

Fall 2019

Poetically Composed, Educationally Imposed: Exploring Imagination and Poetics in Curriculum—A Memoir

Whitney J. Presnal

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POETICALLY COMPOSED, EDUCATIONALLY IMPOSED: EXPLORING IMAGINATION
AND POETICS IN CURRICULUM—A MEMOIR

by

WHITNEY J. PRESNAL

(Under the Direction of John Weaver)

ABSTRACT

Through the use of memoir, my work centers on how poetry is situated within public education curriculum. I explore the curricular context of poetry through the lenses of my lived experiences in early childhood, as a K-12 student, and as an early career classroom teacher. My dissertation draws upon a wide array of literature, honing in on the poetic perspectives of philosophers (Aristotle, 1996; Heidegger, 1947 & 1971/2013; Plato, 1955/2007), poets (Hall, 2003; Eliot, 1920 & 2009), and curriculum theorists (Leggo, 1997 & 2018; Pinar, 1994; Sameshima, 2007). The foundation of my work is drawn from my own circular experiences, falling in and out of love with poetry as its muses spoke softly in childhood, abandoned me altogether in my teenage years, and beckoned me to rediscovery of poetry while obtaining my undergraduate degree. After becoming a secondary educator, I realized that the humanities paired with imagination are deprived in the secondary education classroom; therefore, I made it my ultimate goal as an educator to resurrect the humanities and imagination in the classroom. My experiences with poetry in the past, present, and future influence my teaching pedagogy, honing in on what challenges the poetic license of the mind. In my dissertation, I utilize William F. Pinar's (1994) triad of reflections for working within as an educator; I explore my own accounts of poetry and pedagogy through memoir, underscoring the importance of poetry and imagination in curriculum.

INDEX WORDS: Poetry, Poetic inquiry, Memoir, Curriculum, Imagination, Creative writing

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B.A., University of West Georgia, 2012

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My work would not have been possible without the support of many. I would first like to thank John Weaver, my committee chair and major professor, who has continually provided me with an outlet to explore my imagination in academia, providing me with inspiration, wisdom, and guidance. I would also like to offer thanks to Ming Fang He, who has been my academic cheerleader and creative supporter, and Marla Morris, who has challenged my thinking outside of the classroom walls. Another thank you is needed for Gregory Fraser who awoke my poetic prowess and supported my poetic endeavors during my undergraduate degree program and who continues to offer support in my graduate work. I wish to thank my husband, Blake Presnal, for supporting and encouraging me daily; my daughter, Lila Kate Presnal, who made me a Mama and helped me cross the finish-line; my fur-child, Moonpie, who spent many endless nights and early mornings in my lap while we read and worked toward earning my doctoral degree and her “dog-torate.” I would also like to wish a tremendous thank you to my parents: my father, Tony Johnson, who was an endless supporter and provider of many meals, and my mother, Christie Johnson, for setting an outstanding example of what it means to be a goal-chaser, academic professional, and most of all, the best mother, providing guidance, insight, and love.

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PRELUDE

Childhood—

a mixture of murals—
like those undone pines, those rusty mailboxes
that breathed life over Tranquility Drive cement
waiting for me to ride by on two wheels

with the FM radio mounted to my handlebars
there is nothing more powerful than
the melody of muses in the young evening air
or white Reeboks on the pedals next to the ground

and the fence along the pavement
is so deep you can't really ride next to it
those cows hovering over the wire (waiting for sugar cubes)

a bellow of clamoring at the fence
friendship is inevitable
until the night sky cascades onto the front porch

I pretend that I have found the Lost Ark
And run like Indiana back to my bike:
fast, bold, strong, but female.

The fence is now racing past me, past the pines,
as if I am pedaling light years away
from this glittering galaxy so loved

the turn into the driveway heightens
before the gravel, the evening sighs
into the pasture as I pedal faster

flying from the night, going home, soaring
like the last needles next to the clinging pines,
like the leaves next to the garage,

now I go and climb—the stairs the only
option—toward the fresh scent of home
on the kitchen table and sounds of Peter Jennings

I drink my dairy and eat my dinner:
and I will never see a sound except for
this mural I wish I could frame in time.

Yesterday

my tire mashed my Hot Pocket.
I ate it anyways.

Then, a trucker swerved at primary colors
swinging in air. *Don't be late,*
he mouthed. The exhaust howled,
I chewed all six packs of gum after I noticed a
waterfall of coffee so delicately flowing
upon my floral skirt—the curriculum
is calling. I've revised, cried and
sighed into the open arms of
John Dewey who casts empathetic eyes at
the knobby lock on my classroom door.

At lunch, I snagged my coffee dress on the
corner of a worn out desk where stacks
of essays reside—word-pile evidence that
teenage minds have put their phones
aside in an attempt to analyze Homer—
how epic they must have felt as they
didn't check their accounts for
thirty minutes.

Later, at dinner, I found myself snapped,
cramping and hungry, but desired
my Tic Tacs for wine, wine for Oreos,
Oreos for wine again. Exhausted,
I stripped my blouse,
perched on the counter, traced my index
in filtered coffee grounds with remnants
of pen ink tattooed on my right hand.

At ten the plants grew. I blinked,
slugs squirmed below sod
like whales on Jupiter.
Content with myself, I collected
remnants of garbage, promising one day
I'd write a novel, compose it and autograph—
Let them roll their eyes, I crowed,
I have it mapped on post-its.

By eleven forty-five, I had cramps rough.
I caressed my side, swallowed a pill,
rubbed menthol, clutched my waist,

set my alarm. My head down, jumped weak
 at my stance in mirrors,
 laid my back on the sheets.

Finally, at last, I shut my eyes,
 sore and torn from a dream—
 I recall an ocean or banana peel, no salt,
 a beach, pearls swirled around my neck—
 No pile of ungraded papers holding me down.

Later

slows down and stops to think *me*.
 I think and have stopped and
 usually sigh for a minute while
 gazing at a cracked, lit door,

then over to the carpet, then
 back to mirror as I blink and *see*
 and produce the *see me, see me later*.
 There comes *later*—

and is very comforting; because there,
 this evening, is usually the place where
 I find the I: it's called being self.

Sometimes *later* is named by its location,
 leaving all present *laters* behind, until—

after or later:
 everything will seem the same.

Although *later* is not just *later*. *Later* is also
 a childhood thought: a lost feeling from yesterday,
 and a broken piano, note key from the day
 before now sighing into my ear
 on the stationary next to my lamp—

see you me later.

PRELUDE: THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILDHOOD, YESTERDAY, AND LATER

Throughout the summer of 2018, I engaged in a highly personalized civil war. Hackling myself within the limits of what either mind-side was willing to tolerate, I fired volleys of questions that I quickly returned in rapid succession debate on the topic and path I would take in writing my dissertation. This same summer, as I was sitting in a conference session on mythopoetics and self-study in Savannah, Georgia, the distant smoke of dissertation cannons clouding my brain, I quickly jotted notes while listening to writer, professor, and lecturer Dr. Mary Aswell Doll, hoping to capture each word; every syllable. As she spoke, I found my pen moving faster as she made a bold statement in her lecture with regard to the writing of autobiography and memoir. In the months that followed, I continued to reflect on this statement from Doll's lecture and kept the notes close to me for the forthcoming semesters. Now, when I flip through my well-worn lecture notes, the single statement from Doll is highlighted and starred multiple times because it was so bold and resonated with my interest as well as my fears in writing a memoir on poetry. Doll stated, "It's difficult to talk about yourself because nobody cares. In the 1970s, it was suspect for women to write an autobiography, and who wants to write about women anyhow, but look at us now. We are doing it and we are doing it in the field of curriculum studies" (personal communication, June, 2018). In voicing acknowledgment that no one may care about my self-study, Doll helped me to push aside my fears of writing a memoir on poetry in the field of curriculum studies. All scholarly cannon fire ceased. I finally understood that, as a female, teacher, and poet, I do have something to say about my journey with imagination and poetry in the classroom. Further, I have been freed to speak it. My journey and story is a culmination of my *Childhood*, *Yesterday*, and the *Later* that I will see tomorrow when it is inscribed on paper. And so, pens blazing...I write!

Oddly enough, when I escape into a dream, I find that I am usually roaming about my childhood and the small rural street that I grew up on, Tranquility Drive, as well as the houses that surrounded its dark pavement. A majority of the time, the dreams are exultant and threaded with a few common details: the road, the pine trees, and my bike complete with a bike radio. These three features hum in solidarity throughout my nighttime sleep and seep into my thoughts during the next day. Then, before I realize it, I am recalling my thoughts on paper, pressing my pen to my tablet as if I am petrified to forget my youthful reverie. I have always wondered why I document these non-fiction-like dreams, but, according to poet Donald Hall, it is quite normal to write about stories of one's childhood. Hall (2003) states, "I repeat stories I grew up on, stories that created me" (p. 118). My childhood stories have created who I am, so it is vital that I record these stories revisited to me in dreams. Memories from childhood can surface many different levels of emotion that adulthood cannot, and in a way, perhaps it is almost more enduring as its sincerity gleams off of the pages.

As for adulthood, the stress that accompanies being a secondary teacher, especially an English teacher, can be grueling at times with long hours, raucous teenagers, and endless stacks of essays to grade. Sometimes in the morning, as a teacher, I ponder on the day before, yesterday, and think about how exhausting it truly was to get through. Although it is easy to say that one bad spill should not determine your day, most teachers let that spill flow into the rest of their day whereupon it begins to affect the students. It is truly difficult not to let this one bad spill trickle throughout the day, especially when it is long into the school year and teachers as well as students are aching for a break. A brain break would even be nice, such as writing a poem, but there is no time for that when you have to shove stacks and stacks of essays to grade in your school tote and lug them home. When I began teaching, I actually found that I had less time to

write poetry unless I was trying to squeeze it into a curriculum that so clearly does not tell students how to write poetry, but rather how to read poetry. Poet Donald Hall (2003) was also a high school English teacher who grew frustrated at the stacks of papers to grade and the lack of time he had to write his poetry, causing him to quit teaching and pursue writing more heavily. While I do not plan on quitting my profession, it has been a long time goal of mine to become a published author. I have found this to be a more than difficult task while juggling the responsibilities of life along with a career; however, I truly love my career and would not choose any other profession. I believe most educators suffer from exhaustion and stress, yet fear to admit the perplexities and enervation of the career. *Yesterday* is an ode to an endless, tiring day, elaborating on perhaps the bad days of teaching rather than the good. As an exhausted educator, I will write and publish a book, teach students how to write poetry in the curriculum, and perhaps one day know what it feels like to be caught up on grading endless stacks of essays.

When honing in on the future, the later, I realize that my childhood and all of its tiresome, yet rewarding yesterdays have brought me to a point in life that enables me to reflect on the possibilities of the future as an educator and writer. My writing and perspective on poetry and the words I write have traveled a long way with me since our days of discovery on Tranquility Drive. As a child I became creative; as a teenager I felt the rhythm, yet did not recognize it; in college I found my voice and poetic purpose, and as an adult I became offended that I had been deprived of poetic creativity for so long. The first time someone told me that poetry was based solely on emotion, also known as “emo,” I knew I was a poet. This comment did not settle well with me at all because I knew that poetry gives one life and is based on ingenuity, reflection, language, history, and talent. As a novice poet, I always attempted to focus on how to absorb specific poetry writing elements. Although, I must admit I was quite intimidated at first by

reading other great poets' pieces. Clearly, I would never be Ezra Pound, Elizabeth Bishop, Marianne Moore, or even Kim Addonizio; however, one learns to write like, perhaps mimic, their favorite authors, so that is just what I did. I grew to become more comfortable with the sounds and rhythms that resonated through all of the authors' language. Process is very essential and important in regard to writing, so it is necessary to explain my process in style. When teaching, I attempt to pass on these methods to my students in hopes they also will become interested in the art of poetry. Likewise, Paulo Friere (1994) states, "There is no change without dream, as there is no dream without hope" (p. 91). My *Childhood*, *Yesterday*, and *Later* are the stories that provoke me to write about a needed change in curriculum; it is my dream that educators, and maybe even students, read my work and see the possibilities of poetry in curriculum as I hope that they also find their answer to what it means to live poetically.

CHAPTER ONE POETIC PRELUDE

Don't Smile on Day One

That single day at the beginning of the year
when students nod their heads in fear
and watch as the teacher, me, takes roll—
so the classroom is silent, yet full of sly eyes.

Before, they were chatting in lapsed time
as they scurried to hurry to the next room
like a fast attempt to speed-dating except
now the bell quiets the conversation.

All day I will keep taking roll as I review
the rules that I would so love to toss aside
like the pepper I dropped last night
in the kitchen—*toss, toss*—I'm safe.

Most of the time when students are silent
I think maybe I need a circus act or maybe
they need sleep, but the blank stares
on day one reveal a dread that perhaps

convinces them literature is dead—
And I can feel my angst mixed with their
teenage glare. The roots of my gut begin
to pulse and I fling the rules to the side

and begin to hum a different decent decree.

They sit in their chairs and I on my stool,
both convinced it may be a long year—
it seems *we're all mad here*—
but I begin to slant a Cheshire smile and
we all forget about the smell of bleach on
the cracked, sterile tile.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

OPEN THE CURRICULUM/ MEET ME IN A STANZA

“We teachers have the mechanical means to present the material we deem important to present.”

—William F. Pinar, *Autobiography, Politics, and Sexuality*

“We had the experience but missed the meaning,/ An approach to the meaning restores the experience/ In a different form.”

—T.S. Eliot, “The Dry Salvages,” *Four Quartets*

I am an educator and poet. Please do not equate my identity as an educator with stereotypical visions of the stale, socially inept matron who totes her coffee everywhere, hefting the mug’s bracing warmth for sustenance as she points it at a dry-erase board. Please do not assume my identity as poet to mean that I believe myself an ethereal vision or enlightened mortal being who floats throughout a room reciting the works of other poets while, of course, wearing black and sipping coffee that is perhaps even blacker. I am an educator and a poet; I have grown to live outside my comfort zone—I tempt and teach young, teenage minds to think and write outside of the normed margins and follow the self-defined lines that steer them to their own educational awakening. I am an educator and poet who tirelessly teaches and writes speeches about the importance of imagination—only to find out that I must reteach and *demonstrate* the word imagination because imagining was not a part of the curriculum’s intended outcome. Likewise, T.S. Eliot (1943) writes, “We had the experience but missed the meaning,/ And approach to the meaning restores the experience/ In a different form...” (p. 39). Teachers have the education and experience to inform their students, yet sometimes miss the meaning of restoring their own experiences to help students’ connect to exploration of imagination. Reflecting on my own experiences as an educator and poet, I have realized that my practices and understandings in the classroom must be shared in a different form of exploration.

When beginning to explore imagination and poetic inquiry within curriculum, I found it undoubtedly difficult to ignore my own experiences with poetry as a child, student, and educator. My experience helps establish a foundation of how creativity can flourish in childhood, become dormant as a student, and ultimately be a challenge as a teacher; therefore, my work is centered around the idea of exhuming poetry within curriculum in order to revive imaginations that have either become dormant or have never been sparked. The foundation of my work also stems from William F. Pinar's (1994) *Autobiography, Politics, and Sexuality* whereupon Pinar reflects and analyzes working from within as an educator. Pinar utilizes a triad of reflections on his teaching practices as he focuses on the following: knowledge of self, knowledge of discipline, and knowledge of students (p. 9). Pinar highlights on what I believe is an important component to being an educator by supporting the concept that teachers must come to class "ready to respond, not only as a student and teacher of literature, but as a person" (p. 9). It is important for students to know that teachers are not only there to foster their education as students, but also to help aid them as functioning humans in a difficult and confusing society. Curriculum, in my opinion, leaves little room for this notion as educators are prone to box-checking every day in order to meet state standards. By focusing on poetic inquiry, I have chosen to tell my own experiences through memoir, utilizing Pinar's triad of working from within. This dissertation is not only about the use of poetry in the classroom, but also about what happens when school curriculums ignore poetry in connection to critical pedagogy and culturally relevant teaching practices.

The Teacher, Me: My Story

Brief Knowledge of Self, Discipline, and Students

Born in 1989 in Carrollton, Georgia, I am an '80s baby, but the '90s raised me. Both of my parents had important careers—my mother was an elementary school principal who later worked her way up the Southern glass ladder to become assistant superintendent in our local county school district while my father was a Lieutenant Detective in the felony investigations division at our city's police department. With parents holding career titles that literally illuminated "I SEE YOU," it was difficult for me to get away with anything as a child. And so, I didn't. Much. I was athletic, driven to be successful in school, and owned an imagination that teemed with creativity and eccentric ideas. I was interested in reading, shopping, and listening to my father's lectures in the classes he taught about street gangs. I was raised an only child and had a wonderful childhood. While my story is not seemingly unique, the educational parameters that also helped create me are unique, as these learning experiences within school walls have shaped the lines within my story as a child, student, and teacher.

While I elaborate more on both my personal and educational life in chapter two, one important incongruity for my audience to note is that I never wanted to be an educator. After twelve dreary years in public school classrooms, I loathed the idea of becoming an educator. In fact, if some presumptuous soul dared ask if I wanted to be a teacher, my standard reply was that I wanted to be *anything* except an educator. Clearly, I bear the brunt of this situational irony as I am now a high school English Language Arts (ELA) teacher who truly loves my job. While every now and then I trifle with the idea of going into administration, I can honestly state that I am not yet ready to leave the four walls of my classroom because within these walls, I learn. I

learn about my students, I learn from my students, and I listen to my students. Most important, I find joy from my students. I don't find it difficult at all to smile on the first day of class.

In my poem entitled *Don't Smile on Day One*, I reflect on the nerves that both teachers and students feel on the first day of school. As an undergraduate classroom teaching intern, my supervising teachers reiterated that I should not smile on the first day of school, thus ensuring that students would take me seriously for the rest of the school year. As I pondered this timeworn philosophy, I questioned its validity. While Day One is very important, there are still 179 days that follow in the school year—are we teachers supposed to scowl from late summer until the spring thaw? Exhausting. I concluded early on that my personal teaching rule would be to always smile on the first day of school because this would make life easier for the remaining 179 days. I often ponder educational experiences like these and wonder how I metamorphosed from a child who loved reading to a teenager who despised to pick up a book to a teacher who devours books and reads them aloud to students at every opportunity—this is the shape of my educational journey and story. In this dissertation, my story will not only focus on my personal life, but will also focus on my educational career paired with the importance of poetry and imagination in the classroom.

I am now completing my seventh year of teaching ELA in a secondary classroom (I understand that is not very long as time is measured in the world of academia—I get into this specific issue in chapter five). My first three years of teaching consisted of teaching 9th Grade Literature and Composition classes as well as a creative writing elective class within a medium-sized, suburban high school in a county school system; in this school, among the white students, there was a high percentage of African American and Hispanic students. In my first three years of teaching at this school, it was not easy as students needed constant discipline and motivation,

but it did make me a better educator. The next four years of my teaching experience consist of my current school system, which is a city school system, where I teach both Honors and College Preparatory 9th Grade Literature and Composition as well as Honors World Literature; in this school, the majority of the student population consists of white students. In this school, student discipline is minimal and I have a team of administrators that fully support my teaching tactics and pedagogy. Because both of these high schools provide a different perspective on demographics, my teaching pedagogy has been shaped and molded through my different experiences at these two schools, especially by the students.

While I have taught in two very different schools, I have chosen to teach the same texts to my students. It is important for me to establish the types of texts I teach in my classroom; the primary texts I have chosen to teach are, as I tell my students, the texts that I find the most provocative and interesting to choose from the state-mandated guidelines. In other words, I feel as if I can get more application for transfer and real-world scenarios from primary texts, such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* with its oddly unique take on posthumanism; Elie Wiesel's memoir *Night* with its gruesome truth about the Holocaust; Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* where those who are physically different become the outcast; Homer's *The Odyssey* with its epic digressions and poetic melodies; Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* where presumption of guilt and skin color lead to segregation and discrimination; Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* and Ayn Rand's *Anthem* where living as a collective society results in the silence of imagination; John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* with its sarcastic and witty take on the canonical text of two star-crossed lovers; and William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*, *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, and *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* where we learn that death is inevitable. These authors and their texts have become not only a part of my teaching

methodology, but they have also become a part of me as I weave the words of their pages into students' young ears. Sadly, I can only recall a handful of books that I truly read in high school, and as I admit this regret to my students, it is my hope that they do not abandon the texts that I have chosen. It is always my hope as an educator to delve into what my students find truly interesting in an effortful hope to awaken their poetic prowess.

Students love music, memes, and make-believe; however, if you were to ask them about their love or interest for poetry, it would be on the opposite spectrum of love and perhaps there would be no interest. Similarly, if I were to rewind time and ask my childhood self about poetry, I would have told you that I loved to read it; if I were to ask my teenage self about poetry, I would have cringed and told you I hated it—I absolutely did not read it. I abandoned the art of poetry as a teenager and rediscovered it, accidentally, while pursuing my undergraduate degree. In my early twenties, poetry became my vice, my art, and my one true love. My imagination thrived from the words that reverberated throughout my journal pages and my bedroom walls were filled with poetically worded post-its scattered about in forget-me-not order. On many occasions, I have asked myself why I abandoned the art as a teenager. Across the years, the questions lead to a common curricular root. Somewhere along my educational journey I was miseducated; delivered a deleterious dram by teachers dutifully compelled to dispense it from the state-driven curriculum they were required to teach.

Please note that my teachers intended their students no harm. However, entering the classroom means some measure of risk to students from teachers who will unwittingly provide misinformation to students throughout their educational careers. Teachers, after all, are only human. Effective teachers prepare themselves well in a conscious effort to avoid such misappropriated wisdom. The unfortunate few lead students to think that school is the

stereotypical, inherently boring environment that has been traditionally reiterated throughout the educational arena. Likewise, teaching a basic curriculum to students limits their options toward achieving self-discovery. Dr. Marla Morris (2016) states, “A good way to miseducate our youth is to teach them a basic curriculum” (p. 73). By using the term “basic,” Morris portrays there is not great detail in the curriculum, which limits the depth and opportunities for students.

Miseducating students can create superficial learning; superficial learning can create superficial beings. Being taught a basic curriculum, I was a casualty of superficial learning in secondary education, thus triggering my imagination to fall into a dormant state of being. As an ELA teacher in the secondary education classroom, it is my ultimate goal for my students to not be a victim of this unfortunate trend in curriculum. I believe that the account of my journey as memoir with poetry, exploring the past, present, and future as a student and educator, will help educators pursue the imaginative path to educating our students rather than drudging down the basic path of miseducation.

Methodology

Students nod their head in fear: Why poetic inquiry?

If one were to ask why I have selected poetic inquiry, my response would be *why not?* Although it can be misunderstood, poetry is not dead or in any danger because as long as we utilize language to converse, then poetry will stay alive (Kristeva, 2006; Zapruder, 2017). While I do agree that poetry is alive, I also believe it in peril within U.S. classrooms. In education, there is no cultural movement for poetry. Rather, the lack of movement is reflective of a more static clinical curricular focus where standards are taught, practiced, and assessed. This linear practice leads to standardization of the masses within curriculum. Zapruder states, “To learn to read

poetry is first a matter of forgetting many incorrect things we have learned in school” (p. xiv).

Students are not livestock; therefore, they should not be herded in masses into one fence. Instead, students should be fostered individually based on imagination and creativity, leading them to live poetically and feel their own interests grow around them.

Poetic inquiry, as dainty scholars would say, seems to be a gamble when conducting research; however, if poetry releases the self and if the self is always becoming and finding the truth, then who could deny the benefits of poetic inquiry? If the poetics helps one discover the self and the other, then I would contend that poetic inquiry would benefit the educational arena in ways that are not outlined in state mandated curriculums. In regard to poetic inquiry, Kedrick James (2017) states the following in his essay “The Piano Plays a Poem:”

Among poetic inquirers, there is no collective stance in regard to what poetics best serves inquiry—you don’t need to buy into one school or another or little effort is expended debating poetics—instead, the inquirer strives to be genuine, even skilled, with words, and to find ways to express personal awakenings by potent engagement with linguistic environment. (Sameshima et al., p. 49)

Research results can be described through personal revivals within poetic inquiry. As stated before, I believe that education is too focused in the mundane, but poetic inquiry allows education to forgo the mundane and pursue a more creative outlet for research. By using poetic inquiry in my dissertation, I will be able to address the *why nots* of poetry in the classroom and as a meaningful experience, honing in on my own experiences through the method of memoir.

Chatting in lapsed time: Why memoir?

If one were to ask why I have chosen the method of memoir, my response would be *not on your life... but rather on mine*. Memoir has been growing in popularity since the “turn of the millennium,” becoming a “cultural movement” (Gilmore, 2001, p. 1). If memoir has the power to influence and move our society culturally, then it is the perfect methodology for my dissertation as I hope to underscore the importance of poetry in the curriculum. Similarly, Gilmore (2001) contends that literary memoir is connected with “its ascendancy to the therapy driven ‘culture of confession’ with which it was a perfect fit” (p. 2). Confession allows someone to share their experiences in an attempt to not be alone in their experience. For example, poet Donald Hall (2003) confesses in his memoir that teaching hindered his ability to write poetry while author Stephen King (2000) confesses in his memoir that, as a high school English teacher, he loved working with the coworkers and kids, but by “most Friday afternoons [he] felt as if [he’d] spent the week with jumper cables clamped to his brain” (p. 73). While King’s imagery is in true fashion of his writing style, comical, yet disturbing, I find that it resonates with me as an educator; it truly helps to know I am not alone in this feeling of exhaustion as King confesses his frustration with teaching high school English. Sharing experiences as educators is necessary because it helps us relate among experiences, even if we do feel like jumper cables are clamped to our brains. By sharing my experiences with poetry, it is my hope that both students and educators have realization in the importance of imagination and poetry in curriculum.

Likewise, Pinar (2012) states, “Education requires subjectivity in order for it to speak, for it to become concrete, to become actual” (p. 43). While the speaker’s truth falls plainly within the realm of personal subjectivity, lived experiences help connect concept to reality, giving voice to relevance that actualizes and makes learning “real.” To this purpose, memoir serves a valuable

role in providing dimensional relevance that can personalize the curriculum and advance student learning. As Karr (2016) contends, “The master memoirist creates such a personal interior space... It’s the speaker’s truth alone. In this way, the form constantly disavows the rigors of objective truth” (p. 16). By creating a personal space constructed of story, readers and listeners can become enthralled to learning a tale of someone else’s experiences. As an educator and poet, it is in this truth that I wish to tell my story of how elements from my high school curriculum hindered my imagination and creativity, leaving me to abandon the humanities, especially poetry. Similarly, Gilmore (2001) contends that there has been a “memoir boom” since the twentieth century where writers focus on their life narratives, helping their stories and experience come to fruition (p. 85). When focusing on my educational life narrative, I will focus on Pinar’s knowledge of self, knowledge of discipline, and knowledge of students.

