

Real-and-Imagined Spaces:
Productive Play in a Multimodal Youth Writing Program

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ABSTRACT

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This ethnographic study is driven by the aim of understanding how an out-of-school learning program supports the development of youth artists and writers, particularly when it operates outside of institutional strictures such as mandatory grading, curricular guidelines, and tracking based on age and perceived abilities. The research is guided by the following overarching questions: 1) In what ways do Black, Latinx, and queer students demonstrate investment in critical multimodal literacies? 2) How do world-building projects reveal the possibilities and limits of the imagination? 3) What conditions can inspire youth to articulate their identities as evolving writers and leaders?

This work argues that playing with multimodal projects and imaginative world-building opportunities provided generative conditions for young adults' development as writers, creators, and mentors. By engaging in transdisciplinary projects that invited crafting, coding, urban planning, architectural modeling, and creative writing, youth participants contributed to a participatory learning environment that celebrated their inherent capacities as critical thinkers and actors. My research ultimately highlights the ways that critical multimodal literacies can promote powerful self-expressions, complex articulations of the future, and projections of self-confidence through productive play and public engagement with wider audiences.

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DEDICATION

This writing is for my mother, who taught me how to love with humility and grace, and for my father, whose bookshelves exposed worlds yet unwritten.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Occasions for a fuller understanding of self and others often emerge when people are confronted with tensions. Incidents involving conflict can lead to productive conversations and learning, and in particular, tension in the classroom can turn into instructive moments for growth (Gutiérrez, et al., 1999; Garcia & O'Donnell-Allen, 2004; Fecho, Falter, & Hong, 2016). When individuals have the opportunity to mold tensions into *extensions* of learning, they are better positioned to disrupt the status quo and transform conventional operations. Educators and learners can leverage tensions by encouraging the formation of strategies to navigate, subvert, and survive oppressive conditions (Darder, 1991).

A primary historical trend in the rise of institutionalized schooling has been one of tensions between uniform and personalized curricula. With the National Education Association's establishment of Uniform Entrance Requirements in 1899 and the development of entrance exams in the mid-1910s, educational reformers adopted a model of scaling and efficiency from the industrial era (Applebee, 1974). Although child-centered movements championed by leading progressive figures like Jane Addams, John Dewey, and Louise Rosenblatt shifted the focus to a greater recognition of students' personal experiences in academic life, the dominant pattern of schooling has remained one of conformity and lack of critical thought (Freire, 1970; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Althusser (1971) has commented on what he termed "the educational apparatus," a function of the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), which reproduces capitalist relations of exploitation, and children become subject to dominant ideologies that replicate racial and class stratifications.

Rather than emphasizing active contributions to civic life, schools often constrain learning through the use of narrow definitions and applications of literacy and the deficit-based

measurement of academic outcomes (Wissman, et al., 2015; Campano, Ghiso, & Sánchez, 2013; Mormann-Peraza, 2018). When classrooms enforce static instructional models and prescribe bodily movements, young people — particularly Black, Latinx, and queer students — remain confined within predetermined physical, mental, and experiential spaces. Although adolescents tend to be naturally playful and inquisitive, disciplinary action is too often taken against Black girls because teachers are more likely to see them as intentionally defiant (Morris, 2016). In addition, many schools in the U.S. fail to provide safe learning conditions for queer youth, the vast majority of whom (87.3%) report experiencing harassment or assault in K-12 schools (GLSEN, 2018). This kind of disparity is alarming in light of the systemic violence propelled by the deployment of a conjured “Black identity extremist” (BIE) identity, which is used to sanction racial terror (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2017), as well as moral panic arguments, which fortifies the legal justification for homophobic acts of physical brutality against queer individuals (Lee, 2008).

In our “increasingly complex, transnational, and hybrid world” (Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 148), educational movements should be grounded in efforts towards greater equity and inclusion rather than a fear of autonomous minoritized bodies propelled by self-interest and profit margins. Through an ethnographic study of a summer writing program for Black, Latinx, and queer youth, I have traced what happens when instructors center progress over products, options over prescriptions, and affirmations over examinations.

Statement of the Problem

Oppressions inherent to the modern schooling project inhibit possibilities for innate curiosity and intellectual play. The combined effects of a performance-based testing culture, disciplinary regime, and output-oriented grading reproduce the problematic stratification

reflected in a society that presumes a scarcity of finite resources and secures the reproduction of power imbalances in a neoliberal world order (Foucault, 1977; McLaren, 2003; Brown, 2015).

Classrooms are too often designed to emphasize rote learning rather than open learning environments, intellectual play, or creative self-expression. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), signed into law by President Obama in 2015, has maintained the practice of putting intense pressure on under-resourced schools in a culture of high-stakes testing. The political framework that governs funding distribution does not guarantee that state boards need to address longstanding equity gaps, and such policies ultimately undermine federal support for the country's most underserved students (Black, 2017; Casserly, 2017). As a result, current educational policies fail to hold local and state politicians accountable for the lack of attention to educational equity and social mobility. The current Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, is committed to an unregulated system of privatization that allows families with the most financial resources to attend the highest performing schools (Darling-Hammond, 2004, 2007, 2017).

Pierre Bourdieu (1977) has used the term *doxa* to denote systems of classification and assumptions that serve to legitimize socioeconomic divisions and renders many minoritized groups as part of an underclass. This set of rules ensures that social realities remain unquestioned, such as the limitations on economic opportunity for marginalized communities. For instance, as noted by journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones (2016) in her widely shared reporting on school segregation, both federal and private housing subsidies for families allowed for the growth of segregated suburbs that disproportionately benefited white¹ children. At the same

¹ Regarding capitalization practices, I follow the style markers in contemporary articles from well-regarded journals in the field of English education (Sealey-Ruiz, 2016; Price-Dennis, 2016; Turner, Haddix, Gort, & Bauer, 2017). I have therefore chosen to capitalize the word "Black" to center the lives, voices, and experiences of Black Americans. When referring to "white," however, I have chosen not to maintain the lower case, in contrast to white supremacist groups that often capitalize "White" to denote their vision for the dominance of whiteness in all aspects

time, she has found, black homeowners faced numerous legal and social discriminations in the marketplace, and this inability to access high-valued properties contributed to racial disparities in wealth, health, incarceration, and education outcomes. Even after 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling and the Fair Housing Act of 1968, courts have continuously ruled against desegregation programs, and this practice of active discrimination has widened economic gaps, preserved through race-neutral language and an adherence to neoliberal values (Jones & Vagle, 2013).

The Supreme Court's ruling in *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* (1973) upheld the use of resource allocation based on property taxes (Lee, 2014 Summer), resulting in an educational system that does not give all children fair access to opportunities in this country. The intertwined nature of capital accumulation and dispossession of minoritized communities has resulted in the expropriation of dependent laborers (Fraser, 2016). Schools nominally serve children who reside in their districts, but this practice is influenced by divisions that operate along lines of race, class, gender, and other dimensions of social identities. The current schooling system, in other words, is evidence of a continued investment in what I would argue is legalized discrimination.

Therefore, it is critical for researchers to challenge systemic forces that normalize a racial caste system that disadvantages students and families of color (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Allen, 2008). Even if antiracist educators are entwined in a Sisyphean project, furious resistance is a worthy cause (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Despite the persistence of structural injustices, I remain hopeful about the promise of education. My research interests arise from reflections on critical race theory and on my own location in spaces of privilege (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995;

of social and political life (Perlman, 2015). In instances of author citations, I retain the preferred style of respective writers unless otherwise designated.

Ladson-Billings, 2006; Guinier, 2004), and I was drawn to my research site because its aims were not defined by institutionalized modes of production.

According to Vygotsky's (1978) well-known concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD), learning operates through both a student's engagements with knowledgeable others and independent problem-solving processes. Guided instruction and collaborative tasks facilitate the internalization of concepts so that tasks located within a student's ZPD are completed with assistance from experienced mentors. These tasks are then replaced by new challenges that are more appropriate to the learner's evolving developmental state, not unlike the experience of playing a video game and progressing into more challenging levels or complex missions (Gee, 2004). Players in both actual and virtual spaces traverse environments to develop new understandings offered by the internal logics of a space, but they can also be aided by peers who are playing separately, observing from the side, or co-participating. Teachers and more experienced others can help redirect learners, who can also make adjustments based on self-directed moves, knowledge based on models, and informal dialogue with those around them.

Unlike Gee (2004), however, I do not always find sharp distinctions between tutorial realms, as real-world learning environments often lack the predetermined outcomes for which video games are carefully calibrated. For learning pathways that are less linear, students can learn from divergent experimentations and iterative processes that proceed in a haphazard and unpredictable fashion. Learning environments outside of a gaming experience can also offer more options for mobility and structural transformations to existing ground rules. At times, students might find themselves in positions of learning, observing, and experimenting simultaneously, and they might move imperceptibly between them. In a learning environment, for instance, students might receive basic instructions on paper alongside periodic one-on-one

guidance from an instructor, while viewing peers' productions with their peripheral vision, yet retain full control over their creative experimentations.

My research inquiry is propelled by an interest in out-of-school learning programs in traditionally under-resourced neighborhoods as sites of opportunity for self-discovery, community-building, and sustained imaginative work. In such non-traditional educational spaces, students can leverage their strengths with multiple literacies and take advantage of opportunities for artistic expression beyond the narrow confines of enclosed institutions (The New London Group, 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). This ethnographic research examines how The Kindred Summer Program,² a summer workshop series for youth based in New York, accentuates the ways in which adolescents engage in critical multimodal play, develop affirming social connections, and inscribe speculative stories embedded in both societal critique and a hope for alternative possibilities. Rather than a curriculum dictated by the Language of Wider Communication (Smitherman, 1996), this community centers students' creativity and interest in counterproductions.

As Eve Tuck (2009) has urged researchers, I am mindful not to conduct "damage-centered research," which centers pathologizing harm to make political and social advancements but ultimately reinforces a deficit-centered view of indigenous, Black, Latinx, and other minoritized groups. Instead, my hope is to pursue what Tuck calls "desire-centered research," which is "concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives" (p. 416). Progressive advancements can be marked by legislative shifts and major social movements, but it is also in the daily work of equity-oriented educators and students participate in the struggle to dismantle systemic oppressions (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1983;

² A pseudonym.

Morrell, 2008). When learners draw from local wisdoms and use their imaginations to craft alternative futures, more possibilities can be established for youth who exist at the margins of dominant schooling spaces.

This disrupts common assumptions about broken, depleted, and pathological communities and instead accounts not only for the forces of oppression that have dispossessed communities but also the multitudinous identities that become crystallized when the scale of analysis is at a more intimate, local level. Tuck (2009) has evoked the language of Deleuze and Guattari in her insistence that desire is “an assemblage of experiences, ideas, and ideologies, both subversive and dominant” that are both reproductive and resistant (p. 420). Ultimately, my dissertation research considers how an out-of-school summer program centers students’ creativity, encourages futurist imaginings, and promotes personal engagements with critical multimodal literacies (Ajayi, 2015; New London Group, 1996; Yosso, 2005). I strive to recognize the power of generative play, fictive world-building, and self-expression, particularly for students who thrive within what bell hooks (1990) calls a “marginality one chooses as site of resistance - as location of radical openness and possibility” (p. 153). I contend that the space of the Kindred Program offered opportunities for students to understand the themselves, other worlds, and future possibilities as they engaged in radical counterproductions.

Purpose of the Study

Public schools have yet to address significant opportunity gaps that disadvantage poor and marginalized students (Grant, 2012). Educational policies too often emphasize rote memorization, standardized test-taking, and compliance with dominant behavioral codes that restrict students’ bodily movements, discursive activities, and even forms of dress (Morris, 2016). Angela Valenzuela (1999) has famously referred to this model as “subtractive

schooling,” an assimilationist doctrine that devalues non-mainstream dialects and cultures. The divestment of resources from lower-income neighborhoods results in a failure to recognize students’ assets (Love, 2014). Despite being holders and producers of valuable forms of knowledge, children often suffer from the “education debt” that marks the accumulation of harm from historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions and has resulted in disparities in education, housing, health outcomes, and public services (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

This study’s focus on an out-of-school literacy program centers the wisdom of youth as meaning-makers, and it accounts for how adult instructors model forms of real-and-imagined inquiries when they believe in students’ capacities rather than presume deficits. The program at the center of this study, the Kindred Summer Program, attends not to standardized measurements of intellect in the way that public schools often function, but it instead points to creative play as a liberatory force within a welcoming community space. The analysis focuses on the ways in which play is an integral part of a learning process that allows for discovery and understanding about the world. I will point to the ways in which creative experimentation was an intentional aspect of curriculum design in this summer program. Writers engaged in activities such as the construction of choose-your-own-adventure narratives with open source software, architectural modeling for imagined worlds, and crocheted binary codes with secret messages. In contrast to instructional methods that have historically prescribed a standardized curriculum (Applebee, 1974), spaces like the Kindred Summer Program conceive of multiple possibilities for meaning-making.

Local community sites like Kindred have the power to activate forceful imaginations and revolutionize instruction in the classroom as well, as I will point out in the final chapter. While they are not entirely separate from systems of capitalist struggle, client-based accountability, and

logistical constraints, out-of-school spaces have the capacity to develop important affinity spaces around “shared activities, interests, and goals” (Gee, 2004, p. 73) and serve as models for all educational spaces. Kindred participants, who were young women and gender non-binary youth from Brooklyn, were largely drawn to the program because of its interdisciplinary focus on the creative arts and sciences. Reading, acting, writing, coding, modeling, weaving, painting, mapping, and playing therefore activated critical multimodal literacies, as the program celebrated expansive world-building through a range of modalities.

Research Questions & Overview

This inquiry is anchored in theories that celebrate youth’s multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). The research is guided by the following overarching questions:

1. In what ways do Black, Latinx, and queer students demonstrate investment in critical multimodal literacies?
2. How do world-building projects reveal the possibilities and limits of the imagination?
3. What conditions can inspire youth to articulate their identities as evolving writers and leaders?

Overall, this study is driven by the aim of understanding how an out-of-school literacy space functions when it operates outside of institutional strictures such as mandatory grading, curricular guidelines, and tracking of students based on age and perceived academic abilities. The work is driven by the promise of free public services that can support the development of adolescent artists and writers, but it also assesses potential restraints, given that even the most well-meaning non-profit organizations remain connected to larger neoliberal forces, systemic racism, and gendered violence. Specifically, I am interested in exploring how the Kindred Summer Program supports the multiliteracy practices of youth through transdisciplinary projects

but also navigates certain conditions such as structural factors and pedagogical practices. I deploy a spatial analysis drawn from Edward Soja's (1996) notion of thirdspace to note how 1) material, 2) conceptual, and 3) real-and-imagined engagements helped illuminate the affordances of out-of-school learning as well as the limitations of individual programs. I offer accounts of how students who have been traditionally and continuously marginalized in traditional schooling spaces build counternarratives through multimodal creations and build community with other youth, and I also note how imaginative possibilities are contingent in part on social realities. In addition, I trace how youth come to describe themselves as writers, mentors, and activists through the out-of-school program and highlight the conditions that can help make such self-identifications possible.

Theoretical & Conceptual Frameworks

While the theories that underpin this work will be addressed more thoroughly in the following chapter, I present here a brief overview of the theoretical underpinnings of this work. My research intersects with theoretical perspectives that envision the concept of multiliteracies as contextualized within distinct sociocultural practices, as the enactment of literacies are socially organized and connect to a set of interdependent relationships (Heath, 1983; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1995). In addition, this qualitative study is indebted to the work of scholars who have expanded the field of literacy studies through their work on multiliteracies (The New London Group, 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Gee, 2008). The New London Group (1996) has famously pointed to the need for a broader system of meaning making, and within their framework of multiliteracies, texts are arranged across more than one mode and situated within a complex network of sociolinguistic and technological factors (Kress, 2003). A pedagogy of multiliteracies allows students to deploy critical literacies by offering productions related to

words, visuals, audio, gestures, and space that convey and shape meaning (The New London Group, 1996). Ideas can therefore transfer through written scripts, spatially governed visuals, and other multiliteracies informed by various artistic choices.

I argue that a pedagogy of multiliteracies can be coupled with a Freirean model of critical pedagogy to invite multimodal articulations of institutional power and also encourage the cultivation of newly imagined possibilities through the manipulation of material and conceptual affordances. Freire has critiqued the ways in which dominant forces have suppressed individuals at the level of and beyond the frame of territorial colonialism through the enforcement of mental and cultural colonization, “either verbally or through message systems inherent in the colonial structure” (Freire & Macedo, 1998, p. 184). Multiliteracies, however, can allow for “the different subjectivities, interests, intentions, commitments, and purposes that students bring to learning... in the form of productive diversity, civic pluralism, and multilayered lifeworlds” (The New London Group, 1996, p. 72).

Finally, I am interested in linking this pedagogical lineage to Edward Soja’s (1996) theory of thirdspace, which enunciates geographical expressions of power across time and space, rendering sociohistorical contestations visible. I deploy Soja’s critical postmodernist analytics to highlight ontological multiplicities and epistemological counterproductions that reveal the complexity of youth identities as they articulate who they are and want they want the world to be across multiple modes. In contrast to universal and singular narratives that totalize Black, Latinx, and queer students as either deviant or victimized, I conceive of Kindred as a thirdspace, or a “space of radical openness, a context from which to build communities of resistance and renewal that cross the boundaries and double-cross the binaries of race, gender, class and all oppressively Othering categories nondualistic” (p. 84). As inquirers and emerging leaders,

students in the Kindred Summer Program created, critiqued, and crafted counternarratives that reflected rich learning moments and critical self-understandings.

Significance of the Study

It is often said that the summer months widen achievement rates and disadvantage students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Heyns, 1978; Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007). While it is important to recognize the vast disparities that persist in our current neoliberal environment, it is also valuable to underscore the generative work that occurs during this crucial out-of-school time. This study is therefore applicable to educators and advocates who hope to emphasize transdisciplinary play, creative reimaginings, and self-development. Given some flexibility with time, space, and resources to enact similar projects, classroom instructors could find ways to incorporate critical engagements with multimodalities in existing curricula. I argue that all learners can benefit with the opportunity to experiment, developing affinities, and construct new social possibilities. This study is prompted by an urgency to incorporate a greater range of semiotic resources to support students' critical and imaginative capacities across learning environments. The concept of critical multimodal literacies highlights how advocates can shift the focus from quantitative testing instruments to a constellation of learning opportunities that draw from students' personal interests and inherent strengths.

Chapter II presents intersecting bodies of research that acknowledge the history of critical literacies and addresses the enduring relevance of sociocultural theories of learning. I situate this study in Freirean thought and a pedagogy of multiliteracies to lay the groundwork for the concept of critical multimodal literacies in this ethnographic study. Chapter III outlines the research context, including the setting and information about individual research participants. I will clarify the constructivist methodologies used and the analytical tools that generated

emerging insights. I close by elaborating on my positionality as an etic researcher traveling to Brooklyn as an outsider, and I note the potential limitations and contributions of this study.

The following three chapters expand on how the out-of-school learning space, distinct from certain institutional mandates, could support youth's engagement with critical multimodal literacies and what limitations might be encountered, given broader systemic entanglements. Chapter IV addresses how two students used multiple semiotic configurations to produce journals, masks, poetry, and coded weavings to make their own identities and beliefs clear through personal and fictional work. Next, Chapter V reveals how two students' imaginary worlds constructed through urban planning and architectural projects reflected the possibilities and conceptual restrictions of futurist productions. Chapter VI traces the journeys of three students whose evolving self-identifications as writers, peer mentors, and activists reflected how an out-of-school space offered the conditions to support students' growth as social agents. The concluding chapter provides a summary of key points and implications for out-of-school programs, educators, and researchers.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Freirean pedagogy offers insights into the ways in which critical pedagogy can be put into dialogue with multiliteracies and diverse modes of expression. The conceptual framework of critical multimodal literacies addresses scholarship from the areas of critical literacy, multiliteracies, and sociocultural theories. As these foundations ground my work with the Kindred Summer Program, the following sections highlight extant literature that posits multiliteracies as a more inclusive vision for English education. I follow with commentary about the field of critical multimodal literacies, which interweaves linguistic pluralism with critical literacy as a form a resistance and means for motivating social change. Finally, I integrate critical multimodal studies with sociocultural theories, which contextualize learning and advance the idea that social and cultural foundations of knowledge-building are central to community-based learning.

Critical Multiliteracies as a Conceptual Framework

This review of scholarship frames existing commentary on the influence of multiliteracies, which are continuously shaped by changing technologies and dynamic social networks. The so-called “New” Literacy Study movement of the 1990s has contended that socially situated multiliteracy practices rely on understandings of interpersonal dynamics and social spaces. While this conception has been central to many scholars and instructors, the national movement towards standardization has not abated, due to the ever-intensifying focus on uniformity across classrooms (Ravitch, 2010; Kohn, 2000).

The desire for systemic regularity to address gaps in educational achievement may be well-intentioned (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010). Yet by enforcing a high-stakes testing regime and championing content uniformity without regard to

systemic issues and effects of forced segregation, policymakers ignore varying needs across sociocultural settings, dismiss unique variances among student populations, and discourage faculty from developing pedagogical interventions that are responsive to social transformations and technological innovations. Teachers from the most under-resourced areas, in particular, have often felt a need to concentrate on preparing students to take multiple-choice tests, complete fill-in-the-blank questions, and develop familiarity with what Arthur Applebee (2013) has called “formulaic on-demand writing” (p. 30).

Attempts to standardize learning and measure levels of intellect have been common to English instruction since the 1600s, when entry requirements and academic objectives were outlined (Myers, 1996; Garcia & O’Donnell-Allen, 2004). An enhanced emphasis on national accountability and quantitative performance levels, though, have resulted in competing messages during the post-No Child Left Behind era. School websites and mission statements often express an outward dedication to diversity, inclusion, and personalized learning but have made little institutional progress in redressing centuries of historical oppression against minoritized communities, especially Black families. When institutions identify and acknowledge disturbing trends with educational inequities, they also need to make an active commitment to dismantling dominant Discourses³ (Gee, 2008) and eradicating resource gaps.

In his work on literacy movements, Miles Myers (1996) has traced the historical development of English education through the late twentieth century. His five classifications have included the following periods:

- 1) *oracy* (1600-1776), dominated by face-to-face interactions;
- 2) *signature literacy* (1776-1864), attuned to the stability and reproducibility of writing;

³ I capitalize “Discourse” when referring to the work of James Gee, who deploys this term to denote not only language particularities but socially organized practices, beliefs, customs, and perspectives.

3) *recitation literacy* (1864-1916), influenced by Matthew Arnold's literary canon and uniform entrance requirements;

4) *decoding, defining, analyzing* (1916-1983), marked by bureaucratic regulation and silent decoding as a purportedly objective process;

5) *translation/critical literacy* (modern era), designated by critical interpretations, multiple languages, and collaborative learning.

The most recent period, translational/critical literacy, expands on earlier practices of deciphering language, but it is also characterized by close attention to operations of institutional powers, narrative expressions, and flexible boundaries. It is in this movement that educators have recognized the socially constructed nature of knowledge, the relevance of digital technologies, and the necessity of multivocal dialogue in learning settings (Myers, 1996). I would argue that the most recent shift has been a boon to many classrooms but that schools have not necessarily abandoned earlier inclinations toward copying, uniformity, and regulation. Because schools do not operate outside of the economic and environmental circumstances in which families find themselves, no school reform can replace “medical care, good jobs, adequate nutrition, sound housing, and safe communities” (Ravitch, 2010, p. 241). Teachers and students who are considered inept are set up to fail and because of a disconnect between purported democratic ideals and social realities (Noguera, 2017).

As progressives work to advance the next major wave of interest convergence laws (Bell, 1980) for systemic and political solutions, it is in the everyday work of individual teachers and community-based educators that students' strengths can be honored. The New London Group (1996) has famously focused on “multiliteracies” as a way for instructors to capture the diverse methods of communicating across cultures and languages (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Composed

of several scholars from the United States, Britain, and Australia who gathered in New London, Connecticut, this group has advocated for the greater recognition of linguistic pluralism. Like Freire, they denounced the decontextualization of language and the perception of “letters and words as a purely mechanical domain” (Freire & Macedo, 1998, p. 173).

Many of its members, including Bill Cope, Mary Kalantzis, James Gee, and Carmen Luke, have referred to multiliteracies as a form of “new literacies” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Gee, 2002; Luke, 2000b). The designation “new” can be kaleidoscopic in its meanings, but I follow Knobel and Lankshear’s definition: The term new literacies designates both 1) technical advancements such as digital technologies as well as 2) new social formations that involve various attitudes, beliefs, and practices (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007).

Several scholars have posited that there exist no texts that are inherently monomodal (Stöckl, 2007; Mitchell, 2005), but in my view, the insistence on uniform testing requirements and routinized curricula demands an explicit discourse of new and multiple literacies. With the national drive to standardize curricula and highlight conventional forms of expression (Applebee, 2013), the movement to implement a pedagogy of multiliteracies has been slow. Over-exposure to “print-dense texts,” which is emphasized more as students reach adolescence, tends to diminish engagement with visuals and other forms of meaning-making with artifacts such as painting and photography (Serafini, 2013, p. 17). This discrepancy speaks to what Arnetha Ball (2012) has called the “*knowing–doing* gap in education,” or the difference between educational knowledge and generative action (p. 283, emphasis in original).

An additional complication has manifested with the Federal Communications Commission’s repeal of net neutrality in 2017. The divide between wealthy and poor neighborhoods becomes even wider as the internet becomes less accessible and affordable for

lower-income populations. The lack of teacher preparation has also aggravated issues of access gaps between under- and over-resourced school districts, which are too often situated along intersections of race and indicators of wealth (Rowse, Morrell, & Alvermann, 2017; Johnson, 2016; Hicks & Turner, 2013).

By recognizing multiple forms of self-expression, however, educators can encourage cross-cultural communication and understanding, as well as connections between the classroom and real-world concerns. Those committed to a pedagogy informed by new literacies advocate for “central to full civic, economic, and personal participation in a world community” (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008, p. 14). This text is being written in a moment of political tumult, as white supremacy surges in public and online spaces, Black lives are continually lost to police violence, executive actions separate immigrant families, and political ties between the U.S. and its diplomatic partners become frayed. Educators face a profound imperative to help cultivate in our students the capacity to join anti-racist and anti-fascist coalitions. New literacies thereby intersect with an understanding of social movements and the importance of racial literacies, or an understanding of “the capacity to decipher the durable racial grammar that structures racialized hierarchies and frames the narrative of our republic” (Guinier, 2004, p. 100).

In addition to new literacies, John Potter and Julian McDougall (2017) have suggested the term dynamic literacies, which account for semiotic fluctuations, recursive writings, and multiliteracy practices informed by engagement with media. This notion was developed in response to the accelerated pace of technological, social, and ideological changes during the last century, as it addresses how the digital screen is an important accompaniment to sociocultural and semiotic communicative behaviors (p. 34). When educators view literacies as complex, fluctuating, and contingent, students are better situated to resist static conceptions of literacy,

engage in critical readings, and participate in activist coalitions across print, media, and digital spaces.

Tracing the Roots of Critical Literacies

Education scholars have used the term “critical literacy” to refer to a theoretical tradition that has its roots in critical theory, principles of civic participation, and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1983; Luke & Freebody, 1997; Morrell, 2008; Share, 2009; Knobel & Lankshear, 2002). Critical literacy encourages a close interrogation of received wisdoms and provides an impetus for members of oppressed groups to dissect the mechanisms of influence and privilege that perpetuate structural injustices. I follow David Harvey (2003) in his general interpretation of Gramsci’s writings on hegemony and the “political power exercised through leadership and the consent of the governed, as opposed to political power exercised as domination through coercion” (p. 36). In deploying critical literacies as “weapons” against hegemonic forces (Janks, 2000, p. 184), however, students have the opportunity to become agents of change and demand a more equitable society.

This tradition of active resistance stems largely from the Frankfurt School’s writings on critical theory, which gained traction in the 1930s through philosophers such as the influential Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno. Their aim to theorize the influence and circulation of dominant ideologies through mass communication remains a relevant concern in the modern era (Kellner, 1995). According to Horkheimer and Adorno, popular culture perpetuated the logic of capitalism and social control over consumers (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002; Darder, 1991; Garcia, Seglem, & Share, 2013). This insight remains relevant today, as political instabilities and pervasive violences persist, propelled in part by sensationalized media depictions of minoritized communities as deviant, destructive, and inhuman. Here, I have pluralized the word

“violences” as a nod to what Derman-Sparks and Phillips (1997) have called a “web of economic, political, social, and cultural structures, actions, and beliefs that systemize and ensure an unequal distribution of privilege, resources, and power” (p. 9).

Making these dynamics visible requires a rigorous examination of the underlying power structures that organize the social experiences of racially inscribed individuals and groups. Critical pedagogy encourages students to engage in close interrogations of systemic oppressions, intersecting positions, implicit biases, and shifting identities. Maintaining a critical lens fosters greater understanding of knowledge creation and complex power relations (Luke, 2000a). Racism is not merely a conspicuous act grounded in open hostility towards marginalized groups but the manifestation of networked macro- and micro-level practices that delimit the potential of agents who are systematically oppressed.

The notion of critical literacy as a political tool for the self-empowerment of young adults builds on the Deweyan ambition of realizing democratic achievements through educational reforms. Rather than building curricula through unquestioned faith in “passive absorption,” instructors invested in this educational model promote active learning theories, youth agency, and meaningful curricular connections to students’ lives (Dewey, 1916, p. 38). It is important for learners to not only consume messages but also discriminate between various textual sources and posit alternatives that reflect their own motivations. Once learners begin to read the world with deeper scrutiny, they can be positioned to recast existing accounts and shape larger discourses with their own vocalized narratives.

Critical literacies are grounded in ideas of social justice and participatory democracy. This approach promotes the purposeful involvement of students in the cultivation of rich, pluralistic learning spaces. Paulo Freire has been a pivotal source of inspiration for modern

critical theorists (Kellner, 1995). With the publication of *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) energized a global conversation on critical theory with his writings on educational models and liberatory praxis. In his commentary on the perverse “banking” system of schooling, the teacher is revered as an omniscient depositor of information, whereas students are rewarded for passivity and compliance (Freire, 1970, p. 73). Freire has instead advocated a problem-posing method that destabilizes the traditional teacher-student hierarchy, encourages the cultivation of critical consciousness, activates authentic reflection, and invites contributions from historically disempowered communities toward social change.

In Freire’s vision of emancipatory pedagogy, the language of the so-called oppressed serves to propel a dialogue constituted by reflection and action in order to “transform the world” (p. 87). Liberation depends on a sense of community trust, which is established through revolutionary acts of mutual empathy, humility, faith, and love. With critical dialogue, students develop a greater consciousness about systemic oppressions that inform and shape their world in material, corporeal, and affective ways. Scholars have been drawn to critical pedagogy for its power to actuate social reform and improve material conditions for historically disenfranchised populations through its espousal of participatory action and resistance against oppressive regimes.

This field has also been shaped by technological devices, as numerous media channels and platforms compete for users’ attention. In the digital age, scholars have extended Freirean thinking in their writings on critical media literacies (Kellner, 1995; Kellner & Share, 2007; Morrell, 2008; Tyner, 1998). This pedagogical approach argues that students should be encouraged to comprehend, critique, and recreate content across multiple modes. Media plays a significant role in shaping dominant understandings of social knowledge, and when students take

a critical stance toward multimodal communications, they become equipped to produce counternarratives (Kellner & Share, 2007; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Linked closely are the concepts of cyberliteracy, which emphasizes critical consciousness around technological texts; critical hyperreading, which involves the recognition of the internet's connective features as well as its limitations; and critical cyberliteracies, which necessitate not just consumption but also critiques of power and language (Gurak, 2003; Burbules, 1998; Knobel & Lankshear, 2002). Decoding, processing, and analyzing texts circulated by print and digital distributors are contemporary critical practices that active readers use to dismantle oppressive structures and accommodate new possibilities.

When learners are prevented from critically examining their societies, the banking model of education is reinforced, and students fail to engage in active, authentic, or equitable learning opportunities. Close interrogations and reconstructions help learners to read multiple texts and “produce their own identities and resistance,” as Douglas Kellner (1995) has argued in his commentary on critical media literacies (p. 10). If they are instead given opportunities to rewrite their social worlds, youth can develop the potential to destabilize longstanding systems of power imbalances, and these occasions for social engagement can serve as inductions into sites of cultural and civic transformations (Morrell, 2008; Garcia, 2012; Garcia, et al., 2013; Jenkins & Ito, 2016). Critical examinations can thereby promote active participation in political discourse as global citizens with mutual investments in a collective future.

Engaging with Texts through Consumption and Production

Several scholars whose theories have been important to scholarship on multiliteracies have outlined specific strategies for critical users of texts. In his conceptual framework, David Buckingham (2003, 2013) has stressed the necessity of examining capitalist influences, linguistic

conventions, representations of truth, and targeted audiences. Similarly, Renee Hobbs (2011) at the Media Education Lab has articulated five key questions to guide students in the evaluation of multimedia: Who is the author, and what is the purpose of the piece? What techniques do the creators use to attract readers' attention? Which points of view are highlighted? How might different people interpret this message? What is omitted? (p. 66). Posing such questions draws readers to subtexts and helps them make more informed distinctions about the purpose, execution, and impact of a work.

Others have defined specific roles that students might adopt when engaging with critical multiliteracies in group settings. Luke and Freebody (1997) have pointed to a family of multiperspectival practices known as the Four Resources Model. In this framework, students can take on the responsibility of a *code breaker*, who decodes symbols and conventions; a *text participant*, who interacts with the text through distinct personal and cultural lenses; a *text user*, who explores potential textual purposes within defined contexts; or a *critical text analyst*, who inspects various interests, biases, and omissions (p.214). The capacity to decode symbols, filter readings through personal experiences, pay attention to intentions, and analyze texts for presences and absences strengthens students' grasp of linguistic registers.

In their literature review, Antero Garcia, Robyn Seglem, and Jeff Share (2013) have identified five basic elements in common across various media studies scholars: Kellner & Share (2007), Masterman (2001), and Thoman & Jolls (2005) (as cited in Garcia, Seglem, and Share, 2013). Commonalities included the importance of recognizing media construction as a social process; the hermeneutical analysis of linguistic conventions; an investigation of the audience's role as interpreters; the unpacking of power and ideology; and the examination of institutional, capitalist, and political control in the media industry (p. 111). When students understand that

meaning shifts depending on the influence and context of certain individuals and groups, they are able to grasp how architects, audiences, and authorities shape social knowledge.

This kind of careful attention to the construction of messages can help learners make a greater impact on civic discourse. Rigorously examining intent, semiotic techniques, and different perspectives are helpful for critical readers and writers of complex worlds (Freire, 1970). Perhaps the most widely known conceptual framework was developed by the New London Group (1996), which has objected to rote memorization and information dissemination through lectures. Instead, the group has emphasized students' development of a critical consciousness, active participation, and reflective practices (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000).

The New London Group (1996) has specified four pedagogical moves to support the multiliteracy practices of youth: situated practice, which recognizes the contextualization of meaning-making; overt instruction, which helps students develop a metalanguage of design and obtain greater control over productions; critical framing, which allows learners to critique ideologies and systems of knowledge; and transformed practice, which encourages students to apply theoretical principles and become designers of social futures (p. 85-87). The group's commentary on design elements speaks to the influence of accessible materials, decisive actions, and resulting transformations that take place throughout production processes. Specifically, available designs include semiotic systems like images, words, film, and gestures; designing points to the use of resources to create meaning from subjective viewpoints; and the redesigned designates transformations that result from the act of designing. The New London Group has asserted that these design components provide learners with ways of understanding and constructing new orders of discourse.

