

COMPETING STORIES OF SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY “IMPROVEMENT”:
YOUTH OF COLOR’S CRITICAL LITERACIES AND STORYTELLING
PRACTICES IN A HIGH SCHOOL WRITING CLASS

by

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ABSTRACT

COMPETING STORIES OF SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT: YOUTH OF COLOR'S CRITICAL LITERACIES AND STORYTELLING PRACTICES IN A HIGH SCHOOL WRITING CLASS

Kelly Mershon DeLuca

This practitioner research study uses qualitative data collection and analysis methods to explore student engagement with critical and multimodal literacy curriculum in the context of a writing course focused on storytelling. This research addresses the issue of deficit framing in schools serving Youths of Color and the negative characterizations that lead to assumptions about their learning capability based upon their racialized identity. As a result of these deficit discourses, Youths of Color are often positioned as at risk by educators, an assumption which often results in schools that lack intellectually robust and culturally relevant learning opportunities.

In an effort to surface and disrupt deficit discourses, I looked to literacy theories such as critical, multimodal, and community literacies, which seek to expand the literacies valued in schools serving youth of color. To frame my inquiry, I asked:

- (1) What are students' perspectives and inquiries regarding race, class, gender, and other

social framings, and how do these change over time? and (2) How does this research inform my growing understanding of what it means to teach well? Over the course of one school year, I engaged with a group of 10 students in a school labeled as “in need of improvement” in a critically focused, multimodal storytelling curriculum designed to allow student interest and engagement with social issues as a guide for planning learning experiences.

By collecting and analyzing student artifacts, discussion transcripts, interview data, and correspondence surrounding critical incidents over the course of the school year, I found that students used storytelling practices to critique social issues in both the surrounding city and the school community, displaying a plethora of Community Cultural Wealth which disrupts assumptions about Youths of Color. Despite this evidence of student Cultural Wealth, I found that the school culture was not a Culturally Sustaining atmosphere due to the over-reliance on compliance to district reform plans strictly aligned to discourses of standardization and accountability. These findings bridge the theory practice gap to help inform administrators, educators, and researchers alike by displaying the extensive daily effects societal education discourses have on students’ day-to-day educational experiences.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

We are constantly flooded with messages that frame us. These messages construct who we are “supposed” to be as particular kinds of people based on hierarchies of race, gender, socioeconomic class, and language difference that extend to the neighborhoods we grow up in and the schools we attend. Framing implies a selected picture, curated to highlight some features while occluding others. “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient” (Entman, 1993, p. 52), and depending on the aspects highlighted, and who is doing the perceiving, these frames can influence the way we construct and define issues, make judgments, and suggest solutions. Though the social world is a “kaleidoscope of potential realities,” we can bring a greater array of realities to the fore by “alternating the ways in which observations are framed and categorized” (Edelman, 1993, p. 232). Within contexts increasingly segregated by race and class, the framing—and potential reframing—of schools, curricula, and students is a pressing issue in efforts to support more equitable educational opportunities.

Youth of Color¹ often suffer from deficit framing which positions them as an “at-risk” population (Howard, 2016; Harris 2004; Milner, 2010; Vasudevan & Campano,

¹ In characterizing this population as Youth of Color, I acknowledge that any attempt to categorize a group is inherently problematic. Throughout the dissertation, I use the label Youth of Color to refer to Black and Latinx students from historically minoritized communities. The decision to capitalize Youth of Color, Students of Color, and Communities of Color was made in an effort to reflect consistent terminology

2009). The construction of Students of Color as “struggling” is often tied to negative characterizations of urban neighborhoods and of Families of Color. From politics to pop culture, Youth of Color² only need to look around them to see the traces of the frame which has been used to position them. We see this deficit frame on the nightly news when President Trump justifies the wealthiest Cabinet in history by saying, “I just don’t want a poor person in those jobs” (Scott, 2017, para. 2). We hear it in the lyrics of the Notorious B.I.G., the legendary New York City Rapper, who dedicated his album “To all the teachers that told me I’d never amount to nothin’” (Wallace, 1994). It is evidenced not only in the presence of certain discursive positions, but also in the absence of others, in the lack of presentation of diverse role models of Color in school, in the lack of culturally relevant curricular materials, and in the absence of representation in government and other positions of power.

These discursive frames influence how Youth of Color experience schooling and are augmented by national discourses of functionalism and meritocracy, which assume that societal conditions support all citizens equally and a person’s hard work will benefit them socially and economically (Hurn, 1993; Kliebard, 2004). These national societal discourses promise Youth of Color that they have an equal chance of success and that their hard work in school will benefit them later in life, but many youth know through experience that these discourses of meritocracy mask broader inequities and that hard work in and of itself does not translate into academic or financial rewards.

with the research of Dr. Tara Yosso, whose framework of Community Cultural Wealth is central to the research presented in this dissertation.

² While there are different ways of characterizing this age group in the research literature, I used the term *youth* to emphasize that these individuals are more than just “students” and to challenge developmental models of adolescence (see Lesko, 2012).

Deficit Framing in Schools

The schooling of Youth of Color complements damaging grand narratives by failing to create intellectually robust and culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) learning opportunities. Since the passing of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation in 2002, schools have been steeped in a culture of accountability, which tied the definition of success in the classroom to students' ability to demonstrate their proficiency on state tests. Despite the well-known flaws in standardized tests, which have been shown to position Students of Color as deficient due to inherent bias toward dominant discourses (Willis, 2007), policymakers continue to push forward an agenda that emphasizes test-based accountability as an accurate measure of student achievement. These results are further used to position schools and students discursively as either successful or failing and have implications for a cadre of mandated curricular reforms that policymakers claim will address the problem of “failing” students in “failing” schools.

The neoliberal³ discourses of curricular reforms in the current era equate academic success to possessing a neutral skill set that can be employed in the capitalist workplace (Bowles & Gintis, 1977). This framing obscures the role of power relations in determining which skills are privileged in schools and who is best positioned to have access to them (Gee, 1989). While researchers have questioned this conception as overly deterministic, stating that it is possible for people to participate successfully in alien environments given the proper supports (Delpit, 1992), policies aimed at reforming

³ Free market policies focused on economic growth which have moved from the private sector into the public sector as politicians and policymakers champion that schools and other public services run on a capitalist business model that emphasizes outcomes over processes. In education reform, these neoliberal influences show up in initiatives that standardize and mandate curricula based on assumptions drawn from high-stakes testing and accountability regimes.

schools serving Youth of Color ignore the influence of cultural, social, and political discourses that intersect to constrain possibilities for academic success. For example, poor test results are attributed to a lack of effort on the part of students, parents, and teachers without attention to how systemic inequities such as the racial and economic segregation of schools, the surveillance and criminalization of Students of Color, high teacher turnover, increasingly stretched budgets, and remedial curricula have created limited opportunities for learning.

Gloria Ladson Billings (2006) argued that the “achievement gap” needs to be reframed as an “education debt” in order to call attention to how a systemic lack of access is responsible for differences in achievement along race and class. Continued reliance on standardized achievement tests have fueled back-to-basics discourses focused on remediation and led to a perception that Youth of Color need a curriculum focused on basic skills “before they can get to the creative or interesting part of the curriculum” (McNeil, 2000, p. 731). Policymakers assume a linear progression of skills and knowledge that leads them to believe that certain skills and content must precede other skills and content; however, learning is not a linear process (Pearson, 2013) and this approach ignores the organic nature of learning and other systematic factors that influence the curricular experiences available to students (McNeil, 2000).

Literacy Curricula in an Era of Standardization

The prevalence of literacy skills based on standardized achievement tests has caused teachers of literacy to note a narrowing of the curriculum and an increased rigidity in regard to instructional design (Crocco & Costigan, 2007). The outcome for Students of

Color in schools labeled as academically low performing is often a curriculum that forwards a “banking” approach to education wherein students are tasked with “receiving, filing, and storing” the deposits of knowledge imparted by their teachers’ narration, instead of engaging in “creativity, transformation, and knowledge” generation (Freire, 1972, p. 72). The top-down mandates of neoliberal curriculum reform movements, like the current standards and accountability movement, reinforce hierarchies of knowledge and position students as vessels to be filled with the content and skills that map on to White middle-class ways of knowing (Willis, 2007). The literacy skills highlighted in standards-based reform efforts are sold as neutral but are in fact socially constructed and political. This assumption of neutrality serves to situate the achievement gap within the individual and fails to attend to the ways that systematic factors such as “health, early childhood experiences, out-of-school experiences, and economic security” also contribute to the cause of social inequality (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 10). Despite the fact that these reform efforts serve to situate Students of Color as academically lacking, literacy research has displayed that students can and do interrogate these assumptions and act as agents to resist categorization (Campano & Damico, 2007).

In addition to marginalizing students’ funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), the restrictive discourses of schooled literacy implicit in the curricular reforms of our current era focus on traditional written texts with no specific mention of nontraditional films, images, or digital texts. This continued focus on print-based reading and writing ignores the highly contextual nature of what it means to be an effective communicator, as well as the growing importance of literacy in aural, visual, and digital modes in crafting texts for 21st century audiences. Despite an extensive body of research

to support the integration of multimodal literacies, schools have yet to expand the cadre of valued literacies emphasized as integral to student success (Cope & Kalantis, 2009). Students from historically minoritized backgrounds are particularly vulnerable to a view of literacy that privileges the traditional literacy modalities of reading and writing over 21st century multimodal literacy skills where “aural, visual, and digital literacy overlap” (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, & Weigel, 2009, p. 19), as academically low-performing schools in urban areas are often targeted for these kinds of “back-to-basics” reform efforts. In schools labeled “in need of improvement” (SINI),⁴ reforms focus on remediation and create fewer opportunities for enrichment. The effects of a narrow curriculum that does not recognize multiple modes of literate expression for Students of Color has far-reaching consequences. Beyond high school graduation requirements and college acceptance, a differentiated curriculum that emphasizes basic literacy for some students (mostly Students of Color), and instruction in multiple modes of literate expression for others (mostly White and more affluent students), reinforces the construction of a social elite. The inclusion of 21st century literacy skills into the curriculum, which emphasize the ability to be both critical consumers and producers of knowledge through various traditional and technological media, is often missing in the education of Students of Color and students attending schools labeled as low-performing or in need of improvement.

⁴ In this city, schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress are labeled as “Schools in Need of Improvement” (SINI) and subject to district-mandated school improvement plans.

Toward an Alternate Approach to Literacy Curricula

A literacy education for the 21st century thus needs to include a more robust approach to reading and writing—one that teaches students to look to textual evidence, but also teaches them to look within and around them to recognize the ways in which their knowledge is constructed and framed by discursive practices. While Youth of Color are leading the resistance and critique of these discursive frames through movements like Black Lives Matter and DREAMers, they also need in-school opportunities “to produce multiple authentic texts in multiple authentic genres, for multiple authentic purposes” (Morrell, 2015, p. 220) in order not only to be prepared to enter into the workforce, but also to contribute to social change by actively critiquing and speaking back to discourses of exclusion. A more robust approach to literacy curriculum not only includes different modalities in reading and writing, but also takes advantage of the many different forms literacy practices can take. By limiting students’ opportunities to engage with and craft texts that reflect their beliefs, experiences, and developing identities, we remove a powerful tool for students to generate new knowledge, critically reflect on their experience, and imagine and reimagine social futures (New London Group, 1996). While curricular reform efforts have attempted to attend to their academic development, they do so in restrictive ways by overly circumscribing the literacies that are valued and forwarding visions of education as the successful completion of school-based tasks, rather than the use of texts to make meaning of and participate in the multiple contexts of our lives. In positioning literacy as neutral tools of reading and writing to be used in the service of tasks assigned by one’s superiors (Moore, Zancanella, & Ávila, 2013), we teach students to have a limited sense of what it means to be literate. Instead of looking

around themselves and constantly engaging in the process of reading the word and the world (Freire, 1983), we teach them that literacy is bound within the walls of the text, the school, or the workplace.

Statement of the Problem

In the current school culture of accountability and standardization, test scores and mandated curricula are used to frame students in ways that perpetuate the education debt owed to our Students of Color (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The New London Group (1996) asked the question, “How do we supplement what schools already do?” in their discussion of the design of social futures (p. 19). Unfortunately, what often gets added when Schools in Need of Improvement (SINI) try to reform curricula based upon low state test scores is more of the same; students experience more drilling of basic skills in order to ensure a minimum level of competency, rather than new pedagogical approaches that could expand their cadre of literacy skills. Further, these skills are positioned as neutral, and the national meritocratic discourses surrounding schooling as a great equalizer lead to a situation where “the forms of literacy learned in school usually do not lead to the urge or ability to think ‘critically’ in the sense of understanding how systems and institutions interrelate to help and harm people” (Gee, 2001, p. 1). This predominant focus on the basics leaves out important opportunities to engage critically with texts that are missing from conversations of what we can add to address gaps in curricula.

This qualitative practitioner research study examined how Students of Color in a school labeled academically low-performing engage with a critically focused multimodal curriculum. I look to how students negotiate understandings of race, class, and gender, as

well as how they come to understand the ways in which these identifiers contribute to social benefits or disadvantages. The immediate context of this study made it an ideal example of the classroom-level nexus of competing discourses of literacy, curriculum, and resources. The Art of Storytelling course—initially designed as a collaboration among a public school, a graduate school of education, and an arts-based nonprofit organization in the 2016-2017 school year, and then renegotiated as a multimodal storytelling course for the 2017-2018 school year—displays the complex negotiations that arise in response to curricular reform efforts between institutions that state a common goal but forward different approaches.

The school, Central Arts (a pseudonym), has been a fixture in the community since its founding in the early 1900s, and its struggles with the district stretch back to the 1950s when the school was first subject to reorganization. In attempting to discuss the current emphasis at Central Arts on raising achievement and thus bolstering the school's standing as a provider of a quality education in the city, it is important to acknowledge the sociopolitical and historical context regarding who controls the schools in this neighborhood, and the history of such tensions at this school in particular. Recent history has seen two major threats to the school community as currently organized.

In 2012, Central Arts School, a small high school in one of the largest cities in the northeastern United States, was listed as SINI on state assessments due to poor test scores and low graduation rates. The district's plan for "improvement" was contentious, taking space away from Central Arts in favor of making room for a charter school to use the building space formerly allotted to it. At this time, the school's PTA, assisted by politically powerful community activists, took up the cause and pushed back on the

district's proposed plan. Central Arts was subject to a school revitalization plan that was intended to address the issue of low performance on quantitative measures, but within 5 years, the school was under district scrutiny once again.

During the 2017-2018 school year, when this research took place, the school was again subject to critical attention from the district. Rumors of reorganization and possible closure fueled discontent among students, families, teachers, and other support staff. The occurrence of two major threats to the future of Central Arts in the space of 5 years strongly affected many of the students who featured as participants in this study, as many of them had spent their entire career at Central Arts in unsettled circumstances characterized by administrative and teacher turnover, changes to programmatic offerings, and fluctuating opportunities available through school and community partnerships.

I conducted this study as both a researcher and the facilitator of a multimodal reading and writing curriculum intended to enrich learning opportunities at Central Arts. Many of the 12 male and female Students of Color who participated in this study are considered to be high-achieving academically in this context, but their performance on standardized tests would position them below the national average in reading and writing. In this regard, the administration at the school emphasized that while the course I designed and taught was intended to allow students artistic and enrichment opportunities, it should also contain rigorous literacy instruction that would continue to improve students' reading and writing skills, as evidenced by performance on high-stakes exams.

My background as a secondary English teacher and beliefs in the importance of teaching from critical perspectives were the foundation for my curricular choices and my emphasis on creating a classroom environment where all students felt heard and valued

guided my pedagogy. The collaboration with an arts-based, nonprofit organization to work with a professional filmmaker during the 2016-2017 school year challenged me to widen the literacies that were centered in the classroom as we worked to make our stories come alive, and observing students' learning through the interplay of visual, aural, and written features of the texts, underscored my commitment to expanding literacies in the classroom. I did my best to maintain the focus on multimodality without the guidance of a filmmaker for the 2017-2018 school year.

In addition to creating curricular invitations for students to engage with, I also sought to cultivate a classroom culture which fostered critical inquiry. I implemented pedagogical approaches that frame learning as an ongoing process which requires one to seek out different perspectives and consider power and positioning in the production of social hierarchies and systemic inequality. In order to give a more robust picture of the complex discursive frames students navigate, and how they engage these through critical inquiry, I documented and analyzed not only the student outcomes of this curriculum (e.g., their completed works), but also reflected throughout on the discursive influences on curriculum, instruction, and the learning environment that shape classroom life within a school designated as SINI. Through this research, I gained an understanding of how students engage with narratives of themselves, their neighborhoods, and social justice in order to shed light on the influence of broader framings as they influence classroom interactions, and also to display the power of what can happen in the classroom when students are given the opportunity to interrogate and rewrite these narratives.

Research Questions

To capture the growing understanding among students of the ways in which stories can reinforce, question, or unsettle stereotypes, and to understand their inquiries on social issues related to race, class, and gender over time, I asked the following questions:

1. What are students' perspectives and inquiries regarding race, class, gender, and other social framings, and how do these change over time?
 - a. How do students engage with these inquiries in relationship to curricular resources, class activities, and peer interactions?
 - b. What do the texts students produce say about how they communicate their understanding of social issues regarding race, class, and gender?
2. How does this research inform my growing understanding of what it means to teach well?
 - a. What implications does this study have for critical and multimodal curriculum and teaching?

Conceptual Framework

In the following section, I outline my conceptual framework wherein I discuss the importance of storytelling as a literacy practice in high school classrooms, outline the theories that I drew upon to inform my study, and synthesize how the curriculum I created drew on these concepts.

Storytelling as a Literacy Practice

A literacy practice is a term used to denote the ways in which people use texts in their everyday lives (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000). These practices are laden with values, attitudes, and beliefs, and thus are indicative of social relationships and power (Street & Street, 1984). Storytelling has been suggested (Bell, 2010; Yosso, 2005) as a way of supporting students to inquire critically into their own experiences and craft narratives that reflect their rich cultural wealth. Storytelling as a literacy practice proliferates in elementary grades, where assignments asking students to read and write personal narratives, fiction, and creative nonfiction are common (Caswell & Duke, 1998), but in the high school curriculum, storytelling is more limited and regulated. The result of this shift from an elementary school curriculum that emphasizes the importance of stories of all kinds, to a high school curriculum that distances students from their own stories in favor of the rigidity of the literary canon, frequently results in “the nine-year-old who enjoyed telling stories becomes uninterested in writing nine years later” (Nicolini, 1994, p. 58). While currently storytelling in high school is limited to personal essays and informal writing assignments, opening up the curriculum to include a more expansive look at how stories are composed in different narrative modes like poetry, oral history, songwriting, film, and other digital forms makes space for high interest and varied assignments. Including opportunities to engage with fictional and nonfictional stories in the curriculum encourages students to grapple with self-making, where “individuals construct conceptually a sense of who they are as individuals and in collectivity” (Urrieta, 2007, p. 119).

A story is constructed from a bricolage of personal experiences, observations, and reflections on our values and beliefs, but in the process of crafting a composition from this material, authors choose how to represent themselves and their subject matter. Stories offer the opportunity to reconstruct the past and present from different positions and perspectives and consider possible futures. Through stories, we can both compose a window into other new and imaginative worlds, or we can craft a mirror through which to contemplate ourselves and those other people, places, and events that have influenced our past. The open quality of imaginative narratives allows students to step into different subject positions and explore aspects of themselves and the society of which they are a part. Imaginative exploration encourages students to be aware of the possibilities and inspires “a continuing consciousness of new beginnings” so they can “avoid the sense of being fixed by someone else’s categorization” in order to see themselves as powerful agents who take the initiative to define and redefine who they are, where they stand, and what is most important to them (Greene, 1995, pp. 39-40).

Theorists have argued that storytelling not only represents one’s identity, but also the act of storytelling can help one construct and reconstruct one’s social reality (Georgakopoulou, 2007; McCarthy & Moje, 2002; Mishler, 1999; Wortham, 2004).

Through our creative process, writing new stories

to reimagine in new ways requires that we change the focus of the lens trained on our faces and shift our perceptions. It requires letting go of the old identifications and behaviors. The who-we-are is currently undergoing disintegration and reconstruction, pulled apart, dismembered, then reconstructed.... (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 74)

For Youth of Color, the space to explore their identity and draw on their own critical insights can help them to question and push back against some of the deficit frames

through which they have been positioned; however, even when their narratives reinforce the problematic ways in which they are positioned discursively, putting these oppressive discourses down on the page can aid in deconstructing them and reconstructing other possible narratives (Kamler, 2001).

Theoretical Perspective

Throughout this study, I used a framework of critical theory to inform my research, coupled with attention to the socially constructed nature of texts and the relationships of power therein. Critical theorists aim to critique and resist discourses that marginalize and oppress in order to work toward a more equal society (Anyon, 1997; Apple, 1990; Bowles & Gintis, 1977; Freire, 1972; Giroux, 1985). Returning to the concept of framing, these discourses use race, class, gender, and other distinctions to frame a person's identities and positionings. More than merely discursive, such framings have material roots and consequences.

Bourdieu (1991) argued that "language, by virtue of the infinite generative... capacity...derives from its power to produce existence by producing the collectively recognized, and thus realized, representation of existence" (p. 42). The discourses which legitimate certain worldviews and literate practices while delegitimizing others shape the discursive positions youth can take up and contribute to social reproduction. Bourdieu explained that "instead of telling the child what he must do," the discourse "tells him what he is, and thus leads him to become durably what he has to be" (p. 52). In this way discourse has the power to produce, and reproduce, relations of power through normalizing particular ways of being in and thinking about the world. This study was grounded in the assumption that the institution of schooling is attuned to dominant

hegemonic discourses and thus contributes to the marginalization of Students of Color. Students are evaluated by the extent to which they conform to dominant discourses (e.g., of meritocracy, of White middle-class norms, of literacy engagement) by a system that rewards them for rejecting those discourses that deviate from the “norm” (Gee, 1998).

The term *critical* takes on an enhanced meaning from what schools usually mean when they speak of critical thinking. As Janks (2010) explained, a critical orientation “is used to signal analysis that seeks to uncover the social interests at work, to ascertain what is at stake in the textual and social” (p. 3). Critical social theorists do this through a commitment to work with “the head, hands and heart,” acknowledging that “ideology works most effectively through the stronghold of emotions” (Rogers, 2011, p. 5). In this way, educators who take up a critical orientation seek to encourage students to inquire into social issues that perpetrate domination and oppression, and also support them to imagine and work toward more equitable arrangements.

Critical literacy. Work in the area of New Literacies Studies has opened up notions of what can be defined as a text and what approaches we can take toward unpacking texts. Following from this work, sociocultural researchers view literacy “not as an issue of measurement or of skills, but as social practices that vary from one context to another” (Street & Street, 1984, p. 3). This has helped us to understand literacies as multiple (New London Group, 1996), situated (Barton & Hamilton, 2012), ideological (Street & Street, 1984), and linked with power relations in society (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

In order to uncover the power relations within texts, one of the tools critical educators employ with students is a form of literary analysis that accepts that all

information is biased (Morrell, 2015) and every text thus allows us to question who is represented and who is left out; whose interests are being served and whose are not. Critical literacy follows from the ideological model of literacy (Street & Street, 1984), in that it is imperative in this approach to acknowledge the embedded ideologies and relationships of power present in every text. It is not enough to encourage students to communicate in a diverse array of texts—from this perspective, literacy entails the ability to identify and unpack issues of power, perspective, and positioning within all texts (Jones, 2006). This is commonly known as reading both the word and the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987) and implies that an accurate reading of any text must take into consideration the context within which the text was produced and also the context within which the reader lives, such that our own situated lenses are part of the reading process. While standards-based reforms in literacy emphasize a close reading from within the four corners of the text (Pearson, 2013), critical literacy theorists encourage critique that takes into account what and who the text privileges in society, and how students can use situated literacies to destabilize the power dynamics established by the text (Janks, 2010).

Taking a critical literacy stance means that we read both with and against texts (Janks, 2010) in order to understand the socially constructed nature of its “truths” (Morrell, 2015). This stance assumes that all texts are written from a specific social location, and thus they “are entrenched in perspective...contribute to social positioning...and indicate productive power” (Jones, 2006, p. 67). A pedagogy of critical literacy asks students to engage with the curriculum from a different position. Instead of a passive receptacle for the truth the text presents, students are positioned as agents who can question and critique the text (Scholes, 1986). Students are empowered to question

the ways in which texts frame truth and inquire into this framing through deconstructing the discourses that circulate within the text, and reconstructing texts that represent different perspectives and positions (Jones, 2006). The outcome of this process is social action, which can mean students are inspired to bring their learning to a larger audience, but which can also be seen in individual students' change of perspective or continued inquiry into a social issue that they felt strongly about (Morrell, 2015).

Critical literacy as discourse analysis. Critical literacy, with its agenda of looking beneath the surface at the ways in which power circulates, has been conceptualized as a form of discourse analysis. Gee (2001) suggested that “critical literacy involves using discourse analysis in such a way that we see that language is always fully situated in social and political contexts” (p. 17). Critical literacy helps students to realize that people talk and act under the influence of social and cultural discourses (Gee, 2004), which influence their actions, beliefs, interests, and commitments. Critical literacy emphasizes the need for students to read through a lens that acknowledges that all texts are historically situated and produced within a certain context, for a certain audience, and in line with certain purposes. This approach also asks students to question how texts live outside of the contexts in which they are produced, thus highlighting the complex web of intertextuality wherein “any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Kristeva, 1986, p. 37). When students use critical literacy to unpack texts, they become aware of the mediated nature of reality wherein our interpretations of texts are subject to both the context within which they were produced and that within which they are consumed.

Gee (2001) pointed out that the same sites where we see power operating to influence our beliefs and commitments can also be opened up as places of transformation and change. Teachers can use critical literacy to help students learn to navigate the discourses that infiltrate their life worlds in order to “not only help develop readers who are able to critique social structures and cultural practices,” but to also “help students to know themselves better and participate as more actualized tolerant beings in the human family” (Morrell, 2015, p. 84). Through critical literacy instruction, students become more readily able to interrogate the world around them and also the internalized discourses that control their own values and beliefs. This ability allows for agency in that students begin to realize that, while the discourses that surround them can be controlling, one can take up alternate perspectives and positions to challenge and rewrite these discourses.

Critical perspectives on multimodality. The age of technological innovation has changed the way humans communicate and led to fundamental changes in how educational researchers conceptualize literacy. Research on multimodality has asserted that it is impossible to conceptualize literacy in isolation from social, technological, and economic factors (Kress, 2003), and that effective citizenship requires a mastery of multiple modes of communication across both cultural and physical boundaries (New London Group, 1996). Indeed, students regularly encounter visual, aural, and digital texts in their daily experiences while walking to school, exploring the internet, and participating in social media; however, this diverse list of literacy experiences is commonly relegated to out-of-school literacy practices, and does not factor into the definition of what it means to be “literate” in school.

In addition to undervaluing the genres of composition that allow students to generate texts that reflect their experiences, the modes of expression available to students are also limited by the focus of neoliberal education reforms like the standards and accountability movement, wherein texts are defined narrowly as written products following a particular format and incorporating predetermined features. The multimodal ways in which we communicate in the world outside of the classroom are marginalized in schools through a lack of inclusion of diverse modes for reading and writing. Multimodal composition allows for students to engage in reflective thinking about multiple ways of representing a topic. As they take up the rich cadre of multimodal tools, including written text, pictures, voice, and moving image, students must consider the message that they hope to convey along with the design features that will allow them to best convey their points, given the audience and task. These pedagogies invite students to attend not only to the connotation of certain word choices, but also how images and speech carry meanings that traditional written text cannot capture with fidelity (Kress, 2003).

Multimodality also opens up opportunities for students to mobilize a rich cadre of literacy skills. In doing so, multimodal pedagogies have the potential to reframe students as knowers in that their comfort level with technology often outstrips that of their teachers (Siegel, 2012). In focusing on the affordances of digital literacies within a multimodal context, I looked to Jenkins et al.'s (2009) framework wherein digital literacies are part of 21st century literacy practices that support school-based learning and also allow participation in the larger world community. Though the benefits of multimodal literacy have been espoused by literacy scholars, issues of access often prevent Students of Color in under-resourced schools from engaging with the

technologies that facilitate this work. In forwarding a multimodal approach to literacy, it is important to be cognizant of the ways in which “technology [is] conspiring to create a new cultural elite...” (p. 56). In the world outside of the classroom, we are bombarded with multimodal texts as we encounter advertisements, signs, menus, digital texts, and so on, and in their future careers, students will be expected to interpret, analyze, and synthesize a variety of textual modes in creating presentations, newsletters, reports, and other multimedia texts. When we limit students to traditional written modes, we create a classroom environment that is out of touch with the way texts circulate in the world.

Designing Responsive Curriculum

The curriculum I designed and researched as part of this dissertation study arose out of my commitment to honor the stories of Students of Color and invite them to consider the ideological influences that control how we are represented and go on to represent others in stories. In designing the curriculum for the high school class entitled “The Art of Storytelling,” I conceptualized the relationship of curriculum and pedagogy as responsive. As Green (2017) stated, “Curriculum and pedagogy go together as it were organically, as two sides of the one coin, each of them to be mobilized whenever appropriate or strategic: curriculum *and* pedagogy” (p. 110). In order for the relationship between curriculum and pedagogy to remain responsive, the curriculum must be allowed to shift in order to meet students’ needs, respond to their interests, and make learning more relevant to students by connecting it to topics they feel passionate about.

This understanding of curriculum and pedagogy as a responsive relationship to be employed in the service of students can lead to dissonance with administrators who may hold more closely to traditional fixed definitions of curriculum. Beyond the written

documents of course scope and sequence and units of study, Walker and Soltis (2004) reminded us that curriculum is “not only to the official list of courses offered by the school...but also to the purposes, content, activities, and organization of the educational program actually created in schools by teachers, students, and administrators” (p. 1). Often, the curriculum as designed and intended for use by those outside of the classroom has a dual purpose: offering structure for teachers to work from in designing lessons, but also holding symbolic control over teachers who would deviate too widely from the written curriculum. When conceptualized as an official guide to what happens in the classroom, sanctioned by administration, and founded in the guiding principles of national education movements like the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), the curriculum can become rigid and act to limit the possibilities available to teachers. The distinction between the curriculum as existing in the pages of a document, and the curriculum as formed by all of the people, purposes, content, and activities happening in the school, is important because it carries with it an understanding of how sociocultural factors beyond the classroom come to affect teaching and learning.

The planned curriculum is not always carried out as intended. At times, this is in the service of better meeting students’ needs, such as in altering planned topics or activities in light of observations or input. Sometimes the planned curriculum is not carried out as intended because of a host of other reasons having to do with turbulence at the school site or in the world at large. If curriculum can be seen as a “complicated conversation” (Pinar, 2011), the speakers in the conversation do not just exist within the classroom. In order for the curriculum to remain responsive, it is necessarily flexible.

The struggle to keep the curriculum responsive, and to keep the students at the center, led me to outline below what my intended curriculum entailed; however, in an effort to be attentive to and engage with critical conversations happening at the school and neighborhood level, I did not implement this curriculum as originally intended. The purposes and effects of this mismatch between the planned curriculum and the implemented curriculum are described in detail in Chapter IV and V, when I discuss the changes made to assignments and class activities in my analysis of students' critical meaning making.

The Art of Storytelling Curriculum

The teaching units under study in this project were influenced by Bell's (2010) model set forth in *Storytelling for Social Justice: Connecting Narrative and the Arts in Antiracist Teaching*. In developing this model, Bell noted that "people draw on stories to explicate their views about race, and the persistent ways that certain stories repeat" and thus developed a curriculum for teaching students to be "more knowledgeable and conscious about racism...[and] able to comment on the racial assumptions embedded in stories..." (p. 9). Bell's model (Figure 1) encourages students to deconstruct stock stories, defined as "standard, typical or familiar stories held in reserve to explain racial dynamics in ways that support the status quo" (p. 29), in an effort to reveal concealed and resistant stories that challenge and resist these stock stories. As an ultimate goal, the curriculum challenges students to reconstruct transformational stories which are "new stories we construct to challenge stock stories and...catalyze contemporary action against racism" (p. 75). While Bell focused overtly on counterstories that interrogate assumptions based

on race, I looked to counterstories that spoke to social injustices including gender and class, in addition to race.

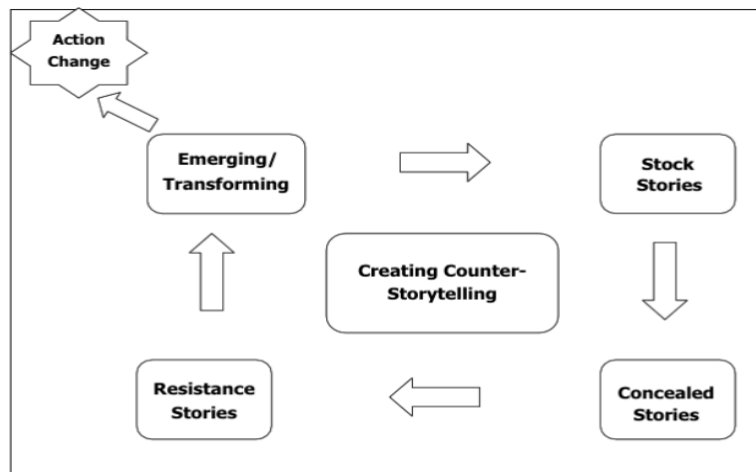


Figure 1. The Storytelling Model from Bell (2010)

The curriculum I developed for the high school class featured in this study maintained a similar purpose to Bell’s (2010) but used different resources in an effort to tailor the lessons to the interests and experiences of my students. In developing these lessons, I looked to the above categories of stories—stock stories, concealed stories, resistance stories—with a goal of supporting students to create transforming stories that lead to social action. In the sections that following, I briefly discuss the teaching units I planned in an effort to create opportunities for students to engage critically with the different types of stories outlined by Bell (2010), as well as the major assignments that I hoped would encourage students to craft their own stories to inspire social action. For more specific information regarding this curriculum, please see Appendix C.

Unit 1—The danger of a single story. The units described here began midway through the school year, after students had already inquired into different forms of

storytelling and had practiced looking to their own experiences through writing personal narratives. Throughout the prior units, the class highlighted narratives that spoke to diverse identities and/or those that provided fruitful locations for a critique of the dominant White middle- and upper-class culture in the United States. In the units described here, I begin, similarly to Bell (2010), with an investigation of stock stories through reflecting on and interrogating the topics and stories we encountered in the first two marking periods.

During this time, we looked to the seven basic story plots (Booker, 2006) which consist of: overcoming the monster, rags to riches, the quest, comedy, tragedy, and rebirth. We then dug into the rags-to-riches story in depth through a critical viewing of *The Great Gatsby* film, and lessons deconstructing the American Dream stock story by examining how race, gender, and class affect one's ability to achieve the American Dream. Students were asked to update *The Great Gatsby* to reflect modern times or issues as situated in local contexts.

Moving forward from this activity, I used Chimamanda Adichie's TedTalk "The Danger of a Single Story" as a basis for interrogating the representations of youth and Communities of Color. Adichie (2009) pointed out that "the single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make the one story become the only story." Guided by the essential question "What do stories help us to see that might be hidden otherwise?" students viewed and discussed how stock stories control representations and emphasize stereotypical thoughts and beliefs. They then critically engaged with poetry as a vehicle for considering stock representations and those that present concealed or resistant stories.

Finally, students created a poetry portfolio where they wrote three original poems inspired by the poetry that they read and deconstructed as a class. While poetry is inherently a multimodal composition in that students must not just be the words they choose but also how these words are arranged spatially, I encouraged students to consider how other visual tools such as images might illustrate or enhance their compositions; thus, they also crafted a collage or mural to accompany their poetry collection.

Intended Unit 2—Writing memory, rewriting history. While Unit 1 was carried out as intended with few changes being necessary, Unit 2 needed to be altered due to a whole school Regents Prep Initiative that curtailed the time students spent in ninth-period elective courses like The Art of Storytelling. Here, I outline the curriculum as intended, and in the following data chapters, I go into detail regarding the changes to this unit as circumstances at the school site influenced how I implemented it, balancing between my planned goals and being responsive to the inquiries and concerns of students.

Once students explored stock, concealed, and resistant stories, and composed poetry in response to the issue of representation of youth and Communities of Color, I intended to ask them to choose their own social issues to unpack in a social issues presentation project. Bell (2010) discussed the importance of memory in storytelling by saying, “as a bridge between past and present, social memory shapes identity, informs our interpretations of events, fuels grievances and claims on the present, and suggests what we might imagine for the future” (p. 47). If students are to produce transformational stories, they must have an understanding of how social memory becomes solidified in narratives which can go on to question stereotypes or reinforce them. In an effort to work toward transformational stories, I intended to ask students to work in small groups

conducting research on the stories told around social justice issues of their choosing. This project was intended to allow students to display their understanding of the different types of stories, while also deepening their inquiries about an issue that they felt strongly about.

Significance of the Study

Students of Color often fall prey to deficit discourses based on assumptions regarding their test scores. When schools are listed as In Need of Improvement due to these test scores, it often results in watered-down, remedial, or test-based curriculum that only serves to distance them from their White middle-class counterparts (Au, 2007). Neoliberal curricular reforms further distance Youth of Color from the funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) they have developed through their community-based experiences and devalue inquiry into social injustices present within their context. Instead, Students of Color are often taught that what exists within and around them is less important than what exists within the texts of the sanctioned curriculum. Unfortunately, the mandated curriculum has neglected to attend to the importance of storytelling and imaginative writing. These narrative forms allow for both intensive critical inquiry into discourse and power, and also lend themselves to explorations of identity and subjectivity that can help youth in the process of redefining themselves.

In this research, I utilized students' existing technological skills and funds of knowledge to design and implement a curriculum that challenges them to think critically about social issues as they inquire into the power, perspective, and positioning of the texts they consume and produce. By decentering traditional texts as the means for

composition and critique in this study, I examined how the opportunities presented by visual, aural, and digital modes invited students to examine texts and open up new possibilities for critique. The findings of this study provided an increased understanding of the ways in which students identified and deconstructed stock stories to reveal the concealed and resistant stories that coexist alongside, potentially creating transforming stories that interrogate oppressive narratives.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to situate this study in the current context of literacy research, I look first to the foundational developments of the interpretive turn in literacy research during the early 1980s, which led to an expanded definition of what counts as literacy, where and when literacy is used, and how we define a text. The interpretive or social turn (Rabinow & Sullivan, 1979) presented a break from positivistic literacy research that defined literacy narrowly as a cognitive process that happens within individuals, and instead turned to investigate the ways in which literacy is a social process (Rhodes & Weiss, 2013). The break between positivistic approaches, which tended to define literacy as singular and written, and the newly developing interpretive social turn, which began to research the ways in which literacy is multiple, multimodal, and situated in local contexts, has come to be called “the great divide” (Street & Street, 1984). Researchers of the interpretive social turn redefined literacy with the understanding that “all meaning...is constructed within a human context and unavoidably interpreted and reported from the viewpoint(s) of the human actor(s)” (Rhodes & Weiss, 2013, p. 91). Street and Street’s (1984) work in this area led to the demarcation of two distinct models of literacy: the autonomous model, which treats literacy as neutral and universal, having social and cognitive effects by itself, and the ideological model, which treats literacy as social

practices rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity, and being which are always contested and ideological.

Sociocultural Foundations of Literacy Research

Research in sociocultural literacy looked to the social and cultural processes that are integrated and transacting with cognitive processes (Tierney, 2014). As Mills (2010) summarized, “these theorists view literacy as socially constructed through talk and other language exchanges that occur and vary across communicative settings, such as homes and classrooms” (p. xxvi). Tracing their roots to the ethnographers of communication in the field of anthropology (Gertz, 1973; Hymes, 1972; etc.), literacy researchers began to use ethnographic methods to record and analyze moment-by-moment social interactions that shape communication in cultures, communities, and classrooms (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2004). Cazden (1982) summarized the major concerns of sociocultural literacy research as follows: the continuity or discontinuity of home and school literacy practices, understanding the situated practice of communication, the importance of the relationship between researcher and participant, and micro and macro analytic approaches. One often-cited example of sociocultural research stemming from the anthropological tradition in literacy research is Heath’s (1983) ethnography *Ways with Words*, wherein Heath studied the early educational practices of the communities of Maintown, Roadville, and Tracktown to demonstrate the ways in which literacy practices are social, cultural, situated, relying on both written and oral interactions.