One major hazard that is characteristic of writing memoir is the fear of vulnerability. As I begin to piece together my experiences, I feel painfully exposed to those who are reading my work. Because I am intertwining poetry into my work, I have found that I am experiencing even greater pressure; a double-dose of high-risk vulnerability. For example, during one of my doctoral classes I presented to classmates a series of poems I had written in regard to my own experiences. After class, some were commending me on my writing, but several of my friends were laughing at a few lines I had written in one of the poems. I felt ashamed of myself for opening the ricocheting streams of my emotion turned to words. As their laughter echoed, it was in this moment I realized how sensitive I was to others’ opinions, especially in regard to poetry. I will say, however, that perhaps these particular classmates did not understand the art of poetry. While tragic, I must also contend that at one point in my life I perhaps did not fully grasp it either. Risking self-vulnerability, however, can open a wave of understanding from outsiders

who were perhaps looking for a deeper meaning in a similar situation. Likewise, in the introduction to her memoir *The Liars Club*, Mary Karr (1995) writes, "...the boat I can feel so lonely in actually holds us all" (p. xvi). Truthfully, writing memoir can feel like a lonely, susceptible process, but the finished product can warrant an understanding from others as the memoirist turns around to see that they are not alone in their own experiences.

Fling the rules to the side: Embracing imagination.

My dissertation draws upon a wide array of literature, focusing on the poetic perspectives of philosophers, poets, and curriculum theorists. The poetic perspective of philosophers will be mainly referenced from Aristotle (1996), Plato (1955/2007), Babich (2006), and Heidegger (1947 & 1971/2013) who provide a poetic foundation on the perspective of language while the poetic perspective from poets will mainly be from the works of T.S. Eliot (1920, 1943, & 2013), Donald Hall (2003), and Richard Hugo (1992) who elucidate the importance of poetry technique and writing. While many curriculum theorists are referenced throughout my work, the main poetic perspective of curriculum theorists will be taken from the works of John Dewey (1943), William F. Pinar (1994 & 2012), Paulina Sameshima (2007 & 2018), and Carl Leggo (1997 & 2018) who support imagination and creativity within curriculum. By incorporating the works of various philosophers, poets, and curriculum theorists, a better perspective of poetics in curriculum can surface. Likewise, Pinar's (1994) triad of working from within as an educator, knowledge of discipline, knowledge of students, and knowledge of self, can also help one understand embracing imagination and poetics within curriculum (p. 9).

Before discussing the notions between poetry and poets, it is important that I address where poetic creative license stems from—the imagination. Greene (2000) contends that

imagination changes some “dimension of our perceiving and thus some dimension of our lives” (p. 140). Greene then goes on to demonstrate that this change occurred for poet Wallace Stevens in his poetry as he created “new connections between selves and things” (p. 141). The imagination here creates a new poetic perspective and helps develop the unanticipated moments in our lives. Though these moments may reveal a raw truth at a first glance, such as Elizabeth Bishop and her writing (Greene, 2000, p. 142), they expose the rare moments of the imagination where we are afraid to go, pushing the creator to the boundaries of his or her potential toward inventiveness.

Imagination creates an entire arena of creative license for student learners; it is the entry way into a new world of thinking and ingenuity. If one were unable to access this entry to their imagination, then they are, at all costs, risking their loss of being and sense of self. Similarly, although we have journeyed a great distance in education, I would argue that we are still teaching under duress of a government that guides our approach to education with mundane parameters, leaving imagination to take a backseat to the standardization of learning and test scores. A democracy of curriculum would allow all educators to help participate in constructing the curriculum, providing a wide variety of input; however, each state provides a select group of educators to help build the curriculum, leaving a narrow view of educational possibilities.

A different decent decree: Curriculum and poetry collide.

Morris (2016a) underscores that curriculum scholars have in common “not the present, but the past” (p. 21). When beginning to study the field of curriculum, I delved into the past and I became particularly interested in the works of John Dewey, especially his contribution toward progressivism and individualism. Dewey helps provide a foundation in curriculum where

educators can be advocates of vocational and liberal arts education. Currently, the comprehensive design for the high school curriculum is declining in modern curriculum design. Both vocational education and liberal art education are important because they provide a variety of foundation in a student's education. Waddington (2015) states that Dewey's definition of vocation is "any form of continuous activity which renders service to others and engages personal powers in behalf of the accomplishment of results" (p. 5). Dewey found these elements of curriculum necessary in order to help the human flourish on both the individual and social level (p. 5). Vocational and liberal arts education may not be what academia refers to as "core academics," but they both complement "core academics" in the aspect of rearing the student's education. Dewey further elaborates that it is the responsibility of the teacher to help students master ideas and apply it in real life, allowing for creative apprenticeship. In connection to Dewey's argument with in-school activities, teachers should be mindful with what students do in their free time. For example, teachers can introduce students to activities and subjects they normally would not be exposed to. Dewey states:

It is something which appeals for the most part simply to the intellectual aspect of our natures, our desire to learn, to accumulate information, and to get control of the symbols of learning; not to our impulses and tendencies to make, to do, to create, to produce, whether in the form of utility or of art. (Fraser, 2011, p. 226)

It is the responsibility of the educator to help foster students' intellectual ability to master any subject or art that a student chooses to learn. In order to create a well-rounded society, students are able to find their own voice in their education, discovering the self.

Likewise, when embracing the notion of Deweyan idealology, one must also consider imagination in the classroom where learners must use all components of their intellectual being

in order to become creative. This truly is a philosophy adopted by most curriculum scholars as the individual understanding of self is an important component to understanding overall culture. Popular understandings of curriculum can sometime seem obsolete. For example, Vaquer (2016) states, “Most popular understandings of curriculum center around an outdated focus on curriculum development rather than an understanding of curriculum” (p. 21). The notion of poetic inquiry, however, is developing among curriculum scholars. When looking back on philosophers, such as Plato, Aristotle, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, curriculum scholars can see a foundation for poetic inquiry. Poets, such as T.S. Eliot, also offer an opinion on poets and poetic perspective.

Much like the philosophers and poets of the past, curriculum scholars often define poetic inquiry as a manifestation of oneself or understanding one’s sense of being (Sameshima et al., 2017). Poetry provides an artful medium whereupon the writer can become the artist and the poem can become the portrait, creating a sense of self within an imaginative piece of art. In going back to my earlier notion that imagination occurs when finding the hullabaloo, curriculum studies scholars support this concept as imagination takes the main focus of many texts. Similarly, in the curriculum studies texts that focus on poetry, the concept of imagination and embracing the self remains the prominent focus in conjunction with poetry.

As stated before, I believe that education is too focused in the mundane, but poetic inquiry allows education to forgo the mundane and pursue a more creative outlet for research. I have read many texts that focus on poetic form situated in curriculum emphasis. For example, Sameshima (2007) explores the epistolary growth through artful scholarly inquiry, utilizing documents, such as e-mail and poems, while Sjollema and Yuen (2017) create a poem as a way to present findings from their research involving aboriginal women. Sjollema and Yuen write,

“Conventional methods of representation would create a disconnect from the emotion and context that were significant to the women’s experience” (Sameshima et al., 2017, p. 61). Truly, academia has been told that there is only a canonical approach to data representation, but sometimes those methods create a disconnect from the participant, researcher, and reader. In my research, I like to teach my participants, read their work, and then begin assessing the creativity within their work. Creative writing, especially poetry, can often be questioned as abstract; therefore, interpreting research may become more difficult, but I believe the interpretation lies within the idea of whether or not a student followed the assignment instructions. The content may be left for interpretation.

Another important concept noted among curriculum scholars is the belief that art and the poetics in the classroom centers on dull, standardized concepts, leaving students to become frustrated with the art. Similarly, Doll (2000) constitutes that “when people say they are frustrated... they lack art” (p. xvii). This also means that students become frustrated because they are miseducated and misinformed in the field of art and poetics. For example, Leggo (1997) argues that when students must explicate a poem, it creates one single perspective, which leaves the art of poetry to be a mundane, subjective task. Likewise, poet Ralph Waldo Emerson (1984) contends that man is creator of his or her own universe when writing poetry; therefore, it is an important task to make sure students are able to create their own universe, rather than someone building it for them. Overall, much like both points from (1971/2013) and Eliot (2009), focusing on the development of poetry and the discovery of oneself is essentially important within curriculum; this aids one to create a sense and place of being in society toward a poetic portrait of their own understanding.

Poetic understanding means that one understands not everything has to be poetry in order to be poetic; our journey and our struggles are poetic. Likewise, in *Art as an Experience*, Dewey (1934) elaborates that fine arts and everyday events are linked together and must be recognized “upon one who undertakes to write about the philosophy of fine arts” (p. 2). After reading this, I felt challenged by Dewey in the sense that I am both an educator and a writer; therefore, I must write about the fine arts, especially poetry. Dewey further states, “This task is to restore the continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience” (p. 2). It is important to be able to connect the arts, such as poetry, to everyday events and occurrences. Likewise, the foundation of my work in poetic inquiry within the field of curriculum surrounds Dewey’s idea that students can flourish poetically within the realm of education.

The Cracked Sterile Tile: Overview

When I was in middle school, I voluntarily opened the pages of Lewis Carroll’s classic *Alice in Wonderland* and feverishly began reading. The plot was odd, but I liked it because it triggered my imagination into overdrive. I distinctly recall the moment Alice tells the Cheshire Cat that she does not want to be in wonderland:

“But I do not want to go among mad people,” Alice remarked.

“Oh you can’t help that,” said the Cat: “we’re all mad here. I’m mad. You’re mad.”

“How do you know I’m mad?” said Alice.

“You must be,” said the Cat, “or you wouldn’t have come here.” (Carroll, 2011, p.43-44)

Now that I am adult, this applies even more to my life—I am mad and I have chosen to recognize two realizations and experiences in my life. My first dissent into madness was choosing to become an educator in a society where educators are only mildly appreciated, exhaustingly overworked, and severely underpaid. In an attempt to add to this madness, the second dissent into madness was deciding to accomplish a lifelong goal of mine by obtaining my doctorate degree in education. In order to know you are mad, as the Cheshire Cat suggests, you must realize that you have chosen to be so. Those who have chosen to be in this state must also recognize that it is an oddity to choose to be mad—we, as educators, are alone together walking on cracked sterile tile in madness. I choose to resonate in the oxymoron phrase of *alone together* because we are among the mad people and the path we have chosen is also an oxymoron as it is *cracked, yet sterile*, and we choose to step along the clean cracks in a valiant attempt to clarify the curriculum given to us by state mandated boundaries.

In my madness, I have attempted to open up the cracks of my path in the field of imagination and poetry in curriculum, attempting to educate and gain a few more mad people. Because, after all, if we were all sane, then there would be no risks, and education needs more teachers to take risks and look into the sterile cracks rather than walking over them in order to blindly find hope at the end of the path. Likewise, Paulo Freire (1994) states, “The idea that hope alone will transform the world, and action undertaken in that kind of naiveté, is an excellent route to hopelessness, pessimism, and fatalism” (p. 8). Education is guilty of holding on to this hope without regard of truly taking action. In this first chapter of my dissertation, it is my hope to underscore and provide an insight into the cracks within curriculum for poetry and imagination, invoking and inviting an audience to become mad with me and to discover a Cheshire grin of their own.

In Chapter one, I lay the foundation for my study and segue into Chapter two, entitled *Sidewalk Writing and Rain Reciting*, where I begin with my poem entitled “Dear Shel and Sylvia” to reflect on my poetic roots. I establish my autobiographical roots in regard to poetry and begin to flesh out the importance of imagination and poetry in school curriculums. I use the works of Shel Silverstein and Sylvia Plath, both of whom have shaped my poetic identity, to help create an understanding that poetics can be both whimsical and intensely autobiographical. In this chapter, I elaborate on the philosophies of Maxine Greene, Elliot Eisner, and Carl Leggo; I break down imagination and poetry within the boundaries of curriculum, establishing the ins and outs of poetic practice in curriculum.

Chapter Three is entitled *Poor Physics and Poetic License*. Here I establish how memories, curriculum, and poetry are all intertwined, highlighting on my experiences as a student in a public school system. In this chapter, I also visit the STEM initiative and elaborate on how the humanities and arts, such as poetry, have taken a back seat while STEM classes become the driver of curriculum-based decisions. This chapter focuses on the works of poets, memoirists, and curriculum theorists, such as Donald Hall, Megan Bishop, Mary Karr, and William Pinar. Overall, I underscore that if educators want to understand the unedited ways of the classroom, then they must read about the candid moments and experiences in the classroom, letting them create a tone for their own pedagogy and their own story.

Chapter Four expands upon poetry within curriculum in field of pop culture. The title of this chapter is *Terse Verse and the Poetry Curse* and I further expand upon the concept of educators making the curriculum more interesting to students by providing culturally relevant pedagogy within the classroom. Highlighting on pop culture, I will underscore that educators must pop their own culture in order to keep students intrigued within the curriculum. This

chapter hones in on my own experiences as an educator and the difficulties that accompany teaching poetry to teenagers who have already stereotyped the subject. I will frame my discussion on poetry in curriculum by linking it to student interest in hip-hop music. My exploration and stories will focus on why students have a love for hip-hop, yet roll their eyes when they hear the word *poetry*. The battle between hip-hop and poetry in the ELA classroom is truly ongoing as curriculum does not offer poetry to be recognizable in places other than the textbook. I will explore the complications, similarities, and benefits between utilizing the art of both poetry and the genre of hip-hop in the classroom, helping aid in the promotion of humanities and arts in school curriculums.

In the concluding chapter, entitled *Perplexing Patterns in Poetry and Personal Identity in Curriculum*, I reflect on the importance of living poetically as an educator and teaching students to live poetically towards their own goals, highlighting where we have been in curriculum, where we are going in curriculum, and where we should attempt to go in curriculum. The main goal of this chapter is to have educators realize that poetry and the poetics take place in an everyday occurrence, and it is important to pass this sentiment on to the younger generation. If high school students could break the notion of the poet stereotype, then these students would be more likely to study humanities in college; therefore, the field and notion of living poetically would be an understanding that comes from curriculum and utilized in everyday living.

It is my hope to inspire and inform educators in the field of poetic inquiry. As an ELA teacher in the secondary education classroom, it is my objective for students to learn poetry outside of the mundane stereotype that is portrayed in media and state curriculums. Much like Pinar's belief, Gitlin and Peck (2005) state, "I believe part of moving outside the classroom discourse involves an altered role for the teacher" (p. 12). In the process of writing this memoir, I

also examine my poetic self as student, teacher, and writer. This requires me to move outside of the classroom discourse and look at all angles of poetic inquiry within curriculum. Sometimes, in order to be a sounding voice for others, one must become vulnerable and examine one's own experiences. I believe that the account of my journey as memoir with poetry, exploring the past, present, and future, will help educators pursue a more imaginative outlet to education, helping avoid this notion of guiding students down a path of miseducation. I encourage readers, especially seasoned educators, to explore these pages with some small hope that reading them will help restore meaning and significance for poetics in curriculum.

CHAPTER TWO PRELUDE

Dear Shel and Sylvia,

Look what you've done—
I am hidden in glares, a freak so normal
it's rare, averse to the hypnotic and
still wanting good hair (Sorry, Shel).

I say sorry without even feeling
sorry (thanks, Sylvia), but I have been
with you for so long that I can't see
the foggy, dirty faced world any more.

And yet, perching here, on this continent
whose quilt of curiosities caresses the ground,
my pen has see-sawed onto pages until
the patchwork of my concerns is found.

I'm sorry, again. I always feel your ways—
I know—but please whisper and tell me the phase
where I stop eclipsing my eyes and find
the supplies to the end of this cemented path.

You, Shel, told me when you're gone
it would be me to carry out poetic legacy,
but I was young and unsuspecting
with no coffee stains coveting my teeth.

I'm sorry—here I go again—you were right:
here I am, carrying out the poetic bridal wreath
that you draped over my paddling head,
so now I am cursed with dictional bloodshed.

And Sylvia, I know you are more cynical than Shel
and so entertained by my pains, but
then again, so am I—a true rebellious rogue
laughing and jumping at our own stances in mirrors.

I find it easy to be you as I escort my smile
to your *Morning Song*, but truth be told
I feel more like *Lady Lazarus*—minus the red hair—
because when I walk I leave words everywhere.

Now I claim I'm a poet (thanks), and have been
deserted and starved, but the truth is I'm a twofold

of bliss (Shel) and woe (Sylvia) that is carved
into the pages of a gleeful abyss.

Beware. Beware. I was gone, gone, gone—
but when digging on the shore I was jabbed
by poetic heirs (thank you) who had to restore
the poetic prowess I tried to ignore.

And so. Now I slouch with a Janus-like mask
in hand and after rousing the rhythms of my claims
I realized this: I am a poet who knows the plot,
but would rather dwell in the twist.

Look what you've done—
I am hidden in glares, a freak so normal
she's rare because I can smell the words
and hear all of the flaws.

Look what you've done—
you've created a dreamer, a poet
who is humming and scarred. And so now,
I must write a memoir.

And I'm not sorry—
Can't you both see—
I am your worn, yet polished
skeleton key.

CHAPTER 2

SIDEWALK WRITING AND RAIN RECITING

If you are a dreamer, come in,
 If you are a dreamer, a wisher, a liar,
 A hope-er, a pray-er, a magic bean buyer...
 If you're a pretender, come sit by my fire
 For we have some flax-golden tales to spin.
 Come in!
 Come in!

—Shel Silverstein, “Invitation,” *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (1974)

“It is raining. I am tempted to write a poem. But I remember what it said on one rejection slip:
 After a heavy rainfall, poems titled RAIN pour in from across the nation.”

—Sylvia Plath, *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*

An Invitation

When I met poetry, I was in first grade and became entranced by Shel Silverstein’s book *Where the Sidewalk Ends*. The words pirouetted perfectly from each page as I read them aloud to my mother. The characters conversed with me as I turned the pages to meet the next magical arrangement of verse. These words taught me that I was a dreamer, a wisher, a liar, a hope-er, a pray-er, a magic bean buyer (I owned a jumping bean, actually), and a pretender. I wish I could go back to first grade and tell myself that, above all of those, I would be a contender in poetry, an art I would later learn to dread in high school and rediscover in college. It would be then, in college, where I learned the poetic cynical wisdom of Sylvia Plath, perhaps the only author I enjoyed reading in high school as I met Esther Greenwood in *The Bell Jar*.

Now that I am a once again in high school, this time as an English Language Arts (ELA) teacher, I often cross-examine myself as to why I avoided poetry through my high school years. Sworn to deliver only truth under the deposition of my own testimony, I ponder. Was it the curricular content? The mundane classroom tasks asked of me? Was it poor instruction or lack of poetic interest from my teachers? My rigorous academic schedule? The distraction of my athletic

participation? Was it simply me? If I were to settle on a single answer, I would blame the curriculum; that humdrum saucer of dry toast with weak tea served daily to students by the U. S. educational system. Maxine Greene (2000) illustrates this point precisely when she argues the mentality of education today consists of “standards, assessment, outcomes, and achievement” (p. 9). Truly, this leaves me to wonder, if the arts may continue to find fit in the canonical infrastructure of curriculum standards, then where? Given that a strong body of evidence suggests the arts provide a learning advantage for many students (Greene, 2001), one is left to wonder why the arts must struggle to find curricular identity. Eliot Eisner (2011), for example, underscores that students work better when they have the opportunity to create images in the form of art, such as “visual, choreographic, musical, literary, or poetic” (xii). Artistic mediums such as these can enhance student understanding in any classroom. However, while reason exists to argue on behalf of all, my overall concern centers on the lack of importance placed on the role of poetry—the jam and butter of the English language—within the curriculum.

If poetry could talk, and I believe it does, perhaps it would join me in asking curriculum scholars why there is so little concern about championing for the inclusion of poetry inside the classroom walls. Why is the art form of poetry minimalized as compared to other fields of fine arts in curriculum or, as Xerri (2014) describes, sidelined in favor of more substantive content? I would argue, in curriculum’s defense, that there are ways of creating, reading, and feeling poetry other than simply teaching students to write a poem. After all, it is through the imagination that students begin to experience poetry. Before they arise to the poetic occasion, however, they must first be invited. I was cordially invited by Shel Silverstein and later summoned by Sylvia Plath, both of whose works have inspired me, as a poet, to tell my journey of poetry to others in the form of memoir. I am inviting readers to partake in obtaining knowledge in poetic inquiry within

curriculum studies as I explore its obstacles, approaches, scholars, and poets in an attempt to elucidate the position of imagination and poetry as an art in curriculum. In this chapter, I will examine the parameters of what it means to live poetically through exploring poetic inquiry in the realm of curriculum.

Educators in Fine Arts: *The Dreamers*

In society, most assume poets are the dreamers due to their abstract thoughts and teeming rhythm that can seem unobtainable and unrealistic. In literature, the dreamers are often those who are punished for having outlandish ideas. Greene (2000) supports this concept as she discusses Jay Gatsby from F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby*: "In the case of Gatsby, the dreamer is the romantic loner, immoral in every ordinary sense except for one decent moment in his life when he takes the blame off Daisy for the fatal automobile accident" (p. 33). Those who are involved in fine arts, such as drama, music, art, writing, and poetry, are typically stereotyped as the romantic loners who get the brunt of negative attention in public school systems; they take the blame off of core subject-areas, and get the short end of the stick, which I would categorize as the tragic automobile accident or as the obstacle. For example, as an ELA teacher, I teach literature in the context of reading and writing; I am also the sponsor of a creative writing club, a group of young individuals who crave to write, especially poetry. Rather than scheduling creative writing as an elective class, the club meets for twenty minutes once a month. Here is the aforementioned fatal accident: the instruction, guidance, and inspiration they need from me, their instructor, cannot be accomplished well once a month in twenty minutes. I would love to support my novice dreamers in their endeavors, but the structure of curriculum makes it difficult to do so. Concurring, Eisner (2011) argues:

Although the arts in American schools are theoretically among the so-called core subjects, and although school districts and indeed the federal government identify them as such, there is a huge ambivalence about their position in the curriculum. No one wants to be regarded as a philistine. Yet at the same time privilege of place is generally assigned to other subject areas. Despite the recent hoopla about their contributions to academic performance, the arts are regarded as nice, but not necessary. (p. xi)

One may argue that poetry is not a popularity contest; however, I would disagree as poetry takes a backseat to other subject areas in education. Much like the cliché scenario where the popular guy overlooks the nice girl, choosing the popular girl instead, poetry becomes the nice subject that is overlooked by school systems rather than a needed entity that is incorporated into classrooms. Similarly, those who teach fine arts in American schools are often disregarded as a sidebar necessity; identified, rather, as an accessory that may be mixed and matched interchangeably within the subjects. The “hoopla” that Eisner is referring to can be seen in the initiative to change S.T.E.M. programs (science, technology, engineering, and math) to S.T.E.A.M. programs (science, technology, engineering, art, and math). In a sense, it seems as if an arts-based curriculum was not invited to the party, but received a pity invitation to join in after reasonable backlash from the dreamers. Truly, learning should be a journey and all facets of the curriculum should be involved in mapping the roads leading to the knowledgeable destination of the learner.

Original discovery is relevant when a student is a dreamer attempting to function in an educational system of realists. In Dewey’s *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902), Dewey utilizes a metaphor of a map and journey when explaining the importance of original discovery and experience in learning. Dewey (1902) states, “The map does not take the place of an actual

journey” (as cited in Willis et al., 1994, p.126). Dewey is suggesting that one may be able to hold a tangible item, such as a map, and read it; however, that does not take the place of actually going forth and exploring on one’s own. Likewise, educator and poet Carl Leggo (1997) explains that poetry in classrooms is much like his experience with driving school whereupon he spent four weeks watching films on how to drive. However, when it was time to actually get behind the wheel he was in shock, as he realized he had “understood the mechanics of driving and had driven hundreds of miles in [his] imagination, but suddenly realized that [he] could not drive” (p. 7). I fear this notion is all too common in our current educational systems as students are exposed to poetry within their various curriculum, yet do not understand there is a realm of poetry that exists outside of what Leggo (1997) describes as the “dead men who had lived in faraway countries” (p. 7). Truthfully, by virtue of policy, educational standards, and teacher licensure, teachers cannot teach beyond their given curriculum. It is important, however, for educators to grasp all pages of teaching and read outside of the margins, revising their classroom content to make room for poetic license and imagination. If educators do not take this action, then our society is unavoidably headed toward a tragic accident.

Poetic Inquiry: *The Wishers*

The term poetry within the context of curriculum studies can present multiple levels of understanding and ideas. In order to provide a foundation for the context of this work, it is important to formally define the word poetry. Merriam-Webster (2016) defines poetry as “writing that formulates a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience in language chosen and arranged to create a specific emotional response through meaning, sound, and rhythm” (p. 956). While the clinical definition is mundane, poetry is truly an experiential medium through

which the writer becomes the artist and the poem becomes the portrait, an imaginative work of art. In curriculum studies texts that focus on poetry, one word remains constant among sources of definition: imagination.

Similarly, the concept of utilizing imagination in the curriculum is not a new idea. The roots of imagination in the curriculum can be traced back to the progressive era in which John Dewey encouraged students to employ deep thinking, otherwise known as “reflective thinking” (Schubert, 2002, p. 24). In provision of the twentieth century social dynamics, Dewey supported this pedagogy in education because it encouraged children to distinguish themselves between the self and other, recognizing they should foster their own outlook and opinions. Dewey saw the importance of the self and where, how, and why the individual learned in an educational environment where one could act upon “reflective thinking” (Schubert, 2002, p. 24). Truly, poetry is an art of reflective thinking in the sense that one explores experiences and history. In her essay, “The Poetic Gestalt: Expressing Awe Towards the Ontological,” Nilofar Shidmehr (2017) states, “To explain the distinctness of poetry, many poets and scholars suggest that poetry is a form of expression in which two different elements are at work at the same time” (Sameshima et al., p. 79). Shidmehr later goes on to explain that poetry and prose are the two means that can come to an end for poetic prowess as one must explore their prose to create a conscious of poetry. Similarly, when one writes poetry, it releases recognition of the self and the other. This self-discovery is essentially important as it releases a sense of being. Philosopher Martin Heidegger (1971/2013) presents an important question in regard to the Being of beings in his essay entitled “What Are Poets For?": “If Being is what is unique to beings, by what can Being still be surpassed?” (p. 128). His answer is quite poetic as he states, “Only by itself, only by its own, and indeed expressly entering into its own” (p. 128). Becoming is a part of Being;

therefore, as poets and educators, we should be constantly becoming in order to transcend ourselves as educators and mentors. As Heidegger elaborates, when one transcends their Being, the truth can be found, and the expression of poetry showcases truth from an unseen angle waiting to be discovered.

Poetic inquiry, as dainty scholars would say, seems to be a gamble when conducting research; however, if poetry releases the self and if the self is always becoming and finding the truth, then who could deny the benefits of poetic inquiry? If the poetics helps one discover the self and the other, then I would contend that poetic inquiry would benefit the educational arena in ways that are not outlined in state mandated curriculums. In regard to poetic inquiry, James (2017) states:

Among poetic inquirers, there is no collective stance in regard to what poetics best serves inquiry—you don't need to buy into one school or another or little effort is expended debating poetics—instead, the inquirer strives to be genuine, even skilled, with words, and to find ways to express personal awakenings by potent engagement with linguistic environment. (Sameshima et al., p. 49)

Research results can be described through personal revivals within poetic inquiry. As stated before, I believe that education is too focused in the mundane, but poetic inquiry allows education to forgo the mundane and pursue a more creative outlet for research. I have read many texts that focus on poetic form situated in curriculum emphasis. For example, Sameshima (2007) explores the epistolary growth through artful scholarly inquiry, utilizing documents, such as e-mail and poems, while Sjollemma and Yuen create a poem as a way to present findings from their research involving aboriginal women. Sjollemma and Yuen (2018) write, “Conventional methods of representation would create a disconnect from the emotion and context that were significant to

the women's experience" (Sameshima et al., 2017, p. 61). Truly, academia has been told that there is only a canonical approach to data representation, but sometimes those methods create a disconnect from the participant, researcher, and reader. This disconnect reminds me of a term coined by American comedian Stephen Colbert on his show *The Colbert Report*. Colbert (2005) refers to the term "truthiness" as a quality that characterizes the truth from the gut or because it feels right without regard to evidence, logic, intellectual examination, or facts. It is when one is bending the truth to a certain extent, which is what occurs when one attempts to rationalize a situation a hand. Colbert further goes on to explain that "truthiness" is feeling the news. For example, there is a sense of disconnect when viewers watch the news—it is simply providing information for the televised audience, but at what point does the audience become emotionally invested in feeling what the news is providing? This concept is similar to that of research and one should begin to question where is the disconnect; poetic inquiry allows the participant, researcher, and reader to feel the content coming at them fully rather than just seeing ink on paper, which is what I believe our students in schools systems are feeling in regard to the poetics—nothing.

