Shifting the educational narrative for youth of color: Moving from criminalization to liberation in alternative schooling

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Boston College
Lynch School of Education

Department of
Teacher Education, Special Education, Curriculum and Instruction

Program of
Curriculum and Instruction

SHIFTING THE EDUCATIONAL NARRATIVE FOR YOUTH OF COLOR: MOVING FROM CRIMINALIZATION TO LIBERATION IN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLING

Dissertation
by

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Abstract

Shifting the educational narrative for youth of color:

Moving from criminalization to liberation in alternative schooling

Raquel Sáenz Ortiz

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Patrick Proctor

Youth of color are owed an "education debt" from this country, built on systems that sought to disenfranchise people of color, from colonialism and slavery to legacies of redlining and present-day criminalization practices (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Black, Indigenous and Latinx youth have consistently been pushed out of schools at higher rates than other groups (Morris, 2016). In recognizing this problem, this dissertation examined the ways that one alternative program in an urban-area in the Northeast sought to re-engage youth of color through emancipatory pedagogical models. All students, except for one, were youth of color with the majority of students being of Caribbean origin (i.e. Haitian, Dominican, Puerto Rican, Trinidadian, St. Lucian, Jamaican). In examining a need for emancipatory pedagogies, I conducted interviews with alumni and focus groups with current students to understand the multitude of reasons that students had been pushed out of traditional schools in their previous educational experiences. I then conducted interviews with past and present staff, as well as observations in the program, to understand the different pedagogies that were created that promoted decolonization and liberation in this particular alternative program. I then analyzed the short and long-

term impacts of the program, primarily in understanding how the program shaped student identities.

This study employed a qualitative approach, including a Youth Participatory Action Research component, to examine the factors listed above. MAXQDA was used to code transcripts of focus groups and interviews to determine themes in understanding the development and impact of emancipatory pedagogical models. Findings indicated the importance of creating a foundation for emancipatory pedagogies through staff spaces and conversations to understand implicit biases and teaching philosophies. This work should then be enhanced by building deep and supportive relationships with students and teaching in ways that uplift students' cultures and promote critical consciousness. Key impacts of these pedagogies were found in racial identity, which was tied to gender identity and academic identity.

A mi hermano, Gabriel Andrés Sáenz, por siempre creer en mí.
Qué descansa en paz.

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION **12**

PROBLEM 12
RESEARCH OVERVIEW 18
POSITIONALITY 19

CHAPTER TWO: MESTIZA METHODOLOGY **22**

A THEORETICAL-METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO LIBERATORY RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION 22
WHAT IS A MESTIZA METHODOLOGY? 23
Chicana Feminist Epistemologies *24*
Concepts of borderlands *25*
Bricolage *26*
THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR A MESTIZA METHODOLOGY 27
Critical Race Theory *29*
Postcolonial Lens *31*
MESTIZA METHODOLOGY: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS 33
Instruments and Data Collection Methods *33*
Interviews *33*
Introducing Participants *34*
Leonel 35
Tiago 36
Alejandra 36
Trina 37
Trey 38
Classroom observations *38*
Youth Participatory Action Research *40*
Data Analysis *44*

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW **49**

INTRODUCTION 49
U.S. CAPITALISM AND THE SYSTEMATIC DEHUMANIZATION OF PEOPLE OF COLOR 50
Slavery *51*
Post-Slavery *52*
Jim Crow *53*
Redlining *55*
Additional housing practices *56*
Lasting impact *57*
CONTEMPORARY STRUCTURES CRIMINALIZING PEOPLE OF COLOR 58
Prison-industrial complex *58*
Youth impact *61*
RACIST VIOLENCE PUSHING YOUNG PEOPLE OF COLOR OUT OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM 62
Schools and ideological control *63*
School-to-confinement pathways *64*
Psychosocial impact and the power of language *67*
Leaving school *73*
"LAST CHANCE" SCHOOLS 74
History and structure of alternative schools in the U.S. *75*
Characteristics of alternative programs *77*
Alternative school successes *80*
CRITICAL AND EMANCIPATORY PEDAGOGICAL PHILOSOPHIES 82

Postcolonial Education ... *82*
México ... 83
Puerto Rico ... 84
Ghana ... 85
Kenya ... 86
Mozambique ... 87
Popular Education ... *87*
Chile ... 90
Brazil ... 90
Pedagogies of Freedom ... *91*
Restorative Practices ... *93*
Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Pedagogies ... *94*
Culturally Relevant Pedagogical Models ... 96
Culturally Sustaining Pedagogical Models ... 100
CONCLUSION ... 110

CHAPTER FOUR: PUSHED OUT OF THE SYSTEM ... 112

"SCHOOL'S NOT FOR ME" ... 113
AGE OF DISENGAGEMENT ... 116
STRUCTURAL FACTORS ... 117
Biased Disciplinary Systems ... *118*
Charter Schools ... *122*
Policing ... *124*
Unreasonable Commute ... *126*
Standardized Testing ... *127*
SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT ... 131
Prison-like Environment ... *131*
Irrelevant Curriculum ... *133*
Neighborhood Violence: "You have to grow up quick" ... *136*
INTERPERSONAL FACTORS ... 139
Disconnect with Educators ... *139*
Bullying ... *145*
PERSONAL FACTORS ... 146
NARRATIVES OF RESISTANCE ... 148
OPTING INTO ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION ... 150

CHAPTER FIVE: CREATING AN EMANCIPATORY PEDAGOGY ... 153

WHY DO WE NEED EMANCIPATORY PEDAGOGIES? ... 155
ORIGINS OF THE HANDS ON KNOWLEDGE PROGRAM ... 158
Competency-Based Grading ... *159*
Critical Consciousness ... *159*
PROGRAM POLICIES AND STRUCTURES ... 160
Orientation ... *160*
Restorative Justice ... *162*
Electives ... *163*
Cut-Off Policy ... *164*
Phone Policy ... *166*
DEVELOPING EMANCIPATORY PEDAGOGIES ... 168
Developing values and practices to promote liberation ... *169*
Ethnic Matching ... 169
Influencing Teacher Philosophies ... 171
Examining Implicit Bias ... 172
Collaborative Meetings ... 174
Connections to Culturally Relevant Models ... 176
"Y'all are Homies": Building deep relationships with students ... *177*
Supportive Staff ... 178

Teacher Openness 181
Small Learning Community 182
Ubuntu 184
Practices to build ubunity 185
"[Hands On Knowledge] runs on Black Power": Emancipatory Curriculum 188
Afrocentric Focus 188
Critical Consciousness 190
Project-based Learning 192
Teach-Ins 195
LIMITATIONS 199
Decline in Restorative Justice 200
Lack of Consistency 200
Lack of Electives 202
Exclusion of Cultures 203
Standardized Testing 204
CONCLUSION 205

CHAPTER SIX: PROGRAM IMPACT 207

AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION 208
Racial Identity 208
Gender and Sexual Identity 211
CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS 216
Critical Reflection 216
Critical Action 218
Lasting Impact 221
SOCIOEMOTIONAL IMPACT 222
Anger Management 223
Emotional Support 226
Respect 227
Shifts over time 231
ACADEMIC IDENTITY 232
Perception of ability 233
Public Speaking 235
SHIFTS THROUGH THE ERAS 236
Origins 237
Building emancipatory pedagogies 238
Current Era 239
PROGRAM FAILURES 240
Attendance 241
Graduation Rates 241
Staff Turnover 242

CHAPTER SEVEN: 244

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

RQ1: PUSH OUT FACTORS 244
RQ 2: FRAMEWORK FOR AN EMANCIPATORY PEDAGOGICAL MODEL 246
Values and practices that promote liberation 248
Deep relationships with students in a family environment 250
Build critical consciousness while promoting racial/ethnic pride 251
RQ3: IMPACT ON IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION 252
ANSWERABILITY 256
IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY, PRACTICE, AND RESEARCH 258
Implications for policy 259
Implications for practice 260

Implications for future research *263*
LIMITATIONS 264
REFERENCES **265**
APPENDICES **293**
APPENDIX A: STAFF INTERVIEW PROTOCOL 293
APPENDIX B: ALUMNI INTERVIEW PROTOCOL 297
APPENDIX C: CLASSROOM OBSERVATION PROTOCOL 300

"Colonized peoples have been compelled to define what it means to be human because there is a deep understanding of what it has meant to be considered not fully human, to be *savage*" (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 26)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In an era where race has become increasingly politicized and discourse of racism has shifted to more covert means, schools have increasingly placed the perceived failures of Black and Brown youth on the individual children and their families. Discourse surrounding the "achievement gap" serves to perpetuate this problematic thinking by failing to take into account the history that has shaped this dynamic: a long history of disenfranchising Black and Brown communities in this country, which began with settler colonialism and chattel slavery. These systems exist in the classroom through punitive disciplinary systems and hegemonic curricula, among other dynamics. Students who challenge these structures are frequently pushed out of the traditional education system. In many places, the alternative schools where these youth end up are perceived as lower quality and further perpetuate problematic dynamics that maintain the status quo. However, there are schools that exist that recognize the need to provide a humanizing pedagogy and a place of resistance to the semi-colonial state. In this research, through a case study of one school, I seek to understand the ways that one alternative program worked to actively address systemic inequities by seeking to create pedagogies that promoted decolonization and liberation.

Problem

The education system in the United States largely ensures the perpetuation of racism and coloniality in the lives of youth of color, particularly Black and Brown youth. In considering the roots of settler colonialism in the United States, I refer to the stealing

of land from indigenous populations, development of a system of chattel slavery, and the eradication of indigenous populations. These systems set the precedence for a national ideology built on the systematic oppression of, and violence toward, communities of color. This violence has been both symbolic and physical in the ways that it is perpetuated in formal education structures. In problematizing public schooling, this research starts with an understanding of the United States as a country where internal colonialism operates. The use of the term "internal colonialism" arose in the early 1960s in both the United States and Latin America. In the United States, Harold Cruse first used the term in *Rebellion or Revolution* to identify Black Americans as a colonized population (Blauner, 1969). In Latin America, Pablo González Casanova used the term around the same time to describe the racialized economic divisions in Mexico between *mestizos* and the indigenous population (Gutiérrez, 2004). In both cases, it was understood, as Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) and Charles Hamilton (1967) emphasized, that colonialism was the foundation of institutional racism. Internal colonialism is "a structured relationship of domination and subordination which are defined along ethnic and/or racial lines when the relationship is established or maintained to serve the interests of all or part of the dominant group" (Barrera, 1979, p. 193).

In understanding colonialism in its more classic context, there is traditionally "a geographically external political unit" of control (Blauner, 1969). In the case of internal colonialism, ghettos and reservations become the colonies, spaces that are intentionally created to remove power from these communities, often by placing them in less desirable or more polluted geographic areas (Rothstein, 2017). "Racism daily constrained the lives of residents in these domestic colonies. Like the wretched of the earth elsewhere, the

residents of these domestic colonies had few opportunities or means to improve their material conditions" (Gutiérrez, 2004, p. 284). Colonialism also continues in more concrete ways through the occupation of indigenous land. Desegregation mandates functioned in a way that perpetuated coloniality by forcing Black youth and other youth of color into predominantly white schools where they faced physical violence and psychological violence through racist educators and hegemonic curriculum. Meanwhile, white students were free to stay in their neighborhoods and attend their same schools. As in other colonial contexts, schools created an atmosphere of submission and inhibition for youth of color (Fanon, 1968). In a Marxist lens, this type of education is one that the ruling classes use to achieve control by creating subjects that willingly submit to domination (Gramsci, 1971). Althusser (2001) postulated that schools were the main sites of ideological control in modern capitalist societies.

In the United States, the colonial nature and stratification of education has been very much created along racial lines, evident through differences in education quality in segregated schools, both in the past and present. Nationwide, in the 2011-2012 school year, 23.2% of black youth were suspended, compared to 6.7% of white youth (Skiba & Losen, 2015). In relation to educational attainment, in the city of Boston in 2008, 11.9% of young Black people and 9.7% of Latinos obtained a Bachelor's degree, compared to 22.3% of whites (Jennings, 2010). These statistics are even starker in relation to graduate degrees. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) framed this as an "educational debt", problematizing the term "achievement gap" as one that removes blame from social systems. The educational debt is something that consisted of a historical debt, an economic debt, sociopolitical debt, and moral debt. Nonetheless, the low achievement of

Black and Brown youth is the result of a system rooted in slavery and coloniality that ensures the dominance of small portion of the population (read: affluent, white men). The result of this system has a deep-rooted history of criminalizing youth of color, particularly black men.

Zero-tolerance crime policies have invaded schools through zero-tolerance disciplinary structures that result in high levels of suspensions and expulsions for youth of color. A study of 12 cities in the United States found that Black youth were suspended or expelled at a rate between 14 and 296% higher than their representation in the population (Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 1999). Furthermore, in 2000, the national arrest rate for Black youth was 74% higher than for whites (Browne, 2003). "Ongoing severe and consistent racial disparities in school suspensions and expulsion lead to a variety of other negative outcomes: The more students are removed from school through suspension and expulsion, the more they vanish from graduation stages and fill the pipeline to prison" (Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, & Pollock 2017, p. 208). In addition to race, class also remains a fundamental element in the perpetuation of colonial structures for certain populations. While cities have increasingly created alternative education programs for youth of color, the vast majority of these programs serve to further perpetuate the school to prison pipeline. In reviewing several types of continuation schools, Jessica Dunning-Lozano (2016) found that the majority of programs emphasized rote memory tasks and served a prison-like role in keeping students locked up while failing to educate them. In addition, students of color (particularly Black and Latinx) were starkly overrepresented in these schools (Dunning-Lozano, 2016).

In understanding the failures of the education system for youth of color, it is essential to understand the colonial nature of this system. Njobe (1990), referring to colonial education in South Africa, noted that "in the colonial school, the targeted objective was often to produce a colonised mind in a colonised personality. This kind of personality was intended to be more well-disposed to accepting the tenants of a colonised status" (p. 29). In this process, traditional knowledge was devalued and portrayed as primitive (Njobe, 1990, p. 29). Furthermore, the colonizer successfully developed the colonial systems by creating a class of the colonized who believed in the superiority of the colonial culture and thus, assisted the colonized in ruling. These individuals became the "colonized elite" (Blauner, 1969). After decolonization, these individuals were often the ones that perpetuated a neocolonial dynamic by continuing to ensure the maintenance of colonial systems (Njobe, 1990). In the United States, Pinderhughes (2011) classifies these individuals as the "Black petty bourgeoisie" who administer the internal colonies in ghettos.

In considering the colonial nature of education in the United States, the framework of a decolonial education becomes useful in envisioning change. "Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men. But this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the 'thing' which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself" (Fanon, 1968, pp. 36-37). Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) noted the importance of indigenous communities in decolonizing their minds in order "to claim a space in which to develop a sense of authentic humanity" (p. 23). Thus, liberation necessarily involves "a recovery of self and autonomous dignity" (Memmi, 1965). Throughout many countries, cultural revitalization projects became an

important part of anti-colonial movements (Blauner, 1969). In the United States, cultural revitalization through education was called for through the various social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. One of the points in the Black Panther Party Ten-Point Plan was: "We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present-day society" (Black Panther Party, 1967). Similarly, the Young Lords, a Puerto Rican liberationist group, created a 13-point program based on the Black Panther Party platform. In the Young Lords platform, their call for education reform was the following: "We want a true education of our Creole culture and Spanish language" (Melendez, 2003, p. 234). This was further clarified: "We must learn our history of fighting against cultural, as well as economic genocide by the yanqui. Revolutionary culture, culture of our people, is the only true teaching" (Melendez, 2003, p. 234). Both the Black Panther Party and Young Lords were socialist organizations that based their platforms on an understanding of the connections between capitalism and colonialism, particularly the internal colonialism of the United States in recent eras. Both organizations developed community-run educational programs, which were actively targeted by the United States government, demonstrating the threat that emancipatory education has for structures of power in this country (Melendez, 2003).

Several schools in the United States have sought to continue a decolonizing agenda through a curriculum that focuses on the development of critical consciousness by recognizing the historical roots of these problems through the curriculum. In examining the project of decolonizing education I focus on the project of destabilizing dynamics of settler colonialism that have marked the organization, governance, and curriculum of

traditional schools in this country, while also recognizing the incompleteness of the project of decolonization without the return of indigenous lands (Tuck & Yang, 2012). In this study, I seek to analyze this type of program through a case study of a school that could potentially serve as a model of an emancipatory pedagogy that promotes decolonization and liberation. This particular program is one that actively resists the dominant structure to create spaces for youth of color, particularly Black and Latino, to analyze and critique social injustice. The core values of this program are critical consciousness, self-awareness, and Ubuntu. Ubuntu is a Nguni Bantu term of humanness and unity, which defines how our relationships are constructed through and with others (Etieyibo, 2017).

Research Overview

Through this research, I sought to understand the ways that one alternative school in an urban area the Northeastern United States could actively address systemic inequities and potentially create a decolonizing pedagogy that focused on resistance to structures of oppression and develop practices of freedom for youth of color who have been pushed out of traditional education systems. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What led youth of color in the Hands On Knowledge program to previously be pushed out of traditional education systems?

RQ2: What are the particular emancipatory pedagogies that promoted decolonization and liberation among students in the Hands On Knowledge program?

RQ3: How did the Hands On Knowledge curriculum, based on decolonizing and emancipatory pedagogies, affect the identity construction of youth?

In considering the concept of pedagogies of decolonization and liberation, there is an understanding of this particular pedagogy as an extension of the physical processes of decolonization. Thus, in examining the program, it was also important to consider areas of failure, as well as areas that limited the curriculum in order to understand how the program could potentially expand and improve. Ethnographic methods, including participant observation, interviews, and focus groups were used to analyze the curriculum and experience of both educators and students. Eleven alumni, two administrators and three past and present teachers were interviewed. Focus groups were also conducted with thirty current students. In addition, a portion of the data came from two Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) projects, which took place in the Spring of 2018 and Fall of 2018 with two separate senior classes in this particular program. The YPAR project served as a program evaluation, as well as an examination of student perceptions of the education system as a whole. Through these projects, students created creative analyses of academic texts, as well as developed a survey on critical consciousness and developed a workshop for outside educators on the pedagogy of this particular program. Students also spent time analyzing their own educational experiences and transition into the program, recording this information in a journal.

Positionality

In any research, it was important to recognize positionality in order to understand the perspective from which the research was undertaken. Although many researchers seek objectivity, this is an unobtainable goal that is overshadowed by the experiences and biases, often implicit, that any researcher carries with them. I approach this study from

"*la conciencia de la mestiza*" (Anzaldúa, 1987). This *mestiza* consciousness is one that arises from roots in both indigenous cultures and the dominant culture in Latin America.

> "Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, la mestiza undergoes a struggle of the flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war […] the new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures […] Not only does she sustain the contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 101)

I am the daughter of a Puerto Rican woman and a Mexican immigrant, both of whom were actively involved in the Chicano movement. I was raised in a city and state that were majority Latinx. Nonetheless, in first grade I recall that after learning about the Pilgrims and the Mayflower, I came home to proudly recount my newfound knowledge, which I assumed related somehow to the history of my family. My father was notably upset and took it upon himself to begin my education of Mexican history and the history of Latin American revolutionaries. When I began my teaching career on the border of Mexico, in a school that was 99% Mexican and Chicano, I sought to center Mexican and Chicano history and identity in the Social Studies curriculum that I created. In doing this, I constantly clashed with the entirely Chicano administration, entrenched in No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policies, individuals who had succumbed to mental colonization and internalized racism. As I continued teaching, it seemed to me that all schools perpetuated the dominant narrative, ensuring that working class youth of color were kept at the bottom. In my first year in Boston, 2013, I had the privilege of working in an alternative

education program where these systems were challenged on a daily basis. This program impacted me deeply in seeing the potential for formal education to be used to shift systemic inequities in a concrete way that privileges counternarratives and challenges the status quo. This was the school that was the site of this current research.

In understanding my positionality as a researcher, it is also essential to note that I was a practitioner researcher in this study. In the first year of the research, the 2017-2018 school year, I worked as the guidance counselor in the program. In the second year of the study, the 2018-2019 school year, I worked as the senior Humanities teacher and guidance counselor. During both years, the YPAR project was part of a course that I taught for the Student Advisory Board, a group of seniors that led community circles in the program. Through this, I was aware of power dynamics that existed between the students and myself, as well as politics in the program that might have impacted the data I collect. Thus, throughout the analyses, I sought to recognize these issues and the potential impact they potentially had on the research. However, at the same time, the benefit of being a teacher researcher is that I had already built a strong rapport with students and other staff members. In addition, I was dedicated to understanding ways to ensure that the program was effectively supporting students through the curriculum used.

CHAPTER TWO: MESTIZA METHODOLOGY
A THEORETICAL-METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO LIBERATORY RESEARCH

Introduction

Methodology is always driven by theory and ideology, whether or not a researcher will recognize it as such. In any research, certain characteristics of participants are honed while others are ignored. What a researcher sees in the data, whether it is quantitative or qualitative, is often based on the life experiences and cultural background of the researcher. Academic research has long served as a means to justify colonization and domination, through a long history of eugenics and research that romanticizes people of color or paints them as savage (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). "Research 'through imperial eyes' […] is imbued with an 'attitude' and 'spirit' which assumes a certain ownership of the entire world" (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 56). In considering this, particularly for communities of color, research should also be conceptualized as a potential tool for liberation.

> "Necesitamos teorias that will rewrite history using race, class, gender and ethnicity as categories of analysis, theories that cross borders, that blur boundaries- new kinds of theories with new theorizing methods. In our mestizaje theories we create new categories for those of us left out or pushed out of the existing ones. If we have been gagged and disempowered by theories, we can also be loosened and empowered by theories" (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxvi).

As a Chicana and Boriqua, the daughter of Latin American immigrants, as well as a female history teacher of color, I am all too aware of the systems that have been constructed over time to ensure the perpetuation of a status quo in which people of

European origin dominate countries around the globe through imperialism, neocolonialism, and forms of predatory capitalist manipulation. Wallerstein (2007) denoted the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer countries as "core-periphery" where core countries exploited the labor and resources of peripheral countries in order to gain capitalist control. Research has been utilized in the past as a means for maintaining and justifying these harsh inequities. In recognition of this, research must necessarily become a means for change, with action imbedded in the research process.

What is a Mestiza Methodology?

In proposing a *Mestiza* methodology, I drew from Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) decolonizing methodologies, Delgado Bernal's (1998) Chicana feminist epistemology Anzaldúa's (1987) conception of borderlands, and Kaomea's (2003) research as *bricolage,* underlining these with Critical Race Theory and Postcolonial Theory. A *Mestiza* consciousness is defined as "the ability of an individual subject to understand her position in a world that undervalues subaltern communities and how she uses this knowledge to transform society" (Elenes, 2001, p. 692). Thus, a *Mestiza* methodology draws on this consciousness as a means to use research for social transformation.

A decolonizing framework should be done from the perspective of the community. In recognizing the diversity of backgrounds among the students in this study, the primary cultural backgrounds, as students identify themselves, were Latinx and Black (from a variety of countries, mainly in the Caribbean, Somalia, and Cape Verde). Most of the students were from high poverty backgrounds. Although I lived in the same neighborhood as most of my students and shared a similar cultural background to many (Latina), I recognize there was a disconnect in many ways due to socio-economics and

not growing up in this neighborhood. Thus, it was important for me to work with my students in co-creating visions of their educational stories and an analysis of the program they were in. Tuhiwai Smith (1999) recognized several questions to analyze in conducting decolonizing research:

> "Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interest does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated?" (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 10)

In disseminating research, it was important to do so in culturally appropriate ways. In including Youth Participatory Action Research, students were involved in developing methodologies of data collection and analysis, as well as dissemination through presentations in our programs, as well as conference presentations. Students presented the research at the Boston-area Educators for Social Justice Conference in April 2018 and the Critical Race Studies in Education Annual Conference in June 2018.

Chicana Feminist Epistemologies

In considering the theoretical foundations for methodology, Chicana feminist epistemology stemmed from African-American womanist epistemologies, creating a foundation in which the identity of the researcher was central to the research conducted, considering the impact of who was generating knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 1998). "A unique characteristic of a Chicana feminist epistemology is that it also validates and addresses experiences that are intertwined with issues of immigration, migration, generational status, bilingualism, limited English proficiency, and the contradictions of Catholicism" (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 561). Although Delgado Bernal (1998) implied

that these categories of the approach were unique to Latinx populations, if one were to replace "Catholicism" with simply "religion", these categories apply many immigrants. Thus, there is really a centering of intersectionality where analysis focuses on the convergence of "systems of race, gender, and class domination" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1241). Through this, it is naturally a "theory and method of oppositional consciousness" and social action (Sandoval, 2000, p. 9). In conceptualizing a Chicana feminist epistemology and method, I also draw on Sandoval (2000) in conceiving of this as a methodology of the oppressed that positions the researcher as resistant to "dominant and oppressive powers" (p. 53). As will be mentioned throughout, a key piece of this was reading signs of power throughout the research, in interactions between myself as the researcher and youth participants, as well as power structures that impact students' lives.

Concepts of borderlands

A *Mestiza* methodology locates itself on a borderlands, whether this is a physical borderlands, a cultural borderlands, or another form of borderlands.

> "Psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands [...] are not particular to the Southwest. In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper classes touch, where the space between individuals shrinks with intimacy" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 19)

The public education system in Boston is most certainly a borderlands, particularly the alternative program where this research took place. Students in this program were almost entirely immigrants and the children of immigrants, most of them

Black and Brown youth. Anzaldúa (1987) hypothesized that individuals forced to live on the borderlands are those marginalized by society and thus, develop a sixth sense for survival in a space of hybridity. Particularly in considering my first research question on examining what pushed youth of color out of schools, this perspective was essential in understanding the multiplicity of factors and layers of contexts that impacted students' educational experiences. In understanding the strengths of youth in this study, I also drew on the borderlands that I have traversed. I am a dual citizen of México and the United States. I have been crossing borders since I was three months old, being trained by my parents by the time I could speak in how to respond to the questions of border patrol officers. And yet, as a light-skinned Latina and a passport-holding citizen of two countries, I am aware of the privileges I have that many immigrants lack. As a young person, I struggled to come to terms with my identity as a Mexican, a Puerto Rican, and an *estadounidense*. This struggle was amplified by the common core curriculum that was at odds with my own identity, creating a disconnect for me with education in my later high school years. Thus, as a researcher and educator, my own identity and experiences undergird the work that I do. In addition, in understanding the ways that the education system further disenfranchised youth of color, it is essential understand that research is not just about observing but is also about taking action (Kaomea, 2003).

Bricolage

Lastly, in constructing a *Mestiza* methodology, it was important to draw from multiple methodological strands in order to find a way to utilize research as a means for action, particularly in considering ways to involve youth throughout the research process. Kaomea (2016) postulated a postcolonial research methodology that stemmed from Lévi-

Strauss' (1966) concept of *bricolage* and the traditional Hawaiian art form of *Ho'oku'iku'i. Bricolage* comes from the French term *bricoleur,* which denotes a handyman or handywoman (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). "Research bricoleurs value diverse forms of knowledge, especially those knowledges that have historically been subjugated" (Kaomea, 2016). In particular, the bricoleur is aware of the complexity of social structures and the ways they play out in everyday life; As a form of critical hermeneutics, bricolage "maintains that meaning-making cannot be quarantined from where one stands or is placed in the web of social reality" (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 82)

In addition, tools of the colonizer should be coopted and combined with indigenous knowledge to create a new methodology (Kaomea, 2016). It was also important to remember that many Western traditions of "knowledge" and research have been taken without recognition from global Black and Brown communities (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Kaomea (2016) compared this to *Ho'oku'iku'i,* a traditional form of weaving, where Hawaiians adapted weaving techniques taught to them by missionaries in order to create their own styles through which indigenous beliefs and identities could be voiced. This is the underlying purpose of a *Mestiza* methodology. Another key aspect of a *Mestiza* methodology, which derived from the tradition of the research bricoleur is an understanding of the impact of power and the dominant discourse, as well as an action component to remove knowledge from the hands of the hegemonic group.

Theoretical foundations for a Mestiza Methodology

In understanding the ways that youth of color are criminalized, it was essential to understand that State institutions, structures, and ideologies function in concrete ways

that maintain a colonial system for people of color in the United States. As mentioned in the introduction, this work began from a conceptualization of the United States as an internal colonial state. Thus, the starting point for analysis must necessarily be the "*conditions of the colonized*" (Pinderhughes, 2011, p. 236). In this country, internal colonialism is reflected in communities of color through "enduring residential segregation", "massive education inequality", "seeping suppression through imprisonment", "systematic economic subjugation" and "profound health disparities" (Pinderhughes, 2011, p. 236).

As Louis Althusser (2001) postulated, schools are the central location through which national ideologies are imposed; "the school (but also other State institutions like the Church, or other apparatuses like the Army) teaches 'know-how', but in forms which ensure *subjection to the ruling ideology* or the mastery of its 'practice'" (p. 89). Althusser identified schools as the dominant ideological state apparatus in capitalist societies in the ways that schools control minds. Extending the concept of state apparatuses from Marx, which identified mechanisms of the State that enabled the ruling classes to ensure domination, Althusser distinguished a difference between ideological and repressive state apparatuses: "What distinguishes ISAs (*ideological state apparatuses)* from the (Repressive) State Apparatus is the following basic difference: the Repressive State Apparatus functions 'by violence', whereas the Ideological State Apparatuses *function 'by ideology'*" (Althusser, 2001, p. 97). However, he recognized that there is violence in ISAs, as well as ideology in repressive state apparatuses. According to both Althusser and Marx, the State is a mechanism of repression, which ensures the reproduction of a working class. However, this analysis failed to take into account the dynamics of

societies that have been predicated upon genocide, colonialism, and slavery. These social forces have ensured that the repressed classes are largely made up of previously colonized and enslaved populations. Althusser (2001) further noted that schools use expulsion and suspension to serve as a means to repress the working class. This process is further intensified for people of color, particularly Black, *mestizo* and indigenous youth, reflecting the coloniality of this nation. In consideration of this, it seems clear that the school-to-prison pipeline is an intentional mechanism of a colonial state.

Critical Race Theory

In analyzing the educational experience of youth of color, critical race theory (CRT) served as an essential lens. In particular, one of the basic tenets of CRT is the normality that racism takes on in this country. According to Bell (1992), this tenet of racial realism has four major themes: Firstly, racial history in the United States has demonstrated “a pattern of cyclical progress and cyclical regression” (p. 98). Secondly, socioeconomic power is the true force in this country, through which Black Americans have always been close to the bottom. Thirdly, struggle is essential. Fourth, it is essential to understand this reality of racism in order to create a shift from this cyclical pattern of subjugation.

Race has become a proxy for racism, but while race is a socially constructed phenomenon, racism is a concrete system that has taken the lives of hundreds of thousands of individuals. “Everyone has skin color, but not everyone’s skin color counts as race, let alone as evidence of criminal conduct” (Fields & Fields, 2012, p. 27). Racism, in conjunction with larger colonial systems and a militarized state, has ensured that many youth of color are treated as potential criminals inside the education system.

Carter, et al. (2017) stated that "'race' is a consequence of slavery and conquest". It would be more apt to say that racism is a consequence of these systems in a colonial state. Patterns of racism are frequently evident through implicit bias of teachers and administrators, microaggressions, and a colorblind perspective in pedagogy and curriculum (Carter, et al., 2017). Bonilla-Silva (1997) postulated that colorblind perspectives further perpetuated racism as mechanisms in a new racialized social system, through which the system continues to function in the same way using different discourse. From an internal colonialism perspective, racism is used to maintain the power of the White majority by exploiting people who are categorized in racial terms (Blauner, 1972).

In relation to a critical race methodology in education, the definition provided by Solórzano and Yosso (2002) is one that provides an important foundation for this research:

> "a theoretically grounded approach to research that (a) foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process. However, it also challenges the separate discourses on race, gender, and class by showing how these three elements intersect to affect the experiences of students of color; (b) challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color; (c) offers a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination; and (d) focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color. Furthermore, it views these experiences as sources of strength and (e) uses the interdisciplinary knowledge base of ethnic

studies, women's studies, sociology, history, humanities, and the law to better understand the experiences of students of color" (p. 24)

In this particular study, through interviews, participatory action research, and creative methods, the goal was be to bring to the forefront the stories and perspectives of youth, conceiving of these young people as agents of change and seeking to work towards liberatory solutions as co-researchers. In highlighting the experiences of students of color who have struggled in previous educational environments, as well as educators of color, an intersectionality approach was essential. In addition, as will be mentioned further below, a critical bifocality lens was used to understand these experiences in a larger historical context. As a theory and method, a key element in CRT is that it is a form of challenging the dominant ideology, as well as a research method that values the experiential knowledge of people of color (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Postcolonial Lens

Thomas (2000) identifies four strands of a Critical Race and Postcolonial theory: external, internal, legitimate-ideological, and illegitimate-ideological. External exposes the reinforcement of the "status quo", particularly in how "law perpetuates inegalitarian social conditions despite its claimed allegiance to social equality" (Thomas, 2000, p. 1198). Internal exposes how the application of laws in individual cases is inconsistent and perpetuates racial hierarchy. In postcolonial theory, this relates to how laws of "sovereignty" are inconsistently applied by the IMF (Thomas, 2000). Legitimate-ideological and illegitimate-ideological expose the ways that ideology legitimates the status quo (Thomas, 2000). This research will examine all four strands through the

literature review in understanding the historical context. In addition, an internal colonial framework will be used:

> "First, it emphasizes the fact that racism is more than mere prejudice, that it is also institutional. […] Second, it locates power relations at the center of race relations. Third, it places an emphasis on the structural arrangements in society. Fourth, the internal colonial framework involved an [*sic*] historical emphasis in the study of race relations. Finally, the internal colonial framework is infused with activist valuations. That it, by viewing colonialism as oppressive, calls are made for decolonization" (Martínez, 1982. pp. 169-170)

Contributing to a critical race theory and postcolonial lens in analyzing the educational experiences of youth of color, as well as educators of color, critical bifocality was also be used as a means of ensuring that this research was clearly located within the structural and temporal locations that contributed to analysis. Critical bifocality is a theory of method developed by Lois Weis and Michelle Fine (2012) that seeks to highlight macro-level and historic structural dynamics in setting the context for schooling. This dual lens highlights the need to be "attentive to *both* structures and lives" (Weis & Fine, 2012, p. 174), rather than one or the other, understanding that they are linked. In this study, it was essential to provide a history of the criminalization of youth of color, beginning during the period of colonization and slavery, in order to understand these tendencies as part of a historical continuum, rather than a recent problem. Through this, it was particularly important to provide a critical rereading of history in order to understand the origins of imperial visions and values (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). In particular, Lois Weis and Michelle Fine (2012) note that critical bifocality works to

display the "linkages or circuits through which structural conditions are enacted in policy and reform institutions as well as the ways in which such conditions come to be woven into community relationships and metabolized by individuals" (p. 174).

Mestiza Methodology: Data Collection and Analysis

Instruments and Data Collection Methods

As mentioned previously, in conceptualizing this study within the larger historical context, a mestiza methodology provided the guiding structure for data collection and analysis methods. In particular, a portion of the data emerged from co-constructed research that came out of the two YPAR projects conducted with seniors from the Hands On Knowledge program. In addition, there was a constant focus on examining the structures that impacted individual lives, as well as programmatic elements.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with teachers and administrators in late Spring and early Fall 2018. In presenting this data, pseudonyms are used for all staff, students, and alumni who participated in this study. In relation to staff, the current director, Sundiata, and one past director of the program, Jin, were interviewed. The current Humanities teacher, Tia, and the current Math teacher, Huey, were also interviewed. One of the co-founders of the school who was an ELA teacher, Leah, was also interviewed. Interviews with staff were essential in understanding the characteristics of the curriculum and program structure in answering my second research question. Eleven alumni were interviewed as well. Semi-structured interviews were used since only one interview was conducted with each individual during which I used an interview protocol (see Appendices), allowing for flexibility in the questions. This form of interview is

particularly appropriate when it is not possible to conduct multiple interviews, due to the flexibility (Bernard, 2002). In addition, alumni testimonials from BPS Budget Hearings, Town Halls, and School Committee Meetings from 2016 were used with permission from the past and current directors of the program. These interviews were made available online to me. This data, along with the interviews I conducted, was essential in understanding how students were pushed out of traditional education systems, essential characteristics of the program, and the long-term impact of the program on student lives. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed except for one where notes were taken at the request of an alumnus not to be recorded (see Appendix A and B for interview protocols). These interviews were also used as data for the program itself in identifying trajectories of the youth. For all alumni interviews, there was a life story component, analyzing the experiences of each person in the education system from their first memories in school through high school. For the administrators and teachers, the focus was on examining how they developed their pedagogical philosophies and how they arrived at teaching in this particular school, as well as their perceptions of the school during their time there. This data was essential for answering my second research question on how the program structure and curriculum was created. For the youth, the focus was on understanding the long-term impacts of the program, particularly in shaping critical consciousness, as well as career choices.

Introducing Participants

Eleven alumni were interviewed and thirty students participated in focus groups. Many of these students will be mentioned in the results chapter using pseudonyms. However, in contextualizing some of the research to come, I want to present some of the

youth who spoke more at length in interviews, informal conversations, and focus groups about their experiences in traditional education, as well as in the Hands On Knowledge program. The students listed below were all members at one time of the Student Advisory Board or the student-led restorative justice committee. Their names, all pseudonyms, will come up multiple times through the results chapters. They are all amazing young people with amazing stories, but I will only highlight a piece of those stories here.

Leonel

Leonel, who identified as Haitian-American, started the Hands On Knowledge program in the 2011-2012 school-year and graduated in 2014. He was born in central Massachusetts, the youngest of seven children, and spent his early years between New York and Massachusetts. His parents separated when he was younger, and he stayed with his father while some of his siblings stayed with his mother. Around the age of 13, his father lost his job and he ended up moving in with his mother. It was during this time that his attendance at school dropped notably. He had more or less dropped out of school by his sophomore year but was enrolled in the larger school that the Hands On Knowledge program was housed within. The previous Director, Jin, encouraged him to come see the program. After one day visiting the program, he saw the opportunity to make a change for himself. He enjoyed the small classes and sense of community. Through the Hands On Knowledge program, he met a martial arts instructor who he ended up working for in the following years, with whom he also studied martial arts at a monastery in China. After graduating from the Hands On Knowledge program, Leonel sought a degree in Automotive Technology and now works at BMW. Leonel later encouraged his cousin, Emmanuel, to attend the program.

Tiago

Tiago was also recommended to the Hands On Knowledge program by Leonel. He started the program in the Fall of 2012 and graduated in 2014. Tiago had spent his early years on the island of São Nicolau in Cape Verde and moved to a predominantly Black neighborhood in the city of Boston at the age of nine. He was a musician, and someone incredibly concerned with the environment, which was reflected in his diet as a vegan and lifestyle as a minimalist who biked everywhere. He had become frustrated with the education system by the beginning of high school, seeing it as a "cramming process". After hearing Leonel talk about the program, he decided to make the move, which he stated was one of the "most amazing educational" experiences he had. I had the privilege of teaching Tiago during his last year in the Hands On Knowledge program through an Arabic elective where he would also regularly give me Portuguese and Cape Verdean Creole lessons. He was a brilliant young man, truly passionate about seeking out knowledge on his own and sharing his knowledge with others. At the time of the interview, Tiago was studying Environmental Engineering at a local community college.

Alejandra

Alejandra was a young Dominican woman who came to the Hands On Knowledge program in 2015 and graduated in 2018. She was born in New York City where she lived until the age of 10 when her family moved to Boston. Growing up, it was just her and her mom until she 10 and her mother had a son. Alejandra mentioned that growing up in New York, "you have to have thick skin". She spoke about being bullied for the clothes she wore or her physical appearance. Once she started high school in Boston, she would frequently come to school late and come in high, having smoked

before class. The only class she liked was Forensic Science, which was the only class she would regularly attend. For her, coming to the Hands On Knowledge program was “eye-opening, inspiring, it motivates”. Despite that, there would be times when she would stop coming to the program, but with the support of staff she would always come back. During her senior year, she was the President of the Student Advisory Board and presented at the Critical Race Theory in Education Conference with me in New Mexico during May 2018, a month before she graduated. After graduating, she started working at T-Mobile, but hoped to become a flight attendant.

Trina

Trina, a proud Trinidadian, came to the Hands On Knowledge program in 2016 and graduated in 2019 after feeling like she might give up many times. She had struggled with depression and anxiety for years, which worsened after her father passed away several years prior. Her family struggled financially and there was not always food to eat, something that she often sought to remedy on her own in supporting her mother where she could. Her brother was autistic, something that she sometimes found difficult to deal with. These factors, along with the fact that it took her over an hour to get to school, made it difficult for her to attend school regularly. She was a student who was naturally gifted in writing and regularly interrogated and pushed back against the systems around her, even injustices that she felt were sometimes committed by staff or other students. She had served as a key member of the Student Advisory Council, as well as previously on the Restorative Justice Council when it existed. She presented with me at conferences, as well as spoke as a guest speaker in a college course that I taught. She was someone that made the effort to teach me about West Indian food and Carnival, ensuring that I

pronounced words correctly and understood roles that she played in her community in the parades for Carnival. Trina aspired to be psychologist but had taken time off after graduating to work on her mental health

Trey

Trey, who identified as Black, started the program in 2016 and graduated in 2019. He was a student who had a keen sense for justice. His family had moved around several times, including moving during his last year in the program, when it would take him two hours to get to school. He had served on the Student Advisory Board, as well as the Restorative Justice Council. He was also a student who was willing to put himself in harm's way for others. In one case, girls in the wider school had been bullying his girlfriend, a soft-spoken student. He spoke to the girls, telling them to stop, as well as to the teachers of the girls. After they continued to bully his girlfriend, one of the other girl's boyfriend got involved and threatened Trey. An administrator pulled the other student aside, but by this time Trey had become so upset he momentarily blacked out and lost his cool. As the administrator shut the door to talk to the other student, Trey punched through the glass window, which shattered into the administrator's eyes. Luckily, the administrator did not have permanent damage, recovered after a few days, and chose to have a restorative meeting with Trey rather than pressing charges. Trey was continuously a leader, before and after this experience, in teaching others about restorative justice and leading some of these processes with other students. After graduating, he took a year off, but was interested in studying Sociology in college and becoming a community organizer.

