation serve as a kind of menu that practitioners may pick and choose from in considering their own classrooms, their own young people and their own school communities. That said, while this work stands on several years worth of curricular resources and course structures that I developed in order to account for this precarious yin and yang balance between control and chaos, I would like to use this section to briefly revisit and consolidate the most significant of those structures as recommendations, and to offer

several tangible artifacts for potential practitioners to build on in imagining the possibilities for their own spaces.

Guidelines for Engagement One of the most important documents that supported our work in the DAP class was a set of guidelines—or moreover, set of agreements—that framed the expectations for engagement in our course (See Appendix 13) Short of calling them "rules," they were, in essence, a set of governing principles that underscored each and every component of the curriculum. Adapted loosely from a resource created by the Program on Intergroup Relations, these guidelines included agreements to "ensure confidentiality," to "trust that people were doing their best" in dialogue and in writing and sharing about their lives, and to "challenge ideas instead of people" during dialogues where conflict had the potential to surface. At the beginning of the year, I distributed a partially completed list of agreements and we spent the first several weeks of the course studying them, talking about them and debating over which ones mattered more than others, and more importantly, what additional guidelines needed to be added to the list. For example, students added agreements to be "mindful of airtime when sharing…and to speak up with others" dominated the dialogue. Eventually, we published and visibly posted an agreed upon version of these guidelines to serve as a reference point throughout the year.

Ritualizing the Free-write Every student in my class received a journal for the independent creative writing component of our course—some purchased their own so as to reflect their personality, and distinguish it from other journals if/when I collected them for an assignment. These journals were to be used solely for our weekly Friday ritual that came to be known as "Friday Free-Writes," which Colby and Mason and Tia spoke about

at length in Chapter V. Students were given a free-write window and a soft prompt suggestion, and four governing guidelines: (1) They needed to be sustained without interruption, (2) they needed to be silent, (3) they were designed to benefit the writer and were without the expectation to share aloud (4) and they needed to be kept confidential (4) (See Appendix 14). At the start of the school year, Friday Free-Writes were as brief as 5 minutes, but by the end of the year they were full 30-minute blocks of sustained, uninterrupted writing time.

Dialogue Instruction, Practice & Assessment As a way of introducing dialogue as a concept, I simplified a number of resources from the Program on Intergroup Relations' introductory curricular module and framed dialogue as a specific form of communication unique from debate and discussion, identifiable by a handful of eight particular habits (See Appendix 3). I introduced students to dialogue slowly over the first several months of the school year, and created a number of projects and activities that involved low-stakes role-playing and focusing on particular habits of dialogue. Eventually, students worked toward longer prompted dialogues, using a soft rubric to assess the quality of their group's dialogue, and individual written responses to assess their own participation in and understanding of the concept (See Appendix 4).

Student Writing Workshops On rotating Thursdays, students participated in small peer-facilitated writing workshops that pushed them to be readers and editors of each other work. Because Thursday writing workshops were almost entirely student facilitated, there were a number of critical resources that students received at the beginning of these sessions including reminders about the various roles they would need to play (facilitator,

time keeper, writer-in-focus) and workshop steps (getting organized, distributing copies, reading aloud, silent read, feedback, take away) (See Appendix 15).

Essay Development & Self-Evaluation Similarly, at the culmination of each unit, students reflected on their experiences via a take-home essay assignment—which over the course the year received a minimum of five times. The purpose of these assignments was two-fold. First, they were designed to gather student feedback about the course—their likes and dislikes, what they found valuable versus what they found irrelevant, what they elected to write and share about in small groups, their hopes for the upcoming unit, etc. Second, because the expectation was that students communicate their above reflection and evaluation within the structure of a 6-paragrph essay, it was also an opportunity for me to teach and develop their essay writing skills—particularly toward the expectation and format of the New York State Regents Exam (See Appendix 5).

While there are a great many tasks that comprise the difficult work of a poet, none are more encompassing than that of taking the most complicated truths about what it means to be alive and distilling them into universally accessible bites. To do so inherently involves the work of creating a sense of order amidst the chaos, pulling out the melody from the cacophony, at once tolerating the ambiguity while quietly working to make sense of it. This handful of small curricular strategies and resources, while geared less toward than the actual development of poets and more toward the curation of space where a poet's work is possible, are offered as potential tools to make easier the simultaneous stepping back and zooming in that is required to facilitate courses such as these amidst the accountability-driven and sometimes rigid environments of classrooms.

Explicitly Teaching Toward Intersectionality Through careful consideration and analysis of my students' various reflections on our course, I developed a renewed appreciation for the importance of explicitly teaching young people to understand the world through an intersectional lens. Building on Tafjel (1979) and Lorde (1984), Tatum (2003) reminds us that our sense of our own social identities—commonly organized in terms of "race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, body size, and physical or mental ability" (p. 20)—rests somewhere in the contested space between how we perceive ourselves and how others perceive us. She further contends that because we hold multiple group memberships simultaneously, many of us are often, at once, both privileged and oppressed, seen and not seen, thriving and disappearing. Despite that, teacher efforts to directly engage social identity in the curriculum frequently neglect the importance of encouraging young people to see themselves in this pluralistic light, and thus miss out on a number of important pedagogical opportunities.

I learned that by providing students with consistent opportunities to take stock of the various identities they hold—and more importantly the freedom to *choose* and to *change* which parts of their identities they wish to engage through writing and sharing—they become more practiced in considering the full range of who they and others are, as opposed to the two or three identities they are constantly reminded of through other peoples' perceptions of them. By allowing students the opportunity—again, the ritual, even—to reflect on components of their identities that may less salient, they become empowered to move beyond the social pressures and expectations they may encounter on a daily basis. Further, toward the specific purpose of engaging students in dialogue that

fosters "perspectivizing" and "risk-taking toward connectedness," focusing on intersectionality also accomplishes several vital things. First, it challenges students to encounter each other in new ways, and to find commonality in each others' emotional experiences with difference, even if they may not share any of the same significant group memberships. Second, it allows students the opportunity to understand the interplay between identities, and consider the ways in which their stories may be unique from one another even if they have multiple group memberships in common. And lastly, if there are elements of students' social identities that they wish not to engage with, affording them the opportunity to consider and focus on another part of themselves makes possible their participation in dialogue in the short term, and it increases the likelihood that they may feel comfortable engaging with those more difficult parts of themselves later on.

In order to meaningfully structure intersectionality into their teaching, educators can employ a number of specific practices—including, perhaps even preliminarily, engaging in substantial critical reflection of their own intersecting identities, and examining the various ways in which those identities "show up" for them socially, at home, at school, etc. Pedagogically, teachers should be equally intentional in how they name, define and frame the concepts of social identity and intersectionality to their students. Students must be able to do more than *assume* that who they are, how they look and where they're from, for example, significantly impacts how they come to school everyday. Several weeks worth of curriculum should be dedicated to students' own examination of their pluralistic selves—complete with considerations of which of their identities are fixed vs. those that change over time (even daily), those that give them privilege and power vs. those that have been historically oppressed or marginalized, and

those that they are most and least aware of. In this way, the theme of intersectionality is introduced as a lens through which to participate in the entirety of the course, more so than an isolated unit to begin the school year.

The resource I used in order to engage initially in my own self-reflection and then to facilitate reflection and dialogue amongst my students was a "Social Identity Profile" I adapted from the Program on Intergroup Relations, which allowed students to take inventory of both their various group memberships and their differing emotional relationships with each of them (See Appendix 2). In fact, as mentioned during my description of the DAP curriculum in Chapter III, I also used this resource as an organizing tool around which to format my entire curriculum, so that each unit focused on students' emotional reactions to various identities they held as opposed to focusing on individual social identity categories through each unit. In this way, the experiences that students wrote during the "Most Aware Of" unit, for example, inevitably represented an intersectional perspective, and allowed for many of the benefits described above. Other ways of routinizing engagement through an intersectional lens include intentionally integrating literature and art by a wide range of identities and experiences—particularly those underrepresented (or not represented at all) by the experiences of students and teachers in the room (See Appendix 16)

Narrative Over Buzzword A final recommendation for practitioners searching for ways to engage this type of education in their classrooms is to avoid the tendency to begin this work through terminology-first approach. Many current trends in critical multicultural research stress the importance of social justice terminology, such as power, privilege, discrimination, racism, homophobia, and so on (Ravitch, 2007; Gorski, 2013).