Work in the area of New Literacy Studies (NLS) further expounded on the socially and culturally situated nature of literacy. Gee (1998) stated that “the NLS are

based on the view that reading and writing only make sense when studied in the context of social and cultural (and we can add historical, political, and economic) practices of which they are but a part” (p. 1). Literacy research happening in the area of NLS attended to the literacy practices and events situated within diverse communities of practice (Scribner & Cole, 1981), and called for a pedagogy of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996), which would address the wide varieties of information channels available to students and emphasize that literacy pedagogy needs to be more attentive to cultural differences (Mills, 2010). In addition, multimodal NLS researchers looked to broaden understandings of the semiotic tools used in meaning making in order to attend to the ways in which a variety of modes, such as aural, visual, and written texts, contribute to meaning (Jewitt & Kress, 2003; Kress, 2003).

Within the area of NLS, increased attention has been paid to the ways in which the digital developments of the 20th and 21st century have changed the way we communicate. “Digital communication has transformed literacy practices and assumed great importance in the functioning of workplace, recreational, and community contexts”; thus, research in this area attends to “new literacy practices in digital environments across a variety of social contexts” (Mills, 2010, p. 246). Focusing on the hybridization of textual practices, the shift toward production and away from consumption, and the collaborative nature of digital practices, work in digital literacies has become increasingly popular as access to technological resources becomes more widespread.

Critical Foundations of Literacy Research

Developing as a lateral movement along NLS, the critical turn in literacy education looks to uncover the ways in which institutional and ideological power are

encoded in language. Critical theorists (e.g., Marx, Gramsci), philosophers (e.g., Habermas, Heidegger), and researchers studying race, class, and gender (e.g., Giroux, Shor, Apple, Anyon) spurred literacy researchers to consider sociopolitical contexts with attention to identity and positioning within cultural contexts. Mills (2010) stated that “critical literacy scholars challenged the constitution of ‘official’ knowledge, including who holds the power of curriculum decision-making and text selection” (p. xxi).

Paulo Freire’s (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was a foundational work in this area in theorizing the relationship between literacy and education and underscoring how people read both the word and the world critically. Freire’s account displayed how literacy can be a liberating force for marginalized communities. Though this work has been open to criticism from those who noted that his emancipatory philosophy reifies hierarchical power relations between teacher and students and his notion of oppression elides the role of gender (Ellsworth, 1989), Freire’s work began a movement toward literacy as a way to question assumptions, critique ideologies, and posit different ways of being outside of the status quo imposed by hegemony.

Critical literacy has continued to evolve in order to attend to these widening definitions and thus critical literacy scholars and sociocultural literacy scholars often find their work in conversation with one another. The recent digital turn has also been picked up by critical literacy scholars to “[demonstrate] the specific ways in which social patterns of marginalization are reproduced and resisted in the appropriation of digital practices across institutional, private, civic, and recreational sites” (Mills, 2010, p. 260). Scholars in the area of critical literacy have explored pedagogical power imbalances

between student and teacher, patterns of power and access to new literacies and critical media literacy, which empowers students to question and critique social and news media.

Review of Relevant Literature

This study used critical and sociocultural perspectives on literacy to establish the ways in which Youth of Color in urban contexts respond, through their own narrative compositions, to the discourses that frame them. I now look to recent research in the literacies of Youth of Color, and the relationship between literacy, discourse, and identity to help me establish a direction for my own work. Specifically, I draw on studies that take place in urban contexts with Youth of Color from historically marginalized communities, with a focus on research taking place in school-based contexts. I look to research using a critical literacy framework, which is inclusive of areas such as critical media literacy and critical multimodal literacy, and spotlight research with high school-aged youth as this population was the focus of my study.

In order to identify relevant articles, I first turned to academic search engines EBSCO, J-Stor, and GoogleScholar to search for articles beginning in the year 2002, which marked the beginning of the NCLB-era, to the present day. I then conducted an ancestral search to identify any other related articles to those initially identified that fit within my parameters. I filtered articles to reflect my purpose of focusing on high school-aged youth in the areas of critical literacy and discourse. Though I tried to locate articles that looked at research conducted during school hours, I found it necessary to include afterschool and out-of-school contexts as well since much of the research which happens outside of the traditional classroom uses critical and multimodal pedagogical approaches.

In the sections that follow, I briefly discuss each pertinent study and then read across the studies to highlight relevant themes. Finally, I summarize the impact of these themes on my own research.

Reading and Writing Cultural Experiences

Research into sociocultural and critical literacies of youth has broadened our understanding of the literacy practices that Youth of Color from possess and use in their meaning-making processes. This research has also highlighted the ways in which teachers can capitalize on these literacy practices by bringing critical perspectives to the consumption and production of texts that speak to student interests and issues relevant to their communities. In an effort to make traditional curriculum more culturally relevant to students, researchers have looked to the ways in which the texts and standards can be enriched by critical perspectives.

Ávila and Moore (2012) looked to Luke's (2000) question of whether critical literacy has the potential to move into state-mandated curricula by identifying Common Core State Standards which most readily invite students to "disrupt the commonplace, interrogate multiple viewpoints, focus on sociopolitical issues, and [take] action to [promote] social justice" (p. 28). The authors argued that critical literacy assignments allow students the opportunity to go beyond the labels assigned to them via test scores in order to add their unique voices to the "discourses of authority" presented by the curriculum, standards, and tests (Ávila & Moore, 2012, p. 32). Similarly, Haddix and Rojas (2004) researched the ways teacher editions for high school literature construct Latinx texts, and how critically minded teachers can use the anthologies of literature as jumping-off points to question power structures and pedagogical strategies that can bring

a critical framework into the English classroom. The authors argued that when teachers look to the framing of the literature, the way they teach it can lead to opportunities for alternative and resistant readings that move beyond the prescribed knowledge presented in these texts.

Fecho, Davis, and Moore (2007), inspired by teachable and researchable moments that arose during their practice, argued for a literacy pedagogy that reconceptualizes language and learning in a way that is aligned with students' cultural frames of reference in order for them to be more aware of the role culture plays in education. The authors framed their work as existing in between the conflicting tensions Delpit (1995) pointed to in discussing the need to both teach students the language codes that are powerful in society, while also helping them to maintain pride and connection within their own cultural language codes. Fecho et al. suggested that in order to strike a successful balance between students' cultural codes and the mainstream power codes they need to be successful in schools, teachers must acknowledge the political nature of language and create platforms for inquiry wherein students can consider the ways in which language contributes to their identity as well as how power contributes to language hierarchies.

Morrell (2002) and Duncan Andrade and Morrell (2008) used a combination of traditional texts and popular culture to create a pedagogy of access and dissent, where students gain access to the cultural capital of the canon while maintaining a critical viewpoint of social structures to prevent reproduction of less than socially just systems. Duncan Andrade and Morrell called for teachers and researchers to continue examining and adjusting their pedagogies such that educators can teach in the most effective and

engaging ways. They contended that educators must incorporate students' lived experiences to make this possible.

Sealey-Ruiz and Greene (2011) highlighted the positive elements of Urban Youth Culture as well as the usefulness of creating a culturally relevant curriculum that draws on the culture of urban youth. In this participatory action research study, the authors, along with a team of university researchers, teachers, and administrators, investigated the factors leading to a persistent achievement gap between White, Asian, Black, and Latinx students. Interviews conducted with students participating in a youth mentoring program known as Project Avalanche surfaced the importance of youth culture to participants, who admitted that while their cultural affiliation was empowering to them, there were significant disadvantages to participating in youth culture in school. The researchers' findings indicated that despite the group's active involvement in social action projects within the school community, members noted that misperceptions of Black males based on styles of dress and speech common to youth culture often led to limited opportunities and an assumption by teachers and peers that they were somehow inferior to their White counterparts. Involvement in Project Avalanche allowed members to build a community that not only valued youth culture as empowering to their sense of identity, but actively fought the deficit framings they faced. The authors suggested that educators develop habits of mind that listen, encourage, value, appreciate, and understand students' cultures, and that they get involved in creating and/or expanding mentoring programs to support Youth of Color.

Jocson and Cooks (2004) highlighted poetry as a way to incorporate both pop culture and real-life experiences of youth into the English classroom. The authors found

that in addition to students' creative and critical use of poetry to reflect on the ways in which race and racism affect their life experiences, teachers were also inspired by the use of poetry and demonstrated a noted openness to innovative classroom practice based on the work done during the P4P program. While the authors resisted any attempt at creating a one-solution formula for using critical literacy in the classroom, they suggested that the use of poetry and topics that explicitly point to the connection of literacy and power can lead to both political and artistic empowerment for students, as it can provide a vehicle for self-expression and critical interrogation.

In her other work, Jocson (2006) has also discussed how hip hop and rap can be useful in both making curriculum relevant to youth and encouraging them to reflect on their experience and express themselves. This is a currently growing area of research, which includes contributions from Duncan Andrade and Morell (2008), Emdin (2016), and Weinstein (2006), who looked to the affordances hip hop culture brings to the classroom, and adds further complexity to how we define the literacies of Youth of Color. Sociocultural literacy research has also focused specifically on how certain identity markers like one's race or ethnicity form part of one's literate practices. Scholars in this area have identified ways to infuse curricula with perspectives that ameliorate the marginalizing influences many students have suffered at the hands of the traditional canon.

Kirkland and Jackson (2009) looked to the markers of African American culture to determine how coolness as a racialized term is enacted through writing, speech, style, and appearance and creates a language for pragmatic use in certain cultural contexts. They argued that "Cool talk" is a cultural code "appropriated from Black culture"

(p. 286) and can be seen to represent the Black linguistic tradition and contributes to help these Youth of Color solidify their identity. The students' use of talk leads to sophisticated language play where students use slang and code switching to work both within and against language to extend their meanings and participate in various linguistic groups. The researchers also found that style has the potential to communicate ideas, through symbolic constructions, "despite being entrenched in a contested educational domain that is commonly hostile to Black men" (p. 291). It contributes to these students' ability to critique their world through writing and symbolic forms.

Kirkland and Jackson (2009) also looked to the ways in which identity is written on the body through the literate practice of tattooing. They saw these tattoos as a narrative of both struggles and counter-stories that help young Black males to cope with their surroundings, connect with their past and present, and comment on their lived realities. Through their analysis, Kirkland and Jackson argued that the body is a site for literacy to be practiced in that tattooing literally prints markers of one's identity on the body. Similarly, Johnson (2011) also looked to the body by using a combination of critical, multimodal, and post-structural theories to explore how critical literacy is embodied and performed by high school students. The study documented how one focal student, Simone, performed identity and critical literacy by using a variety of modes. "In speech, writing, photographs, gestures and her dress, Simone worked to elucidate the ways power and the personal interests of people impacted her life and the lives of socio-economically disadvantaged peoples (Johnson, 2011, p. 29). This scholarship points to the need for teachers and researchers to consider the ways in which students engage in critical literacy through the performance of social texts, which can be seen in the ways

they dress, the language they use with friends, the topics they joke about, and their own unique style and ways of being.

Gutiérrez (2008) built a case around the importance of acknowledging how language and literacy are used in societies. Gutiérrez criticized the current surface-level curricula to promote equity in education, as these efforts continue to privilege schooled literacies. She highlighted her work with the UCLA Migrant Student Leadership Institute to depict the ways in which the creation of a Third Space can change who is viewed as “literate” through integrating student *testimonios* into the curriculum. Gutierrez built on Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development in her quest to create space for migrant students and their stories. Rather than perpetuating deficit perspectives that surround Latinx students, she found an in-between space where students’ experiences can overlap with the formal learning environment. In this space, students learn to read their own stories in new ways, opening up new possibilities for themselves and their futures by valuing the cultural resources they bring with them to the classroom. Gutiérrez explained that “This movement toward a collectively imagined, more just world is facilitated, nurtured, and re-mediated by a grammar of collective hope and possibility and a critical social imagination that sparks cognitive work and sets the ground for persistent engagement in a range of leading activities” (p. 154). Gutierrez’s article can inspire educators to work to find Third Spaces for their own students within the school experience.

Similarly, Enciso (2011) also used student *testimonios* as a vehicle for fostering shared cultural understanding. She discussed the importance of storytelling as a tool of critical literacy pedagogy that allows students to voice their experiences and highlight the

power systems that influence their ability to be seen and heard. Enciso viewed stories as sites of struggle wherein students make sense of themselves and their context through crafting narratives that reflect and respond to the issues most important to them. She referenced Morrell's (2008) notion of critical textual production, wherein students act as cultural workers to imagine and reimagine their worlds. Through the composition of poetry, Enciso noted that students craft resistant stories that speak back to the ways in which they have been judged or stereotyped by others. She suggested that storytelling as a critical literacy practice shared among the members of the classroom community can be a powerful tool for student voice; however, teachers must recognize storytelling as a vehicle for creating art that gives insight into social and political forces and helps one to locate their experiences and beliefs within these contexts.

Reading and Writing Gendered Experiences

In addition to the ways in which race, culture, and ethnicity play a part in the literate practices of youth, scholars have also researched the ways in which gender identity affects students' uses of literacy and meaning-making processes. Godley's (2004) research highlighted the gender negotiations of two focal female students in an Honors eleventh grade English class in Montana. The researcher used a sociocultural framework to examine the ways in which literacy is a gendered social practice by focusing on how students negotiate gender through literacy, and how the literacy practices are in turn shaped by their gender. Godley's findings confirmed that, although the classroom has a complex web of gendered power relations, students are willing to contest these relations, and literacy practices can provide opportunities for reflection on

the ways in which gender is constructed and practiced in order to open up different possible constructions of femininity and masculinity.

MacLean (2014) traced the ways two Caribbean immigrant girls used digital literacy to inscribe their gendered identity. Using a framework of sociocultural and critical literacy, the author gave examples from the focal participants' digital practices to show how they position themselves through the ways they present their body, advocate for themselves and others, and use language as a vehicle for both acculturation and interrogation of norms. By interviewing, observing, and analyzing social media, MacLean determined that the girls used both Facebook and blogging to establish a gendered identity that fit into the style of their new social context in an American city in the South; they also took advantage of assignments that allowed them to leverage their digital skills to advocate for youth from diverse backgrounds to voice their opinions and perspectives. MacLean argued that the implications of this research for teachers lay in the opportunity digital literacy assignments can afford to negotiate across difference. Teachers can make use of these opportunities by presenting literature in which students see themselves, creating a classroom environment that supports diversity and discussion of different worldviews, and using multimodal literacy to encourage students to converse in a variety of modes.

While Godley and MacLean focused primarily on gender, other researchers looked to the ways intersecting identities such as gender, class, and race or ethnicity combine to inform students' literate practices. Hartman's (2006) ethnographic study researched the uses of literacy that a group of working-class girls displayed in their English classroom. She specifically focused on how these girls' gendered and classed

identity influenced the ways in which they used literacy, and in turn how literacy affected their conceptions of gender and class. Although the participants believed they were vocal during classes and shared their opinions freely, the researcher noted that these girls did not participate vocally during class, instead sitting silently and taking notes on the opinions and thoughts of others. While the teacher interpreted this silence and eagerness to please the teacher as dependence and need for academic support, the girls discussed the need to follow rules, meet expectations, and not contradict the teacher. The researcher compared the findings of her observation of middle-class girls to working-class girls, and found that the middle-class girls were vocal and shared opinions, thus demonstrating that liberating education and domesticating education (Anyon, 1980) can exist in the same classroom. Hartman ended by encouraging teachers to ensure that all students' voices are being heard inside the classroom, which at times might require teachers to encourage certain students to step outside of their comfort zone.

Sutherland's (2005) research took place in an high school English classroom and looked to the experiences of six African American girls during a unit focused on *The Bluest Eye*. The article explored the multilayered, relational, and constantly evolving identity representations of these focal students as the class discussed Toni Morrison's text. Sutherland found, through observation and interview, that "contrary to too-common portrayals of them as victims of poor choices and difficult circumstances, participants in this research positioned themselves in their writing and interviews as actors with complex identities" (p. 391). In addition, the researcher found that the girls identified with the characters of the text in feeling compelled to strive for a Eurocentric standard of beauty. Sutherland argued that this research displayed the ways in which literacy and identity are

inextricably linked. While identities can serve to reinforce boundaries, the author argued that engaging in discussion around these boundaries can mean a deeper understanding among students of the ways in which identity is intersectional and co-constructed.

Bettie (2014) highlighted the intersectionality of class, gender, and race in her ethnography set in a California high school. She first situated her study in feminist and Marxist perspectives that forwarded the gender inequalities existing along other class- and race-based inequalities. The title of the work refers both to the lack of cultural capital some women have, as well as the gaps in critical theory that do not attend to gendered class experiences. Bettie studied the negotiations of class and gender identity among different groups, such as Whites and Latinas, as well as within these groups—for example the prep and non-prep Latina social groups. She outlined how these groups each performed their gendered and classed identity through what they wear, their academic record, and their strict social group formations. By studying these groups side by side, Bettie highlighted the ways in which race, class, and gender featured in the girls' identity to either reproduce or challenge inequalities. Bettie argued that in order to address inequalities among middle- and working-class women of different races, researchers must attend to the unique ways these identity markers combine to construct complex identity performances.

Multimodal Engagement With Culture and Gender

With the rise of the digital age has come increased attention to the ways in which youth have adapted their literacy practices in the face of technological advancements and our globalized communication environment. While information is more freely available thanks to these advancements, scholars in critical literacy have also noted the need to be

critical consumers of this information. Widening critical literacies to include multimodal and digital media literacies, research in this area has looked to how Youth of Color consume and produce media, and how they can be taught to better scrutinize the ideological constructs present in these texts.

Ghiso and Low (2013) used a practitioner research approach to look at how immigrant students engage with multimodal literacy through the creation of comic strips to critique national discourses in ways that complicate assumptions related to assimilation into American society, meritocratic conceptions of success, and the idea of linear trajectories. The researchers looked to both students' utterances in these multimodal narratives, as well as "gutterances" or the spaces in between panels where readers must imaginatively fill in gaps to construct a continuous narrative (p. 28), in an effort to surface narratives of immigrant experiences that complicate the assumptions that lie within national discourses. Upon analysis, the researchers found that students complicate triumphant immigration narratives with emotionally moving narratives of struggle and loss, thus displaying contradictions that question the assumed linear trajectory of the immigrant experience. The students' work, as well as conversations between researchers and students facilitated around these pieces, led the researchers to find that multimodal composition allowed students to use multiple representations of immigrant experiences that surfaced the complex development of transnational identities often silenced by national grand narratives of assimilation and upward mobility.

Duncan-Andrade (2006) discussed the need for a pedagogy that encourages students to become producers of media texts in an effort to question the negative depictions they see in the media of portraying Communities of Color. The researcher

suggested that a pedagogy that foregrounds teen production of media can open up a pathway leading to greater agency in combatting conditions of inequality. Duncan-Andrade suggested that, by tapping into issues of community importance to students, empowering them as agents of change, and giving them the media resources that can help to motivate them to broadcast their voices to a wider audience, schools can connect more deeply with the communities they serve.

Goodman's (2003) book pointed out the ways that media production can serve to address the literacy gap between what literacies schools value and what literacies are most consumed and produced by Youth of Color. He suggested that by making use of their interest in digital texts, schools can address this disconnect while also equipping them with the tools they need to become critical consumers and producers of the media that surround them. Goodman's approach used media as a bridge to schooled literacy by amplifying the critical thinking skills that will both help students with their academics while also encouraging them to deconstruct the discourses that marginalize their own forms of literacy.

Literacy and Textual Production

One notable direction in critical literacy research is an acknowledgment of the need to better balance consumption and production in critical literacy classrooms. Morell (2003, 2015, 2004) pointed out the lack of attention paid to the production and distribution of texts in critical literacy instruction. He argued that, while deconstruction is an important skill of both critical pedagogy and critical literacy, it is integral that researchers look to research on composition and rhetoric in order to address more fully the ways in which students can rewrite more socially just texts and distribute their

message to wider audiences. Morrell suggested that teachers move from a focus on consumption to a focus on production through Critical Textual Production. His work further drew an important connection between critical pedagogies and critical literacies as he highlighted how a critical pedagogy of popular culture can make learning relevant to students who feel marginalized by the traditional curriculum.

Mahiri (2004, 2004b) also looked to the importance of moving beyond deconstruction of texts in order to make space for students to bring their own interests, experiences, and passions into the curriculum. He noted that “youth don’t merely consume and blindly respond to messages and images of new capitalism or schooling... they also propagate and produce meanings and representation of their own which challenge...the defining power of society and schools” (Mahiri, 2004, p. 4). Through researching street scripts produced by Youth of Color, which he described as examples of voluntary writing that uses students’ own experiences and perspectives, students display their ability to construct texts that reflect the real-life context and mediums used by Youth of Color to express themselves. Mahiri’s findings suggested that, by using styles and subjects that are not typically encouraged in schools, students challenge regulatory institutional discourses that control access and agency.

Morrell’s and Mahiri’s work suggested that the counter discourses that surface when Youth of Color are asked to deconstruct social injustices critically and then reconstruct stories that contain their own perspectives and beliefs are integral in achieving social action in that these counter-narratives question the status quo. Cowan (2004) also found this important connection between reconstruction and social action in researching lowrider culture in Latinx communities. Cowan contended that “one must see

the lowrider as a socially constructed and culturally valued form of expression, and a symbol of oppositional stance to the pressure to assimilate” (p. 52), and thus the imagery of this culture can be seen to present counter-discourses that are in opposition to dominant negative presentations of Latino/as.

Staples (2008) also foregrounded reconstruction in her work with students to identify print and visual texts presenting pop culture narratives that speak to contemporary issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Using critical literacy tools, students noted several recurring themes throughout the works, including the prevalence of negative representations of masculinity and urban life. One film in particular inspired students’ and teacher’s attention. While the movie *Hustle and Flow* presents a critically acclaimed pop culture narrative, it is also highly problematic in the way it presents gender relations through the main character DJay’s abuse and exploitation of women as a pimp in Memphis. The teacher and students worked to identify the underlying character archetypes in order to re-author them in alternative ways that depict different possible identities. Students then took the work they did in deconstructing and reconstructing the narrative of *Hustle and Flow* and used it to inform their own media literacy projects. Staples found that this work allowed students to imagine new and different possible identities outside of the cultural frames that have been used to categorize and marginalize them.

Kinloch (2010) widened the focus of social action beyond the composition of counter-narratives to a broader community-centered agenda of inquiry and change. In her 2010 ethnographic study, Kinloch concentrated on the lived realities of Harlem youth at a critical time of neighborhood change. She pointed out that while many studies of

neighborhood changes have been done in Harlem through the ages, few consider youth perspectives on community and gentrification. In order to address this oversight, Kinloch focused on “how lived experiences of youth—urban youth in particular—represent literacy stories, or narratives, about place, struggle, and identity” (p. 5), and how they employ a “pedagogy of possibility” that allows students to develop “critical agencies” in regard to literacy and community activism.

Discussion

In the following sections, I discuss the major themes that arose as I read through and analyzed articles on the literacies of Youth of Color. These themes helped me to move forward with my study in that they informed my approach to facilitating curriculum and pedagogy, while also providing guidance for how I conceptualized literate practices and student identities.

Defining Youth Literacies

Research in the area of youth literacies has demonstrated the importance of curriculum and pedagogy that invite conversations which inquire into race, culture, class, and gender in ways that help students investigate how these factors affect their conceptions of self and others. The city environment and local neighborhood itself provide unique opportunities for inquiry in that the imbalances of power are visible and evident to students who have experienced marginalization at the hands of dominant groups (such as through gentrification, in Kinloch’s study). In defining youth literacies in urban contexts, literacy scholars have found that students’ cultural identities provide generative opportunities for interrogating dominant ideologies about certain groups and

composing counter-stories that question the foundations of these oppressive ideologies (Cowan, 2004; Mahiri, 2004; Richardson, 2006). At times, these cultural identities are expressed inside the classroom, where inquiry assignments open doors for students to interrogate the status quo (Richardson, 2006); however, scholars have also found that community inquiry allows students to see the ways these ideologies function in the world outside of schools to control opportunities and the flow of resources (Kinloch, 2010; Morrell, 2015; Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2011).

While youth literacies are rooted in the cultural and community knowledge students bring with them, scholars have also looked outside of students' own funds of knowledge to address the ways in which pop culture and the media influence their world view. Pop culture narratives in movies, music, and television provide opportunities to bring the outside world into the classroom while also capitalizing on student interests (Cowan, 2004; Mahiri, 2004; Morrell, 2015). This attention to the influences of American culture writ large help students understand the real-world connects to the academic content in schools, as well as encourage them to think of texts more widely as living and circulating in their everyday lives. Work in the area of critical media literacy contributes to this widening definition of text, while also highlighting the constructed nature of all texts, even those we look to for our news of world events (Duncan-Andrade, 2006). Bringing pop culture and media literacy to the classroom helps students not only deconstruct the ideologies that position their culture, race, class, or gender in oppressive ways, but also gives students the inquiry skills to dig beneath the surface to see the competing interests at play in all texts.

The articles in this literature review emphasized the importance of criticality in youth literacies. These literacies are rooted in students' culture, existing in the classroom and the community, and presented through pop culture and the media. Due to the marginalizing effects of much of the traditional canon which emphasizes the worldview of dominant White middle-class society, teachers of literacy must equip Youth of Color with the skills to untangle and deconstruct these oppressive discourses in order to fight against disenfranchisement. While it is important that students are presented texts in which they see themselves, we cannot ignore that even when characters of Color are presented, they are often not presented in ways that give students pride in their culture or hope for their future. By teaching students to look at the narratives created about and by People of Color, they can better understand how important their own voices and perspectives can be in changing deficit framings.

Bridging (Non)-Schooled Literacies

Much of the reading and writing done in school curricula presents the viewpoints of the dominant culture as neutral and excludes marginalized perspectives. Many researchers have turned to question how to bridge students' own literate practices to help them meet the demands of schooled literate practices without uncritically assimilating youth culture into school culture. African American and Latinx culture can be brought to readings of traditional texts in ways that allow students to compare and contrast perspectives and discuss the competing interests of discourses, so they are better able to navigate the divide between their home and schooled literacy interactions (Ávila & Moore, 2012; Haddix & Rojas, 2004; Richardson, 2006).

While ethnic and racial identities are important to consider in bridging students in and out of school literacy practices together, it is also important to consider the ways in which culture, gender, and class intersect to position these youths as certain kinds of students. While gender alone is often cited in teachers' expectations of students, as well as students' expectations of themselves and others (Godley, 2004; MacLean, 2014), certain combination of intersectional identities have specific oppressive narratives associated with them that teachers and researchers must be aware of and actively work to disrupt. For example, Black masculinity (Kirkland, 2014; Kirkland & Jackson, 2009) is often associated with negative stereotypes of aggression and violence, whereas Latinx culture (Beattie, 2014; Hartman, 2006) is often seen as patriarchal wherein women are expected to conform to dominant conceptions of beauty and domesticity. In an effort to disrupt these assumptions, teachers and researchers must first be cognizant of the ways in which they might surface in the classroom, and self-reflexive about how pedagogies might work to reinforce or disrupt such dynamics. In centering students' out-of-school literacies in the curriculum, it is important to look at culture, race, class, and gender as both assets to enrich classroom discussion, as well as vehicles for reflecting on oneself and the ways in which our conceptions of self are colored by the texts that surround us.

The articles in this literature review remind us that bridging out-of-school and in-school literacy practices does not just mean looking to how students can better use their funds of knowledge to meet the needs of academic literacy, but also how schools can capitalize on students' funds of knowledge to enrich curriculum and pedagogy. This is an important consideration in that often schooling is seen as an opportunity to instill students with cultural capital associated with White middle-class norms, instead of as a place to

celebrate and re-center the diversity of perspectives present in our society. While it is important for education to give students the tools to be successful in the world outside of schools, it is also important to consider how each student's unique world views and experiences can enrich and transform the literacy canon to be more responsive to the needs of our 21st century globalized society.

Focusing on Textual Production

Though curricula often focus on consumption of texts (e.g., reading, analysis, interpretation), the studies in this literature review demonstrated the promise of highlighting textual production in classrooms. While deconstructing oppressive discourses can teach students to attend to the ways in which power operates in and through the texts that surround them, it is reconstruction that gives a sense of agency. Reconstruction allows students to see how to add their voice and perspective to the narrative, questioning the status quo and presenting counter-stories of strength in the face of obstacles and hope for a more socially just future (Ghiso & Low, 2013; Morrell, 2015).

Writing in many different forms can allow students to produce commentary on the texts that they encounter both inside and outside of school. Students can attend to the ways in which their identities are composed by the texts that surround them, while also composing their own identities through the ways they fashion themselves (Johnson, 2011; Kirkland & Jackson, 2009) and the texts they produce (MacLean, 2014). While some researchers have looked to the opportunities for student analysis and expression within traditional written texts such as poetry and critical essays (Jocson & Cooks, 2004), other researchers have looked to infuse students' culture into these assignments through attention to hip hop or pop culture in the form of raps or slam poetry and other written

assignments such as testimonios (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Enciso, 2011; Gutierrez, 2008; Morell, 2015; Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2011).

A growing area of research into text production looks to the promise of digital and multimodal composition in teaching students both the skills of composing and the usefulness of digital media in conveying complex messages that combine aural, visual, and textual modes. Digital composition has been suggested as a way to bridge students' literacy gaps (Goodman, 2003) as well as an important asset in teaching students to be more critical consumers and producers of media by attending to the differing demands of audience and context in constructing and distributing one's message (Duncan-Andrade, 2006; Ghiso & Low, 2013). Researchers in this area have emphasized that technology is not the magic key to unlocking these competencies, but are an integral part of the process of teaching students the power of their own voice by allowing them to capitalize on the strengths of digital formats to craft impactful and far-reaching commentary on social issues. The role of teachers and curriculum cannot be denied in supporting students to reach beyond the traditional demands of written composition to consider the ways in which digital composition can be used to meet academic goals as well as social justice goals.

Implications for Dissertation Study

The studies included in this review emphasized how important my students' racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds are. They also highlighted how gender intersects with these backgrounds to influence students' meaning making in the classroom. In order to cultivate a classroom community where students feel their identities are valued and

respected, it is important to understand the connection between youth's out-of-school literacy practices and the skills and competencies they bring to the classroom. This requires consideration of their funds of knowledge that stem from cultural and social interactions, as well as honoring their experiences consuming and producing media. Many students are competent users of social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter and have access to a cellular phone that allows them to take pictures and video; however, they might be unfamiliar with how to leverage these skills to create digital stories, animations, or short films, and likely these opportunities are rare in official classroom contexts. It is important that a critical multimodal curriculum draws on what students already know in regard to both composition skills and technological skills.

While the research has shown the overall value of critical approaches to deconstruction and reconstruction, it has also highlighted the ways in which students might (seem to) resist challenging assumptions and exploring new perspectives. While students must be supported through this process, and this might at times necessitate traversing the boundaries of their comfort zone, it is important that pedagogical approaches not force critical inquiry, but rather create spaces for students to come to their own understandings. As teachers facilitate discussion around stereotypes and assumptions, they must also be reflective about the kinds of assumptions they carry, including those aimed toward students. Teachers cannot forget that their backgrounds and positions of power may influence both the way they see their students and the way students present themselves to the teacher.

The studies I encountered through this review points to a trend in literacy research to focus on the classroom level of critical multimodal literacies, highlighting one teacher

or one group of students. While my study also spotlights the interactions and learnings within one classroom, there is a need for literacy studies that link the classroom to broader social and political issues affecting the school and community. While the research literature has argued for a porous view of the classroom that is open to influences from community contexts, often these influences are abstracted. The community and school environment themselves affect the classroom, and on this micro scale, many macro social issues play out in ways that students see on a daily basis. As an implication of this tension, I attempted throughout this study to contextualize classroom-level events in relation to issues occurring at the school and community level. While I highlighted student voices in presenting counter-stories to the social discourses about them, I also attended to my negotiations as a teacher as I sought to create an emergent curriculum that was responsive to the politics of school and community reform so prevalent at my research site.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

This practitioner research study employed qualitative research methods (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) to explore the ways in which Students of Color participating in a multimodal critical literacy course went on to critique, question, reinforce, or reproduce stock stories through their narrative compositions. Throughout this study, I worked from a practitioner inquiry stance, using practice as a site for inquiry in order to “conduct research on the intricate complexities involved in theorizing and working out problems of practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 40). My 10 years of teaching high school English in both urban and suburban schools have instilled in me the importance of the knowledge generated at the local level and intended to forward action-oriented outcomes that are relevant to both the researcher and the participants at the research site (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Herr & Anderson, 2014).

In addition, the tradition of practitioner inquiry most closely aligns with my commitment to doing research with and for participants, as the insider knowledge possessed by members of the community can lead to insights that are immediately applicable to the problems they see as most important to their situation (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Paris, 2003; Souto-Manning; 2014). Keeping in line with the intentions of practitioner inquiry, “questions emerge from day-to-day practice and from discrepancies

between what is intended and what occurs” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 42), and it is this discrepancy that allows practitioner research to become “a space where the uncertainties and questions intrinsic to practice can be seen (not hidden) and can function as grist for new insights and new ways to theorize practice” (p. 37). While I entered into this study with questions that guided my inquiry, I also remained open to the ways in which my participants’ responses shaped and guided the classroom community, as well as my own perceptions of what was important in this research context. In this way, my research spanned the theory/practice divide and presented findings and implications both accessible to members of the academic community as well as members of the local school community (Cochran Smith & Lytle, 2009).

While a practitioner stance aligns most closely with my purposes, it is not without criticism. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) pointed out that “blurring boundaries and roles allows for innovative programs of research and new kinds of knowledge as well as new tensions and professional dilemmas” (p. 43). In addressing some of these tensions and professional dilemmas, I give a detailed outline below of my positionality and how I continually interrogated my own subjectivities in the research process. I followed accepted qualitative protocols for observation, document collection, interview, and analysis, and go into detail about both my data collection and analysis procedures in the sections that follow. Finally, I relied on my partners at the school and within the university community to assist me in maintaining both my commitment to my students, first and foremost, and my attention to qualitative research methods and protocols.

Practitioner Research Design

In this dissertation, I employed a practitioner inquiry methodology to investigate my students' responses to critical and multimodal literacy curriculum through collecting in-depth and diverse data sources intended to display the complexity of the context under study. Consistent with qualitative research methods, this study was designed to "better understand human behavior and experience" by seeking to "grasp the processes by which people construct meaning and describe what those meanings are" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 43). Practitioner research aims to uncover concrete knowledge through the use of detailed descriptions and vignettes; however, the resulting knowledge is deeply constitutive of the context in which the research is carried out. A defining feature of qualitative research is the assumption that "human behavior is significantly influenced by the setting in which it occurs" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 5). Due to the familiarity of the context within which practitioner research studies take place, it is important that practitioner researchers identify and interrogate the assumptions which they enter into the study in order to bring to the surface, and counteract, preconceived notions about what they will find. To accomplish this, I used a couple of self-reflexive exercises such as memoing with a diverse range of data sources, including participant observations; collected documents from class sessions; audio and visual material from student media compositions; and narratives from class conversations, one-on-one conferences, and student-created narrative compositions.

This study took place during a ninth period elective course in a public school in a large northeastern city. While I was at the site as a facilitator for the entire school year, the research phase of the work encompassed the time period from January to March. This

window of time allowed me to observe the class dynamics, begin developing relationships in the classroom community, and fully explain the purposes of my research to potential participants before entering into formal data collection. Beginning in April, city schools start preparing for state testing, and thus I ended formal data collection at this time in order to devote my full attention to supporting my students during this stressful period. Because of a whole school initiative to prepare students for Regents testing beginning in March during the 2017-2018 school year, my timeline for implementing Unit 2 was affected. This critical incidence formed a large part of the data reported in Chapter V and I analyzed the event and its effects as part of my data findings.

Pilot Study

During the 2016-2017 school year, I conducted a pilot study at this research site that was integral in developing my focus for this current study. My pilot study used a teacher action research model (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007; Herr & Anderson, 2014) wherein I enacted multiple inquiries into problems of practice as they arose in order to ascertain the effects of my critical literacy pedagogy on students' compositions, and the efficacy of the evolving curricula I was developing for an elective course on multimodal storytelling. The findings from my observations, interviews, and document analysis, in addition to the perceptions of students and co-teachers, helped me to identify issues of interest to the class, while shifting my pedagogical approach to allow for more student choice in terms of topics and projects.

Throughout the school year, the students engaged in a process of designing and producing critical commentary on issues they found to be socially important. In my pilot year, student projects focused on racial profiling, sexual harassment, toxic relationships,

gang activity, the recent election, and LGBTQ rights. These focus topics were identified by students as important social issues that they saw reflected in their community. By conducting this pilot study, I was able to reflect on my role as a practitioner researcher in order to determine what approaches would ensure quality data collection that was representative of the community of which I was a part.

Research Questions

In an effort to capture the growing understanding among students of the ways in which stories can reinforce or questions stereotypes, and to track their changing views on social issues related to race, class, and gender over time, I asked the following questions:

1. What are students' perspectives and inquiries regarding race, class, gender, and other social framings, and how do these change over time?
 - a. How do students engage with these inquiries in relationship to curricular resources, class activities, and peer interactions?
 - b. What do the texts students produce say about how they communicate their understanding of social issues regarding race, class, and gender?
2. How does this research inform my growing understanding of what it means to teach well?
 - a. What implications does this study have for critical and multimodal curriculum and teaching?

In the following sections, I discuss how I addressed these questions through my methods for data collection and analysis, but first, I engage in an exploration of my positionality as my role in this project affected the questions I asked, the lens through which I viewed students and the curriculum, and the interpretation of my data.

Positionality

Reflexivity is important in all forms of qualitative inquiry but is especially essential to practitioner inquiry in that the researcher is an explicit and visible actor within the study. It was important to the trustworthiness of my research, as well as to the best interests of my participants that I detailed the ways in which my own experiences and perspectives informed (and may potentially bias) my research in order to work toward a critical reflexivity throughout the research process (Herr & Anderson, 2014). While practitioner inquiry is at times critiqued for the close relationship of the researcher to the site and participants, Habermas (1971) highlighted the fact that a researcher is always deeply involved in the research, even in research paradigms that claim objectivity. He proposed that instead of trying to distance ourselves from the work we do, researchers should engage in a process of self-reflection wherein we inspect our purposes, methods, and interpretations in order to examine our assumptions (Herr & Anderson, 2014).

As we always exist at the intersection of multiple identities, Cornwall (1998) encouraged researchers to look critically at their multiple positionalities, including insider/outsider positionality, hierarchical positionality, membership within dominant groups, and position in colonial relations. To accomplish this reflection, I looked to questions posed by Lytle (2000) in her framework for practitioner inquiry. In this framework, Lytle suggested that researchers consider the following categories and questions in order to explore their positionality:

Legacy - Where do I come from? What are my social, cultural, political, and educational frameworks? What traditions or disciplines do I come from and why/how does this matter?

Location - Who am I to be doing this work? What is my positionality on a continuum from insider to outsider? Where is my location in the work? Research on/with/for? To what extent and in what ways is the project collaborative or participatory?

Ways of knowing - What assumptions am I making about knowers and the nature of knowledge? What do I understand as the relationships of inquiry, knowledge, and practice? How do I position myself/others as generators of knowledge?

Orientation - What am I studying? For what? Why? What sources inform my inquiry? How/do these evolve throughout the process of the study?

Methods - What counts as data for my study and how will I collect and analyze them?

Community - What is the social organization of my work? What are the communities to which I belong? Why/how do these matter?

Neighborhood - Who am I talking to in my research? Why/how does this matter?

In the following section, I consider these questions and give an explanation of where I saw myself in relation to each.