The grammar of semiotic systems offers users the opportunity to rearrange existing semiotic arrangements into new configurations, which not only entail the reassembly of designs but also result in personal and interpersonal transformations (p. 76). Redesigns do not simply have to result in mechanical reproductions that lull society into homogenization and consumerism, but learners' creative reworkings can result in what Benjamin (1969) has extolled as the aura-inflected art that retains the touch of an original artist. Such redesigns reflect an interplay of creative forces and contextualized patterns of meaning that are culturally and historically situated (The New London Group, 1996, p. 23).

These frameworks help to frame pedagogy that promotes critical readings, multimodal experimentations, and social engagements. In recognizing the availability of different frameworks, educators can attend to both the interpretive and productive dimensions of multiliteracies. Critical readings necessitate a deep understanding of analytical techniques and how they intersect with personal experiences, while multimodal productions include technical and social understandings during the composition process. These components are essential to the recognition of youth as important contributors to academic discourse.

The next section delves more deeply into what the New London Group calls the "most significant" mode of signification, the multimodal. This form is deeply connected to and encompasses all other forms of meaning-making, namely the linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial (p. 80). A pedagogy grounded in multimodalities recognizes the entanglements of various literacy practices whose associations and interplays constitute various productive modes in learning spaces. Whether constructing digital stories, assembling mixed media collages, or coding through artistic crafts, students can engage in agentive forms of multimodalities to deepen their creativity and criticality.

Developing Critical Multimodal Literacies

Whereas engaging with multiliteracies connotes communicative practices within particular sociocultural and technological contexts, multimodality offers students a range of explicit resources with which to construct content with real-world connections and implications. Intertwined with a framework of multiliteracies, the concept of multimodality stresses the affordances of various semiotic modes. I borrow this term from J.J. and Eleanor Gibson, who have nominalized “affordance” to articulate what “the environment offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill. ... It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment” (Gibson, 1979, p. 127).

In the modern era, technological innovations have allowed youth to engage through interconnected modes, such as designing apps, creating hyperlinked blogs, communicating on backchannels, uploading screencasts, building interactive timelines, publishing e-books, or interacting with augmented reality. Lasisi Ajayi (2015) has spoken to the intersection between multimodalities and critical theory in his notion of *critical multimodal literacy*, which marks the “integration of multiple modes and media for meaning making and offers the possibility of increased agency” in learners (p. 219). This term points to the interdisciplinarity of literacy studies and challenges a monocultural vision of English education, and in bridging this work with that of the New London Group (1996) I have chosen to refer to the plural “literacies” to designate multiple meaning-making configurations made possible through a pedagogy of multiliteracies.

In addition to examining representations of ideas in language, images, speech, video, and other symbolic domains, students of critical multimodal literacies consider how power inequities and forms of resistance might reside in texts and in their potential counterproductions. In his

study of ninth-grade Nigerian female students, Ajayi investigated the ways in which the readers examined texts with criticality. Building on the work of the New London Group and Gunther Kress, he used a “multimodal social semiotic approach” to find that students drew from diverse modes to interpret, question, and redesign texts (p. 10). They critiqued gendered narratives and used multiple literacies to fashion new social practices, identities, and knowledge about the world.

Ajayi’s recommendation for instructors was to rethink the materials with which students make meaning and highlight “the everyday meanings and uses of literacy in the social and cultural contexts of the society” (p. 23). By providing opportunities for students to integrate various sounds, images, and words into their creations, educators allow for richer narrative tapestries and help promote self-actualization, as youth draw from their personal knowledge and interests to mobilize counternarratives.

Mixing and Moving Across Modalities

Gunther Kress and Carey Jewitt have pointed to multimodalities as key components of meaning making (Kress, 2003; Kress, 2009; Jewitt & Kress, 2010). Kress (2009) has drawn a distinction between transformations, which involve the changes of configured elements within a single mode, and transductions, or content changes across modes. An interactive process of the latter, according to Kress, hinges on the designer’s motivations, the availability of resources, the initial prompt, the perceived audience, and the resulting message (p. 169). Others have referred to transductive activities as transmediations (Jenkins, et al., 2006; Batchelor, 2015; Short & Kauffman, 2000) and transmodal moments (Newfield, 2014).

An example of the polysemic term “transduction,” offered by Gunther Kress (2009), is in the movement of content from an image to sound, as when a photograph is recast into speech

through the creation of a story inspired by the initial image (p. 125). Rather than providing a literal verbal description of the image, a learner who offers a personal anecdote, memory, or story when prompted by a picture transfers meaning onto an entirely different mapping system. In the case provided by Kress, a child looks at an image of three figures, two small and one large, then begins to share a story about the child's own parents. This instance of transduction results in a distinctive form, as the rearrangement necessitates a new form of expression. Transductions are therefore inter-modal transitions and result in a series of "different entities" (p. 125). Ultimately, a transductive move has distinct markers of materiality, and its semiotic effects are realized in specific ways, in this definition of transmediation.

It is worth pausing here to place Kress's notion of transduction into conversation with the one offered by the French philosopher Gilbert Simondon (1992). In the latter's conception, "transduction" refers to the following:

A process – be it physical, biological, mental or social – in which an activity gradually sets itself in motion, propagating within a given area, by basing this propagation on a structuration carried out in different zones of the domain: each region of the constituted structure serves as a constituting principle for the following one, so much so that a modification progressively extends itself at the same time as this structuring operation.

(p. 313).

In Simondon's explanation, transductive processes of any kind occur in a series of constant proliferations into distinct entities that are informed by the structure from which they came. This definition nuances the function of transductions, which relate to ongoing unfoldings of individual units of material that maintain some relational connection to the entities from which they have emerged.

Deleuze has supported and expanded Simondon's definition of transduction by noting that in this way, "one milieu serves as the basis for another, or conversely is established atop another milieu, dissipates in it or is constituted in it... the milieus pass into one another, they are essentially communicating" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 313). Following Simondon and Deleuze, I perceive multimodality to be a process of transduction in which modalities are altered into new systems of meaning but remain molecularly grounded within a domain of ever-unfolding interrelations. Deleuze and Guattari offer the visual of a virus that takes flight into the cell of another body but carries genes from the initial host, indicating that evolutionary models follow more of a rhizomatic pattern of operation rather than arborescent pathways of descendancy.

As Lecerle has attested, "Deleuze and Guattari go further on this road than Austin and Searle: the utterance is not merely the locus of a *speech*-act (a promise, for instance), but of a *social* act, a *mot d'ordre*, a slogan... [T]he origin of the slogan is in a collective assemblage of enunciation, that mixture of bodies, instruments, institutions, and utterances, which speaks the speaker" (Lecerle, 2002, p. 88). As such, when a student draws a visual figure of a character from a book they⁴ are reading, there is an act of transference onto the page as choices are made around specific facial expressions, bodily gestures, and sartorial choices. These can emerge from a blend of interpretive moves, personal readings, artistic surprises, and social messages that they receive about aesthetic representations, but ultimately, the resulting image cannot be disentangled from the original that gave birth to this new form. Indeed, what may appear at first to be a completely independent transduction necessitates a reflection on the ways in which

⁴ The singular form of "they" is used as a gender inclusive pronoun.

transformations rely on and give additional meaning to the conditions that shaped its own emergence.

Related to the notion of transduction, scholars have also used the term “remixing” to describe the ways in which students negotiate multiple semiotic modes. Popularized by Michele Knobel and Colin Lankshear (2008), remixing originally referred to the sampling and alteration of audio material by DJs and hip-hop producers, but it has since expanded to include the editing and reorganizing of media such as film, websites, animations, images, and other archived material (Knobel & Lankshear, 2008). Common examples of multimodal remixing include the retouching of original images with photo editing software, splicing of video clips, and depictions of existing fictional characters as fan art. Remixing is a reiterative process without a definitive end, as different modalities continue to rebuild on previous iterations.

Transduction, transmediation, and remixing encompass numerous modalities and their interplay when juxtaposed and overlaid. These notions point to the power that youth have as constructors of a kind of bricolage, or recreations that are designed using different available resources for creative imaginings. By experimenting with multimodal elements, students make use of multiple literacies across media and understand how to draw from semiotic resources for specific purposes and audiences. For example, a student might read a novel and create a skit based on two underrepresented characters, then complete a digital comic or shoot a short movie trailer in which they act with a peer. Another assignment might prompt the creation of a screencast that features a student’s poetry annotations with voiceover commentary, which can then stimulate a class discussion or written reflections on the artistic intentions behind the multimodal artifact.

By moving beyond mechanized translations, transmediated activities help learners adapt content from one semiotic system to another, invent new connections, and identify productive tensions within language (Short & Kauffman, 2000). Greater attention to multimodal literacies can help scholars and educators recognize the plurality of student voices, backgrounds, and perspectives. Such developments in the field of literacy studies expand the field with transformative pedagogies that initiate the production of different social possibilities.

Multimodal Elements of Digital Storytelling

With the rise of a “convergence culture,” older and newer forms of media have collided (Jenkins, 2008), and researchers have begun to examine how multimodal storytelling has positively impacted the identity formation of learners (Muhammad & Womack, 2015; Nixon, 2013; Hull & Nelson, 2005). Glynda Hull is among those who have analyzed students’ multimodal creations and the relationship between storytellers and their works. In their study of a community technology center known as DUSTY (Digital Underground Storytelling for Youth), Hull and her colleagues have found that the blend of multimodal practices increased student awareness of identity formation, promoted youth agency, and strengthened democratizing processes through multivocal collaborations (Hull, 2003; Hull & Nelson, 2005; Hull & Katz, 2006).

Hull’s examination of participants’ after- and out-of-school multimedia creations in the community collaborative has centered on “multiple as well as non-linguistic forms of representation” and noted that out-of-school spaces are well-suited for such projects (Hull, 2003, p. 231). In their analysis of digital storytelling, Hull and Nelson (2005) inspected coexisting systems of signification and the semiotic relationships formed between images, words, and sound. They analyzed the affordances of both combined and distinct components of a selected

piece titled “Lyfe-N-Rhyme,” a multimodal story that interlaced words, spoken social critique, and carefully chosen images by an artist from Oakland, California. The composition advanced subnarratives about “the global concerns of poverty, crime, desperation, hope, and change” (p. 251). In their analysis, researchers argued that hybridized productions enriched themes of class consciousness, capitalism, and the potential for change at universal and personal levels. Multimodality, they noted, involves not just juxtapositions of different artistic media but a deliberate interlacing to create distinct forms of “signification, one that transcends the collective contribution of its constituent parts” (p. 225).

Learning communities that embrace multimodalities help reaffirm students as legitimate and valued creators. Using a range of modalities has been found to enhance the establishment of what has been termed as “literate identities” (Vasudevan, Schultz, & Bateman, 2010, p. 461; Ajayi, 2015, p. 26, Husbye, et al., 2012, p. 91; Skinner & Hagood, 2008, p. 12). In their analysis of a multimodal storytelling project, Vasudevan, Schultz, and Bateman (2010) found that participatory composing practices with diverse media resources helped students author identities as more confident and engaged students of Language Arts. Fifth-grade storytellers drew from home, community, and school contexts to compose multimodal pieces that reflected intricate narratives about these interconnected spaces. One writer in particular developed a stronger literate identity as a raconteur through the curation of artifacts that mobilized images, music, text, and speech about topics such as sports, family relationships, and neighborhood violence (p. 453-454).

Engagement with multimodal writing has been found to validate students’ sense of selfhood through the inscription of personal narratives with a variety of semiotic resources. For instance, youth have been invited to contest damaging public representations of Black girlhood

by redefining standards of beauty, health, and education for themselves (Muhammad & Womack, 2015). The practice of digital storytelling has also prompted interrogations of gender, race, and ethnicity, leading to extensions of learning about power and identities (Nixon, 2013). The inclusion of digital platforms does not mean that traditional print-based materials are entirely supplanted but that students are provided with new avenues for sense-making, opportunities to challenge misrepresentations, and encouragement to amplify historically marginalized perspectives.

Other researchers have examined students' uses of digital and media technologies like podcasts, Wordle, photography, Voicethread, mapping software, and other innovative platforms (Vasquez & Felderman, 2012). For example, Antero Garcia's (2012) study of ninth graders' investigations of their own school and communities helped cultivate youth civic participation, and using iPods allowed learners take part in a “critical social and spatial analysis” of local contexts (p. 108). Additional studies have focused on the development of critical multiliteracies through online forums and digital tools (Lankshear & Knobel, 2013; West, 2008). The use of blog sites has been found to promote serious literary criticism and analytical discourse, which guide students towards intellectual engagement and effective application of different communicative modes (West, 2008).

Engagement with critical multiliteracies enhances students' ability to reinterpret and reinscribe the world, as it carves “multiple paths to knowledge” in formal and informal learning contexts (Ávila & Pandya, 2012, p. 6). With the recognition of linguistic pluralities, youth can benefit from more equitable conditions for learning, particularly when cultural, linguistic, and social differences are valued as strengths. To access these paths, learners have to be provided opportunities to engage in experimentations with multimodal affordances. Accordingly, the

following section comments on the junction between criticality and play, from which not only young children but older learners can benefit.

The Case for Serious Play

In her commentary on transmediation, Katherine Batchelor (2015) has pointed to the importance of play, as it leads to a form of inquiry that expands children's understanding of their worlds. Likewise, Jenkins and his colleagues (2006) have included play on their list of core media literacy skills, since playful experimentation, problem-solving, and engagement with environmental resources are central components of active meaning-making. Playing "with the properties of the world" helps students envision new social possibilities through their manipulation of variables and execution of a series of empirical tests (Jenkins, et al., 2006, p. 24). This approach encourages students to determine a hypothesis based on the best available information and then test it with the resources at hand, just as they would during experimental inquiries and scientific processes of discovery.

The conception of play builds on early 20th century psychological insights into literacy and cognitive development. According to Lev Vygotsky (1978), symbolic play is an important element of human development that contributes to a child's understanding of language and ability to self-regulate. Through symbolic interactions, children engage in behavior that is rule-bound but pleasure-seeking, as their actions with objects like toys simulate possibilities and potential achievements that help them reconstruct and make sense of social situations. When sanctioned by adults as a deliberate part of instructional design, play serves to foster meaningful learning and improve school performance, as it entails "conflicts and negotiations" between various roles (Husbye, et al., 2012).

Rather than viewing students as receptacles in which information should be deposited (Freire, 1970), instructors who encourage a play-based educational model support the acquisition of literacies through contextual applications in low-risk environments. James Gee (2005, 2013, 2017) has written extensively on the nature of play and interactions between learners and video games. Games can motivate learners to navigate complex levels with increasing difficulty, and as they gain expertise, players engage in moments of recursive learning. Through “developmental (not evaluative) skill tests,” games promote a series of intersecting and layered decision-making strategies that involve previous knowledge, intuitive understandings, autonomous calculations, and progressive endeavors (Gee, 2013, p. 319). While I have pointed to the distinctions between video games and live play in classrooms or other learning environments, I note that productive game-like environments permit a degree of freedom sanctioned by partially fixed environments and contribute to a greater sense of confidence in users as they make incremental breakthroughs through unfamiliar but achievable tasks.

Within play-based ecosystems, learning and experimenting occur simultaneously, and students are propelled less by a desire to conform than by self-directed trials through worlds that provide intriguing and inviting constraints. Just as jazz soloists produce their own patterns, phrases, and rhythms within a set of circumstantial restrictions, learners who engage in play can imagine various alternatives, assume different roles, and experiment with various possibilities through trial and error. Playful experiences allow for individuals to take risks, test previous assumptions, and experience the “spirit of discovery” (Gee, 2017, p. 160). These kinds of playful moves help nurture adaptability, cultivate problem-solving skills, and associate learning with positive affirmations.

When a strict binary between work and play is challenged, there is room for what Albert Rouzie (2005) calls serio-ludic rhetoric, or discourse that exists in an interstitial space between seriousness and play. This type of language “functions as a force for critique and change in social educational settings” (p. 236). Critical and serious play help propel productive learning experiences, and when coupled with civic awareness, it has the potential to animate social progress.

Play is a skill that facilitates learning in large part because it “lowers the emotional stakes of failing” (Jenkins, et al., 2006, p. 23). Once stakes are lowered, children feel able to embark on explorations that drive intellectual and social growth. With recent trends in gamified learning, however, educators should be wary of constructing game-like environments that overly emphasize external rewards than generative play. Therefore, knowing how to best offer helpful guidelines rather than strictures and establish a healthy culture of play requires careful and continuous consideration of students’ fluctuating capacities, interests, and contexts.

Exploring Sociocultural Perspectives in Critical Literacy Studies

Within the period of what Myers (1996) has called translation/critical literacy, scholars have gestured towards the co-evolution of critical multimodal literacies and sociocultural practices as prominent intersections of study in education. Several writers have noted how societal, historical, and technological “turns” have marked notable shifts in literacy practices. As youth culture has become increasingly dominated by rich imagistic and technological changes, Glynda Hull (2003) has emphasized that a “pictor[i]al turn”⁵ has replaced a linguistic one (p. 230). The recognition of visual representations highlights the diversity of literacies and the

⁵ In her 2003 article, Hull uses the term “pictoral” once. In a later publication, however, Hull and Katz (2006) use spellings of both “pictoral” and “pictorial.” As the latter article refers to W. J. T. Mitchell (1994), I have chosen to include the “i” in “pictorial turn,” following Mitchell’s original work.

necessary expansion of communicative modes in a postindustrial society. Kathy Ann Mills (2010) has pointed to a digital turn, or an elevated focus on “new literacy practices in digital environments across a variety of social contexts” (p. 246). Frank Serafini and Elisabeth Gee (2017) have also called attention to a “design turn” (p. 78) that was inspired by the New London Group’s commentary on the linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial forms of expression, as articulated previously in this chapter. Moreover, Marjorie Siegel and Carolyn Panofsky (2009) have articulated a “semiotic turn” in literacy studies that acknowledges the shifting nature of sign systems (p. 99).

Gunther Kress (2003) has noted that the visual screen is a central site for text that “shapes the imagination of the current generation around communication” (p. 166). This commentary speaks to the powerful effects of globalization and the connected technologies that are central to the areas of home, school, work, and play. Notions of pictorial and digital turns rely heavily on interpersonal and intertextual engagements, as learners engage with print, media, and digital resources. The consumption and production of content rely on the spontaneous and organized activities that arise in interpersonal and inter-group settings. James Gee (1999) has called this turn a social one, due to the emphasis on participation in communal learning spaces. A sociocultural view of literacies thereby encourages the examination of social dynamics and the ways that they inform circulations of power and language patterns.

It is important for me to recognize the ways in which dominant narratives have shaped historical patterns within even literacy studies. I note the ways in which my literature review is informed largely by highly selective publications and epistemological genealogies to which I have had access through graduate studies and academic conferences. Indeed, the notion of multimodality is not a phenomenon that is unique to the modern age or to Western discourse

(Jocius, 2017; Trigos-Carrillo & Rogers, 2017). In their analytical review of Spanish, English, and Portuguese-language academic databases, Trigos-Carrillo and Rogers (2017) have noted the depth and breadth of research outside of the New London Group and the Global North regarding the practice and pedagogy of multiliteracies. Through inductive research processes, they have found that Latin American scholars, while outside of the narrow scope of those who are regularly cited, have contributed significantly to literacy education and critical literacy; indigenous, bilingual, and intercultural education; and technology and digital literacy (p. 376). Based on their findings, Trigos-Carrillo and Rogers have articulated that the New London Group, while signaling a momentous shift in the field of literacy studies, have unintentionally obscured the “ideas and practices that have deep roots in the struggle of indigenous and oppressed people” (p. 374).

In addition, Kendrick, Jones, Mutonyi, and Norton (2006) have conducted education research in Uganda, where English remains a colonizing force that too often displaces existing languages and sociocultural practices. Upon examining six schools’ use of multimodality in southwestern and eastern Uganda, they have contended that creative productions such as drawing helped affirm students’ positions as active literacy participants. Because writing was more often viewed as a “very private and individualistic activity,” social activities like drawing, photography, and drama could help students see themselves as engaged community members (p. 103). Most of the co-authors in this study were non-indigenous scholars based in Canada, pointing to a need for literacy organizations and publication outlets to expand their networks and support the scholarship of emic writers.

Modes of visual production are certainly not new forms of meaning-making, but honoring multiple forms of semiotic production outside of alphabetic print and standardized

English script can help reinforce the significance of non-dominant modes of expression in literacy studies. As a decolonial turn engages with indigenous scholarship, feminist and queer theory, Black radicalism, and critical race traditions (Radcliffe, 2017), I find it is necessary for me to not only acknowledge long-celebrated scholars but also continue to seek underrecognized scholars whose knowledge is essential to the advancement of the field. Scholarly citations of diverse authors matter in the circulation of knowledge, and I acknowledge my own shortcomings as a reader and strive to make ongoing efforts to broaden my reading selection. In the following section, I comment on the ways in which socially situated learning is integral to the expressive possibilities for youth artists in educational spaces.

New Literacy Studies and Situated Learning

In his writings on the theory of multimodality, Kress (2009) has challenged a Saussurean conception of language and called for the recognition of sociohistorical influences on multimodalities. Social semiotics, he has noted, underscore the materiality, specificity, and historical relevance of signs in different contexts (p. 13). Additionally, in his research on literacy programs in East Los Angeles, Ernest Morrell (2008) has claimed that critical literacies involve active involvement, grounding in relevant issues, authentic and meaningful learning, participation with community partners, and youth empowerment in sociopolitical spheres.

Because social relationships are key components of critical multiliteracies, many writers have rooted their work on new literacies in sociocultural theories (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007; Lankshear & Knobel, 2013). A crucial concept underpinning this theoretical tradition is what Brian Street (1995, 2003) has termed an ideological model of learning, or a contingent view of literacy as a “social practice... always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles” (p. 77). This idea connects English

studies to learners own contextual environments and personal literacy practices. In other words, an ideological view emphasizes the social conditions that affect multimodal communications and transactions in a globalized society.

In contrast, an autonomous model of literacy, a notion that still has currency in many educational institutions today, is based on a narrower definition that associates print-based literacies “with ‘progress,’ ‘civilization,’ individual liberty, and social mobility. It isolates literacy as an independent variable and then claims to be able to study its consequences” (Street, 1995, p. 29). The autonomous model positions literacy as a transferable object and normalizes the interests of the dominant class in a way that appears politically neutral. Such instruction thereby disguises hegemonic ideologies and perpetuates an assumption of literacy as a technical skill to be obtained through formal exposure to institutional codes.

The movement known as New Literacy Studies (Street, 1984, 1995, 2003) is linked to the work of social scientists such as Shirley Brice Heath. According to Heath (1982), reading and writing are not merely functional skills but are instead tied to local practices and distinct interpersonal relationships. In her study of Piedmont Carolinas communities, she tracked literacy practices that often reinforced distinct “cultural patterns” (344). In the rural Black community of Trackton, for instance, she found that while children did not engage in the same bedtime reading rituals as in white middle-class or working-class towns, residents generally engaged in mutually reinforcing written and spoken forms of expression. Children rehearsed language patterns adopted from conversations around them and participated in inviting storytelling practices that were stylized and poetic. Schools, however, reproduced white mainstream norms, focusing on linear texts and literacy practices that were disconnected from Trackton students’ lived experiences.

Other scholars have produced memorable scholarship that have indicated that meanings are context-dependent and informed by “dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade” (The New London Group, 1996, p. 64). Another foundational study was the five-year ethnographic study of the Vai people of Liberia conducted by Scribner & Cole (1981), who have noted that functional literacy can have social functions rather than merely academic ones. A symbolic system like the Vai writing script could help inform multiple “socially organized practices” (p. 237). Recurring and contingent enactments of literacy were governed by social relationships and institutional needs. Documents such as letters, diaries, and business records required multiple skills and helped strengthen business relationships among users of the syllabic Vai script.

Critical multimodal literacies involve not only technical fluencies with multimedia but also socially recognizable ways of information exchange within distinct learning communities. Understanding literacy development within the context of a social system is crucial in respecting a learner’s unique ways of knowing and being. The inclusion of multiple literacies augments possibilities for dialogue, reflection, and action in social groups (Luke & Freebody, 1997; Share, 2009; Seglem & Garcia, 2015).

James Gee (2008) has used the capitalized term Discourses to underscore the many possible ways of acting, thinking, and believing. Just as language is constituted by more than functional literacies such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing, Discourses recognize the various methods of communicating and existing in and across different communities. Through various social interactions and multimodal communications, individuals engage in discursive practices that are shaped in part by shared agreements about accepted behaviors, speech acts, and histories. As such, a Discourse community is sometimes compared to notion of a community of

practice, or a dynamic network of practitioners who build collective knowledge within a certain domain (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Such communities generate consolidated understandings, value new expertise, and reshape social practices to reflect the contributions of its members.

Michele Knobel and Colin Lankshear (2003, 2007, 2005) have claimed that engagement with new literacies includes technical stuff such as digital remixing as well as ethos stuff like participation, collaboration, and distribution. Furthermore, Gee (2004) has stated a preference for the notion of an affinity space, in which individuals relate to each other around common goals or passions rather than similarities in terms of backgrounds or identities. Learning in affinity spaces is enhanced through everyday social practices and can take place in physical or virtual environments. Ultimately, these terms may not be mutually exclusive, as membership criteria and group agendas are contingent on participants' identities, communities' values, and decision-making structures. Both communities of practice and affinity spaces serve important functions, as they facilitate safer spaces for individuals with shared identities and also offer those with common interests the opportunity to collaborate on a collective goal.

In their commentary on participatory cultures, Jenkins, Purushotma, Clinton, Weigel, and Robison (2006) have promoted a form of active and collaborative learning that encourages the examination of different identities, gathering of information from various sources, and respect for various viewpoints. Participation thereby enhances "cultural knowledge," as individuals contribute to the shared project of annotating, appropriating, archiving, and recirculating content (p. 8). With accessible memberships, low barriers to participation, support for novices, and powerful social connections, learning can be transformative, especially when students feel that their voices truly matter (Jenkins, et al., 2006).

Cultivating Hospitable Dispositions in the Social Thirdspace

Dynamic literacies account for changing conceptions of literacy as constituted by multimodal engagements with text-based and design elements, as well as sociocultural theories that are comprised of sociomateriality and “third space” literacies (Potter & McDougall, 2017, p. 39). The concept of third space is connected to a theory of knowledge construction in nontraditional learning communities. In this spatial framework, community programs are concurrently sites of learning and teaching, resistance and solidarity, as well as guided experiences and unstructured explorations. Third spaces like extracurricular programs, community sites, and public areas can function as sites of hospitable partnerships and intellectual growth.

Specifically, third spaces have been theorized as interstitial places of resistance that involve transgressive rupturings of boundaries, cross-cultural social exchanges, and political contestations informed by cultural hybridity (Bhabha, 1994; Soja, 1996). Despite the slight typographical variation, Kris Gutiérrez (2008) has commented on the necessity of a Third Space. In her educational research, students reconceptualized individual identities and projected social futures outside of the formal classroom. Her research on a four-week summer residential program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) resulted in analyses of hybrid language practices of high school students from migrant-farmworker backgrounds. Learning occurred when they examined their own communities’ “sociocultural practices” and engaged in “play and the imaginary situation, learning, and affiliation” (p. 149, 152). In this way, researchers and educators did not need to pinpoint linguistic deficits but allowed opportunities for students to examine sociohistorical moments and the enactments of play and literacy in their everyday lives. Youth could collectivize around specific sociolinguistic practices and develop an

“attention to contradictions in and between texts lived and studied, institutions (e.g., the classroom, the academy), and sociocultural practices, locally experienced and historically influenced” (p. 149).

Similarly, Elizabeth B. Moje and her colleagues (2004) have drawn from the work of Gutiérrez and Soja in suggesting that the hybridized third space collapses the binary between the first space of one’s home community and the second space of formalized institutions like school or work (p. 42). In their ethnographic study of a Detroit neighborhood, the authors interviewed thirty primary youth participants and community members, gathered surveys, conducted participant observations, and examined artifacts such as student texts and clothing. They found that students drew from home knowledge to amplify their learning and elicited information about domestic activities, international travel, the environment, activism, peer activities, and popular culture. As a result, third spaces of learning can welcome and validate social knowledge across multiple affinity sites rather than remain focused solely on a traditional disciplinary curriculum divorced from students’ own social lives.

Although he is not addressed by Potter and McDougall in their commentary on third space literacies, Edward Soja (1996) has presented a compelling conception of “thirdspace” that provides the theoretical foundation for this dissertation. Soja’s collapsed term is unhyphenated,⁶ unlike the references to “third space” by Homi Bhabha (1994) and Henri Lefebvre (1991). Departing from Bhabha’s grounding in alienation and colonialism, Soja grounds himself in urban planning and the spatialization of historical geographies. Building on the work of Henri Lefebvre, Soja has reconceived sociospatial dynamics to articulate the production of first, second, and thirdspace. Firstspace, or what Lefebvre called *espace perçu*, is constituted by the

⁶ Following Soja, I refer to this term as a single word hereafter, unless referring to the work of other authors who have preferred to assign a separation.

given spatial properties of a building that provide structure and material. Secondspace, akin to Lefebvrian *espace conçu*, is determined by the symbolic dimension of space and its imagined conceptions. Thirdspace, or *espace vécu*, then interrupts this binary by accounting for both first and second spaces simultaneously, for it incorporates both perceived and conceived spaces. Thereby, first and secondspaces do not entirely disappear within this framework, but physical ecologies and social dynamics can illuminate different aspects of thirdspace.

This critical postmodern orientation has challenged commonplace understandings of space as static and unidimensional, as interstitiality is constituted by dialogical exchanges and social negotiations given certain material and conceived spaces. The spatiality of makerspaces within school libraries, weekend neighborhood events, and summer youth programs can be conducive to the production of social knowledge as thirdspaces, for instance. They can offer learning experiences based in authentic and hospitable relationships. In an era of extreme polarization, students can develop partnerships by engaging in “practices of a shared humanity, a profound obligation to others, boundary crossing, and intercultural exchange in which difference is celebrated without being romanticized” (Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 149). Productive learning is propelled by an understanding of a collective humanity, an appreciation of diverse perspectives, and a commitment to social betterment.

Noted earlier, Glynda Hull has worked on several joint studies (2010, 2012) that have explored the nature of cosmopolitan dispositions. Building in part on Jenkins’s (2006) writings on participatory cultures, Hull, Stornaiuolo, & Sahni (2010) have found that online social networks fostered critical dialogues, creative artistic productions, and “hospitable and critical imaginings of self and other” (p. 331). In their research, youth from all over the world expanded their capacity for intercultural understandings by interacting in digital thirdspaces. Notably,

sharing blog posts, profiles, and digital stories across multiple modes encouraged genuine exchanges across contexts and cultivated ethical orientations (Smith & Hull, 2012).

The inclusion of digital spaces in educational settings has expanded opportunities for meaningful connections across various domains of knowledge, though certainly an interconnected community can aggravate racial hostility, misogyny, and violent rhetoric against minoritized communities. When technological tools support the cultivation of relationships cross cultural boundaries, digital tools can help address real-world problems. As such, educators who emphasize the importance of hospitable stances across thirdspaces can encourage the disruption of hegemonic norms and foster the development of greater sensitivities to others' positions.

Deconstructing the In/Out-of-school Binary

Cooperative learning and information dissemination can occur in multiple settings, not merely within classroom walls. In the Kindred Summer Program, students authored narratives and designed transmediated content in actual and virtual spaces, but such skills often remain undervalued in traditional classrooms. Scholars have commented on the importance of what Anne Ruggles Gere (1994) has called the “extracurriculum,” or spaces in which writing happens outside of formal education (Gere, 1994, p. 87). Historically, groups such as literary clubs, societies for Black writers, and clubs for working-class women encouraged productions and presentations of writing. Although some groups have flourished in the third spaces outside of formal learning contexts, local organizations may also lack the visibility and deep financial coffers to remain sustainable. At the same time, when non-formalized education models and advocates of egalitarianism move to the periphery, further racial and socioeconomic segregation can increase existing disparities.

Therefore, my interest in the Kindred Summer Program is not precipitated by the bifurcation of educational environments into traditional schools and out-of-school school environments but to point to the possibilities of community-based learning projects that promote critical thinking, community-building, and reimagined social futures. This study is interested in the ways that local educators can support students' critical multimodal literacies and help them realize their potential as creative producers. Any educator can recognize the everyday literacy activities of youth and facilitate opportunities for socially situated learning. Valuing multiple literacies helps learners use personal modes of communication in formal academic environments (Gallego & Hollingsworth, 2000).

Clear connections exist between in-school and out-of-school literacies (Hagood, Skinner, Venters, & Yelm, 2013; Moje, et al., 2004; Hull & Schultz, 2001). When students engage with multimedia and print-based literacies that blend home and school practices, they hone skills across various domains. For example, digital storytelling, video documentaries, and podcasts can also help convey understanding in different ways (Hull & Katz, 2006). By simultaneously drawing from home, school, and communities, students "bridge home and classroom worlds" (Vasudevan, Schultz, & Bateman, 2010, p. 448). By embracing multimodalities, adult mentors can more concretely acknowledge students' natural capacities and magnify their capacity to disrupt the status quo.

Several scholars have challenged the in-school and out-of-school binary, which often cleaves formal and informal educational environments. Imposing a dichotomy between academic and extracurricular life might elide transferences of learning from school to classrooms and vice-versa (Hull & Schultz, 2001, p. 577). Kevin Leander (2007) has advocated for a reconceptualization of curricula so that educational settings can reflect multiple literacy

practices. Processes such as gaming, shopping, downloading music, emailing, chatting, and messaging are natural modes of communication for adolescents, whose personal communicative activities can support their academic learning. Other writers (Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Batchelor, 2015) have explored how technology intersects with popular culture and mediates important literacy practices. By welcoming students' interests in digital technologies and cultural artifacts, educators can more explicitly affirm students' preferred methods of communication.

To some degree, the language of in- and out-of-school learning practices is helpful in knowing how to reconceptualize instructional spaces. This naming allows for the opening up, examination, and rendering visible the binary structure to observe and understand its operations (Derrida, 1982). Therefore, I retain the term “out-of-school” in this study to foreground how a summer program outside of the formal academic year both mirrors and disrupts classroom practices. Summer programs like Kindred are uniquely textured, for they remain external to national efforts to systematize and execute a comprehensive curriculum for its participants, and facilitators can nurture students' multimodal literacies in ways that are more dynamic and relevant than some traditional learning environments (Hull & Schultz, 2001). Yet such programs are susceptible to funding constraints and attendance issues that resemble issues that traditional schools face. The Kindred Program therefore offers promising strategies to personalize support for students, though in an era dictated by a free-market logic, the promise of out-of-school spaces are also informed by larger structural forces. Next, I will point to the ways in which movements toward equity are complicated by logistical hindrances and the saturation of free market principles in educational spaces.

Beyond Access: Advocating for Sustained Equity

The New London Group (1996) has advocated for a recognition of linguistic pluralism, especially in light of fast capitalism, which has signaled possibilities for exciting innovations and collapsed hierarchies but has ultimately failed to eliminate vast inequities. While postindustrial labor initiated more collaborative tasks and disabled certain avenues of social control, it has also excluded marginalized communities from exclusive domains of socioeconomic success. This stratification continues to deny minoritized populations the credentials and marketable skills sought by financially motivated corporations and employers (The New London Group, 1996).