While there is little skepticism that each and every one of those terms are *vital* to an eventual understanding of the foundation of this work, and the difficult task that is building bridges across differences, introducing those terms as a starting point can in fact be more divisive, more detrimental and more boring than beneficial. When students were able to explore and share their own individual *stories* and cultural narratives through the creative autoethnographic approach they were able to truly become invested in the larger dialogue around identity and school culture. Stories, after all, are a universal currency (Witherell & Noddings, 1991).

Future Research

Apart from the incomplete list of recommendations I have made for practitioners working in school contexts, I also believe this study carries with it several important implications for future research.

Defining Cultural Ruptures While the notion of cultural ruptures has served this study well in terms of the framework it provided me to interrogate and make sense of my students' experiences, I question if the manner in which I have defined it here is thorough enough to be engaged in other contexts. This research attempted to repurpose a handful of terms heavily utilized in the field of social psychology as a way to identity moments of cultural friction in the classroom, though I believe it has only set the table for its more exact and precise defining by future researchers. Because so little inquiry has been made into how those moments manifest in education, it is difficult to assess how (and if at all) they could be used as potential frameworks through which to make broader claims. Future research around this concept will challenge it's existing definition, and seek to

build a more comprehensive framework though which to consider student participation in courses like these, and in general. A more precise understanding is needed regarding what those moments may also look and sound like, and whether or not anything is lost or gained through creating them through premeditated efforts (such as curricula) to provoke them in controlled settings (such as classrooms).

Beyond the Graded Classroom While it was mentioned earlier that it may be worth considering if and how this model can be adapted beyond the classroom, it is also worth recognizing the serious limitations of the classroom to begin with, and whether abandoning the school structure altogether as a research site might yield more dynamic and useful results. Aside from the basic restraints such as time, a grades-driven atmosphere, issues of attendance, censorship, etc., deCastell (2005) argues, for example, that schools represent the most historically proven and undeniably efficient system for producing and reproducing "relations of hierarchy and subordination…and have provided a public space for the exercise of power and the legitimizing of racism and oppression" (p. 53). In other words, because the age-old tradition of schooling is so engrained in young people – it is an extension of every other system of government and space of public life, and contains the same violent silences and power imbalances – it seems possible that young peoples' voices become "extensions of official discourse" (p. 55) without their even being aware. Further, it seems a worthy concern that even my analysis of students' voices is deemed meaningful *in the context of school* and that even our expectations of what is possible are tailed by a silent governing of what we've come to expect from schools. Are schools the right place for this work? What is lost and what is gained? By giving young people (and not so young people) the opportunity to engage

with these questions and practices outside of the culture of school, what new possibilities might unfold?

Decentering Whiteness I have referenced throughout this work the various ways in which I had initially hoped to cultivate a curriculum that allowed me, even if only quietly, to "soften the dynamic of my whiteness" in the classrooms I worked in. Toward that end, I tried generated classroom activities, procedures and protocols, assignments and texts, and perhaps most importantly, the routine integration of live voices and bodies very different from my own. When I think about the droves of white educators that have taken my courses or participated in my workshops—and the even larger numbers that continue to show up to graduate schools of education across the United States—I can think of few more valuable offerings than potential tools for identifying how and when our whiteness manifests in the curricula we teach, and how to strategize against it. Further, how to think of ourselves as knowledgeable but humble servants of the communities we work with, and to utilize what resources are available to us to get out of our students' (and our own) way. I believe one necessary and potentially very fruitful implication for future research that this work offers is formally interrogating how white teachers enact their whiteness in classrooms—and more importantly, how and when they develop systems to counter it.

Final Thoughts

A critical English education is one where, as Morrell (2007) and others indicate, students are pushed to consider their own lives in relationship to the world around them. One where, moreover, they are drawn into dialogue around the social and political factors

that shape their lives and encouraged to promote engagement with one another in ways that are reflective of those factors. In other words, a critical education is one where real world problems are not kept at bay from instruction but rather invited into it—starting, chiefly, with the real worlds of students' own lives. It is one where tolerance is not preached bur rather interrogated. The English classroom, like few other places in schools, represents a nexus at which issues of language, culture, identity and power inevitably intersect. As such, it is up to teachers themselves to create curricula that not only addresses these issues but places them squarely at the center of instruction—curricula that is proactive in the process of learning about students' lives, concerns and fears around engaging with one another and society.

In much the same way that English teachers must lead the charge in using their classrooms to reimagine the world as one where perspectivizing and connectedness are fundamental, young people themselves must also recognize their own power to drive those difficult dialogues in ways that most adults in their lives cannot. High school students are infinitely more open and engaged across differences than most adults (certainly the adults currently leading this country), and need to be supported in their efforts to locate that autonomy to speak back to the world as it exists both within and beyond their schools. This chapter is written with the hope that other educators will respond to the call to construct and execute courageous, arts-based curricula where students can speak back to the realities defining their lives, learn to search for agreement with others and to perceive and value difference, especially when the world around them seems to be calling for the opposite.

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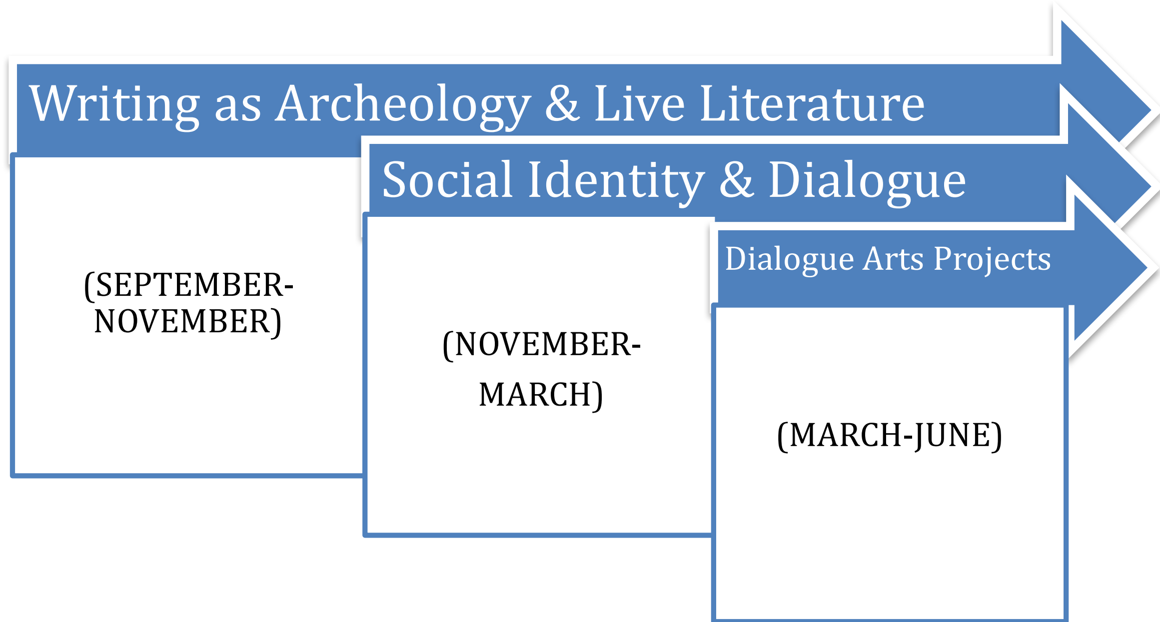
VIII. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Curriculum Stage Flow Chart



Appendix 2: Social Identity Profile (Curricular Artifact)

Side 1

Social Identity Groups

Handout adapted courtesy of The Program on Intergroup Relations (IGR) at the University of Michigan

Social identity groups are based on the physical, social, and mental characteristics of individuals. They are sometimes obvious and clear, sometimes not obvious and unclear, often self claimed and frequently ascribed by others. For example, racial groupings are often ascribed as well as self-claimed. Government, schools, and employers often ask an individual to claim a racial identity group or simply ascribe one to an individual based on visual perception. Other social identities are personally claimed but not often announced or easily visually ascribed such as sexual orientation, religion, or disability status. *For the purpose of this self-examination please identify the memberships you claim or those ascribed to you. Below are examples of social identity groupings.*

Examples
(Feel free to use your own language for your identities.)