Legacy. I come from a White, suburban, middle-class family. I went to high-performing mostly public schools growing up in suburban Florida and rural Connecticut. Despite going to high-performing schools, it was apparent to me from a young age that the education that served me well did not work for everyone. My twin brother, who enjoyed the same advantages as I, did not meet with the same success in school. Though brilliant with technology and quick at math and science, my brother struggled with attendance and grades and eventually dropped out of high school. In the ensuing family

discussions, I became aware of a significant number of my relations who had either dropped out or nearly flunked out of high school. While those of us who finished went on to college and careers, those who had dropped out had made successful careers for themselves as well. I took this knowledge into my teaching career. In the urban and suburban classrooms in which I have taught, I have tried to remember not to judge students on their academic performances alone (especially as defined by standardized assessments), but to make space for all kinds of different definitions of success. This conviction led me back to graduate school after 7 years of teaching, when I found that although my Students of Color were just as intelligent and vibrant as my White and more affluent students, their gifts were not being appreciated or mobilized in the same way within school contexts.

Location. In this study, I was both teacher and researcher; thus, I tried to the best of my ability to present both insider and outsider perspectives. The ways in which I possess an insider perspective have come mostly from my position as teacher at the research site. Since 2014, I have taught classes at the research site, mostly during the Summer Bridge program coordinated by my doctoral institution. Last school year, I taught an elective course which comprised the pilot research for this study. In this role of teacher, I engaged in conversations with students and teachers at the school, encouraging them to discuss what they saw as the benefits and drawbacks of the school community. Entering into this study, I hoped to be able to bring my experience at the location to bear in a way that addresses some of the student concerns they shared with me regarding their education. While I could report my interpretations from the role as a teacher insider in the

community, I relied on student narratives and one-on-one conversations with students to help guide my representation of their perspectives.

As a researcher, I had the advantage of the university community to support me in completing this research. This presented me with resources outside the scope of most teachers. In order to make the familiar strange, I depended on student reflection journals from the beginning of the year as a way of getting to know my new students and co-teacher. One of the most valuable resources that I possessed was a group of trusted mentors to assist me in this work. While I strove toward a critical reflexivity which allowed me to examine my positionality as both insider and outsider, I relied on these mentors, in addition to critical friends, to help me in this capacity.

Ways of knowing. Throughout the study, I aimed to position students as knowers with the ability to contribute the knowledge base of the classroom through drawing on their past experiences, observations, and cultural affiliations. I believe that, while situated to a very specific context, the knowledge derived from this study can serve as a concrete example of the ways in which Youth of Color in an urban school context are positioned by the various discourses that surround them, and how they act to question, critique, reinforce, and/or reproduce these discourses. Throughout this study, I used student narratives derived from their personal experiences, thoughts, or beliefs to drive my instruction and help me make pedagogical and curricular decisions.

Orientation and method. I was studying the ways in which students understand and respond to stock stories regarding race, class, and gender. What I hoped to better understand was how critical literacy can be a tool with which Youth of Color can inquire into oppressive discourses that position them in detrimental ways; however, I believe that

even when students reproduce or reinforce stock stories, their narratives can serve to open up a conversation about the power of discourse—if and how that type of collaborative engagement occurs was part of what this study sought to illuminate. My primary source of this information was the students themselves as I looked to classroom conversations, classwork, and narrative compositions for evidence of the tensions between stock, concealed, resistant, and transformative storytelling. I also used critical literacy pedagogies to encourage students to analyze texts for these discourses, thus documenting their developing understanding. In addition to students, I talked with teachers, administrators, and university partners to help me determine the different discourses present at the school-wide and community-wide levels. This information was used to help me contextualize what happened in the specific classroom that comprised this research site.

Community and neighborhood. While my research came from a genuine desire to produce useful work that speaks to the needs of the community I serve, I would not consider myself a member of this community. I live in relative geographical proximity; however, my on-campus residence means that I spend most of my time in a much different neighborhood than many of my students experience. As a White middle-class woman, I differ in race and social class from most of my students. As an adult placed in a position of authority, I recognize the ways in which I myself reinforce oppressive power imbalances at this research site. In an effort to address the concerns of power relations in my representation of Youth of Color, I used narrative vignettes where possible to include their voices in this research. Where possible, I shared these narratives with students to consult them about my interpretations and representations of their stories. Ultimately, I

hope this research will be of interest both to academic researchers as well as to teachers who might feel disenfranchised by the divide between theory and practice in education.

Reflecting on reflexive practice. It is integral to inspect one's positionality with regard to research ethics; however, in a practitioner study such as this one, it is also very important to consider how one's positionality affects teaching practices and engagement with students. My position as a White middle-class woman whose culture does not match that of my students makes it doubly important in a study looking to school and community culture for me to maintain a learner stance towards my students' culture and the culture of their communities. Because I not only collected and interpreted the data but created the curriculum and activities with which students would engage, I felt that it was necessary to maintain a flexible and emergent vision of the curriculum in order to keep it malleable to student interest and feedback. Though there were limitations to this approach as I outlined above, there were also significant affordances.

My position as both a researcher and facilitator in the class required me to be reflexive throughout the planning and implementing of lessons. I was careful to attend to student input and, because I had the power to design curriculum for the class, I was not beholden to any required district scope and sequence. Thus, when the students became interested in the debate regarding district reorganization plans, I was able to alter my planned curriculum to reflect their interests and facilitate further engagement in the issue. I maintained a researcher journal which allowed me to reflect on each lesson and think through how I could better organize learning experiences to support student learning. Because of my research positioning, I was able to elucidate my approach to my colleagues and was motivated to meet weekly with my co-teacher to facilitate positive

communication, in which we discussed student responses and future curricular plans to ensure they met the needs of the learners in our classroom. I also met regularly with my University supervisor to make sure that the course and student progress met with the expectations of the office sponsoring the program.

All of these moves might be considered just “good teaching”; however, because there is little time in the school day dedicated to this practice, educators often lack the time and resources to attend to their position adequately. Taking a practitioner research stance, and committing to inspect my positionality throughout this research, helped me to maintain an emphasis on reflective practice in a way that not only made my research more trustworthy, but also made my classroom more student-centric because of the attention paid to student identity, interest, and engagement.

Research Site Context, Selection, and Access

In the following section, I discuss the research site, participant selection, and issues of access and consent. I also address the concerns regarding the power imbalance between myself and my participants and discuss the multiple strategies of validation I used to ensure the validity of data collection and interpretation.

Description of Site

Central Arts School is a co-ed middle and high school which resides in a historic 1902 building with two other co-housed schools. Central Arts School, which once occupied the whole building, now occupies floors one and two. In 2012, the school was identified as a School In Need of Improvement (SINI) due to poor academic performance based on Regents testing, SAT scores, and graduation rates. The school

managed to escape closure due in part to community activism, and instead was added to a list of schools the DOE planned to engage in school improvement conversations.

Today, Central Arts School has a total enrollment of 375 students, 70% of whom receive Free or Reduced Lunch. The school's student body is predominantly Black and Latinx, with a majority of female students. Although the school has made academic progress since first listed as SINI, the *U.S. News and World Report* of "Best High Schools" (<http://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools>) showed state test proficiency rates in English and Math lagging behind both district and state averages (see Table 1 below). The graduation rate is also still below the state and city average at 66%, with 45% of high school completers continuing on to a 4-year university after graduation (New York State Education Department, <https://data.nysed.gov/>).

While state testing and district graduation rates reflect negatively on the academics at Central Arts School, this school is unique in its commitment to providing opportunities to students in the visual and performing arts. In contrast to media depictions of urban public schools, which frame these sites in a rhetoric of chaos and need for discipline, the atmosphere of the school is friendly, the school is clean and inviting, and I have found the students to be overall helpful and polite. The building has a large auditorium, gymnasium, and art and dance studios—features which other schools in the city lack. Central Arts School's mission statement includes habits of heart, mind, and work, which emphasize both academic and socioemotional growth.

Table 1

Central Arts Demographic Data

School Level Demographic Data		
Total Enrollment		375
% Receiving Free/Reduced Lunch		70%
% Attending Regularly		83%
% Graduating With Regents Diploma		66%
% Going on to 4-year College		45%
Gender Demographics		
% Male		34%
% Female		66%
NY State Common Core Assessment Data		
English Proficiency		38%
Math Proficiency		28%
Racial Demographics		
Black	Latino/a	White
52%	44%	4%

Partnerships with universities and other organizations have led to increased opportunities for students both during school and in the form of afterschool clubs and summer REACH programs. As part of a school improvement effort, Central Arts School has added a ninth period where students can either attend preparatory classes for the Regents exams or choose from a limited variety of electives that the administration and school partners have been working to enrich. The course, The Art of Storytelling, in

which this research took place is one of the new electives offered this year during this ninth period block.

Recruitment and Selection of Participants

In designing research, Creswell (2007) suggested that researchers “select unusual cases...and employ maximum variation as a sampling strategy to represent diverse cases and to fully describe multiple perspectives about the cases” (p. 129). Maximum variation sampling is a type of purposive sampling designed to document diverse variations in order to identify patterns that cut across these variations. For this study, I looked for participants who were representative of the range of characteristics common at the school site where this research took place. Such characteristics included gender, race, and socioeconomic status (Davis, Powell, & Lachlan, 2013). Due to the demographics of the school, my participants were a mixed group of male and female Students of Color from working-class or lower middle-class families. These students mostly reside in Communities of Color within the city, and bring with them a variety of cultural backgrounds, languages, and immigrant experiences.

The students featured in this research were members of the multimodal storytelling course that I facilitated at the school site during a ninth-period block reserved for elective courses. The students placed in the class by the school’s guidance counselor were a group of tenth and eleventh grade students who were in good academic standing at the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year due to their attendance and grades. The course number varied throughout the school year. All students were invited to participate in the study. Of 22 students who were in the class, 12 agreed to be participants, while the remaining 10 declined the invitation to participate. Though the students all attended

Central Arts, because of the city's open enrollment policy, these students lived in neighborhoods throughout the city. Some lived within the same community as the school they attended, while others lived between half an hour to one hour away from the school via public transportation.

In addition to the students joining me in the classroom, I also counted two different co-teachers as participants. Though I was a certified English teacher in the state of Connecticut, my license did not allow me to be in a classroom with students unless a state-certified teacher was also in the room. I was assigned two main co-teachers over my 2 years of teaching at Central Arts, and both featured in my research to complicate and/or reinforce my perceptions on the events and issues that arose over the course of the study. My co-teacher from 2016-2017, Ms. Baker, remained a helpful source of knowledge about Central Arts due to her connections with the teachers and students in the school community and years of teaching experience at Central Arts. She joined me in the classroom, bringing her background in social studies and special education and her interest in disability studies and LGBTQ issues, which led to a focus on inclusion of these issues in our classroom practice. I drew on her perceptions of administration, teachers, and students as a member-checking resource throughout the study. She also provided a longitudinal perspective as she supported me during my pilot year in developing and implementing the initial Critical Film Studies curriculum and remained interested in my progress after she left the school at the end of the 2016-2017 school year.

Due to some confusion in assigning a co-teacher for the 2017-2018 school year, my second co-teacher, Ms. Nossier, was assigned midway through the second marking period to take over for a rotation of substitute teachers who had been assigned to cover

the class. This co-teacher brought a different perspective to the course, as many of the students in it were also in her sophomore AP Language and Composition class. She provided a helpful counterpoint and challenged me to consider my data from both my perspective, guided by critical and multimodal literacy, as well as her perspective guided by the AP and CCSS interpretations of literacy and rigor in reading and writing. As a member of the full-time teaching staff at Central Arts, Ms. Nossner was integral in helping me to contextualize the critical incidents which influenced the nature of the course.

Finally, Henry, a university employee assigned to Central Arts to assist in program development, featured in this study as a participant who gave insight into the negotiations that took place at the administrative level. His interviews and informal accounts served as important counterpoints for me in attempting to interpret and understand administrative decisions that affected my ability to teach the Art of Storytelling. Henry was able to give me insight into the reasons for school-wide decisions, and the tensions he and his staff felt in making decisions which they knew would have at least some deleterious effects on ninth-period courses. His honesty and transparency in discussing the conflicting interests he attempted to balance provided important understandings of the process of school improvement from an administrative perspective.

Studying one's own classroom. Some concerns that I needed to address in selecting research participants and collecting data included how I addressed power imbalances, guarded against coercion, and ensured that my interpretations were valid. First, although I facilitated this course, I shared this position with a full-time teacher at the research site who was in charge of maintaining student records and grading classwork

and projects. As facilitator, I saw my role as hybrid—part instructor and part support for students. In this regard, while I was in a position of power as facilitator, I guarded against students feeling that I was in an evaluative role in part by making clear to students that I was not responsible for grading, parent conferences, or other assessments of their academic or behavioral performance. Throughout this study, I was assisted by a co-teacher who took some responsibility for helping students to design and carry out projects. Though I was responsible for the bulk of planning and implementing the curriculum, I was able to observe students from time to time as my co-teacher took over instruction.

As discussed above, data are always collected in sites of power imbalance, and thus it was impossible for me to be a completely unbiased observer; however, in my research design and interactions with students, I emphasized the need for self-reflexivity on my role as a facilitator. I relied on my co-teachers to assist me in developing a community where students could feel their opinions were valued and they would not be penalized for the topics or perspectives they undertook in their work for the class.

In order to guard against coercion, I gave students an overview of how the course and the research study were related and detailed what kinds of information would be included in the research project should they choose to become participants. I assured students that their grade would not be affected whether they decided to be a part of the study. I sent home information with students about the course and the research project that I intended to carry out, using the course as a research site. All potential participants were given informed consent forms to ensure that parents and students alike agreed to the terms and conditions of participation.

Finally, I made use of multiple strategies of validation to ensure accurate interpretation. One source of this information came from the students themselves. Throughout the process of supporting students and facilitating the course material, I relied on student feedback to guide my interpretation of what was going on at the research site by sharing with them my understandings and asking for their input. I was in consistent contact with my co-facilitators to get their perspectives and impressions of the students' responses to course material. I also relied on a group of critical friends consisting of teachers with whom I have worked in different contexts over the years and mentors from the academic community. My group of critical friends consisted of mostly female educators, some currently working as teachers, and others who have left the classroom. These critical friends were from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds, with experience teaching in both urban and suburban schools. My mentors consisted of university professors at my institution, as well as those at other institutions who were kind enough to sit down with me and discuss my data and the tensions I felt as a practitioner researcher in this site. These critical friends and mentors assisted me through the process of reflection on the communities of which I was a part and helped me to interrogate my assumptions and challenge my interpretations of the data.

Data Collection

Data collection over the course of this study was intensive and ongoing, making use of multiple sources of information in order to capture the multiple perspectives of participants in the study (Creswell, 2007). My position as a practitioner researcher made it easier to access some data, for example, the archival data from my pilot year. As a

practitioner researcher, I positioned myself to both “[document] classroom practice and students’ learning” and “systematically document from the inside perspective [my] own questions, interpretive frameworks, changes in views over time, dilemmas, and recurring themes” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 44).

Student Artifacts

In order to gain an understanding of the ways in which my student participants responded to stock, concealed, resistant, and transforming stories, I collected and analyzed the documents they produced. Examples of these documents were personal reflections, journal entries, photos, or videos that they produced as part of their coursework, class activities, and final multimodal compositions. During the unit under study, I began by collecting student classwork activities like their daily Do Now writing assignments that captured their evolving understanding of the topics we were encountering as part of our curricular materials and classroom discussions. As students began to craft individual poetry compositions, I collected the multiple drafts they produced along with any peer or teacher feedback given to guide their final pieces so that I could see how their writings evolved over time and under the influence of different members of the classroom community. Lastly, I analyzed the final poetry portfolios that students turned in which consisted of three original poems and one visual collage or mural that they produced to accompany their collection.

In the second half of this unit, I intended for students to work in groups of two to three on social issues that they felt inspired to investigate and ultimately present this work to their peers. However, I was not able to proceed with this unit as planned if I was to remain responsive to student interests. While the students in this study also engaged in

discussions of race, class, and gender, the climate at the school during the 2017-2018 school year was quite different due to district attention to the school's "lack of progress" toward improvement, as evidenced by Regents test scores from the 2016-2017 end-of-year testing. The increased attention and worry regarding school improvement efforts and rumors that the school may be reorganized at the end of 2017-2018 ended up, understandably, heavily affecting the interests and issues students brought to class. Instead of focusing on individual issues of importance, the class evolved into a large-group exploration of the effects of gentrification on the community. As students explored the changing neighborhood, they developed a contextual understanding of the school's position in these efforts at reform and analyzed the intent versus the lived effects of these changes put into action to "improve" the school and neighborhood community. The artifacts used to document this group exploration consisted of posters students created in response to a gallery walk on community change, art, and activism. In addition, students produced classwork and notes that fueled classroom discussion on the topic of gentrification.

Observations

I observed students during class conversations, group work, and activities 5 days per week throughout the instructional units taking place January to March. At times, I observed how the class responded to lessons led by my co-teacher or a guest lecturer, but I was not an active member of the classroom for most of these observation sessions. This presented a challenge, as it was difficult to both assist in facilitating class activities while observing how the class responded to them. For this reason, I used multiple tools for collecting observed data. During lessons, I audiotaped discussions and jotted notes and

observations in a journal. After class, I discussed my observations with my co-teacher who helped to confirm, challenge, and enhance my noticings by adding her own personal observations. After class, I reconstructed what happened during class in detailed fieldnotes which reflected what I captured through the audiotapes, in class notes, and in the debrief conversation. I regularly discussed my impressions of class sessions and student responses with my co-facilitators in order to add their perspectives into my fieldnotes for the day.

In addition, I kept a reflective journal throughout this process in order to record the tensions I felt as a participant observer, my personal interpretation of class events, and my impressions of student responses to the facilitators' curricular and pedagogical choices. When possible, I asked students to reflect on different aspects of the class in their journals, so I could include this feedback to represent student impressions in my reflections. These reflections were also helpful in tailoring the curriculum to meet the needs of my students.

Informal Interviews

Department of Education guidelines for IRB permission in action research projects stipulate that students are not allowed to be removed from class in order to be interviewed, as the project must in no way disrupt the students' regular school day. However, as part of my normal pedagogical practice, I am accustomed to having one-on-one conferences with students about their writing process and progress. Since the topics of conversation revolved around the students' class work or composition in progress during these interviews, I used unstructured interviewing, which allowed for more responsive questioning (Frey & Fontana, 1994). This strategy also allowed me to keep a

more natural environment which would be less obtrusive to students in that they would not be removed from the classroom.

In addition to individual conferences, I regularly sat down with groups engaged in discussion of topics related to their assignments. These group discussions allowed me the opportunity to gain an understanding of how students were tackling collaborative assignments as a team. In this way, I folded in conversations in the spirit of informal individual interviews and informal focus group responses in order to record student discussions of the course topics, assignments, and reflections on their compositions. Where possible, these one-on-one and group interviews were audio recorded for later transcription.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is an ongoing and iterative process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Because of the vast amount of data available to me as a practitioner researcher, I needed to be targeted in the data I collected and the process by which I reduced and organized these data. LeCompte and Schensul (1999) pointed out that as a first step, “data must be organized and reduced so that the ideas, themes, units, patterns and structures within them begin to become apparent” (p. 45). As I proceeded through the steps of reducing, organizing, analyzing, and interpreting the data I collected, I developed both deductive codes derived from my conceptual framework and inductive codes that arose as I read through and organized the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I documented and analyzed classroom interactions and student artifacts in order to determine which stock stories students identified and how they inquired into these stock stories through either seeking

out or developing concealed, resistant, and transforming stories that question stereotypes and assumptions based on race, class, and gender.

During my first phase of data analysis, I organized student artifacts in chronological order and layered them with the classroom discussion transcripts, which I recorded, transcribed, and then used to develop field note recreations of each day's classroom events. Student artifacts took the form of argumentative letters, poetry, and short stories composed by the students during class. I carefully annotated each student artifact to make note of different types of stories (i.e., stock, concealed, resistant, and transforming) as well as the critical literacy tools students were using to interrogate these stories (i.e., deconstruction, framing, perspective, reconstruction, and social action) which formed the deductive parts of my coding scheme. As I annotated, I also coded inductively for influences like context, perspective, and social relationships, not directly reflected in my deductive coding scheme but still relevant to the research questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I then looked to the classroom discussion transcripts and applied the same annotation protocol. Upon completing annotation of all of the student artifacts and classroom transcripts, I created a data table of contents which included key words and synthesized the piece of data into one sentence.

After annotating the student artifacts and classroom discussion transcripts, I re-read the data and table of contents key words in order to color-code the recurring terms and annotations into larger themes. At this point, I presented my coding scheme to my dissertation committee members and critical friends in an effort to narrow down and refine my codes. After these discussions, I refined all of my codes to fall into these four categories: Attention to Inequality (AI), Orientation to Social Issues (SI), Representation

(R), and Sense of Community (SC). In each category, I assigned more specific codes to subtopics. For example: Attention to Inequality was split according to where students were identifying these inequalities—Educational (AI-E), Gentrification (AI-G), Narratives of Progress (AI-NP), Systemic (AI-S). I then input all of these data into qualitative analysis software (NVivo) and re-coded it using my refined coding scheme. See Code Chart (Appendix C) for a representation of my coding scheme.

In my second phase of data analysis, I began by organizing quotes from the data by code category in order to assess how the data spoke to the different categories. Through this analysis, I was able to generate some tentative themes and organize support for these themes via specific data examples. I then moved on to coding student interviews. I used the above protocol to analyze student informal interviews in an effort to triangulate my findings from the student artifacts and class conversations with what students had said about their projects, the class, and the school at large. I then created an outline with my themes and quotes from the student artifacts, discussion transcripts, and student interviews to determine how well the student data supported each theme. The presentation of these data, analysis, and themes appears in Chapter IV.

During phase three of data analysis, I looked to the teacher and administrator interviews, along with my own reflective journal and email correspondence between different university and school-based support staff to reconstruct a timeline of important events at the school. I then did a side-by-side comparison of student data and a timeline of important events in order to contextualize the microcosm of the classroom in relation to the macrocosm of the school. This comparison allowed me to see how events outside of the classroom came to guide and influence the learning that was happening inside the

classroom and allowed me to identify critical incidents that stood as turning points in the data. The use of critical incidents as a method of analyzing data entails systematically looking at specific situations within a context in order to determine what communicative factors lead to certain outcomes. At times, these outcomes are breakdowns in communication, but the ultimate goal is to determine how to better foster communication between the parties involved in the incident. In crafting the description of critical incidents, researchers use a form of narrative storytelling which highlights what is perceived to be most vital within the time and space the event took place (Edvardson & Roos, 2001; Fivars, 1980).

Through this analysis, I was able to identify three critical incidents. The first critical incident occurred after students turned in their first final composition project, which was highlighted in a school-wide showcase event. I chose to highlight data from one student's personal narrative project which demonstrated the conflict between my assessment of the student's work as a multimodal composition and the administration's assessment of it as a traditional written composition. I conducted multimodal analysis on the student data to surface the complexity of the composition and then discuss the Assistant Principal's response to the same data. The presentation of these data, analysis, and themes appears in Chapter V.

The second critical incident occurred just about a month after the first incident and took the form of a curriculum review meeting between myself, the Assistant Principal, my university supervisor, and my assigned co-teacher. I analyzed the email correspondence between this group as we attempted to set a date and agenda for this meeting, and then critically re-read my own personal journal reflections and personal

correspondence with critical friends about the meeting. I determined three main disconnects in the way I defined certain terms in contrast with the school's administration. I then cross-analyzed the disconnects to contextualize them in competing discourses of schooling posed by national education discourses and the discourses of educational research in the area of literacy.

The third critical incidence occurred in March when the administration instituted a school-wide change to the ninth-period block which significantly affected The Art of Storytelling course. I looked to an interview conducted with a school-based university partner explaining the reasons for this change in programming, and then used interview data from interviews conducted with my two co-teachers over the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 school years to discuss the history of administrative response to organizing programming at the school, and their perspectives on the effect of these responses on student experiences. I then detailed the impact of this particular change in programming on The Art of Storytelling course as one situated example of the school reform tensions and incongruences that surface within an environment under pressure of SINI designations.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers value multiple perspectives and situated truths, and as a practitioner researcher study, this particular study sought to speak directly to the context in which the research was produced. Indeed, this was a direct objective of practitioner research in that this type of study was designed to bring about knowledge and outcomes

that might have specific implications for the site and population under study. Qualitative researchers engage in:

prolonged engagement and persistent observation and persistent observation in the field...building trust with participants, learning the culture, and checking for information that stems from distortions introduced by the researcher or informants. (Creswell, 2007, p. 207)

This practice helps to ensure the trustworthiness of their research. I also ensured trustworthiness by using member checking during analysis, clarifying researcher biases, maintaining a critical reflexivity in my observations and interpretations, and creating detailed thick descriptions to represent the participants and setting under study (Creswell, 2007). In carrying out a practitioner inquiry, Herr and Anderson (2014) identified five categories of validity that practitioner researchers should strive toward. These categories are as follows. Included in Table 2 under “plan for ensuring validity” is how I have attempted to address each type of validity.

Limitations

While practitioner inquiry methods allowed me the ability to collect the types of insider data that would accomplish the purpose of producing research that was relevant and outcome-oriented to the specific context in which it was collected, there were certain limitations to this stance as well. Critiques of practitioner inquiry are tied to:

fundamental ideas about what counts in the first place as research, data, knowledge, evidence, and effectiveness, and who in the final analysis can legitimately be regarded as a knower about issues related to teaching, learning, and teacher development. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 46)

While some qualitative research tries to approximate distance between researcher and participant, practitioner researchers seek to immerse themselves in the process and use

reflexive practice, journaling, detailed fieldnotes, and multiple forms of data and validation to ensure the trustworthiness of their research.

Table 2

Validity Table

Type of Validity	Purpose	Plan for Ensuring Validity
Democratic validity	Honoring the perspectives and interests of all stakeholders	Making sure that topics and issues under study correspond with student interests and reflect multiple perspectives
Outcome validity	Resolving problems addressed	Using pedagogical methods and making curricular choices that intentionally speak to needs and interests of students.
Process validity	Using appropriate and adequate research methods and inquiry processes	Combining methods of data collection and analysis that allow for student voice to be both emphasized and situated in the discursive context
Catalytic validity	Deepening the understandings of all participants	Use critical literacy and critical writing pedagogy to deepen the understandings of how texts are constructed by people at the same time that they construct people.
Dialogic validity	Monitoring analysis through critical reflective discussion with peers	Reliance on member checking, conversations of interpretations with university and school partners, and critique by university mentors and critical friends.

One major limitation of this work, which I noticed during my pilot phase, was the need to “hang loose” (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007) in regard to methods due to the ever-changing nature of classroom life. While I used a curriculum which I designed for this course and considered the pedagogical and methodological tools that I planned to employ throughout the study, I also remained attentive to the needs of my individual students as we moved through the coursework. This meant that at times, I needed to deviate from the

intended plan in order to keep their interests first and foremost. While the process of monitoring and adjusting my approach was at times challenging, I believe that my experiences during my pilot year led me to craft a framework of theory and methods to provide a strong foundation throughout this study.

One further limitation of this work was due to changes in the political climate which affected funding for the multimodal resources available to students. In my pilot year, grant funding supported a professional filmmaker as co-facilitator who came with film equipment and expertise in shooting and editing films. For the 2017-2018 school year, the 21st Century Grant Program that supported this resource was cut by the new Education Secretary for the Trump administration. Although I wanted to be able to provide this resource to students, my skills in shooting and editing films were limited to my experiences assisting our filmmaker in 2016-2017. This limited the options for students to use multimodal literacy as I did not have the necessary knowledge and resources needed to support large-scale film projects. For this reason, the multimodal element of the course was not as in depth as I had hoped, based on the pilot study; however, throughout the study, I discuss how I attempted to infuse multimodality where and when possible.

Researcher Role

As a researcher and co-facilitator at the research site, I was deeply involved in this work. For practitioner research,

it is not assumed that practitioners must shed their consciousness and experience as practitioners in order to assume the role of researchers. On the other hand, it is assumed that practitioner dissertations out to do some meaningful work in the world of schools and classrooms. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 105)

In light of this, I brought my years of experience as a high school English teacher, as well as my training as a researcher, to bear in order to create a valuable and useful course for students that allowed opportunities for them to act in agentic ways to deconstruct oppressive discourses and gain confidence in their voices.

At first, my role was getting to know my students and supporting the development of a classroom environment that encouraged inquiry and open and honest discussion of topics of importance. As I began to get to know the students, I was able to establish a rapport that would lead to mutual respect and transparency. Because “practitioners’ questions emerge from important, immediate concerns, engagements, and commitments to their professional settings” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 107), I leveraged this rapport to get honest feedback from students regarding the topics, projects, and issues that arose during class sessions.

Finally, as I scaffolded critical literacy tools for greater student independence, I did my best to instill in my participants an understanding that the discourses that framed them were constructed by people and therefore can be questioned by people. In this way, I supported their ability to “call into question deeply entrenched assumptions about knowledge generation and use and about power relationships in school and university cultures” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 106).

Organization of Data Chapters

In the two chapters that follow, I use data from student artifacts; classroom discussion transcripts; student, teacher, and administrator interview data; and fieldnote

recreations of critical incidents that occurred over the course of this study to generate themes that spoke to my two research questions.

In Chapter IV, guided by the question, “What are students’ perspectives and inquiries regarding race, class, gender, and other social framings, and how do these change over time?” I attend to how the students made meaning of their position in relation to concepts of justice/injustice and social change in the surrounding communities to which they belong. Drawing on a framework of Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of cultural capital, in conversation with Yosso’s (2005) reframing of capital as community wealth, I juxtapose the societal narratives about Youth of Color with the students’ own narratives about their communities of belonging. I use student artifacts, classroom discussions, and student interviews to establish what students identified as the strengths of their communities and where they saw injustices within these communities. Throughout this chapter, I reflect on Yosso’s cultural wealth model as an example of one way to reframe students and Communities of Color in opposition to dominant deficit narratives. Ultimately, the student data demonstrated how Yosso’s model of cultural wealth is more reflective of students’ own conceptualizations of their communities of belonging. Through storytelling, the value of these aspects of cultural wealth come through, showing one example of how assets-based pedagogy and storytelling can draw on student cultural wealth to create a literacy community that supports student culture.

In Chapter V, I turn to my second research question, “How does this research inform my growing understanding of what it means to teach well?” I use data surrounding the three critical incidents I identified through my analysis in order to make visible the negotiations that took place between myself and my university and school-

based partners in an effort to develop and deliver quality educational programming and support students' socioemotional growth. I constructed short vignettes to piece together the narrative of events, while pausing to interrogate assumptions and complicate the narrative by applying contrasting frames of understanding from the perspectives of the different partners. I first contextualize the data in the national discourses of school reform and accountability as one way of understanding rigorous curriculum, the meaning and uses of literacy, and what counts as writing. I contrast this with student data, which I examine through multimodal analysis to demonstrate the complexity and success of this piece. I then look to the administrative response to these same data examples to reveal the tensions encountered by teachers of multimodal literacy when we attempt to widen the definitions of literacy in schools where national discourses are concretized in school improvement initiatives. I end by discussing how these discourses concretized through school improvement plans, test prep courses, rubrics, and other district- and school-level reports and protocols to ensure fidelity to the district's notion of school improvement and present forms of institutional and symbolic power. As I argue through my analysis of the data, these discourses of school improvement, and the literacies associated with them, act on teachers as a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1991), "disciplining" their efforts to center student experiences and critical inquiry in their curriculum and pedagogies.

Chapter IV
YOUTH OF COLOR'S COUNTER-NARRATIVES OF
COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL WEALTH

It was nearing the end of class, and I made my rounds to check in with each student and discuss the poem they were drafting. The class began with a reading of "On the Subway" by Sharon Olds as inspiration for students to write their own poetry reflecting everyday instances of stereotyping and discrimination. As the class discussed the ways in which the poet described a woman's display of White privilege and racism through her seemingly automatic response of fear and suspicion toward a Black man in her subway car, I encouraged students to explore the perspective of the man being stereotyped. What might he be thinking, feeling, or noticing about the woman who seemed so interested in him? Before I set students off to craft their own poetic response to an instance of stereotyping, I clarified the assignment: Your response can explore any instance of stereotyping you have witnessed and doesn't necessarily need to address race or take place in the subway.

Now as I circulated the room, I wondered if my students had been listening to my directions. Though some did address issues of stereotyping related to gender and culture, the vast majority focused on an instance much like the one depicted in the original poem. I stopped next to Tina to ask her about her poem. "What did you choose to write about?"

I asked. "That," she said pointing to the original poem. I repeated my directions from earlier, telling her that she didn't need to respond directly to the poem and could highlight any issue of stereotyping that she's witnessed. "That is an example I've witnessed. It's happened to me," she replied. I looked up to the other students sitting at her table who had stopped their work to listen in on my conversation with Tina. "Have you all experienced something like this?" I asked the table. They nodded and replied that this kind of thing happens all the time, whether it be to them, or their friends, parents, or siblings. When asked to consider the perspective of the man being stereotyped, students did not have to spend time imagining what that might be like, but instead knew exactly what they would like to say when similar instances happened to them.

As a starting point to my analysis in this chapter, I look to my first research question: What are students' perspectives and inquiries regarding race, class, gender, and other social framings, and how do these change over time? (b) How do students engage with these inquiries in relationship to curricular resources, class activities, and peer interactions? (c) What do the texts students produce say about how they communicate their understanding of social issues regarding race, class, and gender? The above narrative, recreated from my fieldnotes, presents a powerful example of how my students, given the opportunity to discuss issues of race, class, and gender, quickly proved that they had something to teach me. I reflected on the fact that "Concealed stories are literally everywhere, 'hidden in plain view' (Loewen, 2006), usually familiar within Communities of Color that preserve and pass them on, but mostly invisible or overlooked in the mainstream" (Bell, 2010, p. 48). I was reminded that my students brought experiences to the classroom which, given my White middle-class mainstream

upbringing, I may not be aware of unless I position myself as a learner in regard to their cultural wealth.

In this chapter, I contrast the dominant narratives about youth and Communities of Color as lacking in “cultural capital” with Yosso’s (2005) cultural wealth model, before turning to the ways in which students represent their communities and deconstruct the different stories being told about them. I present student data from artifacts, classroom discussion transcripts, and interviews in order to paint a picture of how students defined their communities and displayed different facets of cultural wealth in doing so. I then focus on how students defined injustice and identified and inquired into injustices in their community. Because of the changing face of the city and the quickly gentrifying nature of the immediate community, much of this story centers around the idea of school and community “improvement.” I argue that the students’ own stories challenge cultural deficit models and display facets of cultural wealth that can be fostered through the classroom practice of storytelling.

The Narrative About Youth of Color and Their Communities

As detailed in the opening chapters of this dissertation, too often Youth of Color in urban contexts are discursively produced as “at risk,” thus placing blame for “achievement gaps” firmly on the individual students and ignoring the systemic inequities that fuel such disparities. The myth of meritocracy, produced and reproduced in and through our educational institutions, promotes a belief that hard work leads to success, and thus those who are “unsuccessful” must not be working hard enough. Despite the effort and advocacy of students, their families, and their communities, the

educational institutions that serve Youth of Color are time and again labeled “in need of improvement,” a designation which fuels deficit labels of students and communities and which also comes with increased curricular constraints and pressures for achievement on standardized measures of learning.

Deficit framings often result from an assumption that the “cultural capital” of the dominant White middle and upper classes is more conducive to academic success. Bourdieu (1986) identified “cultural capital” as one of four types of capital one can use to secure a higher social role; in the social field of schooling, cultural capital aligns with embodied, discursive, and institutionalized assets that often align with White middle- and upper-class norms. In this way, the dominant class tends to (re)produce what is considered valuable culture. Cultural deficit theories situate the problem within the culture of the community in which Youth of Color are raised. They function from the assumption that the students’ home culture is of less value and their lack of the values of the dominant White middle-class culture is to blame for unequal levels of educational achievement when compared with their White peers (Foley, 2012). These approaches interpret Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital to mean that if one is not born into the dominant culture, one must be taught the dominant culture in order to achieve success.

This cultural deficit framing ignores a host of systemic issues which place Youth of Color at a disadvantage in attaining an equitable education when compared with their White counterparts. As Vasudevan and Campano (2009) argued:

Rather than understanding how students are placed at risk through forms of structural violence (e.g., poverty, school tracking, and severely under resourced and overcrowded schools) as well as direct violence (e.g., racial profiling and hate crimes), they are blamed for the very conditions that oppress them and are often accorded an inflated and superstitious form of destructive power. (p. 314)

In effect, these students are “at risk” before they even enter the schoolyard, but not because of a deficit in their culture or upbringing. Cultural deficit theories position Youth of Color at risk of discriminatory practices, heightened surveillance, unequal access to educational institutions and resources, and fewer opportunities to attain educational and occupational success within their communities.

Who has control over the narrative of Youth of Color is ultimately a social justice issue. As long as discourses that label students as “at risk” are privileged without attention to the factors that place them at risk of systemic inequalities, oppressive narratives are fueled. As Sleeter (1995) wrote:

The discourse over “children at risk” can be understood as a struggle for power over how to define children, families, and communities who are poor, of Color, and/or native speakers of languages other than English. The dominant discourse attempts to frame such children and their families as lacking...and as in need of compensatory help from the dominant society. (p. ix)

The “compensatory help” offered is most often predicated on the internalization and reproduction of deficit discourses, and therefore it compounds inequalities instead of addressing them.

“At-risk” students are offered remediation, socioemotional support, and scholarships that remove them from their community for schooling. These supports can and do help some students overcome systematic factors, but they are often not attuned to the needs of the students and community that they presume to serve. As Fine (1995) argued, “the cultural construction of a group defined through a discourse of ‘risk’ represents a shaved and quite partial image...that typically strengthens those institutions and groups which have carved out, severed, denied connection to, and then promised to ‘save’ those who will undoubtedly remain ‘at risk’” (p. 76). This partial image produced

by “at-risk” labels is fractured when students are given the opportunities to tell their own stories—to define and investigate their own narratives. In the following sections, I look to the ways that my class of Youth of Color described the features of their communities. While these narratives often presented counter-stories to the dominant discourse about them, the students also demonstrated awareness of this dominant discourse as a way of classifying their communities by the challenges and thus ignoring the community assets.

Reframing Deficit Narratives Through a Focus on Community Wealth

Yosso (2005) applied the tenets of critical race theory (CRT) to challenge interpretations of what counts as cultural capital and, in doing so, provided an alternative lens through which to position socially marginalized groups. She argued that “while Bourdieu’s work sought to provide a structural critique of social and cultural reproduction, his theory of cultural capital has been used to assert that some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor” (p. 76). Yosso took issue with the argument that middle- and upper-class cultural capital is seen as superior in value to the cultural capital possessed by People of Color. This assumption serves to marginalize the knowledge of those outside of the middle and upper classes as inherently lacking in culture.

As conceptualized by Bourdieu, “cultural capital...refers to an accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills and abilities that are *valued* by privileged groups in society,” but Yosso (2005) noted how this concept has led to cultural deficit-based thinking that does not acknowledge the wealth of “cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized” (p. 76). In this way, teachers risk reproducing hierarchies by continuing to transmit and

reinforce the values of the dominant class in uncritical ways, instead of recognizing the varied forms of cultural capital that their Students of Color possess and inviting them to understand the issues of power that work to legitimize or exclude knowledge claims.

For Yosso, students who may not have access to White upper- and middle-class resources are nonetheless seen to possess skills and knowledge which they bring to any educational scenario. She explained that “deficit thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because (a): students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child’s education” (p. 75). When school curriculum is designed with these assumptions at the core, students become empty vessels that need to be filled with the cultural knowledge deemed valuable by dominant society. Yosso used CRT to form an alternative, assets-based framing of cultural capital which looks to the community cultural wealth Students of Color bring with them to the classroom.

Yosso started from a stance that assumes that “cultural capital is not just inherited or possessed by the middle class, but rather it refers to an accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills and abilities that are valued by privileged in society” (p. 76) and uses this lens to identify six forms of cultural capital that Students of Color possess. She argued that it is the responsibility of educators to acknowledge this cultural wealth and build on students’ existing competencies in an effort to disrupt dominant forms of culture and broaden our conception of what cultural capital is.