Hypercompetition has been accompanied by a neoliberal agenda in which financial security is defined not only by net incomes but also by what James Gee terms “portfolios” (Gee, 2004). This notion refers to the set of notable accomplishments that communicate an applicant’s skillsets to a potential employer. The emergence of portfolio people marks achievement-oriented metrics for success based on capitalist principles. Gee has resisted this impulse, advocating instead for greater “creativity, deep thinking, and the formation of whole people... [with] success defined in multiple ways, and gain the ability to critique and transform social formations in the service of creating better worlds for all” (p. 110). Opportunities for participatory and hospitable engagements with others, therefore, are crucial for progress towards a more equitable and inclusive society.

Certainly, the movement towards educational equity has been slow and at times regressive, and several profound barriers have thwarted potential advancements. Any tool or ideology can become ineffectual, dogmatic, or even damaging to students when ideas become entrenched or advocates become complacent. Following Foucault, Deleuze (1992) has maintained reinscribed mechanisms of control are continual: “in societies of control one is never

finished with anything - the corporation, the educational system, the armed services being metastable states coexisting in one and the same modulation, like a universal system of deformation” (p. 5). A new regime can “harden” into orthodoxy and relinquish its humanist struggle for collective liberation (Freire, 1970, p. 57; Kellner, 1995, p. 95). Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) have warned that even egalitarianism, with its principle of shared humanity, can become a “repressive” form whose fascistic tendencies extinguish individual rights and freedoms (p. 9). Indeed, pluralism has been similarly placed under attack for its perceived neutrality, purity of perspective, and purported evaluative accuracy (Rooney, 1989, p. 109).

In more recent interviews, members of the New London Group have warned against the uncritical use of multiliteracies as a vehicle for democratic progress in light of a global order animated by self-interest in an unregulated marketplace. In Allan Luke’s view, the concept of multiliteracies is in danger of being co-opted by neoliberal forces under a project of “standardization, assessment, accountability, control and surveillance” that is abetted by government and corporate attempts to measure and codify behavior (Garcia, Luke, & Seglem, 2018, p. 75). Likewise, Bill Cope has expressed skepticism about multiliteracies being regarded as “a democratizing nirvana,” as the trend towards production and consumption as interwoven acts can be either “politically progressive or politically regressive” (Cope, Kalantzis, & Smith, 2018, p. 9).

In other words, a pedagogy of multiliteracies cannot serve as a liberatory praxis when society is defined not only by the intensification of unequal power relations, exploitation of human labor, drive towards corporate dominance, and destabilizing economic bubbles, but also the rationalization of neoliberalism as a normative value that impacts “every dimension of human life” (Brown, 2015, p. 30). Similarly, a Freirean approach towards dialogue and praxis

may be criticized for its apparent lack of specificity in addressing how educators and learners can navigate complex educational systems (Luke, 2014). Concerns about online security breaches or unethical profiting from mined data (Santo, 2012) also continue to raise challenges for educators interested in a pedagogy of critical multiliteracies. As nation-states and authoritarian regimes rise in popularity, advocates and educators must remain vigilant about continued structural barriers and hegemonic ideals that hinder the actual achievement of democratic principles.

Circumspection is needed to prevent even progressive pedagogies from perpetuating regressive educational movements. Instructors, for example, may find it challenging to combat systems of oppression while working in institutions or organizations that reinforce socioeconomic stratifications and focus on students' deficits. Even those with good intentions can be overly prescriptive or problematically see themselves as saviors. Thereby, constant critical interrogations of our own work as teachers and researchers are necessary to prevent from lapsing into mere superficial gestures towards seeming progress.

Just as an educational framework centered on diversity can be derailed by shallow moves rather than supplement a sustained investment in social equity (Guinier, 2004; Lee, Menkart, & Okazawa-Rey, 1997), a pedagogy of critical multimodal literacies must also do more than simply provide available resources or basic access to opportunities (Ávila & Pandya, 2012; Schmier, 2012; Long, et al., 2002; Morrell, 2007). The ability to access multimodal tools, for instance, does not necessarily always translate into liberatory praxis. The provision of technological devices such as iPads, for instance, can still reinforce the Language of Wider Communication (Smitherman, 1996) and accelerate the loss of cultural identities and practices. Therefore, progressive pedagogies must be coupled with a "proactive critique" of power relations and the cultural forces that legitimate them (Morrell, 2007, p. 237).

Advocates can help youth identify pathways toward social change, encourage the disruption of existing systems of oppression, and explicitly commit to an antiracist agenda to promote educative healing. Even in small ways, teachers can participate in social change by providing students not only access to digital tools but also the time, space, and support to explore social issues (Price-Dennis, et al., 2015). By examining the intentional dearth of underrepresented models in media, for instance, students can reshape epistemic value and illuminate exclusionary ideological biases that have prevented oppressed groups from operating within spheres of influence.

It is through the formation of meaningful relationships and a recognition of all students' intellectual promise that teachers can have a transformative impact. Delivering quality educational programs requires significant investments of human labor, financial capital, and institutional support, but these elements are crucial to the destabilization of a schooling system that has preserved racist and classist practices from its colonial and expropriatory foundations. The field of multiliteracies is compelling because it calls for attention to communicative, cultural, and linguistic pluralities. Young children too often travel through the world with a natural curiosity that is quickly extinguished by formal education, but their natural wonder and multiliteracies can thrive in multiple educational settings.

The capacity for students to engage with critical multimodal literacies can depend in part on affordances such as socioeconomic status, geographic location, and historical injustices (Selfe, et al., 2006; Rowsell, et al., 2017). Therefore, a robust ecology of educational, financial, social, and psychological services can help youth take full advantage of multimodal affordances. The work of a small community program at the heart of my research attempts to address these

issues, as it establishes partnerships among summer program facilitators, crowdsourced donations, local guest instructors, and mindfulness practitioners.

By investigating students' engagement with multimodalities through activities such as urban planning, game design, and fan fiction, this work aims to identify ways in which Kindred promotes criticality, creative thinking, and greater awareness of self and others. Nurturing all learners' capacities, affirming contributions to collective conversations, and building participatory communities can activate positive transformations in civic life. An explicit appreciation of students' abilities as critical readers and multimodal creators helps combat deficit-centered views of youth (Nixon, 2013; Garcia, 2012). When educators embrace critical multimodal literacies and anchor instruction in love and care, students may be better equipped with instruments of resistance that carve opportunities for greater educational equity.

The next chapter introduces the context and research setting for the study, and I will then make connections between the research site and the methodological framework that guides this research. My research orientation, data collection methods, and modes of analysis draw upon established but uniquely situated methodological approaches articulated by critical theorists and postmodernists.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This inquiry involved ethnographic methods such as open-ended interviews, participant observations, and document analyses of program artifacts. I have departed from positivist and postpositive orientations that presuppose accurate representations and scientific interpretations of data, and this work is deliberately positioned in contrast to the research methods espoused by What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), an initiative under the U.S. Department of Education that ranks experimental methods as the highest-rated form of research (Institute for Education Sciences, 2014). Quantitative methods such as randomized control trials fail to account for the complexities of individuals' contexts, social relations with others, and unenunciated systems that impact the participants' actions and beliefs. I look to theories of critical postmodernity to inform the ways in which a totalizing and ultimately reductive view of education can be contested through the acknowledgement of fragmentations, pluralities, discontinuities, and tensions within thirdspaces.

Overview of Constructivist Methods and Critical Postmodernity

While this work is informed by ethnographic methods, which I will discuss later in this chapter, I adopt a constructivist lens as a data analyst. Constructivist researcher Kathy Charmaz (2000) has indicated that knowledge is created through the recognition of multiple, subjective realities, and her constructivist orientation has been placed in slight contrast to the initial theories of her advisor Anselm Strauss and his then-colleague Barney Glaser. Despite attending to theories that were embedded in empirical data, Strauss and Glaser became associated with an advocacy of discovering absolute truths that researchers could validate through inductive analyses. In the early years of the theory's formation, they emphasized theorization through inductive processes and constant comparisons of different data sources, but Strauss would later

emphasize deductive elements of what has become known as Straussian grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). At that time, Glaser (1992) railed against Strauss's explicit coding framework after the latter began a collaborative partnership with Judy Corbin (1990), and Strauss began to attend to more contextual factors, whereas Glaser remained faithful to the original vision of data-based theoretical emergence.

Charmaz picked up the tradition of grounded theory from Strauss and Glaser while a graduate student at UC San Francisco, where she pursued a doctorate in sociology. Pushing against Glaser's insistence on the objective emergence of data and Strauss's prescriptive coding procedures, Charmaz (2006) instead provided strategies for researchers in a third wave of grounded theory to take up in their work. Glaser (2002) has since critiqued Charmaz's constructivism for being overly descriptive, insisting, "Again, absolutely NO, the GT [grounded theory] researcher does not 'compose' the 'story.' GT is not description" (para. 16). Strauss and Corbin (1994) gave a more favorable response, noting their "openness" to adaptive recuperations according to each scholar's unique history and personal experiences with the theory (p. 276). In a subsequent interview, Charmaz has expressed the ways in which "when you are not aware of your own starting points, and the situations that you come from, and the positions from which you stand, you tend to think that your view is the only view" (Puddephatt, 2006, p. 10). Poststructuralism, Charmaz has noted, helps researchers be more aware of subjectivities and their personal influence on research situations.

Likewise, Charmaz's UC San Francisco classmate Adele Clarke (2005) has shifted towards a more constructivist view that also acknowledges an individual's multiplicities and partialities. While both Charmaz and Clarke have critiqued earlier views of scholarly objectivity, Clarke (2005) has offered a methodology that has aimed to address power relations,

marginalities, heterogeneities, and contradictions that emerge through the research process. Situational analysis, her contribution to grounded theory, sits in conversation with the so-called postmodern turn, as situational maps address relationality and the interrelationships between and within systems. Despite its semiotic limitations, this methodology enables researchers to address the situatedness and messiness of knowledge production (p. 30). Situational analysis remains rooted in data, according to the principles of traditional grounded theory, but it also attends to critical postmodernist concerns and remains actively aware of nonhuman factors, sociopolitical elements, silenced actors, organizational connections, global interrelations, and other relevant heterogeneities.

The (re)mapping of situations allows researchers to analyze relationality through the materialization of assemblages and entanglements (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Barad, 2007; DeLanda, 2006). Analytic maps plot the terrain of individuals, sites, organizations, and networks (Clarke, 2011). Her attention to mapping speak to Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) insistence on the map as an experimental, rhizomatic space that "is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation. ... A map has multiple entryways, as opposed to the tracing, which always comes back 'to the same'" (p. 12). Likewise, Clarke (2011) has insisted that situational maps are influenced by the researcher's personal "situation of inquiry" (p. 89). When scholars are able to plot different human and nonhuman interactions, material-discursive elements, and catalyzing social conditions on a single plane, they are able to conduct analyses across elemental and collective levels. Situational maps permit the messiness of clusters in a single arena and

reordering categories into practical categories, relations, and/or positions. This kind of flexibility supports the reorganization of ideas, acknowledgement of malleable associations, and the identification of potential absences.

In more recent years, Kathy Charmaz has published pieces on grounded theory in joint collaborations with Clarke (Charmaz, 2015; Morse, Stern, Corbin, Bowers, Charmaz, & Clarke, 2009) that are indicative of the field's diversity and evolution. Charmaz (2015) herself has noted that Clarke's methodology is valuable in that it can "make the hidden and chaotic visible and comprehensible. The method's explicit emphasis on language and discourse prompts researchers to examine nuances of meanings and of silences" (p. 7). Ultimately, both Charmaz and Clarke agree that there needs to be a revision of positivist and postpositivist research and the false notion that researchers can "leave our contents at the door" (Clarke, 2011).

I tend to use the term "critical postmodernity" and depart from the way that "postmodernism"⁷ is deployed in most artistic or political circles that hinge on a particular epoch or aesthetic movement. I also use this phrase to distinguish from Best and Kellner's (1997) use of "critical postmodern theories," as they do seek to challenge technologies that center around a global capitalism but situate the discourse of postmodernism closer to modernist ideals and grand narratives than I feel are appropriate for this study (p. 16). Similar critiques have been advanced against postmodernism by scholars such as James Berlin (1993) in his objection to the erasure of master narratives; Peter McLaren (2005) in his claim that postmodernists overlook the ruthless and "existing social universe of capital" (p. 36); David Harvey (1990) in his renunciation of "fiction, fantasy, the immaterial (particularly of money)" and the conditions that have propelled

⁷ Uses of the word "postmodernism" are included if cited authors have referenced it in their work.

neoconservatism (p. 339); and Fredric Jameson (1984) in his famous contention that a fractured and commodified depthlessness has replicated the logic of late capitalism.⁸

In her often-cited work “Why Doesn’t This Feel Empowering? Working through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy,” Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) has advanced a famous critique of critical theory, noting that rationalism has been a tool used to dominate and can no longer be sustained in terms of classroom praxis. Similarly, according to Elizabeth Bishop (2014), scholars have disparaged critical literacy because of its apparent failure to activate social progress in material ways. Critical literacy, in her estimation, has largely been unable to “put principle to practice,” implement authentic critical pedagogies, or make a decisive impact on society (p. 57).

While there is validity in these criticisms, I contend that there is still value in acknowledging the strategic implications of critical pedagogy. Just as Lani Guinier (2004) posits the rule of law as “a tool rather than a panacea” to address structural racism (p. 117), I view critical theory as a technique to activate critical consciousness in contextualized ways, rather than an explicit formula. With the entrenched and entangled nature of capitalism, it is difficult to conceive of a categorical solution to disassemble its structural, overarching workings.

I also question whether, in positioning critical theory against cultural studies, scholars like Ellsworth (1989) have unintentionally enforced a fixed separation between the two fields, despite her clear and admirable commitment to a project that positions stances as “partial, multiple, and contradictory” (p. 312). Ellsworth’s desire to speak to multiplicities of discourse, intersections of identities, and particularities of context is well-taken, yet I sense there are ways

⁸ “Late capitalism” is often used interchangeably with “fast capitalism” and “postFordism” (Agger, 2016, p. 164).

of interrogating critical theory's paradoxes and questioning the dominance of objective rationality while also acknowledging its most powerful underpinnings.

In multiple publications, McLaren has commented on the need to interrogate the genealogy of critical theory, which is entrenched in Anglo-Eurocentrism (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Giroux, Lankshear, McLaren, & Peters, 2013). However, unlike the vision of naive postmodernists adumbrated by critics such as McLaren (2005), I aim to be attuned to the ways in which capital is indeed an organizing principle in modern society, especially as efforts towards globalization and technological advancements deepen social stratifications between and within nation states.

I am also intrigued by forces beyond the destabilization of capitalism articulated by these white male authors. I am drawn to the margins, partialities, and slippages that emerge when scholars are sensitive to the ways that race, gender, sexuality, citizenship, ability, and other dimensions of identity intersect with class. My critical postmodern standpoint invites a consideration of fractured voices that have been marginalized by dominant narratives. Acknowledging a state of critical postmodernity can help scholars respond to problems inherent to the tradition of critical theory: Namely, many critical theorists appear to work from a history of what Patti Lather (1998) has called a masculine, closed, and universalizing posture, instead of noting the presence of “contradictory voices, counternarratives, and competing understandings” (p. 488).

I recognize the problematic history of critical pedagogy and its associations with a Western imperial project of Enlightenment, but I also aspire to draw from the tradition of criticality to disrupt dominant narratives. This study therefore deconstructs binary oppositions between out-of-school and school-based literacies, between the arts and sciences, and between

creative and critical work. While I use these various terms in this work, I also aim to destabilize longstanding dichotomous divisions. In my view, critical postmodernity is propelled by a motivation to decenter dominant paradigms and reject totalizing moves while interrogating existing power dynamics. While attempting to critique social inequities, I do not presume a stable and definitive demarcation between those with and without power, but I view identities as multiple, unstable, and contextually shaped (Ponterotto, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Luttrell, 2010). I also adhere to the belief that inequities are reproduced through complex matrices of oppression and domination (Collins, 2000; Kohli, 1998).

The process of critical thought for Michel Foucault (1982) was foundational to his thinking, as “the work of profound transformation can only be done in an atmosphere which is free and always agitated by permanent criticism” (p. 34). Criticism is thereby a necessary intellectual tool that serves to unearth assumptions, but I refuse totalizing narratives of rationalism or a transformative point to which we should all strive. Out-of-school programs are not the antidote to the vast systemic issues that impact schoolchildren, given the severe consequences of disinvesting from public services and the limitations that out-of-school programs face in an era of unregulated markets and neoliberal political structures. Instead, there must be “a commitment to the impossibility of justice” (Biesta, 1998, p. 508). Even if the aims of egalitarianism and social change are structurally inconceivable given social realities, it is vital to challenge the status quo through continual critique and collective action.

In finding a space of productive tension, Amy Allen (2015) has proposed a negativistic conception of emancipation, or the “minimization of domination” in unequal power relations (p. 523). Drawing from Foucault and Adorno, she has called for the immanent decolonization of critical theory, pointing to a shifting flow of power dynamics rather than a dichotomous

relationship between oppressor and oppressed. Instead of articulating a utopian objective as a political project, Allen has nodded to Foucault's more modest aim of "enabling a subject that has been constituted by power relations to engage in practices of freedom, self-transformation, and experimentation, within an unstable and reversible social and discursive field" (p. 518).

What I hope to do in this study is apply Allen's negativistic articulation of emancipation to my reading of the Kindred Summer Program, as it undertakes aspects of critical pedagogy but also accommodates notions of fluidity, instability, and dynamism in its attempts to address inequitable gaps in incremental ways. At the same time, I do not abandon a critical hope for greater emancipatory aims within this onto-epistemological position. Like the theories of critical postmodern feminism offered by Jeanne Brady and Audrey Dentith (2001) and Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore (1992), I embrace the multi-positionalities and the uncertainties of finite resolutions, while also committing to the everyday work of social change.

Context of the Research

According to the New London Group (1996), a postindustrial age of fast capitalism has ushered in a new set of business relationships that appear to be more horizontal and fluid. More open floor plans, for instance, are designed to encourage person-to-person communication and collaborative projects, which contest the traditional factory-model of thinking that segments ideas "around prefabricated assembly lines of intellectual work" (Myers, 1996, p. 143). At the same time, however, fast capitalism has exacerbated actual socioeconomic disparities between groups. Participants in the workforce are subject to downsizing, exploitation, and privatization and thus must be able to respond to "communities facing new and old technologies, media, and modes of expressions" (Luke, 1998, p. 306). Automation remains a pressing issue for manual

and low-wage workers, especially in white rural communities that have been severely impacted by the systematic attrition of employment opportunities in the current job market.

At the same time, notions of fast capitalism have only reinforced what minoritized communities have known and felt for far too long, namely the rapacity of capitalists who target, exploit, and expropriate the labor and dignity of the working class. While the harms of the current administration are not to be diminished in its demonization of immigrants, women, queer individuals, Muslims, and racial minorities, it is clear that underserved communities have long understood how the United States has failed to adhere to its purported egalitarian principles. Official government rhetoric has consistently incited terror and endorsed antiblack sentiments, and its policies continue to destabilize vulnerable communities.

Therefore, as pressing as it is for young people to feel equipped to enter a competitive workforce, it is also critical to understand how to best to support one another. As educators, we must provide safer⁹ spaces for vulnerable students to secure protections from threats to their very existence as women, people of color¹⁰, refugees, immigrants, sexual minorities, and members of historically oppressed groups. Community support and collective healing leads to resistance against discriminatory policies, bodily harm, and disenfranchisement that have often been condoned explicitly and implicitly by people in positions of power and influence.

⁹ The comparative form of “safer” is used deliberately to acknowledge that not all spaces can be guaranteed as secure and protected for all students, particularly those who exist primarily in spaces of precarity. Classrooms are not apolitical spaces but are fraught with struggle and the effects of imperialism. Indeed, as Katherine McKittrick has noted, a safe learning space is “a white fantasy because, at least for me, only someone with racial privilege would assume that the classroom could be a site of safety!” (Hudson, 2014).

¹⁰ I use this term intentionally but sparingly. I recall here Jared Sexton’s (2010) reminder that the phrase “people of color” has been deployed to erase and deny the distinct “structural position born of discrepant histories between blacks and their political allies, actual or potential” (p. 47). It has too often been used uncritically as a way to construct a monolithic experience of oppression under white supremacy, when in reality, antiblackness is a principle by which nonblack experiences have long been shaped and by which the state has suppressed the rights of Black Americans and American Descendants of Slavery.

Education reform has been driven in large part by deep-seated national anxieties that emerged in the 1950s as a result of political tensions with the Soviet Union. The release of the first space satellite, *Sputnik*, in 1957 signaled a potential crisis in the education system to political elite, who passed the National Defense Education Act in 1958 (Applebee, 1974; Harris, 1991; Anderson, 2016). This legislation legitimized federal aid for education but also restricted national funds to primarily scientific and technological endeavors. The humanities therefore became subordinate as a matter of national concern to disciplines like math and science.

This narrow focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields has minimized assets afforded to the arts and humanities, and the emphasis on measurable outcomes has bolstered a destructive testing regime. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 resulted in greater funding for disadvantaged children but became overshadowed by a punitive system and educational disinvestment during the late twentieth century (Garcia & O'Donnell-Allen, 2015). The most recent iteration of this cyclical pattern has come in the form of No Child Left Behind in 2001, Race to the Top in 2009, and the Every Student Succeeds Act in late 2015. The continued quantification of knowledge has constrained the work of public school educators, many of whom are compelled to instruct students on strategies to pass standardized exams (Applebee, 2013), rather than tailor a compelling and dynamic curriculum based on the needs of their unique student populations.

For students who participate in programs like Kindred, which is grounded in the art of science fiction, the educative value of out-of-school spaces is clear. Explicit instruction around scientific principles is brief and targeted, and there are plentiful opportunities for student choice in the creative construction of multimodal worlds. Such youth programs challenge the belief that universities are the premier spheres of “scientific power or authority” commanded through

institutionalized learning (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 79). This study is propelled by an impetus to recognize not only adult scholars as scientific investigators but youth as active seekers and producers of knowledge through their scientific and artistic engagements.

Origins of the Study

As a former independent school teacher, I have had the privilege of time, resources, and institutional support to integrate multimodal projects in my English classes. Having worked in one-to-one classrooms with updated technological resources available for each student, I have been able to leverage fast internet speeds to work with learners who have been equipped with digital proficiencies from a young age. Full-time IT staff working with advanced infrastructure has also helped ensure connectivity and additional resource acquisition. Students in these spaces have accrued unearned benefits of greater social and cultural capital to strengthen networks with similarly advantaged peers and to develop entrepreneurial habits that can more easily lead to decision-making positions (Bourdieu, 1986).

In my own experience as a student, I attended a public school but had the fortune of living in a lower middle-class neighborhood that was predominantly white. I was not subjected to police brutality, environmental degradation, severe medical disparities, or other enactments of racist ideas that have resulted in vast economic disparities and poorer health outcomes for Black families (Kendi, 2016). Having had access to fellowships provided by Lions Club, Rotary International, and other service organizations, I was able to extend my learning into the summer months and was acknowledged for my potential to make meaningful societal contributions.

As a researcher, I became increasingly interested in what can happen when educational programs operate outside of school constraints and the quantification of knowledge. I therefore became interested in the work of community programs that served youth but remained largely

outside of bureaucratic pressures that inhibited instructional creativity and student innovation. I learned through online channels about the Kindred Summer Program, and in 2016, I reached out to the co-founders, Terry and Grace,¹¹ who expressed interest in partnering on an inquiry inspired by its dedication to center a community of imaginative storytellers, gamers, and artists. I came to learn more about the Kindred Summer Program and its aims during the winter of 2016-2017, when the co-founders and intern generously shared their insights, materials, and visions for the program's future, and I then conducted a pilot study, which I will elaborate on further below.

Pilot Study

Terry and Grace, the two co-founders and initial co-facilitators of the summer program, invited me to join the program in the summer of 2017. During this third iteration of the program, a new teacher, robin, also joined them as a third co-facilitator. During this time, I adopted the role of documentarian at Terry and Grace's suggestion. I embarked on this project as a pilot study, during which I took pictures for the program to be used by the facilitators for the official website and newsletters while also speaking with participants and taking fieldnotes. The pilot study took place over five weeks from Tuesdays through Fridays in July 2017, from about noon until 5pm. Adult instructional staff included three main facilitators, two teaching interns, and rotating guest lecturers. The facilitators, interns, and student staff arrived early in the day to review lesson plans and set up materials, such as pencils and markers, laptops, weaving kits, and architectural modeling pieces. Following the cue of the adult facilitators and student leaders, I also helped set up the tables, regularly sharpening pencils or charging laptop devices.

The program served predominantly Black and Latinx youth in middle and high school who identified as young women or gender-fluid students who have an interest in the arts and

¹¹ All proper names used in this work are pseudonyms.

sciences. A couple of students of Asian descent participated in the program as well, but the one Asian-American student who joined in the 2018 summer program chose not to be included in this study. In addition, a select group of student fellows, who were second-year participants over the age of sixteen, had been elected to receive a stipend through an application process. They also arrived earlier to help set up with the classroom and talk to newer participants who had also arrived early. These student leaders led movement breaks, planned a field day at a nearby park, and debriefed with facilitators about the program each Thursday after the day's session ended.

The remaining students trickled in between noon and 1pm, and lessons began promptly at 1pm. The student total was thirteen during the summer of 2017, including five fellows, though some participants missed a few days due to conflicts, and one participant left in the middle of the program for unclear reasons. To start the day, one of the three main facilitators engaged the participants in an ice-breaker, and another then took the lead on the main workshop that followed. Workshop topics ranged from coding to writing, and the other instructors would provide support in small groups or one-on-one.

Without having been exposed to coding, weaving, modeling, or many other multimodal projects, I typically learned alongside the students, jotted notes based on my observations, took pictures on the program's digital camera, and spoke with students. In the meantime, facilitators, interns, local teaching artists, and fellows provided instructional mentorship. Student participants were encouraged to develop critical skills around urban planning, architectural modeling, narrative writing, computer programming, and biological understandings. Their eventual multimodal projects emerged from creative play and expansive world-building activities.

The insights gained during this time have informed the dissertation research conducted during the summer of 2018, during which I conducted interviews with the four co-facilitators, as another primary co-facilitator had joined, and seven student participants who elected to participate in the study. In addition, I wrote down fieldnote jottings, which were expanded into longer memos following each day's workshop. Finally, I examined student artifacts and program planning documents. Notes were then categorized into key codes using situational analysis and made sense of qualitative data through a constructivist framework (Clarke, 2005; Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I analyzed the data and integrated them into the discussions in the following chapters.

My jottings reflected a unique lens and perceptions informed by experiences as a program participant and an adult presence. There was no single way to represent moments in the “best” or most “correct” way, so there was no attempt to pursue absolute truths (Emerson, et al., 2011, p. 6). Notes included descriptions and dialogue recorded in my notes during select moments, with pauses, expressions, multiple voices, and gestures included at times. These notes were “products of active processes of interpretation and sense-making” that informed what was written and how the writing was constructed (Emerson, et al., 2011, p. 9).

Research Setting

During the first two summers, workshops had been held in a public library in downtown Brooklyn, where facilitators and visiting teaching artists led workshops. In its third summer, however, a Brooklyn-based university offered an offsite location for the program to house its materials throughout the entire month. At no cost to the program, it allowed the program to use the space, utilities, and maintenance staff. The university had redeveloped a small community writing space situated between the Clinton Hill and Bedford Stuyvesant areas of Brooklyn. The

center held its grand opening in May 2017, and during the academic year, it generally functioned as a space for artistic exhibitions, educational programming, literary journal productions, and organizing for justice-oriented initiatives.

Having started in 2015, the Kindred Summer Program was designed to serve students from lower-income areas of Brooklyn. The inspiration for the program's name originated from the author Octavia Butler, a MacArthur Genius grant winner and science fiction writer who reimagined worlds and explored issues pertaining to equity and social justice. Co-founder Terry had initially envisioned the program providing specific deliverables grounded in skill-based growth and functional literacies. The programmatic emphasis on transdisciplinary skills would help students build a portfolio of skills to be presented to a wider audience "for new opportunities in changed times" (Gee, 2004, p. 97). Learning how to manipulate 3D models, code online games, and craft science fiction could provide participants with a set of transferable literacies.

After the second summer of the program, however, Terry began to envision the program centered around more personal and social development, rather than just technical competencies. Goals of self-confidence, community formation, imaginative enactments, and critical thinking came into sharper focus. The other co-founder, Grace, stated that her vision for students was for them to learn by taking risks through world-building. During the pilot study, I observed exercises such as role-playing and multimodal projects. Through modeling buildings, coding interactive games, and writing science fiction, students acquired not only twenty-first century skills but also challenged themselves to engage in imaginative and purposeful play. The curriculum for the next summer was similarly shaped in the spring of 2018, when Terry, Grace, and robin reexamined curricular goals and coordinated guest instructors, project details, lesson

plans, and funding to tailor the program for both new and returning participants this summer. I touched base with the co-facilitators throughout the process of curriculum development, fundraising, recruitment, and logistics to assess the program's growth, curricular shifts, and refined goals.

Below is an adapted table of the summer curriculum:

Table 1 Curricular Calendar

Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
7/3/18	7/4/18	7/5/18	7/6/18
Orientation	Holiday	Book club	Book club
Journal making		Mask making part 1	Mask making part 2
Group contract		Staff Meeting with Fellows	Rebus puzzle
7/10/18	7/11/18	7/12/18	7/13/18
Science day	Play writing	Branching narratives	Urban planning
	Author guest talk	Book club	
		Staff Meeting with Fellows	
7/17/18	7/18/18	7/19/18	7/20/18

Weaving & Twine stations	Weaving & Twine stations	Weaving & Twine stations	Urban planning
		Staff Meeting with Fellows	
7/24/18	7/25/18	7/26/18	7/27/18
Map-making	Architecture workshop	Architecture workshop	CSS/Styling
LARP		Staff Meeting with Fellows	Twine
7/31/18	8/1/18	8/2/18	8/3/18
Freedom activity	Portfolios	Closing exercises & Feedback	Finish set-up
Field day	Literary agent guest talk	Finish portfolios	Portfolio showcase

Program Participants

Terry and Grace had co-founded the program and also served as its primary co-teachers for the first two years. The former had instructional experience in science, writing, and video game design, while Grace had taught yoga and worked as a full-time playwright. Science, writing, coding, gaming, movement breaks, and writing were integral components of the workshops. Both were white women based in Brooklyn, New York, and they were advised by

board members, many of whom had developed relationships with the co-founders in previous professional or personal contexts. These advisors worked in relevant fields such as creative writing, programming, library science, urban planning, architecture, and nonprofits.

The program's funders ranged from private donors on a crowdfunding site to generous donations presented by prominent science fiction writers who had championed the fundraising efforts of the Kindred Summer Program through Twitter. These writers offered to fund the summer program in its entirety in 2017, allowing the co-founders to focus more heavily on logistics, student recruitment, and curriculum planning. In 2018, the program returned to a model of smaller donations and crowdfunding to subsidize snacks, workshop materials, stationery supplies, guest instructors, and other associated costs.

During the third summer in 2017, they invited an Afrolatinx art teacher, robin, to join as a third lead instructor. She had been a guest instructor the previous summer and had led a workshop on taking selfies and rethinking consent norms. Throughout the rest of the year, robin worked as a museum educator and presented her own performance art, such as an artistic showcase with other gender-nonconforming Latinx artists. In 2018, Desiree joined to become the final co-facilitator; she filled in part-time as Grace stepped back from instruction and charted a bicoastal writing career. Desiree was a Black educator who had studied creative writing at the program-affiliated university that had provided the summer space for Kindred. On the days that Grace was part of the program, Desiree helped lead another summer youth program oriented around leadership training for young women of color.

In addition, there were several part-time program interns, Aria and Fae, as well as a program assistant, Belle. These members of the support staff were either recent graduates or current students with a background in creative writing. Aria was a South Asian writer and

comedienne who had had eight years of experience working with out-of-school youth programs. Fae was a white graduate of a creative writing program interested in becoming a teaching artist, having worked with youth through public schools and city-based organizations. Belle was a Black undergraduate who was about to enter her senior year in a BFA program for creative writing. She had supported Kindred during the previous spring as an intern who helped with social media and editing materials for the program. These individuals worked collectively to prepare program materials, mentor students, and provide guidance to students during workshops.

Each spring, the primary co-facilitators selected youth participants from a pool of applicants who ranged from sixth through twelfth grade. Youth who self-identified as women or gender non-binary from neighborhoods such as Flatbush, East Flatbush, Crown Heights, Bed Stuy, East New York, and Brownsville were encouraged to apply. The program was advertised through the official program website, central neighborhood hubs like the public library, and local word-of-mouth communication. In the summer of 2017, the facilitators inaugurated a fellowship program and invited second-year participants to serve as mentors for newer participants and help to shape the direction of the program through weekly staff meetings. Co-facilitators also handed participants Metrocards regularly to cover public transportation costs to and from the site.

In total, seven student participants elected to participate in the study: Lyra, Ayanna, Ada, Brooke, Judy, Celine, and Katie. Lyra was a participant who was part of the 2017 cohort. She was a thirteen-year-old student who was the only white student in the program. She was a highly vocal participant and avowed feminist lesbian, speaking often about her frustrations with heteronormative storylines in media and assumptions that people made about queer relationships, such as promiscuity. As someone inclined towards understanding racial justice issues, she was a proponent of forming lines of racial solidarity between Black and White women, noting that “no

one could stop us” if activists formed a coalition towards feminist unity to promote social change.

Ayanna was a seventeen-year-old Black activist who had been a fellow and two-time participant in the summer of 2017. She had expressed in her application that she loved stories and art because they could move audiences. She noted that “being a fellow was just being a fellow friend or just one of the fellow participants, the only difference was I was getting paid. ... It also taught me that I have to go in this with an open heart and absolute love for the people around me.” Although she had been unable to attend in 2018 due to a shift in attention to college preparation and caretaking responsibilities for her younger siblings, she had presented at the 2018 showcase about her experiences during and after *Kindred*. She was highly interested in nonprofit collaborations, especially after participating in a fellowship for reproductive rights that Terry had recommended. The position exposed her to women’s rights activism, and she since developed an interest in advocating for women who were homeless or incarcerated.

Ada was also seventeen and identified as a student of Afro-Latinx heritage. They¹² had been in the *Kindred* Program for three summers and became a fellow for the second time in 2018. During the academic year, they were an avid reader and led the cheerleading squad at her school. Having developed close relationships with staff at her local library branch, she often checked out fantasy books that the staff suggested to her. She also became interested in modeling part-time, and she had explored the career with visits to modeling agencies during her junior year.

Brooke was a sixteen-year old first-time participant who had joined because a friend had brought her along. While her friend was unable to continue with the program because she had

¹² Ada identified with both she/her and they/their gender pronouns. I switch occasionally between the two in my writing, but for antecedent clarity, I primarily use the singular form in subsequent chapters.

gotten a summer job that conflicted with the program, Brooke continued to attend and expressed an interest in applying to become a fellow the following year. On her Kindred application, she wrote that she saw herself as “an average teenager” with “a short attention span,” and she mentioned her interest in “art that promotes confidence on the black community.” She was a precocious writer, often celebrated by other participants and co-facilitators for her powerful poetry and prose, and she expressed interest in becoming an English teacher in the future.

Judy was a fifteen-year-old young Black woman who had been in the summer program for two years. While she tended to be less vocal than others, she was highly engaged as a learner and completed meticulous projects. During the pilot study in 2017, she had arrived at the program late on several days because she was part of a summer school whose times conflicted, but during 2018, she was able to attend the program for its entirety. She expressed a keen interest in the visual arts and was most interested in becoming an artist, fashion designer, or veterinarian. She created her own cartoons and loved drawing, but her school did not offer an art class. Judy was most interested, she noted in her Kindred application, in becoming “a better artist,” but she also wanted “to meet new people and learn new things.”