Gender	Woman, Man, Transgender, Post-Gender, etc.
Race	Asian Pacific Islander, Native American, Latin@, Black, White, Bi/Multiracial, etc.
Ethnicity	Irish, Chinese, Puerto Rican, Italian, Mohawk, Jewish, Guatemalan, Lebanese, European-American, etc.
Sexual Orientation	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Pan-Attractional, Heterosexual, Queer, Questioning, etc.
Religion/Spirituality Faith/Meaning	Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, Pagan, Agnostic, Atheist, Secular Humanist, etc.
Social Class	Poor, Working Class, Lower-Middle Class, Upper-Middle Class, Owning Class, Ruling Class, etc.
Age	Child, Young Adult, Middle-Age Adult, Elderly, etc.
(Dis)Ability	People with disabilities (cognitive, physical, emotional, etc.), Temporarily able-bodied, Temporarily disabled, etc.
Nation(s) of Origin and/or Citizenship	United States, Nigeria, Korea, Turkey, Argentina, etc.
Tribal/Indigenous	Mohawk, Aboriginal, Navajo, Santal, etc.
Body Size/ Type	Fat, Skinny, Trim, Person of Size, Under/overweight, Thin, etc.

Target Group: Social identity groups that are disenfranchised and exploited
Agent Group: Social identity groups that hold unearned privileged in society
Discrimination: Prejudicial treatment of individuals based on actual or perceived membership to a social group
Oppression: The systematic, socially supported mistreatment and exploitation of a group, category or individual.

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Appendix 2: Social Identity Profile (Curricular Artifact)

Side 2

Social Identity Profile

SOCIAL IDENTITY	GROUP MEMBERSHIP	I am most aware of…	I think about least…	Has greatest effect on how others see me… (positive or negative)	Matters most in my family or close circle of friends…	I am most proud of…	Makes me uncomfortable to talk about with others…	Gives me power and/or privilege in society…	Has strongest impact on my decision making…	Have the earliest memories of…
Gender										
Sex										
Race										
Ethnicity										
Sexual Orientation										
Religion/ Spirituality/Faith/ Meaning										
Social Class										
Age										
(Dis)Ability										
Nation(s) of Origin and/or Citizenship										
Body size/type										
Additional										

** Consider: What *two* identities would you say most strongly influence your experience in education right now? ________________________________

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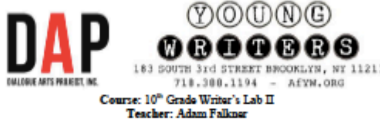
Appendix 3: Dialogue vs. Debate Worksheet (Curricular Artifact)



Throw Some D's

Exploring the Major Differences Between *Debate* and **Dialogue**

In *DEBATE*:	In **DIALOGUE**:
Succeed or win; Existing beliefs are reaffirmed	**Broaden our own perspective; Allow our minds to change**
Advocate one perspective or opinion	**Allow for and invite differences of opinion and experience**
Focus on "right" or "wrong," or "acceptable" or "unacceptable"	**Express ambiguity; Not always clear about "right" or "wrong"**
Use silence to gain advantage	**Honor silence**
Deny the feelings and emotional responses of others	**Explore thoughts and emotional responses**
Search for and find places for disagreement; Identify "flaws" in the opinions of others	**Search for places of agreement**
Listen with the anticipation of presenting a counter argument	**Listen without judgment; A desire to understand/ empathize with others**

** Remember, even though our goal is to engage in **DIALOGUE** in this class, conflict will still be a natural and necessary part of that process. It's not about avoiding conflict or differences of opinion but rather *how we respond* when presented with both. Use this sheet as a cheat sheet.

Appendix 4: Dialogue Self-Assessment Exit Ticket (Curricular Artifact)

Teacher: Adam Falkner
Email: agfalk@gmail.com

Dialogue Self-Assessment Exit Ticket:

Using the other side of this sheet, identity one Behavior/Goal of **dialogue** that your group practiced during today's session. For example, *"Honor silence"* or *"Broaden our own perspective."* Copy that behavior/goal in the space below.

Behavior/Goal:

____
____

Now, think about the specific dialogue that took place in your group. In 3-5 sentences, describe one thing you **saw** or **heard** in your group today that demonstrated the "Behavior/Goal" listed above. Please do not use names.

____
____
____

General Self-Assessment:
** Please circle the number/description that best captures how you feel you and your group participated in today's session. **Place a single star (*) next to one description** that stands out as especially representative of your group's work today. How you rate your participation here *does not determine your final score for this exhibition – that grade is determined using the rough rubrics provided on the original assignment sheet. In other words, be honest.* ☺

5	4	3	2	1
We did **excellent** today! There were ZERO instances when our group fell into "debate mode" and all members respected the class' "Ground Rules for Dialogue." I felt **safe** taking a risk in dialogue today. I felt safe when speaking or sharing. Vocal participation was **shared** by all members in the group. All members **respected** the sharing and listening protocol. It was clear that people were invested in influencing our communication style towards dialogue.	We did **very well** today! There was only one or two instances when the group or individuals slipped into "debate mode" – but we generally did a nice job of catching ourselves and returning to the class' "Ground Rules for Dialogue." I felt **comfortable** while sharing and listening during today's session. Although our group may have been **steered** by one or two specific voices, overall participation was **shared** by all members in. All members **respected** the sharing and listening protocol.	We did **okay** today. There were several instances when the group or individuals slipped into "debate mode" – but we did a good job of catching ourselves and returning to the class' "Ground Rules for Dialogue." I felt **comfortable** while sharing and listening during today's session, but there were times when I felt judged while sharing. Our group may have been **directed** by one or two specific voices, overall participation was shared by all members in. Most members **respected** the sharing and listening protocol.	We **struggled** through it today; the overall tone of our communication style felt closer to debate than dialogue. I **wanted to feel comfortable** during today's dialogue, but didn't. The overall tone of our communication made that difficult. The group was **directed** by one of two voices. Not everyone had the opportunity to share. There were several instances where group members **disregarded protocol**, spoke out of turn or shared in inappropriate ways.	We did **not do very well** today. The overall tone of our communication mirrored debate and there were few, if any, instances where dialogue occurred. I **did not feel safe** while sharing and listening during today's session. I feared my group members' responses to things I wanted to say. One voice **dominated** our dialogue today. Group members showed **disrespect** for the sharing and listening protocol.

Appendix 5: Unit Reflection & Evaluation Essay (Curricular Artifact)

Teacher: Adam Falkner
Email: agfalk@gmail.com

Writers' Lab II – Reflection & Evaluation Essay

In an argumentative/pursausive essay, please answer the following:

Do you feel this exhibition was a valuable experience? Why or why not? You might consider "value" as it applies to you as an individual, your class and/or high school students in general.

The purpose of this writing assignment is to reflect on the process and content of the Dialogue Arts Exhibition we just completed in class. This assignment – much like all of our DYO's – is also designed to assess how your essay-writing skills are improving as the year progresses. Specifically, we are looking at your ability to make a claim (in a single thesis statement) about the overall value of this unit and use appropriate evidence (see below) to support your position. To explore "overall value," perhaps consider the following:

- What new and important skills did I learn during this unit that may help me in other classes, or even outside of school?
- Can I respond to the unit essential questions after having completed this exhibition?
- What did this unit teach me about myself, my classmates and/or the society (or city or neighborhood or generation or world) we live in?
- Did this unit challenge any of my own preexisting beliefs or give rise to any new questions? How?
- Did I produce a piece of writing or participate in a dialogue in ways that made me proud?
- How does what we learned in this unit impact how I engage with other people?
- …?

How will you be assessed?