Students, Scholars, and Poet-Scholars: *The Hope-ers, the Pray-ers, and Magic Bean Buyers*

After introducing myself at the beginning of the semester to my fourteen and fifteen-year-old students, I am usually asked the following question: *what do you do for fun?* My response usually consists of this: *well, I enjoy spending time with my family, reading books, and writing poetry.* They are not taken aback by my comment on spending time with my family because that seems to be a common answer and they are semi-receptive to my comment on reading books (I am an English teacher, so it fits the stereotype), but rather they are taken aback

at my comment on writing poetry. After four years of teaching in my current school system that supports my teaching pedagogy, I have learned that when I investigate my students' interest in poetry there is a lack of understanding with regard to who poets are and what poets do. Poets are not *just* the dead white guys (although there are many) or the emotional teenagers who use clichés to fulfill their angst; rather, poets are musicians, dancers, teachers, composers, and those who seek the truth to their own being (Eisner, 2011). When I apply Eisner's construct to the business of poetic inquiry in curriculum, I imagine students as the "hope-ers" who believe they can merely think positive thoughts to get through school, and the scholars as the "pray-ers" who, as Bon Jovi said best, are living on a prayer that educators listen to their methodologies, and the poet-scholars as the "magic bean buyers" cast aside by others because of their outlandish ideas.

Students

When I was a college undergraduate, I rediscovered poetry by accident. Scanning the course offerings, I made a moment's decision that evolved more from rote than rhythm. In order to fulfill my creative writing minor, I registered for an advanced poetry class, thinking *how hard can this be?* I had told myself that it would most likely be similar to the mind numbing content I had been forced to read in high school. This time, however, I was wrong—I had to write the poetry myself. I remember tackling my first writing assignment, staring at a blank sheet of paper and wishing a poem would appear. The next day, paralyzed by Poetic Torture Study Derangement (PTSD), I found myself knocking frantically on my professor's door to ask—nay, beg—for help. Following several insightful discussions with my very gracious professor (my chair carefully placed away from the proximity of an open spring window), I began to find my latent muse. Soon after writing my first poem, I felt a sense of empowerment that rose simply

and organically from just being; existing especially as a female. The sensation reminded me of one of my favorite Sylvia Plath poems entitled “You’re.” Plath (2016) writes, “Clownlike, happiest on your hands, / Feet to the stars, and moon-skulled, Gilled like a fish... Jumpy as a Mexican bean./ Right, like a well-done sum./ A clean slate, with your own face on” (p. 122). Plath reminds readers that a portrait of oneself can be a messy business; however, at the end, whenever we wish, a clean slate can surface to begin anew. As cliché as it sounds, I realized after struggling with writing my first poem in college that I could also begin with a clean slate—this feeling was poetic and powerful. Now, as an educator, I explain this sentiment to my students; I often remind them of this as the past does not define them, but it certainly does make a great story about who they are as beings. Similarly, Rapper Kendrick Lamar once stated, “If I’m gonna tell a real story, I’m gonna start with my name” (Barshad, 2012). I encourage students to do the same, but I often question if guided curriculum hinders this concept and the free spirit of individuality among our students. I am constantly endeavoring to explore my question because, as a high school student, I was a being who was attempting to find out what it meant to become; however, rather than embracing the individualistic route provided by many authors and poets that I once loved to read, my free spirit was quieted while it patiently waited for me to look in the rear view mirror of my being.

Perhaps if my being had been recognized as poetic, then I could have ultimately avoided the constant questioning of my being in comparison to the other. Likewise, I would like to question curriculum in regard to how we view the students as beings; I have always had a fascination with how we view the other. At the beginning of each semester, I tell my high school students that everything we do is linked to how we view the other, and I define the other as anyone but ourselves. The carnivalesque image comes to mind with viewing the other, and can

be described, as Silverstein would say, as those who are hoppers, prayers, and magic bean buyers. Students hope they understand the curriculum provided to them, pray they will be successful at it, and then unknowingly buy into the magic the mundane curriculum so willingly convinces them to buy. Likewise, I believe that educators categorize their students in this sense. Greene (2000) states, “It is not only that the carnival is the expression of popular culture. Just as importantly, it challenges the pompous and authoritative; it reduces the grandiose to size; it makes hole in empty pieties” (p. 63). While the carnivalesque can be seen as the other, they can also be seen as those who fill in the gaps that society would deem as abnormal, which in my opinion, creates the aesthetic quality to our race of beings. Likewise, our students are the carnivalesque images of our classroom and I would argue that curriculum attempts to mold them into serious members of society who are afraid to laugh not only at others, but also themselves. Truthfully, I cannot recall one single day in my classroom where at least one student did not make me laugh. Laughing is a poetic mechanism that floats through the air and into our being. In regard to dancing and laughing, Greene (2000) contends, “... the value of such energy connects greatly with an argument including the arts and humanities in our pedagogical programs, whatever our ends in view” (p. 63). In a sense, our lives are a work of art and we should be constantly be embracing the methods behind making them whole.

Scholars

Arguably, segregation in academia occurs in school across America for both the scholar and student, hindering those that are hoppers and prayers. In his book, *The Shame of the Nation*, Jonathan Kozol (2005) creates an alarming portrayal of our modern academic settings, expressing that segregation still exists in education. As stated beforehand, different actions have

taken place in education in order to ensure that segregation has been lifted, which I believe has hindered the arts based curriculum. For example, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) caused several spouts of population changes within the school systems across America. Due to these changes, parents moved their children to schools with high standards for learning and better learning outcomes. While I do not think it is wrong to hold students to high expectations in meeting standards, I do believe that this has caused a disarray of student learning in education within fine arts programs.

Recently, however, the idea of re-segregation has resurfaced in the arena of education. In the article, “Resegregation: What’s the Answer?,” Kozol et al. (2010) offer suggestions on how society should respond to the issue of re-segregation. One of the main issues that Eaton (2010) presents is that students are in the midst of a “growing racial and economic isolation” (Kozol et al., 2010). Eaton mentions that students cannot help the area code in which they live; therefore, it is important to foster their needs as young learners. Greene (2001) contends, “And that was the point—for Berger, for Dewey, for ourselves—to find in the languages of the arts a means of clarifying our experiences...” (p. 106). Experience is extremely important for an individual; my concern is, however, that if students are experiencing this notion of resegregation in their own classrooms, then one would assume their experiences are negative. Equally, self-reflexivity, as Greene notes, is important to clarify when incorporating arts based learning in the classroom. As teachers, it is our responsibility to create awareness for those students who struggle with the racial and economic barrier, and it is also important to create awareness for the barriers that disinvite the unsung heroic arts into our classrooms. Academic excellence does not mean that educators feel sorry for the children who do not understand and keep testing them. Rather, it is

important that good teachers focus on the poetic essence of becoming in order to help these students become adapted to content and environment, especially in the realm of poetics.

Exploration of the poetics can lead to one creating a work of art, feeling an immense amount of satisfaction. I am always telling my students that writing is an art, and once a piece of writing has been created, it is okay to sit back and feel a sense of accomplishment because it is art. Arts based research lends the researcher a perspective of poetics. Likewise, Barone and Eisner (2012) contend that art based research lead to one creating a work of art. They state:

Arts based research represents an effort to explore the potentialities of an approach to representation that is rooted in aesthetic considerations and that, when it is at its best, culminates in the creation of something close to a work of art. (p. 1)

One may argue that poetry is not a form of aesthetics; however, when I teach poetry, I encourage my students to close their eyes in order to convey all of the aesthetic sensory images within the poem. Much like Barone and Eisner's point, the depiction of the art is rooted in one's own experiences, leading to the aesthetic. Similarly, in his article "The First Glamourizer of Thought: Theoretical and Autobiographical Ruminations on Drama and Education," Robert Donmoyer (2012) states, "... Eisner has argued that all our knowledge of the world is mediated by the mind. Eisner, however, also adds that we need to not limit ourselves to the mediating symbols employed by social scientists" (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 93). In this sense, Donmoyer is elaborating on the theme of one's control by mind versus one's influence from others on the mind. Social scientists inform educators of the habits of the youth, generating a generalized concept of the youth, thus creating stereotypes. My biggest concern in this is that once the stereotype is assigned it cannot be broken.

Equally, Barone and Eisner (2012) state, “The meaning located in a story, the qualities generated by a symphony, and the cadences that are meaningful in a poem are all sources of enlightenment” (p. 62). It is time that students become enlightened with their own experiences and become exposed to the aesthetic in curriculum. If educators begin involving more aesthetic activities, then students will begin to explore outside the margins of the given curriculum rather than becoming more marginalized (Eisner, 2011; Greene, 2000). This, however, means that educators must take risks, which is not easy to do when developing a critical pedagogy in a public school system. Hill (2009) states, “Despite a clear theoretical commitment to the cultural studies tradition, critical pedagogy scholars have largely ignored multiperspectival analyses in favor of rigid textual approaches” (p. 7). This, in turn, creates more of a strict analysis on students’ education rather than looking through the cracks and igniting the aesthetic. Truly, educators as well as the curriculum must be willing to take risks on art based learning to further explore the aesthetics in poetry.

Poet-Scholars (An Oxymoron? No.)

When thinking of the term Poet-Scholar, one may question if such a term exists as poets are known to be art-based in their practices and scholars are known to focus their practices more on academia-approved topics. I would argue, however, that Poet-Scholars do exist, especially in the field of curriculum studies. I will first contend that scholars are those who have insightful and profound knowledge of a certain subject. In connection to poetry, many scholars become knowledgeable in their content area and then write about it through a poetic medium. For example, many philosophers are also poets or support poetics, such as, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Gaston Bachelard, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman. These

philosophers, among many others, explore the subject of poetry and writing poetry in order to comprehend its art more fully. Not all scholars are poets, but all scholars can attempt poetry. I would argue, however, that most scholars are intimidated by poetry and are afraid to explore beyond the means of their well-known subject. Likewise, Heidegger (1971/2013) contends that poetry promotes understanding of the world and experiences; however, one must ultimately break into the voids of the world in order to begin the process to understand its tendencies.

Heidegger states:

...there fails to appear for the world the ground that grounds it. The word for abyss—*Abgrund*—originally means the soil and ground toward which, because it is undermost, a thing that tends downward...In the age of the world's night the abyss of the world must be experienced and endured. But for this it is necessary that there be those who reach into the abyss. (p. 90)

Those who reach into the abyss are attempting to familiarize and withstand the ways of the world in order to become more knowledgeable. When reaching into an abyss, one does not know exactly what is in store for them, but they continue to out stretch their hand into the unknown until they feel a means of resolve. Sometimes, I believe, a means of resolve cannot be found; therefore, we keep reaching and searching, further producing more writing. This concept has been true for decades and it continues to be true in modern scholarship as well.

There are several curriculum theorists who are poet-scholars and have had works that have spoken to me as a poet-scholar. T.S. Eliot helps me think critically toward incorporating poetry into my teaching pedagogy while constantly helping me recognize the poetic voice I am attempting to embody when writing. Eliot (2009) contends there are three major voices in poetry: the first is the voice of the poet who could be talking to themselves or no one at all, the second

voice is the voice of the poet addressing the audience, and the third voice is the voice of the poet coming from the narrator of the poem or character in their verse (p. 96). These voices help the poet recognize their declarations, which is an art within itself. As a secondary educator, it is sometimes difficult finding this voice in my classroom and on the pages of my poetry. By reading several modern poet-scholars, I have come to understand that I am not the only poet-educator who struggles with this situation. Carl Leggo (1997) is a former high school English teacher who left the field to join higher education and continue his scholarship in poetry. I would argue that Leggo is a poet-scholar who continues to reach into the abyss in order to understand our educational system, constantly dedicating his research to both creative and critical discourse. Leggo (2018) states, “My goal is to offer a hopeful testimony to the value of giving curricular and pedagogical attention to the significance of critical creativity in education” (p. 72). Critical creativity is crucial in learning because it evokes one’s imagination. In regard to connecting poetry to his practices, Leggo (2018) writes, “In the performance, I weave poetry, personal anecdotes and recollections, quotations from writers who have informed and inspired me, and reflections about (my) institutional autobiography” (p. 72). After reading this statement from Leggo as well as other pieces of his work, I realized how similar he and I are in our writing styles. He quotes authors who have spoken to his being, writes poetry to accompany his critical discourse, and tells stories of personal experiences that help his reader understand his content. I also utilize these strategies when writing because I believe it makes the reader feel more connected to the content they are reading; perhaps this method of writing truly works as I feel connected to the works’ of Leggo.

In addition to Leggo, Paulina Sameshima utilizes creative, innovative, and poetic ways to conduct and present her research. For example, Sameshima (2007) explores epistolary growth

through her scholarly inquiry as she delves through different types of documents, such as e-mails and poetry, in order to present her research to her readers. Sameshima's poetic license is truly beautiful as she weaves her story through her stanza. In the Spring of 2018, I had the opportunity to meet Sameshima at the Critical Media Literacy Conference whereupon Sameshima asked me to read the second voice in her dialogue poem. Besides fearing that I would butcher her poem (I had not had the opportunity to practice reading it aloud to myself), I found this moment to be truly inspiring and unforgettable as I later wrote a dialogue poem of my own entitled "A Dialogue Between Poetry and Hip-Hop." In turn, her practices along with Leggo's advice in the classroom have helped shape my perspective in regard to poetic inquiry within the field, thus redefining and exclaiming that poet-scholars do exist.

The Poets: *The "Pretenders"*

I am a poet, I am an educator, but I am not a pretender. Respectfully, the title of this section is dedicated to Plato as he wrote about poets being imitators, pretenders, and deceivers of life, essentially developing a false reality. Poets in Plato's time were migratory or itinerant workers forced to move from place to place in order to make a living from those who had not heard their work. Likewise, in "The Allegory of the Cave," Plato (1955/2007) encourages beings to step outside of the cave in order to see the light, then take the light back into the darkness of the cave so others may be educated about the light, hopefully triggering an awakening of those who are in darkness. I have always loved this philosophical story and example because it sounds poetic as one searches for the light and the truth; however, after I thoroughly began reading Plato, I realized that he would have not considered my notions of his story as poetic a compliment. Rather, he would have perhaps told me that poets are imitators and that his story

does not imitate because it is not “produced by other particular crafts” (p. 337) as poetry tends to do. These assumptions and Plato’s philosophy toward poetry and the arts seem to lack imagination, creating a cynical outlook towards art-based learning and art-based research.

Similarly, Richard Hugo (1992) writes:

The imagination is a cynic. By that I mean that it can accommodate the most disparate elements with no regard for relative values. And it does this by assuming all things have equal value, which is a way of saying nothing has any value, which is cynicism. (p. 15)

If Plato’s assumption on poets as pretenders is true, then would not there be only one actual truth? Plato is saying that nothing of poets has any worth, which conveys a sense of cynicism in his philosophy; therefore, Plato does have an imagination, but it is cynical and cannot see every angle of the light shining through the walls of the cave. Ultimately, I would like to ask Plato the following question: *If poets are imitators who create false realities, then wouldn’t this imply that imitating only creates one way of looking at one reality?* A two-dimensional vision of reality creates a one-dimensional being, such as the figure of a line, guiding the being to live the straight and narrow life. Arguably, a one-dimensional life is no life to live at all seeing as how one would have to conform to the hollow paths of the cave, and us poets do not do well at conforming because, after all, that would be pretending and deceiving.

Even if poets were pretending, Shel Silverstein would have still invited them, along with anyone else, including the cynical Sylvia Plath, into his cave. Perhaps this is why he triggered a poetic awakening within me when I was younger. Although his books of poetry seem to be written for a younger audience, his poetry speaks deeply in regard to human nature; I believe I have carried Silverstein’s words with me since I was a child as he helped me discover my being.

Silverstein's own version of Plato's "The Allegory of the Cave," in my opinion, is his poem entitled "The Light in the Attic":

There's a light on in the attic.

Though the house is dark and shuttered,

I can see a flickerin' flutter,

And I know what it's about.

There's a light on in the attic.

I can see it from the outside.

And I know you're on the inside... lookin' out. (Silverstein, 1981, p. 7)

By using the metaphor of the attic, Silverstein is implying that we tend to hide in unwanted, unused spaces in darkness; however, because the narrator's perspective is from the outside looking in, he is implying that he sees a light in this dark space, and the light is *you*. We, the readers, are the light that helps reveal truth in the darkness, so we must keep writing.

If Sylvia Plath had not kept writing amidst her so-called "darkness," then we perhaps would not be talking about her now. In high school, sprawled out on my grandmother's extremely large Persian rug, I recall reading Plath's novel *The Bell Jar* and meeting Esther Greenwood. Esther's personality was my personality and, in that moment, I read the word *cynical*, not understanding its meaning, so I looked it up on the computer placed properly on the desk in the corner of the living room. I recall reading the definition and the words *dark* and *sarcastic* became engrained in my head. *This is Esther*, I thought, *and she is into fashion and she is cynical*. Perhaps it may seem strange that I remember this particular moment as a teenager, but it sparked me to read more Plath, specifically prose and not poetry (remember, I was in high school and poetry is scary and about the dead old guys). Later, in college, after I had my poetic

awakening, I went back to Plath, except this time with poetry. I recall sitting in the library being mad at myself for not exploring her poetry in high school; her poetry was cynical and I loved it too. I remembered a specific high school teacher who rolled their eyes at the mention of Plath and then mentioned something along the lines of *she's got issues*. While this is the notion of most educators, I would argue that, after reading a great deal about Plath, both her life and her works, she wanted to be remembered as a “mythology to modern consciousness” (Rollyson, 2014, p. 1). Likewise, in regard to my own writing, the cynicism I use is perhaps from reading too much Plath and obsessing over her works; however, I believe Silverstein’s influence on my works is the equalizer to my own poetic process where both authors pull at the light side and the dark side to my poetry. With this notion, perhaps Plato should know that as a poet, not a pretender, I dwindle both inside of the cave and outside of the cave, and he is more than welcome to listen to my three-dimensional truths.

Poetry in Secondary Curriculum: *The Flax-golden Tales to Spin*

Here is a truth: we read the poetry of Tupac Shakur in my classroom. Yes, Tupac was a famous hip-hop artist, but he was also a great poet and his legacy lives on; therefore, it is not only my responsibility to pass on his legacy, but it is also my responsibility to hook teenagers on poetry and Tupac always wins in the classroom. A major question I usually get asked is the following: Is Tupac’s poetry written into the curriculum? And then, I usually respond: No, but early modern poetry and twentieth century poetry is written into the curriculum and teenagers would probably rather complete a thousand math problems before attempting to read that. It’s true—teaching poetry is not easy (Benton, 1984; Leggo, 1997), so educators, especially myself, have to sometimes spin flax-golden tales in order to hook the interests of our students. When

students' interests are paired with canonical texts, then a teacher is more likely to have students' full attention. For example, Naylor (2013) conducted a study in pairing modern poems with early modern canonical poems and twentieth century poems. Naylor comments on the outcome of the students' responses: "They were responsive to the themes of death, loss and the impact that had on the speaker of the poem. They were able to see the relationship between the expression of those themes in the poem and their own lives" (p. 76). Connecting poetry to our own lives and finding ourselves with the poem is the larger picture at hand. This is a task I do not take lightly when teaching my students. Before introducing this connection though, I try to teach my students to look in between the lines of what is missing in their own curriculum.

While educators spin sterile, flax-golden tales to students, they perhaps leave out the biggest reality of all. Between the lines in students' textbooks, there lays a blank slate, meaning students do not think about who or what is left out of their textbooks. Consider this concept from the perspective of Albert Memmi (1965) who states, "The most serious blow suffered by the colonized is being removed from history" (p. 91). There are people, topics, and important issues left out of the curriculum, and students do not even realize it. My students will never believe in the between the lines of reading unless I point it out to them, so I do with fidelity. There are missing elements of our American and worldly histories that do not even scratch the surface of our schools' textbooks or curriculum maps. Recently, I asked my fourteen to fifteen year-old students about a Disney movie whereupon they named princesses, sang catchy tunes, and quoted cliché lines from the film. Later, I then questioned them about Jean-Michel Basquiat, Malcom X, James Baldwin, Elizabeth Bishop, Sylvia Plath, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, and other important figures that I believe are left out of our American school curriculum. At the close of this question, my students did not shout out facts about these figures or even quote them, rather

they gave me blank stares with no reply—their silence spoke more to me than words. I could question why there was silence, but I already knew why: the American curriculum is filtered and craves to be more integrated with worldly history, multi-culturism, and reality. Imagine a curriculum where students knew who these important figures were, recognizing that these people were poetic in their passions and advocates for their own ideas.

Students also need to be poetic in their understandings and think outside of the box. When studying poetic inquiry within the field of curriculum studies, I could not help but notice that the majority of the Poet-Scholars, including Carl Leggo, Paulina Sameshima, and Sean Wiebe, are based in Canada. Perhaps one could say the cold weather and Maple syrup are an inspiration to the poet-scholars; however, one must also question the boundaries of curriculum itself within the borders of Canada versus the confines in the United States. Antonio Gramsci once posed the idea that it is hard to get outside of one's own ideology (Forgacs, 2000). Similarly, students are not allowed to think outside of what the curriculum allows, creating a cyclical effect for the way the American culture is focused; it is a constant chain of reactions that allow our country to merely see materialism rather than idealism. While Canadian education reform is motivated by a more collectivist attitude, Pinar contends that American curriculum history is dominated by business thinking whereas “Canadian curriculum has traditionally been less activist in its ambitions to shape society through schools” (as cited in Doll and Pinar, 2016, p. 36). Truly, it seems as if Canadian education fosters students' free-thinking outside of school while American education fosters students' curriculum aligned thinking within the confines of schools. For example, Canada encourages students to explore their creativity outside of school while the American education focuses on creativity within school boundaries, focusing heavily on how student creativity can contribute to the working society. I believe this causes a chain

reaction within the walls of our schools, creating an environment where students feel pressured about their own education and leave their creativity in the dark. Questioning where the chain of reactions begin, leads me to believe that it starts in our schools and, ironically, no one ever questions it because they believe it is of the common good. Morris (2016a) questions what is good and what is common; knowing the self is “an intractable problem” because “self is built in relation to the other” (p. 62). I believe the foundation of our American curriculum is structured based off of the self who fears the other, which causes students to settle with reading what is on the line rather than in between the lines; therefore, educators must spin these flax-golden tales in order to shed light on boxed-up creativity.

Playing with Poetry: *Come in!*

I will never forget how by-the-books my teaching methodology was when I first began my career in education. I dotted my i's, crossed my t's, and then later, somewhere in between my growing frustration of not being able to write poetry and the tasks that were asked of me, I began to take risks in my classroom. Six years later, and I am telling my students to shut the classroom door so we can talk about Langston Hughes in conjunction with Tupac Shakur or watch a Kendrick Lamar music video for film analysis. Our conversations focus on poetic elements, but most of all, they are in-depth and real. The only way I can truly introduce the art of poetry to my students is by utilizing a tool they can connect with. Music provokes the aesthetic and by showing a music video they are exposed to both the visual, verbal and audible aesthetics, aiding in their artistic experience. Music as poetic inquiry has been the best means of understanding poetry for my students. Truly, all educators are able to utilize the arts in their teaching

methodology, especially by incorporating the every day aesthetic. Aesthetic education provides an awakening of the senses when one falls into the mundane. Greene (2001) states:

“Aesthetic Education,” then, is an intentional undertaking designed to nurture appreciative, reflective, cultural, participatory engagements with the arts by enabling learners to notice what is there to be noticed, and to lend works of art their lives in such a way that they can achieve them as variously meaningful. (p. 6)

Aesthetic education, such as poetry, ignites students’ side of the brain that often falls asleep when given lockstep information throughout the school day. If educators could merge aesthetic education into their content, encouraging students to develop as independent thinkers, then student engagement of the subject would increase, reflecting overall improvement in school systems nationally, and result in overall better humans.

Educators need to know it is okay to take the risk involved in developing their critical pedagogy. If educators are not continually learning, then how are they developing the young minds in front of them? Their extra energy must be utilized to evoke the aesthetic awakening in students. As Moe (2013) encourages the idea of original energy, he truly notes that teachers get wound up in day-to-day antics of education and forget their purpose, losing the poetic aspect to life. Likewise, in regard to poetry, Vaquer (2016) contends, “A poem is a space that encourages dwelling, lingering, and loafing” (p. 130). These three notions are true as one needs to have the space to complete critical thinking. Critical thinking happens when educators are not rushed, but rather breathing in a space where they can reflect and build upon *realistic* ideas and goals.

Vaquer further notes:

Goals are important, but setting oneself up for disappointment is, at best, misguided.

Preparing oneself to respond to a future that unfolds in much the same way as it already

is while allowing for inevitable growth and change is the healthy way of looking towards the future. (p. 28)

If teachers can face the challenges of the past while looking toward the future, then more goals are likely to be accomplished, encouraging them to reach into the abyss and pursue an interest outside of their given curriculum.

Poetic inquiry helps scholars seek the answers they were not looking for and understanding the information they perhaps did not need, which reveals the truth in our humanity. Leggo (2018) contends, “What if the hang-ups are our humanity, at least as integral to who we are and are becoming, as any gifts and talents we might celebrate with the world? Perhaps the classroom needs to be a place where human beings hang out with their hang-ups” (p. 87). Leggo encourages educators to center on a teaching pedagogy that reflects an educator who is willing to help students at any given moment develop as an individual learner, and thinker, regardless of the darkness that has abandoned them in their lives. As a poet-scholar and educator, teaching has taught me that I will be continually learning new methodologies, techniques, and ways to conduct my classroom, whether from my peers, co-workers, or even my students. New aesthetic methodologies are thriving and will not cease until they are truly heard. It is important for educators to continually revamp their style, reinventing themselves each school year in order to ensure a solid foundation for those students who will become leaders, citizens, and independent thinkers in a nation that tells them they are merely dreamers. The invitation to create aesthetic, arts based curricula has been extended to academia; however, educators must listen so they can be the dreamers while fostering the hoppers, prayers, and magic bean buyers. Likewise, poetry is an outlet to this process, and I would argue one of the best art forms to complete this task. As educators, it is important to listen to those who came before us and accept their

invitation, but learn and invent on our own. It is also important to realize, as a poet-scholar, who the two faces are on the Janus-like mask you are holding because you are their skeleton key waiting to be turned; turned in a world that does not necessarily understand your shape or size, and if you get a rejection slip then do not be surprised because you are a poet, an educator, who is writing to glaring eyes.