Classroom observations

Formal bi-weekly classroom observations occurred in the program from September through December 2018. Classroom observations primarily occurred in the 11th grade Humanities classroom, as well as the Self-Awareness courses and Critical Consciousness circle. The Self-Awareness class was a requirement for all students, taking place in small groups for an hour twice per week. The critical consciousness circles occurred every Friday, utilizing restorative justice methods to spur discussion and analyze issues in the Hands On Knowledge community, as well as the larger communities that students lived in. In addition, curriculum and lesson plan materials from the current Humanities teacher and the past English and History teachers were analyzed to understand the ways that each educator sought to develop and utilize a pedagogy of freedom and resistance. These systematic observations were documented through field notes and collection of student work. During formal observation periods, I would observe each class for one hour, which was time where I was not expected to be doing anything else in the program as a staff member. I observed the 11th grade Humanities class five times, the Self-Awareness class five times, and six Critical Consciousness circles.

Informal observations also occurred daily through my position as the 12th grade History teacher and guidance counselor in the program. I took notes in a field journal regarding occurrences related to the curriculum and student response, as well as growth and lags in the core areas of the program. I also regularly wrote in a field journal in reflecting on my work teaching the Senior Humanities class, as well as the YPAR project. In considering the research as a whole, it was also important to gain rapport of the students before conducting the YPAR project. This was also generally part of my job and a personal commitment to supporting students effectively. Thus, starting in November

2017, I would take students with me to community activism events on weekday evenings and weekends. I would also spend time with students on weekends supporting them in their coursework. Through this, I gained a further understanding of students' social, economic, and political contexts, as well as interests. This was an ongoing process for me as an educator.

Youth Participatory Action Research

In answering the research questions, it was essential for me to collaborate with the youth in understanding what they sought in education, as well as how the program had shaped their ideologies in relation to structural inequities. Between January and May 2018, I worked with the seniors, all youth over the age of 18, through a weekly mini course to create a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) project that highlighted their concerns in the program, as well sought to understand the impact of the program. An additional YPAR project was conducted with a separate group of students between September and December 2018. This process was particularly useful in understanding ways students were pushed out of traditional education systems, as well as the characteristics of the program that students found most and least impactful. "There is an intentionality in the PAR process about cocreating collaborative spaces to examine and discuss individual, school, and community concerns, and also to foreground indigenous knowledge and tap into individual and community assets, gifts, and talents" (McIntyre, 2000, p. 128).

Participatory Action Research (PAR), as well as Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), has been perceived as a "hope for socially relevant, hierarchy-disrupting, counter-hegemonic research" (Ayala, 2009, p. 67). In particular, as mentioned

in constructions of decolonizing methodologies, it was important to consider who had control of the research. PAR shifts this control of knowledge by allowing stakeholders to direct the process (Torre & Fine, 2006). In particular, YPAR can be a form of culturally sustaining pedagogy in examining phenomena that directly impact students, as well as an opportunity for youth to examine real issues in their lives through social science research. In some youth-based PAR projects, youth have been predominantly seen as participants with some collaborative power. McIntyre (2000; 2007) worked with both university students and elementary school students in projects where the university students were conceived of as co-researchers and the young people were labeled as "participants". However, it also has been noted that in YPAR projects where students are examining their educational environment, there is a risk for the project to impact student relationships with adults in their school (Ayala, 2009). In Hands On Knowledge, all educators took a critical perspective and thus embraced students' critiques of the programs, as well as support the YPAR project.

Overall, in any form of YPAR, the central idea is for the youth to take responsibility and leadership roles in the project; "Youth-led participatory action research (YPAR) is a form of CBPR that engages young people in identifying problems that they want to improve, conducting research to understand the nature of the problems, and advocating for changes based on research evidence" (Ozer, Newlan, Douglas, & Hubbard, 2013, p. 13). However, in conducting research between adults and youth, there are clear power dynamics that should be addressed, which could potentially impact results of the research. In this particular project, students did not receive a grade, but the project would be part of the graduation requirements. Thus, it was essential to constantly

interrogate power relations between myself and the students, as well as within the program itself.

In other cases of YPAR, there has been more of a focus on youth and community development, which was closer to the model that our project sought to follow. This particular model stated that community development and youth development must be intertwined in order to be fully effective: "When isolated from community (and organizational) development, youth development efforts are stunted in their ability to cultivate young people's individual growth, their membership in communities, and their ability to effect institutional and community change" (London, Zimmerman, & Erbstein, 2003, p. 34). However, in working with youth from non-dominant populations, it was essential to recognize that youth live within contexts of institutional oppression where it was essential to develop skills that promote the "survival and well-being" of their communities (London, et al., 2003, p. 35). Thus, as a form of mestiza methodology, PAR utilizes a multiplicity of methods in order to work towards social action.

In the first YPAR project, students were interested in reflecting on their educational experiences, as well as gaining an understanding of whether the program was effectively raising critical consciousness. Thus, each student wrote bi-weekly in an online journal, kept in a Google doc, about how they came into the program and how the program impacted them. Some of these responses were shared with the student research group and discussed. Readings on critical pedagogy, including those of Paulo Freire (2001), were also used to discuss what the students perceived as problematic in the education system. For many students, they perceived a great deal of problems in traditional educational systems but perceived a notable positive shift in the Hands On

Knowledge program. This opportunity for them to write was an example of the construction of alternative knowledges as a means for constructing alternative histories (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

In seeking to understand general student perceptions of critical consciousness, the research group read articles on critical consciousness. Students also examined components of existing critical consciousness scales (Diemer, et al., 2017; Shin, et al., 2016). In these scales, critical reflection was defined in two parts: Firstly, as egalitarianism and secondly as "critical analysis of perceived social inequalities, such as racial/ethnic, gendered, and socioeconomic constraints on educational and occupational opportunity" (Diemer, et al., 2017, p. 462). Critical action was defined as "participating in individual and/or collective action to produce sociopolitical change" (Diemer, et al., 2017, p. 462). Diemer, et al. (2017), in following the scale utilized by Williams et al. (2002), provided survey items related to examining social inequities for "certain racial or ethnic groups". Students went through each item, deciding whether or not it was applicable and easy to understand. They added additional items based on factors that they felt were missing, often more related to social media and technology. Students then presented the survey to their peers during the critical consciousness circle time and administered the survey to all students in attendance that day and analyzed the data as a group.

Creative methods, particularly Theatre of the Oppressed, were also used in both of the YPAR projects. Image Theater, a form of Theater of the Oppressed in which the actors create body sculptures representing scenarios of oppression, was used as a tool to understand and discuss concepts in articles that students were reading as part of their

research. Past studies with Afro-Canadian refugee youth found that Theater of the Oppressed could be used as a means to challenge dominant discourses in students' educational experiences (Schroeter, 2013). In another study, Theater of the Oppressed was found to be an effective method for supporting discussions of racism, sexism, ableism, classism and other social problems for "inner-city youth" (Sanders, 2004). These methods were particularly useful in gaining insight to answer my first research question in what pushes students out of traditional education systems. Through Image Theater, there was typically an oppressor and an oppressed in the body sculpture, which aided in understanding forces and individuals that served to marginalize youth in their educational experiences. Table 2.1 serves to further identify the methods used to answer each of the research questions.

Research questions	Interviews			Classroom		Program
	Alumni	Teachers	Administrators	observations	YPAR	Testimonials
RQ1: What leads to youth of color in the the Hands On Knowledge program to be pushed out of traditional education systems?	X				X	
RQ2: What are the freedom and resistance characteristics of the curriculum and program structure, and how is it created?	X	X	X	X	X	X
RQ3: How does one program that uses curricula based on decolonizing and emancipatory pedagogies affect the lives of youth in the short and long term?	X			X	X	X

Table 2.1. Research methods

Data Analysis

In analyzing this data, grounded theory provided the primary data analysis method where emergent codes directed further data collection as the research progressed. Initial analysis was led by "sensitizing questions", examining what was happening and how the

participant defined the situation, then "theoretical questions "will be used to analyze the relationship between concepts that arise" and "guiding questions" will be used to further develop the research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I coded the data utilizing MAXQDA. In addition, Critical Race Theory informed the data analysis in the ways that codes were constructed, recognizing that research cannot and should not be objective, particularly in the social sciences. In-vivo coding was also be used to maintain the participants' words. My positionality and values may have impacted the ways that I coded and analyzed the data, as they do for all researchers. As an activist researcher, I strived to code and analyze data in ways that are aligned with critical bifocality, examining the relationship between structures and lives in order to develop counternarratives in challenging the dominant structures to put forth a potential model of an emancipatory pedagogy. Saldaña (2009) noted that the agenda of the researcher naturally impacts the ways that codes are created.

In coding and analyzing the data, I worked to develop counternarratives to the majoritarian stories, understanding the necessity for pedagogies of decolonization and liberation, as well as how these pedagogies were constructed. Through this, counternarratives were useful in answering all three research questions. Firstly, this method was used to understand the stories of youth in being pushed out of traditional education systems, understanding the myriad of factors that impacted this experience. Secondly, the existence of an emancipatory pedagogy was in itself a counternarrative. Lastly, in understanding the short term and long term impacts of the program, counternarratives were used to highlight the stories of youth of color as individuals with agency and potential for revolutionary change.

Counternarratives are the stories of individuals on the margins of society (Solórzano & Yasso, 2002). These stories are used as “a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (Solórzano & Yasso, 2002, p. 32). In coding, I used values coding to ensure that I was interrogating potential ways that internalized colonial narratives may have existed for students and educators, as well as places that shifts were created in developing critical consciousness. In addition, by incorporating Youth Participatory Action Research, I brought codes and emerging theories to the youth conducting research on the program to co-create meaning and examine ways that my interpretations and their interpretations may differ. This method of co-creating meaning, as well as recognizing the subjective nature of coding and striving towards critical interpretations of data, has been cited as part of critical grounded theory (Hense & Skewes McFerran, 2016).

In relation to the construction of counter-narratives, this particular method stemmed from Critical Race Theory in understanding that the use of a “master narrative”, which has served to create and perpetuate racism through a colonial system (Montecinos, 1995). Master narratives serve to normalize racial privilege, distorting and silencing the stories of people of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

> “The majoritarian story tells us that darker skin and poverty correlate with bad neighborhoods and bad schools. It informs us that limited or Spanish-accented English and Spanish surnames equal bad schools and poor academic performance. It also reminds us that people who may not have the legal documents to ‘belong’ in the United States may be identified by their skin color, hair texture, eye shape, accent, and/or surname” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 29)

Thus, in following through with a Mestiza methodology in the commitment to action, there was a need to push back against the majoritarian story through counter-narratives. Counter-narratives can come in the form of personal stories, other people's stories, and composite stories. In this particular research, personal stories came through the youth writing their own stories in the YPAR process while other stories came through interviews of the alumni and educators. In the results chapters, they will be presented more as composite stories. Counter-narratives are defined as:

> "a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society). The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege. Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32)

Thus, counter-narratives stand in opposition to colonial narratives (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2012). In analyzing interviews and the YPAR data, including narratives written by students, it also becomes essential to read erasures. Kaomea (2003) defines "reading erasures" based on Derrida's concept of *sous rapture* (under erasure) and the Hawaiian concept of *mahiki* (peeling away) where outer layers are peeled away to reveal underlying intentions. There is a deep concern for social and economic structures to "unveil the many masked and insidious ways in which various oppressions are reproduced in our schools" (Kaomea, 2003, p. 24). Through this, in the analysis of interview transcripts and artifacts there was an attention to what was concealed and unspoken. Thus, particularly as a researcher of color, it was essential to utilize my personal experiences, drawing from family history and ancestry, in the analytical process

(Delgado Bernal, 1998). Thus, for me, that meant drawing on my identity as a community activist, teacher, traveler, Chicana, and Boriqua, as well as the family experiences of immigration that have shaped my livelihood.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The education system in the United States has failed youth of color for the entirety of its existence. This failure is the result of a concrete, capitalistic system, built on the exploitation of people of color, starting with the system of settler colonialism and chattel slavery. These foundations of the American experience have shaped the structure of the education system and the physical and psychological daily experiences of people of color, particularly Black Americans. Nonetheless, enclaves of resistance have existed since the period of colonization in various forms. In conceptualizing the potential for alternative educational programs to provide pedagogies of decolonization and liberation, it is essential to first understand what these communities aim to liberate themselves from, as well as the ways that the educational and economic systems in this country have stifled these efforts in order to maintain systems of dominance.

This chapter will provide a historic background on capitalism and the criminalization of people of color, in seeking to understand the ways that a colonial system in this country has been perpetuated. I will also examine more contemporary structures that maintain this colonial system in order to analyze the ways that these structures impact youth of color, as well as the systems and ideologies that push many youth of color out of the formal education system. In understanding the institutions and ideologies that maintain these structures, I will then seek to analyze some of the historic examples of emancipatory pedagogies, focusing primarily on formal education structures that examine systems of inequality and seek to create an educational environment where youth of color are given the tools to question and resist these colonial systems.

U.S. capitalism and the systematic dehumanization of people of color

The United States capitalist economy was built on chattel slavery. Cheryl Harris (1993), in providing a legal framework for "whiteness as property", stated, "the origins of property rights in the United States are rooted in racial domination" (p. 1716). In considering the origins of racism in the United States, it seems that it would be fairer to say that the origins of racial domination in this country are rooted in property rights. Slavery revolved around the "seizure and appropriation of labor" (Harris, 1993, p. 1715). This process initially targeted indigenous populations, often taking children into bondage and forced labor, removing them from their families. One example of this was the 1675 battle of the Puritans and the Narragansetts tribe, which resulted in the genocide of almost the entire tribe and the bondage of almost a thousand children (Bell, 2015).

Through the extermination of various indigenous communities and resistance of others, colonizers sought labor abroad, namely in Africa. "The relation between master and slave was a legally recognized relation between a proprietor and chattel property, a formal expression of the relation of force and dependence between them, the master's coercive power and the slave's subjection to superior force" (Wood, 2015, p. 278). Wood (2015) compared this process to feudalism in attempts to create a Marxist continuity in examining the oppression of labor forces. However, this comparison ignored the physical and cultural violence involved in forcibly bringing an individual half way around the world in an era where this would essentially mean that this person would never return to their home, speaking nothing of the conditions that they were brought in, where substantial numbers died in the voyage. Children were forcibly removed from families

throughout the period of slavery, treated as property to be sold at a young age (Bell, 2015). Furthermore, the economics of the voyage that brought slaves to the Americas was an enormous element in this structure; "By the 1800s a single voyage could generate a half million dollars for a white slave merchant" (Apidta, 1995, p. 35).

Slavery

The racialized nature of slavery partially emerged from the economic benefits found from using Black labor; As noted by Emmanuel Downing, the brother of the governor of MA in 1645, "the economic benefits of purchasing and enslaving a Black man for life far outweighed the usefulness of the ten year contracts the Massachusetts whites made with white indentured servants" (Apidta, 1995, p. 33). Slave industries throughout the Americas drove the industrial boom in Europe. "British exports to the world were in manufactured goods which could only be paid for in raw materials- the cotton of the United States, coffee and sugar of Brazil, the sugar of Cuba, the sugar and cotton of India" (Williams, 1944, p. 154). All of these goods were produced through enslaved Black and Brown labor; This economic logic was part of the origins of racism in the United States, where labor relations were constructed based on race. The "one-drop" rule, through which individuals with one African ancestor must identify as Black, served to further stratify and expand the working population. Thus, "the dominant paradigm of social relations […] was that, although not all Africans were slaves, virtually all slaves were not white" (Harris, 1993, p. 1717).

Slavery was not only essential in building the capitalist economy in the United States, but also in constructing capitalist ideologies, which were deeply intertwined with violent racism. In particular, capitalist individuation perpetuated the ideology that white

men had inherent rights to the jurisdiction of others (Grandin, 2014). In ensuring that the labor force was kept docile and immobile, slave codes were also developed. Due to these codes, “Blacks were not permitted to travel without permits, to own property, to assemble publicly, or to own weapons; nor were they to be educated” (Harris, 1995, p. 1718). Many of the slave codes that were used in the United States had their origins in the 1661 Barbados slave codes through which all whites, including the poorest, played a role in ensuring that slaves who resisted were caught, beaten, and returned (Hadden, 2001). Naturally, there was a constant resistance, both small and large, in many communities, to the institution of slavery. Thus, slaves educated themselves and resisted in a variety of ways. Nonetheless, slave codes served as an easy means to provide violent punishment if an individual was construed as having violated the codes. These codes served as part of a continual system that criminalized people of color, particularly Black Americans. Furthermore, the slave patrols that were developed to maintain these systems became the predecessors for our modern day police force (Hadden, 2001). In the early 1700s, public slave patrols were adopted throughout many Southern states, comprised primarily of white property owners who had little means for income (Hadden, 2001).

Post-Slavery

After the abolition of slavery, Black Codes were passed in Southern states, which essentially perpetuated the dynamics of slavery. Vagrancy laws were a key component of these Black Codes. Many of the vagrancy laws were modeled after the Vagrancy Act of 1866, instituted in Virginia. This law forced into unpaid employment, for up to three months, any person who appeared to be unemployed (Vagrancy Act of 1866). At this particular moment, very few people were willing to hire freed slaves. Thus, the vast

majority of African Americans in the south were unemployed. "Shortly after its passage, the commanding general in Virginia, Alfred H. Terry, issued a proclamation declaring that the law would reinstate 'slavery in all but its name'" (Vagrancy Act of 1866). Although Terry prohibited civil and military officials in the state from enforcing the law, it continued in existence until 1904 and inspired the creation of similar vagrancy laws throughout the South at both the state and municipal levels. Individuals who were caught were often placed into convict leasing, which became more brutal than slavery due to the lack of concern for keeping convicts alive and the ease of labor replacement (Bell, 2015). The Freedmen's Code of 1866 particularly targeted youth in enabling former slaveholders to force young Black children into unpaid "apprenticeships", thus continuing the dynamics of slavery and continuing to tear families apart (Bell, 2015). These laws were integral in perpetuating the criminalization of people of color, particularly in the Southern states. As slave patrols were phased out, police forces played a similar role: "Police saw that nightly curfews and vagrancy laws kept blacks off city streets, just as patrollers had done in the colonial and antebellum eras" (Hadden, 2001).

Jim Crow

Throughout the period of Jim Crow, a multitude of laws were created to further restrict the rights of Black Americans and perpetuate the criminalization of this community, particularly of Black men. In 1933, the National Recovery Act, part of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, caused over 500,000 Black Americans in the South to lose their jobs. "The minimum wage regulations made it illegal for employers to hire people who weren't worth the minimum because they lacked skills", which resulted in

mass layoffs (Powell, 2003). This particular law functioned in a way that kept Black workers from competing with whites (Anderson, 2015).

Other New Deal policies that directly impacted job loss in Black communities were the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 and the Wagner Act of 1935. The Agricultural Adjustment Act cut farm production and forced up food prices, which aided white farmers, but resulted in less work for thousands of Black sharecroppers who were also forced to pay the higher food prices (Powell, 2003). The Wagner Act made labor monopolies legal, which permitted unionization, making the exclusion of Black workers easier. “For at least the next thirty years, the government protected the bargaining rights of unions that denied African Americans the privileges of membership or that segregated them into janitorial and other lower-paid jobs” (Rothstein, 2017, p. 150). The creation of the National Recovery Administration at this time raised wages for many industrial positions and created various benefits for healthcare and housing. Industrial careers that were dominated by Blacks, such as canning, citrus packing, and cotton ginning were excluded from these benefits (Rothstein, 2017). These purposeful exclusions became part of a structure through which the job possibilities of people of color continue to be limited, which further limits purchasing power and social capital.

In addition to the concrete impact on labor restrictions, Jim Crow policies resulted in constant psychological and physical violence towards Black Americans through multiple means. Although this psychological violence has been examined in other places and is hugely important to recognize, the depth of this impact will not be analyzed here. In one instance, in the early 1900s, the Whittier State School was created in California, through which the idea that criminal behavior could be predicted emerged, focusing on

Mexicans and Blacks, stating that these two groups were "feeble-minded" and thus should be institutionalized and sterilized as children (Bell, 2015). During this same time period, tribal boarding schools emerged that often tore indigenous children from their families to place them in institutions of forced, and often violent, assimilation (Bell, 2015). Captain Richard Pratt established the Carlisle school in 1879, promoting the motto "kill the indian, save the man" (Bell, 2015, pp. 11). These systems have not only impacted our current education structures, but also impact the communal psyche of the families that experienced these systems.

Redlining

In regard to housing, Black Americans and other people of color have been systematically denied access to quality housing since the end of slavery. In the late 19th century and early 20th century, city ordinances existed in many Northeastern and Southern cities, including Boston, which prohibited integrated neighborhoods (Rothstein, 2017). In some neighborhoods, such as Brookline, MA, it was city policy that resale of property to Blacks and immigrants should be prohibited and stated as such in the deed (Rothstein, 2017).

Neighborhoods that were designated for Blacks were also areas that were zoned for industrial use and frequently permitted the construction of toxic waste facilities (Rothstein, 2017). In 1933, the Home Owners' Loan Corporation was created as a federal entity that determined the risk for refinancing property. Maps were created, drawing lines around areas in which red was considered the riskiest and green was considered the safest. If immigrant or Black families lived in a neighborhood, it was considered a legitimate reason for redlining it (Rothstein, 2017). These maps continued to be used by

the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), which played a central role in the institutionalization of racism and de facto segregation from 1934 to 1968, inspiring similar practices that continue into the present day. Racial language was erased from the FHA *Underwriting Manual* in 1947, but the policies used did not change (Rothstein, 2017). This became increasingly problematic as soldiers returned from World War II and the Veteran's Administration used the *Underwriting Manual* to determine who could get loans through the GI Bill, thus practically excluding Black veterans in their entirety (Rothstein, 2017). Furthermore, the GI Bill was crafted in such a way that allowed state agencies to control eligibility (Katznelson, 2005).

Additional housing practices

Other practices that became commonly used up until almost the present day were blockbusting and subprime loans.

> Blockbusting was "a scheme in which speculators bought properties in borderline black-white areas; rented or sold them to African-American families at above-market prices; persuaded white families in these areas that their neighborhoods were turning into African American slums and that values would soon fall precipitously; and then purchased the panicked whites' homes for less than their worth" (Rothstein, 2017, pp. 95).

Many of the properties sold to Black families were sold on installment plans where ownership would transfer after 15-20 years of on-time payments. Any default in payment would result in revoking the home. Employees of banks such as Wells Fargo have noted that they were specifically instructed to target Black neighborhoods in promoting subprime mortgages (Rothstein, 2017). These loans were a large piece of the

2008 financial crash when many of the loans went into default. Overall, these policies hastened the decay of many urban neighborhoods by ensuring that there was no investment in these areas. These systems, constructed by the government and private corporations, have perpetuated the colonial nature of the American system by ensuring the maintenance of an underclass. The ghettos created by these policies have ensured the continuation of internal colonies that are markedly inferior to those of whites, a dynamic that has existed since slavery, contributing to the dehumanization and colonial treatment of people of color (Morris, 2016).

Lasting impact

Economic and political policies maintained the legalized subjugation of communities of color throughout the Jim Crow era. However, at the same time, organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan worked to eradicate these communities entirely. In the Southern United States, police departments were often synonymous with the KKK, which contributed to the violent criminalization of African Americans throughout this period (Hadden, 2001). In the Northeast, these organizations also continued to impact political and economic interests. “An estimate of Massachusetts Klan membership reaches as high as 130,780 for the year 1925” (Apidta, 1995, p. 58). In considering the fact that these systems shifted relatively recently, it is no surprise that contemporary structures are notably similar. Some Marxist philosophers have argued that issues of racism can be reduced to class (Reed, 2013). However, it is undeniable that the capitalist system in this country was built on slavery and the maintenance of the economic and political system has also been built on the exploitation of people of color. Thus, the relationship between poverty in communities of color and structures of oppression should

be obvious. In Boston, the per capital income of Blacks and Latinos is 42.4% of the per capital income for Whites, an illustration of some repercussions of systemic racism (Jennings, 2010). It is essential to understand the complexity of this system, which has operated under the same colonial means moving from explicit racial language to implicit racial structures over time. These structures have played a substantial role in the livelihoods of youth of color in considering the psychological and systemic toll taken on youth before they enter formal education systems, as well as multi-generational trauma.

Contemporary structures criminalizing people of color

Since the colonial founding of the United States, structures have been created to criminalize people of color and justify this criminalization through narratives implying the inhumanity of these groups. Youth have always been victims in these systems. In considering more recent police violence against youth of color, it is important to consider the precedents for these systems, as mentioned above. Since the end of slavery, Black men, along with other men of color, have been villainized in order to maintain the structure of white supremacy. In 1944, a fourteen-year-old Black boy became the youngest person to ever be sentenced to death (Bell, 2015). He had been charged with killing two white girls, a charge which emerged as completely false after his death (Bell, 2015). Over the past century, policies have continuously been created that targeted communities of color, increasingly using race-neutral language to maintain these same colonial structures.

Prison-industrial complex

In the past thirty years, an entire political economy has been built around prisons. This process began in 1965 through Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, particularly

through his vision of a war on crime. Although these programs were portrayed to the media as supporting low-income communities of color, they created a backlash against these very communities, perpetuating the dehumanization and criminalization of communities of color that has existed since colonialism. One element in this process, beginning prior to 1956, was the creation of COINTELPRO, the FBIs Counterintelligence Program, which targeted the Black Panther Party, among other groups. Under the guise of targeting a communist group, COINTELPRO contributed to the murder of several Black Panther Party leaders and ensured in the practical demise of the group and elimination of the multiple community economic development programs run through the Black Panther Party (Taylor, 2016).

The language developed during the process of the War on Crime and the War on Drugs perpetuated a national narrative of violence in poor communities of color. In particular, through the War on Drugs, "in less than thirty years, the U.S. penal population exploded from around 300,000 to more than 2 million, with drug convictions accounting for the majority of the increase" (Alexander, 2010, p. 6). The War on Drugs was created during the Reagan candidacy, utilizing the media to portray images of Black "welfare queens", "crack babies", and "gangbangers" (Alexander, 2010). The crack crisis did not exist prior to this. Rather, the government was found to play a role in the distribution of crack cocaine into poor, predominantly Black communities (Alexander, 2010). Thus, the vast majority of drug convictions are Black and Latino individuals under the age of thirty (Alexander, 2010). Several states created further laws to keep these populations behind bars, targeting low-income communities of color. One of the main laws was the Three-strikes Law in California, which was endorsed federally by the Clinton administration,

serving to vilify individuals on the assumption that most crime is violent. In addition, it perpetuated the conceptualization of people who commit petty crimes as morally deficient. This idea related to market interests and property, continuing a colonial capitalist system, by primarily punishing people of color who steal from whites, but very rarely punishing whites who commit similar crimes (Alexander, 2010). This was particularly evident in the federal disparities in sentencing between crack and cocaine that existed from 1986, when the Anti-Drug Abuse Act was signed by Congress until 2010 when the Fair Sentencing Act was signed by Congress. During those twenty-four years, "distribution of just 5 grams of crack cocaine carrie[d] a minimum 5-year federal prison sentence, while for powder cocaine distribution of 500 grams - 100 times the amount of crack cocaine - carrie[d] the same sentence" (Vagins & McCurdy, 2006, p. i). Although this disparity was justified by the supposed crack crisis, the reality was that there was not a substantial difference in the way the two substances impacted an individual. The only alleged difference was that cocaine was seen as an upper-class white drug, while crack was seen as Black drug. Based on an understanding of the systematization of racially-based public policies, it seems clear that this law functioned to further maintain a colonial state by targeting Black Americans. In 2003, a study demonstrated that while 66% of crack users were white, 80% of those sentenced for crack-related offenses were Black (Vagins & McCurdy, 2006). SWAT teams were increasingly militarized and sent into communities of color based on the crack crisis (Alexander, 2010).

In California, the Three-strikes Law has disproportionately impacted Black Americans who make up 6.5% of the general population, but nearly 30% of the prison population and 45% of third strikers (Ehlers, et al., 2004). The proportion of Latinos in

California is fairly similar to the proportion of Latinos in prison, making up 32%, but whites are underrepresented in the prison system. While whites make up 47% of California's population, they are only 29% of the prison population and 25.4% of third strikers (Ehlers, et al., 2004). In New York, the "zero-tolerance" policy instated by Mayor Rudy Giuliani had similar results, increasing arrests 40% from 1993 to 1998 (Wacquant, 2014).

Youth impact

It is debatable whether prisons have always been arms of the colonial system in this country, perpetuating institutional racism. The historical precedent of convict leasing seems to imply that this is the case. However, there has been a policy shift in the last thirty to forty years; "To start with, the ethno-racial makeup of convicts has completely flip-flopped in four decades, turning over from 70% white and 30% 'others' at the close of World War II to 70% Black and Latino versus 30% whites by the century's end." (Wacquant, 2014, p. 43). This shift was the result of multiple national, state, and citywide policies that have contributed to the criminalization of youth of color under the guise of supporting these communities through supposed anti-poverty and anti-crime measures. It is also important to note that the majority of those incarcerated are young people; "almost three quarters of all Black and Latino jail and prison inmates in the U.S. are between the ages of 20-39 (Rios, 2006, p. 41). Moon-Kie Jung (2015) recognizes prisons for what they are: "given the extraordinary rise, size, and racial character of the carceral state, prisons and the incarcerated (and the formerly incarcerated) could be seen for what they are: imperial spaces and subjects" (Jung, 2015, p. 81).

Through "zero-tolerance" policies and laws such as the three-strikes law in California, racial profiling has increased nationally, resulting in the incarceration of primarily Blacks and Latinos. Again, this issue is one that largely impacts youth; "In California, youth of color are 2.5 times more likely than white kids to be tried as adults and 8.3 times more likely to be incarcerated by adult courts" (Rios, 2006, p. 41). In research with youth who have been involved with the criminal justice system, Rios (2006) found that the majority of youth of color are arrested for non-violent crimes such as petty theft or vandalism, then consistently treated as a criminal after these initial encounters by community members, educators, and family members in many cases. In this racist process, it is essential to reconsider the dialogues problematizing these processes. Words used to describe these colonialist processes, such as "racial profiling" often take the blame away from the perpetrator; "The victim's intangible race, rather than the perpetrator's tangible racism, becomes the center of attention" (Fields & Fields, 2012, p. 158). An entire political rhetoric has been created through the criminal justice system, as well as the education system and other social services, to shift the blame away from the racism implicit in these processes.

Racist violence pushing young people of color out of the education system

The criminalization of people of color, as well as the multiple political endeavors that function to ensure the racial stratification of this country, have been key motors in pushing youth of color out of the education system. "From the physical violence imposed on those who dared to teach themselves to read during slavery to the systemic violence of the school-to-prison pipeline, white supremacist ideology works tirelessly, overtly, structurally, and covertly to prevent Black youth from realizing their educational hopes,

aspirations, humanity, and freedom" (Marsh, 2016, p. 15). As I have attempted to show, throughout this chapter, the current criminalization of youth of color is the continuation of systems that have been in place since the era of slavery, shifting the rhetoric and method over the years in order to maintain a system of racial dominance and colonial power.

Schools and ideological control

Louis Althusser (2001) identified the education system as a central piece in maintaining structures of dominance. Althusser (2001) stated that the reproduction of labor is ensured through repressive state apparatuses and ideological state apparatuses. In Marxist terms, state apparatuses functioned to reproduce inequalities between the proletariat and the bourgeois. Repressive state apparatuses physically maintained this order, through structures such as the police and military, whereas ideological state apparatuses are more subversive. According to Althusser (2001), the main ideological state apparatuses included religious structures, family, courts, political structures, media, and school. However, Althusser (2001) stated that school functions as the principal ideological state apparatus. In transferring this ideology to the maintenance of structures of racism, it seems clear that overall the education system functions to maintain the status quo. In conceptualizing the United States within an internal colonialism framework, it is also clear that the education system maintains the relation of dominance, which has been intertwined with white supremacy:

> "The relationship between the credentialed 'experts' of 'at-risk' populations and the oppressed 'at risk' individuals has less to do with a democratic society than with a colonial society, even though we are not allowed to call it so. If this

> colonial legacy remains unexamined and the 'at risk' students are denied the opportunity to study and critically understand their reality, including their language, culture, gender, ethnicity, and class position, for all practical purposes the 'at-risk' students will continue to experience a colonial existence" (Macedo, 2001, p. xxvvii).

School-to-confinement pathways

The education system has also become increasingly intertwined with the criminal justice system in perpetuating policies that criminalize youth of color. In 1994, the Clinton administration developed the Gun Free Schools Act, which required school administrators to take a "zero-tolerance" stance on weapons at school (Kayama et al., 2015, p. 27). Although the purpose of this policy was the prevention of school shootings, Columbine happened five years later and schools expanded the policy to include automatic suspensions for fighting or drugs (Morris, 2016). This policy has led to increasing suspensions and expulsions of youth of color and had no impact on school shootings, which have almost entirely been committed by white students (Morris, 2016). In 2018, with a myriad of school shootings behind us, it was almost absurd to connect inner city schools to school shootings since no school shooting had ever taken place in an inner city school. Nonetheless, Skiba and Peterson (2000) note that this connection was the motive behind creating more stringent policies to deal with "disruptive" classroom behavior. However, it is imperative, particularly in relation to the history of criminalization mentioned above, to consider the connection between this history and labeling Black and Brown youth as "disruptive" or "aggressive".

Since the creation of this the Guns Free School Act, there has been a substantial increase of School Resource Officers (read: school police) and untrained officials in the schools, perpetuating arrests of youth of color, beginning in early elementary school. A 2011 study found that schools with School Resources Officers increased the number of non-serious offenses that are reported to law enforcement (Na & Gottfredson, 2013). These policies have particularly targeted young men of color. In Boston, Black and Latinx students are given out of school suspensions at higher rates than any other group, often for non-violent, non-criminal, non-drug offenses (Taylor, et al., 2014).

> "Like many of the racial stereotypes that remain embedded in our consciousness, the notion of the dangerous Black male grew directly out of slavery and its aftermath. […] For Black slaves then, *any attempt to engage in normal human activity made one a criminal"* (Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, & Pollock, 2017, p. 210).

In Boston, two additional structural systems that target young people of color are the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) program and the gang database. In 2014, the Department of Homeland Security named Boston as a pilot program for the CVE program, which asks community members to track and report on individuals who might be vulnerable to "political 'radicalization'" (Rose & Erwin, 2015). The CVE model provided a guide for teachers, police, and healthcare professionals to rate a young person's "parent-child bonding" and "economic stress", among other factors, as a proxy for violent extremism (Rose & Erwin, 2015). In Boston this led to primarily targeting Muslim youth, particularly Somali youth, who were put into these databases and tracked beginning at a young age (Bender, 2015).

The second program mentioned was the Boston Regional Intelligence Center's Gang Assessment Database, which shared information with other law enforcement agencies, including ICE (Holper & Valentin, 2018). This particular system had a list of "offenses", such as wearing red or blue, which could cause an individual to be designated as a gang member if they obtained ten points. If a student was seen with another youth who had been labeled as a gang member, they received five points. Thus, many youth were arbitrarily labeled as gang members very quickly. For one East Boston high school student from El Salvador who had been labeled as a gang member, this designation landed him in ICE custody and deportation proceedings after a minor fight (Dooling, 2018). Thus, the consequences of this arbitrary system are ones that can destroy the life of a young person who has come to the United States to escape gang violence.

Black youth experience these dynamics beginning at an early age. "Today, Black children are 19 percent of preschool enrollment, but 47 percent of preschool-age children who have had one out-of-school suspension" (Morris, 2016, p. 57). The fact that this psychological violence against Black youth begins at such a young age is a testament to the repressive nature of the internal colonialist system that we live within, as well as evidence for a need for drastic change. In California, 2007 became the first year that more state money was spent on prisons than education (Fine & Ruglis, 2009, p. 27). This shift in funding reflected the political shift aimed at perpetuating the "zero-tolerance" policies nation-wide. Fine and Ruglis (2009) also found, through an examination of the militarized and carceral nature of the education system, that the impact of these policies primarily affected Black and Latino youth, with Black youth facing the brunt of the suspensions and arrests. A study of twelve cities in the United States found that Black

youth were suspended or expelled at a rate between 14 and 296 percent higher than their representation in the population (Skiba et al., 1999). In Boston, 12.1% of all Black students and 10.4% of all Latino students were suspended in the 2012-2013 school year, compared to 3.7% of all white students and 2% of all Asian students (Taylor, et al., 2014). Furthermore, in 2000, the national arrest rate for Black youth was 74 percent higher than for whites (Browne 2003). In addition to race, class also remains a fundamental element in the perpetuation of colonial structures for certain populations. "Permanent metal detectors are targeted at schools that are disproportionately large, over-crowded, and serving low-income youth" (Fine & Ruglis, 2009, p. 22). In Boston, as of 2015, 42 schools used metal detectors, 17 of which were walk through metal detectors, mainly in high schools and middle schools (Corcoran, 2015). Mukherjeeet (2007) found that 70 percent of the large high schools with metal detectors fell into the category of ''drop out factories,'' schools where fewer than 60 percent of the students graduated.

Psychosocial impact and the power of language

These statistics reflected the continuation of a centuries old system criminalizing people of color in this country and restricting their movement. Few authors recognized the continuum that exists in policies that have exploited and oppressed certain populations in the United States. In particular, it is important to consider the populations that have faced the brunt of these policies: Blacks and Latinx. Both of these groups consist of a hugely wide variety of phenotypes and ancestry. Doubtless, there are individuals in both groups (read light skinned) who escape from forcible identification and those who do not (read dark skinned). This reality stems partly from the "one-drop" rule and the political risk of passing. However, there is a psychological impact for

individuals who pass, trying to escape from these systems. Cheryl Harris (1993), in establishing the legacy of whiteness as property, recalled the stories that her grandmother told of passing in order to work in a department store, where she would constantly hear remarks belittling African Americans; "accepting the risk of self-annihilation was the only way to survive" (Harris, 1993, p. 1711).

In the education system, the carceral nature of schools and an environment that frequently perpetuated a white supremacist ideology through curriculum and pedagogical methods push youth of color out of general schooling. In regard to educators, there has historically been and continues to be a disconnect between the cultural and class backgrounds of students and teachers, which frequently results in a deficit approach in educating youth. "Simply put, the goal of deficit approaches was to eradicate the linguistic, literate, and cultural practices many students of color brought from their homes and communities and to replace them with what were viewed as superior practices" (Paris, 2012, p. 93). As part of this approach, many educators and administrators have unconsciously begun to use more of a criminal justice discourse in describing misbehavior and suspensions. Kayama et al. (2015) found that 95 percent of educators used criminal justice language in talking about school suspensions, which also caused a smaller percentage of youth to begin to use this language in describing their own experiences. This use of language contributed notably to the school-to-prison pipeline in using language that criminalizes youth beginning at a young age.

"Semantic moves", as described by Bonilla-Silva (2015), have long been an important factor in maintaining structural racism. In fields, such as education, terms that serve to further racialize and criminalize youth of color are used consistently. The power

of these terms comes from the fact that they are accepted as terms that reflect reality, rather than fiction and stereotypes. However, the failure to question the power of this language resulted in further violence being conducted against youth of color at the hands of educators and school administrators, who are often ignorant of the role they play in maintaining structures of racism within schools. One of the main terms that has been used to describe youth of color, particularly Black and Latino youth, is "at-risk". In a Canadian context, the use of this term was problematized because "the language of risk can serve as a euphemism for racism, sexism, and biases" (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2001, p. 331). Carl James (2012) broke down the way that this term was used in Canadian schools to encapsulate stereotypes of Black males as immigrants, fatherless, athletes, troublemakers, and underachievers. In the language of "at-risk" the designation of immigrant was tied to a failure to assimilate: "young Black males' poor educational performance and disciplinary problems are not only attributed to their lack of Canadian educational values and discipline, due to their inability or unwillingness to assimilate, but also to their 'foreign cultures' that do not value education" (James, 2012, p. 472). Thus, in this particular case, culture was also used as a concept that further promoted racism by attaching negative stereotypes to a certain, invented group. In reality, it would be absurd to attempt to imply that various different nations have ideologies that as a whole don't value education.

Since the 1940s, words that have been seen as synonyms for "at-risk" are "dropout", "juvenile delinquent", and "superpredator" (Kamenetz, 2015). We should then question in using this term what we are implying that these young people are "at-risk" of. Although the term implied that they are at risk of not graduating, there seems to be an

implication that they are a risk for society, thus further criminalizing them through this language. Furthermore, “any animated reactions by students that demonstrate dissatisfaction and frustration with the educational system’s lack of attention to their needs, interests, and aspirations might be considered disruptive, troublesome, and/or disorderly” (James, 2012, p. 480). This directly related to the policing of young people in considering that nationally, in 2016, 28% of students who were forcibly sent to alternative schools were done so as a result of “noncompliance with adult directives” (Vogell, 2017). In Massachusetts, 72.2% of school suspensions in 2012 were for non-violent, non-criminal, non-drug offenses, including a category of “disrespect” (Taylor, et al., 2014). In both of these categories, “noncompliance” and “disrespect”, there is an incredible amount of subjectivity, which is undoubtedly impacted by teacher and administrator racial and cultural biases.

Many young people of color become aware of the racism that surrounds them, particularly within the educational system and the ways that educators use their power to (often) unknowingly maintain these structures, at a young age. Thus, the most critical young people who actively object to these systems are designated as troublemakers and frequently pushed out of the education system and into the criminal justice system. Carla Shalaby (2017) postulated that these young people are often the ones most sensitive to inequities from a young age, the canaries in the mine for our education system, calling attention to inequities that exist and suffering for it.

Another commonly used term that has been used to racialize young people of color is the “achievement gap”. “The term refers to the disparities in test scores between Black and White, Latino/a and White, and recent immigrant and White students”

(Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 3). Quantitative research has been a key culprit in perpetuating stereotypes that this gap is somehow due to culture and can be fixed through further education, a clear ideology of a colonial education system (Warikoo & Carter, 2009). The term has been tied to state testing in that the basis of No Child Left Behind was that it was the first policy that required schools to disaggregate data on scores by race and ethnicity, thus displaying what came to be known as the "achievement gap" (Warikoo & Carter, 2009, p. 366). However, educational policy has not fully taken into account the larger structures that impacted young people. "The overreliance on test scores-both school and individual test scores-has the effect of stigmatizing schools and reinforcing stereotypes that might be addressed if educators focused more on the teaching and learning processes and not so much on test scores" (James, 2012, p. 483).