1. **Meaning** – Your ability to accurately respond to the assignment and take a clear position in the form of a thesis statement. You will not be assessed on *content* –meaning, what you say—but rather logici—meaning, whether or not your argument makes sense.
2. **Development** – Your ability to develop your ideas with relevant and detailed evidence that clearly supports your position. *As usual, "appropriate evidence" should include your own writing and experience in dialogue as well as works by other writers used during this unit, but can also include relevant outside information such as politics, literature, film, TV, current events, historical and cultural allusions, logical arguments and personal experience.*
3. **Organization –** Your ability to organize your thoughts into a logical, coherent 4-5 paragraph structure; use effective transitions and topic sentences that connect to your thesis/claim.
4. **Conventions** – Your ability to use correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalization and paragraphing.

Make sure to include in specific detail:

- Information about the exhibition itself and some of the key definitions and concepts
- A clear thesis statement stating your position
- Specific evidence and examples that support your viewpoint (text, performance, class or peer dialogue, current events, etc.)
- A counter-argument acknowledging an opposing viewpoint

Appendix 6: Pilot Study Student Survey

Side 1

DAP
DIALOGUE ARTS PROJECT, INC.

YOUNG
WRITERS
183 SOUTH 3rd STREET BROOKLYN, NY 11211
718.388.1194 - AfYW.ORG

Course: 10th Grade Writer's Lab II
Teacher: Adam Falkner

We Want to Hear From You!
DAP/AFYW Student exit survey

Thank you for your participation in Writers Lab II and the Dialogue Arts Project elective this year! I would love to hear your honest feedback, as it is essential to making both Writers Lab and the Dialogue Arts Projects a better experience for future students.

<u>**PERSONAL SKILLS**</u>

1. This class improved my **self-confidence**.

   1 2 3 4 5
   Strongly disagree *Strongly agree*

2. This class **helped me get to know myself** better; helped me be more **reflective** about my own life.

   1 2 3 4 5
   Strongly disagree *Strongly agree*

3. This class taught me how **to address conflicts in my life** in healthier ways.

   1 2 3 4 5
   Strongly disagree *Strongly agree*

4. This class helped me have more **empathy** for other people – meaning, "place myself in their shoes" as a way of better understanding their perspective.

   1 2 3 4 5
   Strongly disagree *Strongly agree*

<u>**ACADEMIC SKILLS**</u>

1. This class helped me **grow as a writer**.

   1 2 3 4 5
   Strongly disagree *Strongly agree*

2. This class **helped me be more successful in other classes** at AFYW.

   1 2 3 4 5
   Strongly disagree *Strongly agree*

3. This class made me more confident in my ability **work, think and create independently.**

   1 2 3 4 5
   Strongly disagree *Strongly agree*

Appendix 6: Pilot Study Student Survey

Side 2

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT/TEACHER

1. I **enjoyed** this class.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree				*Strongly agree*

2. In general, **I felt safe** taking risks while writing and sharing in this class.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree				*Strongly agree*

3. The teacher of this class made me feel **valued and respected**.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree				*Strongly agree*

4. In general, students in this class demonstrated **more engagement** in this class than in other classes at AFYW this year.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree				*Strongly agree*

DIALOGUE/COMMUNICATION SKILLS

1. This class taught me how to communicate using **dialogue** instead of debate.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree				*Strongly agree*

2. This class improved my ability to **speak and share aloud** with others.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree				*Strongly agree*

3. This class taught me to **listen without judgment**, even when listening to ideas or individuals I may disagree with.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree				*Strongly agree*

OVERALL

1. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is "not at all likely," and 10 is "extremely likely," how likely would you be to recommend this class to a friend?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all likely										*Extremely likely*

2. What, if anything, would change about this class to make it better?

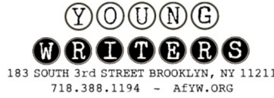
____

____

____

Thank you for your responses! Have a great summer!

Appendix 7: Semi-Structured Student Interview Questions



Teacher: Adam Falkner
Email: agfalk@gmail.com

Rotating Basic Interview Questions

1. How would you describe this class?
2. What are your thoughts about this class? Could you talk more about that?
3. How would you describe your experience in school in general? How would you describe your feelings toward school in general?
4. In what way is this class similar to/different from other courses you take at this school?
5. What does social identity mean to you? Is there a particular social identity that you find that yourself writing about often?
6. Do you find that there's a common theme in general that shows up in your writing? Could you talk more about that?
7. What does dialogue mean to you? Please explain.
8. Do you think you've grown in this class? How so?
9. Do you feel you've been able (or will be able) to take what you've learned from this class and apply it to your life outside? Please explain.

Appendix 8: Parental Consent Form

[redacted]
Media Release Parental Consent Form

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Please be advised that during the course of the school year, through their participation in one of several pilot courses we're excited about at [redacted], your young adult may be photographed, video recorded, interviewed and surveyed about their experience.

In an effort to strengthen these courses and learn more about their capacity to contribute to the academic and community development of our school, these various forms of "media" will be especially helpful for us.

At no point will any contributions your young person may make to our learnings—including even their names or images—be shared externally, unless given explicit written consent in advance.

By signing below, you are indicating that you have read and are aware of this component to our work, and you give your permission for your young person's photograph/interview/survey data to be used internally for these purposes.

Should you have any questions or concerns, or should you like to discuss our work this year in greater depth, please feel free to call the school directly at [redacted].

Thank you in advance!

Adam Falkner & [redacted] Leadership

*****

Students Name: ________________________________ Student ID: ______________

Parent/Guardian Name: ____

Parent/Guardian Signature: ____

Contact: ____

Appendix 9: Media Release Form [4]

Student Media Release Consent Form

Please ensure one box is checked for Part 1 and one box is checked for Part 2 of this form.

Part 1– Events

I, ______________________________, hereby agree and give my permission for the Toronto
(Name of parent/guardian if student is a minor, under the age of 18.
Name of student if an adult, 18 years of age or older.)

District School Board and/or partners to record, film, photograph, audiotape or videotape my/my child's name, image, student work, and performance (hereinafter collectively referred to as "Works") and to display, publish or distribute these Works for the purpose of publishing, posting on the TDSB website, posting in schools, posting on social media sites and/or for broadcasting on television or radio as determined by the TDSB.

I hereby waive any right to approve the use of these Works now or in the future, whether the use is known to me or unknown, and I waive any right to any royalties related to the use of these Works.

I understand that the Works may appear in electronic form on the internet or in other publications outside of the TDSB's control. I agree that I will not hold the TDSB responsible for any harm that may arise from such unauthorized reproduction.

☐ Please mark this box if you **AGREE** that your child may participate in recorded TDSB/school events and TDSB hosted events as described above. (See Part 2 below)

☐ Please mark this box if you **DO NOT WISH** your child to participate in recorded TDSB/school events and TDSB hosted events.

Part 2 – Media Specific

I also understand that external media organizations may attend school events. I give permission for my/my child's name, image, student work, and performance to be photographed, filmed, audio-taped or videotaped for the purpose of being published and/or broadcast on-line, on television or radio.

☐ Please mark this box if you **AGREE** that your child may participate in media events that may be published or broadcast by organizations external to the Toronto District School Board.

☐ Please mark this box if you **DO NOT WISH** your child to be photographed, filmed, audio-taped or videotaped at media events.

I have read this Student Media Release Consent Form and I fully understand the contents and meaning of this release. I understand that I am free to contact the Principal with any questions regarding this release.

Student's Name: ______________________________ Grade: ___

School: ______________________________

Student's Signature (If 18 years of age or older) ______________________________

Parent's/Guardian's Name: ______________________________

Parent's/Guardian's Signature (If student is a minor – under the age of 18): ______________________________

Date: ____________________

[4] This form is a stand-in template, borrowed from another school district.

Appendix 10: Sample Brochure for NYC DOE's "Respect for All" Campaign

Chancellor's Regulations

Chancellor's Regulation A-832
Student to Student Discrimination, Harassment, Intimidation and/or Bullying,

For Staff to Student Discrimination, Harassment, Intimidation and/or Bullying, please see

Chancellor's Regulation A-830
Filing Internal Complaints of Unlawful Discrimination/Harassment

Chancellor's Regulation A-420
Pupil Behavior and Discipline- Corporal Punishment

Chancellor's Regulation A-421 Verbal Abuse

What happens after a report is made?