CHAPTER TWO POETIC POSTLUDE

A Poem Not Titled RAIN

If you had questioned my name
I wouldn't have responded—
I could have been anything:
a specific gal on a specific hour,
a gal too far into the tale of her own legacy
to dream herself into another one,
already starting to measure strands
of what she was, to search
the field changing colors
next to disposition—the best
she'd know of persistence—and if
planes did exist, then one day,
acceptingly, she would say her name;
although she didn't know then,
sparkling from midday showers,
that she could fly.

CHAPTER THREE POETIC PRELUDE

Poor Physics

Blinking at that chaotic pinball as it ricochets—
ricochets I see everywhere on pang on pang of pain
and think how terrifying it is to go down that ramp
and be mindless, fearless in spurring interactions.
Somewhere: it should stop, but it doesn't—endless
rows and signals keep it flipping, bumping, plunging
to the spring-loaded rod that awaits. And the stool
next to the quarter slot keeps blinking—I can't stand it,
lately—as I stir my coffee searching for the grounds
that have been wound to the infinite bottom of my cup.
Then, there's the cement floor under my shoe,
the ants turn their back and make a run for the other side
of my foot because it's safer there. *Am I crowding you?*
I say as I remember the two folds of grief and happiness—
it's a part of you the ants will say, but truly I can barely
feel my own continent, the landscapes, the weather—
but what I'm saying is that I know all about ricocheting
and getting overthrown—and I'm under the glass on the
neon playing field, looking for a target as I propel
away on my own.

CHAPTER 3

STORYTELLING, POOR PHYSICS, AND POETIC LICENSE

“What I fear most, I think, is the death of the imagination....”

—Sylvia Plath, *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*

“Memory is a pinball machine—it messily ricochets around between image, idea, fragments of scenes, stories you’ve heard. Then the machine goes tilt and snaps off. But most of the time, we keep memories packed away.”

—Mary Karr, *The Art of Memoir*

Had I the technology and requisite skills to travel back in time, perhaps it would be easier to write a memoir on poetry; however, I am not Marty McFly and there is no Dr. Emmet Brown, DeLorean car, or flux capacitor to help remind me of details from my past. Perhaps Dr. Brown would explain to me that physics is the key to going back in time. I would tell him, however, that mere physics cannot unhinge the inertia of memories held within; they are buried deep with no net forces waiting to unsettle them or send them skidding across one’s conscience during life’s circumstance. If Newton’s Laws of Motion describe the relationship between a body and the forces that act upon it, then which universal theory is the literary equivalent that allows one’s memories to become propellers of imagination and storytelling? I believe memoirist Mary Karr (2016) explains such discordant harmony best when she states, “Memory is a pinball machine—it messily ricochets around between image, idea, fragments of scenes, stories you’ve heard. Then the machine goes tilt and snaps off. But most of the time, we keep memories packed away” (pp. 1-2). A greater being of ourselves, elaborating on details in order to help the reader feel a sense of presence, can then trigger the memories we pack away. I also contend that when one delves into one’s own memory, these inert bodies of resting thought are ejected, constantly ricocheting to the surface of packed away memories.

While physics may support the science behind the inner workings of the pinball machine, a philosophical tragedy of the machine rests in its confinement to defined space, allowing no room for creativity or thought. If memory remains “packed away,” as Karr would describe it, then one cannot reflect on or share from learned experiences until one consciously explores it, criticizes it, and writes it. Similarly, as an ELA educator, I truly believe that sharing our experiences is essential to the development of literacy skills in students as well as the instruction they receive in ELA and across the curriculum. In order to teach students well, not only must we learn what to do in sharing experiences that bring relevance, joy, imagination, and life to dying curriculum, we must also learn what *not* to do. In *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*, Plath (2000) writes:

What I fear most, I think, is the death of the imagination.... If I sit still and don't do anything, the world goes on beating like a slack drum, without meaning. We must be moving, working, making dreams to run toward; the poverty of life without dreams is too horrible to imagine. (p. 210)

Sitting still and leaving memories packed away, leaves one to become unrhythmic, making imagination become dormant; poetry encompasses rhythm with meaning and listening to a slack drum can create an unrhythmic life with no meter, no purpose. Dreams and memories matter and trigger an imagination that creates a poetic way of living. Likewise, my memories and dreams as an educator and student, a coach and an editor, and a poet and a female create a poetic rhythm in order for me to tell stories. My biggest underlying concern in this chapter is in regard to losing interest and imagination within learning and education, underscoring how memory is like a pinball machine that must be unlocked before the slack drum makes its first beat.

Lived Experiences: *The Chaotic Pinball*

Here is the plain truth: Mine will never be the voice confidently stating, “I’ll take *Alliterative Aerodynamics* for \$1,000, Alex.” I do not understand physics and cannot relate to most *Jeopardy* categories featuring fun facts of science. Frankly, I have made deliberate efforts to forget science altogether, hoping the terrible experiences I had in high school would self-destruct alongside them. Some memories, however, remain far too lucid; camping out in my hippocampus like burned marshmallows clinging to a stick. There are two such incidences that refuse to leave me in peace. Like Elliott in Steven Spielberg’s well-known film *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1992), I too had an issue with dissecting frogs. Unlike Eliot’s scenario in which the frogs were still alive, however, my poor victim was laid out on the cold, hard slab in front of me; dead as some poor Joe in an episode of *Law and Order*. The nauseating smell of formaldehyde fed the panic-laced revulsion building in my throat as I stared at the supine specimen and sterile instruments the teacher set before me. So, I knew had a choice to make: Delve with reckless abandon into the aromatic wonders of basic chordate anatomy or improvise some way to extract myself from disemboweling Kermit? Quickly considering my options, I did what I believed any reasonable A-plus honor student would do—I threw the offending scalpel. Chucked it straight across the science lab toward the improvised wastebasket hoop from my imaginary line at center court. Score; all basket, no three-ply polyurethane net! While victory did not taste as sweet as I had imagined, it smelled far better. With three points on the board, my irritated lab teacher pointed dramatically to a small, quiet corner away from the amphibious crime scene. I was quickly tried then sentenced to the confines of my own desk; tasked with completing one-

dimensional worksheets matching word lists to an artist's sketch of an anonymous frog's body parts. A year later, I would struggle with bewildering science formulas, staying after school regularly to endure tutoring from a dour, unenthusiastic teacher in order to properly memorize all 113 names on the Periodic Table of Elements to prepare for several teacher-constructed tests that I would eventually fail anyway. When, frustrated, I told my teacher that I did not understand how I had failed, she informed me that *just because you have pretty blue eyes and blonde hair does not mean you will always make an A*. Stunned, I realized she had just told me that she believed me incapable of learning what she taught because of my physical appearance. Fast forward to the school term, I will forever remember the bold-faced Times-New Roman grade of 79 etched in black next to the subject *Biology* on my report card. Regardless of my extra efforts, including the self-service after-school tutorials, this teacher chose to exacerbate my discouragement by boldly commemorating my humiliation; cementing it for posterity to that demeaning number. This blighted mark became the first and only C permanently stamped on my transcript; a bellwether to warn college admissions boards this student was incapable of memorizing the Periodic Table of Elements, the singular best measure of potential for long-term student success.

Now here I am: thirty-years-old, a teacher, a coach, and a doctoral student, who has never been required to dissect a frog, recite the Periodic Table of Elements (incidentally, there are now 118), or identify any animal by domain, kingdom, phylum, or class. I have had opportunities to tell my colleagues and students my science story, however, because it is truly from sharing experiences like these that both educators and students can learn. Pinar (2012) was quite right in stating that, "Education requires subjectivity in order for it to speak, for it to become concrete, to become actual" (p. 43). While the speaker's truth falls plainly within the realm of personal subjectivity, lived experiences help connect concept to reality, giving voice to relevance that

actualizes and makes learning “real.” To this purpose, memoir serves a valuable role in providing dimensional relevance that can personalize the curriculum and advance student learning. As Karr (2016) contends, “The master memoirist creates such a personal interior space... It’s the speaker’s truth alone. In this way, the form constantly disavows the rigors of objective truth” (p. 16). By creating a personal space constructed of story, readers and listeners can become enthralled to learning a tale of someone else’s experiences. In this truth, as an educator and poet, elements from my high school curriculum hindered my imagination and creativity, leaving me to abandon the humanities, especially poetry.

Many poets recollect and tell their life story in a poetical form, leaving readers to delve into the pages where the words reverberate and become real. The works of Donald Hall and Elizabeth Bishop have resonated within my writing, helping me bring a memoir to life. Hall (2003), for example, discusses his experience as a former English teacher who became robotic and tired in the classroom, later leading him to abandon teaching and continue writing full-time. Likewise, Elizabeth Bishop’s story rises from the page as Megan Marshall (2017) recounts her experience as Bishop’s former student, mimicking a biography told in memoir-like fashion. When reading *Elizabeth Bishop: A Miracle for Breakfast*, author Megan Marshall (2017) recalls her account as a student of Bishop’s, revealing the poetic and pedagogical tendencies of the famous poet. She begins her book by setting up a scene of Bishop for the reader, and then follows with the words “I wasn’t there either” (p. 3). Although this is memoir, Marshall is putting herself into Bishop’s shoes and recalling memories that were told to her by Bishop, step-by-step. In a sense, the reader must recognize the artful process of writing a memoir as the past is underscored to best portray how familiarity and memoir are truly a twofold of writing about experiences. I invite you to consider:

What if educators challenged students to do the same thing—write their life stories into poetical forms? These lived experiences could be revived on paper, and although sometimes painful, it could perhaps cause the slack drum to momentarily pause and let another rhythmic moment in students' imaginations dance. In a creative writing workshop, I encouraged students to channel a childhood moment where they could resurface their memories. As their faces squirmed, one student asked how far back into their childhood did they need to go while another student awkwardly laughed, saying it is hard to remember things as a child. I encouraged them to think of an action, picture, or moment from their childhood and use it as their first line in the poem. One of my tenth grade students created the following poem with no title:

light under the door

Soft, infinite, bright

I lay flat on the floor

Thin wisp of gold

Finitely ajar

eyes of dark hazel

Pining afar

Constellations dance

Lusters of the forgotten

Hues all banded tightly

Leaving all the misbegotten

Curiosity stems and eats away
 Nebula clouds craving more
 Rays bend and fade to gray
 I lay flat on the floor

In this poem, the student recalls lying on the floor and looking under the door, imagining seeing a different world than her actual home. While there are at least two end rhymes in the first three stanzas, her rhythm becomes more evident in the last stanza as she utilizes an end rhyme in every line, portraying that she is coming to terms and understanding with her memory. Before the student wrote this poem, she struggled with the idea that all poems had to rhyme; therefore, she stayed away from writing them. She later expressed to me that she and I had a conversation after class one day during which I told her not all poems rhymed and it was okay not to rhyme, but to create a rhythm on your own (I also think I mentioned the cliché phrase *march to the beat of your own drum*). As she revisited our conversation, I began to understand that she took a risk not only with her writing, but also with exploring her childhood as a memory. I agree with Leggo (2018) as he states, “I am always seeking to sing in a language that is aesthetic” (p. 73). Perhaps if more educators decided to sing their aesthetic rather than hum a dry tune, then more students would experience a poetic, rhythmic awakening to their own creativity.

Fencing in Poetic Imagination: *Ricochets...Everywhere*

Sometimes, poetic imagination and creativity is stifled due to being fenced into different categories, also known as stereotyping. As humans, it is inevitable to judge each other based off of appearance as well as tendencies. According to Sloterdijk (2009), through humanism, no one throughout history has truly been considered equal; therefore, if there is a sinister act to be

fulfilled, then humans will proceed. Teachers, along with students themselves, are guilty of this act by stereotyping and grouping each other through the idea of fencing. Sloterdijk (2009) suggests:

If there is one virtue of human beings which deserves to be spoken about in a philosophical way, it is above all this: that people are not forced into political theme parks, but, rather, put themselves there. Humans are self-fencing, self-shepherding creatures. Wherever they live, they create parks around themselves. (p. 25)

As humans, we place each other into our own theme parks, creating race or social class as a biology; humans are self-fencing and realize these exclusion exist, yet do not act to change their ways. Similarly, in education, teachers see a student and categorize them into a specific group. For example, if a teacher has the sibling of a former student, then the teacher is more than likely going to assume that student will act similarly to their sibling, automatically taking away the voice of the new student and placing them in a theme park. Much like my former science teacher, many educators tend to judge students based on their looks. As cliché and victimized as it sounds, I was placed into the pretty blue eyes and blonde haired, bimbo category from my teacher; while I do not believe this of myself, I have fought this idea consciously since that moment as I automatically feel a fence growing when people look at me sometimes. Moments, such as mine, continue to follow students in their journey throughout life.

I do often wonder, however, what triggers teachers to categorize their students. I would argue that it is due to fear of the other or perhaps a cyclical effect in society that has yet to end. Likewise, the influence of media contributes to fencing students as the other, creating stereotypical groups. In 2004, I remember going to the movies three times to see the new hit film *Mean Girls*, quoting every single funny moment with my friends. The film even opens with a

funny line as popular girl Regina asks the new girl Cady: “If you’re from Africa, why are you white?” (Waters, 2004). As a fourteen year old, I did not realize anything was wrong with this stereotypical statement other than it’s comical factor; however, as an adult, I realize that what is wrong with this statement is everything. Statements like these are where self-fencing and ignorance begins, causing people to begin thinking of themselves as outcasts. William Shakespeare, however, conveys to us in “Sonnet 29” that seeing oneself as an outcast has been an ongoing concept for centuries. Shakespeare (2001) writes, “When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,/ I all alone beweepe my outcast state,/ And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,/ And look upon myself, and curse my fate...” (p. 31). There is no doubt that self-fencing creates the sense of being othered, and poets know this feeling more than anyone as they use their language to convey their sense of being and feeling.

As a poetic philosopher, Heidegger (1947) addresses an important issue as he asks his readers who counts on this Earth, leading him to believe that language counts as being. Heidegger (1947) states, “Language is the house of being” (p. 239). Communication is an important factor in how educators foster their students through education and preparation for life. As it would be nice to be able to say words do not matter, in actuality, they do matter and students carry educators’ words with them through life. Our language and words are connected to the stream of conscious as vocabulary words are linked to one another in the process of thinking. In my opinion, I believe that society has a dying language of vocabulary and reading, meaning that teachers need to be proactive in increasing literacy involvement. Sloterdijk (2009) would agree as he advocates for the use of literacy. Similarly, vocabulary is a key aspect to our language because it helps incorporate literacy awareness. The following techniques are utmost essential to building vocabulary in the classroom: Learning a basic vocabulary, learning to read

known words, learning new words that represent known concepts, learning new words that represent new concepts, and clarifying and enriching the meanings of known words. Learning basic vocabulary aids students in building a basic vocabulary. If teachers fence their students into categories, then literacy is in danger as Heidegger (1947) suggests that language does not make us look superior, but our outlook on language does make us feel superior. Sloterdijk (2009) also suggests that theory must catch up to the ever-changing world; humanism and science are behind, meaning if we want the sciences to do what we think they should, then perhaps the sciences needs humanities to function, such as words. It is important to follow through with words and be selective with words because they influence the youth. If humans realize that words are self-fencing, then perhaps the ways of our language would begin to change, letting us live a more poetic life.

Fencing in Educators: *Spurring Interactions*

When I think about the most well-known fictional character in the educational arena, my mind lingers to fictional character Mr. John Keating who is played by Robin Williams in the film *Dead Poet's Society* (1989). Promoting “Carpe Diem,” Mr. Keating often refers to many famous, classic poets that are meant to inspire his students to stand for their own rights and decisions. In the beginning of the film, Mr. Keating states:

Boys, you must strive to find your own voice. Because the longer you wait to begin, the less likely you are to find it at all. Thoreau said, ‘Most men lead lives of quiet desperation.’ Don't be resigned to that. Break out! (Weir, 1989)

Mr. Keating teaches his students that finding their own voice is the key to declaring their own identity, developing self-expression and determining their interests. Perhaps Moe (2013) would

agree with Mr. Keating as he encourages poetics intertwined with sciences. Moe utilizes the example of Walt Whitman's poetry, suggesting that Whitman was in tune with what was going on as he explored the scientific aspects of poetry. Likewise, this makes me question if teachers can do the same with their students. If teachers truly do see their students as the other, then they should incorporate poetics for their students rather than biologically fencing and judging. Truly, Moe (2013) encourages the idea of Whitman's original energy for writing, which stemmed from channeling the senses and feelings of animals. If teachers were to channel their original energy for teaching, especially their poetic and imaginative energy, then perhaps they could see past the animal of the student, leaving room for more poetic interpretation. Likewise, Mr. Keating does channel his original energy of poetry as he shares his passion with his students.

I would argue, however, that Mr. Keating abandoned the one aspect to his pedagogy that he so blatantly encouraged his students to act out on—find their own voice. Mr. Keating is essentially silenced as he leaves his job due to his own voice. It is apparent at the end of the film that the students need Mr. Keating because the principal, who has taken over the classroom, is teaching the students straight from the textbook, which is a bore to the students. At the end of the film, the students use their voice to stand up for Mr. Keating. Mr. Keating, however, walks quietly away from his job as well as his students without activating his voice, displaying that his teaching methods do not match his actions. Perhaps Mr. Keating should take heed to his own advice and *Carpe Diem*, or perhaps read the sign hanging outside my classroom door for all of the school to see; it reads—*the diem ain't gonna carpe itself*.

When educators ignore their own imagination and poetic being, teachers begin to build fences around themselves. As Moe (2013) encourages the idea of original energy, teachers truly get wound up in day-to-day antics of education and forget their purpose, losing the poetic aspect

to life. As Braidotti (2013) argues, science does not have an interest in the humanities anymore. Whitman, however, fully understands that the two were connected and created his voice as purposeful for his audience (Moe, 2013). Currently with teachers, the movement is to specialize in a subject area, but this is problematic because one must know more than one subject area if they want to teach. For example, teachers must know the pedagogy of teaching along with their subject level; this creates at least two specialty areas of knowledge. Relating back to Sloterdijk (2009), teachers must pick two fields and know them well, which displays another way fences are created. Some teachers, like myself, have three specialty areas; I would argue that most of the third subject areas involve self-interest, such as a hobby, pastime, or original energy. These third interests tend to not find themselves in the educator's classroom, meaning the educator is losing their original energy for teaching. For instance, my third specialty area is creative writing, especially poetry. When my students hear the word poetry, they sigh, roll their eyes, and perhaps face palm themselves. When I hear the word poetry, I usually start reciting some of my favorite lines or perhaps jump up and down with excitement, which also makes my students sigh. My thought process in bringing in my third specialty area is in hopes sharing with them may trigger a third interest area in life for them, and it is more than okay if it is in the area of humanities.

Humanities are a lost art and undervalued (Braidotti, 2013). Quite often in college for my undergraduate degree, when I told people I was an English major, their response usually centered on questioning the value of the degree and my future. When I told people my minor was in creative writing, the response was usually a nod or a laugh. My senior year in college, I had the opportunity to study with poet Thomas Lux at The Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) in downtown Atlanta. Poetry at Georgia Tech is a very successful program, but so few people are aware of it because the institute itself does not have a humanities department per say;

rather, their department is called language and literacy. The first day of class Lux specifically told us if we wanted to be a poet and get rich, then we would be greatly disappointed. The term starving-artist surfaced and I began to realize that if I did not have poetry, then my intellectual abilities would truly be starved; however, since beginning my teaching career, I have rarely had time to write anymore—my original energy has vanished and it is a ripple effect in the classroom. The more I write, the better teacher I am. The more teachers who channel their third interest can more than likely hone in on their own purpose in life, helping guide students to their purposes. One may realize that without the original energy of purpose, teachers feel fenced in to one area often feeling dead and alive at the same time. In his poem entitled *Pedestrians*, Lux (1999) writes:

—And yet we all
 fix our binoculars on the horizon's hazy fear-heaps
 and cruise toward them, fat sails
 forward.... You meet him on the corners,
 in bus stations, on the blind avenues
 leading neither in
 nor out of hell, you meet him
 and with him you walk.

There is this constant idea that humans create their own space and world, yet we blindly walk side-by-side with one another, not seeing the other is in the same or similar predicament. Self-fencing occurs when we do not observe each other carefully, creating a binary force between the sciences and humanities. Likewise, Braidotti (2013) underscores that the fate of the humanities is questionable, yet it must change and survive at the same time. Accepting and seeing the other as

valuable helps demolish the fences created between citizenship and we begin to recognize each others experiences through storytelling.

Educator experiences, however, do vary; therefore, it is important to understand the difference between creating a story for memoir and a story for fiction. In high school, I recall reading the newly published memoir entitled *A Million Little Pieces* by James Frey (2003). I sat in awe reading this memoir as I could not believe the events that occurred to this twenty-three-year-old recovering alcoholic; his words sounded poetic, yet harsh. Oprah Winfrey endorsed this memoir in her book club; therefore, I knew it must be true. Weeks after Oprah had Frey on her show, *The Smoking Gun* came out with an article entitled “A Million Little Lies,” accusing Frey of fabricating portions of his memoir. Frey, once again, appeared on Oprah’s show, admitting that he had fabricated some of the information in his memoir as a therapeutic tool for recovery and that he simply misremembered his own experiences. I recall seeing the term “literary forgery” on the television after this episode aired. I felt sorry for Frey, but I was also angry with myself for being so gullible in assuming truth in his stories. Incensed with Frey, Karr (2016) points an accusatory finger at the author who has inappropriately created the genre of memoir as an “anything goes” type of writing environment (p. 85). The genre of memoir as a storytelling mechanism does have form and creating fictional stories is not part of this writing form; there is a difference between blurring “*memory* and *fact*” as well as “*interpretation* and *fact*” as Karr would argue (p. 86-87). My current perspective on Frey’s controversy, however, has changed over time as I have read more on memoir; however, I do understand that perhaps he was attempting to channel his own imagination in order to become poetic, creating a rhythm of understanding for his readers. Truthfully, it seems that taking risks, such as telling the truth, is one of the most compelling challenges characteristic to writing memoir, yet I also agree that this

vulnerability can be found within the lines of poetry as well. I have not read an author's note yet that says writing memoir or poetry is easy because it exposes the truth; instead, writers of both memoir and poetry state the opposite and tell the reader it is difficult delving into the past and rehashing memories. These spurring interactions of truth of vulnerability trigger ones imagination, eventually provoking creativity to immerse.

Fencing in Students: *Endless Rows*

When students sit in rows in a classroom, it promotes mainstream thinking—there is no collaboration or storytelling, which is most likely the intended reasoning behind the teacher's neatly placed rows—it promotes students' silence. This is a tragedy in our classrooms as students need an environment where they can share and tell stories, ultimately having a sense of community and class discussion. Quite often when discussing memories, I remind my students that people will tell them anecdotes from their own lives, thinking it will help ease a scenario in the student's life; however, I stress that every story and point of view are different, so one cannot simply listen to the stories and think their own will turn out the same. Humans are the writers of their own lives, but they do not stop and think to ask the right questions in regard to actually being. We ask ourselves this too late in life; for example, when one is on their deathbed, they often ask themselves what have they done with their life. Teachers simply do not stress the realities of life enough; teachers do not teach students about the fences they will be placed in when they exit the educational arena. Students need to be reminded of their purpose and live a meaningful life. Likewise, Derrida (2002) discusses the power of the fall as he weaves the book of Genesis from the Bible with the Greek and Roman story of Epimetheus and Prometheus (p. 389). If teachers could consider themselves as a parallel to the tree of knowledge, and students to

withhold the power of Prometheus rather than embracing the faults of his brother, Epimetheus, then the purpose of life would have more meaning; however, educators are so quick to analyze students and make them feel as the smaller being who cannot possess more knowledge than the giver of knowledge themselves.

When I teach, as I press the Promethean Activpen to the board, I am always reminded of Prometheus's powerful story and how much wisdom he possessed. When I use my Promethean board, I feel a sense akin to an electric current in igniting the young minds in front of me as power surges through my fingertips as I press facts, data, and intriguing prompts onto the board, further kindling the elation born of passing my fire-torch of knowledge on to young, impressionable intellects. Likewise, Prometheus craftily applied his wisdom toward outwitting his leader, Zeus, stealing the power of fire and then giving that divine power to Man. After this act, Zeus punished the Titan for outthinking and disobeying him, renouncing all knowledge from Prometheus. Perhaps some might argue that Prometheus deserved to be punished for outthinking his leader; however, punishment of those who study, synthesize, and share knowledge is generally accepted as harmful in an academic society (Derrida, 2002). The message such chastisement carries throughout academic communities is that of a dictatorship, driven by a leader who craves and continually seeks all-consuming, absolute power. Power then becomes a greater question of which human or animal is the most dominant. Did Zeus become nervous about being overthrown by a Titan who was anything less than an actual god? Similarly, have political leaders in the United States become Zeus-like in constructing a hierarchy that forces educators to place themselves on a pedestal above their students? These questions lead one to believe the lack of imagination of curriculum is perhaps vanishing day-by-day as students do not question their elders.

If students knew how or what to question in their own education in regard to education, then perhaps they might realize they are being fenced in to their own learning in environment. Likewise, Komornicka (2014) discusses the history of establishing a lower class versus a higher class. During the Medieval times, walls were built around cities in order to keep the other out. For instance, the plot of HBO's hit series *The Game of Thrones* (2012) centers on the entire idea that in order to gain power one must build a wall to keep the other out; if one group is unlike the other, then it is understood that they do not belong. Character Tywin Lannister states, "A lion does not concern himself with the opinions of sheep" (Benioff & Weiss, 2011). Likewise, humans categorize others as they see with their eyes, further underscoring the concept from Sloterdijk (2009) that humans are "self-shepherding creatures" (p. 25). Humans want to lead their own flock, not realizing they are leaving others behind. Students in schools, however, feel the need to lead their own flock and get banished for their acts. Students are all too familiar with the idea of fencing as they are banished from the halls of their own schools, often being isolated within in-school-suspension or being kicked out of school for out-of-school suspension. This one specific act of fencing can lead to a cyclical effect of students misunderstanding authority and rebelling later in life, causing them to be viewed as the stereotyped other. Even if students are put into the categories, one may question how can they get themselves out; unless educators give them an outlet to banish these beliefs, then students will never find the imagination or poetic prowess to speak out, but rather be silenced.

Regardless of gender, race, and age, stories should be recorded so others may see the multiple perspectives of the other; students should be encouraged to write down these stories. Similarly, another misconception that surrounds writing memoir and poetry is that of chronological age. Popular logic assumes the writer must be older and therefore wiser to be

capable of producing such an art. Without question, I understand that the longer one lives, the more experiences they will be able to share. However, experiences that bring the depth and rich dimension important in considering perspectives from every angle are ageless. Memoirist Kate Christensen contends, “The older I get, the more interested I am in telling the truth, and the less interested I am in artfulness for its own sake” (as cited in Maran, 2016, p. 17). Regardless of age, the truth is beautiful in its own right. Multiple stories can provide multiple truths about experiences. For example, in a creative writing workshop, I challenged students to think of a reoccurring familiarity that surfaced in their memories. One eleventh grade student, who normally writes in a melancholy tone, came up with the color red as a memory and wrote the following poem:

Red

The apple you ate under the monkey bars in kindergarten

The time you fell off your bike in the fifth grade and skinned your knee

That sundress your mom gave you for your sixteenth birthday

The car he drove you home in after your first date

The lipstick he tasted after your first kiss, staining his heart

The wine at your outdoor wedding

The roses at your bedside

The color of your hospital bracelet

The rosy cheeks of your firstborn

Her chin dripping with strawberry juice at the park

The ladybugs she plays with in your garden

The bow she wears on her first day of school

The apple she eats under the monkey bars in kindergarten

Red

As I previously stated, this student normally writes in a melancholy tone, incorporating heartbreak and blood; however, a different approach was taken to the above poem as there are an abundance of memories that involve red and not a single one of them is related to heartbreak or blood—this student took a risk. If this student had been fenced in, then I believe they would have taken their usual outlet and have written in an unhappy tone. The repetition of the student's words helps reiterate the memories, creating room for poetic license. Leggo (2018) contends, "Poetry teaches us to trust and distrust at the same time in a Trickster-inspired hermeneutic that takes nothing for granted, that revels in an agnostic's devotion to questions and new possibilities" (p. 81). Imagination in writing creates a sense of new possibilities, letting the writer feel like they can take on new challenges and leave the mainstream rows; therefore, there should not be any age restrictions on any type of writing because our society needs those who put heart into their art and story.

Curriculum and Storytelling Align: *Flipping, Bumping, and Plunging*

Educators are constantly looking for new ways to revamp their classroom curriculum. As previously mentioned, storytelling is a great outlet for students to feel connected to the classroom curriculum. Academia is finally beginning to understand that not all learning processes and research methods must be the formal ways of qualitative research and teaching, which is why memoir and storytelling is becoming more popular. When one thinks of memoir, they perhaps think of narrative inquiry because it is a form of storytelling. Likewise, when one thinks of the word narrative, they most likely associate the process of storytelling. Equally, the objectives of

narrative inquiry consist of collected stories that aim to reconstruct one's experience, elaborating on the experience of self, others, and social experiences. Researchers study narratives from research participants in order to explain observable phenomena, studying the experience, lives, and representations of people in the world (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The overall objective of narrative inquiry is to provide an insight to the truths and beliefs of one's lived experiences, providing a lens of perspective for the audience. Memoir, however, devles into the memory of the author, conveying the research method of a self-study.

Although memoir is not always deemed as a formal qualitative self-study method, I believe it is more formal than academia acknowledges, beginning with William Pinar's creation of the term *currere*. Pinar created *currere* in order to create opportunities for self-study that develop ideas that extend beyond the self (Pinar, 2012). Pinar contends that *currere* seeks to "provide a strategy for students of curriculum to study the relations between the academic knowledge and life history in the interests of self-understanding and social reconstruction" (p. 44). To be clear, I am not arguing that *currere* and memoir are the same type of methodologies; rather, I am contending that the field of curriculum studies has a well-established foundation of *currere* whereupon memoir can be linked, underscoring the process of how one relives and writes their memories in order for self, social, and cultural understanding.

For example, I encourage my students to conduct a self-study in the form of a 6-word memoir. I begin the lesson with Ezra Pound's poem entitled "In a Station of the Metro," where students argue that it cannot be a real poem because it is too short. Then, I delve into Ernest Hemingway's well-known shortest short work where he writes: "For sale: baby shoes, never worn." Students also argue that this cannot be a sort story because it is too short. It is at this point where I begin my 6-word memoir lesson, where we unpack the meaning behind Hemingway's

six words and apply it to self-study. After the brief lesson, students then understand they must also write their own 6-word memoir. Out of all of my lessons, this is truly the one I see students struggle with the most because it challenges them to think outside of the box about themselves using very few words. Saunders and Smith (2014) argue that when students write a 6-word memoir they “grapple with how to begin writing because they have seen few opportunities to write for purposes other than in preparation for standardized tests” (p. 600). This, above all, is the biggest tragedy in education as the curriculum prepares students for testing and hinders their creativity. Educators must think beyond the usual logic of curriculum and deconstruct the writing for more creative lessons.

In regard to curriculum theory that extends beyond the usual logic, Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (2014) suggest that we should perhaps read it as poetic theory. Pinar et al. states, “These theorists seek to dissolve, explode, and deconstruct the taken-for-granted and reified forms of curriculum research that are frequently mistaken for the reality of educational experience they pretend to map” (p. 491). Storytelling as an art can sometimes be ignored in the field of curriculum whereupon theorists often take for granted that such practices exist. Similarly, poet and educator Carl Leggo (2018) reflects on his own practices in a storytelling fashion, often reminding me of my own writing style. As a curriculum scholar, Leggo (1997) contends through his own experiences and storytelling that teaching can sometimes become robotic in the field of poetry, making students greatly dislike the genre. Leggo’s passion through his own accounts warrants a reader that should listen carefully.

In connection to Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman’s (2014) idea that curriculum theory should extend beyond the usual logic, I believe that writing letters are an accepted practice among curriculum scholars in the field, and perhaps educators should also take heed to

this methodology of self-study and inquiry in order to help their own practices. For example, in *Dear Paulo: Letters from Those Who Dare Teach*, educators and community workers respond to the works of educator and author Paulo Freire (Nieto, 2008). When I first began reading these letters, I was shocked at how impactful one person's work could be to a diverse league of so many others. Teaching with passion is a story through which Freire continues to impress upon educators, and this work reflects his heartfelt teaching practices as educators provide their own experiences.

When I think of curriculum and storytelling in the form of poetry, I associate the pair with an academic practice that flips, bumps, and plunges into a lexical abyss that many scholars do not understand. When referring to autobiographical praxis versus personal practical knowledge, Pinar et al. (2014) contends, "...autobiography conveys how teachers' knowledge is held, formed, and how it can be studied and understood. Autobiographic praxis refers to conceptualizations of teachers' knowledge" (p. 556). It is specifically important for educators to reflect and share their stories, as they are the ones who are shaping the minds of the youth. Even if memories are painful or unpleasant, one must continue to be vigilant in his or her practices in order to continue the works in the field. Likewise, Derrida and Stiegler (2002) ultimately suggest that one must encompass "vigilance" in order to become a "conscious 'cultivated' citizen" who can fight the memories that weigh them down (p. 135). If memories can become liberated in the form of memoir, then perhaps the field of curriculum should take note and become more aware of the stories waiting to be conceptualized in liberating its own.

Storytelling and Poetry: *The Two Folds of Grief and Happiness*

I always wonder how one can become so skilled at a talent that it seems natural, then leave it dormant for so long it is difficult to gain it back, underscoring that grief is the loss of talent and that happiness is active talent. I found this true of my poetic efforts when rediscovering my love for poetry in college. This rediscovery was, in fact, an accident as the only reason I signed up for an advanced poetry class was in order to meet my creative writing credits. On the first day of class, my professor, Dr. Gregory Fraser, gave us a homework assignment as he stated, "Write a poem and bring it to our next class meeting." I did not waiver at the first initial thought of this assignment because I was thinking the following to myself: *how hard could this be?* Later, I would find out that this thought was, in fact, situational irony. After many hours of staring at a blank sheet of paper at my desk in the upstairs of my townhome, I found myself knocking on Dr. Fraser's office door and seated next to him on a couch where he introduced me to "'improv-ing' and journaling" (Davidson & Fraser, p. 20). Dr. Fraser took the time to show me the art of poetry and I left his office loaded down with books on poetry. After this fortunate encounter, I fell in love with poetry again and spent most of my time writing rather than participating in events that any average college-aged girl would enjoy. My poems gave me life; my poems give me life. My point to this tale is that rediscovering my talent overwrote my grief with the happiness found in reviving it. If the art of beautiful poetry is best practiced in recalling one's lived experiences, truly storytelling is the perfect literary canvas on which to showcase poetical form.

Although my college professor introduced journaling to me, I would argue that I have been journaling and writing memoir since I was a child. Harriet the Spy taught me that observing others and recording the evidence truly brings forth a great story. However, it was Clarissa

Darling, the teenage protagonist, who showed me how to break the mythical “fourth wall” light years before Marvel’s *Deadpool* (2016) made it cool, and Nickelodeon’s *Clarissa Explains it All* (1991-1994) who encouraged me to be upfront, funny, and descriptive for my audience. As an only child, I was constantly journaling and talking to myself in the mirror; acting as though I had my own television show. While this may seem strange to readers—an only child talking to herself in a mirror—it was completely normal to me, and a habit I would continue well into my adulthood. As I spoke to my other self, I constantly waved my hand and tapped my foot to find a rhythm in my language with an eye roll here and there (I still do this today as well). At the time, I did not realize I was finding a melody within myself, but I needed more than Harriet the Spy, Clarissa Darling, and the stacks of adventure novels poised on my desk next to my Lisa Frank pencils. I later discovered a love for music, and although I could not sing well, the music spoke greatly to me. Celine Dion’s album *Let’s Talk About Love* (1997) was my favorite album at the age of eight as I recall dancing around my bedroom to the album’s song “Treat Her Like a Lady.” The song’s rhythm always led me to our southern style front porch where the world became my stage, then soon enough I would sign autographs, blow kisses, and tell my chauffeur to bring me my bike. Riding away, I would wave like a Disney princess in a parade and scuttle to the pavement of Tranquility Drive where I could listen to my other favorite song—Coolio’s “Gangsta’s Paradise” (1995). I never understood, however, why my parents would not allow me to listen to this song. With my Reeboks pedaling and my blonde hair blowing in the wind, I felt so liberated singing the lyrics: “Tell me why are we so blind to see/ That the ones we hurt are you and me” (Coolio, 1995). I would secretly doodle these words in notebooks next to pictures of the Hanson brothers, knowing I could never get caught listening to a song that had the word “Gangsta” in it.

Perhaps recalling the details of my childhood and youth seem mundane, but I recap these small events in order to present the rise to my authorship as a poet who writes in memoir and creative non-fiction. These “repeated stories,” as Hall (2003) would call them, resonate within me and travel down to the tips of my fingers as I write them down. I will continue to write about my childhood and its accompanying stories, learning a little more about myself every time as I reexamine this person I call self. Although, if there is one quirk my childhood taught me, it was that I cannot predict the future, especially without the flux capacitor; however, I always loathed the moment when someone asked me the infamous, terrifying question: *what do you want to be when you grow up?* My response was always the same mundane, three-worded response: *not a teacher.*

Memoir, Poetry, and Teaching: *Getting Overthrown*

Plot spoiler: I am a teacher. I am a high school English teacher. I have a story to tell. I am honest with my students on the first day of class as I explain to them that I never *ever* wanted to be a teacher—either God has a sense of humor or I should learn to insert my foot into my mouth. I then have to explain that I am not literally going to put my foot in my mouth, but rather it is an idiom and, *bless*, this is going to be a long year. While it seems terrible I would tell my students I never dreamed of my job, I tell them my job really does seem like a dream—I am happy. I confess, however, that grading papers begins to wear on me, as I take my purple pen, never red, and jot down tedious comments on grammar, structure, and content. While I am passionate about the ever so brash, epic hero Odysseus, from Homer’s the *Odyssey*, or Shakespeare’s young, impulsive lovers, Romeo and Juliet, I must understand that my students are passionate about updating their latest moment on their social media accounts or that one moment they get to pass

by their ill-fated ex in the hallway just to say hey. Should I let it slide that their papers are not perfection or should I continue to turn their papers into a mess of purple feedback? I always choose the second of the two whereupon I choose to toil on structure, commenting and highlighting—it is monotonous and mundane. Similarly, poet Donald Hall truly resonates with my frustration on grading papers. Hall (2003) states:

The classroom was a lark because I got to show off, read poems aloud, to help the young, and to praise authors or books that I loved. But teaching was not entirely larkish:

Correcting piles of papers is tedious, even discouraging, because it tends to correct one's sanguine notions about having altered the young minds arranged in the classroom's rows.

(p. 4)

It is almost as if teaching English is like wearing a Janus-like mask: the smiling contributes to being able to teach the texts we love and the frowning contributes to the tedious grading that makes educators reflect back on their state-guided processes. The art of teaching literature is tasked down to not being art at all, but rather a machine becoming oiled to create mass productions of our youth.

The supreme issue that all teachers face is one word whose very sound makes coffee cups shake and stress-eating doughnuts flake: *testing*. I truly have to tell myself that I must do my duty as an educator and follow the provided standards; however, no one has yet to tell me that I cannot stand on my desk while reading Shakespeare's *Hamlet* or stab myself with my light saber while I pretend to be the distraught and dying Juliet in her tomb. I must realize that testing is merely a tool for the government to collect numbers. As Gitelman and Jackson (2013) state, "Data are everywhere and piling up in dizzying amounts" (p. 2). It truly is troubling as a teacher to have to cram so much information into the brains of our youth as if they are machines. Data is

everywhere; however, when I hear that terrible word, and while sometimes I do feel almost as distraught as Juliet on her deathbed, I must realize that no one can take the poet and writer out of me. It is my overall goal to make my job as fun and as poetic as possible, so I attempt to incorporate creative writing into my lessons as much as possible—without offending the blindly guided curriculum, of course.

My teaching pedagogy is a story that I will continue to hold near and dear to my heart and my practices. My stories and practices constantly place me at the center of the classroom becoming a comical or emotional act before my students' very eyes. Hall (2003) made mention that he loved larking and showing off his knowledge towards texts in the classroom; similarly, not only do I love to lark about literature, but I also love to tell stories of experiences both humorous and somber. Stories keep my classroom alive and display to my students that I am human. Similarly, in talking about her own dreary moments, Karr (2016) states, "Bleak humor right at the edge of being wrong has kept me alive, so it's wound up in my work" (p. 49). Telling these stories and jotting them down on paper as poetry has also kept me alive, and it is also evident these stories are coiled into my teaching pedagogy as well.

Similarly, reading books about other educators has helped me understand that I am not necessarily alone and that education is not a utopia in which we all learn and live in treasurable harmony. In connection to the academic novel, Elaine Showalter (2005) states, "Well, all utopias are boring in the end. The current bitterness of academic fiction may be exaggerated, but perhaps it is healthier and wilder not to harbor idyllic fantasies about English departments and their inhabitants" (p. 124). If education was a utopia, then there would be no fun in telling stories to my students and then jotting down their reactions later; there would also be no obvious reality of the world as utopias provide happy endings, and happy endings, as I stress to my students, vary

by point of view. It is most definitely idealistic to focus on the realities of teaching, and write about them in a poetic memoir fashion. Equally, Karr (2016) writes, “The only way I know to develop a voice is to write your way into one” (p. 52). This is perhaps why it is important to tell stories and record them down. Karr continues, “As a memoirist moves words around on a page, telling stories, she starts to uncover that thing she does best, which could stay in view during most of the book” (p. 52). Overtime, writers begin to understand and feel their writing style more, letting them create a tone for the rest of their piece. Yallop and Carmen state:

...sharing experiences, moments, and spaces is how we connect with and support each other; it is how we, as authors, have connected with and supported each other, and it is how we might be part of opening up possibilities for our readers to connect with us and with each other, so that we might create more and layered connections and supports—perhaps a way to live in the world. (as cited in Ng-A-Fook, 2016 p. 53)

In order to understand how to live in the world, one must read the on-goings of the world. Similarly, if educators want to understand the unedited ways of the classroom, then they must read about the candid moments and experiences in the classroom. As writers, educators, and scholars, we learn from each other; teachers begin telling stories and shaping their classroom, letting them create a tone for their own pedagogy and their own story. I truly believe that voice is important both on and off of the page as we reveal our identity in connection to our stories. It is important to take off our Janus-like masks as educators and let our true selves resonate within our pens on paper.

Poetic Storytelling: *Propelling on my Own*

The writing process of poetry, especially from one’s own experience, can become a long and tedious procedure. As I grow into my thirties, I find myself spending less time writing poetry

due to the realities of life and teaching. Juggling work and grading, fostering a two-year-old marriage, preparing to be a mom (yes, I am writing a dissertation while pregnant), coaching a group of nineteen teenage cheerleaders, and earning a doctorate degree does not afford me nearly enough time to write about the sounds I see and the sights I hear. I long to write and the writing longs for me. I revisit old work only to find that I grow angry with myself for not writing judiciously. Then, as I sit down next to my notebooks, “junkyard” journals, and portfolios, I recall an eager twenty-two-year-old that promised herself she would write a novel or perhaps even a book of poetry and publish every line. I truly did have it all mapped out then, on Post-it notes daubed to my bedroom walls with feminist-strong lines lingering from stanza to stanza. My friends would laugh at me and my college boyfriend would deem me ridiculous as he flipped the channels on the television. *After all*, he would say, *after all, aren't you taking this whole I am a female thing too far?* He would never come to understand me or the fact that being vociferous and poetically strong about my gendered roots did not mean that I had to give every male I met the middle finger—and in case you wonder, it is safe to assume that he is not the man I married.

These memories become the stories that I share with my students and readers in order to help them understand that taking what one is passionate about a little too far is the best and only way to ricochet in the right direction: toward one's dreams. One may choose to live a routine life, but how mundane and bland must that choice be? It is okay to be strong in one's statements; I refuse to live a passive life, so I do choose to take the female thing too far, especially in my poetry. Heilbrun (1988) elaborates:

We women have lived too much with closure: ‘if he notices me, if I marry him, if I get into college, if I get this work accepted, if I get that job’—there always seems to loom the

possibility of something being over, settled, sweeping clear the way for contentment. (p. 130).

Heilbrun truly reveals the meaning of life and all of its discourses for women. Although it seems modern times are in full bloom, women still undergo hardships with their choice of career, even in writing. Women are also stereotyped, fenced in, and put into categories as I recall my science teacher's lingering words telling me *just because you have pretty blue eyes and blonde hair does not mean you will always make an A*. She did not foster my growth as a young, creative female, but chose instead to sentence me to a corner where my hatred for science would solidify, and above all, my distaste for learning intensified. Much like Heilbrun's take on happiness, the world is full of 'ifs' and the longing for contentment; I would argue, however, that contentment could never fully be achieved if one does not express themselves through their artful medium. Writing about the past in poetic form helps me obtain contentment with my decisions and myself.

Heilbrun writes, "As long as women are isolated one from the other, not allowed to offer other women the most personal account of their lives, they will not be part of any narrative of their own" (p. 46). If there were no stories of experiences, then there would continue to be a deficit of writers. Stories and those voices who tell the stories help the other learn how to grow and cope with the pangs of life. Perhaps, as a writer, I will continue to poetically cling to these momentous murals of the past. Karr (2016) argues that poetry "taps into both the unconscious and memory" (p. 63) and that she is "enough of a poetry fan to believe it can work like voodoo under a reader's awareness" (p. 63). While it is not my intention to practice voodoo (a bit too complicated in terms of scientific inquiry for my personal interests), it is my intention to evoke the reader's own unconsciousness and memory of their own experiences. The experiences of my own education in connection to imagination and poetry has followed me well into my adulthood, but sometimes, as

an educator, I feel as though I am in a pinball machine, under the glass, waiting for someone else to make the right move. We cannot, however, always wait on others to make a move because it is easy to get overthrown and exhausted, especially as we watch our students' heads nod in rhythm to the slack drum. Therefore, educators must propel away on their own in order to be "moving, working, making dreams to run toward" within the curricular platform (Plath, 2000, p. 210).

CHAPTER FOUR POETIC PRELUDE

A Dialogue Between Poetry and Hip-hop

Between tracks I'll pull at my sweater
 until I stand up and hum the tunes
 to whatever beat is released from
 the speaker next to my books and seat.

*During the tracks I try to loosen my collar
 before I venture and make a dollar
 on whatever street is whimpering sweet
 with the beats in my ears I run to fleet.*

Around the chorus I'll say it's okay
 to be behind the times of the tender age—
 may this beat—or the lesser—would say
 that when I teach I should be put away.

*After the chorus I'll seem mainstream
 when I'm told—your grade is low—
 but if I could shed my life outside these
 streets, they would see beats are a feat.*

When the beat dies the silence will be
 a loud weight, humming within
 my feet while I put the laundry away.

*After the beat dies so does the fate
 of my lyrical debate that pulsates,
 weeks later, into verse vibrations.*

A silence that won't touch me as I know
 a private language of terse verse
 in the nighttime air I share.

*The silence that will grow like the drip
 in a kitchen sink and when I sleep
 the street's night noises will dance on me.*

Sooner or later, I will forget the worse
 verse the way languages are lost
 among those who cross their legs.

*Sometime or other, I will forget the books
 and leave the house, nodding to whoever*

can count my silence as a stare.

Maybe I am one of them, I say
as I listen to nerve endings
soaking up strumming taps like dew.

*I am one of them, I yell
as I keep myself from going to school
listening to verse like I can leave this breed.*

These words are difficult to wrap my verse
around—finally settling on one word—poetry.

*That word is stiff like the notes that dropped
from my hellacious hook—hip-hop.*

How close can one trot to the bullied
youth from the coincidental fires?

*Why should I retreat from the life
of my beats, swaying in flaming desires?*

If only they understood what it's like
to be a teacher.

*I only understand I can be a legendary
verse preacher.*

I can't argue—poetry—it's not the same.

I will dispute—hip-hop—it's not lame.

Line after line—

verse on verse—

poetry and

hip-hop

It's the—

curse.

CHAPTER 4

TERSE VERSE AND THE POETRY CURSE

“Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,/ Old time is still a-flying; And this same flower that smiles today/ tomorrow will be dying.”

—Robert Herrick, *To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time*

“Now I ain’t much of a poet/ but I know somebody once told me to seize the moment/ ... ‘Cause you never know when it all could be over tomorrow.”

—Eminem, *The Monster*

When I was in fifth grade, Eminem dropped his single entitled “The Real Slim Shady” (2000), triggering what I call the trifecta of bleach-blonde hair dominate amongst the boys in my grade. Along with the beach-blonde hair, the majority of the boys wore over-sized denim jeans along with a plain white tee. Eminem’s alter-ego, Slim Shady, soon dominated the halls of Central Elementary’s fifth grade, and I was left to wonder why so many eleven-year-olds were entranced by a singer whose lyrics, I was told by parents and teachers, were made of profanity. It was in that moment, I had to investigate for myself the identity of the real Slim Shady, so I did what any sensible eleven-year-old girl would do—I kissed my parents goodnight, said my nighttime prayers, and then waited until midnight for the rerun of MTV’s show *Total Request Live* (TRL) to play “The Real Slim Shady.” Through my eleven-year-old eyes, I did not see the so-called profanity; rather, I saw a white man rapping, using his thumb, forefinger, and middle finger to rap his beats. It was in this moment I decided to seize the opportunity to tackle an assignment that had been dreadfully lingering through the pages of my literature notebook—a poetry recitation assignment. Using my flashlight, I picked up my well-worn, hardcover copy of *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (Silverstein, 1974) and began reading the poem entitled “The Crocodile’s Toothache.” Although I had read this book from cover to cover many times, I dreaded standing in front of my classmates reciting a poem. As the words spewed from my mouth, I began using Eminem’s technique of marking the beat with my thumb, forefinger, and

middle finger. It worked. A week later, I gleefully recited “The Crocodile’s Toothache” to a crowd full of teachers, parents, and peers all while utilizing Eminem’s technique. Eighteen years later, I am still reciting poetry utilizing Eminem’s technique. This time, however, it is not a Shel Silverstein poem delivered to my classmates; rather, it is recitations from the works of Homer, Sylvia Plath, William Shakespeare, and Edgar Allan Poe to my fourteen and fifteen year old students.

Truthfully, Eminem taught me how to read and recite poetry. In his song *The Monster* (2013), featuring Rihanna, Eminem states, “Now I ain’t much of a poet.” While Eminem is referring to Robert Herrick’s poem entitled “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time,” I would argue that Eminem is wrong because he, along with many other hip-hop artists, is a grand poet who intentionally creates rhymes, beats, and verse in order to form a work of art. Essentially, poets embrace the same methodology as they also create intentional lines of verse to craft an artful masterpiece. The underlying concern in school curriculum, however, is explaining where hip-hop and poetry meet, or if they meet at all. Due to a culturally sensitive school curriculum, I would argue that most educators do not attempt to incorporate hip-hop as a poetic art into their classrooms; in fact, I would claim the opposite effect occurs as hip-hop is most likely censored from the classroom due to the nature of the content. The irony in this, however, is that students are listening to the genre of hip-hop regardless of what adults say, and most students will groan in pain when they hear the word poetry. I find this ironic as both poetry and hip-hop are one in the same, yet not recognized as so in classrooms. Dimitriadis (2015) poses an important question: how do we go about legitimizing something that is not legitimate? In this chapter, I tackle this question, addressing how to make both poetry and hip-hop legitimized and understood

in classroom curriculum; I will explore the complications, similarities, and benefits between utilizing the art of both poetry and the genre of hip-hop within school curriculums.

The Curse: A Misunderstood Dialogue

There is one word that consistently makes my noisy high school students unite in complete silence: *poetry*. When the comments erupt, I usually get responses such as *yuck*, *boring*, and *please do not make me write a poem*. One time, a student even remarked that poetry is only for guys who wear tight shorts and fall in love with girls easily. While the majority of their reactions seem comical, as a poet and an educator, I find the stereotypes and negativity extremely problematic. However, when I drop the word *hip-hop*, my students' eyes light up in excitement while they voluntarily share their favorite hip-hop songs and artists. The irony in such instances is that poetry is hip-hop and hip-hop is poetry; therefore, I question why students do not react to poetry in the same light as hip-hop. Likewise, my true concern with the curriculum is the discourse between poetry and hip-hop—the curse. Poetry is intertwined into the English Language Arts (ELA) classroom and students dislike it, yet hip-hop is frowned upon in many classrooms and students like it. I argue that those who create the lockstep curriculum for educators are hindering some of the best practices by not incorporating hip-hop. If students cannot learn with what they love, then there is no wonder why students shun what they are forced to learn. Students are going to listen to hip-hop outside of the classroom walls; therefore, educators should bring the words and beats of their favorite artists and connect it to the poetics.

Bataille (1991) explains it best as he describes everything that can be captured has a type of “excess energy” within itself (p. 21). Wherever this excess energy is within oneself, one can contain it and explore it further. Bataille's overall point is that energy must escape and we,

especially educators, cannot control it. Consequently, systems fail when they run out of their excess energy, creating a likelihood that school curriculum will perhaps run out of energy one day due to the fear of taking risks. Teachers should be concerned about what their students do with their excess energy. I argue that if students are exerting their excess energy into hip-hop, then they are more likely to be interested in poetry; however, hip-hop is generally considered a curricular risk within the school setting. Truthfully, state curriculum does not condone the use of nontraditional literary devices. As schools do not assume such unnecessary risks, teachers cannot tap into the benefit of hip-hop releasing the creative flow that feeds on the excessive energy students need to release. Therefore, teachers must use their excessive, creative energy in order to help foster students' learning, teaching outside of the expected curricular boundaries.

Arguably, school systems across America are guilty of staying inside the norm of expectations for curriculum. Each state dictates standards for teachers to utilize in the classroom, thus creating a collective methodology to study. It is especially important to ask why school curriculums have created guidelines that, figuratively, make students color inside the lines. Teachers should be encouraging students to color outside of the lines because there rests the excess energy. Similarly, Dasgupt and Weaver (2001) argue that "... academics respond with stifling methodologies that are more concerned with fitting the world into categories and boxes than understanding what is going on" (p. 105). Rather than taking time to see what student interests are, curriculum coordinators label students with methodology driven tasks. Based on task and ability, students are grouped into different categories, and they accept it because it is the established norm of the curriculum. Comparably, Peter Sloterdijk (2009) argues, "Humans are self-fencing, self-shepherding creatures. Wherever they live, they create parks around themselves" (p. 25). In this sense, once students are told they belong in certain ability groups,

they accept it and continue to move forward with their education. This same concept can be applied with poetry in the ELA classroom and the genre of hip-hop that is not present in the ELA classroom. Academics have responded with the basic curriculum of poetry within the classroom walls, fencing themselves in and accepting the methodology the way it is. Because of this fencing and acceptance, it leaves no room for hip-hop to become an accepted format of learning poetry in the ELA classroom.

What if, however, poetry and hip-hop could be cast in the same curricular light? What types of questions would educators, students, and academicians begin asking? Stovall (2006) also ponders these questions, stating, “The class was challenged with the question, What would be in a curriculum that challenged dishonesty? Here, the deception lies in the status quo view of history in which the contributions of those outside the Anglo-Saxon paradigm are excluded” (p. 597). Imagine perhaps if we could see what the perspective looked like on the outside of the fence and understand the marginalized. Seemingly, this factors into the concept of when one fears the other, the other fears anyone except for himself or herself. The other fears their opponent will succeed them and, as humans, it is unimaginable to think that someone might actually be better than ourselves, leaving the marginalized to think that they are not as great as we had thought beforehand.

Imagine that poetry and hip-hop were not marginalized; rather, that both were viewed as the central solution to understanding each genre. Shuesterman (1997) argues that rappers see themselves as artists and poets, and if someone does not see them as an artist, then it is likely they will never understand them (p. 143-144). It is vitally important that curricula understand hip-hop is an art much like poetry as they have similar characteristics and themes. Equally, an underlying theme characteristic to both poetry and hip-hop is the notion towards fear of the

other. Campbell (2016) describes the term ‘othering’ as “an action that labels an individual or group as not belonging.” When the other is labeled, it then creates different categories for the other, providing a generalized stereotype. Likewise, Morris (2016a) states, “People project (or spit on) what they feel is contaminated about themselves (what Jung would call the shadow) and project that shadow onto others” (p. 65). It is important to understand the shadow as the outcast stereotype; people see what they want versus actually seeing the facts. People do not recognize what is in the shadow because they are too concerned with what is in the light. Both poetry and hip-hop have been cast in this shadow; however, they do not exist in the shadow simultaneously. In curriculum, poetry is thrust into the light while hip-hop is cast into the shadow. Arguably, if students frown upon poetry, but seem interested in hip-hop, this would mean that students wish to explore the shadows; the very place where curriculum spat. While the institution itself chooses not to draw such perceived danger from the shadows, students will find a way out of this darkness themselves. This is why it is imperative that hip-hop and poetry both be cast into curricular light, breaking through the traditional classroom curse that separates the two artistic forms.

Between Tracks: Where Poetry and Hip-hop Meet in the Classroom

Once properly illuminated, curriculum designers may clearly recognize that poetry and hip-hop have many similar characteristics that can be utilized in classrooms. Educators must first learn to educate themselves on both subjects in order to become a successful practitioner of the two art forms, leading students to self-discovery. Peterson (2016) states, “Search and discovery encourages students influenced by Hip Hop culture to seek further knowledge and to prepare themselves for the ongoing benefits of intellectual discovery” (Hill & Petchauer, 2013, p. 52).

Intellectual discovery is essential to developing minds as they explore their extra energy outside of the classroom walls. However, I would like to raise the challenge of bringing such discovery-driven energy within the classroom walls. If educators are to successfully draw from hip-hop to enhance classroom learning, they must first develop an understanding of hip-hop's origin, structure, and other literary characteristics in order to reap the benefit of hip-hop as an acceptable form of poetry. It is important to note that they should not be mimicking hip-hop, but rather incorporating and addressing the content within the words to the content of the curriculum. For example, many educators in America mimic hip-hop by creating catchy tunes for test-taking strategies. Love (2012) underscores that the curriculum can be changed through hip-hop while Watkins (2008) argues that hip-hop should not become a commodity in the classroom. These are two powerful guidelines: incorporating hip-hop works, but do not make fun of it. In the same context, Ibrahim (2016) states, "Let us remind ourselves that Hip-Hop makes school illiterate. Schools misread and most often label some kids as 'semi-literate' or even 'illiterate'—meaning they lack literacy" (p. 9). Schools must be intentional and make sure they are not, once again, creating fences for study ability and making hip-hop education a commodity. I believe that the incorporation of both poetry and hip-hop in the classroom would help build literacy skills and make students very literate. Based on Bradley's (2017) book entitled *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop*, I argue that the rhythm, wordplay, style, storytelling, and signifying within both genres present strong writing techniques that could engage students to becoming better learners as well as peak their entrance in a new genre of art.

Rhythm

Every year, when teaching Shakespeare, I instruct my ninth graders on how to write poetry in iambic pentameter. I first begin explaining that poetry is written in lines, broken down into meter, and then divided into feet, which are unstressed then stressed, creating a da-DUM sound. After explaining this methodology, we begin creating the rhythm together using our left hands for the unstressed beat (da) and Dum-dum suckers for the stressed beat (DUM). Iambic pentameter goes as follows: da-DUM/ da-DUM/ da-DUM/ da-DUM/ da-DUM. Shakespeare's "Sonnet 2" would look as follows: "When FOR/ty WIN/ters SHALL/beSIEGE/ thy BROW" (Shakespeare, 1997). As we work together to create the beats, the students can hear the rhythm flow throughout the classroom. After several minutes of practice, I then let students try their own hand at writing a sonnet. The rhyme scheme comes easily to most of them; however, the iambic pentameter does not come easily as they attempt to find the da-DUM sound to their lines. After much counting and tapping of fingers, students usually come up with a beautiful masterpiece. A few years ago, one of my students, who was usually very quiet and reserved, shared her sonnet with the class entitled "Our Gardens." She writes:

We all hast gardens growing in our hearts.

Most art quite bountiful and without strife,

Yet dear, thy garden is crumbling apart.

Thou petals are wilted and lacking life;

Therefore, thy garden is where I shall toil.

I will strive to fulfill thine garden's needs

By uprooting the anguish from thy soil.
Lovely lilacs replace thou loathsome weeds.

Alas! As many morrows come to past;
And once the last of my soul hath been poured,
Thine garden is beautiful and shall last,
Yet my garden sings a different chord.

Empty is my pitcher and blooms deceased,
But at least thou garden shall be at peace.

In this assignment, I encourage students to utilize words from the Elizabethan Era in order to help maintain the scansion, or stresses, of the poem. Much like the poem above, sometimes students must utilize irregular scansion in order to create the poem that flows best. When introducing scansion, I let students try their hand at another beat from hip-hop artist Trinidad James's song entitled "All Gold Everything" (2012). Trinidad (2012) raps, "Shout out to them freshmen/ on Instagram straight flexin'." Students usually find the da-DUM sound very easily within these lines, but they typically notice it is a little off-beat at the end. I explain to them that this is irregular scansion, and perhaps this is the reason they associate hip-hop with poetic beats so often. I then expound upon the concept that Shakespeare also utilizes irregular scansion when creating poetry. Similarly, Bradley (2017) states, "Even Shakespeare—especially Shakespeare—wrote lines with irregular scansion, both out of measured poetic effect and the inevitable rhythmic imprecision of the English language itself" (p. 9). Notably, Shakespeare is not the only poet to utilize irregular scansion along with his poetic art. My argument here is that if both the

world's most famous poet, Shakespeare, and the genre of hip-hop utilize irregular scansion to create their art, then why has curricula unilaterally avoided bringing the element of hip-hop to the forefront to enhance students' knowledge of traditional poetry? Bradley (2017) states, "Rhythm is rap's reason for being" (p. 3). Truly, all hip-hop songs and all poetry have rhythm, so they should be utilized together in order to create a solid foundation for learning poetry.

Wordplay

The reason listeners get so in-tune with poetry and hip-hop is due to the creative wordplay. Bradley (2017) states, "[Rap] fashions itself as a ritualized language, heightening sound, establishing patterns of expectation and innovation, and crafting images that engage the audience in an implicit but powerful process of communication" (p. 90). As Bradley explains the wordplay of hip-hop, he does not make mention that poetry is based on the same foundation. Daspit and Weaver (2017) argue, "Style in the culture industry is formulaic" (p. 145); moreover, style in the poetic industry is also formulaic. Poems can be, among many, structured as an autobiographical, limerick, ballad, elegy, dedication, and lyrical. All of these poetic elements of wordplay surface in not only poetry, but hip-hop as well.

Wordplay should empower one to facilitate a change in humanities. One of the best poets, in my opinion, to begin this movement is hip-hop artist Tupac Shakur. Tupac's manager, Leila Steinberg, discusses how Tupac's biggest goal was "how the arts could be included in school curriculums to help youth address some issues that they were experiencing in their lives" (Shakur, 2009, p. xix). In many of his poems, Tupac utilizes wordplay to call out social issues in society. For example, in his poem "Lady Liberty Needs Glasses," Tupac (2009) writes, "excuse me but Lady Liberty needs glasses/ and so does Mrs. Justice by her side...I mean if anyone

really valued life/ and cared about the masses/ They'd take 'em both 2 pen Optical/ and get 2 pairs of glasses" (p. 135). Tupac utilizes his poetic license to create wordplay of political statements, criticizing the unfair justice system in America. Later, he would write and produce his hit song "Keep Ya Head Up" (1993), voicing through wordplay that even if one struggles in life, there is still hope as long as one keeps their positivity. The youth could benefit from the wordplay of this sentiment as growing up is full of struggles and controversy.

Another important, popular element of wordplay is recursivity, also known as repetition. In my classroom, I teach repetition not only as a poetic device, but also a rhetorical device to underscore that the author or artist is attempting to make a point to their audience. Poet and feminist Gertrude Stein is famous for her play on words with repetition. In her poem, "If I Told Him, A Completed Portrait of Picasso," Stein embodies the concept of creating imagery through repetition and beat. For example, Stein (1990) writes:

If I told him would he like it. Would he like it if I told him.

Would he like it would Napoleon would Napoleon would would he like it.

If Napoleon if I told him if I told him if Napoleon. Would he like it if I told him if I told him if Napoleon. Would he like it if Napoleon if Napoleon if I told him. If I told him if Napoleon if Napoleon if I told him. If I told him would he like it would he like it if I told him.

Now.

Not now.

And now.

Now. (p. 333)

The poem continues on with repetition and wordplay as Stein ends her poem stating “History teaches” (p. 336). When I let students read this, they say it looks like a mess much like Picasso’s artistic style; however, when I let them hear Stein recite her poem, they can hear the beat within the lines and often say it sounds like a rap song with a beat. When hearing Stein, most of my students comment on the latest hip-hop Trap music that incorporates obvious repetition, such as Lil’ Pump’s song entitled “Gucci Gang” (2017). I would argue, however, that there are better representations of repetition in hip-hop, such as Post Malone’s latest song entitled “Psycho” (2018). In his song, Post Malone repeats the same chorus, underscoring that fame comes at a price, which results in trust issues. There is no doubt that my students are listening to this new song as we speak, and come Monday, I will be asking them what the deeper meaning of this wordplay of recursivity means. Truly, wordplay plays an important role on the Billboard charts, poetry books, and in the classroom.

Style

Perhaps the world of curriculum would be surprised if I were to tell them that hip-hop is not the only genre of art that criticizes dead-beat dads and lost loved ones. In Sylvia Plath’s posthumously published poem “Daddy,” she attempts to exorcise the memory of her father. Plath utilizes stylistic conventions, such as repetition, in order to convey her annoyance with her father as well. Plath writes: “You do not do, you do not do. . . . Daddy, I’ve had to kill you. You died before I had time—” (Plath, 2016, p. 222). The repetition and harsh sounds of Plath’s lines resonate with readers as they understand her discontent with her father. Similarly, hip-hop artists have been creating the same type of art as they dis their own father. For example, The Temptation’s “Papa was a Rolling Stone” (1978), Run DMC’s “Papa Crazy” (1988), and

Tupac's "Papa'z Song" (1994), create tension between the writer and the subject of the song, the father. This stylistic approach helps listeners, such as my students, understand and cope with the daily struggles that life may bring to them.

Another stylistic approach that should be recognized between poetry and hip-hop is tone. I would argue the most obvious stylistic tone in both hip-hop and poetry is the concept of keeping a loved one's memory alive. For example, in Edgar Allan Poe's poem "Annabel Lee," Poe focuses on the death of a beautiful woman, Annabel Lee, as she grows up by the sea with her childhood companion, who eventually becomes her lover. Poe bemoans that Annabel Lee cannot control her own future after she dies from natural circumstances. Poe works to build the reality of raw emotion found in mortal love by highlighting that immortality, much like the ethereal elements of nature and fate, may actually rob mortals of the eternal love they continually seek. In discussing the poem, Bradley (2017) writes, "As long as readers haven't willfully disregarded the rhythmic clues Poe has set down in his arrangement of words and vocal stress, his distinctive voice should emerge from the mouth of whoever is reading the poem" (p. 33). Poe's words are very intentional in the matter of letting the reader know he is hurt by a loved one's death. Similarly, rapper Scarface's song entitled "I Seen a Man Die" (1994) also underscores that mortals are robbed of the life they seek while Puff Daddy, also known as Sean Combs, creates a ballad entitled "I'll be Missin' You" (1997), mourning the death of rap star Biggie. These songs, among many, were created to portray the stylistic tone that a loved one has been taken from the world. The stylistic message in both poetry and hip-hop underscore the very thing that separates man from death is the ability to love.

Storytelling

As an educator, the art of storytelling is very important to me; I believe students learn best when they hear stories, read stories, and create their own. When discussing her experiences with storytelling, Love (2015) states, “I can bring to bear the learning experiences of young urban children who have been left out of most childhood development studies,” highlighting how students’ cultures enlighten their learning (p. 117). It is important to take note as an educator how storytelling creates a basis of learning for the student. The art of storytelling dates back centuries ago and we are still reading those texts in classrooms today, especially epic poems. For example, both *Beowulf* and Homer’s *The Odyssey* are a part of the Common Core Curriculum and taught in most American states. *Beowulf* dates back to the first Anglo-Saxon movement. Bradley (2017) also supports the idea that rap can be heard within Anglo-Saxon traditions of storytelling and argues this point with most ancient texts. One text that specifically comes to mind is *The Odyssey*, where Homer tells a tale about an epic hero, Odysseus, who fights monsters, drinks wine, and sleeps with women in order to get home to his wife. Truly, *The Odyssey*, can be compared to modern times, especially hip-hop music and the art of storytelling. Much like how every poet creates a poem about poetry, I would argue that almost every hip-hop artist creates a song about home. For example, the following artists, among many, have utilized their home as an art of storytelling: “Walking in Memphis” (2009) by Yo’ Gotti, “Welcome to Atlanta” (2001) by Jermaine Dupri featuring Ludacris, “Put on” (2008) by Young Jeezy, “California Love” (1996) by Tupac, “St. Louie” (2000) by Nelly, and “Straight Outta Compton” (1988) by N.W.A. Utilizing songs such as these along with ancient texts, such as *The Odyssey*, helps prepare my students for writing “Where I’m from” poems. In this activity, students tell me about their background through the art of poetry and storytelling. In these moments, I can truly

see students' lives come to fruition in the form of art. Equally, all hip-hop songs weave stories throughout their verses while poetry creates a meaningful truth.

Signifying

In conjunction with storytelling, when introducing epic poems to students, I always begin explaining the concept of signifying. Bradley (2017) explains signifying as the following:

Two competitors face one another, encircled by a crowd. One of them begins delivering improvised poetic lines filled with insults and puns...such a battle could be happening right now in a Brooklyn basement or at a Bronx block party...it also could have happened many millennia ago, at a poetry contest in ancient Greece. (p. 175)

Oral tradition in ancient Greece was the best form of storytelling, giving traveling minstrels a purpose to display their art for others. While this strategy has been occurring for centuries, including at the beginning of the hip-hop era, I contend that it became more noticed by high school students after the 2005 premier of MTV's show *Wild 'N Out* where participants face off in rap battles. Rap battles incorporate poetic elements that help endow the artist behind the words. Likewise, Neal (2009) states, "Historically, African American youth culture has been driven by ideological concerns, but instead has embraced, appropriated, and reanimated existing structures, organizations, and institutions that African American youth perceived as empowering them within various social, cultural, and economic constructs" (p. 135). Black youth is more interested in how to survive, both in appropriated and reanimated structure. I believe that all youth are seeking empowerment in different forms because the youth, in general, is not interested in idealology, but rather empowering themselves. Signifying is a method of liberation

that could be utilized as a poetic tool within the curriculum, leaving students to create their own art in the classroom.

‘Improv’-ing (My Favorite)

Math is my nemesis. In fact, I still count using my fingers and my students sometimes question the grade on their paper, double-checking my math—I am okay with that because I know I am bad at math. It all began with learning my multiplication time’s tables in third grade, especially when my class began learning to the number twelve. The night before my test I wrote a poem. My poem mimicked Shel Silverstein’s poem entitled “Sick” from his book *Where the Sidewalk Ends*. I had Silverstein’s poem memorized, so I thought if I created my own poem I could memorize it too. The only problem was I had to change the end of the poem because tomorrow was not Saturday it was Friday and it was test day. The next morning I recited the beginning of the poem to my mother: “I cannot get educated today because you see my health has not gone my way. I have the weasels and bumps and on my forehead is a bad lump.” She stopped me before I could get to the fifth line of the poem—*busted*—and she called me Whitney Silverstein, and then proceeded to tell me to get in the car. Next to her car phone where my backpack shrugged, I sulked, dreading the test that was in my future. As an adult, I honestly cannot remember what I made on that math test, but what I can recite to you is the poem I wrote and I can explain how I wrote the poem. I did not know it then, but the writing technique I used to write the poem is called ‘improv’-ing, a term I would later learn while obtaining my undergraduate degree (Davidson & Fraser, 2009).

Much like the music industry’s concept of sampling, poetry provides its own method to help poets riff, or improvise, while creating their work. This method is known as ‘improv’-ing

whereupon writers play with an established set of absolutes (Davidson & Fraser, 2009). At first, this notion of ‘improv’-ing seemed wrong; after all, stealing is frowned upon. In poetry, however, the most established poets steal other poet’s ideas, and that is the master of the craft. From his collection of essays in *The Sacred Woods*, T.S. Eliot (1920) discusses the poet’s craft at stealing and writing:

Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different. The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that from which it was torn; the bad poet throws it into something which has no cohesion. A good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest.

(p. 114)

Eliot underscores that it is okay to echo another poet’s space as long as you can make it better and create it differently. Perhaps the melody of the lines mimic those of the other poet, or perhaps the shape of the poem looks similar to the other poet’s poem; either way, the goal is to create a congregation of language that resonates with the reader.

Likewise, the reader is one of the most important components of poetry as it is the best critic. As a secondary education English Language Arts (ELA) educator, I realize that the art and craft of poetry has been abandoned by mandated statewide curriculum. When students hear the word poetry, they cringe in either fear or dread. Sadly, I lecture my students daily on plagiarism, but never mention that improv in poetry is acceptable. These lines are blurred in education, as most students do not know how to write good poetry or they categorize poetry into a stereotypical classification that makes it seemingly uncool. Why has our culture created this stereotype of poets? McDaniel (2012) contends, “...in a flawed analogy, the media compared

slammers to the Beat poets of the ‘50s” (Glazner, 2014, p. 28). Likewise, I could blame it on the Greeks, who chose to begin the tradition of oral, poetic storytelling, I could, much like McDaniel, blame it on 1950s beat poets who did actually wear the shades, I could blame it on MTV’s slammers who began promoting the notion of rap battles, or I could blame it on the film industry who continually promotes the stereotype. For example, when I ask my students the definition of improv poetry, they automatically begin shouting in excitement the slam poetry scene from the 2014 film *22 Jump Street*, starring actors Jonah Hill and Channing Tatum. When both Hill and Tatum walk into the poetry slam, they awkwardly begin making their way to their seats, looking uncomfortable amongst a room of poets. Hill unwillingly walks onto the improv poetry stage and begins reciting an improv poem. While I should be mostly annoyed that Hill is mimicking poets, he does have several good improv techniques he utilizes in his poem. Although poets are not “angry” and do not wave their hands when they recite poetry, they do have a specific point of view on things. Hill’s word play is also clever and useful as he attempts to create a melody for his lyrics, letting his words resonate off of the other. While the content of the poem is not thought-provoking, it does exhibit the basic steps to improv poetry, an art that is lacking in the curriculum.

When beginning a poem, I usually improv or riff from another poet’s work, or I pull from what Davidson and Fraser (2009) refer to as a ‘junkyard journal,’ a place where poets keep the language and phrases that they love and could later incorporate into a poem. In order to create a substantial ‘junkyard,’ one must take lines that they read and jot them down onto paper. I tend to jot down these lines on post-its and stick them to my journals or my walls—whichever works at the time. Then, one must take these words and transform them into their own, thus creating

improv lines. There are several different ways one can improv lines: find rhymes within the words, find antonyms, or find synonyms.

While school curriculums do not whole-heartedly welcome improv poetry as a teaching method, several genres in our culture do welcome improv with open arms. For example, sampling in music is a common practice in our culture, especially in hop-hop music. Much like improv poetry, hip-hop artists will riff off of each other's beats and words; however, one could begin to question copyright laws in this method of the craft. In connection to sampling and artistic creation, Perry (2004) states:

As a legal academic, I assert that the legal standard for copyright violation for music has been too rigid when it comes to hip hop. In those cases in which the rap is simply placed over another song's instrumental, a copyright violation has obviously taken place; the music of another has been used for rapper's profit. But in the case of a smaller splice, which acquires distinct meaning in the context of three or four or ten other samples, the outcome constitutes a new composition. (p. 114)

New writings occur from taking smaller pieces of a work and editing it to your own liking. For example, in his 2018 hit "Nice for What," hip hop artist Drake samples small splices of Lauryn Hill's 1998 song entitled "Ex-Factor." Drake did not use Hill's song word for word, beat for beat, or voiceover-to-voiceover; rather, he incorporated smaller pieces of the song in order to create a masterpiece of his own. This process also holds true in poetry improv as poets work to create their own writing, drawing on inspiration from other's writings.

Another genre that embraces improv poetry is young adult novels. In his novel, *The Fault in Our Stars*, John Green has protagonist Hazel Lancaster riff William Carlos Williams's poem entitled "The Red Wheelbarrow." William's poem goes as follows:

so much depends

upon

a red wheel

barrow

glazed with rain

water

beside the white

chickens.

Similarly, as Hazel rides in an ambulance with her star-crossed lover, she states:

And so much depends... upon a blue sky cut open by the branches of the trees above. So much depends upon the transparent G-tube erupting from the gut of a blue-lipped boy. So much depends upon this observer of the universe. (Green, 2012, p. 247)

Green utilizes the first line of William's poem in order to help his character have meaningful improv during her unfortunate situation. This writing technique can be utilized as a poetic teaching technique in classroom curriculum. For example, my student's read Green's novel after completing Shakespeare's "The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet." After we finish the "The Red Wheelbarrow" chapter, I have students pick an abstract or concrete noun to write their own poem. This is 'improv'-ing as students create their own poem based off of William's poem. Below are two examples of two of my students 'improv'ing from Williams poem:

Student A:

so much depends

upon

a polka dot

umbrella

sheltering from treacherous

rain

but also hiding

the rainbow

Student B:

so much depends

upon evil

so we can decipher

the good

for if everyone were

alike

I'd be calling a monotone place

my home

While both of my students' poems seem similar, they are each very different. The first line is the same in both poems, much like Williams, then each poem begin to create their own personality. Student A focuses on a concrete noun, the umbrella, while Student B focuses on an abstract noun, evil.

One may contend that the activity above is simply called imitation rather than improv; however, I would argue that imitation and improv are synonymous. According to Drury, Gioia, and Ring (2006), the poetic definition of imitation is as the following:

Method of learning an art, such as poetry, by copying the work of other artists...The apprentice tries to mimic the master poet's work, copying the forms and meters and tricks of breaking lines, attempting to catch the characteristic tone, choosing similar subjects, or even substituting his own words for the poet's words, noun for noun, verb for verb, in a word substitution poem. (p. 143-144).

Once again, Davidson and Fraser (2009) define 'improv'-ing as when a writer plays with an established set of absolutes. Both imitation and improv poetry help guide the poet to his or her own craft, giving them a window to creative thought and energy. School curriculums should embrace poetry as a creative art, aiding students to be more outstanding thinkers. Improv poetry is an outlet to help guide students on this path to innovative growth.

After the Chorus: The Benefits of Poetry and Hip-hop in Curriculum

When I was twenty-two-years-old, I began my first year of teaching. At the time, I was in a school where I taught ninth grade literature to lower level learners. Of those learners, the

majority were African American males who would rather plug their ears with headphones rather than listen to me babble on about Romeo and Juliet and the tragedy of death. The truth of the matter is that most of my students already knew about death. As a novice educator and a young white female, I quickly realized that the only way I could possibly, if at all, reach these learners was to ask them what they were listening to. I did not, however, have to change my preference for music because I already listened to hip-hop, but my point here is that if educators are going to understand their students, then they must explore their students' spaces, including music. I made sure to put the songs they were listening to on my playlist so I could understand them better. Irby (2015) argues, "If we concerned ourselves with the hard-to-read ideological and material terrain of the urban, urban education, urban teaching, urban classrooms, and urban students' thoughts, desires, hearts, and minds, a *critical urban education perspective* would emerge" (p. 27-28). Educators should be concerned with students extra space and individuality rather than converting to the masses of curriculum and conforming. These educators should be asking their students questions that are outside of the curriculum. Relatedly, even though I relocated schools three years later, I still find asking questions outside of the curriculum is a constant methodology I incorporate into my own teaching pedagogy. On a bi-weekly basis, if not more, I make it an intentional effort to ask my students the following questions: *Who are you listening to? What are you listening to? Why are you listening to it?* This helps me create a space of not only knowing my students, but also incorporating the music into my lessons. While it seems tedious to constantly change lesson plans, I dispute that teachers should be constantly changing and learning themselves in order to better their students.

Likewise, incorporating hip-hop has been implemented into the classroom effectively from many different educators. Petchauer (2010) researches the effects that hip-hop has on

college students while Cutts, Love, and Davis (2012) underscores the adversity they felt while being college students. Oppositely, Christopher Edmin (2010) and Marc Lamont Hill (2009) explore the benefits of hip-hop in a high school setting. Christopher Edmin (2010) asserts that a teacher's approach to hip-hop is very critical in the classroom. In the subject of science, Edmin contends that if educators are going to incorporate hip-hop as a new methodology, then it must be "as relatable as it is complex" (p. 96). This same truth applies to all subject areas of teaching; educators must make content relatable and keep the content complex as well. In his experience, Hill (2009) contends that hip-hop not only connected him to students' understanding of curriculum, but also in the realm of critical media pedagogy. Hill states, "In addition to increasing engagement with the texts, our discussions about cautionary narratives created space for the students and me to engage in critical media pedagogy" (p. 42). By incorporating hip-hop and poetics into the classroom, educators would receive a better understanding of their audience through multiple faucets. Also, if educators can change the way they teach using hip-hop, then students will excel in the classroom. It is important to note, however, the idea that learning is fun can be a misconception because the notion of fun differs based on the individual. If learning was fun, then students would want to come to school everyday, but the reality is most of them dread it. For them, making learning fun is not a reality. Students must understand the complexity of learning, and if educators could incorporate a connection for learning with hip-hop, then there would be an outstanding effect of higher growth in student learning.