In a literature review on the conceptualization of race and culture in social science research relating to education, Warikoo and Carter (2009) found that structuralists "explain minority disadvantage as a result of the limited availability of systemic educational resources such as parent resources, lower teacher quality, and the socialization of such students to be compliant workers and laborers in a capitalist regime" (Warikoo & Carter, 2009, p. 369). This essentialization of race and culture has been criticized by critical pedagogy theorists who noted that the focus on systemic resources failed to take into account youth agency and resistance. However, even critical pedagogy theorists often fail to take into account the ways that systems of racism impact the lived of young people beginning at an early age.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) reframed the "achievement gap" as an "educational debt", which she saw as something that consisted of a historical debt, an economic debt,

sociopolitical debt, and moral debt. Historical debt referred to the ways that education was limited for Black, Native American, and Latinx students in the past. She provided historical examples for each group, but the comparison that she made between these three groups seemed problematic in failing to recognize the vast differences in these historical experiences. In particular, although many communities of color have been marginalized, it was the system of slavery that shaped racism in this country. For this reason, as well as the impact of Jim Crow, the experience of Black Americans is unique. Discrimination of Black Americans has been recognized as one of the most profound forms of racial persecution globally (Dudziak, 2011, p.30). Economic debt was defined as funding disparities in schools, recognizing the fact that schools in predominantly white communities often have more funding. The sociopolitical debt referred to the lack of legal representation for communities of color. The moral debt referred to the way that communities of color (again she particularly mentions Black, Latinx, and Native Americans) have been vilified and defined as threats. This particular process is one that was very much intertwined with the process of racialization.

Another term that has been used to promote the criminalization of youth of color was that of "grit", which was promoted in many education circles. Paul Tough (2013), one of the key authors to popularize the term, defined grit as possessing perseverance, curiosity, conscientiousness, optimism, and self-control. However, as Ira Socol (2014) noted, what Tough actually wanted to teach children was compliance, not "grit" nor "character". Grit has been defined as the ability to push through difficult situations to success. In schools this meant accepting rules and regulations that perpetuated colonial systems. Resistance to the status quo was marked as deviance and youth were pushed into

disciplinary structures that criminalized them at a young age. “Only in a field [such as education] that has obliquely refused to examine how it extensively contributed to societal disadvantage can those cast on the underside of humanity be told that they merely need to be grittier or have a growth mindset” (Patel, 2016, p. 400).

For many low-income youth of color, the concept of “grit” romanticized hardship, which can be dangerous for their socio-emotional growth (Ris, 2016). Many elite schools have utilized the term in considering ways for privileged youth to be given adversity to overcome (Duckworth, 2016). In applying the concept to low-income youth of color it became very much tied to the idea of meritocracy, a myth that this country has been built on, where individuals are fed the idea that anyone can succeed if they just try hard enough, ignoring the systemic barriers that are maintained by schools and government entities. It has been easier to place the blame for student failure on the student, which was often the case.

Leaving school

In deciding to leave school, a notable percentage of students cited an oppressive school environment (Tuck, 2012). However, pushing youth of color out of the education system serves the capitalist colonial agenda in ensuring the maintenance of a low paid labor class. Overall, “the practice of pushing students out or repeatedly suspending Black students from school leads to the *social death* of those who are no longer part of the pedagogical life of the school and society” (Rose, 2016, p. 28). Even for students who sought out a GED alternative, one study found that career options for them are more similar to those of youth who have no high school diploma or equivalent (Tuck, 2012). This phenomenon has been referred to as a diploma penalty by some authors, including

Fine and Ruglis (2009). The "diploma penalty, interacting with institutional and systemic racism, bears substantial and disproportionate impact on communities of color, in terms of employment, income, and […] health and involvement with criminal justice system" (Fine & Ruglis, 2009, p. 29).

"Last Chance" Schools

In an attempt to eradicate the diploma penalty, most states have established different forms of "last chance" schools for youth who have been pushed out of the general education system for a variety of reasons. "Nationally, secondary school graduation rates are disproportionately lower for Black, Latino, and Native American youth, at 40-50%, than White youth, who have graduation rates of 60-70%" (Tuck, 2012, p. 4). "Last chance" schools, also known as alternative or continuation schools, primarily target these populations. Vocational high schools have also occasionally been considered to be a part of this category of schools, but in this particular piece vocational schools will not be addressed at length.

The U.S. Department of Education defined an alternative school as a public elementary or secondary school that addressed the needs of students, which could not be met in traditional schools, thus providing a nontraditional education (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Although alternative schools can have a wide variety of structures, "at this point in its evolution, most agree that alternative schools are defined by the fact that they tend to serve students who are at risk for failure within the traditional education system" (Lehr, et al., 2009, p. 19). Alternative schools are generally public schools or charter schools. In some cases, they are run by for-profit or non-profit organizations.

Mary Ann Raywid (1994) classified alternative programs into three categories: firstly are innovative programs for successful students, which are often sought out by parents. Second are last chance schools with a focus on "behavior modification" and lastly, remedial schools. In considering the last two types, distinctions have also been made between academic and disciplinary alternative schools (Franklin, Streeter, Kim, & Tripodi, 2007). Disciplinary schools often include corporal punishment and have more of a prison-like environment whereas academic alternative schools resemble innovative college preparatory high school programs.

History and structure of alternative schools in the U.S.

Vocational high schools originated in the 1950s, focusing on teaching youth different working-class trades (Dunning-Lozano, 2016). These schools traditionally had a shortened school days to allow students to gain experience in their trade in the afternoon through internships or formal employment. Alternative schools emerged more in the 1960s, expanding in the 1970s as part of the progressive education movement (Land & Letgers, 2002). The development of these schools was supported by Chapter I of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Act, particularly in providing program funding as a means to prevent students from dropping out of school entirely (Land & Legters, 2002). By 2001, 39% of all school districts nationwide offered alternative schools or programs, with 77% of programs in urban districts (NCES, 2001; Cox, et al., 1995).

Over time, a notable number of alternative education programs have shifted into punitive educational structures that provide a direct pathway from school to prison through the enhanced carceral nature of the programs (Vogell, 2017). In a national survey, 70% of state education representatives stated that alternative schools served as a

disciplinary consequence (Lehr, et al., 2009). In some states, students are transferred involuntarily (Kim, et al., 2010). This has been impacted by education policy, particularly No Child Left Behind, which raised testing standards for schools, thus raising incentives for schools to remove low-performing students (Chiang, 2012). In some districts, students were expelled or removed from a school and the state was not required to provide any alternative forms of education. The legal cases *Doe v. Superintendent of Schools of Worcester* held that the "right to education" was not "fundamental" in the state of Massachusetts and thus, students could be denied services if it was "rationally related to a legitimate state interest" (Kim, et al., 2010, p. 102). These types of policies that can be broadly interpreted becoming increasingly dangerous in consideration of the ways public institutions have served colonial interests, disproportionately impacting youth of color. Furthermore, alternative schools are increasingly being run by for-profit companies, which often increased funneling youth of color into the prison system due to a capitalist value in keepings these students in subpar learning environments that often use techniques from correctional facilities, as well as directly refer students into the criminal justice system for school infractions (Chiang, 2012). In considering the ways that some of the schools functioned as pipelines to the criminal justice system:

> "First, they push students out of the school system via expulsions and suspensions, often leaving students with no education alternatives or alternatives that are inferior to regular school- which in turn leads to higher incarceration. Second, they refer students directly to the juvenile and criminal justice systems, by having them arrested on the premises of the school if need be. And third, they operate to acclimatize students to the juvenile and criminal justice systems, with

diminished privacy expectations and a culture of punishment and discipline" (Chiang, 2012, p. 622)

Characteristics of alternative programs

Due to the wide variety of programs, it was impossible to make any sweeping generalizations of all alternative education programs. Some researchers have found that many of these programs had limited academic offerings, lacking the necessary courses for admission into four-year colleges (Dunbar, 2001; Dunning-Lozano, 2016). In addition, the curriculum often involved rote memory tasks and there was a constant focus on behavior management with strict disciplinary procedures (Dunning-Lozano, 2016; Muñoz, 2004). Although some youth may have enjoyed the programs since they feel they do not have to work hard, these schools served to further stratify students (Dunbar, 2001; Dunning-Lozano, 2016; Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006). In other cases, researchers found that alterative programs generally had small class sizes, student-centered curriculum, and a flexibility in the structure of the program (Aron, 2006; Lange & Sletten, 2002)

In considering the student population, there was often an overrepresentation of Black and Latinx students (Dunning-Lozano, 2016; Booker & Mitchell). The majority of alternative programs were located in urban districts with high populations of students of color (primarily Black and Latinx) (Kim, et al., 2010). In Atlanta, a study of one alternative school run by a for-profit company found that the school "became a warehouse for poor African American children, providing them with subpar educational services in a chaotic and often violent environment" (Chiang, 2012, pp. 615-616). In Texas, disciplinary alternative schools began in elementary school, where racial disproportionality was highly evident; in the 2008-2009 school year, 13.6% of all first

graders were Black, but made up 47.3% of the disciplinary alternative school population of first graders (Booker & Mitchell, 2011). This was a clear example of the criminalization of youth of color beginning at a very early age. In California, Latinx students made up 45% of the general student population in the 2007-2008 school year, but 56% of the population in alternative schools (Malagón, 2010). Overall, these schools served to "safeguard and maintain an investment in whiteness, which is achieved through the removal of mostly non-White and low-income youths into a substandard school that offers a limited curriculum and does not prepare students for direct entry into higher education or 'good' jobs" (Dunning-Lozano, 2016, p. 434).

Other studies found the school environments of many alternative schools to be highly problematic. One nationwide study, interviewing alternative education representatives for state departments of education found that 13% of districts did not provide academic counseling and 21% did not offer career counseling (Lehr, et al., 2009). However, even more problematic were the ways that many alternative schools violated student rights. In 2006, Texas was one of twenty states where corporal punishment was legal in schools, something that was heavily evident in alternative schools in Texas, Connecticut, Hawai'i, and Kentucky (Tajalli & Garba, 2014). In Atlanta, the legal case *M.H. vs. Atlanta Independent School District* found that one alternative school was in violation of Fourth Amendment Rights where in daily searches for "contraband", "students were required to take off their shoes, to open their mouths and show their tongues, and even to 'snap' their bras" (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010, p. 108). This type of physical abuse, similar to that used in prisons, which disproportionally affected Black

and Brown youth due to the population of these schools, was evidence of the continued colonial treatment of Black and Brown bodies in this country.

In relation to curriculum, there were a wide variety of curricula used by alternative schools throughout the country. State mandates in 28 states required that alternative schools comply with core-curriculum standards (Kim, et al., 2010, p. 108). As we will see later in examining the impact of some of these programs, the most innovative programs that were creating a notable positive impact were those with the freedom to create their own curriculum. Nonetheless, in most cases electives were not provided to students. Surveys of state education departments found that fourteen of thirty-four states surveyed did not provide physical education, health, art or music (Kim, et al., 2010). In some cases, students had little access to teachers and were required to work independently. In Tennessee, one school used computer programs to provide all subject-matter instruction (Kim, et al., 2010). In Texas, a trial court found in another school, "instruction was provided in only four core courses; lectures were limited; and students generally worked independently from textbooks and only had access to teachers when they encountered a problem in the book, raised their hand, and waited up to twenty minutes" (Kim, et al., 2010, p. 104).

The curricular and disciplinary dynamics noted above clearly contributed to problematic outcomes in many alternative schools. Overall, about half of alternative schools had graduation rates lower than 50% (Vogell, 2017). In relation to this, it is important to note that many students in these programs are facing trauma in some arena of their life, which also impacts graduation rates. In relation to behavioral issues, for which many students are sent to alternative schools, a study of 50 alternative schools

found that attending an alternative school did not impact the rate of behavioral incidents (Vogell, 2017). Oddly, in several South African alternative schools, teachers linked the banning of corporal punishment to increases in behavior problems (Naong, 2007; Maphosa & Shumba, 2010). Some researchers found that community members saw corporal punishment as a cultural right (Masitsa, 2008), whereas others found that corporal punishment had a negative impact on parent-child relations through a justification of violence (Moyo, et al., 2014). In the United States, school districts with higher percentages of white students had higher disproportionality of disciplinary cases towards Black students (Tajalli & Garba, 2014). Again, these problems must be connected to a history of colonization and criminalization of people of color in understanding the continuum of these issues.

Alternative school successes

Despite an overwhelming number of negative outcomes found in alternative schools across the country, there were also schools that were going against the grain to find successful outcomes. In one study of 832 students at alternative schools in one Midwestern city, compared to data from 5031 students in traditional schools, it was found that attendance was lower, but more credits were earned per semester on average (Wilkerson, et al., 2016). Similar results were found in a small alternative school in Austin (Franklin, et al., 2007). There were less office referrals, but more suspensions, which was problematic in thinking about pipelines to the prison industrial complex, as mentioned previously (Franklin, et al., 2007). In another Midwestern city, a quantitative comparison between middle school students with similar characteristics who did and didn’t attend an alternative education program found that students in the alternative

program had higher self-esteem, better GPA, and improved attendance during their time at the alternative school (Cox, 1999). Unfortunately, these positive factors disappeared when students returned to traditional school (Cox, 1999). This shift may have been due to returning to a school with larger classes and a more stringent curriculum. The researcher of this particular study found that “the environment of the typical alternative school is more relaxed, caring, supportive, and friendly than the traditional school” (Cox, 1999).

In a qualitative study of another Midwestern alternative school, characteristics of the school were found to be: a hands-on curriculum, half-day school, half-day paid internships, small classes, caring/familial environment, and rules co-created by students (Dugger & Dugger, 1998). In this particular school, students applied for admission and completed an interview process in order to be accepted (Dugger & Dugger, 1998). A comparison was made of students from this program and students on the waiting list with similar characteristics, finding that there was a statistically significant increase in perceptions of academic competence and self-esteem for students in the alternative program (Dugger & Dugger, 1998). In addition, compared to students on the waiting list who were at other traditional schools, dropout rates were much lower with 17% of students in the alternative program dropping out over the course of the year, compared to 66% of students in the comparison group (Dugger & Dugger, 1998). In another alternative program in Texas, where there was more flexibility in school hours, 90% of students stated that teachers were more accessible and concerned than teachers in traditional schools (De la Rosa, 1998). This was also noted in a California alternative school where one student stated that, “everybody was willing to help you. And…they were glad to do it instead of at a regular school. [There] it was like a burden for them to

have to do it." (Loutzenheiser, 2002, p. 455). Students mentioned that there was a more familial environment in the alternative program, with space for both students and teachers to make room for emotions, trauma, and other issues impacting students' lives (Loutzenheiser, 2002).

Other pedagogical methods of resistance have existed throughout the history of this country. In this research, no alternative programs have been found that used emancipatory pedagogies and/or culturally sustaining models, but there are no doubt schools that are following such a model. The school examined in this particular study is an example of one such program. However, in other educational realms, in the United States and other countries, these pedagogies have existed for centuries in many forms.

Critical and emancipatory pedagogical philosophies

Emancipatory pedagogies have existed for centuries in formal and informal learning spaces in communities of color around the globe. During the era of slavery, Marron enclaves existed in Jamaica where workers were taken a few at a time in order to provide a space to rest and engage in political education (Harney & Motten, 2013). However, an important process in the political education was the recognition of the condition of oppression and the role of the oppressor; "Marronage is a practice of freedom that must, necessarily, start from the condition and category of enslavement in order to transgress it" (Patel, 2016).

Postcolonial Education

As countries in the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa and Asia gained their independence, newly formed governments sought to create national identities that stood in opposition to colonial nationalism. Many of these newly formed countries were made

up of many different ethnic groups who spoke different languages and held different cultural traditions. Education came to play an essential role in the construction and perpetuation of new national identities, "mediating the relationship between particular cultures and the nation-state" (Woolman, 2001, p. 32). Postcolonial education movements can be seen as the original form of culturally relevant education in promoting the incorporation of certain native languages and cultural traditions. Many of the initial presidents and government officials of the newly independent nations had been freedom fighters and understood that the purpose of colonial education was domination, a system that had damaged traditional values by perpetuating individualistic Eurocentric value systems (Woolman, 2001). The "hidden curriculum" in the colonial education system was "intended to teach that the coloniser's person, way of life and culture were superior to the person, way of life and culture of the colonised man" (Njobe, 1990, p. 35). There were a multitude of examples of the construction of postcolonial education systems globally and it continues to be something that many countries are pursuing. However, in providing a foundation for emancipatory-based culturally relevant pedagogies, I will provide only a few examples of the successes and limitations of some of these postcolonial education systems in Africa and Latin America, notably Puerto Rico, México, Ghana, Kenya, and Mozambique. These countries all had particular leaders who came to embody the creation of the new cultural nationalisms and promoted them through education.

México

In México, José Vasconcelos became a key part of the development of national identity through the education system during his time as the Secretary of Public

Education from 1921-1924 (Ocampo López, 2005). During this time the Mexican Revolution had just ended and there was a push for empowering rural and indigenous communities. This also became a key era in promoting a Mexican cultural nationalism (Ocampo López, 2005). Like many other countries in the global south, Mexican government officials recognized the importance of the arts in promoting a cultural identity. The group *Ateneo de la Juventud* was a community of artists and intellectuals who sought cultural reform after the dictatorship of Porfirio Días, leading in the creation of many of the key cultural institutions that exist today (Ocampo López, 2005). In relation to education, Vasconcelos created a national education campaign to provide rural and indigenous education programs, collaborating with artists in creating curriculum (Ocampo López, 2005). It is also important to recognize here, as with many countries, many of the indigenous populations continued to be oppressed through these policies that collapsed a multitude of identities into one national identity; The goal of many of these programs was also assimilation (Ocampo López, 2005). Vasconcelos created the concept of *la raza cósmica* (cosmic race) in postulating that Latin American identity was a cultural hybridism, *un mestizaje,* which should represent the future of the region (Ocampo López, 2005). In promoting a *mestizo* identity, indigenous cultures and traditions were brought into the national narrative, but were not given sovereignty or any true power in the country. In promoting the *mestizo* identity and cultural nationalism, Vasconcelos saw education as the primary means for development.

Puerto Rico

In the case of Puerto Rico, the creation of a national identity was slightly different in that it was a commonwealth of the United States. In addition, while México has 68

indigenous languages, Puerto Rico's only indigenous Taino language had been almost entirely lost. In promoting a national identity for Puerto Rico, the first governor, Luis Muñoz Marín, played a notable role starting in the late 1940s. Muñoz Marín created law #372, which stated that "pedagogical materials ought to be relevant to the Puerto Rican reality" (Marsh Kennerley, 2003, p. 419). In the style of much of the popular education to come in decades after, Muñoz Marín created an adult education program that was led by artists to develop and promote a national identity for Puerto Rico, as well as provide health-based education (Marsh Kennerley, 2003). The artists were comprised of visual artists, actors, and writers. Author René Marqués became key in establishing the *Jíbaro* (rural) identity as *lo puertorriqueño* (Marsh Kennerley, 2003). As with México, the problem with this dynamic arose in the exclusion of the Afro-puertorriqueño identity from the national narrative, focusing on the rural population that was largely of Spanish origin, thus continuing in many ways with the colonial narrative. Artists and authors interviewed rural community members as a part of understanding what should be included in films and the *Libros para el Pueblo*, which would become the core of the adult education curriculum (Marsh Kennerley, 2003).

Ghana

In the case of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, the first president, saw education as an essential tool for promoting a national identity and unifying the country, as well as redistributing wealth (Dodoo, 2012). Ghana is a country with over 80 different ethnic groups, each speaking a different language. In recognition of this, Nkrumah saw the creation of a national identity essential to diffusing ethnic tensions (Dodoo, 2012). As a Pan-Africanist, Nkrumah also sought to promote consciousness of cultural identity

throughout Africa. He oversaw the development of publications on Ghanaian culture in different Ghanaian languages, which was also promoted through the education system (Dodoo, 2012). Similarly to México and Puerto Rico, as well as many other countries, Nkrumah saw the establishment of cultural institutions along with new education systems as essential to the promotion of a national identity (Dodoo, 2012). Nkrumah saw the "colonial mentality" as one of the central obstacles to the development of Ghana and promoted socialism as a means for breaking down colonialism (Dodoo, 2012). Similarly to other nations, "the history of colonialism in Africa resulted in a peculiar type of psychological dependency which has made the reassertion of African culture and identity an important part of African nation-building" (Woolman, 2001).

Kenya

In Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta used the rallying cry of *harambee* (all come together) to promote a national identity (Keller, 1977). Beginning in 1963, Kenyatta created rural development programs using the concept of *harambee* to promote national unity. In a country with 42 different languages, Kenyatta recognized the importance of indigenous traditions and informal education among clans and families to maintain tribal cultural practices. Nonetheless, in formal education there was a focus on math and science in order to promote economic growth. Wealthy Kenyans founded *harambee* schools as a national model of education, but generally these schools followed a British colonial model of education (Keller, 1977). National artists and authors, including Ngugi wa Thiongo, led a national movement for the literature curriculum to focus more on African and other "Third World" literature (Woolman, 2001). However, these are still issues that

are being pushed for in Kenya with continuous efforts to decolonize the education system.

Mozambique

In Mozambique, Samora Machel, the first president created a national education policy in 1974 that declared a focus on removing racial discrimination and promoting national unity, as well as combating illiteracy (Woolman, 2001). Initially, the former socialist revolutionary utilized Marxist-Leninist theory to inform the pedagogical method, utilizing popular education methods in rural areas to teach literacy and political education (Woolman, 2001). In urban areas, cooperative, non-authoritarian pedagogical models replaced the test-centered Portuguese schools and textbooks were gradually replaced by teacher-produced Africanised curriculum (Woolman, 2001). Similarly to many other countries, educational language policy was one of the last things to change due to the multitude of languages spoken (20 Bantu languages) (Woolman, 2001). However, due to the fact that the majority of the population did not learn Portuguese until they began school, this has been an important shift in some schools in more recent years (Woolman, 2001). Nonetheless, pedagogical methods have remained largely colonial over the years with a focus on rote memorization, a problem that exists globally in teaching practices (Woolman, 2001).

Popular Education

Over the past forty years, revolutionary educators have sought to address the failures of the education systems that have been created in the global south. In particular, popular education methods became a method of resistance to colonial dynamics in education systems that oppressed rural populations and ethnic minority groups around the

globe. Popular education methods have also been cited as "critical pedagogy"; "Situating the curriculum as a form of cultural politics, critical pedagogy requires that we see education and the process of schooling as primarily concerned with the legitimation and reproduction of dominant cultural norms, values, interests, and beliefs" (Marsh, 2016, p. 15). In examining the philosophy of critical pedagogy, it was essential to separate the discourse from the practice. In schools of education in the United States, the language of critical pedagogy was coopted in restructuring systems of exploitation in order to maintain the status quo through ideologies of colorblindness. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2015) saw these discursive tropes as a key component of the new racial structure in the United States. "Whites avoid direct racist language to express their racial views, employ 'semantic moves' to avoid discussions, project their own views to implicate the minority party, and become close to incoherent when discussing forbidden issues or racially sensitive matters" (Bonilla-Silva, 2015, p. 1365). The language concerning critical pedagogy and social justice was coopted for these semantic moves in many cases. Nonetheless, it is important to analyze the foundations of critical pedagogy in popular education in order to conceptualize the role of utilizing these methods as a form of resistance.

Paolo Freire is considered to be the father of critical pedagogy and one of the main promoters of popular education as a means for critical pedagogical practices. In the opening to his renowned book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* he stated that "concern for humanization leads at once to the recognition of dehumanization, not only as an ontological possibility, but as a historical reality" (Freire, 2009, p. 43). Thus, before considering the possibilities for emancipation, it was essential to first recognize the

structures and systems of oppression that impacted an individual. It is no mistake that this systemic analysis has been completely absent from the curricula of general K-12 History and Social Studies classrooms in the United States. Henry Giroux (2001) cited three elements that were essential to recognize for the construction of critical pedagogical methods. First, he stated that schools cannot be analyzed as institutions separate from their socio-economic context. Second, schools are political sites involved in the construction and control of discourse. Third, the values that guide teaching practices are rooted in specific politics.

Recognition of the political nature of education and the systemic oppression of certain populations were not the only factors necessary for the construction of critical pedagogy. Another important element was the authentic co-construction of knowledge with students. Freire (2009) problematized the "banking" system of education where schooling "becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor" (p. 72). Freire (2001) stated, "to teach is not *to transfer knowledge* but to create the possibilities for the production and construction of knowledge" (p. 30). The objective of critical pedagogy and popular education is the creation of a critical consciousness (*conscientização*) of oppressed populations, as well as a liberatory process that seeks a lifestyle distinct from capitalism (Palmas Salina, 2017). Popular education in Latin America has long been part of a tradition of resistance and part of the construction of alternatives to structures of capitalist domination that have been in place since colonialism (Torres Carrillo, 2009). In understanding this method, I will give two examples from Chile and Brazil as to how the method has been put into practice.

Chile

In Chile, popular education arose during the Pinochet dictatorship between 1973 and 1990 as a means for resistance and social movement (Palmas Salinas, 2017). Through interviews that one researcher conducted with popular educators, findings showed that educators often felt incredibly transformed by their experiences (Palmas Salinas, 2017). For many, participating in a popular education project shifted their way of seeing, experiencing, and thinking about the world by sharing other lived realities and learning the value of those experiences (Palmas Salinas, 2017). As mentioned previously, in popular education knowledge is co-constructed with participants, rooting the lessons in the lived realities of community members. Through interviews with participants, the success of the popular education programs was found in participants noting that they felt more control over their lives and a growth in the ability to make decisions for their personal growth, as well as questioning their social reality and beginning to see the world in new ways (Palmas Salinas, 2017). For children, an increased self-esteem and sense of self-value was also found (Palmas Salinas, 2017).

Brazil

In Brazil, Paolo Freire founded and inspired a multitude of popular education programs around the country. Based on his teachings, one rural school in Pernambuco sought to combine popular education with cultural maintenance methods in a predominantly indigenous school with 1497 students. In a qualitative study of the school, interviewing 21 teachers and 45 students, popular education was seen as a pedagogy based in “ethnic affirmation” (Cristina Cavalcante, 2012). In this particular school, the underlying philosophy was that the study of one’s history and culture should be the

primary means towards understanding one's rights and responsibilities as a citizen and community member (Cristina Cavalcante, 2012). The school emerged during the 1980s as part of the Indigenous Movement in Brazil, which sought to focus on maintaining and strengthening indigenous languages and cultures (Cristina Cavalcante, 2012). The curriculum is based on Freirean liberatory pedagogy, as well as the incorporation of ancestral means of knowledge through collaborations with local elders. Many of the teachers are from the Fulni-ô tribe and see formal education as an essential location for the development of cultural identity since it is where young people spend a substantial portion of their day (Cristina Cavalcante, 2012). Students also mentioned that they saw school as an important place to learn their history and a place where they felt that their cultural identity was centered (Cristina Cavalcante, 2012).

Pedagogies of Freedom

Carla Shalaby (2017), in imagining the potential for pedagogies of freedom in the United States, noted the importance of making space for students to resist and question pedagogical processes:

> "I understand school to be a place where young people must be treated as free persons but-more important-a place where they can learn, together, how to skillfully insist on their right to be treated as free people. Classrooms must be places in which we practice freedom. They must be microcosms of the kind of authentic democracy we have yet to enact outside those walls-spaces for young people, by young people-engaging youth to practice their power and master the skills required by freedom" (p. xvi).

The Freedom Schools, instituted by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Mississippi in the summer of 1964, provided an U.S. example where methods similar to those of popular education were used in informal adult and youth education programs. “The schools represent an ideology of education for freedom passed down through hidden transcripts of resistance since slavery” (Hale, 2016, p. 111). One factor that set these schools apart was the fact that many of the educators were white, which resulted in an important growth experience for the teachers (Hale, 2016). However, there was no documentation as to whether this might have contributed to colonial education models in some cases. One of these educators, who was deeply impacted by the experience, was the activist and historian Howard Zinn (Hale, 2016). It is difficult to know in retrospect whether the impact of the schools would have been more profound if educators came from communities of color, but either way, there was a lasting impact in teaching a curriculum that was very much in line with critical pedagogical methods. The curriculum included African-American history and literature, lessons on how to conduct community engagement and protest, as well as core classes (Hale, 2016). The pedagogical methods focused on dialogue, critical thinking, and hands-on activities, which was sometimes a difficult shift for teachers who had worked in the general education system (Hale, 2016). In addition, theater was incorporated into all of the schools: “Freedom School teachers encouraged students to write, act, and perform in plays that portrayed the brutal reality for many blacks in Mississippi” (Hales, 2016, p. 116).

Influenced by the Freedom Schools, the Free School movement emerged during this era with a focus on schools that upheld the anti-racism principles of the Civil Rights

Movement (Dunning-Lozano, 2016). Most of these schools were community-led with a focus on youth leading their own educational process. Some of these schools continue in existence today, including the Sudbury Valley School in Framingham, MA. Many of these schools, including Sudbury Valley School, were driven primarily by whites and served a predominantly white community. In shifting the educational narrative for youth of color, there is a need for a focus on interrogating systems of power. In particular, restorative justice education and culturally sustaining pedagogies are growing in popularity across the United States.

Restorative Practices

"Restorative practices are defined as an emerging field in the social sciences that focuses on personal and group capacity building (subsidiarity) and creating peace through participatory learning and decision-making" (Cavanagh, 2009, p. 62). Restorative justice practices originated in indigenous communities and were applied in the criminal justice system, popularized particularly in New Zealand, but quickly extended to the education system. In New Zealand, restorative justice practices emerged as a response to the "zero tolerance" policies in the legal process (Cavanagh, 2009). In schools, this approach problematized the power relationships inherent in formal education structures, where teachers were perceived of as in control of students. "Power structures (e.g. hierarchy/control, including control over information) and how curriculum is taught (pedagogy) is rarely challenged" (Cavanagh, 2009, p. 68). In shifting this dynamic, culturally responsive pedagogy could be an important element. Another key component of restorative justice practices was the use of "circles". Cavanagh (2009) mentioned that this process was based on the practices used in indigenous communities but did not

mention whether there was a particular tribe that utilized this method. Overall, "circles" offer a time for students to gather together to share their personal feelings and ideas about anything that is significant to them" (Cavanagh, 2009, p. 75). This process was used as a space to address any issues or conflicts in the learning community. The "circles" process was based on several foundational ideas:

> "(a) based on the ideas that we are all social beings and want to be connected with one another, (b) grounded in core values that help people connect in good ways, (c) meant to help us connect when connections are not easy, particularly when conflicts and wrongdoing are involved, and (d) used to provide a safe place to make such connections so we can develop positive relationships" (Cavanagh, 2009, p. 76).

Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Pedagogies

Culturally relevant pedagogies, as postulated by Ladson-Billings (1995a), were very much connected and built from Freirean pedagogical philosophy. Culturally relevant pedagogies, and later culturally sustaining pedagogies, sought to create a drastic shift away from deficit thinking in education. "Simply put, the goal of deficit approaches was to eradicate the linguistic, literate, and cultural practices many students of color brought from their homes and communities to replace them with what were viewed as superior practices" (Paris, 2012, p. 93). Deficit approaches continue to be the norm in most schools in perpetuating the oppression of marginalized voices and "emphasizing the 'classics' and canons of hegemonic culture; instilling values consistent with the status quo (e.g. individualism, competition, etc.); and ignoring issues such as colonialism and racism" (Potts, 2003, p. 174).

In defining culturally relevant pedagogy, Ladson-Billings (1995a) noted three defining characteristics: "an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical consciousness" (p. 483). Academic ability was seen as the development of basic academic skills such as literacy and numeracy, as well as social skills (Ladson-Billings 1995b). Cultural competence was put forth as a way of maintaining "cultural integrity" and seeing students' culture as a "vehicle for learning" (Ladson-Billings 1995b, p. 161). Critical consciousness was based on Freire's concept of *conscientização*, as a "sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities" (Ladson-Billings 1995b, p. 162). However, in research over the past two decades, Ladson-Bilings (2014) found that most educators who sought to be culturally relevant failed to take up the "sociopolitical dimensions of the work" (p. 77), failing to meet the criteria of critical consciousness. In drawing from critical pedagogy, Ladson-Billings (1995b) noted that Freirean pedagogy formed the basis for culturally relevant pedagogy, but she saw it as a form of collective empowerment. She positioned this as a difference from critical pedagogy, but Freire (2001) also emphasized the collective nature in seeing education as a means for collective radical change. However, the difference seemed to come in the focus on "cultural integrity", although this was also something that popular educators drew from Freirean philosophy (Cristina Cavalcante, 2012). Thus, culturally relevant pedagogy can be seen as a form of popular education in drawing from these traditions. Ladson-Billings (1995a) saw successful culturally relevant educators as those who

identified with the "political underpinnings of the students' community and social world", as well as believed in Freirean notions of education (p.477).

In focusing on culture, Ladson-Billings (1995a) saw that for many African American youth, academic success came at the expense of cultural and psychological well-being. However, culturally relevant pedagogy has often been enacted by educators in ways that simplify culture and fail to focus on the dynamic elements of cultural traditions in the present (Paris & Alim, 2014). There has also been a failure to position youth as the subjects of their own education (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Paris (2012) postulated culturally sustaining pedagogy as a means to address some of these issues. I will discuss culturally sustaining pedagogy more at length further on in this section, but there is more overlap than difference between the two pedagogical philosophies. Although neither pedagogy directly states that it should form the basis all aspects of the educational process throughout a school, this seemed to be more in line with culturally sustaining pedagogies. Thus, in this particular section, a difference between the two pedagogical models will be the ways that culture is incorporated in curriculum. Courses or lesson plans that incorporate "cultural integrity", academic success, and critical consciousness will be noted below as examples of culturally relevant pedagogies, but schools where this was promoted across all content areas throughout the school will be mentioned in culturally sustaining pedagogies even if this was not the distinction that the authors may have intended.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogical Models

In considering science education, culturally relevant curricula and lesson plans have been created by educators throughout the country. In one urban Southeastern school,

a white middle school teacher used Derrick Bell's *The Space Traders* to consider issues of racism in relation to science, focusing on the development of critical consciousness (Laughter & Adams, 2012). The story, an exemplification of Critical Race Theory, postulated that aliens had come to offer a trade to the United States. They would provide a remedy to climate issues in exchange for all African Americans in the country, but they did not mentioned what they planned to do with the people they would abduct. The lesson was found to be effective through students' in-depth discussions on bias and shifts in racism over time, pushing students towards a higher academic level as well as building a sociopolitical awareness (Laughter & Adams, 2012). However, it seemed that the general curriculum in the class did not focus on cultural maintenance or critical consciousness.

In an indigenous community in the United States, a culturally relevant summer school science program was developed through a community-based research project with indigenous educators and academics in different fields of science (Marin & Bang, 2015). All of the educators also had or were pursuing a graduate degree in different types of science. In this particular study, researchers noted the importance of educators being from the same background as students in providing "the most fertile beginning point to build from and [allowing] youth to see [them] engaging with expertise from within the community" (Marin & Bang, 2015, p. 36). Elders were also consulted in building curriculum, using traditional stories to build relationships with place (Marin & Bang, 2015). The depth of community collaboration in this particular project seemed to be evidence of both culturally sustaining pedagogies and culturally revitalizing pedagogies. Curriculum design meetings often analyzed culturally relevant ways to root Western science concepts in indigenous storytelling and connections to the land (Marin & Bang,

2015). The "efforts toward 'storywork', or in this case applying lessons from stories to the development of curricula, became part of a decolonizing pathway" (Marin & Bang, 2015, p. 46).

In Australia, interviews were conducted with educators at different schools with between 0-25% Aboriginal students to understand methods that were being used to incorporate Aboriginal cultural knowledge (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011). Many educators, both Aborginal and non-Aboriginal, problematized non-Aboriginal teachers trying to include Aboriginal culture in the curriculum since they were often perpetuating stereotypes or providing a very simplified version of the culture; "quality teaching of Aboriginal perspectives is contingent upon the teacher's conceptualization of Aboriginal knowledge as that which is always grounded in places and only meaningful in the context in which it is produced" (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011, p.66). Thus it often became incredibly problematic for an educator who was not from the culture to attempt a culturally relevant pedagogy; "Students are not learning *Aboriginal* views or perspectives, rather they are learning their *non-Aboriginal* teacher's perspective on Aboriginal Australia" (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011, p. 70). In one school that seemed to have an effective culturally relevant pedagogy, Aboriginal parents and elders were consulted in all stages of building the curriculum (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011). In this particular school, the focus on parent involvement led to a shift from 386 suspensions in one year to 17 suspensions two years later (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011). However, in three other schools, Aboriginal culture day was the only day when Aboriginal culture was taught in the school (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011). The authors of this particular article seemed to see the celebration of Aboriginal culture as positive, but this seemed to be the

classic example of incorporating festivals and food as supposed culturally relevant pedagogy, but in reality providing a very superficial and stereotypical representation of a culture.

In New Zealand, the ministry of Education created a Māori education strategy, *Ka Hikita*, which recognized cultural maintenance as essential for academic success (Rau & Ritchie, 2011). Through this, Māori worldview, *tikanga*, has been incorporated at different levels nationwide (Rau & Ritchie, 2011). In particular, early childhood education became a key area for language (*te reo*) and cultural revitalization through schools that were managed by Māori community members (Rau & Ritchie, 2011). In 1996 a bilingual national curriculum was creating, a notable shift in the valorization of *te reo;* "*Te reo Māori* narratives and stories embedded in Māori metaphoric lore provide cues mapping pathways and life passages" (Rau & Ritchie, 2011, p. 802). In various schools, connections to earth were represented through gardens that educators used to support children in expressing thoughts and emotions through nature, as well as teach about the life force (*mauri*) of plants and stones (Rau & Ritchie, 2011). In addition, in several preschools, there was a focus on parent involvement, centering community cultural norms. Thus, paperwork was not done with parents until they felt at home in the school (Rau & Ritchie, 2011).

In secondary schools in New Zealand, research in four schools using interviews and focus groups found that the most effective way to improve Māori student attendance, engagement, and academic success was to include *te reo Māori* and *tikanga* in the curriculum (Whitinui, 2010). In New Zealand, Māori students had the highest dropout rates, which was evidence of a need for curricular change (Whitinui, 2010). Beginning in

the early 2000s, a certificate course in Māori was created for high school students through which language and cultural classes could be taken for credit towards the completion of the certificate (Whitinui, 2010). In these four schools, *kappa haka* (traditional Māori dance) was seen as an area that had a notable impact on student success. Students who participated in this course were found to have higher self-esteem and less behavioral issues (Whitinui, 2010). However, in all of the schools, students and teachers mentioned that student behavior was much worse for white teachers than for Māori teachers (Whitinui, 2010). As mentioned previously, in the study with indigenous science programs in the United States, this is a testament to the importance of having educators from the communities of students. Nonetheless, in New Zealand, 75% of teachers of all backgrounds interviewed stated that incorporating cultural activities and practices into their subject areas would improve educational outcomes for Māori students (Whitinui, 2010). However, many white teachers were unsure of how this could be done whereas the Māori educators saw their cultural identity as inseparable from their pedagogy (Whitinui, 2010). Several of the white teachers were more resistant to incorporating Māori culture and stated that this should be the focus of home life, not school. These types of debates are often what prevent effective culturally relevant pedagogies from being enacted in schools globally.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogical Models

Alim & Paris (2017) hold that "relevance" does not go far enough and that much of the work being done under the umbrella of culturally relevant pedagogies comes up short. Thus, culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) is proposed as a means of pushing this further in authentic ways. "Culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster-

to sustain- linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (Paris, 2012, p. 95). Unlike culturally relevant pedagogy, there are not a set of characteristics that identify culturally sustaining pedagogies. However, Alim and Paris (2017) imply that it is something led by people of color as a means for cultural sustenance; "CSP calls for sustaining and revitalizing that which over the centuries sustained *us* […] as communities of color struggling to 'make it' – to resist, revitalize, and reimagine – under enduring colonial conditions that constantly work to diminish our intellectual capacities, cultures, languages, and, yes, our very lives" (Alim & Paris, 2017, pp. 12-13). Thus, culturally sustaining pedagogies are pedagogies of resistance.

Although culturally sustaining pedagogy implies, by its very nature, a development of critical consciousness, this was not as explicit as it was under Ladson-Billing's proposal of culturally relevant pedagogy. A key difference between the two was that Paris and Alim (2014) emphasized the importance of understanding culture as an evolving entity and, through that, the importance of incorporating youth-based forms of culture, such as hip hop. They noted that youth should engage in sustaining heritage cultural practices, as well as modern cultural practices that are important for them (Paris & Alim, 2014). Through this, there should also be a critique of mentalities (i.e. homophobia, misogyny, and racism) that have come to be seen as intertwined with modern and heritage cultural ways of being (Paris & Alim, 2014). This seemed to be more of the focus of building critical consciousness than an understanding of colonial and imperial influences. However, the authors did mention briefly that CSP should be a "critical, emancipatory vision of schooling that reframes the object of critique from our children to oppressive systems" (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 3). Thus, in analyzing schools

that utilized culturally sustaining pedagogies, I focused on schools with a critical, emancipatory framework through which cultural ways of being were sustained throughout the school, in both curriculum and school policy. In moving towards a conceptualization of pedagogies of decolonization and resistance, culturally sustaining pedagogies formed an important base.

In one international school in New York City for newcomer youth, interviews and participant observation showed that a transnational identity was encouraged throughout the school with many students aspiring towards careers where they could support communities in their home country though education or healthcare (Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018). Throughout the school, teachers sought to build curriculum where students could share their migration stories, as well as histories of their home countries (Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018). In addition, students made connections from injustices in their home countries to those occurring in the United States (Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018). In English, one unit was a global poetry unit in which students read Latin American, Asian, and African poetry and wrote their own poems (Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018). Teachers, many of who were of immigrant origin, noted that creating constant connections to students' home countries increased motivation for students (Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018). Students mentioned that the "environment of transcultural and transnational sharing" created a space in which they felt that they belonged (Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018).

In Tucson, Arizona only 50% of Chicano students graduated from high school, whereas 93% of Chicanos in the *Raza Studies* program graduated (McGinnis & Palo, 2011). This particular program focused largely on Mexican and Latinx history and literature, as well as an examination of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement. Critical Race

Theory and critical pedagogy were actively incorporated into the curriculum, citing Paolo Freire as an inspiration for their pedagogical methods (McGinnis & Palo, 2011). "Circles" methods were also used for discussion and conflict resolution, incorporating chants and practices from the Mexica tribe in central Mexico. Key concepts incorporated into the curriculum were *tezcaltipoca* (self-reflection), *In Lak'ech* (you are another me), and *Quetzalcoatl* (precious knowledge) (Acosta, 2013). These particular concepts were all taken from Mayan and Mexica traditions. The concept of *Quetzalcoatl* was related to critical consciousness in portraying this as a rigorous examination of lived experience whereas *In Lak'ech* was related to community and unity. Students began each day reciting the poem *In Lak'ech*, which was written by notable Chicano author Luís Valdez to explain this concept further (McGinnis & Palo, 2011).