All reports of bullying, harassment, discrimination or intimidating behavior will be investigated.

In keeping with Chancellor's Regulations A-443 , if a student's conduct violates the Discipline Code, appropriate disciplinary action will be taken.

If the behavior constitutes criminal activity, the police will be contacted.

Student Support

If appropriate, individual or group counseling, referral to an external agency and/or other inter-

NYC Department of Education

Bill de Blasio
Mayor

Carmen Fariña
Chancellor

Retaliation against someone who reports an incident of harassment, bullying, intimidation or discriminatory behavior or who helps in an investigation is prohibited. Students who believe they have been retaliated against should immediately contact a school supervisor.

If additional assistance is needed, please e-mail: RespectForAll@schools.nyc.gov

UFT BRAVE Hotline 212-709-3222
Monday –Friday from 2:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

Confidentiality: It is the NYC Public Schools' policy to respect the privacy of all parties and witnesses to complaints brought under this policy. However, sometimes, we may need to share information in order to resolve a complaint. Therefore, information regarding a complaint may be disclosed in appropriate circumstance to individuals with the need to know.

New York City
Department of Education

Respect for All:

Making NYC Public Schools Safe and Supportive for All Students

Appendix 11: Compiled List of National Youth Literary Arts Organization

Brave New Voices Leadership Network

First Peoples Fund
Rapid City, South Dakota

Forward Arts Inc.
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Get Lit – Words Ignite
Los Angeles, California

InsideOut Literary Arts Project
Detroit, Michigan

Kuumba Lynx
Chicago, Illinois

Mass LEAP
Boston, Massachusetts

Philadelphia Youth Poetry Movement
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Sacramento Area Youth Speaks
Davis, California

Southern Word
Nashville, Tennessee

TruArtSpeaks
Twin Cities, Minnesota

Urban Word NYC
New York City, New York

Words Beats & Life
Washington, District Of Columbia

Writers in the Schools
Houston, Texas

Young Chicago Authors
Chicago, Illinois

Brave New Voices Network Organizations

ALABAMA

Real Life Poets
Center Point, Alabama

Athens Renaissance School
Madison, Alabama

Thats My Child Youth Organization
Montgomery, Alabama

ALASKA

Diff3r3nt by D3sign
Anchorage, Alaska

Aarigaa Writer's Collective
Anchorage, Alaska

Seward Poetry Team
Seward, Alaska

ARIZONA

Spoken Futures
Tucson, Arizona

Phonetic Spit
Phoenix, Arizona

CALIFORNIA

With Our Words, Inc.
Stockton, California

California Poets in the Schools
San Francisco, California

The Talented Tenth
Fresno, California

Community Multi Media Academy – Tennyson High School
Hayward, California

Youth Radio
Oakland, California

Ace Empower Academy
San Jose, California

Give Us The Floor
San Francisco, California

SPARC Poetry
San Francisco, California

Santa Rosa Junior College Petaluma Campus
Petaluma, California

InsideOUT Writers
Los Angeles, California

Loco Bloco
San Francisco, California

Speak it into Existence
San Francisco, California
California Shakespeare Theater
Berkeley, California

PULSE – Balboa High School
San Francisco, California

Institute for Sustainable Environmental, Educational, and Economic Design (I-SEEED)
Oakland, California

Get Lit – Words Ignite
Los Angeles, California

Say Word
Los Angeles, California

Sacramento Area Youth Speaks
Davis, California

Arts for Incarcerated Youth Network
Los Angeles, California

Lyrical Opposition
San Francisco, California

MACLA
San Jose, California

Poets4Progress
Van Nuys, California

COLORADO

Minor Disturbance
Denver, Colorado

Art from Ashes
Denver, Colorado

Hear Here Poetry
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Colorado Springs School District 11
Colorado Springs, Colorado

CONNECTICUT

UpWords Poetry
Columbia, Connecticut

Pieces Literary Magazine of Wethersfield High School
Wethersfield, Connecticut

DELAWARE

Art For Life Delaware
Wilmington, Delaware

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Writopia Lab DC
Washington, District Of Columbia

Breathe Nonprofit
Washington, District Of Columbia

WHUT
Washington, District Of Columbia

Words Beats & Life
Washington, District Of Columbia

Split This Rock
Washington, District Of Columbia

FLORIDA

Jax Youth Poetry Slam, Inc. (JYPS)
Jacksonville, Florida

Boca High Slam Poetry
Stuart, Florida

'Canes On Da Mic Poetry Club
Gainesville, Florida

Tigertail Productions, Inc.
Miami, Florida

Heard Em Say Youth Arts Collective
Tampa, Florida

Coral Reef Senior High Black Student Union
Miami, Florida

Lyrical Souldiers
Fort Lauderdale, Florida

OCSA Spoken Word
Kissimmee, Florida

Florida Freedom Writers
Hollywood, Florida

Method Poetry
Lake City, Florida

Lyricist Lounge
Jacksonville, Florida

GEORGIA

Fountain City Teen Poetry Slam
Columbus, Georgia

Positive Arts Movement, Inc.
Tucker, Georgia

Youth Ensemble of Atlanta
Atlanta, Georgia

Deep Center
Savannah, Georgia

VOX Teen Communications
Atlanta, Georgia

HAWAII

Hawaii Preparatory Academy
Waimea, Hawaii

Maui Arts & Cultural Center
Kahului, Hawaii

ILLINOIS

People of Extraordinary Talent
Chicago, Illinois

Young Chicago Authors
Chicago, Illinois

Kuumba Lynx
Chicago, Illinois

Sunshine Cultural Arts Center
East Saint Louis, Illinois

Goodman Youth Poetry Ensemble
Chicago, Illinois

INDIANA

Word As Bond, Inc.
Indianapolis, Indiana

Indy Pulse
Indianapolis, Indiana

Chapel Hill 7th & 8th Grade Center
Indianapolis, Indiana

IOWA

RunDSM
Des Moines, Iowa

Bobcat Speech at Marshalltown High School
Marshalltown, Iowa

KENTUCKY

Generation iSpeak, LLC
Louisville, Kentucky

Young Poets of Louisville, Inc.
Louisville, Kentucky

LOUISIANA

Forward Arts Inc.
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

The New Orleans Youth Open Mic
New Orleans, Louisiana

MAINE

Exhale Inspiration
Gorham, Maine

MARYLAND

C. Burr Artz Public Library
Frederick, Maryland

Dew More Baltimore
Baltimore, Maryland

Fenix Youth Project Inc.
Salisbury, Maryland

MASSACHUSETTS

Raw Art Works
Lynn, Massachusetts

Mass LEAP
Boston, Massachusetts

ZUMIX
East Boston, Massachusetts

MICHIGAN

RAISE IT UP! Youth Arts & Awareness
Flint, Michigan

InsideOut Literary Arts Project
Detroit, Michigan

Teen HYPE
Detroit, Michigan

Neutral Zone
Ann Arbor, Michigan

MINNESOTA

Perpich Center for Arts Education
Golden Valley, Minnesota

TruArtSpeaks
Twin Cities, Minnesota

MISSISSIPPI
Hattiesburg Arts Council – SmART Space
Hattiesburg, Mississippi

MISSOURI
Saint Louis Story Stitchers Artists Collective
Saint Louis, Missouri

UrbArts
Saint Louis, Missouri

American Jazz Museum
Kansas City, Missouri

NEBRASKA
Nebraska Writers Collective
Omaha, Nebraska

NEVADA
Spoken Views
Reno, Nevada

NEW HAMPSHIRE
Rivendell Academy
Orford, New Hampshire

South Church Senior Youth
Portsmouth, New Hampshire

NEW JERSEY
Colonia High Poets
Colonia, New Jersey

University of Orange – A Free Peoples' Organization
Orange, New Jersey

Jersey City Youth Slam
North Bergen, New Jersey

NEW YORK
Children at the Well
Latham, New York

DreamYard Project
Bronx, New York

Monticello High School
Monticello, New York

The Moth Education Program
New York, New York

M.A.D. Youth Poetry
Albany, New York

viBe Theater Experience
Brooklyn, New York

Writers & Books
Rochester, New York

Urban Word NYC
New York City, New York

Green Earth Poets Cafe
Brooklyn, New York

Cyphers for Justice
Queens, New York

National Coalition Against Censorship
New York, New York

NORTH CAROLINA
The Poetry Project
Greensboro, North Carolina

Rocky River Poets
Mint Hill, North Carolina

HomeWord
Asheville, North Carolina

Sacrificial Poets
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Blackspace
Durham, North Carolina