In order to maintain a greater development of student learning, educators must also understand that making connections with students is extremely important; most educators call this moment of connection application for transfer. In other words, how can the student apply this knowledge outside of the classroom? The only way for this to truly work is to bring what is

outside of the classroom into the classroom. For example, if someone were to ask my ninth graders which modern hip-hop artist I continually discuss in my classroom, they would respond with rapper Kendrick Lamar. Although Lamar is not in the written curriculum, he is in my personal curriculum of teaching. Lamar was recently named as the first rapper to receive a Pulitzer Prize for music; the Pulitzer Prize is a great honor that many poets have received as well, such as Carl Sandburg, Robert Frost, Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop, and Ted Kooser among many others. The idea that a hip-hop artist is winning a prestigious American award underscores that his words are more than just rap, and can be revered as a poetic justice. While my students think Lamar is just another rapper, I continue to bring his name into the walls of my classroom as he raises important issues about gender, class, humanities, love, and greed. On his recent album entitled *DAMN.* (2017), Lamar utilizes the repetition of one line throughout the entire album: *nobody pray for me*. In this sense, Lamar is stating that the other is marginalized and then forgotten about, underscoring there is a need for change in society. I contend that this can start in classrooms with the incorporation of poetry and hip-hop.

Much like the intention of any poet, it is clear that Lamar himself does not want to be forgotten as he weaves his concern in regard to the treatment to those of color. This is a similar pattern noted among his previous albums. In his album entitled *Good Kid, m.A.A.d. city* (2012), Lamar contextualizes his concerns of the other as marginalized. Love (2016) states:

Lamar does not hide from his flaws, but instead confronts them by recognizing that many are the result of a system that was built and thrives on racism, exploitation, entangled hierarchies, and eviscerating Black leadership in already fragile communities of color. In short, Lamar acknowledges that no matter how *good* he is, the system is not set up for him to survive. (p. 320)

Educators must take Lamar's words and dispel the notion that no matter how good a student may be, they have the opportunity to survive with the correct guidance and fostering. Through the use of hip-hop and poetics, students may have the opportunity to succeed both in the classroom and outside of the classroom, much like Pulitzer Prize winner Kendrick Lamar.

Teacher and Verse Preacher: Breaking the Silent Curse

I cannot recall a time when I was ever truly satisfied with the final version of my poems. In fact, I usually have to let my poems rest a few weeks before I go back and revisit them. I would dispute that this unsatisfied feeling stemming from my work is an underlying characteristic of art—it is a continually changing process. Hip-hop is also a continuous process that is never complete. While Brennan (1994) discusses the concept of the “central aesthetic” (p. 677), Shusterman (1997) argues that a major tenet of art questions hip-hop in the sense that it is never truly finished, meaning that the aesthetic quality is ever changing and the aesthetic is never done. Shusterman's overall point is that if we look at hip-hop, then we can find philosophical issues. In the same sense, teaching is never truly done; this is why it is pertinent that educators continually question themselves and their methodologies within the curriculum.

Truly, the stereotype of both poetry and hip-hop must be broken, and this cycle can be shattered with educators who are aware that it is necessary in the realm of curriculum. Rose (1994) argues that rap has been publicized “as media attention on rap music has been based on extremist tendencies within rap, rather than the day-to-day cultural forces that enter into hip-hop's vast dialogue” (p. xiii). Similarly, Vaquer (2016) contends the same argument for poetry. She writes, “No perfect definition of what poetry is exists, and it is a testament to the ephemeral and abstract nature of poetry that this is the case” (p. 20). Both hip-hop and poetry are two

different art forms who are misunderstood and are begging to be comprehended in classroom curriculums.

Incorporating both poetry and hip-hop into the curriculum is essential to fostering young minds as they develop. Educators must, however, follow what interests them and pursue it in order to convey their own passions in the classroom. As mentioned before, it will take some risks for implementing this methodology in the classroom when our curriculums are built for ability grouping. I cannot help but think that if educators chose teaching as their career, then they must want to change the world somehow, requiring some risk in order to be a trendsetter. I cannot help but think where our culture would be if some music artists or authors did not take risks. For example, one of hip-hop's first artists, Grandmaster Flash, attempted to explore a genre of music that did not exist while the Mesopotamians created the first epic poem, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Both genres at one point were non-existent, but someone chose to pursue them because of passion and interest, creating both art and history. Educators must choose to pursue a path that has some risks. Petchauer (2009) highlights that in order to pursue interest one must "follow the thing" (as cited in Marcus, 1998, p. 91), meaning that one must know the history of what they are interested in and pursue it. Petchauer (2009) states, "To 'follow hip-hop,' a useful review must take place through a broad lens not limited to the field of education or respective publishing venues, and scholarship that is strictly in the field of education must be seen in relationship to the broader body of scholarship on hip-hop" (p. 948). This is the time for the curriculum agenda to revise and rewrite hip-hop into the curriculum as a useful tool for teaching poetry.

Furthermore, Daspit and Weaver (2001) state, "We submit that the only time rap becomes a form of traditional western style opposition is when rap invades suburbia and (white) middle class young adults adopt and construct their own form of hip-hop culture in order to

revolt against the dominance of middle class values” (p. 107). The concept that rap alludes to revolt against middle-class values is also another agenda for educators to rewrite. Perhaps popular culture is to blame for the stereotyping of both poetry and hip-hop. I argue that, despite the negative comments of popular culture, one can find the good in it if one were to study it, but studying takes effort and we live in a culture that believes effort is found in the masses.

Likewise, Daspit and Weaver (2003) also comment on society’s reduction of art to the masses, which would apply to both hip-hop and poetry. They state, “The culture industry’s reduction of art, in all its possible forms, to the lowest common denominator, has severe consequences on the individual psyche of the masses” (p. 145). When the masses have conformed, that is when society becomes fenced in to living in collectivity. Rap lyricist and rapper Reuben Bailey (2018) from the Dungeon Family, also known as Big Rube, states, “Living in solidarity can help renew the mind; when you’re with others, there is too much influence. Much like a computer, the input gives you the output, which is why negative lyrics have a negative outcome on kids” (personal communication, April, 2018). If society reduces art to nothing and the masses embrace this concept, then the youth will also be influenced by this decision. Bailey suggests that when one thinks alone in solidarity, then a more positive outcome will occur, hence the production of leaders. This notion should be a critical pedagogy in which educators embrace in their classrooms as they attempt to mold the minds of the youth.

When teaching in secondary education, it is often hard to help students relate to the topic at hand due to the restricting curriculum provided by the lockstep curriculum. This is where educators must embrace the concept of taking risks within their own classrooms. Stovall (2016) contends, “Although many suggest this is too much to ask from an industry unconcerned with critical analysis and reflection, the consumers of the music (young people) should at minimum

have the opportunity to engage the genre critically” (p. 599). Our curriculum, however, does not give students an opportunity to engage the genre of hip-hop critically; rather, it only looks at poetry in the curriculum, making it a mundane task. It is in this sentiment that educators should wake up and realize the curse between poetry and hip-hop must be broken or else our curriculum and suffering students will remain in silence. As educators, when life becomes scripted, we typically begin exploring different creative spaces. Our identities are ever evolving, yet our voices as educators are in danger of becoming forever lost; eclipsed in the scripted curricula. It is time to discover change and explore the different realms of teaching poetry and hip-hop. When the curriculum tells us no, it is our job to break the silence and say *no, I am working on my instructional identity*. Identities shape us, but truthfully, we create those lines. As two great poets, Herrick and Eminem, once told me, “Gather ye words while ye may because you are a poet and time is still a-flying, so you must seize the moment or else tomorrow will be dying and it could be over—just keep writing.”

CHAPTER FOUR POETIC POSTLUDE

An Afterthought between Poetry and Hip-hop

therefore all want to lean
 away from the
 angst
 doubt
 concern
 misgiving
 mistrust

but we error on missing
 the point, unaware of the space
 between the words—the blanks,
 the breaths, the beats—
 that don't teach words or the
 main perception perceiving
 a senseless play of worth—

like Dracula during the day,
 and Tupac off the street—
 the time in between makes
 a
 silent
 beat

You close your eyes to look around
 KENDRICK LAMAR

Do you see? It must be the aprons of silence.
 CARL SANDBURG

CHAPTER FIVE POETIC PRELUDE

Perplexing Patterns

The words on the soon-to-be published
 paper next to the living room door hum secrets
 to the carpet I don't understand. Usually,
 I time the silence by the trucks outside
 revving their engines to the hums. Later and now,

I can understand their deep hallow howls
 reminiscent of those silent claps during
 the Masters that no one seems to understand.
 They strangely hiccup at our lawn (mown),
 A winking man (the gnome) and the sun

like a caged basket of so many hot stones.
 The howls we really thought were dying cats
 turned out to be laughs. When I go to my car
 I hear the larks triple in sound and bump
 until I slam the door. We then both realize

we should stop binge-watching *Dateline*
 as I lock the door and sigh down to
 the welcome mat that is stained with
 dirt from our pastures where we graze
 with future hopes next to disposed plastic bottles.

Always, we'll walk away and abandon the groans
 through the trees, hallow, dark, like soaring
 advice from our peers. You never
 mentioned what would happen if
 we left those plastic bottles full of

rainwater on the corner—we'd be better
 off if somebody else inherited our recycling.
 But the walk back would be silent,
 a street of hullabaloo and flies. I'd have to
 know how to milk a cow, or change a tire—

I could probably find one on the road—
 but really I want to be standing on
 our welcome mat next to the pile
 of laundry that hasn't been folded
 because there is an open notepad sighing

my name. It's as obvious as the words
that repeat over and over again in my skin—
like the postman who used analogies to explain
the decline of letters—I can now hear the secrets
from the carpet, but I can't make out
the patterns.

CHAPTER 5

PERPLEXING PATTERNS IN POETRY AND PERSONAL IDENTITY IN CURRICULUM

“Nowadays, we all look for the Figure in the Carpet.”

—T.S. Eliot, *A Choice of Kipling's Verse*

Educational restrictions gradually imposed on students as they inch their way through the K-12 system build and solidify barriers that deflect creative thinking like a tidal barrage against high waters. Storm as we may, the institutional limitations that arrogantly assume to define us do not cease their imposition after senior yearbooks are signed, diplomas issued, and we depart; hands raised in tearful farewell as we cast off in cars brimming with housewares and hope toward the hallowed halls of academia. Fast forward two college degrees and three professional classroom years later, I am ready to pursue my ultimate educational goal: earning my doctoral degree. Though I thought the seawall of limitations had long ago eroded, posing no barriers to my highest academic aspirations, I soon learned it held like the barnacles at the base of its impenetrable mass. Had I settled contentedly into the cold, numbing depths of discouragement that washed over me from the words on a single page, I would never have cast off in what Hurston (2010) describes as one of those “ships at a distance that has every man’s wish on board” (p. 1).

Picture this: it’s a chilly March afternoon, around 4:00pm, and I am sitting in the Kroger parking lot wiping floods of tears from my face. I expect to drown in my 2005 red Ford Mustang, the same car I received on my fifteenth birthday. *They will find you here*, I thought, *and think to themselves it’s a pity she’s twenty-seven and still drives the same ole teenage two-door around town*. The woman next to me loads the produce in her white sedan while I continue to wallow in my current state. I think back to my life a mere five minutes earlier, blissfully unaware of my imminent future meltdown next to a Kroger cart corral. Until then, the day had gone reasonably

well as I left my classroom and drove over to pick up the few groceries I had not been able to fit into my busy weekend. As I pulled into a parking spot, the e-mail notification on my cellphone sang, so I curiously checked my phone—my e-mail—and quickly realized this was a message I had long been waiting for, a response to a doctoral program application I had submitted in January, so long ago. As I opened the e-mail, my heart quickly sank into my gut as I read the word *sorry*. Sorry? I must have read this incorrectly. At a second glance, I realized I had read it correctly—after all, I am an English teacher.

In my confusion, I dialed the number to the college of education at the local university where I had applied. An administrative assistant answered the phone as I nervously asked for clarity on why I had not been accepted into the program. I suddenly envisioned Miss Jane Hathaway of the *Beverly Hillbillies* as she cleared her throat to answer my questions. She informed me that she had attended the meetings where the applications were being read and, upon a long discussion, the decision was made that I did not yet have enough experience in education to begin a doctoral program; I was simply too young. I ground my teeth together tightly, working hard not to cry as I began to think of Mary Shelley who wrote her first novel when she was “simply” a teenager. *Am I too young?* I was young enough to own my own home. I was young enough to have a solid career in which I taught teenagers. I was young enough to watch them graduate and I was also, unfortunately, young enough to attend a handful of their funerals. And now there I sat, wallowing in self-pity while reading the brief, stinging lines of rejection over and over like a broken key on a piano. After wiping mascara-stained hands onto my skirt, I grabbed my grocery list, opened my squeaky car door, and placed one high heel on the ground: *I hear what they are saying*, I told myself, *but I don't understand the words*.

Scenarios much like mine, I fear, are all too common not only in the world of academia where those who wish to receive an advanced degree are declined due to some degree of age, years of experience, or other artificial barriers, but also in the k-12 curriculum where students who hope to obtain an imaginative, solid education are weakened due to the dry content of curriculum barriers. Truthfully, I had never considered the possibility of being too young for admission to a doctoral program; I assumed that committees would review my application and recognize me as a young woman who thrived in the classroom and craved to grow personally and professionally in higher education. I was, however, very wrong in this assumption. After swallowing one bitter pill, I became aware that other programs might also measure and reject me by the same criteria, so I was hesitant with regard to completing applications for admission to other doctoral programs in the state of Georgia. Nevertheless, I was determined to dispel the myth that my young age and early career experience as an educator should be barriers to the doctoral program admission process. With this in mind, I revisited the doctoral programs offered by Georgia Southern University where I had earned my Masters degree, applied for the curriculum studies doctoral program, and later accepted the offer to join their prestigious program. I have since come to realize how fortunate I was in lacking the age and experience expected for admission to another institution. In this program, I have learned more about myself as an educator, human, and poet. In fact, if it were not for this program and its prestigious professors, I would not have reevaluated my own education as a young adult. I may never have come to realize that the humanities, especially poetry, had grown quietly dormant in my teenage years.

My teenage years in the k-12 classroom lacked enthusiasm when I needed it the most—my intellectual imagination was latent and I needed someone to trigger the sleepy visions that I harnessed within. I always tell my students that our relationship as teacher to student feeds off of each other; if I am excited about a lesson, perhaps they will have a small drive to be as well and if they are excited about a new pop-culture sensation, such as a new music artist, then I need to explore this new perception and attempt to be excited as well. Showing interest always demonstrates love, which triggers poetic vision and new opportunities in the classroom. Leggo (2018) states, “Poetry offers a new language of possibility... The new language we need in education is the language of love, which is always committed to possibility and hope” (p. 74). Teachers who value students’ education and their own education are more likely to break through the tidal barrage where the high waters churn, fostering poetic possibility and hope in education.

As I have reevaluated my own education, I have come to the realization that most educators perhaps are guilty of the same crime I had committed—taking a backseat to my own education and becoming latent in thinking outside of the box that curriculum packages and seals for us. These circumstances lead educators to perplexing patterns within curricula, as they are able to understand the words in the guidelines, yet fail to make out the patterns of their own unique experiences. Because of relational circumstances, it is important for educators to recognize their own patterns and share them with others in order to help foster a more creative curriculum. As Pinar (1994) recommends, it is important for educators to encompass knowledge of the self, knowledge of discipline, and knowledge of others. Much like poetry, there is no one correct solution or answer for identifying this trifecta of knowledge; therefore, educators must

delve into each category of knowledge and begin to examine the perplexing patterns from their perspective.

Later and Now: Where are the Perplexing Patterns?

In 1896, author Henry James (1896/2014) published a short story entitled “The Figure in the Carpet,” featuring a narrator who became obsessed with figuring out the meaning and purpose of his favorite author’s works. The narrator searches for one overall answer, but the story ends with him still questioning the intentions of the author. Truly, James’ purpose for his work is to underscore that not all writing and works can be interpreted the same because they have multiple meanings. For example, if we all saw the pattern in the carpet as the same design, then there would be no room for interpretation. Similarly, if we all saw the patterns of students and education as the same design, then there would be no need for differentiation. However, we know that all humans are built differently, so curriculum must provide a foundation for a variety of patterns. Within the same light, people also question the meaning of poems and poetry, but all perspectives are different and poetry cannot all be interpreted the same; therefore, much like curriculum, there must be an open-mindedness in order to allow the patterns of meaning to develop.

Throughout the decades, curriculum has been designed and reformatted from multiple angles; however, one aspect has remained the same—imagination has taken a backseat in curriculum, leaving students to remain dormant in the content area of the humanities. Likewise, poetry is a victim of this deprived curriculum as instructors attempt to coat over the basics of poetry when teaching, leaving no room for imagination. For example, students learn that poetry is formulaic, often creating frustration by setting specific parameters. This basic and unfortunate

method to teaching poetry leaves students with a negative impression on the subject of poetry. In reflecting on my experience with poetry as a teenager, I recognize that I believed poetry was formulaic and, truthfully, stemmed from abundance of old, white men (and lets be honest, what teenager wants to read rhymes from someone who died centuries ago?). The perplexing pattern of imagination of the poetic process was left out of my teenage thinking, which is a tragedy within itself. The imagination can encompass a variety of sensual and unusual yet familiar awakenings within the mind. Greene (2000) states, "...the role of the imagination is not to resolve, not to point the way, not to improve. It is to awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard, and unexpected" (p. 28). The imagination is the emergent idea that heightens the unforeseen moments in our lives; if we did not have our imagination, then we could not unveil these unpredicted instants that yearn to be seen. As humans, however, it is important that we move toward these moments in order to ensure that these patterns in our imaginations come to life.

When giving students a creative writing assignment, especially poetry, I often hear them say something along the lines of the following: *But you don't understand, I am not creative.* My natural, first instinct is to go thump them on the head and yell: *Yes, you are! You just have not found the right pattern!* However, I love my job and would never act upon this slightly aggressive act, so I encourage them to dig a little deeper than they normally would in order to find their outlet to imagination. I imagine that some students stare at creative writing assignments in distress the same way I stare at math and science problems in distress—perhaps the room is spinning and they are stuck in a hullabaloo of confusion. Truly, imagination creates an entire arena of creative license for student learners; it is the entry way into a new world of thinking and ingenuity. If one were unable to access this entry to their imagination, then they are,

at all costs, risking their loss of being and sense of self. Likewise, from one of my favorite novels, *The Bell Jar*, character Esther Greenwood states, “I felt very still and very empty, the way the eye of a tornado must feel, moving dully along in the middle of the surrounding hullabaloo” (Plath, 1971, p. 3-4). While Greenwood states this as a college-aged girl in the early 1970s, she forgoes the comments in regard to her schooling in the 1960s. Much like Esther, students in the 1960s experienced schooling while standing in a spiraling change of curriculum. Throughout the sixties, behaviorists thrived on these new opportunities, considering curriculum projects the “age of ‘gold’” (Schubert et al., 2002, p. 148). Although this time frame can be considered the golden age of curriculum reform, one could argue that beneath the gold was the eye of a domineering government who guided the direction of the curriculum spiral. Schubert et al. (2002) underscores that America was functioning more as a dictatorship of curriculum rather than a democracy of curriculum. Similarly, although we have journeyed a great distance in education, I would argue that we are still amidst a government who guides our education with mundane parameters, leaving imagination to take a backseat to the standardization of learning and test scores. A democracy of curriculum would allow all educators to help participate in constructing the curriculum, providing a wide variety of input; however, each state provides a select group of educators to help build the curriculum, leaving a narrow view of educational possibilities.

If all educators cannot participate in the process of creating the curriculum content, then it is necessary to spark a change in the concept that educators must help their students invoke their imaginations in a commonplace of curriculum, guiding each student to an awakening of their own hullabaloo. In order to awaken the imagination, students must visit what I would refer to as the familiar unknown—the longing and desire that resonates deep within that has yet to be

stirred up in ones imagination. Similarly, (1955/2007) grasps this concept in “The Allegory of the Cave” in Book VII of his work entitled *The Republic* as Socrates explains that one must first embrace imagination before understanding reality. The prisoners in the cave first know the shadows as the familiar, naming and creating concepts for shadows, utilizing their imaginations. One of the prisoners takes a risk to become awakened, leaving the confine of the cave walls and enters the hullabaloo known as the outside world. Truly, the prisoner had a yearning desire that needed to be unveiled outside of the cave walls, and it all stemmed from his imagination. In order to understand reality, one must encompass imagination and move towards the hullabaloo that can often seem so perplexing at times.

The Welcome Mat is Stained with Dirt: Where We Have Been

In order to get work done, sometimes I stay at school late—the trash cans have been emptied, floors vacuumed, hallway floors waxed, and hallway lights turned off. How humbling it is sometimes to be in the quiet of an empty school where hours before the rooms and halls were so vivaciously filled with human interaction. Then, sitting quietly in my classroom grading papers, my mind lulls off into a haze and I begin thinking about the past as I look at the stains on the carpet. I know that some of the stains on the carpet were here before me and often wonder how they got there, and other times I get frustrated because the stains are still there and I must endure them another year (You would think classic Windex would do the trick, but I guess not). Either way, the stains will remain there and both the students and I will continue to see them and walk over them everyday because they were here before us and cannot be removed. Much like these stains, there are foundations in our curriculum that cannot be removed because they too foster a history and a story that make up our educational system.

For example, I must recognize that the Philosopher is a pattern in the carpet of poetry albeit his opinion of poets is not of the highest. Although Plato (1955/2007) argues that art and poetry are two components that one should be the least concerned with in their lives: “Art and poetry appeal to, and represent, the lower less rational part of our nature” (p. 345). Poetry seems irrational, according to Plato; therefore, one should not embrace poetry because it embraces false realities. Plato reasons that poets are imitators of nothing; therefore, they are not valid since they imitate. Plato describes a poet as “...one who can make all the objects produced by other particular crafts” (p. 337). This explanation means that poets do not create an original product because they have copied another craft that they have seen. Plato describes this utilizing the metaphor of a craftsman who is making a bed or a table, justifying that the craftsman did not create the concept or the first model of the bed or table; rather, he is imitating the original model and rebuilding what he has seen. Therefore, the craftsman is an imitator, which means poets are imitators as well.

One may question why I am giving Plato a shout-out when he seems so critical of poets of poetry; however, it would be naïve of me to not mention Plato as a foundation in theorizing poetry because along with the positive criticism of the arts the opposite perspective must be presented as well. Plato’s notion of poets as imitators is discouraging to poets who value their craft as an art; however, if we were to factor in criticism and art as a pair into imagination, then we would find the two go hand-in-hand. Plato’s student, Aristotle (1996), counters this notion and describes poetry in regard to imitation as an act that is necessary because humans crave the notion of gaining knowledge. I would like to give “two claps and a Ric Flair” to Aristotle as he challenges his own professor and yearns to know more about the art. As Aristotle (1996) writes about poetry, he constantly refers to poetry as an “imitation,” defending his belief that poetry

releases the imagination. We have to have a foundation of writing before taking off on a journey of imagination. Aristotle disagrees with Plato in regard to the concept that epic poetry and tragedy are imitations and, therefore, should not be considered one of the lowest elements that one should care about. Aristotle (1996) states:

Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is admirable, complete and possesses magnitude; in language made pleasurable, each its species separated in different parts; performed by actors, not through narration; effecting through pity and fear the purification of such notions. (p. 10)

These imitations are necessary in life because they present a notion of normalcy that readers are use to, leading to the assumption that the reader can relate to the text. In teaching, we call this application for transfer as students take a guided notion and apply it to their everyday life outside of the classroom walls. Much like Aristotle's notion above, poetry is necessary because it guides our realities in a realm of imagination—even if we are imitators. If we were to question the foundation of “imitators,” then we would need to question Homer for his epic poems *The Illiad* and *The Odyssey* as well as the anonymous author of the epic poem of *Beowulf*. However, no one questions these epic tales in terms of poetics and they are taught worldwide in classrooms, including my own. We come from patterns of imitators that have solidified the outlines of patterns within the carpet and we must respect those boundaries.

Likewise, we have continued to grow in historical poetic fashion in order to establish a foundation for imagination and poetry. For example, Friedrich Nietzsche was not only a philosopher, but he was also a poet and musician as he both composed and played music (Babich, 2006), underscoring the importance of the arts. If Nietzsche can be a contender in all of these arenas of the arts, then truly his argument is valid in the sense that it takes imagination to

be poetic and a creator of the arts. Much like Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger (1971/2013), contends that all works of art “have this thingly character” (p. 19). It especially important to note Heidegger’s use of the word “character” as we, as educators, often try to instill character into our students, underscoring the concept that to be different is good. Furthermore, Heidegger states, “The art work is, to be sure, a thing that is made, but it says something other than itself, *allo agoreuei*” (p. 19). Truly, Heidegger is underscoring that being different than the other is art as *allo agoreuei* translates from Greek to mean “speak in other.” Likewise, Babich (2006) contends, “As thinker, Heidegger is consigned to use language to understand the essence of poetry and language and thought, as of being itself” (p. 15). Heidegger expresses his value of the art by composing in the art itself, becoming an outlet to “speak in other” by creating poetry.

Although Heidegger is not necessarily deemed a poet like Nietzsche (Babich, 2006), this notion of philosopher as poet truly embraces that creating an idea within written language is art, thus evoking the imagination to an outlet of creativity. Heidegger (1947) encourages us to think poetically rather than scientifically because thinking scientifically is calculated while creating poetry is an unintentional placement of words from within oneself. Likewise, while all of these philosophers have a wide array of opinions on the art of poetry, it is certain that, in their own right, each one of them is a poet himself, including Plato who seems to think that poets are the lowest man on the totem pole of knowledge.

Of course, poets are going to defend themselves in the manner of their art, but they do so in a mindful discourse that proves Plato’s postulation of poets as imitators to be an invalid and outdated idea. In his collection of essay entitled *On Poetry and Poets*, poet T.S. Eliot (2009) states, “In more advanced societies, such as that for ancient Greece, the recognized social functions of poetry are also very conspicuous” (p. 4). With this notion, it is important to note that

perhaps Socrates and Plato understood the prominent aspects that poetry brought to functioning in society, but chose not to recognize its meaning; however, Aristotle is the only philosopher out of the three who accepted poetry's role as a social function in Greek society as he discusses the positive aspects of poetry in drama.

Much like the recognition to the Greek culture, we should also recognize, as Eliot (2009) underscores, that poetry and art can be forms associated with ones place or locality. Eliot states:

We observe that poetry differs from every other art in having value for the people of the poet's race and language, which it can have for no other. It is true that even music and painting have a local and racial character: but certainly the difficulties of the appreciation in these arts, for a foreigner, are much less. (p. 7)

In a sense, we can look at each other's art as an appreciation for oneself, regardless if we do not understand the meaning or not. As for poetry, a poet can write about their sense of place or being and it may differ from the reader's background; this does not mean that the reader should think less of the poem, but rather embrace the poet's language of being within the poem. As stated before, Heidegger (1971/2013) suggests that all works of art "have this thingly character" (p. 19). Similarly, Eliot (2009) mentions this "character," although it can be foreign to the reader, must be embraced as the poet's background. This is why I find it so frustrating when students think poetry has more than one right answer; they must truly look to find the pattern and tell us the meaning through their own perception.