In one study tracking Tucson students from 2008-2011, comparing *Raza Studies* participants to demographically similar non-participants, it was found that participants were 150% more likely to graduate (Cabrera, et al., 2012). As the program came to its end, there was still a notable difference, but participants were 46% more likely to graduate in 2011. However, it is important to note that in 2010, ethnic studies programs were banned through House Bill 2281 under the guise that classes promoted overthrowing the government and advocated for a dangerous ethnic solidarity (Acosta, 2013). This bill, a testament to the power of white supremacy in the United States, was overturned by a federal court in 2017. After the 2010 ruling, an informal community program, known as the School for Ethnic Studies, was created to continue teaching the concepts of the program in collaboration with professors, artists, and community activists (Cabrera, et al., 2013). Youth participants (ages 14-18) noted that it was uplifting to learn

their own history and that they felt much more engaged and connected than in traditional schooling (Cabrera, et al., 2013).

Another school, the Native American Community Academy (NACA) in Albuquerque, New Mexico was created in 2006 as a space to sustain indigenous culture (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2013). Although students in the *Raza Studies* program took several courses in the program and participated in events outside of school, it was not a philosophy that was the basis for the whole school. This was the case for NACA, which was founded as a place to integrate personal wellness, cultural identity, and academic success for grades 6-12 (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2013). However, unlike the *Raza Studies* program, there was not a clear focus on critical consciousness. "The school is guided by the belief that Native American students thrive in academic environments that include and value their languages, histories, heritages, and cultures" (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2013, p. 48). In this particular school, 95% of students are indigenous, representing more than 50 tribes (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2013). In New Mexico, only 45% of Native American students graduated from high school, which is lower than any other ethnic group (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2013). The program was created as a means to shift the educational disconnect that many indigenous students experienced in being pushed out of school. The core values of the program were respect, responsibility (responsibility to Native peoples and the environment), community/service, culture, perseverance, and reflection (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2013). The curriculum integrated traditional storytelling methods, oral traditions, community presentations, and Native languages and

literature (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2013). One of the core goals of the director, an indigenous woman, was to hire as many Native faculty and staff as possible (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2013). Students mentioned that in their previous schools they had felt isolated and disengaged, but experienced a huge shift at NACA, feeling a sense of pride in their identity and a feasibility in attending college (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2013). Similar findings were noted in total immersion schools in New Zealand that were created in the 1980s, driven by a desire from Māori parents to preserve traditional culture (Whitinui, 2010).

In the United States, Afrocentric pedagogies have gained traction since the 1970s. Potts (2003) conceptualized an African-centered emancipatory pedagogy, which was very much in line with both culturally relevant and culturally sustaining pedagogies. However, in this particular model, the liberatory focus and a strong cultural focus underlined all elements of curriculum and school policies:

> African-centered emancipatory pedagogy is "one that (1) explicitly addresses social oppression, situating community problems (and targets of primary prevention) within historical context, (2) acknowledges students as agents for social change, and (3) affirms African cultural resources for healing and social transformation. Emancipatory education seeks to invoke the liberatory potential of education for children and society. African-centered emancipatory education affirms identity and agency, helps restore a sense of history, and provides opportunities for social action" (Potts, 2003, p. 175)

Central philosophies of this particular pedagogical model were the 42 Ancient Egyptian ethical and moral principles of *Ma'at* and the seven principles of *Nguzo Saba* (commonly referred to as the principles of Kwanzaa) (Potts, 2003). The principles of *Nguzo Saba* are *Umoja* (unity), *Kujichagulia* (Self-Determination), *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility), *Ujamaa* (Cooperative Economics), *Nia* (Purpose), *Kuumba* (Creativity), and *Imani* (Faith). In Hartfort, Connecticut, the Benjamin E. Mays Institute utilized an African-centered emancipatory education to underline their entire educational process as a separate educational program within a larger school. Through this, the program included parent organizations, mentorship programs, community workshops, annual conferences, African-centered curriculum and forums with community leaders (Potts, 2003). Students in this particular middle school consistently outscored all other Hartford middle schools on the Connecticut Mastery Test (Potts, 2003). In addition, students were found to have higher measures of African identity than students in the general education program in the larger school, based on the Racial Identity Attitude Scale (Potts, 2003). Thus, this particular program demonstrated incredible success through cultural sustenance and academic success.

Based on Potts (2003) findings, two Black women who were academic researchers created an elective class within an inner-city school in a Midwestern city (Lewis, Andrews, Gaska, Sullivan, Bybee, & Ellick, 2012). In this particular program, a course was implemented with 65 students during one class period three times per week for one semester. (Lewis, et al., 2012). However, findings showed a decrease in ethnic identity measures over the course of the semester (Lewis, et al., 2012). In recognizing these findings, it seemed that the short time span of the program, as well as the relatively

little time spent with students, might contribute to the result. In another Afrocentric school, educators noted that it took students almost an entire year to buy into the African principles of the program, since it was not something that many students had encountered previously (Robinson & Jeremiah, 2011). Thus, in considering the success of a culturally sustaining program, results must analyze programs that have been in place more than a year.

In Chicago, an Afrocentric high school was started as part of the Chicago Small Schools reform (Robinson & Jeremiah, 2011). In this particular case, educators and community members sought to revitalize a school that had been the second Black school in the city, started during the segregation era (Robinson & Jeremiah, 2011). Similar to the African-centered emancipatory pedagogy, this school had the virtues of *Ma'at* and *Nguzo Saba* as the basis for the overarching pedagogy. The learning goals in this particular school were the following:

> "Students will understand and use cultural knowledge (Virtues of Ma'at and Principles of Nguzo Saba) to make informed ethical choices; Students will have strong sense of selves as Africans in the Diaspora; Students will be leaders and entrepreneurs; Students will use technology as a tool for academic and professional roles; Students will demonstrate success and academic achievement; Students will understand how literacy is related to the arts, sciences, social sciences, and technology fields" (Robinson & Jeremiah, 2011, p. 313)

The African-centered approach was integrated into curriculum, discipline, school rituals and after-school programs (Robinson & Jeremiah, 2011). Each school day began with a circle to recite the virtues of *Ma'at* and *Nguzo Saba*, then to sing the Black

National Anthem (Robinson & Jeremiah, 2011). In starting the school, 90% of students were below benchmark in Math and Reading, coming from one of the higher poverty areas of Chicago (Robinson & Jeremiah, 2011). In building up the curriculum, teachers found that many students purposefully missed the opening circle and were not eager to accept the philosophy of the school (Robinson & Jeremiah, 2011). Thus, teachers began to spend more time in and out of class to break down the concepts that the school was based on and have students analyze them and provide initial impressions (Robinson & Jeremiah, 2011). By the end of the school year, various students mentioned that they saw a change in themselves after learning about the principles, particularly in not being as reactive and not giving up easily (Robinson & Jeremiah, 2011). Nonetheless, after the second year almost all of the original faculty had left the program, citing difficulties in differing philosophies among administrators (Robinson & Jeremiah, 2011).

In eastern Massachusetts, an Afrocentric charter school was started in the mid 1990s as the result of organizing efforts over six years from a coalition of African-American community members, parents, and educators (Murell, 1999). A five-year qualitative study analyzed the initial years of the school (Murell, 1999). In this particular school, 81% of students were Black, with many parents choosing the school because their children had been labeled as "behavioral problems" in other public schools (Murell, 1999). Similar to the Chicago school, students began each day with a call and response ritual aligned with the seven principles of *Nguzo Saba* (Murell, 1999). The first year of school, the curriculum was entirely Afrocentric for all grades, incorporating the study of different African diaspora countries throughout the year (Murell, 1999). However, after the first year, one of the key administrators left due to struggles with other administrators

(Murell, 1999). Thus, during the second year there was much more focus on the state curriculum frameworks, which was also something that was pushed for by the state in maintaining charter school funding (Murell, 1999). This process continued over the following years, despite the protests of parents and community members (Murell, 1999). Thus, overall, “the constraints engendered in running a public institution have inhibited the thoughtful and consistent development of an African-centered pedagogy” (Murrell, 1999, p. 576). The researcher stated that the decline of the Afrocentric pedagogy was due to conflict between school leaders, as well as the absence of a community of practice (Murrell, 1999).

Overall, there were multitude of factors that impacted the “success” of culturally sustaining and emancipatory models of education. In considering “success” many schools have also begun to consider the development of critical consciousness and ethnic identity as measures of success, which is an important shift. In considering ethnic identity, studies found that a strong ethnic identity was correlated with higher self-esteem (Martinez & Dukes, 1997; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; Phinney & Chavira, 1992) and lower levels of depression (Yasui, et al., 2004). In addition, high self- esteem has also been correlated with higher academic achievement among minoritized groups in the United States (Cveneck, et al., 2018; Hernández, et al., 2017). Direct links were also found between a strong ethnic identity and academic achievement (Hernández, et al., 2017; Grantham & Ford, 2003). In the emancipatory and culturally relevant schools and programs mentioned above, self-esteem was definitely a key factor that was found as an example of success (Palmas Salinas, 2017; Whitinui, 2010; Robinson & Jeremiah, 2011). A stronger ethnic identity was also found as a factor relating to the success of programs (Potts, 2003;

National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2013; Cabrera, Meza, Romero, & Cintli Rodríguez, 2013; Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018; Whitinui, 2010).

Conclusion

In considering the history of criminalization of youth of color in the United States, it is not a surprise that many of these individuals are pushed out of the education system before graduating from high school.

> "Our schools are designed to prepare children to take their assumed place in the social order rather than to question and challenge that order. Because we train youth in the image of capitalism instead of a vision of freedom-for lives as individual workers rather than solidary human brings-young people are taught academic content that can be drilled and tested rather than understanding literacies and numeracies as forms of power, tools for organizing, fodder for the development of their own original ideas" (Shalaby, p. xvi).

Carla Shalaby (2017) postulated that the youth most often labeled as "troublemakers" were those most sensitive to the structural inequalities that exist in this country, the children who challenged these structures despite the harm it might entail. The majority of schools depicted these youth as deviant and pushed them towards the criminal justice system. However, schools do exist that challenge this dominant narrative. The school that will be analyzed in in the proceeding chapters is one that utilized both restorative justice practices, as well as culturally sustaining pedagogy in a form similar to an African-centered emancipatory pedagogy in developing a pedagogy of decolonization and liberation. Youth were encouraged to question the structures around them and general education content included courses on environmental justice, neocolonialism, and

mathematics of the prison-industrial system, among other content rooted in activism. These are the programs that youth of color in this country desperately need in order to resist the criminalization and violence that frequently shape their lived experiences.

CHAPTER FOUR: PUSHED OUT OF THE SYSTEM

Young people of color have been historically disenfranchised in the education system. There are a multitude of factors that push students out of school. In contextualizing the need for an emancipatory pedagogical model, it was essential to examine the reasons that students in the Hands On Knowledge program previously became disengaged with school or pushed out of school. Guidance counselors, family members or teachers sought to reengage them in school by recommending them to the Hand On Knowledge program, which will be examined more in-depth in the following two chapters. Through this chapter, I will seek to answer the question: What led youth of color in the Hands On Knowledge program to previously be pushed out of traditional education systems?

I will begin this section by contextualizing the sentiments of students and highlighting some of the primary reasons that students were pushed out of traditional educational structures, as well as the age when they became disengaged, as cited by the students or alumni themselves. I will them delve further into the factors of disengagement, which arose as themes from the interviews and focus groups. These themes were broken down into structural, social environment, interpersonal, and personal factors impacting students' educational experiences, both directly and indirectly, as seen in figure 5.2. These are overlapping and interconnected categories used more for structural coherence than an attempt to completely separate each topic, understanding that there are interactions between multiple factors that will be discussed. Structural, social environment, interpersonal and personal levels are used in following loosely, using more simplified terms, with Bronfenbrenner's (1989) Ecological Systems Theory, which

provided a framework to understand the various environments that individuals interact with.

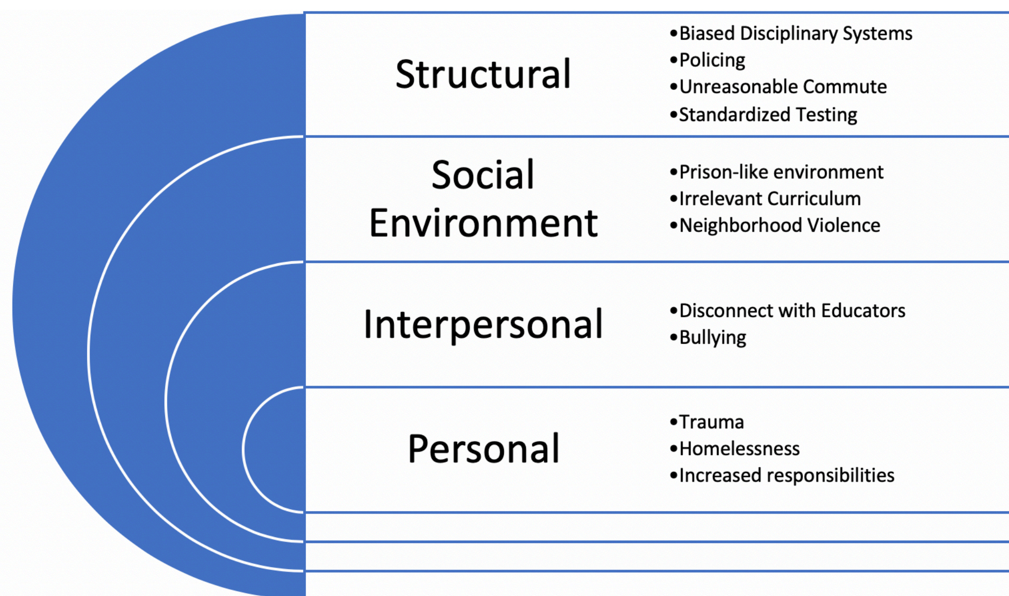

Figure 4.1. Factors pushing youth out of traditional schools

Through figure 5.2, key themes found are listed, which will be detailed after discussing the age of disengagement. Overall, through these themes, there were also narratives of resistance in ways that students pushed back against systems and individuals that worked against them, which will be examined at the end of the chapter.

"School's Not For Me"

As I sat in the corner of a pizza parlor in the heart of one of Boston's Black and Latinx neighborhoods with Emmanuel, a young Haitian-American, he struck me by starting our interview by stating "I honestly feel like school's not for me". This statement came in response to being asked to describe his background. Although I was referring to his racial and cultural background, he referenced his academic background. That simple

statement exposed the deep impact of systemic structures that push youth of color out of school and make them feel unworthy of being in academic environments. Having previously done many of the orientation interviews for potential students in the program, this was a sentiment that I had heard echoed time and time again. For a young Honduran woman, she noted that her lack of success in school was a result of not fitting in. She had come from a school in a neighborhood with deep-seated racism, known to be one of Boston's historical Irish-American communities. However, there was so much behind these statements that reflected the failure of our education system in this country in pushing Black and Brown youth out of school.

In returning to the initial statements made by students, one of the larger themes that emerged was that students felt that schools weren't for them. In the case of the Hands On Knowledge program, staff had a deep understanding of the narratives and systems that disconnect youth and push them out of traditional schools. One of the previous directors of the program, Jin, recognized that part of his job as director, and the jobs of the educators in the program, was to "peel those layers away of this isn't your fault. There's nothing wrong with you." He noted that students frequently came into the program stating that "school's not for me. I'm not a student. I'm never gonna be a scholar. I just got to grit my teeth and get through it." For many students, there was an element of self-blame in not having found success in traditional schools. In one focus group, one Black young man mentioned that he was in the program because he had messed up. Another student, a young Dominican man, echoed this same statement. In other focus groups, when pressed about what the system had done to impede their success, most students held onto the idea that it was just their fault. For one young

woman, she stated that “I was just bad for no reason”. Although there is truth to the agency that young people have in shifting their path and choices, systemic, neighborhood, and economic factors play an enormous role in whether students are able to be successful academically.

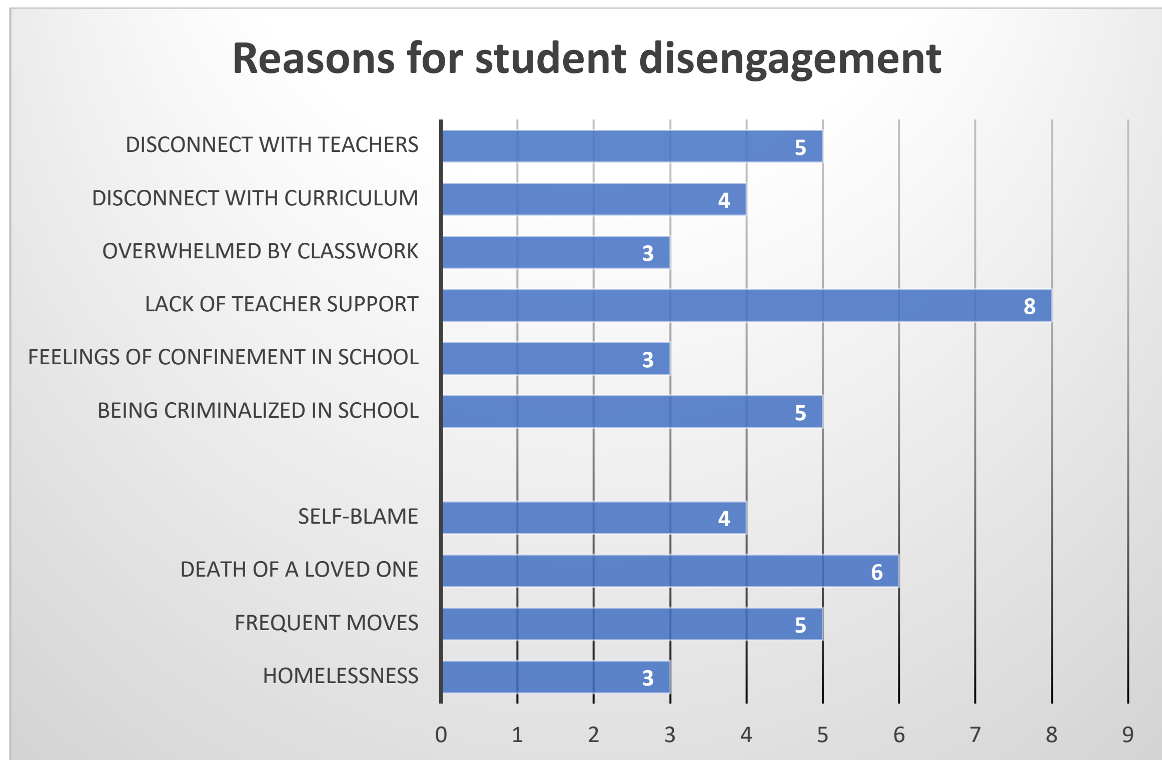

Figure 4.2. Reasons for student disengagement in the Hands On Knowledge program by number of students, as reported by students and alumni

There were a multitude of factors that impacted a student’s engagement or disengagement with school, as seen in figure 4.1. Some of these factors were related to home environment and pressures of poverty. Other factors were related to neighborhood and experiences with violence, which also connected to ways that youth experienced policing. Other factors focused on ways that young people of color were criminalized in and out of school. Yet another factor related to the lack of emotional and academic

support students had, in school and sometimes out of school. In addition, students were impacted by culturally irrelevant educators and curriculum. The information presented in figure 4.1 reflects the responses of both current students who participated in focus groups, as well as alumni who were interviewed. Some students noted up to three reasons relating to their disengagement.

Age of disengagement

Through interviews and focus groups, a notable theme that emerged was the shift in students' academic success and engagement with school during middle school or freshman year of high school.

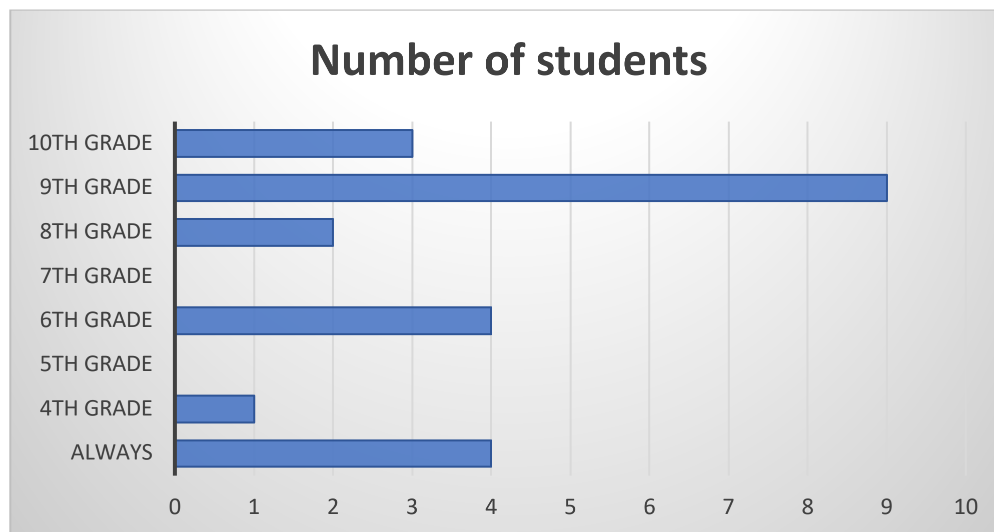

Figure 4.3. Grade level when students disengaged from school

All of the students in the focus groups and interviews except for one mentioned that they enjoyed school in elementary school. Talia, a seventeen-year old young Black woman noted that "I always liked school, like in elementary school I was an honor roll student and then middle school was kind of rocky and then high school was, I don't want to come here, what's the point?".

This sentiment was echoed throughout the focus groups with current students in the Hands On Knowledge program. As can be seen in figure 4.2, several students mentioned that for them the disconnect began in sixth grade. However, the majority of students mentioned that a disconnect began Freshman year. The information in figure 4.2 came from responses recorded from current students during focus groups. Nationwide, according to one large-scale survey, school engagement started to decease drastically in 6th grade. In 5th grade, 75% of students felt engaged, compared to 67% in 6th grade, 45% in 8th grade, getting to a low of 32% in 11th grade (Gallup, 2015). This pattern was somewhat reflected in figure 4.2. However, figure 4.2 focused on initial age of disengagement, rather than levels of engagement at each grade level.

Structural Factors

In considering structural factors, various themes relating to the criminalization of youth of color had an enormous impact on the ways that students became disengaged from school. In framing this problem around criminalization, a parent of a Hands On Knowledge alumnus noted at a School Committee Meeting, where parents and alumni were fighting to ensure that budget cuts did not result in cutting the program, the ways prisons were growing while schools were not: “We’re triple bunking, putting them in hallways, in dorms, in tents because if we don’t make space for them in high schools, we’re making space for them in jail cells”. Key structural themes that emerged through current student focus groups and alumni interviews were biased disciplinary systems, lack of neighborhood schools, and standardized testing. As with other categories, it is essential to understand there is a relationship between structural, social environment,

interpersonal and personal factors. Thus, it was also essential see all of the factors as intertwined with one other.

Biased Disciplinary Systems

In the case of schools, discipline was a structural issue that was bolstered at all levels by practices that maintained systems of inequity. This particularly occurred through bias, both implicit and explicit, on the part of educators. In relation to this, a key theme that emerged around biased disciplinary systems were the experiences of Black girls getting in trouble for their "mouth". One young woman, Misty, experienced this particular issue in the larger school. She was someone who was often seen as an exemplary student by her peers in the Hands On Knowledge program, supporting other students in History class and pushing others to think more critically in class and during teach-ins. During her time in the program, she decided to shave her head in pushing back against ideas of femininity. When asked about why she shaved her head, she conveyed a perspective related to ways that Black women were gendered and racialized in ways that damaged their identities, something she sought to push back against. However, in her previous educational experience, she would frequently have conflicts with teachers:

> "I always had a deep and, just deep hatred for school. Everything about school. The teachers. I used to just get in arguments with those teachers upstairs all the time. That's another reason I barely came to school. They wouldn't like my mouth. They wouldn't like what I had to say. They would try to get crazy with you, but then when you gave them that same energy they would want to get mad"

Misty noted that this started in middle school, which caused her to start skipping school since she felt it wasn't worth it to go. This was a major theme among the young

women in the program. Two alumni in the program, one Dominican and the other Black American, noted the ways that they had frequently gotten into trouble because of their "mouth". Both students tested at college level in both Math and English on tests given at the beginning of the school year in considering student groupings. In the Hands On Knowledge program, they ended up becoming the President and Vice President of the Student Advisory Board, leading the development of a professional conference workshop for educators on the importance of critical consciousness and culturally sustaining pedagogies. These young women noted a disconnect with education due to school culture and pedagogies that "othered" them, a phenomenon consistent with research conducted with other young women of color in alternative education (Loutzenheiser, 2002). This relationship with schooling was both racialized and gendered in being impacted by standards that they were held to about how young women should behave (Loutzenheiser, 2002).

A particular issue, which has been found to disproportionately effect Black girls, was the framing of discipline around "disrespect", a widely subjective term that has become synonymous for many Black and Latinx youth with enacting their own cultural norms. Black and Caribbean youth are considered louder and more outspoken, qualities that could be beneficial in considering leadership, but have been framed as "disrespectful" in the classroom. Both male and female students in the Hands On Knowledge program mentioned that they had problems previously at school related to issues of perceived disrespect. Morris (2016) noted that the problematization of these characteristics of strength stemmed from perceived nonconformity to traditional gender expectations. One study found that teachers frequently perceived Black girls as "loud"

and “defiant”, impacting a higher rate of reprimanding Black girls, compared to white or Latina girls (Morris, 2007).

Another theme that emerged related to discipline was students’ experiences with disciplinary systems where they felt they were unfairly targeted. Many students had been suspended from school prior to transferring into the alternative program. For a young Cape Verdean woman, Flavia, she had felt the injustice of the education system in a very concrete way through the criminal justice language used to intensify an incident that she did not commit.

> “When I was at [an urban middle school], there was this teacher, Mr. [X], the tiniest dude. He was like, I had just threw a pencil, this was the situation that happened. He was like don’t throw pencils. I was like aight’, I’m not gonna throw pencils. So, I was like I’ma lay back, not throw pencils, not gonna force it. So, somebody threw a pencil and it hit him. I swear to God, on dead dawgs, I did not throw that pencil. As soon as he turned around he looked right at me because I had just thrown that pencil in the trash. So, he looked at me. He was like come outside. So I was like alright. So, the deans came. They was talking about some assault and battery with a pencil. I was like come on, I got mad stuff, I dead ass did not throw that pencil. And all the kids were in there laughing. […] I just felt like he made me not want to go to that school. That’s why I transferred over here. And it was a big ass situation, it was assault and battery on the paper, with a pencil“.

The criminal justice language used by Flavia to describe this situation was evidence of the ways that this language had been used to describe her actions. As noted in

the previous chapter, one study found that 95 percent of educators used criminal justice language to describe students' actions in school suspensions, a factor that had been tied to the school-to-prison pipeline (Kayama, 2015). Furthermore, as mentioned in chapter two, in Boston, Black and Latinx students were suspended at higher rates than any other group, typically for non-violent, non-criminal, non-drug offenses (Taylor, et al., 2014). All of the students in the Hands On Knowledge program who had been suspended were Latinx or Black. In the state of Massachusetts, 12.1% of Black students and 10.4% of Latinx students were disciplined in the 2012-2013 school year, compared to 3.7% of white students (Taylor, et al., 2014). For students in the Hands On Knowledge program, these "unfair" suspensions or disciplinary actions were often related to things they stated that they had not done.

Flavia was also a student who felt that she had been unfairly placed in Special Education classrooms during 6th grade, which caused her to begin to disengage from school:

> "So I was like aggravated already because I'm in the small classes with the small, with the niggers that were like mad slow and shit, but I was like everybody's not that slow, but they kind of like catching up slowly. So I'm just there and I was one of the fastest kids so I'm sitting there like damn, what the hell, I'm not coming to school no more, like why am I in this class."

Although this particular example was not mentioned by other students, it connected to the overrepresentation of youth of color in special education, particularly Black and Latinx youth. Nationally, "American Indian/Alaska Native students experience a risk of 13.7%, African American students 12.4%, White students 8.7%, Hispanic

students 8.3%, and Asian/Pacific Islander students 4.6% of being labeled as having a disability" (Zion & Blanchett, 2011, p. 2191). Nationally, Black students made up 14.8% of the school age population in 2002, but 20.2% of students in special education (Ferri & Connor, 2005). These disparities varied by state and by special education label. In New York state, Black youth were three times more likely to be classified has having an emotional disturbance whereas Latino youth were twice as likely as any group to be classified with a speech disability (Ahram, et al., 2011). Zion and Blanchett (2011) noted the connection between students being pushed out of school and the disproportionality in special education referrals, connecting that to disproportionate discipline and referrals for young people of color. In particular, this connection between pushing students out of school and the disproportionality in special education referrals resulted from a cultural deficit mindset on the behalf of educators making the referral (Ahram, et al., 2011). In consideration of this, as well as the experience mentioned by Flavia, the disconnect between school and disproportionate referrals also becomes clear, connecting both implicit bias of educators and systemic disparities.

Charter Schools

Another theme that emerged in pushing students out of traditional educational environments, an extension of biased disciplinary schools, mentioned by fewer students, was related to the ways that charter schools implemented disciplinary systems. One young woman mentioned that her disengagement with school related to the disciplinary, prison-like structure of the charter school she attended: "When I went to the charter school I freaking hated it. It was sixth grade. […] But, um, I didn't like it because it was like jail". Another student, who had also attended a charter school in middle school that

she felt was “like jail”, directly connected her disengagement to the ways that she felt criminalized and policed in this particular school:

> “I went to a charter school and I hated it because it was like jail. Like, so in the hallway, if you walked in the hallway they had this black tape going around and if you walked to the bathroom you had to walk all around the tape first and then go to the bathroom, like you had to do a whole lap and then go to the bathroom. And then, they gave you demerits if you cough, if you sneeze, if you look at them, that’s how it felt, they just gave you demerits for no reason”

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the carceralization of schools notably increased in 1994 due to the Gun Free Schools Act, which established zero-tolerance policies in schools (Kayama, et. al., 2015). Although the impetus for this shift was the increase in school shootings, the laws came to primarily target schools with large populations of youth of color. These policies have been particularly evident in many charter schools. A number of charter schools with a “no excuses model” utilized zero-tolerance, punitive discipline policies (Roberts, 2018). These schools began to expand in 1995, starting with KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program), known by its opponents as the “Kids in Prison Program” (Roberts, 2018).

The experience of the young woman mentioned above aligned with the 2003 KIPP school plan for the city of Fresno, which noted that inacceptable behavior included the following: “untucked shirts, slouching, note passing, loud talking, deep sighing, whining, laughing at others, eye rolling, teeth sucking” (Roberts, 2018). Disparities in discipline for youth of color are also impacted by the deficit mindsets that many white educators have in charter schools (Sondel, et al., 2019). Overall, charter schools have

been found to have higher suspension rates for students of color and students with disabilities (Roberts, 2018). This was particularly problematic in light of the already existing problematic disparities that exist in traditional schools.

Policing

School discipline very much connected with policing in both policy and practice. Through Participatory Action Research Projects, students found that police violence against youth of color was a notable factor that peers problematized in their community. Members of the Student Advisory Board, also participants in a Youth Participatory Action Research course that I taught, led focus groups with other students around this topic. Focus group questions were co-created with leaders of community organizations from Dorchester and Roxbury. Transcripts of these focus groups were sent to the ACLU as part of a lawsuit against the Boston Police Department. Through the focus groups, it became clear that a notable number of students had experienced violence at the hands of police officers. Overall, most students stated that they did not feel safe around police officers and would never call the police, even if it was an emergency situation. In one case, a student described the corruption of a police officer that had an interaction with his friend:

> "This happened like two years ago. I was at Ruggles and my friend, he threw his wave brush at this dude's face. Alright? So, then, the cops came and then the cop was in the space like, 'oh you a little ass nigga', he was like 'you a little nigga ass shit. I'll wipe you right now off the floor and nothing would happen to me'. Ya, he said it to him in his face. He was like, 'I'll beat your ass and nothing will happen to me and you'll go to jail'"

Overall, when asked if students personally felt that the police were watching them, over three fourths of students responded affirmatively. One student mentioned that they often saw the "undercover D boys" in their neighborhood, referring to undercover police officers. Other students mentioned feeling more surveilled in certain neighborhoods, particular in Nubian Square (formerly Dudley Square). When asked if police regularly watched their communities, all but two students responded affirmatively. One student noted, "they're definitely watching our community, especially us Black and Brown people. They want to see everything we do". On a larger scale, it was evident that communities of color received higher surveillance than white communities, which then raised supposed crime counts in those neighborhoods (Alexander, 2010). As mentioned in chapter three, this connected to federal and state disparities in sentencing. This was heightened in the 1980s during the so-called "crack epidemic" through which SWAT teams entering communities of color became militarized and massive disparities existed in sentencing between crack and cocaine, primarily impacting Black males (Vagins & McCurdy, 2006). Zero-tolerance policies at a state level disproportionally impacted Black and Latinx youth, which was mirrored in school-level zero-tolerance policies (Rios, 2006). In the high school that the Hands On Knowledge program was housed within, there were three school resources officers, but each floor had one to two unit leaders and one to two assistant unit leaders. All of the assistant unit leaders, who are generally seen as the ones responsible for discipline, are Black or Latinx. This situation reflected the findings of a study with 27 Black male teachers noting that Black men were often positioned as pawns in the "universal carceral agent", expected to act as disciplinarians in the school for youth of color (Bristol & Mentor, 2018). One Black male educator in the

Hands On Knowledge program noted that he spent nine years as an assistant unit leader, expected to mete out discipline to youth of color, although he often disagreed with classroom policies. In feeling part of racialized policing systems he sought a shift by becoming a teacher in this alternative program.

Unreasonable Commute

A further structural theme that emerged among current students, as well as alumni, in considering factors that disengaged students from school was the commute. In the Hands On Knowledge program, 93% of students traveled at least an hour to get to school each day. In addition, several students emphasized that it was particularly difficult to get to school by 7:30am, which was the start time for the larger school. One young woman, Trina, struggled with mental health issues and elaborated on why it was a struggle to get to school on time. She frequently emphasized to me that it was hard enough to get out of bed early, particularly since this meant waking up at 5am to be at school on time. However, for her the larger struggle was getting on buses and trains that were often packed, which would increase her anxiety. Thus, if she did make it to school, it would be in an increased state of hyperarousal. Several other students mentioned that they would often let various trains or buses pass rather than be packed onto public transportation. These are often factors that schools don't consider in thinking about why a student might be late or not at school.

The general high school is one of the lowest performing 10% of schools in the state due to low graduation rates and high absenteeism (DESE). In the Hands On Knowledge program, on a daily basis, approximately 50-60% of students are present in school. However, it was important to note that many of these students had been

disengaged from school for over a year, in addition to living far from the school. In the city of Boston, the lack of quality neighborhood schools in communities that are primarily people of color became a pressing issue and one that local organizations (such as Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative and Inquilinos Boriquas en Acción) were fighting to shift. It was clear that this contributed to students' struggle in attending school on a regular basis, particularly when compounded with other issues.

The commute that many youth of color in the city of Boston undertake has roots in the desegregation of schools in Boston, which began in the 1960s. Part of this was the METCO program, which started in 1966, bussing youth of color into predominantly white neighborhoods. Of course, no white students were bussed into predominantly Black and Latinx neighborhoods. In the neighborhood where the larger school where the Hands On Knowledge program is located, young Black and Latinx youth were bussed into the white working class neighborhood high school beginning in 1975 (Kifner, 1975). Students bussed in went through streets graffitied with the phrase "white power" and stones thrown at the bus (Kifner, 1975). Although the neighborhood demographics shifted, the shift was more towards a wealthier white population and the majority of white families ended up taking their children out of school. The high school was 4.5% white in 2018 (DESE). The majority of the students in the high school commuted from other neighborhoods to attend the school, while a small percent came from the housing project next to the school, the largest housing project in the city.

Standardized Testing

Through informal conversations with students, as well as daily participant observations at the school through the role of History teacher and guidance counselor,

another structural theme that arose was the pressure of standardized tests. Trina, a brilliant and critical young woman, mentioned above, refused to take the state Math test each year due to anxiety. She would insist that she was going to fail and be absent the entire week of testing. She would also consistently skip Math class. On her senior year, I spent time with her preparing for the test and checked in with her in the days up to the test. Our Director also decided to have me proctor her test in a separate room, which was possible through her IEP accommodations, and she had requested that I be her proctor. In the end, she received the second highest score on the Math test in the entire school. However, for her, this was no consolation since she still felt that it was pointless that students needed to pass this test in order to graduate. In this particular program, about 65% of students had yet to pass the Math state exam (MCAS) in 2019, which was a requirement for graduation. Students would repeatedly ask for ways around passing this test, which was impossible for staff to accomplish. Students had to fail the test three times in order to receive a waiver to complete a lengthy portfolio. For more than one student, they had failed the test at least three times. For one young man, we began the portfolio process, but it was so much work that the student chose to continue taking the tests, finally passing by one point on his fourth try. Due to the fact that the larger high school was at risk of becoming a turn-around school, students were often kept coded as 9th graders in order to keep them from taking the MCAS if administrators felt they might fail, an illegal practice which then restricted the opportunities they had to take the test multiple times once being placed in the alternative program.

For the Math teacher, he frequently felt the pressure placed on him by the larger school to focus on the MCAS. However, he recognized that there was more of a need to get students passionate about learning:

> "In one of the staff meetings I was asked to push or to come up with more MCAS interventions. I have a tough time with that because I feel like that's not where they're at. Attendance is another hurdle that we first have to get past before we jump into that hurdle of math. And that feels very, when I hear that talk, I think come on, let's get them first into a classroom, then do math. Let's get them learning math, let's get them comfortable with math, just come to the game and talk with them, and I'll talk with my students. A number of them have never, they didn't go to math class, they haven't been in math class for two years, so math in itself I think, I've gotta get over this hurdle before we can just get you into the classroom and understanding some theory"

The focus on standardized testing created pressure within schools to focus on test scores rather than comprehensive and critical curriculum, due to the risks of becoming a turn-around school. In 2019, this particular high school was among the lowest performing high schools statewide with a federal designation of comprehensive support (DESE, 2019). Out of four levels, with one being the best, this particular school was at a level four. If it maintained this level for four years it would reach turn-around status, which would result in a replacement of the principal and a faculty force transfer. These levels were primarily based on student scores on the state exam, the MCAS, and attendance.

In one study of 13 turnaround schools in a large urban district in the Northeast, about a third of the schools had a positive working environment. Schools deemed to have

a negative working environment were schools where teachers felt they had no power and expectations were often not relevant to the work being done (Cucchiara, et al., 2015). About a fourth of the students in the Hands On Knowledge program came from a high school that had become a turn-around school. One young Puerto Rican man noted that the year prior he occasionally heard teachers talking about the need to get rid of certain students:

> "I could hear them talking that they needed to get kids out of school. And I was like that's weird. And some teachers were talking about certain students and I was like y'all need to respect us. I wanted to smack them. Fuck. That's crazy."

This sentiment was echoed by administrators in the larger high school that Hands On Knowledge was housed within, implying that students who they knew might not pass the state test should be pushed down a grade (since the 9th graders were not tested in Math and ELA) or discharged from the school. The pressure placed on tests, particularly in schools with predominantly youth of color, was impacted by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), following No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandates, which were supposedly created in order to close the racial and socioeconomic disparities in education. Common Core standards, which continued to focus on European-American literature and European-American versions of history, have been promoted through ESSA (Allen, et al., 2018). Zeus Leonardo (2007) dubbed NCLB as "No Caucasian Left Behind", a testament to the impact of the colorblind rhetoric that drives the policy, ignoring the structural obstacles and historical trauma that impact communities of color. Although ESSA considered historical patterns of exclusion in schools, it failed to consider intersectional factors in the ways that gender and race might intersect in

impacting the educational experiences of youth (Evans-Winters, et al., 2018). Furthermore, in maintaining a focus on accountability, testing is still required for certain grades, which can become problematic when tied to graduation requirements, as is the case in Massachusetts. Further consequences of the focus on high-stakes testing are a narrowing of the curriculum and a focus on low-level skills that are reflected on the test (Darling-Hammond, 2007).

Social environment

In considering other factors that caused young people to disengage with school, there were factors related to social environment that fell into two categories. Firstly, there were school related factors, including physical space and curriculum. In this case, curriculum was a factor that had structural, social environment, and interpersonal elements related to it. Secondly, there were neighborhood and home-based factors that impacted student engagement.

Prison-like Environment

The physical structure of schools also connected to the school-to-confinement pipeline through prison-like conditions. One theme that arose through interviews with alumni and focus groups with current students was that students felt “cooped up” and “cramped”, some comparing this to feeling as if they were in prison. This was one element that continued to disengage students while in the Hands On Knowledge program since students felt that they were even more restricted than in the larger high school since they did not have electives and the program took place in one small section of the building. This will be discussed further in the next chapter in relation to limitations of the

program. However, in describing how being kept all day in a building impacted one student, he stated that “you get cramped and you get aggravated”.

In the larger high school that the Hands On Knowledge program was housed within, students began the day going through a metal detector. Students’ bags were also regularly searched, even if the metal detector did not go off. Students in the Hands On Knowledge program went through this process as well. One of the staff members who would search students bags admitted that there were certain students that he felt were “suspicious” and would regularly search their bags. This mental list of his included at least one Hands On Knowledge student. The student who he mentioned was “suspicious”, half-jokingly saying that he wouldn’t be surprised if he committed a school shooting, was a half-Haitian, Half-white student who was very quiet and often sat alone at lunch.