BreatheINK Youth Poetry Initiative
Charlotte, North Carolina

Authoring Action
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

The Hub: Poetic Anarchy
Garner, North Carolina

Poetic Pathos Youth Slam
Fayetteville, North Carolina

OHIO

Dayton Human Relations Council
Dayton, Ohio

One Mic Open
Cleveland, Ohio

OREGON

Spit/WRITE
Portland, Oregon
Metropolitan Family Service
Milwaukie, Oregon

SIREN
Springfield, Oregon

ONTASC
Ashland, Oregon

Literary Arts
Portland, Oregon

PENNSYLVANIA

Breaking Ground Poets
Tunkhannock, Pennsylvania

The Mix at Arbor Place
Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Philadelphia Youth Poetry Movement
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

RHODE ISLAND

ProvSlam Youth
North Providence, Rhode Island

SOUTH CAROLINA

The Peace Center for the Performing Arts
Greenville, South Carolina

Holy City Youth Slam
North Charleston, South Carolina

The Peace Center
Greenville, South Carolina

SOUTH DAKOTA

The Heritage Center at Red Cloud Indian School

Pine Ridge, South Dakota
Wambli Ho

Rapid City, South Dakota

First Peoples Fund
Rapid City, South Dakota

TENNESSEE

Speak Poetry Academy
Memphis, TN, Tennessee

Hutchison School
Memphis, Tennessee

Southern Word
Nashville, Tennessee

Generations Literary Alliance
Knoxville, Tennessee

Project GRAD Knoxville
Knoxville, Tennessee

The Live Seed, Inc
Memphis, Tennessee

TEXAS

Big Thought – DaVerse Lounge Program
Dallas, Texas

Dallas Youth Poets
Dallas, Texas

Young DFW Writers
Keller, Texas

Writers in the Schools
Houston, Texas

Thank You Darlin' Foundation
Fort Worth, Texas

Free The Streets Non Profit Organization
Dallas, Texas

Forthwrite Youth Slams
Fort Worth, Texas

UTAH

YouthSpeak Park City
Park City, Utah

VERMONT

Young Writers Project, Inc.
Burlington, Vermont

Scout Film Festival
Stowe, Vermont

VIRGINIA

Slam Richmond Youth/ Slam Dominion
Richmond, Virginia

TWP – The Youth Movement
Norfolk, Virginia

The Listening, Inc.
Lynchburg, Virginia

WASHINGTON

Youth Speaks Seattle (a program of Arts Corps)
Seattle, Washington

WISCONSIN

Still Waters Collective
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Appendix 12: Syllabus for School Leadership & Families (Curricular Artifact)

Side 1

Room:
Periods:

Teacher: Adam Falkner
Email: agfalk@gmail.com
Adam cell: (734) 223-6383

Writers' Lab II

Essential Question for the Year:

1. How can writing change the world?
2. How can writing and the arts improve our ability to communicate with others?
3. What is social identity and why should we care?

Course Description: Half a decade ago, when AFYW was founded, it was the school's intent not only to prepare students for life after high school and to succeed in college but also to emphasize the importance of writing in the lives of all young adults. Last year was the first year we were able to put that fundamental idea into practice with the inception of Writers' Lab 1 – and this year, we'll be taking that idea one step further by using writing as way to strengthen our verbal communication skills as well. Specifically, we will be using the writing we produce in this class to engage in numerous structured dialogue activities during which we will discuss personal experiences, current events and meaningful "hot topic" issues pertaining to social identity. These dialogue sessions – and this course in general – will ask us to consider the viewpoints of cultures and communities different from our own, and much of how you'll be assessed in this class will be based on participation and growth demonstrated in these sessions.

This course is a collage of creative writing workshops, activities and projects, guest writers and performers, close reading and analysis of various texts, field trips, and small-group fishbowl-style dialogues. I believe that writers are the most powerful people in the world – and that this class is among the most important and dynamic in the school. Think of this course as an opportunity for you to explore and the topics in your life that mean the most to you and to improve your ability to communicate honestly with those around you.

There will be many times in this class that you will be asked to push yourself emotionally and write and share about things that might make you uncomfortable. While it is our hope that we'll all push ourselves to take important risks as writers, you'll never be asked to share anything that you do not wish to share.

This class is designed with four major goals:

1. To provide students with increased opportunities to creatively express themselves in ways that are reflective of their own experiences, opinions and beliefs.
2. To offer students increased opportunities to engage with one another in structured dialogue about personal experiences and meaningful hot topic issues pertaining to social identity.
3. To serve as a "writing/workshop center" for students to receive meaningful feedback and critique on work they are producing and to develop a language to talk about the process of writing.
4. To create a space for students to develop and practice the core skills that will strengthen their writing across all disciplines.

Appendix 12: Syllabus for School Leadership & Families (Curricular Artifact)

Side 2

"Dialogue Arts Exhibitions"

At least 7 times this year, we will have unit exhibitions called "Dialogue Arts" exhibitions. These will consist of two parts. First, you'll submit a creative writing assignment/project that speaks to some of the themes and writings addressed during the unit. Second, you will also prepare for and participate in a small in-class dialogue session with several classmates during which you'll have the opportunity to share your creative writing submission as a "springboard" into that dialogue. If you plan to be absent for the days scheduled for in class dialogue, you need to speak with me ahead of time – your participation in that dialogue is worth just as much as the actual writing submission itself!

Approximate Schedule:

M/T – We will often start the week by reading other writers' work and generating our own writing.

W – On Wednesdays, we will usually work on some of the nuts and bolts of writing such as grammar, punctuation, organization, etc. Also! On a bi-monthly, basis (approximately five times a year) we'll host visiting artists whose work we'll be looking at and studying in class.

Th – Thursdays will usually be dedicated to our writing workshops.

F – We will usually end the week with a Friday Free Write and by revising work we may have shared in our workshops the previous day.

**** If there is a Dialogue Arts exhibition – meaning, a two-part exhibition that consists of both a creative writing submission and participation in a small-group dialogue – that exhibition will often take the place of our normal Thursday/Friday schedule.**

Materials: You will need your own writing journal or notebook in this class. You will also need a section in your binders for any and all "notes" you compile and handouts your receive. My suggestion is to leave your writing notebook in class (in a specific basket designated for your period) and take it home only on the nights when you anticipate writing in it.

How will you be graded?

Exhibitions – 40%
Includes all major writing assignments and end of unit projects. Exhibitions may include: essay writing, creative writing, art projects, presentations, performances, writing portfolios, in-class dialogues and fishbowl sessions, etc.

Homework – 15%
Homework is graded as follows:

Check Plus / 100% – Assignment is complete and its clear you put in a great deal of effort and an appropriate amount of time
Check / 80% - Assignment is complete but you clearly could have put in more time and/or effort
Check Minus / 70% – Assignment is either incomplete or its clear that you just wanted to get it done. Fast. ***All late work will receive a Check Minus*

Participation and Growth – 20%
Your participation will be measured by your effort and contribution to class dialogue, group work, individual work, punctuality and attendance. Growth is measured by the degree to which you grow as an individual, academically and otherwise. Students who are often late or absent will not do well in this category.

Course work – 25%
Your course work grade will be made up of all assignments completed in the classroom including: openers, journals/free writes, group work, worksheets, reflections, seminar discussions, exit slips. Students who are often late or absent will not do well in this category.

Appendix 13: Guidelines for Student Engagement (Curricular Artifact)

Guidelines for Workshop Engagement [1]

1. **We will ensure confidentiality.**
   We want to create an environment for open, honest exchange—and no one can ensure this happens but participants ourselves. Even in small groups, what's shared here, stays here.

2. **Our primary commitment is to learn from each other.**
   We will listen to each other and not talk at each other. We acknowledge differences amongst us in backgrounds, skills, interests, and values, and we realize that it is these very differences that will increase our awareness and understanding through this process.

3. **We will meet risk with risk.**
   We will acknowledge risk and vulnerability where we see it demonstrated by others by risking something ourselves. We understand that "risk" looks very different for each of us.

4. **We will be active participants: Step up and step back!**
   We will be mindful of our "airtime" when sharing, and try not to take up more time than others. At the same time, we will empower ourselves to speak up when others are dominating the dialogue.

5. **We will challenge ideas, instead of each other.**
   If we wish to challenge something that has been said, we will challenge the idea or the practice referred to and not the individual sharing this idea or practice.

6. **We will speak our discomfort.**
   If something bothers us, we will share this with the group. Often, our emotional reactions to this process offer the most valuable learning opportunities.

7. **We will trust that people are doing the best they can.**

8. **We will accept and expect a lack of closure.**
   We understand that this workshop experience will likely generate more questions than answers, and agree to allow that ambiguity into our experience. We understand that there will be no "neat ribbon" on the end of this session.

9.

10.

[1] Guidelines modeled after a number of critical resources generated by the University of Michigan's Program on Intergroup Relations.

Appendix 14: Guidelines for Friday Free-Writers (Curricular Artifact)

AFYW Freewrite Guidelines

Here at the Academy for Young Writers, we believe that sustained, silent writing for reflection is one of the healthiest and most productive routines that students (and adults!) can practice. While one size does not fit all, we tend to provide students with a set of prompts to choose from – and a soft set of guidelines to adhere to in that process. Additionally, we also often make sure our workshop participants know that during a "freewrite windwow," it is always an option to return to a poem or story already in progress.

There are only 4 guidelines that we ask students to adhere to during the freewriting process. Because there are so few "rules," we ask that students make an extra special effort to respect the following guidelines. So here goes:

OUR FREEWRITES ARE…

1. Sustained

It is important that we write for the entire amount of time provided. Does this mean we write like madmen, and never pick up our pens for even one second? Maybe. What it more likely means, however, is when we catch ourselves drifting off into a daydream or a state of quiet reflection (which is natural!), it's important that we push ourselves to remain present. If we feel we have finished a particular prompt and have nothing more to say – start something new or return to another, unfinished draft. Don't just sit there.

2. Silent

The room will always be silent during freewrites. Students who struggled repeatedly to repsect shared space in this way will be asked to leave until they are able to rejoin the group.

3. For Self

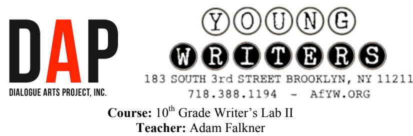
The freewriting process is for you and you alone, and you will never be pressured to share anything you do not wish to share. If you DO choose to share out at the end, great. We appreciate you. If not, great – we still appreciate you. You shouldn't feel pressured to write with an expectation to share, and if you fold a journal page in half, that will be instruction to your teacher not to read what you have written for that particular entry.

4. Safe

Among other things, freewrites are an opportunity for us to exorcise and vent emotionally – and we are strong advocates for "risky writing" wherein authors push themselves to write about stories they might not share with others. **That said, confidentiality is essential.** In the event that our classmates (or our teacher) share a personal story aloud, it is our responsibility to honor that story by keeping in the room. While it can be tempting to share what happens in class with friends of family members outside the room, it is imperative that we hold each other up in this way. We take this component of freewriting and community-building very seriously at UW.

Thanks for taking these guidelines seriously. Happy freewriting! ☺

Appendix 15: Guidelines for Student Writing Workshops (Curricular Artifact)



Course: 10th Grade Writer's Lab II
Teacher: Adam Falkner

Writing Workshop Structure

1. **Get organized**
   - Group takes out all documents: copies of pieces, warm/cool feedback prompts, workshop structure document (this one)
2. **Distribute copies**
   - Writer gives a copy of the piece to each group member
   - At this time, the writer can discuss any specific feedback she or he is looking for
3. **Writer reads piece aloud**
   - As the writer reads, group members should annotate the piece.
   - After the writer reads aloud, group members can ask clarifying questions about anything that is unclear or they feel needs to be explained in order experience the writing.
4. **Group members read the piece, to themselves, a second time**
   - Group members continue to annotate the writing and write warm and cool feedback onto the copy of the piece
5. **Group members share feedback**
   - Each group member shares specific warm feedback.
   - Then, each group member shares specific cool feedback.
   - During the feedback, the writer should listen and take notes but is not allowed to respond.
6. **Take Away**
   - The writer shares what he or she "heard" and some possible ideas for revision or continuing to work on the piece of writing.
   - All group members hand the annotated copies of the poems back to the writer in focus

Each time you meet in your writing workshop groups, each member will have the chance to be the *Writer in Focus.* In addition, one member of your group will be the facilitator and another will be the time keeper.

Descriptions of Roles

1. ***Facilitator*** – Make sure all member have all necessary documents. Uses Writing Workshop Structure to guide the group through the workshop protocol. Just stick to the script!

2. ***Time Keeper*** – Uses the Writing Workshop Structure to make sure there will be enough time for each writer to share. *Hint: Divide time for workshop by number of prepared participants.*

3. ***Writer in Focus*** – This role will change. Each group member will be the writer in focus during each writing workskhop.

Appendix 16: Sample Poems (Curricular Artifact)

Page 1

Sample Texts & Prompts

Things I Could Never Tell My Mother
by Aaron Smith

I read *Playgirl*.
I go to gay bars.
The eye shadow you found cleaning under the bed was mine.
I stole it from Jessica and put it on.
The kids at school called me faggot. They were right.
I've smoked pot.
I've driven drunk and even hit a car without getting
the license number—twice.
All of my friends are gay, too, even Brian. I've kissed him.
I smoke.
I started swearing in third grade.
I seduced my college chapel choir director.
I masturbated in your kitchen.
I tried on your high heels and your nightgowns.
I looked at male underwear ads in the Sears catalog.
I did drag shows for my second-grade class
and only played with the girls.
that was why I was nervous when we saw my teacher in
town.
I think about if you've ever gone down on dad.
When grandpa was sick, I never prayed for him
because I did not believe.
I party with drag queens.
I lie about being too busy to come home;
I just don't want to.
I wiped the booger on the wall.
I remember when you told me to get AIDS and die,
that if I were gay you'd never want to see me again.
I remember you saying you wish you'd never had me
because I was so unhappy.
I've almost killed myself.
I don't answer the phone on Sundays
because I know you're calling.
I don't like your brother.
I hate your church.
I hate your God.
I hate the shame you taught me
and that I'm too afraid to show you this.

© Aaron Smith, 2012

Prompt, after Aaron Smith: Consider one person or group of people to heighten your awareness of one particular identity. Compile a working list of things you would never say to, in front of or about that individual or group.

The Moment
by Sharon Olds

When I saw the dark Egyptian stain,
I went into the house to find you, Mother –
past the grandfather clock, with its huge
ochre moon, past the burnt
sienna woodwork, rubbed and glazed.
I went deeper and deeper down into the body
of the house, down below the level
of the earth. It must have been
the maid's day off, for I found you there
where I had never found you, by the wash tubs,
your hands thrust deep in soapy water,
and above your head, the blazing windows
at the surface of the ground.
You looked up from the iron sink,
a small haggard, pretty woman
of 40, one week divorced.
"I've got my period, mom," I said
and saw your face abruptly break open and
glow with joy. "Baby," you said,
coming toward me, hands out, and
covered with tiny delicate bubbles like seeds.

© Sharon Olds, 1993

Prompt, after Sharon Olds: Tell the story of a time when you were made *especially* aware that you belonged to this particular group. Keep in mind, this could be a time when you were "singled out" or felt like an outsider or a time when you felt particularly comfortable or connected amongst other members of this group. This could be a ritual or rite of passage, or a single, isolated moment that stands out as significant.