When accepting one's work, it is important to understand the process as well. For example, I believe that Plato did not embrace the process of poetry, but rather he saw it as a mundane task that he chose to discredit. Richard Hugo (1979) states: "Don't start arguments. They are futile and take us away from our purpose. As Yeats noted, your important arguments

are with yourself. If you don't agree with me, don't listen. Think about something else" (p. 3). The art of poetry is not about the process of one's work; rather, it is about the process that the poets create within themselves. This inner being is where the argument should take place as the poet grapples with his or her own experiences, words, and sense of being. Without this grappling, there would be no stains left behind in the carpet. Likewise, the foundations and criticisms of poetry established by philosophers and poets help create patterns in the carpet that guide the arts, humanities, and curriculum in a more meaningful and purposeful direction.

Somebody Else Inherited Our Recycling: Where We are Going

The direction through which education is going is sometimes troubling, as curriculum tends to repeat itself. Teaching is much like recycling as educators receive new students every year, hoping to reuse and then build upon students' prior knowledge from the year before. When this act is complete, students move on to the next grade level whereupon their next set of teachers will begin their recycling process—we inherit each others recycling in order to create a newer, better product. Unfortunately, when we receive someone else's recycling, we do not necessarily get the product that we want; therefore, we must work diligently in order to meet the needs of those students who fell behind in their education. In the secondary education environment, our goal is to prepare students for graduation, making sure they have met all needed requirements and credits to receive a golden ticket to the world of adulthood as they walk across a stage. In my seven years of teaching, I have had a hand full of students who never made it to the stage of graduation to receive their diploma. Several of these students stand out in my mind and I often wonder what I could have done differently as an educator—did I not identify their patterns in enough depth? Did I not take enough scraps from the grade level before and

reclaim enough of the instructional methods for comprehension? The wondering can sometimes be endless with this select group of students who simply just did not make it to the final stage of their education.

When I think back to my second year of teaching, one particular student who stands out in my mind was a student who I struggled with on a daily basis, a true thorn in my side; however, in between his cussing and venting of office referrals, he and I formed a connection as I attempted to think what his purpose was outside the walls of the school. Outside of school, I knew he created graffiti, hot-wired cars, sold drugs, and participated in a local gang—this was his art and purpose, not school. He even told me that he would rob a bank and give me part of the dough so I would be set for life—a true statement, in my opinion, that he had accepted me. Once I began to understand his purpose, I challenged his intellectual boundaries in connection to his interests. He began doing well in my classroom—he went from miserably failing my class to having a solid C, which we both knew was a huge accomplishment for him. As the last few weeks of school were approaching, I learned that he had been kicked out of school for behavioral issues. I was not surprised, but instead sorely disappointed, as I understood that other educators, my colleagues, did not understand his purpose; therefore, my recycling was turned into a contaminated product that had a bad taste toward the hazardous elements of schooling. Later, a few weeks into the summer, I would be attending this student's funeral as he was murdered on a street due to gang activity. This is probably one of the most painstaking moments I experienced in the beginning of my teaching career as I watched a student, who I knew had a purpose and an art, be buried into the dump of the Earth.

Knowing his death was not my or my colleagues' fault, I still question what could have been done differently in his education. Students face two worlds—life outside of school and life

inside of school—and this particular student seem to lack confidence with his life inside of the school. Who is to bear this weight? Morris (2016a) quotes transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau in regard to thinking outside of the realm of education. She states, “... getting an education outside of formal institutions is very important” (p. 67). Students must be able to identify and solve problems when placed in everyday situations, educators must look outside of the formalities of curriculum and foster student discoveries, helping them find their own recycling and turn it into treasure—their purpose. Although my student’s senseless death and loss of treasure may seem to have nothing to do with his schooling, I know in many ways it does have something to do with his schooling. If I were to rewind time to his childhood, I would ask his teachers if they allowed him intellectual freedom in his *actual* interests. I would ask them if they were preparing him for the main event—life—rather than miseducating him with the fluff that floats in textbooks. In turn, as his former teacher, I would ask myself these questions too. While I view myself as a teacher one way, it may not typically be the same view from my students’ perspectives. Although I could say I am the hippest teacher with my students, I am sure this former student, along with my other students, view me in a different light as their teacher—an adult who is trying to control their actions. Somewhere along the lines of reality versus hope, educators need to realize this fine line in preparing students for the future. I often question where we are going in education, but the truth is that sometimes we are not going anywhere because our recycling never gets reclaimed, restored, and renewed.

I am in a constant state of being where I believe students need to be challenged through the arts in order to find their purpose. If students, such as my former, struggling student, had an established purpose in their schooling, then they would have a sense of being. Liberal arts help students channel their inner being. I also believe that this particular student would have been

interested in poetry, which is an outlet I never had the opportunity to introduce properly to him as I was strictly following the curriculum guidelines as a new teacher. If I had introduced my student to poetry as art involving hip-hop, then perhaps he would have felt an ultimate purpose in his education rather than following the monotonous routine society places in our school systems. Because of this particular student, I make it a purposeful act now to introduce music as poetry in my classroom. I begin the semester off with a music video analysis where both the students and I analyze music videos together (yes, I have my students' parents sign a permission form). We begin with Michael Jackson's hit *Thriller* (1982) and discuss the zombification of America. It is here where I ask students to go below the surface and tell me the meaning of the song and video, connecting it to culture. After students have mastered this, I then move on to a more recent, controversial song and music video by Donald Glover, also known as Childish Gambino, entitled *This is America* (2018). It is with this gut-wrenching music video that students are able to make cultural connections to what they listen to, examining a song as a purposeful poetic device. In peaking their interests, I then let students choose their own music video where they must not only analyze the music video, but also interpret the lyrics utilizing poetic devices and making cultural connections.

Teaching poetry in the secondary classroom is not an act for the wary, but educators need to delve into its challenges; I constantly struggle with dense teenagers who have been taught somewhere along the lines of curriculum that poetry is lame and who uses it anyway. Not only are students taught that poetry is lame, but also that high school is equally lame; I often hear remarks that are along the lines of how they cannot wait to graduate high school. The terrifying part of this statement is that these students have no idea what life is like outside of the high school walls and what it means to "adult." I truly question though why students are so turned off

by poetry and schooling, then I realize it is because they have been told to concentrate too often, which closes up the imagination. In *Like Letters in Running Water*, Doll (2000) refers to Harold Rugg's term "utter concentration" (p. 2). Doll states that "utter concentration" can "not only shut out external stimuli but shuts up imagination, keeps imagination silenced, blocked" (p. 2). Doll then refers to it as "stonewalling" (p. 2). How often are educators "stonewalling" their students in order to maintain the guidelines the state-mandated curriculum provides? Keeping imagination silenced and blocked is a true tragedy and makes students think of teachers just as the television and film industry portray us—as boring tyrants.

Speaking of tyrants, teaching is not a dictatorship. An educator is more than just a teacher—educators hold the responsibility of helping students develop the characteristics of well-minded, responsible citizens in a more globalized, 21st century. While targeted instructional objectives seem to be the key to student success, a well-rounded student must also experience learning that includes preparing for life and personal experiences. These include learning opportunities supported with technology, community engagement, and civic responsibility. Students should not only be prepared for college, but also be provided with an abundance of opportunities to reach beyond classroom walls. These include experiences to helping them cultivate a stronger knowledge base that will motivate success in both the academic arena and a global society.

This concept, however, is frustratingly difficult to grasp in the arena of the public school system. Weaver (2010) states, "Once where schools offered hope in creating citizens of an active democracy and once offered hope to those who wished to receive an education, now there is no covering the public school agenda with a veneer of democracy or individual enlightenment" (p. 6). Rather than focusing foremost on the needs of learners, schools now must first attend to

sociopolitical noise, depositing learners on the backburner of educational priority. School systems are now targeted for global capitalism as students take classes preparing them for future “job training”, passively creating “docile test takers,” and building “future consumers” (Weaver, 2010, p. 6). Molding students into these three categories may indicate society is producing cybernated citizens; however, this strategy for curriculum structure is more along the lines of Ira Levin’s “Stepford wife” mentality as it mass-produces zombie-like, submissive students—perhaps the term “Stepford students” is newly appropriate. If public education continues to insist on building curriculum along these parameters, then the individualism and poetic prowess among students will be completely lost. Each student has an undiscovered wealth of talents to contribute to society. It is the role of the teacher to help students detect those hidden talents, building upon the students’ own personal experiences and interests.

Students have an abundance of personal knowledge that most educators do not hone in on due to targeted instructional objectives. Dr. Marla Morris (2016a) states, “Students do not know where their intellectual labors will take them. If teachers begin to set objectives, students will never be able to truly do the intellectual work that will free thought...” (p. 182). Again, set objectives create this idea of “stonewalling” (Doll, 2000, p. 2), leaving it almost hopeless for educators to even begin to get creative with the arts in their classroom. For example, I struggle with teaching my students that poetry is not formulaic because that is what they have been stonewalled to think. I am required to teach students formulaic poems, such as a limerick, haiku, or sonnet, but as soon as I move outside those formulaic boundaries their heads begin to spin in mass confusion as I allow them to explore their intellectual labors. Students must be given the options to explore these intellectual labors, emphasizing the need for students to live poetically in their own rights. As I stressed earlier, teachers should not dictate students’ learning; rather,

teachers should underscore to students that it does not matter what academic path they choose as long as they do it well. To this end, teachers must find ways to creatively administer the arts, such as poetry, in order to facilitate students' self-discovery of individualism.

Recognizing the pattern to self-discovery of individualism is a very important and purposeful act in the classroom. Truly, it takes a motivated, creative educator to foster these needs for students. Arguably, one of the biggest problems as an educator is realizing students have a lack of specified purpose in school. Students follow the same day-to-day routine and go to school because they are told to do so. Everyday we should be becoming rather than just being (J. Weaver, personal communication, June 19, 2016). In aid of art helping us become, aesthetics in the arts is important in fostering student growth. In education, teachers hone in on how the term aesthetics means how one feels when they experience an out of body occurrence; Morris (2016b) highlights how aesthetics can mean much more than the perception of living in the everyday world occurrences, conveying the arts should not be separated from the routine world. Living poetically means pursuing a passion within oneself with the aesthetic maintaining one's happiness. As an educator, I like to think that I live poetically everyday, especially in my classroom. It is hard to think that a career will provoke an aesthetic meaning of happiness; however, if an artist enjoys their work, then is it really considered work? It is true that most people make the assumption that artists do not think about their work at hand (Morris, 2016b, p. 24). However, as a former dancer and current competitive cheerleading coach, I can testify that choreography requires deep thought, planning, and implementation. The movements require repetitive practices until the body learns to take over and simply do its job. Likewise, I can recall a moment from my high school days whereupon I scheduled a meeting with my principal in regard to starting a dance team. Her answer was a resounding no and her reasons consisted of

dance not fitting into the curriculum of the school and the lack of a faculty advisor to invest time. Morris (2016b) states, “American culture is particularly problematic because the arts are not highly valued” (p. 25). Similarly, undervaluing the arts means that living poetically is at risk within school curriculums. Morris (2016b) even goes further and elaborates that the arts are the first cuts made in school curricula because they are viewed as “merely ornamental” (p. 25). Ornamental objects add panache to lackluster objects. Imagine a Christmas tree without any ornaments—it is just a tree. Similarly, a school without the arts would be just as mundane, offering a disappointingly sterile education rather than a satisfyingly fruitful education.

A Street of Hullabaloo and Flies: But Lets Go Here Instead

Why is it that I always remember my worst classes and my most annoying students? I believe it is because they have the most impact on me as a teacher, challenging me to not only become better at my profession, but also as a human, helping see life as poetic. One fall semester at my current high school, I taught a class that could absolutely break my nerves down by the end of the day; however, through the hullabaloo, I always ended up laughing by the time the class was over. As the spring semester approached and I received a new group of students, I slowly realized that I missed my annoying bunch of rowdy teenagers from the previous semester; truly a thought I never believed would cross my mind as I had spent many nights venting to my husband about how terrible they were. Surprisingly, as the spring semester began in full-force, the most annoying students from my rowdy fall class would make it a point to stop by my room and visit weekly during their break time; they proceeded to do this all semester as they pulled chairs up to my desk to tell me really lame jokes, talk about their other classes, reflect on lessons from my class, and vent about their problems. Sometimes when they came to visit, they would

notice I was busy, but instead of walking away they would pull chairs up beside my desk and play on their phones without talking, sitting in silence as I worked. At first, this was strange to me as I was not use to their silence, but then it became a weekly occurrence as these students were in and out of my room during break time. I would like to think that I formed this connection with these students because I am a good teacher; however, while I taught these students, I vented my frustrations to them as a human and a teacher, connecting it to reality, life, and poetics—I would literally quote poems and song lyrics daily in an attempt to arouse their interests in my class. While this may seem unusual, I like to believe that this was my small way of connecting to the students while teaching them how life and poetry intertwine. In order to teach the arts, one must know the arts; therefore, my students needed to trust me as well as my pedagogical notions of living poetically. Do all educators, however, understand that they can live poetically in the classroom by knowing the arts?

Teaching the arts consists of one knowing the arts. Many could say there are an abundance of subjects that consist of the arts in our school curricula; however, these arts are undervalued. For example, I use to teach at a Title I school where not only did I teach ninth grade literature, but I also taught creative writing. As a poet and creative non-fiction writer, I was completely ecstatic about teaching this subject. However, little did I know that students and some faculty did not take this class seriously. On the first day of class, the students explained to me that counselors enrolled them in creative writing in order for them to receive elective credits. This news is not only disappointing to a teacher who teaches writing as an art, but it is also devaluing to the arts.

Categories of the arts, such as drama, chorus, and band, are the more prominent arts offered in schools. While drama has elements of storytelling, it does not necessarily focus solely

on the creation of one's own story. While chorus and band focus on music, these do not incorporate the history of song. Also, the construction process of the arts has been eliminated out of curricula. Teachers should be able to create intellectual abilities for students to master anything that comes at them. In this light, there are numerous poetic hidden arts left out of school curricula that help students identify themselves as individuals. These poetic hidden arts include the elements mentioned above, such storytelling, writing, construction, and song. To help foster these individuals, teachers should be mindful of student activities, and perhaps point them in the direction of the hidden arts while bringing forth Pinar's (1994) knowledge of the self, knowledge of discipline, and knowledge of students (p. 9). Lets go there.

Poetic storytelling as better learning.

Sometimes, I have a difficult time understanding my students and where their frustration in learning is rooted. I get extremely excited when introducing a new novel to my students, and I always assume they will get equally excited. However, their response usually begins with eye-rolling, comments of complaints, and zoned out sidebar thinking—*Is it time for weight lifting yet? I want to go to drama. I hope we don't run too much at practice today. I wonder what I am having for dinner tonight?* Speaking of dinner and food, fiction is a type of art that feeds the soul. If one has a soul, they must feed it. Mary Doll (2000) contends, "Fiction feeds the soul's hunger; words are like food for starved souls (p. xvi). As humans, we feed off of words, especially stories. Storytelling is an art and it is poetic as I am the muse. This is one of my preferred arts—elaborate storytelling with facial expressions and hand gestures. In order to get my students' attention, I usually tell them personal stories with a few fictional details to help break their frustration. The response I get from this is much better than the eye-rolling

introduction to the novel. The storytelling begins a ripple effect as students want to tell their own stories, slowly feeding off of each other's experiences. Doll constitutes that "when people say they are frustrated... they lack art" (p. xvii). In cases such as mine, I believe my students are frustrated because they lack art. Storytelling as poetic is a small window into the arena of art, so they thrive when they have the opportunity to act on it. For students to understand learning, they must enter into a world they do not understand. Frustration is normal and beneficial, as Dewey would agree, aiding in making us all better learners.

Poetic writing as voicing injustices.

Many people do not use the art of poetry to escape, but rather to cope with life. What one person perceives as a glorious situation, another may perceive it as a tormenting situation. For example, I believe writing is a glorious situation because it is a freeing situation I enjoy; however, my students would more than likely argue that writing is a tormenting situation for them because they are forced to (a) write and (b) are being told what to write. I do, nevertheless, give them writing assignments where they choose the topics. Although it is more freeing for them, they still find writing as a torment. If they could understand that writing is freeing, they would be able to cope with the injustices they feel about their lives as a teenager.

I share with my students that poetic writing provokes knowledge of power. Imagine living in a world of familiarity, and then in surprise you are stripped of your culture, being told what to do in the way of new culture, clothing, and mannerisms. Rather than enacting a riot, Native Americans in the United States in the late 19th and 20th centuries utilized poetic resistance in order to battle the acquisition of knowledge thrust upon them as they battled harsh schooling

and living environments. When a group of these Native American students were asked to write a poem about school, they wrote the following:

If I do not believe you
The things you say,
Maybe I will not tell you
That is my way.

Maybe you think I believe you
That thing you say,
But always my thoughts stay with me
My own way. (Adams, 1995, p. 231)

Although this poem is not lengthy, it most definitely delivers a significant message to the school leaders as it weaves literary elements, such as rhyme, diction, and meter, as well as a between the line interpretations. The idea that these students resisted the higher power by using what the school gave them, literacy and writing skills, portrays that poetic knowledge is a very powerful tool that should not be suppressed among the races; rather, it should be implemented to those who possess multiple levels of race in order to stress a common good of knowledge, helping level out injustices.

I also like to inform my students that there are many authors who have utilized poetic writing in order to deal with injustices. For example, James Baldwin (1963) truly represents this notion as he utilizes the art of writing to cope with his emotions about civil injustice. I must make a side note, however, that when I introduce James Baldwin to my students they confess they have never heard his name before, which is another tragedy in our curriculum. However, in

The Fire Next Time, Baldwin is an advocate in demonstrating the freedoms of marginalized populations in America, especially African Americans. Through his writing, Baldwin speaks the truth poetically as he sees it and does not care what others think. When students take this honest approach in our schools and attempt to express their own poetic realities, they are often mocked for speaking their truth. Baldwin (1963) confirms that some dreams are mocked because others “love the idea of being superior” (p. 88). These dreams, however, lead to an individual establishing their own identity. Baldwin proclaims “human truth has made it nearly impossible to attain one’s identity” (p. 88). Young adults already have a difficult time establishing their identity—I know this as I watch these transitioning teenagers in our school systems. There have been numerous times where I have questioned and blamed society in regard to this demanding discovery of identity. In a globalized, selfie-seeking world, society is to blame for young adults collectively looking in the mirror (or cellphone camera) and destroying themselves. Educators, however, need to direct these young adults away from destroying their own image and turn them to coping with the process of identity discovery, especially through poetic writing.

Similarly, Dimitriadis and McCarthy (2001) call into question identity in education. They state, “Education today is an emergent and unfinished idea. In fact, the very idea of research as a privileged space of expert knowledge has been called into question” (p. 55). Dimitriadis and McCarthy (2001) comment even further on the need for “new and overlapping roles for ethics, aesthetics, and the civic” (p. 55). The combination of these three topics elegantly placed in writing could weave a beautiful tale of one’s life journey and identity. In this case, an educator could assign this artful assignment to students while being mindful to who we are and who our students are. Baldwin (1963) writes, “In short, the black and white, deeply need each other here if we are really to become a nation—if we are really, that is, to achieve our identity, our maturity,

as men and women” (p. 97). Telling stories leads to writing, and humans need each other in order to write and discover themselves regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender. The art of poetic writing provides others with a different outlook on how to play the cards that life deals to us.

Poetic construction of song as narrative.

Although it is important to listen to written words, it is equally important to listen to what people do not write about. I stated earlier that I teach my students music is poetry, a true poetic narrative of expression. Poetic narratives, especially in music, are a prime example of this as they tell the story of an individual. Imani Perry (2014) discusses the lyrics of rapper Ice Cube’s song, “It Was a Good Day” off of his album entitled *Predator* (p. 79). In this narrative song, Ice Cube explains his ideal day, leaving out all of the negative aspects that could occur. Listeners are not exposed to the negatives that could occur at the end of Ice Cube’s ideal day because he leaves it out of his written word; however, in his dramatized music video, Ice Cube “enters his home, which is surrounded by police cars and helicopters” (p. 79-80). In this aspect, if Ice Cube’s listeners of his song had not become viewers of his music video, then they more than likely would not have known the negative effects that could come from his ideal, good day. In the same light, this highlights what teachers see versus do not see in curriculum with their students. For example, I once had a student who wrote a poem about her relationship with her mother; it was a sentimental poem where she highlighted her mother’s best features, making it sound like she was the perfect mother. Later, after having a parent-teacher conference with this student’s father, I learned that the mother abandoned the family a few years ago, and I soon realized that this particular student created her poem based off of what did not exist—an imaginary caricature in her life. While writing poetry cannot help one obtain closure, it can help one, especially students,

cope with the realities of life. Serres (2000) states, “To break into pieces in order to launch oneself on a road with uncertain outcome demands such heroism that it is primarily children who are capable of it” (p. 8). If one “launches” themselves on the “road” to closure (p. 8), it requires great self-discipline in order to avoid the traffic of the mind that cannot accept the missing pieces. Likewise, it should be the role of teacher to not only pay attention to what students write about, but also pay attention to what students *not* write about. This should be a golden rule embedded within curriculum as students voice their narratives in the direction of their personal lives. The art of narratives are particularly important in creating individuals because it promotes explicate details into one’s personality and lifestyle.

The poetic construction of song can sometimes leave one with a strong opinion toward the author of the narrative as music reveals true, raw feelings. Similarly, Serres (2000) suggests, “Without space, music holds in us the nil island of memory” (p. 23). Memory can provoke candid and hidden emotions as the writer is triggered from a place within. It is important for educators to bridge this connection when introducing music as poetry in the classroom. The poetic narrative writing that is revealed through song writing can also alter teacher’s opinion as a student and it is important for the teacher to push that aside. Similarly, one of the biggest issues in the arts of music and songwriting is labeling and stereotyping an individual’s lifestyle; teachers cannot make this mistake too. For example, sometimes teachers identify students based on the types of music they listen too. If teachers continue to label and stereotype their students like this, then education will never change. I believe it is important for teachers of all content areas to link music as poetry. When I am executing this role in my classroom, I attempt to survey the most popular genre of music among my students, which is usually hip-hop. As stated in a previous chapter, most educators are too afraid to utilize this risky genre of music in their

classroom as they have it labeled as unfit for society. Teachers are not only labeling their students, but also their favorite genre of music, which just so happens could be a very useful tool in their classrooms. Christopher Emdin (2010) argues that the “societal perception and labelling of hip-hop students as uncivil, unruly, and unmanageable” is problematic (p. 63). Not recognizing these students as artists also presents a problem in education. While some people recognize rap artist T.I. as the rapper that got arrested in Atlanta, Emdin identifies T.I. as a scholar (yes, a hip-hop artist is a scholar... I had to say it again for all of the people who choked on their coffee). Emdin highlights on one of T.I.’s rap songs: “T.I. describes himself as a scholar despite not having a diploma or passing a high school equivalency exam, he evokes a level of confidence that would not be expected from a person who has not been successful in formal education” (p. 68). This insight provides the lyrics of an artist who is successful without strict education. The listener must read between the lines of these lyrics in order to create a significant meaning from the artist. Teachers must read their students “between the lines” at some points in order to make an impact on their identity through education. In this instance, T.I. thrives because he writes what he knows in regard to his personal experience and lifestyle, regardless of education. However, not all students are as successful as T.I. without a formal education. Emdin (2010) states, “The fact that hip-hop is the unified language that many diverse populations share means that it must play a part in how these populations are educated” (p. 6). Students must be educated through the art of song, regardless of genre, because it provides a narrative of self-identity and education.

The Secrets from the Carpet: Create Your Own Patterns

I find it ironic that I am still in high school and that I am still learning as an educator—I learn from my students each day. Educators who place themselves on a higher learning pedestal than their students are at risk for providing their students with a negative outlook on education. As a high school educator, I see the route that students take when leaving the confines of the high school walls that have so neatly kept them together for four years. Many of these students that leave high school have a disheveled notion of what it means to be poetic. I would argue that poetry and the poetics take place in an everyday occurrence through communication, exercise, and thinking. I believe that if younger students could break the notion of the poet stereotype, then these students would be more likely to study humanities in college. Similarly, Taylor (2007) states, “It’s true, of course, that stereotyping of all kinds is innocently passed along by people who simply don’t know any better; in this case, people who might be interested in poetry, but who are perhaps not close to its recent history” (para. 3). Truly, students do not understand the history, process, or artful masterpiece to poetry, and I would also argue they do not understand how freeing this genre of writing can be when one takes part in it. Jill Bialosky (2017) contends, “A poem can do many things at once,” such as challenge the reader intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally” (p. 5). It is important that students know poets are not people who wear all black, sip coffee while wearing a black beret, or snap their fingers to applaud; rather, poets are everyday people who glide to the hullabaloo of life as they fall in love with the language, attempting to flesh it out on paper.

When students abandon their imagination, misunderstanding poets and poetry, then they turn into adults and citizens who continue to misconstrue the meaning and purpose of such art. As adults, they continue to live their lives as they become community members, parents, policy

makers, or perhaps educators themselves. The notion of poetry evoking imagination will remain dormant, and the idea of the cliché, stereotyped poet will remain in tact with these adults because they never broke the cycle of misunderstanding. Similarly, I was almost lost in this monotonous cycle until poetry reawakened my spirit and emotions. Later, as an educator, I struggled with finding a sounding voice that would become an advocate for teaching poetry in a culturally relevant classroom. My intellect as an educator who is passionate about poetry was truly dormant until I began the curriculum studies program at Georgia Southern University. In this program, my creativity and poetic imagination as an educator has been awakened; this intellect is then transferred to my students through my teaching where I hope they understand and act upon imagination and poetics. In order to do this, however, I must sometimes shut my classroom door and veer slightly away from the content provided in the ELA curriculum, teaching my students the texts of authors whose names do not reside on a state-approved curriculum map. Perhaps some would say this could warrant an unpleasant scenario with students, administrators, or parents; however, it is more uncomfortable knowing that students would continue the cycle of mishearing the secrets disguised as a dry, droning curriculum, leaving them to believe the language of learning is woven with only one perplexing pattern. Pinar (1994) would perhaps agree that this notion is how an educator responds as a “person” rather than a “teacher of literature” (p. 9). The poetic truth of teaching is this: every carpet has a pattern, but we all see the design differently; there are many perplexing patterns in the carpet, but it is up to the educator to step off of the carpet and create their own poetically composed patterns in order to disrupt an educationally imposed culture.

CHAPTER FIVE POETIC POSTLUDE

To those *Poetically Composed*:

From time to time every syllable
 moves to the Lethe where
 it must be ransomed and
 questioned later—morals
 left loose and undone.

The memories, like swaying shadows,
 will always be murmuring. Therefore,

you may think that time is trying
 to pronounce the in-between blinks
 during your sips of coffee, swishing
 down as your pen fumbles, quarreling
 on post-its, humming to the class
 that you are *educationally imposed*.
 Even though your sentences seem
 damaged—they stick, and your words
 are purged minutes before your bruise even
ticks—

But it is like explaining one of those
 films where lips don't match sound
 —where hour-to-hour moments
 are unwound—and there you are,
 exposed, holding all your words,
 reeling in what critics think are
absurd.

All of this, maybe soon,
 will spill onto the skyline
 past the edges of this page
 where the audience will lose
 all writing morals—*unwound*
yet engaged.

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