As mentioned previously, metal detectors have primarily been used in overcrowded schools that are mostly low-income youth of color (Fine & Ruglis, 2009). In Boston, this particular school was one of 17 schools that used walk through metal detectors (Corcoran, 2015). Overall, schools with metal detectors have been found to be “drop out factories” where fewer than 60% of students graduate (Mukherjeeet, 2007). This is definitely the case in this particular high school where the graduation rate hit a high of 55% in 2017, which had climbed from 42% in 2013 (Boston Public Schools, 2017). There were approximately 950 students enrolled in the high school in the 2017-2018 school year and students were not allowed to leave the building during the school day. Students had regular encounters with school resource officers, both upon entering school and when teachers might struggle with discipline in the class. This was particularly problematic in understanding the ways that discipline reports can be accessed

by police and contribute to getting youth onto government databases, such as the gang database and into the CVE program. Through both of these programs, young people of color were put into databases as supposed threats and tracked, which has led to the deportation of at least one high school student from another school in the district on false terms (Bender, 2015).

In the larger high school building, many of the rooms had no windows, including all classes located in the basement. One young Dominican woman noted that in her previous school most of her classes were in a basement, which contributed to a feeling that she was in prison most of the day, unable to even see the sun. Several students who had come from Florida noted that they felt much more confined in this particular school building since they never left the building during the day, whereas in their schools in Florida, there were often field spaces for students to be in during lunch, as well as pass through from class to class. The high school that the Hands On Knowledge program was located within had six floors, with about half of the classes having windows. Thus, particularly for students who might have most of their classes in rooms without windows, feelings of confinement seemed only natural.

Irrelevant Curriculum

Another notable theme that emerged through alumni interviews and focus groups with current students was the lack of curriculum that students connected to. One alumnus, Tiago, discussed how he felt that education was a "cramming" process:

> "I had been growing to not like the state of what I guess school was, I guess more and more with every year that went by. It felt like a cramming, training process that wasn't really providing much of an understanding because that takes patience

> and school doesn't really do that because it tries to mash a lot of things into your head all at once. So, I kind of got a little discouraged and annoyed with that and took it into my own hands and realized I don't need this."

Tiago's curiosity had become stifled in traditional schools. JC and two young Dominican men, also all brilliant students, echoed this sentiment in stating that they often felt that teachers "talked at" students, a pedagogy that failed to connect them to content. All four of these young men were critically minded individuals who keenly understood the systems that impacted communities of color in the United States and frequently sought to bring light to these systems for their peers in the Hands On Knowledge program. However, this was not knowledge that was built up or drawn from in previous schooling. Paolo Freire coined the term "banking education" to identify one way that the education system failed students by maintaining structures of power through which educators are the keepers of knowledge and students mere recipients. Freire (2009) problematized the traditional educational models as ones where teachers were seen as the depositors of knowledge and students as the depositories. The example given by Tiago was a clear example of a "banking education" system.

Tiago mentioned that for him, part of the disconnect came from not learning about anything that interested him. Instead he sought knowledge through the internet, "YouTube University" as he called it. He explained how school started feeling irrelevant to him:

> "It started feeling very mundane and I was already practicing different, on my own, those whys that I was asking. I started asking them mostly on the internet. And then started realizing, oh my god, the purpose of school is to acquire

knowledge that you could essentially acquire anywhere else. And then with the advent of technology, especially the internet, knowledge and information had become ubiquitous. So I took it into my own hands to start diving into the things that I loved and it was so much more exciting because I understood where I was confused, I understood where I wasn't. And then there were constantly new mentors that I'd never meet on the internet, but were always putting out incredible material. I guess what I'd call it now is YouTube University, but there's channels that are incredible that I follow, that teach amazing things about Biology, Chemistry, Physics. I've kind of always been a STEM person and learning that way has been exciting because people are super excited about it and it makes it really fun. There's sources that they post that you can follow, you can dive into it, it's infinite. The internet has become infinite. But that's what I chose instead really."

On one hand, this sentiment demonstrated dedication to knowledge and learning. On the other hand, it also demonstrated the ways that many teachers failed to create curriculum that students could connect to and that reflected their interests and passions. Of course, it would be impossible for a teacher to create curriculum that would align with every student's interests and passions, but there needs to be much deeper consideration for why certain topics are included in common core curriculum and others are not. Curriculum has always been political:

"The curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, somehow appearing in the texts and classrooms of a nation. It is always part of a selective tradition, someone's selection, some group's vision of legitimate knowledge. It is

produced out of the cultural, political, and economic conflicts, tensions and compromises that organize and disorganize a people. […] There is, then, always a politics of official knowledge, a politics that embodies conflict over what some regard as simply neutral descriptions of the world and what others regard as elite conceptions that empower some groups while disempowering other groups" (Apple, 1996, pp. 22-23).

Thus, it becomes obvious that the groups that become disempowered through the curriculum are typically young people of color, who are already disenfranchised by so many systems in this country. In considering the relevance of the curriculum, several students mentioned that they felt that in traditional schools they had not learned about anything that was applicable to their own lives. For a young Black woman, this disconnect came in the form of not being able to study Black history: "Like what are we learning about white people for when we Black. Honestly. I'm just saying". The director of the program, Sundiata, echoed these sentiments in their own educational experience, having eventually dropped out and sought a GED. Prior to this, they became disengaged in school due to the lack of relevant curricula:

> "There was this anger that I wasn't learning the things I wanted to learn. Nothing seemed like it was relevant to me or my family or what my future would pan out to be. I felt like they was giving us wrong information and although I didn't have proper education and I didn't have a good life, there's these things that are in the world that all people have access to which is books and information."

Neighborhood Violence: "You have to grow up quick"

In addition to school conditions and curriculum, students also faced a multitude of home factors that impacted their ability to be at school. For most students, these factors did not play a role in their disengagement with school but did impact their ability to be in school regularly. Alejandra was a young Dominican woman who noted the ways that neighborhood and home context impacted her ability to be in school. "You have to grow up quick. You have to have thick skin." She referred to expectations that existed in her neighborhood to act or dress in certain ways. Alejandra was an incredibly critical young woman who once, in breaking down the song "This is America" by Childish Gambino during a teach-in on the song, noted that the portrayal of phones and mention of clothing reflected the way that capitalism impacted communities of color by ensuring that youth of color became overly focused on items they wanted, rather than what was happening in their communities. She was also a student who had presented with me as a co-presenter in the Critical Race Studies in Education Annual Conference.

Another factor that some students mentioned more in informal conversations, as well as one that occasionally came up in restorative circles and class projects was gun violence and gang violence in some of the neighborhoods where students live. A large number of students listed a multitude of neighborhoods and streets that they avoided for fear of being shot. In the program, students regularly wore buttons to memorialize friends who had been lost to this violence. One student mentioned that he had five friends who had been killed in the last two years. Approximately 65% of students had family members or close friends who had been killed. Many of the young people in the program felt unable to communicate their experiences witnessing violence, as well as the stories of those people close to them who had died. On Day of the Dead in 2018, we held a circle to

honor the people in our lives who had passed away. Only ten students participated in the circle, while another twenty said that it would be too much for them to hear the stories. For those who participated, they shared memories and named the individuals who they wanted to honor through the circle. Most of the stories they shared were of friends and family members who had been killed, mostly by being in the wrong place at the wrong time. It's clear that these experiences created a deep psychological mark that impacted other areas of a young person's life and their ability to cope with additional daily struggles. Through this circle, as well as others, students mentioned that the opportunity to share helped them cope with some of the pain they felt.

These findings echoed those of another study that found that 94% of students in one inner-city school had been exposed to some form of community violence in their lives (Howard, et al., 2010). This violence tied into the ways that cities were structured to intentionally place people of color in the most undesirable locations in cities through early zoning laws and later redlining, as mentioned in chapter two. The ghettos created by these policies have ensured the continuation of internal colonies that are markedly inferior to those of most white neighborhoods, a dynamic that has existed since slavery, contributing to the dehumanization and colonial treatment of people of color (Morris, 2016). Higher rates of poverty have been correlated with higher rates of witnessing and experiencing violence, as well as lower academic achievement (Chauhan & Reppucci, 2009). In addition, experiencing violence through parental abuse or peer violence has been correlated with a higher likeliness to engage in violent behavior (Chauhan & Reppucci, 2009). Witnessing violence has been correlated with higher rates of delinquent

behavior, such as drug dealing and stealing (Chauhan & Reppucci, 2009). And yet, these factors cannot be untied from the racial origins of zoning that created the problem.

Interpersonal Factors

Very much tied in with community factors, were interpersonal factors that impacted student engagement, considering daily interactions that students had with both peers and teachers. Within schools, the main factor that arose through alumni interviews and current student focus groups was a disconnect with teachers, through a lack of support and feeling that teachers didn't care about students. A smaller number of students also mentioned the issue of bullying at the hands of peers.

Disconnect with Educators

For JC, the disconnect came in the form of feeling like his teacher could never remember who he was: "I couldn't connect with her. Every time I'd say what's up to her, she had to remember me, you feel what I'm saying. I'd show up like three times a week maybe. Every time I saw her it was like I was meeting her again". Although this might stem from a large number of students taught by a teacher, this might also be connected to other ways that the teacher was unable to connect to JC. Similarly, other students mentioned that they never really connected with any of their teachers, but that they weren't sure why that was.

This sentiment was also echoed by the director of the program in reflecting on their personal educational history:

> "All these different elements were going on in my world. The school did not understand. There was never any way to support me. When I was in, I want to say, early middle school I started to go mute and I stopped talking and didn't want

> to participate in class and didn't want to do anything. I remember they put me in one of those classes that they felt like my skills were low when I needed help. When I got there, there was a Black teacher who ran that classroom and she realized that my skills were actually higher than average. It wasn't my skills. I just like being in her room because she was Black and I could talk to her and she understood. I realized in that moment now that I'm older that my white teachers just didn't know what to do with me and maybe I'm quiet or what was going on, my mom was in a really abusive relationship. That's what was making me shut down. Instead of them trying to support and figure that out, they automatically deemed me stupid and that I needed a smaller classroom and I needed extra skill work instead of more student support. It was very difficult to go to schools like that."

Within Sundiata's statement were multiple elements that impacted their disconnect from educators. One of these factors was the racial disconnect. However, another was the failure of teachers to support them, which was mentioned by several current students in the program. It was also poignant to see the connection between Sundiata's experience and that of many of the students, something that reflected the ways in which the Hands On Knowledge program sought to have staff that reflect the students' identities and experiences. I will examine this more in depth in the following chapter in understanding the development of a pedagogical method that seeks to resist and decolonize. However, it is important to mention that in at least one large-scale study (including over 2.9 million students in Florida), the positive impact of having a teacher with the same racial background of the student positively impacted academic

achievement for both Black and white students, showing more impact in an elementary level and high school Math classes (Egalite, et al., 2015). The importance of teachers from the same racial background has also been postulated to have a particularly positive impact in perceiving these educators as role models, mentors, advocates, and cultural brokers for young people of color (Ladson-Billings, 1992).

Overall, it was a constant theme that both alumni and current students mentioned that in traditional schools they had felt that many of their teachers did not want them in the classroom. One alumnus noted, “as an overall, we're talking about teachers as a whole, I can't say every single teacher in there wanted me as a student”. This rejection was heartbreaking to hear, but it was clear that this would be a factor that would deeply impact a young person’s desire to be in school, compounded by the carcereal atmosphere and lack of relevant curriculum. Overall, nationwide, issues of bias related to cultural and racial disconnects between students and educators, have been found, particularly in urban districts. In one study, it was found that white teachers generally perceived Asian students to have the highest scholastic ability and Black students to have the lowest abilities, whereas there were not statistically significant differences in nonwhite teachers’ perceptions of students based on race or cultural background (McGrady & Reynolds, 2013). Teacher bias can thus impact student engagement. Higher levels of disengagement with school have also been found for Black students and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Kelly, 2008), which are related to the multitude of factor mentioned above.

About half of the Hands On Knowledge students came from the larger high school, while the other half had been in other high schools in the city. In both cases, a

notable theme that emerged was that one of the factors that contributed to their disconnect from school was the fact that "the teacher didn't always have time" for each of the students. Several students mentioned that due to this lack of support, they started falling behind in classes where they weren't understanding the material. One young Cape Verdean man, JC, mentioned that this was particularly the case for him in Math: "Freshman year in math. I was a whole year, like what is going on. That was like the first time I didn't know what the hell I was doing." This particular student was one who excelled in Humanities when there was a critical lens, understanding the depth and impact of structural racism in schools. He was a student who read Machiavelli's *The Prince* on his own time after I had mentioned that this was where Tupac Shakur had taken his initial rapper's name. JC broke down Machiavelli's thesis and ideas in a way that most college-educated adults would be unable to do. And yet, he found himself struggling in traditional schools, disconnected from what he was learning and not receiving the support that he needed. He was also a student who had experienced substantial trauma outside of school and had various encounters with police, impacting his critique of the world. He mentioned that teachers in the wider school never took this into account: "They had no regards for what I was dealing with outside of school".

Other students mentioned that they often felt that teachers didn't care, a sentiment that is no doubt impacted by the inability of teachers to fully support the needs of all students in the large loads that most high school teachers have with four to five blocks of twenty students each. Alejandra described the way that she experienced this structure:

> "Everything else, the teachers, they didn't really care. They'll be on your back, but I feel like the teachers really only fuck with the kids that are on their ass. Like, the

class pet, whatever, the teacher's pet. Those are the only kids the teachers really care about. They don't care about the kids that's, I wish I was struggling, but I just wasn't motivated."

In understanding this experience, it was also important to recontextualize schools as businesses within the capitalist model where cutting costs becomes a key element in the structuring of schools. In many schools with declining resources, hiring few teachers becomes the primary way to cut instructional costs (Chingos, 2012). Despite the ease of increasing class sizes in order to reduce personnel costs, it has a clear negative impact on student education and frequently impacted schools with larger percentages of students of color, of which many are frequently underfunded (Heitzeg, 2016). There has only been one randomized experiment measuring the effect of class size, which was the Tennessee STAR Experiment. This particular study analyzed the experiences of 11,600 students in eight schools where some students were kept in regular schools and others were placed in smaller classes. Students in smaller classes outperformed peers in regular classes by 0.22 standard deviations on standardized tests over the course of four years and were 2% more likely to attend college. (Dynarski, et al., 2011). Although this was a very small percentage, the differences between larger and smaller classes were more impactful for Black students from low income families who were 5.8% more likely to attend college than similar peers in regular classes. These percentages might still seem small, but they are notable in creating a difference in academic outcomes for more students. In addition, it would be important to consider the impact of shifts on a larger level, which I will examine more in the following chapter. The interviews with students in this current research reflected the ways that students were negatively impacted in larger classes,

where they noted that they were not receiving support they need and not being able to develop positive relationships with their teachers. However, the disconnect connected to the size of classes, as well as the attitude of the teacher, which may be impacted by implicit bias.

In addition to feelings about lack of support, a smaller theme that emerged was that students felt overwhelmed with the number of classes that they had to take. Several students noted that they would prefer to work on one class at a time. They struggled to deal with completing various assignments from different subjects at once, which was an element they struggled with in traditional schools, as well as the alternative program. Overall, as the current director described, Black and Brown youth were being pushed out of the education system for a myriad of reasons, which may also stem from the cultural disconnect that exists between many educators and students. The director felt that there was also a certain fear amongst educators:

> “That's another set up that the education system does. They always want to push the Black and Brown kids out and, ‘Oh, they're overage, let's give them some credits. Let's patch this together and that together and let's send them out the door.’ Usually, it's because they're afraid of the Black and Brown kids. They want them to fail. They don't care what their future looks like. For my brother? Oh no. For the tax paying dollars my mama pay, he going to get every buck of his education that he's supposed to get.”

It is important to contextualize this perspective of the director through a bit of their history with the program. In the next chapter, I will give a bit more of this history, but it is important to note here that the director, Sundiata, first became involved with the

program when their brother was a student in the first year of the existence of the program. Sundiata essentially served as a guardian type figure to their brother and thus became deeply dedicated to his success in the program, which led to them eventually being offered a position to work in the program after pressuring the staff consistently about their commitment.

Bullying

A minor theme that emerged in considering peer relations and disengagement from school was bullying. Alejandra, an alumna mentioned previously in discussing neighborhood violence, mentioned how she frequently struggled with bullying beginning in 6th grade, which caused her to feel less connected to school. A current student, Kato, a young man of St. Lucian origin who had often been targeted for his sexual orientation as a young gay man, felt that he had been forced to toughen up by the system around him. This shifted for him around 9th grade:

> "I just feel like school systems, they don't decide to be on my side for some reason. I feel like they always think I'm the aggressor when at that point in time I feel like I was changing a lot. […] Because at the end of the day I have respect for myself and I know that if I keep runnin' up on people it's not gonna take me nowhere. […] Schools wasn't really fuckin' with me. They was being funny. They was letting bitches bully me in freshman year and so I had to toughen up"

For Kato, his disconnect was related to bullying, as well as a failure of educators and administrators to take action against the students who were bullying him. In considering the intersectional impact of bullying, studies have found that immigrant and non-white youth are more likely to be bullied than white youth (Maynard, et al., 2016;

Vitoroulis & Georgiades, 2017). In addition, in one study findings showed that Black and Latino males experienced higher rates of bullying than other groups but were less likely than any other group to report the bullying (Lai & Kao, 2018). In considering this, it becomes clear that pressures to exhibit certain racialized or gendered identities can impact a young person's ability to cope with bullying.

Personal Factors

A last category of factors relating to student disengagement were personal factors. As with the other categories, it was essential to highlight that all of these levels were very much intertwined. In considering shifts in a student's life, there were often neighborhood and economic factors that might impact this shift. A notable theme that emerged was experiences of personal issues and struggles that impacted their academic success and ability to be in school. Although none of the students wanted to elaborate on these issues during focus groups or interviews, in my informal interactions with students, it was clear that the vast majority of students had experienced some sort of notable trauma that impacted their academic success. For one alumnus, he had been kicked out of the house during his Junior year and been couchsurfing at friends' houses. This had been an experience faced by several students throughout the history of the program, as well as homelessness. Other alumni mentioned that their families had been homeless for at least a month during their sophomore and junior years. In relation to family economic struggles, one student mentioned that he needed to work, which took priority over school.

An issue that impacted several students and alumni was frequent moves between cities and states. Three students had moved around Florida and eventually to Massachusetts. For one young Haitian-American man, Leonel, he felt a shift in his ability

to engage in school after moving in with his mom after his father lost his job. He had previously felt much more stability with his father, which he initially did not feel with his mother. Emmanuel, Leonel's cousin who he lived with, and another Hands On Knowledge alumni, noted that for him the shift in home environment also resulted in feeling increased responsibility at a young age:

> "I feel the fact that my parents always had to work and my dad not living with us, like just being able to be with myself, that my mom was always at work, she always had to leave me with other people and stuff like that. I didn't see the point, so I started, I was like five years old, walking all the way to the bus stop by myself. There's a lot of things I had to do by myself because my mom was always at work, and my dad was working but he didn't live with us so, I would stay independent."

This type of responsibility and independence, something that no five-year-old should have to deal with, was a reflection of the cycles of oppression and poverty that exist in many communities of color due to histories of structural racism. Alejandra noted that these cycles impacted her perception of her own potential for success: "Everyone in my family had dropped out in high school, if they even made it to high school. So I figured why even try, this is what my life is supposed to be like."

In considering increased responsibility, another young man noted that his mother started giving him more freedom and stopped waking him up for school Freshman year and putting his education more in his hands, which allowed him to increasingly decide that he wouldn't go to school on certain days. Several young women in the same focus group nodded as he talked about this.

Narratives of Resistance

In examining the factors that impacted student disengagement, there was also an underlying narrative of resistance that existed in these stories and the ways that students continued to push through the multitude of obstacles in their schooling experiences. Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) cited four types of oppositional behavior: reactionary, self-defeating resistance, conformist resistance and transformational resistance. Reactionary behavior was when a student is oppositional but lacks a critique of systems that oppress them (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Self-defeating resistance was critiquing certain systems, but lacking interest in social justice whereas conformist was an interest in social justice, but no critique of oppression.

Transformational resistance was a critique of oppression and desire for social justice. Although this does not entirely explain disengagement and oppositional behavior, it can be useful in understanding connections to systems impacting students and young people's desire for justice and change in their communities and their own lives. In the case of Kato, who had experienced bullying related to his sexual identity, it seemed that he was in a self-defeating resistance phase. He understood that the system was unfair but was not interested in working towards any sort of systemic change, which would be a difficult step to take when feeling a lack of support due to the disparities in education systems.

For several students in the program, their disengagement was very much related to a form of transformational resistance. One young man, JC, who lived two hours from the school and worked a heavy schedule at a restaurant, struggled to arrive to school on time on a regular basis. He had served on the program's restorative justice council and

Student Advisory Board in past years. In considering his own education, he stated “I feel like this is a test, like, alright you go to twelve years of school and the ones that come out on top are gonna lead the world by the time we’re dead. I feel like it’s just a game”. He very aptly identified the way the education functions as a repressive state apparatus, reproducing social inequities. Another young woman, Shanee, who had also shown a deep critique of social inequities and had worked in several youth organizing collectives in trying to shift these issues, noted “I feel like school was just bullshit. Like I never understood why schools can’t make moves for kids. I never understood that”. Through this, she referred to the irrationality of busy work and testing, which often contributed to pushing students out of school rather than supporting them in completion of a degree.

Another conceptualization of resistance was examined by Tracy Robinson and Janie Ward (1991) who identified two types of resistance when speaking to African American young women: resistance for survival and resistance for liberation. For many students, their resistance to education was part of their survival. As Kato mentioned previously, he felt that schools didn’t support him when he was bullied and thus, he felt forced to take matters into his own hands and “toughen up”. Kato was a student who was easily set off by other students and fought peers both in and out of school, which had become a part of his identity that he recognized did not always serve him. For many other students, their disengagement from school was also a resistance for survival. They disengaged due to unfairly being targeted by disciplinary processes, as Flavia was when a teacher accused her of “assault and battery” with a pencil. However, other students spoke out against perceived injustices, as resistance for liberation, even if it resulted in further disciplinary action.

A major theme that I found through interviews, focus groups, informal conversations and participatory observations in the program was a higher level of critical consciousness for many students who had been pushed out of traditional schooling for a variety of reasons. This was more notable in alumni and students who had been in the program for two years, than for newer students, particular in ways that they critically analyzed the ways that structural racism impacted their lives through policing and neighborhood structures. Overall, for many students in the Hand On Knowledge program, the narrative of who was successful in school had become racialized. In one focus group, a young Black man stated "We're all put in here because of our race. We're all going through problems. We all get through something and that's why [Hands On Knowledge] is here". This particular statement came in response to a prompt from a Black male Math teacher about whether the students felt the curriculum was relevant. However, in this statement, this particular young man connected his placement in alternative education to his racial background. For other students, there was more of a connection between ways that teachers and disciplinary structures worked to push youth of color out of schools.

Opting into alternative education

In considering the multitude of factors that impacted how students are pushed out of traditional schools, it was also important to consider how and why students opted into alternative programs. In the Hands On Knowledge program students attended an orientation interview after which they could decide if they would like to join the program. This process will be explained more in-depth in the next chapter. However, it is notable to mention that many students' first impression of the school was that it was "for bad kids" as several current students mentioned. One current student said she thought the

program was for “criminals, hoodlums”. Another student said she thought it was for all the “slow kids”. This language was perpetuated by certain staff members in the building, as another student recalled being told about how students were court involved: “I thought this was like a bad thing, like they kept saying they was gonna send me here and I was like really scared. They were talking about kids who had court cases being here and I’m like I don’t do that kind of stuff”. Students also mentioned that the Director of the Hands On Knowledge program also perpetuated this language in orientation interviews. One student stated, “if you listen to Mx. [Sundiata] to present it to you, the first thing you hear is you’re here because you fucked up. That was the first thing she told me”. Other students echoed this same sentiment.

Most students felt initially resistant to the program when it was proposed to them, whether this was by a teacher, an administrator or a parent. However, most students also felt that it was a last chance for them. This was emphasized by Alejandra:

> “I was kind of hesitant to enroll as well. But I finally had to put my big girl pants on and get serious about finishing school if I wanted to be something in life. I saw the program as an opportunity to right my wrongs and prove to people that doubted my intelligence how smart I really was”

Other students shared similar stories in recognizing that they were older than some of their classmates and wanted an opportunity to graduate on time. Overall, many students felt that they had failed in the education system by the time they entered the program, whereas the reality was that the education system had failed these students through a lack of mental health services, small classes, relevant curricula, and educators that students were able to connect with, among other factors. In particular, some of the

key factors that impacted student disengagement were disparate disciplinary systems, lack of support in school, and personal trauma. These factors particularly pointed to a need for mental health services in school, as well as spaces for reflection and holistic support. In addition, small classes or professional support in classrooms (such as teaching assistants) would be particularly important for these students in receiving the support they need in class, as well as connecting on a deeper level with their teachers. These are some of the factors that the alternative education program sought to address, which will be mentioned in the following chapter, as well as areas where the program continues to struggle.

CHAPTER FIVE: CREATING AN EMANCIPATORY PEDAGOGY

In schools today, as well as educational research, all too often there is a focus on the problems emerging for youth of color in the education system. Although it is essential to understand the layers and background of the inequities in our current system, there is a dire need to examine models of success. In considering the impact of emancipatory pedagogies that promote decolonization and liberation among students, this is an enormous project that needs to be undertaken in schools. Both past and present, there are models that have sought to create more liberatory forms of education, as mentioned in chapter two. In this chapter, I will examine how one alternative school emerged and shifted towards an emancipatory model of education, as well as limitations and ways that the program began to slip out of this model over time. In particular, I will seek to answer the question: What are the particular emancipatory pedagogies that promoted decolonization and liberation among students in the Hands On Knowledge program?

In examining the emergence of emancipatory pedagogies through this particular program, I will begin by examining the origins of the program, as well the initial programmatic structure. In doing this, it will be important to understand where and how emancipatory pedagogical models began to emerge through different pieces of the program. A key piece of these developments revolved around the staff in the program in different eras of the school. I will analyze the factors and relationships that drove educators in the program to develop teaching philosophies that sought decolonization and liberation for youth of color.

After examining the origins of an emancipatory pedagogy through the staff that pushed for the creation of this model, I will delve deeper into the current structure of the

program, as well as daily practices. In examining these practices, it will become clear that not every practice promoted liberation nor aligned with the core values of the program. Nonetheless, there will be more in-depth analysis of the core values of the program and the ways that these permeated different arenas of the program, particularly in examining ways that the program promoted critical consciousness and community (*ubuntu*). Lastly, I will highlight themes related to the limitations of the program, in considering ways that the program struggled to continuously be a model of decolonization and liberation, particularly in considering how shifts in staffing shifted ideological pieces of the program.

The core values of the program were developed through the teaching team in the 2016-2017 year, based on much of the work that had been done in the program up to that point. The core values were ubuntu, self-awareness, and critical consciousness. In considering ubuntu, there was a focus on creating community and family within the program, which was promoted through community practices that were developed in the program over time. Self-awareness practices existed through teach-ins and weekly talk circles held in lieu of advisory. Critical consciousness was evident through curriculum and teach-ins, as well as informal conversations with students. There were three key practices that came to light through this research in thinking about the particular pedagogical methods, which are steps that this program uses, although not as a formal model, to work towards promoting decolonization and liberation:

1. Develop values and practices that promote liberation

2. Build deep relationships with students in a family environment within the school
3. Build critical consciousness while promoting racial/ethnic pride

These three practices will be the focus of this chapter. In setting the stage to understand these practices, I will first examine the need for emancipatory pedagogies, as well as the origins of the Hands On Knowledge program and key elements of the program structure and policy. These elements will aid in contextualizing the practices that promoted decolonization, as well as some of the limitations, which I will examine at the close of the chapter.

Why do we need emancipatory pedagogies?

In defining emancipatory pedagogies, I draw on Potts (2003) definition of African-centered emancipatory pedagogies, which

> "(1) explicitly addresses social oppression, situating community problems (and targets of primary prevention) within historical context, (2) acknowledges students as agents for social change, and (3) affirms African cultural resources for healing and social transformation."

In considering emancipatory pedagogies more broadly, for the purpose of this research, I am shifting the third characteristic to be affirming a students' cultural wealth through community resources. In relation to the first two categories, these are both very much intertwined with a definition of critical consciousness, which Paulo Freire (2001) tied to both an understanding of the world around us, as well as a will to take action. In developing a measure of critical consciousness, one group of researchers broke this down further in postulating three pieces of critical consciousness: "(a) critical reflection:

perceived inequality, (b) critical reflection: egalitarianism, and (c) critical action: sociopolitical participation" (Diemer, Rapa, Park & Perry, 2017, p. 461). Thus, emancipatory pedagogies seek to develop critical consciousness in all three aspects, while affirming and sustaining students ethnic/racial identities.

In examining the Hands On Knowledge program, these success indicators for emancipatory pedagogies are the key areas that will be addressed in correlation with the three shifts mentioned above that were necessary for working towards this change

Year	% students graduated	% males graduated	% females graduated	% Black students graduated	% Latinx students graduated
2018	61.6	52.6	71.4	72.9	49.0
2017	55.3	54.3	56.6	45.1	55.1
2016	53.9	50.9	57.3	50.6	55.3
2015	50.9	48.3	53.6	56.5	43.7
2014	45.6	41.0	51.4	46.8	30.1
2013	42.2	34.8	49.4	43.1	30.7
2012	52.3	46.8	57.4	47.9	47.0
2011	42.7	32.2	54.1	49.0	31.8
2010	42.7	36.5	48.5	40.2	38.2
2009	43.3	37.9	49.7	45.2	35.7
2008	46.8	35.4	58.6	50.6	32.7

Table 5.1. Four-year graduation rates for students at Charlestown High School

In examining the emergence of the Hands On Knowledge program, two teachers in the general high school saw that the school had a high dropout rate, which began increasing in 2009 through 2011, as can be seen in table 5.1. As seen in table 5.1,

graduation rates were particularly low for male students. Some of the factors impacting students being pushed out of school may have been factors mentioned in chapter four, which students had faced in their previous educational experiences. In the year prior to the creation of the program, 2008, the four-year graduation rate was 46.8% for the whole school with the graduation rate for Latinx students at 32.7%. Although the graduation rate increased slowly over time, there continued to be notable disparities between ethnic/racial groups in many years. Leah, one of the two teachers who founded the Hands On Knowledge program, noted that in the larger school "all we do is discipline" and questioned the purpose of suspension hearings and disciplinary action in the school. Around this time, in 2007, a community leader named Kerry began leading restorative justice circles in the school. Through this, Leah began to problematize traditional disciplinary structures as something that contributed notably to rising dropout rates. Underlying this issue was one of teacher bias in considering how students were disciplined, as well as the standards that students were held to. One of the former directors of the Hands On Knowledge program, Jin, mentioned that he began to realize this problem after being confronted by a small group of Black educators in a previous school where he worked. He noted that many seniors were graduating with poor writing skills, which was problematized by the Black teachers at the school:

> "So, a small group of our black teachers would put their foot down like this is not okay. And at the time I didn't fully understand it without this lens I developed more here, but now I get that they were saying, 'You fuckin' white people. You're okay with this. We're not.'"

Black and Latinx youth suffered in feeling blame related to their failure in school, impacted by teacher bias and other factors noted in the previous chapter, as mentioned by current students and alumni from the program. In being part of the initial Hands On Knowledge administration team, Jin, as director, saw a large piece of the purpose of the program to undo the traumas that students had related to their educational experiences:

> "That is not your fault. Kids get so beat up inside that by the time they reach us […] There's nothing wrong with you. You're not broken as a person, because I feel like the majority of students are coming to us just feel like, 'school's not for me. I'm not a student. I'm never gonna be a student. I'm never gonna be a scholar. I just gotta grit my teeth and get through it. At least earn my diploma, and then that's it.' So, regardless of the diploma part, a lot of what we try to do is to undo some of that stuff."

Origins of the Hands on Knowledge Program

By understanding issues students were facing that pushed them out of school, Leah and one other teacher, both white women, created the Hands On Knowledge program in the 2009-2010 school year. Initially, there was no focus on emancipatory or decolonizing pedagogies in the program. The criteria to be part of the program was that a student hadn't amassed any credits for one academic year. Students were told the program could be completed in one to three years, depending on the credits that students came in with. A notable part of the initial program was the affiliation with a larger educational organization that focused on college and career entry, competency-based grading, and supportive student environment. This collaboration was part of the reason that the Principal of the school was willing to accept doing a trial year for the program

and reassessing the need and success of the program on a yearly basis. During the first two years of the program there was an English, Humanities and Math teacher. Students took Science and electives classes in the general school. During the first couple years, Leah felt that there was a struggle in maintaining high expectations in the program. She noted, "we used to make jokes in the first year about it felt like we were putting a high school diploma on sale". Students were also able to take online courses in the first couple years of the program, which one alumnus who graduated in the first year of the program saw as a key component in his success.

Competency-Based Grading

One of the key pieces that initially set the program apart from the general school was the competency-based grading system, which continued to be used in the program at the culmination of this research. Through this, each course had a set number of benchmarks that were needed to complete a course. For both alumni and current students, a theme that emerged was a feeling that competency-based grading was a key component that set the program apart from traditional schools. For one current student, competency-grading "works better because as long as I can show y'all that I know it then I'm good".

Similarly, another student saw competency-based grading as a system that made her educational experience more feasible:

> "Traditional school is all about keeping up with your class, and meeting standards and deadlines. Diploma Plus is more flexible and suitable for each individual student. The benchmarks and competency-based grading system makes passing more achievable."

Critical Consciousness

Elements of critical consciousness and decolonizing pedagogy began to emerge through the Math teacher, Kwame, and the Humanities teacher, Ara. Leah mentioned that Ara "pushed the historical content to a different place", while Kwame incorporated circles in his Math class to critique different social issues that were arising. Jin noted that the focus on critical consciousness in the program very much originated with Kwame through projects and teach-ins that he would lead with all students. This part of the program began to grow more and more, starting in the 2011-2012 school year, when both Kwame and Ara gained more concrete roles as teachers within the program. This will be examined more in-depth in later sections of this chapter.

Program Policies and Structures

In examining program policies and structures, this was an important piece in understanding the day-to-day processes of the program, particularly in examining which pieces supported emancipatory learning structures and pieces that potentially impeded these structures. In particular, I will begin by examining important structural pieces of the program, focusing on the orientation process and the restorative justice component. In examining the program structures and policies, I will focus on those that were pertinent to current students and alumni, through themes that emerged in the research.

Orientation

Throughout the existence of the program, students have opted into the program rather than being required to attend it. Similar to at least one other alternative program, students apply for admission and complete an interview process in order to be accepted (Dugger & Dugger, 1998). The interview process has developed over the years but came to be called "orientation". A parent was required to attend this initial meeting, even if the

student was over the age of 18. In the case of students who were estranged from their family, the presence of an adult over the age of 21, who was willing to support the student in their education, was required. Through the interview process, students were asked about why they had missed school or dropped out school, in an effort to understand the different supports a student might need. One potential factor that might prevent a student from being admitted to the program would be serious conflicts in the recent past with a current student in the program. The orientation meetings also served to explain the sourcebook and contract to the students to decide if it was something that they would want to do. For some students, the interview process was an important piece of the program in building accountability. One Haitian-American student, Leonel, described this process:

> "To be honest, it was a little nerve-wracking. Like, I think that probably was one of the first interviews I had ever been in. And to kind of see them in the front was somewhat intimidating. Thinking back, I'm like, 'What happens if they don't choose me? What do I do?', nerve-wracking. But they can actually see if it's someone who needs a little guidance, but actually is capable of doing the work. So I liked having to go through that process. Because it's not to say that everyone at that table will be equal, but they definitely did choose the right people who just need a little guidance, instead of going there just to go there, thinking that it's going to be easy. So they do well with that. I think, actually, the process was pretty great. And then they can actually hold you accountable."

This orientation process set the Hands On Knowledge program apart from many alternative programs. Seventy percent of state education representatives stated that

overall alternative schools served as a disciplinary consequence with students being required to attend (Lehr, et al., 2009). At the end of the Hands On Knowledge orientation, if it seemed like a good fit for the student, the parent, and the program director, everyone would sign the contract. This contract detailed certain policies in the program, including requiring parents to attend at least three events per year, denoting a cut-off time for students, detailing a cell phone policy, regulations around respect, and restorative justice procedures if there was a breakdown in the contract. Students and parents were required to sign the contract yearly, which would be done in community meetings held in libraries in the students' neighborhoods.

Restorative Justice

More alumni than current students saw restorative justice as a key element of the program, but for current students it remained notable for four students in the focus groups.

This was a piece of the program that existed since the beginning, as noted by the co-founder Leah:

> "We brought circles here from upstairs with [Kerry]. That was always a big part. […] But I think every year we got better at figuring out what we wanted to do and how much we wanted our students to be co-collaborators and co-creators. I think every year that got better."

Based on interviews with alumni and previous staff, particularly through alumni interviews, it seemed that the restorative justice piece functioned at its best between 2012-2016. During this time, a student restorative justice committee existed, "Justice League". Students on this committee were trained by Kerry in restorative justice

techniques, particularly in using circles. Between those years, there were also occasional moments when students who were having more conflicts had to go before a student committee who would decide if they would stay. In one of these cases, the staff prepared packets on norms that these students had violated, as well as conflicts with other students. The students in question were invited to the circle to state their case. In this particular example, one student in question did not show up and was voted out. The former director, Jin, described how students engaged in a serious discussion before voting, with all of the students vehemently defending their decision. In addition to this, regular circles were held and are still held to a lesser extent to examine issues in the community. Tiago, a student from 2012-2014, recalled the impact of these circles during his time in the program:

> "We would have circles to essentially introduce some days, and we'd break down things, anything. The topics would range and vary a lot. And the one thing that I would notice from the students, and from myself also, was that we were building wisdom. There was knowledge essentially being regurgitated into the circle and it was being used. It was being used everyday"

Electives

Another impactful element of the program was the electives, which included a multitude of topics, including hip hop, visual arts and martial arts. Beginning around the 2011-2012 school year, the previous director began to bring in different community members to teach electives. Leonel, an alumnus who began in the 2011-2012 school year, recalled the impact that one of the electives teachers had on his life. Leonel took a martial arts elective with a local martial artist who also focused on nutrition. Leonel subsequently

worked with the martial artist as an assistant teacher for children's martial arts classes. He later had the opportunity to study martial arts with monks in China along with this man and another alumnus from the program. This particular elective teacher was one who had a deep impact on several alumni interviewed. Another elective teacher that returned over the course of several years through electives and teach-ins was a local hip hop artist and activist who would often teach about politics through hip hop. In the 2017-2018 school year, the current director introduced a book club and a self-awareness class. Several students felt that the book club was useless and this was eliminated after one year. The self-awareness class became a space for students to talk about issues they were facing in and out of school. The current director described the rationale behind creating this particular course:

> "For self-awareness, I decided that student support looks ugly in education. They don't have enough black and brown clinicians and therapeutic mentors and social workers and psychologists and street works and all that good stuff working in the schools to really communicate with the students and the families to really give real results […] Sometimes they're in a room with another adult, especially if they're not of your race, ethnic background or culture, there's still an emptiness where you're talking and they're listening, but they don't understand and sometimes they're listening with academic ears, with privileged ears. It's harder for them to help. I thought of this thing like, 'Why don't we do talk therapy groups with the youth?'"

Cut-Off Policy

Two of the main program policies that students hold passionate positions, for and against, are the cut-off time, and the cell phone policy, which will both be examined and detailed below. In the 2019-2020 school year, the school day started at 9:30 and students would not be let in after 9:45. In the 2018-2019 school year, as well as the previous year, the school day started at 8:30 and students were not to be let in after 9:30. This policy had been in place since 2015 in different iterations. Prior to 2015, there was no cut-off time and students who arrived late were sent to a “late room”.

Sundiata, the current director of the program, first became a part of the Hands On Knowledge community as the sibling of a student in the program. During that time, they were acting as their brother’s guardian and questioned the efficacy of the program. The director at the time, Jin, sought feedback from Sundiata and eventually offered them a job in the program overseeing the “late room” along with another community member. In this room, Sundiata would support students with their work, as well as have check-ins to understand what was going on in each student’s life that was preventing them from arriving at school on time or at all, as well as ways to re-engage students.

After several years of this, staff decided to make the shift to having a cut-off time and eliminating the “late room” in the 2015-2016 school year, hoping that this might increase accountability and thus raise attendance. Attendance for the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school year was on average 60% of enrolled students attending the program on a daily basis, with lower attendance toward the end of the school year. Unfortunately, data was not available for prior years for the program. This was slightly higher than other alternative schools in the district. For one other alternative school in the district, one that Hands On Knowledge modeled their competency-based system after, the average

attendance for the 2017-2018 school year was 50% while at another alternative school it was 49% in the same school year (Boston Public Schools). Nonetheless, 62% of current students in the focus groups said that they would want to get rid of the current policy, which was the cut-off time. Two alumni mentioned how frustrating it could be to go all the way to school, often over an hour long trip, only to be sent home. Trina highlighted how this decreased her motivation to be in school, as a student who often struggled with depression, which made attendance difficult for her:

> "I'd eliminate cut-off time in Diploma Plus because it sucks trooping to school to miss cut-off by 10 minutes and be turned around and sent home. Waking up and having the motivation to take public transportation from all parts of Boston is already difficult."

Three other students mentioned that they often had to take younger siblings to school, which made them miss the cut-off time and thus be turned away from school. Of the 28 percent of students who supported the cut-off time, the main reason seemed to be that they felt it held them accountable. One alumnus mentioned he felt that this prepared students for jobs, which would not be as tolerant of employees arriving late. Other students mentioned that the cut-off policy gave them more motivation to be in school. One student stated that she would probably get to school around 11am everyday if there wasn't a cut-off time. Overall, in staff meetings, there has been continuous debate about the cut-off time policy, in examining whether or not this could be commensurate with emancipatory pedagogical philosophies.

Phone Policy

Another controversial policy that emerged as both impactful and detrimental, based on differing opinions of students and alumni, was the phone policy. When students arrived at the school each day, they checked in with the assistant director or another staff member. When they checked in, they turned in their phone, which was returned to them at the end of the day. Occasionally students found a way around this by claiming they didn't own a cell phone or they'd give a burner phone. Leah mentioned that this policy began around 2012, describing the difficulties in creating the policy since it seemed "counter to restorative justice", similar to debates around the cut-off time. Of the students, perceptions of this particular policy were a little more evenly split. Forty percent of current students in the focus groups, all boys, stated that they wanted to have their phones while thirty-five percent of students, all girls, stated that they liked the policy and twenty-five percent did not have strong opinion on the policy. For several students, the main reason that they wanted their phone was to listen to music. JC, another student who had served on the Student Advisory Board, as well as the restorative justice committee, struggled to attend school and eventually left the program, after trying to get there from two hours away. He felt that his phone helped to keep him in school: "That's the number one thing keeping me in school, you feel me. I'm in school bumping music, texting my mans, you feel me". Of course, this rationale was also the reasoning behind the decision to create the policy in trying to keep students focused and away from the distractions of social media.