Yosso’s model was designed to capture the talents, strengths, and experiences that Students of Color bring with them to schools. She identified six assets of cultural wealth Youth of Color bring with them to their schooling experiences. These are: aspirational

capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, and navigational capital (see table in Appendix E). I use these assets as a basis for illustrating students' meaning making that evidenced community wealth. Storytelling is a fruitful platform to make this community knowledge available for teachers to mobilize in an effort to infuse their pedagogy with culturally sustaining elements.

The Community Counter-Narrative as Constructed by Youth of Color

In an effort to disrupt the dominant deficit narrative told about Youth of Color in urban contexts, I looked to examples of how students defined the different communities to which they belong. Using various resources such as videos, artwork, and articles based in the local community around the school, students first defined their community historically as an artistically and culturally important location for People of Color. Then, students looked to the diversity within the neighborhood by discussing how different groups of people came together to make it a vibrant and dynamic place. Finally, in keeping with our theme of using poetry to inspire our own writing, students used George Ella Lyon's *Where I'm From* poem as a vehicle for unpacking the diversity of our classroom community (Christensen, 2001). When students were asked to reflect on the communities to which they claimed membership, a proliferation of diverse and colorful community narratives surfaced, which complicated the partial and flattening valences of existing narratives regarding Communities of Color.

In an effort to focus on funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), students bring with them to the classroom; in my thematic coding, I sought to attend to how students discussed community in their writing, class discussions, and interviews. I based my understanding of community on the concept of "communities of practice" wherein a

group of people “who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). Bell (2010) noted that at the heart of storytelling for social justice is a deliberate focus on developing a classroom community that supports discussion of race and critique of social power and privilege in order to transform dominant oppressive narratives. In determining students’ views on race, class, and gender and how these views may have evolved over time, I approached the data looking first for how students described their communities.

As I coded for sense of community, I noted how the students’ sense of belonging was influenced by their pride in their culture and history and social action in the Black and Latinx communities. The codes I used to trace this theme were: Sense of Community (SOC): Activism (A), Belonging (B), Culture (C), History (H), Pride (P). In the section below, I describe the data organized according to these codes and analyze students’ words to construct an image of what makes them feel a sense of pride and belonging in relation to community. I first organized these codes around students’ sense of community outside the school, and then focused on the school community itself.

Focusing on Community in Determining Cultural Wealth

Through students’ poetry, connections to cultural and historic communities which display the proliferation of backgrounds present underneath, blanket terms like *minority*, *urban*, and *at risk* come to the surface. While student demographic numbers noted a high percentage of Black and Latinx students at Central Arts, the students within the school were far from being a homogeneous group. Students’ poems showcased a complex network of roots in communities throughout this city, the United States, and beyond.

When asked to compose a picture of where they were from, many students looked to family backgrounds situated in their Afro Caribbean and Latinx heritage. Bobbie, Gabriella, Samuel, and Tina sat together composing their poems and comparing their upbringing, split between the islands where they often spent vacations and summers and their life in the city. Gabriella's voice rang out across the classroom, met by Tina's laughter as she put on her best impression of her mother angrily yelling at her in accented English: "Yuh no have no respect? Pickni and yuh no finish yuh food, ah wha yuh a do wit dat?" They decided together that this line must go into Gabriella's poem. The Jamaican patois is part of their shared experience of what it means to grow up in a home warmed by the sounds, smells, and tastes of the West Indies. Both Tina and Gabriella highlighted the mix of reggae and gospel music that formed the soundtrack to their childhood. They remarked on traditional foods that taste of home, including "red pea soup and sorrel," "ackee and saltfish," "curry goat and steamed veggies," "banana chips," and "conch" as connections to their shared Jamaican heritage. Ultimately, Gabriella stated that, although she had roots in many places, it was her Caribbean heritage that she most identified with, stating, "I'm from Brooklyn but the red string pulls me closer to Jamaica" (Student Artifact_ *Where I'm From*).

Bobbie and Samuel also pointed out connections to their Afro Caribbean roots. Bobbie wrote, "I am from an island/ From bachata and adobo/ I am from the small camps, hot, loud, small space." A small picture adorned the corner of her poetry poster depicting a young Black girl sitting under a banana tree reading a book. This significant location marked the place "where secrets are told, stories shared." Bobbie paused her work and joked to the table about including the *chanquetas* that her Dominican relatives

would threaten them with if they did not follow the directive to “apagar las luces” [turn off the lights] when their “late-night parties” went a little too late (Student Artifact_ *Where I’m From*). Samuel looked up when he heard this. He was familiar with the *chancleta* also. As he and Bobbie joked and mimed their mom, aunt, or grandmother waving her *chancleta* at them, Samuel began to write about his island roots. In his poem he painted a picture by proudly stating, “I’m from Puerto Rico./ The island located under Florida./ The island with warm water./ The island with white beaches.” He went on to unpack the symbolism of the Puerto Rican flag as a symbol to Puerto Ricans everywhere: “The great flag of Puerto Rico that blows in the wind./ Red representing brave warriors blood/ Blue representing the sky and water/ And white representing the peace and victory of their independence” (Student Artifact_ *Where I’m From*). His poem highlighted both the beauty of the island and its history, giving a clear sense of his pride in his heritage and his connection to the brave men and women of Puerto Rican descent who came before him.

As well as making visible their Afro Caribbean and Latinx roots, students also connected to other minority communities throughout the city and the country. Alex wrote about her yearly migrations between the north, where her immediate family lives, and the south, where her extended family resides. She stated that she was from “airplane and airport/ I am from the south/ Hot summers, icy winters.” She mentioned the strong women, “Murline and Annette,” who raised her and taught her to love “cooking and kinky hair” and value “kindness,” “manners,” “acceptance,” and “creativity” (Student Artifact_ *Where I’m From*). In the follow-up gallery walk where students displayed and commented on the poetry the class composed, students pointed out specifically the

inclusion of “kinky hair” as an example of celebrating Black beauty. One student’s sticky note highlighted her appreciation of the “melanin infused words, because not many of the other poems I’ve seen describe Black beauty” (Student Artifact_Response Note) and another student noted that “I like how you describe Black beauty because it means no matter what’s your skin tone you are pretty in your own way” (Student Artifact_Response Note).

Though many students did not include specifically mention race in their poems, their works were filled with allusions to Black culture. Miru highlighted his racial background, stating that he was from “the lack of chocolate turning white at the core” and that he was “a sheet of caramel skin” (Student Artifact_ *Where I’m From*). When asked to clarify this statement, he remarked that his background was mixed race and he felt split membership in these communities. He remarked, “this is how I am at school, but if you saw me in the street you wouldn’t even recognize me,” implying the code switching he undertakes between his identity in school and his identity outside of school. While direct mentions of race were few, many of the students included indicators of their racial background in their poetry. In Mercedes’ poem, she mentioned traditional dishes commonly eaten in the Black community like “collard greens and cornbread” (Student Artifact_ *Where I’m From*) and Nella talked about the “Black-eyed Peas” and “Pecan Pie” (Student Artifact_ *Where I’m From*) that her southern Black and Native American family eat at gatherings. Several students mentioned music traditions that connect back to the Black community as well, including hip hop and gospel music. Beyond these superficial mentions of cultural indicators, students also connected to the history of the Black community in the United States.

Many students indirectly referenced the history of the communities they named as being “from.” Nella’s reference to her Native American descendants displayed a sense of pride in her heritage and reminded us that some of our students carry roots in this country far deeper than those of the dominant White European culture. Samuel’s reference to the brave warriors of his homeland and their fight for independence was an acknowledgment of the history of colonialism by the Spanish, and today, the United States.

Gabriella mentioned both sugar cane and gunstocks in her poem, linking her Jamaican heritage to the industries which gave rise to and sustained the slave trade in the Atlantic. Tina took this one step further by contextualizing her sense of where she is from in relation to the history of her people. She wrote, “I am from the soil planted by my ancestors, where cotton grew, and sugar cane stand tall,” acknowledging herself as a product of former enslaved Jamaicans who were brought to the island to work the land. She went on to say that she is from the dreams of these ancestors, “immigrants coming to the land of Stars” and the “blood, sweat, and tears, drizzling down [their] Brown skin” (Student Artifact_ *Where I’m From*). This powerful connection to the dreams of her ancestors, and the sacrifices they made for the success of their future progeny, brought to mind similar sentiments from famous Black authors and poets. Martin Luther King Jr. based his “I have a Dream” speech on his dream for a better future for his children where they will be treated as equals in society. Maya Angelou (1978) ended her final stanza of “Still I Rise” with a similar statement, saying, “I am the dream and the hope of the slave.” By positioning herself as the fulfillment of her ancestor’s dreams, Tina powerfully connected herself to her heritage and displayed an understanding of what this heritage means to her identity.

Highlighting linguistic, familial, and resistant capital. In the above section, student data displayed the extent to which shared cultural knowledge made students feel a sense of belonging. Their in-class interactions showed how linguistic capital and familial capital can be shared through storytelling. Linguistic capital “includes intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style” (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). Linguistic capital looks to the multiple languages of communication students may be proficient in, including visual art, music, or poetry. This also includes the role of storytelling as cultural capital because it fosters “skills [that] may include memorization, attention to detail, dramatic pauses, comedic timing, facial affect, vocal tune, volume, rhythm, and rhyme” (p. 79). In the above examples, we see students using different languages (varieties of Spanish) and dialects of English (Jamaican patois) woven into their group storytelling practice. In addition, Miru, Mo, and others referred to their ability to code switch between their home and school environments.

Familial capital “refers to those cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). This includes both personal and social human resources students drew from their extended familial and community networks. These human resources can serve as role models in that they “model lessons of caring, coping and providing which inform our emotional, moral, educational and occupational consciousness” (p. 79). Students tapped into familial capital when they referred to the family stories passed down through the generations. They highlighted the cultural experiences they had while in a cultural community of belonging. The wide-ranging nature of these communities can be seen in Alex’s reference to the “south” as a community she belongs to, or Nella’s reference to

being part Native American. The family and community wisdom of their elders is spiced with the food and music of their culture, as seen in the work of Tina and Gabriella. This familial capital gives students a sense of where they come from and who they are in relation to their ancestors and cultural roots.

Finally, resistant capital is the “knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Resistant capital is founded in the experiences of Communities of Color in securing equal rights and collective freedom. People of Color instill resistant capital in their children when they teach them to value themselves and be self-reliant, even in the face of structural oppression. This connection to a historical legacy of engaging in social and racial justice movements prepares youth to enter society prepared to critique and address inequality. Tina displayed resistant capital when she referenced the resistance of her ancestors and their contributions to history, and Samuel when referencing the heroic freedom fighters honored by the Puerto Rican flag.

Focusing on the School Community

Midway through the school year, the course content took a sharp turn toward reflecting on the school community. At this point in the planned curriculum, the class was going to begin group inquiries into social issues with their classmates. I originally intended this to be a small group project, but because of the changed nature and tone of the class, we launched into a whole-group inquiry looking to the school and local community as a research site for understanding the effects of gentrification. Central Arts had been under scrutiny for years due to lower than expected graduation rates and student achievement on state and national tests; however, the threat of school closure

had calmed down. Now the heightened sense of fear at possible closure was stoked by rumors of a partial reorganization of the co-housed schools who shared our building. The ultimate outcome of this was speculated to be a curtailment of Central Arts to make more space for growth at the other schools. This renewed scrutiny of the district sparked conversation among students, parents, and staff regarding the future of Central Arts.

I arrived at school one day to teach, but upon entering the classroom I found that there were no students, only my co-teacher sitting at her desk. She looked up from her work and told me that the school was having an assembly and the students should be released to their ninth-period class when the assembly was over. As she finished her explanation, we began to hear noise in the hall. Students trickled into class more somber than usual; less talkative and more critical. It seemed like the assembly had upset them, and in listening into their conversations I quickly learned the reason. The school was under review yet again, and this time it seemed like action was imminent. It was impossible to get the class to quiet down and focus on their writing assignment, so instead we discussed the assembly. What came out of this conversation was a commitment from me and my co-teacher to create opportunities for students to reflect on their school community in an effort to form a more accurate narrative of Central Arts School, that looked beyond test scores and graduation rates for evidence of success and failure.

While re-reading the student discussions, interviews, and artifact data to surface the ways in which students constructed their communities, I noted that one of the communities students discussed at length was their school. In this section, I organize student data to along the same concept (Sense of Community) and sub-concepts

(Activism, Belonging, Culture, History, Pride) described in the previous section, but attend specifically to how these codes appeared in student inquiries on the school community.

When asked about the strengths of their school community, students overwhelmingly cited the supportive community of teachers and students at Central Arts. Miru focused on the dedication of his teachers, saying many of the teachers at the school

pour their life into what they teach us. I can tell you that these teachers teach us with everything they have” and that this drive to see their students successful makes him feel like “...they wouldn’t let us fail without giving us a fight.”
(Student Artifact_ *Argumentative Letter*)

Mercedes echoed this regard for her teachers, saying, “the bonds I have with my teachers...they taught me more not only about school but about life and that’s what’s important” (Student Artifact_ *Argumentative Letter*). She highlighted the fact that the teachers at Central Arts did not just focus on academics, but also taught lessons that students can carry into their lives outside the walls of the classroom.

Mercedes, a sophomore at the time of this research, had attended Central Arts throughout middle and high school and looked at the teachers as supporting her development over this time. “I grew up at Central and I experience so many things and my teachers watched me grow up and they watch me graduate middle school” (Student Artifact_ *Argumentative Letter*). The relationships she made over her time at Central Arts led her to value her education there, despite the fact that her hard work and dedication could open doors for her in other places.

Alex also reflected on the acceptance she had found at Central Arts as being integral to her success, stating, “I have a whole group that supports me for me and there are absolutely no bullies at this school. Everybody knows everybody and were all

friendly to each other” (Student Artifact_ *Argumentative Letter*). In this excerpt, Alex highlighted an important strength of the school community. Alex and Bobbie both openly discussed their genderfluid status and struggles with mental health issues throughout the course and remarked that the acceptance they had found among their peers and teachers has been integral to their ability to navigate their journey toward better understanding themselves.

The value of relationships cannot be overstated when it comes to supporting students. Though success is often measured by test scores and graduation rates, Central Arts students cited the success of the school in creating an environment that students want to be a part of. Miru summed up the strengths of Central Arts by saying, “one thing this school does do well, the school treats everyone like family. That’s one thing I can say the school really does well. It makes me feel like I’m at a home away from my home” (Interview). Miru and Alex would not be the kind of students who would be considered successful by standard measures alone. They have both struggled academically and socially throughout their schooling and came to Central Arts primarily for the Arts programming, where they found a welcoming social community of peers and a supportive community of teachers. Miru expressed his gratitude, saying, “this school not only gave me a chance to pursue my art dream, they also gave me a second family to go to” (Student Artifact_ *Argumentative Letter*). The focus on community that students brought to the fore when asked about the school’s strengths reminds us that one of the major battles within schools serving Youth of Color face is disenfranchisement among students. The fact that these students felt their school was an extension of their family holds value far beyond their performance on Regents tests.

Though high schools in this city are all offered as a choice regardless of the neighborhood students call home, the process of getting into a first-choice school can be rigorous and often disappointing. Central Arts, in contrast with the more selective program at LaGuardia High School, does not require auditions and thus accepts a wide variety of students of different skill levels and training in the visual and performing arts. Many of the students cited the arts specifically as the reason they chose Central Arts and continue to come back year after year. When asked why she was initially attracted to Central Arts, Mercedes cited the Arts focus, and Seb commented on the opportunity to “develop into something better by being able to express our true passions through any of our desired arts” (Student Artifact_ *Argumentative Letter*). Clearly, these talented students found the Arts programming at Central Arts to be a major strength of the school.

Bobbie noted the open admission policy as a major draw for her, saying:

I only wanted to go to La Guardia. But La Guardia didn't accept me, and Central Arts was the only school that accepted me, so I was like, you know...this school accepted me, so I'm gonna go there because you chose me, even though I didn't audition or anything. (Interview)

Bobbie's disappointment about not being chosen to LaGuardia was tempered by the fact that Central Arts chose her, and therefore she felt an immediate sense of being wanted and accepted into the school community.

Miru also noted his appreciation for the opportunities available to him at Central. “Central was the only Art school that accepted me. This school gave me a chance when no other art schools did, and I appreciate them for this” (Student Artifact_ *Argumentative Letter*). His feeling of gratitude that the school took a chance on him when other schools refused to do this underscored the need for the kind of programming available at Central Arts in tapping into and leveraging students' artistic talents as a motivating factor in their

educational experiences. Miru strongly identified as an artist, stating in his *Where I'm From* poem that “I am from an Art Piece/ From Pencil and paper/ I am from the Splatters of paint on the Aisle/ Bright, Glorious, and feels like life” (Student Artifact_ *Where I'm From*). Initially he was reluctant to write during class, but when I gave him encouragement to use his artistic talents to create a comic strip, he jumped into the assignment with gusto. Gradually, he started writing more and more, but always kept the drawings as a way of illustrating his writing. When he was removed from the class in March to attend a test prep class instead (a topic I will return to later in Chapter V), he still visited my class from time to time and remarked how he wished he was still able to attend the class.

One surprising strength that students pointed out with regard to their school was the legacy and history of Central Arts. They reflected on the irony of Central Arts being reorganized when “the name and legacy is carved into the building already telling the world who this building and school belongs to” (Student Artifact_ *Argumentative Letter*), as Seb pointed out. In truth, this school has been a fixture of the community since its inception over 100 years ago. Despite prevailing discourses that many Youths of Color do not value their education, these students remarked on their pride in being able to say they graduated from a certain school. Mercedes connected this pride to her family legacy, saying, “I graduate in two years and I want to back to the school I grew up at and I want to say I went to Central. My mother also grew up at Central and yes she loved it as well” (Student Artifact_ *Argumentative Letter*). She went on to suggest that it is necessary to fight for the school as generations before did: “Us as a school should fight for our rights.

Central fought for this school to stay opened and we should never let anyone take over” (Student Artifact_ *Argumentative Letter*).

In fact, students overall seemed to look at the reorganization as less of a practical matter based on test scores, and more of a social justice matter, a point that I will return to in the next section dedicated to students identifying injustices in their community. The feelings of injustice sparked students to believe that social action is necessary. As Seb stated, “We need to be able to stand up for what is right and not sit down watching our family being taken away from us” (Student Artifact_ *Argumentative Letter*). Despite the rhetoric of school improvement being an impartial process targeted at raising educational achievement, students clearly took the suggestion that Central Arts was inadequate as a personal attack on the vibrant school community to which they belonged.

Highlighting navigational, aspirational, and social capital. The relationships that students make and maintain help to instill a sense of belonging in them and strengthen the school community. The navigational and social capital students gain through relationships also helps to foster a school environment that is conducive to the growth of aspirational capital. One’s social capital consists of the “networks of people and community resources” with whom one is connected (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). This includes peer and social connections that can provide instrumental and emotional support—“Communities of Color gave the information and resources they gained through these institutions back to their social network” (p. 79). Students identified the strong opportunities for building social capital at Central Arts when they indicated that their peers were supportive and there were no bullies at the school.

Navigational capital consists of the “skills of maneuvering through social institutions...not created with Communities of Color in mind” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80), which takes determination and resilience. Students who are empowered to maneuver within unsupportive or hostile environments are able to exercise “individual agency within institutional constraints” (p. 80) and maintain connections with their existing social networks. Students documented how their teachers and counselors act as navigational capital in helping to guide and support them in their education. The strong relationships students like Miru and Alex felt with these staff members at school led him to believe they were a “second family” who were there to support them and have their best interests at heart.

Aspirational capital is “the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Related to resilience, aspirational capital nurtures the students’ ability to dream of the possibilities that lie outside of their current experiences and circumstances. The school environment can foster aspirational capital when students feel supported by students and staff to dream beyond their school years and picture what their future might look like. Unfortunately, the school can also serve to curtail aspirations if students perceive it as an unsupportive environment. In the following section, I describe how I used elements from Bell’s (2010) storytelling model to open up opportunities for students to identify and discuss injustice. Once again, the school environment comes to the fore.

Defining and Identifying Injustice

My curricular plans for the Spring had been to focus around the concept of storytelling for social justice, and thus the students' passionate response to the perceived injustice of Central Arts being under threat from the district became a concept that the class returned to throughout the unit. Bell (2005) highlighted the use of storytelling as an analytical tool where the stories serve as a means to explore race, class, gender, and other identities. She argued that "because stories operate on both individual and collective levels, they can bridge the sociological, abstract with the psychological, personal contours of daily experience" (p. 16). In doing so, stories help us to "connect individual experiences with systemic analysis" (p. 16). These situated experiences with injustices, when mapped on to more abstract accounts of injustice, become powerful tools to examining social justice issues at both a macro (societal) and micro (individual) level.

The data featured in this section came out of my efforts to create productive opportunities for students to explore issues of social justice in relation to their own lived experiences. As I re-read and coded the data from this study, I became attuned to how students talked about the topics of representation and injustice in relation to community issues, and noted they began to make connections between injustice, community change, and school improvement. These data were representative of the coding categories Attention to Inequality (AI) and Representation (R). I refined these larger categories to reflect the emphasis on Education (AI-E), Gentrification (AI-G), Narrative of Progress (AI-NP), and Systemic (AI-S) in the student data. Similarly, I identified two subcategories under Representation: Representing Oneself (R-O) and Stereotypes (R-S). Through my analysis, I constructed an image of how Youth of Color defined and

identified injustices in their communities and reflected on the effects of these injustices on community members, themselves included.

Throughout this section, I connect to Bell's (2010) storytelling models as a way to support inquiry. I begin by briefly describing the activities and assignments I used to support inquiry, and then go on to analyze how students respond in writing to the themes and tensions arising in class discussions. The student data in this section consist of discussion, interview, and artifact responses to curricular materials I chose to serve as a model of the different types of stories in the storytelling project (Bell, 2010). For example, I used *Still I Rise* (Angelou, 1978) to model resistant stories (Bell, 2010). Afterwards, students were asked to write a poem that illustrates what they rise from. Several students chose to write about issues of injustice, stereotyping, and racism. These poems, along with poems in response to an earlier lesson using *On the Subway* (Olds, 1987) as an example of a stock story, and the classroom discussions surrounding these reading and writing activities, form the bulk of the data in this section.

In her poem below, Nella directly takes on the complex topic of injustice, attempting to define it for herself and her readers. In her first stanza, Nella defines injustice and questions the need for fighting against injustices.

Injustice is the lack of fairness or justice
 Fairness is impartial
 Fairness is just a treatment
 Fairness is a behavior given off
 Without Favoritism or even
 Discrimination
 Why should we fight against injustice?
 (Student Artifact_ *Still I Rise*)

In these lines, Nella equates injustice with unfair treatment, saying that impartiality is key. In order to act justly, one must act without "favoritism" or "discrimination." By

equating justice and injustice with actions, Nella brings the debate out of the nebulous region of thoughts and intent. She reminds us that, despite the ideal of justice this country is founded upon, its actions and behaviors separate justice from injustice. Ideals mean little if our actions are not guided by them. At the end of stanza one, Nella leaves us with a question, “Why should we fight against injustice?” which again alludes to an active concept of justice and injustice as concepts that need to be fought for or against, thus displaying the need for actions to follow words and ideals.

Nella picks up her inquiry in stanza two, where she responds to the question “Why should we fight against injustice?” with another question, this time rhetorical: “It’s because we are not equal, right?” Rhetorical questions are a persuasive device that subtly guides the reader down a certain line of reasoning. The rhetorical question is asked because of its effect on the audience. This coupling of questions helps the reader to reflect on the ideals that so many people pay lip service to in our country, without acting upon. The United States might have been founded on idealistic principles of justice, but it would not be necessary to fight for justice if society was already just; therefore, something is missing between our ideals and their social outcomes. Nella seems to suggest that this missing piece is action.

It’s because we are not equal, right?
 Still facing racial profiling amongst
 Ethnicities
 Or like not getting enough help
 To find out who killed your
 Baby Boy
 What is the point of justice if
 It isn’t given respectfully?
 (Student Artifact_ *Still I Rise*)

In the following lines of stanza two, Nella points out examples of how the ideal of justice falls flat when attention is turned to the actions of those in power. She mentions racial profiling as a major issue that hinders just actions and goes on to imply that instances involving police are sometimes not governed by just actions. By saying “not getting enough help/ to find out who killed your/ Baby Boy,” Nella points a critical finger at the police and other government agencies that are supposed to make sure that the powerless in our society are accorded justice and respect. When Nella mentions that these people in power do not give justice respectfully, she implies that Black and Brown citizens in vulnerable social locations find they have to fight for their rights, not with the people who are positioned to help them, but often against them. She ends the stanza with another rhetorical question for her reader, asking what the point of our ideals is if people are not going to act on them in a respectful way. If people have to demand justice and fight for it, then why continue to pretend that our country is governed in a way that ensures justice for all? Nella reminds us here that, while children pledge “liberty and justice for all” every morning in schools across this country, this is a hollow promise.

Nella next turns to the concept of justice in contrast to injustice. She places justice at the other end of the binary, saying that justice demands genuine respect, not hollow ideals.

Justice is the total opposite
Justice is a genuine respect for people
Justice is fair
Justice is being reasonable
 Standing up against unfairness
 Makes us stronger
 It could help us who are suffering
 Finally reach reverence
 So, let's keep the fight going
 Until we finally reach the top

No matter if you are young
 Or old
 (Student Artifact_ *Still I Rise*)

Nella equates justice with reason and justified standing up to unfairness as it makes us stronger and helps those who are suffering. She suggests a collective approach to fighting for justice and places herself and others who are suffering on even footing, saying that though they suffer, the fight makes them stronger, not weaker.

Nella referred specifically to race in her definition of injustice; however, other students focused on different injustices. Tina noted that, though our class assumed the audience Angelou had in mind was White, the poem could also implicate Black men who hold Black women down. In lines like “Does my haughtiness offend you?/ Don’t you take it awful hard/ ‘Cause I laugh like I’ve got gold mines/ Diggin’ in my own backyard” (Angelou, 1978), Tina points out how powerful Black women can be seen as threatening to Black men, thus emphasizing the role of intersectional oppressions. Tina stated:

For me, I know I’ve seen a lot of Black men [say]...”Oh, I’m gonna be the doing the money. You’re gonna stay here, take care of the kids. You’re gonna go to the school. You’re going to do all that.” And I go to work, or hustle, ‘cause you know, that’s what they do—the street hustling, I guess. That’s why I feel like [the poem] kind of can’t be directed to just white men and women. It could be directed to Black men as well, because they also feel like they’re the more dominant in any relationship. (Classroom Transcript_Feb 6_Tina)

In her example, Tina troubles binary constructions of who has power, pointing out the role of patriarchy in Black women’s lived experiences.

Lisse picked up this nuance of intersectionality in relation to social justice, but applied it to the differing levels of socioeconomic success among her immigrant family. She pointed out that the familial expectations of her more financially successful

grandparents, and the judgment she faces as the progeny of their financially struggling son, are oppressive to her. Lisse stated:

Familial expectations...I would say mostly on my grandparents because they were the most successful out of everyone in the family. They were the ones who brought the family from Colombia. They brought them over here. Now they're like, "Oh, you gotta be that person. I was working at the age of 15 and I'm still working. I've been working for 48 years. (Classroom Transcript_Feb 6_Tina)

This is a theme she picks up in her poem, stating that she feels she is "buried in the shadow of the people who gave [her] life" and citing the "history of disorganized parents" who she feels have dulled her light in the eye of her grandparents. As a hardworking student and vibrant student, she feels she needs to work extra hard, "so my grandparents know I'm not a mistake," which includes never getting in trouble or "showing herself" as anything but perfect (Student Artifact_Lissie_Still I Rise).

The above examples from Nella, Tina, and Lisse all convey their understanding of inequality as an imbalance of power, emphasizing the role of one's identities in social hierarchies and the intersecting oppressions that can shape the lived experiences of Women of Color. Nella turned her attention to race and specifically the injustice of racial profiling which causes members of her community to look at the police with a critical eye. She said that those who are oppressed have to fight for respect; this statement represents a contrast with the respect that is freely given to those of the dominant White race. Tina extended the issue of oppression beyond Black and White binaries by pointing out that even among Black men and women, there is a power imbalance. She noted that Black women are often in a subordinate social position to Black men, and therefore the intersecting of being a Woman of Color places them at a social disadvantage. At the same time, these intersecting identities can be a source of pride and inspiration also. The poem,

and Tina's response to the poem, demonstrated the complexity of identity and social relations. Finally, Lisse noted socioeconomic status and the pressure to maintain upward mobility as a form a power dynamic she experienced in her own family, where her grandparents' definitions of success as social class were projected on Lisse, who felt she had to work twice as hard to overcome their deficit opinions of her potential.

Identifying and Interrogating Injustice in Society

As an introduction to the way in which concealed stories (Bell, 2010) call into question the historic representation of social groups, the class looked to the controversy surrounding the #OscarsSoWhite hashtag, which first went viral during the announcement of the 2015 Oscars nominations. To fuel the conversation I asked, "in a year when so many hit movies starring People of Color were released (i.e., *Selma*, *Beasts of No Nation*, *Straight Outta Compton*, *ChiRaq*, *Tangerine*, etc.), why were all the top awards categories dominated by White actors, actresses, and directors?" The students discussed the problem with lack of representation, and the implicit message this omission sends to People of Color.

The students agreed that representation is important to young people's conception of who they can become and what positions are open to them in society. Lissie stated, "Yeah, it is important, like, you know, representation, the kids need to see...successful people. People who look like them. Doing stuff they do" (Classroom Transcript_Jan.30). Gabriella stated her hope that "with the increasing portrayal of women, LGBTQ and People of Color it will expose the people in our society to be more open-minded, gain support for those groups and embrace the diversity of it instead of closing their hearts to the idea that our next person in power could be from either of those groups" (Classroom

Transcript_Jan.30). Though these responses showed that the students did pay attention to the representations they saw in the media and understood how increased representation can lead to positive social change, the class also spent time discussing that simply including Black and Brown actors in movies was not enough to address the problem.

To supplement the discussion about representation, the class turned to the problem of a single story. As Ava DuVernay pointed out in an interview with Democracy Now!:

The question is: Why was ‘Selma’ the only film that was even in the running with people of Color for the award...I mean, why are there not—not just Black, Brown people...Asian people, indigenous people, representations that are more than just one voice, just one face, just one gaze? (https://www.democracynow.org/2015/1/27/selma_director_ava_duvernay_on_hollywoods)

DuVernay’s comment speaks to the idea of a single story of diversity in the United States, which Chimamanda Adichie unpacked in her TedTalk “The Danger of a Single Story.” Upon critically viewing this TedTalk, students discussed how they saw this issue of a single story as relevant to themselves and their communities.

The class came up with the following reasons why simply including representations of Black and Brown people in the media was not enough, because our society must pay attention to kinds of representations and diversity of perspectives, noting that “single stories strip us of diversity” (Classroom Transcript_Jan.30_Miru). These stories present “one-word ideas of people” (Classroom Transcript_Jan.30_Lissie) who “don’t have an identity beyond that label” (Classroom Transcript_Jan.30_Tina). Because of this, “not only does it create a lot of biases, it also leaves people very closed minded, so they only think one thing when they think of a person” (Classroom

Transcript_Jan.30_Gabriella). When asked about the connection between representation and power, Bobbie added:

It has to do with power because most of the time what we're taught in history is basically the only time we ever really hear about different continents and countries like for example, the most we've ever heard about Africa is the fact that they were slave workers and the most we've ever heard about Mexico and stuff is that, just bad things, like how White people had power. (Classroom Transcript_Jan.30)

The students attributed this problem to the education they receive in schools, where the dominant White perspective is woven throughout the curriculum—a point I will return to in the sections to come.

Concealed stories work against the mainstream discourse by challenging dominant White middle- and upper-class ways of viewing the world and understanding problems. Bell (2010) pointed out that “Concealed stories challenge stock stories by offering different accounts of and explanations for social relations...offering different... explanations for social relations” than those of the dominant discourse (p. 44). To serve as an example of a concealed story, the class viewed *Hidden Figures*. This movie was released in 2017 and, in contrast to the 2015 #OscarsSoWhite controversy, enjoyed much attention during the awards season, including three Oscar nominations. While students saw the need for knowledge of these hidden aspects of history, they were also able to point out the problem of narratives of progress that Civil Rights Era representations can bring to the fore. Venus pointed out that representations of historic Women of Color are necessary because

before I saw the *Hidden Figures* movie, I didn't know the story about the powerful role that women of Color played in sending the first man off into space, this story isn't taught in history books or mentioned in inaugural speeches but what society doesn't realize is that it wouldn't have been possible without these amazing women. This movie shows the intellectual skill of Black women despite

the stereotypes that society sets up (Student Artifact_ *Response to Hidden Figures*)

Venus went on to echo the importance of diversity of representation in the media, saying:

Movies like these are important for the representation of Women of Color and minorities in the future of our country because when we see our faces in these positions, we are more empowered and stronger. Little girls need to grow up being supported by the media and being shown their value in history and how they can inspire as well. More portrayal of diversity in media helps young people to learn more about their culture and their untold stories because a person without history is like a tree without roots, neither can grow. (Student Artifact_ *Response to Hidden Figures*)

However, the students also identified the problem of false narratives of progress in a society where Black and Brown citizens are still marginalized and oppressed. Though some students felt that the film displayed “that we as a country have progressed from the single stubborn mindset we had during the time of our hidden heroes in history” (Student Artifact_ *Lissie_ Response to Hidden Figures*), the majority of students felt that “in today’s society women and People of Color are still going through discrimination and inequality...not much has changed” (Student Artifact_ *Nella_ Response to Hidden Figures*). Gabriella, Nella, and Mercedes focused on both issues of race and gender as a basis for discrimination because “People of Color and women face a lot of similar challenges that the characters in hidden figures faced. The three women in the movie ‘Hidden Figures’ were always doubted and looked down on. This still happens currently for some people, either because their gender or skin Color” (Student Artifact_ *Lissie_ Response to Hidden Figures*).

Samuel pointed out that legal action to end discrimination has done little to change society, stating:

Unfortunately things have changed very little since the 50s and 60s as in the way of thinking. The only things that have change are laws that prevent people from discriminating anyone solely based on gender or race. (Student Artifact_Response to *Hidden Figures*)

These student assertions run counter to the assumption in American society that racism and gender-based discrimination ended with the Civil Rights movement and the women's movements in the 1960s and 1970s.

Through their inquiries, students recognized that limited representations—single stories, as Adichie labeled them—often led to stereotypes in that complex identities are flattened. In order to explore this concept further, we looked to an example of a stock story, the poem *On the Subway* (Olds, 1987), as an entry into thinking about how stereotypes act to control people's perceptions of and responses to certain groups of people. Stock stories display the ways story can reproduce White privilege and draw on negative stereotypes in crafting representations of People of Color (Bell, 2010). In the poem, a White woman reflects on her response to a young Black male in the subway. She characterizes the young man in clearly racist stereotypical terms as having “the casual cold look of a mugger,” while she in contrast wears a “dark fur coat.” She goes on to examine the power imbalance, known as White privilege, that places her as a more powerful member of society, despite his greater physical power. The poem leaves the reader with a clear feeling that, though the woman in the poem is afraid, the Black man has much more to fear from a society that oppresses him because of the color of his skin.

As I described in the introduction to this chapter, when it came time to write a poetic response, I was surprised by how many students recounted experiences that were similar to that of the man in the poem. Because of my background and experiences as a White woman, I assumed that mainly Black and Brown students may have experienced or

observed discrimination, but I was not able to understand how prevalent discrimination is in the lives of Youth of Color. Tina explained how a similar situation had happened to her earlier that week:

I was on the train the other day and this White, middle-aged man came on the subway with his son, who was also White. There was an empty seat next to me but there was also an empty seat next to an older White guy and that side was way more crowded than my side, and he saw that his son was gonna sit next to me, but he pulled his son away to go sit on the other side. (Classroom Transcript_Feb.1)

Tina felt that the father's clear preference was to have his son sit next to a member of his own race, despite the fact that there was plenty of room next to her and the son had initially chosen her side.

In Mo's response, there is a clear reference to the stereotyping he feels vulnerable to because of his clothing style. In his poem, he states:

I sag my pants, black
Polo sweater and some Timbs so
They know I'm deadass, but
I'm not a drug dealer nor a killer; this
(Student Artifact_*On the Subway*)

Mo notes that his clothing choices are designed to present an appearance that his peers will respect—"they" will know he's "deadass" or real, legitimate, the genuine article. However, this appearance is also misinterpreted by those outside of his peer group as the dress of a "drug dealer" or "a killer" because of these same style choices. Through the specific focus on clothing, Mo shines a light on the criminalization of Black men.

In the next stanza, he imagines what the lady staring at him "like I'm an alien" might be thinking of him:

Lady is staring at me like
I am an alien, she probably thinks I have
A girlfriend who is pregnant and that
I am a part of a gang, but

Actually I have a 4.0 GPA and I'm
 The captain of my football team
 I probably have scholarships to colleges
 That this woman never even heard of
 (Student Artifact_ *On the Subway*)

In this poem, Mo characterizes himself in opposition to the stereotype often imposed on him because of race. He vividly enumerates the stereotypes commonly placed on young Black males, making visible such deficit framings, which he goes on to disrupt. In opposition to these assumptions, he proudly states, “I have a 4.0 GPA and I’m/ the captain of my football team,” showing that the labels placed on him do not account for the markers of success he has actually attained. He goes on to position himself as a someone who has “scholarships to colleges that this woman has never even heard of,” reflecting that despite the fact he is academically successful, the playing field still is not even. Though he is more knowledgeable than this woman, he is still at the mercy of her judgment.

In his final stanza, Mo returns to the issue of how he represents himself and the stereotypes he is vulnerable to because of this. He points out that, although some people place him in the category of “troubled teen” because of his appearance, his clothing choices—and his freedom to choose—are a form of self-expression and a right:

I'm dressed like this because its
 The trend, the fashion, and plus
 I think I look pretty good, it's not illegal
 I'm not breaking any laws so let me be; I
 Don't need to be judged by a white lady who
 Has everything
 (Student Artifact_ *On the Subway*)

Mo’s references to legality echo the racial profiling in Nella’s poem. Mo seems to recognize that although freedom of expression is a right guaranteed by our Constitution,

his decisions to express himself in a certain way can place him at risk of being profiled, even though “it’s not illegal” and he’s not “breaking any laws” through his choice to follow fashion trends. His frustration and advocacy are evident in his final appeal to “let me be.”

Bobbie’s poem also displays awareness about the judgments of those who make assumptions based on fear and stereotypes. She critiques the fear of the woman in the poem who does not stop to consider the person she is stereotyping as someone who has fears of her own. She states that “Though she’s inches away from me/ The fear doesn’t let her see my pain” (Student Artifact_ *On the Subway*). While Bobbie mentions fearing for her safety on the streets of her neighborhood, she states that “I have a job to secure my funds for college” (Student Artifact_ *On the Subway*), underscoring that living through difficult circumstances does not presuppose a lack of academic or social success.

Ultimately, Bobbie criticizes the woman in her poem for being scared for her safety because this is a largely false worry. The fact that this “scares her more than my fear of being shot for holding candy/ Being shot for having on a hood/ Being shot for sitting on the train” (Student Artifact_ *On the Subway*) leaves Bobbie’s reader very aware of the real threats to the safety of Youth of Color because of stereotyping and racial profiling. Her mentions of “holding candy” and “having on a hood” are references to Trayvon Martin’s murder due to stereotyping and fear. Bobbie makes the point that while the person doing the stereotyping often claims they are “afraid,” these perceived emotions are often used to justify violence against Youth of Color.

Other students echoed these concerns in both their *On the Subway* poems and their *Still I Rise* poems. Samuel writes, “I don’t understand why? Is it the color of my

skin? Is it what I'm wearing? Or is it because I'm the only Colored one on the train?" (Student Artifact_ *On the Subway*). Throughout his poem, feelings of stress and anxiety induced by being noticed and judged in this way leave Samuel feeling vulnerable and looking for escape. He notes the strategies he draws on to circumvent and deal with the White gaze, saying, "I try not to make eye contact. I want to put my hoodie on, but I feel I'll look more suspicious" (Student Artifact_ *On the Subway*). When the subway finally stops, he exits the train feeling "as if a boulder has been lifted off my shoulders," a statement reminding the reader of the toll incurred by this silent emotional work of deflecting and confronting racial stereotypes.

Seb writes about the injustice of stereotyping, questioning why he is "...cursed with the color of my skin?" He goes on to explain that he feels he is "not taken seriously when I say that I want to have a good life and a good education" (Student Artifact_ *On the Subway*). Despite his efforts to attain dominant markers of success, he feels that "they laugh at me. They say that I'm going to be a statistic. They say that I won't be able to make it in life, it's just impossible" (Student Artifact_ *On the Subway*). His feelings that, no matter how diligently he tries to be successful, his efforts will not be recognized is a stark reminder of the number of Youths of Color who become disenfranchised with the educational system, which promises them upward mobility but does not seem to deliver on this promise.

Focusing on the Community

Because of the pride students discussed in the history and legacy of Central Arts within the community, I developed a gallery walk for students to engage with its various historic legacies of activism as well as the current issues facing the community. I

designed this gallery walk with Bell's (2010) words about resistance stories in mind: "resistance stories come from the work of contemporary artists, educators and activists who model ways to challenge racism through their artwork, pedagogy and political actions" (p. 62). Thus, I decided to focus on artwork in the form of community murals and short documentary videos depicting the activism in the neighborhood, starting in the 1960s and connecting to today's community activists. One of the major issues that has been visibly changing the face of the neighborhood is the gentrification of the surrounding community. Students moved through three stations in groups learning about the art, culture, and history of the neighborhood. These stations included multimedia exhibits on the arts and culture of the area as well as the local politicians and community organizations that have advocated for the community throughout history. Students looked to the colorful murals that adorn the streets of the neighborhood to unpack the influence of Black and Hispanic culture, and the legacy of important community members. The final station presented the current debate about the area being rebranded under a new moniker, as so many neighborhoods in this city have once gentrification sets in.

Students defined gentrification as "the process of renovating and improving a district so that it conforms to middle-class ways" and went on to say that gentrification often means that "the culture is being put aside or ignored for the benefit of the Caucasian slash rich people" (Classroom Transcript_Feb.12_Tina). Alex cited the example of one large store covering a famous mural celebrating the culture and history of the neighborhood as a visual representation of this erasure:

The voice of Harlem being muted, and the culture altered to look down on. And more buildings are being renovated and rent is going up, running people like us out, and when they wanted to re-name it. (Classroom Transcript_Feb.12)

This sense of injustice at newcomers coming into neighborhoods with deep historic and cultural roots and rejecting the local community by positioning it as in need of improvement showed through in our class discussions as well as student compositions.

Venus wrote in her *Where I'm From* response:

As I walked down the street, I noticed they took down the pharmacy down the block...how come they take these places down without caring about the memories and things behind them? I used to play with dolls everyday with the owners' kids. I practically grew up there and they just gonna take it down without caring what anybody else has to say. (Student Artifact_ *Where I'm From*)

Her focus on the local bodega as a significant location to her, and the quickness with which this business was shut down when the community began to change, is just one example of how community members' perspectives, informed by historical knowledge and the awareness of underlying racial bias, differ from accounts of gentrification as community "improvement."

One topic that came up were various examples of graffiti murals and other markers commemorating the passing of community members. Tina commented on the memorials she had witnessed being painted or curated on the streets of the neighborhoods she frequents, and that these memorials are significant to the community memory. She stated:

There're people that have died. So you can't...if somebody just has a memory of something, and they're still passing down their memories, it's gonna change, and it's gonna get lost. So if we have these memorials still up, that memory of what happened is still there for generations to come. So if they're just taking it down, it's pretty much they're erasing art history in [the neighborhood] on the whole because as things get erased, people don't think to say it, talk about it, or ask questions about it. (Classroom Transcript_Feb.12)

Lissie added her own example of how a mural her grandfather had commissioned at the 5 Pointz in Long Island City had been painted over when the site was closed as a

community Aerosol Arts collective. Following a lawsuit, it was found that the developer who bought the 5 Pointz complex was in violation of the law when he painted over the artwork and was ordered to pay damages to the artists whose work was erased. Nella suggested that

important landmarks like buildings that help improve the neighborhood should be left so that future generations can remember our culture's history...a good way to preserve culture and history at the same time would be to have something like a museum. (Classroom Transcript_Feb.12)

As the class discussed the tensions of gentrification, the inevitability of community change, and the need for thoughtful compromises between the past and the future, students cited many examples of how they had witnessed their community evolve over the years. Some of these changes the class agreed were for the better, but others seemed to exacerbate inequalities in the community because they divided community members or forced existing residents to make difficult choices because of rising prices in the area. As the students discussed the positive changes they had witnessed as the city attempted to clean up a notoriously run-down housing complex in the area, one student made the connection to the debate about the Central Arts reorganization.

The students had been discussing the idea of community erasure as a way of gentrifiers judging community institutions as not being up to the standards of the dominant White culture, when Mo said, "They don't know what it is, so they don't care...like this school." When I asked him to clarify, he said "The school. Like nobody know what this school means to me. And these people, whoever, the government, they try and take it away" (Classroom Transcript_Feb.12). Heads nodded in approval, and Lissie responded, "you gonna get right to it now" (Classroom Transcript_Feb.12). He had hit the nail on the head. The fate of this school, once centrally located in a low-

socioeconomic neighborhood, had seen the demographics of the neighborhood change significantly, and because it was judged as “not up to the standard” (Classroom Transcript_Feb.12_Tina), it was at risk of being erased despite its vital historic position in the local community.

Turning a Critical Eye on Their School

The location of Central Arts in a quickly gentrifying area only increased the scrutiny that was already focused on the school. Years of poor scores on state and national tests, coupled with low graduation rates, had caused the school to come to the attention of the district. Though fluctuations in the teaching staff, administrative disorganization, and shortcomings in funding for programs had caused instability at Central Arts, students felt that the bulk of the attention toward school improvement was focused squarely on their test scores.

Emerging or “transforming” stories are composed in response to deconstructing stock stories (Bell, 2010). These emerging stories “challenge stock stories, build on and amplify concealed and resistance stories and take up the mantle of antiracism and social justice work through generating new stories to catalyze contemporary action against racism” (p. 75). In this section, I look to how students construct, and deconstruct, their school community, including where they identify injustices and how they suggest we approach acting on these injustices. I spotlight data organized around the code of Attention to Inequality (AI), with special attention to the sub-code Education (AI-E), in an effort to compile an image of students’ own narratives of school change and the concept of “improvement” at this school site. I argue that the narrative students compose through these discussions, interviews, and artifacts presents a “transforming” story in that

students take control of the narrative of school change, pointing out the problems in how the district conceptualizes change, the actual effects of initiatives aimed at improvement, and the ways in which the narrative of school change at the district level causes educational turbulence and personal stress for students.

The youth focused many of their critiques of the education they received at Central Arts around the impact of high-stakes testing and the pressures they felt as a result. They described how the emphasis placed on Regents testing put them in the position of making the school look either “bad” or “good,” based on their individual performance on these tests. Mercedes reflected on the various school improvements she had seen in her time at Central Arts, saying that raising test scores would be good initially but may not lead to long-term change.

Yeah, because it would make the school look good, but what about when they leave? It's still not gonna look good. And plus, the test scores and then the middle school they're trying to kick out. That's not really looking good on the school, actually. (Interview)

Mercedes pointed out that the attention and resources brought into the school in order to make it “look good” dry up after a certain point and all they are left with is the remaining bad publicity the school garnered in the process. The attention damages the school’s reputation even if student test scores rise because, after being labeled as “In Need of Improvement,” it is difficult to shake the associations of failure and risk that come with the designation.

Mercedes confirmed in an interview that she wrote her *Still I Rise* poem about the stress that she felt to perform well in her classes and on the Regents tests. She wrote:

The stress from today
Travels with me again tomorrow
Like weights on my shoulders

Unable to be thrown off
 Until daylight shines
 Lifting it away
 But not for very long
 Because the stress from yesterday
 Starts again tomorrow
 (Student Artifact_ *Still I Rise*)

In her poem, she speaks of stress as a burden that she carries with her always. She points out that this stress seems to snowball from one day to the next, never really being resolved. Sometimes she is able to see the “daylight” at the end of the tunnel, but this is only a fleeting glimpse. The stress cannot be “thrown off,” but is with her everyday, lingering long after she has left the school building and taking hold again first thing in the morning. The emotional burdens of the high-stakes testing culture permeate the educational experiences of Mercedes and her peers.

Lissie echoed the frustration of being placed in a position to succeed or fail based on the year-end Regents testing, and the messages students receive about being in part responsible for the failure or success of the school based on their ability to perform on high-stakes tests. She said:

Yeah, that’s what they tell us that. You need to do this. You need to do that. You don’t give us the materials so we can do it. If you were to give us more prep earlier in the new school year, not late when you know- now that you find out this school’s- that school’s closing- oh, yeah let’s make us look good. No, that should’ve been happening before. (Interview)

Lissie’s incisive assessment of the situation pointed out the institution’s role in perpetuating inequities through lack of systemic supports, noting the last-minute test prep students were required to participate as the Regents exam approached was not fair to the students who should be prepared already via their year-long academic coursework. She noted that she did not feel that the school provided the students with the adequate

resources upfront and then tries to fill in the gaps at the last minute before testing begins. These comments underscored the difference between “looking good” by inflating test scores through targeted drilling and test-focused prep and “being good” by offering students a robust intellectual experience year-round.

Test prep began in mid-March, a new addition to the school’s programming which required a reorganizing of schedules for many students. This is a circumstance I discuss at length in Chapter V, but in addressing injustice in school from the students’ perspective, I include some of their reactions to this change in programming. At the end of her interview, I asked Mercedes if there was anything she wished we did more of during The Art of Storytelling class. She responded:

I could wish for more time, I wish we had more time...because I really don’t want to go to the Regents Prep. That’s why I didn’t go for the last three weeks, because I was focusing on the book...don’t wanna waste 45 minutes when I could be doing this. (Interview)

The book Mercedes mentioned was the children’s book she was writing and illustrating during class, which she was not able to finish due to the Regents Prep schedule getting in the way of her attending her regularly assigned ninth-period course.

In discussing the effects of the Regents test prep beginning in March, Bobbie pointed out how it affected her motivation in her other classes. She said:

I don’t know why they’re doing it so early. The Regents Prep just puts kids in the mindset like, ‘Oh we’re having Regents Prep, that means I don’t have to like, do any other work.’ Because it does put me in that mindset. I get lazy when [prep starts]. (Interview)

Bobbie noted here that the beginning of test prep sees a change in her mindset. The assumption that test prep is a review of things that have already been covered, and that this review signals the end of the year, leads to a feeling that the learning is over for the

year. Both Bobbie and Mercedes are students with high grades who take part in Advanced Placement courses and are on track to graduate in both their coursework and testing requirements; however, these students were pulled out of their ninth-period coursework to participate in “test prep” (even though this support should not be warranted, given their high academic achievement). This made it difficult for them to maintain their motivation and engagement.

Miru commented on the Regents test prep as being a necessary evil in his eyes. He also noted how the test prep affected his ability to participate in the ninth-period storytelling class, saying:

I wish that I still could have been in the class, but I guess the Regents are more important. I need the prep more than anything. Getting out of high school and getting your diploma is more important than anything at this point. (Interview)

While he admitted that passing the Regents test was a necessary step toward graduation, he also commented on the frequency of this test prep being a drag on his motivation. He stated:

I don't think it needs to be five days a week. Maybe four, three. We do have to work, I don't think too much. Towards the end, we're not overdoing it to the point where it's almost every day...it would definitely make me work harder [if prep was] on alternative days, I can actually go back to the writing class. That would actually make me want to work more than those other classes. Being that I'm being treated, not that they really have to be, but they're giving me that choice. (Interview).

Once again, the negative motivational factors of test prep came to light in this statement, where Miru highlighted how being able to attend his ninth-period writing class would make him more motivated to work hard during test prep. Those 5 days of test prep seemed to be “overdoing it” and being able to alternate days of test prep would give him

something to look forward to. As the students attested, test prep becomes the default curriculum.

Miru's comment about choice pointed to a major injustice that the students encountered regarding their ability to have a say in their education. Miru, Bobbie, Mercedes, and Lissie all had their schedules changed in order to squeeze in Regents test prep courses. Lissie noted being frustrated that the school seemed to assume that she would be unable to pass the Regents tests, saying, "like they don't even give us the chance to try before they be putting us in prep. I haven't even taken the test yet, and it's like they assume I'll fail" (Interview). Other students asked their parents to call the school to pull them out of test prep as their grades and attendance were good and there was no reason to assume they would not do well on the upcoming Regents tests. Students found more value in their storytelling class than they did in the test prep and took every opportunity to skip test prep in order to attend ninth period.

Although the students were rarely asked what they felt needed to be targeted in terms of school improvement, they recognized that they themselves were often labeled as the problem. When asked to respond to rumors of reorganization, students wrote letters to the Panel for Educational Policy (P.E.P), asserting the value of Central Arts despite poor scores. Students seemed to recognize that the district focus on test scores meant personal responsibility was placed on them for bringing up the overall school performance through their individual scores. Because of this implicit connection, students asserted their own exceptionalism in comparison to the dominant "at-risk" discourse of Youth of Color in failing schools. Seb asserted that, despite the assumptions often made about Youth of

Color, “not everyone in the middle school sector of [Central] are bad students,” and went on to discuss why he thought the middle school students are not bad students:

Having personal encounters with a majority of these students, I find that they have a very high level of intelligence but lack the ability to know when and how to act in certain environments. (Student Artifact_ *Argumentative Letter*)

Seb’s comments displayed his feelings that the middle school students were being judged as unintelligent simply because they were young and acted immature at times.

Mercedes also asserted her own ability to excel and overcome hardships in her letter to the P.E.P. She used her success as evidence of the school’s quality education and her own promise if allowed to continue to study at Central Arts. She stated:

I came in with an IEP that I had ever since first grade and in the middle of sixth grade I stopped having an IEP that was one of my biggest achievements in middle school. I also made honor roll plenty of times and I had better grades. Ever since I’ve been in [Central] I begin to have an interest in drawing and in freshman year I was in an advanced class for art. My grammar and the way I wrote essays improved and my math improved. I even passed my algebra Regents. (Student Artifact_ *Argumentative Letter*)

Mercedes held up evidence of her own ability to thrive at Central Arts because of her successes in arts and academics as a reason to expect other students at the school would also be successful. She said, “I also see middle schoolers in the honor roll and the enrollment increased more this year than last year and the year before” (Artifact_ *Argumentative Letter*).

Mercedes and Seb presented a counter-story to the assumption that all students in failing schools struggle academically by focusing on their personal success and the growth of other students within the school. This counter-story acknowledged the pressure on individual students to help the school rise through their efforts, but shifted the focus away from any individual student’s responsibility to work harder and distinguish

themselves and, as a result, their school. Instead, students looked to problems caused by systematic instability such as teacher quality and retention, administrative disorganization, and school-wide policies that were not in the best interests of student learning.

Though most students could name certain teachers at the school who have been formative in their academic and personal development, others pointed out concerns about the teachers at Central Arts. Miru stated that his English, Science, and Art teachers were passionate and “will not let you rest till your work is done and not only do [they] do that but [they] make the work something that you want to do which is something students want in a teacher” (Student Artifact *Argumentative Letter*); however, Seb felt:

I personally think that the styles in which the teachers teach could change. Some of these will go exactly following their curriculum standards with no concerns on how to keep it interesting for at least most students to learn on a right path. (Student Artifact *Argumentative Letter*)

While these statements seem contradictory, they represent aspects of the teaching staff at Central.

Miru named three teachers who were veterans in their profession and have spent at least 5 years teaching at Central Arts. As a result of district plans for improvement to Central Arts, changes in administration and programming at Central Arts have seen the numbers of these veteran teachers decline over time. Seb’s comments on teachers sticking close to curriculum standards and not being confident in adding elements to make the learning more relevant to students could be explained by the relative novice status of many of the teachers hired to replace veteran teachers who have left Central Arts. Contrary to assumptions that the quality of teaching is poor across the board, students reported many high-quality teachers and delivered appropriate criticism

regarding the efforts needed to support the teaching staff with pedagogical strategies to engage students in their learning.

Mercedes commented on the changes she has seen to teaching and administrative staff over the course of her 5 years at Central Arts. When asked how the school has changed over the years, she said:

Oh my god. I've seen a lot of changes. I mean, before the principal here, there was another principal and another dean. Their roles changed throughout the years.... They both left when I was in seventh grade. And then it was Ms. F- as the dean in eighth grade, I think. Then I think she changed again. And then it's just the people in the school in general. And the teachers as well, because a lot of teachers left.... (Interview)

This juggling of administrators and their roles leaves a confusing track to follow for students and teachers, both of whom depend on smooth functioning at the administrative level to support their efforts in the classroom. As Venus stated, “The eradication of a middle school is not solely to blame on the students or school faculty but also on the DOE and the schools’ administration” (Student Artifact_ *Argumentative Letter*). Venus held up an example of how the decisions of those at the administrative level end up having deleterious effects on the students’ performance on the tests used to judge educational quality. She stated that:

Cutting out the [university] tutoring program that helped half of the school to pass their math exams was an act of negligence and telling the program that we could manage was a disservice to the student body of [Central]. (Student Artifact_ *Argumentative Letter*)

The variety of programs and partnerships, and the unintended effects of these relationships beginning and ending suddenly, are issues I take up directly in the next chapter. However, here I would like to point out the irony of Venus’s statement. The tutoring program she described was meant to address students’ low performance on the

math Regents, and successfully did so, but the administration ended it in favor of a more widespread approach which saw Regents Prep offered to all students during ninth period. Though Venus noted the effectiveness of the tutoring program by holding up the evidence respected by administrators—student test scores, she noted that the program was still ended because the school “could manage” on its own. It is interesting that this was her perspective, as clearly the University, who sponsored both this tutoring program and the Regents Prep initiative that is featured in Chapter V, did not believe the school could manage on its own. The district also instituted oversight measures that brought in outside help to support the school, indicating that district officials did not believe the school could manage without help.

This is not to say that these failed reform efforts are the fault of the school-level administrators alone. As I outline in the next chapter, precarity is endemic to Central Arts and many other schools which serve Communities of Color. It is worth noting that students are able to point to instability at the administrative level and its effect on programs and partnerships, noting how these changes trickle down and negatively impact students’ ability to find academic and socioemotional support consistently at the school. Often, the decisions made at levels far above students have serious consequences that students could have predicted if their perspectives had been considered. In asking students why Central Arts should not face reorganization, they were able to point to some major issues with the district’s plan for change. Seb pointed out that this plan would “result in us having to share our advanced classes with the rivaling high school in the building. This will cause several issues with fellow students” (Student Artifact_ *Argumentative Letter*). As noted earlier by Anna, Central Arts enjoys a welcoming

student community with few instances of bullying or violence between students. Seb pointed out that the plan to share space in the building after Central Arts is shrunk to one floor will disrupt this balance among students and force them into classes with their rival school in the building.

Other students identified issues of access to the arts programing. Earlier in this chapter, I highlighted the gratitude certain students felt at being accepted into Central Arts after being denied admission to another arts-based secondary school in the city. These same students pointed out the injustice that limiting Central Arts programs would mean for other students. Samuel commented that “if they do take our middle school away, then that will be robbing us from being able to develop into something better by being able to express our true passions through any of our desired arts” (Student Artifact_ *Argumentative Letter*). Nella echoed this point, saying “this will affect the middle schoolers being able to find another school to attend providing them with the same opportunities given here” (Student Artifact_ *Argumentative Letter*). These students were well aware of the unique programs offered at Central Arts that continue to make the school a valuable asset within the city—programming that is being eroded through the mandated focus on test prep. They were able to predict the long-term effects of the loss of these programs to other students in a way that district administrators might not see.

Mercedes echoed this criticism of the short-sighted nature of the district’s current plan, stating “after the middle school is taken away what’s gonna happen next year? What’s going to happen the year after that? You’re making plans but what will happen in a couple of years, will [Central] still stand as an arts school?” (Student Artifact_ *Argumentative Letter*). As a student of Central Arts for 5 years, Mercedes has seen many

changes and rightly wondered whether the plan to reorganize the school is sustainable. Venus noted the systemic problems at the heart of school improvement efforts, saying that “letting schools close and be repurposed are a criminal act legally purported by the very systems that created them” (Student Artifact_ *Argumentative Letter*). She believed that the prospective reorganization of Central Arts represents a continuation of the hypocrisy of a school system that promises to offer equal educational opportunities to all students. Venus implied in this quote that the closing of schools serving Youth of Color is a perpetuation of segregated schools, and went on to say:

The department of education’s alleged promise to provide education to students of all ethnicities does not apply to students attending schools that are institutionally setup to fail. The cycle of poverty continues to manifest itself in communities like ours by denying students a quality education. (Student Artifact_ *Argumentative Letter*)

When asked who is responsible for school failure, Venus acknowledged that test scores often point to students, but this only masks the real problem. She argued that the school she attends is institutionally set up to fail and thus is not capable of offering an equal education to students, despite the efforts of individual students and teachers.

Discussion

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that storytelling, and specifically Bell’s (2010) storytelling project model, can be used to surface students’ cultural wealth. Storytelling in the classroom can serve as a vehicle to honor youth’s linguistic capital and transform it into other types of capital by connecting to communities of belonging (familial and social capital), identifying important relationships and goals (navigational and aspirational capital); when infused with critical perspectives, storytelling becomes

resistant capital via stories of resistance and transformation. In the following sections, I reflect on my initial research question: (a) What are students' perspectives and inquiries regarding race, class, gender, and other social framings, and how do these change over time? (b) How do students engage with these inquiries in relationship to curricular resources, class activities, and peer interactions? (c) What do the texts students produce say about how they communicate their understanding of social issues regarding race, class, and gender?

Here I focus specifically on the last part of this question—what the texts students produce say about how they understand social issues—before moving on to consider the importance of discussing injustice in schools.

Unpacking Representations of Communities of Color

While students' characterizations of their neighborhood and school community often present counter-stories to the dominant discourses about Youth of Color, they also acknowledge many of the problems they see around them. Students are all too familiar with both the symbolic and direct violence to which they are vulnerable on a daily basis.

Mo wrote in his *Where I'm From* rap:

I was born in the slums with the drugs and the bums. Where there's only happiness when the money comes. I'm from getting robbed from your neighbor. \$2.75, that's a lot where I'm from. That's a baby's bottle or toilet paper. I'm from where kids get thrown on the floor with cuffs for smoking water vapor. (Student Artifact_ *Where I'm From*)

This statement both acknowledges the dangers of his neighborhood and also contains marked awareness of the complex systemic problems that compound these dangers, such as the criminalization of Black youth.

At this point in time, \$2.75 is the price of admission to the subway, an amount that Mo stated is sizeable for many people in his neighborhood; however, jumping the turnstile of the subway carries an even higher price. Until recently, fare jumpers could be arrested and charged with a misdemeanor, and even today fare evasion can cost up to \$100 for the offender. While it is not illegal to swipe a person into the subway using your public transit pass as a courtesy, it is illegal for a person to request this courtesy from passersby and carries a fine or a potential summons if caught (<https://www.wnyc.org/story/can-i-get-swipe-can-we-get-trouble/>). This issue has come into the news recently as one example of how the city criminalizes poverty in ways that disproportionately affect Black and Brown citizens.

Mo also highlighted the difficult choices that many of the members of his community must make on a daily basis. Though in his description there was a contingent of “drugs” and “bums” in his neighborhood, Mo focused on those who had difficulty affording “toilet paper” and “baby bottles,” alluding to the reality behind representations of panhandlers in the city using the money to avoid work or buy drugs (Student Artifact_ *Where I'm From*). In truth, many of those who are on the street are only trying to make ends meet. Unfortunately, this is another area where city crackdowns on food vendors, buskers, and selling merchandise on the street have criminalized poverty. While the city caps the number of these permits at 853, so many others sit on a waiting list that the Department of Consumer Affairs stopped adding names in 1992 (<http://streetvendor.org/faq>). Laws on what one can sell and where, with or without a permit, are murky and many people are in violation without even being aware of it. Similarly, murky laws surrounding panhandling often leave it to individual enforcement officers to determine

where the line is between legal and illegal loitering (<http://www.nypress.com/local-news/20170531/panhandlers-and-the-law/1>).

Finally, Mo's reference to instances of kids being "thrown on the floor with cuffs" (Student Artifact_ *Where I'm From*) highlighted the disproportional threat to young Males of Color who are targeted by NYPD policies like broken windows policing and stop and frisk. In 2017, the city chapter of the ACLU noted that a total of 10,861 residents of the city were stopped and frisked by the police, also pointing out that 9 out of 10 people stopped and frisked are found to be innocent of any wrongdoing. The statistic for 2018 was on target to meet 2017's number: as of July, 5,064 citizens were stopped and frisked, 89% of whom were Black and Brown citizens (<https://www.nyclu.org/en/stop-and-frisk-data>). Mo's specific mention of "smoking water vapor" (Student Artifact_ *Where I'm From*) speaks to the issue of unequal enforcement of drug laws in Communities of Color. Marijuana legalization and enforcement became a major issue in the recent state elections, with one candidate pointing out that marijuana had already been in effect legal for White city residents for years; thus, legalization to legalize marijuana formally was simply a matter of extending equal rights to Black and Brown residents (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/11/nyregion/cynthia-nixon-marijuana-legalization.html>).

Though the students were aware of the problems that exist in their neighborhood, they were also proud to call these communities home, and recognized the contradictions between the ways in which they were represented through dominant discourses and the daily reality they experienced as community members. When asked to characterize their neighborhoods, very few focused on the challenges therein, instead highlighting the

things they loved about their community. Mercedes noted the “noisy, colorful urban streets” (Student Artifact_ *Where I’m From*) and Miru remarked that his community is the “crown” of the city (Student Artifact_ *Where I’m From*). When students did point out injustices, they often identified issues that cross the boundaries of any specific neighborhood or school and extend to larger social inequalities prevalent throughout the United States.

Discussing Injustice in Schools

If schools are part of the problem, they can also be part of the solution. Student responses regarding inequality in education, racism, gender-based discrimination, and other injustices proved that they were no stranger to these issues. Students recognized that as a function of their age and position in society, they are assumed to be naïve to these issues. Student responses troubled these assumptions, instead signaling their awareness and civic involvement. Tina stated:

Yeah, we see what’s going on and we’re not turning a blind eye to it like we don’t understand these kinds of matters. We’re saying, “Oh, that happens on a daily basis. We know it’s going on and we are paying attention.” (Classroom Transcript_Feb.6_Tina)

Tina’s *Still I Rise* response focused on the kind of injustice she faces, saying:

One thing they don’t teach you in school is how act when you get stared at. When I’m out with them. The hateful thoughts from the old lady, with the sour look on her face. The mother covering the eyes of her child. The man turning to his friends making jokes. The pointing, laughing, and dirty looks. (Student Artifact_ *Still I Rise*)

Though she encounters issues that she feels are racist or patriarchal, she does not feel she has been taught how to respond, and grapples with how to process the interaction and advocate for herself.

Miru spoke about the benefits of discussing these topics in school because

It opens your mind to different things that are going on in the world. If they keep the topics closed, you're never going to know what's going on outside of the world. If they open up the topics to you, then you kind of have a sense of what's going on and how it can be fixed in a sense. (Interview)

Lissie echoed this emphasis on connecting their education to what happens in the outside world, stating, “My first period class we talk a lot about Black people, and I find that I learn more too, and I feel more enthusiastic about reading it and discovering more about that one topic” (Interview). The connection to life outside of the school walls acts as a motivator in that students are able to see how what they are learning about applies to the world.

Discussing injustice helps students to see the connections between their learning and the real world, but it can also signal to students that the classroom can be an effective place for inquiring into or reflecting on difficult or traumatic events. Mercedes pointed to how her teachers have helped their classes to process events in the past:

Say how something happened. Somebody got shot...you know? You kind of bring that to the school and talk about it, and they'd be like “this isn't right.” We'd probably write an essay on why it's bad. I probably will make a connection and compare it to a couple years ago and say that the world is not really changing. Society is not changing, it's just getting worse. That's what we can make a connection to.... Because you get to learn what the world is really like because it's not always sunflowers and happiness. The world is really bad. The world isn't perfect. (Interview_Mercedes)

The world is often unfair, but the classroom can serve as a place for inquiring into the problems of the world in an effort to address them.

The students not only discussed the issues relevant to themselves and their communities, but also reflected on their own role in issues of importance in the city and

throughout the world. Lissie noted that inquiring into difficult questions with no easy answers helped her to understand the importance of multiple perspectives. She stated:

You get to learn more, like I said, about other people's opinion, as well. We get a different interpretation of it and we could just further know it, so we don't just catch it after doing something. We stop ourselves and we try to put the eyes more on how the people feel that are on you.... It encourages you to talk about it how you acknowledge it more and care about it more. (Interview_Lissie)

Opening the classroom to inquiry into injustices like racism, gender-based discrimination, and educational inequalities inspires students to look at their own actions, and the actions of others, with a critical eye that acknowledges that if one cares about a topic, taking action and speaking out can lead to change. The students were able to reflect on their own role in these issues and the importance of stepping outside of their own perspective, so they could gain greater insight into how issues affect different people differently.

In the next chapter, I focus on the challenges that arose throughout the 2 years I spent at Central Arts to give a fuller picture of the inner workings of school improvement through the eyes of teachers and partner organizations. However, I would like to end this chapter noting the importance of the efforts of students and teachers to maintain a supportive learning community that balances academic and socioemotional growth. Creating and delivering curriculum are academically rigorous and engage students in discussion around topics that are often considered contentious and challenging in any circumstance, and I address some of the reasons why Central Arts was an especially difficult place to make change in the following chapter. The continued efforts of students to engage with the topics and assignments of the course and challenge themselves to take up many different modes of composition and tackle issues with no easy answers formed

the engine that kept this course running strong. I placed these students' perspectives ahead of the perspectives in Chapter V in an effort to highlight the importance of putting students at the center of their own education, and extending to them the opportunity to define themselves, their communities, and their schools without imposing our own labels on them.

Chapter V

CONFLICTING NARRATIVES OF SCHOOL “IMPROVEMENT”

The story of the school and surrounding community as told by the students presents a stark contrast to many of the stereotypes and assumptions imposed on Communities of Color. At one end of the spectrum, the discourses of “at-risk” students in “failing schools” paint a bleak picture of the possibilities of success for Youth of Color. At the other end, students present themselves and their communities in ways that reflect cultural and community wealth, which often goes unnoticed and undervalued in school contexts. These are not the only stories, though. Between the overly deterministic narratives of “troubled teens” and the culturally affirming and critical stories told by Youth of Color, a host of educators and administrators are working to provide robust educational opportunities.

While district measures like Regents test scores paint a bleak picture of the quality of education students at Central Arts receive, students’ own perceptions of themselves and their school often run counter to these nationally defined measures of proficiency. The data presented in Chapter IV traced the ways in which students’ own stories about their community and school presented a counter example interrogating the assumptions of this single story. Of course, schools are complex environments filled with students, teachers, counselors, administrators, and a plethora of support staff, all speaking

from different positions and perspectives. The stories that lie between societal discourses and the students' own stories, those of teachers, administrators, and other school-based staff, help to give a fuller picture of what happens inside schools.

While each member of the educational community plays a part in determining the outcomes for students, these negotiations happen in a context rife with power struggles. Institutional power refers to the power wielded by social institutions (governments, corporations, schools, etc.) to control people and direct their behavior. The institutional discourses in education, which align with standards and the accountability movement, hold power of enforcement via documents like the Common Core State Standards, and the texts, skills, assessments, and related curricular texts suggested by official institutional documents serve to impose structure on diverse educational institutions. This “standardization” is one example of how discourses at the institutional level (the standards movement) can become transferred to symbols (standards, rubrics, assessments) and thus “discipline” the curriculum. Bourdieu (1991) called this disciplining power “symbolic violence,” which highlights the pressure to comply placed on outliers who run counter to the institutional discourse. Symbolic violence is “the gentle, hidden form which violence takes when overt violence is impossible” and this type of “unrecognizable, socially recognized violence” serves to maintain relations of domination (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 185). In this way, the institutional discourses of the standards and accountability movement trickle down from state and district officials to school-based administrators, and land firmly on the shoulders of teachers, to be considered in every planned lesson, activity, and assessment, leaving little room to define

success in ways that cannot be “objectively” measured on authoritative national and state tests.

In this chapter, I present the data surrounding critical incidents which occurred during my time as a teacher at Central Arts School in an effort to examine the complex negotiations that took place between teachers, administrators, and other support staff, who were all committed to providing a strong program of studies for students. I build my analysis on Bourdieu’s concept of field analysis as a way to deconstruct social spaces (fields) by focusing attention on “fields of struggle,” defined as “sites of resistance as well as domination” (Swartz, 2012, p. 121). In defining a critical incident, I read through the data from my researcher journal, correspondence with partners, and personal communications with critical friends, with an eye to determining moments where I noted feeling as if I had run up against institutional discourses. Attending to these “fields of struggle” helps to surface the logic of competition between opposing viewpoints.

In the sections that follow, I outline the three fields of struggle in determining and upholding what “quality” education and “rigorous” instruction looks like at Central Arts, which I noted as critical incidents in this study. In each field, I outline the key tensions between opposing viewpoints based in contrasting notions of what is best for students. I introduce each field of struggle through a short vignette representing events from my data, before I move into an analysis of the source of conflict in this field. Attention to fields often captures “Struggle within the logic of reproduction; [fields] seldom become sites of social transformation” (Schwartz, 2012, p. 121). In an attempt to disrupt this logic of reproduction, I connect the data to larger discourses in educational research, leadership, and practice, and consider how different discourses frame three common foci

of education—the student, the teacher, and the curriculum. Finally, I reflect on my understanding of ways in which institutional and symbolic powers “discipline” the possibilities in the school, and what this means for teachers who want to develop disruptive curricula

Through my analysis, I unpack the ways in which the school-based partners committed to strengthening the education students receive can and at times do work at cross purposes, due to conflicting conceptions of what it means to do right by students. In presenting these three-layered critical incidents, resulting in breakdowns in my perceived ability to meet the needs of my students, I interrogate what it means to teach well in a context where the pressure to improve student test scores defines success.

The Institutional Discourse of Standardization

In this section, I outline one critical incident that occurred early in the school year, when a student’s successful creation of a multimodal personal narrative forced me to reflect on the contrasting definitions of what a rigorous assignment might look like from the perspective of administrators and my own perspective as a teacher. I first describe the context in which this event took shape, outlining my curricular negotiations with a student, where I sought to leverage his skills and interest in multimodal texts as an asset in crafting his personal narrative. I follow this by presenting two different analyses of the assignment—the first using multimodal analysis to surface the complex interplay of word and image, and the second using a standardized rubric representing the lens of standards-focused educational discourses. Through this analysis, I demonstrate the ways in which conflicting definitions of rigor with regard to composition can serve to create tension

between students' needs, teachers' efforts to meet those needs, and administrators' commitment to raising achievement.

Miru sat with his head down on the table while the other students began to take out pencils and paper to outline their first writing assignment. As an entry into storytelling, I wanted to create spaces for students to reflect on their own personal experiences and the way in which these experiences had shaped their values, beliefs, and approach to life. Having previously taught creative writing, one of the obstacles I noticed was that students often thought they did not have anything to write about, discounting stories of their own personal experiences as not worthy material. As a first step toward crafting creative compositions, I asked students to map out the experiences they considered pivotal in their lives, then they would choose one to explore more extensively. Ultimately, these explorations would take the form of a personal narrative, but students had some options as to how they could tackle this assignment. One option was to write a traditional personal narrative of the type many students have to submit with their college applications. In earlier sessions, some students had expressed worry about upcoming college applications in their junior year and anxiety to begin working on pieces of these applications, so these students were encouraged to take up the assignment in a more traditional way that would attend to the personal goals they had conveyed about academic inquiries.

Other students had identified themselves as poets, and upon watching Jamila Lyiscott's TedTalk Three Ways to Speak English, had become interested in writing and performing their poetry. I encouraged them to craft a personal narrative in verse much the way Lyiscott had. Additionally, as part of the culminating class session of this unit, I

planned for any students who wanted to perform their poem for the class to do so.

Finally, in keeping with the school's theme of centering the arts in education, I opened up the assignment to include an option wherein students could tell their story in the form of a comic. Through these choices I hoped to send a message to students early on in the course of our class that storytelling can take many forms depending on the genre, audience, and style of the author. I hoped to affirm our classroom as a creative environment that would foster not only successful compositions, but also exploration of the different forms these compositions could take.

*Miru had come to previous class sessions excited to engage in conversation and participate. We had been critically viewing the film *Lion* to examine how personal narratives, in various forms, could take readers/viewers along on a personal journey while also helping them to reflect on some of the larger issues of the society. Miru had made some very insightful points during these discussions which I thought would turn into momentum for writing, but now seeing him sitting with his forehead on the desk, I wondered what was going on and if I was going to be able to reignite his interest in the class.*

I had seen evidence of Miru's talent as an artist decorating the margins of his previous class work, so at the end of class I asked if we could chat about the assignment. "Miru, it seems like you're not feeling well today. Is everything ok? You seemed tired in class," I asked. He replied, "No, I'm fine." I asked why he didn't seem interested in starting his assignment. His reply was short, "I don't feel like writing." I reminded him that there was an option of creating a comic book. "I was actually hoping you would take that option, Miru, because I've seen what a good artist you are, and I'd really like to see

what you make of this assignment.” He pointed out that no one else in the class was drawing. Everyone had been writing that day. I had planned that class as a time to outline ideas, so I had not come prepared with art supplies. “You’re right, Miru. We were just brainstorming today, but if you feel ready to start, I’ll bring poster paper and markers tomorrow.” I left the classroom and immediately went to raid the supply closet for art supplies, hoping that Miru would be more excited about the assignment when he was able draw on his interest and talent in drawing.

The three pieces of Miru’s personal narrative project are pictured in Appendix F. The first part of this assignment, called *My Storied Life* (Appendix F, Item 1), invited students to trace the stories that helped them to grow up, with emphasis on how the books and films they interacted with over the years had influenced them. Miru chose to craft his assignment around Pokémon trading cards, a role-playing game where interactions between players shape the story as it develops. Group storytelling is at the heart of this game as there are a variety of different cards and actions depend on the players’ decisions. In his comic, Miru displayed how the interactional storytelling element of this game facilitated his social development, and thus influenced his personal narrative of growth over time. In order to encourage students to write about their lives in greater specificity and detail, the next part of the assignment was to choose one small event I called a “kernel” from their original narrative to “pop” into a detailed exploration of what this one event meant for their overall life story. In part two of the assignment, titled *Personal Narrative*, Miru chose to expand panel two (Appendix F, Item 1) where he made his first friend in kindergarten (Appendix F, Item 2). Finally, in part three of the assignment, called *Reflecting on Growth*, students were asked to consider how this one

small event contributed to their overall development by discussing what they learned from it and how it may have affected their beliefs and values. In his *Reflecting on Growth* assignment (Appendix F, Item 3), Miru used a design that mirrors that of a Pokémon card to convey this information about himself. Here, Miru also composed poetry, mixing different modes to convey his learning about what friends mean to his life.

Throughout these different pieces of his project, Miru created a strong theme emphasizing the importance of friends to one's social development. Though his *My Storied Life* narrative details events of his life over the past 16 years, covering a lot of ground in only seven panels, two of the panels—accounting for nearly one third of Miru's life story—focused on how Pokémon trading cards have facilitated his entry into a supportive friend group, first in elementary school, and then again in middle school when he enrolled at Central Arts School. Over time, the reader sees Miru's friend group expand from his first friend in kindergarten to his high school friend group who have come to support each other throughout the years. This group is so close that Miru's poetic summary of the lesson he has learned focuses on how friends can be like family.

While the overall message of his narrative is positive, it is evident that Miru has not always found making friends to be easy. Miru's *My Storied Life* narrative and his *Personal Narrative* assignment conveyed how emotional the experience of entering a new social scene can be for students. Though Miru's initial encounter with Charlie, Miru's first friend, seemed to indicate that they became friends easily, Miru's second, expanded, version of this story as presented in part two showed a much more complex and emotionally fraught situation. In an effort to surface the nuances of these compositions, I utilized McCloud's (1993) framework for analyzing how different

elements of text and image work together in comics to create complex meanings to better understand Miru's works. Finally, I return to the world of the Pokémon to demonstrate the ways in which this game draws on multimodal literacy skills and community literacy practices which fostered Miru's developing literacies.

A Multimodal Perspective on Infusing Rigor Into Curriculum

Multimodal texts engage students in deep reflective thinking about the multiple ways of representing a topic. As they consider the rich cadre of multimodal tools available to them, including written text, pictures, voice, and moving image, students must consider the message they seek to convey along with how particular design features can contribute to this message. This entails not only the connotation of certain word choices, but also how images and speech carry meanings that traditional written text cannot capture (Kress, 2003).

In the genre of comics, words and pictures work together to create meaning and present powerful portrayals of human experience. As McCloud (1993) stated, for this reason, "comics have been firmly identified with the art of storytelling" (p. 152). Due to the versatility of the format, comics allow the creator to depict meaning without having to make the compromises necessary when forced to choose between text or image. As Ghiso and Low (2013) argued, "because the comics medium intrinsically blends semiotic systems, it can serve as an instrument for authors to represent dimensions of their life stories that may be difficult to convey with a single mode" (p. 27). The affordances offered by the genre of comics can assist students in representing the seen as well as the unseen, such as gesturing toward the world of emotions with the inclusion of a single tear, as seen in panel two of Miru's *Personal Narrative*.

While the ability to use text and images to convey meaning compounds the creator's ability to communicate with the reader, McCloud (1993) suggested that "the art of comics is as subtractive as it is additive" (p. 85). Creators must strike a balance between too much information and too little information. If too much information is revealed, the reader's imagination is not engaged, and the powerful force of reader participation is compromised. If too little information is revealed, confusion ensues, and the reader is not able to follow the story line. In order to strike this balance, creators must carefully select words and images that convey just enough information while making assumptions about what the reader, based on experiences and imagination, will be able to fill in for themselves (McCloud, 1993).

A multimodal analysis of Miru's *Personal Narrative*. In this section, I showcase my analysis of Miru's multimodal *Personal Narrative* assignment to make visible its complexities. I look to Miru's choices of text and image, and how they are designed to engage the reader as a fellow textual composer in making meaning (McCloud, 1993).

In order to surface the complex ways that image and words worked together in Miru's composition, I use these analytical tools to look closely at the panels of Miru's *Personal Narrative* text, and also supplement my analysis with selected images from Miru's *My Storied Life* and *Reflecting on Growth* texts to explore how these three texts worked together to create meaning.

Table 3

Multimodal Analysis Table

Framework for Analyzing Relative Contribution of Words-Images <i>(Adapted from McCloud, 1993)</i>		
Category	Definition	Appearances in Data
Word Specific	Pictures illustrate, but do not significantly augment the words, which are mostly a complete text.	Panels 4, 7, 8
Picture Specific	Pictures dominate and the words do not significantly add to the meaning of the image	Panel
Duo Specific	Words and pictures send the same message	Panel 6
Additive	Words augment the meaning of the image (or vice versa)	Panel 3
Parallel	Words and/or images follow different courses and do not intersect	Miru did not use this strategy
Montage	Words are integral parts of the picture	Miru did not use this strategy
Interdependent	Image plus words convey an idea that neither could convey by itself.	Panels 2 & 5
Framework for Analyzing Panel to Panel Relationships		
Moment to moment	The next panel picks up where the previous panel left off transitioning from one moment to the next in continuous fashion.	Panels 3 & 4
Action to action	The transition between two panels presents a single subject engaged in an action that begins in the first panel and concludes in the next.	Panel 6
Subject to subject	The two panels transition from one subject to a different subject.	Panel 7
Scene to scene	The two panels move the story across distances or time, forcing the reader to fill in the actions that happened in between.	Panels 2 & 8
Aspect to aspect	The two panels move between different aspects of a single place, event, idea, or mood.	Panel 5
Non-Sequitur	The two panels have no relationship to one another.	Miru did not use this strategy

Analysis of personal narrative. Looking to the combination of words and images helps to surface the balance of communicative resources Miru uses to create his text. Miru draws on five of the seven image/word constructions outlined by McCloud. While nearly every panel contains images, he incorporates word-specific panels three times. In these, Miru uses words to develop dialog between his main character and Charles. He also uses a word-specific panel to summarize the end of his story, making sure his reader is aware of the importance of these words through the use of capital letters, exclamation points, and bolding to infuse the words with emotion and capture the main points of the narrative.

The panels where he relies on words to tell the tale are the interactions that are more interesting textually than visually; however, when he needs to set the stage for the action, like in the opening panel, he chooses a picture specific panel. In Panel 1, Miru handles both the exposition and conflict of the story. We see a classroom scene that is easily recognizable to those familiar with U.S. elementary schools. Students circulate the room in indoor recess, while Miru is located in the corner. The interpersonal dilemma between Miru and his classmates is evidenced by the fact that two students seem to be talking about him, while another student walks away leaving Miru by himself. In Panel 1, we also see the conflict, via the clear separation between Miru and the other students. From the detailed images in Panel 1, the reader is pulled into the middle of the action in Miru's kindergarten classroom. Miru uses interdependent and duo-specific styles which rely on both words and images to capture the complete meaning for Panels 5 and 6. In these two panels, we see Miru and Charles bonding over their first Pokémon trade. The dialogue and images run parallel in that the images display the content of the boy's

conversation and allow readers to anchor their interpretation in the actions within the images which support the text.

Looking at transitions is one way to surface the way Miru engages the imagination of his reader. Miru draws on nearly every transition style except the non-sequitur (representative of no relationship). In his choices of transition, Miru varies his style, using each transition either once or twice. He uses scene-to-scene transfers when he pushes the timeline of the story forward, like in his move from Panel 1 to Panel 2. In Panel 1, the main character (himself) is part of a group of students represented, but in Panel 2, he has moved away from the group to show a graphic representation of his ostracism. Between Panels 2 to 3, Miru uses a moment-to-moment transition to document the effects of Charles's few words on the main character. This transition helps the reader to understand how much Charles's offer of friendship meant to Miru, by showing his face go from sad to excited, with his hands in the air in victory. In Panel 5, we see an example of aspect-to-aspect transition, which McCloud (1993) stated is a sophisticated transition but not often used in U.S. comics text. Panel 5 shows the same scene as Panel 6, but now the image is focused on the boys' outstretched hands holding their Pokémon decks. This transition shows the direct object of the boys' conversation in the former panel, which requires the reader to follow both the texts and the images, since the content diverges but the topic stays the same.

A more thorough panel-by-panel analysis can be found in the Appendix; however, this brief survey of the tools Miru used in his composition exemplifies the sophisticated choices he made in authoring his piece. First, he needed to consider the balance of content in each panel and drew on different ways of constructing this content through an

interplay of words and images, crafting a more complete meaning than either words or images would achieve alone. Then, he needed to consider how to organize the action across panels in a way that gives his reader enough information to make the connection, but also attends to the need to move along the story timeline, craft character, and engage the reader in adding up the disparate panels to one narrative whole. McCloud (1993) likened this work to a trapeze artist who in each panel “catches” the reader and gives some bits of information, before “letting go” of the reader to cross the gutter successfully by using the information they have and adding their imagination into the text to transform two separate panels into one single idea.

Cross-text analysis. The theme of friendship and the importance of the Pokémon narrative in solidifying Miru’s friendships over the years is one that he follows across all three parts of his narrative project. In his first representation in his *My Storied Life* comic, we see two pivotal points where Miru was challenged to make new friends. In his *My Storied Life* depiction, the meeting with Charles is far less complex, and takes shape as a positive interaction without the shades of vulnerability and emotional response depicted in his *Personal Narrative*.

In his initial version of events (Appendix F, Item 1, Panel 2), Miru sits by himself playing Pokémon, and Charles comes up to him and asks if he wants to be friends. Using this image to inform the *Personal Narrative* panels, it seems that Miru was ostracized by his classmates for his interest in Pokémon, a rejection of one of his central personal interests, and therefore helps the reader to understand how difficult it must have been for him to share this interest with Charles, opening himself up to possible rejection again. In this overview of Miru’s story, we lose the detail provided by the more narrowly focused

Personal Narrative, but the theme remains the same. Miru's words accompanying the image continue to emphasize how his friendship with Charles to the present day. Indeed, this is a very special relationship to Miru, one that provides entry into a growing group of supportive and caring friends.

When Miru begins secondary school, he is again placed in a situation where he must gain acceptance by his peers (Appendix F, Item 1, Panel 5), but this time the reader sees him as the initiator of a friendship with Leon. In this panel, Miru again faces potential rejection, but instead of secluding himself, he opens himself up to a classmate by making an overture of friendship.

Here, Miru opens conversation by saying "Don't I know you?"—his hand outstretched in a friendly questioning gesture. While Leon looks surprised and nervous, with a tear in his right eye, Miru in contrast looks calm and confident. This image echoes the image from Panel 2 of Miru's *Personal Narrative* where he is the one with a tear in his eye. The exchange presented here, however, is a reversal of roles. This time Miru is the one pursuing friendship with a classmate under emotional duress. His words at the bottom of the picture state, "At 14 years old I met Charles's friend Leon in Global and since then we've been friends." In the panel that follows, we see Miru's friend group expand again to include five characters, displaying the reward Miru has seen from continuing to extend himself to others.

Finally, in Miru's *Reflecting on Growth* assignment (Appendix F, Item 3), he solidifies the lessons he has learned from these experiences through a poem distilling the importance of friendship. The importance of Pokémon to this understanding is represented through his decision to depict this reflection in the style of a Pokémon card.

In the top left-hand corner are the words “Level Up,” which is the language used in Pokémon when a character evolves into a more complex version of itself. Each of the two lessons that follow are prefaced by a star, a symbol in the Pokémon world indicating the rareness and value of a card. The lessons he lists after these stars are significant for Miru, who admitted in a follow-up conversation to being rather shy as a child and from a very small family consisting of only his mother and himself. He lists the “Lessons I Learned from the Experience” as “To be more outgoing/Make More Friends” and that “Friends - are Like Family.”

In the box of a Pokémon card, the character is depicted, and Miru has mirrored this by including an image of himself in the bottom right corner. He has a big smile on his face and shouts using capital letters and exclamation points, “I LOVE ALL MY Friends!!!” This image echoes the image present on his favorite Tyranitar card, where the Tyranitar is depicted with his mouth open in a monstrous roar.

The text of Miru’s poem summarizes his understanding of what it means to have good friends: “friends are like family, some of them are here to the end.” For a child without brothers and sisters, the friends he has made over the years have taken on the role of family. His multiple references to loving his friends display the extent to which he feels fulfilled and supported by them. Significantly, these relationships were all brokered inside the different schools Miru attended over the course of his education, shedding light on Miru’s statements regarding the supportive environment of Central Arts as a “home away from my home.”

A View of Rigor Constructed via National Discourses

In this section, I discuss the perspective of rigor as informed by the national educational discourses of standardization and accountability, in an effort to set the context for events to come (described later in the chapter) which highlight how educators in leadership and administrative roles (mis)interpret what it means to create rigorous educational programming. While the idea of raising rigor in schools is widely assumed to be a positive step, the way that administrators and teachers have come to define rigor at Central Arts has been based on interpretations of the Common Core State Standards. I contrast my multimodal analysis of Miru's text with an alternative analysis based in the discourse of standards and accountability to demonstrate what this perspective highlights at the expense of multimodal complexity.

One of the ways we see the trickle-down effect from institutional discourses to the classroom is in how rigorous instruction is defined. Standards-focused educational discourses highlight traditional modes of composition and are commonly plagued by certain limitations in defining and enacting rigor in regard to curriculum (Blackburn, 2012). Upon adoption of the Common Core State Standards in 2009, rigor became a buzz word in districts across the United States. Quality instruction, assignments, and assessments were described as rigorous and relevant, but 10 years later, there is still no consensus on how we define rigor across the field of education. This has led to a tendency for administrators and teachers to define rigor as simply making the curriculum more "objectively difficult" for students (Sztabnik, 2015), an effort that is rife with assumptions about what students should know and be able to do by the end of each grade in order to be college- and career-ready upon graduation from high school. These

assumptions by and large support Eurocentric content and White middle- and upper-class norms of literacy participation and ignore the wealth of community knowledge and resources of People of Color (Yosso, 2005).

Blackburn (2012) identified several common misconceptions about rigor that have become ingrained into our educational understandings. She pointed out that often rigor is associated with doing more work with less support; thus, it is often assumed that not all students will be capable of accessing a rigorous curriculum. Instead, these students will be in need of remediation and may never succeed beyond a mastery of “the basics.” Based on these conceptualizations, increasing rigor involves pushing resources and skills previously encountered by older or more highly trained students down into lower grades; however, simply giving students more complex resources (e.g., harder texts, more involved writing assignments) does not mean that students are benefitting from a rigorous education (Sztabnik, 2015). Simply assigning an advanced text to students does not mean they are understanding or applying what they are learning, and if we understand rigor as doing more with less support, then teachers may not build in adequate scaffolding to ensure student success (Blackburn, 2012). Another common way rigor is interpreted in schools is by piling on more work faster—giving more reading, more assessments, and expecting this to happen in increasingly shorter windows of time (Sztabnik, 2015). By assigning more work more quickly, with less support, students who cannot keep up are assumed to need remediation (Blackburn, 2012). The emphasis is thus on individual achievement rather than calling into question any of the underlying assumptions about what counts as a rigorous curriculum, who benefits, and who decides.

Rigor by the rubric. One way that notions of rigor found in the discourses of standardization and accountability are translated into symbolic power is through the use of writing rubrics that attempt to quantify the writing process into numerical measures. Hout (1996) pointed out that “Writing assessment procedures, as they have been traditionally constructed, are designed to produce reliable (that is, consistent) numerical scores of individual student papers,” but inherent in this practice is the assumption that “student ability in writing, as in anything else, is a fixed, consistent, and acontextual human trait” (pp. 549-550). When attempting to measure student writing in quantitative terms, administrators and teachers often look to nationally recognized measures like CCSS-aligned national tests, state tests such as Regents in New York, and Advanced Placement tests of writing. While these tests and associated rubrics facilitate a representation of students’ ability to write so that teachers, administrators, and district officials can compare performance from school to school and year to year, these large-scale measures based on false definitions of “rigor” ignore individual matters of context regarding student performance.

At Central Arts, one push to increase rigor has been to develop AP Literature and AP Language courses into the English Language Arts offerings at the school. Supported by the College Board as an official College Preparation-level curriculum, AP English Language Arts courses carry potential college credit if students perform well enough on the year-end test; generally, this means a score of 4 or 5. Like other year-end high-stakes tests, often the effect of such pressures is that the writing students do in the course becomes anchored on AP rubrics based on the test scoring. Below, I outline a sample rubric used to assess students in Narrative Essay writing in AP Language classes. The

complete rubric appears in Appendix G; however, here I highlight the criteria for “A”-level work, which would carry a score of 5 on the AP Test. I then include the evidence from Miru’s text to demonstrate how his composition aligned (or not) with the guidelines listed in the rubric. Finally, I reflect on what the rubric highlights, as compared to what is missed when students are assessed only on these categories.

Table 4

Sample AP Narrative Rubric

Sample AP Language and Composition Narrative Writing Rubric	
Category	Evidence
Clearly and concisely narrates a story that advances an argument and a persuasive purpose. Demonstrates with great depth and insight how reflection on experience led to personal growth or realization.	<p>Miru’s composition focuses on the theme of friendship. He develops a detailed story of making his first friend in elementary school, and how this experience has helped him to form a peer group to support him. His key realization as outlined in his reflection is on the ways in which close friends can become like family and seriously influence a person’s future development.</p> <p>Score – 5/5</p>
Expertly blends narration, exposition, description , dialogue, and reflection throughout the essay.	<p>Miru narrates his story using text (and descriptive images). He infuses dialog to build the story, and ends with a reflection that ties back to the theme of friendship</p> <p>Score – 3/5 Exposition and description are achieved through attention to image. Only narration, dialog, and reflection are captured through text; therefore, Miru would lose points here if the images are not counted as evidence.</p>

Table 4 (continued)

Category	Evidence
<p>Makes highly effective use of language to support the argument and influence the reader:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistently demonstrates deliberate and highly effective diction. • Regularly uses rich sensory imagery. • Uses highly effective detail whenever appropriate. • Uses a wide variety of syntactical structures to focus the reader on what is important in each sentence. • Varies the length of sentences and the types of sentences. • Clearly demonstrates the writer’s attitude toward the subject through the tone of the composition. 	<p>Miru consistently relies on the language of text (and image) to engage the reader while moving them through the story.</p> <p>He chooses communicative resources that are most effective to task and purpose (and uses rich images to enhance detail and focus the readers’ attention on what is important in each panel).</p> <p>His attitude toward the subject is clearly communicated through the use of emotion in text (and image), as well as the emphasis on the value he places on friendships as formative relationships in his life.</p> <p>Score – 2/5 Though Miru accomplishes the criteria, he does not rely on language to do it. Looking only at the text and not the images, Miru would lose points for having syntactical errors, and using image instead of text to add detail and focus.</p>
<p>Is organized in a highly effective fashion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proper and effective paragraphing pervades the composition. • Story successfully begins in the middle of the action, with necessary exposition following thereafter <p>Succeeds at addressing a particular target audience.</p>	<p>Miru’s composition is organized containing a central conflict, multiple characters, and the necessary exposition and denouement at the beginning and end. Miru targets his audience by engaging them in creating meaning from his use of image and text.</p> <p>Score – 3/5 Though the composition is organized and effective, Miru does not use “paragraphing” as such, and the exposition and denouement are primarily handled via images and not text alone.</p>
<p>Contains no flaws in grammar, mechanics, or usage. Is double-spaced, typed, and titled originally and appropriately.</p>	<p>Score – 0/5</p>
Total Score	13/25 = 52% F

Lost in the “Gutter” Between Discourses of Standardization and Multimodality

My analysis of Miru’s *Personal Narrative* project displays the gulf between rigor, as defined through discourses of standardization, and rigor, as defined in the research on multimodal literacies. Imposing a standardized rubric on a multimodal text forces one to consider the work done by image as a deficit in the text, while multimodal analysis looks to images as an asset to communication. This contrast in perspective results in Miru’s multimodal narrative, assessed solely on words, appearing as an unsuccessful composition; however, the multimodal analysis clearly attends to the complex decisions Miru made in engaging his audience and conveys the powerful emotional and descriptive impact of his personal journey.

Attending to this tension between standardized “rigor” and multimodal complexity is important when developing composition assignments for students. The above analysis accentuates how, although Miru’s text is a complex multimodal composition, the lack of written text as the central form of communication makes it subject to criticism by administrators who hew toward traditional modes of composition and standards-aligned assessments. In considering what the AP Narrative Composition rubric makes visible and what it occludes, I drew on Jago’s (2011) principle of constructive feedback, “first, do no harm” wherein she pointed out that “students, like most adults, are insecure about their writing. In order to mask their fear of inadequacy, some choose to turn in either nothing at all or papers that have so obviously been dashed off in a rush that the work could not possibly reflect the writer in any real way” (p. 10). To facilitate Miru’s storytelling, I offered multimodality as a strategy to break through his initial hesitance. While I believe this was an effective approach in creating multiple

options for students to take up the topics and display the narrative writing skills they were learning, the administrative response outlined below showcases the challenges that I faced in my valuing of multimodality as a legitimate form of composition.

One question that administrators asked repeatedly with regard to my assessment of student compositions was “Where’s the rubric for that?” Both my co-teacher and Assistant Principal asked for a rubric with each assignment. The Assistant Principal even asked me to include the filled-out rubrics on the bulletin board showcasing student work. The resistance of multimodal forms to quantitative measures endorsed by the standards and accountability movement can make success look like failure. This has the effect of limiting what modes of communication are available to teachers and students and disengaging students from potentially affirming curricular opportunities.

Bosselman (2015) noted that while misinterpretations of rigor are all too common among teachers and administrators alike, they are

too narrow and rigid for our work in schools. It is not enough to define rigor as doing 10th grade work with 6th graders...or to follow a narrow prescriptive curriculum that does not incorporate what we know people need to be successful in the 21st century. And it certainly isn't enough to score well on a multiple-choice test. Clearly, we need to create a new definition for rigor. (Para. 2)

In working toward this new definition, we must come to understand that rigor is not inherent in a text or an assignment, but is instead a function of what students do with these texts and assignments. It will not look uniform across the board but different in every class and for different students. It is not the amount of information students display, but the depth of understanding (Sztabnik, 2015).

Standardizing Terms and Values

The critical incident I describe in this section occurred as a result of my attempts (as outlined in the previous section) to negotiate the institutional discourses of standardization in an effort to find room for multimodal literacies. In the following section, I look to the central disconnects in determining what literacy is, what writing is for, and how we define rigorous instruction. Through presenting contrasting viewpoints and connecting them to the larger struggle over how we assign value to certain resources, activities, and assessments, I create a picture of what it means to teach well at this site by identifying and interrogating what is considered valuable knowledge. Finally, I argue that assigning value to terms like literacy, genres, and purposes of writing occurs within the paradigm of standardization at Central Arts, and thus acts to discipline teachers' curricular and pedagogical choices in the classroom.

Shortly after Miru turned this assignment in to me, I was notified that elective courses would be included in a showcase intended to educate students about the elective offerings at Central Arts in an effort to raise enthusiasm and interest in these courses (Correspondence_12/12/17). I was asked to bring a sampling of student work to display and wanted to make sure the work I showed would spark student interest and facilitate a conversation about the range and styles of writing my storytelling class composed. I immediately chose Miru's texts as the central showpiece of this display for several reasons. First, I was proud of the work Miru had done, and believed it was a wonderful example of multimodal literacy and storytelling. Second, the organization of the event did not lend itself to students quietly reading typed pages of students' written work. Though I had many solid examples of more traditional personal narratives written using only

words, I was interested in attracting students who wanted to explore storytelling in multiple forms and therefore I sought to display an example that would attract the attention of students who were graphic artists as well as talented writers.

As the Principal and Assistant Principal circulated the room, I was excited to showcase Miru's work (Fieldnotes_Showcase_12/16/17). I had been told by other teachers at the school that Miru had been labeled as a student who "struggled" both socially and academically by the administration, and therefore believed that they would be impressed by his beautiful projects. To me, they displayed not only the ability to tackle the academic challenge of composing multimodal narratives, but also his social acumen in making and keeping close friends over the years. When the Principal arrived at my table, she silently flipped through Miru's work, looking cynical. She said nothing and walked away. I followed her progress with my eye, noticing that she immediately went over to talk with the Assistant Principal. Then the Assistant Principal came to my table. She flipped through the work, then looked up and said, "Where's the writing?" I was perplexed by this response as the images were filled with words, if that was what she was looking for, but beyond that, the narrative taken as a whole communicated in ways that words alone could not. It was evident to me that she did not see what I saw when she looked at these assignments.

I was disappointed by this response (Fieldnotes_Showcase_12/16/17), and surprised when I received an email from the Assistant Principal asking to meet with me to look over my curriculum (Correspondence_12/21/17). The curriculum meeting was attended by myself, the Assistant Principal, the University-based supervisor in charge of

this particular collaborative course, and Ms. Nossner, the co-teacher¹ with whom I had been assigned to work. In this meeting, many disconnects between my conceptions of rigorous literacy instruction and the administration's surfaced. In this section, I examine portions of this meeting, which I represent through an analysis of fieldnotes, correspondence, personal reflective journal, and my triangulation of these data via personal communication with critical friends. Throughout, I pause to reflect on how the ways we define literacy, writing, and rigorous instruction in schools can serve to reproduce institutional discourses of power and limit teachers' ability to negotiate engaging curriculum aligned with student interests and relevant to their culture.

Defining Terms to Resonate with National Discourses

The curriculum meeting began with a discussion of the purpose of the course and the focus of my curriculum. I reiterated my belief that the course was intended as a creative writing elective, since the school was unable to provide the necessary resources to support filmmaking. One of the central conflicts in developing the elective course I was responsible for teaching at Central Arts revolved around the simple issue of what to call the course. I wanted the course title to reflect its content and therefore suggested a title indicating the multimodal and critical literacy elements of the course. In the 2016-2017 school year, the course had been called Critical Film Studies; however, for 2017-2018, the school-university partnership had lost the funding from a 21st Century

¹ I was assigned a number of different co-teachers over the 2 years I collaborated with Central Arts. The state department of education requires a certified staff member to be in the room while I teach. This was initially intended to be a collaboratively taught course; however, because of the school's inability to assign a consistent co-teacher, my teaching partner was not an active part of planning or instruction, but instead acted as a liaison regarding administrative issues such as taking daily attendance, notifying me of changes to the school day for assemblies or school trips, and so on.

Community Learning Grant which had allowed for students to work with a professional filmmaker (Correspondence_7/25/17). I explained that my suggestions for the course title had been designed to reflect this change and asked why they had been rejected in favor of a title I did not feel was reflective of the curriculum (Fieldnotes_Admin. Meeting_1/12/18). I did not think it was fair for students to enter the course believing it was a film course, so I requested we change the title to indicate that the course would focus on creative writing with elements of film and image study. I suggested Critical Literacy Studies, Literacy Through Storytelling, and then Storytelling Through Multimodal Literacy, all of which were rejected (Correspondence_7/27/17). Because of my commitments to a wide definition of literacy, and my belief in the importance of reading both the world and the word (Freire, 1977), I advocated for including the word “literacy” in the title because I felt that it was representative of a wider array of ways to read and write. In my email to the Assistant Principal, before our meeting regarding my course and curriculum, I explained my choice to focus on composing narratives and justified my decisions by saying:

This year I wanted to focus more broadly on storytelling in all of its forms.... Therefore, we are focusing on analyzing and composing narrative forms. They get a lot of prep in argumentative writing in their other classes, but they have fewer opportunities to do creative compositions. I hope doing multimodal literacy (reading and writing texts that include words, images, moving images, sound, and speech) will teach them literacy skills, make them more familiar with digital composing (presentations and short films), and give them a creative outlet. (Correspondence_10/6/17)

Despite my attempts to explain my perspective of literacy to the Assistant Principal, the name of the course was not changed to reflect the curriculum I was developing, but instead it was given the title Film Through Literature. When students arrived in class with their new schedules, they were confused because they had come to

the course expecting it to be a film course, and I was frustrated as I had suggested several titles which had been rejected in favor of a title that I did not really even understand (Researcher Journal_10/6/17). Was I supposed to be teaching film by having students read literature? The course was intended to be a composition class; were we supposed to be writing literature? Was I supposed to ask students to write screenplays from literary texts? We no longer had the resources to actually make these films, so this seemed like a futile effort. I finally just explained the situation to students and told them that, despite what their schedules said, the course was called The Art of Storytelling, and that is what we would be doing: storytelling through the arts.

I told the Assistant Principal that this was the primary reason I had wanted the word “film” to be removed from the course title, in favor of “literacy,” as we would be composing multimodal texts; however, film would not form the basis of this composition. I asked why the decision was made to keep film and change “literacy” to “literature” when the course was clearly not designed to be a literature-focused course. Her response was focused on the implications of the word “literacy” as opposed to the word “literature.” She said there was no way we could include the word “literacy” in the course name because it indicated that the course was designed to teach the basic skills of reading and writing. She believed that if this was included in the course title, colleges would assume that the student had been in need of remediation in reading and writing and was placed into a developmental literacy course as a result. In contrast, including the word “literature” indicated to colleges that the student had taken an elective literature course which was far more desirable, in her opinion, to potential colleges.

Terms as symbols of power. While my frustration remained, her answer pointed to how the ways we talk about literacy in education research can at times be far removed from the ways in which it is defined by the public school system. I felt the tension of being stuck between the discourses of schooling that universities would recognize on students' transcripts, and my personal commitments to disrupt these discourses when they were not in service of supporting students. With the acceptance of the CCSS, the responsibility for teaching literacy was distributed across the curriculum. The Key Design Considerations, an accompanying document which explains the underlying commitments of the CCSS, state the need for literacy across the curriculum in order for "college and career ready students to be proficient in reading complex informational text independently in a variety of content areas" (<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/introduction/key-design-consideration/>); however, the attention to literacy for college and career, as well as the emphasis on reading complex and informational texts, indicate a conceptualization of literacy as a technical skill, and thus resonates with an autonomous model of literacy (Street & Street, 1984).

As a result of all teachers now being responsible for literacy, districts and schools need to reflect on what exactly the definition of literacy was. Many English Language Arts teachers were also left to distinguish what they teach from what everyone else at the school teaches. Faced with the task of defining the role of literature teacher, Cronin (2014) wrote that "Literature...is the art of reading and writing. It is cerebral and visceral—explicit and implicit," while "Literacy is the ability to decode text and to produce text to make meaning" (p. 46). She equated a focus on the basic skills of literacy at the expense of teaching literature to be like an approach that "promotes paint-by-

number illustrations at the expense of a Sistine Chapel” (p. 46). Cronin identified the association of literacy with basic skills and the reading of literature with higher-order thinking skills.

The association of literacy with the basic skills of reading and writing speaks to the misunderstanding between my Assistant Principal and myself, leading me to reflect on the disconnects between the school’s institutional discourses and the literacy research discourses that resonated with me. I recognized the extent to which terms could become symbols of power, which held power in varying degrees depending on context. While the dominant discourses of critical, multimodal, and community literacies are prevalent in the field of literacy research, this school reflected the dominant discourse of national education reform wherein “[t]he school culture can be seen to reflect the dominant class and, so too, the cultures of literacy and literature embedded within the school culture” (Barrera, 1992, p. 236). While I defined literacy to resonate with research discourses with which I connect, the school associated this term with remediation. In contrast, a literature elective course was associated with enrichment, and thus this term was highlighted by the administration on students’ transcripts.

Reproducing Traditional Values in Reading and Writing

I had been told to bring student “data” to the meeting to share, and in light of the Assistant Principal’s response to Miru’s work, I carefully considered what I selected. Despite the videos of students I had performing their slam poetry in front of the class (Student Artifact_Bobbi_*Personal Narrative*; Student Artifact_Alex_*Personal Narrative*) and Miru’s wonderful example of a multimodal *Personal Narrative*, I made sure to come with ample examples of more traditional personal narratives that students had composed

(Correspondence_1/2/18). Though the Assistant Principal was not my evaluator, this meeting was a high-stakes one in which my work at the school was being called into question. I decided that it was best to show the Assistant Principal what I assumed to be the kind of work that fit with her conception of rigorous instruction. Upon seeing these examples, the Assistant Principal was more encouraging (Fieldnotes_Admin.Meeting_1/12/18; confirmed in Correspondence_1/15/18).

Satisfied with the fact that students were doing what she recognized as “writing” in the class, the Assistant Principal next asked to see my plans for the upcoming units. I had planned to lead the students through an exploration of resistance poetry written by some very well-known poets. In this unit, students would read poetry by Maya Angelou, Langston Hughes, Martin Espada, and others (Appendix B). As a class, we would discuss the ways in which these poets used the form to create their own poems of resistance. Upon seeing that this upcoming unit was focused on reading and analyzing famous poets, the Assistant Principal changed her positioning toward the class (Fieldnotes_Admin.Meeting_1/12/18; confirmed in Correspondence_1/15/18). Instead of questioning my motives and methods, she became excited about this upcoming unit and asked that I share these resources with her as she was planning to offer a writing course to begin at the change of the semester. She asked to be invited to the culminating poetry celebration and to be provided with copies of the poetry book the class would be preparing (Correspondence_2/26/18). Clearly, she could see the value of reading classic literature.

Reflecting on text complexity and reproduction. In addition to literature for the classroom being commonly defined as “(a) written, (b) commercially produced, and (c) in English” (Barrera, 1992, p. 237), there is a tendency to value works of literature

hierarchically. While Espada, Angelou, and Hughes represent a widening of the canon to include Black and Latinx authors, they still fit the definition of widely accepted literature for the high school classroom. I had initially hoped to use these texts as jumping-off points for a photo essay and a possible short film project, but I now questioned the level of acceptance the Assistant Principal would have for my efforts to waver from more “traditional” reading and writing activities. Applebee (1992) pointed out the tendency for teachers and administrators to reproduce the hierarchy of value in regard to texts because they see the familiar titles of the high school canon as having literary merit, appealing to students and being unlikely to provoke negative reactions from parents and administrators.

The CCSS supports this hierarchy of literary texts through its definition of a complex text and suggested textual resources to accompany the standards. The CCSS measures text complexity qualitatively and quantitatively, also taking into consideration the purpose for which the student is reading. Because the meaning of text complexity is layered with multiple factors that are difficult to measure and dependent on context, the accompanying suggested text lists are an essential guide to anchoring perceptions of text complexity (<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/standard-10-range-quality-complexity/texts-illustrating-the-complexity-quality-range-of-student-reading-6-12/>). A brief analysis of this list, however, makes one reflect on the politics of power regarding text complexity. Out of 20 novels and short stories listed as an example of a complex text, only one was written after the year 2000. Eleven of the texts were written by White men, four by White women, totaling 15 out of 20 complex texts by White authors. There were three texts by Black women, one text by an Asian American man, and one text by

an Indian American woman. Texts like *Tom Sawyer* and *Jane Eyre* are no doubt complex reads for Youth of Color, but this is not because of a quantitative measure of readability. These texts are far removed from students' experiences, both historically and culturally.

The association of text complexity with many of the texts and authors of the traditional canon (e.g., Twain, Steinbeck, Poe, etc.) sends an implicit message about the value of these texts. As a result, other more contemporary texts presenting diverse voices and perspectives may not be seen as complex due to not appearing on official lists. The list of complex texts in the CCSS is merely a suggested list, which does not hold any power of enforcement, yet many districts—this city included—model their conception of complex texts around the CCSS suggestions (<https://www.engageny.org/resource/grades-9-12-ela-curriculum-map>). The school administration has the power to authorize national discourses of accountability and standardization through approval or criticism of curriculum plans and pedagogical choices. In my case, the Assistant Principal's clear preference for more traditional reading and writing activities led to a reproduction of the status quo in my classroom, though I attempted to resist where I could using curriculum and pedagogy informed by my critical stance. In the following section, I outline the suggestions for moving forward from this meeting made by my co-teacher and discuss the pressures institutional discourses can have on curricular choices.

Symbolic Power and Curricular Choice

When asked about our future plans beyond this proposed poetry unit, my co-teacher, Ms. Nossier, spoke up. She mentioned that many of the students in this elective course were also in her AP Language and Literature course (Researcher Journal_10/14/17) and expressed frustration with students who she felt did not take the course

seriously. She attributed what she perceived as a lack of effort to the fact that the coursework was not as rigorous as what she assigned in AP Language and Literature (Researcher Journal_11/12/17). It was not a surprise to me then that when the Assistant Principal asked for her input on how to make the course more rigorous, she suggested we include assignments asking students to complete writing tasks similar to those they would find on the AP Language and Literature Exam. She stated her belief that an elective writing class should support students' performance on writing assignments aligned with the CCSS focus on argumentation (Fieldnotes_Admin.Meeting_1/12/18; confirmed in Correspondence_2/2/18). As I noted above in my justification for the course, this was at odds with my intention to provide students with something different than what they were already doing in their coursework in English and History courses, where significant emphasis was given toward expository and argumentative writing.

The unit proposed by my co-teacher would focus on argumentation using a document-based question assignment, common to the AP History exams. This type of question requires students to read a set of pre-selected texts in response to a question posed by the teacher. They read, analyze, and discuss the different arguments presented by the texts to argue for or against the topic in question (*Artifact_Argumentative Letter Assignment*). This type of question asks students to exercise many of the reading skills emphasized in the CCSS and in response compose an argumentative synthesis, which is the type of essay assignment seen on many state and national tests of writing proficiency for students. I balked at the rigidity and lack of choice inherent in this assignment, but in an effort to compromise, told her that she could take the lead on designing this unit, and

then we would come together once this assignment was over and decide how to follow up.

The meeting described above had significant impact on the final unit I taught at Central Arts. In the following section, I describe how the two attempts at organizing a unit based on exploring the same topic produced different responses from both students and teachers. I briefly present the unit designed by Ms. Nossier, our conflicting interpretations of student success on the final assessment, and my attempt to follow up with an inquiry-based exploration to challenge and extend the students' thinking. I argue that the symbolic power of national discourses of standardization and accountability guided Ms. Nossier's choice in organizing the unit of study. This discourse, supported by the administration's oversight in approving curricular plans and assessing teacher effectiveness, can at times lead teachers away from more expansive curricular and pedagogical choices if these resources and methods are not overtly sanctioned at the school.

The discourse followed rigidly. As discussed in Chapter IV, about midway through the year the school community was rocked by rumors of reorganization that students and teachers felt inspired to speak out against. In discussing the students' response to this news, my co-teacher and I decided that this topic was of interest to students and could provide an engaging exploration through writing for them. After our initial conversation, I asked my co-teacher to take the lead in designing the first foray into this topic. She had expressed interest in creating an AP Exam-inspired synthesis question using the DBQ ("document-based question") format, and in the spirit of collaboration and

compromise, I decided to step back and encourage her to lead class during this part of the unit.

The DBQ she designed asked the students to consider the following question: “After reading the following articles, write an argumentative letter to the Panel for Education Policy comparing and contrasting public versus charter school education.” The accompanying articles were taken from newspapers like the *New York Daily News* and *The New York Times* and addressed different aspects of the debate between whether charter schools or public schools are better at addressing the educational needs of the city’s students. Students were asked to read the articles, then compose their response (Artifact_Argumentative Letter Assignment). The expectation was that students would work quietly, drawing evidence from the articles, and then craft their response using the AP Language and Literature Rubric as a touchstone for what a successful letter would look like. Students turned the assignments in to my co-teacher on Friday, and we planned to meet on Monday to discuss the responses (Correspondence_2/2/18).

When I came into her classroom on Monday, my co-teacher was sitting at her desk reading over the student responses to the assignment. “How did they do?” I asked. She responded, “These responses are awful. They didn’t even follow the directions. If I used the rubric to score them, they would all be failing” (Researcher Journal_2/5/18). I sat down to read the responses, and I saw that she was right in saying that the students had not followed her directions; however, my assessment of the quality of the letters was very different. They were passionate and confident in their questioning of the district’s critical attention towards Central Arts. They sidestepped the debate about public versus charter schools and spoke directly to the issue as they saw it: the assessment of their

school as “failing” and the injustice of this assumption. I featured many quotes from these responses in Chapter IV to signal how students felt about their school community and the injustices they identified with regard to the prospective changes to it.

Interrogating the frame. Despite the disappointment of my co-teacher regarding the students’ success on the assignment as measured by the AP rubric, I felt that the effort was successful in that students offered thoughtful responses to an issue that directly impacted their education. My co-teacher had designed the assignment as a way for the students to display their academic skills in using the form of argumentation and evidence to the Panel for Education Policy. While the students did not address charter versus public school education or include evidence from the articles, they did address an ongoing issue for which school and district administrators had found no easy solution, and they accurately pointed out areas for growth at the school in addition to legitimate concerns with the district’s approach to the problem. I believed that the choice they made to focus on the root of the matter, and the evidence drawn from their personal experiences they used to support their arguments, did display an understanding of argumentation.