Appendix 16: Sample Poems (Curricular Artifact)

Page 2

B-Boy Infinitives
by Patrick Rosal

To suck until our lips turned blue
the last drops of cool juice
from a crumpled cup sopped
with spit the first Italian Ice of summer
To chase popsicle stick skiffs
along the curb skimming storm water
from Woodbridge Ave. to Old Post Road
To be To B-boy To be boys who snuck into a garden to
pluck a baseball from mud and shit
To hop that old man's fence before
he burst through his front door
with a lame-bull limp charge
and the fist the size of a half spade
To be To B-boy to lace shell-toe Adidas
To say word to Kurtis Blow
To laugh in the afternoons
someone's mama was so black
when she stepped out of the car
the oil light went on
To count hairs sprouting
around our cocks To touch
ourselves To pick the half-smoked
True Blues from my father's ashtray
and cough the gray grit
into my hands To run
my tongue along the lips of a girl
with crooked teeth To be
To B-boy To be boys for the ten days
an 8-foot gash of cardboard lasts
after we dragged it
seven blocks then slapped it
on the cracked blacktop To spin
on our hands and backs To bruise
elbows wrists and hips To Bronx-Twist
Jersey version beside the mid-day traffic
To swipe To pop To lock freeze and
drop dimes on the hot pavement-
even if the girls stopped watching
and the street lamps buzzed all
night we danced like that
and no one called us home

© Patrick Rosal, 2008

Prompt, after Patrick Rosal: Write a piece about what it was like to "come of age" into this specific identity – meaning, what it was like to grow up and learn about how you belong to this social identity group. Include specific memories, routines, behaviors that were important to your learning yourself as a member of this group. Use Patrick Rosal's structure as a guide, but as always, be sure to cite him properly.

Tina Green
by Elizabeth Alexander

Small story, hair story, Afro-American story,
only-black-girl-in-my-class story,
pre-adolescence story, black teacher story.

"Take your hair out," they beg on the playground,
the cool girls, the straight-and-shiny-hair girls,
the girls who can run.

"Take your hair out," they say.
It is Washington hot, we are running, I do,
and it swells, snatches up at the nape, levitates,

wooly universe, knotting, fleece zeppelin, run.
So I do, into school, to the only black teacher
I'll have until college, the only black teacher

I've had to that point, the only black teacher
to teach at that school full of white people
who(tell the truth) I love, the teacher I love,

whose name I love, whose hair I love,
takes me in the teacher's bathroom and wordlessly
fixes my hair, perfectly, wordlessly

fixes my hair into three tight plaits.

© Elizabeth Alexander 2005

Prompt, after Elizabeth Alexander: Write about an incident when you were singled out for a physical feature of yours that was regarded as distinctive in the environment where the story takes place. (Distinguishing factors can include skin, hair, height, weight, shape, scars, etc.) How did you respond to the attention, and what was the resolution? Include a line of dialogue from the event, jot down a list of words that serve as bones to the narrative (i.e. story, girls, run, black, teacher, love, fixes) and repeat them throughout to create musicality, emphasis, momentum.

Appendix 16: Sample Poems (Curricular Artifact)

Page 3

Theme for English B
by Langston Hughes

The instructor said,

Go home and write
a page tonight.
And let that page come out of you---
Then, it will be true.

I wonder if it's that simple?
I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem.
I went to school there, then Durham, then here
to this college on the hill above Harlem.
I am the only colored student in my class.
The steps from the hill lead down into Harlem
through a park, then I cross St. Nicholas,
Eighth Avenue, Seventh, and I come to the Y,
the Harlem Branch Y, where I take the elevator
up to my room, sit down, and write this page:

It's not easy to know what is true for you or me
at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what
I feel and see and hear, Harlem, I hear you:
hear you, hear me---we two---you, me, talk on this page.
(I hear New York too.) Me---who?
Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.
I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.
I like a pipe for a Christmas present,
or records---Bessie, bop, or Bach.
I guess being colored doesn't make me NOT like
the same things other folks like who are other races.
So will my page be colored that I write?
Being me, it will not be white.
But it will be
a part of you, instructor.
You are white---
yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.
That's American.
Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me.
Nor do I often want to be a part of you.
But we are, that's true!
As I learn from you,
I guess you learn from me---
although you're older---and white---
and somewhat more free.

This is my page for English B.

© Langston Hughes, 1949

Prompt, after Langston Hughes: In a piece, address a person from another group that you have interacted with in a social, educational, or professional setting. Incorporate a line, phrase, or question from them that stands out, and respond using phrases: I am, I wonder, I like, I feel/see hear, I like, I guess, I don't know, I remember, I believe.

Appendix 16: Sample Poems (Curricular Artifact)

Page 4

We Wanted More
by Justin Torres

We wanted more. We knocked the butt ends of our forks against the table, tapped our spoons against our empty bowls; we were hungry. We wanted more volume, more riots. We turned up the knob on the TV until our ears ached with the shouts of angry men. We wanted more music on the radio; we wanted beats; we wanted rock. We wanted muscles on our skinny arms. We had bird bones, hollow and light, and we wanted more density, more weight. We were six snatching hands, six stomping feet; we were brothers, boys, three little kings locked in a feud for more. When it was cold, we fought over blankets until the cloth tore down the middle. When it was really cold, when our breath came out in frosty clouds, Manny crawled into bed with Joel and me.

"Body heat," he said.

"Body heat," we agreed.

We wanted more flesh, more blood, more warmth.

When we fought, we fought with boots and garage tools, snapping pliers—we grabbed at whatever was nearest and we hurled it through the air; we wanted more broken dishes, more shattered glass. We wanted more crashes.

And when our Paps came home, we got spankings. Our little round butt cheeks were tore up: red, raw, leather-whipped. We knew there was something on the other side of pain, on the other side of the sting. Prickly heat radiated upward from our thighs and backsides, fire consumed our brains, but we knew that there was something more, someplace our Paps was taking us with all this. We knew, because he was meticulous, because he was precise, because he took his time. He was awakening us; he was leading us somewhere beyond burning and ripping, and you couldn't get there in a hurry.

And when our father was gone, we wanted to *be* fathers. We hunted animals. We drudged through the muck of the crick, chasing down bullfrogs and water snakes. We plucked the baby robins from their nest. We liked to feel the beat of tiny hearts, the struggle of tiny wings. We brought their tiny animal faces close to ours.

"Who's your daddy?" we said, then we laughed and tossed them into a shoebox.

Always more, always hungrily scratching for more. But there were times, quiet moments, when our mother was sleeping, when she hadn't slept in two days, and any noise, any stair creak, any shut door, any stifled laugh, any voice at all, might wake her, those still, crystal mornings, when we wanted to protect her, this confused goose of a woman, this stumbler, this gusher, with her backaches and headaches and her tired, tired ways, this uprooted Brooklyn creature, this tough talker, always with tears when she told us she loved us, her mixed-up love, her needy love, her warmth, those mornings when sunlight found the cracks in our blinds and laid itself down in crisp strips on our carpet, those quiet mornings when we'd fix ourselves oatmeal and sprawl onto our stomachs with crayons and paper, with glass marbles that we were careful not to rattle, when our mother was sleeping, when the air did not smell like sweat or breath or mold, when the air was still and light, those mornings when silence was our secret game and our gift and our sole accomplishment—we wanted less: less weight, less work, less noise, less father, less muscles and skin and hair. We wanted nothing, just this, just this.

["We Wanted More" from We the Animals by Justin Torres copyright (c) 2011 by Justin Torres. Reprinted by permission of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved.]

Prompt, after Justin Torres: Using your "blind metaphor exercises" from class, identify an abstract noun that you wish you had more of in your life. Generating concrete images and sounds that all represent that abstract noun—freedom, for example, or love, or attention, or silence, or patience—develop a list that tells the story of your desiring that thing. Explore how adding more and more detail narrows the specific *version* of the thing you want more of for your reader. Use Torres as a guide.