Two alumni in the program, both young women, felt that the phone policy helped them to focus since they both recognized that they were addicted to their phones. Two current students echoed this in explaining how the policy helped them to get more work

done in school. One young woman, who was often recognized a critical scholar in the Humanities, broke down why she felt the policy was effective:

> "No matter how much we really don't like to admit it our generation is kind of addicted to our phones and we have a big issue being on it all the time and it's all we ever known. We've never lived in a world without like the internet or technology. I can't remember a time before me being able to go on google and looking stuff up. So, I feel like we have a big issue with that so taking away our phones, it's like cleansing. Like, 'cuz I can see my mom and she'll put down her phone and not be on her phone like the whole day and I don't understand how she can do it. Even when I'm at home trying to get homework done, I don't get as much work done as I do here because I have my laptop, I have my phone so I really do like the phone policy because our generation truly needs it […] I feel like our attention spans are getting shorter and shorter and shorter. I like that policy".

Developing Emancipatory Pedagogies

In the next section, I will detail key findings related to key pedagogical components that promoted decolonization and liberation. As mentioned previously, three key practices were identified based on observations, focus groups and interviews:

1. Develop values and practices that promote liberation
2. Build deep relationships with students in a family environment
3. Build critical consciousness while promoting racial/ethnic pride

The previous sections provided the context to understanding some of the day-to-day policies and structures that are often intertwined with the practices that will be

detailed below. In delving into these practices, examples will be given for each one to detail how these practices evolved and existed, as well as how they impacted students in the different eras of the program.

Developing values and practices to promote liberation

Through this particular study, it became clear that the first step in promoting decolonization and liberation in schools was to build emancipatory educators. Through the program, both educators of color and white educators saw a key part of this process being the reflection of students in the staff, particularly in bringing more staff of color into the program. The co-founder of the program, Leah, stated that she felt comfortable stepping out of the program when more staff of color were coming in. The program began in 2009 with two staff members of color, including the director, and four white staff members. By the 2018-2019 school year, the staff was seven people of color and one white staff member, a dynamic that is rare for the vast majority of schools in the nation. However, for both white staff and staff of color, spaces to interrogate values, biases, and teaching philosophies were essential.

Ethnic Matching

One student who ended up dropping out of the program noted that one of the program elements that he found the most impactful was that there were more Black staff members than any school that he had attended thus far. He mentioned that he loved the program, but that there had been too much going on in his life for him to remain enrolled, electing not to elaborate on the multitude of issues that influenced his decision to leave. Research has shown that ethnic matching between staff and students can have a positive impact on socioemotional development and academic growth. In one study, Black

students who had Black teachers showed 5-8% growth on Math test scores and 16-17% growth on ELA test scores, compared to 2-3% growth in both areas for Black students in the same school who had white teachers (Easton-Brooks, 2019). Another study found that reading scores increased more for Latinx students who had Latinx teachers and Black students with Black teachers, compared to either group having white teachers (Clewell, et al., 2005). In addition, in another study, researchers found that 88% of students of color had positive relationships with teachers of color while 65% had positive relationships with white teachers (Easton-Brooks, 2019). Educators from the same ethnic background as students also allow students to see an expertise within the community, understanding that knowledge and wisdom can come from their communities and cultures (Marin & Bang, 2015).

The current director and two staff members echoed the importance of the racial shift in staff members. For the director, Sundiata, they felt that being from the same community as students had made it easier for families to relate to them. The current Math teacher, Huey, a black man who had seen the harsh disciplinary inequities in other schools where staff were majority-white and students were mostly youth of color, saw the power in teacher-student ethnic matching:

> "I think that as the students will see black and brown people with the knowledge that you need and delivering you that knowledge, I think that's very powerful, and I think that's our staff right now. […] I think it is important that they receive the information from people who look like them."

For the current ELA teacher, a black woman, this shift represented a large portion of the successes that had been built with certain students:

> "The staff, primarily, reflects the students and the population that we serve. We look like our students and I think that's a big part of why we have some of the success that we do with getting students to school and building relationships with them, because we look like our students."

Influencing Teacher Philosophies

For all educators in the program, the process in becoming an emancipatory educator, working towards decolonization and liberation, was described in interviews with each of them as a continual process and one that often began several years into their teaching careers. For every educator and administrator in the program, there had been someone in their community, family or through their educational experience that pushed them to think critically about the work they do and created a shift towards an emancipatory philosophy of teaching, particularly in believing in the liberation and decolonization of Black and Brown minds. The previous Director, Jin, was influenced by an administrator that he had worked under earlier in his career. This particular administrator had a "compass that's very anti-establishment, anti-standardized testing, anti-lots of things that are trendy now". This perspective pushed Jin to gain a "different way of looking at schooling".

For the current Math teacher, Huey, other staff members in the program served as notable influences on his teaching, particularly around how to teach in a way that developed critical consciousness. His first exposure to these ideas was from a white educator who consistently read material that challenged the status quo. He articulated the second impact as having interacted with myself during my time as the history teacher and guidance counselor.

> "[Alex] is a complicated individual but he's a critical thinker and he's well-read and he would put me on the stuff that I didn't always know and so being around that is dope. Being around you, because obviously I feel like you're somebody who carries that torch, who came in and was like alright, I'm picking up the slack and you expose us to certain ideas and thinking and readings that we need here, just as professionals, I think that's important".

Examining Implicit Bias

For many educators in the program, an essential element in teaching for decolonization and liberation was to first understand one's implicit biases, particularly in relation to internalized racism, anti-Black racism within communities of color, and white supremacy. In the Hands On Knowledge program, much of this work came through interactions with other staff. Leah, the co-founder and a white woman, spoke of the deep impact that she experienced working with the previous Math teacher, Kwame. Kwame was someone who developed many components of the program culture, as well as pushed everyone to think deeper about the systems around them and their own pedagogical practices. Leah mentioned the impact that Kwame had in pushing her to understand her role as a white educator for youth of color:

> "I now realize as a white person that the burden is on me to self-educate, not them. And he taught me that and told me that straight up, which I think no one had ever bothered to tell me that before. […] I had done a lot of reading about race, and class, and intersectionality and all that stuff but it didn't come to light in the same way".

Jin also saw Kwame as someone who had a deep impact on his evolution as an educator and administrator, as well as Sundiata, who served as the Assistant Director during his tenure in the program. For Jin, this process was a deeply impactful and emotional process in examining his race and privilege:

> "And then with [Kwame] and [Sundiata] especially, it was really just a heavy slamming of a whole new level of understanding race and class and privilege. I used to cry at night. I used to say, 'I shouldn't necessarily be in this program. Someone else should do it,' and all this stuff. There were two years in there that were really, really hard on me. I was talking to [Leah] about this, and she's the supporting white person and sort of going through a similar journey, and it feels like every two seconds she's checking the person on something else that their doing that's fucked up. (laughs) To be honest, right? And I said, and [Leah] also went through this with [Kwame] herself, and I said, 'You have to tell this person, like, that it's really rough, and it's not like you're ever done, but you will turn a corner'".

Teacher educators working towards the promotion of antiracist pedagogies have found resistance among their college students as those teacher candidates grapple with their potential complicity in structures of white supremacy, showing difficulties in interrogating one's biases (Shim, 2018). The current history teacher's process was different in learning to overcome pieces of internalized racism. Tia, the daughter of two Jamaican immigrants, had attended predominantly white schools for most of her education. She studied education in her undergraduate program and participated in practicum teaching experiences in predominantly white schools. It was during this time

that she had a white professor who pushed her to "to talk about race and to focus on that aspect of [her] identity". This was a point of transition for Tia since she had never really thought about the ways that she experienced racialization and how this might also impact youth of color.

Collaborative Meetings

An important dimension of the ways that staff members continued to grow in their emancipatory teaching practices were the collectively-run meetings among staff. Leah felt that this allowed for staff to get to the root of issues in the program, allowing for debate without "dancing around" the topics. At the time of the interview, Leah worked in an administrative role in the larger school and felt that these types of conversations were not possible on larger teams where there were 14-20 people in every meeting. The smaller team allowed you to get to know your colleagues better and feel that there was the space to be honest. "Down here [in the Hands On Knowledge program] it was always really hard, really important, but really hard conversations. And that felt really different."

Leah spoke about how this collaborative space was built by making the time to talk about each person's personal beliefs in relation to the purpose of schooling:

> "A lot of our collaborative time together was spent talking about beliefs, was spent talking about messaging, was spent talking about and naming the ways in which some of us were getting it wrong. All of us were getting it wrong, all of us were getting right too in some ways but a lot of it was spent at least in that first year of [Kwame] having to teach".

For anyone who taught with Kwame during the initial four years of the program, he was someone who deeply impacted the thinking of everyone he worked with. In

meetings I would attend as a long-term sub during Kwame's last year, he would regularly challenge others in the meeting to think about whether their practices or suggestions really moved students towards developing critical consciousness and supporting the liberation and decolonization of Black and Brown minds. Tia, the current ELA teacher, saw the ways in which some of these particular practices continue:

> "I feel like the collaboration of the staff in [Hands On Knowledge] runs very smooth because we are all on the same page, that we want Black and Brown kids to succeed and that we're willing to do any and everything in our content areas or as people to see them succeed and I feel like we all have a mentality of just picking up where somebody is falling short or just being helpful to one another to get the job done for the kids and I feel like the kids are the focus of this program in all of our minds. Even if people aren't getting along at the moment or people have an alternative viewpoint, they'll set that viewpoint aside and just go with the majority and go with the decision to put something out there for the kids, and if it doesn't work, I feel like our team is very good about not being like, 'Told you so.' I didn't say that it was not gonna work. We all are just like, 'Yeah, let's try it.' We all have the mentality of, 'Let's try it. Let's see. Let's do it'".

Through these collaborations, there was often clashes due to different perspectives and teaching philosophies. Sometimes these differences were complementary and sometimes they created tension in trying to understand the purpose of the program and the role that staff should play to lift up youth. In thinking about teaching philosophy, this was much of what drove staff members to work towards emancipatory pedagogies, influenced by previous mentors or co-workers in the program. This was reflected in one

Afrocentric school where staff would spend their lunch hour talking about differing forms of Black identity, as well as engage in debate about the effectiveness of the program during staff meetings (Robinson & Jeremiah, 2011).

For the current director, a key component of what drove them to do the work was highlighting the knowledge that students had, understanding that “street smarts” and “hustle” was knowledge equally valuable to academic knowledge. Sundiata was someone who, as mentioned previously, came from a similar environment to many of the students and became involved in the program through their brother’s time as a student in the program. Thus, for Sundiata, they saw a large portion of their success in the combination of academic knowledge and “street smarts” that they had cultivated. Sundiata also mentioned the importance of students connecting with their own history, which was further noted by Huey, the current Math teacher. For him, connecting students with their history allowed them to build a fuller sense of self:

> “I want to try and teach, I want to try and help our students connect with their history and understand how that helps them propel forward, like how it helps them be that catalyst of change and it's difficult to put into words but I guess I just want to change, I want to help them tap into their consciousness, I want to help them awaken what's inside of them, what's innately theirs. And I think that not enough of our students view themselves as smart, intelligent, and capable and I want to figure out how to help them tap into their own power. That's why I'm in it”.

Connections to Culturally Relevant Models

Overall, observations and interviews with teachers tied into findings from the foundational research done by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995a) on culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1995a) observed eight teachers, recommended by parents and principals as effective educators, over the course of three years. Through commonalities in the "philosophical and ideological underpinnings in their practice", Ladson-Billings (1995a) identified three key components which were labeled as components of culturally relevant pedagogies (p. 162). These three components were academic success, cultural competence and critical consciousness. Cultural competence in this case was seen as using "students' culture as a vehicle for learning" (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 161). Teachers in the Hands On Knowledge program had similar values in their teaching. However, there was a focus on centering students' racial background through the curriculum, more a culturally sustaining model. A key difference here was the focus placed on relationship building and concepts of family within the school environment.

"Y'all are Homies": Building deep relationships with students

Building deep relationships with students was found to be a critical emancipatory pedagogy that promoted decolonization and liberation. Some of the key descriptors students used in talking about their teachers in the alternative program were "accessible", "open", "supportive", and "someone you can connect with". Half of the students in the focus groups mentioned the positive impact of having supportive staff. Leonel, an alumnus who graduated in 2014, saw the difference in the Hands On Knowledge staff compared to traditional teachers in the passion that they had for their work:

> "Before, in a regular class, it felt like the teachers were very monotone. But DP, they're very engaging. Like, they wanted to be there. It wasn't just a paycheck. Keep that up, keep getting to more and more students with things like that. It shows the sincerity, that they want to be there for a reason. And I guess, just keeping in close contact with the students. That really shows the students that they matter. Like all of them being there is not just filling a seat, but that they really want them to come".

Leonel further mentioned that there was always a teacher available and that any of the teachers were happy to help in any subject area or bring in someone to support students when they needed help. For one current student who had never felt that he connected with any of his teachers in his past educational experiences, this connection also came from feeling that he could talk to the teachers about anything and through this feeling that there was a "strong understanding and bond". The current ELA teacher, Tia, echoed this sentiment in expressing that one way that the program met students' needs was through a welcoming environment where staff were willing to forgive students and continued to support them whenever there were frequent absences or assignments weren't turned in. In particular, Tia found the restorative practices as a key piece of building a welcoming environment.

Supportive Staff

In considering key areas of success for the program, many students mentioned that they felt that every staff member in the program was supportive and understood the issues that students were facing more so than any past teachers they had. This echoes findings of past research emphasizing the importance of strong student-teacher

relationships, which has been correlated with higher academic achievement, particularly in math (McCormick et al., 2013), as well as greater school engagement (Martin & Collie, 2018). In addition, for students with hyperactivity or inattention, which included a notable number of students in the program, close relationships with teachers correlated with higher behavioral engagement overall, particularly through engagement in class, as well as higher cognitive engagement for boys (Olivier & Archambault, 2017). For Trina, a brilliant and critically minded young Caribbean woman, a large piece of this was respecting the students as people:

> "I think a big part of the efficiency of [Hands On Knowledge] is the understanding staff members. They get what we go through as actual people and not just students, so they try to accommodate our everyday life while still giving us the work to match our potential".

For one young Cape Verdean woman, the difference came particularly through the deep empathy of the staff:

> "[Hands On Knowledge is] different from upstairs. I feel like y'all understand like us more, like the issues that we have, like that sometimes we can't make it to school or like we can't be in the classroom the whole day and sit down the whole day, stuff like that. I feel like y'all understand all of our issues more."

This finding connected with the fact that that two staff members came from both economic and cultural backgrounds similar to students. Although the staff were majority people of color, most of the staff members grew up in middle class families. Nonetheless, even for the white staff members, there was a commitment to doing home visits and being in students' communities when possible that allowed for this understanding. Five

of the eight staff members, all people of color, lived in the neighborhoods that most students came from. One alumna, Alejandra, who had also served in leadership roles in the program and presented with me at a professional conference, emphasized the importance of interactions in thinking about how staff related to students:

> "Based on my personal experiences, [Hands On Knowledge] is successful at building relationships with their students. The staff is really good at identifying and relating to their student's life even if they don't personally come from the same background. For example, last year we had a white teacher from a suburban neighborhood in Boston who students felt like they could relate to more than their black teachers, solely because of how the teacher interacted with his students".

Another alumnus, of Haitian descent, also emphasized the impact of this particular teacher who happened to be a white man who fluently spoke Haitian Creole through summers he had spent on the island with friends. He stated, "knowing he was white but somehow I felt like he could relate to me, and even if he couldn't relate in all aspects, he could relate in some, like there was enough for me to be like, 'Okay, I feel comfortable with this guy'". This same sentiment was echoed by another Haitian student, Jean Pierre, who graduated in 2019 after being held back for a year in needing to pass the state Math test. He was a student who had been in the program for three years and taken the state Math test three times before passing on his fourth try. Even after completing all of his coursework, he would regularly come in to school to work on Math. Jean Pierre would frequently spend most of the day in the Math teacher's classroom working independently. He was distrustful of most people who came into his life and it took me almost a year to develop a relationship with him through small conversations and check-

ins, eventually spending hours after school working on college applications. At the time of writing, Jean Pierre would call me occasionally for support on his college assignments. However, for him it was hugely impactful to have a teacher who spoke his mother tongue even if the teacher was not from the same culture as him.

Teacher Openness

Other educator qualities of teachers that allowed for deeper relationships included the importance of teachers being more open with their lives, which permitted more mentorship relationships rather than solely those of teacher and student. Misty, a critical thinker who excelled in the humanities, noted:

> "I feel like y'all are more open with y'alls lives. That was the main issue upstairs. It's like you see them as a teacher because you don't really know them as a person. Like some teachers, you would be cool with depending on how open they are to their class. Y'all are really open and y'all talk about your own experiences and yourselves and stuff and you become more than teachers. You become mentors and elders, not elders, not elderly, but elder because y'all are older. I see y'all as elders like the way I see some of my mom's friends, like grown people I can ask about life because at the end of the day no matter how grown we think we are we're 16, 17, 18, and we haven't seen life. Life has already hit you hard so we can ask y'all about how life has hit y'all and what you guys did to get through those rough patches. I see y'all as more mentors than teachers. There's as spiritual and emotional connection I have with the teachers".

Tiago, an alumnus, mentioned that for him, he learned a lot when teachers shared their point of view on an issue or current event. He was someone who attributed much of

his lifestyle to what he learned from the passions and lifestyles of the teachers in the program in becoming a vegan and living a low-impact lifestyle. Misty also emphasized the relationships built with teachers by saying “y’all are homies”, which other students agreed with through nods and “ya” in the focus groups. Other students emphasized this point in explaining that they potentially had one teacher at a school previously that they connected to, but in the Hands On Knowledge program they connected to all of the teachers. Another alumnus echoed this sentiment: “There's not one [Hands On Knowledge] staff that I like sat there and was like, ‘Nah, I'm not feeling that person’”. In considering the relationships build with staff, another key area that students highlighted was the availability of staff in supporting students when they need it. Tiago noted that teachers always gave students their numbers in case they needed anything.

Emmanuel, an alumnus, saw the relationships with staff as a key element of what brought students to school and kept them there:

> “Like if I was going in, to talk to them, visit, and I see the vibe of like ‘Dude I want to actually learn here every day,’ so the vibe of people actually caring for them and stuff, and I'd be all set”.

Small Learning Community

In thinking about how this environment was created in developing consistent caring relationships between staff and students, the commitment of staff was necessary, but it was also hugely important to have a small learning community in allowing for family dynamics and community to be built. Three young Latino students who had struggled in previous schools mentioned that for them they felt comfortable coming to school every day because they knew everyone, students and staff. Leonel, Emmanuel’s

cousin and another alumnus, felt that the smaller classes in the program allowed him to ensure he was never left behind in content. He felt that there was a comradery build among students where they supported each other more than in traditional schools. Tiago, who graduated the same year as Leonel, in 2014, found that collaborative learning spaces helped to build passion for learning amongst students:

> "Every class it felt like we were actually a group collaborating towards a goal and if somebody didn't understand something it wasn't cheating, you know. It was literally like we're gonna tutor each other. If I understand it, I got you. Or if none of us understand it, like let's say we're in one of the environmental science classes […] I would help explain some of that stuff to the students with a lot of the projects that we had. And then even when we broke into smaller groups to work on more defined projects to be presented, we'd still essentially work with each other to make sure that everyone's understanding the material. We'd stay after. That's also something that came more easily than the traditional system when a class ended an everyone would leave. But what would happen with [Hands On Knowledge] is you'd see like a pool of people stay behind and still be working on things, still asking questions. Sometimes it was like a hang out, but that's like the fun of learning also. You go in sometimes and you're very meticulous about what it is that you need to learn and then sometimes you tone it down a little and are more relaxed about that process".

Another alumnus who graduated the same year felt that a key piece of the supportive learning environment was the constant availability of the teachers who stayed after, allowing for students to stay and supporting them in that work. This began to shift

in the 2017-2018 school year when there was more staff turnover and it became rare for the new Director to stay after school. Nonetheless, students still felt there was more of a collaborative environment than they previously had in past schools.

Ubuntu

In thinking about how relationships and community were built in the program, a key concept was "ubuntu". As mentioned previously, this term emerged as one of the core values during the 2015-2016 school year. One of the students who was working towards a 2020 graduation, a young Puerto Rican who grew up in foster care, coined the term "ubunity", which other students and staff began to use in the program. For all of the students, past and present, two terms that consistently came up in describing the program were "family" and "love". Leonel described it as "more than just a program; it's actually a community. […] it's our own little [Hands On Knowledge] family". For another student who ended up dropping out of the program due to unspecified issues, the family environment in the program came from the fact that staff really got to know each of the students. One of the current students credited this to the current director, Sundiata, who tried to make the program more comfortable for students. This was also highlighted by Misty:

> "Ya, I feel like because it's a smaller community it's easier to know everybody who's here. Because of that you get a lot more connected to people and everyone's cool and everybody's on a cool basis and that makes it a really cool environment. I feel like Mx. [Sundiata] really plays a big part in that. I feel like she fights really hard to make it a community and to make people feel

comfortable and make everyone feel comfortable and included, no matter what sexuality or how they self-identify or anything. Everybody is loved overall".

The familial environment was a factor that other programs also noted as particularly impactful when it existed in alternative educational programs (Dugger & Dugger, 1998; De la Rosa, 1998; Loutzenheiser, 2002). Key factors found to build this environment in other programs were more accessible teachers who cared about students and were willing to go the extra mile for students (De la Rosa, 1998; Loutzenheiser, 2002). Another element that was also reflected in the Hands On Knowledge program was a more relaxed and caring environment, which was also noted to be a factor in building community in another alternative school (Cox, 1999).

Practices to build ubunity

There were multiple practices that staff and administration used to create family and community in the program. One of these practices was a morning and afternoon circle that took place on a daily basis. Kwame, the previous Math teacher, was credited with developing the idea of the morning circle, initially calling it "role call". Sundiata felt that the name should be changed, and Kwame proposed "harambee", which means "all come together" in Kiswahili. During both the morning and afternoon circle, students would say their names and AKAs, as well as any announcements they had or that staff had. The circle would close with a mantra. Initially this was the circle leader saying, "Why are we here?" and everyone would respond "We're here to win". In the 2016-2017 school year this changed to the circle leader saying, "knowledge speaks" and everyone else responding with "wisdom listens". Typically, students would lead the morning and

afternoon circles. In the past few years this was seniors in the morning and a student who had excelled during the day for the afternoon.

As part of the morning circle, students would break down a quote chosen by the students. Tiago described the origins of the morning quote in the program:

> "We would have a board also, like a quote, some seed we want to plant in our mind and the cool thing about planting seeds in the mind, thoughts, is to make them grow we just have to keep thinking about them, that's it, super simple. So, we would have this quote and it was directly in sight of when we walked into the unit. It was an open board so you could add things to it also. And then it got really interesting because everyone would see it all the time and everyone would see it mainly because new things were being put on it every week and it was both by the students and by the teachers. It kind of became like a feed, like if you have a Facebook post or an Instagram post or whatever it may be. It was very similar. We would go there and we would check the feed for the day and we would read it. They got me very excited. I would start conversations about them. Also, this, along with everything that I'm saying, it's super subjective in the sense that there's a very curious energy that helped me thrive in that environment with all of these things going on".

This energy around the daily quote shifted over time as it became more structured. Students were no longer able to add to the board and there was a structure students needed to follow in breaking down the "wisdom of the day". Huey, the current Math teacher, saw this as an area where the program needed to improve, where there needed to be more effort made to push students to think critically about what they are

hearing and reading. In another Afrocentric program that held morning circles, one study found that many students purposefully missed the opening circle, which made students more reticent to accept the philosophy of the school (Robinson & Jeremiah, 2011). Similarly, this became as issue in the 2018-2019 school as students began to arrive at the end of the morning circle, waiting outside, since this was the cut-off time for the program. Thus, many students felt that morning and afternoon circles were not necessary every day. This particular practice seemed to be more impactful for alumni who had been part of the program in previous years. For one current student, this was an important piece of knowing everyone in the program.

Another factor that several students mentioned was an important piece of the Hands On Knowledge culture, particularly in building a family environment, were the monthly potlucks. Leah, the co-founder of the program, mentioned that this was a practice that existed since the beginning of the program, through celebrations and meals together. For one alumnus, Emmanuel, this was his favorite part of the program. Potlucks became more structured and consistent towards the end of the Jin's time with the program.

Two final pieces that contributed to building community within the program were community partnerships and ways that staff sought feedback from students in their classes, occasionally through circles. Jin, the previous director who pushed the program towards a more emancipatory focus, brought in many of the community partnerships. Black and brown community artists and activists would lead teach-ins and electives with youth. Past electives included a mural project and hip hop courses. Through both the art

and music electives, there was often a focus on understanding systems impacting youth, as well as examining how art can be used to push back.

"[Hands On Knowledge] runs on Black Power": Emancipatory Curriculum

The final key component found to promote decolonization and liberation in the school environment was teaching students in a way that built critical consciousness and promoted pride in their racial and/or cultural identity. In considering building pride in students' ethnic identities, the focus of the program was to uplift Black culture, particularly Black American cultures. In this, some students who did not identify as Black sometimes felt that the curriculum was not culturally relevant for them. For students who identified as Black, the majority of students in the program, this particular aspect was a key component of what students enjoyed in the program, as well as what engaged them more in the process of learning. Through this section, I will do a deeper dive into the curriculum of the program, focusing on specific examples from different eras of the program in the project-based learning section.

Afrocentric Focus

One student highlighted the Afrocentric focus of the program by stating proudly that "[Hands On Knowledge] runs on Black power". For another student, Trey, who graduated in 2019, this was one of the elements of the program that engaged him back into learning. For Trey, the curriculum allowed him to reconnect with learning after feeling disconnected from school:

> "I like how everything we do, mostly everything revolves around teaching us about Black people, like knowledge and community. Upstairs like a lot of the stuff we learn about and a lot of the stuff they force us to learn, they're teaching

the wrong stuff".

For several students, they mentioned that the curriculum made them feel proud of their history and proud of themselves. As mentioned previously, correlations have also been found between a strong ethnic identity and academic achievement (Hernández, et al., 2017; Grantham & Ford, 2003). Overall, 92% of students felt that the curriculum was relevant to their racial or cultural background. For many of the students, what they learned in the program was "actual history":

> "Raquel: Do you feel that DP is relevant to your cultural or racial background? Why or why not?
>
> Alyana: Yes because, I don't know. I know what you're saying. I don't know, but I do know. Because we learn our actual history. Otherwise in real schools and shit, and stuff, they teach us, like, bullshit.
>
> Kiera: Yes, because you guys have a different curriculum. You guys try to teach us about African-American history instead of teaching us like about Christopher Columbus found America, we learn about the Indians who were there first, before he came.
>
> Liana: Yes, because you guys teach a lot of Black history and I'm Black, so yes, it is.
>
> Misty: Ya, like just like [Liana] just said, aside from slavery, you guys teach us about, like gentrification and like stuff that's going on currently that's gonna affect us, not just stuff that affected our ancestors".

For most students, the importance of the curriculum came not only through teaching about Black history, but connecting the past to the present, particularly to

current events and issues in students' neighborhoods, including gentrification. Three students mentioned feeling a personal connection to their assignments in understanding how the past had shaped the realities they lived in and the inequities many students faced on a daily basis. Two students also mentioned how one white teacher, who spoke Haitian creole, taught students about the complexity of identity in a way that allowed students to examine how they constructed their own identities:

> "the history teacher gave us so much more history in terms of racial awareness, of our identity, of the depth of different cultures that we don't study because of how much I guess that knowledge is suppressed in the average curriculum. So, that was intense."

Critical Consciousness

Through this, the focus on building racial and ethnic pride was very much connected to the core value of critical consciousness in understanding the ways that society functioned, as well as building a sense of what it meant to push back. In a school committee meeting where students and staff spoke about the program, the former director highlighted this particular aspect of the program:

> "We're a leader in what it means to educate through a lens of social justice. I don't know how many other […] schools had their students visit Occupy Boston, how many had a weeklong teach-in on how to be respectful of race, gender and sexual identity, how many teachers created a curriculum on the war on drugs and it's devastating impact on Black and Brown children like our own, how many schools last August made the decision to engage in a three month study through

their social studies class on the events in Ferguson and the growing Black Lives Matter movement".

These topics engaged students more, as the students themselves reported, in providing information that connected to their experiences. Several students mentioned how they used the information they learn in class "in the real world". This was a notable difference for students in comparison to their past educational experiences where most students felt that they weren't learning material that related to their lives, which disconnected them from school. For many students, the curriculum built on an already budding critical consciousness that was above that of many college students. Most students had experienced stark and brutal inequities in the communities they live in, through poverty and police violence, among other factors. Some students came into the program with a lot of anger related to these experiences. For some students, they were able to connect this frustration to their experiences, but for others they lacked the language to explain this connection upon entering the program. There was a space for students to make these connections through the courses. In one class on financial literacy, one student who would rarely come to school made these connections:

> "Why do U.S. citizens have to pay tax money? They say our tax money goes to public transportation, the schools, police, what the fuck is that? Like, we're really paying for schools that don't even educate people, we're paying for public transportation that makes us late to school every fucking day, and we're paying for cops that kill us every fucking day. So, literally, we're literally paying for dumb shit. That's how we live, literally".

Although students could often go off on tangents related to what they were learning, teachers in the Hands On Knowledge program made space for students' emotions and frustrations in examining systemic inequities that impact students' lives. Teachers and staff were also receptive to hearing topics that students wanted to learn about. One alumnus mentioned how he always felt that the previous director took student perspectives into account in driving curriculum and projects within the school. In thinking about how teachers in this particular program created curriculum with a goal of decolonization and liberation, project-based learning and teach-ins are important components of the program.

Project-based Learning

Since at least the 2011-2012 school year, there was a growing focus on project-based learning related to building critical consciousness in the program. Tiago, an alumnus who started the program in 2012, spoke of how the curriculum went more in-depth and connected to the real world, even through mathematics:

> "We're usually taught things like Algebra, or different sections of Algebra, in a way that it is Algebraic, right, it's just a set of rules, that's all we really ever learn, but once you dive into things like Trigonometry and you work with positioning and harmonic analysis and you understand how this is breaking down the natural environment that we exist within and it's doing so in a really cool way that can help us build things. So, that in itself, that's a small portion of how deep and how much we actually covered, went into it, and understood it. But those were some of the holes, for example that were missing, that I couldn't get the answers for in the normal high school curriculum".

There were also larger projects that were done over the course of a semester. Santiago, a student who graduated in 2014, reflected on a project that students completed related to gentrification. Through this, students spent time in a housing project near the school where several students lived and interviewed residents about changes they had seen in the neighborhood. For Santiago, this particular project was one that shifted how he thought about his community and the work that he wanted to do. At the time of the interview, he worked for a bank and hoped to shift some of these dynamics in thinking about loan practices.

In the 2017-2018 school year, students completed a project through their Math and Science classes related to the Black Panther Ten-Point Plan. Students each chose one point of the plan and used data to create an infographic analyzing how the city measured up to the goals in that particular point. The math teacher, Huey, mentioned how this particular project allowed students to see how many of the issues they wanted to change in their communities were issues that Black and Brown activists had been fighting for over decades. For Huey, the impact of this project came through a community forum where students presented their infographics to their families and other community members, becoming community teachers:

> "I felt like it was important for them to be able to apply some of the math that they have been learning outside, to something tangible, something that they were able to then show to their parents. I think that when they presented the information that they studied and it work that they had done, I think when they were able to show that to some of their families, I thought that was powerful. I think that being able to not only able to learn, but then they be able to share that

type of knowledge with their peers and their families is very important and it took, create that change and bring it back to the community. I think if you can change the thinking of your family, it's very important going forward".

In another project, the history teacher from the 2017-2019 school year who became the ELA teacher in the 2019-2020 school year, Tia, developed a project related to colonialism. As the other History teacher in the program, I supported her in the development of this particular curriculum. She had students in the first year of the program create presentations that analyzed the histories of colonization, imperialism and resistance in different countries. Many students chose to examine the country where they had roots or had been born. For Tia, this project allowed "students to see how things connect not only in the classroom but how the classroom connects to their outside lives and how their outside life connects to the classrooms". This was similar to a project done in the 2014-2015 school year where students did community presentations on colonialism and imperialism in certain countries, as well as examined the impact of postcolonial movements and literature.

In the 2018-2019 school year, the Math teacher and I developed a seminar for the seniors on Financial Literacy and Cooperative Economics in communities of color. We partnered with a local organization led by a woman of color that had developed a community fund through which they provided loans at lower rates to businesses owned by people of color in communities that were predominantly people of color. Students would participate in workshops weekly, co-led by the director of the organization, the Math teacher, and myself on cooperative economics, financial literacy, and economic imperialism. The final project led to community workshops on financial literacy that also

examined alternative economic systems, such as cooperative economic systems, in the community. Groups of 4-5 students led four workshops over the course of the day and culminated with an activity through which community members were asked to identify businesses they loved, needed, and wanted to replace. This information was part of a larger project for the community organization on identifying businesses to provide with loans.

Teach-Ins

Another key element in building pedagogies that promoted decolonization and liberation within the Hands On Knowledge program were "teach-ins", which would focus on a community issue or larger national issue that impacted Black and Brown communities to delve deeper into the topic through various workshops throughout the day and guest speakers. Leah, the co-founder of the program, noted that the idea of the teach-ins came from Kwame, the previous Math teacher. Sometimes Kwame would start these teach-ins organically during the day based on a discussion that students were having related a current event or event in their neighborhood. Leah noted that as a white woman, she often felt that it was not her place to speak on many of these issues so Kwame would often take the lead. Students would gather together in the common area and Leah noted it became a place to collectively process "things that were happening in the world and in the community". Tiago used very similar language to reflect on the teach-ins he had experienced four years prior:

> "There were days that we would be collectively, the entire unit, we would essentially break things down that were happening, both in the classes or with us,

> things that we were thinking. We would give input and in doing things like this as a collective, that's what made this learning environment such a potent one."

These teach-ins reflected the core value of critical consciousness. In defining critical consciousness within the program, students resonated with the definition provided by Diemer et al. (2017). Critical consciousness was defined as critical reflection and critical action. Critical reflection was divided into two parts: Firstly, as egalitarianism and secondly as "critical analysis of perceived social inequalities, such as racial/ethnic, gendered, and socioeconomic constraints on educational and occupational opportunity" (Diemer, et al., 2017, p. 462). Critical action was defined as "participating in individual and/or collective action to produce sociopolitical change" (Diemer, et al., 2017, p. 462). Thus, key components of critical consciousness were not only an understanding social inequities and systems that impact students, but also a move towards action. Alumni felt that the teach-ins were an important factor in what set the Hands On Knowledge program apart from traditional education. Leonel, a peer of Tiago's, recalled that he felt that these experiences allowed students to have a deeper understanding of what was going on in the world around them and how this related to their lives:

> "When you're in DP, when certain things are really going on in this world, they actually feel the need that you have to know what's going on. And not many places actually do that. So you'll always been left in the loop. They actually want you to see what's going on. They want you to be aware of what's happening in this world. That when you leave them, it's not so overwhelming that you don't know what's going on, you don't know how to feel about things. It's already put on the

table for you. So I think that's really great. I'd never had a teacher that's done that before. So I think that was pretty cool".

In the last few years, particularly after Kwame left, teach-ins became more structured and there was less time and space allotted to develop projects around the teach-ins or develop topics organically, unless they were led by the director, Sundiata. Some of the teach-ins that alumni recalled having the most impact on their thinking were an Art Week, a teach-in on the War on Drugs, and on the riots in Ferguson, MO. Art Week was held annually for several years until Sundiata became the director. Community members were invited who were visual artists, rappers, spoken word poets or other artists. One alumnus, Jaden, who ended up dropping out of the program, recall that he found the musicians to be motivating. He was a student who regularly rapped and recorded music that many of his peers would listen to and follow.

Leonel found the teach-in on the War on Drugs the most impactful, connecting current violence in communities of color to this particular era:

"That one was definitely an eye-opener. Especially with all the violence that was going on. And kind of thinking about how it originated, the whole idea of it. Like I said, it was a big concept to grab, but it's always something that's in front of your face, but as young adults, you don't really question it, or where it's coming from or why. So, they helped you kind of see that. And then once you start seeing other things that's going on in this world, then you actually now start to question it. You wonder, you know, why is all this propaganda on the news? And what is it for? You question what's going on".

Leonel recalled that the teach-ins were generally very interactive and there were often guest speakers who had dealt with the issues being discussed or had a personal connection to the issues. Leonel's brother, Emmanuel, mentioned that in one case, during a teach-in that turned into a project on the riots in Ferguson, teachers decided to stop teaching when students weren't taking the topic seriously. Students had each written their own stories about police violence, relating to experiences that had been through or seen. They were supposed to practice the speeches each day with the goal of presenting them publicly in a touristy area of the city as a form of protest. Emmanuel noted that students weren't taking the assignment seriously and so the teachers said they were going to stop teaching.

> "They didn't teach for a whole week. They closed all the classrooms, they made us sit in the common area and just, we'd sit there and chill all day. Like for the first two days that we did that, we went to school, we'd sit there, we didn't have to give our phones up. It was chilling, you feel me? And then after a while they told us 'Yo, y'all not supposed to be in here. If you want this to end, y'all better get to practicing your monologues. And, you know, get ready.' So after the first two days, we'd have a movie, it was chill or whatever, but after that something struck in all of us, that we were like, 'Yo, this is boring.' Let's just come together and actually sit here and prepare up, practice and then I sat there and actually learned them, and then the teachers would come back, 'We're going to come in. Y'all rehearsed it for us, we'll give you all feedback'".

For Emmanuel, this was one of his favorite moments during his time in the program in connecting to the material in a different way.

Limitations

Despite the many successes of the Hands On Knowledge program in working towards emancipatory pedagogies, there are structural and programmatic limitations that have kept the program from achieving a fully emancipatory structure. One of the key factors was the history of “messy politics”, as the previous director put it, that had existed since the beginnings of the program. The former director, Jin, referred to the fact that the original director of the program was a Black woman who many of the other unit leaders in the larger school did not respect as a leader. Jin was unaware of these politics when he was asked to be the director and noted that she probably would have wanted to continue leading the program if it had been an option. The original director, Rina, spent the next few years as the guidance counselor. The year that the most recent director took their position, Rina was assigned to an office that was the size of a closet. After taking a leave of absence, she left the program. Other staff in the program felt that she had been pushed out of the position by the director, Sundiata. Two other staff members, who left when they Sundiata became the director, refused to be interviewed regarding the program due to difficulties they had towards the end of their time in the program.

Many of the program limitations mentioned by students and staff were issues that shifted after the current director moved into their position. One of these factors was a decline in the restorative justice program. Another factor was a lack of consistency and clarity in the program. A third limitation was the elimination of electives. Two factors that had consistently been a limitation for the program were the need to meet state testing requirements and a curriculum that often excluded non-Black communities of color.

Decline in Restorative Justice

In considering shifts in the restorative justice program, one of the main shifts was that the student restorative justice council seemed to fall apart once Sundiata became the director in 2017. Four students who had been part of the program under the previous director mentioned that this was a "big failure" for the program. Two of these students also mentioned that they felt that there were more conflicts in the program since the restorative justice council was eliminated. One alumna also commented on the restorative questions that were used after a conflict and noted that they should relate more why the person did what they did and how they felt, rather than questions related to the conflict itself. This same alumna noted that students were also not held accountable in the 2017-2018 school year:

> "I also feel like in the last year [Hands On Knowledge] has struggled with holding students accountable to the source book i.e.: phone policy, attendance, drug policy. In my opinion in the last year the students really just came to school to do whatever they wanted, nothing, and had no consequences for it at all".

Lack of Consistency

In thinking about the lack of clarity and consistency, one staff member noted that there was a lack of consistency in the policy in how students were moved up. Some teachers had counted passing the state exam as the credits for students' foundational year, where for other teachers this was not the case. In addition, for some students, previous credits from other schools were counted as foundational credits to move students up. The inconsistency of this policy had been something that students noticed and found problematic. For two students, a notable issue had been the lack of consistency in the

rigor of the curriculum. Five students mentioned that they found the curriculum of the two teachers who left in 2017 to be more rigorous and engaging than the curriculum of the teachers who took over these roles in ELA and History. Alejandra made the comparison of how she felt in the previous teachers' classes compared to in the class of the ELA teacher in the 2017-2018 school year:

> "I was really the first, in the front row, 'Oh, that's crazy', learning, like mad interested, I liked what they was teaching. This year, I can't tell you nothing. I feel like they just gave out assignments. In the beginning of the year, you have to do a roadmap about your life. I'm not trying to throw shade, […] but alphabet poster, what the fuck? Last year, we was not doing none of that".

The director Sundiata also acknowledged this as an issue and noted that they felt there had been a difficult balance between "having the right content", but not making it too difficult:

> "Finding that middle ground of how do we do all this dope, difficult, critical consciousness, social justice work without dumbing it down because the kids aren't dumb, but how do we make the work accessible to where their skills are because that part is not their fault that the education system has failed them".

A prior issue in the program was a lack of special education support. Leah noted that prior to the 2017-2018 school year, students with IEPs were not always getting the services they needed, and the program was frequently out of compliance. This shifted for two years when an ELA teacher was hired who had a background in special education. She worked hard to get everything into compliance but chose to leave the school after the 2019-2020 school year.

Lack of Electives

Another issue that emerged as a theme was that students problematized the lack of electives and gym. This was a shift more in the 2017-2018 school year when students only had electives for one semester. The next year there were no elective options. Several alumni had mentioned the deep and lasting impact that some of the electives' teachers had on them. Leonel mentioned that there had been a martial arts class offered several years in a row. As mentioned previously, he ended up working for the instructor to teach younger kids in community programs and eventually traveling to China with the martial arts teacher. One other alumnus had also been able to travel to China with this instructor. Both students fundraised to support the trip.

Overall, eight current students mentioned wanting electives. Five students, all males, wanted gym time. This was an issue that they had pushed for consistently in advocating for themselves, noting the difficulties they felt in sitting in a classroom for long periods of time. Four students mentioned wanting Hip Hop and Art electives, which had been provided in the past. Misty noted how the lack of electives was a missed opportunity for growth:

> "I think we need yearlong extracurricular activities because that looks really good on a college application and I feel like that's kind of like a missed opportunity. I'm trying to focus on my education, but at the same time I want my college application to look fire and it's not really looking fire if I'm just sitting in class".