In teaching about argumentation, students are encouraged to use the rhetorical triangle which takes into consideration audience, task, and purpose. They are taught that context matters. It is integral to a successful argument to consider the context to which the argument refers. The topic of charter versus public schools is very broad and complex, and without attention to context, it is hard to argue for one being better than the other. In their responses to the prompt, students held context as a centrally important aspect of their argument. The evidence that they presented to the P.E.P. was information that could not be learned from reading a newspaper article or research study on the

topic—it came directly from their perspective as the ones who were impacted by district policies. They presented counter-narratives that added nuance to the evidence base used to make these decisions (see Chapter IV), and they did so by drawing on the rhetorical tools they had been taught. They used Ethos in reflecting on the length of time and amount of experience they had at this particular school location. They reflected on the changes they had seen come and go during their time at Central Arts and proved that having spent more time as students at the school than many of the teaching and administrative staff, their opinion could be trusted to be accurate and informed (Student Artifact_Mercedes *Argumentative Letter*). They used Pathos by discussing the importance of the school to their personal development, the care and concern teachers and students shows for one another, and their feelings of familial acceptance at Central Arts (Student Artifact_Miru_ *Argumentative Letter*; Student Artifact_Alex_ *Argumentative Letter*). Finally, they used Logos in identifying their own growth as displayed on district-approved measures such as their class grades, honor roll status, performance on Regents tests, and improvement on IEP goals (Student Artifact_Venus_ *Argumentative Letter*). It seemed false to measure these efforts as unsuccessful because of the students' choice to alter the focus of their letter and use different evidence when they clearly used many of the techniques of argumentation successfully.

Enrichment through inquiry. In discussing how we should move forward from this assignment, my co-teacher was discouraged and felt that the student responses were further evidence of her assessment that they did not take the class seriously. My approach was different. I saw that they were clearly engaged in the topic and believed that this engagement could be used as fuel for a larger research project examining the deeper

reasons for school and community change (Researcher Journal_2/5/18). I used the students' passionate responses to guide the class into a multimodal exploration of gentrification in the community and how it affected students at Central Arts. As described in Chapter IV, students engaged in a gallery walk that asked them to consider the history of the neighborhood, its artistic legacy, and the current effects of gentrification in the area. Students then presented what they had learned about these topics to their classmates and the class discussed the effects of gentrification they observed around them on a daily basis.

One student in particular, Mo, showed a tremendous change in perspective once the class had researched the context by which Central Arts was surrounded. My co-teacher had initially held up Mo's response as the weakest argumentative letter and was nearly in tears as she explained that this showed that students did not care that the school was in danger of reorganization. In truth, his response was very brief and did not show as deep an understanding of the problem faced by Central Arts as some of the other students. Here is Mo's response in its entirety: "I feel that if the middle school was to be taken out of [Central Arts] it would be a benefit. The high school will have more room and there would be more focus on the high school with extra activities and extra tutoring and more everything in general" (Student Artifact_Mo_Argumentative Letter). While he was correct in asserting that limiting Central Arts to just Grades 9-12 would allow the administration to focus the opportunities and resources to a smaller group of students, which could in turn improve test scores and graduation rates, he did not pause to consider possible negative outcomes of this change.

After engaging with the different materials in the gallery walk, Mo actively participated in the discussion around the effects of gentrification in the neighborhood. The class started discussing the topic widely, as evidenced throughout their own disparate neighborhoods across the city and determined that efforts to “clean up” certain parts of these neighborhoods were good, but these efforts also had unintended consequences that forced many long-time residents out to make room for the largely White middle-class gentrifiers. The class then focused on the street that Central Arts occupies, pointing out that when they had begun their education at Central Arts, the neighboring buildings were part of a public housing development which had been known for drug and gang activity (Classroom Transcript_2/12/18).

The class discussed the changes they saw to the block as the city focused on renovating first one side, then the other side of the street, noting that the block looked better now and fewer people were outside hanging out because of the installation of cameras and an intercom system to discourage loitering. In order to accomplish this renovation, students noted that the residents were moved out of their homes, and they asked, “Where did these residents go?” It was clear that the residents would have had to move out of their homes in order for the renovations to take place as the buildings they had lived in were being totally gutted, leaving no possibility of them living in the units as the renovations happened, yet no one was able to answer where these residents had been moved to (Classroom Transcript_2/12/18). Students suggested that the residents were moved to a different housing development, but after the research we had done looking at the effects of gentrification over time, they were not convinced that these residents would be able to move back into the newly renovated buildings, although many of them had

called this block home for many years. It seemed unlikely that the city would move them out temporarily, only to move them back when work was finished.

At this point in the conversation, Mo made the key comment linking our discussion about gentrification and the tendency of gentrifiers to look at all change as positive without considering the effects on the community to the struggle to save Central Arts: “they don’t know what it is, so they don’t care...like this school.... Like nobody know what this school means to me. And these people, whoever, the government, they try and take it away” (Classroom Transcript_2/12/18). I had hoped that students would make this link when I developed the gallery walk. I had seen them getting closer and closer geographically to the school’s location, but I wondered who would finally make the link. I thought it was very meaningful that the person who had made this connection was the same one that my co-teacher had assumed did not care about the school because of his perceived lack of effort on the argumentative letter assignment. The student who was most successful in this follow-up activity was the one who had been singled out as deficit in the more assessment-aligned activity.

Reflecting on Rigor in Reading and Writing

Teachers and administrators alike discuss giving students multiple opportunities to access a topic and different options in displaying the depth of their understanding, but often these same people assume that when students’ responses are initially limited or superficial, there is a need to simplify the ways in which we present information. This instance shows how powerful learning can become when students are asked to inquire into a complex topic. When Mo was given the opportunity to see the situation concerning Central Arts as part of a larger struggle for social justice in the neighborhood, he

incisively pinpointed the place of Central Arts in relation to the systemic issues of gentrification that can arise in an effort to “improve” the community.

The choice between “remediation” and “enrichment” is guided by the national discourses of student success in education. Assumptions about the need for learning basic skills before moving on to more enriching coursework leads to students being targeted for remediation for presumed failure, as measured by the standardized rubrics and assessments aligned with CCSS. These rubrics and assessments, infused with symbolic power via their connection to CCSS, can serve to guide teachers’ choice of activities, assignments, and assessments in order to be recognizable to administrators looking for alignment with CCSS. Literacy research suggests that formulaic approaches to analyzing and composing texts dominate teacher curriculum and pedagogy and fail to spark creativity and inspire lifelong learning because they do not connect with the larger community outside of schools (e.g., Turner & Hicks, 2011). Enrichment is not a reward, but a tool for fostering more in-depth meaning making for students, and the above example displays how enrichment can sometimes be more effective than circumscribed or standardized measures.

Disciplining the Curriculum Through Symbolic Violence

To conclude this chapter, I explain the circumstances in which the unit featured ended up being the last complete unit that I was able to teach at Central Arts, despite the fact that it took place in March and the school year extended through May. In this section, I outline first how the disruption in ninth-period scheduling affected the teacher (myself) and the students in my ninth-period course. Then I move on describe my experience of

this shift in relation to the University leadership's reasoning for the change. I analyze the role played by administration and leadership in this choice in order to contextualize the disruption in programming in light of the district threat to reorganize the school at the end of the 2017-2018 school year. Through this analysis, I illustrate how national discourses are imposed on school leadership and administration, and lead to instances of symbolic violence.

Scheduling at Central Arts was a constant struggle over the two years that I spent teaching there. Fluctuations in student schedules were common and the first few weeks of school had seen students placed in my course and removed from the course as the administrative staff attempted to solidify course offerings and student credit needs. At the start of the 2017-2018 school year, my storytelling course had been evenly split between students in tenth and eleventh grade. Slowly all of the eleventh graders were moved out of this elective course to create room in their schedules for a language course, and students who were in need of credit recovery were moved to courses that would fill these holes in their transcripts. The students left in my course at the end of this schedule shifting were those who either did not have any credit needs and thus could take an elective or those who happened to end up with a hole in the ninth-period block because of the courses they needed to pass to keep on track for graduation. I had hoped that this would be the end of the scheduling changes, but at the turn of the semester in January, I lost another five students to additional schedule changes.

Then in March I came into class and my co-teacher said, "I think we are going to have three students today" (Researcher Journal_March30). I asked her if there was an assembly or school trip. These kinds of disturbances were common during the school day

and often teachers were notified last minute or, occasionally, not notified at all by administration, but instead I found out about the disruption when class began and no students showed up. Ms. Nossler had a stack of new student schedules to hand out to students, and upon looking at these schedules, I could see that all of my students would be pulled from my class between two and five days a week to be sent to a Regents Prep course. Some of the students who had expressed most interest in the coursework and assignments, like Miru, Lissie, and Mo, were totally removed from the class in favor of placing them in Regents Prep classes.

After the successful completion of the last unit, I had planned to use the students' interest in the social justice issue of gentrification in a larger group research project on a social justice issue of their choice. I had hoped that students could conduct research, interview community members, and put together presentations to raise awareness of the major issues in their communities among their classmates. It was clear to me that I would not see many of my students often enough to complete this project, and that putting them into groups was an exercise in futility as the students in the class fluctuated daily. I was going to have to rethink my plans for the rest of the school year, and I was going to have to do it very quickly as this change had come with no warning.

In the end, I designed a project that could be completed individually, in whatever time students were able to spend in class. Each student would write a children's book that highlighted a social justice issue they were interested in. They would write the text, and then illustrate it and bind it into a book. The students who were only in class once a week would have the goal of writing the text; those who were in class three days a week would be expected to write and illustrate their book. I hoped that we would eventually be

able to take a trip to a local elementary school to read these stories to a class. It quickly became obvious that the rotating schedule of students coming in and out of the class on a daily basis made it impossible to plan a cohesive sequence of lessons to support this assignment. In the end, I used a variation on the writing workshop model where we began classes by discussing progress and setting goals, and then students used most of the class to work on their story. Because some students were only in class once a week, and others chose to skip their prep class to spend 3, 4, or 5 days a week in class, everyone ended up at vastly different places in their work. This did not only affect the students' ability to complete their work, but also disrupted the sense of community the students and I had worked to cultivate throughout the course of the school year.

Though I continued to try to plan lessons for the class, it felt like the heart had gone out of the students. There had been such excitement at the end of the last unit, and I had hoped this would turn into engagement in this next unit, but the damage to the classroom community done by fragmenting the class proved to be irreparable. As the unit dragged on, my co-teacher and I eventually decided that we would have to impose a deadline and ask the students to turn in what they had at that time so we could move on. Only Bobbie was able to finish her book, even though the students had over a month of class time to work on the assignment. Mercedes nearly finished, but her story ends abruptly right before we find out what happens to her main character. Most of the other students ended up turning in partially completed work which showed great potential that they had not been able to realize.

Because of the mismatch between the University semester schedule and the public school calendar, I had planned to hand over the reins to my co-teacher after this unit. I

would be there to launch the final unit, which I had planned as a family history project, and then take a supporting role as the co-teacher took over facilitating the course. I put together all of the resources she would need and wrote up all the pieces of the assignments on google classroom so students could complete them at their own pace. I believed that I had left her on solid footing for finishing out the last month of instruction before Regents review and testing began. A week after I left Central Arts, I received an email from Lissie, one of the students (Correspondence_4/16/18). She said that Nella was choosing to leave the class in favor of Regents Prep because the course had devolved into a study hall. The students who came to class spent the time chatting with each other and doing their homework, while the teacher sat and chatted with them or worked on her grading. This turn of events felt like a major failure to me. I had been at this school for 2 years attempting to develop a course that would be sustainable once my time there was over. It was clearly unsustainable without my constant effort to hold things together. This was a devastating realization, as I felt like I had failed the students whom I had hoped to benefit. I was unable to fight against the administrative policies and the apathy that came as a result of these policies.

Power and Conflict in University-School Partnerships

At the time when these disruptions were wearing away the sense of community that the students had come together to create, I was frustrated and angry. I wanted to know who had made these scheduling decisions that implied that the work students did in the storytelling class I taught was less important than Regents Prep. I assumed that this was a decision made by the school administration, but when I began asking questions, I found that the same university-school partnership that had placed me in Central Arts to

teach storytelling was also responsible for organizing the Regents Prep schedule (Interview_Henry, confirmed in Correspondence_3/20/18)). This came as a revelation for me. I had assumed that the university-based partners were a united group in terms of determining how to address the issues present at the school site. It was not a matter of the school working against me, but instead an issue of different well-intentioned partners getting in each other's way. In this section, I present data centered on my attempts to understand why the decision was made to remove students from storytelling class in favor of Regents Prep. My analysis brings to the fore the complex negotiations that take place within and among partners, and how breakdowns in communication or mismatched agendas can lead to a situation where we work against each other instead of with each other.

Henry, a school-based university staff member placed at Central Arts as part of the university's implementation of a support plan, was kind enough to give me a very candid interview wherein he explained the need for the schedule changes. His justification was based on the Regents testing data and progress toward Central Arts' revitalization benchmarks. He stated that the Regents Prep Initiative was an attempt to fill a perceived hole in programming at the school. The implementation of these courses was, in his characterization, "an effort to ensure students are able to graduate on time" because "Regents are the primary reason why students miss their 4-year graduation benchmark" (Interview_Henry). Central Arts "designed their program to allow students to take their Regents in a particular order...and aligned their course programming to sync with their prescribed Regents sequence" (Interview_Henry). When students fail a Regents exam, however, they are not automatically placed in a Regents Prep class, leading to a situation

where students must “retake an exam 2-3 years removed from their exposure to the content with little to no opportunity to prepared for it” (Interview_Henry).

In attempting to explain the last-minute nature of the Regents Prep program put into place, Henry explained that “this year was setting up to be the most egregious case of this kind with only two Regents Prep courses on the school’s program deck and about 55% of juniors still needed to pass a global Regents,” which they were expected to have passed during their sophomore year (Interview_Henry). His analysis of student data as of February showed that the school was “tracking to miss this benchmark as too many... students had not accumulated enough Regents to meet the DOE’s on-track criteria” (Interview_Henry).

The decision to implement the Regents Prep courses as an intervention to maintain on track for graduation status for students and maintain progress toward the district’s imposed benchmarks ended up being a unilateral decision by the university partners. Henry noted that “Before initiating the prep courses, we had approached [the school’s] leadership about \$30,000 in funding that we had to support the school. Their vote was that we use it to hire a Public Relations firm to help sell [Central Arts] to prospective students/families” (Interview_Henry). Henry then presented the same data to the university staff member overseeing the university-school partnership who agreed that his “findings about Regents Prep gaps...[and] baseline analysis of our progress towards meeting benchmarks” demonstrated a need to use the funds toward Regents Prep (Interview_Henry). They ended up overruling the schools’ vote and chose to spend the money to hire an outside organization to deliver the Regents Prep curriculum.

In answer to my questions about why students were removed from their existing courses to accommodate the Regents Prep, Henry stated, “I made every effort to ensure students were not being pulled from core classes,” even though this meant not being able to place all of the students targeted for intervention into the Regents Prep courses. He also related that he had felt conflicted about these last-minute scheduling changes and thus “made a very specific ask to the school that they communicate to students and affected teachers”; he went on to point out “this was not done, or was done ineffectively” as many teachers and students were caught off-guard and became confused and frustrated by the changes (Interview_Henry). Though this program was put into place without the initial support of the school, Henry felt these changes were in line with the intention of the ninth-period Extended Learning Opportunities block that had been required by the school’s revitalization plan and aligned with the University’s community school initiative.

Ultimately, Henry felt that the efforts put in place by the university to raise the school’s performance on district measures of effectiveness were not appreciated by the school’s administration. In response to my questions about why there was so much instability in my student roster and coteaching assignment, Henry stated that Central Arts “wanted our work for purely ornamental purposes...the school didn’t value the instructional content of your class. For them it was just a place to dump kids they had no other plans for” (Interview_Henry). I would like to be able to say that this statement is untrue, but it was partially substantiated by fact that the Assistant Principal was unaware of the content or purpose of the course, as evidenced by our disagreements regarding the course content and title.

Upon checking this interpretation with Ms. Baker, my 2016-2017 co-teacher, I found that although she would not go so far as to state that the school thought the course held no value, she did agree that the way in which the school administration programmed students into the ninth-period ELT block historically did leave some students with nowhere to go during that time. Thus, instead of being placed into an elective of their choosing, they were placed into the course that was most convenient to their schedules (Correspondence_2/9/18). She also noted that this kind of reactive planning was common at Central Arts where students were regularly shifted around, creating confusion during the school day (Correspondence_2/9/18). Whether this was purposeful or not, the message this lack of thought and planning sent to students and teachers alike made many believe that it was not a “serious” class. This fact was echoed many times by Ms. Nosser, my co-teacher in 2017-2018, who felt that the students did not take the class seriously (Researcher Journal_10/14/17; Researcher Journal_11/12/17; Fieldnotes_Admin. Meeting_1/12/18).

The discourse of university-school partnerships. The terrain of school and university partnerships is fraught territory. While research has suggested they may result in positive outcomes, it is important to attend to the inherent negotiations and power struggles that characterize these partnerships in order to foster a functioning system of communication and support. In an effort to broker positive partnerships, it is necessary to have a central desire to understand and communicate between partners (Castle & Sydor, 2001). This negotiation of agendas is critical, and often does not take place because of assumptions on the part of schools and universities that they hold the same values and purposes with regard to reform (Hatch, 1998). In order to calibrate goals and expectations

regarding the reforms instituted by the partnership, it is necessary for those involved in the work to come together in negotiating the educational agenda (Darling-Hammond, 1994).

As the movement of school-university partnerships has gained popularity, research has documented an increased awareness of how complex and fraught these partnerships can be (Bracey, 1990; Laine, Schultz, & Smith, 1994; Petrie, 1995). As Kreisberg (1992) noted: “Teachers occupy a paradoxical place in the web of institutional and ideological domination in schools. Although they are central figures of authority and control in the classroom, in the larger hierarchy of the educational bureaucracy they are remarkably isolated and often strikingly powerless” (p. 9). He went on to note that this imbalance of power between teachers and administrators/leadership is one example of partnerships holding “power over” instead of negotiating “power with,” in which there is “mutual assertiveness and reciprocity (p. xi). Because of these imbalances in power, it is doubly important, if one aims to negotiate “power with” collaborators, that agendas be explicitly discussed and negotiated consistently throughout the collaboration (Mitchell, 2001).

Reproducing the discourse of remediation. Imposing a whole school initiative around Regents test prep not only throws students and teachers into confusion and frustration, but it also sends a clear ideological message to students. As seen in Chapter IV, when students encountered this disruption in their schedules, they reported feeling less motivated for several reasons. First, students reported that the Regents tests were associated with the end of the school year and this time signalled that the real work of the school year was over as the school transitioned into activities that mostly summarized

what students have already learned (Interview_Bobbie). Second, the assumption that students are in need of remediation was offensive to many students who felt they had worked hard all year and deserved a chance to demonstrate their learning before being remediated (Interview_Lissie). Finally, when students recognized their need for review of key concepts, they still challenged the assumption that they needed remediation instead of enrichment (Interview_Miru).

Given the chance to contribute to school programming, university leadership chose to put their money and efforts toward Regents Prep, a remedial program, instead of developing and/or funding already existing enrichment opportunities. In this way, university leadership reproduced the status quo of national discourses of standardization and remediation. This instance exemplifies how “the educational goals embodied in the ideas of excellence became the standard, and students who could not reach these goals came to be at risk” (Valencia, 2010, p. 344). Here we see how the symbolic power of national discourses shape the conception of school reform at this school site. When the university leadership is given the opportunity to determine educational programming, they do not question this discourse, but instead use it to confirm students’ place in the social hierarchy, thus producing them as “at risk” and in need of remediation.

The university leadership’s decision to take decision making out of the hands of administrators and teachers alike displays the power wielded by universities who act as gatekeepers in directing the funding of educational programming. This critical incident forced me to reflect on the assertion made by my co-teacher that our students did not take our class seriously. After surveying the administrative disorganization around securing staff and resources for the program and then stepping in to guide curriculum mid-year, I

felt that the administration was sending a solid message to students that the course was not “serious” because they did not provide the necessary structure and support. However, upon learning that my university partners were responsible, against the wishes of school administration, for the decision that so seriously impacted my ability to design and implement a valuable course, I became aware of how university leadership was complicit in not taking my efforts or the efforts of my students seriously. While I stood in my classroom believing I had the support of the university in providing students an opportunity they did not get elsewhere in the school day, my university partners were deciding that Regents testing took precedence when it came to reforming the quality of education at Central Arts. The university’s imposition took the curriculum, and educational reform, out of the hands of teachers and sent a clear message that what they considered to be valuable teaching and learning aligned with national discourses of school reform. This emphasis, and the ways it was enacted through mandated Test Prep scheduling, undermined the emphasis on community, multimodal, and critical literacies that I had held at the heart of the work I did at Central Arts.

Teaching Within Fields of Struggle

Throughout this chapter, I contextualized the data I collected regarding my negotiations as a teacher while at Central Arts within competing discourses in an effort to interrogate what it means to teach well in a context where the pressure to improve student test scores defines success in a limited way for both students and teachers. As I worked from my classroom outward, to administration, and finally to university partners, I examined how the national discourse of standardization and accountability is transmitted

to teacher and students via symbols of power, such as standards and rubrics, but also via the hierarchical value system built around these dominant discourses. This value system legitimizes the national societal discourses through assigning relative value to terms (literacy v. literature), modes (written composition v. multimodal composition), genre (argumentative writing v. narrative writing), and other elements of the curriculum. As a result, teachers are influenced to think within the national discourse of standardization and accountability when they develop curriculum and assessments, because to comply is to signal to administration that the education students are receiving in one's classroom is rigorous.

The use of symbols of power to reproduce the national discourse at the school level significantly impacts the kind of educational opportunities offered to students. I was in a unique position as a teacher at this site because the Assistant Principal who questioned my methods and purposes was not my evaluator. The Assistant Principal was my co-teacher's evaluator. While I was not at risk of a poor performance evaluation should the Assistant Principal come to be unhappy upon observing the class, my co-teacher mentioned her concern over a poor evaluation several times. This pressure exerted over teachers to create curriculum and choose pedagogy that is aligned with CCSS can guide them away from taking risks with multimodal texts, providing flexibility in assessment for students, and allowing student interests and cultural and linguistic resources to guide the curriculum. In the end, the importance associated with Regents testing as a measure of school improvement was enough to take power out of the hands of teachers and administration who believed efforts could be placed elsewhere, and firmly

into the hands of university partners who controlled the source of funding school improvement initiatives.

Exploring what it means to teach well at this school site led me to reflect on the political nature of teaching, and the complex systems of power of which teachers are a part. I attempted to resist the institutional discourses at this school site but was pressured to compromise in order to continue to foster a positive relationship with the school's administration and my co-teacher. For years as a high school English teacher, I took a "close the door and teach" mentality toward administrative oversight. I gave administration what they wanted to see when they were observing my class, but when administration was not in my classroom, I brought in multimodal texts, put together lessons that took on social justice issues, and discussed critical topics like race, class, and gender with students. Re-entering the classroom as a teacher allowed me to understand that it is impossible to "close the door" to the national discourses that guide most of what happens in schools. Institutional power is present in every choice, from the options of texts included in classroom libraries, to the reform initiatives developed and implemented school-wide.

It is impossible to step outside this field of struggle, but this does not mean that teachers have no agency to resist these expectations. As educators, we need to consider our responsibility to students as a check-and-balance on these discourses. Bourdieu (1986) suggested that by analyzing fields of struggle, it is easier to determine central conflicts as well as purposes and values that different stakeholders have in common. In speaking with teachers, administrators, and university partners alike, it was evident that we shared a common concern of providing high-quality education to students; however,

we diverged widely in ways that at times made it seem like we were not speaking the same language. Instead of developing a common vocabulary and deciding on shared purposes at a high-stakes meeting that happened in the second half of the school year, we should have approached this process proactively by reflecting on our own assumptions regarding educational discourses of rigor, literacy, and assessment. As important as these conversations between partners are, they do not always happen, as the dominant discourse I have depicted in this chapter is often assumed to be the only way of approaching reform initiatives. Ultimately, if we comply too narrowly with pressure to align with standards and accountability discourses, we miss opportunities to value student cultures, foster inquiry guided by student interests, and allow for an exploration of all of the forms and modes of literacy that can deepen and enrich their abilities to communicate with the world.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In designing this study, I made a commitment to highlight not only the rich and insightful work that my students produced, but also the tensions that surfaced in an effort to balance the promise of critical and multimodal approaches within the limitations of a school undergoing reform efforts. I set out to attend to the discourses privileged in the school environment, community, and society at large to emphasize the ways in which students took up, questioned, transformed, and/or reproduced these discourses in their work. In doing so, I could not have predicted that the 2017-2018 school year would present an opportunity to examine first-hand how national educational discourses of school reform affect all that happens in the classroom. While this particular school year saw a flare-up of district oversight on the school, the proposed changes to Central Arts are only the latest example of how the discourse of school improvement has long shaped, and continues to impact, the school site and its members.

Findings

In the following section, I bring together insights from the data presented in the preceding chapters in an effort to highlight the major contributions of my dissertation study. I connect these findings to broader take-aways about the discourses of school

reform as conceptualized in the era of standardization and accountability. I then look to the implications this study has for the areas of leadership, research, and practice, as well as for my own scholarly research trajectory.

Clash Between School Culture and Youth Literacies

In emphasizing the need for standards and assessments as a way to ensure educational “equality” for all students, the culture of schooling has been largely shaped by the explicit and implied assumptions of the accountability movement. While literacy is a term that has grown to be more expansive in the research discourses of multimodal, critical, and sociocultural perspectives, Common Core State Standards has limited the definition of literacy to resonate with the technical and utilitarian purposes for learning reading and writing, as outlined by the CCSS. By framing English Language Arts objectives through a lens of basic skills development, teachers are less free to experiment with different approaches to teaching literacy, and students are more constrained in the ways they display their literate identities. In attempting to align educational reform at individual school sites, like Central Arts, there is a risk that educators and administrators lose sight of the fact that education standards are supposed to be baselines of what students should know and be able to do; however, they are not meant to present limitations to students who are willing and able to perform above the standard.

Many of the literacy practices students displayed throughout this study were, what I would argue, examples of performing above the standard. Students drew on multiple modes (oral, visual, textual, etc.) of communication to explore different genres and purposes of composing texts. They contextualized their learning into larger contemporary and historic social issues, and they added to the knowledge base of the classroom through

mining their own community and cultural experiences for counter-stories. These were powerful learning experiences that interwove their home and community literacies with their academic literacies, showcasing how their cultural and community knowledge worked with and enhanced their in-school work. At the same time, these were not necessarily literacies that were encouraged or rewarded by CCSS-aligned assessment measures. The inability of certain activities to be assessed by rubrics or standardized tests should not mean that students are not encouraged to have these opportunities. Sadly, these CCSS-aligned materials often do preclude the ability for school reform efforts to fully cultivate rich alternate learning opportunities in favor of those that can be more easily monitored for fidelity and improvement. As educators, we need to be aware of the limiting nature of CCSS-aligned literacy and, thus, the limited nature of CCSS-aligned reform efforts.

Highlighting and encouraging youth literacies, as in the example of Miru's *Personal Narrative* composition, display both the promise of inviting these literacies into the classroom and the tensions faced in doing so. Miru's storytelling practices of playing Pokémon and drawing comics came together to display his understanding of the form of personal narrative, which he explored both successfully and with clear and clever details that demonstrated the depth of thought that went into creating his composition. However, to my surprise, this same example became a point of conflict in terms of how student success was defined in terms of literacy and rigor at Central Arts. This conflict was evidence of one way in which teacher efforts to center youth literacies may be undermined by school leaders who are preoccupied with standardization and

accountability. These discourses tend to be reproduced in and through symbols of power that guide how teachers make decisions about curriculum and pedagogy.

The discourse of standards and accountability functions to limit knowledge into testable chunks. Teachers who feel the pressure of accountability break topics into smaller units, thus fragmenting larger topics into little pieces, each with an assessment at the end. Eisner (1984) pointed out that:

[t]he results of this fragmentation is to make it increasingly difficult for students to see how each piece is a part of a larger whole. When the content taught for each small fragment is tested, the test is a signal to the student that he or she can forget what has been “learned” after the test has been taken. (p. 34)

The association with testing as the end of learning not only held for teachers with regard to planning, but also towards students’ attitudes when test prep season started. Students came to expect review time as the end of any new material and thus the end of any learning happening at the school, as evidenced by the participants’ own words in this study.

When school-wide reform initiatives push the date of review season back to March, students spend nearly 4 months of a 10-month school year not learning. Students who spend 40% of the school year reviewing are missing almost half of the learning potential of the school year. This is a social justice issue caused by a rigid commitment to reform as guided by the CCSS and aligned assessments like Regents tests. Schools that are designated “in need of improvement” feel under duress to follow these rigid measures, while other schools taking the Regents tests do not follow intensive test-aligned reform measures and thus leave more room for other kinds of learning to be valued by the school. The culture of school reform in SINI educational contexts like Central Arts is predicated on making the school look successful through improved scores,

but this organizing logic operates at the expense of the educational experiences students deserve and need, including opportunities to bring youth literacies and community knowledge into the curriculum.

Re-aligning School Cultures

In documenting how the accountability discourses of educational reform shape opportunities to bring youth, multimodal, and critical literacies into the classroom, this study pointed to considerations beyond just the culture of literacy as shaped by CCSS and Regents testing. The administrative reaction to my efforts to offer a broader variety of curricular opportunities surfaced the classroom tensions created by standards and accountability measures pervading the school culture. The ways in which standards-aligned assignments, rubrics, and standardized tests shaped the definition of rigorous learning at Central Arts concretized a form of symbolic violence that shaped possibilities for what counts as learning.

The clash between “school” literacy as defined by CCSS and other literacies plays out at various levels within a school, with the classroom as one site of a broader school ecology, and it is fueled by national discourses that put forth standardized measures as ideologically neutral. The national discourse of educational reform is so heavily tied to dominant academic and cultural discourses (redolent with White middle- and upper-class knowledge and perspectives) that standards-aligned reform measures have the effect of reproducing this discourse again and again. As Delpit (2006) pointed out:

We say we believe that all children can learn, but few of us really believe it. Teacher education usually focuses on research that links failure and socioeconomic status, failure and cultural difference, and failure and single parent households. It is hard to believe that these children can possibly be successful

after their teachers have been so thoroughly exposed to so much negative indoctrination. (p. 172)

As a result of the way educational reform discourses shape the playing field for administrators, teachers and students alike, it is difficult to spot, and thus disrupt, the ideological messages shaping schooling-as-usual.

For teachers, especially those like myself whose racial or cultural backgrounds do not match those of my students, it is important to acknowledge the problematic elements of the dominant educational discourse and actively plan curricular opportunities for students to draw on the assets of their own backgrounds and community knowledges, especially where and when these conflict with the cultural capital rewarded in schools. In order to enact these responsive and sustaining pedagogies, we must first learn about our students: Who are they? Where are they from? What are their interests and passions? This is one area where storytelling, and the kind of community environment that emerges from group literacy practices based on storytelling, can aid teachers in gaining an understanding of the many assets students bring to the classroom.

One of the decisions my co-teacher and I disagreed on was putting personal narrative writing as the first unit of instruction. She believed that students would not feel comfortable, but my years of teaching personal narratives as a first assignment in Senior English courses had shown me evidence that students were willing to talk openly about themselves, if given the space to make decisions about what to share and how. In addition, I had seen how starting the year with personal storytelling was an entry into developing a supportive community of learners. The narratives written by my students at Central Arts allowed me to learn about their experiences and aspirations through their own words. It was also an excellent way for me as a teacher to trade stories with students

as I shared examples from past lessons I had learned. The bravery and honesty with which students discussed their personal challenges and hopes for the future through their various compositions reaffirmed the Youth of Color's community and cultural wealth and the ways such knowledge is central to the curriculum. This cultural wealth can act as a resource to teachers who are interested in fostering learning across cultural and racial boundaries. As a White teacher in this context, it was important for me to constantly interrogate my own assumptions about the curriculum and how academic literacies are determined in the classroom. In addition, this reflection on my own background in relation to my students helped me to better understand how to de-center Whiteness in my classroom as I stepped into a role as a learner with regard to my students' culture and experiences.

Youth can and do read the word and the world, as evidenced by the prevalence of counter-stories they told about important social issues affecting them and their communities. Their responses to the reorganization of Central Arts illustrated that their keen powers of observation and critique were not just applied to the world outside school walls, but also to the decisions made by leaders and administrators, which affected the educational experiences available to them. The students in this study asked poignant questions about the longevity of reform efforts and the unintended effects of turbulence in tutoring and support programming. Administration, university partners, and district leadership would do well to consider these concerns, as the students are the ones who are best positioned to speak of the outcomes of reform efforts on the experience of schooling. When students are capable of pointing out how the ill-conceived reform efforts of district and school administration reproduce the cycle of educational inequality, but are still

slated for remediation on Regents tests, we must confront the fact that the school culture is the problem. It does not reward student inquiry, criticality, and agency, but instead forces compliance to standards.

Reproducing the Cycle of School Reform

Central Arts is an example of a school embroiled in a historic struggle to meet district measures of school quality. The latest rumors of reorganization are only the most recent conflicts to rock Central Arts. Just 6 years before this study took place, the last round of district involvement nearly saw the school closed. Some of my participants have been at the school long enough to experience the reforms instituted by the district in 2012 and will also see new reforms as a result of 2018. One student even pointed out that her mother went to Central Arts and there were threats of school closure at that time as well. The discourse of school reform has (re)produced Central Arts as a school in a constant state of struggle. The label of “School in Need of Improvement” calls upon school administrators to cultivate a culture of CCSS-aligned reform initiatives. In effect, the leadership, administration, teachers, and students alike “perform” school reform in ways aligned closely with standards and accountability discourses in order to plug into the symbolic power these discourses hold.

This study documented the extensive daily effects national educational reform discourses have on the opportunities provided to students. One school-wide reform initiative had the power to impact courses, redistribute the time students place on learning activities, and shape the school climate. What does a decade of reforms do to the school culture? What about half a century of reform efforts at the school site? When students questioned the longitudinal effects of current reform efforts, they highlighted a necessary

review and re-evaluation of the process of reform by which persistent labels are placed on them (at-risk) and their schools (in need of improvement). Varenne and McDermott (1995) made the following caution regarding culture:

Every culture, we must acknowledge, also gives, often daily and eventually always, a blind side, a deaf ear, a learning problem, and a physical handicap. For every skill that people gain, there is another that is not developed; for every focus of attention, something is passed by; for every specialty, a corresponding lack. (p. 331)

When school culture becomes perpetually linked to reform (aligned with national discourses of standardization and accountability), the dominant culture in these schools silence the aptitudes, experiences, and cultures of our students.

Throughout this study, I documented how the focus on standards-aligned educational reform works to label even academically successful students as at risk. This understanding of the ways in which a narrow focus on standards and accountability affected myself and my students surfaced the prevalence of these daily incidents and raised the question of how these add up across the 12-plus years Youth of Color spend in classrooms rigidly aligned with a culture that does not value or reflect their own. Nearly 20 years have passed since the signing of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, and in this time, we have seen generation upon generation of students labeled as “at risk” and a preponderance of schools struggling against the district oversight that comes with the label of “in need of improvement.” Instead of instituting the same types of reforms which emphasize accountability and remediation, this dissertation research spoke to the need for reform efforts that will change the school culture in ways that encourage both academic success and pride and value for students’ experiences and cultures.

Implications

This study has implications for educational leadership and practice, as well as for future education research in literacy and curriculum development. Below I describe some of the areas this study speaks to, as well as how my experiences and findings throughout my dissertation study have shaped my future scholarly interests and research trajectory.

Implications for School Partnerships

School partnerships with universities and community organizations can provide the necessary resources and support to under-resourced schools; however, the budgetary and programming instability that comes from relying on outside partnerships can make it difficult to sustain long-term change within a particular school site. Over the course of the 2 years I spent teaching and researching at Central Arts, I worked with three nonprofits, various university and school staff members, and four different co-teachers. After I left the school, so did both of the university-school partners I worked with leave the project. I have been informed that the partnership under which I worked at the school has been seriously scaled back for the 2018-2019 school year. With this kind of year-to-year turnover in funding and staff, it is difficult to build programming that will continue to function long after the individuals who started it have moved on.

Funding and staffing instability at the school site made it very difficult to connect with resources and network among the teaching and support staff at the school site. After I had left, I learned that the school librarian would have been a wonderful resource for my students, as he had run an afterschool writing club for years and published an annual literary magazine. Though I had mentioned to the Assistant Principal, my university

supervisor, and my co-teacher Ms. Nossler (pseudonym) that I was interested in possibly compiling a literary magazine, no one put me in touch with the librarian, and it was by happenstance that I discovered this information after I had left. While each of the partners I worked with over the course of my time at Central Arts was there with a specific reform agenda, no one seemed to be talking about where these agendas might match up or connect with already existing resources at the school. The high rate of staff and teacher turnover at the school had also contributed to this issue as institutional memory has dwindled to just a few long-term staff members.

Communication breakdowns between partners can lead to logistical issues and erode trust. As in the example of the Regents Prep Initiative at Central Arts, the decision of the university to spend available funds on test prep resources was not supported by the administrators. Teachers, students, and parents were also not consulted. This sends a clear message about who holds the power of decision making when it comes to reform at Central Arts. This not only worked directly against my own efforts, which were a part of the same partnership, but also modeled the kind of individualized decision making that does not consider the needs of the community being served. Such fragmented efforts at reform do not take into account the long-term sustainability of reforms or community perspectives in determining how to distribute resources.

This study demonstrated the importance of proactive and continuing communication efforts that focus attention first to the assets of the community, and then to the needs as voiced by those who will actually be affected by the suggested reforms. When building partnerships between schools, universities, and community organizations, it is essential for leadership to come together to create a collective approach to change

that makes those working with and for different partners understand their contribution and trust in the vision of the leadership. By first establishing a network of collective support among the school and partnership staff, it will be easier to locate resources, make connections across subject areas and courses, and create a cohesive and responsive school culture.

Implications for Practice

For practicing teachers, administrators, and school leaders, this study showed the difficulty of keeping students at the center of educational agendas, especially when there is heavy pressure to align with district reform efforts. Many of the student participants in this study were students who had good grades, engaged in extracurricular activities like sports, dance, clubs, and so on, and did not have any disciplinary referrals or an excessive number of absences. Despite all of these markers of success, these students were still targeted for Regents Test Prep and removed from their ninth-period class. It objectively did not matter how well students performed in their classes when the Regents test stands as the high school exit requirement. Sleeter (2005) drew an important distinction between “standards driven” and “standards conscious” in her work on curriculum planning (p. 60). This is a frame that could help teachers and administrators to move away from rigid alignment with standards and open up possibilities for community-based inquiries that draw on a variety of standards, but do not act as limitations to students. While “standards-driven” planning puts the discourses of standardization and accountability in the position of driving school reform efforts, “standards-conscious” planning allows educators to balance the ideological commitments of CCSS with factors of school context and student identity.

The removal of students from their ninth-period course midway through the school year is just one example of the lack of choice given to students to have any say in their education. Several students voiced frustration and disappointment about having to be removed from their ninth-period course and placed into Regents Test Prep; however, they were not given a choice in the matter. Some of the students felt this decision made the assumption that they would be unsuccessful at test time. Other students pointed out that, though passing the Regents is important, balancing this prep time with their regularly scheduled coursework would be more motivating for them. Educational research on culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings) and culturally sustaining (Paris, Ladson-Billings) pedagogy highlighted the importance of bolstering academic success through creating a strong assets-based school community that values students' cultural wealth and builds on this wealth to promote their empowerment and academic success. The identities, interests, and passions of students can be leveraged into engaging inquiries that support both academic learning and social and cultural learning.

Lack of choice in ninth-period programming was not a new issue for students, however, as the way they were initially programmed into ninth-period courses was based on schedules and availability and had nothing to do with student choice. Despite the fact that the course I taught at Central Arts was an elective, none of my students over the 2 years actually said they had chosen to be in the course. For social justice-minded educators, this lack of choice at the administrative level in terms of which courses students take, when, and in what order presents a barrier to classroom-based efforts to weave choice into the curriculum. Efforts to infuse student choice into learning activities and assessments can also conflict with the discourse of standards and accountability at

the school site. For teachers and administrators who work in schools undergoing district reform efforts, it is necessary to problematize these reforms when and where possible in order to keep students at the center of their own education. If we hope for students to be successful beyond the limited way we define success in school, we need to consider whether the education they are receiving is supporting them toward this goal of being fulfilled and agentic citizens. Educators have an integral role in ensuring that students are provided with opportunities to tap into their cultural wealth, inquire into issues they are passionate about, and connect the classroom learning to issues of larger social importance. It is integral for White teachers of Youth of Color to be self-reflexive in the choices they make in curriculum and pedagogy or they will miss opportunities to connect school culture with student culture, thus providing a culturally sustaining and academically successful environment for and with students.

Implications for Research

The findings of this study regarding the culture of power operating in “Schools In Need of Improvement” pointed to the need for research that seeks to change the culture of power to resonate with students’ own cultural positionings. Research in culturally sustaining practices has demonstrated the need for assets-based pedagogy to remain dynamic and critical in a constantly evolving world. This emphasis on culture as an evolving process helps to avoid static representations of culture and encourage inquiry into the oppressive aspects of both the dominant and the marginalized culture. More research needs to be done on the process of developing emergent critical literacy curriculum guided by student interest and investment in topics relevant to themselves and their community. While this approach holds promise for keeping the curriculum dynamic

and responsive to student culture, the limited flexibility in many schools for curricular change necessitates attention to how teachers and student negotiate emergent curriculum, as well as how they work with administration and school leadership toward a more dynamic vision of curriculum at the school site. Attending to how teachers support student inquiry into contemporary issues and the ways in which they facilitate connection to heritage community practices will help build the research base on culturally sustaining practices and also glean practical approaches to shifting school culture through curriculum development.

One area of attention this study suggests is researching how teachers and community researchers locate cultural resources, both classroom approaches to engaging students' cultural knowledge and the community network building needed to locate the people, events, and sites of cultural importance. It is important for educators to determine networks of support so we can connect researchers, teachers, and community organizers doing similar work. Research into the networks of community wealth done in tandem with community organizations, schools, and other groups could help to forward a collective-minded approach to issues of community importance, facilitate communication and collaboration, and allow those involved in community projects to share knowledge in a way that creates a more nuanced understanding of the assets and needs of the community. In this regard, youth participant research could extend the already existing networks of support to include those that students identify or build themselves.

In the area of literacy studies, and particularly in the area of multimodal literacy, this study suggested the importance of discussing foundational assumptions regarding literacy and multimodality with teachers, students, and administrators alike. In schools

where district oversight creates a focus on CCSS-aligned reform, a widened definition of literacy that includes multimodal composing may conflict with the vision of rigor held by those in administration or leadership. The tendency for Schools In Need of Improvement (SINI) to also be located in areas serving low-socioeconomic communities adds to the digital divide by squeezing out multimodal and digital opportunities in favor of those more rigidly aligned with reform discourses. Attention should be directed at how schools undergoing reform efforts can negotiate definitions of literacy and rigor that draw on multimodal, critical, and community-based literacy to avoid the relegating literacy to basic skills approaches and standardized assessments.

For practitioner researchers especially, this study reaffirm/ed the need to maintain critical reflexivity to avoid some of the hazards that come with being an insider/outsider at a research site. While practitioner researchers are privileged with a view of the inside workings of the school site, they also hold a huge responsibility to the school community that they enter. When practitioner researchers implement curriculum and pedagogy that are resistant to the norms of the school culture, their research can be disruptive at the school site. In this regard, there is a need for maintaining positive communication despite conflicts in values and beliefs. In an effort to keep communication positive, sometimes difficult compromises are necessary to align personal research goals with the needs of the community. This is the work of negotiating the theory-practice line that makes practitioner research particularly valuable in terms of translating theoretical knowledge into practical approaches; however, this work requires approaching the opposing view with an eye toward understanding if these negotiations are to be successful.

Practitioner researchers, even those who have worked at a certain site for multiple years, cannot assume that their research agenda is aligned with the needs of the community, as these needs shift and evolve over time. It is critical to remain in communication with the various stakeholders at a research site so if conflict does arise, the parties can come together to work toward mutual understanding in a positive way. In developing curriculum and programming to serve a specific community, it is important to design with longevity in mind, and part of ensuring that programs developed and implemented by practitioner researchers is establishing an accepting school environment that believes in the quality and value of the work the practitioner research is doing at the school. This means networking with teachers, administrators, and school staff in order to develop continuing support for programs after the initial practitioner research project ends.

Implications for My Future Research

In my own research trajectory, I hope to continue to focus attention on the theory-practice divide in literacy studies and curriculum design. The promise of critical and culturally sustaining pedagogies to confront and shift school culture inspires me to look at the process of curricular transformation at Schools In Need of Improvement. Multicultural education (Banks), and more recently culturally relevant pedagogy (Paris & Alim), have raised questions about the uncritical adoption of approaches to integration of cultural material that is prevalent in schools. These “contributions” or “additives” approaches (Banks) leave the basic (culturally oppressive) structure of the curriculum intact and thus still reflect the norms and values of the dominant group. Critical and culturally sustaining pedagogies are necessarily disruptive, as they hold as a goal

challenging the hegemony of the dominant discourse, and opening up a view of concepts, issues, and themes from alternate perspectives. I would like to further examine the process by which this disruption and transformation happen at schools whose culture of power reflects the discourse of standards and accountability.

Critical pedagogy and culturally sustaining pedagogy have an implied focus on pedagogical moves, but as curriculum and pedagogy go hand in hand to develop and support learning in the classroom, I would be interested to work with teachers interested in critical and culturally sustaining pedagogies to see how they design units and lessons with these orientations in mind. While individual lessons and units are valuable contributions to practice, I would also be interested to see how their curriculum develops across the school year in response to district requirements and school and community events.

In the interest of finding cross-disciplinary spaces to insert critical and culturally sustaining practices, in my further research I would like to follow a student to his or her different classes over the course of the school day with an eye toward topics, concepts, and themes that provide a fruitful location to take up a critical lens or infuse alternate cultural perspectives. In this way, I hope to discern the opportunities for approaching cultural shift at the school across the school day, not just from within a single classroom. This could also open up opportunities to work with interdisciplinary teams of teachers to find places within their curricula that align with certain elements of student or community cultural wealth.

This work to negotiate critical and cultural assets-based theories into actual classroom practice is valuable to researchers, teachers, and administrators alike who hold

as a goal curricular transformation. Ultimately, I hope that my future work supports literacy researchers, curriculum designers, and educators in taking up anti-oppressive pedagogies to come together in collaborative and collective approaches to transforming school culture. In doing so, I hope to find ways to connect the promise of critical, cultural, and multimodal literacies to classroom and school-based practice of designing programs and courses.

Final Thoughts: Possibilities for Praxis

It can feel paralyzing when an individual teacher or student realizes the extent to which their experience in schools is affected by factors that lie out of their power to control; however, James Baldwin (1963) pointed out how this tension can also act as a provocation. He stated, “One of the paradoxes of education [is] that precisely at the point when you begin to develop a conscience, you must find yourself at war with your society. It is your responsibility to change society if you think of yourself as an educated person.” For this reason, I highlight the need for educators to investigate the process by which students are denied access to intellectually engaging curriculum, in an effort to identify curricular openings that intersect with the issues faced by Youth of Color. Locating this point of tension can serve as an entry to interrupt processes of social reproduction by using learning activities and assessments that center assets-based approaches to centering students’ identities, aptitudes, and interests. The lenses of community and cultural wealth; multimodal, critical, and youth literacies; and an emergent storytelling-focused curriculum proved to be effective influences in creating a classroom environment that

fostered students' creativity and pride in their background, while also drawing on a variety of purposes and modes for consuming and producing texts.

By highlighting the work done in the classroom alongside the negations that took place outside of the classroom but were deeply involved in ensuring certain opportunities while limiting others, this study demonstrated the conflicts that occurred as a result of teachers and students who attempted to step outside of the discourse. Turning attention to not only the opportunities, but also the limits, of teachers and students to exercise agency in navigating these parameters helps to surface necessary considerations in moving forward to create and implement transformative educational opportunities. When we are aware of the promise of centering students' community and cultural wealth, and also the conflicts inherent in a national educational discourse premised on the homogenization and marginalization of students' assets, we are better equipped to support educators in bridging the gap between curricular mandates and student-driven social justice-oriented curriculum and instruction.

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Appendix A

Definitions of Terms

Here I define some of the key terms used throughout this proposal in order to establish a working definition of how this term is being used in the context of this study.

Composition. The creation of a text from the arrangement of words, images, sounds, speech, moving pictures, digital components, etc.

Critical Literacy. An approach to analysis and interpretation of texts that acknowledges the power dynamics that circulate within these texts (Morrell, 2015).

Discourse. Discourse is a system of representation presented through language and other communicative practices to establish oneself as a participant in particular groups or communities (Gee, 1989).

Discursive positioning. Positioning is a process whereby selves are produced in negotiation with other participants as part of a collaborative storyline. These selves are contextually situated to reflect particular cultural, historical, or social assumptions that contribute to the ways in which a self is constituted and performed (Davis & Harre, 1990).

Discursive practices. The usage of situated communicative practices that allow one to produce and/or understand social and cultural meanings (Hall, 2001).

Framing. The ways in which society and culture construct certain perspectives through which phenomenon are presented and interpreted thus obfuscating differing interpretations (Goffman, 1974).

Intertextuality. The relation of a story to a prior story. This theory emphasizes the impossibility of creating a text without intertextual linkages to other previous texts (Linde, 2009).

Literacies. Literacies are the different repertoires of communication that one possesses that allow them to move proficiently through different textual worlds. Literacies are multiple (New London Group, 1996) situated (Barton & Hamilton, 2012) ideological (Street & Street, 1984) and tied to power relations in society (Freire and Macedo, 1987).

Narrative. A text that tells a story through the author's arrangement of words, images, speech, sounds, moving pictures or digital components. Narratives can be in the form of fiction or non-fiction texts and can be represented in diverse forms depending on the speaker, purpose, and audience.

Appendix B

The Art of Storytelling Curriculum Units

Unit Topic: Storytelling for Social Action				
Overarching Unit Essential Question: How can stories help to rewrite the past, reflect the present, and shape the future?				
Curricular Objectives:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will be able to interpret texts on a thematic level, deconstruct social narratives therein, and critically question the aims of the author in creating these narratives. • Students will be able to identify, analyze, and critique the ways in which text depictions both reflect our culture, and shape it. • Students will be able to compose narratives using different modalities, and mixing modes where possible. 				
Unit Objectives:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will be able to identify and deconstruct competing discourses of gender, race, language, and sexuality in stories. • Students will be able to reconstruct stock stories to reveal concealed, resistant, and/or transformational stories. • Students will be able to compose stories that represent multiple perspectives. • Students will be able to use images and text together to craft a meaningful story. 				
Unit Themes	Focus Question(s)	Literacy Topics/Skills	Modes of Composition	Assessments
The Danger of a Single Story	What do stories help us to see that might be hidden otherwise?	-Deconstructing stock stories -Exploring perspective and positioning -Representing concealed stories	- Poetry - Collage - Film	Poetry Project Harlem Misconceptions Project
Writing Memory, Rewriting History	How can I present stories that challenge the historic record?	-Identifying and analyzing social justice issues -Searching out counter-stories -Reconstructing resistant and transformational stories	- Multimodal presentations	Social Issues Media Project Project Presentation & Discussion

P R O J E C T C A L E N D A R

START DATE: January 30th

END DATE: March 29th

M O N D A Y

T U E S D A Y

W E D N E S D A Y

T H U R S D A Y

F R I D A Y

W E E K O N E - J a n u a r y 3 0 ^{t h} - F e b r u a r y 2 ^{n d}

No School

Stock Stories

- The Danger of a Single Story

- Views of urban youth via Subway poem (Olds)

Concealed Stories

-Subway from the other perspective.

-Poem in 2 Voices example

Poem in 2 Voices Project

Poem in 2 Voices Project DUE

W E E K T W O - F e b r u a r y 5 ^{t h} - 9 ^{t h}

Resistance Stories

-Poetry of Resistance (identify themes)

Still I Rise

- What do you rise from? (Identify social issues of concern)

Still I Rise Poem Assignment

Still I Rise Poem Assignment

Still I Rise Poem Assignment DUE

W E E K T H R E E - F e b r u a r y 1 2 ^{t h} - 1 5 ^{t h}

Transforming Stories

- Murals & poetry of El Barrio (gallery walk)

Where I'm From Assignment

Where I'm From Assignment

Where I'm From Assignment DUE

No School

Homework over break:
Create a mural to go along with your poetry collection

WEEK FOUR - February 19th – 23rd				
No School	Winter	Break	No School	----
WEEK FIVE - February 26th – March 2nd				
Where I'm From Gallery Walk	Harlem Misconceptions -Discuss reality versus assumptions based on “place” but really indicating race and class	Harlem Misconceptions -Hemz launch project	Harlem Misconceptions -Hemz work with class	Harlem Misconceptions -Hemz work with class
WEEK SIX – March 5th – 9th				
Social Issues Media -View Harlem Misconceptions & discuss product & process -Define social issues media: How can social issues media help to rewrite stock stories?	Social Issues Presentation -View #MeToo project & discuss assignment	Social Issues Presentation -Group Work	Social Issues Presentation -PROPOSAL DUE * Issue, Argument, Format	No Class - Conferences

Appendix C

Code Chart

Name	Description	Files	References
Attention to Inequality (AI)	Students point out instances of injustice, discrimination, and prejudice in regard to individuals and groups based on race, class, gender, ethnicity, etc.	16	21
Educational (AI-E)	Students attend to inequalities as they appear in their own schools and educational experiences.	12	25
Gentrification (AI-G)	Students attend to instances and the effects of gentrification in their own (and surrounding) communities.	2	7
Narrative of Progress (AI-NP)	Students attend to the topic of progress in regard to social issues	10	11
Systemic (AI-S)	Students attend to the ways unequal outcomes are built into our institutions that thus (re)produce inequality.	20	29
Orientation to Social Issues (SO)	Students attend to different positions towards responsibility/agency/progress in regard to issues in society.	9	9
Collectivism (SO-C)	Students focus on the need to approach issues with a communal mentality wherein individuals come together to act as a collective to tackle problems together.	8	10
Individualism (SO-I)	Students focus on the ability of individuals to rise, overcome circumstances, and work toward progress as an individual figure within society.	8	11
Exceptionalism (SO-I-E)	Students point out the superiority or difference of themselves or their community(ies) from the expected “norm”	7	11

Name	Description	Files	References
Representation (R)	Students note the representation (or absence) of people from non-dominant groups.	8	12
Appropriation (R-A)	Students identify instances of the adoption of elements of a minority culture by members of the dominant culture.	1	1
Inclusivity (R-I)	Students indicate the importance of including people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized.	3	3
Representing Oneself (R-O)	Students refer directly or indirectly to the ways they represent themselves.	5	5
Stereotypes (R-S)	Students point out overgeneralized beliefs and assumptions made about people(s) based upon their race/class/gender/etc.	15	23
Tokenism (R-T)	Students differentiate between genuine diversity, and symbolic efforts that give the appearance of equality.	3	5
Sense of Community (SC)	Students situate themselves and/or others as members within a certain community.	0	0
Activism (SC-A)	Students discuss social activism within a specific community to which they (or those close to them) belong.	4	5
Belonging (SC-B)	Students refer to certain people, places, or activities that give them a sense of belonging.	10	21
Culture (SC-C)	Students refer directly or indirectly to a cultural community to which they (or those close to them) belong.	8	15
History (SC-H)	Students refer to the history of a specific community to which they (or those close to them) belong.	4	6
Pride (SC-P)	Students refer to certain people, places, or activities that give them a sense of pride.	3	6

Appendix D

IRB Forms

Teachers College, Columbia University
 525 West 120th Street
 New York NY 10027
 212 678 3000

PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM

Protocol Title: Examining Students' Critical Engagement with Multimodal Composition

Principal Investigator: Kelly DeLuca, Teachers College, 860-368-9621

INTRODUCTION

Your child is being invited to participate in this research study called "Examining Students' Critical Engagement with Multimodal Composition." Your child may qualify to take part in this research study because he/she is a student in Wadleigh High School's Critical Film Studies course. Approximately forty people will participate in this study and it will not require any time commitment from your child outside of their normal participation in the course.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

This study is being done to determine the benefits of using visual, aural, and digital texts to help students practice composing texts.

WHAT WILL MY CHILD BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE THAT MY CHILD CAN TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you decide to allow your child to participate, your child will not be asked to do anything outside of the normal activities and projects in the course curriculum. Your child may be audio recorded having conversations with his/her peers about course topics and projects. Your child may also be audio recorded having conversations with the researcher or teachers. After the audio-recording is written down the audio-recording will be deleted. If you do not wish your child to be audio-recorded, your child will still be able to participate. Your child will be given a pseudonym or false name in order to keep his/her identity confidential.

If you choose to allow your child to participate in the study, your child will be asked to share his/her completed projects and assignments. These will be de-identified and your child will be issued a pseudonym to keep his/her identity confidential.

All of these procedures will be done at Wadleigh High School, in the Critical Film Studies class during 9th period.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN MY CHILD EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life. However, there are some risks to consider. Your child might feel embarrassed to discuss social justice issues that your he/she has experienced at school or in your community. **However,**

your child does not have to answer any questions or divulge anything you don't want to talk about. Your child can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty. Your child might feel concerned that things you say might get back to your principal or parents. The principal investigator is taking precautions to keep his/her information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering or guessing your child's identity, such as using a pseudonym instead of your name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN MY CHILD EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no direct benefit to your child for participating in this study. Participation may benefit other students who choose to take Critical Film Studies at Wadleigh High School in the future.

WILL MY CHILD BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?

Your child will not be paid to participate. There are no costs to you or your child for taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN MY CHILD LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?

The study is over when your child has completed or withdrawn from the course. However, your child can leave the study at any time even if he/she hasn't finished.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CHILD'S CONFIDENTIALITY

The investigator will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected. What is on the audio-recording will be written down and the audio-recording will then be destroyed. There will be no record matching your child's real name with your child's pseudonym. Regulations require that research data be kept for at least five years.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?

The results of this study will be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Your child's name or any identifying information about your child will not be published. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the principal investigator.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO AND VIDEO RECORDING

Audio recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission for your child to be recorded. If you decide that you don't wish your child be recorded, they will still be able to participate in this study.

_____ I give my consent for my child to be recorded _____
Signature

_____ I **do not** consent for my child to be recorded _____
Signature

WHO MAY VIEW MY CHILD'S PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

_____ I consent to allow my child's written, video and/or audio taped materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College

Signature

_____ I **do not** consent to allow my child's written, video and/or audio taped materials viewed outside of Teachers College Columbia University

Signature

OPTIONAL CONSENT FOR FUTURE CONTACT

The investigator may wish to contact you in the future. Please initial the appropriate statements to indicate whether or not you give permission for future contact.

I give permission to be contacted in the future for research purposes:

Yes _____ No _____
Initial Initial

I give permission to be contacted in the future for information relating to this study:

Yes _____ No _____
Initial Initial

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the principal investigator, Kelly DeLuca at 860-368-9621 or at kmd2185@tc.columbia.edu. You can also contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Ghiso at 212-678- 8171.

If you have questions or concerns about your child's rights as a research subject, you should contact the **Institutional Review Board (IRB)** at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu. Or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 10027, box 151. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection at Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

- I have read and discussed the informed consent with the investigator. I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my child's participation is voluntary. I may refuse to allow my child to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty to future student status or grades; services that my child would otherwise receive. I understand that my child may refuse to participate without penalty.

- The investigator may withdraw my child from the research.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to allow my child to continue participation, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies my child will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent document.

My signature means that I agree to allow my child participate in this study

Child's name: _____

Print Parent or guardian's name: _____

Parent or guardian's signature: _____

Date: _____

Teachers College, Columbia University
 525 West 120th Street
 New York NY 10027
 212 678 3000

Assent Form for Minors

Protocol Title: Examining Students' Critical Engagement with Multimodal Composition

Principal Investigator: Kelly DeLuca, Teachers College, 860-368-9621

This Critical Film Studies class is a new elective at Wadleigh High School, and as I work to put together the curriculum, I am really interested in working with students to make the class a place where we can practice some academic skills, while we also learn new filmmaking skills. As a facilitator for this class, I am invested in looking at the social issues that you believe affect your lives, and how these issues come through in your projects and assignments. I'm very interested in hearing feedback and opinions from students, as well as looking at the work you are completing. In order to do this, I'm interested in knowing a bit more about your interests and background and getting your feedback so I can design the best course possible with this class personally in mind. I want you to feel invested in the course and I feel that your opinions and ideas are important in this regard.

I _____ (child's name) agree to be in this study,
 titled _____.

What I am being asked to do has been explained to me by

_____.

I understand what I am being asked to do and I know that if I have any questions, I can ask

_____ at any time. I know that I can quit this study whenever I want to and it is perfectly OK to do so. It won't be a problem for anyone if I decide to quit.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Witness: _____ Date: _____

Investigator's Verification of Explanation

I certify that I have carefully explained the purpose and nature of this research to _____ in age-appropriate language. He/she has the opportunity to discuss it with me and knows that they can stop participating at any time. I have answered all of their questions and this minor child has provided the affirmative agreement (assent) to participate in this research study.

Investigator's Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix E

Forms of Cultural Wealth
(Adapted from Yosso, 2005)

Type of Capital	Explanation	Key Questions
Aspirational capital	“The ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers” (p. 77). Related to resilience, aspirational capital nurtures the students’ ability to dream of the possibilities that lie outside of their current experiences and circumstances.	How are we supporting the maintenance of students’ aspirations? What assumptions do we have about our students’ aspirations?
Linguistic capital	Linguistic capital “...includes intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style” (p.78). Linguistic capital looks to the multiple languages of communication students may be proficient in, including visual art, music or poetry. This also includes the role of storytelling as cultural capital because it fosters “skills [that] may include, memorization, attention to detail, dramatic pauses, comedic timing, facial affect, vocal tone, volume, rhythm, and rhyme” (pg. 79).	How are we supporting the language and communication strengths of our students? To what degree do courses utilize inclusive pedagogical practices?
Familial capital	Familial capital “...refers to those cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition” (p. 79). This includes both personal and social human resources students draw from their extended familial and community networks. These human resources can serve as role models in that they “...model lessons of caring, coping and providing which inform our emotional, moral, educational and occupational consciousness” (p. 79).	How do we recognize and help students draw on wisdom, values and stories from their home communities? How do we create environments that honor and invite families to participate?

Social capital	<p>One's social capital consists of the "...networks of people and community resources" one is connected with (p. 79). This includes peer and social connections that can provide instrumental and emotional support – "...Communities of Color gave the information and resources they gained through these institutions back to their social network" (p.79).</p>	<p>How do we help students stay connected to communities and individuals instrumental in their previous educational success?</p> <p>How do we engage with likely individuals and community-based organizations with supports successful students need?</p>
Navigational capital	<p>Navigational capital consists of the "...skills of maneuvering through social institutions.... not created with Communities of Color in mind" (p. 80) which takes determination and resilience. Students who are empowered to maneuver within unsupportive or hostile environments are able to exercise "...individual agency within institutional constraints" (p. 80) and maintain connections with their existing social networks.</p>	<p>How do we help students navigate our institutions?</p> <p>How willing are we to acknowledge that our institutions, both their structures and cultures, have a history of, and are still in many ways, unsupportive and/or hostile to our students and their communities?</p>
Resistant Capital	<p>This form of capital refers to the "...knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (p. 80). Resistant capital is founded in the experiences of Communities of Color in securing equal rights and collective freedom. People of Color instill resistant capital in their children when they teach them to value themselves and be self-reliant even in the face of structural oppression. This connection to a historical legacy of engaging in social and racial justice movements prepares youth to enter society prepared to tackle inequality.</p>	<p>How do we support students to engage with and serve their community?</p> <p>What opportunities do we provide students in and outside of the classroom to prepare them for participation in a diverse democracy?</p>

Appendix F

Multimodal Student Data (Miru)

Item 1: My Storied Life

Panel 1 (0yrs - 3yrs): *Awesome!!!*
At the age of 3yrs old my mom showed me pokemon and i use to love watching it, so much so i'd grab a chair out of the living room and stand on it to see the show better.
Oh sure... ima best yet!!!

Panel 2 (4yrs - 7yrs):
wanna be Friends? yeah sure!!
at age 5 i met my first true friend. (still hang with him till this day.)

Panel 3 (8yrs - 10yrs):
At 8 yrs old we'd battle and play pokemon games on dsi.

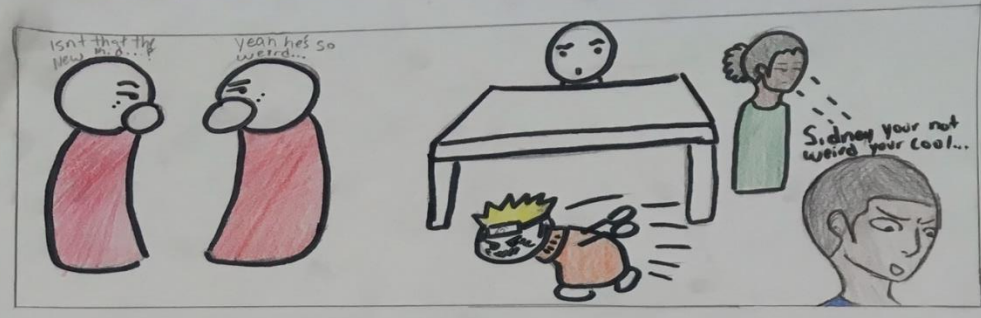
Panel 4 (10yrs - 12yrs):
Graduation!!!!
Final Trade.
at 10 or 11 (cant remember) we graduated elementary school and we traded cards one last time.

Panel 5 (12yrs - 14yrs):
Dont i know you? He's this kid? NOOOO!!!
At 14yrs old i met Koreys friend Vanishim in Global and since then we've been friends.

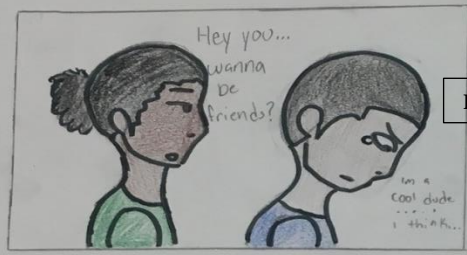
Panel 6:
Hehe!! HAHAH! CHRIS NOW
Ye!! PRIDE
HELP

Panel 7:
Friends Till The end
"BAF" Best Art Friends

Item 2: Personal Narrative



Panel 1



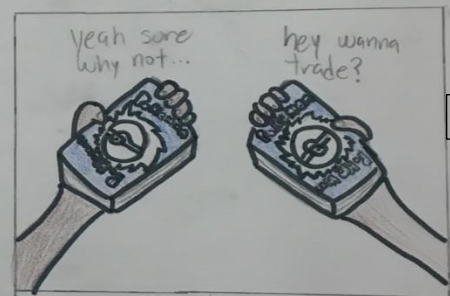
Panel 2



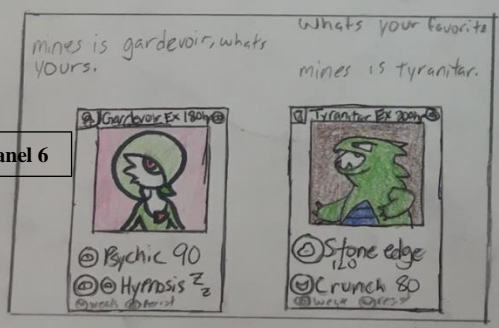
Panel 3



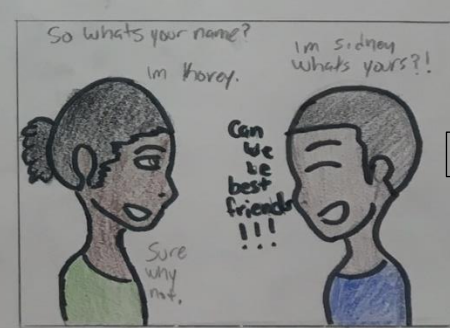
Panel 4



Panel 5



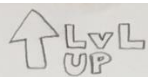
Panel 6



Panel 7

IT'S BEEN 11 years since This day and we're still BEST Friends!

Item 3: Reflecting on Growth



Lessons I Learned from this Exp.

★ To Be More Outgoing/Make More Friends.

★ Friends Are like family.

FRIEND POEM

[Copyright]

Friends Are like family some of them
they're Here to the end.

The messages we speak of
the messages we send

We send these messages to those who are our
Friends.

So Friends Are like family and they're Here
to the end

Friends Are like family and I love all of
them. ♥♥♥♥♥♥♥♥



I Love
ALL My
Friends!!!

Appendix G

AP Language and Composition Personal Narrative Rubric

Personal Narrative Essay Rubric: AP Language and Composition

- A**
- Clearly and concisely narrates a story that has a persuasive purpose.
 - Demonstrates with significant depth and insight how reflection led to personal growth or realization.
 - Expertly blends narration, exposition, description, dialogue, and reflection throughout the essay.
 - Consistently demonstrates deliberate and highly effective diction.
 - Regularly uses rich sensory imagery and/or figurative language.
 - Uses highly effective detail whenever appropriate.
 - Uses a wide variety of syntactical structures to focus the reader what's important in each sentence.
 - Varies length/types of sentences (simple, compound, compound-complex, and complex).
 - Clearly demonstrates the writer's attitude toward the subject through the tone of the composition.
 - Is organized in a highly effective fashion
 - Contains no flaws in grammar, mechanics, or usage.
 - Is double-spaced, typed, and titled originally and creatively.
- B**
- Somewhat clearly and concisely narrates a story that advances a persuasive purpose.
 - Demonstrates with depth and insight how reflection led to personal growth or realization.
 - Competently blends narration, exposition, description, dialogue, and reflection in the essay.
 - Demonstrates deliberate and highly effective diction.
 - Uses rich sensory imagery and/or figurative language.
 - Uses effective detail whenever appropriate.
 - Uses a variety of syntactical structures to focus the reader what's important in each sentence.
 - Varies somewhat length/type of sentences (simple, compound, compound-complex, and complex).
 - Demonstrates the writer's attitude toward the subject through the tone of the composition.
 - Is organized in an effective fashion
 - Contains few flaws in grammar, mechanics, or usage.
 - Is double-spaced, typed, and titled originally.
- C**
- Narrates with little clarity and conciseness a story that suggests a persuasive purpose.
 - Demonstrates with limited depth and insight how reflection led to personal growth or realization.
 - Attempts to blend narration, exposition, description, dialogue, and reflection throughout the essay.
 - Demonstrates somewhat deliberate and effective diction.
 - Uses sensory imagery and/or figurative language inconsistently
 - Uses somewhat effective detail whenever appropriate.
 - Uses little variety of syntactical structures to focus the reader what's important in each sentence.
 - Sentence length/type could be improved (simple, compound, compound-complex, complex).
 - Faintly demonstrates the writer's attitude toward the subject through the tone of the composition.
 - Is organized in a somewhat effective fashion
 - Contains numerous flaws in grammar, mechanics, or usage.
 - Is double-spaced, typed, and titled.
- D**
- Narrates without clarity or conciseness a story that may or may not have a persuasive purpose.
 - Demonstrates with almost no depth and insight how reflection led to personal growth or realization.
 - Does not attempt to blend narration, exposition, description, dialogue, and reflection in the essay.
 - Makes ineffective use of language to support the argument and influence the reader:
 - Uses only limited sensory imagery and/or figurative language
 - Uses somewhat ineffective detail whenever appropriate.
 - Uses almost no variety of syntactical structures to focus reader on what's important in sentences.
 - Does not vary length/types of sentences (simple, compound, compound-complex, and complex).
 - Does not demonstrate the writer's attitude toward the subject through the tone of the composition.
 - Is organized in an ineffective fashion
 - Contains abundant flaws in grammar, mechanics, or usage.
 - Is not double-spaced, typed, and titled.

Appendix H

Sample Multimodal Analysis

Panel 1: In this panel (Appendix F, Item 2, Panel 1) we see five children plus one individual behind a desk. This individual's position in the room leads me to believe that he/she is the teacher. The relative detail of the children indicates Miru's emphasis on the student interactions in the classroom, while the lack of detail in the drawing of the teacher places less importance on this member's role. The look on the teacher's face, with one eyebrow arched and mouth open, suggests surprise or confusion. It seems that this individual does not understand the social dynamics happening in front of them.

Two students dressed in red, a color associated with danger, whisper behind their hands, "isn't that the new kid," "yeah he's so weird..." while another student dressed in orange, runs away from the cartoon depiction of Miru with a smirk on his face. Miru, turned away from the rest of the group, seems upset and confused. It seems that the others in the class are judging him and rejecting him from their social circle; however, one individual seems to "see" Miru accurately. To the right of the teacher's desk we see Charles lock his eyes on Miru and state "you're not weird, you're cool."

This panel is Picture Specific, giving the reader most of the information needed to understand the text through the use of color, positioning, and the details of the images within the panel. Miru makes assumptions about the reader's experience in classrooms to help engage the reader in the scene. Most readers will be familiar with U.S. kindergarten classrooms where students are allowed to play during certain portions of the day, commonly known as structured indoor recess or "centers," and so will assume that this picture depicts a situation where the teacher's role is less important, and thus he/she is

able to sit at his/her desk as they are not responsible for leading the class at this point.

The choice to begin his story during this time of the school day helps the reader to enter into the world of the children, and thus sympathize with the complex social negotiations that take place between them.

Panel 2: In this panel (Appendix F, Item 2, Panel 2), Miru moves the reader forward in time through a scene to scene transition, displaying how Miru isolates himself from the group, while Charles follows him. Charles's identification of Miru as a person who is "cool" is followed by action, some of which happens in the gutter between panels.

Though Miru does not depict himself or Charles walking away, it is clear that Miru has turned away from the class, further isolating himself, and that Charles has followed him in order to have a conversation with him. McCloud (1993) points out that "here in the gutter, human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea" thus forcing the reader to act as a collaborator in creating the missing parts of the scene.

In this panel, words seem to take the lead in conveying meaning, except for one significant detail. The single tear in the corner of Miru's eye holds the key to the level to which this interaction was emotionally charged. For this reason, this panel's use of words and images is Interdependent, as neither the image nor the words alone carry the whole meaning of the text. The reader needs to hear Charles ask Miru, "Hey you...wanna be friends?" in order to infer that this is his intent in following Miru. Miru's conflicted feelings about himself, as introduced by the previous panel, are clarified by his statement, "I'm a cool dude...I think." This statement seems to be made to himself as he faces away from Charles. The words are smaller than in other panels and take up only a small portion

of the bottom right corner. His negative interaction with other classmates has made him unsure of himself. Both boys are tentative in this first interaction as evidenced by the ellipses used to convey conversation broken by pauses.

Panel 3: Here we see a moment to moment transition between panels (Appendix F, Item 2, Panel 3), with Miru responding to the question Charles asked him in the last panel. His response is in all capital letters; these words and images augment the text by emphasizing his emotional response to this positive interaction. His excitement is further augmented by the image of his face with stars in his eyes, mouth open in a smile, arms raised in victory. Four more stars surround his head, radiating happiness from his character. These stars are a significant symbol commonly associated with providing a point of light in an otherwise dark sky. Charles asking Miru to be friends has brought light to an otherwise dark event in Miru's life. Charles does not seem to have realized what this display of kindness would mean to Miru, as his response does not match Miru in excitement, but instead provides further reassurance in the form of a smile and the words, "yeah, sure..."

Panel 4: In panel four (Appendix F, Item 2, Panel 4), the conversation continues depicting a moment to moment shift from Panel 3. Miru attempts to find a common interest between himself and his new friend, asking "Do you know about Pokémon?" Charles replies "yeah, I have my deck on me right now." This interaction displays how Pokémon played an integral role in Miru and Charles's bonding as this game was a shared interest between the two. This panel is Word Specific, as the reader depends on the words to interpret the interaction correctly. In the image, Miru and Charles stand facing one another and smiling. Here, the reader can assume that this is a mutually

pleasant interaction between the two; however, without the words, it would be difficult to accurately guess what the two characters are discussing.

Panel 5: This panel displays a shift from aspect to aspect (Appendix F, Item 2, Panel 5), showing the same scene, but now focusing on the boys' outstretched hands holding their Pokémon decks. Miru initiates the game, stating "Hey, wanna trade?" to which Charles responds "Yeah sure, why not..." Though Charles was initially the more assertive member of this interaction, once Miru determines that Charles wants to be his friend he takes over the role of initiator in determining a common interest and extending an invitation to play a round of Pokémon trading. While in Panels 1 and 2 Miru seems unsure of himself and suffering from a lack of confidence in his ability to make new friends, Charles's overture of friendship has brought out a far more confident and assertive version of Miru. Once he determines that Charles genuinely wants to be friends, he is able to let his guard down and engage with him.

The combination of words and images in this text are Interdependent, in that both are needed for the reader to understand the exchange. The Pokémon decks extended help the reader determine what specifically the boys are trading; however, the extended decks alone could not convey with accuracy what the nature of the interaction is without the words "Wanna trade." Both words and image together help the reader to establish that the boys are entering a round of Pokémon, wherein they choose cards to battle one another's characters. This image of two extended hands holding decks of cards, brings to mind the phrase "laying ones' cards on the table" which implies honesty and putting oneself out there for potential judgement (or acceptance) by another. While Miru initially felt reluctant to engage with class members who he felt were judgmental of him, he is now

able to open himself up to a classmate to discuss a key piece of his developing identity, the Pokémon.

Panel 6: This panel transitions from action to action (Appendix F, Item 2, Panel 6), displaying the outcome of the trade initiated in the last panel. Miru asks, “What’s your favorite?” Charles responds “Mines is Gardevoir. What’s yours?” Miru then displays his favorite card, “Mines is Tyranitar.” In the panel we see a Duo Specific relationship where each of the two Pokémon cards pictured, each representing one of the boys’ favorite cards as referenced in the text. Once again Miru initiates this interaction by asking his new friend Charles about his favorite card. Charles chooses the Gardevoir card, a psychic character that is also known as the Embrace Pokémon because of its ability to protect its trainer through use of its psychic power. According to the Pokédex, an index of all the different Pokémon cards, Gardevoir has the power to see into the future and will give its life to protect its trainer (<https://pokedex.org/#/pokemon/282>). In contrast, Tyranitar is a massive armored monster type Pokémon. Because of the strength of this character and its armored skin, Tyranitar is not shy to launch attacks, and as described in the Pokédex even the ground quakes when Tyranitar walks (<https://pokedex.org/#/pokemon/248>).

In researching the powers of each of these cards, it seems significant that Charles, the student who was able to perceive Miru’s suffering and act in a way that made him feel accepted, would pick a psychic card. For Miru, who was ostracized and initially resistant to making friends because of bullying, it seems significant that in this context his card is associated with strength as evidenced through the words “stone edge” as a stone is an obstacle that can be difficult to crack. Though Miru initially defended himself against his classmates by closing off and walking away, Charles’s ability to perceive the

hurt caused by other students and his desire to heal this hurt, much like Gardevoir would for its trainer, quickly cut through Miru's stone-like façade to broker a lasting friendship between the boys.

Panel 7: Miru then transitions from subject to subject (Appendix F, Item 2, Panel 7), to move focus away from the game at hand and the significance of the cards, to show the two characters' smiling faces. In their final interaction, Charles asks Miru, "So what's your name?" To which Miru responds, "I'm Miru, what's yours?!" Having passed the initial friendship screening symbolized by the trading of Pokémon cards, Miru is confident in his choice of a new friend, and thus asks confidently, "Can we be best friends!!!" This panel is Word Specific. The bold black lettering and central location in the middle of the image and directly between the two boys further emphasizes the significance of this question, and the three exclamation points show his excitement about this interaction. Charles responds, "Sure, why not" providing the final affirmation of the bonding power of this Pokémon trade and the boys' mutual desire to be friends.

Panel 8: The final panel (Appendix F, Item 2, Panel 8) of this comic jumps forward in a scene to scene transition to tell the reader a very important piece of information about Miru and Charles's friendship: "It's been 11 years since this day and we are still BEST FRIENDS!" In this final Word Specific panel, we see the importance Miru places on his friendship with Charles over the years. Despite the passage of time and the fact that they no longer go to the same school, they have remained best friends.