Celine was a thirteen-year-old first-time participant who had lived previously in Ghana, Abu Dhabi, New Jersey, and New York. While a self-proclaimed “shy” student, she had learned Arabic and English, and when she was younger, she had spoken a regional language native to Ghana whose name she could not recall. She enjoyed Physical Education and Theatre Arts in school, and she admitted that she did not see herself as enjoying writing, but she did enjoy being creative and imagining stories. She also loved to read, especially manga that has been translated to English. In her application, she also mentioned that she liked art “because I can show my feelings.”

Katie was a thirteen-year-old and first-time participant in 2018. She was the granddaughter of immigrants from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. While she lamented not being able to speak Spanish fluidly, she understood her grandparents when they spoke Spanish to her and expressed pride in her Latina identity. Katie was interested in reading and received regular book recommendations from her mother, who was a former elementary school teacher and had recently become a teacher educator. In her application, Katie mentioned that she enjoyed swimming, writing poetry, fantasy stories, romantic comedies, historical fiction, and composing songs. She also mentioned that if she could change anything about the world, she would “want discrimination and hate towards people with different sexualities to stop.”

Methodological Framework & Research Design

This study was informed by qualitative research methods, particularly grounded theory informed by a critical postmodern turn. Interviews, observations, readings, notetaking, and analyses took place simultaneously and iteratively, as I examined the ways in which multimodal engagement impacted students’ capacity for transdisciplinary play, social reimaginations, and self-development. I was influenced by the New London Group’s (1996) work on multiliteracies and Ajayi’s (2015) concept of critical multimodal literacies, which have acknowledged students’ capacity to engage in sophisticated forms of meaning-making and multiple acts of creative production.

The table below outlines the relationship between my research questions, data collection tools, and data analysis.

Table 2 Research Process and Analysis

Research Questions	Data Collection	Data Analysis*
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<p>1) In what ways do Black, Latinx, and queer students demonstrate investment in critical multimodal literacies?</p>	<p>Notes from constructivist interviews with student participants and three adult facilitators (Charmaz, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Hoffmann, 2007).</p>	<p>Data are categorized into key codes using situational analysis and constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Clarke, 2005, 2011).</p>
<p>2) How do world-building projects reveal the possibilities and limits of the imagination?</p>	<p>Fieldnotes & memos from participant observations of the summer program workshops and meetings (Emerson, et al., 2011).</p>	<p>Grounded theory applied through situational analysis, with maps that disrupt linear ways of reading and allow for assemblages, (dis)connections, and disorder to materialize (Clarke, 2011).</p>
<p>3) What conditions can inspire youth to articulate their identities as evolving writers and leaders?</p>	<p>Document analysis of program materials such as pre- and post-program surveys, unit plans, and student portfolios (Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2005, 2011).</p>	<p>Codes, memos, and theories that provide opportunities for reflections on the trialectics of space</p>

		<p>(Soja, 1996).</p> <p>*This process involved iterative movements across data, memos, analytic codes, and theory development (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).</p>
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Data Collection Procedures

This research involved open-ended interviews with program stakeholders, participant observations of workshops, and document analyses of artifacts and surveys to understand the workings of the program. The work drew from ethnographic methods and grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2006), notably the constructivist tradition of situated analysis to isolate primary themes and ideas that were informed by my own subjectivities (Clarke, 2005; Clarke, 2011; Charmaz, 2006).

Interviews Aligned with constructivist interview methods, I perceived the ethnographic process of data collection to be a collaborative one in which I valued the insights, questions, and directions towards which interviewees gestured (Charmaz, 2006). At the same time, I recognized that I was not an objective interviewer, having been influenced by my own education

and current studies at Teachers College, where doctoral coursework has illuminated the ways in which formal schooling is often designed to restrict the student's body and mind (Street, 1995; Manning, 2018).

I entered this study with optimism about the potential for learning opportunities in out-of-school spaces. Recognizing that a small sample size of a few participants could produce findings "of lasting significance," I viewed interviews with the three program facilitators and a limited number of student participants as having potential importance to a wider academic community (Charmaz, 2006, p. 108). Conversations were propelled by a series of follow-up questions that hinge on each individual's specific responses (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Hoffmann, 2007). I did not stop anyone from backtracking or redirecting conversations and instead drew from the respondents' own language when pursuing follow-up questions. For instance, if I heard an interviewee bring up funding, criticality, space, or queer identities and was interested in sharing more, I was inclined to find openings for deeper conversations about the topics that were raised by the participants themselves.

I remained attuned to the ways in which both interviewers and interviewees contributed to the shaping and direction of conversations, which were unstructured and conducted with participants throughout the course of the program (Scheurich, 1997). Conversations took place largely during the workshops and afterwards with facilitators and students. As in the pilot study, interviews were not audio recorded during the 2018 program, as I felt they could place even greater distance between the researcher and students than was already present. When I spoke with participants, I jotted down direct quotations when I had my journal open and completed reflective fieldnotes both immediately after the conversations and later in the evenings. I filled

in potential gaps by adding to recollections at the end of each workshop day, when I typed up my notes on my computer.

I also kept in mind a set of questions, which inevitably evolved as I spoke with participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Questions that came up included the following: “What are you making?” “Have you done anything similar before?” “How did you come up with this idea?” Questions remained largely open-ended so that I did not unintentionally impose “preconceived categories” or force issues onto participants (Charmaz, 2006). When students worked on their creative projects, for instance, I aimed to have natural conversations rather than force participants to address pointed questions. In total, I engaged in roughly 1-2 hour interviews with each student participant throughout the summer program.

During the interviews, I was committed to the participant’s language and tone, avoiding “irrelevant, superficial, or forced questions” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 63). I refrained from pushing for conversations if participants seemed to be deeply focused on their project or otherwise occupied. As the workshops often included transition times for clean-up and set-up of activities, I also found time to make connections with students and guest teachers during breaks. Conversations with the three adult co-facilitators were more frequent and structured, beginning with program planning meetings during the fall of 2016, continuing with weekly meetings during the summers, and following with reflective interviews after the program in 2018. Interviews with adult facilitators were about an hour at a time, with about seven meetings in total, with no additional obligations outside of normal program planning and operations.

Participant observations A second source of data stems from participant observations of workshops. Research sites are typically “initially unfamiliar,” but following the pilot study, I hoped to gain a deeper understanding of the participants’ use of space and daily habits that

emerged as patterns throughout the program during the summer of 2018 (Emerson, et al., 2011, p. 1). The acts of observing and participating were dialectical and interdependent activities (p. 19). I thus gathered jottings during quieter moments as teachers led workshops, and I also took notes in between helping students acquire supplies like extra paint and construction paper.

During data collection, I made choices about what to highlight based on my own experiences and perceptions as an educator, researcher, learner, and an individual with multiple dimensions of identity. Ultimately, both the selection and framing of events in specific ways transformed the events themselves (p. 12). The workshops that I observed and took part in were constructions of perceived reality, or “a version of the world” that relied on the selection of words, style, organization, and senses produced as a result of “highly selective and partial recountings of observed and re-evoked details” (p. 46).

As with interview notes, daily jottings were expanded after each workshop day. During the pilot study, I found it somewhat challenging to remain present and attuned to my own conversations with others, while keeping as faithful to the jotted recordings, so I added reflective memos in the evenings, a process I repeated during the primary data collection period. During the summer of 2018, I found that I could remain more attuned to participants’ interactions and conversations more organically, as I had a better understanding of the program’s operations and practices, and I did not feel as though I had to jot notes from the periphery. Returning to the program for a second summer also allowed me to reconnect with previous participants and ultimately enhanced my memory of the dialogues beyond initial impressions and my recollection of selective moments (Charmaz, 2006). While I was not able to capture everything that happened from my limited vantage point, I was able to expand on key moments that I observed and also build on these notes with follow-up interviews throughout and after the program. I

engaged with all participants on a daily basis, usually for a few minutes at a time through ad-hoc conversations, which totaled approximately an hour per student throughout the entire summer.

Documents and artifacts The third source of data comes in the form of document analysis. Extant documents (Charmaz, 2006) included program materials that existed prior to the study, such as pre-written survey questions and unit plans created by the facilitators. Additionally, students constructed final online portfolios of work produced during the summer workshop. While not every student was able to attend every workshop, all students were given time to complete projects in the final week of the program and choose pieces to feature family, friends, and community members to view during a community showcase at the end of the program. Digital portfolios, shared on the program's official website, consisted of pictures that the facilitators took of students' work and brief artistic statements that the creators composed following each workshop.

Elicited documents (Charmaz, 2006) involved the participants' pre- and post-program survey responses. These were developed by the co-facilitators (see Appendix A). Originally taken by hand on paper, these surveys were then scanned as PDFs for record-keeping, then typed into spreadsheets by robin, before I examined them for further analysis. The surveys revealed that overall, students felt that they could envision using their imaginations with multimodal projects in traditional academic fields such as coding, gaming, science, and architecture. They also indicated that the formation of an intimate and fun community was central to their positive experience during the summer.

At the same time, several participants noted that the program had been more challenging and instructive than they had previously thought, and on average participants indicated that they felt more confident using computer programming, creating multimodal art, producing creative

writing, learning about science and technology, using science and technology for creative purposes, designing cities and maps, building architectural models, and using a 3D modeling program. Such responses point to the possibility that a summer program like the Kindred Summer Program could simultaneously engage youth in disciplines viewed as rigorous but also raise their confidence as learners and as contributors to a learning community.

Data Analysis

This study used interview data, participant observations, documents, and surveys to examine how young women and gender non-binary students engage with critical multimodal literacies and potentially foster creative and critical capacities in a summer program centered around individual and collective world-building. Data analysis was informed by the theoretical underpinning of thirdspace (Soja, 1996) with a constructivist orientation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). While constructivism itself is a heterogeneous field, there are some overlapping commonalities amongst researchers: an understanding of the social construction of identities, the intersubjectivity of agents, co-constitutive nature of beliefs, persistence of normative structures, and complex notions of contingency (Jackson, 2009, p. 175-176). I recognize that fieldnotes and analyses are influenced by the choices made when, for instance, removing certain utterances for perceived clarity sitting in a selected area of the room to observe and highlight specific exchanges (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As I revisited the data, I used reflexive writing to analyze data and highlight codes that I found to be salient (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Luttrell, 2010; Richardson, 2000).

Constructivist Grounded Theory

In this study, I examined notes taken from open-ended interviews, fieldnotes from workshop observations, program planning documents, pre- and post-program surveys, and

students' online portfolios to better understand how the program engages students in critical multimodal literacies through intentional play, community building, and imaginative world-building. Because qualitative research is "inherently interpretive, subjective, and partial," my intention was not to create broadly generalizable data but focus on descriptive details that I found to be meaningful as a researcher (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 45).

Data analysis was informed by constructivist grounded theory, as I aimed to identify themes during constant shifts between data and analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2005). Analysis remained open-ended, as in Glaser and Strauss's original writing (1967), but I would assert that themes did not simply emerge from data. Instead, as Adele Clarke (2005), Fred Erickson (2004), and others (c.f. Vasudevan, Rodriguez Kerr, Conley, & Riina-Ferre, 2015) have contended, researchers selectively find data, and this process is contingent on our unique backgrounds, experiences, biases, preconceptions, and previous knowledge. At the same time, I strove not to be led purely by unfounded assumptions or problematic impositions, and instead, as I endeavored to make connections based on what student participants, adult co-facilitators, and program documents expressed.

In the tradition of constructivist grounded theory, I made an effort to understand meanings and derived analytic categories and theoretical memos directly from what I observed in responses and artifacts (Emerson, et al., 2011). I found myself aligned with Strauss's (1998) later iterative emphasis (1998), and I made comparisons between different data points to identify areas of convergence and divergence. This process involved consistent evaluations across data sets, memos, situational maps, analytic codes, and theory development (Clarke, 2005; Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

As I moved between interviewing, recording, transcribing, and analyzing, I identified certain patterns and code them. For instance, as I re-read fieldnotes, I coded for references to creative play, community-building, and critical understandings. I attempted to analyze and reexamine concentrated threads once grouped into deliberate categories (Emerson, et al., 2011). Each sketch, episode, dialogue, and sequence of codes reflected my own choices and “particular writer’s lens” (Emerson, et al., 2011, p. 127). I also applied Adele Clarke’s (2005, 2011) situational analysis and mapping to help make sense of coded and uncoded data to make deeper connections across fieldnotes, interview jottings, program artifacts, and spatial conditions. Conducting these analytic exercises helped me interrogate data from new angles, digest information more deeply, develop greater familiarity with data, identify new relations, and expose tacit assumptions (Clarke, 2005, p. 83-85).

As I solicited thoughts and responses from participants, I recognized that my own language was shaped by unique experiences. In rearticulating interactions, I abandoned the goal of capturing pure representations and eschewed “any desire for a seamless narrative, a cohesive identity, or a mimetic representation” (Britzman, 1995, p. 232). As a researcher, I was in a privileged position of listening to and gathering stories that were not my own. As I engaged in interviews and participant observations, therefore, it was my aim not to make critiques but remain a humble part of the reflection process, pose thoughtful questions, and center the study’s participants. At the same time, I recognized my own influence as a researcher, as I developed relationships with research participants and highlighted patterns that I noticed across the data to identify compelling insights (Emerson, et al., 2011, p. 123; Saldana, 2009, p. 251; Charmaz, 2006, p 150, 153).

Spatial Analysis in Three Dimensions

Referenced earlier in this research, the work of Edward Soja (1996) has helped to anchor this study to a tradition of thirdspace theory (Lefebvre 1991; Bhabha, 1994; Gutiérrez, 2008). A trialectics of space, according to Soja, is “a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meanings” (p.2). An assessment of firstspace opens up perspectives about the material and physical components of space that permit social relations. A secondspace lens offers a crystalized understanding of conceived spaces, which often reflect the operations of spatial power through the efforts of some urban planners and policymakers, who perpetuate the racialization of segregated spaces. In this study, however, I demarcate how firstspace, secondspace, and thirdspace operate in separate and overlapping ways to foster creative self-expressions, futurist imaginings, and transformative literate identities.

Thirdspace exposes the radical possibilities of understanding the provisional and ambiguous contexts within and across spaces. This concept challenges the notion of neatly demarcated spaces and instead outlines how the concrete configurations of firstspace and the conceptual worlds of secondspace function simultaneously and independently. Soja’s thirdspace is a flexible term that is appropriate to a concomitant rise of “relativism, radical pluralism, eclecticism, and pastiche in an effort to avoid totalizing or essentialist metanarratives” (Soja, 1996, p. 244). This spatial theory has been situated in the layered and interconnected cityscape of Los Angeles, but the language of first, second, and thirdspaces is useful in its understanding of space as a useful construct that I adapt to the research site of the Kindred Program.

Following Soja, therefore, this study challenges the notion of spatiality as static and unidimensional. Thirdspace exposes an interstitial place for “critical exchange where the geographical imagination can be expanded to encompass a multiplicity of perspectives” (Soja,

1996, p.5). Accordingly, this research examines how space can foster a close and creative learning community, multimodal speculative worlds, and real-and-imagined social identities. While the community program was contained within the four walls of an off-campus educational space to protect participants from environmental conditions and social interlopers, as any space would, its walls were also porous. For instance, students extended relationships beyond the program by walking to and from the subway together, chatting on group messaging platforms, and having informal gatherings outside the program. In addition, the program's borders were malleable due to the end-of-summer program showcase and digital portfolios, which featured student-selected pieces and made students' voices accessible by the wider community. I will close by elaborating on my own positionality and potential affordances and restraints on this research.

Positionality of the Researcher

Critical Postmodernity's Influence on the Research(er)

As I was influenced by critical postmodernity, I approached this research with the understanding that I would be examining partial realities as an outsider. As the program was situated in a particular sociohistorical context, I aligned with constructivist scholars who maintained that knowledge is built through historical conditions, cultural values, and alignment with societal beliefs (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Peter McLaren (1996) has advocated for a sustained commitment to Freire in light of the critical postmodern response to critical theory, noting that "Freire's work cannot be so easily dismissed as an anachronistic project that has failed to notice history's wake-up call from recent postmodernist critiques" (p. 182).

Yet critical consciousness, in my reading of Freire (1970), is not a point of arrival that sits at the intersection of a bifurcated moment of pre- and post-liberation. This progress narrative

is complicated by critical postmodern notions of selfhood, which is not a static conception but always already in the process of becoming and unable to be captured perfectly by subjective interviewees or researcher with various intentions, only some of which are evident (Scheurich, 1997). Material-discursive enunciations are deeply unstable and incapable of capturing experiences in their entirety, as narratives continually altered by the thinkers, speakers, listeners, readers, receivers, and producers. Knowledge about historical memory is contested and reshaped by dynamic flows of social power, and I wanted to remain attentive to my own limitations as a listener, observer, conversationalist, and agent in the world.

Despite critical theorists' purported attachment to a Eurocentric project with pure rationality as a central telos, some scholars have pointed to the ways in which critical postmodernity positions a researcher to trouble existing power structures but also adopt more than one epistemological stance (Agger, 1991; Allen, 2016; Allen, 2015). As Foucault (1984) has indicated, the point of criticism is not to identify a universal structure or endpoint but to interrogate the constitution of the self as a subject that is able to act and think within a historical moment.

While acknowledging the impossibility of inscribing a historical record of individual or group dynamics, I attempt to find a productive space between Freirean critical pedagogy and the critical postmodern inclination to value plurality and experiential knowledge. Henry Giroux (1999) contended that a postmodern pedagogy can acknowledge how youth shape dynamic and intersectional identities within historical moments, especially in "spheres generally ignored by schools" (p. 110). As a researcher inhabiting Kindred's out-of-school space, I was highly aware of different social engagements and their implications for this writing, but rather than striving for

definition of truth with a high degree of accuracy, I followed Denzin and Lincoln (2011) in providing crystallized accounts, supported by reflexive journaling and contextualized retellings.

Those influenced by critical postmodernity are often suspicious of claims about singular truths, but my epistemological stance did not entail a dismissal of “conventional methods of knowing and telling,” which are still capable of being leveraged and critiqued (Richardson, 2000, p. 928). Even if scholars operate on assumptions of competing perceptions of reality, writers can continue to help illuminate and develop others’ understanding of truths that seem distinguishable from unfounded and deceptive statements. As no single researcher can possibly capture a consistent and clear picture of reality, my narratives are incomplete but may nonetheless be gesture towards valuable insights about the promise and shortcomings of educational thirdspaces. The subsequent sub-section presents additional insights into my role as a researcher and standpoints in this inquiry.

Participation in Affinity Groups

This study aims to articulate the value of educational spaces outside of formal institutional mandates. My interest as a researcher was in the exploration of firstspace, secondspace, and thirdspace, in which students and instructional co-facilitators — rather than administrators and policymakers — were the architects of learning. I attempted to refrain from predetermining conditions for liberation or single-handedly establishing the means for transformation on behalf of others. I found that a more productive research positionality avoided the imposition of ideas, in favor of productive dialogue with participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 113). I felt inclined towards this orientation, and I was aware of my affiliation with Teachers College and remained vigilant in working against any impulse to rescue a perceived oppressed class with correctional practices, as Freire (1970) has warned.

Writing reflexive memos at the end of the day was one way to better understand my positionality (Richardson, 2000). The practice of reflexivity also helped reveal my own subjectivities (Pillow, 2003). Reflexive acts are often important to ethnographic projects, as researchers are influenced by life experiences, unexamined biases, and sociohistorical factors, which can vastly alter documentations and analyses (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Luttrell, 2010). Barad (2007) has helpfully pointed to the weaknesses of reflexivity lacking a framework to examine “gender-and-science-in-the-making” and its claims to representationalism (p. 87). Resisting an impulse to depict complete representations, I attempted to be acutely aware of the limitations of writing as a tool to re-present what I noticed. Rather than impose my own ideas about pedagogical practices, however, I aimed to listen and partner with program participants with as much humility and openness as possible. I found it important to celebrate the critical and creative productions of youth, who participated in generative learning opportunities to enact critical multimodal literacies.

Still, I acknowledged that I could at any time be complicit in reinforcing hierarchies, as power differentials might nevertheless inform the tone of conversations or the comfort that participants could have felt (Hoffmann, 2007; Charmaz, 2006). I took responsibility for the immediate individual actions related to my physical presence and historical benefits I have accrued because of “situations not of one’s own making” (Lee, 2014, p. 242). I was also aware of the potential “politics and privilege of my researcher role,” especially as I was not writing from an emic perspective (Villenas, 1996, p. 715).

During the pilot study, I grappled with my status as a relative newcomer to Brooklyn. In order to be able to afford to live in Manhattan during my graduate studies, I worked as a residential life staff member in the Upper West Side. As a result, I had not spent a significant

amount of time outside of Manhattan's disproportionately affluent neighborhoods. I realized that joining the summer program as a researcher would not grant me immediate membership into this community. As I have continued to deepen my relationship with the community and program, I have attempted to find a balance between taking and making space.

While I can only speak from my own, unfinished standpoint as a researcher, as a Korean-American, I have been advantaged and disadvantaged by the intentionally structured dominant narrative of East Asians as intellectual high-achievers. The mythology of individualized success and national meritocracy has minimized the destructive impact of systemic forces, racial injustices, and legalized discrimination on minority communities and the disproportionate effects on African-American students (Guinier, 2004; Milner IV, 2010). I do not wish to diminish the legacy of struggle and oppression endured by Asian-American groups as a result of racist policies like the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the internment of Japanese-American citizens during World War II, and other policies and practices that have shaped a second-class citizenship for immigrants of Asian countries and their descendants (Sue, et al., 2009). Political reports, for instance, have shown that the majority of those charged under the Economic Espionage Act from 2009-2015 have been people of Asian heritage, with convicted defendants receiving sentences twice as long as those with Western last names (Kim, 2017). This type of bias reflects and upholds the image of Asians and Asian-Americans as perpetual foreigners.

Asian-Americans also benefited from historical, political, and social shifts in the mid-20th century that broadened opportunities for full participation in and contributions to economic life (Hilger, 2016). Many Korean-Americans in particular have been able to gain access to middle-class resources with the "knowledge and motives that are required for successful entrepreneurship" (Bogan & Darity, 2008, p. 2009). Although I was a beneficiary of free school

meals, subsidized housing, and financial aid, I was also the product of suburban public school education, elite universities, and teaching experiences in well-resourced independent schools. Like many children, I was exposed to racist and sexist language in my youth, but I also benefited from a school with a robust music program and teachers who believed in my academic potential.

I am sensitive to the historical harms committed by academic researchers in their quest for scientific progress. Those affiliated with institutional powers have engaged in horrifying experiments such as the Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis, which utterly disregarded the rights of Black men for four decades (King, 2016). Such studies have pathologized minoritized communities as less able, morally bankrupt, or part a larger monolith. I realize that although I am not committing outright deception in the same manner, I am in some ways tied to historical colonizing practices like the social science research whose “products and practices carry forward the social history of that group and exclude the epistemologies of other social groups” (Scheurich & Young, 1997, p. 8). My knowledge has also been supplemented and endorsed by institutions that have historically benefitted from the enslavement and oppression of Black communities (Foner, 2017). The continued expropriation of Black families and neighborhoods has continued with the expansion of predominantly white institutions and residents into West Harlem through the use of eminent domain and other predatory tactics (Mays, 2017).

This displacement of existing residents and businesses deepens social and economic disparities between wealthier white and Asian communities on one hand and underserved Black and Latinx communities on the other. If I am invited into predominantly Black spaces such as the Kindred Summer Program, I hope to maintain humility and a genuine desire to learn rather than impose an agenda grounded in my own beliefs about best educational practices or signs of learning. In this work, I center the critical multimodal practices and self-motivated expressions

of the research participants, and as a scholar, I strive to do the least harm possible by remaining attuned to invitations to engage with participants, whether signaled through active dialogue or body language.

György Lukács has maintained that theorists may unintentionally preserve divisions and conflicts, but researchers can work to investigate the boundaries between actual existence and a possible future state of “self-emancipation” (Held, 1980, p. 25). While the influence of outsiders can be destructive, the disintegration of barriers between universities and nearby communities could also precipitate larger social movements (Cushman, 1996), and it is my hope that this kind of scholarship might be of interest to other educators who want to help youth build their capacities and contributions to civic life.

Situating the Study

My research points to generative and collaborative ways of world-making that are fueled by young adults’ imaginative storytelling and engagement with critical multimodal literacies. I acknowledge a certain set of inherent limitations within this type of qualitative research. As with any inquiry that carries an anti-positivist stance, this study is influenced by my subjective views of social dynamics and salient codes. As an educator who has worked with secondary students and found schools to be inspiring but often constraining, I have shifted my attention to out-of-school spaces with this study in my desire to center what is possible when education program through more self-governed practices. Given my qualitative training and research interests, I was predisposed to see student participants as intellectually capable, hospitably oriented, and curious about their social worlds.

In addition, the relatively small sample size of respondents might be an issue for readers who prefer larger studies on which to base conclusive findings. While the insights shared in the

subsequent chapters might resonate with those interested in multiliteracies, out-of-school learning, and community-based organizations, this study does not propose a singular, definitive educational model that can be applied in any context. In joining Lyotard's (1984) rejection of a totalizing metanarrative, I am intrigued by the articulation of heterogeneous, fragmented, and shifting social conditions. I seek to emphasize the uniqueness of individual circumstances and sociocultural conditions, and concrete generalizability is thereby not a central concern.

Finally, social change can certainly be realized through incremental progress, but it has also been criticized for being overly idealistic, imprecise, and distanced from the real world (Duncan--Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Ávila & Pandya, 2012; Said, 2001). I hope not to present singular narratives of resilience but instead center the engagements of youth who are critical, creative, and compassionate individuals with the power to envision and forge a more equitable future in coalitions. As Patricia Hill Collins (2000) has asserted, a project of liberation is part of a broader struggle for freedom of all underrecognized groups.

The following three chapters trace the ways in which first, second, and thirdspaces unfolded during my two-and-a-half years with the Kindred Summer Program. Following Lefebvre (1991) and Soja (1996), I examine participants' spatial practices, their representations of space, and resulting spaces of representation. None of these types of spaces is privileged over any other, but I am drawing these temporary and artificial boundaries in my analysis to highlight important insights. In drawing on the trialectics of space, I follow Soja in his articulation of three distinct analytical frames through which to understand the complexity of a space (p. 21-22). In the next chapter, I will begin by commenting on the physical and material uses of space that I argue allowed for particular self-expressions from nonnormative identity positions.

CHAPTER IV: MATERIAL SELF-EXPRESSIONS IN FIRSTSPACE

In this chapter, I will highlight how two students used critical multimodal literacies to contest normative stories with personal narratives that conveyed their potential for self-expression. In Lasisi Ajayi's (2015) formulation of critical multimodal literacies, students engage with various representational materials and use them to help explain structural conditions and confront social inequities. His research examined the multiliteracy practices young Nigerian women who used "embodied knowledge and repertoires of practice" to subvert social norms (p. 220). Giving students the opportunity to critique injustices and create counterproductions can help make visible nonnormative identities and ways of being.

In this chapter, I am guided by Edward Soja's (1996) notion of firstspace. In Soja's reading of Henri Lefebvre, spatial practices reflect definitive, material, and tangible objects within a space that delineate measurable features of a particular territory. The firstspace of the Kindred Program, for instance, included the rectangular one-room space, in which moveable tables and chairs gave shape to a range of multimodal activities. This flexible arrangement helped accommodate various group formations, though most often, desks were put together into one large table in the middle of the room. At times, however, they were placed into two separate stations at which students worked on different activities.

Posters, pamphlets, and campus flyers hung around the room, as they had been left behind by the university students in the literary arts program who had used the space during the academic year. These posters referenced events such as a "Queering Radical Pedagogies Teach-In." They had also posted clippings of *New York Times* articles with titles like "Life on the Margins in LGBT Africa." Other firstspace materials included a small stage located near the front entrance and elevated about a foot off of the ground floor. Stacks of plush cushions leaned

against a floor-length frosted glass window and occupied the floor below a slightly elevated platform. These were pulled out regularly for students to lounge on during book readings and discussions.

The program's firstspace was also constituted by the infrastructure of a building's physical features. At the back of the room was a small closet office with extra soap and cleaning supplies, along with a large table that held a supply of snacks for students. Co-facilitators, interns, fellows, and support staff set up and replenished fruit bowls, sandwich supplies, and chips throughout the program day. Towards the back of the large room were a mini-fridge and storage cabinets that contained excess pantry items, and a sense of plentitude encouraged students to return to the table and get more food at any time.

In contrast to schools that required hall passes and issued other forms of accountability, Kindred made explicit on the first day that students were free to move around the space as they needed. In many schools, administrators and teachers disproportionately police Black and Latinx students in ways that mirror broader forces of systemic criminalization (Stoudt, Fine, and Fox, 2011; Crenshaw, Ocen, and Nanda, 2015; Morris, 2016). In part because it operated outside of institutional schooling, however, the Kindred Program was able to create its own rules. As such, students were allowed to get up during activities at any time without adults' permission or sanctioned passes. Co-facilitators also supplied the bathroom with menstrual products, which co-facilitator Grace remarked were used more readily here in the off-campus university site than the previous public library space, where students would have had to grab tampons or pads in the open and carry them to the public restrooms.

In my firstspace analysis of Kindred, I comment on the material engagements and visible flows that were informed by the infrastructure, movable seating, and multimodal crafts that

produced various articulations of selfhood. This chapter comments on two participants' engagements with journals, masks, weavings, and interactive fictions, whose physical manifestations revealed how students actively constructed their identities and beliefs in visible ways. In the first two sections, I explain how Ada's and Lyra's critical investments in firstspace elements helped them make clear their personal identities and ideologies. The final sub-section is devoted to a commentary on the relevance of nonessentialist positions in students' self-expressive multimodal projects.

Ada's Personal Incantations in Multimodal Artifacts

Expressions of Empowerment in Self-Made Journals

Ada was a seventeen-year-old who identified as a AfroLatinx gender-fluid student who used both she/her and they pronouns.¹³ She was tall and wore fashionable round glasses with thick frames, and she aspired to work as a model, having already attended a few casting calls in the city. Like many Kindred participants, she was also an avid reader, as her book bag often contained fantasy books that she had checked out from her local library. She knew the staff there and received recommendations from them on a regular basis.

She was a three-time participant who had returned to Kindred because she enjoyed meeting new people each summer, and she expressed that the program felt like a "safe space where no judgment is allowed," which was particularly important for "young girls and the LGBTQ+ community." In the past two years, she served as a fellow and had enjoyed mentoring newer students. She had an open, friendly disposition and was proactive in taking care of regular fellow duties like collecting name tags, wiping off the tables, cleaning up snacks, and sweeping

¹³ For antecedent clarity, I most often refer to Ada with "she" and "her" pronouns, which she readily used and responded to during the time of the study. Nevertheless, I fluctuate at times and note the importance of pronoun fluidity in everyday discourse as a way to disrupt normative gender expressions.

floors. Other adult program staff also contributed to these tasks, in addition to storing students' projects and borrowed laptops in the cabinets.

On the first day of the program, the co-facilitators began with an ice-breaker, or what Kindred referred to as "movement breaks." Grace wanted to include physical energizers because she felt that writers often benefited from keeping the brain and body active. Movement breaks were also a way for fellows to lead program activities and give them an opportunity to teach their peers. For her opening activity, Ada guided the participants through a pair stretching exercise that she had done with cheerleaders. During the academic year, she served as a captain of her school's cheerleading squad, and she brought in physical warm-ups to Kindred. She directed program participants and adult co-facilitators to hold hands with one another and pull back and forth to stretch their legs. Because adult instructors, undergraduate interns, and program assistants participated as well, student fellows like Ada demonstrated their capacity to command the entire room and invite adults to follow their lead as well.

After Ada's movement break, the students returned to the large cluster of tables at the center of the room. Co-facilitator robin explained that they would create journals, for which Octavia Butler served as a guiding spirit. Several students had heard of the program's eponym, but to acquaint others with Butler and her work, robin offered what Tovani and Moje (2017) might call a "microlecture," or an informative talk under twelve minutes that provided enough background information to spark student interest. Microlectures were a low-movement activity that did not demand a high level of active involvement, but they were an efficient way to deliver the same background information to students who ranged in ages. Although the program was an out-of-school learning community that functioned separately from institutional mandates and policies, certain moves resembled schooling practices, and robin's microlectures were perhaps

most reflective of teacher-directed mini-lessons. These talks were no more than a few minutes long and were accompanied by visuals that showed, in this case, pictures of Octavia Butler and her own journals.

Although the co-facilitators revisited the curricula every year to keep content fresh for returning students, they typically began each summer with a journal-making exercise. This activity helped (re)introduce Octavia Butler to the participants, and the project was a relatively accessible entry point into the program's hands-on activities. After constructing their own journals with scrapbook paper and awls, students would later use these journals to compose their own writing, which could be developed into longer branching narratives in the future.

By asking students to think about the work involved in making journals, the program also established explicit connections between material origins and production processes. While the co-facilitators were inspired by science fiction and world-building as modeled by writers like Octavia Butler, many conversations were grounded in environmental issues and its intersections with racial justice. When students created their own weavings, for instance, they began by watching a video about the origins of fabric and a discussion about the formation of textiles like cotton and silk through land extraction, factory work, designers, and distributors. In creating their own journals, students had the opportunity to learn about the sources of everyday objects and the often invisibilized labor behind them.

Co-facilitators attempted to strike a balance between offering unbounded explorations of new creative heights and the establishment of clear directives. They regarded Butler's own journal entries as models, but students had a great deal of latitude to make informed decisions as agentive artists. robin showed a few excerpts from Butler's handwritten work, which had been acquired by The Huntington Library in 2008 and contained self-affirming comments such as, "I

shall be a bestselling author. After *Imago*, each of my books will be on the bestseller lists of LAT, NYT, PW, WP, etc. My novels will go onto the above lists whether publishers push them hard or not, whether I'm paid a high advance or not, whether I ever win another award or not. This is my life. I write bestselling novels" (Durkin, 2016).

Butler's writing remains widely regarded today in part because of her talent and the force with which she believed in it. Kindred co-facilitators wanted to inspire program participants to develop and exhibit a similar kind of self-assuredness, and they invited students to write mantras, or "incantations," in the journals to revive their spirits during challenging times. While these statements on their own would be insufficient for the amelioration of an impoverished schooling culture that does routinely fails its Black, brown, and queer students, they could help students foster practices of self-affirmation.

Students' expressions could be hidden on the inside of the journal in an indecipherable code or made public and legible to others. In my examination of the Kindred Summer Program's firstspace (Soja, 1996), I was attuned to the ways in which students made use of material affordances to make statements about themselves and their identities. Students' incantations were often pulled from song lyrics or poetry. Some looked through Instagram feeds of poets like Nayyirah Waheed for quotations, and others tucked an earbud from their smartphones to streamed Youtube songs, listening for key phrases from the *Hamilton* soundtrack or pop songs to write in their journals.

Ada followed in the tradition of Octavia Butler and authored statements that represented her desire and capacity to be a self-advocate. She centered declarations of positive self-encouragement in her journal. Her chosen statement, "Nothing is impossible, just a challenge," was a common refrain that she had told herself to propel herself forward when she faced personal

barriers. Instead of looking for quotations written by and about others, she decided to highlight self-empowering aphorisms that carried purchase in her own life.

On a separate occasion, she had expressed that she felt that being a student of mixed heritage was complicated. As an aspiring model, she had also seen that girls were separated by perceived skin tone, and she expressed frustration at the fact that white girls were cast most often. Yet peers at school made assumptions about her “being snooty,” which she felt were unwarranted characterizations based on her phenotypic features and mixed heritage.

Using self-empowering statements was one way for Ada to build and project confidence. In her journal, Ada took the opportunity to speak back to those who denied or underestimated her potential. She eventually penned a poem that spoke directly to her complex identities and abundant capabilities. In her poem “Mulatto,” she expressed, “A mulatto, but that’s not the only thing I am / not just black and white. / Pero soy negra, blanca, e hispana.” Then directing the reader’s attention towards her future, she indicated, “I will make a path in my road. I will control the pen and paper of my life. Writing my own destiny and creating my life.”

Ada used her AfroLatinx identity as a way to destabilize assumptions about her and assert control over her own path. In foregrounding her mixed heritage, she conveyed that she existed beyond a racial binary and instead spoke to the ontological simultaneity of being Black, white, and Latinx. Self-identifying as “negra, blanca, e hispana” did not mean that she would be relegated to roles solely designated by singular racial perceptions. She, like Octavia Butler before her, negotiated the terms of her own future and charted her own path forward through the “pen and paper of my life.”

For Ada, having the chance to create statements of self-empowerment in her journal allowed her to assert her racial identity as a positive aspect of selfhood, a position from which

she could control her own narrative rather than being defined by others. In her program feedback, Ada expressed that she appreciated being in a “free space,” and she felt that it was gratifying to be around others who accepted who she was. “Every year,” she wrote, “I get a new family.”

This kind of out-of-school space is valuable for all learners but especially important for Black, Latinx, and gender-nonconforming students who face disproportionate degrees of marginalization in classrooms. Existing outside of mandates that require punitive actions or quantitative metrics of success, out-of-school literacy spaces can play an important role for students like Ada in providing a community of belonging and a space for optimistic self-expression.

Post-Rationalizing with Papier-Mâché Masks

On the second day of the program, the co-facilitators took inspiration from the program’s summer reading, Nnedi Okorafor’s *Akata Witch*, and invited participants to create papier-mâché masks to celebrate either superpowers that they already possessed or powers that they wished they had. To begin the workshop, robin provided a microlecture on the history of masks and their global importance to populations across time. Using a projector, she showed different types of masks and explained that although they were most often associated with Halloween costumes, masks had “a long and complicated global history.”

This part of the program felt the most teacher-directed, but the content’s intentional global shift away from Eurocentric figures was a notable choice. From their seats, students examined different slides with comparative photographs and short video clips of dancers with masks across various cultural and historical traditions. robin pointed to the emotions and actions by performers in ancient Greece, actors in Japanese Noh plays, Zaouli ritualistic dancers, young

women initiates during Mende ceremonies, colorful Carnival revelers, and anti-surveillance antifa activists. She explained that these artifacts had different transformative and disorienting effects across different contexts, stating, “There’s a relationship between masks and magic and otherworldliness.”

Desiree and Terry presented a papier-mâché of a mask that they had created before the program as a model. The students shared what they noticed, considering what kinds of powers it might have and how features such as an oblong nose and wide mouth might endow it with supernatural talking attributes. The participants then created their own “superpower masks,” beginning with a base made out of foil that they creased and folded to add dimensionality. Some manipulated the foil to form ovular masks that covered the entire face with jutting noses, and others arranged the tin to make smaller accessories that could be fixed to the side of the head. After students had created the base outline of their masks, they covered them with newspaper strips dipped liberally in wheat paste to create a mold that they would later cover with acrylic paint.

As they worked, co-facilitators and other adult assistants walked around the room to provide individual support to students while a music playlist featuring Erykah Badu hummed in the background. To help propel their creative work, Terry would ask individual students questions about their work as she circulated the room. In addition to providing material support in the form of extra supplies, she prompted them to explain their thinking and share if they had particular superpowers in mind for their masks. If they did not, she encouraged them to continue to experiment, noting that ideas would continue to emerge as they worked.

The co-facilitators recognized that the creative process was not always a linear sequence from brainstorming to final execution. Instead of insisting on moving in an orderly succession

from abstract ideas to discursive constructions to multimodal configurations, they communicated that perhaps counterintuitively, the motivations of a work might be revealed to students after the production of an artifact. As guest teaching artist Miriam explained, the creative process was rarely linear: “We don’t go from step 1 to step 2 to step 3. We can go from step 4 to step 2.” In her architectural work, she often alternated from sketching to modeling to writing, and different dimensions evolved throughout this iterative process.

Playing with various versions of material constructions and conversing with others to shape their ideas happened simultaneously. Co-facilitators did not cleanly divorce acts of ideation from production, as these were often recursive moves for students. Students did have to find a natural stopping point once the program workshop ended and materials were put away, but they could return to these pieces during the last week of the program, which was used primarily for revisiting and refining any projects that they wanted to present at the closing showcase and their online portfolio. In part because of the low-stakes and iterative nature of the work, students reported in post-program evaluations feeling more comfortable and confident in working across different artistic modes.



Figure 1. Ada's superpower mask. (Photo credit: The Kindred Program. Used with permission.)

After each workshop, students completed artist's statements in which they expressed in writing what they learned, encountered, or tried along the way. They then later typed and posted these as accompaniments for student-selected online portfolio pieces. For her mask, Ada decided to create a protruding unicorn horn and two offset eyes, and she covered the black-painted base of the mask with star-like markings and symbols. The creation of a smooth surface was challenging in putting together the mask, but Ada stated that she was "proud of the overall execution of the mask" in her artist's statement. She wrote that her mask possessed "the superpower of 'Believe it and Achieve it'" and explained that the markings indicated the number of times a magical power had been conjured for any wearer who had their wishes granted.

Like her journal incantations, Ada infused her mask with a personal mantra of self-motivation. She was especially pleased to have been able to make sense of some artistic choices

after creating the mask and having had time to reflect on her own work. She wrote in her statement that she enjoyed beginning with “something abstract” and then filling in a “background story I made.” This move was akin to what Sylvia, who was Miriam’s colleague and a fellow guest teaching artist, would later call *post-rationalizing*. She explained that as an architect, the articulation of intentions might come after material arrangements of architectural forms. Kindred participants could rehearse this practice, for some students like Ada could make sense of their aesthetic choices upon seeing what she had physically accomplished. In this way, creative productions and the rationalizing mind were not separate domains but worked in conjunction to build on their work. Students could bring their ideas to fruition by making artistic discoveries through and after the construction of their multimodal projects.

Experimental constructions, from papier-mâché to science fiction writing, propelled various forms of meaning-making in the Kindred Program. For Ada, the journal creation and superpower mask were creative projects that encouraged multimodal expressions of self-empowerment. She used personal incantations to represent and reinforce the notions of strength and resilience. As students’ confidence in their abilities may decline during their adolescent years (Farrington, et al., 2012), educators in all spaces can build learners’ belief in their own capacities as thinkers and creators by providing opportunities for artistic creations, low-stakes play, and student choice.

Engaging in iterative work is not easy for student producers, as it demands that they reexamine their intentions and visions. I have found that writers find it challenging to revisit their work at times, particularly if a piece feels uninspiring or if the audience or purpose of the writing remains opaque. Instructors often intuit that the process of reconsidering a work can strengthen productions and help an author achieve a desired effect, but it can be difficult to

perceive the value of reexaminations if a piece feels overworked. Completing multimodal projects and engaging in post-rationalizing across different modes, however, inspired creative energy in Kindred participants. Artist's statements helped them make sense of their own work, and while the depth of writing varied from student to student, the invitation to play provided learners the incentive to rethink their work from new angles. In their surveys, students reported feeling significantly more capable of sharing their work with an audience (71%) after the program, and part of this work required explaining their multimodal artifacts to others through online portfolios and gallery walks, which will be discussed more in Chapter VI.

Trying not to pressure students to feel compelled to finish within a constrained time period did result in some unevenness with execution. Some students took longer to finish their projects than others, leaving little time for reflections at the end of the program day. Although the co-facilitators often encouraged students to write thoughtfully, if students wanted to move on, co-facilitators did not express any qualms. Therefore, at times, some students' artist's statements were not as lengthy or substantive as others', as the focus was more on playful experimentations and self-discoveries.

Because the students could decide which three projects and reflections they would ultimately share in their online portfolios, they had greater freedom to determine which post-rationalizations they felt most ready to share with a wider audience. Students consistently mentioned that they appreciated being in a non-judgmental and open learning environment. The program valued multiple forms of creative expression across different mediums, and through material engagements in the firstspace of the program, participants like Ada were able to leverage multimodalities to foreground narratives of self-empowerment. The next section

demonstrates how another student used multimodal activities as a way to center her queer identity and cement positions on social norms through interactive fiction writing.

Lyra's Ideological Textures and Texts

Demonstrations of Investment in Learning Through Coded Weavings

In previous years, the Kindred co-facilitators found that certain multimodal activities did not always evoke desired excitement in students. One such discontinued project was a wearable electronics workshop that encouraged students to design fashion pieces with wearable electric lights for science fiction characters. The co-facilitators noticed, however, that not all students were able to make the lights turn on, leading to frustration on the part of those who were not able to master circuitry in this visible manner. The electric lights were, Terry reflected, “a hard and fast measure of success, even though the designs would be quite cool.” The concept of wearable electronics had appealed to the curriculum designers because they thought it help students explore scientific concepts while expanding their imaginative skills, but they saw that the activity promoted a limited impression of achievement.

To endorse more learner-guided discoveries and magnify possibilities for personal success, the co-facilitators shifted instead to a weaving project in the third summer of the program. Terry's friend Tim was a white male researcher from California with a background in mathematics and energy simulation. During the second summer, he led a coding workshop, and the co-facilitators invited him back in the middle of the 2017 program to lead a workshop on weaving, which had been a personal hobby. He added a lesson on binary coding, and students would later build on these elementary coding principles with their own interactive stories, which will be referenced in the following sub-section on Lyra's branching narrative.

Tim began the workshop by explaining that both weaving and coding involved transmissions of messages, often secret ones. He led a group discussion and a written exercise to help students understand binary coding and its applications on paper. After a brief introduction to the history and concept of binary numbers, students then translated their names into binary code, letter by letter. Co-facilitators provided individual support, and some of the students offered peers assistance if they had previous knowledge of programming languages.

Once everyone had completed their binary translations, Tim guided participants through a workshop on weaving and noted that they could put these codes into woven fabric. Program assistants handed out small kits, which were bags that contained weaving frames, heddles to separate strands of yarn, small combs to make refinements, and wooden needles for initial threading. Students ranged in their familiarity with the craft, so co-facilitators provided different forms of information delivery: Tim modeled basic weaving techniques with the kits, and other adults handed out worksheets that replicated his verbal instructions in detail. Terry also put up instructions with visual diagrams on the whiteboard, which the weavers could look up and reference quickly as they worked. Students were able to choose the specific types of fabric, colors of yarn, and length of materials they wanted to include. While they had the option to code a word like their first names into the weavings, not many decided to complete the task of managing double the cognitive and creative demands if they weaving and coding were new to them.

Lyra was one of the few participants who decided to interlace binary coding into her weaving. She was a thirteen-year-old student with glasses and wavy brown hair who self-identified as a lesbian. The only white student in the program, she was drawn to Kindred because it was a space in which there was not as much “rigidity in conforming to gender roles”

or prejudice in the form of cissexism, as she expressed in her program feedback. At her own school, she had found it difficult to fit in with classmates largely because of her queer identity. After she had come out in sixth grade, she felt frustrated at being repeatedly asked to explain her sexual identity to her straight peers. “When I came out,” she explained to the group during preliminary introductions, “people started asking, ‘Do you like this girl? This girl?’” At Kindred, however, she felt a greater sense of belonging in a safer community where she could discuss “lesbian wisdom” and challenge cisheteronormative narratives.

At times, however, Lyra did not always read social cues gracefully, as she sometimes talked over others in her excitement to share her own thoughts. When sharing either with a large group or with one conversation partner, she was an effusive and enthusiastic speaker, particularly when she was passionate about a topic of personal interest. Lyra was particularly fascinated by manga subculture and Korean pop music, and she was fiercely critical of the Trump administration and the far-right policies that sought to obstruct reproductive rights and economic justice.

When she became animated to the point of dominating a group conversation, however, adult co-facilitators and guest teachers made at first subtle gestures, then more explicit directives, to Lyra about the need to hear from others who had not yet had the opportunity to speak. The adult instructors, especially Desiree and Terry, were aware of the responsibility they had to carve space for Black and Latinx students to feel they could be heard, which necessitated Lyra’s silence at times. Although she was well-meaning and saw herself as a progressive white ally, Lyra occupied a sonic space that prompted adult facilitators and guest teachers to ask her to step back.

In one instance, the co-facilitators had discussed the need to include more voices in discussions in a weekly staff meeting, and robin asked students if they had heard of “stepping in” and “stepping out” of a conversation. Lyra answered immediately, “If you’ve talked a lot, you can minimize your contribution to the discussion. And if you haven’t talked as much, you can contribute to it at least once.” robin agreed and said that because they were there as a collective group, they were all needed to help “maintain, build, and nurture the space. The co-facilitators referenced this practice when Lyra’s voice became disproportionately vocal. Such reminders were helpful for Lyra, who became more cautious about overspeaking and actively minimized her contributions with these reminders. The co-facilitators wanted Lyra to feel that she was welcome in the space but not at the expense of Black and Latinx students in the program.

Although co-facilitators sometimes asked Lyra to reduce her verbal contributions, they did not aim to shame or embarrass her for her verbosity. When she was asked to step back, Lyra would often sit back in her seat and turn her attention to drawing. She was an avid illustrator who often doodled during discussions or microlectures as a way to have her hands active. As a student who had been diagnosed with ADHD, she explained that keeping a drawing pad close to her helped her remain focused. Being able to focus her energies into a productive artistic channel, allowed her be more mindful.

On occasion, she was prone to distractions such as checking her phone, a habit that sometimes preoccupied her to the detriment of her multimodal productions. Generally, the program had no explicit rules against the use of electronics, but when robin or Terry saw that Lyra was lingering on social media on her mobile phone for more than a few minutes, they came by to check in with her. When Lyra was not producing sentences for an Exquisite Corpse language game, for instance, Terry came around to her side of the table to whisper, “Did you

hear the prompt?” These private redirections were forms of calling in rather than calling out in order to help bring Lyra back to communal engagements. With open discussions that involved others, however, they gave more pronounced and direct reminders to Lyra about “stepping back.”

Naturally, some projects engaged Lyra’s interest more than others. Completing a “superpower mask,” which was explained in the previous sub-section with Ada’s project, was a particular challenge for Lyra, who had begun with a conception of a Medusa head that had several snake heads jutting out of the face. This ambitious undertaking required more intensive time and engagement than Lyra was able to devote. A program intern, Fae, offered help, which Lyra gladly took but soon became more interested in socializing with peers and abandoned the foil work until the papier mâché had dried and was ready for paint.

Lyra was also not as enthused about movement breaks such as yoga, dance, or karate. As others gathered at the front stage, she sometimes lingered behind at the large table, and this delay prompted co-facilitators to call her over to join the rest of the group. The staff made a deliberate choice to have all students to be involved in the movement breaks, which were led by fellows, co-facilitators, or guest teachers. Even if individuals chose not to be highly active participants, the aim was to have everyone grouped together in a unified space to support the fellows, guest teachers, or instructors who were leading the movement break. In this way, Kindred attempted to structure opportunities for collective bonding through some degree of close physical proximity, though participation could be modified based on students’ needs and varying degrees of comfort, which will be addressed further in Chapter VI. Like schooling spaces, the program organized common activities, but co-facilitators were driven by a desire for a shared participatory experience rather than strict accountability measures and bodily control.

In contrast to the mask-making and movement breaks, Lyra appeared to be highly engaged by the weaving activity. It required long periods of focus and repetitive movements, but she was deeply interested in coding and had explored some programming languages on her own. Lyra participated in the weaving activity with intensive focus, as it involved both hands and required her to keep track of multiple elements: her binary message, yarn color patterns, and weaving techniques.



Figure 2. Lyra's binary weaving (Photo credit: The Kindred Program. Used with permission.)

Lyra was interested in coding the acronym “LGBTQ” to represent her queer identity. Her decision to queer her piece was motivated by her strained relationship with her grandparents,

who did not acknowledge her sexual identity. “My grandfather,” Lyra expressed to me as she was weaving, “said that if I were to be in love with a woman, I shouldn’t have the right to marry her. He said it would be worse than eating shit.” With such condemnatory language coming from her extended family, Lyra clearly felt that speaking back to her grandfather in this subversive way had meaning for her. Her online portfolio did not mention what she had coded in her weaving, but she wrote that she was “proud of creating a message in binary.”

These material engagements, coupled with her personal interests in coding and her desire to articulate her queer identity converged in what Bonny Norton (2013) has called an “investment” in learning. Although Norton has written primarily in the context of language learning, I found her comments about the “investment in the learner’s own identity, an identity which is constantly changing across time and space” to be relevant to Lyra’s experience (p. 51). Similar to the language learners in Norton’s research, Lyra was not simply motivated to complete a task but *invested* in the production of her queer identity in material form. The connections between her lesbian identity and passion for coding propelled her multimodal engagement. For youth who benefit from multiple avenues for expression, multimodal projects that entail active material engagements and opportunities to make evident their own identities can be occasions for creative growth and meaningful counterproductions.

Conveying Personal Values in Online Choose-Your-Own-Adventure Stories

A second activity that took place during the second half of the 2017 program and inspired Lyra’s investment in learning was her work on the program Twine. The open-source platform gained some notoriety in late 2018, when Netflix released a standalone episode of the series *Black Mirror*, as creator Charlie Brooker had used it to construct a complex network of interlocking stories. Twine was an online storymaking tool that had been chosen by the co-

facilitators because it integrated accessible programming commands with a choose-your-own-adventure format. Using this platform, Kindred participants created online branching stories and inserted hyperlinked choices that led readers down diverging narrative paths.

Students used laptops that were on loan from the local university that supplied the program space each summer. At the end of each of the five Twine workshops, participants had the option to take USB flash drives home if they wanted to build on them afterwards. The material affordances of laptops, USBs, and wireless internet allowed students like Lyra to make strategic choices as writers. At first, they brainstormed and imagined various narrative pathways through post-it notes and designing layout, color, and effect choices with basic CSS codes. Lyra composed a postapocalyptic story with branching narratives about a teenager's attempt to survive after nuclear war.

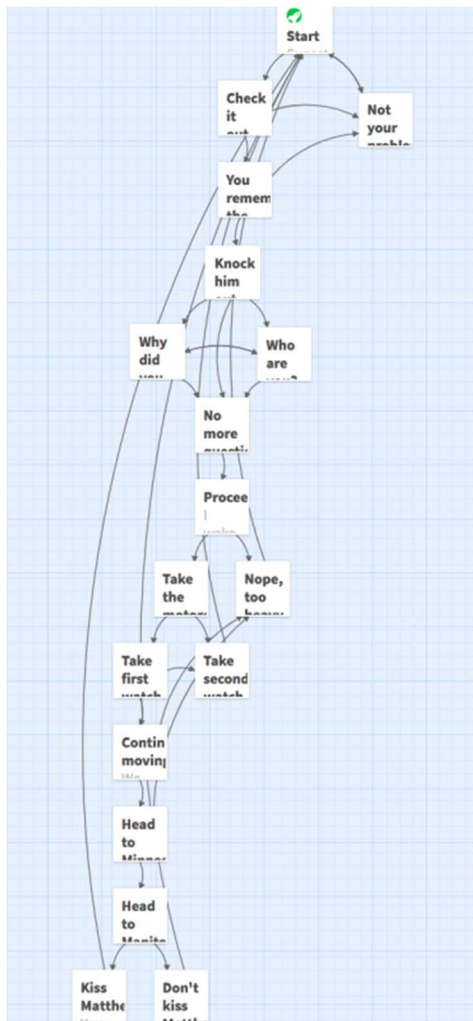


Figure 3. Lyra's branching narrative (Photo credit: The Kindred Program. Used with permission.)

Her story began with a first-person description of the state of the plan after a nuclear explosion:

Sunset is nearing completion. Doesn't matter though, the smoke from the ongoing nuclear war blocks out the sun constantly. Even so, the animals know when the sun sets. Hell, I know. Something deep inside, something primal, tells me to run into a hole in the ground until the sun wakes again with the world. I use the term world loosely. Earth is a hollow shell of its once glorious, green self.

The establishment of setting indicated a devastating loss of rich natural spaces and wildlife. As the sole survivor, the protagonist faced an animalistic transformation into nocturnal patterns of activity once the sun's rays reduced the amount of sunlight the planet received. Upon daybreak, a scream came from a nearby abandoned amusement park. At this point, the reader faced two choices in this interactive narrative: "Not your problem, forget it" or "Check it out."

A click on the first option directed readers to the "Game Over" page, which read, "Radiation eventually reaches your little shelter. You die a horrible, painful death from radiation sickness in 10 years, at 28. You have only one regret: that you never helped the screaming person behind the Rapids who needed your help." This consequence revealed the author's belief in the importance of helping others in need and intervening to provide aid. Alternatively, to take a self-serving route resulted in a "painful death from radiation sickness" and a haunting sense of remorse.

Lyra's narrative then took a turn to the second person, as the reader identity merged with that of the protagonist. Continuing with the narrative as both audience and storyteller, Lyra's reader encountered another human being cowering under a threatening robot that had sophisticated artificial intelligence. The speaker in the narrative deftly shot the robot, at which point its gun was picked up and turned on the protagonist. Readers then faced the option of shooting or disarming this person. The former resulted in the same "Game Over" page as before, whereas disarming the person led to a revelatory conversation about the stranger's sense of fear and distrust of others in a postapocalyptic world. This authorial decision pointed to Lyra's insistence on preserving certain forms of life-saving measures rather than committing murder.

The other person, now revealed to be named Matthew, joined the protagonist to find a safe passage to Mars. They were ultimately able to receive it, and at the end of her story, Lyra

offered a final set of choices, either “Kiss Matthew” or “Don’t kiss Matthew.” With either click, however, the reader was led to live a “long happy life.” The reader could find the same path towards fulfillment, whether with the company of a friend or romantic partner. This construction reflected Lyra’s personal inclinations as a reader, for she expressed her disapproval of “forced” heteronormative romances in novels. In creating her own story and refusing to gender her protagonist, Lyra charted multiple paths for various satisfying outcomes that hinged largely on the reader’s own preferences.

The branching narratives, which students worked on over the course of several weeks, could be experienced differently by readers not only because of their individual transactions with the text (Rosenblatt, 1982) but also because of the decisions that they could make in the interactive story. Lyra’s interactive piece espoused particular values around relationship-building, as it permitted readers to engage in acts of self-protection, but by closing particular narrative threads, her text thwarted attempts at violent execution and instead guided her readers towards productive dialogue.

Readers could retrace their steps to replay the narrative with layers of accumulating knowledge to inform their decisions. When reading Lyra’s narrative, for instance, I followed her narrative branches to their end points, then returned to the beginning and played again until I had exhausted all possibilities and reached the outer edges of the world. In early 2019, Netflix employed a similar form of storytelling, in which viewers who continued to watch the entire episode would eventually revert to the beginning and then follow the streams of narrative threads. Twine’s semiotic affordances formed what might be called an “ecosocial network” of narrative pathways (Lemke, 2000, p. 282). Hyperlinked branches necessitated complex understandings of time and space, as students had to imagine and connect several stories that met

or diverged along various points. In her artist's statement, Lyra wrote, "*It was* challenging to keep track of all the different storylines, and connecting them to a few eventual endings," but she noted that "Twine was my favorite project by far" (emphasis in original).

By creating branching narratives, Lyra directed readers across an apocalyptic landscape to face choices that could lead to lifelong happiness or a painful death. The causal effects revealed her personal stances of favoring constructive dialogue and supporting multiple kinds of social fulfillment. Her authorial decisions made evident certain values at work in her piece. Unlike formal essay writing, this coding project conveyed how Lyra could again demonstrate keen investment as a writer and use critical multimodalities to make a case for socially permissible and impermissible acts.

Nonessentialist Identity Positions in Multimodal Self-Expressions

In my analysis of Kindred's firstspace (Soja, 1996), I have taken note of how Ada's and Lyra's material engagements with journals, masks, weavings, and interactive fictions allowed them to make certain beliefs visible to their audience. Coming from unique vantage points, Ada and Lyra produced distinct work that respectively spoke to what Soja (1996) has called "postmodern cultural and geographical politics of difference," which did not necessarily mean "remain[ing] rigidly confined by this 'territorial' choice, as was usually the case in modernist identity politics" (Soja, 1996, p. 117). Indeed, Ada and Lyra chose to comment on their personal identities and beliefs, but they were not confined to these socially peripheral locations in their storytelling. Even as they chose to center particular aspects of their identities and ideologies in these pieces, these creators possessed ontological multiplicities.

Having students interrogate their respective identity positions required deliberate conversations and sustained reflections. In her multimodal projects, Lyra chose to comment on

her perceived position of queer marginality in her weaving project. Yet she had a different set of privileges and lived experiences from Ada, an older gender-fluid AfroLatinx youth. Lyra's whiteness was clearly notable to the co-facilitators as they discussed openly with students how to make space for under-represented voices. In addition, Terry had private conversations with Lyra about the legacy of white privilege and the implications for structural racism, and Lyra conceded that there were realities that she would never understand because of her race, even as she sought solidarity and affinity with Black students.

Ada was also given subtle redirections if they unknowingly expressed non-inclusive rhetoric, but for all students, the process of being attentive to language was not one imbued with shame or embarrassment in Kindred. For instance, in a conversation about structural barriers to public transportation, students named different forms of travel at different price points across neighborhoods, and Ada mentioned, "Walking is free!" robin gently urged her and other participants to consider that while walking is free, it "can be hard for some people to do, so that's something to keep in mind." Encouraging diverse perspectives about dis/ability, race, and sexuality entailed an open mind and an acknowledgment of one's own positionality within broader movements of solidarity. Even as many of these students faced discrimination and injustice in their own lives, they learned about ways to support others through their body and language.

Schools are frequently places where harms are carried out against minoritized students, and out-of-school spaces play an important role in offering safer spaces from institutionalized violence against racially and sexually marginalized youth. Black and Latinx students suffer disproportionately from zero-tolerance policies and punitive systems of dispossession (Fine & Fuglis, 2009; Sealey-Ruiz, 2016), and adolescents who present nonnormative gender and sexual

identities face disproportionate rates of psychological trauma, suicide, and violent bullying (Sedgwick, 1993; Cover, 2012). Therefore, by creating multimodal pieces grounded in affirming expressions and reparative relations, Kindred students revealed nuanced impressions of self-empowerment and collective healing. Specifically, Ada adopted created inspiring mantras and poetry that reflected her strength as a nonbinary student of mixed heritage, and Lyra made legible a dimension of her identity that had been denounced by her extended family.

“Identity politics” is a phrase that has been much derided by liberal thinkers in the public sphere because of its supposed efforts to undo the logic of rational Enlightenment thinking. What these critics have often missed, however, are the historical roots and deployment of the original rhetoric in political discourse. In its founding document, the Combahee River Collective demanded the recognition of various marginalized identities as a place from which activists could work to end multiple and interconnected sites of oppression. Briefly mentioned by Edward Soja in the context of Gillian Rose's work, the Collective was a Black feminist lesbian women's organization in the 1970s that is credited with first making the phrase “identity politics” widely known (Taylor, 2017, p. 19).

In pointing to Kindred participants’ distinct identity positions and how they became salient through their multimodal projects, I recognize the dangers of potentially reductive, albeit self-ascribed, markers of identity such as “mulatto” or “lesbian.” In his assessment of the Combahee River Collective’s writing, Asad Haider (2018) has advanced a critique from the radical left, condemning the notion of a “crystalized black identity,” a phrase he finds has been emptied of meaning due to the neutralization of radicalism and lack of historical specificity (p. 25). Confronting the paradox of reenabling a racist agenda within a politics of difference, Haider has stressed that he does not intend to “deviat[e] from the legacy of the Combahee River

Collective or the mass movements against racism that have shaped our contemporary world” but aspires to expose the contradictions of a project that “paradoxically reinforces the very norms it set out to criticize” (p. 24). For Haider, it seems a shift in political language is necessary to revive the original anticapitalist and antiracist underpinnings of the Combahee River Collective.

While I depart from other aspects of his argument, such as Haider's discomfort with the notion of “antiblackness” as a rhetorical tool because of its purported reification of a separatist ontology (p. 36), I find value in his provocations as a way to clarify my own positions. When I heard Ada calling herself a nonbinary student of “mulatto” heritage or Lyra referring to herself as a “lesbian,” I took these identities not to be essentializing postures but self-designated locations from which to develop and build productive alliances. Both students’k were committed to building antiracist coalitions, as Lyra voiced the importance of white and Black feminists partnering together in a collective revolution, and Ada insisted on a need for “positivity and agreement” if they were to advocate for a more just society.

Combahee River Collective co-organizer Barbara Smith has pushed against the popular misconception that “unless you suffer a particular kind of oppression, that you have no role in the struggle against it... [I]t’s almost as if by embracing one’s identity, that you give up on any sort of hope or notion that there is such a thing as solidarity” (Taylor, 2017, p. 62).

Identifications with particular racial, sexual, and gender identities should indeed not preclude a united resistance against hegemonic inscriptions of illegitimacy, inadequacy, and deviance onto racialized or queered bodies. As historian Barbara Ransby (2018) has offered, “Combahee River's expansive and inclusive radical statement... begins by locating its authors in the hierarchy of the society and world we live in and grounds them in a set of lived experiences that create the

basis for (but are not determinative of) their radical critique of the status quo— capitalism, empire, white supremacy, and hetero-patriarchy” (p. 161).

So-called identity politics therefore do not have to be reductive positions from which to hold onto divisive oppressions but to accommodate coalition-building from within the margins. As Hortense Spillers (2003) has argued, instead of condemning what has been derided as “identity politics,” critics can center the body as “a discursive and particular instance that belongs, always, to a context” (p. 21). In this regard, out-of-school spaces provide an important service in that minoritized students can acknowledge, love, and articulate their bodies and its various becomings. I am therefore drawn to the notion of assemblage, translated from the French *agencement* as a particular form of agency, one that is coded through ecological territorializations and deterritorializations rather than isolated to one individual’s demonstration of self-actualization (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

In this work, I follow the thinking of scholars who have pointed to the productive potential of thirdspaces as sites of nontraditional learning and personal growth (Gutiérrez, 2008; Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo, and Collazo 200; Potter & McDougall, 2017). Kindred participants actuated projects of what Soja (1996) might call “thirding-as-Othering,” or a critical restructuring of existing binaries into an “anti-reductionist” stance (p. 10). In his acknowledgement of the influence of bell hooks, Soja has expressed,

[T]he political project is to occupy the (real-and-imagined) spaces on the margins, to reclaim these lived spaces as locations of radical openness and possibility, and to make within them the sites where one's radical subjectivity can be activated and practiced in conjunction with the radical subjectivities of others. It is thus a spatiality of *inclusion rather than exclusion*, a spatiality where radical subjectivities can multiply, connect, and

combine in polycentric communities of identity and resistance; where ‘fragmentation’ is no longer a political weakness but a potential strength: the spatiality searched for but never effectively discovered in modernist identity politics. (p. 99, emphasis added)

I agree that what Soja denounced as a modernist project of appropriating identity politics sits in opposition with the power of self-authoring and a collective resistance. I would add that critical multimodal literacies support such political projects of “radical openness and possibility” in students’ multimodal counterproductions.

In a political climate that often devalues voices of historically and presently marginalized communities, out-of-school programs like Kindred can provide pathways for youth to demonstrate their developing critical consciousness. As co-facilitator Terry stated during a pre-program planning meeting in early 2018, many of the participants were “directly responding to their real world, and Kindred provided a space in which youth could fashion stories of personal and social resilience. Program intern Aria added in a one-on-one interview that the program served “whole, unique people with different challenges and attributes... [based on] the systems they live in.” Kindred participants used multimodal forms of expression to articulate aspects of their identities and beliefs. Ada’s and Lyra’s self-asserted politics were evident in their multimodal projects, which amplified aspects of their lived experiences and hopes for a more restorative world.

In her widely cited work on imagination, Maxine Greene (1995) has spoken to the power of visual and nontraditional forms of expression, for painters can transform colors into vast scenes and “change some dimension of our perceiving and thus some dimension of our lives” (p. 140). Likewise, journals, masks, weavings, and branching narratives can offer meaningful avenues for self-understanding through self-expression.

At the same time, I do not mean to claim that Black and queer students are responsible for creating the conditions for their own success through self-empowering narratives. Such expectations are dangerous and deny the reality of structural racism and cisheteropatriarchy, which further burden youth who exist at the juncture of multiple vectors of oppression. However, instructors in all spaces can support their students by allowing them to name their diverse experiences and strengths through multimodal literacies.

The Kindred Summer Program reflected the inclusive philosophies of Octavia Butler, who once expressed in an interview, “I thought it was just as important to have equal rights for women as it was to have equal rights for black people and so I felt myself to be very much a feminist” (Kenan, 1991). Butler’s efforts to situate her work within an egalitarian and visionary landscape grounded in antiracism and feminism are largely why her writing continues to resonate powerfully with contemporary readers.

One final qualification about multimodal projects that invite articulations about students’ own beliefs and identities is the importance of student choice. Too often, schools deny youth the potential to make decisions about their own learning, and forcing students from marginalized backgrounds to explain their identity positions would deny them the right to decide what information to reveal about themselves through particular mediums. Surely, any seemingly progressive pedagogy can be misapplied when students are deprived of the chance to choose what stories to tell, where to share, and when do disclose them. Ada decided to speak from her personal experience for her journal incantations and then integrate aspects of science fiction to her self-empowering mask, and Lyra coded her queer identity into her weaving and then created a fictional postapocalyptic tale for her interactive story that revealed normative positions, but they were not forced to make such personal locations visible.

This chapter revealed how material affordances were integral to students' chosen self-expressions through journals, masks, weavings, and interactive fictions. Physical encounters with materials like paper, foil, fabric, and computers emphasized learners' own identities and ideological positions. In the next chapter, I will describe how two other Kindred participants engaged in world-building activities and applied their imaginative skills to urban planning and architectural modeling. The section will outline how these students constructed complex conceived spaces to highlight existing structural issues, with some notable constraints on their imaginative productions.

CHAPTER V: THE OUTER LIMITS OF THE IMAGINATION IN SECONDSPACE

In the previous chapter, I highlighted how students engaged with material affordances such as journals, masks, weavings, and interactive narratives to make assertions about their identities and beliefs. In this chapter, I will comment on the complexities of students' conceived spaces through an analysis of world-building activities by two students, Judy and Katie. This section, which focuses Soja's notion of secondspace, points to how individuals constructed social environments through mental conceptions of space (Soja, 1996).

Whereas a reading of firstspace centers the legible aspects of space that permit empirical descriptions, secondspace offers a slightly different organizing framework of analysis. Through this lens, I examine imagined representations of social worlds constructed by visionary youth who act as cartographers, city planners, engineers, and designers. I contend that Kindred itself was a site to support the creation of secondspaces, or imagined worlds designed by student participants. Their conceived spaces reflected the vast imaginative capacities of youth, but I found that they were also influenced by structural issues such as state violence, environmental degradation, and authoritarian control.

The Kindred Program urged students to dream of futures that extended beyond current realities, but their products revealed the difficulties of conceptualizing entirely new settings. Judy's and Katie's projects reflected the inherent tensions within liberatory projects, which often entail recursive examinations of society through critical reflection and imaginative projection in the advancement of novel possibilities. Such work might appear be inconsistent visions of alternative worlds, but I argue that these spatial reconstructions reflect the inherent tensions of broader political organizing.

Judy's Multi-Layered Urban Planning Visuals

Structural Reproductions in Urban Tracings

The Kindred Summer Program invited students to engage in several multimodal projects that unearthed imagined cities through activities such as mapping and spatial modeling. At the end of the summer, the program featured participants' portfolios on their website for a wider audience to view students' work. Online profiles displayed pictures of their work as well as their accompanying artist's statements, in which students wrote about their purposes and challenges. Writers like James Gee (2017) have noted that this kind of reflective writing can help strengthen students' metaknowledge and understanding of their own learning processes.

In 2017, the co-facilitators decided to invite students to participate in the curation process by selecting three of their final projects they wanted to exhibit on the website rather than have all of their projects posted online. As a result, students had time and space to polish the specific pieces that they wanted to share. Judy was a fifteen-year-old Black student who chose to highlight her urban planning projects in her 2017 and 2018 portfolios. Both activities involved futuristic environments and were led by a local city worker who was a friend of one of the co-founders of the program. In this section, I will describe how Judy's urban planning reflected the promises and limits of the creative imagination. Tracing and collaging activities represented vivid, progressive urban spaces, but these were also layered with structural flaws that reflected contemporary spaces.

A self-directed learner, Judy enjoyed English class, but she expressed that if her school had offered an art class, art would be her favorite subject. Like many Kindred students, Judy kept an artist's sketchpad, as she was a skilled, self-taught drawer. Largely an introspective and quietly observant student, Judy worked with methodical precision on her multimodal projects.

She showed me a series of cartoon characters that she had created that resembled hybridized cat-humans with a human proportions but feline facial features and fur.

According to Judy's program feedback, some elements of the summer program were similar to school, such as book club discussions, but "the amount of guest teachers that came in" was new for her in the out-of-school space. The program invited several professionals to share their expertise in writing, science, and technology, and they helped guide students in their own projects. Guest mentors could provide disciplinary knowledge with "personal [and] institutional community resources" (Smith & Shen, 2017, p. 89). Co-facilitators Terry and Grace wanted to give students in Brooklyn, particularly Bed Stuy, Bushwick, Fort Greene, and Crown Heights, the opportunity to work with and learn from women of color.

As Grace expressed to me in a 2016 interview, she and Terry, who were white ciswomen, had a "very different set of experiences and privileges" than her Black and Latinx students. Grace was critical of the notion that out-of-school spaces could empower students to learn technical skills like writing and coding to enter a middle-class lifestyle. "I don't view the [Kindred Program] as a stepping stone to an acceptable middle-class life, or buying into that sort of mythology," said Grace in an interview. "I see it as, this is a space for you to think critically about the planet and about your place in the planet. And for you to think about other modes. Not to be taught by me." She and Terry wanted students to be able to develop and act on their critical consciousness and not simply accept the world as it was.

One of Terry's friends was a New York City native and Black woman urban planner named Darcey, who came into Kindred to lead urban planning workshops in 2017 and 2018. Drawing from her work in building resilient cities in the summer of 2017, she introduced her workshop by asking the Kindred participants if they were familiar with Hurricane Sandy.

Several students had recalled the electric disruptions and basement flooding that the city suffered, as well as the groups of transfer students who had come from flooded areas and attended their schools for several years. Because of issues like Sandy, Darcey noted, urban planners had to think about how to make a more environmentally sustainable future.

Darcey then asked students to consider what conditions they would want to improve in their neighborhoods, and students named overcrowding, noise pollution, pedestrian safety, and environmental devastation. She asked them to envision themselves as city planners who could build more resiliency into the infrastructure of cities. Their task was to complete urban planning tracings of newly imagined cities mapped onto existing pictures. Students could look through a pile of printed color pictures of New York City and place translucent tracing paper on top so that they could draw new cities and refashion the existing terrain with more comfortable, safe, and ecofriendly representations of city landscapes.

Looking at the pictures, Darcey modeled the activity by taking a photograph of a building in the South Bronx, which she mentioned was from a part of town that was quickly gentrifying. Lyra noted in response, “They should have the decency to make solar panels, at the very least!” Darcey agreed and said that the first change she would make was to add solar energy to her conceived space. Placing the tracing paper over the picture, she used a pencil to outline basic buildings, but then transform the space with solar panels, trees, benches, and areas for recreation. She then invited the students to choose pictures and work on their own tracings featuring alternative visions for Brooklyn.

For her urban planning tracing, Judy chose to work with a picture of a police station. She redrew the basic outline of the building and redesigned the station with solar panels, bike racks, a library, and pet-friendly park spaces:



Figure 4. Judy's urban city retracing (Photo credit: The Kindred Program. Used with permission.)

In her artist's statement, Judy wrote, "Even though it's jail, you should still be able to read." The added library was integral to her vision for the future of Brooklyn, for all individuals should have access to literacy and literature, in her view. She accompanied her world with several rules that students were asked to create in conjunction with their tracings: "1. You get a house for free. 2. Limited car space on each street. 3. Trading instead of buying." As an urban planner, she wanted to distribute free homes to people, encourage a trade-based economy, and promote alternative transportation methods to help protect the environment from further damage. It was difficult to create a list of rules that seemed fair to everyone, she admitted in her statement, but noted that within a few years, the city could become "more diverse" and have "more green

space.” Judy shared that hoped to see more vibrant, colorful spaces in her reimagined city, as her aim was to create “a city of fairness and equality for everyone.”

Although Judy constructed a world that was informed by environmental and economic justice, her conceived space also preserved capitalist and punitive systems that replicated existing social stratifications. In providing free housing to everyone, she maintained the practice of home ownership and did not delve into the potential for nonproperty, or the collective sharing of resources to transform social relations. This latter restructuring would involve a “fundamentally different means of organizing the use and management of wealth” centered around democratic decision-making (Hardt & Negri, 2017, p. 97). In addition, by retaining the prison rather than extracting it from her urban planning, Judy’s conceived space maintained structural inequities that inherently reproduced racist policies and practices which have disproportionately impacted Black and Latinx communities (Forman, 2017; Alexander, 2012). Envisioning a city of “fairness and equality for everyone” did not necessarily involve the disruption of social formations that would eliminate capitalist structuring of property ownership and systematic dispossession. Judy’s experience of the world influenced her conceived space, which reflected both her hopes for transformative justice as well as the forms of systematic dispossession and racist displacement abetted by free market capitalism.

These tracings reflected the difficulty for any individual to conceive of what Hardt and Negri (2017) have called *antagonistic reformism*, which “sets its sights on fundamental social change” (p. 276). Rather than collaborative reforms, which serve to soften the damage wrought by hegemonic institutions, antagonistic reforms instead call for structural changes that include radical progressive policies, legal mandates, and environmental protections (p. 277). Kindred Program students offered noteworthy structural solutions to provide cleaner and more efficient

public infrastructure, but the limited availability of fundamental restructurings was informed by the persistence of current inequities and social failings heightened by neoliberal policies that have secured benefits for a small percentage of the population.

While visual tracings could at first appear to be frivolous, these occasions for creative world-building reflected the complications of imagining urban revitalization and policy solutions to support environmentalism, public transportation, civil rights, and fair housing. Such projects revealed the inherent challenges of advancing social reform agendas. Judy's tracing revealed important efforts to promote greater safety, advancements in human rights, and more equal redistribution of resources, yet the visual sustained problematic policies, particularly pertaining to the carceral state and property ownership. Her work was not the result of her own failings but a reflection of the social realities that face many political organizers. Activists who wish to reach the mainstream or a movable middle have to confront the challenge of how to effect structural transformation from *within*, without maintaining some aspects of existing inequities. The next section indicates the difficulties of articulating futuristic depictions of the planet without traces of historical precedence in a collage project.

Environmental Futures in Urban Collages

In the summer of 2018, Darcey returned to facilitate another urban planning activity during the third week of the five-week program. She began by asking students, "How did we all get here today?" Most stated that they had taken public transportation like the subway and the bus, though a few had walked to the program site. Darcey followed by asking, "When you took these modes of transit, what'd you see? As you were taking the train, what'd you notice outside?" Students mentioned flowers, people, pets, and buildings, and Darcey stated that all of these aspects of the city had to do what urban planning. City workers helped determine how

people got to different places across the city, and her job was to help people deal with rising population rates, climate change, and public services. Garbage generation, she said, was one such issue that concerned urban planners. New York City residents produced 25,000 tons of trash, which students calculated to be 50,000,000 pounds or, as Darcey put it, 125 whales. She explained that the generation of waste led to contamination and disease.

Brooke asked, after some hesitance, “If people die from these diseases, then if more die, aren’t (pause) there more people able to live in New York City?” Darcey named this phenomenon “environmental racism,” noting that hazards like power plants were placed in minority areas, resulting in different life outcomes for Black neighborhoods. Heat was also another factor that impacted quality of life, particularly for the young and elderly. Rising precipitation rates, for instance, meant that sewers would fill up more quickly. Those living in modern apartment buildings with air conditioning and plumbing would therefore have a different experience from those who had poor living conditions or worked outside. Natural disasters and climate catastrophes impacted poor areas disproportionately, and racist policies shaped how spaces and residents fared after environmental devastations.

Ultimately, urban planners played a key role in building a better city with fair housing, public transportation, and food security. Darcey invited the students to envision themselves as planners and create collages that reflected their visions of Brooklyn in the future. She encouraged them to be imaginative: “If you have weird buildings,” she said, “what do they look like? If there are robots, what do they look like?” Earlier in the day, co-facilitators had split pages of images from magazines for easier cutting and arranging, and students selected from these visuals to craft a collage with their own vision of the future. Judy chose to look for magazine pictures of trees, bridges, camp grounds, and porches into skyscraper shapes.



Figure 5. Judy's Future Brooklyn collage (Photo credit: The Kindred Program. Used with permission.)

In the left-hand corner, she drew a partial picture of a distant vibrant green-and-blue earth that was enclosed by a chain of high-rises, whose close-up was presented in the foreground. Judy explained in her artist's statement, "In Brooklyn in the future, there will be an even bigger population with even better technology. However, the world or human race might end due to the climate changing and getting warmer as well as the water levels rising." She underscored trends toward population increases and technological advancements, but she also acknowledged the possibility of human extinction due to the effects of climate change on the planet. She wanted to reveal "how cluttered the buildings will be because of the growing population." Her collage

therefore contained no human beings living in the buildings, and the intentional absence of human life served as a harbinger of the self-destruction wrought by climate change.

Developing a “critical spatial perspective” deepened Judy’s interrogations of sociohistorical realities and the effects of capital accumulation on the environment (Soja, 2010, p. 14). She expressed in her written statement what she learned from working on her collage. “This project,” she expressed, “helped me to think about how our actions affect the planet and its inhabitants.” She wrote that design elements could help mitigate the effects of climate change, such as a “filter system to help stop land and air pollution as well as a way to decrease the temperature to stop global warming.” These ameliorative tactics were possible, but they seemed to be unable to prevent the possible annihilation of the entire human species.

When asked to imagine the future, students had the freedom to create secondspaces with few explicit conceptual boundaries for alternative and imagined futures, but their ideas were informed in part by the permeation of existing realities. Given the preponderance of capitalist systems, students like Judy tended to replicate aspects of current injustices and did not necessarily visualize an entirely new global order. The next section will highlight how world-building activities such as mapmaking and architectural modeling revealed a similar inclination to build what Angela Davis (2018) has called a “space of negativity,” which will be explained further.

Katie’s Imagined Spatial Diagrams and Systems of Governance

Porous Borders and Restrictive Regimes in Fictional Maps

In addition to urban planning activities, Kindred asked students to construct conceived spaces through the creation of maps. robin led a mapping workshop during the fourth week of the 2018 summer program, and these creations could feature settings from their interactive

Twine stories, a project that was explained in Chapter IV. First, robin asked students to think about the features that constituted an ordinary urban city, such as houses, grocery stores, power plants, and garbage trucks. Katie responded, “Streets with different houses and names,” before adding that “usually white neighborhoods” were better kept than others. The group discussed how certain privately owned services for the public such as bicycle sharing were not always financially or geographically accessible to poor communities. Trains and buses, robin added, were supposed to be a common good, but in actuality, they were out of reach for many who remained on the outskirts of public transportation networks.

robin then directed students towards the mapmaking portion of the lesson: Participants would create an emergent map whose city features would materialize as they progressed, and they could make decisions around what city features to include. Co-facilitators set up paper plates with watercolor paints between the participants and passed out canvas paper. robin modeled the activity and advised the students to begin choosing colors. She covered her own map with different shades and then dropped a few beads of water onto her canvas. She then crumpled, expanded, and layered on a piece of wax paper over the wet paint. Once the paint dried, robin explained, they would remove the wax paper to find small white lines running through their map in places where it had touched the paper. Students could then use black pens and markers to denote make these lines more visible to form streets, borders, lakes, highways, bridges, train tracks, or other city features.

Because the students could make sense of the maps once they found unexpected lines on their paintings, Kindred called these “emergent maps.” robin stressed that they would “be somewhat unplanned, and a city will emerge out of some chaos.” Students could build on their maps with additional colors after the initial paints dried if they wished. robin framed their next

steps as an array of possibilities: “Maybe you’ll mix in another color; maybe you won’t. Maybe you’ll take a color that’s complementary to it and do some funky things. I’m gonna take some wax paper that I may crumple up, make some folds, and thin some of this out with water.” Offering a series of options rather than directives allowed students to create unique pieces that did not have to follow a prescriptive standard.

Katie was a thirteen-year-old Latina student from Brooklyn with short, curly brown hair and an affable personality. She was the granddaughter of immigrants from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, although she expressed that some of her family members were disappointed that she did not speak Spanish fluently. As an outgoing individual, she projected self-assurance, though she admitted that she did not always feel confident. Nevertheless, she appeared to strike up conversations with older students and adult co-facilitators just as easily as with peers her own age. Her mother was a former elementary school teacher who had recently moved into a teacher coaching position. She often shared book recommendations with Katie, who occasionally brought in books by contemporary poets such as Rupi Kaur.

Katie’s mapped representation of space posited worthy alternatives to the current political landscape of anti-immigration in the U.S. She protected fundamental liberties and freedom of movement, as her map contained designated territorial markings that she emphasized were *open* borders. The labeled regions did not hoard resources or draw rigid distinctions between who was permitted and not permitted, and her map was initially driven by a vision of a shared future that centered spaces of plentitude. As with Judy’s urban planning retracing and collage, however, Katie’s map did not perfectly represent a frictionless utopian world with a renewed vision of justice and peace. Instead, as she continued to work on her map, Katie began to include societal elements that preserved and reinforced a system of punitive redress and oppression.



Figure 6. Katie's emergent map (Photo credit: The Kindred Program. Used with permission.)

According to her artist's statement, Katie's map represented "the world I wanted to create for my fictional piece," namely one that defined different states with distinct systems of governance established by ruling families. She included territories like the "Kai Sea," which was a major tourist attraction and a highly accessible area for travelers from around the world. As she was working, she explained to me that another territory, Sarianah Kingdom, was "where travelers go for a better life with more fortune." The areas reflected possibilities for movement to less advantaged individuals who lived in the outer regions of the map and wanted to migrate inwards. She indicated in her final portfolio that areas like the Kai Sea were "excess-able," which to me was an indication that the territory was defined both by accessibility and an excess of resources.

Katie wrote that the inner areas were “a great travel and money source across the globe.” While the borders appeared to permit free movement, this policy did not necessarily entail comprehensive freedom for all who entered prosperous territories. She wanted to stress the importance of open borders in her conceived space, but her map also gestured towards darker authoritarian inclinations. In her artist’s statement, she mentioned that her conceived space was also shaped by “beauty standards of the world to be perfect, especially for women,” which she found to be a frustration in her own life. She disliked movies that upheld the idea that conventionally beautiful and “lighter-skinned” girls were deemed to be more attractive, and she had found this preferential treatment to be a reality at her middle school, where straight boys were drawn to girls with fairer skin and celebrity features. Katie wanted to believe that personalities mattered more than appearance, but the world was signaling the unfair existence of desirability standards, which she replicated in her own map despite starting the project with more egalitarian aims.

As adrienne maree brown (2017) has argued, political organizing involves futurist thinking, for “creating systems of justice and equity in the future” entails “creating conditions that we have never experienced” (p. 160). Revolutionary change can be propelled by the construction of conceived futures, but often the work of Kindred participants revealed that transformative progress could not always be cleanly divorced from harmful structural injustices and their disastrous effects. Katie’s desire to have an open travel policy promoted migration and border-crossing across different regions, but this initial purpose became complicated by her interest in reanimating social practices that enacted gendered marginalization and geographies of repressive rule. The next section will explain how Katie engaged in an architectural modeling

project to flesh out the despotic elements and consequences in a world that maintained internally regulated conformity.

Erecting State Authority in Architectural Models

Rather than gesturing towards communal restoration, Katie's science fiction world began to shape more retributive policies, which limited democratic negotiations and the reintegration of rule offenders into mainstream society. On the day after the map-making activity, two guest teachers led an architectural modeling project that invited students to assemble conceived worlds from their interactive fictions. Miriam and Sylvia were white ciswomen working in the city as professional architects who had met at a summer architecture program in Brooklyn, and they had since reconnected while working on a shared professional architectural project. They were drawn to Kindred because it brought together a community of youth artists in a similar manner through shared creative passions in an out-of-school summer program.

Miriam and Sylvia began by asking participants to take several plain pieces of white printer paper and fold, cut, and shape them into different three-dimensional items. They pointed to a list of adjectives on the board such as "heavy," "light," "pulled," "pushed," "expanded," and "contracted," and they encouraged students to focus on one of these terms as they worked. Like the co-facilitators, these teaching artists did not imagine a single approach or one desired end result. Sylvia prompted them with questions such as, "Can you stack it? Fold it? What happens when you rotate it? If you've done origami before, this is similar. And this is meant to be fun and free; there's no wrong answer." Rather than directing them with a series of step-by-step instructions, she hoped students could develop greater comfort with the idea of multi-dimensional modeling and architectural play.

Sylvia and Miriam showed them professional examples of three-dimensional art created from two-dimensional sheets of paper that artists had layered, expanded, cut, and glued into pieces that resembled accordions or sculptures. After about ten minutes of work time, students had completed several models and went around the table to share a work or two. The program accommodated different paces and production quantities, so students conveyed a wide variety of textures and shapes. Although both had chosen the word “light,” for instance, Celine had taken her time to make a thin, delicate boat, whereas Katie produced multiple small models, including a snowflake, a feather, a butterfly, and a baby. While not all highly talkative students were necessarily fast producers, Katie was often one of the first students to jump into a project, make creative decisions, and progress through different components at a quick pace, often finding time to socialize with others along the way.

The group then shifted into the main world-building activity using architectural modeling tools. Co-facilitators handed out pieces of blue foam that had been various sizes, thin foam core boards, glue, and scissors to participants. In the meantime, I asked Sylvia why the light blue color might have been chosen by professionals, and she said that she wasn’t sure but that it might have been because “there’s nothing quite like this in the real world.” The unusual shade could allow architects to “use our imagination,” as Sylvia expressed, to build original structures. Yet as with previous world-building exercises, Katie’s architectural model was informed by a desire to reflect existing social injustices, pointing to the difficulty of inventing a new social order.

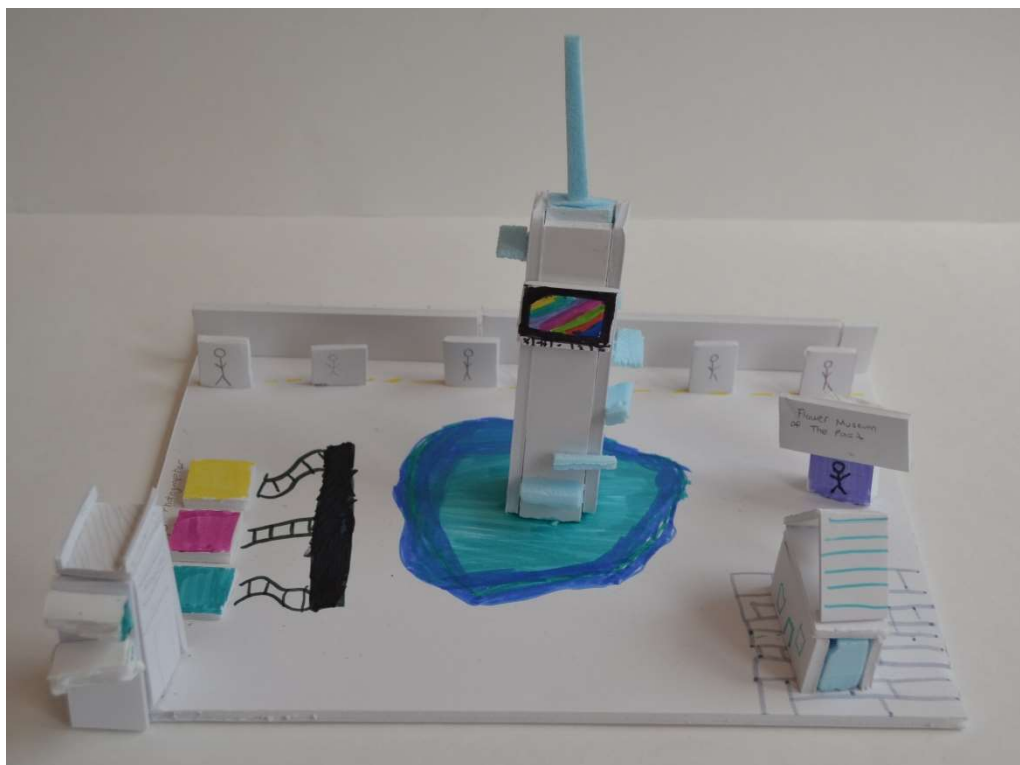


Figure 7. Katie's architectural model (Photo credit: The Kindred Program. Used with permission.)

For her architectural model, Katie chose to expand on her earlier emergent map, maintaining the idea of the open borders that she began with in her mapmaking. As she built the architectural structures, she created increasingly stringent rules. She focused in on one particular region of her map, called “North Heathen,” which was inspired by the totalitarian regime in North Korea. She stated that she wanted to address how her imagined society passed “judgments about where you come from.” She pictured a homogenous nation that permitted individuals to enter its state, but these residents were in danger of being persecuted at any time.

Using architectural modeling tools, Katie arranged foam parts to build a tall tower in the center. She remarked that no ordinary civilians could enter this structure, which she explained in her artist's statement was “where all the decisions are made and no one has the right to change

them.” The government could torture any rule violators by sending them into a simulator that presented terrifying challenges like a zombie invasion. There had been no survivors, she said, who emerged from the simulator alive.

At the start of her world-building project, Katie wanted to fashion open borders in which regional boundaries did not entail strict divisions. Her conceived world was open and accessible to border-crossing travelers, in contrast to contemporary nationalist rhetoric that dominated the media landscape and was propelled by the violent logic of white supremacy. Nevertheless, those who entered the territory found that it was marked by authoritarianism, social uniformity, disciplinary power. Despite a stated intention to open emancipatory borders for broader populations, Katie’s constructed world confined its residents to a type of open-air imprisonment governed by a disciplinary state and torture devices that violated people’s bodies and minds.

The borders here resembled the types of barriers that Achebe Mbembe (2018) has characterized as not only physical demarcations between sovereign states but as features of “organized violence” that categorized acceptable and condemned populations. Commenting on the seeming undesirability of migrants from the continent of Africa, Mbembe has called attention ways in which boundaries preserved colonial unfreedoms and intensified impressions of disposability in regards to human life in order to uphold illusions of security and social order.

Control over the flow of groups and the containment of segmented groups have long characterized state formations, and Katie’s simulation machine reflected the nature of seeming border permissions being fundamentally tied to sovereign restrictions. A country can scarcely have borders, even open ones, without placing at least some demands on individual mobility. Kindred participants’ conceived spaces therefore reflected how alternative futures can often be fraught with complex systems of power and control. Judy’s and Katie’s multimodal artifacts

pointed to the difficulty of articulating plans for transformative change given the temptation to reproduce oppressive structures. These exercises were thereby indicative of the multidimensional and contradictory impulses of the human imagination.

Epistemic Constraints on the Creative Mind

Through my examination of Judy's and Katie's conceived spaces, I have noted how secondspaces could indeed be sources of "creative imagination of some artists and poets" (Soja, 1996, p. 67). Just as art and literature could reflect hopeful alternatives and current conditions of oppression that mark lived experiences, these students created secondspaces in their tracings, collages, maps, and models that reflected the intricate interconnections across systems of oppression and opportunity. In their multimodal artifacts, Judy and Katie addressed a range of social issues such as the carceral system, capitalism, environmental destruction, gender norms, and totalitarianism. Their works reflected the difficulties of reimagining social configurations given the webbed nature of systemic injustices.

The potential for the creative imagination and its legibility across various forms of expression, from mapping to modeling, might be limited by humans' very observational capacities that can propel examinations of and experiences in the wider world. In other words, students' conceived visions of futuristic and fictional settings seemed to be shaped in part by their awareness of environmental degradation, neighborhood segregation, and racist policies and practices. Therefore, even in illuminating possibilities for restorative justice, wealth redistribution, educational access, and open borders, students' imagined worlds also incorporated darker dimensions of social relations.

After a creative exercise in which students tried to imagine a free society, Ada expressed, "It's hard for me because coming from where I live and the world around me, based in reality,

people aren't going to change unless everyone decides to change. Reality taints the imagination." Angela Davis (2018) has pointed to the importance of art in giving shape to complex visions of the future, but she has also highlighted the complications of imaginative projects as "necessary ways of navigating the structural cruelties of the present." I align with Davis's description of *utopia* through its component parts, the Greek οὐ (*ou*, not) and τόπος (*tópos*, space), to reflect on the meaning of a *no-place* rather than purely a better one. Imaginative productions, as Davis has stated, retain a "space of negativity" that connects to critical examinations of complex structural injustices through the process of social change.

While this version of futurism might seem inattentive to the hope and optimism embedded in conventional liberatory projects, I view Kindred participants' artifacts as reflections of critical imaginings that simultaneously envision alternative futures while acknowledging the reality of lived histories. These individual and collective political imaginings, as Davis has noted, are best worked out in art and political praxis. Futurist thinkers from colonial resistance leaders to prison abolitionists to Afrofuturist writers propose imagined utopian societies that critique state institutions themselves while locating possibilities for more just conditions.

Similar to Davis's conception of utopia, Adorno and Foucault have provided "negativistic accounts of utopia or the good life," (Allen, 2015, p. 187). In this account of utopia, there is a recognition of existing modes of domination even as society moves towards a transformed field of more balanced power relations. The Kindred Program's multimodal projects demonstrated that to some degree, students could anticipate emancipatory moves, even as they worked within given structural realities. Their conceived spaces problematized a romantic version of liberal progression devoid of existing power dynamics.

In her program feedback, Katie expressed that she appreciated the opportunity to focus on writing about events that were directly related to their lives. As opposed to classes in her school that taught only functional skills like “the slope and area of a circle,” she remarked, the program helped her think about “how you want your future and what you want the world to be.” Even though conceived spaces often reproduced aspects of existing oppressions, students like Katie had the opportunity to articulate possibilities that prompted thinking about intricate assemblages of power and the ecology of inequalities.

adrienne maree brown (2017) has called the process of ideation a kind of “healing behavior, to look at something so broken and see the possibility of wholeness in it” (p. 19). This journey towards healing, however, often required a lengthy examination of what was “broken.” Kindred students like Judy and Katie engaged in world-building by adumbrating existing injustices and oppressive spaces as they also dreamed of partially restorative ones. For these students, collaging, modeling, and writing reflective statements provided opportunities to craft secondspaces that captured the complexities of power dynamics.

Power, according to co-facilitator Grace, was a “narratively juicy” way for students to get into a creative mode of production. Urban designs, emergent maps, and architectural designs allowed students to conceptualize the intertwined nature of world-building. Instead of focusing on a single subject, Kindred allowed students to think about interrelated structural forces within social environments. Co-facilitators supported multimodal engagements that invited participants to “play with the world that we’re in and play with the new one,” as robin asserted during an early 2018 planning session.

In one of my first interviews with co-founder Terry in the fall of 2016, she mentioned that her initial vision for the program had been to equip students with transferable skillsets such

as coding, writing, and other technical skills. During the early days of the program, she had wanted to bring “deliverables” so that students could “walk away knowing x, y, z.” After meeting the participants during the first summer and seeing what excited them, however, she began to reorient program goals more around “applying their imaginations” to different projects. She wanted to emphasize how creativity was integral to meaning-making across disciplines and hoped to build their confidence as youth artists. Yet as Judy’s and Katie’s projects revealed, productions of the imagination were inflected and charged by their astute knowledge about prevailing injustices such as disenfranchisement, environmental devastation, colorism, sexism, and autocratic rule.

These imaginary worlds underscored the possibilities of partial advancements within ecologies of injustice and the difficulty of decoupling from long-standing power imbalances. In part, such epistemic constraints on students’ imaginative productions were a reflection of their deep criticality. The Kindred students’ multimodal projects were informed by close examinations of and experiences within global flows of power, thereby pointing to the difficulty of ignoring current conditions while proposing alternative possibilities for social progress. These outcomes echo the surprise that Afrofuturist artist Ytasha Womack felt when talking with fifth graders in Chicago about their visions for the future. Expecting to hear about topics like space travel and future worlds, Womack was taken by the students’ stories about wanting to see a world free of gun violence and hoping to be able to play outside. She noted there existed a “barrier around the fact that many of the students could not see beyond what they felt were their present circumstances” (Making Contact, 2019).

This complication of building anew *from within* dominant social formations evokes Saidiya Hartman’s commentary on historical productions of thought from “the outside while in

the inside” (Moten & Hartman, 2018). Hartman was speaking to the constitutive racial violence inherent to the transatlantic slave trade in her conversation with Fred Moten, but I find her words to be pertinent, given the long *durée* account of antiblack prejudice going back to the ancient world (Kendi, 2017, p. 18). I remain drawn to the persistence of imaginative thought even if there is *no outside* to the struggle for liberation for marginalized communities. Students’ conceived worlds might reflect the various vicissitudes and permutations of systemic crises, but this iterative condition does not mean that educators should not prevent youth from trying to make sense of their social worlds and envision futuristic alternatives, even if they are laden with contradictory properties. Imaginative productions informed by experiential knowledge and received wisdoms can position young adults as builders of complex worlds and initiators of more just possibilities.

Ultimately, the imagination remains as an important “lifeline,” as Womack has asserted, to enable artists to participate in healing and liberatory work (Making Contact, 2019). Alexander Weheliye has pointed to the long-standing importance of “freedom dreams,” which have played a role “in slave cosmologies” and persist in more modern social formations such as ball culture and the Crunk Feminist Collective (Miller & Driscoll, 2015). In the Kindred Program, students’ creative power in tracings, collages, maps, and models represented the webbed nature of social reproductions and spatial geographies, and the hope is that naming these complex injustices can mobilize a disruption of the status quo through coalition-building across issues.

The following chapter explores the significance of thirdspace (Soja, 1996), and I will describe real-and-imagined fluctuations experienced by Kindred participants and the expressed changes activated by spatiotemporal flexibilities within the program. After commenting on the ways in which co-facilitators and students manipulated space and time, three sub-sections will

articulate how students' engagements with lived spaces catalyzed progressive self-conceptions as readers, writers, and leaders.

CHAPTER VI: SOCIAL FLUIDITIES AND STUDENT LEADERS IN THIRDSpace

Kindred Program participants occupied multiple positions as designers, engineers, and architects whose imagined worlds presented social injustices and posited complex alternatives. Through these multimodal projects, the program did not necessarily privilege one form of expressive medium over others, as world-building involved iterative and recursive play across different design platforms. Kindred participants therefore moved fluidly from pen-and-paper writing to digital or visual mediums to imaginative journaling or verbal exchanges in small groups. Students had access to various semiotic tools with which to visualize futuristic and fictional conceived spaces, and the teachers wanted to help open various imaginative possibilities through different combinations of colors, textures, and forms.

In Chapter IV, I examined the elements of firstspace, or the physical arrangements and creative instruments, with which students made choices about how to articulate aspects of their own identities and beliefs in material forms. Ada and Lyra created journals, masks, weavings, and interactive stories to prompt articulations about who they were and what they believed in various multimodal configurations. In Chapter V, I outlined features of Kindred's secondspace, noting how participants conceived of futuristic and fictional worlds that were shaped in part by existing issues of social control in broader society. Urban tracings, collages, emergent maps, and architectural models facilitated the power of imaginative world-building and reflected students' understandings of the oppressive entanglements within a larger ecology of social geographies.

Chapter VI turns to Edward Soja's (1996) reading of thirdspace, or what Henri Lefebvre before him referred to as spaces of representation. In thirdspace, a combination of material features and conceptual visions of space lead to an understanding of how *lived* space encompasses fluctuations between and within the physical and perceptual. The previous two

chapters emphasized material and conceptual spatial arrangements as separate analytic tools, but first and second space are also deeply enmeshed in what Soja has designated as the real-and-imagined space, or what I view as a place of becoming. In this chapter, I comment on how three students' material and imaginative constructions led to the development of students' expressed identities as writers and leaders.

Specifically, the following sections are devoted to a careful examination of space, time, and assemblages in the out-of-school learning community: I begin by noting how co-facilitators made a curricular adjustment to allow for more unstructured time for students to bond, then I trace the journeys of three Kindred participants who developed evolving positions as peer models during and beyond the program. Finally, I close with a commentary on the connection between real-and-imagined nourishment in sustaining the politicized body.

Spatiotemporal Flexibility in an Out-of-School Learning Space

Unstructured Time for Community-Building

Writing in the context of childhood education, Donald Winnicott (1974) has emphasized that play is a natural part of the development process and that it also requires a deliberately structured learning environment. Because acute pressure and compliance do not foster productive learning, however, a child should be able to manipulate "external phenomena in the service of a dream" (p. 51). I contend that, in contrast to Piagetian stages of development that are contingent on strict temporal categories, play is not unique to only young children but central to older students' understandings about themselves and their societies. As I have noted in previous chapters, Kindred provided material constraints and supportive guidance, but participants also had opportunities to play freely with semiotic affordances to articulate their identities, beliefs, and imagined futures.

Although often cast as incidental to learning and schoolwork, I argue in this chapter that multimodal play was integral not just for the articulation of students' identities and normative values through personal counterproductions and fictional narratives, but Kindred projects could also support students' evolving conceptions of who they wanted to *become* in a collective learning space. Across individual one-on-one interviews, the four Kindred co-facilitators Terry, Grace, robin, and Desiree expressed a mutual hope for students to feel like members of a welcoming learning environment united by a pedagogy of play.

Each instructor was invested in student-centered curricula but communicated slightly different approaches to building a low-stakes educative space. Terry, one of the two original co-founders, said that she wanted to help students develop confidence in their own artistic and intellectual strengths. In a one-on-one interview in the fall of 2016, she noted the following:

Play is so important to learning, so even when they're joking around, like when they're in the book club, just being silly and role playing, they have to think through the story and character-building. I think a playful environment is necessary for intellectual enrichment. ... They need to see each other having fun and us having fun, being silly and having fun. We're all playing.

Terry pointed to the ways in which play was essential for both youth participants and adult facilitators. Co-facilitators modeled active participation in the movement breaks that were led by the student fellows, and the program interns often sat at the large table to work alongside the students. Unlike many traditional schooling spaces, in which adult instructors are seen to have separate roles from their students, the Kindred staff often joined the students in playful engagements.

The other original co-founder, Grace, was committed to the students' development as writers who could "think more imaginatively, critically about our planet." Criticality, however, involved conversations that were grounded in a "generative, generous, and supportive" group of co-learners. In contrast to what Grace called a "think tank" mindset motivated by profit accumulation, Kindred encouraged creative solutions to pressing challenges through imaginative exercises. She was interested in emphasizing that students' imaginations operated across disparate fields such as architecture, writing, and computer programming. In her view, the Kindred Program should not just equip students with applicable skills but the ability to see "layers of choice" everywhere.

The fragmentation of disciplines, as physicist David Bohm (1980/2005) has noted, is an "illusion" that "lead[s] to endless conflict and confusion" (p. 2). Similarly, Grace wanted to blur the boundaries between the arts and sciences, as she believed that creative artists needed to cultivate the same skills of curiosity, imagination, and criticality as those required by scientists. Rather than being driven by numerical metrics of success defined by standardized exams or report card grades, Grace stressed that specific learning outcomes in the Kindred Summer Program were "a little bit tricky to find. The main goal is to think expansively and critically, to think across disciplines, [and] not get shy about getting inspired."

In addition to transdisciplinarity, Grace believed in improvisational pedagogy and wanted to advance a "yes-and" approach to thinking and making. In a later interview, she explained, "We're trying not to attach any outcomes but trying to get as many ideas. Some people said they got ideas from a walk, and that made it into a Twine. But everybody's approach is different. It's a generative process. It's more about a rhizome approach." Her response evoked Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) assertion that "semiotic chains of every nature are connected to very diverse

modes of coding” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 7). Through brainstorming and creative exercises, the “yes-and” philosophy could generate ramified ideas across nonlinear and nonhierarchical constellations of thought. Rather than conformity to prescribed benchmarks of achievement, in Grace’s conception of rhizomatic thought, learning should resemble pathways that were “detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification” (p. 12).

In her interview, robin shared how she drew a distinction between play and product-focused work. Like Terry and Grace, she wanted to help build a learning space that fostered critical explorations rather than imposed standards. She felt that students should be able to “choose paths to enter and escape,” especially by producing unconventional ideas and subversive acts. I found connections between robin’s conceptions of critical explorations of the open pathways and rhizomatic systems that Grace mentioned. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) have expressed, such “acentred, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying” routes lack “an organizing memory or central automaton” (p. 20). robin expressed that despite the “intense” nature of the program, she hoped students would generate ideas for the purposes of “feeling” and “developing” rather than striving for outcome-oriented goals.

robin’s use of intensity aligned with what Deleuze and Guattari have described as a multiplicity of thought occasioned by a surge of ideas. Intensity is expressed through flows or voyages that can reveal different “patchwork, differentials of speed, delays and accelerations, changes in orientation, continuous variations... Voyage in place: that is the name of all intensities... To think is to voyage” (p. 482). As such, during multimodal activities, robin often offered a prompting questions to promote intensities of thought. Even if they did not always have a definite plan or objective, students were encouraged to experiment with nonlinear and divergent ideas in their writing.

As explained in Chapter III, Desiree was the fourth and final co-facilitator, having joined the Kindred Program in 2018. As Grace had stepped back to meet increasing demands on her schedule as a professional playwright, Desiree came to the program every other day, alternating work at a different leadership training organization for young women. This transition was part of a long-term succession plan, as Grace and Terry imagined eventually stepping back as facilitators to allow other nonwhite educators to lead the program. As a teacher and writer, Desiree viewed one of her primary goals in a classroom setting was to “hone in and listen” to the students. She wished that Black girls in schools generally could “take up as much space” as their white counterparts so that their voices could be heard and valued by all educators. Desiree also valued youth input, noting that the “curriculum should change with the students, who should have a say.” She found the student fellows’ insights to be especially valuable in shaping the direction of the program, indicating that instructors should continually accommodate new curricular possibilities.

While all four instructors’ attention to student-driven engagements and exploratory play, the out-of-school program itself was intentionally structured and carefully planned. The co-facilitators had planned a series of mini-lectures, hands-on projects, physical stretches, reading sessions, and other activities each day because they had wanted to keep the students stimulated and engaged. They wanted students to return each day, and because attendance was voluntary, the co-facilitators wanted to balance an offering of fun activities with well-organized learning opportunities. Terry was especially attuned to the potential for younger participants to feel restless, so they had built a robust curriculum with multimodal workshops, movement breaks, and collaborative engagements.

With the packed schedule, it became apparent to the new lead instructor, Desiree, that the program could accommodate more time for students to relax in between planned activities. During the middle of the program, at a planning meeting with co-facilitators and student fellows, she suggested having some leisure time for unstructured play. The other co-facilitators and fellows agreed that they could benefit from more recreational time, and they adjusted the curriculum to allow for an ice-cream break.

At Desiree's other summer program, a leadership academy for young women and gender-expansive youth, the leaders and participants spoke frequently about issues of power imbalances and structural injustices. By the end of the program, however, Desiree mentioned that these conversations had become somewhat exhausting for those students, whose energy had visibly started to wane. By providing some leisure time, however, the Kindred Program offered students the opportunity to have a break from critical conversations about social issues and "intense" creative productions.

Opportunities for spontaneous levity and casual play helped students to get to know each other in unplanned ways. During these open spaces and times, students shared jokes that were written on the backs of popsicle sticks and played casual games led by the fellows. On the side, I struck up conversations with students who were interested in learning about Korean language and pop culture. Most of these conversations took place on the small porch outdoors, where students and adults were intimately gathered but not formally arranged. Inside, in contrast, name tags designated assigned seats, as fellows and co-facilitators placed these each morning in different spots so that participants could get to work with new partners over the course of the program. Name tags also helped participants feel that they all had a place, for even if they arrived late, there was a seat at the table for them.

In the program feedback, participants reported feeling much less stressed in the out-of-school program than they did in school, which Katie reported was dominated by “rules and expectations to be perfect.” While Kindred maintained certain traditional practices like forming norms and having assigned seating, it also welcomed input from student leaders and newer co-facilitators, whose contributions helped provide greater spatiotemporal flexibility in ways that aligned with co-founders’ initial conceptions of open play and spontaneous thinking. The next section outlines how pedagogical practices around voluntary sharing helped increase students’ comfort and confidence as well.

Using Agentive Silence to Build Writerly Confidence

Rather than viewing the out-of-school space as an avenue for calculated productions and technical skill-building, the Kindred co-facilitators hoped to build students’ capacities with transdisciplinary play through creative experimentation, unbound from codified measurements of progress and achievement. Among the co-facilitators, Terry’s vision for the program was the most long-term, as she also thought about sustainability, hopes for the future, and participant outreach. She strove to raise the visibility of the program through organized recruitment, fundraising, and social media.

In the program’s third year, she helped institute the fellowship program, and returning participants over the age of sixteen could apply to be peer mentors and receive a small stipend for their support. Offering payment was an important way to incentivize older participants to remain involved, as some became unable to participate because of financial obligations. With limited crowdsourced funding, Terry was unable to offer stipends to all students, but she hoped to eventually expand some form of fellowship payments to non-fellows as well.

The co-facilitators faced questions about how to reach out to as many interested participants as possible but also provide individualized attention. With the high number of adults and support staff, the twelve participants were able to obtain one-on-one help from any of the four to five adult staff on a given day. At times, Terry was unsure whether there were too many adults in the space, as some interns and staff did not have immediate responsibilities and stood in the margins as the students worked independently. In their program feedback, however, participants expressed appreciation for the availability of many support staff in the space. The low student-to-adult ratio meant that they could readily ask for supplies or help with techniques like coding or weaving. As Brooke expressed, “You don't have to wait on the teacher because there are many.” When students worked on their own, the extra adults could seem superfluous, but the steady availability of adult staff helped students feel supported on a constant basis.

Because the program did not have a grading system or external incentives other than voluntary sharing, students were also free to build multimodal projects without scrutiny and fear of evaluations. Numerous students appreciated the sense that there were no “judgments” about their identities and capabilities. As noted in Chapter IV, co-facilitators like Desiree supported different forms of participation, as she emphasized that students should not feel pressured to speak if they felt they were not ready but that their voices were always welcome.

Similarly, if students did not feel like sharing, Grace normalized these decisions and explained that taking time to feel comfortable about their drafts was natural. After some students expressed shyness around sharing their work, she validated these feelings and shared her own challenges with the writing process: “Sometimes I write things that I throw out. When I’m editing, I sometimes throw away hundreds of pages. Sometimes I just put it in a drawer and never want to look at it again. Or sometimes I take a line and give it another home somewhere

else.” She admitted, “Sometimes we have to be brave,” but also explained that her own writing still disappointed her at times. She said, “We might not like what happens. We might think, ‘Oh, that came out of me? Gross.’” She did not push all participants to share, but a few more volunteered to do so. Because she understood that each person was in a different place with their writing, Grace left the invitation to share open and simply shared her own struggles as a writer. Her own social location as a writer helped acknowledge students’ difficulties helped affirm the importance of silence as an agentive choice.

robin also drew from personal perspectives to try and relieve some of the pressure on students to present in-progress work in a particular time and place. She stressed to students that they had control over their own work and stated, “Sometimes I know I have a hard time saying something, so then I’ll write a note, then share it later.” Because some students might want extra time to process and polish an idea before sharing, robin offered this reminder as a way to value multiple pathways to participation. Although participants rarely took on this option of writing down thoughts to share at a later moment, robin’s statement made clear that every idea, even nonvocalized at the time, had value.

Terry likewise attempted to reduce students’ anxieties around sharing by articulating her own experience as a student writer. Following a fourth-week workshop in which only a couple of students shared their writing, she noted that a professor once told her the following:

Writing is like having a newborn baby. You would never tell the baby, “You’re crying wrong” or “You’re not being cute enough.” (Laughter from participants.) You just need to nurture your writing and give it support. ... We can all just love each other’s newborn baby pieces. ... It’s okay to be wrong or say something silly or think that we’re not making sense — it’s about experimenting and playing with ideas and physical things.

This invitation had an effect on students at a mental and corporeal level. Immediately after her comments, the students transitioned into a movement break that required some displays of vulnerability. One fellow had led a recurring exercise that required choreography, and in previous sessions, several students like Judy and Celine had chosen to stand with the group but watched shyly from the back of the room. After Terry stressed in her comments that “none of us are experts,” the students became slightly less self-consciousness and joined the group to follow the choreographed dance moves, even if they did not feel perfectly coordinated or completely confident.

The effect was not permanent, as some reserved students continued to choose not to share their work in larger groups, but the repeated reminders about participatory choices around their use of space and time helped some students feel comfortable seeing themselves as members of a larger writing and reading community, as I will elaborate further in the following sub-section. Several visiting teaching artists and adult mentors remarked that they wished they had belonged to a similar kind of open and non-judgmental learning community.

Program assistant Belle, for instance, was an undergraduate student majoring in creative writing. She stated that her own university writing program was not “racially diverse” in its faculty or mentorship, and she regularly encountered students who challenged the legitimacy of her personal writing. Recounting an exchange with a white cismale classmate, she expressed dismay at her peer’s response to her nonfiction pieces: “He was like, ‘But are you *sure* [this happened]?’” In contrast to her own experience, she was glad to see that a program like Kindred was available to youth whose own lived experiences were not being challenged on a regular basis. Black, Latinx, and queer youth who write from sites of marginality too often experience curricular erasure in classrooms that do not account for their identity positions, and this kind of

harm can be detrimental to the spirit of a young writer. I argue that is important, therefore, to offer students the opportunity to feel affirmed as writers and readers, the latter of which will be my next focus.

The Art of Slow Reading and Responding

Students of color and children from low-income backgrounds typically face larger class sizes, fewer quality instructors, less rigorous academic courses, and fewer materials and extracurricular activities than their white and/or wealthier peers (Darling-Hammond, 2004). In contrast to these classroom environments, out-of-school spaces can promote critical multimodal engagements that foster student decision-making, rich counterproductions, and the expression of literate identities.

Each summer, Kindred co-facilitators selected a common summer reading, around which they centered program activities. The figure below presents texts that had been used in previous years:



Figure 8. Book Club novels

Book clubs had long been a consistent feature of the program, as Kindred co-facilitators had wanted to encourage a community of readers to engage in young adult science fiction and fantasy novels, especially those written by Black and Latinx authors.

In 2018, the program co-facilitators and students read parts of Nnedi Okorafor's *Akata Witch*. This 2011 young adult fantasy novel featured a twelve-year-old protagonist from the U.S. who moves to Nigeria, where she discovers powers that link her to a network of magic practitioners. In previous years, co-facilitators had handed out copies of the collective reading for each student to take home and return with each day, but some students had read ahead, and others had left their books behind, so allowing for full discussions with books on hand for everyone while keeping spoilers from entering the conversation became a challenge. The co-facilitators wanted to maintain reading aloud as a part of the program experience, but they also wanted to find a way for everyone to have access to books without embarrassing anyone who might have left their texts behind.

In the fourth summer, the co-facilitators decided to keep the books on site for two weeks so that participants could have access to them for a few chapters of collective reading. Afterwards, they could take the copies home to keep and read them at their own pace. The program wanted to neither mandate homework assignments nor set students up for disappointment if they did not have enough books, so the decision to keep books in the program space for two weeks was a pragmatic one. If a student missed a day and returned on a later occasion, they might miss a section or two, but co-facilitators asked students to summarize the previous chapter so that everyone was relatively caught up.

There were often audible cheers when Terry announced book club in the program. Many of the students had been drawn to the program because they were interested in reading, and

during read-aloud sessions, students grabbed black cushions on which to sit or lay down as participants volunteered to read passages. Because they relied on individuals to jump in and read on their own rather than go around in a circle, sometimes there were pauses between readers as potential readers deliberated who would read next, but there were always enough voices to carry the group through the day's reading.

More outgoing students like Katie and Ada offered to read aloud every time, whereas more reserved students like Celine and Brooke volunteered on one or two occasions, and others like Judy never read aloud but listened actively. Even when students like Celine took their time to read and paused before pronouncing multisyllabic words like “exasperated,” the other participants did not show impatience or make any visible attempts to read ahead. Silent reading would have likely allowed them to finish the text at a quicker pace, but the aim of book club was to have a collective experience rather than an efficient but solitary one. The program viewed reading as a communal activity, even if participation did not look the same for every student.

Through collective read-alouds, the Kindred Program ensured that the greatest number of students had access to the same reading content in the co-facilitators' desire to help construct an equitable reading environment. For various reasons outside of the students' control, readers might not always be able to complete readings at home. Therefore, book clubs helped all students have access to the same information by reading every word aloud together. This choice, of course, meant that students who were fluent readers would progress at a more measured rate by following a collective pace. For the co-facilitators, striving for an equitable learning environment was more important than the strengthening of efficient literacy skills or compulsory academic habits, which are often reinforced by practices of shame and punishment.

Jerome Bruner (1986) has attested to changing his mind about the nature of learning, from the belief that “the solo child master[ed] the world by representing it to himself in his own terms” to thinking about learning as “a communal activity, a sharing of the culture. It is not just that the child must make his knowledge his own, but that he must make it his own in a community of those who share his sense of belonging to a culture... [of] not only discovery and invention but the importance of negotiating and sharing — in a word, of joint culture creating” (Bruner, 1986, p. 127). Similarly, students who decided to join Kindred could read separately on their own time, but as a member of the program, they became integrated into a “joint culture of reading.”

For feminist poet Adrienne Rich (1995), participating in a literary community was a way to form social bonds and preserve cultural practices, especially among women. She wrote that “reading aloud to one another the books that have moved and healed us, analyzing the language that has lied about us, reading our own words aloud to each other. But to name and found a culture of our own means a real break from the passivity of the twentieth-century Western mind.” Although she was writing primarily about adult women collectives, young adults could also certainly benefit from having spaces in which to honor the ancient practice of oral storytelling.

After each book club session, students engaged in a discussion about the text. Some learners could immediately comment on character motivations, make connections between self and text, and elaborate on literary themes. In one instance, the participants had just read a passage about the Nigerian home of one of the novel's protagonists, Chichi, who lived in a mud hut made of “water-damaged walls” that was also filled with stacks of books (Okorafor, 2017, p. 14). When Desiree asked what students thought of the phrase “There’s more to the world than

big houses,” Katie responded immediately, “It’s not about how rich you are but who you are. It’s about how you much you make out of life.”

In discussion spaces, Katie did not require a lot of time to process her thoughts before speaking. She was able to make sense of ideas instantaneously as she spoke, and as a result, she participated verbally during book club conversations with greater frequency than others who preferred to have more time for reflective thinking and journaling. After the brief exchange with Katie, Desiree saw that other students were more quiet, so she asked everyone to reflect on the reading in writing. She asked guiding questions such as “What does [Chichi’s house] look like? What does it smell like? What types of objects are in it? What are the textures in it? How does one feel in this home?”

This additional step might seem like a commonsense gesture, but learning in student-oriented classrooms can overwhelmingly favor students who perform actively as enthusiastic speakers. A downside to such environments, while dialogical and student-centered, is that they can disadvantage learners whose introspective and contemplative natures require more time to formulate their thoughts. Indeed, such students are not simply passive receptacles who receive information directly from adult figures of authority (Freire, 1970) but are more self-contained and deserve to be able to choose how and when to engage in verbal interactions.

Brooke, a fifteen-year-old first-time participant, was one participant who benefited from having more time to process before joining a verbal conversation. Once given more time to think and write, she volunteered to read aloud from her work in response to Desiree’s original question. She read from her writing, “It’s not much, but it’s a home. You don’t have to live lavish to make it feel like home. Any home can be ordinary, but the people within it can be extraordinary.” A home, in her view, was defined more by the people in a space than by the

status associated with its physical quality. This response underscored that Brooke was able to consider thematic implications upon having sufficient time to reflect, and this additional temporal affordance was important in helping her convey a thoughtful response to her peers in this learning space.

As Maxine Greene (1995) has indicated, the power of literature lies in the “particularities” that allow readers “to see and to feel, to imagine, to lend their lives to another’s perspective” (69). Providing students with different response times permitted both Katie and Brooke to share literary interpretations at a pace that felt natural for them. Spatiotemporal flexibility could promote the cultivation of multiple “member[s] of the culture-creating community” (Bruner, 1986, p. 132). The reading community was therefore informed by collective and individual literacy processes. Reading aloud occurred at the same pace for the group for the first two weeks, as everyone had access to the same textual information, but processing the text occurred at different rates, and students were able to make sense of their reactions through immediate verbal reactions as well as more reflective written work. Such practices allowed the program to maintain its sense of a cohesive reading community while honoring students’ individual preferences as learners. The next section outlines how both group and personal writing activities helped one student come to identify as a writer.

Celine’s Verbal and Nonverbal Creative Acts

Verbal Contributions to Group Writing Activities

As much as Kindred co-facilitators endeavored to hear from all students, they did not penalize students for using agentive silence as writers and readers. The co-facilitators invited multiple ways of being, including nonverbal contributions, and they did not consistently force youth to speak beyond their spatiotemporal preferences. Aside from quick go-arounds in which

students willingly shared a brief word or phrase about their work, participants could choose when and where to share their multimodal pieces. In addition, the performance showcase at the end of the program featured volunteer readers such as Brooke, whose words will be featured later in this chapter.

Because adult staff did not level critiques at students' writing, the artist's statements and interactive fictions did not perhaps benefit from the close scrutiny of craft practiced in more technically demanding writing workshops. Students were given many opportunities to engage in writing exercises, and co-facilitators helped participants navigate disciplinary mechanisms in the creation of online branching narratives, but there was significant flexibility in terms of story length, complexity of characters, and development of ideas. The program was generally more interested in elevating the self-confidence of youth by supporting their production across different modes rather providing critical assessments of their work.

Co-facilitators thereby focused on growth of writers from *within* rather than from external evaluations, as demonstrated by Terry's emphasis on appreciations of writerly choices. After a student offered a writing suggestion during a sharing session, Terry said that "unless the author asks for feedback," they could simply listen actively or share positive feedback. Student fellows like Ada accordingly modeled by followed peer readings with responses like "Oh, I like that!" or "That was the best." These were genuine expressions of appreciation that helped fellow writers develop a sense of self-confidence in their work, particularly as some participants had faced negative experiences with instructors in their respective schools.

Katie had a math teacher who she felt had unfairly stereotyped her as a poor math student, and this experience of instructional prejudice was not unusual for Black and Latinx students. Octavia Butler's own teachers had "little engagement with Butler's prodigious,

obvious talents on the part of her teachers... And when they did comment, it was derisive. ‘Why must you write such strange things?’ The assignments at hand were never appraised for their structure, their technical prowess, their logical argument. Just red ink, correcting a stray typo or misspelling, or making a common assertion of personal taste rather than focusing on the writer and her needs” (Bryant, 2018, p. 28). As opposed to the instructors who covered Butler’s papers with punitive markings, Kindred co-facilitators wanted to provide opportunities for experimental play and student-driven growth.

In addition to literary discussions and reflective writings, students responded to literature by composing branching narratives inspired by the summer reading. By the second week of the program, participants had read the introductory chapters, and they worked in groups to devise multiple pathways for a fan fiction project. Using Post-Its, they created interlocking plot sequences that followed a choose-your-own-adventure model of nonlinear storytelling for *Akata Witch*. They would later return to this technique for their own work, as articulated in Chapter IV with Lyra's interactive fiction.

youngest students in the program, she was able to take on an integral role and participate in the writing process, even without engaging in the physical act of writing. She would later build on this plotline for her own branching fiction and architectural modeling.

As the summer came to a close, Celine signaled a different self-conception of her writing abilities that aligned with her fluency as a creative thinker. At the end of the fourth week, students had completed their own interactive fictions after several Twine sessions, and as a closing activity, students shared a brief phrase about what they had learned that week. Some mentioned that they developed a greater understanding technical skills like coding, and others mentioned socioemotional skills like perseverance. When Celine shared what she learned, she declared, “I’m a writer.”

After participating in group and individual writing exercises, Celine developed ownership over her writing identity and shared this self-designation with her peers. The Kindred Program offered opportunities for collaborative and solitary creative work, which was directed by the students and encouraged by peers and co-facilitators. Being able to craft her own path into writing production helped Celine express her literate identity publicly. Thirdspace is relevant here in that Celine was able to engage in imaginative writing exercises, which precipitated the recognition of a real identity, that of a writer.

Rather than asking students to follow the same processes, co-facilitators encouraged students to collaborate and produce independent work in meaningful ways that had effects on students’ self-conceptions. As Celine created branching narratives with her group and built her own interactive fiction, she assumed control over the creative process. The real-and-imagined space of the program provided a degree of freedom that helped Celine express her literate identity to others in her own time. The learning conditions that engenders growth, however,

often involves tension, and not all Kindred exercises produced the same kind of outward sense of confidence. The next section articulates how Celine navigated a performative exercise to match her distinct spatiotemporal needs as a learner.

Negotiating Space and Time During Role-Playing Activities

Three days before Celine declared that she felt that she had become a writer, Terry facilitated a live-action role playing (LARP) game. Such role-playing games (RPGs) invited participants to adopt particular storylines and develop a world together through acting. RPGs are typically associated with a gamified experience, but instead of focusing on badges, points, and competition, role-playing in the Kindred Program supported participants' capacity to understand conceptual tools like characterization and space.

The most outgoing students like Katie took to the role-playing games naturally, while more reserved individuals like Celine were much more hesitant to act in front of others. As the students gathered to play the RPG, Celine asked me quietly if she could sit out during the exercise. I was surprised, as she had been an energetic participant in previous activities, and I looked up to see all of the other students lining up towards the front of the room. I thought about whether she might feel even more isolated if she were to sit out and watch from a distance, so I asked Celine if she might read the directions and then decide whether she wanted to stay. I suggested that she could also be part of the group but not perform or make any exaggerated expressions. Celine agreed and joined the others, and from her willingness to stroll over, she did not seem to show any visible signs of acute anxiety or undue stress, but I did wonder whether I had just sent her into an uncomfortable situation.

Terry handed everyone, including adult staff, a slip of paper. Each one listed a different scenario to act out without words, and participants did not know what was on other cards.

Directions included statements such as, “You and the others are prisoners waiting for the verdict – you know you are guilty, but what do the others know? And is there a way you can escape? Get someone else to take your place?” Terry had adapted this exercise from an online role-playing site and removed cards with references to sex acts in order to keep the game accessible to adolescents. These types of world-building exercises were meant to inspire the use of silent bodily movements. Anyone could signal a “brake” to slow down or a “cut” motion to stop the scenario. When the RPG began, everyone began acting out independent storylines without talking. Some participants lurked in corners, others danced openly, and a few interacted through nonverbal exchanges. Celine walked around the room silently while observing others.

I was given instructions to be suspicious of others, and I found myself creating scenarios in my head to interpret other participants’ actions and to make sense of my own narrative. Many of these were wildly off-base. I had thought Katie was in trouble and needed help, but in our post-LARP conversation, she revealed that she had been a condemned prisoner trying to trick someone to replace her in prison. Likewise, Ada had thought that robin’s mission had been to take up as much space as possible, but robin had been putting her back flat to the wall because someone had been looking for her. Desiree was trying to get close to others, but robin had thought she was trying to chase Celine, who smiled and expressed that her aim had been to avoid people. I wasn’t sure whether Celine was referring to her card or to her own choice, but she had adapted the guidelines to fit her level of comfort and allow herself to be an active participant on her own terms.

Bodily engagement can offer students the opportunity to read the complex texts of their social worlds. These enacted occasions for meaning-making do not happen through prefixed, linear patterns but, as Leander and Boldt (2012) have noted, “unexpected, emergent

combinations that take flight into something new” (p. 43). Referencing Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) notion of the rhizome, they have argued that bodies are engaged in emergent properties of experimental and unpredictable connections, rather than a chain of causal patterns. In this RPB, each student found their own way into the activity. While several took to the call for dramatic flair quickly, students like Celine found ways to be subtle and still appear to follow the games’ rules to remain connected to the wider learning community.

Celine was not a recalcitrant student; she was highly creative, engaged, and self-aware. She successfully modified activities like LARP, which often felt more natural for extroverted students like Katie. The improvisational nature of the exercise was likely not the only limiting factor, for Celine was adept at the emergent mapping outlined in Chapter V, as she expressed pride in her artist’s statement in making a map with “surprising” shapes and enjoyed “working on a project that I did not plan completely.” The physical aspect of the activity was also not the only inhibiting component, as Celine participated readily in group exercises with specific moves like hapkido and yoga.

It seemed that a notable distinction between these activities and the LARP was the *performative* element of acting with bodily movement. Like dancing but unlike martial, acting could prompt greater discomfort and timidity in some students because of its performative nature. Being asked to act, even in a group improvisational setting, was perhaps intimidating or uninteresting for Celine, but these moments also helped her regulate her own spatiotemporal engagements. She was given enough autonomy to move around the room during the LARP to remove herself from inter/acting with others for as long as she wished, but she also remained an engaged member of the learning community. Providing students with the option to make

decisions around their use of time and space during performance-oriented activities could promote help learners know how to bend rules in their favor.

Because the Kindred co-facilitators did not provide a rubric of standards for student participation, Celine was able to adapt activities to her relative needs. A difficulty for any learner is knowing what kind of tension can be productive, as some degree of internal conflict is often an indication of personal growth. As Celine expressed in her program feedback, “I was shy but had fun” in the program. She was able to do activities that she had “never done before,” and she especially appreciated having extra time in which to work on her multimodal projects. Just as students are expected to read attentively and engage in multimodal activities, it is important for educators to recognize and make space for students’ agentic choices. While instructors should hold high expectations for all students, a belief in their capacities does not necessitate prescriptive approaches to learning. Instead, helping students realize their individual needs and supporting independent journeys can lead to new flights of experience.

Brooke’s Path from Private Writer to Aspiring Peer Mentor

The library has historically been a site for thriving democratic cultures, as diverse patrons have been able to access shared, neutral public grounds and form social relationships across communities (Klinenberg, 2018; Oldenburg, 1989). During the first two years of the program, Kindred had borrowed space in the top floor of a local neighborhood library. Because of the shared public nature of the space, however, the program’s success at the original site was impacted by factors outside of the co-facilitators’ control. Challenges with logistics arose from negotiating the space and time with a free community lunch program, which took place just before the program and often went beyond its designated reservation period.

While such services were crucial to the lifeblood of the wider community, Kindred co-facilitators found it was difficult to maintain consistency as a program. If there was a delay in setting up materials because of the other non-profit service, Terry and Grace found that time for students was reduced. Once the facilitators moved into a university-sponsored space during the summer of 2017, they were able to maintain temporal regularity with the support of program fellows and assistants who helped set up food, multimodal supplies, and seating arrangements. “It was helpful,” noted robin to me in an interview, “that the space was malleable and not disappearing.”

The new room was also conducive to a semi-public showcase. From 2017, based on conversations that I had had with Terry and Grace, the program shifted its performance showcase from a mid-year festivity to a closing event at the end of the summer, leading to higher attendance rates and a stronger sense of closure to the program. The co-facilitators expressed to the students that everyone was welcome to invite friends and family members to the closing celebration, but it would not be completely open to strangers, thereby retaining the integrity of the shared community space.

On the final day of the 2018 program, students helped set up stations with laptops that had their Twine games for attendees to play. In the back were tables with snacks like chips and fruit for the guests, and the program space transformed into an art gallery that featured students’ multimodal projects. Participants prepared for the showcase in different ways. Celine and Katie volunteered to create a welcome sign and decorative tags next to multimodal pieces that designated artists’ names, whereas others like Judy worked on completing Twine stories. Co-facilitator Grace created gallery statements to provide background information about students’ projects. In anticipation of student performances, program interns worked with a few volunteer

readers who had signed up to present five-minute pieces. After each person's run-through, they reviewed various performance options and discussed how performers could emphasize certain words, develop compelling vocal dynamics, and use tempo effects to accentuate certain ideas in their work.

That afternoon, a steady stream of guardians, guest teachers, friends, siblings, neighbors, and donors walked into the program space. As the program aimed to help all participants feel like valued members of a creative community, the showcase offered different ways of recognizing the achievements of youth artists. Although Celine did not volunteer to share her work aloud during the performance showcase, she nevertheless had an opportunity to present her work to family members and friends by walking them through the gallery. All students received a certificate of completion at the end of the program.

Brooke was among the participants who not only shared her work privately to guests like her mother during a gallery walk, but she also chose to read her poetry publicly during the program showcase. A fifteen-year-old Black student, she had joined the program last-minute because her friend had been a participant but had stopped attending because of a job conflict. Nevertheless, Brooke committed to finishing the program and ended up giving her first poetry reading at the community showcase. She was interested in issues of social justice and representing different issues in her multimodal pieces. The mask creation activity, which was outlined in Chapter IV, allowed Brooke to paint black and white colors that represented the promise of "interracial agreements," according to her artist's statement. Her commitment to coalition-building across racial affinity groups was clear, and she was "most proud of ... my ability to put real world situations within my mask and come up with solutions to counter them."

Her showcase poem was titled “Umoja” and centered the experiences of Kenyan women who lived in an actual self-governed city. Before her reading, she took off her shoes and stepped onto the stage with her bare feet. In a clear, strong voice, she explained that she was barefoot only in homes where she felt comfortable, so taking her shoes off in the Kindred Program symbolized how she felt at ease here. She then gave background information about the city of Umoja, which she said was “formed by women as a refuge against sexual violence.” Lines from her poem included, “Voices sing praises. / Oppression has released us from the shackles of hell. / We have no owner, so we walk without leashes. / We are who we are.”

This work referred to an imagined “we,” a collective fictional voice to represent the perspective of real victims and survivors of sexual abuse. The fusion of her personal feminist ideology and the fictional voices living in an actual village situated Brooke in a real-and-imagined space of a performing artist. A wider schooling context often emphasized standardized exams that disproportionately limited the advancement of Black students (Morris, 2016, p. 33), but this out-of-school literacy space aimed to offer students a platform for sharing their work and amplifying their voices as public performers. During writing exercises, Grace encouraged students to put their “critical brain away” and instead find “something unexpected, something ugly, something beautiful, something that happens.” Rather than viewing her own work through a judgmental lens, therefore, the Kindred Summer Program encouraged students like Brooke to turn their critical gaze onto the world. Brooke’s poem forcefully illustrated a real-and-imagined space of social reflection that engendered the enunciation of multivocal Black feminism.

As described earlier in this chapter, Brooke had been generally reserved as a student who benefited from more reflective writing exercises rather than spontaneous responses. By the end of the program, she felt comfortable preparing and presenting a poem of self-determination and

resistance. She expressed in her program feedback that “getting the opportunity to be who I am through writing and sharing my thoughts was amazing.” After giving her first poetry reading, she went to the co-facilitators and expressed that she wanted to apply for a fellowship position next year and help mentor younger students. Her desire to take on a visible leadership role aligned with her increasingly prominent role as a public performer. This interest also intersected with her career aspirations, as she wanted to become an English teacher in the future and support learners.

The Kindred Summer Program revealed the potential richness of a curriculum informed by imaginative writing, iterative productions, and various opportunities to celebrate student work. Learning did not arise simply from only “the traditional, rationalistic academic mode” (Buckingham, 2003, p. 171). Brooke’s reference to Kindred as a kind of home evoked bell hooks’s (1990) call for the “subversive value of homeplace” to function as “a site of resistance” (p. 47). Writers like hooks have been “innovatively open to the formation of multiple communities of resistance, poly vocal political movements capable of linking together many radical subjectivities and creating new ‘meeting places’ and real-and-imagined ‘spaces’ for diverse oppositional practices” (Soja, 1996, p. 84). Brooke’s evocation of being barefoot at home evokes bell hooks’s desire for “Black folks in general across class ... to restore that sense of resistance in the home” (Yancy, 2017, p. 21). Out-of-school spaces could therefore offer students like Brooke to articulate a politics of resistance from a space of solidarity.

Brooke mentioned in her program feedback that Kindred was “a comfortable space where you don't get judged on the way you think or work.” Throughout the program, co-facilitators constructed detailed lesson plans with specific timelines, materials, guest lecturers, and activities. At the same time, they permitted spontaneity, unfinished ideas, and the cultivation of individual

strengths. Because of the opportunities for personal development and peer mentorship, co-facilitators were able to see students like Brooke develop greater self-confidence as a writer and leader. The next section will highlight how one program alumna, Ayanna, began to traverse across spaces and contribute to social movements beyond Kindred.

Ayanna's Evolving Activism Across Thirdspaces

Seeing Extraordinary Possibilities in Ordinary Places

As the most populous borough in New York City, Brooklyn has an estimated population of 2,648,771 (NYC Department of City Planning, 2017). In the 1970s, the city divested and neglected many neighborhoods, but with the downtown reconstruction of the MetroTech Center in the 1990s, certain areas became economically reinvigorated (Gould & Lewis, 2017).

Socioeconomically advantaged white populations could expand their influence across the bridge from lower Manhattan, and the real estate investments established new construction sites for incoming residents. As a result, areas such as Park Slope and Brooklyn Heights, followed by Carroll Gardens, Fort Greene, Red Hook, and Williamsburg, became rapidly redeveloped and occupied by wealthier renters and homeowners (Plunz, 2016).

The Kindred Program was located in a rapidly gentrifying area north of Prospect Park. It did not, however, focus exclusively on identifying spatial injustices, as they also highlighted the positive properties of the local neighborhood. Through occasional neighborhood walks, co-facilitators asked students to notice the generative aspects of the area around the program site. While students often understood and discussed broader structural injustices that impacted Brooklyn, these walks did not only point to blight and irreversible destruction. Instead, the students could see the promise of play through encounters with the outdoors and what Grace called creative “limbering.”

Ayanna, who was a sixteen-year-old program fellow in 2017, had learned about the program from a neighborhood flyer. In her program application, she noted that she considered herself to be an outgoing person and enjoyed reading books with “layers” of meaning that prompted multiple readings. She believed that storytelling was a “powerful and moving” medium through which to express feelings. As the oldest child, she took care of her siblings while her mother worked, and she believed fiercely in developing networks to form solidarity across communities, racial identities, and age groups.

On the fifth day of the 2017 program, the co-facilitators held a workshop focused on biology and the communication channels through which plants spoke to one another. robin began with a microlecture on trees and showed a documentary about how they formed cooperative relationships through the redistribution of nutrients and signals across fungal networks. The video clip revealed how older, bigger trees established connections with younger ones and transmitted information without a central nervous system. Rather than a purely competition-oriented view of evolution, the film presented an understanding of the interconnectedness of life. robin asked students to discuss their reactions, and Ayanna was especially drawn to the idea that scientific theories could change over time. One scientific view might not always hold, she said, in contrast to what she had been told in school. Just as human beings evolved, Ayanna remarked, “science can change.” Both organic matter and scientific theories could adjust as new understandings emerged about the world.

robin explained that both scientists and artists shifted between questions and observations. “We’ll be doing that too,” she said, and invited students to be part of an inquiry as naturalists. robin noted that historically, the work of naturalists was “connected to the work of colonialists, in that they’ve been going into places and discovering things.” Even as students

participated in the work of scientific-artistic investigations, the Kindred Program provided a critical context for understanding interrelated systems of colonialism, racism, and expropriation. Students decided that they had descended from Venus to take note of their encounters on Earth, and by adopting an inquisitive stance, they could document any noticings around the neighborhood.

Their task, robin stated, was “to find plants and find their uses” through drawings and written notes. After heading outside and stopping at a small patch of grass near the corner, robin asked students several questions to prompt their creative writing:

Think about whether you’re taking notes quickly because you’re in a hurry, or whether you’re taking notes in detail. Notice the shape, the color. Do the things look similar to what’s on Venus? Why do you think the shape is the way that it is? Why is it that things like this and get dry on this planet? Is it by itself? Why do you think they’re so far away from each other? ... Do you think these things could survive in Venus? ... What does it say about this place? Are these things special, or are they not? Do these things move?

Spatial explorations involved inspirations from ordinary community “third spaces” (Moje, et al., 2004, p. 42). Merging biological investigations and writing exercises reinforced the notion that scientific and artistic processes involved overlapping and iterative practices of observing, questioning, and inferring from the world around them. Students imagined that they were looking for new signs of life, but their own turn as naturalists inaugurated a project of constructive imagination rather than one of destructive expropriation.

When students summarized their writing in a large group, they revealed an understanding of how scientific and artistic explorations could lead to positive naturalist findings. Ayanna wrote a brief piece from the perspective of a “scientist who thought it would be a good way to

cure the ugliness of human behavior” through her investigation of nearby plants. Similarly, as Adrienne Rich (1995) has proposed, developing an alternative to cultural degradation occurs through “a naturalist’s attention to minute phenomena, for reading between the lines, watching closely for symbolic arrangements, decoding difficult and complex messages left for us by women of the past. It is work, in short, that is opposed by, and stands in opposition to, the entire twentieth-century white male capitalist culture.” Similarly, in contrast to explorations that have resulted in colonial exploitation and devastation, naturalists like Ayanna embarked on a discovery for social betterment.

Such projects connected students to nearby outdoor spaces, which youth were encouraged to see as sites of possibility and promise. Kindred encouraged students to re-search their city as imaginative creators and understand the potential for urban landscapes to be sources of inspiration for futurist projects. Through these exercises, students expanded their creative dexterity as explorers, gaining new perspectives of seemingly dormant objects and spaces. The following section will trace how Ayanna’s activist standpoint helped propel her work as a student leader both in Kindred and other out-of-school spaces.

Building Fellowship Within and Beyond the Program

The Kindred fellows occupied a unique position in the program, as they were participants who engaged in all workshops with peers. Fellows like Ayanna and Ada consistently provided encouragement of others, offering high fives and accolades when peers shared their writing. Their roles were also flexible, as they stepped into rotating leadership positions. Some facilitated yoga exercises, taught martial arts moves, and led choreographed dances, and they took turns modeling active participation. Responsibilities rotated so that fellows could lead the group on occasion but also provide support from within the group as attentive participants. They also took

turns taking pictures for the program's social media pages on Instagram and Twitter, which prominent science fiction writers recirculated to add public support.

The student leaders also debriefed with adult co-facilitators to provide weekly feedback and to discuss which participants might need extra support in the program to feel a greater sense of belonging. These conversations helped inform where fellows would sit the next day, as they were typically spaced out throughout the room so that they could work with younger and newer participants. Fellows also helped plan a field day outdoors on the local university green, as the co-facilitators had included a program day in the outdoors since the second year to help encourage more interactivity with nearby parks. Fellows helped lead activities like makeup tutorials and hula hooping, and students could also play card games or weave friendship bracelets.

After her time with Kindred as a student fellow in 2017, Ayanna returned to the program in 2018 to attend the performance showcase and share her experiences. She explained that Kindred felt like a “safe environment” because she was “surrounded by people like me.” Her desire for knowledge, she said, grew during her time with the program. She was energized by the aspiration to have more youth voices involved in activist causes and to mobilize for women's rights. After the showcase, Ayanna shared with me that she was helping to organize a Youtube channel with some friends that featured teen perspectives on political events, such as the Kavanaugh hearings or racial profiling against Black college students in dorms. She also reached out to me to ask if I had suggestions for topics that Asian-American communities might face, as she believed that issues of social justice and racial discrimination impacted various communities.

With Terry's encouragement, she applied for and received a fellowship with an organization that advocated for women's reproductive rights. As a result, she became inspired to provide a service that would offer material necessities like toiletries and tampons for women in local shelters. Ayanna's commitment to nonprofit work demonstrated adolescents' capacity to combat forces that threaten to deny basic rights, such as reproductive services (Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc., 2014; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). Her engagement with nonprofits beyond the Kindred Program spoke to the possibilities of a "central repositioning" of the body as a way to interpret "real-and-imagined geographies of everyday life in and outside the city" (Soja, 1996, p. 112).

Ayanna's work demonstrated the importance of moving across different social assemblages (DeLanda, 2006) and building relationships with different resource partners. The body, long abandoned as a site of transformation from which the "whole of (social) space proceeds" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 405), could be leveraged to form networked resistance. By making connections across non-profit and social media sites, Ayanna embodied the distributive capacity of the body as an active force rather than passive object in relation to unjust policies and practices. The thirdspaces of nonprofit organizations and social media sites provided real-and-imagined spaces in which infrastructures and relationships helped Ayanna become an active mobilizer. In realizing the radical potential of youth organizing to catalyze racial and gender justice beyond a single program site, she represented what Soja might call an embodied "resistance to the dominant order" (Soja, 1996, p. 68).

In using the term "body" I am mindful of the need to push against a Cartesian dualism of the mind as an objective and separate entity from the body, and I instead gesture towards a critical postmodern feminist conception of situatedness (Haraway, 1988, p. 583). Self-awareness

and social connections in out-of-school spaces can help youth work against the politicization of their own bodies by forming assemblages that disrupt racial and gendered subordination. In crossing over from Kindred to a women's rights organization to her own nonprofit and Youtube channel, Ayanna advanced an equity-oriented mission across physical and virtual spaces. While these moves are not panaceas for structural violence and white cisheteropatriarchy, I argue that in meeting with women's rights organizers and gathering support through various social media platforms like Instagram, Ayanna opened new avenues for social change. In the final section, I comment on the importance of personal wellness in shaping a generation of student leaders.

Nourishing the Body to Sustain the Soul

In this chapter, I have emphasized the ways in which participants' use of space and time contributed to the development of their writing and leadership identities. Degrees of spatiotemporal flexibility permitted bonding within the learning community, and bodily autonomy allowed more reserved students like Celine and Brooke to foster and articulate their identities as creative writers and peer mentors. Furthermore, the real-and-imagined space of the Kindred Program supported the enactment of Ayanna's activist efforts through creative writing and community organizing in nonprofit and social media spaces.

The Kindred Program's co-facilitators and participants established a fluid learning environment through the shifting assemblages of book clubs, writing collectives, individual project sessions, and semi-public showcases. This thirdspace permitted opportunities for students to ideate, iterate, and inform others, and it helped students build on their strengths across the sciences, mathematics, and the arts. Even with the program's emphasis on individual growth, it also remained focused on cooperative community-building. Ada explained that Kindred

provided an “interactive and creative” learning environment that was meant to “empower young girls and the LGBTQ+ community in a safe space where no judgement is allowed.”

The program facilitated opportunities for sharing of not only writing but personal objects. In the middle of the 2018 program, co-facilitators organized a clothing swap and invited anyone to bring in items from their wardrobe. Grace expressed to the participants, “This is something that we do in our friend group because sometimes you might have clothes that you like but you’re tired of them or they don’t fit as well as you’d like.” The co-facilitators emphasized that anyone could take pieces from the pile, even if they did not bring any to share. On the afternoon of the swap, co-facilitators and a few students brought in shoes, clothing, bags, jewelry, and make-up, and participants stayed after for up to an hour, trying on different pieces. Wearing outfits and accessories previously owned by others in the program helped students and adults develop language around common experiences. Terry remarked, for instance, how pants that did not fit her as well anymore fit a student particularly well, and they discussed how finding the right pair of pants for their relative sizes and shapes was difficult given the standardization of clothing sizes.

A word that Kindred participants brought up throughout the two years of the research project was “family.” During the summers, participants reported feeling integrated into the Kindred family by the end of the program and gave each other familial titles like “mom” and “sister.” Co-facilitator Grace mentioned that this feeling of community was fostered in large part because of the fellows. Ayanna said that as a Kindred fellow and participant, “I felt like I was part something bigger than myself,” and she wanted others to feel as though they were part of a larger collective too. If everyone understood that they shared common interests, she stated, everyone could start to engage in community organizing.

Thirdspaces, as Kevin Leander (2001) has noted, refer to postmodern and feminist counterspaces that are “simultaneously combined and reconfigured through lived spatiality” (p. 640). While Kris Gutiérrez (2008) has used the term slightly differently to note the power of transformative sites of deep learning for nondominant communities, I see the expansive value of this theory. The radical potential of thirdspaces is in its capacity to destabilize institutionalized learning methods and make provisions for safer spaces in which students can thrive. Given that “education can act as a practice of dominance and oppression,” particularly for queer Black youth, out-of-school spaces are crucial in support students’ sense of belonging (Johnson, 2017, p. 14). As explained earlier in this chapter, Kindred program co-facilitators were more interested in building a sustained community of writers and artists with the self-confidence to propel their own growth as learners, rather than teaching technical skills or measurable “deliverables.”

The co-facilitators believed in the importance of care through the preparation of snacks. “I think,” said Grace to me in an interview, “food plays a role in feeling cared about.” The adult staff and student fellows arrived early each day to set up arranged bread, deli items, chips, fruit, and vegetables on a back table, and on participants’ birthdays, co-facilitators brought in cupcakes to celebrate. In the first couple of years, Kindred had used pre-packed, identical lunch boxes, but some food was thrown away because not everyone ended up eating the same food items. In contrast, the current open setting allowed for less waste because students were able to take exactly what they wanted to eat during self-designated moments.

In addition to the regular availability of snacks, the bathroom was stocked with menstrual products that were easily accessible to students. The separate facility was advantageous because it provided a space that was separate from public view. In the public library during previous summers in 2016 and earlier, some of the participants reported feeling made uncomfortable by

the presence of young men who made suggestive or lewd comments to former participants on their way to the bathroom. Having a separate program space therefore helped the young women and nonbinary youth feel more protected and safer.

Kindred co-facilitators recognized the necessity of providing not only intellectual stimulation but also non-traditional provisions such as nutrition, sanitary supplies, affirmations, and a sense of collective obligation to advance causes of racial justice and environmentalism. Developing as writers and artists necessarily involved attending to wellness in mind, body, and spirit, as Kindred recognized that care for others and the wider planet began with care for the self.

CHAPTER VII: A FUTURE FOR CRITICAL MULTIMODAL LITERACIES

Summary of Emerging Understandings

In the Kindred Summer Program, middle and high school students engaged with critical multimodal literacies through the (re)arrangement of diverse semiotic resources, as they experimented and learned from peers, guest artists, and adult co-facilitators. The program supported the development of transdisciplinary knowledge, opportunities for speculative world-building, and the formation of literate identities across physical and virtual spaces. I propose that out-of-school learning spaces like Kindred can point towards diverse possibilities for meaning-making. Throughout the summer program, participants examined existing realities and added layers onto complex universes as inscribers of vast imaginaries.

Following Deleuze and his longtime collaborator Guattari, I viewed space not as constituted by fixed boundaries but as a site of mutable assemblages. I have contested in previous chapters that Kindred facilitated encounters with multiple modalities and illuminated various occasions for self- and world-building. By examining the program through the lens of first, second, and thirdspace, I have sought to map the significance of multimodal affordances across space and time. Exploring, remixing, and sharing projects constituted a constellation of activities that served to reinforce students' assertions of personal identities, alternative landscapes, and spatiotemporal choices.

In Chapter I, I commented on the contemporary issues at stake and the urgency of centering asset-oriented models of teaching and learning. I expressed that through this research, I was interested in understanding 1) how students who have been traditionally and persistently marginalized in formal schooling spaces demonstrated investment in critical multimodal literacies, 2) how participants' creative projects revealed the possibilities of and constraints on

the imagination, and 3) what conditions helped inspire youth to express their identities as evolving writers and peer mentors.

Chapter II provided a review of critical multimodal literacies, from its historical origins in critical theory to more modern accounts of critical multimodalities. This section also placed a theory of multiliteracies into conversation with sociocultural perspectives of learning and teaching. Working against a romanticized view of critical praxis and teleological reforms, I closed with a recognition of the challenge of achieving ecological transformations and systemic change. Next, in Chapter III, I discussed research methodologies and offered a chronological overview of grounded theory, situating myself within a constructivist tradition. Pushing against positivist conceptions of replicable experiments and postpositivist dimensions of grounded theory, I articulated my positionality as a researcher who harbored subjectivities that impacted my partial and incomplete understandings of a learning space, of which I was a constituting member.

In the next three chapters, I focused on different aspects of the Kindred Summer Program by using particular angles of spatial analysis, which I will summarize in three parts: In Chapter IV, I first outlined how Kindred participants engaged in a dynamic process of meaning-making in firstspace through diverse material forms. The program fostered imaginative play and critical multimodal literacies through handmade journals, papier-mâché masks, binary code weavings, and choose-your-own-adventure tales. These multimodal affordances provided opportunities for transdisciplinary experiments as well as concrete materializations of selfhood. In my analysis of firstspace, I noticed how students chose to foreground aspects of their racial and sexual identities in multimodal productions. With particular material elements, Ada and Lyra decided to make visible dimensions of their identity that had been invisibilized, dismissed, or devalued in other

contexts. Their investment in critical multimodalities was sutured to their own self-affirmations and self-expressions, which were not always accessible in formal schooling spaces.

Chapter VI focused on the spatial and modular arrangements that accommodated various imagined worlds. Judy's and Katie's conceived secondspaces, or representations of alternative futures, charted the promises and potential limitations of the imagination. Through tracing, collaging, mapmaking, and architectural modeling, students had the opportunity to construct futuristic worlds, yet I found that their conceptions were affected by their understanding of existing social issues. While examinations of environmental injustice and racial segregation allowed them to demonstrate critical consciousness, students engineered spaces that in part preserved existing damaging practices. I do not mean to state that the students themselves were inadequate or lacking in their thinking. Instead, I assert that when a society has broken covenants with families and communities through institutionalized learning, an impoverished media landscape, and profit-driven reforms, it becomes difficult for any individual to imagine a new world that is completely devoid of current forces of capitalist expropriation.

In my penultimate chapter, I highlighted the conditions that made visible how the Kindred Program supported students' changing conceptions of themselves as readers, writers, and leaders. In documenting the formation of evolving self-identifications, Chapter VI noted how the program promoted synchronous readings but also provided spatiotemporal flexibility for students to process texts, share their interpretations, and engage in embodied literacies in their own ways. Introspective students like Celine and Brooke refined their authorial voices through collective and individual activities, which contributed to the development of literate identities. This chapter also commented on the importance of public performance opportunities, which

provided student leaders like Ayanna the opportunity to reach broader audiences and share her efforts to support community needs beyond her own immediate circle.

In this conclusion, I will articulate how out-of-school learning environments like Kindred can reflect possibilities for all learning spaces. I first outline why out-of-school spaces are important, as they supplement educational opportunities for families who are disadvantaged by racial segregation and unequal resource allocation. I will then explain how some of the insights from the Kindred Program can translate to classroom spaces, where teachers might face fewer resources and have less professional autonomy than out-of-school sites.

Although not all classrooms can be extricated easily from institutional mandates or competitive rankings that create artificial scarcities at the top, every school has the capacity to fulfill its promises to advance public good by celebrating the rich idiosyncrasies and affinities of students rather than reducing them to caricatures of “smart” and “struggling” learners. School instructors and specialists can expand their repertoire to be increasingly inclusive and culturally sustaining to meet the needs of their student populations. Specifically, by incorporating critical multimodal literacies in their classrooms, teachers can encourage learners to play with textures and topologies to convey compelling stories.

In this dissertation, I have used the term “out-of-school” to situate my work within a particular scholarly tradition of English education, but I am aware of the limitations of this phrase and anticipate that emerging historical currents will provoke more precise language, as different words gain currency in academic discourse. Ultimately, I hope that the binary between in- and out-of-school learning spaces will be destabilized, for greater partnerships between institutions and community programs can forge essential cross-spatial alliances. I close by offering implications for theorists who are interested in reexamining established boundaries

drawn around particular educational environments, and these final remarks motion towards the ultimate purpose of this research and the ongoing nature of justice-oriented efforts in education.

Importance of Out-Of-School Learning Environments

As testing regimes persist within formal schooling sites (Ravitch, 2010; Kohn, 2000), formal institutions too often drain teachers and students of their creative spirits. In contrast, this study has examined how out-of-school learning environments can champion students' learning and promote their development as multimodal creators and changemakers. Scholars like Vadeboncoeur (2005) have noted that nontraditional learning settings have the flexibility in their organization of time and space can allow for more intimate relationship-building and time to process ideas and produce work. In the Kindred Summer Programs, co-facilitators carved out segments of the day for students to contribute to group activities, but participants largely had control over decision-making in their own work. With the reduction of grade-based incentives, participants had the opportunity to take home portable assignments like Twine narratives if they wished, and they used the final week to extend their work on key projects. For the live showcase and online portfolios, students chose which pieces they wanted to share with community members and wider audiences.

Participants also retained bodily independence in the out-of-school learning space. Individuals could stand up and walk freely to cool off by the A/C, access free sanitary supplies in the bathroom, or refill their snack plates. Students mentioned that they ate more nutritious foods like fruits and vegetables at the program than they did during the school year. Furthermore, participants like Lyra, who had been diagnosed with ADHD, could benefit from doodling during discussions and micro-lectures. This flexibility was also beneficial for others, particularly if

Lyra, who was a talkative student and the only white participant, needed to step back from dominating conversations and allow Black and Latinx students to be heard.

At the same time, students were challenged in appropriate ways. Ranging in ages from thirteen to seventeen, Kindred participants explored various scientific concepts like biological communication among fungi as well as artistic techniques like watercolor blending. As former student fellow Ayanna expressed in an interview, Kindred allowed her to realize that “creativity, reading, imagination, science, coding, and architecture are ... all a part of everyday life.” Informal conversations during projects moved fluidly from anime to HTML coding, and multimodal engagements informed how students saw themselves as agentic creators across the arts and sciences.

In some aspects, the Kindred Summer Program functioned similarly to traditional schools. They engaged in micro-lectures and grouped students in assigned seats to invite different partnerships. Although they were not in the business of preparing students for state and national exams, co-facilitators wanted some degree of consistency in order for smooth planning and more effective community-building, so attendance and retention were important to them. They texted students and sometimes called caretakers if participants unexpectedly missed several days. Instead of reporting warnings, they called to express that they missed the students and hoped that they would be returning. Participants did not receive any consequences for being late. If someone arrived later in the day, they were received with cheerful greetings and smiles as they walked into the space. This sense of sonic joy resonated and helped make participants feel welcome. While participation remained consistent for most students, some conflicts arose when non-fellows obtained summer jobs during the program, and co-facilitators expressed their hopes to offer stipends to all students one day to help with retention.

As scholars have attested, out-of-school spaces have the potential to be sites for expanding conceptions of selfhood, increased competence across multiple literacies, and the authorship of new social possibilities (Flores, 2018; Muhammad & Womack, 2015; Gutiérrez, 2008; Alvermann & Hinchman, 2011; Christenbury, Bomer, & Smagorinsky, 2009; Gutiérrez, Bien, Selland, & Pierce, 2011; Hull & Schultz, 2002). Kindred participants stated that they felt freer to be themselves in Kindred, which provided a sense of connectedness and a new “family.”

Educators often want to push students towards engage in risk-taking in order for them to grow as learners, but such invitations can be fraught because of the high-stakes nature of schooling. Failing in front of teachers and peers can result in public shame and perceived incompetence, which can have lasting negative consequences on students’ sense of self-regard. Kindred co-facilitators provided different opportunities to allow students to present their multimodal creations, whether in pairs, small groups, a collective whole, or a semi-public showcase. Students were not forced to present their writing or ideas in larger groups if they did not feel ready. In their feedback forms, participants overwhelmingly noted how the program encouraged them to engage with challenging activities but in a safer and open learning space.

The program certainly benefited from a certain level of self-selection, as participants applied to be part of the program. The co-facilitators, however, accepted every participant who had applied and welcomed friends of participants like Brooke to join last-minute. Building inclusive spaces for Black, Latinx, and queer students to thrive is crucial for learners who have been marginalized in formal schooling spaces and broader society. This responsibility can be taken up by all educators across different learning sites, and the next section will elaborate on how some of Kindred’s practices can relate to more formal schooling spaces.

Implications for Classroom Educators

In a political moment that is characterized by rampant funding cuts and increased privatization of public goods, states often place extreme pressure and strict accountability measures on schools in the most under-resourced areas. As Linda Darling-Hammond (2007) has argued, learning conditions are worse for many students of color and low-income students in the twenty-first century than before the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to desegregate schools (p. 255). With the perpetuation of a high-stakes testing regime, low-income minority students encounter more teacher-centered instruction and an “attenuated curriculum” that disadvantages learners (Golann, 2015, p. 104). In particular, Black and Latinx students disproportionately attend schools that “emphasize regulation and centralized control” (Lipman, 2004, p. 69). Increased classroom bureaucratization and routinization diminish the joy of learning and perpetuate the unjust classification of minoritized students as seeming under-achievers. Youth then face the brunt of structural failures, and they are punished for the racist and classist policies that have perpetually targeted them.

Out-of-school programs that operate without the direct influence of a pervasive testing culture can offer students greater choice and more opportunities to engage with multimodal projects. However, curricula inspired by programs like Kindred can also inform the work of classroom instructors, especially if plans are adapted for particular contexts and environments (Smith & Shen, 2017). Like the out-of-school programs that Jennifer Vadeboncoeur (2005) has examined, Kindred did not maintain a strict behavioral policy, punitive attendance records, designated bathroom keys, or proficiency standards. At the same time, adult instructors still had high expectations for students, as they promoted a depth and breadth of transdisciplinary

understandings. The program provided creative latitude for multiple pathways towards content production and enactments of critical multimodal literacies.

For schools that are concerned about student engagement and academic persistence, curricula involving multimodalities can promote more occasions for student-driven experimentations. Kindred co-facilitators eschewed mere skills-based pedagogy and measurable products in favor of invitations for generative play. Their aim was to move beyond the acquisition of functional skills and encourage students to make transdisciplinary discoveries across modalities. Co-facilitators provided material items like paint and card stock, which youth could freely adapt with additional assistance to render visible science fictions and alternative worlds. Exposure to different forms of creative expression, from architectural modeling to binary weaving, could leverage students' interests and inspire new passions.

When learners draw on their natural curiosities in classroom activities, they can more readily invest in transdisciplinary literacies across subject areas. Even if educators are interested in building opportunities for experiential learning and student choice, a lack of funding might remain a substantial barrier to the incorporation of multimodalities in classrooms. While Kindred's crowdfunding techniques are certainly available to instructors through popular sites such as DonorsChoose.org, education should not be a privatized endeavor that is available only to those who can make use of time, social capital, structural support, or personal sacrifices to acquire extra materials for exploratory play.

In such cases where material goods are inaccessible to instructors, the Kindred Program demonstrated that the body itself could be a site for transformative pedagogical practices. Black female scholars have attested to the weight of trauma from racialized and gendered violence inflicted on Black women's bodies across history and throughout the present day (Glymph, 2008;

Evans-Winters, 2005; Morris, 2016). While acknowledging these persistent realities, educators can simultaneously encourage the mobilization of bodies for liberatory purposes. The Kindred Program aimed to celebrate different kinds of corporeal productions by inviting students to act out skits, embody coding symbols, and engage in various movement breaks. It also provided nourishment in the form of mindfulness workshops, compliment jars, replenished snacks, and free menstrual products. As bell hooks (1989) has attested, providing fulfilling educational experiences for Black students involves a constant “striving for wholeness, for unity of heart, mind, body, and spirit” (p. 49).

Angela Davis (2018) and Demita Frazier (Taylor, 2017) have pointed to the promise of Afrofuturism for its revolutionary potential to activate more inclusive social futures. The term “Afrofuturism” is often attributed to Mary Dery (1994), but it stems from a long history of liberatory experimentations and artistic reimaginings. As Davis (2018) has stated, the work of Octavia Butler and other Afrofuturists permits “exploring relationalities that may not yet be conceptualizable through our existing vocabularies... We are the materialized imaginations of our forebearers.” Encouraging students to participate in futurist thinking can help refocus curricula from Eurocentric histories to Black identities and diasporas in a conceivable future.

Bruno Latour (2005) has stated that works of fiction such as novels and comics “provide a vast playground to rehearse accounts of what makes us act” (p. 55). Based on my work with Kindred, I would add that books do not alone constitute the imaginative terrain. Critical multimodal literacies across disciplines allow students to play and produce artifacts that propose different social possibilities. Investigative processes such as conducting inquiries, making observations, and drawing tentative conclusions resonate just as strongly in empirical spaces like scientific labs as in creative fields like short story writing. Critically, while no universal panacea

exists for racial stereotyping and damaging prejudice against Black students pursuing STEM careers (McGee, 2013; Riegle-Crumb, King, Irizarry, 2019), the Kindred Summer Program demonstrated that futurist thinking could stimulate scientific practices such as examining objects, documenting insights, and exploring the natural world.

If students have the opportunity to make visible their speculations, they can build what Allan Luke has called “an agentic bridge” to promote “cultural and civic action, and, indeed identity work, institutional critique and formation” (Garcia, Luke, & Seglem, 2018, p. 75). School-based educators can adapt Kindred’s peer mentorship model to support youth leadership and learning in mixed-age environments. Colleagues can facilitate inter-class visits across grades level to invite readers of different experiences to share their knowledge and co-construct an interactive multimodal presentation. Partnerships within and even across schools can also provide opportunities for recent immigrants or international students to share their expertise of heritage languages or numeracy, perhaps with the support of peer translators or translation software if needed.

In addition, inviting community role models and guest teachers into classrooms can spark greater interest in the arts, STEM, politics, and other pertinent fields. If possible, compensating professionals from the community could also help build sustainable intergenerational knowledge that is relevant and meaningful for students. In their program feedback, the Kindred participants expressed overwhelming enthusiasm about meeting a Black woman science fiction writer who was also from Brooklyn. During an afternoon workshop, the writer shared her latest stories and answered questions about her experiences with the publication process and her personal career transitions. For teachers who are uncertain about how to connect with potential mentors, they can begin to develop networks through social media spaces, nonprofit and municipal websites,

education conferences, local community gatherings, and school functions to help bring experienced authors, artists, athletes, and activists into youth spaces.

Educators, as Maxine Greene (1995) has argued, have the power to “bring warmth into places where young persons come together” (p. 43). Teaching then “becomes a search for a social vision of a more humane, more fully pluralist, more just, and more joyful community” (p. 61). Although it is important to recognize the ways in which schools still widely reproduce systems of inequity and restrict impoverished communities to low-wage vocational work, classrooms can promote contextualized curricula that leverage inherent social and cultural capital. By shifting their missions from test preparation to multimodal play and community-based education, schools can release institutional pressure on teachers, who can then devote more energy to deepening relationships with students and supporting the contributions of youth to broader society.

Theoretical Significance for Researchers

Soja (2010) has described thirdspace as one that is “filled with politics and privileges, ideologies and cultural collisions, utopian ideals and dystopian oppression, justice and injustice, oppressive power and the possibility for emancipation” (p. 103). Thirdspaces collapse divisions between time and space, offering what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) might refer to as a plane of immanence, or a single sheet from which multiple “lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social formations” can be observed (p. 9).

Similarly, I view out-of-school programs as part of a broader plane of immanence consisting of various learning phenomena. On this plane, different pedagogies, theories, and histories can cross-pollinate, and a hope for more equitable futures can co-exist alongside a recognition of stark realities. A Deleuzian plane of immanence involves a simultaneous

recognition of boundary productions as well as intertwined phenomena (Barad, 2007), specifically regarding in-school and out-of-school spaces. This kind of thinking about space and time can inspire critical reflections of the “social, political, and conceptual dimensions of language practice” which are “intimately tied up with who students can and should be” (Leander, 2001, p. 673).

As noted, I have used the phrase “out-of-school” to serve as a direct reference to the lineage of research that has been conducted in nontraditional learning sites (Hagood, Skinner, Venters, & Yelm, 2013; Moje, et al., 2004; Hull & Schultz, 2001). While I use this term to align with a particular scholarly tradition, I recognize that this expression enunciates an unhelpful divide between formal schooling and other sites like after-school spaces, weekend classes, and summer camps. Out-of-school spaces can also be subject to resource constraints, attendance inconsistencies, and teacher-directed pedagogies. Because I view language as being contingent on sociocultural shifts and contextual customs, however, I remain attuned to the ways in which educational communities generate phrases that account for practices that live within the fluidities of multiple learning sites.

A theory of thirdspace will hopefully guide us closer to this moment, as it highlights and disrupts divisions between spaces (Soja, 1996; Lefebvre, 1990; Harvey, 1990). Its theoretical value has been in acknowledging the concurrent preservation and deconstruction of existing spatial formations. For example, similar to the complex secondspaces conceived by Judy and Katie, political projects that aim to advance equity may unintentionally reproduce existing structural stratifications, especially given organizers’ entangled positions within global relations of exploitation and profiteering. Therefore, mobilizing support for the eradication of policies and practices that have fortified the virulence of neoliberalism entails the recognition that

educators and activists are also deeply implicated themselves in these divisive systems, even as we work to dismantle them.

However, the paradoxical nature of radical activism does not mean that teachers and scholars must work towards the dissolution of all boundaries. The struggle for legal protections of marginalized groups requires activism across multiple fronts and demands recognition from local, state, and federal organizations. As Ella Baker has attested, “[T]he struggle is eternal” (Cantarow, O’Malley, and Strom, 1980, p. 93), and so the journey of transformative justice is an ever-unfolding project. Educators can move this agenda forward through an unwavering commitment towards youth and a stance of revolutionary love.

Concluding Remarks

Today’s teachers and organizers are well-served by looking to the past and remembering the historical legacies that inform how we can shift towards securing reparative relationships as a collective. Animating a democracy in the U.S. that aligns with our purported moral values requires a deep reckoning with ongoing practices of enslavement, colonization, and racial terror. Because schools in economically depressed neighborhoods face a dearth of resources, there are resulting “fewer opportunities to learn, lower graduation rates, ultimately very low college graduation rates, and fewer labor market possibilities” (Anyon, 2014, p. 101).

However, out-of-school programs and dedicated classroom educators can help learners access the kinds of learning enrichment opportunities that have been predominantly made available to wealthy white families (Smith, 2012; Alexander, Pitcock, & Boulay, 2016). A thirdspace like the Kindred Summer Program offers researchers, educators, and organizers an opportunity to see the productive potential of educational centers in the advancement of

community-based partnerships. By pointing to material, conceptual, and fluid layers of thirdspace, I have aimed to reveal some of the possibilities and paradoxes of such learning sites.

Because every neighborhood has a distinct sociocultural context, I do not argue that every school needs to function just as Kindred does. Nevertheless, this research aims to help scholars, teachers, and learners sketch “imagined geographies of better worlds” (Leander, 2001, p. 675). I hope this work contributes to a growing body of further research that examines the shifting rhizomatic assemblages of educational and community services. Transdisciplinary coalition-building across learning sites can give rise to an ecology of immanent changes that emerge from *within* a relational system rather than ones imposed from above.

Regarding his contribution to the field of multiliteracies, Allan Luke has noted that the aspect of design was ultimately “about creativity and agency” of students across the arts and sciences (Garcia, Luke, & Seglem, 2018, p. 74). Transdisciplinary connections are a natural extension of literacy studies, as a more expansive notion of communicative practices expands the possibilities for self-expression and social change. Holding in mind the ever-evolving nature of ecological systems, I posit that learning communities can help facilitate the development of learners, while also noting that spaces themselves are shaped by students’ agentic moves and self-actualizing moves.

While I appreciate the impermanent and transduced nature of matter and bodies, I also believe in the power of stories that can move educators towards more loving, affirming, and healing directions. Qualitative research can have the unintended effect of encapsulating individuals as fixed representations, but with this work, I have attempted to gesture towards different possibilities for liberatory educational praxis by sharing what happens when young adults make counternarratives legible and participate in collective world-building projects.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Pre- and Post-Program Survey Questions

1. How important is using your imagination for the following?
 - a. Making artwork
 - b. Writing
 - c. Reading
 - d. Learning about science
 - e. Learning about cities and maps
 - f. Learning about architecture or building models
 - g. Computer programming
2. How interested are you in the following?
 - a. Computer programing
 - b. Making artwork in different mediums
 - c. Creative writing
 - d. Designing cities and making maps
 - e. Architecture and building models
 - f. Learning about science
 - g. 3D Modeling on the computer
 - h. Using science or tech in my writing or art
3. On a scale of 1-10, how confident are you in your ability to
 - a. Use computer programming

- b. Make artwork using different materials and mediums
 - c. Develop a piece of creative writing
 - d. Learn new things about science and technology
 - e. Use science and technology to create artwork
 - f. Use science and technology with your writing
 - g. Design cities and create maps
 - h. Learn about architecture and build models
 - i. Use a computer 3D modeling program
4. How comfortable are you in
- a. Speaking up in a group setting
 - b. Sharing my work in a group setting
 - c. Sharing my thoughts and opinions in a group setting
 - d. Contributing my thoughts and opinions to others one-to-one
 - e. Thinking critically about what I read, watch, hear from TV, books, and the internet
 - f. Expressing yourself in writing

Additional Post-Program Survey Questions:

1. Which activities felt most like school classes, and why? Which felt the least like school, and why?
2. How did you come up with creative ideas for your projects? What skills did you develop this summer? What do you still want to know more about?

3. How have the teachers and guest instructors impacted your experience? Who was particularly memorable, and why?
4. What new things did you try this summer? How did you push or challenge yourself, and how do you feel about this? What do you want to carry with you into the school year?
5. What makes you want to consider returning to the program? What might be changed to make it a different and even better experience next summer?
6. What did the fellows do to impact your experience? OR What did you do as a fellow this summer for others, each other, and yourself?
7. How would you describe the community we developed this summer? How do you think we got there?