This particular issue was one that was noted in chapter two as a frequent problem in alternative schools. In one survey, findings showed that half of alternative programs did not provide electives (Kim, et al., 2010). In many of these programs, a lack of

electives was tied to a more punitive disciplinary structure where students felt that the environment was more like a prison (Kim, et al., 2010). Two students mentioned they felt that the Hands On Knowledge program felt like a prison in that students weren't allowed to go the larger school and had to stay in a wing of the school for the day. However, students did not make a connection between a lack of electives and a carceral environment.

Exclusion of Cultures

Another issue that some students brought up was the focus on Black history and identity in the program. Many students did not see this as a primary part of their identity, including Latinx students who likely had roots in the African diaspora. Many of the Dominican and Puerto Rican students, as well as many of the lighter skinned African-American students, experienced internalized racism. This was no doubt in part due to colonial messaging about identity. However, internalized racism has also been correlated to experiencing more racism overall (David & Okazaki, 2006; et al., 2016). Higher internalized racism is also correlated with lower senses of ethnic or racial identity (Bryant, 2009; Cokley, 2002; David & Okazaki, 2006; Ferrera, 2017; Hipolito- Delgado, 2008; Zhen-Duan, et al., 2018). For some of these students, the program allowed them to feel a sense of pride they had not previously felt in their Afro-Latino identities, which I will delve deeper into through the next chapter. However, for other students, including students who identified as Middle Eastern, they did not feel that the curriculum connected to their cultural background. There were also several Caribbean students, particularly two Haitian students, who felt that their cultures were never incorporated into the curriculum. Overall, nine students out of twenty-eight who participated in focus groups mentioned

that they did not feel that the curriculum was culturally relevant for them. Four students, including students with roots in Iraq, Jamaica, Haiti, and Puerto Rico, noted that they wished that more countries and cultures were talked about in the program. In considering relevance of the curriculum, two students also noted that they wished that they learned more "real life skills, like how to do taxes and apply for housing".

Standardized Testing

Another larger programmatic limitation existed through the state exam requirements through which students needed pass the ELA, Math, and Science state tests in order to graduate. For students who come into the program under-credited and overaged, this was often a struggle. Testing has becoming increasingly problematic in schools. As mentioned in the last chapter, due to low test scores for the larger school, pressure has been placed on the school to raise test scores, which impacted the alternative program as well. Focus shifted away from some of the more creative and innovative programming to make room for test prep. This is something that the current Math teacher struggled with:

> "In our staff meetings where I was asked to push or to come up with more MCAS interventions, I have a tough time with that because I feel like that's not that's not where they're at. […] I think, come on, let's get them first into a classroom, then do math. Let's get them learning math, let's get them comfortable with math, just come to the game and talk with them, and I'll talk with my students. A number of them have never, they didn't go to math class, they haven't been in math class for two years, so math in itself I think, I've gotta get over this hurdle before we can just get you into the classroom and understanding some theory and thinking".

Conclusion

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995a) postulated three criteria that culturally relevant pedagogy rested upon: academic success, cultural competence and critical consciousness. In this chapter, I found similar criteria in developing emancipatory pedagogies that promoted decolonization and liberation. The final criteria were a focus on teaching students in a way that built critical consciousness and promoted pride in one's cultural identity, similar to the last two criteria of Ladson-Billings. However, in achieving these pedagogical goals, there seemed to be two criteria necessary in developing an environment where this was possible. Firstly, was developing values and make spaces for conversations to understand practices that did and did not promote liberation. Quite differently from the research conducted by Ladson-Billings (1995) on individuals, a key piece of the findings in developing emancipatory pedagogies was collaboration among staff.

Through the Hands On Knowledge program, staff made space for conversations about their own beliefs and practices. In addition, each staff member had done a significant amount of work in interrogating their own positionalities and biases, something that was often addressed in meetings as well. These conversations and internal work were often something that was not addressed in considering culturally sustaining pedagogies and other emancipatory models. However, this was clearly an essential piece in providing a basis for teaching. In particular, in cultivating anti-racism pedagogy, a key component had been "naming racism as the central construct of oppression and inequity" (Kinloch & Dixon, 2017). All of the teachers in the program did this work, as well as examined the role that they played in perpetuating oppression, as well as had

conversations in thinking about how to shift these structures. This work was necessary to do prior and in conjunction with building relationships with students.

The second factor was building deep relationships with students, particularly in a familial environment. In building relationships, students highlighted that teachers were always available and supportive. In addition, students mentioned that teachers were more open with their lives, which several students saw as an important piece that allowed them to relate more to teachers. In deepening community and creating more of a familial environment, there were certain community practices that were noted as key parts of this, including morning and afternoon circle, monthly potlucks, and community partnerships.

The third factor was teaching students in a way that built critical consciousness and promoted pride in one's roots. In the Hands On Knowledge program, many students mentioned that there was a focus on "black power" and Black identity. There were also spaces for students to break down systems around them when they had questions about what was going on in the world around them. Another study found similar type spaces and flexibility to make room for issues that students found to be important as a notable factor in culturally responsive pedagogies, particularly for white women teaching youth of color (Warren, 2013). However, this was done by most of the teachers in the program. In addition, there were symposiums and teach-ins that allowed for students to present projects to the community, as well as learn from community members. Overall, these three factors were essential elements in working towards emancipatory pedagogies that promoted decolonization and liberation, even if there were limitations in achieving a completely emancipatory pedagogy.

CHAPTER SIX: PROGRAM IMPACT AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Through the pedagogical methods and program structure mentioned in the previous chapter, the Hands On Knowledge program impacted the identity construction of youth through its existence, both in the short-term and the long-term. This chapter will focus on the impact of these pedagogies, which was determined through themes that emerged from interviews with alumni, as well as multiple focus groups with current students. One key area where students experienced a shift in identity was in relation to racial identity, particularly in developing pride in an Afrocentric identity. Another area where students experienced a shift was through gender identity, notably related to masculinity. Related to both of these factors, students also grew in areas of critical consciousness and socioemotional development. In so far as the socioemotional development, particularly anger management, these shifts were very much related to shifts in racial identity. In addition, students developed leadership skills that were often built on the foundations laid by the previous factors. These impacts reflected a drastic shift from previous educational experiences that students had in traditional schools where they were often criminalized and became disengaged with school.

Through this chapter, I will examine how one program that used curriculum based on decolonizing and emancipatory pedagogies affected the identity construction of youth. I will also examine how this impact differed through the various eras of the program, from its origins in 2009 to the 2018-2019 school year. Lastly, I will examine some of the failures of the program, as identified by students, and areas where the program potentially had a negative impact of the some of the students, both past and closer to the present.

Some of these factors were low attendance and low graduation rates, something that shifted over the course of the program, as well as complex politics among staff.

Identity Construction

Racial Identity

Race was a significant lens through which identity construction was impacted by students and alumni, as reported through focus groups and interviews. Almost 40 percent of current students felt that they were prouder to be Black due to their experience in the program. For several students, this shift was very much tied into beginning to connect Blackness with success and excellence. One student, who dropped out of the program after attending from 2013-2018, described growing in how he saw himself as a Black man:

> "I think coming made me know what I'm capable of as a Black man growing up in America, coming up in America period. There's more than what I like see on a daily basis. There's more to the world than what I see. When I come here, it makes me look at stuff different".

Two current students from the program continued to highlight how they felt that the program created a space where Blackness was valued on a daily basis:

> "Adriana: I feel like in the outside or whatever, […] they stereotype us. But here, we're us and we learn about us, what we originated from.
>
> "Amara: Like Adriana said, in the outside world, they stereotype us and they put us out to be like these bad people, but here we learn like how we're unique".

For many of the students, this shift was created through both the curriculum, as well as a staff that reflected the students themselves anx highlighting the experiences of

Black communities through curriculum and teach-ins, as mentioned in the previous chapter. One young man of Jamaican ancestry mentioned that the program focus on Black history made him "feel good about [his] history because it's telling [him] stuff [he] needed to know". A young woman described the impact of the curriculum on her racial identity development:

> "I've always been proud to be Haitian and Trinidadian. In a way, I feel a bit more prouder because, you know, learning about your own history and some of the stuff that affects us, even to this day, and we're still standing strong and doing our thing so of course I'm going to be even prouder".

For several students, there was also a tie between development of critical consciousness and racial identity development. For one young biracial man, this was tied to an understanding of the criminalization of Black men:

> "I feel like it changed how I think, like I should be better. You know how were set up to be in jail and stuff like that. I feel like that stuff pushed me to be, like, I should be different. He's not just a regular Black kid. He's successful".

This particular statement reflected the deep impact that racialized narratives had on young people, as well as the racialized realities that exist in the United States, which vastly differentiated the experience of youth, based on race and socioeconomic status. In addition, several of the Afro-Latino students had never felt connected to their Black identity due to internalized racism and racial discourse they were exposed to in their families. For two young Dominican women, they experienced a shift in this through their first year in the program:

“Liana: I just felt more Black here. Before I came here, I felt more Hispanic. And then I’m here and I felt Black

“Adriana: I feel like we’re the shit now. Black people.

“Liana: Right! I feel like that too!”

For one young Puerto Rican man, he shifted the language he used to talk about Latinos, from referring to himself as “Spanish” to “Latino”. He also refused to recognize himself as Black upon entering the program, which shifted slightly over the next two years as he referred to himself as “light skinned”. Nonetheless, he was still a student who struggled with these issues and often promoted colorism within the program, jokingly referring to himself as a “house nigger” as if it meant he was better than others in some way. He was one of several male students who frequently put down female students for being “dark skinned”, which became a notable issue in the community for which we held several restorative circles and dialogues. Nonetheless, when asked if the program had impacted how he viewed his culture or race he mentioned that he felt that people of color needed to work together since they faced the same issues rather than creating conflict between each other. Through this statement, as well as shifts in how he labeled himself, it is seemed clear that the program created some shifts in his identity, but his actions in the program also revealed areas where he still internalized many of the racialized messages he received about success in other areas of his life.

For some students, these shifts were connected to the ideologies of teachers, as well as the curriculum. One alumnus noted that for him, his growth was connected to having staff that was primarily Black. For all of the male alumni, Kwame, the previous Math teacher and a Black man, was one of the key educators that they saw as a mentor

and felt had a deep impact on their life. One alumnus described that Kwame was like a father-figure for him. In daily observations of the program, it was clear that many of the Black and Latinx students also gravitated to the classroom of the current Math teacher, Huey, who was also a Black man. Young men would play chess in his classroom during lunch on a daily basis or stay after school. Some students would work while other students would hang out, choosing his classroom over any other space.

There was also one white staff member, the previous History teacher, who several students mentioned pushed them in their thinking about their racial and/or cultural identity, in connecting it to current politics. Tiago spoke of how this teacher, Alex, impacted his racial identity growth:

> "[he] gave us so much more history in terms of racial awareness, of our identity, of the depth of different cultures that we don't study because of how much I guess that knowledge is suppressed in the average curriculum".

This particular staff member spoke Haitian Creole and was one that two Haitian-American alumni connected strongly with. However, he was also a staff member that was described as "complicated" by another staff member in considering ways that he sometimes culturally appropriated Black culture through dress and the way that he spoke. At the same time, both this staff member, along with all other staff members who have been a part of the program were deeply committed to uplifting Black and Brown identities, even if it wasn't the culture that they were from. This connected to the complexity of practicing culturally sustaining pedagogies when you are not part of the culture that you are seeking to sustain.

Gender and Sexual Identity

An important impact of the program that was not frequently highlighted through the curriculum or core values, was a shift in perceptions of the LGBTQ population. Sundiata, the current director, often felt that the larger school sent many gay, lesbian, and trans students to the program because they felt that Sundiata could better support these students as a queer, non-binary person. There would be frequent conversations in self-awareness groups about identity, as well as times when teachers would call students out for language they used or for misgendering other students. Through some of these experiences, students experienced shifts in how they practiced or felt hegemonic masculinity.

One young Dominican woman, Alejandra, who graduated from the program in 2018 spoke about how she began to understand pronoun use through seeing the transition of a peer in the program:

> “there's a lot of LGBTQ students. When I first started, there was this guy that he was in the middle of his transition […] we got to see him transform to [Laura], that made me change. Oh, she's out! So I don't know. For me it was eye-opening, you only used to see that shit in the movies or on shows, but I never lived it and I didn't know how to react to it because like I said, I never lived it. So getting the pronouns right, what they are, like he, she, it, I don't like calling people ‘it.’ […] I'm like ‘Sis, what do I say so you don't feel like out of place, disrespected, nothing’. He was like, ‘It's not he or she’. […] Any time I meet a person that's from that community, I be like, ‘What do you want me to call you?’ Like that girl that started this year? I'm like, ‘What do I call you? I don't wanna be rude but what do I call you?’ I always had to tell everybody that”.

Alejandra continued to speak about the sensitivity that she developed in trying to ensure that she used pronouns that each individual preferred in trying to show respect. Nonetheless, she, as well as other students, described how they found this to be "confusing". In this particular program, there were two students in the last five years who were transgender. For many students, seeing the transition of a peer provided a lens into a small piece of trans experiences. One of the trans students mentioned feeling part of a family in the program, while the other student ended up completing requirements for the program from home. In consideration of these shifts, it was also important to recognize that outside of school, trans youth were often more likely than cisgender youth of color to experience homelessness and police brutality (Reck, 2009). The student who completed the program outside of school was a student with severe anxiety who had also experienced homelessness after her mother, a devoutly Catholic Latina woman, refused to recognize her child's transition.

Many of the young men in the program had little exposure to the LGBTQ community prior to being in the program. Some struggled with ideas of masculinity that had been pushed upon them, through which they felt it was unacceptable to dress in a way that they perceived as feminine. These young men were more open about some of the confusion and doubts they felt about this during a focus group led by one of the Black male educators in the program, Huey:

> "Henri: To be honest, I'm going to say that the way I view genders now compared to back then is different because a lot of this stuff I wasn't seeing at the school I was at before.
>
> "Huey: Ok. When you say a lot of this stuff, what do you mean?

"Henri: Males dressed as females. I didn't see that a lot, but it's something to get used to in DP because it's a diverse group.

"Huey: So do you think it kind of helped you to see the world differently? Be more accepting?

"Henri: Well, it's not really accepting. I have a gay cousin, but he doesn't dress and you know what I'm saying. He knows how to be around men. You know what I'm saying?"

Although Henri mentions that the way that he viewed gender is different, the last phrase in saying "he knows how to be around men" belies an ideology of hegemonic masculinity. After being pushed by Huey, the Math teacher, to expand on this, he talked about how men should act a certain way (e.g. speaking in a way that was perceived to be masculine and not wearing wigs). Many of the male students in the program were aspiring rappers who listened to both mainstream and underground rap. One of the students who rapped sought to talk about issues impacting the Black community, particularly systemic violence. However, for most of these students, the songs that they shared and sang promoted violence and subjugation of women. Rap, particularly in its more recent form, has been perceived by some as a means of constructing a Black masculinity through violence (Anderson, 1999; Majors & Billson, 1992). Gangsta rap, in particular, often promoted "hypermasculinity, misogyny, and homophobia" (Oware, 2011, p. 22). These characteristics were often present on a daily basis in the interactions between students, as well as what students chose to say in certain spaces. The conversation above was among a group of students placed together in self-awareness due to the fact that they all exhibited a certain hypermasculinity. These were also students

who had experienced more trauma earlier in life, been in juvenile detention centers or been arrested at least once. These were factors that impacted the identity that they constructed.

A male student mentioned that he felt that being in the program exposed him to the LGBTQ community in a way that he hadn't been exposed to before, but saw the openness of the students with their sexual and gender identities to be a positive element:

> "Like I wasn't used to any of that. Like when I went to the school in like middle school and when I came to [the larger high school], there probably was kids like that, but they wasn't really outgoing. They probably was on the low, but they weren't saying oh ya this is me. But here, they was like proud to be the way they are. That's good though".

Another student mentioned that he felt that within the community, the focus on ubuntu and family allowed students to be themselves more, through the various aspects of their identity. This particular student felt that the current director, Sundiata, was a large piece of this in promoting community and ensuring that students' identities are respected:

> "I feel like because it's a smaller community it's easier to know everybody who's here. Because of that you get a lot more connected to people and everyone's cool and everybody's cool and everybody's on a cool basis and that makes it a really cool environment. I feel like Mx. [Sundiata] really plays a big part in that. I feel like she fights really hard to make it a community and to make people feel comfortable and make everyone feel comfortable and included, no matter what sexuality or how they self-identify or anything. Everybody is loved overall"

Critical Consciousness

Another major area of both long-term and short-term impact of the program was found through the development of critical consciousness. In considering critical consciousness here, I will use the definition that was examined with students from Diemer et al. (2017). Their definition included two critical reflection components, one of which dealt with understanding societal inequity while another dealt with promoting egalitarianism. The third component was a critical action component, which encompassed various types of sociopolitical participation. In consideration of both critical reflection and critical action, for students in the program shifts in critical consciousness were very much intertwined with shifts in racial and cultural identity, in understanding the ways that history impacted how they were perceived in society.

Critical Reflection

In considering the above definition, the key impact was through shifts in critical reflection, particularly student analysis and understanding of the impact of certain social structures in their life. This was particularly evident among alumni in the program, both male and female. Three alumni who graduated in 2018 wrote about the impact that the program had in shifting how they view the world, particularly in understanding the way that certain social and political systems functioned. These students wrote about their experiences in the program through our Youth Participatory Action Research course as part of their senior coursework. For one young woman, Alejandra, the shift was notable in understanding an interconnectedness of systems that impacted her:

> "This program has impacted me in a variety of ways. Mostly in the way I view the world. Before this program I didn't really think too much about current events or

politics. My view on things going on in the world was, if it didn't directly apply me or my loved ones, they just didn't matter. But that quickly changed after my first few months taking Humanities classes in Diploma Plus. I was taught how literature, media, and modern day ways of living were exploiting the oppression of minorities all over the world. I was finally taught how things going on in the Middle East and different parts of the world directly affect me. It was a real eye opening time in my life to say the least. My teachers were proud that now I was able to talk about current events without saying that these things didn't matter to me".

She expressed the ways that the curriculum connected content to student lives, as well as the impact of educators in the program in providing culturally relevant pedagogy. For Alejandra, the History teacher who taught in the program from 2013-2017 created much of this impact in shifting her perspectives on the world:

> "He was a fucking force. He was crazy, I don't know. He would really smack you with some real world facts. He was like oh sure, you can't do nothing about it, but soak it in. But I don't know what they taught us this year, and all bullshit they just gave out assignments".

In this particular statement, it was also evident that she felt that curriculum had deteriorated notably with the shift in the teachers. For a separate student, he expressed almost identical sentiments to Alejandra in thinking about the importance of understanding the ways that the political decisions and laws impacted Black communities, as well as the connection between the role of U.S. imperialism outside the

United States. For Michael, learning about the histories of communities of color, "our history", caused him to rethink some of his goals in larger context:

> "I am able to now see the world. I had bits and pieces, but now I can see the whole picture of how we ended up here, by learning more about our history from different parts of the world and cultures and how we are connected. What happened before our time and learning it really explains and shows how our world got like this today. I'm allowed to think beyond myself and look at something bigger than me and actually understand it, something that raises my intellect. […] My motives and feelings are more mature now and I try not to do anything that doesn't have a real meaning or understanding behind it. I had grown in my adolescence just like everyone else, but I feel like even though I haven't achieved the moves I want to make my level of thinking is now a little above adolescence".

This student, along with and another who echoed similar sentiments, was a young man who often sought knowledge outside of the school. He mentioned to me that there was a Black man in their lives who was in his early 20s and would often talk to them about the history of Freemasonry in Ancient Egypt, as well as other topics, such as sacred geometry. A young man who was part of this group of friends spoke about the importance of knowledge and education in gaining an understanding of the histories of communities of color, pre-colonization, through resistance movements, and cycles of oppression. For him, this knowledge was transformative: "It's like knowing things can change the quality of your life. That's all I want. And life experience".

Critical Action

Beyond critical reflection, many students also showed a shift both short-term and long-term in critical action, through participation in social movements, as well as other community work. Through the Participatory Action Research Course, seniors created a survey on critical consciousness, modifying a survey created by Diemer, et al. (2017). Seniors administered the survey to all students who were not seniors in the program. Through this, one of the findings showed that 75% of students had "participated in a protest, march, political demonstration or political meeting" at least once. This attested to an already existing critical consciousness among many students. However, many of the alumni credited the development of this critical consciousness to their teachers and the curriculum in the Hands On Knowledge program. This was further evident in the questions that students asked me before signing the waivers to participate in this research. One student asked if the research would be used to create positive change, "for something real". I had conversations with them about what they sought to change, as well as the ways that the research would be used to inform program shifts for the future, which was done through the course of the research process.

It was a notable theme among alumni that the majority worked in their community in some way to create change, through volunteering or lifestyle choices. Tiago, who graduated in 2014, reported that his entire lifestyle and way of thinking were impacted by the program:

> "In terms of the social issues and things like that, I didn't think at all about this stuff before going into [Hands On Knowledge], which was like, this was again another really powerful piece that came out of [Hands On Knowledge] for me and I hope the teachers that prolong this legacy of [Hands On Knowledge] can still

keep introducing topics like this in such a way that students can become as passionate about them. But, no it was all [Hands On Knowledge] that introduced me to a lot of these issues. I am like, I'm on the verge of becoming like an environmental extremist, not in a destructive way obviously, but because of these concepts that I learned, like [the science teacher] for example would talk so much about natural, you know, the natural existence of things and the natural assembly of the world. And I guess we take a lot of those functions for granted, not because we don't care, but because they're not presented to us as often, as passionate or in a way that shows us that we can essentially be a change in anything. And, um, so they inspired a lot of the volunteerism that is essentially everything that I believe in and do".

Tiago's activism came through leading a low-impact lifestyle and talking to others about their impact on the environment. It was very much the teachers in the program that created the most notable shift in his thinking, which was partially created through their passion in certain issues. He noted that due to the impact of the previous History teacher he became a vegan. Due to the impact of the Science teacher, he became an environmental activist. For another student, his shift into community action came through the impact of one of the electives teachers in the program who taught martial arts and nutrition. This particular student continued to work with the teacher after the course, teaching younger children and working in community gardens. In separate case, the impact of the program came through the alumnus' growth in his leadership capacity, as well as inspiring him to create the change that he wanted to see in his university:

> "I'm a founder of a group called Fellowship of Manhood in which we create a space and a brotherhood for Black men on campus to overcome racism and institutionalized racism on campus in a predominantly white institution. And it's gonna keep going. I'm a living, breathing definition of what [Hands On Knowledge] can be and what it can do".

For many of the alumni, the teachers that were mentioned were from the earlier years of the program. In particular, many students highlighted the impact of the former History teacher, Alex, who was a white man and the former Math teacher, Kwame, who was a Black man. Current students did not mention any of the teachers in considering shifts in their thinking or the development of critical consciousness. This will be examined at the end of the chapter in understanding how the impact of the program differed during the different eras.

Lasting Impact

In addition to long-term commitment to activism, another theme that emerged in relation to the impact of the program was the importance of knowing one's history and the ways that this creates self-awareness and a desire to push for positive change. An additional theme that emerged in relation to the long-term impact of the program was creating a passion for knowledge and critical awareness of the word, understanding the lasting impact of shifts in critical consciousness. One alumnus highlighted this in mentioning how he always sought to understanding the information he received, whether it was in person or via media:

> "If I'm reading a book and I don't know what the word is, I feel like I have to go look it up. Or if I'm seeing something on TV that I'm not quite comprehending, I'll

look it up. So I'm constantly looking things up that I don't comprehend, I want to learn more about. So even then, that taught me that, don't just listen to something and just take what people say about it. You actually want to go and learn and understand it for yourself, and make a judgment based for yourself. So I took that away".

Huey, the current Math teacher, recalled the prior History teacher, Alex, sharing a similar sentiment with him about the impact of the program and the importance of thinking critically about the world around them:

"he talked about the fact that some of these kids are not doing well with the benchmarks but I can guarantee that in terms of the way that they're thinking about life, they're a lot better than they were, and I think that's where we come in, when [Hand On Knowledge] is tough because I don't believe they'll ever really give us credit for that. But I think helping our students to think differently about these systems and helping our students to look at them critically, that's outside of the mindset that they might have come in with outside of the typical school. I think we do an excellent job".

Shifting student patterns of thinking and critical consciousness, connected to understanding political contexts and pushing for change, was a clear pattern that emerged among alumni, both for recent graduates and students who had graduated ten years prior.

Socioemotional Impact

In considering the socioemotional impact of the program, key themes that emerged were related to anger management and growing understanding of the importance

of respect, both self-respect and respect for others. In consideration of this, these shifts were very much tied into constructions of racial and gendered identities.

Anger Management

Several alumni and current students described how the program allowed them to work through their anger. In considering this, it was essential to understand the ways that anger was connected to oppression, in thinking about experiences that students have had with policing and community violence, as well as trauma in their life. However, at the same time, anger has become racialized and gendered in the villainization of Black communities, particularly Black women.

> "For Black girls, to be 'ghetto' represents a certain resilience to how poverty has shaped racial and gender oppression. To be 'loud' is a demand to be heard. To have an 'attitude' is to reject a doctrine of invisibility and mistreatment" (Morris, 2016, p. 19).

A young Somali-American woman spoke about the ways that she had seen these dynamics and the ways that the program acted as a liberating space from disparaging stereotypes and images painted by the media:

> "In the outside world, they pan us out to be these angry people, that's just always mad and always trying to mess stuff up. But in here, we uplift each other, we know our background and where we come from and that we are not what they think we are".

This statement underscored this students' understanding of the ways that individuals and media sources racialized anger, as well as how the program provided a space to liberate students from this messaging. The shift occurred in understanding the

impact of media and messaging on their own self-image in the case of some students. For other students, there was a process of self-reflection on their own behavior and reactions, which created shifts. This was the case for Alejandra, an alumna who became a leader in the program through the Student Advisory Committee and Restorative Justice Committee. Alejandra examined this through some of the reflective writing that we did as part of the Youth Participatory Action Research Project:

> "This program has also helped me work on my temper. Any minor inconvenience used to be a big ordeal that had me yelling and cussing and acting a fool. This program has also turned me into a more compassionate person. I didn't have any regard for people's feelings or wants or needs at all. After a few months in the program I understood the importance of not being such a bitter soul all the time. It's not like I wanted to be like that; it was just kind of like a defensive mechanism for me. Believe it or not I used to get bullied a lot in Elementary and Middle school. Going through those experiences made me be rude to everybody. Being in [Hands On Knowledge] has also taught me to take more responsibilities for my own action. I used to blame every negative thing that happened to me on everybody around me. After about a year in the program I was substantially more self-reflective. I now understood that everything that happened to me was all my doing. I learned how to stop blaming others for my losses. After two years in the program I was a completely new person. I am now more mature, more aware of the world and, most importantly, critically conscious. [Hands On Knowledge] has instilled in me many positive attributes that I would otherwise never bother to learn. If I would've never started this program, I don't know where I would be in

life. Most likely in the same negative environment I was in before. In actuality I had already plans to most likely drop out".

Alejandra connected the shifts in her behavior to critical consciousness, as well learning more responsibility. In an interview with her, she also connected these shifts to the restorative justice processes in the program:

"If it was just for that, yo, they would have kicked me out mad long ago 'cause I did mad dumb shit when I first started. It's like they believe, I feel like, no bullshit, it does work. Not always, I don't feel like for every situation, like sometimes you need punishment, not punishment, but consequences. 'Cause it's not like you about to tear up the whole school and then you sit there and answer 20 questions and you're good. But I feel like for people that really take it serious and really learn from it, take back from it, it's helpful".

One alumnus connected the restorative justice process to a growth in responsibility through the work done by students to support their peers. He recalled one instance where a student was caught cheating and the rest of the students had to come up with reasoning for why he did it and what the consequences should be to make up for his actions. This particular student was one who was suspended regularly previous to being in the Hands On Knowledge program. For him, the restorative justice process allowed him to have more responsibility in school, which made him more engaged in the learning process.

A shift arose through the impact of the restorative justice program as well as a martial arts elective that existed for two years. Leonel examines the lasting impact of these two program elements:

> "When I was in [Hands On Knowledge], I was the one who did the restorative justice program. So while a lot of people don't necessarily know too much about me, they know that I'm very low voice, very nice, calm. Before, I actually grew up with really strong anger issues. Going into that setting, having some of this stuff that was like restorative justice and martial arts, I felt like going through school after not being in school for so long, I didn't feel overwhelmed at any point. I never felt flustered, frustrated. I mean, you'd get frustrated, that's the way it is, but I never felt like it was unbearable, that I was going to drop everything I was doing. I felt like, if I needed help, I'll get it".

Leonel's brother, also an alumnus, felt that something he gained in the program was an understanding of how to treat others with respect even when you are struggling: "How to treat people. Can't just be like my day's fucked up. I can't just treat you fucked up. Keeping your word". This was echoed by two current male students who mentioned that one of the key things they learned in the program was to treat others with respect, which was also noted by Leonel's brother who added that "a lot of people don't believe that we have a voice because they feel like their voice don't matter because it's one voice, when in all actuality every voice matters".

Emotional Support

The impact of the emotional support of staff members, as well as students, emerged as a theme that connected to the sense of community. This seemed to be a factor that impacted students' ability to manage emotions in school, as well as a desire to be in school. Although for some students the late policy made it more difficult to be in school, more than half of the staff members would text or call students on a daily basis,

sometimes giving them wake-up calls and multiple calls, to try to ensure they were able to make it school before the cut-off time. For several alumni, this was an important part of the program that allowed them to manage some of the trauma in their lives. One alumnus also connected this emotional support to acting as a protective factor against systemic oppression:

> "Diploma Plus has given me so much support; they have showed me how to keep on fighting because the rest of the world doesn't want us to; Keep on fighting even when you don't have any strength left, work through the weaknesses. DP showed me its ok to fail because that's a big part of success. It's what you do after that matters: if you challenge yourself to study your failure and become aware of your errors so you can do better".

This student tied support given to a critical reflection component of critical consciousness. This was also a connection made by the current math teacher who saw his support of this students as something that would hopefully impact their communities and create change:

> "I think it's very, very important, especially when our kids leave and go back to their communities, they need to bring that sort of love and appreciation of where they come from and then hopefully, critical consciousness to create the change that their community needs".

Respect

Many students noted a change in the way that they viewed the importance of respect, as well as how they treated others. Some students connected this to anger management in understanding that however they were feeling that particular day did not

necessarily need to be reflected in how they treated others. JC had experienced pieces of the injustice of the justice system through two arrests for minor offenses. His major takeaway from the program was in how to treat others:

> "How to treat people. Can't just be like my day's fucked up. I can't just treat you fucked up. Keeping your word. You gotta keep you're word. Shit that you really need. You feel what I'm saying?"

This particular statement came from an interview that a peer led as part of the Youth Participatory Action Research project in asking JC what he had learned during his time in the Hands On Knowledge program. This was also echoed through Alejandra's writing in what she had learned from the program:

> "After I finished last school year, I learned the importance of up lifting others as I was up lifting myself. It feels good to be somewhat of positive example for people to look up to. People always looked at me as the rude mean girl that you should never speak to but now I feel like people's perception of me has changed. Ubuntu has also taught me how to lead with love and respect".

Sundiata, the current director, was someone who had coined the phrase "lead with love and respect" during their time in the program. Sundiata would often repeat this phrase in morning circles, afternoon circles, one-on-one conversations with students, and transformative justice processes. Overall, it was clear from interviews and focus groups that students felt that their shift in behavior related to respecting others was connected to the mentorship of teachers in the program. Two terms that were repeatedly used to describe the program were "family" and "love". Students very much connected to the concept of "ubuntu", or "ubunity" as one student coined it. One young man who dropped

out of the program still felt that this was a piece of the program that left a lasting imprint on him through the passion of teachers to support the students:

> "They all had their own ways of impacting someone, even if it was not a way you thought it was impacting you, it was impacting you. There was Mr. [Kwame]. He let you figure stuff out by yourself. Everyone had a problem with him not teaching, but that was his way of having everyone come together and help each other and show that you could use your peers. We're all family here, everyone is striving for something, but another one that is striving for the same thing can help you. You might as well basically work together, just to finish. And that's showing you Ubuntu, to stay together. And that's a big word here. Oh, Mr. [Edmond]. He always definitely helped everyone. He'll even stay after and help. And then my first year there was also Mr. [Alex]. He was cool. He impacted everyone, definitely. He taught you everything about what's going on in the world. Like he had different outlooks on everything that makes you see things differently. And he was like always about taking us out on field trips, showing us different things. He also cared for us. He always brought us food and all that stuff".

This again connected to the emotional support that teachers provided through consistent presence and going above and beyond to create community in the program. Tiago, also an alumnus, noted that he saw the teachers "more as mentors than as teachers". In showing the deep impact that they had on his life, described previously in considering critical consciousness, he stated, "most of their perspectives I've adopted into my life". Although most students mentioned the core teachers and staff, one alumnus also

mentioned the impact of the martial arts teacher in helping him to grow in areas of self-control:

> "When I first started there, we had a martial arts elective. Growing up, I had always learned martial arts. And it's just interesting that we had a martial arts elective, just the fact that a lot of people have a negative mindset of martial arts. That it's all about fighting, and so on and so forth. But martial arts is all about self control, and learning to conquer certain things, in a nice peaceful inner self. A lot of the programs, like that, that somehow maybe negative feedback from other students, taking other programs. But then a lot of these had electives like that. They actually showed us that they actually had more faith in us than some people thought. Which was good for the students to see. So that was really cool".

Overall, it was clear that all of the staff had a deep love for the students and commitment to the work that they did, which created an impact for students in socioemotional growth, which very much overlapped with critical consciousness in understanding that some of their anger was tied to the systems impacting their life that they were unable to change. The current director highlighted that for them, a notable area of success for the program was in achieving the "love and respect" that they sought in the program:

> "I think DP has always been successful at loving black and brown youth. I don't think there's ever been a staff member who has been hired on this team that didn't genuinely have a love and respect for black and brown youth. When it comes to love, that's something that we do here better than, I don't mean to be biased and cocky, but I don't think there's another education team in this country, bump that,

in this world, that is as successful at love than we are. That's something that we don't need to work on or change because we love these kids. We love them like they are our own".

Shifts over time

Although respect was a notable area of positive impact for many alumni in the program, this was not something that was mentioned by current students in thinking about the short-term impact of the program. It seemed clear that this was also a factor of the program that had shifted over time. One alumnus who dropped out of the program, who had attended from 2015-2018, noted that he felt that the program was not as family-oriented as it used to be. He mentioned this in a year when the previous director and the previous English and History teachers had left the program. This was also evident in the larger number of physical fights in the program. Prior to the 2017-2018 school year, there had been no physical fights in the program for the prior five years. In the 2017-2018 school year, there was one fight in the program. In the following year, there were three fights during the school year in the program. The current math, Huey, teacher felt that respect was an area where the program currently needed to improve:

> "I think we can do a much better job with helping our students to respect one another when they walk into that space, so help our students to speak to one another differently when they come into that space. So I think making that space a little bit more sacred almost when they come in, I think we can do a better job".

Sundiata echoed this sentiment in noting that the culture and tone in the program had begun to shift:

> “Culture and tone we're starting to lose that. That was never really a problem. One of the problems in DP were how do we keep the kids coming every day and how do we get them to put pen to paper to do the skills part that is required of this district hear me clearly, not how do we teach them, how are we going to get them to be smart or be more intellectual or brilliant”.

JC also felt that staff needed to do a better job at setting the tone in being more serious about the program and the work being done. He felt that this would make students take the program more seriously and take their lives seriously: “You gotta take your life serious. You’re not here because you’re fucking up. You can’t take traditional school”

Academic Identity

Focus groups with current students and interviews with alumni revealed shifts in a sense of academic identity, which stemmed from a growing self-awareness. Many of the students held various leadership roles through the Student Advisory Board and the Restorative Justice Committee. For students, the first step towards success was gaining a better understanding of how they learned, as well as their own abilities. Leonel highlighted that he gained an understanding of the fact that he was more of a visual learner and struggled when a teacher was only talking. However, he learned that taking notes helped him to stay focused in these contexts, which allowed him further success in college. He had completed a degree at a technical school in automotive technology and now worked for BMW. He felt that through the Hands On Knowledge program, he had learned to hold himself more accountable for his own academic success, which allowed him to succeed in college. This was something he very much attributed to the previous

director of the program, Jin, who he saw as someone who would continuously hold him accountable while breaking down tasks into feasible steps.

Perception of ability

A major theme for alumni of various different graduating years, from 2009-2017, was a growth in the way that they perceived their own academic abilities. For many students, this idea of academic success had become racialized. This was highlighted by one student who dropped out of the program:

> "You don't have to be what everyone is waiting for you to be. Everybody already has, with African-Americans, everybody already has their little idea of what you're going to become. They just make you see that there's more possibilities. I could be a leader".

Most students did not connect success and leadership with their racial and cultural identities, particularly for Black and Latinx students in the program, prior to their time in this learning community. One alumnus, who went on to attend a competitive four-year university where he started a club for Black Men, noted that the program "gives students who are overlooked a chance to be students again, to be powerful students". This particular statement was made during a School Committee Meeting where alumni attended to petition against a possible closing of the program, which did not end up happening. For the former director of the program, a major area of success for the program was in shifting students' perceptions of self and the world:

> "I think it's certainly met kids' needs in that it inspired them to look at themselves and the world differently. I think a hundred percent. I think, even with the students that we did not serve well, I think if a student spent at least six months

> with us, they left with that. Certainly, if a student spent a year with us. Absolutely, if they spent more than a year with us. I do feel like students' world view and self-view have been altered forever".

The shift for most students in perception of their abilities was attributed to the staff in the program. Tiago noted that the passion and mentorship of the teachers "both created a more passionate environment to learn within and apart from that […] there was so much moral growth […], especially our perspectives of the things we do and who we are in the world". Certain students attributed different pieces of their growth to particular teachers in the program. One alumnus felt that the previous History and English teachers, Sonia and Alex, showed him that he knew more than he thought he did. In his words, "that helped me feel like I can actually go better myself, and not just think that it's just something I don't need in this life". The previous Math teacher, Kwame, was another educator who had a notable impact on various students. Several alumni compared him to a father figure. Leonel noted, "he taught me, you'll learn as much as you really want to learn, and you can't leave it to someone to want to teach you. To learn, you have to go and get it yourself". Leonel's brother, another alumnus, mentioned that he felt that Kwame saw much in himself that he didn't see. The current Math teacher saw this as an area of success in exposing students to different ways of thinking:

> "I think we do a really good job of making kids who would not be comfortable in traditional school settings comfortable, and that doesn't always mean that they're succeeding academically off the bat. But getting them in the door and getting them around some of our practices and getting them to kind of be exposed to certain ideas and certain thinking is important and you might not be able to

quantify that by the success that they're having immediately, but I do think that we do a good job".

Public Speaking

A key area of growth was public speaking. One alumnus who graduated in 2016, felt that a key component that he gained from the program was an understanding of the power of his voice, which provided him a growth in leadership. In responding to how he continued to be impacted by the program in 2019, he responded:

"I would say leadership, independence, and being able to actually have people listen to you. They always say that your voice is powerful. I've always known my voice was powerful because I like talking, but I didn't know how powerful it was. So that would be one of them. I would say the knowledge of the world now, just things that are happening that I didn't even know about before. The way life is set up".

Other alumni highlighted public speaking, which allowed them to feel that they could be mentors for others and speak up when needed. One of these students was a student who testified at the School Committee Meeting, which was something he felt he never would have the confidence to do if it weren't for his growth during his time in the program. In considering shifts towards advocacy and action, a current student also mentioned that there was a networking component in the program that allowed for some of this growth where students were pushed to support each other more:

"I learned the importance of networking and actually talking to people. The way that I was raised, I was raised to be really independent and do shit on my own because nobody is gonna nothin' for you. You have to do it for yourself so I've

> always had that mentality. Nobody is gonna help me, nobody is gonna want to help me so I gotta do it on my own, but sometimes there are people that are gonna want to help you if you just ask for it. So, now I understood the importance of asking for help [inaudible] because I used to be a very prideful person. Especially in Math. That's why I have issues in Math now. I would never ask nobody for no help. Like in normal school, that's how it really felt. I'm the stupid one. I'm not gonna sit here and ask no one for no help. Upstairs people would clown me for not understanding something, but down here it's like ok you I don't get math, but you don't get ELA. I'll help you with Math".

This provided a testament to the impact of the program culture, as well as the familial component in the program. Students also regularly took leadership roles by leading the morning or afternoon circles, which allowed for opportunities to become comfortable with public speaking within their community. Further opportunities were provided through community symposiums.

Shifts through the eras

Through the different eras of the program, it was clear that the impact of the program differed notably. Through focus groups with current students and interviews with alumni and staff, there seemed to be three eras of the program's existence. The first era was the origins of the program. This could be traced to the 2009-2011 school years. The second era was a shift towards an emancipatory pedagogy, which emerged through the previous director and previous staff members in the program from 2011-2017. The last era is the current era, 2017 – present through which various shifts have occurred in the program, many of them negative, based on perceptions of current students and alumni

who were part of the previous current eras. Data sources from the different eras are noted in figure 6.1, highlighting the eras when each person interviewed or who participated in a focus group was part of the program.

	Origins		Building emancipatory pedagogies						Current Era	
	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
Alumni										
Alejandra										
Emmanuel										
Tiago										
Jaden										
Marco										
Leonel										
Jaime										
Santiago										
James										
Michael										
Aracely										
Focus Groups										
Admin										
Sundiata										
Jin										
Teachers										
Leah										
Huey										
Tia										
Testimonies										

Figure 6.1 Program Eras and Data Sources

Origins

Leah, one of the co-creators of the program, spoke about the origins of the program, rooted in feeling the need to do something different based on seeing low student attendance and higher discipline for students. In the first two years of the program, students were able to take online classes. This was something that one alumnus, Jaime, from the first year of the program found impactful in allowing him to graduate during the first year. There were also limitations in data collected on this era since only one alumnus and two staff members (Leah and Jin) were interviewed who were in the program during this period. Leah also mentioned that graduation rates were higher in the program during

the first two years since program requirements were more lenient. During those origin years, some of the key culture elements of the program began to emerge through the Math teacher, Kwame. Kwame taught in the program from the initial year, in 2009, up until 2016.

Building emancipatory pedagogies

During the shift towards a pedagogy of resistance, there were several components of the program that deeply impacted students. The main component was the mentorship and support of the teachers in the program, as well as the focus on building critical consciousness. An additional key component was the restorative justice component. In considering mentorship, Kwame was one person who had an initial impact as an important mentor for several alumni. Leah and Sundiata also mentioned that Kwame was someone who created much of the culture and structure of the program that continued into the present. He developed the idea of having teach-ins, as well as the morning circle. He was also someone that alumni recalled as having high standards and pushing students to support each other in their learning. Further into this particular era, the previous History teacher, Alex, was also important person who pushed the critical consciousness component of the program. Through his course, various alumni noted feeling that their perspective on the world shifted. Students who attended the program during this era also highlighted the familial atmosphere of the program, which impacted student engagement in school, as well as shifts in anger management. Restorative justice was also cited as a factor that created shifts in these areas, particularly the student-led restorative justice committee. Related to this was a growth in the understanding of the importance of

respect. In addition, shifts in perception of ability and growth in public speaking skills were other areas of impact for students who attended the program in this era.

Current Era

In the current era of the program, there were less clear positive impacts of the program. The key area of impact in the program was through shifts in identity, both racial and related to sexuality. A notable theme that emerged through focus groups with current students was a shift in racial identity, through embracing an Afrocentric identity, while also building a sense that Blackness and success were and should be connected. There was also a shift for current students in thinking about sexuality and normalizing non-binary, non-cisgender identities. For many of the male students, this was a continuous process, but one that began during their time in the program. In other areas, alumni who experienced the shift from the previous director to the current director felt that the tone in the program shifted in a negative way. This was also noted by the current director, Sundiata, as well as staff who had been a part of both eras. No specific reasons from staff and students were postulated for this change.

In considering the shift in tone, staff felt that respect had become an area of the program that needed more work in ensuring there was respect among students. A theme that emerged through focus groups with current students was that there was currently a lack of organization within the program. One student stated, “y’all half ass it”. Another student said, “everything is a split decision”, referring to feeling like staff were not on the same page. This will be examined further in the program limitations in understanding potential roots for this issue. However, in considering other changes that might have impacted the shift in tone, electives were removed in the 2018-2019 school year and it

was the first school year that there was not a symposium held for all students to present projects. Seniors held a Financial Education assembly in place of this, but other students were not required to participate. A notable shift in the program was through a reduction in graduation rates over the course of time. In the 2018-2019 school year, six students graduated, while in the 2017-2018 school year, four students graduated. That year was a low for the program in the entire history of the program. Graduation rates were not available for most other years, but the previous director noted that graduation rates had been notably higher in previous years. Leah noted that graduation rates were highest in the first year of the program, which she credited to low requirements.

Program Failures

In considering the impact of the Hands On Knowledge program, it was also important recognize the areas where little impact or a negative impact was made. Similar to other educational programs with emancipatory frameworks, there were challenges that limited the extent to which a school could implement pedagogies that promoted decolonization and liberation. In one Afrocentric program in Chicago, the failure of the program was credited to differing philosophies among staff and administrators (Robinson & Jeremiah, 2011), which affected the program organization. Teachers in the Chicago program felt that there should have been more professional development around the Afrocentric concepts to ensure that staff were all on the same page (Robinson & Jeremiah, 2011). This became an issue in the Hands On Knowledge program as several staff left between 2016-2019 due to differences with one of the administrators. Overall, the primary failures of the program existed through low attendance, low graduation rates and higher staff turnover.

Attendance

One of the key areas where the program struggled was in attendance. Of course, it was important to note that most students in the program were recommended to Hands On Knowledge due to low attendance or having been out of school for a year or more. Thus, attendance was always going to be a primary area that the program needed to tackle. This was an area that all current staff members saw as a key problem in the program. One alumnus noted that for him it was the “biggest failure” of the program. Another current student spoke about the importance of giving multiple challenges and being understanding of missing school, which was something she felt that the program did well. She felt this allowed for students to keep coming back from the program, whereas in traditional school their family might be sent to court for high absences, which created further disengagement for some students. Overall, attendance had been an issue throughout the existence of the program, an area that most alternative programs struggle with (Wilkerson, et al., 2016).

Graduation Rates

In relation to graduation rates, this is something that has shifted over the course of the program’s existence. As mentioned previously, graduation rates were high in the first two years of the program. Leah, the co-founder of the program, saw this as an area of success during the initial years:

> “I think that we did not succeed in closing some of the gaps. I think we still graduated some people who did not have all the skills they need to succeed in school. But they had done the things, you know? They had taken feedback and tried really hard and they had grown in so many ways, but we did definitely

> graduate students who did not have high school level skills. So we didn't do a good job closing some of the major gaps across content but we were very successful in helping people feel like successful students. And many who had never thought that in their lives".

Leah cited ways that she felt the program was successful and unsuccessful in graduating students. The previous director, Jin, felt that staff failed in the initial years in meeting student needs. However, he also noted that in the past few years there was "an enormously high failure rate". This was also seen as an issue by more recent alumni. For two students who dropped out of the program, they felt that it was related to personal issues and that there was nothing the program could have done to keep them in school. This was no doubt a factor in lower graduation rates, but it may have been impacted by shifts in expectations. Jin noted that the struggle for current staff was in having high expectations for students and also re-engaging students who had been disengaged, which was "the hardest job in the world what we're trying to do".

Staff Turnover

The last major issue in the program, primarily as cited by staff was the high staff turnover rates. Sundiata, the current director, saw this as a notable issue in building trust with students:

> "The first thing these kids are going through in their mind is, 'I can't trust anybody'. Why the fuck would I trust you. You're going to leave like everybody else. You're going to leave like my mom, my dad, my grandparents and people leave them for different reasons. Leave them because they're jerks and assholes, leave them because they never got to find out the way. Leave them from that, but

> it always feels like a loss for these kids. When you're not staying, I think that it should be a requirement that you have to do a minimum of three years in [Hands On Knowledge], three or five years before you can leave. It should be a real commitment because the tenderness of this youth, it doesn't work with a revolving door. There's nothing to leave behind. No program should be based around one person or certain people and that's something that the DP kids struggle with and I can speak for myself and speak for different things".

Two staff members left when Sundiata became the director in 2017, with two counseling and support staff leaving the following year and two teachers, including myself, leaving at the end of the 2018-2019 school year. There were politics within the program that created high staff turnover. Jin realized within his first year that these politics had existed from the origins of the program due to shifts in leadership. The original director of the program, a Black woman, was not offered the opportunity to continue as director for the second year and the position was offered to Jin. After this, there were issues when the current director took the position. Two staff members left at this time. Both of these staff members stated that they would prefer not to be interviewed in relation to the program. Other staff members left and there was little discussion about the reasons behind their leaving. However, from observations within the program, it seemed clear that there was tension between several other staff members and the current director. This tension was likely perceived by students. A theme that emerged from the focus groups with current students was that the teachers were "hypocrites" and policies frequently shifted in the program, which they felt benefited certain staff rather than students.

CHAPTER SEVEN:
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The research reported on here was enhanced by my role in the program, which began several years prior to formal data collection. Before the research began, I worked at the school co-leading an internship experience, then as a long-term substitute teacher and an Arabic elective teacher. Following this, I began formally working in the program as a Guidance Counselor in the 2017-2018 school year, then also as a History teacher for seniors during the 2018-2019 school year. These experiences allowed for day-to-day interactions with students and staff, as well as deep relationships to be built between students, staff and me. In viewing the school as a potential model for emancipatory pedagogies, I sought to answer the following questions through this research:

1. What led youth of color in the Hands On Knowledge program to previously be pushed out of traditional education systems?
2. What are the particular emancipatory pedagogies that promoted decolonization and liberation among students in the Hands On Knowledge program?
3. How did the Hands On Knowledge curriculum, based on decolonizing and emancipatory pedagogies, affect the identity construction of youth?

Through the previous three chapters, I answered each of these questions in detail. I will highlight findings below and articulate how these findings can be used in developing a model for emancipatory pedagogies. I will then briefly address limitations of the study and implications for policy, practice and future research.

RQ1: Push Out Factors

Students were referred to the Hands On Knowledge program based on previous disengagement with school, evident through low attendance and a lack of credits. Through interviews with alumni of the program and focus groups with current students, I gained an understanding of the multiplicity of factors that impacted student disengagement. Key factors that emerged were disconnect with teachers, disconnect with the curriculum, feeling overwhelmed by classwork, lack of teacher support, criminalization, and personal trauma (see figure 4.1 in chapter 4). The primary factors, mentioned by the largest number of students, were related to criminalization and teacher-student relationships.

One area that seemed to impact female students more than male students was getting in trouble for their "mouth". This echoed findings from Monique Morris (2016) related to the ways that Black girls were criminalized by beliefs and practices that pushed them out of schools. Students from the Hands On Knowledge program reported, similarly to responses from research done by Morris (2016), that teachers were often disrespectful to them and argued with them. Students felt this was never addressed by administrators. Related to this, both male and female students reported experiences with biased-disciplinary systems, both in and out of schools (e.g. police, school resource officers, administrators, teachers). These experiences of criminalization were heightened by physical structures of confinement, including metal detectors in the schools and a lack of windows.

Another key theme that emerged related to student disengagement was a disconnect with educators. Overall, students felt that their teachers in traditional schools

did not support them or care about them. Several students connected this to forms of favoritism in the classroom, which might have also related to lower expectations that exist for Black and Latinx students, particularly in Math and ELA (Cherng, 2017). Students' academic expectations for themselves are also often lower when teacher expectations are low (Cherng, 2017). In particular, students in this study did not feel valued in traditional classrooms and felt that there was a lack of support. Many young people felt that teachers failed to understand the issues going on in their lives and were not empathetic. This connected to previous research findings from a study conducted in the Midwest noting that student-teacher relationships were correlated with student engagement (Murray, 2009). Students in the Hands On Knowledge program also noted that they felt disconnected from what they were learning in their previous classrooms.

School-based factors were compounded by personal trauma, which was sometimes related to neighborhood-based factors. Many students had experienced neighborhood violence and the deaths of family or friends. Through these multiple factors that were often connected, disengagement became a means of resistance for many students, actively and passively pushing back against these structures by removing themselves from traditional educational environments. These were the educational contexts that students came from, before they entered the Hands On Knowledge program, that the alternative program sought to shift through an emancipatory pedagogical model.

RQ 2: Framework for an emancipatory pedagogical model

A model for emancipatory pedagogies emerged through themes that came out of student focus groups, alumni interviews, and staff interviews. This model connected to existing models of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies, expanding substantially

on the model proposed by Ladson-Billings (1995a) that highlighted teachers who could "develop students academically", "support cultural competence", and develop sociopolitical consciousness (p. 483).

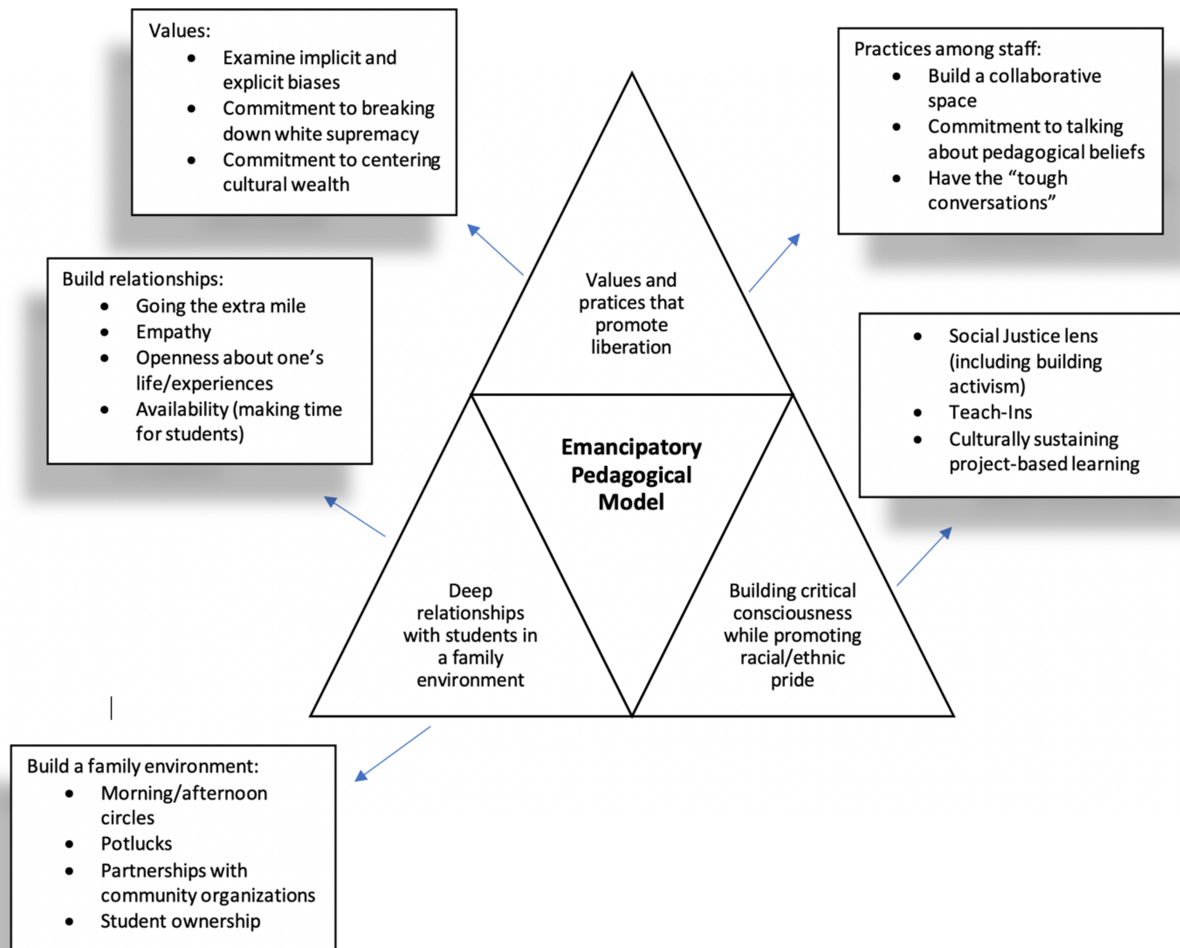

Figure 7.1 Emancipatory Pedagogical Model

Figure 7.1 illustrated three key practices that emerged, promoting decolonization and liberation among students:

1. Develop values and practices that promote liberation
2. Build deep relationships with students in a family environment

3. Build critical consciousness while promoting racial/ethnic pride

Values and practices that promote liberation

There were two parts to the top triangle (as seen in figure 7.1). The first was developing values that promoted decolonization and liberation while the second centered practices that promoted decolonization and liberation. While concise, values and practices are the most complex dimensions that go into building emancipatory pedagogies. Ladson-Billings (2014), as well as Paris and Alim (2014), argued that a pitfall of culturally relevant pedagogy put into practice was that many educators failed to commit to the sociopolitical elements of the work. In developing values, the first step was to examine implicit and explicit biases that one might have as a teacher or administrator. In doing this, each person examined the ways that they might be complicit in upholding structures of white supremacy. This step often looked different for people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Jin and Leah, an Asian and a White administrator and teacher respectively, were pushed to do this by Black staff members, namely Kwame and later Sundiata. Through these experiences, Leah learned that as a White person it was her job to do this work, not the job of people of color to educate her. This difficult process was reflective of the model of white identity formation postulated by Janet Helms (1990). Helms (1990) saw the first stage as "contact", which was a colorblind stance. Once this stance shifted due to a particular experience, there was a move into the stage of "disintegration". For Leah and Jin, these experiences were encounters, confrontations, and discussions with Kwame and Sundiata. Leah spoke about coming to terms with realizing that it was not the responsibility of people of color to confront racism, moving beyond the "pseudo-independence" stage into "immersion/emersion". The final stage,

"autonomy", was having a positive connection to white identity while also being actively anti-racist. This seemed to be a stage that most white staff in the Hands On Knowledge program may have reached during their time working in the program.

For staff of color, the process of examining implicit and explicit biases might involve examining internalized racism, as was the case with Tia. This connected to DeWalt's (2013), expanded version of Cross and Vandiver's (2001) model of Black racial development, which started with the internalization of beliefs about the dominance of white culture and/or an unawareness of racial implications. The final stage, which seemed to be one that all staff of color in the Hands On Knowledge program who were interviewed were at, was "internalization-commitment". DeWalt (2013) highlighted the importance of building a Pan-African identity, particularly for immigrant origin Black communities, as part of this process, something that was applicable to Tia as the daughter of Jamaican immigrants. The final stage was related to a strong sense of racial identity and commitment to your community, as well as others. The other stages will be examined more in the next section. Intertwined with this was also recognizing the importance of having teachers who ethnically and racially reflect the students in the program. Leah felt that she was able to leave the program once this was the case.

The last component identified in developing values that promoted liberation was a commitment to centering the cultural wealth of the students, which also included uplifting their cultural/racial backgrounds. This particular component was something that students identified as a component that reengaged them in learning, as well as a factor that staff found impactful in the program. This was similar to the findings of an immigrant based school, where staff members were also mainly of immigrant origin and

centered the identities of students, which made students see the school as a space of belonging (Jaffe-Walter & Less, 2018). This particular value was also very much tied to the third key practice in promoting racial/ethnic pride, as seen in figure 7.1.

In developing practices that promoted liberation and decolonization, the first step was to build collaborative spaces. In the Hands On Knowledge program, this was done through retreats at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. These retreats were used to talk about why we did the work and provide feedback to each other on our strengths and weaknesses. Some of this work was done through restorative circles, while other pieces were done through activities in the retreats. Different components of meetings were led by different staff members. Through these retreats, as well as multiple weekly staff meetings, collaborative spaces were built among staff. These spaces also allowed for time to talk about pedagogical beliefs and have "tough conversations" about practices that do and do not promote liberations, as noted in figure 7.1. This was also done in an Afrocentric emancipatory school in Chicago where camaraderie was built among staff, allowing them to speak openly about shortcomings (Robinson & Jeremiah, 2011).

Deep relationships with students in a family environment

The second key practice in building emancipatory pedagogies was focused on building deep relationships with students by building a supportive family environment within the school. In the Hands On Knowledge program, staff built relationships with students through their passion for the work, being available outside of core class time, and being open about their lives. The impact of educators who went the extra mile was also noted in a California alternative school where one student stated that, "everybody

was willing to help you. And…they were glad to do it instead of at a regular school. [There] it was like a burden for them to have to do it" (Loutzenheiser, 2002, p. 455). In addition, two key themes mentioned by alumni and current students were that staff often understood the situations students were dealing with, which connected to both staff empathy as well as ethnic matching. Previous research has found that students of color generally have more positive relationships with teachers of color compared to white teachers (Eddy & Easton-Brooks, 2011). In the Hands On Knowledge program, students had strong relationships with all teachers, which was likely impacted by the internal work that teachers had done related to their own biases, in addition to their commitment to students.

In building a family environment within the school, students and alumni mentioned morning/afternoon circles and potlucks. Some alumni also highlighted that feedback was often sought from students, which was also mentioned by a current teacher. Lastly, community partnerships through courses and electives were seen by students as an important part of building community. Community building practices have been a key characteristic for various culturally sustaining programs, including the *Raza Studies* program in Tucson (McGinnis & Palo, 2011), a Māori community-managed school (Rau & Ritchie, 2011), as well as an African-centered emancipatory model (Potts, 2003). Similar to methods used in the Hands On Knowledge program, these programs involved community members as leaders, held core values related to community, and created practices for students to bond.

Build critical consciousness while promoting racial/ethnic pride

The last key practice in building emancipatory pedagogies was teaching in a way that built critical consciousness and promoted pride in one's racial and/or cultural identity. This section of the triangle connected to the qualities of African-centered emancipatory pedagogy postulated by Potts (2003) in addressing social oppression, acknowledging "students as agents for social change" and affirming African culture (p. 175). The Hands On Knowledge program did this through a curriculum that focused on Black history, a Social Justice lens, teach-ins and project-based learning (done in a way that was culturally sustaining). The impact of similar forms of teaching has been seen in Tucson through the *Raza Studies* program, which notably increased graduation rates (McGinnis & Palo, 2011). Graduation rates were not available for this study, but the impact was seen in growth in critical consciousness, as well as shifts in academic identity, among others, as will be noted in the next section. These shifts were notable for students who had previously experienced educational systems as oppressive, highlighted by experiences of disengagement in traditional school before entering the Hands On Knowledge program.

RQ3: Impact on Identity Construction

Through the observations, interviews with alumni and staff, and focus groups with current students, key themes emerged related to the ways that the pedagogy from RQ2 impacted the identity construction of youth. The key areas impacted were racial identity, gender identity, and the development of critical consciousness, which were often intertwined.

There are a multitude of theories related to the stages of racial identity that an individual experiences. Two main theories are that of Cross and Vandiver (2001) and

Phinney, Lochner and Murphy (1990). Cross and Vandiver's (2001) model, mentioned briefly above, focused primarily on the development of a Black identity, whereas Phinney, Lochner and Murphy (1990) postulated an ethnic identity model for "minorities". Other authors (i.e. Kim, 1981; Arce, 1981; Ruiz, 1990) have focused on models centered around particular ethnic groups. According to Cross and Vandiver (2001) the first stage was an "pre-encounter", which was the de-emphasis of one's racial group and/or belief that the dominant group is superior. The second stage was the "encounter" stage where someone was forced to acknowledge the role of racism in their life due to an event or series of events. Most students entered the Hands On Knowledge program in this stage, having experienced police brutality or educator bias, among other factors. This was often connected to what some alumni identified as having an "anger problem". Many of the students were rightfully frustrated by the experiences they faced outside of the classroom, including police brutality. The third stage was "immersion/emersion" where someone sought to explore their culture and surround themselves in this culture. Many students moved into this stage during their time in the program, as well as the next stage, "internalization", where someone was proud of their racial identity while also being willing to engage with others outside their group who respected their identities. The final stage was "internalization-commitment", a sustained commitment to one's community. This connected to the action piece of critical consciousness, which many alumni credited to their time in the program. Cross (1978) initially developed this model in considering identity shifts related to the Black Power movement. DeWalt (2013) problematized this model in noting a gap in addressing consciousness issues related to identity construction for Black immigrant origin youth.

His focus was on the children of immigrants from African nations. Cross and Vandiver's (2001) model was apt in examining some of the racial identity shifts for students in the program, but no doubt leaves out many factors, including the impact of Hip Hop culture, which has been found to impact the values and identities of Black youth, particularly in emphasizing the importance of respect (Beauchum & McCray, 2011). The emphasis that students in the program placed on the importance of respect connected both to identity, as well as to their relationships or lack of relationships with teachers (more the former during their time in the program). It is also important to recognize the limitations of racial identity models in being rooted in Eurocentric, colonial modalities. In particular, one potential issue that racial identity models promote is the idea that people of color need to "get over" anger and resentment connected to experiences of racism (Shin, 2014). In addition, other social identity categories, including gender, are excluded from these models (Shin, 2014; Constantine, et al., 1998). Identities are layered and complex, which was evident in the multiple identities of students, from national identity to racial identity, sexual identity, gender, and others.

Shifts in racial identity were intertwined with shifts in academic identity. One theme that emerged was the shift among students in creating a connection between being Black and being successful. This was similar to findings from an Afrocentric school where by the end of the first year, students were less reactive and felt that they didn't give up as easily (Robinson & Jeremiah, 2011). Direct links have also been found between a strong ethnic identity and academic achievement (Hernández, et al., 2017; Grantham & Ford, 2003). In the Hands On Knowledge program, this was evidenced through the construction of positive connections between students' identities and histories of

resistance and strength. In the emancipatory and culturally relevant schools and programs described in chapter two, self-esteem was notable factor in the success of the programs (Palmas Salinas, 2017*;* Whitinui, 2010; Robinson & Jeremiah, 2011). A stronger ethnic identity was also found as a factor relating to the success of programs (Potts, 2003; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2013; Cabrera, Meza, Romero, & Cintli Rodríguez, 2013; Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018; Whitinui, 2010). In the Hands On Knowledge program, alumni often attributed the shift in their academic identities to the impact of certain staff members who encouraged them and pushed them to accomplish more.

Shifts in gender identity were also tied to racialized identities. For many young men in the program, the shift occurred in relation to notions and internalizations of hegemonic masculinity. Young men in the program spoke about how the program exposed them to different gender identities and trans individuals in ways that they had not previously experienced. Some of the young men struggled with accepting ways that they felt other gay young men in the program acted in portraying their identity (i.e. wearing wigs). Queer youth of color are often more likely to disengage from their school community (Koswic & Diaz 2005; Russell, 2004) and face derogatory remarks from other students (Grady, et al., 2012). Some of the young men in the program had spoken derogatorily about their queer peers, while others were in different stages of coming to accept and support queer and trans students.

Another shift that occurred for both male and female students in the program was related to anger management. For young Black men, anger had been connected to an absence of spaces or people with whom these young men can talk about the multitude of

stressors in their lives, often connected to systemic inequities (Goodwill, et al., 2018). This was addressed in the program through the use of talking circles and spaces for students to talk about the issues they were facing in their lives. For young women in the program, being loud had been something that several students had been policed for by previous teachers and administrators. This connected to Morris' (2016) findings about the criminalization of young women of color.

Answerability

Leigh Patel (2016) suggests answerability as a tool to undo coloniality in research by "being responsible, accountable and being a part of an exchange" (p. 73). As a practitioner in the program, as well as a researcher, the practice of answerability is essential for me in seeking to practice emancipatory pedagogies by actively working to undo the coloniality embedded in school structures. This work is also informed by pedagogies of liberation and liberation psychology in considering who benefits from this research and whose voices are highlighted. I will not call myself an emancipatory educator because that is something that I consistently work towards while recognizing the coloniality of structures that we teach within and the limitations that these structures create.

In building a liberation psychology praxis, through which power dynamics are challenged in this research (Montero, Sonn, & Burton, 2017), part of the work involved interrogating my own role as an educator and guidance counselor in the program. In navigating some of these power dynamics, I sought to implement dialogical ethics (Watkins & Shulman, 2008) by co-formulating the research with participants. The impetus for this research began through a conversation with the previous director of the

program where he mentioned it would be useful to have more research on the impact of the Hands On Knowledge curriculum. As the project advanced, I sought to highlight some of the perspectives of youth through the Youth Participatory Action Research project. During these sessions, students guided some of the questions asked, as well as analyzed some of the alumni interviews. A limitation here was that students were not the ones driving the larger research questions asked. However, the research questions came out of my observations in the programs in earlier stages as a long-term substitute teacher and electives teacher.

In working to ensure that this research served a liberatory function, I implemented findings into my own work as an educator, as well as shared findings along the way with staff, which impacted small changes in the program. I worked to create a space where students felt that they had voice in my course. The difficulty sometimes came in creating spaces for students who wanted to work quietly and for students who had a lot on their mind to share, as well as conflicts that occasionally arose through these dynamics. Many of the students who were in my class expressed it as a point of pride that they were in my class, which they perceived as the one of the most difficult classes in their senior year, along with math. One student, who I continue to support through check-ins with his family, shared in a circle where the purpose was to evaluate staff, that he didn't always like that I was always "on [his] back", as he put it, but that he always appreciated that I was constantly pushing him and checking in with him, something he felt he needed. Thus, part of my commitment through this research, was and continues to be to support and push the young people that I had the pleasure to work with during this time, as they also pushed me.

In relation to my colleagues in the program, conversations had in staff meetings, such as the ones I mentioned in chapter five, were also spaces where I was able to share some of my findings with staff members. I will also be sharing these findings in different ways with different staff members. The Principal of the larger school has requested a recording of me presenting the research. The previous and current directors requested a summary of the research. The current assistant director and math teacher chose to attend my dissertation defense, both as friends and practitioners in the program. I will also make myself available for any further discussions of the findings.

In working towards emancipatory pedagogies, as professor of education, I have incorporated this research into courses that I teach on the Sociology of Education and teaching bilingual learners for future educators. It is difficult work to push young people who hope to be educators to recognize their own implicit biases, as well as understand the systems of coloniality that continue to exist in traditional educational structures, as well as many alternative educational structures. This work is a constant process as I seek more creative ways to build critical consciousness among the college students that I teach, in working to ensure they are better prepared to be in classrooms in reciprocal relationships, rather than in a banking model of education (Freire, 2009).

Implications for policy, practice, and research

Through this research, I sought to highlight the voices of youth of color through interviews with alumni, focus groups with current students, and Youth Participatory Action Research (including peer interviews). I also conducted interviews with current and previous staff in the program, teachers and administrators. All too often the voices of youth are not included in academic research. This is often compounded for youth of color

and is also the case for educators of color. Part of an emancipatory pedagogical model requires us to bring forth these perspectives, through curriculum, pedagogy, and teacher-student interactions. This research highlights these voices by examining areas that one alternative school has found success in building emancipatory pedagogies, as well as places that the program has fallen short. Through both the successes and failures of the program, there are a multitude of implications for policy, practice and research.

Implications for policy

It has long been clear that the U.S. education system fails youth of color and the source of the problem is multifaceted. On a national scale, shifts in education have often been focused on standardized testing, holding schools accountable with tests that have been proven to be biased (Farrell & Lawrence, 2016). In recognition of this, there are clear shifts that need to occur in schools in order to support the academic achievement of youth of color. First is the importance of smaller classes. One study examined the positive impact of small classes in alternative schools (Dugger & Dugger, 1998). In traditional schools, small classes have also been found to be more impactful for low-income youth of color (Dynarski, et al., 2011). From this study, large class size and disconnect from teachers were key factors that pushed students out of school. In reengaging students, faculty in this program were able to commit themselves more to students due to the small classes. For many students in the Hands On Knowledge program, the relationship with their teacher was a key factor in their academic success. This was also connected to ethnic matching, but very much influenced by the small class size.

The second policy implication is for the elimination of state-wide standardized testing. Multiple studies have shown bias within standardized testing structures, particularly bias that impacts young people of color (Farrell & Lawrence, 2016). For the students in the Hands On Knowledge program, overwhelmingly there was a sense that the state-required standardized tests were keeping them from graduating, yet another barrier that stood in their way. For students who completed all requirements, but had yet to pass the state Math test, it was a constant struggle to maintain their motivation to stay connected with school so that they could take this test. Previous research has shown that variance in test scores is impacted more by socioeconomic status and racial factors, than school-based factors, across all levels of K-12 schooling (White et al., 2016). Thus, it seems there is a dire need to shift the reliance on standardized tests in schools.

The third policy implication in this study is the importance of promoting emancipatory pedagogies on a wider basis. Findings demonstrated growth in critical consciousness and leadership skills, including public speaking. This particular study did not examine academic success in the traditional sense, through graduation rates and GPA. However, previous studies have found correlations between stronger racial and ethnic identities and academic success (Hernández, et al., 2017; Grantham & Ford, 2003). This is also intertwined with the previous policy implication, which is the importance of supporting the development of educators from low-income communities of color, in considering the importance of building pride in one's racial or ethnic identity.

Implications for practice

In considering teacher educator programs and professional development for current teachers, there needs to be a much more concerted effort to ensure that all

teachers, but particularly white teachers, are able to spend the necessary time interrogating their own biases and understanding ways that they are complicit in upholding structures of white supremacy. It is also important to recognize this as a continual process that should be embedded in all educational structures, rather than including it as a one-time professional development session or as an activity in a teacher education course. As mentioned by Jin and Leah through their interviews, this is difficult work. Both of them talked about how they would sometimes go home crying, feeling that they weren't doing the work right. However, in the end, the tough conversations and confrontations allowed them to be more effective educators for youth of color. There has recently been work done in teacher education programs to incorporate an examination of racism and white fragility, but these implementations are often done superficially (Lensmire et al., 2013). Members of the Midwest critical Whiteness Collective problematize the use of Peggy McIntoch's seminal "knapsack" article as a stand-in for the deeper antiracist, action-based work that needs to be done by white teachers (Lensmire st al., 2013). It is important to recognize that change comes out of making someone feel uncomfortable. As noted prior in Helms' (1990) model, the key shift in moving towards an actively anti-racist stance was an experience that confronted prior beliefs about being non-racist or colorblind. This was evident in the experiences of Leah and Jin, which notably shifted their pedagogical philosophies.

In addition, it should be understood that becoming an anti-racist educator is very much intertwined with all elements of critical consciousness, including sociopolitical action. This does not mean that attending protests will help you become a better educator. Rather, there needs to be a commitment to working towards structural change in schools,

understanding the difficulties that this can pose as an educator. In understanding traditional schools as upholding values of coloniality, seeking to become an emancipatory educator includes constantly pushing back against these structures. In my experience as an educator, this can often mean going against school and district policies that maintain the status-quo. Part of this work is also an answerability to students, in committing to seeking feedback and working in collaborative relationships with the young people that you "teach" as you learn from them. Through my time in the Hands On Knowledge program, I cannot express in words the extensive amount that I learned from the brilliant young people that I worked with.

Related to this work was the importance of supporting educators of color in teacher education programs and schools. Both students and staff mentioned the importance of having staff that represented the communities that students came from, which was also noted above. In ensuring that young people of color, particularly those from lower income communities or households, can make it through university-level programs, there need to be structures of support in college classrooms and departments to ensure that these students not only feel supported, but feel that their cultures and communities are seen as assets in the work that they do and are uplifted through the work done in teacher educator courses. This can often be difficult to couple with ensuring the white students are pushed to interrogate their biases since the needs of these students are often vastly different and teacher candidates of color often end up getting the short end of the stick when there are not spaces to think about how to access and build upon their cultural wealth as educators. Marla De Rosa (2015) found a multitude of factors that impacted students of color in medical careers: racial microagressions, deficit-based

pedagogical approaches, linguistic inaccessibility of textbooks, and deficit-based portrayals or lack of representation in class resources. These experiences connect to some of the experiences of the Hands On Knowledge students in their previous educational experiences. This connection is poignant in thinking about the ways that students of color continue to experience education as an ideological state apparatus, a system of oppression, in traditional schools of all levels.

Implications for future research

For future research, it would be useful to continue to think about academic engagement for youth of color beyond indicators of four-year graduation rates, GPA or attendance. These indicators can be useful, but do not encompass the multitude of ways that students might engage with their educational experience. Success should also be extended beyond these indicators to include factors such as critical consciousness and identity (particularly racial/cultural identity), as well as understand the connections between some of these indicators and the more traditional indicators listed previously. It would also be useful to collect long-term data on career trajectories of alumni in the Hands On Knowledge program, including but not limited to college completion rates. This is something the current director hoped that I might be able to collect, but I was unable to receive responses from the majority of the alumni in the program.

Overall, further research is needed on the impact of culturally sustaining and emancipatory pedagogical models, particularly with schools where the entire school utilizes this type of pedagogical model. It would be particularly useful to have more information on schools that uplift students' cultures and build critical consciousness in

contexts where students come from a variety of cultural backgrounds, as was the case in the Hands On Knowledge program to a certain extent.

Limitations

The main limitations of this study were the inclusion of only one school and data limitations. As I mentioned previously, it would be important to compare different schools within the same city to understand other models for emancipatory pedagogies. I was unable to find another high school that seemed to offer a program that utilized culturally sustaining pedagogies and/or emancipatory pedagogies as a key model within this Northeastern city. In addition, it can be difficult to gain full access to public schools where staff are often overwhelmed and don't have the time to bring in or sponsor a researcher.

A second limitation was only being able to connect with and interview eleven alumni, a small percentage of all program alumni. There was only one alumnus from the first three years of the program, which created somewhat of a gap in the research. Interviews with staff who worked in the program during this time were useful in filling this gap. However, due to complex politics mentioned above, two staff members from the middle years of the program chose not to be interviewed. They were staff members that many alumni mentioned had a notable impact on their academic and personal trajectories. Thus, it would have been useful to hear their perspectives on curriculum they developed, relationships with students, and their trajectories as educators. It would also have been useful to have data on graduation rates from all years of the program, as well as attendance data for all years.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Staff Interview Protocol

INTERVIEWER: Raquel Sáenz

INTERVIEWEE: ____

I. INTRODUCTION

Background

Thank you so much for agreeing to do an interview about your experience at DP. My name is Raquel Sáenz and I am currently the guidance counselor at DP, as well as a PhD candidate at Boston College.

I began working with DP about five years ago, leading an internship program and teaching an elective. I was very impressed by the work that the teachers and administrators were doing with the program.

This current research is part of my dissertation for my PhD in Curriculum and Instruction. I am seeking to understand the short-term and long-term impacts of the program. In addition, I am interested in how education can be a means for resistance and liberation, thinking about how DP could potentially do this in working with youth of color. I am also hoping that this research will be used to further develop and improve the program.

During today's interview, I will be asking you a series of questions. It is important for you to know that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions I am asking. Therefore, I want to encourage you to speak openly about your thoughts and ideas. Please also let me know if you do not feel like the questions I am asking adequately address your experiences.

Confidentiality and audio recording

This interview should take approximately 30 minutes to an hour. I will be recording the session because I want to fully capture your comments and ideas.
All responses will be kept confidential. This means that I will ensure that any information I include in my research will not identify you as a respondent. Are there any questions about what I just explained? Do you consent to this interview being used for research purposes?

Okay. Let’s begin.

II. BACKGROUND

I am going to begin by asking you a bit about your background and life before working at DP.

- How would you describe your racial and/or cultural background?
- Where did you grow up?
- What are key elements that you remember from your high school experience? What were the most positive elements and most negative elements?
- Have you ever had a teacher or community member who impacted your career, psychological or academic growth?

III. INTRO TO EDUCATION

How did you decide to go into the field of education?

- Was there any experience that impacted your decision to become an educator?
- What type of program did you do to become an educator? Please describe this process.
- What is your philosophy of education?
- What key elements would be incorporated into your ideal school?
- To what degree can and should youth be treated as co-collaborators in their own education?

IV. EXPERIENCE AT DP

How did you decide to work at DP?

- Do you feel like DP was different from your previous experiences in school systems? Why or why not?
- What do you think were key aspects of the DP culture or DP values?
- What are some of the curricula or lesson plans that you found most effective? Least effective?
- Do you think that DP met students needs? Why or why not?
- What do you think the community's perception of the school is?
- What areas do you think DP was succeeding in when you were there?
- What areas would you like to see DP change in?
- What types of topics did you seek to teach at DP?
- What was collaboration like between the staff while you were there?
- What kind of support did you receive from the administration?
- Did DP support your needs/interests? Why or why not?

VII. WRAP UP	Before we conclude, is there anything we haven't talked about in relation to DP or education in general that you would like to mention? Thank you for all the information and thoughts that you've shared. Your advice will be very helpful in continuing to develop DP and similar program.

Appendix B: Alumni Interview Protocol

INTERVIEWER: Raquel Sáenz

INTERVIEWEE: ______________________________________

I. INTRODUCTION

Thank you so much for agreeing to do an interview about your experience at DP. My name is Raquel Sáenz and I am currently the guidance counselor at DP, as well as a PhD candidate at Boston College.

Background

I began working with DP about five years ago, leading an internship program and teaching an elective. I was very impressed by the work that the teachers and administrators were doing with the program.

This current research is part of my dissertation for my PhD in Curriculum and Instruction. I am seeking to understand the short-term and long-term impacts of the program. In addition, I am interested in how education can be a means for resistance and liberation, thinking about how DP could potentially do this in working with youth of color. I am also hoping that this research will be used to further develop and improve the program.

During today's interview, I will be asking you a series of questions. It is important for you to know that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions I am asking. Therefore, I want to encourage you to speak openly about your thoughts and ideas. Please also let me know if you do not feel like the questions I am asking adequately address your experiences.

Confidentiality and audio recording

This interview should take approximately 30 minutes to an hour. I will be recording the session because I want to fully capture your comments and ideas.

All responses will be kept confidential. This means that I will ensure that any information I include in my research will not identify you as a respondent. Are there any questions about what I just explained? Do you consent to this interview being used for research purposes?
Okay. Let's begin.

II. BACKGROUND

I am going to begin by asking you a bit about your background and life before DP.

- How would you describe your racial and/or cultural background?
- Where did you grow up?
- How would you describe your childhood? Who did you live with? What was your family situation like?
- What elements of your childhood impact the person you are today?
- What is your first memory of school?
- What areas did you succeed in through elementary or middle school? What areas were difficult for you?
- Were you interested in what you were learning? Why or why not?
- What do you recall about your middle school education experience? What were the teachers like? What did the school look like?

III. TRATIONAL TO ALTERNATIVE ED

How did you decide to go to DP?

- What year did you come to DP? How old were you? What year did you graduate?
- Can you describe your high school experience prior to coming to DP? Where did you attend high school?
- How did you hear about the DP program?
- Why do you think you were referred to the program?
- What led to you transferring into the program

IV. EXPERIENCE AT DP

How would you describe your overall experience at DP in a few sentences

- Do you feel like DP was different from your previous educational experience? Why or why not?
- Does DP look or feel different than your previous school?
- What do you remember being key aspects of the DP culture or DP values?
- Were there adults in the DP program that impacted your life? If so, how?
- What do you feel like you learned from DP?
- What was your favorite moment at DP?
- To what degree can and should youth be treated as co-collaborators in their own education? Was this done at DP?

V. POST-GRADUATION

How do you think that DP impacted your life after graduation?

- What do you currently do? (job, school, etc.)
- Are you involved in any type of community activism?
- Do you feel like DP changed the way you view social structures and interactions? If so, why?

VI. SUGGESTIONS

In thinking about improving the program or ensuring that elements of the program are never lost, what recommendations would you give current staff and administration.

- In thinking about your experience at DP, what would have made you stay on track more or be more engaged?
- What would you like to see changed at DP?
- What things should never change about DP?
- What would the success of DP look like?
- What questions would you ask to understand whether DP is succeeding or not?

VII. WRAP UP

Before we conclude, is there anything we haven't talked about in relation to DP that you would like to mention?

Thank you for all the information and thoughts that you've shared. Your advice will be very helpful in continuing to develop DP and similar program.

Appendix C: Classroom Observation Protocol

Name of observer: ____________________________________

Place: ____

Time of observation:

Start: ______________________________ Finish: ________________________________

What is the topic that students are learning?

Who is in the space? How many young people? Adults?

What kinds of racial and ethnic backgrounds are people from (as best you can tell)?

What are students doing?

What materials are they using?

What does involvement look like? Is everyone involved?

What is the structure of the lesson?

How is the teacher interacting with students?

How are students interacting with each other?

General notes: