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"In the School, Not of the School": Co-Performing Critical Literacies with English Amped

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“IN THE SCHOOL, NOT OF THE SCHOOL”:
CO-PERFORMING CRITICAL LITERACIES
WITH ENGLISH AMPED

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by
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August 2017

To the students and teachers of English Amped,
and to students and teachers everywhere
who dare to reimagine education together.

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This dissertation belongs to a wide community of people who have from the start shaped its life, and my own life with it. Through each phase of this project, I have depended on collaborators who stood alongside me as partners, advisors, and dear friends. Destiny Cooper and Dr. Susan Weinstein have been my collaborators in the fullest sense. Destiny and I worked together day-to-day through the often-intense highs and lows of creating and teaching in Humanities Amped. I cannot imagine my own life without her friendship, teacher wisdom, MacGyver-like problem solving skills, and seemingly endless commitment to holding open the learning spaces through which so many fortunate people, myself included, become more confident and alive. I am likewise honored to stand with Sue Weinstein, who simultaneously holds the role of my major professor, long-time collaborator, and dear friend. Sue's intellectual and ethical considerations are woven into the tapestry of my scholarship and public service at every step. I thank her for her generous feedback on this dissertation, her fierce sponsorship of Humanities Amped, and her willingness to help me navigate so many learning thresholds of my own. It is hard to know where the ideas of these two collaborators end and where mine begin, and this project simply would not exist without their generous presence in it.

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examples that enabled me to locate my own place in academia at moments when that felt challenging. I am grateful to have been supported by people whose lives I so fully admire.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the possibilities and limitations of “amplifying” critical literacy practices within an urban high school English and creative writing class. This action research project defamiliarized English education and created conditions for participants to imagine and perform alternative possibilities by bringing together critical research, community involvement, creative writing and performance in an extended class with high school, university, and community-based collaborators. Participants were high school juniors, partnering teachers, university-based student teachers, and community members who collaborated to form the English Amped program in the 2014-2015 academic year. Ethnographic methods were used to collect data through field notes, semi-structured interviews, photographs, writing samples, questionnaires, and audio recordings. Findings demonstrated that the socially structured and habituated alienation of working-class students of color in urban schools delimited the ways that participants imagined and enacted critical literacy in school. Historically-based and persistent experiences of school *as it is* limited the legibility of school *as it could be*. The de-familiarization of traditional schooling provoked both euphoria and anxiety for participants. English Amped produced *thresholds* of contact between differently positioned people, institutions, ways of knowing, and forms of experience. Over time, these thresholds helped English Amped participants to experience *performances of possibility* that generated new repertoires of critically grounded knowledge and forms of relationality. Participants could later draw on these repertoires to produce more sustained forms of solidarity, agency, and well-being. Performances of possibilities helped students, teachers, and teacher candidates to experience increased agency and connection, which in turn helped participants to navigate

the anxieties of critical literacies in school. This study points to the humanizing and emancipatory possibilities of critical literacy projects that construct collaborative, cross-institutional networks embedded deeply within urban high schools. Ultimately, English Amped demonstrated that the proliferation of critical literacy in urban public high schools may grow from concrete sites of practice and networks of relationality that enable people to create alternative repertoires over time, and thus co-perform transformative possibilities of school *as it could be*.

CHAPTER 1

IN SEARCH OF SPACE FOR BELOVED COMMUNITY

My first day in English Amped was crazy. I've never been in a class where we had more than one teacher, and there were a lot of students I never took classes with, so I was nervous at first. After a while we grew into a community, and then we were a family.

-Precious, Senior Year Reflection, May 2016

Through my research, I learned that we as a whole are very contradicting. ... I learned that you have to want it, and you have to have that push to do it. ... You can use the cycle of critical praxis throughout your daily life. I will most definitely use it as I get older, and more people should apply it to their daily lives.

-Georgia, Senior Year Reflection, May 2016

It was amazing to see how so many different situations and aspects that almost have virtually nothing to do with one another can create such problems without making any connections to each other on a surface level. The idea that these completely different issues can find a way to come together to become one huge problem was definitely mind-blowing.

-Tristen, Senior Year Reflection, May 2016

When it doesn't come easily to me, that's not because I messed up, it's because I'd found a code and all I needed to do was crack it. It's because I'm getting warmer! Pushing through that was very tough. I know I could have done much better with that as well. Which brings me back to what I also learned about research, you're supposed to have moments when you realize you could have done better. Research is never done, it's just a stopping point.

-Robin, Senior Year Reflection, May 2016

Another woman in her mid-fifties broke down in tears after the fashion show telling me how she wished there had been something like my project [in her youth] because then she would be more accepting of her body. That really hit home as to how impactful my research was.

-Kaiya, Senior Year Reflection, May 2016

Mrs. Cooper and Ms. West were more like mothers than teachers. They showed me a new way of learning, showing that teachers can learn and teach students as well as students teaching them in return.

-Jalon, Senior Year Reflection, May 2016

This taught me that I don't have to be in college to learn and do work that could possibly change the world... Critical Participatory Action Research taught us the steps, it showed us what to do after we saw an injustice.... I learned how to do something with the ideas I had in my head.

-Bri'Yonna, Senior Year Reflection, May 2016

Overview of English Amped

The words that open this chapter are from the students of the inaugural English Amped class. They were written on the last day of class as our two-year journey together ended in May of 2016. Their words reflect their learning experiences as critical researchers and members of a class aimed at transforming public education through critical literacy, participatory research, and social action. Those words demonstrate some of the perceptions that students in the first English Amped class held as they looked back at their own learning and its results: a sense of connection to a community, the determination to push through transformative learning experiences, an emerging analysis of complexity, an understanding of students and teachers as collaborators, and a belief in the power of oneself and one's peers to act as agents of social change.

English Amped, a program first imagined by myself and collaborator Destiny Cooper, began in the fall of 2014 and took place in an urban, historically Black and working class public high school in the Southeastern United States. A diverse array of students representing the school's multiple academic tracks were encouraged to apply for and take part in the English Amped program, which fused multiple classes to form an expanded literacy block for eleventh graders. Destiny and I collaboratively taught the block class with help from the local university's English secondary education students and other partners from the university and surrounding community. Kaiya, an English Amped student, succinctly describes the goal of the class in a letter to fundraise for her senior English Amped action project. She writes, "The goal of the class is to amplify student learning through inquiry that is grounded in both critical and creative thinking with community involvement" (2016). Indeed, the goal was to amplify the learning of multiple collaborators,

positioned differently as high school students, teachers, and community partners, as we imagined and co-performed the many possibilities of education “grounded in both critical and creative thinking with community involvement” at its core.

Since its start in 2014, English Amped has evolved into Humanities Amped, a multi-disciplinary program with 100 tenth through twelfth grade students enrolled in integrated English, social studies, and elective coursework. Plans to expand the program to 225 students by 2018 are underway. At the time of this writing, a core group of people continues to collaborate with one another to develop Humanities Amped, now a project recognized and financially supported by the local public school system and, to a lesser extent, the local university. The ongoing commitment to “amplify” public education in ways that tap into the connections between personal, academic, and critically-engaged, justice-oriented literacies continues to drive the shared learning of the students, teachers, community partners, and alumni connected through Humanities Amped.

The English Amped I refer to in this study is the community of 27 high school juniors, two teachers, five undergraduate English education majors, and various partners who came together in the 2014-2015 school year when this project was in its first iteration. For me, as for others, English Amped represented a “performance of possibilities” (Madison, 2005), a critical praxis that went beyond either analysis of or resistance to the given configurations that enable and constrain critical, justice-oriented literacy practices in schools. Instead, we ventured to act upon those configurations, posing alternative scriptings of what is, and therefore of what could be possible. English Amped functioned as a concrete opportunity for its participants to “defamiliarize their familiar situation...[and] to reflect on things as if they could be otherwise” (Greene, 2001, p. 98). The project was

therefore a site through which multiply-positioned people explored how, or indeed whether, an urban school could function as a critical, emancipatory literacy space.

In an interview on March 10, 2015 with BriHop, an English Amped student, I asked what she believed the goals of English Amped were. She replied, “You know how they say, ‘Be in the world, but not of the world’? We’re in the school, but not of the school.” As BriHop viewed it, English Amped sought to transcend the norms and goals of schooling from within school itself. She drew on the vernacular knowledge of her home and church community to express a form of yearning for transformative change that was expressed in English Amped. We sought to shift the norms of school as it was normally performed among participants by “amplifying” structural and performative elements of school; for example, we combined English III and Creative Writing into one longer class, and then combined more normative academic literacy practices with many non-school based approaches to knowing, doing, and being together. We drew approaches from popular education, community-based critical literacy practices, and critical participatory action research. These approaches “amplified” English education because they did not supplant the already-present purposes of an English class to increase academic performance and expand the literacy of students. Instead, these objectives intertwined with other goals, like those that Kaiya describes above: to involve community and to build students’ capacity to engage a critical and creative praxis. To amplify also meant to make it possible for people to see and hear what was happening through our classroom, to call attention to a performance of schooling “as if [it] could be otherwise.”

The critical ethnographic research that I conducted in the 2014-2015 academic year draws from Geertz's concept of “local knowledge” as “vernacular characterizations of what

happens connected to vernacular imaginings of what can” (1983, p. 215). Throughout this study, I trace ways in which participants in English Amped made sense of and co-performed English Amped from their own vernacular perspectives. I return to a few core questions across this research: What were the conditions that shaped and shifted local knowledge among English Amped participants as we engaged in critical literacy approaches together? How did this group of students, teachers, and partners imagine what happens, and what can happen, in an “amplified” English classroom? What were the limits and possibilities of critical literacy education in the particularly situated institutional, discursive, and historic locale from which we imagined and performed an “amplified” English education together?

“Yearnings and Desires”: Between Non-Profit, State, and Grassroots Movements

D. Soyini Madison (2012) defines critical ethnography as beginning with “an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular *lived* domain” (p. 5). She explains, “the researcher feels an ethical obligation to make a contribution toward changing . . . conditions toward greater freedom and equity” (p. 5), and the critical ethnographer fulfills this obligation by beginning to “probe other possibilities that will challenge institutions, regimes of knowledge, and social practices that limit choices, constrain meaning, and denigrate identities and communities” (p. 6). This understanding of critical ethnography, in which the researcher collaborates to “probe other possibilities,” moves beyond the ethnographer as participant-observer, and situates the researcher as an active participant who interprets and performs meaning alongside co-performers. This approach follows Dwight Conquergood’s notion of research as not only performative, but also dialogical and co-performative (1982). Madison (2012) summarizes:

Coperformance as dialogical performance means you not only do what subjects do, but you are intellectually and relationally invested in their symbol-making practices as you experience with them a range of yearnings and desires. Coperformance . . . is a 'doing with' that is a deep commitment. (p. 186)

Indeed, my co-performance as a teacher and researcher in the English Amped community gave shape to the project itself. I was in the position to collaborate with Destiny from the start to imagine how the class would be structured, and to petition the school for the space to bring English Amped into being. As high school and college students, as well as other partners and collaborators, signed on to be part of English Amped, they connected their "range of yearnings and desires" to the foundation that Destiny and I set in place through our initial call to bring this community of people into being with one another in the first place.

In January 2014, Destiny and I met up for lunch and found ourselves imagining the project that would become English Amped. We had been friends and on and off collaborators since 2005 when Destiny signed on as a teacher partner with the youth spoken word poetry program I started in that same year. Over the years, we had become friends, connected by our shared love for education with a focus on creative and social justice-oriented literacy practices. We often talked about the politics of local educational systems, in which Destiny was embedded as a long-time public school teacher, and in which I was situated as a partner in a grassroots non-profit organization. As we sat down for lunch that day in January 2014, we had a nine-year foundation of respect for one another's commitments. As White women born and raised in the local region, and people for whom class, family structure, social networks, education, and institutional affiliations afforded us access to resources and power, Destiny and I shared an ongoing dialogue about what our privileges, responsibilities, and limitations meant as citizens within a larger

metropolitan community where the legacies of marginalization, racism, and structural inequalities shaped daily lives for ourselves and the extended communities we were connected to.

We were also both in the middle of graduate school programs, which each of us saw as an opportunity to pause, reflect, and gather resources that we could bring to bear on our longstanding commitments. As we sat and talked on that day, we began to express a “range of yearnings and desires” about what life might look like on the other side of graduate school for each of us. What if, we wondered, we could collaborate in such a way as to create more space for ourselves to do the work that we truly desired to do? We began to dream together about what English Amped could become as a platform for the young people we worked with, for schools and educators, and for our local community. We also talked about our own “yearnings and desires” to center wellness (our own and the wellness of others) as an integral part of our desire for broader, transformative social change. Ebony Golden (2014) explains, “Any movement for liberation, any movement for progressive social change, cannot happen if people aren’t well. When the people are well, the people can vision and make what they want to see in the world” (Kuttner, para. 5). To a certain extent, Destiny and I realized that finding a way to approach our work in education and community engagement so that it was sustainable, and so that the efforts uplifted and preserved the humanity and wellness of everyone involved, would mean shifting the structures in which our work had previously been situated.

Burnout among teachers and non-profit workers is a phenomenon rooted in structural disempowerment, including a lack of control, support, and resources amid demanding work conditions (Hsieh, 2014; Tsang & Liu, 2016). Destiny and I had each

stepped into graduate school as a kind of retreat from the pressing daily demands of our work, finding a space from which it was more possible to balance our human need to learn, reflect, and care for ourselves. We each expressed a fear that once the experience of graduate school was over, we would return to the path of burnout that drove us to retreat in the first place without changing anything about the unsustainable ways in which our work was situated. Wellness is connected to larger structural forces, and any meaningful shift would call for the concomitant “self-transforming and structure-transforming” that Grace Lee Boggs (2012) advises us to reexamine. Citing the ethos of the American Civil Rights movement, Boggs writes, “Radical social change had to be viewed as a two-sided transformational process, of ourselves and of our institutions, a process requiring protracted struggle and not just a D-day replacement of one set of rulers with another” (p. 39). She calls for a humanized revolution, one that does not merely reverse power structures, but instead calls people into new forms of relationship with one another, echoing Martin Luther King Jr.’s call for “beloved community.”

Vincent Harding (2014) describes beloved community as a process that includes, but also transcends, the struggle against injustice, a process that builds networks of relationship in which people may experience “our best human development and our best communal development” (Tippett, para. 15). I had experienced beloved community as a sustaining force before, and in some sense, it was my longing for such community that sent me on my journey to look beyond non-profit organizations for other kinds of spaces. The possibility of beloved community in the community-based non-profits where I had worked in the past too often felt stuck between the vibrant opportunities that sprang from local knowledges on one hand, and the techno-rational management and capitalistic marketing

demands placed on non-profits on the other hand. Questions about the extent to which the means of non-profit existence justified the ends, or fundamentally limited the ends, troubled me. In the meantime, my experiences of beloved community told me that such spaces were possible and worth fighting for.

My formative experiences in beloved community largely took place outside of the non-profit complex. As an undergraduate college student, I lived for a year in Guadalajara, Mexico, where I spent mornings taking classes at a local university, but lived for the afternoons when I was immersed in language and life with fifty-five boys and two nuns at a Catholic-run orphanage called *Casa Hogar*. It was there that I learned in my bones what it felt like to work “with” and not merely “for” a group of people. At *Casa Hogar*, I began to question my desire to create “programs” built from the assumption that my privilege automatically meant I had something to offer. I started to learn what it meant to be in solidarity with people, to become part of the already existing tapestry of being-togetherness among the boys and their care givers that functioned as a source of survival and strength. Ramon Rivera-Servera (2012) uses the term *convivencia diaria*, or “daily life interactions,” to describe affective economies of being-togetherness. He draws from the work of Milagros Ricourt and Ruby Danta, who studied the ways that working-class Latinas sharing public spaces as part of their everyday routines, and as the result of intentional community organizing, “created bonds that translated into active support networks” (p. 38). As Rivera-Sivera, explains, *convivencia diaria* contributes to “a feeling, an insight or an embodied experience of who we are or who we might become in the collective social sharing of the performance event” (p. 39). In other words, the experience of community and what it can make possible is heightened through performative experiences in which

care and concern for one another can be expressed. I experienced such co-performances of collective care while playing, doing school work, and tending to daily chores at *Casa Hogar*.

One example of such a performative moment in which *convivencia diaria* was instantiated as a form of beloved community was the evening ritual at *Casa Hogar*. After dinner, the nuns would sit on an embankment outside of the dormitory with a bowl of water and a comb, and the boys would stand in line to have their hair combed before going to bed. This moment of one-on-one contact between adult women and children stood as a ritual of care, one that the boys seemed to approach with an air of reverence as they stood in line so that their caretakers could take a moment of time for each of them individually to express intimacy and nurturance through the simple physical gesture of combing each boy's hair as the other boys looked on and awaited their turn. I went to *Casa Hogar* for half a year before I was invited to stay and take part in this evening grooming ritual. When boys excitedly chose to stand in the line where I sat with a comb, and as they took their turn to step into physical contact with me as an adult caretaker, I understood that I was a co-performer in a rite through which adults performed care for the children, and children performed being cared for using a vocabulary of physical touch as a basis for intimacy otherwise unavailable in their institutionalized lives.

I also understood that trust and membership were the prerequisites of this rite within *Casa Hogar's* beloved community. I had nothing to offer that could have mattered there without first entering the compact of beloved community. This was a direct challenge to the savior complex that drives much community service, and it explains why no one made it easy for me when I first began to volunteer there. The nuns later told me that they expected me to stop showing up after a few weeks because that was what usually happened with the

American service learning volunteers. On my first day, several of the boys at *Casa Hogar* demanded that I explain to them why the U.S. had stolen land from Mexico, and then beat up a younger kid in front of me while I looked on. Their righteous demand for justice and refusal of my guardianship's legitimacy exposed my claim to service for the farce that it was. This was a stark lesson for me. Indeed, I was a stranger in their home, and to be a legitimate member of the community would require building trust.

The moments of mutual care and solidarity that I eventually experienced at *Casa Hogar* threw into relief my experiences working in highly-structured afterschool programs in the United States, environments in which I had been expected to "deliver" programming that was most valued when it produced intentional outcomes via intentional means, unlike the less externally managed being-togetherness that characterized life at *Casa Hogar*. Youth programs where I worked in the U.S., which were intended to improve the quality of life for youth who were labeled "underprivileged," were structured by means and ends that did not emerge from participants, but were predetermined by "service providers" who often did not live with nor reflect the identities of "service recipients." The hierarchical "service provider" and "service recipient" roles fundamentally structured interactions in ways that too often denied experiences of beloved community.

Casa Hogar was not my first experience of beloved community among people struggling towards a more just world, nor was it my first time belonging to an intergenerational community of people crossing boundaries of race and class. I grew up experiencing a version of such community. In the 1970s and '80s, I spent much of my childhood crossing the railroad tracks in the mid-sized Southern city where I grew up as my parents participated in community organizing efforts. These crossings took my White,

middle class family into the neighborhood known as The South, the same neighborhood where Frazier High School, the site of English Amped, resides. My mother opened the doors of our home as a free Montessori pre-school in the 1970s, prompted by social justice-oriented Catholic liberation theology and the fact that she had left her career as a high school English teacher to stay at home with her young children. She crossed the raced and classed boundary dividing neighborhoods, and began to knock on doors and invite people to send their children to the school she was opening in her home. For children and families living in The South, these crossings meant spending time in our whiter, more affluent part of town. These crossings also brought my family into contact with the lives of people with whom we would normally not have been in contact, and sometimes placed us in oppositional relationships with our own neighbors, several of whom attempted to have the pre-school closed because of their investment in keeping the racial and class boundaries of our community in place.

And yet, my family's service orientation, my own year of service in Mexico, and my later participation in Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) in the mid-90's, all experiences that moved me further along a career trajectory toward non-profit youth organizations, can also be understood as part of a discourse that shifts movement building and collective social action towards what Kwon (2013) describes as "political participation and citizenship as an individual practice, as opposed to a social practice" (p. 19). By "rendering volunteerism as individual deeds of goodwill rather than political practice" (p. 20), Kwon argues, service paradigms promote the advancement of individual careers rather than the tackling of complex social problems. Harry C. Boyte (2015) likewise explains that the rise of community service and volunteerism "easily masks interests" (p.

8), and “neglects root causes and cultural dynamics at work in the formation of values” (p. 7). Indeed, community service is a problematic formulation that contrasts heroic, powerful “givers” against powerless, deficit-filled “recipients,” often without troubling or even acknowledging the structural forces that created such uneven distributions of resources to begin with.

Kwon (2013) traces the roots of youth-serving volunteerism to the Progressive Era programs of youth care and reform, which were characterized by the settlement house movement founded by Jane Addams and Ellen Star. Kwon writes, “For Addams and her fellow child-savers, youth were in need of control and it was the reformers’ responsibility to care for them; neglecting to provide youth with wholesome activities would lead to delinquency and other unproductive behavior” (p. 31). Kwon’s analysis portrays youth-serving community programs in the U.S. at the turn of the twentieth century as mischaracterizing poor immigrant youth and their families. Wealthy, privileged, well-educated women saw these communities as lacking in the values and behaviors deemed important to their American assimilation. At least part of the intention of the youth-serving programs of settlement houses was to expose “immigrant children to upper-middle class, well-educated volunteers and social reformers, [so that] the latter’s values and decorum could be learned by and transferred to the former” (Kwon, 2013, p. 33). The settlement houses and Progressive Era child reformers, who won the first child labor laws and offered the first templates for secular youth and community centers, lay the foundations of youth-serving social services as they exist in the United States today. Indeed, these foundations were not free of patronizing and deficit-centered views of youth and the “other,” to some extent laying a template for social services as a form of doing *for* others, rather than *with*

them, across power differentials. Yet, this analysis fails to account for some of the ways that settlement houses also functioned as spaces of transculturation. The agency of Addams and her colleagues did not erase the agency of immigrants who brought their own cultural knowledges and used those settlement houses to generate new forms of agency for themselves as they settled in the United State. Transculturation, as Diana Taylor (2003) explains, complicates theories of acculturation by emphasizing the ability of cultures to appropriate from one another across power differentials, creating new cultural practices that fuse the “traditional” and the “alien” into something new (p. 104).

The contact I experienced in the border crossings of my childhood, like the transculturation of Progressive Era reformers and immigrant communities, was more complicated than simple charitable transactions between “haves” and “have nots.” On one hand, my mother, like the women of the Progressive Era women, could afford to open our home as a free pre-school due to my father’s profitable job as an engineer at a multi-national chemical company. The company profited from environmental exploitation that affected poor communities across the globe, including The South. On the other hand, the free Montessori school she opened in our home offered opportunities to families during a time when public pre-school was not available. Like those who came to the school, my family’s life was affected. For a period of years in my youth, my mother stopped attending Catholic church and took my brothers and I instead to a small Baptist church situated at the edge of the neighborhood alongside the river in The South. My first memories of religious community were shaped in the sweltering experience of that Black church, in which impassioned speech, collective singing, and call and response style participatory engagement (let me hear “amen”) stood in stark contrast to the restrained and well-

financed setting of our neighborhood's Catholic church. When we began attending our own neighborhood's church later in my childhood, I remember how uncomfortably cold I found the environment, both literally cold due to the air conditioning, which I had never experienced in church before, but also impersonal and disconnected. Surely, the attraction and sense of home I found later in my life in spoken word poetry, which has close discursive ties to the Black church, was shaped by those early experiences.

Our parents became friends with a family in The South whose children's ages mirrored our own, and the mother of that family, Mrs. Johnson, joined my mother as a second volunteer teacher in the pre-school in our home. Eventually, when my mother went back to college to study elementary education, the preschool was moved into the home of another family whose children attended the school. Not only did my mother and these other women care for children from The South, but my brothers and I were also cared for by this extended network of families at whose homes we would be dropped off while my parents worked on various community endeavors. One such project was a field that people came together to clear and level using machetes and shovels. This field was then the site of a monthly "play-day" in which people of all ages would gather for a neighborhood cookout and field day. My favorite thing about play-days as a child was the blanket toss, in which a small person could lie down on a blanket and be tossed into the air by a group of people holding the edges. This was an experience gleeful pleasure and sublime connectedness. Like the boys at *Casa Hogar*, I experienced a childhood in which people performed beloved community through forms of care in which the boundaries of home, institutions, and public spaces were often blurred as people transgressed barriers to imagine and, if only fleetingly, co-perform connections with one another.

To a certain extent, these spaces in my childhood functioned as a form of beloved community; the people who participated in those spaces saw their collaboration in terms of a struggle for justice, shifting conditions so that all people could “share in the wealth of the earth” (The King Center, n.d.). However, these spaces were also “contact zones.” Mary Louise Pratt (1991) describes contact zones as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of power” (p. 34). The metaphor of contact zones illustrates the complex multi-directionality of exchanges where people come together from differently situated identities and histories and negotiate meanings across those differences. Contact zones, such as the Progressive Era settlement houses and the community play-days I remember from my youth, enable interactions among those who are often structurally divided, thus producing spaces in which dominant narratives about “the other” can be challenged and nuanced. Pratt’s ideas about contact zones “contrast with ideas about community” as originating points from which meaning travels outward into the world (p. 4). She contends that meanings are produced in the contact zone; they do not merely travel into it. Pratt describes her experience of teaching within a pedagogical contact zone as living with the tensions inherent in “the knowledge that whatever one said was going to be systemically received in radically heterogeneous ways that we were neither able nor entitled to prescribe” (p. 6). The imaginary of community as a fixed space with stable boundaries is elided by ways that contact zones hold, rather than suppress, these multiplicities.

Pratt, however, advocates for the necessity of a form of homogeneous community, which she calls “safe houses,” as a mode of protection and group self-determination. The spatial conceit that she creates (“houses” and “zones”) suggests movement between these

territories as an ongoing process of revising meaning. King's language about beloved community also functions as an ongoing, future-moving process of revising meaning. In a 1956 rally following the desegregation of Montgomery's buses, King declares, "the end is reconciliation, the end is redemption, the end is the creation of the Beloved Community" (The King Center, n.d.). King's rhetoric exhorted community as a vision that lay within and beyond the contact zone, a form of *being togetherness* that does not merely end with being together, as the often-sanitized vision of Civil Rights integration is now portrayed; instead, it is a vision in which selves and structures are transformed in the contact. The desire for such a transformative beloved community had driven me both into and from non-profit youth work, and it profoundly shaped the ways in which I envisioned English Amped as a possible space from which to perform such possibilities in collaboration with others.

My desire to leave non-profit work and attend graduate school stemmed from the questions and discomforts that had accumulated for me over the decade and a half that I worked as an organizer, teacher, fundraiser, and director within community-based youth organizations. Was it possible, I wondered, to sustain networks of inter-generational care and justice-oriented community-development from within the professionalized, and often privately funded world of non-profit organizations? Did other sustainable alternatives exist? I had moved along a professional trajectory within non-profit, youth-serving organizations for fifteen years, first working directly with youth in a variety of community and school-based youth programs, and later as a director, developer of programs, and supervisor of staff, mostly in programs focused on youth spoken word poetry. Ironically, as I moved along this trajectory, I spent less and less of my time in relationship with young people themselves, and more and more time making decisions that would affect them.

Like my peers in non-profit and educational settings, I was positioned to use research about young people of color in working-class communities to justify my job and the jobs of those who worked with me, many of us White and middle class. Data derived from expert-designed evaluations was treated as a form of currency traded among managers and funders with virtually no input from young people or those who worked closely with them as to what the production of such knowledge meant, or why it had been produced in the first place. It seemed a bitter irony to me that much of my career was spent teaching in and developing youth spoken word programs in which the local knowledges of youth were amplified into a public sphere, including the powerful counter-narrations of youth who were often multiply marginalized. Yet these local knowledges seemed untranslatable within the circuits of wealth and power that enabled the existence of the very non-profit organizations that supported and celebrated them. Worse, a collusion with such circuits of wealth and power seemed to enable a co-optation of youth counter-knowledges, ultimately domesticating such ways of knowing and being.

I was uncomfortable with such collusions and co-optations before I had a vocabulary to describe them. For me, graduate school afforded an opportunity to gain a language and analysis of how neo-liberalism functions as a context for non-profit organizations. I began to see how my own labor, while well intentioned and often resulting in good for many people, was also immersed in a context defined by the “transformation from a welfare state to a neoliberal state, the increasing dependence of the state on civil society to contract its social services, and their complementary relationship to capital” (Kwon, 2013, p. 125). Andrea Smith, in the introduction of *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (2007), explains:

Capitalist interests and the state use non-profits to . . . divert public monies into private hands through foundations . . . ; redirect activist energies into career-based modes of organizing . . . ; allow corporations to mask their exploitative and colonial work practices through 'philanthropic' work; and encourage social movements to model themselves after capitalist structures rather than challenge them. (p. 3)

As Smith argues, non-profit organizations, whose missions are typically to secure and advance forms of welfare, participate in the process of neoliberal divestment through which resources for public welfare are transferred from public ownership to private capital. The managerial class to which I belonged within the non-profit domain functioned to professionalize knowledge, which then served as a barrier to working *with* the young people and communities we purported to *serve*.

This distinction between *working with* and *serving* communities distinguishes the aims of autonomous, grassroots organizing from many of the programs and services conceived by the non-profit sector or the state. In the non-profit youth spoken word programs where I worked, the challenge of securing employment and benefits for staff presented a constant struggle, one in direct competition with more constituent-driven models of organizing our work. For example, the scarcity of resources de-incentivized the training of young teaching artists who could have been perceived as a threat to the security of our jobs, which depended on our claims to specialized knowledge. Opportunities that would have been generative for the mission of organizations where I worked, that would have helped young people to develop their own capacities as they offered their gifts, were often overlooked in a paradigm that held staff as "providers" and youth as "recipients" of services. Even as youth spoken word organizations proclaim themselves part of a social movement, the professionalized staff-leadership is in a strange position of limiting, rather than expanding, the base of people involved in producing the organization's work. This

quandary from my experiences in youth spoken word organizations exemplifies a contradiction that non-profits face, even though many non-profits in the U.S. sprang from social movements. Eric Tang (2007) asks, “Can the NP [non-profit sector] give life to that which is a precondition of its own existence?” (p. 225). In other words, can non-profit organizations find the means to accelerate rather than erode the political momentum that holds the state accountable for the rights of access to fundamental human services? Ideally, non-profits committed to justice situate themselves so that there can be synergistic cooperation with both grassroots organizing and what remains of the welfare state.

This cooperation, however, requires a form of liminality that I desired, but had never seen before. It was this desire to see and experience a liminal position, somewhere between the non-profit sector, grassroots organizing, and the welfare state, that brought me into partnership with Destiny to begin laying the groundwork for English Amped at Frazier High School. As Destiny and I began to imagine English Amped together, we imagined ways to shift the structural dynamics in which our work had been ensconced: the non-profit complex, public secondary education, and higher education. How could we create contact zones between institutions that would shift how these structures functioned to limit or authorize critical literacy pedagogies? Deborah Brandt (2001) sets forth the concept of “sponsors of literacy” in which “sponsors . . . are any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (p. 19). Indeed, secondary and higher education’s sponsorship of literacy are not neutral. As with the non-profit complex, critical literacy practices that build from local knowledges and aim to enable beloved community within formal educational institutions are constrained by forces

so powerful as to make such goals seem unimaginable. However, in an era of eroding investment in public education, the desire to invest in an urban public high school as a site for potential sponsorship grew from our mutual knowledge that young people are within public schools whether we choose to be there with them or not. How could we invest our energies into amplifying possibilities within those spaces?

Research Questions, Methods, and Positionalities

Throughout this research, I ask how participants imagine and perform the possibilities and limits of learning, teaching, and being together in a critical literacy-infused public high school classroom. I ask what the possibilities and limits are of an urban public school as a site for critical literacy. Using ethnographic methodologies, I trace how a group of students, teachers, and community partners imagined and acted as members of an “amplified” English classroom that created critical connections between differently positioned people, institutions, and ways of knowing about and practicing literacy. I explore how critical connections create liminalities, or *thresholds*, acting as both barriers and openings between how people imagine and perform school *as it is* and *as it could be*. My attention to thresholds plays on an architectural metaphor: thresholds as doors or windows, openings in the built environment of institutions. At the same time, the *threshold* also suggests a futuring-orientation that draws pragmatically from what already is, but adds to it a sense of possibility and desire.

Eve Tuck (2009) theorizes desire-based research “as not the antonym but rather the antidote for damage-focused narratives” (Tuck and Yang, 2014, p. 231). Damage-focused research involves a “recognition that is enamored with knowing through pain,” in which the researcher inhabits marginalized voices from a place of privilege, projecting a voice for

the supposedly voiceless through narratives focused on damage and disenfranchisement (p. 227):

Pain narratives are always incomplete. They bemoan the food desert, but forget to see the food innovations; they lament the concrete jungles and miss the roses and tobacco from concrete. Desire-centered research does not deny the experience of tragedy, trauma, and pain, but positions the knowledge derived from such experiences as wise. (Tuck and Yang, 2014, p. 231)

Indeed, I look throughout this research for the wisdom derived from experience among research participants. My search is for expressions of critical hope and possibility, as well as the ways in which discourses of hope and desire find openings within institutions which are often designed, paradoxically, to confine and constrain.

I began collecting data in August 2014. I wrote descriptive field notes during and after class meetings and in encounters with students and collaborators outside of class time. I kept a notebook with me and used opportunities when students were working independently or in groups, or when Destiny or someone else was facilitating class activities, to record observations. On many days when there was no time or space to step back and observe within the classroom, I recorded audio notes on my way home from school and at other times wrote notes on my laptop when I could sit at my desk later that day or the next morning. I periodically wrote reflective memos in which I tracked emergent themes. Destiny and I met on a regular basis to reflect and plan, during which time I often recorded notes from our conversations. Destiny also wrote personal reflections on a periodic basis, to which she gave me access. I recorded field notes and compiled memos from August 2014 through May of 2015, the period of active data collection. I also occasionally collected field notes during the second year of English Amped, from June 2015 to May 2016, a period that was not a focal point for data collection; nevertheless, relevant

events and themes often came up in the second year in ways that pointed to my research questions. In January 2015, I decided to begin recording class sessions using an audio recorder; this allowed me to create an audio record which I could later return to. I kept a log in my notebook during class meetings so that I could relocate specific moments of audio within the over 100 hours of recordings that I collected. Additionally, I conducted eleven semi-structured interviews with English Amped high school students during the spring semester of 2015. In August 2015, I conducted one interview with another teacher at the school who frequently observed English Amped class sessions. I regularly gathered student writing. I paid particular attention to ungraded, reflective writing in which students were asked to deliberate on and respond to various English Amped events and activities. Photographs and infrequent videos of class interactions were also collected as data.

I applied to the Institutional Review Board under the supervision of Dr. Susan Weinstein and got approval for research in April 2014 (see IRB approval, consent, and assent forms in Appendix A). I likewise applied for and received permission to conduct research from the local school system in April 2014. In keeping with the guidelines outlined in my application to the Institutional Review Board, I use pseudonyms for institutions and geographic locations in this study. Initially, all research participants who agreed to be part of this study were given a pseudonym. However, in March 2015, I requested an amendment to consent and assent forms from the Institutional Review Board so that research participants could choose to use their real names in the study, or alternately, to select a pseudonym for themselves, or have me select one for them. I made this amendment because some participants in my research requested that I use their real names and expressed an interest in being identified within the research.

I believe that the desire of some English Amped participants to be named in the research speaks to the participatory and collaborative nature of the project. Though I reminded participants throughout the period of data collection that I was collecting data, and that I was using data to do my own non-collaborative research and writing, participants in English Amped also understood themselves as collaborators in the participatory work of creating and performing English Amped; like me, they derived some identity, pride, and pleasure from this participation. In short, some English Amped research participants saw themselves as collaborators who wanted and deserved recognition. While the role of the Institutional Review Board and the use of pseudonyms is presumably to protect human subjects in research, Norman Denzin (2003) writes about the limits of the IRB framework to capture the kind “collaborative, public, pedagogical” relationships that can arise between researchers and human subjects (p. 137). While I do believe that informed consent is an important aspect of the power relations between researcher and subjects, especially in a project like English Amped where I also held the powerful role of teacher in a compulsory school setting, the IRB process inserts a language of researcher/subject that fails to capture a dynamic of interrelationship that is more than human subjects being submitted to procedures by researchers, as in the medical context.

Furthermore, the writing of this dissertation was understood by some participants as work that I did on behalf of a collective group, a document of our shared experience. At various points in the writing process, I showed drafts of this writing to participants who were featured in the writing, in part to check the accuracy of my representations, but also to satisfy the curiosity and pleasure of readers who anticipated the text as a way to celebrate their own visibility and the group’s collective profile. No doubt, this readership

affects what I choose to include, what I choose to leave out, and the meanings I make of field notes, interviews, and other kinds of data. These choices reflect a sense of accountability to participants and how they are represented, and highlight the potential vulnerability of all those involved in ethnographic research. Ruth Behar (1996) reflects on her commitment to retaining and invoking vulnerability in her ethnographic writing; she asks, “Who is this woman who is writing about others, making others vulnerable? What does she want from others? What do the others want from her?” (p. 20). Indeed, these same questions echo in my own research and writing as I attempt to calibrate the risks and rewards of writing research so that it is truthful and accountable to my own and others’ vulnerabilities.

The ethics of critical ethnography, according to D. Soyini Madison (2012), calls on the researcher to “contribute to the quality of life and to the enlivening possibilities of those we study” (p. 98). Madison defines critical ethnography as beginning with “an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular *lived* domain” (p. 5). She explains, “the researcher feels an ethical obligation to make a contribution” (p. 5), and she fulfills this obligation by beginning to “probe other possibilities that will challenge institutions, regimes of knowledge, and social practices that limit choices, constrain meaning, and denigrate identities and communities” (p. 6). As a critical ethnographer, I position myself throughout this project as someone who is invested in contributing to the well-being of students and teachers in urban schools.

Other participants in English Amped, including high school students and pre-service teacher candidates, conducted their own critical research within the context of this study. This created a framework in which layers of research interacted with one another; my

ethnographic investigation into participants' ways of making meaning interacted with their simultaneous critical participatory action research projects. In this context, we were researchers together. Because research had a pedagogical function in English Amped, data collection and forms of documentation that I practiced were often taken up as group activities, a process that I describe in more detail in Chapter Three. By sharing my broad research questions openly with participants, and by inviting participants in various ways to construct their own research questions and collect documentation of their own, research in English Amped took on a polyvocal dimension. In some cases, our research questions and purposes overlapped. One of the research groups that formed in the 2014-2015 class even asked a research question remarkably like my own: "Is it possible to do critical pedagogy in a school?"

My desire to co-perform and amplify the possibilities for beloved community among students, teachers, and the surrounding community at Frazier High School follows an understanding of performance as a praxis, "both the theory and the doing" (Rivera-Servera, 2012, p. 28). Keisha Green (2014) offers the metaphor of "Double Dutch methodology" to describe this "intimate, messy, and at times, unpredictable" way of doing research in which researchers "jump in" with participants to work collaboratively towards shared goals, or simply to offer help where it is needed (p. 157). Indeed, as in a game of double-dutch jump rope, the need for balance, rhythm, and finesse presented a constant challenge. Data collection required fast footwork within this dialogic, critical ethnographic project; it took place within the ever-emerging press of daily work that included planning, teaching, organizing, mentoring, problem-solving, and simply being together in ways that would allow connections to unfold among members of the community.

A commitment to critical ethnography also means that I look reflexively at my own positioning relative to my collaborators. My positioning is deeply affected by the fact that I am a White, middle class, middle-aged woman with multiple degrees and close ties to a historically White university. As I discuss in detail in Chapter Two, Frazier High is a historically Black school, and students who identify as Black make up 85% of the 2014-2015 enrollment (Brister, 2015, p. 2). Though the high school is less than a mile away from the flagship South State University, the school's neighborhood sits on the other side of a raced and classed boundary drawing a sharp divide between a wealthier, Whiter part of town and a poorer, Blacker part of town. These long-standing, institutionally- and geographically-inscribed relations of power deeply affected my collaborations with students, many of whom are positioned along a spectrum of difference from one another, and often in ways that stand in stark contrast to my own race and class positioning. My interpretative work as an ethnographer is inflected by the various forms of power and privilege that I hold relative to my students, a limitation that I describe throughout this study. My life-long ties to the city along both sides of its racial and class boundaries also give shape to the interpretive and collaborative possibilities that I bring to this study. The experiences of beloved community from my childhood that I describe earlier in this chapter took place in the very community surrounding Frazier High. These points of connection and disconnection influence the forms of knowledge, desires, networks, and cultural capital that I bring to bear as a researcher and collaborator within English Amped.

At Frazier High School, I was positioned as both an insider and an outsider. Though I was not an official faculty member of the school, I was positioned as another adult working among teachers; hence, I was granted many of the powers that teachers hold, and I was

also expected to act in ways that conformed to those power dynamics. The teacher is herself a powerful figure in relation to students and their communities, equipped with the ability to confer grades and establish an academic and disciplinary record that can impact students' subsequent opportunities or lack thereof. She holds the power to sponsor forms of literacy, define how time is spent, make choices about how public resources are used, and confer privilege to some forms of knowing and being above others, all powers that profoundly affect young people's relationships to institutions, knowledge, and life itself.

The teacher is also subject to power dynamics that flow downward from the state department of education to the local school system, dynamics that are translated by school administrators and finally brought to bear on relationships between teachers and students. Because Frazier High School did not pay me, it had no official claim of authority over me, and I was able to subvert many of these power dynamics in ways that my partner teacher, Destiny, could not. For example, I was not evaluated by administrators, and I did not have to turn in lesson plans, stand "duty," give grades, or keep records like other teachers. If the entire school was called to an assembly, I could just as easily go home. And yet, in the everyday performance of school life, my position as an educator who worked within the school's structure and collaborated closely alongside a teacher who was formally employed by the school system, meant that I was positioned in much the same way as other teachers. I was expected by students, their families, and the other adults I worked alongside, to behave as a teacher behaves, to uphold the school's code of discipline, to know the written and unwritten rules, to enforce consequences for students' noncompliance, and to reward and punish students using the various mechanisms of control such as grading and

disciplinary protocols. In short, my positioning as an educator and adult meant that I was expected to assume guardianship and authority over students.

This positioning as a guardian, and sometimes as a guard, within the authority-based structures of the school profoundly shaped my ability to probe the local knowledge of teachers, students, and their communities. On one hand, I was an insider to the world of students and teachers, someone who labored daily alongside teachers and students in their everyday ways of doing and making within the life of the school. On the other hand, I was an outsider to whom many of the rules and standards did not apply. This insider/outsider status shaped my access to students' experiences insofar as they expected me to exercise authority over them, hence they likely consciously or unconsciously guarded or selected what aspects of their lives I could bear witness to. The pedagogical and evaluative role of the teacher afforded me insights into some aspects of students' lives and prevented me from accessing others. On the other hand, my somewhat rogue status as a researcher and "unofficial" teacher meant that I could do what most other teachers did not, or could not, do. I gave students my phone number, drove them home from school, spent time interviewing them, and connected them to community activities, mentors, and programs. I simply had more time than other teachers, time that enabled me to write lengthy responses to their writing, provide one-on-one tutoring, be there in crisis moments, and organize field trips and guest visits. These roles offered me perspectives into students' lives that I would not have had access to if more normative teacher-student roles circumscribed my interactions.

In the 2014-2015 year, Destiny assumed a new role as Instructional Specialist for English and Social Studies teachers. This gave her more flexibility in her time, which was

critical to the planning and reflecting that we did together during that year. Through Destiny's long-standing relationships at the school, where she had taught for seven years, I was granted access to relationships among Frazier's faculty and administration. I was often regarded as an extension of Destiny in the school, her sidekick of sorts. This positioning was reinforced by the space I claimed in her office, a small side desk where I cleared room for my laptop amid the piles of paper and bags of supplies that cluttered the office space she shared with another Instructional Specialist. The only class Destiny taught was English Amped; otherwise, she fulfilled administrative functions for the school and mentored new teachers. Her status as an effective teacher and leader with a great deal of institutional knowledge meant that I had an inside track to listen in on talk among teachers, many of whom showed up during off hours, clearing places to sit or stand in her crowded office so they could ask questions, reflect on their experiences, vent, or share comradery.

I felt my outsider status most acutely on the many occasions when I arrived at the school midday to encounter the chaotic, frenetic energy of the school. Unlike other teachers, I was not caught up in the sometimes-relentless grind of the school day, a day that for them started before the first class began at 7:05 am and unfolded in ways that were often characterized more by disruption and reaction than intention and stability. To step midday into that frenetic spacio-temporal rhythm from the somewhat less chaotic world of my quiet office, or the relatively spacious and focused classroom where I taught English composition at South State University, presented a collision of affect and frames of reference between me and those teachers whose work days were more wholly situated within the school. Gloria Anzaldúa describes this phenomenon as a crash, or *choque*. She explains, "The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incomparable frames

of reference cause a *choque*, a cultural collision” (1987, p. 78). My entrance mid-flow into the school day was often like the second jump rope in the game of double-dutch for me and my collaborators, adding a new layer of complexity that called for renegotiating rhythms and roles. While this need to re-negotiate spacio-temporal frameworks was generative because it opened new perspectives and in-between spaces for critically questioning and reimagining our work, it was also frustrating for everyone involved, resulting in breakdowns and entanglements. I was in a privileged position as someone who had some time and space away from the school’s rhythms, but I also had to figure out how to enter the game from the edges, discerning the moments to jump in and the moments to stand back.

The *choques* that I experienced with Destiny and other teachers, some subtle and some overt, often led to moments of reflection, self-explanation, and witness. In other words, *choques* were thresholds that made space for considering alternative perspectives and negotiating meanings. At these times, my identity as researcher helped me to take a listening stance. Teachers seemed drawn to me as someone who would listen to them when they felt injured or overwhelmed by the larger system they worked within. In those moments, they would turn to me as if to say, “Are you getting this?”, and explain what it felt like to be caught up in the school’s dynamics. As Richard Schechner (2006) contends, “one performs fieldwork” by acting as a sympathetic participant who simultaneously assumes a stance of critical distance from oneself and ones’ subjects of study (p. 2). My outsider status - the fact that I was not competing with teachers within a framework that set them up to compare themselves to one another, and my positioning just at the edges of the game - meant that I was close enough to empathize, but far enough to exit the dialogue in moments

when it was simply more useful for me to “perform fieldwork” as a listener capable of bearing witness to the daily life of the school.

Grounding Frames and Theories

I situate this project at the intersection of critical literacy and critical youth studies within an urban school context. Each of these academic fields builds on an understanding of knowledge as socially constructed within unequal relations of political, economic, and social power. A critical approach therefore encourages questions about how power works to produce forms of knowledge and counter-knowledge. Critical literacies bring this focus to bear on how languages, texts, and discourses - always in the plural - function to “produce us, speak through us, and ... nevertheless be challenged and changed” (Janks, 2014, p. 42). As an open-ended approach, critical literacy practices prioritize “social, political, and cultural debate and discussion with the analysis of how texts and discourses work, where, with what consequences, and in whose interests” (Luke, 2014, p. 22). Through multiple methodologies of counter-storytelling (Yosso & Solórzano, 2002), critical literacies call forth knowledges and ways of being that are too often silenced. By centering the texts, languages, and modes of interpretation produced in marginalized sites, critical literacies raise a challenge to what Paulo Freire calls “the culture of silence” (1985), in which power overly determines ways of knowing and being. Finally, critical literacies orient literacy practices towards social and personal transformation.

In this context, the definition of literacy does not just mean the ability to read and write, but is expanded to include critical praxis, the capacity to interpret and act upon the world in order to transform it (Freire, 1970). Scorza, Mirra, and Morrell (2013) offer a definition of critical literacy that synthesizes the above priorities:

Critical literacy goes beyond reading and writing—it is a set of cognitive, emotional and sociopolitical skills whereby individuals are able to understand and articulate relations of power, dominance and hegemony using media, text, artifacts, oral tradition and experience that both illuminate and disrupt internalized oppression. (p. 23)

This definition of critical literacy underscores an emphasis on skills and capacities, which the authors follow with questions that could be a heuristic tool for any project doing engaged critical literacies with youth: “Have youth learned to produce powerful texts? Are they reading the word and the world in more powerful ways? Do they envision themselves as willing and able to speak truth to power using traditional and multi-modal genres of communication?” (p. 23). Indeed, these questions capture many of the pedagogical goals of English Amped, and they provide a framework for analyzing the ways that participants understood the possibilities and meanings produced within English Amped.

Critical Youth Studies (CYS) is a field of academic inquiry emerging over the last decade that emphasizes the critical and collective possibilities of youth agency. CYS posits that the critical agency of youth is frequently overlooked in the prevailing field of youth-oriented social science research, which too often exaggerates youth behavior as maladaptive or pathological, shifts the responsibility onto youth for unjust social structures, and wrongly interprets youth practices and meanings through exclusionary models of normativity. As A.A. Akom, Julio Cammarota and Shawn Ginwright (2008) argue, CYS takes another view, framing research that “goes beyond traditional pathological approaches to assert that young people have the ability to analyze their social context, to collectively engage in critical research, and resist repressive state and ideological institutions” (p. 2). Many scholars who position their work in the field of CYS call upon the ethical commitment of researchers to attend to and participate in building contexts for

participatory research, not merely *for or about* youth, but *with* youth as collaborators (Akom, Cammarota, Ginwright, 2008; Cammarota, & Fine, 2008; Fine, Roberts, Torre & Bloom, 2004; Noguera, Ginwright, & Cammarota, 2006). Critical youth participatory action research, an approach to research used by many scholars in CYS, takes seriously the premise that valid knowledge about youth lives is constructed collaboratively with youth. Furthermore, the capacity of research to affect social change is prioritized, as research and action are viewed as co-constructive processes in a constant cycle of critical praxis.

Practices and theories derived from critical literacy pedagogies and critical youth studies shaped English Amped as both a pedagogical and theoretical project. My background working in community-based youth arts organizations that center spoken word poetry and performance inflected our approach on one hand, leading us to incorporate numerous popular education pedagogies that are associated with both critical literacies and the sites of critical youth studies. On the other hand, the project's location within an English classroom in an urban school deeply impacted my focus on critical literacies pedagogy and critical youth studies as both enabled and constrained within the disciplinary and institutional boundaries of urban schooling and secondary English education.

English Amped was conceived as a project aimed at the transformation of those institutional and disciplinary boundaries, an attempt to enable myself and myriad collaborators with "the capacity of going beyond created structures in order to create others" (Merleau-Ponty as cited in Greene, 1995 p. 55). Going beyond created structures is contingent upon the existence of thresholds in given institutions and roles, openings that could be found along institutional and disciplinary boundaries. Thresholds are both points

of entry and limits marking the shifting point between changing states. In *Threshold Concepts and Transformational Learning*, Jan H.F. Meyer, Ray Land, and Caroline Baillie (2010) put forth an explanation of threshold concepts that entails “certain concepts, or certain learning experiences, which resemble passing through a portal, from which a new perspective opens up, allowing things formerly not perceived to come into view” (ix). Threshold concepts, as Meyer et al. explain them, “represent a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or of viewing something, ... and results in a reformulation of the learners’ frame of meaning” (ix). In other words, threshold concepts, or learning thresholds, are challenging encounters that eventually give way to transformative shifts in perspectives. A threshold presents a period of difficulty that troubles and estranges previous ways of knowing and being, ultimately transforming the initial frame of meaning. As an action project, English Amped created conditions for collaborators to encounter learning thresholds that could trouble vernacular understandings of what could be possible within an English classroom.

I also use *thresholds* as an architectural metaphor, pointing to the constructed nature of institutions, and the intentional or unintentional openings left within them, spaces through which the agency of everyday people may be enlivened. In David Harvey’s (2000) book, *Spaces of Hope*, he puts forth the concept of an “insurgent architect,” both a literal and metaphorical figure who acts, strategically and tactically, to “open spaces for new possibilities, for future forms of social life” (p. 200). The insurgent architect attempts to subvert the reproduction of neo-liberalism as a power relation that saturates all spaces. The insurgent architect asks, “How can you use the knowledge and the technology at your disposal to achieve goals that are different from, or alternative to, capital’s goals?” (Harvey,

2016). The practices of Harvey's insurgent architect are differentiated from the practices of navigating space in a purely tactical manner. Michel de Certeau (1984) describes the agent of such tactical navigation as a "renter" who "transforms another person's property into a space borrowed for a moment by a transient" (p. xxi). Tactical conversions of institutionally given spaces, such as the way many students use school as a space to subvert pedagogies of control, remains covert and illegible from the perspective of dominant power structures. However, Harvey advocates for a dialectic that is both strategic and tactical, an art of translation in which the "right to the production of space" (p. 251) is claimed via processes of dialectical exchange in which the individual and collective, the personal and political, the given and the imaginable, the built and the unbuilt, as well as the universal and the particular, struggle together to articulate new configurations of meaning and materiality (pp. 234-248).

Thresholds, as I employ them, are more than the cognitive learning processes that are often understood as threshold concepts. Thresholds also encompass the metaphor of *insurgent architecture* by describing the structural arrangements that enable contact zones between differently positioned institutions, disciplines, and territories. Schools, in many senses, create patterns that have the effect of disabling contact, akin to what Erving Goffman (1961) describes as "total institutions," which are primarily characterized by their function as "barriers" to social intercourse (p. 4). Though Goffman did not identify schools (other than boarding schools) in his framework, contemporary education scholars draw compelling comparisons between Goffman's framework and the functions of public education. Potter, Boggs, and Dunbar (2017) contend that "the manifestations of this theory [of total institutions] are evident in low-performing, high-poverty schools that are

generally located within urban areas with a high minority population where there is generally a strong focus on behavior and rote skills” (p. 70). They compare urban schools to Goffman’s framework for total institutions and find the similarities striking: the compulsory nature of schooling, the ways that people are grouped, their time and bodies controlled through schedules that account for every moment, and the use of reward and sanction to authorize and deny access. They argue that urban schools mirror total institutions in ways that prepare young people of color in low-income communities for entry into the criminal justice system. The idea of *thresholds* in this project seeks to disrupt such enclosures, offering a structural metaphor for ways of constructing and attending to the possibilities of opening doors, of removing barriers, and widening the lens so that alternative ways of knowing and being with young people can be enabled through zones of contact.

Thresholds likewise build on the premise that *critical is comparative*, meaning that examining perspectives across and between differently situated positions is likely to promote de-familiarization and critical inquiry. A threshold is always already constrained by the architectures of meaning circumscribed by discourses and institutions, but it also anticipates the radical possibility of movement and transformation. Like Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) conception of borderland/*mestiza* consciousness, *thresholds* account for the destabilizing processes of historic, political, social, and linguistic domination and resistance. These concepts also share a notion of the border or threshold as a transitive state for dwelling in ambiguity, a state where we might experience uncertainty, a place for crossing not as a singular act of closure, but rather, as an act of anticipation and continuing historicity.

The work of English Amped was to shift and highlight thresholds of contact among multiple systems. English Amped, as a form of architectural insurgency, draws particular attention to the following thresholds:

- Disciplinary thresholds that articulate boundaries between knowledges that are organized by fields, often separating creative, analytic, and action-oriented modes of study and production;
- Institutional thresholds that structure English education in higher and secondary education through professionalizing identities, disciplining knowledge by creating ways to authorize and not authorize the legitimacy of knowledges;
- Raced and classed thresholds that territorialize space in ways that profoundly shape forms of power, privilege, and access;
- Epistemic and ontological thresholds that shape the relationships between knowledge, meaning, and desire in and between such distinct locations as homes, communities, and schools.

Calling attention to these thresholds, which are both barriers and openings, is about leveraging differently-situated forms of power and access from across institutional sites and combining them with one another.

While the aim of English Amped was understood by many to be the creation of an autonomous space within the school (as BriHop explained it, to be “in the school, not of the school”), the fact remained that English Amped was embedded in the school in ways that affected everything we did. Our possibilities were powerfully circumscribed by the rules, management hierarchies, federal curriculum standards, and normative written and

unwritten expectations articulating the power relations that produce and reproduce schooling. Indeed, one might argue that this project was an attempt to use the “master’s tools” to “dismantle the master’s house,” which Audre Lorde (1984) so convincingly warns against in her argument for intersectional, women-of-color feminisms. And yet, if one reads Lorde closely, she also calls for a dialectical orientation, in which the master’s tools, which are never the “only source of support,” are used interdependently with the strengths “forged in the crucibles of difference” for those “who stand outside the circle of this society’s definition of acceptable...” (p. 113). For our purposes, the dismantling of power relations within schools could be derived in part from the resources, relationships, and forms of knowledge found in schools, but only as an act of translation that also mobilizes the critical local knowledge and ways of being together that “stand outside” of such power formations. English Amped, as a research and action project, traces the ways in which knowledge and ways of being together were combined, often with great difficulty, to create performances of possibility that exceeded the logics and forms of relationship that too often characterize urban schooling.

Overview of Chapters

In Chapter Two, “School as It Is: Situating English Amped,” I offer an analysis of Frazier High through a historic and geographic lens that attends to the processes of race- and class-based forms of segregation. I analyze the demographics of Frazier High School and the 2014-2015 English Amped class through the lens of these processes, outlining the ways in which thresholds of contact are constrained within schools. Dynamics of simultaneous intimacy and division put people of different races and classes in proximity to one another while upholding many forms of de facto segregation. The result is an elaborate mechanism

of sorting and tracking, which I describe as one of the conditions of school *as it is*, a significant barrier for participants attempting to imagine school *as it could be*. I examine how capitalist logics of achievement promote forms of interpersonal and curricular alienation. These forms of alienation make it possible to deny equitable services and to dehumanize many young people through pedagogies of surveillance and criminalization in place of pedagogies of care. There is a continued need for in-service and pre-service professionalizing institutions, including university-based teacher education programs, to find ways to immerse teachers in culturally relevant pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995), funds of knowledge (González, Moll, and Amanti, 2005), and critical counter-stories (Yosso & Solórzano, 2002) so that educators are prepared to work in solidarity with the young people and communities where they teach, not merely to “manage classrooms.”

In Chapter Three, “School as It Could Be: Performances of Possibility,” I describe the ways in which participants in English Amped reclaimed agency and possibility by acting in ways that broke with normative school scripts, often in heightened, performative moments before the gaze of others. I examine the ways in which research and documentation enabled performative pedagogies through which participants could make knowledges, identities, and forms of relationality visible to themselves and others. By inhabiting academic discourses in ways that embraced students’ cultural and personal knowledges and calling on the power of the university to authorize those knowledges, we were able to disorient the alienating and dehumanizing ways that schooling had acted upon students. Popular educational approaches and curriculum infrastructures that highlighted students’ capacity to “own their education” created a liminal educational space in which well-being

was made possible for many participants who experienced opportunities for solidarity, healing, and critical hope.

In Chapter Four, “Navigating Liminality: Students and Teachers at the Thresholds,” I describe the anxieties, frustrations, and limits of English Amped’s liminalities. Forms of knowledge and relationality that were not authorized by school often meant that English Amped’s approaches seemed illegible, causing participants to interpret the work as madness, not methods. Departures from command and control pedagogies combined with the vulnerabilities of humanizing the classroom often led students and teachers to feel unprotected and out of control. Analyzing injustices in a space structured by those injustices often led to breakdowns and a loss of hope and trust in one another. Teachers were positioned ambiguously as guards and guardians relative to students, creating power differentials that were both necessary and disabling. English Amped required radical unlearning on the part of students and teachers, which meant learning to live with uncertainties and failures as we grappled with what it meant to transform ourselves as well as the structures we operated within.

In Chapter Five, “Thresholds of Critical English Teacher Education,” I focus on the experiences of pre-service English teachers who participated in English Amped through field experience, student teaching, and the concurrent Art of Critical Literacy independent study. Through the lens of two participants’ experiences, I describe the ways in which the intimate, small group setting of Art of Critical Literacy, combined with an immersion in English Amped, created opportunities for participants to develop a repertoire as culturally responsive teachers. I describe Rita’s emerging sense that school could be a site of humanizing contact between people and ways of knowing, and Jennifer’s confrontations

with the scripts of Whiteness as she came to complicate narratives of the heroic savior-educator.

In the concluding chapter, “Where Do We Go From Here?” I revisit the insights drawn from the first year of English Amped, and examine what these insights bring to bear on the fields of critical literacy and critical youth studies. I also examine future directions for English Amped, now expanded as Humanities Amped, a multi-disciplinary project at Frazier High School with increased visibility and reach within the local school district. The question raised in the first section of this introduction about how spaces and procedures can produce and sustain beloved community come full circle as I close with considerations about the threats and possibilities inherent in the growth of a project like English Amped, which in many senses grows from the borders and margins of schools, but could face new forms of compromise if future iterations are not intentional and carefully considered.

CHAPTER 2

SCHOOL AS IT IS: SITUATING ENGLISH AMPED

Intimacy and Division

In March of 2015, the “Black Law Professionals,” a group comprised of African American police officers, lawyers, and others who work in the criminal justice system, held a special assembly in the cafeteria of Frazier High School for about fifty students. It was unclear to me what the basis was for inviting some students and not others; students who attended speculated that students who were generally thought of as troublemakers on one hand, and leaders on the other, were the invited ones. The students who came back to English Amped after attending the meeting were angry. For them, the event contrasted in important ways with a community event that English Amped had helped facilitate in November 2014. That youth-led community event, which took place in the wake of Michael Brown’s shooting by police in Ferguson, Missouri, was intended to create a space for youth to dialogue and respond. Adults, including the city’s district attorney and chief of police, were invited to listen at the youth-led event, but not to speak. The event in March at Frazier High was set up, conversely, as an opportunity for adults to speak to youth, but not to listen to them.

Along with Destiny, my English Amped partner teacher, I got into a conversation with a student on the breezeway in front of the cafeteria on the day following the Black Law Professionals assembly. Leon had attended the assembly, and we were interested in his perspective. He was not in English Amped, but he spent a lot of time in Destiny’s office, where he was mentored by another instructional specialist at the school. He emphasized that he was thankful the group took their time to visit the school, saying with appreciation,

“They didn’t have to come down here.” We asked if he felt heard by the visitors, a question that he did not answer directly, though he reluctantly explained that the message he heard from the group was that you should be respectful and friendly towards the police. After thinking about it for a moment, he told us, “Of course I don’t like you [the police]. Every time I deal with you, you’ve got a gun pointed at me!” As we talked, a loud noise in the parking lot caused Leon to jump, and he asked us, “Y’all aren’t nervous standing out here?” He then told us about a friend he lost at age thirteen, a boy who was shot “right over there.” Leon pointed in the direction of the block adjacent to the school, and explained that he did not know why he thinks about him so much, but, “he just be on my mind.”

In retrospect, I believe that what Destiny and I wanted to hear from Leon, as we had heard from the students in our English Amped classroom, was that the police and related officials should have come to the school to listen to his perspective, to be in dialogue with students, not to tell young people what their perspective should be. However, Leon did not appear to hold any expectations of being heard by the legal authorities who were, in his experience, more likely to have “a gun pointed at me” than to do anything else. The prospect of adults, especially adults holding positions of authority such as this group of law enforcement officials, coming to listen to youth at Frazier seemed, perhaps, unimaginable to Leon. As Sean Ginwright (2016) explains, young people living in environments beset by persistent structural violence have experiences that are “not only traumatizing, but often have a profound negative impact on their sense of efficacy and agency” (p. 3). The visit from this group of law enforcement officials was perhaps meant to open a line of communication and expand the perspectives of young people like Leon, who had previous negative contact with the police, and with the kinds of violence that brought police into the

neighborhood around the school. However, the visit did not open that line of communication for Leon, who appeared not to imagine himself the way students in English Amped had begun to imagine themselves, as people with the agency to respond.

Far from acknowledging Leon's anxiety about encounters with the police, and his own losses to the violence that law enforcement officials presumably sought to end, the visit seemed to re-inscribe a respectability politics that would leave Leon with the message that he was responsible for correcting the social environment in which he lived by simply changing his behavior. Leon's neighborhood, where Frazier High sits, is a place in which high levels of poverty and blight prevail, as do a lack of basic resources such as access to decent-paying jobs, transportation, healthy food options, and healthcare. The law enforcement officials, by communicating to students at Frazier High School that they should be respectful and friendly towards the police, unintentionally framed the structural violence in the community as primarily a matter of personal responsibility. The outcomes of interactions with police, according to this framing, rest on the shoulders of the youth.

This perspective did not anger Leon on the face of it. His first response was polite: "They didn't have to come down here," a statement that betrays the geographic and economic distances that stratify the relationship between Leon and the law professionals, even as Leon interprets the visit as a form of civility, a gesture of care from those "up there" to the others "down here." Journalist Aurin Squire (2015), reflecting on Black respectability politics in his own upbringing, explains, "We internalized the racism we feared and then used it to castigate the people in the community who had less" (para. 15). Indeed, the visit from the Black Law Professionals, who felt the need to warn youth at Frazier of the dangers of reacting impulsively to police force, did communicate a sense of connection and shared

fate between a Black middle and working class, between “up there” and “down here.” And yet, even a small exchange with Leon revealed that the conflict between Black youth and police was connected to a larger fabric of unequal access and power. The talk about reacting carefully to police was an important one, but it also served as a cover for a larger failure to address the more persistent issues at the root of conflict between youth and police in the community. It felt to many of our students like a form of punishment, blaming them for the violence and over-policing of their bodies and neighborhoods. Instead of awakening a capacity for response and civic engagement, the visit reinforced a narrative that students at Frazier could control the forms of violence that beset them by simply behaving themselves.

I use the example of student responses to this school-sponsored assembly to illustrate the reality of structural violence in the local community and the ways in which Frazier High School could operate ambivalently, both striving to connect with and yet profoundly disconnecting from the complexly-situated realities of students’ lives. To understand the work of English Amped, which was aimed at developing connections between students, teachers, and community members, it is important to understand the dynamics of intimacy and division that exist at Frazier High School. These dynamics grow out of Frazier’s history and the history of the local community, which are closely tied to one another. As Jean Anyon (1997) has argued, “schools, like people, are the products of their past, as well as of their present. We must uncover not only the histories of the schools and districts, but also of the cities in which they are embedded” (xv). Indeed, a historicized analysis of local and translocal contexts offers a view of how relationships and power

dynamics have formed among students, teachers, and community members at Frazier High School.

Historicizing Frazier High School and The South

The neighborhood surrounding Frazier High School is known by many of the city's black residents simply as "The South" because of its location on the south side of town. The South is distinct from the city's entire south side, which encompasses the city south of downtown and includes numerous unincorporated areas where development has taken off in recent decades. The South, specifically, is how many locals refer to the parts of the city's south side where Black residents live. This signification contrasts with the north, where the majority of the city's African American communities are now located in neighborhoods built during the mid-twentieth century. In contrast, The South is a historically Black area that grew from settlements where people migrated during the Civil War, and then expanded south alongside an industrial corridor close to the river, eventually fanning out in the 1920's over an expansive swath of land that had once been a plantation (Hendry and Edwards, 2009, p. 33-39).

The city itself, home to a population of 229,542 people according to the 2010 U.S. Census, is 54.5% Black or African American ("QuickFacts," 2010). According to "How Did We Get Here: A Brief History of Black Baton Rouge," written by Christopher Tyson for the Urban Congress (2016), the city's Black population doubled during the Civil War and the early period of the Reconstruction era because, unlike surrounding areas, it was occupied by the federal government (p. 2). Many of the city's Black institutions were founded during this period as a Black population expanded, rising to almost 60% of the city's total population in the 1880's (Hendry and Edwards, 2007, p. 37). The South sits between

downtown and the city's oldest neighborhoods to the north, the river to the west, the historically White flagship South State University to the south, and an early suburb known for its oak tree-lined streets and expensive real estate to the east. Many areas of historic development surrounding The South, including the plantation that once encompassed much of the area, were constructed strategically along elevated terraces, putting a large portion of The South in a flood zone that many refer to today as "The Bottom," while the more elevated parts of the area are referred to as "The Top."

White backlash to Radical Reconstruction led to residential segregation starting in the 1890's. As in many other Southern cities during the early- to mid-twentieth century, the development of The South followed checkerboard patterns of racial settlement, in which "white- and black-settled zones interspersed and interconnected" due to enforced segregation and the demand for Black domestic workers in nearby affluent white neighborhoods (Hendry & Edwards, 2009, p. 44). Therefore, The South developed into the segregated center of Black life in the city, situated close to the city's zones of development and nearby affluent White neighborhoods. While these political, geographic, and economic forces shaped The South, the area was also where the city's "black community shaped its own world" during the height of Jim Crow segregation through African American churches, businesses, civic associations, schools, and cultural institutions (Hendry & Edwards, 2009, p. 15).

Frazier High School, founded in 1927, was an important part of that world. Built as a "showpiece for Negro schools in the state" that offered both vocational and pre-college training in a beautiful two-story facility, Frazier drew African Americans from all over the region to settle in The South (Hendry and Edwards, 2009, p. 68). As the only publically

funded African American high school in the state at the time, a symbol of Black excellence and uplift, the school continues to be a point of civic pride for African Americans whose intergenerational connections to the school run deep.

As in many other cities throughout the country in the 1960s, The Department of Transportation and Development routed the new interstate highway system directly through the Black community of The South. This decision destroyed over 400 homes and a newly constructed private high school (Hendry & Edwards, 2009, p. 50). The noise and blight caused by a massive overhead interstate and the geographical bifurcation of the neighborhood contributed to a “loss of leadership and a slow decline in the political effectiveness in the community” as many of the more affluent families moved away after the interstate’s construction (p. 51). The Black-owned businesses that thrived during the Jim Crow era were hurt as spending left the local neighborhood during this period. While many African Americans of all social classes retain ties to The South as an important center of historic and cultural life in the city, returning to the neighborhood to attend church or send children to the historic Frazier High School, the lack of economic opportunities, healthy food, quality housing, and community safety has meant that many affluent African Americans have politically and economically left the area behind.

According to Christopher Tyson (2016), class-based divisions among the city’s Black residents were facilitated during the civil rights era by “the timid nature of the city’s black leadership, the grip the state had on black institutions...and the class dynamics undermining collective action in the city” (p. 5). Tyson illustrates how the city’s historically Black university, under pressure from the state government, persecuted students for their involvement in civil rights protests. He also points to the ways in which local industry

provided uneven opportunities for economic development among Black residents in the early twentieth century, providing upward mobility for some while leaving most of the city's Black residents to deal with high rates of unemployment and miserably low wages (p. 4). The dynamics of intimacy and division that characterized the visit to Frazier High from the law enforcement officials in many ways stem from and mirror this larger community history of forced racial segregation, class bifurcation, and the weakening or disintegration of traditional Black institutions.

These dynamics are also shaped by the history of the city's local public school system. The school system was subject to the longest running school desegregation court case in the country, which began in 1956 and ended in 2003, lasting forty-seven years (Cowen Institute, 2010, p. 2). According to Bankson and Caldas (2002), the local school board initially approached desegregation via "freedom of choice" policies, which effectively failed to desegregate and were declared unconstitutional (p 88). In 1981, the year that I entered the first grade, the failure of local officials to effectively desegregate the schools brought on a court-mandated plan to close schools and bus students. The enforcement of desegregation within the local public school system led to immediate White flight, causing an almost overnight expansion of private and parochial schools as well as rapid development in suburban areas outside of the city as Whites sought to maintain de facto segregation (Bankston & Caldas, 2002). Many schools were closed or combined, resulting in Black students being bused into White neighborhood schools. Several rounds of desegregation reform took place from 1981 to 2003, many of them focused on the creation of special programs like the gifted and talented programs created in 1982 at Frazier High

School, conceived as ways to attract White and middle-class families to stay in public schools and the city itself.

As in other places throughout the country, these reforms brought on institutional practices that had the effect of maintaining race and class segregation within the school while still upholding racial diversity quotas at the overall school level. These practices continue today, as school performance is largely measured by data from standardized tests aggregated at the school level, an approach that renders invisible the ways students are segregated into widely differing academic programs *within* schools. The overall school performance score is positively affected by the structure of exclusive tracks that primarily serve high-achieving, often middle-class students who are more likely to stay enrolled in urban public schools if they are offered advanced classes. These classes regularly come with the perks of smaller class sizes and more highly qualified teachers.

This dynamic, in which young people from different race and class backgrounds attend school alongside one another, and yet are tracked into very different kinds of educational environments and experiences, is rooted in the raced and classed political and social histories of the neighborhood and school system. The same dynamics of simultaneous intimacy and division that characterized the Black Law Professionals' visit to Frazier High in March 2015 are reinforced by these kinds of checkerboard arrangements that keep people close and yet divided from one another across boundaries that have been defined historically by race and class.

Demographics of Frazier High School and English Amped

Frazier High School had 1,368 students enrolled in the 2014-2015 school year. According to an executive summary (2015) prepared by the school's lead administrator,

23% of the student population attended the school due to special programs including tracks for students who were screened as “gifted” or “great scholars” per tests intended to measure academic and intellectual abilities (Brister, p. 1). A third magnet track is for students deemed “talented” based on an arts portfolio or auditions in an artistic medium. The ability of young people and their families to advocate for these services, and in some cases to pay for private screenings, are a factor in determining who will gain access to these programs. The remaining 77% of Frazier students attend the school based on geographic location. These students are either considered “traditional” (69% of the school) or “exceptional” (8% of the school), euphemisms indicating that students either do not receive special services, or have an individualized learning plan based on an identified disability of some kind (Brister, 2015, p. 2).

Per the principal’s executive summary (2015), seventy-five percent of the school was eligible for free or reduced lunch in 2014-2015, an indicator of low socio-economic status (SES). This figure closely matches the 77% of students who attend the school because they reside in the neighborhood attendance zone, suggesting a correlation between the two. Of course, this does not mean that all neighborhood-based students live in poverty, nor does it mean that students in the gifted, talented, or great scholars programs are free of poverty. It does, however, suggest that family socioeconomic status and students’ access to these special programs are related. This would support a wealth of evidence that there is “an obvious, and very strong relationship between socioeconomic status and academic achievement” (Stanford Education Data Archive, 2016, p. 7), and, furthermore, that “racial achievement gaps are the result of racial/ethnic disparities in family socioeconomic background” (Reardon, 2016, p.13). In other words, race and

socioeconomic class are closely related, and both educational opportunities and outcomes are greatly impacted by these factors.

More specific demographic data about students in each program at Frazier High School would be needed to show a correlation between income, race, academic achievement, and tracking; however, the state department of education and local school system do not report demographic data at the level of intra-school programs. No Child Left Behind's legislation made the reporting of academic achievement alongside other data like race and income levels a federal standard through school and district report cards; yet, according to the U.S. Department of Education (2013), a state, school system, or school "may use whatever style or format it determines to be most effective in presenting information to stakeholders and the general public in a manner that is both understandable and useful" (p. 7). The reporting format used by the department of education for Frazier High's state appears like that of other states. Pootinath and Walsh (2011) report a similar trend in their study of tracking and racial segregation in Connecticut. They write, "While a school may be considered desegregated and report testing differences among historically under-performing subgroups, we have no information regarding racial demographics within the classrooms. Put simply, we have no widespread statistical data regarding school tracking" ("What We Know and What We Don't," para. 2). Even as many reform advocates rally for schools to be more equitable using strategies that are "data driven," the failure to display intra-school data obscures this larger objective and suggests a disinterest in the ways that tracking through academic programs is related to uneven student outcomes.

Because one of the goals of English Amped was to create a context to bring students into a contact zone with peers with whom they might not otherwise be tracked, Destiny

and I recruited for the first English Amped class by visiting sophomore English classrooms across Frazier's multiple academic tracks, including traditional, advanced placement, honors, and the Gifted and Great Scholars programs. Of the seventy interest forms we collected after doing short presentations, we sorted students based on academic assessments provided by their tenth-grade English teachers, aiming for a heterogeneous mix of "high" and "low" performing students from within and across each track. A disproportionately small number of students who were labeled by teachers as "low" academic achievers submitted interest forms for the program, so we worked with teachers to identify and recruit eligible students, an effort which enabled us to eventually collect enough applications to fill those seats.

The lack of initial applicants who were classified by teachers as "low achieving" reflects a pattern in which students believe that special programs are for high-achieving students, even when explicitly told the opposite. This recruitment and selection process required frequent communication with teachers, students, and families in which we found ourselves having to explain and re-explain that the program was not intended for a special group of students based on high or low academic achievement, but rather, was intended to bring students together across these categories. A demographic exit survey that English Amped students took at the end of their senior year in Spring 2016 shows how ingrained this commonsense notion is that special programs automatically mean programs for advanced or accelerated learners. When asked to list any advanced placement or honors classes they had taken while at Frazier, 35% of the students responded "English Amped." Of course, students knew that their English Amped classes were not officially advanced placement or honors in the technical sense of those terms, and yet they still associated the

program with the kinds of special programs into which students were separated according to academic rigor, the kinds of programs that were typical of the school.

The English Amped classroom in 2014-2015 may have been Frazier High School's most heterogeneous. Almost half of the class lived within the attendance zone, a full half of the class lived outside of the attendance zone, and 5% claimed to live "somewhat" in the attendance zone, which I take to mean that they either lived close by, moved, had more than one home, or used an address other than their own to attend the school. Forty-three percent of the class was enrolled in Gifted, Great Scholars, or Talented tracks at the school, compared to 23% of the school as a whole. One student was in the Great Scholars program, two were in the Gifted program, and five were in Talented Music or Drama. Among students not in a special academic track, four had taken advanced placement or honors classes at some point during high school. Therefore, 32% of the total class were otherwise engaged in highly-tracked academic programs, and 23% participated in a talented arts program.

Seventy-five percent of the class claimed that they were eligible for free or reduced lunch, a figure that matches the overall school demographic. While 85% of the school is considered African American according to the 2014-2015 executive summary, 91% of English Amped's graduating class considered themselves either Black or African American. Five of those students who classified themselves as Black or African American also laid claims to mixed heritages, mostly Native American. Of the two students who did not claim a Black or African American identity, there was one student who described herself as White, and another who described herself as Arab.

What this demographic data about race, socioeconomic status, neighborhoods, and academic tracks tells us is that English Amped was in most ways highly representative of the school at large, though the opportunity to be in a shared learning environment with one another was a unique experience for many students. This was part of our intentional design for the class, to create a contact zone in which students could come together from different tracks to explore the possibilities for school *as it could be*, a space of contact between people who are otherwise kept apart through institutional practices that both mirror and reproduce social inequalities. Inviting students, families, and our colleagues at Frazier High to reimagine how students might be grouped posed a challenge to normative school practices and beliefs. Misperceptions - among teachers and administrators, that we had cherry picked the best students from other classes; among students and parents, that highly-tracked students were taking our class to avoid a challenge; among students themselves, who believed they were in a traditionally-defined honors class even when they were not - continue to abound into the third year of the program. Even as we performed an alternative reality, in which students from different tracks collaborated with, learned from, and grew close with one another, the prevailing structure of school *as it is* had a firm hold on the collective imaginary. English Amped's incongruence with the logics and institutional practices that defined not only Frazier, but the school system at large, meant that our practices were often disorienting and illegible, a subject that I take up at greater length in Chapter Four.

School *as It Is*: Narrowly-Defined Achievement

Two weeks into the school year, English Amped students took a standardized pre-test for English III that was administered to all students in the school district. The district pre-

and post-tests in the 2014-2015 academic year were in addition to two benchmark tests at other points of the year in each core subject area. There are four core subjects, so that means that students took sixteen total district tests (a pre-, post-, and two benchmarks for each subject), with each test taking between one to three class periods to complete. Eleventh graders also took the state's End of Course (EOC) exams in each core subject area. The EOC typically takes each student several days to complete. Many students additionally took the pre-SAT (PSAT), and all eleventh graders were required to take the ACT; each of these takes approximately a school day to complete. Clearly, a lot of time is spent taking tests, and they mean a great deal in terms of student advancement, teacher evaluation, and the overall ranking of schools and districts.

I decided to take the district pre-test for English III while students took it, which I found to be a frustrating experience to say the least. I write in my field notes:

'Describe how themes of greed and suffering interact in selection 4' feels like an impenetrable idea to me, especially with all the shuffling outside in the halls, the constant interruptions from the intercom. . . . My brain glazes over reading a passage from a Supreme Court deliberation on NY state labor regulations. I cannot pay attention long enough to make sense out of two sentences at a time. (8.19.14)

Indeed, the English III test was hard for me, someone with an advanced degree; I could not bring myself to finish it. At least six students of the 27 in the classroom put their heads down and went to sleep early into the test period. I write in my notes, "I see [a student] just bubbling in the whole answer sheet without even glancing at the test." Even though Destiny and I encouraged students to focus on the test, my own feelings of incredulity at how difficult the test was, filled as it was with arcane and decontextualized passages and questions designed to trip the reader up, made it hard for me summon the will to hold students accountable for it.

Destiny and I decided to hold a dialogue the day after everyone finished their pre-tests to elicit students' responses. The class jumped quickly into a discussion about issues of racial equality and standardization (field notes, 8.21.14). Dontre'lle opened by pointing out how repetitive the tests could feel.

"They give us the same test over and over, like they think we can't do it. In a predominantly White area, they might get different tests [than we do]."

"Statistically, Black people are not doing as well as White people," Candice replied. "But they make the tests the same."

"It seems like you're saying that they know that Sarah will score better than Quineishia. Just because we're Black, just because we live in Louisiana, it doesn't mean that we can't do what they do in New York," Alyson shot back.

"If they give Black people an easier test than the White folks, it ain't gonna go," Jayreal said. "You see Black people out there doing all the bad stuff, you don't see White people doing that— we need to do like them."

As this exchange illustrates, students felt both a suspicion of and an adherence to the prevailing paradigm of standardization as a measure of equality. Jayreal's comment reveals the internalization of a discourse of personal responsibility; as he saw it, Black people were to blame for not living up to White standards of achievement. Though students grappled and disagreed with one another about whether standardized tests were fair or valuable measures of their achievement, they seemed to agree with one another about how they felt when taking the tests. Devanté was the first to introduce this idea:

"I was doing my test, and I wasn't understanding it; I was thinking, are other people understanding this? Am I as smart as them?"

This comment led to many other students sharing their experiences of feeling “too dumb” while taking tests. Georgia exclaimed with an air of defeat, “I was reading about, what was it called, hydraulic fracturing? And I was like, I don’t know about this and I never will!”

As Georgia’s comment, “I don’t know about this and I never will,” suggests, many students experience profound frustration about their own perceived abilities to participate in the literacy tasks asked of them on standardized tests, tasks that are legitimized to students and their communities as valid measures of academic success or failure. An uncritical, or partially critical, belief that the test is an accurate measurement of one’s success leaves many students feeling disappointed and angry at themselves or their teachers. This frustration is generated within a paradigm in which racial and cultural identities are conceived through a deficit lens. The standard of achievement, which students understood as defined by a standard of hegemonic Whiteness, hence remained unachievable without in some way negating one’s culture or community. In these conditions, it is not hard to imagine how students of color in predominantly low-income public schools come to form dispositions towards schooling that resist such affronts. As many scholars have found, it is not that students of color in low-income schools do not want to learn; rather, when students perceive schooling as a systemic negation of their own identities and forms of cultural capital, a resistance to schooling is fostered (Goldenberg, 2014; Harris, 2011; Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Morrell, 2008).

School-based modes of achievement, which prioritize testable and therefore decontextualized forms of knowledge, clearly left many English Amped students feeling defeated and negated. Many test takers, myself included, responded by shutting down and

just not completing the assessment. Some students internalized a message of “I’m not capable.” Others resisted by simply not taking the test, and by doing so gained some measure of short term control, but denied themselves the opportunity to practice for other instances when testing would in fact determine their access to future resources. Not surprisingly, my observations of students during test taking showed that those who focused and pushed through the test were students who already possessed an identity as academically successful, the same students who were in highly-tracked programs.

As Pierre Bourdieu (1973) has theorized, the sorting and classification of students in school systems works to legitimize the reproduction of the given social order. The probable relationship between academic tracks at Frazier High School and the socioeconomic status of students, and the strong correlation between these factors throughout the country, points to the ways that schools function to reproduce social inequality by using a technology of accountability that, instead of measuring the quality of teachers and schools, merely reflects the sociocultural circumstances of test takers. The effect of these technologies is to justify the further educational dispossession of those who are already the most disadvantaged. As David Harvey (2004) has argued, neoliberalism accumulates capital through such strategies: “Accumulation by dispossession is about dispossessing somebody of their assets or their rights... we’re talking about the taking away of universal rights and the privatization of them so it [becomes] your particular responsibility, rather than the responsibility of the state” (p. 2). In other words, technologies of accountability, like standardized testing, “prove” the unworthiness or worthiness of individual students, teachers, and schools, thus shifting attention from social inequalities that deny the least advantaged communities access to a quality education.

Through the lens of school accountability, Frazier High School is considered a “C” school, one of the more successful schools in the district, with a performance score of 84.8 in the 2014-2015 school year. However, only 72% of Frazier students successfully received a high school diploma in four years (louisianabelieves.com). While this means that Frazier outperformed the district at large, in which only 66% of students finished high school with a diploma in four years, these numbers clearly fall short of the “world class education” that it is the district’s stated mission to provide. If one in every three students in the local school district, and more than one in every four at Frazier, is unable to finish high school in four years, most likely because of failing grades in core academic classes that cause students to repeat classes or be pushed out of school altogether, clearly, the system is failing a large percentage of students. This failure is far from a rationale for dismantling the public system in favor of more unstable educational choices. It is instead a rationale for looking closely at the experiences that cause students to become disengaged, and in many cases, push students out of school into low-wage labor or privatized, state-sponsored mass incarceration.

This dispossession operates through a framing metaphor in which grading represents total, systemic accountability. Grading relies on supposedly objective measurements at each level: individual students are graded, teachers are graded, schools and school districts are graded. The relationships of micro to macro follows an industrial logic through which the individual student’s output can be aggregated to see the output of the school system at large. What this conceit renders invisible are sociocultural processes, such as the undeniable correlation between poverty and academic achievement; these processes, which are real, are not accounted for in the prevailing report card metaphor through which

schools are graded as successful or unsuccessful. A failure to account for these processes means that teachers, schools, and students are trained to think in positivist terms about educational inputs and outputs. This means ignoring the circumstances of students' lives and the forms of cultural capital, relational networks, and world views that students bring with them into the classroom, and carrying on with educational programs and curricula designed to fit the needs of standardized testing.

Ironically, such decontextualization is connected to discourses of school choice and innovation. The current era of school reform is characterized by the marketing of options and resources that are not under public control: charter, private, and virtual schools, and privately outsourced testing and curriculum materials that are in constant need of renewal. The branding of this as a marketplace in which choice prevails obscures the ways in which local control - through the traditional means of publicly-elected school boards, teachers' unions, and community and family input in neighborhood public schools - is rapidly disappearing. The effect on teaching and learning, as Michael Fabricant and Michelle Fine (2013) have argued, is that the "experience of public education is cheapened and hollowed out through ever-more mechanized forms of classroom instruction," many of which are hawked as easily reproducible market innovations (p. 9).

School achievement in this context becomes narrowly defined via the forms of knowledge that can be reproduced in a mass curriculum and assessed through standardized testing, forms which privilege discreet information and skill sets that can be performed by individuals outside of a meaningful context. Ultimately, this version of schooling creates an epistemological stance that regards knowledge as bits of information to be accrued in a logical and gradual program, a view of learning most suited to the

“banking model” in which teachers and textbooks deposit information into the minds of passive student recipients (Freire, 1970). Many English Amped students described to me the prevalence in some of their other classrooms of packets featuring ready-made worksheets for students to complete each week. These practices fit easily into a system of oversight in which national standards and grading practices are expected to flow smoothly from classroom to classroom without much divergence. More project-based, experiential, relational modes of learning that require flexibility, emergence, and meandering on the part of teachers and students do not fit so easily into these prevailing modes of accountability. The privileging of narrowly conceived curricular approaches is driven by a set of values and motives that over time accrue as “common sense,” but in fact reflect several under-examined ideologies. Bullough (2014) offers a synthesis of the values and motives underpinning much of contemporary schooling:

1. Extended hierarchies conferring higher status to those furthest removed from local practices and concerns,
2. A celebration of externally imposed order,
3. The trivialization of teaching evident in the separation of conception from execution of labor,
4. A tightening and narrowing of job specifications and a need for high levels of conformity to achieve greater outcome predictability and fidelity of prescribed performances,
5. A devaluation of processes and relationships in favor of products and things (including test scores),
6. A fear of human agency and of the goodness of human intentions in favor of faith in markets and systems and in those few experts who interact directly with those systems to produce what are thought to be the most *reasonable* decisions about what teachers and teacher educators ought to do and therefore ‘be.’ (p. 191)

These troubling values, which reflect a deep mistrust of students, local communities, and teachers—all those working most closely on “the ground” of education— form an ideological basis for educational policy and practice. Because ideologies are masked and propagate as common sense, ways of teaching and learning that are mismatched with these underpinnings appear to contradict common sense itself.

One policy in Frazier's school district provides an example of the mismatch between approaches that stem from narrowly conceived schooling versus more critical, experiential pedagogies. According to this policy, 80% of high school grading must reflect the accuracy of student work, with teachers expected to input a minimum of two grades per week. Grade books are scanned by department chairs to ensure that grades among students differ, thus ensuring that the teacher is measuring accuracy and not merely completion. While the intention of this policy is to prevent teachers from merely plugging in empty participation grades, this policy also eschews teacher efforts to implement alternative, holistic modes of student assessment. For example, a portfolio grading system in a writing class in which students generate a number of rough drafts and then choose among them at midterm for work to revise for mastery would not mesh with a weekly requirement of 80% accuracy and 20% completion. While this is a composition strategy that is well-supported by scholarship in the field of writing pedagogy, it does not fit into the district's accountability paradigm. To navigate the school's expectations of grading and *also* implement such a portfolio system, as we attempt to do in English Amped, requires continuous contortions, putting an additional burden on teachers who choose to use holistic and process-oriented approaches.

Uniform systems of oversight demand uniformity. In this context, teaching and learning become too easily converted into a numbers game, with student, teacher, and school accountability primarily shaped by forms of visibility that can be tracked from a distance. Entire departments at the state and local level exist to enforce such versions of accountability, and multiple administrative jobs at the school are dedicated to the coordination of testing and management of student data. The investment of public

resources towards these technologies is enormous, as they require sophisticated data analysis software, ever-changing test materials, and instructional materials aligned to standardized test requirements. From the perspective of a school's or district's administrative offices, this conversion of students into data is a game of survival, as it is for teachers who are now evaluated according to those scores. To expend energy on alternative approaches is widely perceived as unpragmatic. Indeed, it may be. There are few professional incentives for teachers to forego the ease of pre-packaged curricula in which the various mandates of accountability are already satisfied. For those who do, the need to contort approaches to fit the system can become overwhelming, especially when doing so makes one subject to increased scrutiny by administrators, colleagues, and even students and their families.

For the group of students in the first English Amped class, most of whom entered kindergarten in the same year that the No Child Left Behind Act was passed into law, notions of what school is and what it could be are to a certain extent circumscribed by imaginaries developed during the era of mass standardization. As Tim Walker (2014) of the National Education Association writes,

The educational practices that proliferated during the first decade of NCLB, which were intended to prepare students for test success, inadvertently flattened what learning looked like in many schools. Today, more than a decade later, the law is uniformly blamed for stripping curriculum opportunities, including art, music, physical education and more, and imposing a brutal testing regime that has forced educators to focus their time and energy on preparing for tests in a narrow range of subjects: namely, English/language arts and math. For students in low-income communities, the impact has been devastating. (para 3)

As Walker explains, the narrowing of curriculum to spend resources and time on test preparation resulted in the loss of opportunities for students to engage project-based, discussion-oriented, experiential forms of learning in a range of disciplines. The backlash to

test-driven educational practices has had some effect, leading to the eventual reworking of the NCLB bill in 2015 in a rare moment of bipartisan agreement in Congress: “Republicans and Democrats alike backed away from the law as it became apparent that its penalties for struggling schools were overly punitive” (Huettemn, 2015, para. 7). Though the tide does seem to be shifting to reduce some of the punishing practices associated with high-stakes testing, new legislation does little to reduce the predominance of standardized testing. The fact remains that for an entire generation of students, “getting an education” has been interchangeable with performing well on standardized tests and accepting the kinds of teaching and learning that are most closely aligned with test taking.

School As It Is: The Need for “Relationships That Educate”

In early December 2015, as I sat in the library reading students' semester writing portfolios, I observed an interaction between students and adult authority figures that demonstrates something of the struggle between adult authority figures and Frazier students. A new teacher who had been hired just a few weeks earlier was pleading with students to stop walking around the library and get settled into the computer lab. In an effort to coerce students to sit, the teacher declared over and over, “Five points to sit down. Five points to sit down.” This grade incentive had very little effect. As she focused her attention on one student or group, others would begin getting up and moving around again, while some just ignored her pleas outright. One young man sat down and placed a fast food meal and soda on the table next to a computer. Frazier students are not allowed to leave campus during lunch, so food from nearby restaurants is considered “contraband,” doubly so in the computer lab where food and drinks are not allowed. The teacher told the young man, “Absolutely not.”

“But I haven’t had lunch,” he replied.

“You could get kicked out of the library.”

“But I got to eat lunch.”

The teacher then picked up the student's lunch and walked it to the other side of the room. He followed her, complaining loudly so that the entire library could hear. Other students in the library were now focused on the student, and joined his complaining while laughing and enjoying the theatrics of the episode. At this point, a librarian and an administrator who were also in the room intervened; they yelled loudly and forcefully at the young man, and everyone, including me, froze from the force of their voices. One of them shouted, “I don’t play that!” The student's food was taken away, and he was pushed out of the library, presumably to go to the office for a disciplinary referral. The class continued to carry on as it had before, mostly ignoring the teacher as she attempted to instruct them.

In the meantime, a young man I had often seen hanging around in the library approached me and, doing his best *Scarface* voice, tried to sell me a chocolate bar as part of a fundraiser for some school activity. Though I explained that I had no money on me to buy a chocolate bar, he carried on with the charade, acting as though he were a mafia boss and I a potential drug client, even getting me to smell “the product” and threatening humorously to “break my fingers” if I didn’t bring the money the next day. Another teacher later informed me that this young man was part of a small group of students who require special education accommodations, and that the group typically spends several hours each day in the library without any instructional support.

These juxtaposed interactions, which are representative of many similar events I witnessed in the school, display the consequences of the school's failure to provide youth with meaningful, ongoing, trusting relationships with adults as a context for educational success. Students in the math class experienced abandonment when they went most of the fall semester without a math teacher. They were then expected to comply based on what amounted to empty appeals to authority: grades, school rules, and finally the display of outrage from authority figures. Students largely rejected these sources of authority, and worked collectively to poach the class time and space for themselves. The drama of the young man with his lunch operated as theater of the absurd, a way to display the powerlessness of official power, and to suggest the actual power of those without access to official power. These library scenes exemplify Michel de Certeau's (1989) notion of tactics, and how they are used by those without officially sanctioned power to gain pleasure, display wit, or exercise some measure of control over those who do:

Because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time—it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized 'on the wing.' Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into 'opportunities' (p. xix) ... Strategies, in contrast, conceal beneath objective calculations their connection with the power that sustains them from within the stronghold of its own 'proper' place or institution." (p. xx)

Unlike the strategically-centered power of the administrator and librarian, who, in contrast to the newly-hired teacher, firmly understood their positions within the institution, the tactics of students depended on "a calculus which cannot count on a 'proper' (a spatial or institutional localization)..." and which "shows the extent to which intelligence is inseparable from the everyday struggles and pleasures that it articulates" (xix). In the case of both the playful Scarface chocolate vender and the fast food bandit, Frazier students used tactical means to pursue pleasure, to display intelligence, and to create relationships

with others despite, and even in direct defiance of, the modes of relationship promoted by the institution. Though neither of the students involved in these scenes gained any “proper” institutional power, and one even risked being moved along a disciplinary pipeline towards more severe consequences, each could temporarily take hold of the institution for their own purposes. Institutional strategies of control had minimal hold in the momentary, improvisational theater of disruptions and playfulness that students created for themselves.

Underlying the scenes in the library are the ways in which the school failed to provide care and guardianship for students, in some sense abandoning them without providing what Deborah Meier (2002) calls “relationships that educate” (p. 28). The absence of a math teacher and the lack of any plan or structure for special needs students are examples of the lack of such relationships. If we understand such relationships and educational processes as part of an unspoken contract schools hold with their students, a failure to provide these resources signals a form of educational and civic abandonment, a denial of the fundamental right to an education.

I do not mean to paint an overly morbid picture of the school. There are many pockets throughout Frazier High School where students experience relationships that educate. Each of the eleven English Amped students whom I interviewed described teachers they considered great, and in whose classes they felt safe, comfortable, and inspired to learn. Yet the predominance of classroom and school-wide spaces in which students did not feel that way meant that adults' demands for student capitulation and compliance on one hand, and students' refusal to comply and, instead, their efforts to retain a tactical sense of power and

pleasure by “getting over” on the other hand, were norms inscribed into the environment. These habits and norms aggregated to form the overall climate of the school.

The criminalization of young, poor people of color plays a role in this school climate. According to the Children’s Defense Fund (2009), “A Black boy born in 2001 has a 1 in 3 chance of going to prison in his lifetime” (para. 2). The CDF reports that Black girls and Latino youth of all genders are also disproportionately criminalized in comparison with White youth. According to the “Louisiana Platform for Children” report put out by The Louisiana Partnership for Children and Families (2016), 57% of the youth held in Louisiana’s juvenile prisons were adjudicated for offenses that involved neither violence nor weapons (p. 23), and school discipline practices were found to be among the strongest contributing factors to youth criminalization.

The logics of youth criminalization, which cast young people of color as predators in need of constant surveillance and policing, underlie the disciplinary climate at Frazier. School-wide “lock downs” were frequent, and police were often stationed at the front and center of the school. Students who arrived more than five minutes late to class could be written up for cutting class, and put on “no admit” lists that frequently spanned dozens of single spaced pages with the names of students who were not to be allowed into the next day’s classes. The frequency of tardies was greatly affected by the fact that bathrooms throughout the school were regularly and randomly locked in order to deter students from misbehaving in non-surveilled spaces. This resulted in students being unable to access bathroom facilities without searching campus between classes, a factor contributing to student tardies. Many violations of the rules, particularly dress code and cell phone violations, were infrequently enforced by the school’s administration, but when they were,

seemingly at random, students could be rounded up en masse and detained from class. Announcements were frequently made after lunch telling teachers to lock their doors at the sounding of the tardy bell so that “late students can be rounded up and processed.”

This dehumanizing language, and the denial of personal control over bodily functions and movement, characterize an environment in which self-determination is systemically denied. Erving Goffman (1959), in his study of asylums (which he calls “total institutions”) found that one characteristic of a total institution is the way “personal autonomy of action” is denied. He explains, “Minute segments of a person’s line of activity may be subjected to regulations and judgements by staff; the inmate’s life is penetrated by constant sanctioning interaction from above” (p. 38). Goffman elaborates, “Each specification robs the individual of the opportunity to balance his needs and objectives in a personally efficient way and opens up his line of action to sanctions. The autonomy of the act itself is violated” (p. 38). Indeed, for Frazier High School students, “the autonomy of the act,” including movement, dress, the need to use the restroom, eating and drinking, communication, and the use of one’s time were subject to open-ended and often random forms of scrutiny. As Potter, Boggs, and Dunbar explain (2017), “Viewing schools as total institutions helps us to better understand the conditioning and socialization processes that occur in many urban schools for direct transition of students into the prison system” (p. 72). Indeed, the lack of trust in students to exercise bodily autonomy indicates an environment in which criminalization was normalized. The resulting climate of antagonism among adults and youth worked directly against the educational mission of the school, creating an overall climate in which cooperation and shared power often felt unachievable, and in which students were faced with the overly-simplified choice to either capitulate to or openly resist authority figures.

During a presentation before the school's faculty on February 26, 2015, an administrator from the school district's central office (part of a district leadership team that came and went within a few years' time) told the school's faculty that the local district is "one of the highest in the nation for referrals" (Field notes, 2.26.15). The most frequent referrals, he explained, were for the category called "willful disobedience and disrespect for authority." As he pushed teachers to "address ambiguity in the terms," and suggested that a lack of relationships among teachers and students was to blame, a core group of White teachers became vocally agitated. One teacher described trying to address a hallway rule violation and being told, "Fuck you, bitch," by a student. Another teacher questioned why teachers were being "chastised," and a third suggested that the presenter himself go stand in the school's hallways for a day and try to tell students to put away their cell phones. When the presenter suggested that the school "put some of those badass kids on a committee to tell you what you are doing wrong," a voice from the faculty shouted back in a mimicking voice, "Y'all won't let me have my phone!"

Genevieve Miller, a Frazier High English teacher and twelve-year veteran of the local school system, offered a contrasting voice that I suspect reflects a perspective held by many other teachers at the school, particularly Black teachers, who were mostly silent at the faculty meeting. In an interview on August 24, 2015, Genevieve described what she perceived to be a widespread failure to establish strong relationships at the school. She explained, "There is no community at the school. It seems like it is teachers against students, administration against teachers." She described other schools where she has experienced teachers and administrators creating clear, supportive expectations and relationships across the board. Ironically, the two schools where she taught before Frazier

were both taken over by the state and eventually shut down or occupied by a charter system after she and other faculty were dismissed. It was at these schools that Genevieve experienced a sense of connection and pride amongst students and faculty. She explained:

Frazier just doesn't have that, it's every man for himself. No systems, and the relationships are bad, they're very weak. I have students who I have never even taught before that come in here like 'Hey, Mrs. Miller, I want to ask you something.' I'm like, 'Who are you?' But they have no relationship with the teacher that teaches them, and that's why they are coming to me. And that's not a good thing. That's why we have so much confusion, because we don't have relationships, these kids don't feel like they have a voice, they don't feel like they have control over what they do in most of the classes, or the campus, so they lash out and they fight, bring guns to school, they mace people, because some adult is not giving them any kind of power, and also not listening to their voices.

Genevieve's critique of student-teacher relationships at the school echoed the criticism of the administrator from central office, and stands in contradiction to the angry White teachers who spoke out at the meeting. She understood not only that sharing power with her students is the basis of strong relationships, but that those dynamics must be reflected in the larger adult culture of the school:

I'm not going to come in here and say, you have to do this, this, this, and this. I'm not going to do that because I have lost with them. I've lost that student if I'm constantly pushing, pushing, pushing. Let's meet, and let's have a happy medium, and you can feel safe to say what you have to say in a respectable way, and I can do the same thing. And we have a relationship where I know you've got my back, and I've got yours, and we can work this thing out together. That doesn't happen enough. And it doesn't happen with administration and teachers.

As Genevieve's analysis and the polarizing faculty meeting reveal, the failure to establish relationships that educate existed on at least two levels. First, there was a genuine failure to envision students as people who were responding to, rather than creating, a hostile school climate. Many teachers at the faculty meeting seemed unwilling to entertain the notion that "willful disobedience and disrespect for authority" were a symptom, and not a cause, of problems at the school - problems over which they had some measure of control.

Secondly, and importantly, the faculty perception that they were being “chastised” by administrators from the central office speaks to the ongoing experiences of teachers who, like students, are punished within a system that applies arbitrary regulations and forms of surveillance. The exercise of administrative power, and teachers’ sense of helplessness and hostility in the face of that power, mirrored the responses that students have within the same system. For example, the administrators acted as though a one-time faculty meeting was a sufficient response to the problem of a district-wide climate that overuses punitive measures to control youth. Throwing concepts like restorative justice into a fifty-minute meeting and expecting teachers to convert those concepts into sustained and meaningful practice denies the complexity of systemic change, which requires extended study and planning among teachers and administrators.

The criminalization of youth within schools, then, is an extension of an underlying logic that views accountability as sanctions imposed from above. Everyday forms of surveillance and abandonment are accompanied by overt disciplinary policies that work to push students who cause trouble out of school and into the criminal justice system:

Schools now serve to discipline and warehouse youth... The combination of school punishments and criminal penalties has proven a lethal mix for many poor minority youth and has transformed schools from spaces of youth advocacy, protection, hope, and equity to military fortresses, increasingly well positioned to mete out injustice and humiliation (Giroux, 2009, p. 102).

It is a bleak reality, indeed, when public schools operate not to transform the life opportunities of their students, nor, in the transformative vision of Grace Lee Boggs (2012), to “provide children with ongoing opportunities to exercise their resourcefulness to solve real problems for their communities” (p. 137), but instead to punish, frustrate, and dispossess students of those opportunities in the name of academic rigor and adult control.

School *as It Is*: The Need for Culturally Responsive Teacher Preparation

Kevin Kumashiro (2009) explains that dominant ideologies are masked in “tradition, professionalism, morality, and normalcy” (p. xxxv). “Common sense,” he explains, “is not what should shape educational reform or curriculum design; it is what needs to be examined and challenged” (p. xxxvi). To take up this aim, which is to interrogate what is already accepted under the normalizing paradigms of professionalism and tradition, calls for teachers and pre-service teacher candidates to step back from schooling *as it is* and become critically reflective practitioners, interrogating their own educational experiences as well as the needs and contexts of the diverse students and communities with whom they work. However, the prevailing normativity of educational paradigms, in which education is understood as narrowly defined achievement, and in which students of color in working class communities are offered pedagogies of surveillance and control in lieu of pedagogies of relationship and care, creates steep *unlearning* curves for teacher education.

For teachers whose own class and cultural backgrounds do not reflect those of their students, these unlearning curves are especially steep. The cultural capital, ways of knowing, and forms of wealth that young people of color from working class communities bring with them to school have long been approached by educators and educational institutions as deficits to be overcome rather than resources to be sustained. Deficit approaches to language assume that dominant language use, meaning the language used by power groups, is seen as inherently superior and worthier of study. Views of people of color as “culturally deprived” have long shaped educational discourses and practices, ways of thinking that position the “achievement gap” as a cultural failing rather than understanding the differences in educational achievement as the historic and longstanding

consequences of structural racism (Ladson-Billings, 2006, Milner, 2010). Deficit views have justified education as a tool of assimilation, epistemic violence, and attempted cultural genocide. These forms of harm are exemplified by the Indian Boarding Schools established in the late-19th and early 20th centuries, in which Native American children were taken from their families, stripped of their language, dress, and forms of cultural expression, and forced to assimilate to White, American norms. Paris (2012) explains, “The goal of deficit approaches was to eradicate the linguistic, literate, and cultural practices many students of color brought from their homes and communities and to replace them with what were viewed as superior practices” (p. 93). Indeed, “color-blindness” characterizes many deficit approaches when teachers and curriculums simply omit the texts, perspectives, histories and ways of communicating practiced in non-dominant cultures.

Culturally sustaining pedagogies, on the other hand, are committed to sustaining “linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (Paris, 2012, p. 95). Gloria Ladson-Billings first coined the term *culturally relevant pedagogy* in 1995, a framework that emphasizes teachers’ ability to tap into student culture and experiences as a vehicle for learning, the practice of engaging the world and oneself in critical ways, and setting high standards for all students to achieve academically regardless of social inequalities (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This framework has since expanded to include an array of theories and practices, including the recent “remixes” of culturally *sustaining* and *revitalizing* pedagogies, which challenge educators to do more than use culture as a tool to advance achievement within given educational paradigms, but also to use educational sites as spaces for “reclaiming and restoring” cultures (Ladson-Billings, p.82, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014). At its core, culturally responsive/sustaining/revitalizing

pedagogies mean that educators are involved in a constant praxis that asks:

Who are my students? What are their histories (both family/community and as a people/culture over time)? What cultural constructs (e.g., language, family traditions, arts, spiritual foundations, historical struggles) shape their daily lives? What urban realities impact their living conditions and learning processes? How do students define themselves culturally? (Fugiyoshi, Guevara, Mathew, Michie, Hensler, Rodriguez, Smith, Stovall, Zaccor, n.d., para. 1)

As these questions demonstrate, the practice of culturally responsive/sustaining/revitalizing pedagogues goes far beyond one off lessons in which students compare hip-hop lyrics to classical poetry. Instead, it is a commitment to an inquiry-based stance that takes seriously the intersectional contexts and positionalities of students' lives in service of a justice-oriented praxis.

A related framework that positions teachers as researchers of students' lives is the "funds of knowledge" research developed by González, Moll, and Amanti (2005). Using ethnographic interviews as a methodology for teachers to learn from the families of students, "funds of knowledge" call attention to the cultural resources, ways of knowing, and "essential tool kits that households need to maintain and mediate their well-being" (p. 18). Such research opportunities allow teachers to experience their students and their families in ways that underscore the fact that "people are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge" (González, Moll, and Amanti, 2005, p. ix-x). Approaching students from such an asset-based perspective builds bridges from home to school and counters the ways that the homes of students of color in working class communities are often framed.

Even as cultural responsiveness gains status as a universal marker of teacher effectiveness (NCTE, 2010, AERA, 2012, NEA, 2014), and even as teacher education programs more readily embrace culturally responsive teaching than they did in the past

(Kea, Campbell-Whatley, & Herlaldo, 2006), the lived experiences of many teachers and teacher candidates stand in sharp contrast to the lived experiences of many of the students with whom they work, presenting a barrier to teachers' ability to be culturally responsive. According to "The State of Teacher Diversity Report," over 80% of the teaching force in K-12 schools is White, even though students of color make up 44% of the national student body (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015). While there were steady increases in the number of teachers of color in the 25-years from 1987 to 2012, this growth was outpaced by the growth of a minority school population in schools (Albert Shanker Institute, p. 5). A mismatch between student and teacher racial and sociocultural identities means that it is more challenging for teachers, who are less likely to be "grounded in the day-to-day experiences" of students, to teach in culturally responsive ways. According to the National Education Association (2014) report on diversity in teaching:

Educators who are grounded in the day-to-day experiences of their students and communities bring to their work more favorable views of students of color, including more positive perceptions regarding their academic potential. They frequently teach with a greater level of social consciousness than do others, appear to be more committed to teaching students of color, more drawn to teaching in difficult-to-staff urban schools, and are more apt to persist in those settings. The research also implies that same-race teachers are more effective in teaching students of their respective race. (1-2)

These findings point to a longstanding commitment of critical educators, that being "grounded in the day-to-day experiences of their students" matters, which is connected to sharing a racial background, but is also about an empathy and awareness about the social, economic, and cultural conditions shaping students' lives.

While such understandings indicate that race does play a role in teacher effectiveness, teachers of color, who are disproportionately working in high poverty, minority, urban schools, are leaving the profession at a higher rate than other teachers due

to working conditions in those schools. According to Albert Shanker Institute (2015), “The strongest complaints of minority teachers relate to a lack of collective voice in educational decisions and a lack of professional autonomy in the classroom” (p. 5). No doubt, the surveillance and mistrust cast on students in urban schools extends to teachers as well, and retaining effective, culturally responsive teachers in these schools is intertwined with the need to reframe accountability and give both teachers and students more control over themselves and their environments. Culturally responsive teaching is not just about how the sociocultural identities of teacher and students overlap or diverge. Indeed, as Christopher Emdin (2016) argues, “It is possible for people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds to take approaches to teaching that hurt youth of color” (viii). Culturally responsive teaching is rather about the ability of teachers to create learning environments that critically engage the realities of students’ social environments, structured as they are by race, class, and other markers, creating pedagogical spaces that allow people to “recognize ... differences, and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behavior and expectation” (Lorde, 1984, p. 115).

How to prepare teachers to do this work of engaging students’ social environments and framing students’ home cultures from asset-based perspectives is part of the challenge of both pre- and in-service teacher development. Though I had worked alongside K-12 teachers and provided forms of professional development for teachers in spoken word poetry pedagogies for many years, in the 2013-2014 year, I experienced my first attempts at becoming an educator of pre-service teachers when I taught my first teacher education classes in English at South State University. My educational and professional background oriented me towards English education in ways that were explicitly more connected to the

critical literacy and popular education approaches that proliferated through grassroots community organizations, and less so to K-12 schools. The spoken word educational spaces in which I spent almost two decades of my life were spaces that facilitated literacy through practices that often centered the embodied, experiential knowledges and stories of people whose intersectional identities marginalized them in numerous ways, but also provided them with forms of “community cultural wealth” often overlooked in dominant cultural spaces (Yosso, 2006).

In many senses, these were spaces that embodied counter-storytelling. With its theoretical roots in Critical Race Theory, counter-storytelling draws critical attention to the way that “the majoritarian story distorts and silences” (Yosso & Solórzano, 2002, p. 29). Counter-storytelling is a pedagogical and research method that centers the experiential knowledge of marginalized people to dismantle dominant, racist and oppressive epistemologies by functioning to: “build community among those at the margins...challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society’s center... nurture community cultural wealth, memory, and resistance...[and] facilitate transformation (Yosso, 2006, pp. 14-15). Part of the public pedagogies of youth spoken word spaces are embedded in opportunities to listen across difference, to absorb narratives that “challenge .., perceived wisdom”, and to experience an embodied *being-togetherness* that enables networks of solidarity.

As a new teacher educator, I borrowed strategies from other teacher educators, primarily having students read literature on culturally relevant pedagogy, reflect on their own schooling experiences, and attempt to unpack assumptions about the students and communities they encountered in their field experiences. And yet, I also hoped to facilitate experiences in which teacher educators could experience pedagogies of counter-

storytelling, and see how these pedagogies could fit into K-12 educational spaces. I found it challenging to figure out productive ways to do so that did not put undue burden on the margin of students who other students might turn to as “native informants” (Spivak, 1999) or to inadvertently invite students into the kind of us/them talk that, as Edward Said (1978) so aptly points out, functions to dominate the “other” and aggrandize the self.

As a new teacher educator, I also struggled to understand how we could interrogate power and privilege in a space where power and privilege were concealed by the way the university classroom was unevenly structured. Of the thirty students enrolled in the cohort that I worked with during the Fall 2013 and Spring 2014 semesters at South State University, over 90% identified themselves as White, and the overwhelming majority of that group identified as White women. According to anecdotal evidence collected through classroom discussion, of the thirty enrolled students in that cohort, there were two who identified as African American, one Latino, and one Native American. I did not have access to data about students’ socioeconomic backgrounds; however, “College Portrait” estimates that 20% of students at South State University are “low income” (Voluntary System of Accountability), meaning that the likely majority of the students I taught were also middle class. Even as the workings of structural racism and classism were so vividly illustrated by the ways that our university classroom contrasted with many pre-service teachers’ field experiences in local public schools, the opportunities to talk about race, class, and other forms of social difference constructively in these spaces felt constrained. Many of the pedagogies of counter-storytelling and critical literacies that I had experience with did not work in the same way here. Picower (2014) asks, “How can I insist that they [pre-service teachers] are experts in their own experience when their ‘expertise’ includes a belief that,

for instance, White people are the victims of racism?" (p. 32). Pedagogies of counter-storytelling and experience-based critical reflection clearly fall short when the sites for pre-service teachers to interrogate their own identities remained safely ensconced in institutional formations that endorsed White, middle class normativity.

As pre-service teachers encountered differences marked by power and privilege in their field experiences, attempts to talk openly and critically about these differences often created a crisis of meaning for some students, a crisis in which many refused to engage.

While crisis may be a necessary part of the learning process, it is not in itself what constitutes learning. Entering crisis is merely the stage where students confront troubling knowledge. To change their thinking in ways that work against oppression, students need a learning process that helps them to work *through* their crisis. (Kumashiro, 2009, p. 30)

Indeed, how to facilitate a process that helps pre-and in-service teachers to confront and move through crisis is a question that may matter more than any other for those of us who wish to call ourselves social justice teacher educators. Institutions like South State University and Frazier High School, which are themselves profoundly shaped by raced and classed forms of segregation, work in powerful ways to normalize power and privilege, and to keep people within those institutions from recognizing how their lives are structured. Many pre-service teachers at South State could choose to avoid troubling knowledge about race and class, much less move through the crises brought on by that knowledge, by simply refusing to engage.

I wonder if the challenge for teacher educators working in places like South State is not merely to find better class readings and more provocative activities? How does a predominately White, middle class public university, positioned as the site of expert knowledge in relation to a predominately Black, working class public school system, best

use its extensive resources to prepare culturally relevant educators? Alongside the thoughtful work that many teacher educators are already doing to promote culturally responsive pedagogies, I imagine that numerous structural changes to the university itself would be needed “to upset the set-up,” as Dr. David Stovall so aptly described the impetus to transform institutional practices and structures during his visit to our classroom (8.19.14). At South State, I imagine this would involve increasing enrollment among working class students of color in the secondary English education program, ideally by creating an educational pathway that would give students from the local community greater access into the university. It would also require curricular changes across multiple classes, not just those in the teacher education program, to ensure that students receive abundant opportunities to learn about and reflect on culturally-relevant issues. Such shifts would likewise call for more carefully coordinated field experiences and student teacher placements, ensuring that pre-service candidates were placed with highly-effective, culturally-relevant teachers who could model for them and with them what it looks and feels like to be in a culturally-sustaining learning environment. No doubt, such deeply systemic changes would take tremendous, long-range political will among faculty and administrators. The existence of field experience and student teaching placements would mean that in-service teachers would have to already exist in the local community who were doing the kind of culturally- and socially-engaged teaching that pre-service teachers could observe as a concrete model.

As a teacher educator during the 2013-2014 year, I made many attempts to structure my own classroom so that teacher candidates could experience critical literacy pedagogies first hand. We used a lot of the methods that would later define the English Amped

classroom: story circles, writing workshops, open mics, movement-based learning, critical reading, and reflection about social issues stemming from teacher candidates' own lived experiences. I hoped that students could reflect on the connections and tensions between these methods and their own past experiences as English students, and as participant observers in their field experience classrooms. And yet, student field experience journals and dialogues continued to reveal the general disbelief that such approaches could happen within a “real” English classroom, or with “real” middle or high school students. Though many students reported enjoying and getting a lot from the approaches they used for themselves, even the most willing students expressed doubts about whether the approaches could translate, and some of the more skeptical students wondered whether our forays into experiential learning were no more than a distraction from the real business of preparing future English teacher for the realities of the vocation.

Teacher candidates struggled to imagine English education in schools *as it could be* because they had never seen concrete models of what we were doing in our teacher education classroom in secondary schools themselves. The gap between the critical educational theories taught in the university classroom and the vocational realities shaping practice in local schools required too much translation for inexperienced teacher candidates to navigate without access to concrete, alternative models of possibility.

As I finished my first year as a teacher educator, the lack of such models in the context of local secondary schools troubled me. These troubles spurred me to talk with Destiny and English secondary education advisor and professor, Dr. Susan Weinstein, about including a teacher education component to English Amped. We decided to invite teacher candidates from the cohort I had been working with to join us for a focused field experience during

their fall semester before student teaching. These students would also take a small group independent study called “The Art of Critical Literacy” together, which would serve as a space for everyone involved in the project to have weekly study and reflection with one another, including myself, Destiny, and Sue. Six students applied and five students were accepted into the opportunity, which would begin in Fall 2014. I discuss the experiences and findings from working with this group of teacher candidates in Chapter Five.

Conclusion

In Chapter Three, I take up some of the ways that alternative possibilities for public education in an urban high school English classroom were shaped and performed at Frazier High School through the group of collaborators who worked together to shape English Amped. The performances of possibilities that we took on were profoundly shaped by the history of the local community surrounding Frazier High School, including the race and class relations that gave rise to segregated neighborhoods and schools, and later the politics of desegregation that led to intra-school tracking as a form of checkerboard segregation, mirroring a longstanding history of simultaneous intimacy and division among people situated along uneven power differentials in the local community. The contact zone that we created in English Amped attempted to challenge these myriad forms of segregation, bringing together students who reflected the range of diversity for which the school was appreciated, and yet who were too often kept apart through the ways that students were tracked within the school.

The way that students, teachers, and other collaborators perceived the landscape of limitations and possibilities in English Amped stemmed directly from the conditions of school *as it is*. These conditions include the policies and discourses of market-driven school

reform with their emphasis on individual accountability and positivist technologies of instruction that disregard the collective, sociocultural experiences underlying how students and teachers experience urban schools. Pseudo-scientific technologies of schooling are mirrored by a loss of relationship and connectivity that supplants pedagogies of care with criminalization and surveillance. These conditions of school *as it is*, which are underwritten by both public policy and to some extent the professionalizing institutions of education, inscribe versions of reality onto the imaginations and daily lives of youth and adults within schools. English Amped, as a project designed to raise questions and alternative images “as if things could be otherwise,” sought to carve out new spaces from within given institutions, to create crawl spaces, a term Robert Moses (2009) uses to describe leverage points for “pushing from the bottom” (p. 375), spaces from which new configurations of possibility could emerge.

CHAPTER 3

SCHOOL AS IT COULD BE: PERFORMANCES OF POSSIBILITY

Performing Possibility

In an interview on March 12, 2015, Tristen, an English Amped student, described an experience from the year that stuck out to him as important:

When we went to the forum at [South State University], even though you all told us that we were going to be able to speak, I was not one of the people who spoke because even though you all told us that, I figured, I'm going to sit down, this is my place to sit down. But then just seeing Bri' stand up and speak her mind, and seeing all of the other adults and professionals stand up and clap for what she said, it really stood out to me. It made me feel like, wow, our voices really are important. They do matter. . . . It allowed me to understand that what I'm saying does matter, what I am thinking does matter, and no matter how young I am, I do have something to say that is wise. (Interview with Tristen, 3.12.15)

Tristen's recollection stems from a forum that our class attended at South State University on September 18, 2014. The forum, which was organized for an audience of academics and others working through the university to engage African-American communities in various ways, was focused on the subject of African-American male educational success. It was a thrilling experience for many English Amped students who, like Tristen, remembered the moment when Bri'Yonna stood up and challenged an adult authority figure. It was a moment that called up self-determination, affirmed the experiential knowledge of English Amped students, and actualized the notion that it was possible to think and act "as if things could be otherwise" (Greene, 2001, p. 98).

Because the forum focused on African-American education, English Amped students had the powerful opportunity to recognize themselves as the objects of a political and academic discourse about which they had significant, experience-backed insights. English Amped students could recognize their abilities to act as subjects upon that discourse by

adding their knowledge to the conversation. When Destiny and I described what the forum would be like to prepare students a few days beforehand, several English Amped students wondered nervously what people at the summit would think about “a whole bunch of high school students being there.” Destiny and I asked students to consider the ironies of what it would mean if African-American students were not there when the forum was essentially about them. This conversation elicited a role play in which students practiced various aspects of how they would carry themselves, greet people, ask questions, and, if needed, push back. The sense of anxiety that some students held about whether they would really be welcome at this academic and professional event was also abated when Dr. Roland Mitchell, the summit’s organizer, welcomed the students warmly and explicitly.

Dr. Mitchell had previously invited English Amped students to prepare poems and perform them between the panel discussions. Alyson’s poem, “Barbarians,” described the ways that teachers misidentify students as “barbarians,” failing to see the pain that young people face in their lives. BriHop and Bri’Yonna wrote a two-voiced poem in which they debated how much responsibility for educational failure belongs to students themselves, and how much to a system that denies equal access. Jazmyne performed a poem about the city’s then political fight over schools just outside of the city limits, where suburban communities were rallying in the name of “neighborhood schools” to create their own school district and even their own city, so that students from poorer, Blacker parts of town would no longer be bused in. Jazmyne’s poem sparked some lively discussion between panels about that fight.

Dr. David Stovall, one of the summit’s keynote speakers, opened his talk by explicitly addressing the English Amped class: “This is for the high school folks...I always get mad

when people say you are the future. Young people are the right now. We don't talk about the right now." Dr. Stovall called for academics of urban education to translate their politics into an activist ethic in solidarity with "the block." He told the audience, "Academia can put you into the stratosphere of nothingness," eliciting snaps of agreement from the row of English Amped students. Stovall spoke about the distinction between schooling and education, and explained, "I don't want us to get caught up in 'success.' How do we interrupt that in a way that allows us to engage an education in different terms?" As he began to talk about the need for those who are most educationally dispossessed to generate knowledge and solutions to transform education, English Amped students erupted in snaps and claps meant to affirm his words. Dr. Stovall told the audience, "It can't be generated from the university first," and he challenged scholars to overturn paradigms of social science "research *on* people, not *with* them, to change their conditions." These words from Dr. Stovall resonated directly with the work we had been doing during the first month of the English Amped class to explore the tensions of official knowledges and counter-knowledges, including the students' very recent introduction to critical participatory action research as grounded in an ethics of research "with, not on."

The community engagement panel that followed Stovall's talk provided the moment that Tristen describes as "seeing Bri stand up and speak her mind" in the passage above, and that I name in my field notes from that day as "the electric moment." A panelist talked about the work she had been involved in to garner community involvement in a university-conceived "violence elimination" initiative that was widely supported by the local business community and managed in partnership with the police. The panelist explained the frustration her initiative initially experienced when they offered community services

meant to complement the criminal justice efforts in the community, which was defined by the initiative in terms of zip code. She explained, “The money sits there. We cannot get people to come in and get the services.” During the question and answer session, Bri’Yonna took the microphone and asked this panelist rather pointedly, “What exactly are you doing in [that zip code]? I have lived there for sixteen years, and I haven’t seen or heard anything about this outreach. No one has asked me or my family to be involved.” To this, the panelist responded, “I honestly don’t know how you don’t know.”

At lunch on the day of the summit, students reflected excitedly about Bri’Yonna’s exchange with the panelist, referring to Stovall’s words about “research with, not on.” The next day, on September 19, 2014, Bri’Yonna talked about the experience with Dr. Stovall, who came to visit our class. She told Dr. Stovall, “When she goes home to [the zip code of a wealthier, Whiter part of town], I go home to [the zip code where the violence elimination program was focused]. She doesn’t come to [that zip code] after seven o’clock at night.” To this, Candice added, “If you haven’t first-hand dealt with something, you can’t tell somebody else how to handle it,” and Alyson wondered, “Who is checking up on how these people spend the money?” These critical questions and declarations of wisdom derived from experience synthesized the learning goal Destiny and I had charted for the first month of school: to critically examine how knowledge and power are shaped by positionalities, and to begin to collectively imagine how English Amped could become a space from which to act upon new possibilities.

Bri’Yonna’s choice to stand up and speak helped Tristen and other English Amped participants to realize that it was not inevitably the “place” of young people “to sit down,” as Tristen previously believed, but that it was possible to stand up and claim perspectives

or forms of knowledge that are traditionally marginalized in spaces authorized by power. This realization and others like it were critical to the entire project of English Amped, which attempted to create a space for students and teachers to collectively reimagine school “as it is,” and to perform other possibilities within it. Moments like the one Tristen describes are important to unpack because they describe learning thresholds in which new horizons of possibility came into view for English Amped participants. As Tristen described it, “just that one event right there” changed his perspective on his own power. This moment, and many others like it that happened throughout the year, can be called a “performance of possibilities.” As D. Soyini Madison (2005) explains, “In a performance of possibilities, moral responsibility and artistic excellence culminate in an active intervention to break through unfair closures, remake the possibility for new openings, and bring the margins to a shared center” (p. 196). Although Bri’Yonna’s comment during the panel’s question and answer section was not an artistic performance, it did call on modes of performativity to claim critical knowledges, make unjust structures visible, and ultimately summon the agency of people to imagine things “as if they could be otherwise” (Greene, 2001, p. 98).

The performative in Bri’Yonna’s act stems from an understanding that “performances are actions” (Schechner, 2013, p. 2). In other words, performances are not only intentional, cultural performances like the poems that Alyson, BriHop, Bri’Yonna, and Jazmyne performed at the summit. Such performances are framed by cultural markers, as Richard Bauman has demonstrated, that delineate the performance as a heightened space of intensity and meaning-making (1977). But performance is also embedded in the social dramas of daily life. Victor Turner theorizes social drama as a process of everyday life that

can be framed in essentially narrative terms, moving through the phases of “breach, crisis, redress, and either reintegration or recognition of schism” (1982, p. 69). About this process, Turner writes, “I tend to regard the social drama ... as a process of converting particular values or ends, distributed over a range of actors, into a system (which is always temporary and provisional) of shared or consensual meaning” (1982, p. 75). In other words, social dramas are processes through which groups of people instantiate collective meanings, however fleetingly. Citing Barbara Myerhoff (n.d.), Turner explains performance as “being *reflexive*, arousing consciousness of ourselves as we see ourselves” (1982, p. 75). In this view, performances are reflexive actions, experiences that are framed and heightened, either through the narrating structure of social drama within everyday life, or through the markers that set performed experiences apart from everyday life, thus calling greater awareness to them.

Bri’Yonna’s exchange with the panelist at the forum was a moment of heightened awareness for English Amped participants. It was structured as a micro-social drama, offering a breach, crisis, redress and recognition of schism in rapid-fire manner. It was also framed as a genre of performance, structured as it was by the formalized conventions of the panel discussion’s question and answer session, a scenario we had rehearsed in class. In this heightened space of meaning making, Tristen experienced an affirmation that contradicted his previously-held system of meaning about what it meant to be a young person in adult spaces. Importantly, Tristen’s new meaning and his conviction about it did not come from merely being told about this possibility. Though Destiny and I gave permission to the class, emphasizing that they should and could speak even in oppositional ways at the forum, and even though other adults, like Dr. Mitchell and Dr. Stovall, clearly set

the path for English Amped students to speak, Tristen likely heard those messages as contradictions to his more enduring sense of the world. Yet Bri'Yonna's exchange with the panelist, heightened as it was by its performativity, took on the force of a convincing reality for Tristen. For the version of the world that we imagined in English Amped, a world in which youth could stand up and speak among adults, to hold any real currency, it would have to take on the force of reality.

While the presence of strangers was important to confer upon the forum a sense of publicity, constructed in part by what Michael Warner (2010) calls "stranger-relationality" (p. 90), there was also a sense of in-group familiarity among English Amped members in the midst of this public event. The contrast of stranger-relationality with more intimate group familiarity was an important pre-condition of Tristen's realization. Even though he did not speak at the summit, he refers to "our voices," revealing a sense of affiliation and proximity with Bri'Yonna that connects her speech act with his potential speech acts. Such movements in what seems possible, according to Ramón Rivera-Servera (2012), are preconditioned by "affective economies" (p. 95). That is, being together with others opens dispositions - in Raymond Williams' terms, "structures of feeling," - that can bridge differences, moving social actors towards new arrangements, if only fleetingly (p. 20). Like the Latinx queer performances that Rivera-Servera (2012) describes in *Performing Queer Latinidad*, English Amped enabled *convivencia diaria*, a sense of being among and with others over time that is productive of youth experiencing themselves as social actors, "not as a narrative of identity, but as a feeling, an insight or an embodied experience of who we are or who we might become in the collective social sharing of the performance event" (Rivera-Servera, p. 39). In this case, the circulation of affect combined with the political

identity that Tristen and Bri'Yonna shared as youth to create a powerful sense of an “us,” allowing Tristen to internalize Bri'Yonna's action as belonging to his own repertoire of possible actions.

The combination of affect, youth identity, and heightened meaning making before an audience of strangers combined to create a performative force, ultimately changing Tristen's reality. As Judith Butler (1997) explains, speech performs reality by interpellations that rest at the intersection of bodies and naming. Butler writes:

One need only consider the way in which the history of having been called an injurious name is embodied, how the words enter the limbs, craft the gesture, bend the spine. One need only consider how racial or gendered slurs live and thrive in and as the flesh of the addressee, and how slurs accumulate over time, dissimulating their history, taking on the semblance of the natural, configuring and restricting the *doxa* that counts as 'reality.' (p. 159)

Butler (1997, 1999), following Derrida's notion of citationality (1988), describes how social scripts become internalized, inscribed into bodies through a repetition and recirculation in which speech, gesture, and texts of all kinds are “cited” with a force that can seem to sediment as “reality” through normative performances of identity. For Tristen, the identity of “youth” had functioned as a normative social script that assigns youth bodies a proper place from which it is neither possible nor desirable to talk back to adults in authority. The social script of youth compliance and deference to adults can thus function as an ideology inscribed into the bodies of youth who come to expect themselves to “sit down” in a passive way.

As I argue in Chapter Two, this expectation of passivity, or conversely, tactical rebellion, and a loss of confidence in one's own wisdom, describes a normative experience in many urban schools where knowledge is alienated from experience and where working class youth of color are simultaneously abandoned and surveilled by a system that

disconnects adults and youth from themselves and one another. To claim one's agency and be confident in one's own wisdom must have felt for Tristen, as for many English Amped students, like a powerful counter to such normative experiences and their accompanying messages of inferiority. In this way, performances of possibility awaken agency in those for whom agency has been denied. As Madison (1999) explains, "*A performance of possibility* strives to reinforce to audience members the 'web' of citizenship and the possibilities of their individual selves as agents and change makers" (p. 479). Indeed, such moments of performative awakening are not an end unto themselves, but rather moments that build solidarity among participants towards other ends. Jill Dolan (2001) describes such moments as "utopian performatives," which Rivera-Servera (2012) describes as "moments in performance that allow us to experience or feel the world as it should be" (p. 35). While the moment Tristen described represented a conflict, it nevertheless worked to "generate a felt materiality that instantiates the imaginable into the possible" (Rivera-Servera, 2012, p. 35). The proximity of both strangers and intimates in the heightened space of performance generates moments of newly-framed awareness; this is how such moments of utopic possibility are felt and transmitted.

Indeed, on the same day as the forum, I went into the restroom and was surprised to find Sonia, a member of our student-teaching group, with tears streaming down her face. When she noticed me enter the restroom, she put her arms around me and said, "I can't believe this is happening." Though I comforted her in the moment I later wrote in my field notes that I was unsure about what was in fact happening for her. I asked her a year-and-a-half later, on January 6, 2016, and she explained to me that her outburst in the restroom that day was because she felt for the first time that it was possible to change things. She

told me about growing up hearing elders say, “We’ve got to change things, change, change,” but she had never truly believed she could be part of something that would transform the injustices she saw in the world around her. Now, suddenly, she was beginning to see that she could be a part of such change, and it evoked such a joyful and overwhelming feeling that it sent her into the bathroom in tears.

In the meantime, Tristen really did begin to carry himself differently with adults. In an interview on March 12, 2015, he describes his own surprise about a conversation he had with his computer teacher:

I actually sat down and talked to her. When I did that, this is actually what she said: ‘Oh my god, Tristen! I never knew you were such a deep thinker.’ [I laugh.] We were talking about zero tolerance policies. At first, she did what a lot of teachers would do when I brought that up; she said, if we did not learn how to follow rules in school, just simple rules, then how were we going to be able to follow them like in the workplace and stuff? And so I started telling her these events on how it actually came about, and how a lot of teachers are misusing it, and on that she actually got an *understanding* of it, why a lot of people feel it is not a good thing. And then I told her about the research project I am doing on it, and so after that it just blew her mind, and now she’s expecting a lot out of me! [We both laugh.] Now she expects me to stay on my game, and if I start slacking, I will get fussed at!

Tristen was clearly surprised and thrilled about what he perceived as a newfound freedom to have an “actual” conversation with his teacher, one in which he could offer a perspective that pushed past what he saw as a rote teacher response that would have otherwise shut down the conversation. Like the adults and professionals who Tristen remembers as applauding Bri’Yonna, he is pleased that the computer teacher was moved by his words, even to the extent that it “blew her mind.” As Tristen sensed that this teacher held respect for him, he seemed to draw pleasure from the idea that the teacher would expect more from him; even the prospect of being “fussed at” elicited Tristen’s enthusiasm. What this enthusiasm reveals is the hunger that young people feel to be *known* and *prized* by adults,

to be listened to by adults who will take their ideas seriously, and from this mutual respect to be cared for by adults who expect enough of young people to fuss at them when they are not living up to high expectations. Tristen was able to perform the possibility of this kind of student-teacher relationality and thus engage his computer teacher in a new form of relationship with him. Tristen's research on zero tolerance policies clearly gave him a sense of authority in the conversation with his computer teacher, a sense that he could speak up because he possessed a rightful claim to the actual. The use of research to speak truth to power was an ongoing method we used in English Amped to scaffold our performances of possibility.

Situating Polyvocal Research as Critical Co-Performance

The "right to research," as Arjun Appadurai (2006) explains, is about ensuring equitable access to "the tools through which any citizen can systemically increase that stock of knowledge which they consider most vital to their survival as human beings and to their claims as citizens" (p. 168). For Appadurai, research in its most basic sense means to increase one's knowledge, and is "an essential capacity for democratic citizenship" that is critically linked to the "capacity to aspire...to plan, hope, desire, and achieve socially valuable goals" (p. 176). For English Amped, research was a critical methodology that not only enabled student to increase literacies and skills, but also fostered social imagination and mutual agency, a capacity to aspire together. As Appadurai argues, the "capacity to aspire" engendered by research is of great importance in a rapidly-changing world where the ability to gain and produce new knowledge is essential for survival. I would add that the need for people to collectively aspire, and to produce knowledge in service of that collective aspiration, is essential to building the kinds of social formations and institutions

in which we truly desire to work and live. Knowledge and aspiration that move from the bottom up are more important than ever in public education, as disaster discourses about failing schools are manufactured to institute rapid, sweeping reforms with very little input or planning from the communities most affected, as has been the case in places like Detroit and New Orleans over the last decade. If we do not understand the right of everyday people to research, and therefore to frame knowledge and recommend courses of action, we leave intact a prevailing division of labor in which academics produce knowledge and professionals implement that knowledge, ultimately leaving the young people, communities, and increasingly de-professionalized teaching force most affected by adverse educational policies without the means to document, reframe, and assert their own realities.

My own research questions are underscored by the realization that it would mean very little for me alone, or even for the narrowly-selected knowledge communities of the university, to understand the limits and possibilities of an “amplified” English classroom. My research questions matter inasmuch as they are connected to the needs, knowledges, and aspirations of my collaborators. Research as a pedagogical tool offered my students and colleagues a vocabulary and set of tools for making sense of my research inquiry, for inquiring with and alongside me and one another, and for performing, in a polyvocal and multi-directional way, other possibilities for English education in an urban school.

Throughout the year, we created a context for English Amped students and undergraduate teacher candidates to design and carry out critical participatory action research (CPAR) projects. CPAR is defined as collaborative, community-based research that is designed “to interrogate the gap between dominant ideologies and human lives, using

deeply participatory methodologies accountable to the goals of social justice” (Torre, Fine, Stoudt & Fox, 2012, p. 171). CPAR builds on the work of critical theorists such as Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Freire, who contend that the ways that knowledge is produced and controlled often function to preserve inequities of power. CPAR is, therefore, a “radical epistemological challenge to the traditions of social science, most critically on the topic of where knowledge resides” (Fine, 2005, p. 215). CPAR is not a method so much as an ethic that presumes critical knowledge to be located not solely among few legitimized “experts,” but rather, among people whose indigenous, or local, knowledges too often remain unauthorized by formal gatekeeping institutions and modes of knowing. Per McIntyre (2000), there are three principles guiding CPAR:

- 1) The collective investigation of a problem
- 2) The reliance on indigenous knowledge to better understand that problem
- 3) The desire to take individual and/or collective action to deal with the stated problem (p. 128)

While university-credentialed researchers often initiate and partner with participant researchers in collaborative CPAR projects, such work is ideally co-designed from the floor up with indigenous participant knowledge informing research questions, methods, analysis, and the purposes for which the research is used (Public Science Project, 2014).

I do not contend that my research within this study is itself an example of CPAR, but, rather, that students developed CPAR projects within the context of English Amped. Other teachers, including pre-service teacher candidates, Destiny, Sue, and a handful of community partners, worked alongside English Amped students and undergraduate teacher candidates on their research, sometimes as teacher-guides and sometimes as collaborators. The vocabulary and praxis of research that students gained as a systemic way to inquire and analyze empirical data framed the possibility of research as a form of

dialogic co-performance between us. As Dwight Conquergood explains in “Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance” (1982), “Dialogical performance is a way of having intimate conversation with other people and other cultures. Instead of speaking about them, one speaks to and with them” (p. 10). As students came to perform identities as researchers alongside my identity as a researcher in the classroom, some of the power differentials between us were mitigated by the emergence of a shared identity. In this way, there was a multi-directional, polyvocal dimension to English Amped as an environment in which we researched not always *with* one another, but at the very least, *among* one another. The differences between my voice and the voices of my students, who were participants and co-researchers alongside me, did not need to be collapsed in such polyvocality. As Madison (2012) explains, “Dialogical performance means that one is a cop performer rather than a participant-observer... It is to... *incorporate* rather than *gaze over* (p. 186, Madison’s emphasis). English Amped thus functioned as a context for polyvocal research as a form of multi-directional speaking and listening in which many people framed questions that mattered in their lives and built knowledge through research with and alongside one another.

In the previous section, Tristen explains to his computer teacher that he was doing research on zero tolerance policies. That was during the 2014-2015 school year, when Tristen was part of an English Amped CPAR group that called themselves “Civil Writes Enforcers.” Their more general inquiry about Black criminalization in the fall of 2014 led to a project in which they tracked customer perceptions of racial profiling in three corner stores within walking distance of Frazier High School. In the 2015-2016 school year, Tristen framed a senior CPAR project with Ronnie, his friend and classmate, in which they

asked how Black intimate relationships were shaped by the expectations of Black masculinity. It was not until the last day of school in his senior year, in May 2016, that I understood to what extent these research projects rose from Tristen's deeply held questions about his own life. We had spent the day at a retreat at Destiny's house, where the class gathered to celebrate and say tearful words of good-bye to one another. Destiny and I gave each of the students awards, which we named somewhat creatively to express each person's individual talents and contributions. We gave Tristen the "Black Intellectual Award" because it was his tendency to read deeply and engage in lengthy conversations and ambitious writing projects, and because it was his style to giggle over episodes of the *Boondocks*, listen to jazz on oversized headphones with the enthusiasm of a serious trumpet player, and sport a camouflage jacket with an air of retro-Black coolness. Tristen asked me for a ride home after the retreat. As I drove, he talked, and it seemed to me that he had an urgent need to tell me a story, which he began as he often began stories, by starting as far back as he could. This story began with his ancestors, whom he explained were Irish slave owners who enslaved African people and eventually formed a line of mixed-race descendants. My field notes on May 5, 2016 describe what he told me:

He described the pain of always being the lightest-skinned person in his early school years. Unlike his sister, who excelled at academics and went to magnet schools, Tristen didn't perform well in school and found himself in the 'traditional' schools, which were more racially segregated than the magnets, and where because of his skin color, Tristen experienced a lot of bullying from his peers. As a kid and young adolescent Tristen felt like he had to prove his Blackness by acting tough, resisting school, and getting in trouble. He described how he got sent to TOR [time out room] on a regular basis, though his parents never knew because the school did not report it to his parents. He'd be walking down the hall to TOR and people would say, 'Where are you going?' and though inside he was dreading going to TOR, he felt proud to say where he was going because he knew it would earn him respect. His friendships, he told me, were painful experiences in which he was often the bottom dog, the butt of the joke. So, by the time he got to high school, he was pretty checked

out of school, used to getting in trouble, getting by with minimal effort. He hadn't really ever felt checked in or interested until English Amped.

As Tristen shared this perspective on his life with me, I began to understand how deeply his interest in questions of Black criminalization and masculinity ran, indeed, how these projects had facilitated a space for Tristen to free himself from ideologies that had settled into his consciousness from early on. The Black intellectual within Tristen had not been affirmed in his schooling experiences prior to English Amped, and his passionate inquiries into the construction of Black masculinity and criminalization were connected to wounds he had carried across his childhood to the edge of adulthood. Though Tristen had written numerous personal narratives and poems about how his life and research intersected prior to this conversation, he had never shared this story with me before, and I suspected that he had only just begun to put these parts together for himself.

In that car ride home, Tristen also described to me, as many English Amped students had that day, how Mrs. Cooper and I had been like mothers to them over the two years we worked together. Tristen seemed to marvel at this, telling me, "I never thought anyone else could be to me like what my mother is" (5.5.2015). As with other youth in English Amped, I did not always feel comfortable when mothering, parenting, or even family metaphors were invoked by students, though they often were. Not only is family tricky psychological territory, filled with projections and sometimes abusive or dysfunctional dynamics, but the comparison seems to overstate the relationship. Offering rides home, feedback on writing, encouragement and a listening ear did not equal being a parent to Tristen, and I think he knew that, as did I. Yet young people in English Amped often made this kind of comparison.

I suspect there are two factors involved in how students invoked the kinship metaphors to describe teacher-student and peer relationships in English Amped. First,

there are few models for the kind of liminal youth development work that Destiny and I did with our students; we were teachers of skills and knowledges, but we were also explicitly invested in students on a personal level, and willing to go out of our way at times to look after their needs. We exceeded the typical professional requirements of teachers in this sense; yet, we were not merely friends to our students. They understood that our role was to care for them, and not the other way around. This kind of adult-youth relationship evoked a sense of kinship for many, though not all, of our students. Second, we made explicit connections to students' families whenever possible. I reached out to parents and other family members before the class even began, opening lines of communication with whomever would return my calls. Tristen's mother responded warmly to this open line of communication. She included me on group text messages with her circle of friends, spent time explaining her family's history to me, and later reached out on numerous occasions when Tristen was sick or needed extra support in school. Before I even met Tristen, I had a sense of his mother's concerned gaze over him, and I felt the weight of responsibility to care for her child in a way that was continuous with her ways of expressing care for him. This feeling changed how I regarded this initially quiet young man, and I imagine it shaped the course of our relationship, making me a trusted member of Tristen's world, someone who regarded him with enough respect to be able to fuss at him from time to time, but also to be witness to his stories. He clearly relished opportunities to explain his life to me, and my role as a researcher was in that sense synonymous for Tristen with my role as a teacher and someone who, like his mother, acted as a caretaker. The use of family metaphors to describe our relationships in *English Amped* therefore stemmed from the ways Destiny and I performed caring functions for young people, and whenever possible, connected with

other adults in their lives who did the same. This extended to various non-familial networks in students' lives, sometimes including church members, mentors, and other young people who were friends to English Amped students. These members of students' kinship networks often visited the classroom, attended events outside of the classroom, and became parts of the extended community of care that we attempted to build within English Amped.

I share the story about Tristen's research to illustrate how close to home many students' CPAR projects ran, and how closely linked these research inquiries were to the most guarded inner worlds of our students, many of whom, like Tristen, chose to take on topics that cut to the core of personal and political struggles. A great deal of trust was needed among members of the English Amped community to facilitate such deep listening to their own lives and one another. One of the ways that such trust was constructed in English Amped was through using research to create a context for listening to one another and "amplifying" our voices.

Throughout the data collection period of this project, I used photography as a method of daily documentation, often inviting students to join me in taking pictures that captured a multiplicity of perspectives within the classroom. These photographs were not only used as data for my analysis, but also to perform a sense of connection and reflexivity within the daily life of our classroom. Destiny and I selected a photograph each day, often sent from student phones or taken by students on one of our phones, which we sometimes left lying around the classroom for that purpose. The chosen photograph was then projected within a Power Point presentation during the next class period, along with a quotation from something someone had said or something we had read in the previous class. Students also

participated in gathering quotations, which were passed to me as the official documentarian of the class whenever someone overheard something interesting from another source or just wanted to get a message out through this simple classroom-based medium. The quotation would be placed under the photograph and read at the end of each class opening meeting, serving to set the tone or provide a meditation or moment of bonding as a lead-in to whatever was happening in class that day. The example in Figure A, from October 30, 2014, provides an example of what these daily Power Points looked like.

The ongoing, collaborative documentation and publicity of our classroom life created a way for students to make sense of my role as a researcher within the classroom. It also gave them a way to contribute to the process of data collection, and in doing so, join me in gathering significant moments worth archiving.

My field notebooks are stuffed with pieces of paper with an array of handwriting that record lines overheard in class. Many quotes are excerpted from class dialogues, such as, “Schools are supposed to be a safe haven for students, not something they resent” (Saida, 2.18.15). Others reflect playful braggadocio and inside jokes: “I’m not a show off; I’m just that good” (Bryston, 2.20.15), and “Context clues! Figure it out, you’re smart!” (Eric, 3.3.15). Others quotes offer bits of poetry intended to shape class culture, for example, “Step up, step back, and let the soft-

English Amped

ERIC: Man, this class feels like college sometimes.

JAYLON: Yeah, we don't talk about these things in other classes.

Today's Agenda

Thursday, 10/30
Set Up: PAR Groups

6th:

- ✧ Opening Meeting, Historians, Vocab, Agenda, Reflection
- ✧ PAR Reading Group Session

7th:

- ✧ Counting Circle
- ✧ Reading/Writing Studio

Reminders

- ✓ Portfolios due Friday. Only two Writing Studios left this week. Do you need to work on your portfolio at home?

Figure 1: Daily class Power Point from 10.30.14.

spoken rise" (Kaiya, 10.27.14). Many of the quotes simply reflect and perform moments of well-being and satisfaction, such as, "I'm not going to lie, I kind of was enjoying school for a little bit today" (Devanté, 10.30.15). The daily, ritualized presence of images and quotes on daily Power Points gave documentation a performative and pedagogical function by translating the everyday embodied presence and utterances of people within the classroom into texts that could be cited and re-performed in new contexts. There were also occasions when my field notes took on explicitly pedagogical functions, such as when I read back passages from field notes to students as they struggled to translate their thoughts from discussion to writing. In this way, the record I was keeping as a researcher enabled a form of meta-reflection among the larger collective.

This pedagogical use of documentation borrows from the Reggio Children schools in Italy, where documentation is used to create "a context of multiple listening" integral to the processes of learning and fostering learning communities (Rinaldi, 2001, p. 82). In the Reggio Children approach, documentation is not collected to provide evidence at an endpoint in the learning process; rather, it interacts with and amplifies the learning process through a spiral of observation, interpretation, and documentation that is inserted into the process of learning itself. Teaching and researching become synonymous as teachers observe, interpret, and document student activity, and then share that documentation with students, thus modifying and enriching the conceptual maps through which students make meaning and find value. Rinaldi writes, "Ours is a different way of thinking and approaching the child, whom we view as an active subject with us to explore, to try day by day to understand something, to find a meaning, a piece of life" (p. 79). From this perspective, documentation not only reflects meaning and value, it also engenders meaning

and value. Documentation is seen as “visible listening, as the construction of traces...that not only testify to the children’s learning paths and processes, but also make them possible because they are visible” (Rinaldi, 2001, p. 83). By making visible not only the relationship between learners and their objects of study, but also the act of listening to students, documentation functioned to center students’ experiences and learning processes.

The choice of one image or quotation above others in the daily Power Point meant that value was given to some things and not others. As Rinaldi (2001) explains, “Documentation is this process, which is dialectic, based on affective bonds and also poetic; it not only accompanies the knowledge-building process but in a certain sense impregnates it” (p. 86). This view understands documentation as a tool that amplifies underlying values. All research does this; however, this process, which was open to multiple members of the community, did not suppress the interpretive and value-laden aspects of research. In a small way, it invited more people into the interpretive process of documenting and co-performing the classroom. This approach turns extractive notions of research upside down. Rather than merely mining data from within a given community to advance agendas set outside of that community, such as my agenda to use this research to receive a doctoral degree, this was a form of research that also re-performed valued images and utterances back into the context of the immediate community from which they came.

Upsetting the Set Up: Acting as Insurgent Architects

The performances of possibilities that took place through English Amped, the sense of trust and confidence in one another and in our collective agency to produce knowledge and to aspire, were produced by processes that were pedagogical. In other words, choices were made, primarily by teachers, about what to read, what activities and assignments to engage

in, and how to structure the use of time and space in the classroom. However, English Amped's many performances of possibility also stemmed from classroom infrastructures, the way in which the environment itself was produced to allow students to "own their own literacy," as we came to phrase it within the English Amped classroom. Inasmuch as the aim was to produce more emancipatory conditions and relations of power than those I describe in Chapter Two, we needed to "upset the set up," as Dr. Stovall put it in his visit to our classroom on September 19, 2014. Upsetting the set up meant more than reimagining curriculum. It also meant the reconstruction of power dynamics and forms of relationality between students and teachers, and among students. This would mean acting as insurgent architects, building a space "in the school, not of the school" in which critical forms of knowing and being together could be called upon to remake school-based forms of relationality.

Before Destiny and I could begin to define the approaches that we would use to structure English Amped, we needed to first identify our goals. In March 2014, before English Amped would begin the following fall, we introduced the goals of the program to members of the high school's administrators and English faculty. Our written agenda indicated that the aims of English Amped were to "boost student engagement and literacy learning" and "find mutually beneficial ways to connect the university with Frazier." These official aims were not out of synch with the more robust goals we later developed, but their language was tailored to mirror the accepted rhetoric of achievement that is commonplace in educational settings. It was a few months later, on May 23, 2014, that Destiny and I completed a document that articulated the goals and intentions we brought to English Amped (See Appendix B). The writing of this document was an exercise in

clarity, trust-building and collaboration between the two of us. We never showed it to anyone else. We structured the document by identifying the kinds of participants who would be involved in English Amped, and described what we believed they would gain. These participants included students at Frazier, families of Frazier students, students in the undergraduate teacher education program at South State University, teachers at Frazier, Destiny, professors and graduate students at South State, me, and both Frazier and South State as institutions. For example, we wrote:

Students at Frazier High School will develop . . . a love for literacy and for one another. They will experience literacy as a means to think, imagine, and take action informed by critical insight. They will have gained intellectual and social tools that are transferrable to multiple contexts in their present and future lives. Lastly, they will demonstrate some aspects of what they learn and achieve using multiple methods of documentation, including academic measurements.

South State University will have increased its capacity to build and sustain collaborative relationships with Frazier High School. By doing so, relationships and projects will have begun to take root among multiple stakeholders at each site, in some cases independent of the direct coordination of English Amped. We want South State and Frazier to tap into each other in ways that systemically improve teacher development (for pre-service and current teachers) and in ways that open the possibility of relationships and knowledge between faculty, students and community on both campuses. We want South State to embrace and make visible the praxis that results from forming and sustaining such relationships, recognizing this work as vital to South State's own mission and viability.

As beneficial, and in some senses, as tame, as these goals may have been to Frazier and South State, Destiny and I did not feel that our project would be taken seriously or given passage through the mazes of bureaucracy within the school system if we openly declared our agenda, which started and ended with words like "love" and "praxis." By couching our goals in language that reflected the language and goals of the school system, we gained access to institutional resources and forums - in a sense, to "the master's tools." This act of translation could be viewed as a failure to broaden the accepted ways in which educational

institutions view student academic achievement. Yet, as David Harvey (2005) argues, insurgent architecture is an art of translation (p. 234). While we had very little interest in reproducing narrowly-conceived discourses, the ability to inhabit the space of school meant inhabiting the discourses of student achievement as an entry point.

Another example of how we inhabited discourses in order to transform them as we proposed English Amped to school administrators had to do with our desire to untrack the English Amped class. Some members of the school's administration did not believe that seats in the program, which held the potential for boosting academic achievement, should be used for already high-achieving students. This attitude seemed to reflect an entrenched belief, supported by a long history of policy and practice in the local school system, that academic tracking reflects a natural and beneficial grouping process. After realizing that we were not going to win this argument in the first meeting, Destiny and I decided to make our case by developing a rubric for recruitment and selection criteria, in which we cited educational research showing that no group of students has been found to benefit consistently from homogeneously sorted academic groups, and that the learning of average- and low-performing students is negatively affected by homogeneous placements (Boaler, 2007; Humphreys & Sebba et al, 2007; Oakes, 1985). When we returned to the school to present this document, the question about whether we would be allowed to include students from multiple academic tracks was quickly dropped.

This incident provides a small but interesting example of how cross-institutional relationships restructure the process through which policies and practices are interpreted and designed. As a teacher working within a hierarchical chain of command at the school, Destiny would have been unable to shift the prevailing policy if she were not working in

partnership with someone authorized by another set of institutional priorities and procedures. By backing our appeal to include students from multiple tracks with academic research, and contextualizing this research within the ongoing imperative presented by my dissertation project, we were able to invoke the high status of the university and its authorizing knowledge to affect a small, temporary change in policy within the local secondary school setting. This example points to what Gerald Campano and Lenny Sánchez have called “the ephemeral nature of policies” (2010, p. 206), which ultimately become tenuous abstractions, unable to carry the weight and meaning of context once they are removed from the particular situational and relational dynamics that articulate their value. Hierarchical policies passed from the top down attempt to deny this ephemerality by imposing regimes of meaning that systemically disregard context. The ephemerality of policy allowed us to practice a politics of insurgent translation using research as a discourse of power coupled with the rubric of selection criteria, a genre that suggested a form of rationalism that was both familiar and respected in the secondary school setting.

In August of 2014, just before the school year began, Destiny and I reached out to students and their families to invite them to an evening of English Amped orientation. Because Destiny and I were still just beginning to clarify our intentions for ourselves, we struggled to figure out how to communicate them in a way that would match the interests and forms of discourse familiar to our incoming students and their families. In some senses, the gathering we held in the school library on August 7, 2014 could be described as a *disorientation*, which was, perhaps, generative, as this group of people began to create an “us” that could figure things out together. After the event, I wrote of my perception that we had begun to move into another sphere:

When we [Destiny and I] introduced one another the feeling in the room seemed to really shift from awkward meeting to one of greater connection and trust. Maybe this has something to do with our first basis for doing the work being grounded in a friendship and trust in one another? We laid that out in pretty clear terms, and people seemed moved to see us praising each other that way. How rare is that in a 'professional' space? In the morning when Destiny introduced me as her friend in the faculty meeting, I sort of cringed because it seemed so inappropriate, but at the parent meeting it seemed to propel us into a sphere where personal relationships would be the norm. (8.7.14)

As this passage from my notes demonstrates, I felt the discomfort of being identified as a "friend" in the professionally-defined space of the school's faculty meeting; however, in the more community-gearred space of the family orientation, invoking friendship became a signal that relationships were an explicit value of the space we were trying to create.

I also write in my field notes that "we seemed to have accidentally invoked church" (8.7.14). By the end of the evening, parents were testifying to one another. Jazmyne's mom stood up and vouched for us to the other parents, based on her daughter's experiences in the spoken word poetry program that I had previously worked with. She also promised that she would help to look out for everyone's child, a promise that she later acted on at several key moments. In the parking lot after the event, I asked people who were lingering if they needed anything, and they told me not to worry - they were "fellowshipping." This word choice invoked the Black church, a major force of community life in The South. The evening had disoriented the business-like norms of school-based relationships and reoriented people towards a genre of being together that is more typical of the local culture's voluntary, intergenerational community spaces.

The themes of dis- and re-orientation continued into the school year. Throughout the first year of English Amped, we incorporated activities that disrupted what I came to call "the genre of schoolwork," meaning rote pencil and paper tasks that are often

decontextualized from outcomes other than skill building for the sake of school-based assessment. In other words, “the genre of schoolwork” signaled activities that produced outcomes that only mattered in the context of school. It is not that we never did schoolwork as such, but rather that we also spent a lot of time doing activities that looked and felt not-like-schoolwork. We



Figure Two: Class Party in September 2014.

played theater games, we went outside sometimes to count in unison how many times we could keep a ball volleying in the air between us, we ate numerous birthday cakes, offered toasts, and threw potluck parties with sing-alongs and dancing. Even some of our academic skill building looked less like classwork and more like an afterschool program’s version of school: comic books and You Tube videos, writing prompted by story circles and movement activities. On the first day of school, while other teachers were going over syllabi and being careful not to seem like pushovers, we were playing games and telling stories. A class photo (Figure Two), taken just a few weeks into the fall semester, shows something of the jubilation that students and teachers felt as we got to know one another and claim the possibilities of other ways of being together in school.

The first few weeks of our school year were marked with the euphoria of liminality. At the thresholds of new configurations, we stood in that space that Victor Turner (1969)

so aptly describes as “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (pg. 95). We had interrupted the habitual performance of school by changing the pattern of relationships, inviting multiple adults into the classroom who could alternate roles as participants and leaders, upsetting the dynamic of a single adult authority with multiple youth neophytes. By bringing together students from differently-positioned achievement tracks, we reordered the hidden curriculum of individual achievement and competition to prioritize relationality and cooperation across difference. These disruptions and disorientations produced an experience of what Turner (1969) calls *comunitas*, a time and space “in and out of secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition...of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties” (p. 96). *Comunitas* is a temporal space in which otherwise differently-positioned people become disoriented enough to recognize an intersubjectivity that is usually obscured by structural forces. *Comunitas* instantiates that moment in time in which Maxine Greene’s (1985) aspiration for teachers and students to “appear before one another” becomes, while impermanent, possible (p. 69).

While moments of *comunitas* wove throughout our time together that year and the next, the first few weeks of school held what seemed to be especially utopic promises. Other than setting aside time for required district pre-tests during the second week of school, our opening classes were designed to “amplify” the four core practices that we would engage throughout the year (reading, writing, research, and publication), and to get maximum student input regarding what they wanted from each of those practices. Grades

were never discussed during those first few weeks, and there was very little school work in the traditional sense of reading academic texts and writing in academic genres.

Week two of class ended in celebration. Students worked in groups to complete a publication challenge in which each group created a text to be published in class on August 22. Though the subject matter was left open, each of the four groups chose to write about their first two weeks in class. As they shared their writing through performances and handouts, the euphoria of becoming a community filled the room. One group wrote and performed a song. Before her group's performance, Alyson explained:

"Y'all, I don't rap." She then began to rap, "We the second week in and we so tight. We done laughed and cried and we feel alright. We had confessions on Monday."

Mira jumps in: "I'm so sorry!"

Alyson continues: "Church on Tuesday."

Mira: "Preach girl!"

Alyson: "Struggles on Wednesday"

Mira: "I can't! I need!"

Alyson: "A debate on Thursday and a cypher on Friday ... Even though we just met about a week agoooo!"

Deuce comes in for a solo: "In ELA, guess what, we all tight, son. You know we all get along, we don't fight, son! Mrs. Cooper and Ms. West got it on lock, son! We wrote a contract and it's on lock, son! We ELA, that's who we are."

He drops his paper and freestyles to the jubilation of the class. Deuce's freestyle rapping, a gift that he shared for the first time that day, would later become a ritual of celebration in the two years this group was together. The rest of the group danced behind Alyson, Mira,

and Deuce, except for Ronnie, who stood a little awkwardly off to the side. At the end of the performance, the group gathered around Ronnie, who showed a half smile, causing everyone to cheer in triumph. The shyest student in class, who had at that time yet to speak above a whisper to anyone, was part of the fun now too.

Destiny and I met on Sunday, August 24, 2014 to put together a plan for the remainder of the six-week period. We reviewed input on what students wanted that we had collected from students over the first two weeks of school. We had purposely only planned through the first two weeks, and knew that we needed to define some curriculum and infrastructure at this point that could provide a sense of a routine and purpose to the classroom. A sense of anxiety that I write about in Chapter Four was just beginning to appear behind the euphoric destabilization of new beginnings. We decided that our first foothold into a critical curriculum would be cracking open a set of epistemological questions about how knowledge is constructed and validated from various vantage points. We planned activities and assignments using the adaptation for young people of Howard Zinn's *People's History of the United States* (Zinn and Steffoff, 2009), focusing on the critical retelling of Columbus' "discovery" of the Americas. We also planned an elder oral history video project and student story circles using the prompt, "Tell about a time when someone in a position of power saw you differently than you saw yourself," to illustrate the conflict between "official" knowledge and knowledge constructed from different vantage points. These activities and concepts set the stage for critical participatory action research (CPAR), which we introduced in mid-September just before the forum at South State that began this chapter. CPAR would then be the curricular through-line that defined how the rest of the year was structured, as we moved through developing topics, doing background research,

developing research projects, collecting and analyzing data, and creating research presentations.

In our planning meeting two weeks into the school year, Destiny and I also began to craft some of the classroom structures that we believed would allow the classroom to function as an open system in which students held decision-making power and responsibility over aspects of classroom life. Using an approach that critical science educator Christopher Emdin (2016) calls *cosmopolitanism*, which focuses on “allowing students to feel as though they’re not just guests in the school, but active participants in how these spaces operate” (“Cosmopolitanism,” para. 1), we crafted job opportunities for which students could apply and then be appointed to carry out daily classroom functions, including taking attendance, facilitating daily class meetings, documenting classroom life, and greeting guests. I had already used this approach in college classrooms to some success after hearing Emdin talk about how he designed classroom jobs in 2013. We also created a format for students to be elected to serve on class committees intended to shape various responsibilities that sprang from student suggestions, such as publications, field trips, documentation, and fundraising.

We defined a segment of class time to stand apart as a student-directed “Open Reading and Writing Studio,” in which students could, as our first handout on this process describes it, “choose their own literacy adventures” in reading, writing, publication, or community organizing. While options were offered as jumping-off points, students were free to create their own projects and set their own goals. These structures were designed to position students as decision-makers and agents of classroom life. As Leif Gustavson (2007) argues, curriculum infrastructures differ from the alternative, curriculum

structures, in which “the potential for learning only exists in what is delivered by the teacher” (p. 157). In other words, curriculum structures are teacher-driven methods for delivery of content, for example, our teacher-designed assignment for students to read a particular selection of *Young People’s History of the United States*. Curriculum infrastructure, on the other hand, refers to:

The rituals, routines, activities, forms of evaluation and assessment, and criteria that make it possible for specific kinds of work and learning to happen. An infrastructure shows students what they have the freedom to do within an identified intellectual boundary, often taking the form of a discipline . . . (Gustavson, 2007, p. 156).

By scaffolding open-ended curriculum infrastructures alongside more predetermined curriculum choices, students took part in teacher-directed activities, but also experienced autonomy and self-direction in other activities.

BriHop explains the appeal of open-ended infrastructures such as Open Reading and Writing Studio:

Reading and writing studio is my favorite thing. I like freedom. It gives us so much freedom. We can just sit back and write what we want, and how we want it. . . . It seems like we get a lot done - well, I got that backwards. It doesn’t seem like we do a lot, but at the end when you really look at it, we get a lot of stuff done. We have certain things where it’s like, ‘Wait, we did all this?’ Especially last portfolio. It was like, we have five days, do I really have something to publish? Do I really have an academic writing? I was like, ‘I do, I have all this.’ I didn’t even notice that I had it all. All I needed to do was pull it out and put it in the binder. I like portfolios. I can see that I did that. I wrote that.

As BriHop explains, the opportunity to produce work freely, while it sometimes led to a sense of meandering, helped students to slowly build a body of writing over which they felt a sense of ownership. Students had to demonstrate their work through portfolios that were due every six weeks, and in which they were expected to show that they had written and revised multiple pieces of writing in both academic and creative genres. As BriHop points out, some students did not even realize how much they had produced. When this approach

worked well, it allowed students to find and follow their own passions, only to look back later and realize that they had accomplished something that might have seemed overwhelming if they had not been able to enter gradually and on their own terms.

Approaches to curriculum that make school more like “real life” are linked to the ideals of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century progressive education movement. Activities like opening meetings, committees, and Open Reading & Writing Studio mirror “real life” in how they position students to produce things of immediate and intrinsic value. For example, students used the daily opening meeting not merely as an exercise for future meetings they might participate in outside of school, but to communicate news and negotiate needs in the present. Students used Open Reading & Writing Studio to read about work opportunities after high school and write poems to be performed at community events. The purposes for reading and writing could be as frivolous or pragmatic as students wanted them to be. These purposes reflect the idea of school as an institution that facilitates participation in a social world, rather than as one that merely transmits knowledge *about* that world. This goal is articulated in John Dewey’s 1897 “My Pedagogical Creed”:

I believe that much of present education fails because it neglects this fundamental principle of the school as a form of community life. It conceives the school as a place where certain information is to be given, where certain lessons are to be learned, or where certain habits are to be formed. The value of these is conceived as lying largely in the remote future; the child must do these things for the sake of something else he is to do; they are mere preparation. As a result they do not become a part of the life experience of the child and so are not truly educative. (para. 10)

The ideal of “school as a form of community life” is one in which students do not merely prepare for a future world in which they will *do* English (or any other subject matter), but one in which students *do* subject matter as “a form of community life” in the here and now.

Curriculum infrastructures, as we applied them in English Amped, became means to facilitate such community life. Infrastructures such as Open Reading and Writing Studio, class jobs, and the “Featured Artists’ Friday” open mics that we held nearly every week, created ways for students to engage in citizenship and literacy for myriad personal, social, political, and economic purposes, and to build on one another’s efforts towards common goals. These practices broadened the English curriculum and often pushed students to imagine new possibilities for their own literacy practices.

The daily opening meeting was perhaps the most poignant example of how students performed “school as a form of community life.” Student facilitators led a daily meeting in which class members could share praise, needs, and information. This was a space that allowed for multi-directional ownership of the classroom. As the phrase “community life” suggests, infrastructures like the meeting create a protocol that is bounded enough to produce a “community,” and yet porous enough to facilitate “life” as an open-ended process of being together without being subject to finalized, uncontestable rules imposed from above. Community life neither begins nor ends with the authority of teachers, and students imposed their own improvisational structures and created their own traditions through the openings offered to them in the daily meeting. For example, one of the meeting facilitators in Fall 2014, Saida, ended meetings by swinging her fist forward and declaring in an upbeat tone, “The meeting is closed!” This became a tradition, and when Saida was absent, or later in the year when other students rotated into this job, the signature closing continued. If it did not, someone would almost certainly shout out, “You forgot to close the meeting!” Practices like this one became joyful evidence of student ownership and camaraderie.

In Spring 2015, when students from the first year of English Amped visited tenth grade classes to recruit the following year's English Amped juniors, many started by saying that "students run this class" (field notes, 4.12.15). This way of describing English Amped often struck me as an exaggeration, since students only "ran" portions of the class, and ran those in ways previously established by teachers. It was, nevertheless, a point of pride and enthusiasm for students that they had gained some measure of control and ownership. Likewise, student satisfaction surveys at mid-year and end-of-year consistently ranked Open Reading and Writing Studio as a favorite part of the class, demonstrating how satisfying it was for many students to feel ownership and control over their own learning.

Many of our curriculum practices were rooted in pedagogies usually practiced outside of school, in community-based non-profit organizations and autonomous grassroots groups. These sites are part of a long history of popular education, a field closely linked with political and community organizing and with roots in Gramsci's notion of the "organic intellectual" and Freire's "critical consciousness." In the United States, popular education is most closely associated with the Highlander Folk School, now called the Highlander Research and Education Center, famous for its role in the civil rights movement and its contributions to environmental justice in the Appalachian region. Popular education deemphasizes structural differences between students and teachers, prioritizing approaches in which "education is a collective effort" and "teachers and learners aren't two distinct groups" (Popular Education News, 2005, para. 3). The following definition of popular education, offered by Project South (ctd. in Kaba, Mathew & Haines, n.d.), offers an encompassing framework that articulates many of the orientations of popular education that we attempted to translate into English Amped:

1. [Education for liberation]—Popular education is essential in developing new leadership to build a bottom-up movement for fundamental social change, justice and equality.
2. [Accessible and relevant]—We begin by telling our stories, sharing and describing our lives, experiences, problems and how we feel about them.
3. [Interactive]—We learn by doing: we participate in dialogue and activities that are fun, including cultural arts such as drama, drawing, music, poetry and video.
4. [Education with an attitude]—We are not neutral: through dialogue and reflection we are moved to act collectively—creating change that will solve the problems of those at the bottom in our communities, those of us who are most oppressed, exploited and marginalized.
5. [Egalitarian]—We are equal. All of us have knowledge to share and teach. All of us are listeners and learners, creating new knowledge and relationships of trust as we build for our future.
6. [Historic]—We see our experience within the context of history, indicating where we have come from and where we are going.
7. [Inclusive]—We see ourselves in relation to all people, including those of different ethnic groups and nationalities, social classes, ages, genders, sexualities and abilities.
8. [Consciousness raising]—We critically analyze our experiences, explaining the immediate causes of our problems and discovering the deeper root causes in the structures of the economy, political institutions and culture.
9. [Visionary]—We are hopeful, creating an optimistic vision of the community and global society we want for ourselves and our families.
10. [Strategic]—We are moved to collective action, developing a plan for short-term actions to address the immediate causes of our problems, and long-term movement building to address the root causes of our problems.
11. [Involves the whole person]—We use our head for analysis, reflection, and consciousness; our heart for feeling and vision; and our feet for collective action for the short term and the long haul.

In English Amped, these eleven approaches were central tools of our insurgent architecture. Specific activities we used that reflected these approaches included spoken word poetry performance, guided writing workshops, research rooted in student’s lives, image and forum theater, story circles, guided dialogues, elder interviews, community-building activities, gallery walks, restorative justice circles, peer mediation, dancing, singing, and parties.

The responsibilities that come with having to manage one's own choices were not always easy for English Amped participants to navigate. At times, we succeeded, and at other times we became frustrated and disoriented, as we attempted to translate ways of learning that are not typical of school into a school-based learning environment. The well-worn paths directing all of us towards habituated ways of being together in school posed significant barriers to the legitimacy and stability of community life within the classroom, a topic which I take up at length in Chapter Four. However, before turning to those challenges, it is important to describe some of the ways English Amped participants experienced community to generate solidarity, healing, and hope.

Solidarity, Healing, and Hope

In order to perform possibilities that would have positive academic, social, and political outcomes, participants in English Amped first needed to foster an ability to experience beloved community with one another as a source of social imagination and critical agency. Many of the popular education approaches listed above helped us to generate an element that is not included in Project South's framework: a sense of solidarity, healing, and hope. These affective states are pre-conditions of academic, social, personal, and political well-being, and in many ways, shifting our high school English classroom to make space for these forms of affect was the most radically transformative aspect of English Amped.

During our last gathering as a class at Destiny's house on May 5, 2016, we formed a circle to do what we called "love seat." This was a ritual we had invented on the last day of school the year before in which we pass a lit candle around a circle. Whoever holds the candle sits quietly while each person in the circle shares what they love about the person in

the “love seat.” This final love seat was a serious matter, lasting at least two hours, as each member of the circle sat in the glow of the candle to receive their love from the group. Surprisingly, the first tears to fall that afternoon came from Deuce and Bryston, two young men who had formed an unlikely friendship. Deuce was a drum major for the marching band, a popular and outgoing person who loved music and conversation, a quintessential social butterfly. On the other hand, Bryston was quiet and withdrawn, his head often buried in a thick fantasy novel. In the love seat, Bryston was celebrated by his brother Trey and his close friend Eric for his misanthropic sense of humor; they would often joke to the rest of the class, “Y’all don’t know Bryston, he’s truly an evil genius!” Bryston wrote gothic poetry about death and destruction, listened to heavy metal, and generally hid under a black hoodie that he wore hood-up even on the warmest spring days. Deuce and Bryston were both characters, but were unlikely friends. Yet, at some point during his senior year, Deuce had decided that he was going to make it his mission to get Bryston to open up. This started as a joke, one that often ended with Deuce catching Bryston off guard and hugging him while Bryston groaned in agony. Eventually, this play led to a genuine friendship, which I could see unfolding in their research group during the spring. During the love seat, Bryston told Deuce how surprised he was to learn that Deuce “could actually hang with us.” In other words, he was surprised to find that Deuce had the cultural capital to navigate the nerdy fan culture that Bryston and his friends inhabited. Deuce told Bryston that he was also surprised by the friendship, saying, “I really do love you, man.” Their eyes misted up, and the entire circle erupted in a celebratory, “Awwww!” This kind of unexpected bond between two young high school students, each positioned very differently in the social

world of Frazier High, was part of the dynamic of connection and possibility that unfolded in many corners of English Amped.

For other students, love seat was a time to recognize how the relationships that had formed in English Amped helped people to deal with challenges they faced elsewhere. Dontre'lle, who once half-jokingly described herself to me as “the underdog of the underdogs, because even the underdogs pick on me,” was wrapped in a blanket as she held the candle and listened to the warm words directed at her. She told the group about participating in a story circle during the fall of our first semester together. We were in a nearby city on a field trip with other youth and teachers, and the prompt for the circle was to tell about an experience that changed your life. During love seat, Dontre'lle told the group, “I blurted out your names. I didn't even understand why at the time. Now I get it.” After the love seat, Isabella approached Destiny and I to say she was sorry for how she had closed out the school year. She did not want to sit for an exam and so she left school, proclaiming, “I don't regret anything.” I assured her that I was, if anything, amused by her choice, and knew she was dealing with the consequences of it. I told her, “We all get a chance to grow up, Izzi.” At this she began to cry, and told me how lost she had felt in her life when she first came to Frazier High School, and how much she had come into herself through our class. I told her that I remembered the story she told in the circle on the first day of class, a story about something serious that had caused her to leave her last school. I remembered that she had laughed it off that day, but that Destiny and I knew it was serious, and recognized that she was on a journey to feel whole in her life. For many students like Isabella and Dontre'lle, the silences did not need to be explained. At that point, we had spent two hours a day together for two school years, and we had navigated many

choppy and emotional chapters as we all tried to do work together that we had never done before.

The first time we ever talked openly in English Amped about the emotional content of the class was during the second week of school in 2014. On August 19, just ten days after the police shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, I shared a You Tube video of the poem “Lost Count” by youth poets Nate Marshall, Demetrius Amparan, and Deja Taylor (2009). The subject matter and delivery of the poem are intense, as the poets list the names of young people killed in gun violence and bear witness to the stories of two friends, ultimately suggesting that the violence in their communities is a form of genocide. It was the first text we had used in English Amped that directly merged the political and personal issues faced by young people of color in urban communities, and the dialogue that followed reflected both students’ appreciation for the poem and the hesitancy many felt to embark on such an intense and personal discussion in class.

As we transitioned from the poem into a writing activity, Alyson began to cry, moving to the back of the room where friends tried to comfort her. Destiny and I each checked in to ask if there was something she wanted to tell us, but she could only shake her head and continue crying. We gave her permission to leave the room with a friend, and a little while later she came back, holding tissues and still crying quietly. In the meantime, another student asked to talk with me in the hall, at which point he also began to tear up as he told me about issues he was dealing with outside of school. Just as these two students began to calm down, the class was called to the library to collect their assigned textbooks for the year. On the way downstairs, Destiny and I checked in with one another. Why so much crying, we wondered. We compared notes about each crying student, and realized

that the emotional outpouring was not directly related to the content of the poem. Nevertheless, we wondered if the unexpected introduction of such highly emotional content tapped into feelings that students were usually able to push down. We wondered if, and to what extent, we should address the emotional responses. We did not want to draw attention to the two students who had cried, but we did want to find a way to acknowledge and honor the sudden outpouring of feelings in the classroom.

As the students reassembled, Destiny and I did our best to explain that we were committed to making English Amped a space where people could be more human with one another. Crying is okay here, we explained, because we want this classroom to be a space where we can learn how to be fuller human beings. We asked if students could commit to holding space for one another to have emotional responses, and encouraged students to try to stay in the classroom rather than leaving when they felt overwhelmed. Candice, apparently moved by this invitation, made a declaration to the class: "I love everyone. I know I just met some of y'all . . . but I feel closer to you than some people I've known for years. If anybody in here is going through anything, anything, y'all please let me know." And then she wrote her phone number on the board. This prompted another student to start a contact sheet, which was passed around the room. Candice declared that she would set up a class "Group Me," which would allow students to text one another as a class. I was concerned that some students might not have phones, or might not feel safe giving out their numbers, so I added that people could opt out of the list if they did not feel ready to take that leap. A few did not join, but most did.

That afternoon's sudden emotional outpouring, followed by the commitment of students to care for one another, inaugurated our classroom as a space oriented towards

what Sean Ginwright (2010, 2016) calls radical healing. He writes, “Radical healing refers to a process that builds the capacity of people to act upon their environment in ways that contribute to well-being for the common good” (2016, p. 8). One student’s decision to create a contact list so that all of them could be present to one another outside of school signaled the agency of students to “act upon their environment” by creating a digital space to gather and care for one another away from the surveillance of the school, including the surveillance of the adults in English Amped.

It is hard to say whether students’ impulse to bring the emerging classroom community into a digital sphere was about extending the nurturance of the classroom, or about an implicit disbelief that classrooms could ever genuinely sustain such a healing community. A disbelief in the classroom as a space for genuine connection would not be unreasonable. As Ginwright (2016) explains, the enduring and persistent social traumas that face urban communities of color can be addressed through healing justice, in other words, “social change from the inside-out...(through) self-transformation, healing, hopefulness, and fostering a general sense of well-being” (p. 10). However, while healing justice is critical to well-being at the individual, community, and societal levels, it is typically ignored in urban schools, and even in most youth community organizations. To reorient classrooms towards this kind of work would mean radically reimagining school. While the words of students and teachers on that day demonstrated our desire to transform the classroom into a space of radical healing, the ways in which emotional connections were immediately routed out of the classroom, into the hallway for students who were crying and later onto digital spaces for students to “be there” for one another,

suggests an underlying mistrust that students may have felt about whether a classroom could function as a space for radical healing.

In a personal conversation with Alyson on May 19, 2016, almost two years after the class began, she shared with me that being in English Amped helped her to confront an abusive situation at home, and to finally feel that it was possible and necessary to change that situation. This ironically resulted in her leaving the city and Frazier High School so that she could live with nearby family. Alyson did eventually come to me and Destiny, and to some of her classmates, for support during that period in Fall 2014. Looking back, she said she did not understand why her experiences in English Amped helped her to make changes that “the counselors could not help me with.” She theorized that the sense of connection in English Amped helped her to recognize that she was not alone. Because we used critical tools and practices that encouraged students to be open about the content of their lives, inviting the intertwined political and emotional responses that this content carried, we challenged cultural silences and created room for difficult conversations. Therefore, Alyson knew that other members of the English Amped community were also living and struggling with forms of violence. For Alyson, this knowledge was ultimately what helped her to remove herself from an abusive situation. As Michelle Fine (2008) writes, critical research with youth serves to “clean out the shame and help youth recast dominant formulations of causality” (p. 225). By recasting personal oppression as an object of analysis in the larger framework of a community, Alyson could glimpse the patterns of violence and oppression in her life not as personal pathologies, but as outcomes caused by historically-shaped conditions.

It became apparent for Alyson, as for others, that personal suffering was not a cause for shame, but was, instead, connected to a larger fabric of community in which it was possible to reframe meanings. As Fine (2008) argues, critical counter-knowledge is imbued with the work of “restoring integrity to self, refusing shame and returning the analytic and political gaze back on inadequate...systems” (p. 225-6). As we worked throughout English Amped’s first semester to explore the forms of counter-knowledge that students held as a result of their lived experiences, and to perform that counter-knowledge for one another in the form of stories, theater, and critical analysis, Alyson experienced herself as part of a community that was committed to establishing solidarity at the same time that we worked to critically read and rewrite the world. The solidarity among people in English Amped allowed her to undo the sense of individual pathology that she may have carried with her into counseling, where she did not experience collective agency in the way she did in English Amped.

During the second year of the program, Destiny and I formed a productive working relationship with a new school-based social worker. She would often comment to me that a disproportionate amount of her caseload came from our classes. Twenty-three percent of her caseload was comprised of English Amped students in the 2015-2016 school year, though the fifty students in English Amped represented only 4% of the school’s population. She saw this as positive; young people in English Amped were more willing to face problems and seek help than their peers. This tendency to reach out and make use of counseling services at the school, often at the prompting of teachers, seems to have been directly related to the opportunities that students had within the English Amped classroom to show up in more humanized ways with themselves and others. It also suggests that

individual counseling became reframed for students who were able to see the service as an extension of the community of care they experienced in English Amped. Like Alyson, many students realized they were “not alone” and that personal suffering was not a basis for shame rooted in pathology and isolation.

Unfortunately, the need for counseling services is far greater than the available services and supports. Childhood trauma is prevalent, especially among youth living in poverty, where as many as 96% of children are estimated to have witnessed or experienced some form of violence in their early lives (Zimmerman and Messner, 2013). Post-traumatic stress disorder among youth of color in poor communities is, according to Ginwright (2016), “ongoing and persistent” (p. 3). Maura McNerney and Amy McKlindon (2014) explain that stress response systems become dangerously over-reactive among those who have experienced trauma, leading to what can become “a constant state of emergency;” this, in turn, has profound consequences on healthy development and one’s ability to function (p. 4). Trauma is defined as “actual or threatened death or serious injury, or threatened physical integrity of self or others” (American Psychological Association, 2008). A traumatic event “need not be violent and need not be directed at the child who experiences the trauma” (McNerney and McKlindon, 2014, p. 2). In other words, a child who indirectly experiences the threat of death or serious injury, or who lives within an environment that is physically or psychologically destabilized, also experiences trauma.

The kinds of trauma students in the first year of English Amped experienced ran the gamut: students came to school even as they lived with homelessness, domestic and community violence, sexual assault, unplanned pregnancies, the incarceration of family members, substance abuse, loss of familial support systems, poverty, and mental illness.

Many of these struggles were talked about among members of the class, and still others, I imagine, remained hidden. For some students, an inability to cope sometimes resulted in violent episodes at school; two English Amped students were expelled from school in January for participating in physical fights on campus. For others, accumulated trauma and stress took the more mundane, everyday face of dysfunctional coping, which included physically or mentally disappearing through drug use, sleeping, lack of effort, or literal absence. Ginwright (2016) explains, “persisting injustice (i.e., structural barriers to opportunities) contributes to suffering that is the internalization of powerlessness” (p. 24). The capacity to build power among members of the English Amped community depended on our ability to address suffering and injustice *as* a community. This solidarity and the sense of power that came from it sometimes led to a cessation of suffering, as in Alyson’s experience. Other times, feelings of cynicism and insecurity won out, as I discuss in Chapter Four.

Conclusion

On January 15, 2015, Isabella, Kaiya, and Robin stood in front of the class to perform a poem by Victoria Safford, “The Gates of Hope.” They began the performance by reciting the first line in unison: “Our mission is to plant ourselves at the gates of Hope.” Kaiya continued on her own until the three girls’ voices came together again, and then it was Isabella’s turn to read alone:

A different, sometimes lonely place

The place of truth-telling,

About your own soul first of all and its condition.

The place of resistance and defiance.

Then their voices came together again: “The piece of ground from which you see the world.” Finally, Robin read alone:

Both as it is and as it could be.

As it will be;

The place from which you glimpse not only struggle.

But the joy of the struggle.

Finally, their voices came together in unison one last time, closing out the performance, as the class cheered and applauded.

After the performance, I reviewed the previous day's activity of writing and drawing our visions of “how it is” and “how it could be” related to the four student research groups themes: undoing white privilege, ending sexual assault, creating educational justice, and ending racial profiling. Destiny joined me and asked, “Are we doing the window thing?” I handed her a note card with the words, “This is the window of HOPE,” written on it, and she stood on a table and taped the card to the window.



Figure 3: The window of hope.

We chose the window because it was the only window in a wall of windows that opened. The remodeling of the school a handful of years earlier had left each classroom with just one functional window. This was especially a challenge in the winter months, when chilly Southern mornings would turn into warm and sunny winter afternoons; the

heating could not be switched off once it was engaged in the morning, so many winter afternoons brought sweltering heat blowing full force into our classroom, intensifying the warmth generated by that long row of west-facing windows. It was a punishing environment, and it was even worse for the handful of students who declined to take off their winter sweatshirts lest they reveal that they were not wearing school uniforms underneath. I brought a shop fan from home to circulate air through the room, though its drowsy hum combined with the heat to put many people to sleep. These factors were not helped by the 7 a.m. school start time and the long bus rides preceding it for many students. On the hottest winter afternoons, students would take turns standing in front of that one open window, hoping a cool breeze would alleviate some of their misery.

I told the class, “We need a concrete symbol of what hope can be in our class, because times will be hard. There will be times when we will be angry and frustrated with one another, and we will say that we are just totally incapable of this work together. And so, we decided that what we needed was a symbol. We decided this would be the window of hope. Why do you think we decided to make this the window of hope?” Kaiya responded, “It’s because the window opens, and all of our hopes are like an open door.” Many hands shot up and I called out an order of speakers.

Devanté went next. “Because an open door, like, you walk through it.”

Brandon, always eager to outshine his classmates, followed, “See, they are not seeing the big picture, Mrs. Cooper and Ms. West.”

“Alright, come on,” Destiny said, playfully.

Brandon explained, with obvious pleasure, “The big picture is that through the window of hope you see the sky. We realize the sky is the limit, and that stands for hope!”

A handful of students added their interpretations, and some asked, "Why a window?" Roshua complained that it seemed depressing. After all, hope could fall out of the window.

Deuce came up with an alternative, the ceiling tile of hope, "Because it doesn't seem like it could be moved, but it can!"

Kaiya asked, "Can we hang our hopes from the ceiling?"

And Destiny, who is known to get a little emotional, responded, "Y'all are going to make me cry!"

Destiny and I realized at some point in the fall that we had to be intentional about fostering a spirit of hopefulness within English Amped. The heaviness of the content that our students had chosen to research was sobering and sometimes depressing. As we invited students to take up social justice inquiries and search for ways to act together, we also needed to keep in mind that young people who are already dealing with the outcomes of injustice, trauma, and powerlessness in many parts of their lives needed spaces to be rejuvenated, experience joy, and cultivate hope with one another.

The window was both a symbolic and literal opening; it was a gateway between school "as it is" and "as it could be." The struggles we faced together and alone did not cease because we had created an opening to imagine things "as if they could be otherwise." We could neither entirely remake school nor recreate our lives into everything that they should have been, yet we could work together to imagine what could be, and to perform those possibilities with each other. This imagining and performing of possibility requires a classroom with a vocabulary for hope, and with practices that help students experience freedom and gain ownership of their learning. It requires a reflexive classroom in which participants critically examine how knowledge is constructed. English Amped made

openings between school and the world beyond - the great sky just outside the classroom window - into which students could project performances of possibility, and in which they saw themselves reflected as they truly were: powerful, capable, wise agents of change.

CHAPTER 4

NAVIGATING LIMINALITY: STUDENTS AND TEACHERS AT THE THRESHOLDS

To Appear Before One Another

In July of 2015, the summer after English Amped's first school year, a group of students and a few volunteer facilitators met at the public library for a series of workshops to explore college opportunities. One afternoon, I drove Robin home after the workshop, and we chatted so long that we forgot where we were going and ended up lost in conversation as we roamed the streets on the north side town. When we finally got to her house, we lingered in the driveway for a while longer, and the conversation turned towards the approaching second year of our English Amped class, which was just a few weeks away. Robin expressed her worry about whether tensions that began to mount among students, and among students and teachers, would carry themselves into the coming school year. My field notes from the next day record my memory of Robin's words:

She recalls an incident with another student in which she got 'jumped on' for something she saw as petty, and she tells me how the younger Robin would have gotten into a fight at that point, but instead she warned the other student by telling her, 'I don't fight with words.' . . . I sense that Robin is seeking for me to approve how she handled the situation, or if not to approve, for me to offer some guidance for how she could have possibly responded in a way that would be in keeping with the ethos of English Amped. As I listen, I feel unsure about how to answer her.
(7.23.15)

The uncertainty that I felt in response to Robin's dilemma about how to deal with conflict with another English Amped student exemplifies the questions that became sometimes painfully apparent during the first year of English Amped, questions that centered on the ethics of living together in some form of community within an institution that was not structured to facilitate shared power and connection between us. The uncertainties stem

from the inherent challenges of people in public attempting to exist as an “us” across many differences and divides that would have, under other circumstances, pushed us apart.

Robin presented me with a challenge to which I could have responded with the “official” voice of the teacher-student relationship, which would have meant reminding her that fighting would get her expelled, or advising her not to allow others to rile her. These responses would not have been wrong, but they would have missed the point of what she was looking for, ultimately reinforcing the unspeakable distance between us as student and teacher, older person and younger person, White person and Black person, middle class and working class person. To have taken on the expected and mutually comfortable role of boundary setter and advice-giver would have seemingly erased those differences, but it would have also erased the intimacy of the question. What she seemed to be asking of me, as a mentor and trusted elder, was how to proceed living in community with those who she did not always get along with, how to go forward with tools that would allow her to disarm herself of familiar and often destructive weapons. I write in my field notes:

I remember on the last day of the school year when we passed the candle and praised each person how Robin said about me that I was ‘Really strong . . . how you put up with so much disrespect back in the fall and stayed calm.’ (7.23.15)

Of course, Robin must have realized that I did not feel calm when some English Amped students treated me unkindly, speaking over me, and refusing to cooperate with me at times as a leader of activities in the classroom. My visible struggle to find footing in the classroom, and to learn how to respond to conflict in a way that honored my own code of ethics when students tested boundaries exhaustively, was most likely why Robin chose to surface her own struggle. I did not have an easy answer; I could only tell Robin that I struggled constantly to find a way to bring forth respect and mutuality as a teacher based

in something other than fear, shame, and control-over, and that I was often frustrated and hurt in my attempts to do so. My field notes reflect how the dialogue between us came to a close that afternoon:

Robin laughs and says, 'You live by your own code, Ms. West, and that's why I respect you.' I return the compliment and tell her, 'That's why I respect you, too, Robin.' And it is true, I do respect her, as do many people, because Robin struggles openly to make sense of the world, and to find a way to live in it in a way that resonates with her values. It seems like the questions floating under the conversation, which may have been mine, or may have been hers, are settled in this idea of 'living by our own code.' For me, it's a good feeling to come to that together, and it seems to be pleasant for Robin as well. We just sit in the driveway for a little while longer, stewing in that feeling.

Indeed, as this driveway dialogue between me and Robin demonstrates, being teachers and students together in English Amped was not without external and internal conflict. As we all negotiated roles within the institutionally given context of an urban public school, we simultaneously sought ways to reroute our sense of what was possible among us, and in many cases, to go beyond the scripts of student and teacher in search of other forms of being in ethical relationship with one another.

Throughout the year, we traversed the question

posed by Maxine Greene, (1985, p. 69) and depicted in the cartoon by Jarod Roselló ("Comics," 2011), "How can the extinguished light be lit again, so that teachers and students can appear before one another and show, in speech and action, who they are and what they can do?"



Figure 4: Image by Jarod Roselló, 2011.

The challenge of becoming present with one another preceded the possibility of collaboration and educational transformation. From within the often alienating and punitive environment of school, we needed to become an “us” capable of appearing before one another in way that was more humanized than the normative roles of teachers and students would typically allow. To do this would require that we mutually imagine and embody a new ethics, a code for being in relationship that was neither derived from the school proper, nor merely from the configurations and subjectivities that people transported from their individual lives and negotiated within the context of school.

Robin’s search for how to respond to conflict among her classmates as she reflected over the summer, and my parallel search to find balance between my conceptions of respect and power, reflected the discomfort many members of the English Amped community felt throughout that first year as we searched for ways to become another kind of “us” within the context of a large urban public school. The promise of English Amped, which was to “amplify,” in other words to intervene in ways that enlarge the agency and capacity to make meaning within a high school English class, would first depend on a renegotiation of given roles so that we could become insurgent architects, able to collectively see beyond the limits of “school as it is.” And yet, the conditions of school “as it is” that I outline in Chapter Two, including schooling defined as academic achievement in the narrowest sense, and the policies and practices of containment that ultimately justify the disposability and foster the resistance of low income youth of color in urban schools, set the stage for how difficult it could be for students and teachers to “appear before one another” to show “who they are and what they can do.”

Threshold concepts in learning posit that there are concepts and learning experiences which “resemble passing through a portal, from which a new perspective opens up, allowing things formerly not perceived to come into view” (Meyer, Land, and Baillie, 2010, p. ix). Instead of merely adding new information to a given perspective, learning thresholds shift the frames of meaning through which learners make sense of information. As Jay Meyer and Ray Land (2003) explain, “the shift in perspective may lead to a transformation of personal identity, a reconstruction of subjectivity. In such instances, a transformed perspective is likely to involve an affective component—a shift in values, feeling, or attitude” (p. 4). Indeed, shifts in student and teacher learning throughout the course of the year, which were sometimes thrilling and euphoric, were often preceded by periods of conflict that could feel exhausting. Learning experiences did more than incrementally modify existing identities and ways of being together; they also disrupted and troubled identities and the community itself. The sense of discomfort and even loss that comes from such transformative learning means that learning “is both a cognitive *and* a deeply emotional venture for learners” (Timmermans, 2010, p. 7). The human desire to avoid such disorienting upheavals means that resistance can characterize learning thresholds, as some learners will seek stability over the crisis of meaning that is brought on by change. These conflicts between stability and change characterized the learning thresholds that students and teachers faced together in English Amped during its first year.

By the time the 2014-2015 group of eleventh grade students arrived in English Amped, they had spent most of their lives practicing schooling as a performance of achievement based on standards measured from a distance. To propose that education means something other than this was, for many English Amped participants, to enter a

terrain without a map. For young people who had not been given opportunities to systemically analyze the ways in which schooling differs from education, the accumulation of past experiences in school had consolidated as a kind of habitus. Pierre Bourdieu (1977) theorizes that habitus acts as “a system of durable and transposable dispositions which, integrating all past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perception, appreciations, and actions” (p. 83). In other words, while social responses to a given environment or field are not pre-determined nor prescribed, and even where critique is present, there is a strong inclination to respond to social environments based on protracted prior experience. For example, though many students refused to take the standardized test I describe in Chapter Two, it did not mean that they did not accept the test as a fair measurement of their individual aptitude. An underlying belief that students were not academically capable functioned as a reinforcing loop in which experiences and perceptions consolidated into a devastating habitus with regards to how many students internalized messages about their own worth and capability even as they resisted school-based forms of learning and assessment.

For the group of students who took part in the first year of English Amped, whose eleven prior years of public education were shaped in the vortex of No Child Left Behind policy, an educational habitus that looked very unlike the critical, process-oriented, messy, and socially saturated English Amped, was already well formed. As Wacquant (2005) explains, habitus “is endowed with built-in inertia, insofar as habitus tends to produce practices patterned after the social structures that spawned them” (p. 317). English Amped, a project constituted in part through the institutions of mass schooling, was thus implicated in the social structures endemic to those forms of schooling. If our intention was to

intervene and push back on the deeply habituated ways of enacting school, the challenge we faced was to supplant school-based norms of interaction, which centered on teacher-control and student compliance, with more productive, caring, and ultimately emancipatory practices.

As I explain in Chapter Three, English Amped integrated multiple practices and forms of relationality that instantiated performances of alternative possibility within the school. As BriHop explains, we aimed to be “in the school, not of the school” (3.10.15). And yet, English Amped was very much part of the official structure of the school. Like any other class, we started and ended class at times set by the larger institution, we acted in ways consistent with most of the school rules, we evaluated students through prescribed forms of assessment, and we centered activities around pre-configured “standards.” Even though our class met for two periods that functioned as an integrated whole, this reality was not reflected in the official gradebook, a standard online platform used by all teachers within the school system. In this way, English Amped’s integration of two courses, English Language Arts and creative writing, remained illegible in ways that mattered to our everyday operations and that held meaning for students and their families.

Another example of English Amped’s illegibility within the official school structures was in our teaching arrangement. Even though Destiny and I co-taught the class, she was the teacher of record and official employee of the school. Because team teaching was not a frequent practice within the school or school district, and I was not an official employee of the school, this meant that I was in some ways invisible to the institution. My name did not appear on any official documentation, I was left out of official chains of communication, and I did not have direct access to everyday resources such as a computer login or copy code.

To access institutional resources, I acted as Destiny's proxy, using her computer passwords, copy codes, bathroom keys, office space, and so on. My invisibility within the institution was both liberating, for example I was never expected to stand on duty in the lunchroom, and restrictive, in the sense that I was often misrecognized by faculty, students, and community as a lesser version of the "real" teacher. While I was often privileged as an outside teacher from the university, the normative concepts of what it meant to be a teacher, and normative understandings of what it meant to be a class, delimited the legibility of English Amped within the school. This illegibility often made it difficult to perform alternative possibilities, or even to appear at all within the schemas of meaning typical of the school. This illegibility held powerful sway over everyday interactions and affected the ways that meanings and values were ascribed within English Amped.

In a classroom that frequently posed more questions than answers, and that openly sought to challenge the norms of schooling from within the context of a school, anxieties were often provoked. These anxieties served to heighten personal and inter-personal conflict. As Destiny began to describe it, "In English Amped, *everything* gets amplified." In other words, our differences and disputes were amplified as well as our sense of connection and joy. As these dramas played out, a normative version of school *as it is* existed in almost constant tension with our attempts to perform school *as it could be*. Our departures from conventional schooling led to breakthroughs, in which we instantiated solidarity through alternate ways of being and doing school with one another, but it also led to break downs as the anxiety of the unknown overwhelmed relationships and left people without a clear social script to follow. The journey of building a classroom community taught us that humanizing education as a collaborative exploration among

students, teachers, and community meant going off script, both the script of traditional schooling, and the imagined scripts of critical pedagogy as a mythical one-way journey from oppression to liberation. To perform alternative possibilities within an urban high school English class, we had to become an “us” capable of navigating the uncertainties of the in-between.

Decentering Teacher Control

During the second week of English Amped we created and signed a “contract” representing what we needed from one another to be successful as a group. As students compiled the list of things they wanted from one another and from the teachers to form the contract, a preoccupation with trust became apparent. The word “trust” was explicitly listed three times on the contract, “open-mindedness” two times, as were related words like “confidentiality” and “judge-free.” My field notes from August 19th, 2014, the day students signed the contract, reflect that several students inquired whether everyone would have to live up the agreement, and how would the teachers respond if someone did not? Destiny and I urged students to surface issues as they came up and assured them that issues would be dealt with through dialogue and conflict resolution, which we would figure out together when the time came. Despite these efforts to set students at ease, I noted expressions on several students’ faces that suggested a dubiousness that such a contract, not fortified by consequences nor the singular authority of a teacher in control, would hold much weight.

During the first month of English Amped, as participants experienced the euphoria of liminality, anxieties also began to emerge. On one hand, there was a delight in such non-authoritarian arrangements. This was represented in the rap that students performed on

August 22, 2014. In the song, Deuce made the lyrical declaration, “We wrote a contract, and it’s on lock, son!” The lyric expressed a desire for security from the contract, one that is closely tied with a sense of security in the teachers. The proceeding lyric, “Mrs. Cooper and Ms. West got it on lock, son!” betray this desire for teachers to keep students safe, expressed here as “on lock,” by exercising our power to control. This wish for familiar, teacher-driven control may have also been what I noticed in the wary expressions of students who asked how, as teachers, we would follow up if there were a breach in the contract. Our response, that this too would be part of a process in which we would work it out together, must have seemed like an unviable and unrealistic option. Without a clearly established process for working it out, a perhaps unreasonable level of trust was called for in this arrangement, especially considering the experiences that many students have in classrooms where teachers do not make a commitment to keep the space safe from forms of violence. Students may have interpreted that our classroom would be laissez-faire about how people treated one another because there was neither a clearly defined conflict process to address conflict, nor an authoritarian tone from teachers.

Indeed, what non-teacher centered models and experiences do students and teachers have to draw from when imagining how to monitor and tend to the life of the community? What we might have tapped into were any number of frameworks for fostering restorative justice in school settings, also known as “restorative practices,” or “restorative approaches.” These non-punitive, dialogue-oriented approaches to building communities of trust and resolving conflict gained traction over the last decade in U.S. schools as a response to overreaching school discipline policies that have functioned to sort, marginalize, and push students too many students out of school (Guckenburg, Hurley,

Persson, Fronius, Petrosino, 2016). At the time that we started English Amped, I did have some knowledge of Maisha Winn's (2013) call for a "Restorative English Education," in which she argues that English educators should incorporate restorative justice ideas and circle processes, which are "deeply indebted to Indigenous communities throughout the United States, Canada, and New Zealand ... [as a] ... tool to promote healthy dialogue, discussion, and understanding" (p. 128). We had, in fact, called on some of those ideas and approaches when structuring community-building activities, especially story circles, in English Amped during the first year. However, neither Destiny nor I had at that point studied the literature on school-based restorative practices, nor had we ever seen it modeled in ongoing ways. It was not until the third year of English Amped that we finally studied and incorporated restorative justice processes for addressing conflict using a guidebook developed by the Center for Restorative Process for the San Francisco Unified School System as our compass (Clifford, n.d.). The oversight in our infrastructure, which set community-based standards for how people would interact, but then failed to define what community-based redress would look like, was one cause of the anxieties that people experienced in English Amped that year. This uncertainty was coupled with the lack of experiences, on the part of both students and teachers, of existing within genuinely cooperative, school-based learning environments. It was hard for anyone to trust in a process that they had never seen, and for which there was no map to guide the journey.

My impression of other classroom communities within the school, a handful of which I got a chance to observe up close when I shadowed Bri'Yonna, an English Amped student, for a day on March 12, 2015, was that classroom interactions existed on a continuum with effective teacher-controlled environments at one end, which was generally

a positive indicator of a classroom's emotional safety and student engagement in learning activities, and ineffective teacher-controlled classrooms at the other end, in which teachers attempted to control the classroom, but failed to do so. In the safest and most engaged classrooms, patterns of interaction were driven by teachers who commanded the respect of students. These teachers could be described, to some extent, as "warm demanders." Lisa Delpit (2012) explains,

Many researchers have identified successful teachers of African American students as 'warm demanders.' James Vasquez used the term to identify teachers whom students of color said did not lower their standards and were willing to help them. Warm demanders expect a great deal of their students, convince them of their own brilliance, and help them to reach their potential in a disciplined and structured environment. (p. 77)

In each of these classrooms, an emphasis on traditionally-conceived discipline and teacher-driven structure seemed to boost student engagement. The more "warm" the demanding, in other words, the more teachers expressed a sense of care and belief in the students as they demanded, the more students seemed to be engaged in the class content.

The JROTC instructor in particular showed a willingness to help students that was paralleled by her high expectations. I was intrigued by the JROTC class because we shared many students who were both fiercely committed to JROTC and to English Amped, and so I returned to sit in on this teacher's class on three occasions. Because our English Amped class, it seemed to me, was explicitly not militaristic, and because a critique of the military industrial complex informed my own thinking about how urban schools funnel young people of color into narrower, and markedly more dangerous pathways of "success" than their college-bound White counterparts (Ayers, Kumashiro, Meiners, Quinn, and Stovall, 2010), it seemed inexplicable to me that many of the students who were most enthusiastically invested in English Amped were also devout members of JROTC. In an

interview with Bri'Yonna, she explains how English Amped and JROTC compare to one another and differ from most classes:

Both classes let the students lead. In both classes I have a job. In other classes [imitating teacher] 'I'm giving you notes, but you're not in charge of your learning.' In those classes I need you [the teacher] for everything. (3/3/2015)

Observations in the JROTC allowed me to see how much Bri'Yonna enjoyed her job, which included commanding other students during drills. The pathway for hierarchical advancement offered through JROTC was appealing to Bri'Yonna, who hungered to show her leadership abilities and have some control of her environment.

My observations also helped me to understand that the JROTC teacher, Sgt. Greene, was an effective "warm demander" who created deep ties with her students and provided continuous and meaningful mentoring to them inside and outside of school. I also experienced, in my handful of visits to JROTC, the sense of profound being-togetherness that comes from marching in unison with other people. As my field notes from March 3, 2015 indicate, English Amped students and their JROTC peers delighted in my fumbles and modest successes as I learned to follow orders such as, "forward, march" and "about face." As I got the hang of marching side-by-side with students under the leadership of a member of the class, I felt momentarily reassured by our communal movement, and satisfied by the display of order our marching produced. It became clear to me that students would be attracted to the sense of security provided by such forms of embodied ritual, especially contrasted with the sense of chaos that proliferated in other spaces throughout the school. That satisfaction, alongside the opportunities for intergenerational mentorship and peer-led activities, must operate as powerful incentives for students to participate in JROTC, factors that critics of such programs, myself included, would do well to consider by asking

how young people's needs for a concrete sense of security, connection, and intergenerational contact can be re-imagined within urban schools?

However, other than the student-led marching exercises in JROTC, interactions in the classrooms of the “warm demanders” seemed to flow from teachers at the center with very little student-to-student contact or collaboration. Unlike the teachers that Gloria Ladson-Billings identifies in her seminal book, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African-American Children* (1994), on the days that I visited, these classrooms did not seem to encourage a “community of learners” through “student cooperation and mutual responsibility” (p. 77). In other words, students did not appear to hold real decision-making power about the direction that conversations or activities would move, as they often did in our English Amped classroom. It was also notable that in the classrooms where I saw what seemed to be successful “warm demanders,” the class size was considerably smaller, with fewer than fifteen students each, and two of these three classes were electives. The other classes I observed had between twenty and thirty students each.

Two of the other classrooms I saw during my observations were student-centered in the negative sense; they were classrooms where teachers seemed to try, but to a large degree failed, to create a structured or engaging environment; the dream of a “classroom community” seemed very far away in these learning environments. In these situations, both of which were taught by non-Black teachers, emboldened students controlled the classroom environment, often at the expense of other students who wielded less social status than their peers. In one class, students roamed around freely as the teacher attempted to begin the class. One of the students began to challenge the teacher about what she was asking them to do, and they got into an argument that went back and forth. One

student sitting near me muttered, “Here we go,” and another followed by saying, “This [happens] every day.” There were 25 students in the class and three or four of them seemed to be working on the assignment given out that day. When it came time to turn work in, students openly copied off each other, all the while carrying on conversation and complaining about how much work the teacher assigned. Throughout the class period, students playfully teased and made jabs at one another. As I watched a student I also taught in English Amped get teased by a group of other boys, I cringed because I knew from conversations in English Amped how much this student struggled with the very same issues he was being teased about. It was neither a safe nor a productive space for student learning. Of course, I may have visited these classes on atypical days. Further, I cannot draw complete conclusions about a class based on only one visit.. And yet, I asked eight students in interviews to walk me through their school days and tell about each class, and it was not unusual for students to report that they experienced chaos and meaninglessness in several classes each day. Tristen contrasted English Amped with what we saw as an “ordinary classroom”:

People don’t sit up in here on their cell phones all the time like an ordinary classroom. They got classes where the whole class will take out their cell phones and play a game. They got this game called *Frontline Two*, and the whole class will be ignoring the teacher and playing the game. Even during tests, especially during tests, people get on their phones, texting people, on Snap Chat, telling each other answers. It’s to the point where the teacher, he or she can’t really take off points because they don’t really know who is cheating and who is not cheating.

Tristen’s description of classrooms where students had taken control of the space because teachers had failed to take control was echoed in other interviews. It was not uncommon to hear students describe other classes with terms like, “We don’t do anything in there,” or

“So-and-so just doesn’t teach.” This abdication of teacher control reflected the sense of abandonment that students seemed to feel.

As I reflect on the prevalence of students’ experiences in classrooms where teachers fail to effectively structure a learning environment, especially in spaces where teachers lack the understandings and tools of culturally responsive teaching, it is easy to see that the newfound control and freedoms in the English Amped classroom could act as a double-edged sword. If my day with Bri’Yonna taught me anything, it showed me by the time students arrived to 6th and 7th hour, the last two periods of the day when English Amped took place, they had already spent five hours navigating a school that looked and felt very different from English Amped. Other than marching in JROTC, I did not observe any other opportunities for students to take on ownership of the community life that supported learning objectives, and even in that class, the opportunities were pre-programmed and ordered for students. The more effective classrooms were tightly teacher controlled; in essence, teachers produced the space and students inhabited it. Students did not have opportunities to take ownership and make curricular choices that we were experimenting with generating together in English Amped. Students seemed to be habituated to respond to school based on two kinds of reoccurring options: a warmly demanding teacher-controlled classroom, or a survival of the fittest, student-controlled classroom where very little learning was going on.

This binary of teacher-led control versus student-led chaos meant that students were challenged to make sense of English Amped using a whole new framework. Infrastructures such as Open Reading and Writing Studio, Get Right (a space in the classroom where students who did not feel capable of participation could opt out of class

participation for a period of time), and the numerous collaborative, personal approaches to doing school that we practiced almost every day, greatly troubled students' prior understandings of what a classroom should be like by calling on students to make ongoing choices about their own participation. These choices required that students practice a level of self-accountability, self-awareness, and regard for others. The responsibilities and freedoms that came with these choices were so discontinuous with their choices in other parts of their schooling experience that students were often overwhelmed by them. English Amped did not belong entirely to the dynamics of the school as an institution of social control, and yet, it could not be a total refuge from it. By throwing open the curriculum to students' own lives in a way that attempted to honor the idea that students could act with agency within their own educations, we also opened the anxiety and heartache, but mostly the inexperience, that came with previously having been denied such freedom. As Devanté explains:

I never thought that a class could be taught the way English Amped is taught. And sometimes we have our struggles, because like we're an open class, and sometimes we have a lot of freedom, students have a lot of freedom. And sometimes, being kids, you take, you don't realize you're doing it, but sometimes you take advantage of your freedom, and sometimes there are days where we don't focus as much because we have so much freedom. But most of the time, we really are working pretty hard. I like the fact that it's open, and then like, some stuff comes out in English Amped. (4.8.2015)

Indeed, "some stuff comes out." As Devanté's words suggest, what emerged from our attempt to create a classroom that allowed students certain measures of control and freedom was often the satisfaction of "working pretty hard" towards something that people cared about, but also the frustrations of learning how to navigate a level of freedom that was unusual for young people in school.

Between Madness and Method

In an interview, I asked Devanté to tell me what he remembered about his first impressions of the English Amped. He explained how unfamiliar it was for him to be in a classroom that emphasized critical thinking and dialogue over the kinds of tasks that he had come to associate with English class.

It was, it was weird! Cause it wasn't like a normal class. It was a lot of open speaking. It wasn't like reading vocabulary words, vocabulary test. It wasn't like all this writing. Even though we do write, it seemed like more verbal learning, and uhm, opinionative. We got to say what we thought instead of the teacher just telling us, oh, this is the way it is, or this is how it's supposed to be done, giving us worksheets and reading out of textbooks and stuff. (4.8.2015)

Genevieve, the English teacher whose classroom we used for class meetings, shared Devanté's sense that "It was weird." She told me about her first impressions:

When I first, first sat in here the first few days, I was afraid. I was like, 'Oh my God, what is this? These kids are having too much fun.' But I didn't know where it was going, so I didn't understand the method. I just felt like it was madness. But then I was like, you know what, there is something to this madness. There is a method to this. (8.24.2015)

As Genevieve explains, her first response to our non-traditional approaches to humanize and even bring playfulness into schooling was to assume that it was "madness." It is not hard to see how students could feel in some ways elated about this madness, but in other ways untethered and unprotected from the social scripts they usually brought with them to school.

On the other hand, habituated responses to schooling meant that activities that looked and felt like the "genre of schoolwork," sent students and teachers into normative patterns of interaction and response. As soon as we began to implement more coherent curricular systems in late August, these more normative school responses to our class followed. Alyson, who had in the previous week expressed a desire for more clarity about

where the class was headed, told me during the break on Tuesday, August 26, 2014, “Y’all spoiled us [before]. This week is just a lot more...sleepy.” Reading the multi-page selection from the *Young People’s History of the United States* seemed to invoke sleepiness in other students as well. Even though Destiny had organized the text as a multi-vocal reader’s theater, a longish excerpt from a book written in academic prose seemed to signal for a handful of students that naptime had begun.

The introduction of everyday classroom conventions such as organizing binders and reading long passages of text did not kill the emerging euphoria of *comunitas* entirely. However, it did complicate any naïve assumptions that it would be possible to perform school as a space where literacy is enacted as an organized, accountable set of activities, and to meanwhile evade the domesticating and disciplinary functions of those activities. Teachers were habituated to seek student compliance through programmed activities, which functioned as a form of teacher-authority, and students were habituated to resist, or passively acquiesce to literacy activities and authority they implied.

My field notes from the fourth and fifth weeks of class reflect ways in which we had begun the struggle to find a third path between the exclusively teacher-controlled and exclusively student-controlled binary. On September 3, 2014, I wrote, “We are inventing a hand signal,” which was a student-generated way to signal among class members that it was time to quiet down and listen to one person speak at a time. By September 8, 2014, I wrote the ironic comment, “Hand signal still works, but only on quiet folks.” On that same day, I describe the lack of engagement among students writing constructed response paragraphs about the passage from *People’s History*. Destiny thought we should use a formula for constructed response that was prevalent around the school and that students

were already familiar with: R.A.T.E. paragraphs, a writing formula that is intended to scaffold constructed response writing. R.A.T.E. stands for: Restate the question, Answer the question, use Textual evidence to support your answer, and Explain your reasoning. This acronym was new to me, but students were already well versed in the formula, and the school had even printed up posters with the school logo that explained the acronym. On our first day writing R.A.T.E. paragraphs, I wrote in my field notes, “The energy begins to sap out of the room, many heads down. RATE paragraphs!” On the next day, September 9, 2014, I wrote, “Bell schedule all messed up.... Destiny stares down a group of students.” I then described, somewhat bitterly, “Committees are a genre that obviously just mean hang out! Argh. I had to redirect Alyson almost physically to get her back into her own group.” As these notes show, Destiny and I are by this point doing what teachers are expected to do, redirecting students when they get off track, and assigning work that is directly and clearly related to academic literacies as measured by the expectations of standardized test formats. Students are also responding as they are expected to respond by looking for openings in the framework, ungraded and less teacher-controlled activities like committee meetings were taken as opportunities to hang out with friends and the more familiar academic tasks were taken by many as time to sleep or zone out.

Even though a large number of students were reluctant to engage in traditional reading and writing activities, classroom dialogues that were related to the *People’s History* reading and writing began to reveal that students were making new, critical insights.

Candice wrote in a reflection on August 29, 2014:

So yesterday I think the point was that like what are we learning in school? Is it REAL history? Is what we are learning really history, it is, but it gets watered down, so is what we learned really real? It is real, but is it the Real truth?

For many students, the reading, discussion, and writing about Columbus opened a first, critical insight about the power of master narratives to construct an official “Truth,” and the power of counter-narratives to contest what is “really real.” This understanding shook and angered students. In the dialogue with visiting professor Dr. David Stovall on September 19, 2014, students explained how learning about Columbus affected them. Devanté told Dr. Stovall, “They don’t tell us the whole story. My whole life, I’ve been taught one thing. I’ve got two years left in school, why are we just getting this now?” To this, Dr. Stovall responded, “If you had an accurate accounting of history, and a way of investigating it, what would be different?” In other words, Stovall asks Devanté to consider how educational dispossession has functioned as a very effective strategy to keep the status quo in place. To this, Dontre’lle exclaimed, “Oh my God. I think you’re telling me that that they have enslaved my mind!”

Precisely because students did not already come into English Amped with such meta-reflections about their own schooling experiences, a central challenge of building a cooperative learning space was to facilitate critical reflection about education itself. By the second year of English Amped, we began to organize curriculum to explicitly help students analyze schooling itself so that students could scaffold an understanding of why English Amped operated on such different terms, especially regarding compliance and cooperation. Without such understandings in place, we lived in the contradiction of performing many of the power dynamics and habitus inherent in school even as we assigned students to engage with these questions in the first place. To have never assigned the reading from *A People’s History*, nor structured writing and discussion activities to follow it, would have meant denying students the critical insights they gained from those literacy practices. And yet, by

doing so, we also set in motion the performance of school as compliance or resistance to teacher-driven activities, the very patterns that so often functioned to keep us from “appearing before one another” in a more humanized way.

In an attempt to off-set these patterns of how students responded to the genre of schoolwork, we often used methodologies derived from popular educational approaches to engage students in critical discussion and inquiry. Many of these approaches did not resemble school-based approaches at all, such as story circles, Boal’s Forum Theater, open mics, and community building games. While these approaches came to be beloved learning practices for students, there was often a learning period in which these kinds of activities could be a double-edged sword because they fell so far outside of the genre of schoolwork that students struggled to trust in the process of such activities, understanding them as recreational rather than tied to “serious” learning. Genevieve, who was able to watch our class unfolding from the distance of a somewhat detached observer because she often stayed in the classroom during English Amped, later told me, “The kids didn’t know where they were going. Like when y’all were doing the Forum Theater, they would even come to my desk and say, ‘I think we’re just doing stuff to do it’ (8.24.15). The problem that Genevieve identifies here, that students did not understand the purpose of some activities we did while we were doing them, especially those that seemed playful, speaks to one of the greatest challenges of disrupting the habitus of schoolwork. How could we build classroom community and engagement in learning through exploratory, interactive activities if students did not first trust our intentions, and then trust themselves and one another?

I learned that simply stating the purpose of activities before we did them was often not enough. On September 11, 2014, before beginning our Forum Theater unit, I shared a short presentation about the history and meaning of Forum Theater. The presentation explained “Boal’s idea was to use the theater as a place for people to think through the problems they faced together. He wanted people to use acting in Forum Theater to prepare for action in the world. He called Forum Theater, ‘a rehearsal for reality.’ ” We were, I explained, going to adapt some of the stories students told in Story Circle groups into Forum Theater skits, which would help us name and understand the social problem at the heart of each story. In turn, this exercise would help students define what our research projects would be this year. This attempt to directly explain the purpose and meaning of the method before engaging in it failed to connect with students because they did not have experiences to connect these ideas to. What did it mean to rehearse for reality? What did it mean to define a research project this way? Of course, there are likely ways to improve explanations given before and during activities, and yet, explaining does not completely diminish the anxieties inherent in doing activities you have never done before.

Many of the approaches associated with popular education, like Boal’s methods, involve embodied, interpersonal, and creative risks. These risks are barriers to student engagement, especially as students experience a method for the first time. To fully get how an activity like Forum Theater works, students had to become comfortable, experience the method for themselves, and begin making their own experience-based connections. We learned over time with the Boal-based methods that it was important to build in smaller, less critical exercises early on before using the methods in ways that built towards larger goals. For example, in January of 2015, we re-introduced Forum Theater through an

improvisational scene in which a handful of students played the part of a group of students and community members who were given the prompt to convince members of the state board of education to reduce the amount of standardized testing in the state's schools. Another group played board members interested in keeping the test status quo in place. The allure of "winning" in a struggle where two sides are clearly pitted against one another held an immediate appeal and connected students to a sense of purpose. Students seemed to immediately understand the purpose of the theatrical scene as an exercise in forming arguments and analyzing conflicts. And yet, not all struggles are so easily dramatized between winning and losing sides. The first time we did Forum Theater, the goal was not just to analyze any conflict, but to look at conflicts with power that students had experienced in their own lives. We drew from the stories that students told in their Story Circles in response to the prompt, "Tell about a time when someone in a position of power saw you differently than you saw yourself," and we adapted these stories into Forum Theater scenes. Compared to the standardizing testing skit, which was designed to represent the connection between individual and systems-based conflicts, naming the systems at play behind students' own narratives was a messier and murkier process. It would have been helpful if students had more experience with Forum Theater as they headed into these scenes. As it was, for students to see the "point" they had to stick it out for a little bit before the more complex set of meanings could emerge.

Fortunately, students did stick with the Forum Theater scenes, in part, because they were fun. On September 15, 2014, I wrote in my field notes, "Multiple kids were asking today, 'Are we doing Forum?' Isabella also asked, 'Are we doing Open Reading and Writing Studio?" These questions reflect the enthusiasm that students sometimes brought to the

more open-ended, playful class activities, even if they did not always take them seriously or immediately see their connection to bigger ideas. Working in groups, students converted the stories they selected into Forum Theater scenes. Each group created one skit that was supposed to dramatize the struggle the protagonist faces. They were to leave the conflict unsolved, and other classmates would be invited to tap in to improvise ways to resolve the conflict with the final goal of finding a satisfactory response, or in most cases, a more complex understanding of the issue.

Field notes from September 15, 2014 describe how this process played out in the last of four scenes that students presented and worked through as part of this unit. This scene was based on Jazmyne's personal experience in a McDonalds restaurant in which a White woman mistook her and her little sister as mother and child, and then patronizingly lauded the girl she mistakenly perceived as a young mother for her parenting. The group of students acting out the scene initially took the opportunity to perform the skit more as an opportunity for sketch comedy rather than social drama by creating a scene in which everything goes wrong and everyone acts out, such as boisterous McDonald's employees and rude bystanders. The purpose of Forum Theater, which is to present a tragically unresolved social conflict, and then collaboratively explore opportunities for redress with the audience, was lost in the more familiar convention of sketch comedy. As the facilitator of this activity, I had to push students to do less entertaining and more clarifying for the audience. The group replayed the scene several times without anyone tapping in from the audience to explore a response. Each time, I asked, "What is the scene about? What is it supposed to be about?" As they replayed the scene, it became clearer. I recorded in my field notes:

It finally got pared down to the central conflict. Jayreal came in as the authoritative father figure and scared the 'White lady' off. I asked if the problem was solved and people respond, 'Not really, not in the long run.' Candice comes in to play the actual mother to the little girl, and very politely but firmly informs the White woman of her mistake. People are still not happy with this solution. Some students contend that there really is no solution to this problem. I encourage them to name the problem, and Kaiya points out that someone could come into the scene and point out to the women that 'she is operating on a stereotype.' Devanté and Brandon contend that it wouldn't actually change her mind, 'She's probably spent her whole life thinking this way.' People join in, suggesting other ways to explain to the woman the error of her ways, or pointing out the futility of doing so. (9.15.2014)

The exchange that broke out between audience members and actors towards the end of this scene produced exactly what Forum Theater is intended to: an engaged conversation about what it would mean to solve the social conflict at hand in the larger, more systemic sense. Had the participants successfully resolved the problem within the scene, in other words, if they had figured out how to transform the problem of racial stereotyping while waiting in line at McDonalds, such a solution would have been ultimately unreal. What was more important was the inquiry that was provoked about how to, or indeed whether it was even possible to, change White condescension and racist micro-aggression. The otherwise abstract conversation gained a concrete lens. Unlike R.A.T.E. paragraphs on one hand, the dialogue garnered authentic interest; unlike the unfocused, sketch comedy version of the Forum scene on the other hand, it gave the class a sense of shared focus and urgency.

Students formed research groups around the questions raised in the Forum Theater exercises: White privilege, racial profiling, educational justice, and sexual harassment. It was only after the story telling and acting were done that students could fully make the connections between what they had done and research projects, an understanding that took on additional layers of complexity as students gained a better understanding of research over the course of the year. Getting to those moment required that a trust be built

among one another and in the process. By their second year in English Amped, students became much more willing and even proud to engage alternative methodologies like theater exercises and story-telling as serious intellectual inquiries that could then relate with more fluidity to traditional school activities like academic reading and writing. Over time, these modes of doing school became part of an English Amped tradition that experienced students could re-perform with one another and in front visitors or new students entering English Amped. We also learned as teachers as we practiced these methods to become more intentional about a practice of reflection along the way, not just as an end point. We learned to pause and ask, “Why are we doing this?” so that students could explain meanings to themselves and one another along the way, and in doing so form a cognitive bridge tying together popular literacy practices and traditional school-based literacy practices.

Well into the third year of working with these methods, English Amped teachers continue to learn how to anticipate the anxiety and confusion that exploratory, experience-based, and less teacher-controlled methodologies create in spaces where people are not used to learning in these ways. We have come to understand that connecting these methods to the academic frameworks and skills means acting as translators who can explain and elicit explanations of the reasons that both exploratory work and academic work matter for our students. To do this work of translation, we have needed to refine our own and our students’ abilities to code switch between two overly dichotomized modes of learning. We had to build our collective repertoire for being together in ways that are radically unlike school, creating a safe space for relationships, truth-telling, imagination, and solidarity. How else could we get beyond the alienation of schooling and become

honest and vulnerable about the conditions in which our lives are structured? We have had to translate the genre of schoolwork as a series of alienated tasks, and instead find ways to engage students in the taking ownership of the human purposes of research and literacy. Indeed, to bring students' lives into the center of the curriculum means learning how, as Adrienne Rich (2013) instructs, "to write, and read, as if your life depended on it" (p. 33).

Facing Injustice and Despair

To bring the personal lives, intellectual questions, and ethical concerns of our classroom community together in English Amped meant guiding students to identify and investigate the questions that mattered the most in their own lives. From September on, Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) was the most defining infrastructure that shaped curriculum for the rest of the school year (see Chapter Three for a detailed description of CPAR). For many students, research enabled and amplified a social justice identity, and gave students a way to approach injustice with curiosity and a sense of power. On April 8, 2014, Saida described to me in an interview how being placed in "traditional" classes after moving back to the U.S. from Palestine, though she had always been in more highly tracked classes prior to this move, had "opened her eyes to how school is structured and how people are divided." Rather than feeling punished by the fact that she was now placed in classes that were tracked below her previous performance levels, Saida saw her placement in traditional classes as an opportunity to research. The educational justice CPAR group that she belonged to in English Amped did a study comparing pedagogies in traditional, gifted and advanced classes. As Saida walked me through her school day, she described with intense interest what was going on in each classroom, and how it connected to her analysis. She explained that she wants to work in comparative international

education and saw herself as beginning on that path through this project. And yet, even as these feelings of power and possibility began to surge among English Amped participants, so did underlying feelings of hopelessness and despair.

I first noticed the dynamic way that power and possibility seemed to amplify hopelessness and despair on September 19, 2014, the day that Dr. Stovall visited the English Amped class. Dr. Stovall exchanged ideas with a mesmerized group of students during his visit. His eloquence and energy, and his positionality as a Black scholar who openly eschews respectability politics in his dress and speech, for example, how he seamlessly spoke about the relationships between “neoliberalism and the block,” provided a concrete model for our students of organic Black intellectualism. Students were able to see how swagger, scholarship, and a love for justice could overlap with one another through Stovall’s example. This was something Destiny and I could not do as fully for our class, a limit set by our whiteness, our social class backgrounds, and rhetorical powers. And while most students were enrapt during Stovall’s visit, I could also feel an edge of defeat in the room. One student in particular sat at the edge of the group with his head down, sleeping or pretending to sleep. When we gathered to take a group picture, he quietly slipped out of the room. I couldn’t help but wonder what he was feeling and thinking that made him so unreachable on this day. To some extent, the comment and question that Devanté poised to Stovall about reading *A Young People’s History of the United States* revealed the despair he felt at recognizing the extent of his miseducation. He asked, “I’ve got two years left in school, why are we just getting this now?” Of course, for many students who have been told again and again that doing the tasks asked of them in school would ensure an education, it

must have felt frightening to realize the extent to which school had not prepared them to think in the critical and exciting ways that Stovall exemplified.

On the phone that weekend, Destiny and I shared that we both noticed the undercurrent of anxiety in the classroom. We admitted to one another that we ourselves felt exhausted and overwhelmed at that point. I wondered if the moment in which we felt most hopeful and clear eyed about what kind of work there was before us and our position to bring it about, was also the moment in which we doubted ourselves, our ability to follow through, and our legitimacy as people who could indeed do so. Like our students, we had to contend with our own doubts in ourselves, in one another, and in the viability of our project. Destiny and I began to talk about this as the struggle for hope in the face of despair, which soon became a shorthand between us for those moments when someone would begin shutting down, checking out, or kicking up drama in the classroom just as new horizons of possibility came into view.

Interpersonal conflict began to erupt in the class as soon as the next week, which was the seventh week of the school year, so it is hard to say whether it was in fact connected to a heightened sense of despair in the face of new and challenging possibilities, or whether it was about people becoming more comfortable with one another. On September 23, 2014, I recorded in my field notes:

Today there is an undercurrent of tension in the room. Candice asks that we review the contract. Impossible to get into one conversation without a lot of ruckus. Students are talking over other students who are facilitating. Students are asked to move into research groups, making a final choice of which group they will work in, and there is some palpable excitement for some, but 5 or 6 stand in the middle, uncertain of where to go. This seems less about the topics and more about who is in each group.

A handful of students who had seemed interested and engaged in research questions the week before were now lukewarm about joining a group. For the first time, I sensed there was something that students were not willing to say out loud when asked. Clearing the air had become complicated.

Another note in my entry from September 23, 2014 foreshadowed a conflict to come. I wrote, "Something is up with Candice and me. She got mad when I didn't call on her first in a discussion, but there is clearly something bigger beneath it." Candice, who had previously been very warm and enthusiastic towards me, was starting to give me a cold shoulder. On September 25, 2014, we watched a PBS documentary about a proposed breakaway school district in our city in which a wealthier, Whiter part of town was trying to create its own school system and had even gone so far as to attempt breaking away from the city to form a new city. In the discussion afterwards, I mentioned that I knew some of the people who were interviewed from a group of activist parents who were opposing the breakaway. Candice raised her hand and told me "Please don't bring any White people to this class." I responded to Candice that it is important to recognize that some White people are allies, and that this particular group of mostly White women had been working very hard to counter the breakaway. To this, Candice shut down, visibly angry and frustrated with me. The next day she did not come to school, but I could see that several other students were treating me differently, and that resistance to activities, like a quiet reading time, were also mounting in the room. Worried, I checked in with Destiny and with myself on September 28, 2014. Destiny told me, "It was the first real moment of her claiming knowledge and expertise in the face of ours." I ask how she thinks I should have responded, and Destiny explains to me, "It was a witness moment and not a challenge moment." I

began to think about how to acknowledge this with Candice and hopefully set things right. In my notebook, I rehearsed things I might tell her: *I missed the cue to listen, and I'm sorry for that. We are not going to bring White people into this classroom to be experts in your experiences.*

The following Monday, I walked with Candice to her bus after school and told her that I noticed that she seemed upset with me. She denied that anything was the matter. I offered my apology anyway for missing the opportunity to bear witness to her perspective after watching the documentary. She looked surprised and told me, "As a teacher, you didn't have to do that, so thanks for that." In this exchange, it became clear to me that Candice saw me as I was positioned by my role at the school, one that exempted me from having to do things like make apologies. It had not occurred to me before that exchange that Candice would not expect me to apologize for my mistakes. I had worked in schools and with youth in after school settings for many years as a spoken word teaching artist, which invoked a very different set of affiliations, both literally with my colleagues who were mostly people of color, and through association with an art form that resonates deeply with Afro-diasporic forms. Now I was standing before students as a White teacher who was partnered closely with another White teacher in a mostly Black school where we held significant structural power. That Candice perceived my positioning as a teacher as somehow above and beyond the courtesy of admitting a wrongdoing was a lesson for me in how powerfully structured our individual relationships are by institutional roles.

It seemed to me at the time that this apology, and Candice's acceptance of the apology, would end the conflict; however, to my surprise, she continued to be distant towards me, as did a few other students who were friends with Candice who seemed to

have taken her “side” in an unnamed battle. Later that week, two other students approached me to say that they felt I was being unfairly disrespected and that I needed to do something about it. At Destiny’s advice, I approached Candice at the start of class and told her that I needed to talk with her one on one. The whole class seemed to take note as we stepped out of the classroom, and Candice’s body language told me that she did not want to be in conversation with me. Again, I asked what was going on for her, and again she told me very little, finally saying, “It will probably be fine when we get back from the holidays or something.” I took this to mean that she was holding on to her stance towards me to save face with her peers.

Candice never told me directly why she stopped being warm towards me and began to act disrespectfully towards me, and eventually towards Destiny and some of the other students in the class as well. It was a pattern that lasted for months, even though I tried many times to engage her in an honest conversation about it. I suspect that some of the tension came from the discomforts of engaging a race-conscious analysis of education from within the very racial dynamics that structure that system, specifically the disproportionate whiteness of teachers in urban schools. As a White teacher in a mostly Black school, how could I be exempt from the discomfort of confronting racism within an environment structured by that racism? How could I invite a race-centered analysis through the curricular choices I made, and also evade the pain inflicted by hegemonic whiteness on people of color? I do not mean to suggest that I had completely neglected to recognize my own privileges in how I approached these conversations, but in many ways, I may have grown too comfortable in my sense of myself as a White ally. I was perhaps unable to articulate or expose to Candice, and even to myself, what was also at stake for me in such

conversations. My personal histories of White supremacist critique and organizing did not exempt the fact that I was now operating as the face of a powerful White university, nor did it change how I was now in a power position at the high school that added new weight and meaning to my whiteness. For me, this required returning to the painful recognition that my personal desires and choices, like those of my students, would never deliver me entirely from a racialized caste system into which my own life was a priori structured by the violence of White supremacy as a system. What else would it mean, in fact, to be aware of White privilege? The pain I felt at Candice's rejection of me may have reflected a pattern of misrecognition that Zeus Leonardo and Ronald Porter (2010) describe:

Too often, whites interpret minority anger as a distancing move, or the confirmation of the 'angry' person of color archetype, rather than its opposite: an attempt to engage the other, to be vulnerable to the other, to be recognized by the other, to be the other for the other. ... When the oppressed open their wounds through communication, they express the violence in their dehumanization that they want the oppressor to recognize. (p. 151)

It is possible, though perhaps I will never fully understand, that Candice perceived me as failing to recognize the pain and sense of powerlessness inherent in racialized power structures, which I exemplified as a White teacher. Of course, I do not finally know what her perception was, and it may well have involved some other forms of difference or psychological projections between us.

The personal, political, and historic struggles that English Amped's methodologies surfaced called for a significant level of trust between people. The newness of student-driven forms of control, inter-personal conflict among people, and confusion about what we were doing and why we were doing it made it hard at times to take on the additional emotional stress of confronting injustices as part of the curriculum. On January 12, 2015, a representative from an organization that supports people who are survivors of sexual

violence came to lead a workshop in class. The workshop leader was a community mentor for the group studying sexual harassment, the largest CPAR group in the class with eight members. I anticipated that there would be a high level of engagement in the workshop because of student interest in this topic, and yet, it proved to be challenging to sustain a meaningful conversation during the workshop. My field notes from that class period document the challenges of facilitation:

There were 10,000 exceptions today. Georgia, Candice, and Jalon were at a Junior officers meeting during most of 6th (they came in without a note and just said they were meeting with the principal). Then, Jayreal and Bri' had to leave during 7th to take a diagnostic test with Mrs. Butler. By 7th hour, Get Right contained no fewer than Jalon, Trevor, Deuce, and Precious. Dontre'lle and Kaiya were whispering to each other throughout the workshop, and Danni and Candice were also side talking. Georgia was complaining under her breath at every direction given, and so on and so on, it seemed. (1.12.15)

The unfocused and uncooperative energy in class made it hard to be present to the very serious content of the workshop. The workshop leader had given us a scenarios activity, which asked students to put themselves in the shoes of various individuals experiencing a continuum of sexual violence, and to discuss and write about what they would be feeling emotionally, physically, short-term, long term, and to analyze the power factors involved. Even though the activity was highly interesting and directly connected to the research that as many as eight students had chosen to take on, it was also highly risky to engage in this content which surely affected many people in the room. While many students had taken the opportunity to opt out of the risky activity by going to another classroom for the day, the students who did choose to be in the conversation clearly did not feel the level of trust to engage fully with it. Paradoxically, a real engagement required trust, but trust could only be fostered by taking the risks of engagement. The intensity of our work sometimes overlooked the need for low stakes ways for students build their engagement with

emotionally risky subject matter. Many students checked out or half checked out to keep themselves safe, I suspect, and by doing so, the possibilities of trust were further eroded in class on that day and on others like it.

While critical and justice oriented approaches often helped students and teachers to find sources of hope and solidarity with one another, as I discuss at length in Chapter Three, they also opened doors to painful wounds and power dynamics that could not be healed or resolved in the span of a workshop, a semester, or even a year. Our attempts within English Amped to build solidarity and community so that people could experience wellness and healing, and to awaken our capacity to act against injustices were not perfect, and could not account for all the overwhelming struggles against injustices that were woven into the school itself, into the lives of students and teachers, and the ways we related to one another.

Between Guard and Guardian

On that same day that tension began with Candice and a few other students, my field notes have a small notation, “Welcome and onboard Robin” (9.23.14). Robin joined the class the Monday after the summit, a transfer student from another school. She signed up for creative writing and was placed in English Amped. Bri’Yonna interviewed her in the hallway, and then introduced her to the class, providing some information about her life. One of the “fun facts” that Bri’Yonna decided to share about Robin included some gossip that Robin knew about a faculty member at the school. When this gossip was presented from the front of the room, Destiny cut the presentation off immediately in the firm, “this is not acceptable” tone of a veteran teacher. I noticed how ashamed the new student looked, and so I followed Destiny with a slightly softer message about “making mistakes as a way of

learning.” During a reflection at the end of the year, Destiny shared with me that she believed that that this was a moment when I lost status with some students.

In the reflection on May 27, 2015, Destiny advocated to me, “Our boundaries need to be more clear about acceptable and unacceptable actions.” She believed that “students at Frazier respond to shame,” and that shame, like how she responded to shut down the public gossip about another faculty member, is often a necessary tool to create a boundary. I felt deeply conflicted about this, as I did about many other such moments where my role as an adult in the school seemed to come with the expectations that I would shut down behaviors using shame. It seemed to me that hierarchical authority that used shame as a method of control closed the possibilities of dialogue and the exploration of values at the root of dehumanizing behaviors. It is not that I believed that students should spread gossip about other people in the school in our classroom; it is that I wanted students themselves to recognize and claim that ethic for themselves. Shaming, as Destiny practiced it on that day, was an efficient route to establishing an ethical boundary for the class, but it did not offer a space for students to contemplate and grapple with those boundaries themselves. The meta-questions that Destiny and I had not fully reckoned with included the question of what boundaries needed to be in place a priori to function as a classroom community at all, and therefore needed to be established through teacher authority, and which boundaries the students themselves needed to grapple with and make sense of themselves. In the first year of English Amped, Destiny and I each stood on a different side of this question, with me advocating to err on the side of collaborative boundary setting, and her on the side of boundaries set through authority. We both wanted to establish a safe and productive space,

but we each had work to do to shift our own habituated ways of responding in order to create this space in-between what we each felt most comfortable with.

Most of my previous work with youth had taken place in community-based organizations, and when I did work in schools prior to English Amped, I was a guest teaching artist who did not have to enforce boundaries, have extensive knowledge of school rules and procedures, or internalize the norms of teacher-student interactions. I had no desire to learn those things, and in some ways resisted learning them. It took me over a year to remember the procedures to enter attendance or mark a student tardy, or to use the online grade book. I never learned how to write a discipline referral for a student. I deferred to Destiny on most of these matters. Before we sorted out some policies and procedures for our classroom between the fall and spring semesters of the 2014-2015 year, I did not know what the norms were for when someone needed to go to the bathroom, so I would often reply, "Go ask Mrs. Cooper." If she was not present, my uncertainty about school policies was palpable, and students pushed boundaries to see what they could get away with.

I could not have it both ways; I could not both reject school-based authority and get the respect associated with that authority. It did not occur to me at first that my presence as a day-to-day teacher at the school meant that students perceived me as simply failing to occupy that authority. I was concerned about becoming a guard in a system that I perceived as oppressive, and yet what I may have unintentionally communicated to students was that I was not capable of being a guardian to them. As much as I may have wanted to leap directly from school *as it is* to school *as it could be*, I had chosen to abdicate the responsibility of translation by simply acting as though I were not a teacher in the school

whenever it was convenient for me, often leaving Destiny with the burden of being the adult authority figure.

As it stood in the 2014-2015 school year, my inclination towards a non-authoritarian stance in times of trouble was often understood as naïve optimism by teachers and students alike, especially since I did not have experience or more than a handful of concrete ideas about how to supplant authoritarian control with other modes of decision making in a school environment. I had faith in the ways that I had interacted with young people in the voluntary, non-school based youth programs where my career had taken me, spaces that were more conducive to youth agency and self-determination. Destiny's instincts were different than mine, as a veteran of the classroom with 14 years of experience working in urban schools. In moments of disagreement between us, she would often begin thoughts by saying, "As a teacher I know that..." This conflict between our two forms of expertise and sense of what mattered, which epitomized the challenge of being in the school but not of the school, often meant that Destiny and I were of two minds, and we wavered back and forth as we sought compromise and gained influence over one another. This question, to what degree teachers should act as guards and/or guardians of students, created certain tensions between me and Destiny during the first year in which I habitually abdicated certain responsibilities associated with maintaining order and in which she continued to carry out the role of teacher as she had learned to do it over the course of her career.

In the absence of a coherent plan for how we would address conflict in the classroom, we sometimes ventured into territories that lay somewhere between each of our instincts, but with which neither of us were truly happy. On October 3, 2014 we held a

dialogue in class intended to, in Destiny's words, "stand in the sun," meaning that we wanted to hold open space to address the increasing "shade" circulating throughout the room in multiple directions, and coming from multiple people. It was my instinct to create a circle and use some facilitative questions to help students surface what they appreciated and needed from the class. Destiny's instinct was to take students into the hall when trouble surfaced and work it out there in the least disruptive way possible. What ended up happening was a strange blend of the two. What we hoped would be a thirty-minute class dialogue turned into a two-hour fiasco that began with group dialogue and then broke into small group mediation in the hallway, followed by even more big group dialogue. In the meantime, many students grew visibly frustrated that personal conflicts between a handful of people had taken up so much space. The dialogue and hallway mediations, which were meant to return students to a sense of connection and solidarity, added fuel to what felt like a family feud with people taking sides and airing aggressions. Seven of the English Amped interviewees I spoke to that year told me what they liked least about the class was the "shade," and also, "standing in the sun." As Destiny reflected later, "standing in the sun begets more shade" (5.27.15). Indeed, the original euphoria of breaking with school norms, especially in how much control and freedom students would have, seemed to be collapsing in a disastrous power grab.

We would have benefited greatly at that point from restorative justice (RJ) circle processes, but we had not yet tapped into resources that would have helped us use those methods. Instinctively, we sensed that creating a circle and holding a dialogue would help the class move through the conflict, and indeed, this is at the heart of RJ circle processes. Yet, we neither understood how to facilitate that circle, nor did we understand at the time

that it is not uncommon for things to become more inflamed before there is restoration, because airing conflict is by its nature an uncomfortable process. We were earning these insights the hard way.

As Ginwright (2016) explains, “Well-being is a function of control and power young people have in their schools and communities” (p. 24). Even though Destiny and I intended to develop opportunities for student power and control, we had not developed a pedagogy for how students would learn to gradually manage power and control, and thus it was often a frustrating experience for students. In an interview with Danni in the spring, when I asked what were the things she found most enjoyable and least enjoyable about English Amped, she replied, “the freedom (pause) and the freedom” (5.13.2015). As Danni explains quite succinctly, the extent to which students had some freedom and control in English Amped was both a gift and a burden. Negotiating control and power with students over some aspects of classroom life pushed both students and teachers outside of our comfort zones and challenged the norm of unilateral teacher authority typical of mass education. Student power in English Amped was not initiated by students coming together themselves and mobilizing their will to unrest power and authority from teachers; rather, teachers were in the awkward position of inviting students, from our own authority, to take some power and authority from us. Ira Shor (1996) describes the paradox of this situation:

Unlikely as it seems, I am trying to be a critical-democratic teacher in a setting where critical inquiry and power-sharing have virtually no profile in student experience. Faced by this democratic vacuum in everyday life, I have no choice but to use my institutional authority to ease into a process of shared power. (p. 19)

As Shor emphasizes, the process of renegotiating power and authority between students cannot begin with teachers merely abdicating their culturally and institutionally ascribed forms of teacher authority. Rather, teachers have a responsibility to “ease into a process of

shared power.” This took Destiny and I two years of struggle to accept, and it will likely take many more to refine.

Moral philosopher Hannah Arendt, who wrote extensively about the subjects of agency and authority, turned to the subject of education just once in her long career. In a 1954 essay, “The Crisis in Education,” she argues that adults in schools must not experiment with the future through the kinds of democratic schooling reforms associated with the progressive education movement. She argues that “the function of the school is to teach children what the world is like and not to instruct them in the art of living” (1954/2006, p. 13). For Arendt, this distinction hinged on the imperative of adults to take responsibility for the world as it is; regardless of one’s critique of the world, and to introduce young people, who are not yet experienced, to the world as it is, which they will inevitably come to change *after* they have been educated. This willingness to claim responsibility for the world as it is, she argues, is the basis of a legitimate authority.

It is as though parents daily said, ‘In this world even we are not very securely at home; how to move about in it, what to know, what skills to master as mysteries to us too. You must try to make out as best you can; in any case you are not entitled to call us to account. We are innocent, we wash our hands of you.’ (p. 11)

Authority for Arendt means taking responsibility for introducing the young to the world that they will inevitably change. The refusal of this responsibility on the part of adults is a form of abandonment, such as the way in which my desire to not act as a guard over my students also meant that I could not also be fully trusted by them as a guardian. Though I may have wanted to disengage from the inherent adultism and oppression of guardianship within a system designed from its outset to reproduce an unjust social order, the only way to legitimately engage youth within that system was to accept the paradoxical nature of the dual role of the guard/guardian.

However, I cannot fully accept Arendt's thesis that education can play no part in politics because educators must assume a responsibility for the old, that is, the inherited world, and because politics must "deal with those who are already educated" (p. 3). This idea fails to capture the exponential rate of change in modernity, a shift that makes learning the world anew a nearly constant responsibility for both young and old, thus eradicating any promise of ever finally being "educated." And yet, Arendt's argument that a state of constant uncertainty does not excuse adults from their responsibilities to the young is one that must be taken seriously, and has very much to do with the ways in which youth experience a lack of adult authority as abandonment. What is called for is a dialectic of guardianship and democratic facilitation in which adults create liminal spaces for the young, and gradually with the young, so that we may practice the forms of participation that enable freedom in a democratic society together.

By mid-fall of 2014, Destiny and I were novices to such dialectics, and fearing that we had gone too far in abdicating our adult authority, we made a number of reactionary decisions to retake control. From the beginning of the class, we had not developed a coherent system for grading student work, nor had we fully accepted that grading was a reality of schooling that we would not be able to immediately throw off in our utopian experiment. In late September, we assessed that our non-grading was contributing to students acting out, and so we assigned the first major due date with a 100-point grade attached. Portfolios showing work from Open Reading and Writing Studios were to be turned in. Not surprisingly, students responded by testing the boundary: many portfolios were not turned in.

After reflecting on how much stricter we were with our own children than our students in English Amped, Destiny and I decided on September 25, 2014 to create a “Closed Writing Studio” in which students who had not yet turned in their work would have to sit and not be able to participate in the otherwise “Open Reading and Writing Studio.” It was for the most part a rhetorical construct, but one that introduced a limit and a measure of control that had previously been invisible in the room. Open Reading and Writing studio, as I note in my field log the previous day, had begun to feel chaotic, a space in which some students were taking advantage of the freedom to do their own thing by doing little to nothing. Creating a closed studio space did not seem to solve the problem so much as send the crisis over freedom and control to the next level. In mid-semester surveys, a handful of students named “Closed Writing Studio” as the thing they liked least about the class, with one person insisting, “open writing studio should be open!” I had to admire the fight students were willing to put up to retain the control they had been promised. As students pushed the boundaries of curriculum infrastructures and personal relationships, they were testing the limits of our promise for more student ownership and control. The fact that we did not have a coherent, consistent approach for how we would respond to transgressions, whether that be in how class time was spent, or in how work was turned in, or how interpersonal challenges would be addressed, made it imperative for students to continuously test the system. Of course, defining how and when to negotiate such systems with students was a major challenge of our first year, especially because we were in a learning process both with and alongside students on what it would mean to use teacher authority in a legitimate way to ease students into the process of sharing power.

During the second year, Destiny experienced what she refers to as her “learning curve” with English Amped as she struggled even more deeply with questions of authority and control. Our new teaching schedules meant that I was only part-time in our two English Amped classes. As she became the central figure in both classes, she struggled to hold for herself the dialectic of teacher-controlled and student-controlled that she and I struggled so much to counterbalance together in the first year, playing off one another’s strengths and weaknesses. In a reflective journal that Destiny kept throughout the 2015-016 school year, she wrote in an entry on September 15, 2015:

If you are going to teach critical literacies in a high school institution, then you have to have an appropriate management plan that maintains positive relationships. So, last week I realized that I need to enforce trust, love, and respect rather than ‘police’ student behavior. But what does that look like?

As Destiny began to ask these questions on her own, she began to yield more power to students in the new eleventh grade English Amped class, inviting them to negotiate what the boundaries of the classroom would be so that she could explore what it looked like to not “police” student behavior. In November of 2015, the second eleventh grade class negotiated a contract with one another that was vastly more detailed than the first cohort’s list of words describing ideal behavior. This contract detailed how things like phones, food, and side-talking, and grades would be handled. Many students rejected the contract process itself and became frustrated with Destiny, as the first cohort had with me in the 2014-2015 school year, for hoisting such responsibilities upon students rather than just handling it ourselves like the professionals we were supposed to be.

As Destiny took on this critical exploration for herself, distancing herself from what she knew as a teacher about how to create boundaries for students, and attempting to negotiate those boundaries with students, she felt the whiplash of what she describes as

the “rollercoaster” in this learning process with the 2015-2016 eleventh-grade class. In December, Destiny began to ask some questions that mirrored my questions from the previous year, but from a different perspective. She writes:

I also wonder why students desire a teacher who is not ‘too nice.’ I think back to the way I used to be in the classroom. Typically, by the end of the second six weeks students would tell me that I’m black, that I act just like a crazy black lady. I’ve let a lot of that go, and it really has been killing me. I used to act on tough love a lot sooner and a lot more. I think I need to call that back up. I don’t think getting rid of tough love has helped much, I think it has made things worse. (12.17.15)

At this point, Destiny was reclaiming some of what she had come to understand from her experience as a “warm demander,” which she referred to as tough love. As Delpit (2012) explains, “warm demanders expect a great deal of their students, convince them of their own brilliance, and help them to reach their potential in a disciplined and structured environment” (p. 77). This was knowledge that I only fully began to realize towards the end of the first year of English Amped: that I could not be a guardian in the eyes of my students if I was not also willing to be a guard, someone who was willing to be firm and enforce rules when they needed to be enforced. As Destiny recalled what she knew in her role as a culturally responsive teacher in a Black Southern school context, love often meant being tough.

Even as Destiny’s exploration returned her to some of her previous wisdom, the journey also brought her, like me, to recognize the complexities of how the guard/guardian role fit together in a critical classroom context where our aim was not merely to comfort students and ourselves by replicating the world as it is, a world in which adult authority and youth powerlessness are the cultural status quo. For Destiny, this meant pushing beyond shame and policing as strategies for gaining control to articulate more clearly how love meant helping to facilitate youth to take more ownership of their own education. In

the same journal entry where she reclaims herself as a “tough love” teacher, she goes on to write:

Difference between compliance and commitment. How do we get our students to commit instead of comply? In most of their other classes and areas of their lives, they are asked to comply. How do we get them to trust that we are asking them to commit? To trust in the commitment?

While the abdication of teacher authority could mean chaos in classrooms, and even signal abandonment for students, on the other end of the spectrum, classrooms that were overly compliance oriented undermined students’ abilities to participate in democratic power sharing and experience the agency that Tristen talks about in Chapter Three. Students could not become committed participants in the educational process if we did not do the hard work of confronting the internalized powerlessness that kept students on a compliant to non-compliant trajectory. In many senses being a “warm demander” meant demanding commitment, which is more than mere compliance. These struggles, to both invite and push students who have internalized powerlessness to take ownership of their own educations and claim their own agency, continue to be a central pedagogical challenge in Humanities Amped.

Creating spaces for students and teachers to work through these challenges is ultimately the threshold-making practice of insurgent architecture that collaborators in English Amped, now Humanities Amped, continue to learn. In early October of the second year, Destiny wrote in her journal, “I have to be okay with learning, too. It is so difficult after 14 years. I feel as though I have lost some of my status” (10.6.15). Indeed, part of what Destiny and I both had to experience was a radical unlearning of what felt “normal” for each of us. My discomfort with authority and Destiny’s learning curve towards sharing power with students meant that we each had to risk the habitus of our professional

knowledge to push through a new threshold in-between the realities of school *as it is* and *as it could be*.

By the third year of English Amped, we have set in place some teacher-driven “boundaries” as guidelines for the classroom, thus giving us a shared vocabulary for claiming our authority as guards/guardians in the classroom. Students negotiate classroom agreements with us and one another about more aspects of classroom life that are, unlike the “boundaries,” open for negotiation. By studying and implementing restorative justice practices, we have finally gained a methodology for building community and addressing conflict when it does arise. We have also begun to shift our curriculum so that students entering Humanities Amped in their first year spend significant time focused on reading, researching, and reflecting on issues of schooling itself so that they may develop a critical perspective about how power works in schools as a basis for developing a more collaborative classroom and school culture. Of course, we have not mastered this work; it is an ongoing process of learning and unlearning for everyone involved. Part of what we have learned very clearly is that learning to share power and imagine schools as if they could be otherwise takes real time. A student in a current English Amped senior class told me in November 2016, regarding her class, which was in its second year together, “We were a total mess last year, but now we just love each other.” Indeed, it was my sense with both the first and second group of English Amped students that a sense of security and solidarity, a feeling of trust in one another that did not need to be constantly tested, did not emerge until the second year.

The dialectic art of creating threshold spaces through which such complex learning about human agency, power, and citizenship could happen involves acknowledging the

internalized beliefs about authority that students and teachers bring with them into the classroom, as well as looking for ways to experiment, knowing that we will experience failure as a generative part of the learning process. The binary of “in control” or “out of control” too often push people towards either magical thinking or heightened authoritarianism. This binary thinking stunts generative educative processes, ultimately failing to facilitate ways in which young people may become adults who are fluent in the arts of democratic participation. We cannot afford to do as Arendt suggests and attempt to divide education from politics in such a world, nor could we if we tried. However, to intentionally combine the two requires a constant dialectic that invites teachers to be learners and learners to be teachers. For adults who are invested in making that kind of space for youth to learn and practice, it is simultaneously imperative that we hold such space for ourselves. It is only then that our authority as facilitators of youth learning gains legitimacy. Indeed, adults must also create liminal spaces to learn with youth and with one another. The way that teachers could collaborate with and challenge one another beyond our habituated world-views was part of the rich teacher-learning community that was woven into the process of English Amped.

Conclusion

The time it takes to build trust means learning to live with the uncertainties and anxieties inherent in behaving in new ways. Giving such experimentation time to unfold means actively resisting the fears and anxieties that are projected into urban schools. These fears have everything to do with the policing of poor, young people of color. Popular representations of “good” teachers in urban schools feature the trope of the magical “White lady” who by herself heroically liberates poor students of color from their ignorance and

oppression on one hand and the “get tough” Black educator who wields a baseball bat on the other. Whether making a White public feel good about their extraordinary kindness, or making a Black public feel powerful through an ability to call upon self-discipline, these tropes hyperbolize the ways in which young people of color in urban schools are feared by the culture at large, fears that likely reflect a cultural anxiety about the future itself.

If we are to engage the complexity of what it is really like to build spaces where students and teachers can earn solidarity, trust, and learn the arts of sharing democratic power, we must challenge overly simplified ideals of “safe space.” Safe space may seem to promise environments in which people will not be made to feel uncomfortable in the midst of creating more humanized spaces for learning in schools. The journey of becoming a humanized “us” in English Amped capable of sustaining a community in which people could “appear before one another as they truly are” was anything but safe; it was beset with challenges to our own identities and our sense of security within a larger community of people. There is considerable anxiety in moving from our habituated world, much as we might critique it, to “soar into a world [we have] never seen” (Levison, 2012, p. 185). To make this journey required attempting and often failing to create the other world within our classroom.

English Amped entered a liminality that was both euphoric and troubling by destabilizing the norms of power and control between teachers and students, inviting the content of students’ lives into the curriculum, and reframing uncritical “schoolwork” so that it resonated with students’ lives and privileged various forms of counter-knowledge. We lost the safety of a neatly teacher-controlled classroom to forge such possibilities, but doing so also meant taking on the risks of soaring into a world that we as teachers had never

seen, thus challenging the ways that we understood our roles and responsibilities as we learned how to be both the guards and guardians that students sometimes needed us to be. In these ways, English Amped destabilized the norms of school, which not only made the work of enacting another, more sustaining and emancipatory, education possible, but also made it impossible to do so when the learning curve and risks were too high.

The “us” of English Amped was formed in both the euphoria and the crucibles of our liminality as we moved through performances of school as it could be possible, over time changing the collective habitus of teachers and students. In many ways, it was a journey that must be repeated with each new group of English Amped students. And yet, in our third year of this process, the teachers and students of Humanities Amped have learned a lot about the ways to guide ourselves more safely across the inherent anxieties of unlearning and reimagining school. I imagine that we still have other journeys to take, and yet I cannot imagine there will be a journey quite as wild, quite as filled with love and hope as the one we took with those very particular twenty-seven students and our ever-expanding network of partners and friends in that first difficult and surprising year.

CHAPTER 5

THRESHOLDS OF CRITICAL ENGLISH TEACHER EDUCATION

Going Beyond Created Structures

Time was set aside for a going away party on a hot Friday in May of 2015, the last day in English Amped for Rita and Jennifer, the two undergraduate pre-service teachers who stayed with the class as student teachers into the spring semester. Of the five undergraduates who took part in the fall field experiences and formed the Art of Critical Literacy group, which also included Ellen, Rose, and Sonia, these two had been with the class the longest. Deleon, the school librarian, brought refreshments to the party, Destiny brought gifts, and Saida volunteered to act as emcee so that we could offer toasts for the party's guests of honor, a way of saying goodbye that had now become ritual in our classroom. Rita and Jennifer huddled together at the front of the room, waiting for the send-off to begin. Robin was the first to offer a toast, turning the celebration into an instantly tearful affair. "When I was going through something....they just really helped me..." she said. Her voice broke, unable to finish her sentence, and Rita and Jennifer went to her desk offering hugs before Robin could get any more words out. Eric was called on next, who picked up on a lighter note, saying "I want to give a toast to Ms. Halport, and I can't say why, because if I do Trey will hit me. And I want to give a toast to Ms. Boone, because she was with me when I wrote one of the first poems I ever wrote way back in the fall." Others added their thanks, "I love y'all," and "Y'all are awesome people" being some of the most frequent refrains. Dontre'lle added, "I'm scared for English Amped next year because I don't even know what it's going to be like without y'all." Tears were flowing down more than a few faces, mine among them, and Rita and Jennifer spoke last, echoing a theme of gratitude

and reciprocity through words like, “Thank you for teaching me,” and “I have learned something from every single student in this class.” As the closing announcements blared from the intercom and students lined up for the bell, I saw Devanté make his way over to the student teachers. Jennifer was seated, and so he squatted down, putting his hand on her shoulder the way a basketball coach might, and summoned Rita to lean down so she could hear what he had to say to them. There was a tenderness in the image of their heads bent together, and though I did not hear the words, the image spoke volumes. I snapped a picture discreetly, trying not to intrude on the moment, but to record in nonetheless. Later that evening, I sent it to Rita and Jennifer a text message stating simply, “This happened.”



Figure 5: Devanté with Rita and Jennifer at going away party.

And yes, this happened. Our classroom became a space where people showed up, never without conflict and uncertainty, but nevertheless showed up and cared for one another. Teachers did not solely care for students, but also, as Devanté’s protective gesture towards Rita and Jennifer reveals, students also showed up to nurture teachers. This discovery, that relationships grounded in trust and mutuality are vital components of what “real” teaching and learning can like in a “real” English classroom, was a major point of discovery and reflection for the English teacher candidates from South State University who participated in the Art of Critical literacy group while doing field experience in the fall and who continued in the spring with

student teaching in the English Amped classroom in the 2014-2015 school year.

Philosopher of education Maxine Greene, in an essay entitled “Teaching: The Question of Personal Reality” (1978), writes:

It is difficult to gain the capacity ‘of going beyond created structures’ (to use the words of Maurice Merleau-Ponty) ‘in order to create others.’ And yet, as Merleau-Ponty saw it, this capacity – like the power to choose and vary points of view – is what defines the human being. (p. 28)

Indeed, as Greene saw it, the ability to “go beyond created structures” is that upon which humanization, and a humanized education, depends. As I discuss in Chapter Two, my experiences as a teacher educator at South State University during the 2013-2014 academic year provoked me to recognize the structural barriers that kept the predominantly White, middle class pre-service English teacher candidates at South State University from seeing “beyond created structures” to imagine how culturally sustaining, critical literacy-infused teaching and learning might be implemented for students in the predominately working class and Black local school system. For English teacher candidates from South State, just like students at Frazier High School, the work of translation between school *as it is* and *as it could be* called for performances of possibility, concrete examples that could call up the courage of people to act together towards alternative possibilities.

During Spring 2014, as I worked with English teacher candidates at South State and simultaneously planned for English Amped to begin in the following academic year, I began to wonder if there were ways to invite teacher candidates into the process of creating English Amped. I wondered, how could we sustain the eddies of rich conversation and discovery that surfaced in the official teacher education classroom among students who were most interested in transformative pedagogies? How could we hold a more sustained space to reflect, read, and practice alongside one another? How could we humanize the

contact between in-service teachers, teacher educators, and teacher candidates so that we could be in dialogue and eschew the scripts of academic expert, practitioner expert, and novice that too often divorced theory from practice and constrained our mutual capacity to ask questions and reimagine together?

Destiny, who had years of experience working with student teachers and early career teachers as a mentor, was excited to join me in thinking through these questions, as was Sue Weinstein, an Associate Professor at South State in English who had ten years of experience working as a teacher and advisor to undergraduates in the English secondary education concentration at South State. Together, we decided to send out a call to the thirty undergraduates in their junior year of the secondary English education program, inviting them to fill out a simple application for a small group independent study in the art of teaching through critical literacies that would take place in Fall 2014. The small group independent study, which we titled *The Art of Critical Literacy*, would be paired with the students' required 40-hours of field experience, which would be scheduled to take place in the English Amped classroom at Frazier High School. I sent out an email to the juniors in the English secondary education cohort, all of whom were my students at the time, with the following blurb:

Critical literacies call attention to unjust structures and social conditions by 'reading the word and the world' (Freire & Macedo, 1987). In other words, participants will read about, reflect upon, and practice literacy learning (reading and writing in multiple mediums) as a means to critically analyze, represent, and affect the social worlds in which we live. This independent student is tied to a field experience classroom at Frazier high school called 'English Amped' in which high school students are also immersed in critical literacy pedagogies. Therefore, [South State English Education] students will have the opportunity to connect course readings and discussions to lived experiences in a public high school classroom. We will read extensively and also practice the art of critical literacy ourselves through hands-on, project-based methods such as writing workshops, story circles, critical dialogue, oral histories, performance, and participatory action research.

Within a few days, I had enough applications to fill the group, which we decided to cap at five. Jennifer, Rita, Rose, Sonia, and Ellen received word shortly thereafter that they were accepted, with excitement on all ends. As they peppered me with questions about what we would be doing together, I had to explain that I did not fully know yet myself. The Art of Critical Literacy class would be an exploration for us all, as would English Amped. While the approach would be organized by what we understand and learn about critical literacy, and while it would build on the various kinds of knowledge that Sue, Destiny, and I have put into practice in our careers thus far, we would also be a community of teachers and students exploring questions of practice and theory together. This orientation was later expressed on the course syllabus (see Appendix C), which introduced the class with these words:

As a community concerned with pedagogical issues, we will continuously interrogate commonsense notions of what it means to teach and to learn. Shari J. Stenberg (2005) offers a definition of pedagogy that we may take as a starting point: (1) Pedagogy is a knowledge-making activity that involves the interplay of visions and practices, both of which require reflection; (2) pedagogy is dependent on learners and is remade with each encounter, as the students and the teacher change; (3) pedagogy cannot be finished; we cannot 'finally' learn to teach. (xviii)

Following Stenberg's understanding of pedagogy as emergent and dependent upon the encounter among changing people, visions, and practices, we offer this as an exploratory course in which teachers and students will learn alongside one another. We hope that this learning community becomes one in which we may follow our own inquiries and generate new visions, practices, and relationships through which our work as teachers and learners may continue to unfold in meaningful dialogue with one another.

As Stenberg suggests, our educational experience would flow from a place that privileged emergence, reflections, and the contingencies of working alongside one another in previously unknown circumstances. If we were to go beyond the "created structures" to shape a more humanizing space for teacher education, as with the high school English

Amped class, the approach would need to be more tactical than strategic, less concerned with questions of replication and scale than with the development of relationships that could generate other performances of possibility.

In this chapter, I discuss how pre-service teacher candidates from South State University were affected by their participation in the Art of Critical Literacy and English Amped. Our work together included a fall field experience in which the five pre-service teacher candidates each spent at least one class period per week in English Amped, the weekly Art of Critical Literacy seminar that met during the fall semester, the spring semester of student teaching in English Amped for Rita and Jennifer, and less frequent gatherings of the whole group throughout the spring for check in and reflection. Throughout this chapter, I ask how the meanings and possibilities of English education came into view for the pre-service teacher candidates, and how involvement in the Art of Critical Literacy and English Amped disoriented and reoriented these participants' understanding of themselves as emerging English educators. While I draw on research data collected from all participants, I approach these questions by focusing on the concerns, understandings, and images of English education that seemed most salient for two members of our group, Rose and Jennifer, whose experiences I believe illuminate larger themes in the field of critical teacher education.

Rose's Journey: Transforming What Counts as Education

Rose was a student who engaged passionately in the teacher education course where I first met her during the 2013-2014 academic year. I was surprised when she later told me that, prior to joining the teacher education program, she had been disengaged at school, sort of floating through doing as little as possible, engaging her intellectual curiosity

through other forums. She was the first person to apply to the Art of Critical Literacy.

On her application, she wrote:

I am extremely passionate about using my own literacy as a way to connect to the world. I already do a lot of reflecting upon the social role literacy plays in society (and how we learn), but I would really like a chance to actually practice and gain experience using what I have learned about literacy education. . . . I would really like to focus my career on encouraging literacy through hands on methods that allows students to 'do' to learn.

For Rose, as for others, this question of how “to do” and how to “connect to the world” through literacy framed central desires and concerns that participants brought to the Art of Critical Literacy.

The relationship between education and “the world” remained central to Rose’s inquiry throughout the fall semester and framed important decisions she would make after that semester as well. During an oral reflection with the other members of the Art of Critical Literacy group on January 31, 2015, Rose summarized some of the key things she learned:

I think the biggest thing for me was unlearning what counts as education, because for me . . . there’s always this question of like how important is personal relationship, personal interaction with students, because for me in my education it wasn’t important at all. I had no relationships with my teachers. I never felt as though they were anything more than people who spewed out information at me and I just did the best I could with it, and that’s kind of the way I went through high school and did the rest of my school.

Here, Rose explains that her own school experiences provided her with a model of schooling in which alienation was the norm. She learned that being a good student means doing the best one can in keeping up with the “people who spewed out information.” This figure of the teacher that spews knowledge, and of the student that tries to be a good receptacle, captures Freire’s (1968) critique of the banking model of education. Rose saw

herself as actively trying to “unlearn” that model, and replace it with one in which personal relationships between people are part of what “counts.”

The lack of personal relationships in Rose’s own schooling experiences are related to a disconnect between what she saw as “school-knowledge” and “real world” knowledge, which she previously viewed as alienated from one another. During an Art of Critical Literacy meeting on October 28, 2014, Rose told the group:

I was thinking about the way story circles were presented to them, [which] really kind of drove that home to me, they already had this knowledge, they already had it in a story form, because when you relate it to another person, it comes out in a story, right?

Rose noticed that by creating spaces for students to tell stories drawn from their lived experiences, they could connect their knowledges from other spaces to school and relate that knowledge to ways of knowing that are more privileged in schools, such as reading and analyzing print-based texts. The connections between how students held knowledge inside and outside of school, and the inter-personal relationships framing that knowledge, became a key point of interest for Rose. When it came time for her to develop an action research project in the Art of Critical Literacy class, she decided to plan a “community night” for English Amped students and the people they chose to invite, either their families or other important people who students identified as “community” having shaped their lives.

She explained her plan for the action project to the rest of the Art of Critical Literacies group at the October 28, 2014 meeting:

My research project that I am going to do is a community night in which our students invite two people . . . an elder or someone who has really shaped who they are. . . . It will be at the Frazier Alumni Center, which is really cool because then we can have the students in one place and the elders in a place where they can really see the history of Frazier because this is a really historically significant part of their community.

Rose's choice of location, the Alumni Center, points to the history of the school as the first publically funded Black high school in the South. The Frazier Alumni Center is located at the original site of Frazier High School, a historic building opened in 1927 and renovated in 2005, which now serves as a community center hosting numerous social service programs. As a site for the community night, the Alumni Center invited English Amped students and their guests to interpret the event as part of the pride and sense of affiliation among the city's Black residents. As a White person from what she described as a "White flight" rural area outside of the city, Rose understood "their community" to be separate from herself.

When Rose was first planning the event in early October, I informed her that to secure the Alumni Center she needed to stop by and make a request for the space with someone at the center's front desk. Because the event was connected to the school, we would be able to use the space for free. In my field notes (10.10.14) I write about how I sensed that Rose was hesitant about showing up at the Alumni Center as a representative of Frazier High School, and so we made plans to go over together one Friday afternoon. As we drove back to school, she expressed her genuine surprise at how easy it was to just walk in and ask to reserve the space. I was more than happy to elucidate on the benefits of dropping by to make a personal connection versus emails or phone calls when making a request. She seemed eager to be in on this bit of practical information about how to organize an event, and told me that she had previously driven past the building on a regular basis on her way to work, but never knew what it was. Rose's obvious enthusiasm at knowing more about the Alumni Center, and learning how to request access to the space, and my role in walking Rose through the process of requesting that access, signals much about the barriers for teachers who are perceived and perceive themselves as outsiders in

the networks of affiliation that make up the “communities” in which they are seeking to work in solidarity.

I write “communities” in scare quotes here because while networks organized by relationship, common affinities, and locality are real forces that constitute actual communities the world over, “communities” are also imaginaries constructed from a distance and applied to the other, often in ways that dehumanize, by failing to recognize the contradictions and intersections from which such networks are formed. As Rose traversed the organizing of this event, it was important for her to begin translating broad generalizations about “their community” into a language of particular, nuanced, never-totally-systemic assemblages. As she approached tasks such as booking the Alumni Center, or working with students to identify guests, Rose was forced to translate the imagined coherence of “their community” into a network of particular experiences and relationships. By its nature, such a network is an assemblage, which is less a coherent system and more “hodgepodes...combinations of interpenetrating bodies” (Deleuze ctd. in Bryant, 2009, para. 3). In the tendency to essentialize “their community,” an encounter with “their community” becomes impossible; one cannot encounter a community because an encounter is always particular and depends on specific points of connection. Community, then, is an imaginary through which particular encounters are connected to one another in dynamic, generative, and often unexpected ways. Rose’s relief and joy at connecting with the talkative receptionist at the Alumni Center was a way for her to learn experientially that community is not an insurmountable *object* that exists elsewhere, but an everyday practice of coming into contact with particular others.

The English Amped community night took place in mid-November and it was a large and delightful encounter among about 75 people of all ages. In the large reception space at the Alumni Center, a long table held the variety of potluck dishes that people brought with them, and students performed poems and led their guests in activities including story circles and a writing prompt. For many students, the poetry segment of the evening was a first, exciting experience of sharing writing in front of a large group. After the handful of students who were scheduled to perform finished their set, a group formed on the stage and, declaring their name to be “Bars,” launched into freestyle poetry and rap. This open-mic spirit infused the night. After the writing prompt “I hope...” was given out to the whole room, it was announced that anyone could come up to share what they had written, and various people, including some of the delightful younger siblings of English Amped students, formed a line alongside Rose to take their turn at the mic.

These joyful encounters, and the meanings made of those encounters, were discussed the following day in class, November 12, 2014. In response to the question, “Do you think having events like community night are important?” Bri’Yonna answered:

I think this is important because not only are we connecting outside of school, but our parents are connecting too (lots of snaps), for example like my mom and BriHops’s mom, they only talked one time before, just to say, ‘Yeah, my daughter calls your daughter sometimes,’ but like last night they actually talked, and my mom and Deuce’s mom, they actually talked, and it was connecting not just for us, but for our families too, so it was a real, active community. (People clap in response).

Rose followed Bri’Yonna:

I want to build off of that. My mom and stepmom came, and they felt like they learned things they wouldn’t have learned otherwise. They wouldn’t have gotten that kind of story, that kind of knowledge, from people in their own communities, so for them to come somewhere where, you know, people had different experiences than them, they learned something, too. I think that was cool, because you usually associate that with a classroom, but we weren’t in a classroom.

These responses reflect the way in which community making is a process of linking and extending kin and friend networks. Bri'Yonna identified this process as a “real, active community” as opposed to a community that is not real because people are not actually involved in constructing it. Rose links this idea to how the event allowed her family to make connections that traversed the race and class territories defining “communities” writ large across the region, allowing them “to come somewhere where, you know, people had different experiences than them.” Indeed, having *somewhere* in which stories between differently positioned people can be shared, not only for teachers and students, but also for their wider networks, converts the promise of American democracy, if only for an evening, into a concrete practice. As Sondra Myers (2002) writes:

The local community must be the microcosm of our pluralistic, inclusive democracy, and the realization of our democratic ideals. Community is, in fact, democracy incarnate, where culture is woven into the fabric of our daily lives, not worn as a decoration on its surface, or observed from afar as the province of the privileged few. (p. 4)

The pluralism and inclusivity of “democracy incarnate” in English Amped’s community night meant that a public space, a common, was formed through which people whose lives are connected, but who are structurally separated by raced and classed geographies and their institutional articulations, could experience time and space in common with one another. It was a performance of possibilities that enabled English Amped participants to “dare to imagine different social arrangements and instantiate new communitarian configurations” (Rivera-Servera, 2012, p. 35). By summoning into being, if only in a temporary way, more desirable configurations between students, teachers, our own networks of family and friends, and the larger systems in which we are immersed, we could all imagine a form of education that was not the alienated version of schooling that Rose

describes from her own life experiences. Kaiya explained the affective impact of what was performed through community night:

I was going to say it leads to a sense of solidarity, because my mom, I tell her about what we learn and what we go through, but for her to see everybody, and put faces to names and to stories, it kind of does something, it does something, it kind of broadens it, and it brings out whole new mindsets. (11.12.14)

Kaiya's invocation of "whole new mindsets" here feels magical, imbued with the utopic possibility that comes from bringing imagined and actual worlds together. This bringing together of the delineated spaces of school and home, which Kaiya had previously narrated to her mother, became real through coming into one another's physical presence.

Rose writes in her final research paper for the class, "It was a unique experience to see my white middle class mother from [nearby rural/suburban area] (one of the "white flight" parishes surrounding [the city]) sitting next to black teenagers from Frazier High School and talking about racism" (2014, p. 6). The choice for teachers to invite their own families as guests to the event grew from a conversation in the Art of Critical Literacy weekly meeting about engaging in the same activities that we asked students to engage in as a way to practice mutual vulnerability and avoid pedagogies of surveillance. As Ellen put it, "We can't just be like, 'Bring in your people, and us be like- ha-ha-ha' [evil laugh]" (10.28.14). Indeed, the opportunity for teachers and pre-service teachers to bring some of the people in our lives into contact with one another and with our students, was a humanizing experience for us all.

The final question asked in the post-reflection on the day after community night was, "How do you think community plays a part in the process of getting an education?" Here, Jayreal and Brandon brought Kaiya's utopic "new mindsets" home to suggest how connecting their home and school networks, and the ways of caring and being in solidarity

that span those networks, can form collective agency that transforms educational possibility:

Jayreal: When you feel like you're welcome there, like that's where you need to be at, like that's your community, it makes you open for the learning. You want to know more stuff when you feel like that's your home.

Brandon: I think it plays a good part in the process of being educated because I feel like what happened last night was everybody saw the big picture. Everybody came together as a whole, and that's a strong part of a community. Because if we don't know each other, you wouldn't try to stand up for nobody you ain't know, and that's real, we wouldn't try to fight for nobody we don't know. So, the fact that we know each other, it means we can stand up, we can fight for a better education. (people clapping). Y'all see where I'm coming from? [people say 'Yeah']. It's about the bond. (11.12.14)

These rich responses worked to generate even greater solidarity among students and teachers as we reflected on the meanings invoked by community night and the "big picture" that it brought into view for us.

As an organizer, Rose gained a "big picture" of what it feels like and means for students to connect their home and school worlds and ways of knowing to one another. She also gained a lot of practical skills about how to create contexts through which such meanings can be performed. As she explains, "It was eye opening for me, mostly because I started to realize the importance of personal relationships inside the classroom, and what it could look like outside of the classroom, and what it meant for students" (1.31.15). In "Becoming Culturally Responsive Educators: Rethinking Teacher Education Pedagogy," Kea, Campbell-Whatley, and Richards (2006) call attention to the importance of "meaningful immersion" in community-centered activities as a way for pre-service teachers to become more culturally responsive:

This requires pre-service teachers to invest time into learning about students and families by joining them in meaningful activities and events outside of the formal school environment. Relationship building with families and communities becomes a resource for school-related goals and objectives. (p. 11)

Certainly, this kind of “meaningful immersion” is just what Rose and the other members of her cohort could experience through the community night. Opportunities for such immersion were not readily available to Rose and her peers through the standard offerings of the teacher education program at South State; however, the action research requirement of Art of Critical Literacy created an infrastructure through which Rose could pursue her passion and generate such immersion for herself.

The work that Rose did to plan and host the community night event demonstrates that it is possible, even for teachers like Rose who do not share the same cultural or geographic background as their students, to act as organizers, building networks of solidarity and creating experiences of community in which teachers, students, and their extended networks may come into humanizing contact with one another. For Rose to connect her own life-world, her continuous self that exists inside and outside of school, to the continuous life-worlds of English Amped students, it was important for her to recognize the spaces and practices that shape how “communities” function. It was also important for her to develop the capacity to organize, to bring people together to achieve the shared purpose of bridging “in school” and “out of school” ways of knowing and being together across the boundaries of race, class, and institutionally defined roles.

Perhaps somewhat ironically, exploring the connections between formal schooling and community-based learning led Rose to decide that she would step away from college for a semester to explore alternative spaces for learning. During a presentation at South State in on February 21, 2015, she stated:

My experiences in English Amped blew up the idea in my mind of what is education, what counts as education, because I started to realize that I had this really limited definition of what that meant. So, I decided to take a step out of this circle of formal

education and seek, I guess, alternative spaces for learning. What that's looked like for me is that I'm not enrolled at [South State].

Indeed, the notion that learning that took place out of school was also valid and real learning meant that Rose felt permission, if even at times a somewhat fraught permission, to pursue learning in spaces other than school. Consequently, she arranged a semester-long internship with a local youth spoken word organization where she gained considerable experience organizing, teaching, and honing her own experiences as a writer.

During the presentation at South State, Rose explained why she believed she needed to take the risk of leaving school for a semester:

I started to realize if I was going to do this work, this work based on the relationships between communities and classrooms, it needed to be an avocation, it needed to be something that was so important to me that I was going to sacrifice a lot in order to do this, because who would do this if they didn't enjoy it, because it is so scary, right? It is so awful, and so stressful, and heartbreaking in a lot of ways [people laughing], that really you have to feel called to this work in a lot of ways. In the English Amped classroom, our focus on reflection really changed my life, because I realized I wasn't doing a lot of reflecting on how I viewed education, on how I viewed my own literacy, so it got to the point where I was telling students, 'use your voice' and 'be an agent of change' and realizing that I wasn't necessarily doing that myself. . . . And mostly that's led to me seeking these outside spaces, these community-based education spaces. (2.21.2015)

For Rose, taking a semester off school to pursue writing, teaching, and organizing in a community-based education space was a direct outcome of her action research on the relationships between communities and classrooms. She disclosed to the audience at the panel that she saw the work of teaching as "scary . . . so awful, and so stressful, and heartbreaking in a lot of ways." This disclosure demonstrates a willingness to be open with herself and others, an openness that she associated with a focus on reflection in our classroom that "changed my life." Indeed, her choice to leave school for a semester to pursue an alternative educational path was a major life choice.

It is important to note that reflection within The Art of Critical Literacy group meant more than writing field experience logs or even looking back at events together; it also meant reserving a space for open-ended dialogue that was grounded in our personal lives. Our weekly Art of Critical Literacy meetings always began with a personal check in, which was usually quite open ended and would sometimes take nearly an hour of the two-hour meeting. The check-ins were usually followed by open dialogue weaving together our weekly reading with whatever questions and stories we felt prompted to tell. The open-endedness of our meetings helped to facilitate a *being-togetherness* that built from, but also exceeded, what we associate with more broadly sanctioned school activities such as formal reflection and dialogue. This being-togetherness enabled us to care for one another and ourselves in ways we had not previously imagined, and resulted in a form of beloved community. I think many facilitators would fear that such a person-centered approach to a seminar would bog the discussion down in tangents unrelated to the course goals, or keep participants from approaching the material from an analytic or critical perspective. I often feared this as a facilitator of our meetings. And yet, our sometimes-meandering check-ins ultimately helped us engage with the course material, probably because it created conditions in which we could engage from where we truly were, sometimes surprisingly so, in the presence and company of one another.

In such spaces, the perspective that teaching can feel “scary” and “so awful” is admissible. The attendees at the South State presentation where Rose spoke laughed at her words, probably because the room full of teachers recognized the susceptibility to heartbreak and discomfort that can be inherent in teaching. For Rose, as for others in the group, relationship-oriented approaches to pedagogy meant rethinking what it would

mean to be a teacher. She told the rest of the Art of Critical Literacy group during an oral reflection on January 31, 2015:

I had all of these ideas about what it means to be a teacher, and what it means to operate within a school system, and critical pedagogy totally flipped that because you have to care, you have to be very real.

The realization that “you have to be very real” if you are going to engage critical approaches to teaching is a way of thinking that countered Rose’s previously held beliefs about the alienation of what it would mean to “operate within a school system.” Unlike previous experiences, including in other teacher education classes, the experience Rose had in the fall of 2014 demonstrated to her that alienation was not a necessary requirement of learning, even in school. She told the group:

For some reason they drill this into us, there is this separation between our education and our lives, right? And for me, that wall really dissolved when I started to come to Art of Critical Literacy because I realized that like there was room for like, myself [laughs], you know, in this stuff. (1.31.15)

This revelation, that there was room for herself in education, is a transformation of what Rose previously believed about school being apart from one’s real life. Her realization affirms the central thesis of Parker Palmer’s (2007) book, *The Courage to Teach*, in which he argues that the question “Who is the self that teaches?” is the “most fundamental question we can asking about teaching and those who teach— for the sake of learning and those who learn” (p. 8). As Palmer explains, teaching well is not a question of form, but a question of, exactly as Rose suggests, making “room [for oneself] in this stuff.”

Greene (1979) argues that coming into touch with what she calls “personal reality” is foundational work that teachers must to do to interpret overarching theories and policies into practical, grounded practices, and to be effective teachers who can legitimately invite students into the sometimes scary and disorienting work that is learning. “Alienated

teachers,” Greene writes, “out of touch with their own existential reality, may contribute to the distancing and even to the manipulating that presumably take place in many schools (p. 29). In other words, the dehumanizing, frustrated classroom is in some senses an outcome of alienated teachers.

This is because human beings who lack an awareness of their own personal reality (which is futuring, questing) cannot exist in a ‘we-relation’ with other human beings. They cannot know what it means to live through a ‘vivid present in common’ with another. (p. 29)

This alienation is itself an extension of the status quo conditions of school *as it is* that I discuss in Chapter Two, and simply a not a personal failure of individual teachers.

For Greene, the teacher who is not present to herself cannot be present to others, and the challenge of teaching lies in inviting others into a “vivid present” from which aspiration becomes possible.

However meaningful these insights into the importance of personal reality may be, throwing off the effects of alienation is not a simple task for teachers or for anyone, especially when the structures of schooling so powerfully reinforce these forms of disconnection. Rose explained to the rest of the group how learning about the importance of personal relationships in classrooms was daunting for her:

That was really important for me, but it was like, oh, and now I gotta face the problems within myself before, not necessarily before, but while I am learning. So that’s been like really hard for me, though, understanding how important these personal relationships [with students] are, having that vulnerability, and then not knowing if you can do that, just not feeling ready to do that. That’s a scary thing, and I’m sure I’m not the only person, I’m not the only teacher that’s like, ‘Fuck!’ But maybe the importance of relationships hasn’t been like completely in your face for a semester. Because that was kind of like what it was for us [in the Art of Critical Literacy]. (1.31.15)

Though her semester with English Amped had officially ended, Rose felt the weight of responsibility that comes from entering a “we-relation” with students. She expressed a respectful caution about the mutual vulnerability asked of her in such a classroom space, and recognized her own need to “face the problems within myself.” This awareness describes Greene’s call for “personal reality,” which is to first enter into a humanizing relationship with oneself as a starting point of being with others in humanizing educational spaces.

Rose’s revelation, that “you have to be very real,” reveals the heart of what we taught and learned with one another through our weekly dialogues. To the extent that our goal was to humanize educational spaces, this outcome will most likely continue to evade the language of teacher education syllabi and remain illegible at the level of institutional structures. In fact, the inability to own such transformative knowledge in school-proper may be exactly why Rose felt the need to step away from the university to become the teacher she wanted to be. And while Rose’s experience was unique, I do not believe that her desire to create a more direct and personal learning space for herself is uncommon. As she points out, “I’m sure I’m not the only person, I’m not the only teacher that’s like ‘Fuck!’” And I agree with her, she is not alone, though she did have a rare space within her schooling from which to explore how such alienation might be transformed.

While the decision to take time away from school was not without financial or emotional conflict for Rose, she referred to our group as being one of the only spaces where she was not made to feel ashamed about her choice. She told the group:

When I do talk to other people about why I’m stepping out of this space, I am stepping out of this institution, it’s very much like, ‘Oh well, we lost her!’ It’s very much like an ‘I failed’ kind of thing. (1.31.15)

Rose's choice, which I contend was a healthy one for her and for her future students, may not have happened if she had not been able to see beyond notions of success as a linear trajectory from school to career, the very ideals set up through institutionalized schooling. The validation and support she had within the Art of Critical Literacy to do this deeply reflective work made the way towards other possibilities easier for her.

As a result, Rose took her learning into her own hands. As she explained during the presentation at South State, "I realized that I really want them [English Amped students] to own their own education, I really want them to discover their own voices, discover their own spaces, and then [I realized] I was not doing that myself" (2.21.17). Rose, as a White teacher from a rural community, came to see the ways that schooling dispossessed students of color in urban schools of their right to "their own education" (Moses, 2010). However, importantly, Rose's understanding of educational dispossession did not stop there. She enlarged her frame of reference to reckon with her own educational dispossession. What she learned does not reify the safe distance between self and other, setting up a savior mythology in which she can bring the privileges of her community to bear on "their community." Instead, what Rose learned is that vulnerability is a condition of solidarity, that "you have to be very real," in other words, present with yourself, in order to be truly present with others.

Since her semester in the Art of Critical Literacy, Rose has taken on a greater public identity as writer, community organizer, and educator. She eventually completed her degree and became an English teacher at another high school just a few miles away from Frazier High. With other members of the Art of Critical Literacy, Rose continues to share and explore ways to remain committed to critically humanize "what counts as education."

Jennifer's Journey: Confronting Whiteness

After school on March 25, 2015, Rita and Jennifer, who had stayed on in the spring as student teachers with English Amped, described a sense that they were out of touch with other pre-service teachers at their South State cohort. They describe a discussion that took place in one of the education department's methods classes in which an article had been assigned about interactions between White female teachers and students of color. The following dialogue conveys Rita and Jennifer's reactions following that class period:

Rita: [talking about another student] She's like, 'I don't see why I have to read all this stuff about being a White girl going into a classroom.' And I'm like, a) you're a girl, and b) you're White, and c) you're going into a classroom. I get really irritated at our cohort sometimes, it's like sometimes they're just arguing about nonsense. ... I don't know why we can't move on to a more productive conversation.

Jennifer: Honestly, this class, they were like my only friends [before] . . . They were my people, and now I feel like I don't have any people.

Rita: They're not people who I'm hearing about their day. Because like the check-ins with people, just hearing how somebody's doing, it's like, I don't know how you're doing, I don't know if you are happy with your teacher.

Jennifer: But that one time that we do have a reflection, I was the only one who said they were having problems, everyone else was like, 'Oh, it's been fantastic.' She asks, 'How's everyone been?' and I'm already at the verge of tears. Everyone else is like, 'It's been good, it's been great.' And to me, I'm like, 'I don't know where y'all have been, but I've been here.' . . . then people are like, 'Yeah, it has been kind of rough. Yeah, it was so weird. I'm telling you, it's been so weird to hear how other people's experiences have been. Because I feel like, I must be in, we must be in this weird world.

Rita: We must be in a bubble or something.

During their student teaching semester Rita and Jennifer sometimes experienced themselves as apart from other members of their teacher education cohort. This feeling of separation came with some hostility in the exchange above: not only had they become impatient with the unwillingness of some members of their cohort to engage in critical

conversations about their positionality, they also perceived other students as unwilling to practice vulnerability in reflections about student teaching. Statements about being in a “weird world . . . a bubble or something” speak to the sense that Jennifer and Rita’s identities were being shaped in ways that differed from some other members of their teacher education cohort. As was the case with Rose, the emphasis on small group reflection facilitated by Art of Critical literacy, and the on-going dialogue grounded in a sense of care and connection among members of our group, provided Rita and Jennifer with more space than usual to surface and work through anxieties. They had grown accustomed to a form of reflection that emphasized trust and engendered a vulnerability that is difficult to achieve in large university classes. The critical interrogation of race and gender, among other things, had been modeled for them by more experienced teachers such as Sue, Destiny, and myself; and the relationships they formed with us and with one another supported their sense of identity as people who could stand in such vulnerable conversations. While Jennifer and Rita express their feelings of apartness from the cohort as a conflict in the above exchange, their feelings towards the rest of the cohort were more often expressed as concern. If pre-service teachers did not learn how to engage critical social problems and be vulnerable in university classrooms, would they ever learn to do so while teaching in secondary schools?

Jennifer, throughout the course of her year working and learning with English Amped, moved across thresholds in her identity as a White, middle class woman working in an urban school with youth of color from working class communities. Like the other four members of the Art of Critical Literacy group, Jennifer entered the experience looking to expand on the kinds of learning she had previously experienced in the two English

education classes I taught with her cohort in the previous year. My memories of Jennifer from those classes are filled with a sense of her whole-hearted exploration: she wrote thoughtful reflections about her field experiences, read carefully, and carried out her class job as “care chief” to maximum effect, assigning each of the thirty members of the cohort an adjective that summed up their contributions to the group. In her application for Art of Critical Literacy she wrote, “After a semester of discussing digital literacies, wordplay seminars [spoken word poetry workshops led by a local organization], and diving into the importance of critical literacy in the classroom, I have become fascinated with multiple mediums being incorporated into the English classroom setting.” Like the other pre-service teachers joining the English Amped project, she initially identified critical literacies as being primarily about methods for teaching through multi-modal and socio-cultural approaches to literacy.

However, during the fall semester in Art of Critical Literacies and with English Amped, Jennifer began to connect her enthusiasm for learning alternative methods of teaching with explicit questions about race, social class, power, and privilege. As a young White woman from a conservative, middle class Southern community who wanted to work in urban schools, these questions were important and often painful for Jennifer to confront. In the fall, these questions took shape as explorations into culturally relevant pedagogy and getting to know the “community.” As her action research project, she designed and led a unit on hip-hop literacy, and used the occasion to read extensively from the literature on hip-hop education. She borrowed a stack of books from Sue about hip-hop and read copiously. She told us several times that she probably read more for that project than in all her classes combined that semester. Mid-way into the fall semester she also began riding

her bike to Frazier High instead of driving her car. She seemed excited to be exploring the neighborhood beyond the university, through the more open, relational stance that a bicycle allows compared to a car.

In the field site description that she was required to write for another university class and later shared with me, Jennifer writes, “(I) have been discovering and exploring what is commonly referred to by [South State] students as ‘the Ghetto after Weinerschnitzel,’ which is exactly how I viewed this community . . . prior to working at [Frazier High School]” (2015, p. 2). “Weinerschnitzel” refers to a fast food restaurant of that name serving hot dogs and fries from a bright yellow and red building. The restaurant, which is incidentally a long-standing business that has been there for at least the duration of my own life, sits along the major road connecting the university to downtown. It marks a threshold where the enclave of apartments and businesses oriented towards university students is replaced by the contrasting landscape of The South. In her field description, Jennifer included pictures of the neighborhood around the school, like the one included here, and described what she had noticed about the neighborhood now that she was riding her bike past the infamous Weinerschnitzel and into the “ghetto” beyond:

I have weaved in and out of the streets around [Frazier], observing the people and their interactions, the homes, the businesses. . . . Almost all of the homes have porches, or some form of sitting arrangement, and if you are around after a school day, neighbors are sitting around and waiting for their children to get home or just talking. Last Friday I walked with two of our students around the neighborhood and to the house



Figure 6: Photo taken by Jennifer of a house with mural in neighborhood near Frazier.

down [from the school] that, every day after school, serves \$2 seafood plate lunches, snacks, and a Dixie cup. If you don't know what a Dixie cup is, Robin, one of the students that walked with me, described the Dixie cup as a 'ghetto term' for purple Kool Aid frozen in a Dixie cup, then you flip it and it becomes an Icee. (p. 2)

As these descriptions demonstrate, Jennifer is seeing that life exists in the space that she was previously taught to imagine as a negative, dangerous space, a "ghetto." Jennifer put herself bodily into the space that was previously forbidden to her; she traveled on foot to buy food from someone's house and by bike to see how everyday people enjoyed late afternoons on porches. These embodied experiences enabled Jennifer to construct knowledge about previously forbidden and mythologized spaces. Jennifer learned that The South is a place where everyday things happen, like parents waiting for kids to get home from school, and "just talking."

I see Jennifer's emphasis on the everyday life of the neighborhood, and her sense of accomplishment in taking part in it, as the beginning of an effort to raise questions, at the level of her own bodily experience, about how race and racialized territories are structured. For Jennifer, this movement outside of the sanctioned pathways created for her as a university student going to a field site mark a significant threshold and a performance of possibility. By moving outside of the trajectories scripted for her, Jennifer sought to experience alternative modes of traversing the spaces defined by racialized power-laden institutional practices and histories. As George Yancy (2008) explains, "While one might come to judge his or her racism epistemologically false, it may still have hold on [his or her] body" (qtd. in Phillip and Benin, 2014, p. 20). In some senses, Jennifer sought to understand and challenge white supremacy's hold of her own body: the ways that her affective responses, and her body's movement through space, had been structured by racialized

territories and the dominant narrative that White bodies must fear Black bodies and spaces.

While Jennifer's journeys are performances that test the limits of White supremacy's hold on her body, they are also a form of tourism in which movement through the spaces of the "other" are a form of adventure, and in which the adventurer describes and interprets meaning from a romantic distance without the risk to subjectivity that comes from sharing a daily life. Jennifer was not without an understanding of those limits. She wrote, "It's not like performing these activities will automatically make me a member of this community, but it will help me in becoming more familiar, understanding, and respectful of my students' culture" (2015, p. 2). Her desire to become "familiar, understanding, and respectful" required more than an intellectual engagement; it required her to challenge her own socialized responses to "the ghetto after Weinerschnitzel."

Bree Picower (2009) demonstrates the ways in which White teacher candidates enact dominant racial ideologies by calling upon "tools of Whiteness" to "facilitate in the job of maintaining and supporting hegemonic stories and dominant ideologies of race, which in turn, uphold structures of White supremacy" (p. 204-205). Fear, she finds, was "by far the most prevalent hegemonic story shared" by the participants in her study of White teacher candidates whose student teaching and field experiences caused them to cross racialized thresholds (202).

Because of their fears of people of color, the participants avoided the communities in which people of color live. Most had grown up in ways organized to keep themselves surrounded by other Whites and, for the most part, they had successfully avoided spending time in communities different from their own. Their student teaching placements, in which they spent time in schools throughout New York City, were often their first experiences in communities of color. (203)

Like the participants in Picower's study, Jennifer had been socialized to fear communities where people of color live. And yet, unlike the participants in Picower's study, Jennifer did not appeal to fear, or her family's fear, as a tool to recuse herself from the risk of moving beyond the socially sanctioned script. In fact, she moved toward the fear she experienced and looked for avenues to understand it, often in ways that unsettled her and alienated her from her own family and friends.

While the literature about White educators is filled with examples of cultural imperialism and false empathy (Matias, 2013; Matias, Viesca, Garrison-Wade, Tandon & Galindo, 2014; Picower, 2009; Warren, 2015) there are fewer examples of ways in which White pre-service teachers challenge their own socialization in the "tools of Whiteness." Such examples are necessary, especially if university teacher education programs hope to better scaffold the experiences of White undergraduate pre-service teachers and to help them resist the pedagogies of surveillance and cynicism that characterize so much of urban schooling. It is important to describe the thresholds that Jennifer had to confront when her journey to becoming a culturally responsive educator became more complicated for her than bike rides, Dixie cups, and hip-hop pedagogies. Kumashiro (2009) argues that critical teacher education needs to pay more attention to preparing teachers for the resistances, discomforts, and uncertainties that come from unlearning and troubling knowledge. While deeply uncomfortable, he contends that figuring out how to "learn through crisis" is imperative to the goals of social justice education.

By 'crisis' I mean a state of emotional discomfort and disorientation that calls on students to make some change. When in crisis, students feel that they have just learned something that requires some response. Sometimes this crisis is visceral and noticeable, as when students express feelings of guilt or anger, or in some way resist continuing with the lesson. At other times, this crisis is subdued and self-conscious, as when students feel discomfort but are unable to name that feeling. In

either case, students who are in crisis are on the verge of some shift and require the opportunity to work through their emotions and disorientation. (p. 30)

Learning crises, as Kumashiro describes, signal an opportunity to revise previously unexamined systems of meaning. He calls our attention to the threshold learning experiences of educators for whom challenging deeply habituated experiences and narratives comes with turmoil and discomfort.

And yet, a crisis does not always mean that someone is learning. It is important to help teacher candidates move through crisis. Kumashiro offers theoretical constructs, ways of thinking that may aide how we prepare future teachers to approach teaching and learning. He draws from socially engaged Buddhism and queer theory, encouraging teachers to acknowledge the partiality of knowledge, to see contingency and uncertainty as germane to knowing (pp. 46-48), and to recognize the value of discomfort and disruption in challenging oppressive norms (pp. 51-55). However, Kumashiro does not take up the structural or ontological conditions that would facilitate such transformative learning, nor does he offer examples grounded in the everyday experiences of teacher candidates moving through crisis. In the remainder of this section, I examine Jennifer's experiences confronting the crisis of race and the continued legacy of White supremacy as a young White teacher, and I explore the implications of how she moved across this learning threshold.

"Things happen at [Frazier], man. It's a wild life," Jennifer told the rest of the Art of Critical Literacy group (1.31.15). By January 2015, two of the other members of the group had gone to do student teaching at other schools, and Rose was interning at a community-based spoken word poetry organization. Jennifer and Rita stayed at Frazier High, where they worked in the English Amped classroom during 6th and 7th periods. Rita spent the rest

of the day teaching in one of the school's "gifted" English classrooms, and Jennifer spent the rest of her day working in a "traditional" English classroom. Jennifer described seeing a large bag of marijuana fall from a boy's shorts at an assembly, and then having to make a report to the administration about it. She described a police "lock down" at the school in which kids who had been selling drugs under the guise of selling chips to other students were quickly trying to unload their goods in her classroom. The teacher with whom Jennifer was placed yelled at a student who came into her classroom to supposedly sell chips to someone. Jennifer tells us, "She told him to 'get the fuck out of my classroom.'" Jennifer, it seemed, was one part in awe of how the teacher handled this, and one part frightened by it.

The question that seemed to trouble Jennifer the most a month into her student teaching was how to reconcile her role as someone who champions students, who approaches them with the familiarity, understanding, and respect that she wrote about in her field site description in the fall, while also playing the part expected of her to maintain order and control. She explained how torn she felt moving between the English Amped class and the other classes she worked with:

But like respect, safety, structure, these things are not happening at [Frazier] full scale, why would they think it's going to happen in the classroom? Why would they listen to the teacher if they can do whatever the hell they want? Why would a kid put a huge baggie of weed in his pocket and think, I can get away with this today? Much less sell it? They come in the classroom, and I'm not surprised they think they cannot do anything, or they don't want to do anything.

Here, Jennifer is struggling with the frustration she feels as a representative of a larger system that provides minimal supports for "respect, safety, structure," while it simultaneously holds students accountable through zero tolerance policies for drugs and fighting, and teachers accountable through testing and top-down evaluation systems. At

another level, Jennifer is struggling to understand how and why young people come to make destructive choices, like bringing a “huge baggie of weed” to school.

In this struggle to make sense of how and why such destructive choices are made, Jennifer was forced to confront a tendency, on one hand, to romanticize Black, urban youth, and on the other, to criminalize and condemn them. When one of the students she had grown close to was expelled that winter for fighting, and a teacher described to Jennifer the surveillance video that she was required to watch as a “character witness” for the student’s trial, the crisis of these two competing images of Black youth came to a head for Jennifer.

She writes in her journal entry (n.d.) that she later shared with me:

What does it mean to be a good person
Because
I’m struggling to believe that
What I’ve been taught
to believe
about morals
and dignity
is something a little bit
more grey
than black and white
[Student name] put a girl in the hospital
[Teacher name] had to watch it
over
and over
punching and kicking another human life
fuck I watched him write
write about change
and breaking out the chains
that society has
cuffed on his wrists
fuck.
Why do I want to defend him
they call them monsters
but its more
THAN BLACK AND WHITE
MORE THAN THAT I watched him write
maybe we should give
MONSTERS PENS

As this journal entry demonstrates, Jennifer was experiencing cognitive and emotional dissonance as she tried to make sense of the way that she had been socialized to view Black criminality (“they call them monsters”) and her conflicting desire to witness Black youth in emancipatory terms (“breaking out the chains”). The simplified, “black and white” ways of thinking, what she has been “taught/ to believe” regarding “morals/ and dignity” must now give way to a more complex set of understandings so that she can make sense of her goals as an English teacher in an urban classroom. I read her last line, “maybe we should give/ MONSTERS PENS” as both ironic and frustrated. The goal of promoting literacy among those deemed subhuman is an absurdity. If Jennifer is to teach English, she must believe in the humanity of her students, and to do so she must learn how to reconcile these competing gazes.

As Jennifer worked through this crisis in meaning, she was not immune to the “tools of Whiteness.” She spoke with candor about her feelings in ways that reflect some of the tools that Picower (2009) enumerates: she talked about seeing herself as unable to relate to the students she was working with, being overwhelmed with guilt, and her fantasy that she would heroically save students from their terrible circumstances. And yet, what is important to note is the way that Jennifer, unlike the students that Picower writes about, did not use these ideological and performative constructs as a way to protect herself from a confrontation with White hegemony; rather, she surfaced those constructs as a way to make sense of her own crisis of meaning and move towards a more grounded, livable mode of anti-racism as a White teacher.

Picower describes the use of “I can’t relate” as a construct that White pre-service teachers call upon to explain why they would be poor candidates for teaching in urban

environments. As she explains, this reasoning “released the need to consider that perhaps their aforementioned intense fear of students of color and urban communities might be the real reason that they did not want to take a position in such a school” (p. 208). “I can’t relate” re-inscribes a fear-based operation of othering and functions to recuse White pre-service teachers from a sense of responsibility and interdependency with people of color. In some ways, Jennifer also surfaced a narrative of “I can’t relate,” though she used that narrative towards different ends than the pre-service teachers in Picower’s study. She tells the Art of Critical Literacy group:

Let’s just start with names. So, I called out roll, right? And [laughs, voice cracks] it was sooo embarrassing. They get so mad about [me mispronouncing student names], and like, I don’t mean to cry, but it was really kind of like overwhelming sometimes because I don’t know, I had to have like a conversation with a whole bunch of girls because we had to do a budget project where they budgeted out their lives, and it was really cool actually, because I did it with them, because I really never have done that. But we were budgeting and started talking about welfare checks, and I don’t know, there was this moment where it was kind of like a funny thing, they were like, ‘Oh, you know whatever Deja, your Daddy pays \$700 in welfare checks,’ and she’s like ‘I don’t even get a welfare check,’ and they’ll be like ‘You know you get a thousand dollar welfare check,’ and it was funny, right? But then I was like, ‘Oh my God, I couldn’t even try to relate, like ever.’ Do you know how many things come up where I don’t say anything? I feel like I just don’t understand . . . and I want to teach them life lessons, but how can I teach them life lessons when my life has like none of those lessons that they’ve had, like really I want them to teach me those lessons. (1.31.15)

As Jennifer explained, she has experienced “I can’t relate” as an embarrassment at not knowing how to pronounce student’s names, and having to learn through the trial of fire how important this would be to the students in her classes. She also faced the embarrassment of realizing that she is unable to participate in discourse, even jokingly, about things like child support and public assistance (which are conflated in her telling), because her class positioning has made such realities seem unimaginable to her. And yet, Jennifer does not use these examples of feeling embarrassed to make excuses or look for

ways out. Instead, she uses them to come to an important realization: “I feel like I just don’t understand.”

“I feel like I just don’t understand” is a healthy extension of “I can’t relate” because it opens the space for Jennifer to reconsider how she might approach working with students from a different race and class background than her own with the humility of someone who is learning to traverse spaces she is unfamiliar with. “I feel like I just don’t understand” creates an essential opening for Jennifer to begin reimagining her own identity as a teacher in a community that she does not belong to. She told the Art of Critical Literacy group:

It’s been some really, really real life shit, y’all. Zero to a hundred, my life went from flighty [Jenny], like really, like, ‘Life is so great, I’m going to like save the world,’ to ‘Holy shit, the world is hard...it’s hard’ ...it’s not like I didn’t know the world was hard, but it’s a lot fucking harder for them, and seeing them go through it and wanting to do everything for them, and they do stuff to themselves that you can’t help them with. Oh my God, I don’t know, y’all. Working at [Frazier], is seriously, whew . . . I don’t know how those teachers do it. I just, I don’t know. (1.31.15)

Here, Jennifer admits that her previous fantasy of “I’m going to like save the world” has given way to a much tougher realization that “The world is hard.” This realization is painful and humbling for Jennifer, because it causes her to adjust a heroic image of herself to a far more modest perspective about what she is capable of doing. And yet, Jennifer cannot become an anti-racist educator without this realization because the fantasy of the heroic teacher continues to perpetuate the myth that changing individuals, not systems, will bring about a more just society.

In this way, Jennifer begins to move past one of the most insidious tools of Whiteness that Picower describes, the tool of “I just want to help them.” She explains that the participants in her study used this tool to maintain power and still “see themselves as ‘good people’ for working with people of color, thus maintaining this hierarchical balance

of power in which they were the givers and people of color were the recipients” (p. 209). In this construct, White teachers imagined themselves as doing good by simply showing up in communities that supposedly “need their help” because of the supposed pathologies and deficiencies of communities of color, “rather than...the institutions that were inequitably serving them” (p. 210). Indeed, Jennifer’s challenge was to understand that solidarity with her students would require her to relinquish the privilege-infused belief that complex social problems would be easily remedied by individual actions. Chezare Warren (2015) calls this letting go of the “whiteness of good intentions,” which “replaces humility with prerogative, as these young White teachers set out to teach without ever being truly primed or prepared for the experiences they will encounter” (p. 595). Fast-track teacher education programs, like Teach for America, she explains, “are built on this very premise” (p. 595). Indeed, teacher candidates need adequate time to build relationships with the students and communities they will work with. Jennifer’s significant realization of “I just don’t understand” is a starting place from which to build an understanding that is rooted in humility and the possibility of working in solidarity with others.

The caring and trusting relationships with mentor teachers aided Jennifer’s ability to work through the crisis she confronted of recognizing her own racial privilege and processing beyond the “tools of Whiteness.” The Black mentor teacher with whom she worked as a student teacher during the periods when she was not with English Amped provided her with a steady source of support and reassurance. Destiny, Sue, and I also provided assurance to Jennifer, rebuffing some of the messages she was receiving from her family and friends. As more experienced White teachers who maintained a commitment to working in communities of color, we were sometimes able to provide insights into how we

have navigated our own positioning. When Jennifer described her embarrassment to the group about messing up student's names, the following dialogue ensued:

Anna: You've got to create yourself some space, give yourself that space to learn.

Jennifer: And that's one thing I'm learning from [mentor teacher]. She's all like, 'Girl, it's okay, you're fine.' She helps me.

Anna: And knowing that you do bring Whiteness. This is part of my own journey as a White teacher in a lot of not-White spaces . . . There was a phase when I was always trying to be the down White girl, like this is my project, right?

Jennifer: [Agreeing] Mmm-hmmm.

Anna: And especially as I get older, like, the absurdity of that [laugh] reveals itself more to me. And so now I'm just trying to embrace myself. You know, we were playing the game Big Booty in class the other day, which is all about rhythm, and I just can't be on it [laugh], and so I get put out of the game like right away [everyone laughs], and so I say to the class, 'I should get some kind of handicap thing, because White people should get one in this game.' And this is funny to everyone, because often there's this thing where Whiteness is invisible, and it's not mentioned, and it's important to talk about it.

Jennifer: Yeah, and it's also like, on the budget project, there was like this \$200 miscellaneous for hair, and they were not budging on that. At first I was asking, 'Why do you want so much money on your hair?' And it was so dumb of me to say.

Anna: No it's not. How do you know if you don't say that you don't know?

Jennifer: I was like, I got to get a haircut like every four months, and they were like, 'Girl, no! We got to do this, and this. Got to buy the hair, got to put it in.' And I was like, cool, I really didn't know . . . and it wasn't like a weird conversation, it was like I really didn't know and they were like genuinely interested in my hair, and they were asking about my hair, like what I do, and it was fine.

As this dialogue demonstrates, teaching and learning about how to carry one's racial identity with humility, openness, *and* a sense of self-worth was a meaningful point of discussion as Jennifer began to imagine moving beyond the shame she felt for not immediately understanding the codes and discourses of the Black spaces she was entering. When one considers the mammoth efforts of educational projects bent on teaching low-

income students of color how to navigate the codes of middle class whiteness (an implicit theme of many charter schools), it is interesting to note how few opportunities there are for White people to learn how to navigate in non-White spaces. This was a large part of what Jennifer drew from her experiences and concomitant reflections within our group. Through these processes, she could move through a crisis in her own confrontation with racial and class identity.

It is important to recognize Jennifer's experience as a crisis of identity that is legitimate and worthy of attention. Recent public discussion about "White tears" could seem to suggest that crises like the one that Jennifer went through are not worthy of attention. Robin DiAngelo (2015) describes "White tears" as a phenomenon connected to the larger problem of "White fragility" (2011), which she describes as "the inability of white people to respond constructively when our racial positions are challenged" (para. 5). The criticism embedded in "White tears," which is aimed particularly at White women, is about a performance of White fragility that transforms critical moments of racial consciousness into occasions to comfort and reassure White people that they "have done nothing wrong," instead of focusing on the pernicious, systemic, and seemingly less lamentable injustices that people of color endure as a result of racism. Such critiques are important and valid, and should not negate the simultaneous reality that White people who are learning anti-racism require space to process, especially in light of the intense socialization that characterizes whiteness.

C.E. Matias (2013) argues that "The emotional and psychological aspects of whiteness must be examined to investigate how Whites emotionally and mentally invest in whiteness, an investment that hinders the ability to become a culturally responsive White

teacher” (p. 76). In other words, White supremacy cannot be challenged without doing the difficult emotional and intellectual work of confronting how whiteness operates at the personal and systemic level. Citing the work of Thandeka (1999), Matias explains that the ideology of color-blindness functions as a form of child abuse in which White children “are asked to repress a racial reality to be White and everyone else is made to be complicit, through racial supremacy, in ensuring that the lie is never revealed . . . when this happens, White children develop a deep White shame about race” (p. 76). Indeed, the shame and guilt that Jennifer felt in relation to her Black students, which drew power differentials into relief, was deeply upsetting to her. Yet, it was important for Jennifer to process what she was seeing and experiencing, and move beyond her own shame and discomfort about it. As Matias (2013) explains, “resonating in guilt produced . . . a sense of reverse racism where white stereotypes, white guilt, and white discomfort is equal to the terror found in the Black imagination. This becomes problematic because anti-racist work must move beyond guilt” (p. 299). Indeed, Jennifer used the space afforded her in *Art of Critical Literacy*, and the community of peers and mentors surrounding it, to confront the ways that she felt paralyzed by guilt and begin to move beyond it.

For The Art of Critical Literacy group, teaching and learning through such difficult and deeply personal questions depended greatly on the dialogic nature of our gatherings. Our beloved community was instrumental to confronting and moving through the uncomfortable feelings that surfaced. This allowed something like Jennifer’s crisis about race to surface, and the inter-subjectivity afforded by our genuine care and concern for one another allowed her to work through the crisis without losing a sense of self-worth and belonging. Like Rose’s choice to leave school to pursue an alternative path for learning,

Jennifer drew courage and a sense of self-worth from our group. This was especially important for her because her desire to work in a low-income urban school seemed indecipherable to her family and peer networks. During a conversation about trouble that several students had gotten into at school, Jennifer told the Art of Critical Literacy group:

I can't even tell my friends what goes on because I'm not here to listen to, 'get out of that situation.' And then with my mom, y'all know my mom, when I called and told her about the whole thing, she was like, 'I told you this was gonna be . . .' And I was like, 'This ain't about you! This ain't about you. It isn't even about me.' (1.31.15)

Jennifer then told the group:

Like, I don't know about y'all, but [voice starts to break with emotion], I feel a huge disconnect now with my life, with like school and with friends, cause I have like 'school me' and that's who I am, I go to that classroom, and I give myself all day everyday with them, and I feel like nothing with my friends because I don't like know how to explain it to them or like tell them anything and then like I go to school and [garbled] and so, I literally don't know what to do with this information, like where do I put it? (1.31.15)

As these disclosures reveal, Jennifer was traversing a social network that saw her work with urban youth as alienating and that often interpreted her participation through a lens in which race- and class-based fear were thought to be compelling reasons to abandon the work at any time. As she made empathetic connections with her students and placed herself in a position to be in solidarity with those experiencing the persistent traumas of injustice, her own support system of family and friends was unable to provide her with a sounding board or even to recognize her goals as legitimate. As she tried to make sense of her role within an urban school, she was inflicted with a crisis in her own previously held system of relationships and meanings, leaving her unanchored, with nowhere to place new experiences, knowledge, and identity. However, Jennifer's ability to even express this unanchored feeling within the space of our group meant that she did have somewhere to "put it." The conversation that day, and on many days, ended with us telling each other that

we loved each other, suggesting that we had become a surrogate peer and family network through which identities themselves could be negotiated.

Philip and Benin (2014), in their study of White prospective teacher identity, ask, “How do people, and Whites in particular, deconstruct Whiteness within the very contexts that induce them to maintain the invisibility of Whiteness?” (p. 4). In other words, how do spaces that are fundamentally structured by racism, like the secondary English teacher education classes where I first met Rose, Jennifer, Rita, Sonia, and Ellen, become spaces where Whiteness as normativity can be interrogated?

When I consider my own experiences as a participant or facilitator in conversations about race, class, and other forms of power in more overtly hierarchical university classrooms, it seems like no surprise that many students shut down and become actively resistant. Confronting and assimilating knowledge about racial injustices asks students to embrace a crisis that is not merely cognitive, but that also threatens a sense of a positive personal and group identity. While this has often felt infuriating to me because I want students, and especially those who are preparing for careers as teachers, to see beyond their own personal fears of being “the bad guy” and reckon with larger injustices, it also does not change the reality that for the individual, identity itself is at stake.

Philip and Benin (2014) argue that, “White prospective teacher identity must be explored and engaged as a contextually instantiated identity that emerges from the intersections of ideology, program structure and culture, available teacher racial identities, interactions within a program, and perceptions of self and other” (p. 19). In other words, if teacher education programs hope to meaningfully impact how students approach entrenched social identities and the kinds of beliefs and behaviors associated with these

identities, it is going to take more than reading Peggy McIntosh's (1989) "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." Such shifts in identity require shifts in relationships and ways of being together. For teacher education candidates to "move through crisis," as Kumashiro (2009) would have us do, we need more than theoretical and epistemic interventions; we need to also remake the infrastructure of teacher education programs so that teacher candidates can experience relationships, alongside modes of action and reflection, which can support transformative learning.

Conclusion

As Rose and Jennifer's experiences illustrate, the aim of preparing teacher candidates to become facilitators of humanizing, culturally responsive, community-engaged English classrooms calls up a steep *unlearning* curve for the overwhelmingly White, middle class teaching force entering urban schools today. And yet, it is not impossible to create a meaningful and ultimately joyful experience for teacher candidates as they learn to see beyond alienating pedagogies, connect with students and their communities, and confront the various "tools of Whiteness" that stand at the threshold between teacher candidates and the kinds of teachers they would hope to become. With neither the means nor the political will to transform the infrastructure of teacher education programs at South State in their entirety, performances of possibility through small, dialogue-oriented groups like the Art of Critical Literacy, alongside experience in explicitly critical classroom settings like English Amped, may offer the most easily available ways to imagine "beyond given structures" and ask what critical teacher education *could be*.

And yet, the ever-tenuous "bubble" that Rita and Jennifer talked about being inside compared to the rest of their cohort represents the vulnerability of such interventions in

teacher education. The question remains open as to whether the institutions of higher education that prepare pre-service teachers for secondary schools, or secondary schools themselves, could truly recognize or replicate the journeys that pre-service teacher candidates took as part of their work with English Amped and The Art of Critical Literacy group. The deeply interpersonal learning space that we created together, not as a political or institutional mandate, but as a decolonizing process at the intersection of personal, professional, and political discourses and institutions, may very well be illegible from the perspective of institutional decision makers. Such decolonizing work, by its nature, sits uncomfortably within institutions. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) argues that academics must be willing to occupy the discomfort of such liminality if they hope to do more than write and talk about overturning oppression in scholarship. They must also propose “radical solutions for addressing it;” however, this position, she tells us, is likely to make us “permanent outsiders” (p. 27). Indeed, the small, intentionally personal, and experiential learning community created through the Art of Critical Literacy may never reside as the center of the university’s teacher education program. The spaces at the margins, which are themselves the thresholds of what institutional spaces will hold, may be the only spaces that can sustain such work.

As Jennifer and Rita said good-bye last spring to the English Amped class, there was no doubt that their lives, like my own life and the lives of nearly everyone involved, had been transformed. Even as the Friday announcements began to broadcast over the intercom at the end of her last day of student teaching, Jennifer tearfully stood in front of the room and read the following words:

I am being completely honest when I say that each and every one of you has changed my life, walking in last year, I had no idea I was meeting a group of people who

would change my life. I see an image of who I want to be and want to become. I see kindness. I see the ability to change the world in each one of you guys. I see a work ethic. I see humility. I see positive attitudes. I see negative attitudes. I see how y'all take those attitudes and turn them into something new, all things I look up to and strive to accomplish in my own life. [Pauses, voice breaks with emotion] Huh. Not only have we talked about how to change the world, but we've shown people how to do it. Through what you all have taught me, I realize that being a teacher can be more than a job, but an avocation. You all are the reason I have this commitment deep inside my heart to fight for educational justice, to change the world. There are not enough thank you's in the world to show you how much you've changed my life. I have no doubt that your dreams and hopes will be fulfilled. Thank you for helping me find purpose in this life, thank you for teaching me.

Indeed, Jennifer earned a form of solidarity with the students of English Amped, and they earned a form of solidarity with her. It is not through the heroism of individual teachers that education will ever become *as it could be*, but rather through the courage of solidarity between teachers, students, and their larger communities, whose assemblages of relationship and aspiration for something more make the "fight for educational justice" both possible and worthwhile.

CONCLUSION

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

“As If Things Could Be Otherwise”: Insights From English Amped

In March 2017, I drove a current Humanities Amped student to a neighboring high school so that he could collect field notes for his research on school funding inequities. As we documented the school together, we marveled at the spacious classrooms, modern design, and state-of-the-art technology. This newly built campus, which cost nearly 55 million dollars, sits less than a twelve-minute drive from Frazier High School. Situated in the same neighborhood where I grew up, a mostly White, middle class part of town, the school was first built in the 1960's during an era of White backlash to integration, and was thus given the name of a famous confederate general. Though the school's name was partially altered in the last decade, community efforts to completely change it did not pass a vote with the local school board in 2016, and the general's last name remains emblazoned on the red background of the school's logo.

We took the scenic route back to Frazier High, driving past the stately homes and large, green lawns facing the South State Lakes. Jordan talked about how the investment in the renovated school reflected an investment in the neighborhood itself, and how unreal it felt that all of this was so close to Frazier High and The South. To further his point, I drove along a small one-way street that runs between Frazier High and the lakes. To one side we could see the lake glimmering in the midday sun, and to the other, the back side of Frazier, including the row of mold-covered “T-Buildings” buildings where our Humanities Amped classroom stood at the very edge of the school. These supposedly temporary buildings, which have been there for nine years, face away from the lake. To get to them from the road

where we stood would have been impossible because a cement canal and a tall chain link fence with razor wire separate the school grounds from the lake and its adjacent properties. There are no bridges nor openings in the fence to facilitate contact. The quickest route from the point where we stood looking at the back of our classroom and an entrance to the school is a 1.3 mile trip. A map shows clearly how the city was designed to shape distinct geographic territories, incredibly close, but separate. Jordan and I wondered what it would be like if the school were turned to face the lake, and if bridges were built to enable contact and offer residents in The South the gorgeous views of the lake that stood right in their backyard.

And yet, Jordan also resisted something about this image and its connection to the lakes and the neighborhood named after Confederate generals. He explained to me, “I wouldn’t trade my school for their school.” Indeed, as we pulled up in front of Frazier High School at lunchtime, another image of the school presented itself: the step team performing in the small courtyard where hundreds of students and faculty stood, many bouncing joyfully with the music. Jordan quickly thanked me and slipped out of the car to join the festivities. Seen together, the views from the back and the front of the school speak to the nature of Frazier High, its simultaneous struggles and joys. From these combined perspectives, it is easy to imagine that it is not the wealthier parts of the city that have turned their backs to The South, but rather, The South that has turned its back to them.

The first year of English Amped showed that being “in the school, not of the school” meant finding ways to gaze simultaneously from within and beyond the structures that shape an urban school. Frazier High School *as it is* stems from the pride of local Black institution building, and being in the school meant embracing this view of the school as

continuous with such pride and connectedness. And yet, being in the school also meant understanding the view from behind. Like many urban schools throughout the United States, Frazier High School is rooted in the painful injustices of race- and class-based inequities, both contemporary and historic. These inequities are masked in discourses that rationalize the disposability of youth through sorting and tracking, positivist technologies of accountability, the silencing of youth voices and experiences within the curriculum, the denial of services and supports that would mitigate the effects of persistent and intergenerational trauma, and the everyday business of surveillance and criminalization in the place of education. These commonplace forms of injustice function to successfully alienate many young people from school while pushing some of the most vulnerable out of school into minimum wage labor, or into the arms of the carceral state.

These conditions and the histories shaping Frazier High School affect how students, teachers, and all those concerned with life in urban schools too easily internalize the distortions of school *as it is*, and misapprehend *what is* for *what must be*. For the teachers, students, researchers, and collaborators of English Amped, our ability to imagine what school *could be* depended on creating thresholds through which differently positioned people could change and exchange perspectives, viewing ourselves and one another from sometimes euphoric, and sometimes painful angles. Just as Jordan and I saw Frazier High School through new eyes after our visit to the neighboring high school, English Amped constantly sought out ways to defamiliarize school as it is, inviting us all to imagine what could be.

English Amped defamiliarized school *as it is* by constructing *thresholds* that brought together people and forms of knowing that are too often alienated in schools. These

thresholds brought together students who were structurally divided through intra-school tracking; they brought together teachers like myself and Destiny, whose pedagogical practices and perspectives had been shaped in different settings. English Amped brought English teacher candidates from South State University into meaningful contact with young people and their families on the other side of a boundary that otherwise functioned to dehumanize and alienate people from one another. The *thresholds* of English Amped also brought academic literacies and embodied, social knowledges into conversation by inviting participants to show up in radically humanized ways in the classroom, raising questions about how knowledge and relations of power are produced. English Amped participants made connections between our situated lives and the forms of literacy most centered in academic contexts. Popular and critical literacy practices such as story circles, Boal's theater of the oppressed, spoken word poetry, community-building activities, and reading "the word and the world" through critical participatory action research, enabled these connections.

In its most generative moments, English Amped's *thresholds* became public performances of possibility. In these moments, students and teachers appeared before themselves, one another, and the eyes of strangers and friends to show a capacity for acting in solidarity, and for refusing gazes that negate the agency of young people to act upon their world together. Performances of possibility took place in moments when people claimed their agency in surprising ways, such as the moment when Bri'Yonna spoke up at the forum at South State University, or when Tristen spoke back to a teacher to assert his analysis of zero tolerance policies, or those many times in which students led critical dialogues in other classrooms, collected research data during lunch shifts, or presented

their own writing and research to adults and other youth, showing that “systemic inquiry and analysis” are a “collective public enterprise” (Public Science Project, n.d.). Other performances of possibility in English Amped were moments when people claimed their humanity and articulated care for one another against the expectations that school-based relationships would be primarily transactional and alienated. Those moments instantiated a form of solidarity and beloved community. When we passed a candle to people seated in the “love seat” and told each other how we mattered; or when we created space to build relationships, to both play and struggle with one another, or in some cases to address traumatic experiences and seek healing, these moments shifted what school felt like and meant. Our sense of solidarity helped us to refute the idea that the problems of people are merely problems they have created for themselves. Because we could claim our wholeness, we could refuse the hold of shame. Beloved community in English Amped helped us to do the work of “returning the analytic and political gaze back on inadequate...systems” (Fine, 2008, p. 225-6). This refusal of shame enabled English Amped participants not only to return the gaze of unjust systems, but also to develop a vocabulary of critical hope and an imaginary of possibility.

This journey towards possibility required developing a capacity to dwell in the anxiety of a liminal space between what is and what could be. We faced many failures and breakdowns that challenged a sense of connection and efficacy as we struggled to learn how to listen to one another across differences. Destiny and I had to learn how to navigate the power differentials of student and teacher without abdicating our responsibilities as guardians nor uncritically acting as guards within the disciplinary formations of the school. We had to learn when the risks of confronting injustices and critically examining the

outcomes of those injustices were too high for students, and reinforced traumas rather than transforming them, especially where Destiny and I did not share identities with our students and did not hold our own experiential knowledge of what it is like to be a person of color, to be economically marginalized, and so on. This did not mean turning away from critical conversations so much as building a capacity for young people to see themselves as powerful and capable of confronting the difficulty of such work. The multi-year cohort structure of English Amped, which was not something we initially planned for, turned out to be essential for providing the expanse of time that it takes to move through the nonlinear and messy landscape of disruptions and crashes, the *choques* that Anzaldúa refers to when distinct systems come into contact and initially struggle to negotiate new forms of meaning (1987, p. 78). The initial illegibility of many of the pedagogical practices that we used, which neither looked nor felt consistent with the disciplinary norms of school, signaled for many students and colleagues throughout the school that English Amped was “madness” rather than method. Indeed, the lack of experience that students and in some cases teachers had with the new forms of learning and being in community that we strived to create in English Amped meant that it took time to develop new repertoires and habits.

There were many times throughout the first year of English Amped when both students and teachers were moved to a point of discomfort, these were moments in which pushing away or giving up seemed more reasonable than pushing through. As Georgia, one English Amped student at the end of her senior year, explained to a room full of incoming sophomore English Amped students and juniors who were about to replace the senior class, “It does something to be in a room together for two hours every day, it gets hard, but

stick to it because you will be surprised by how much you are going to care about each other” (4.22.16). Indeed, the *choques* were survived, and meaningful relationships and ways of seeing the world lay on the other side of these learning thresholds. If any of us had been given an easy way out, we might not have stayed through the two hours each day to figure out how to get along and work together.

Pre-service teachers from South State University were also invited to push through difficulty and take risks through the network of relationships created in the Art of Critical Literacy independent study and our work together in English Amped. Instead of arming these teacher candidates with professionalized discourses and “best practices,” we built a network of relationships that allowed pre-service teachers to experience critical dialogue, action, and reflection. Through these experiences, pre-service teachers were immersed in an environment where relationships mattered: relationships between people, and relationships between inside and outside of school forms of literacy. Rita’s experience of creating and organizing the first English Amped community night was an opportunity for her to understand that communities are assemblages made of many distinct points of connection between people. This understanding helped Rita to translate seemingly abstract ideas about being a culturally relevant teacher into simple and concrete actions, and to recognize her capacity to do these things in an ongoing way. She also realized that cultivating ownership of her own literacy would mean leaving school for a semester to participate in community-engaged writing spaces. Her pull towards non-school based learning spaces was driven by an understanding that her own education had provided her with too many models of alienation and disconnection, and that she needed to decolonize her understanding of teaching and learning before she would be able to facilitate

transformative learning as an English teacher in a school setting. Rita took a risk by claiming the wisdom to step back and grow in ways not facilitated by school. The care and vulnerability that we performed together in the Art of Critical Literacy group helped her to navigate that risk.

Jennifer also navigated risk by confronting the hold that White supremacy had on her own life and knowledge of the world. The spring semester of her student teaching brought on a crisis for Jennifer as she dismantled the myth of herself as a heroic teacher and began to learn how to act with cultural humility in spaces that she had been simultaneously taught to fear, avoid, and romanticize. Jennifer relied on the openness of the Art of Critical Literacy group as a space that could affirm her identity and worth even as she unlearned vital aspects of who she believed she was. Our ability to act as a support system for Jennifer in a time when her friends and family would not affirm her life choices suggests that unlearning racism for White pre-service teachers requires a surrogate network of relationships through which emerging teachers may confront fears and have new identities modeled for them. The intimacy of the Art of Critical Literacy group facilitated transformative identity work for both Rita and Jennifer, each of whom reimagined her life and made major life choices based on experiences with English Amped during the 2014-2015 year.

English Amped's first year points to the need for scholars, educators, and organizers interested in not only disrupting, but also reconstructing, educational possibilities within public schools to pay attention to the art of relationality that shapes how critical learning spaces are produced. In *Democracy in America*, Toqueville writes, "In democratic countries, knowledge of how to combine is the mother of all other forms of knowledge; on its

progress depends that of all the others” (Book Two, Chapter 5, para. 9). Indeed, part of what English Amped accomplished was to make a space where “knowledge of how to combine” proliferated. By building critical connections between institutions, people, forms of knowledge, and networks of relationality, students and teachers stepped outside of the habituated, normalized behaviors prescribed by schooling. The enclosed nature of a public secondary school, in which bodily movement, forms of relationship, and flows of information are constrained, means that “knowledge of how to combine” introduces disruptive and creative forces that upset hierarchical forms of control and opens democratic possibilities.

Harvey’s (2005) figure of the insurgent architect describes how people starting from multiple positions can deploy a process of decolonization, leveraging “knowledge of how to combine” to convert spaces and processes from the interests of capital and reclaim them for the publics for whom they are meant. In public schools, insurgent architecture means creating affiliations that can resist disciplinary gazes and claim the forms of relationship and knowledge that enable people to humanize themselves and work towards their own best interests. By combining relationships and forms of knowledge that are privileged within academia with relationships and forms of knowledge privileged among the students and communities connected to an urban school, and then combining those knowledges with teacher and administrator knowledge about how to navigate and shape spaces within school itself, we were able to open “crawl spaces,” a term Robert Moses (2009) uses to describe leverage points for “pushing from the bottom” to insist on the right to a quality education (p. 375). Normative ways of thinking about and evaluating school do not change without first opening pathways for people on the ground of public education— students,

educators, and communities—to push, often uncomfortably, through the narrow openings left in institutionalized schooling. These openings can be thresholds of contact that enable people to see themselves and one another from new perspectives, to co-perform possibilities, and to build the courage of coalitions able to insist that structures be changed so that they work for the people within them. Without combining knowledges and relationships, the courage and imagination to act “as if things could be otherwise” is foreclosed within disciplinary hierarchies that delimit agency.

These insights have meaningful implications for scholars and educators who are interested in how critical literacy’s aims are implemented within the field of English education. This study suggests that critical literacy scholars and educators look for openings and opportunities to build coalitions that can be embedded within the sites where English education is articulated, including secondary schools and university programs that prepare future English educators. The translation of both scholarship and community-based knowledge to English education’s sites of practice calls for the creation of intentionally liminal sites that can be both “in, but not of” the institutions that house them. Without doing this work to translate the aims of critical literacy into the institutional formations of English education, critical literacy remains, as one pre-service teacher called it in her end of semester Art of Critical Literacy presentation, “all theory, no game.” Imagine if sites like English Amped, which make concrete models of critical literacy visible to English education candidates and in-service teachers alike, matched the number of academic studies of critical literacy at a one to one ratio. As Rita explained, organizing a community night for students and their families was not in and of itself hard for her to do. What was hard was believing that it was possible.

Implications for how to better attend to the relationships between scholarship and practice are also significant for scholars and activists in the field of Critical Youth Studies. Julio Cammarota and Michelle Fine (2008) warn critical youth scholars against the essentializing notion that youth are somehow innately oriented towards a resistance of oppressive social orders. They argue that learning to resist and organize against oppression is a process, and challenge scholars to attend to the settings in which the process of critical inquiry and action among multi-generational collectives can effectively take place (p. 4). English Amped provides an example of a process and setting through which people collaborated intergenerationally to organize and transform some aspects of public education from within. Because many Critical Youth Studies projects are focused on community-based youth organizing sites, or projects that go into schools, but do not grow out of them, the lessons from English Amped may shed light on how to build critical coalitions that are deeply embedded *within* urban schools. Adding to the work of CYS scholars whose critiques of neo-liberalism center on urban schools as sites of possible resistance (Andrade and Morrell, 2008; Buras, 2010; Mirra, Garcia, and Morrell, 2016; Romero et al., 2008; Stovall, 2006), English Amped points to the ways in which critical literacy and research can be leveraged as both a program of rigorous academic learning and a means to organize for greater youth inclusion, justice, and power. As Scorza, Mirra, and Morrell (2013) argue, social justice-oriented critical literacy approaches to schooling should not be a special opportunity or program. Rather, “it should just be education” (p. 15).

Three Years In: Future Directions for Humanities Amped

Three years in, English Amped has grown to become Humanities Amped, a larger program that includes multiple teacher and graduate student collaborators, and 100 students in the tenth through twelfth grades. We have additionally been contracted by the school district to provide professional development for middle and high school teachers from twenty-three schools. In the 2017-2018 school year, our plan is to grow to 150 students in integrated English and social studies classes, and to offer a handful of electives that complement the core subject classes. We have proposed to the district that a cohort of fifteen teachers from across the district be brought together to form a network for collaborative study and cross-pollination throughout the 2017-2018 school year. In addition to this district-wide study group, Humanities Amped will convene a team to facilitate teacher-driven professional learning communities at Frazier High School in the coming school year. These small group learning communities will be geared towards improving school climate through more caring and supportive relationships between teachers and students. By the 2018-2019 school year, we plan to enroll 225 students in Humanities Amped classes, with 75 tenth, 75 eleventh, and 75 twelfth grade students. In this configuration, students will spend three years in the program, through which they will participate in integrated English, social studies, and elective classes work with an emphasis on critical participatory research and civically-engaged social action.

Despite what this growth suggests, our goal is not to continuously make Humanities Amped larger. Some measure of scale is needed to dedicate the resources of full time staff and to provide a multi-year pathway for cohorts of students and teachers working together over time. The long-term vision is even more ambitious: to transform the school and even

the system itself so that for Humanities Amped, being in and of the school become indistinguishable from one another. Transforming a school or school system is not a top down project led by a small group of people. Instead, what is needed is a broad base of people pushing from the bottom who know how to collaborate with one another to critically challenge and creatively restructure school towards more emancipatory ends. As English Amped students, community partners, in-service teachers, and pre-service teachers continue to practice and learn with one another, the opportunities to challenge and restructure may grow rhizomatically through decentralized relational networks that are organic and flexible. The entry of former English Amped student teachers into the school system who continue to collaborate and use related methods in their own classrooms is one way this is already happening. We are also hoping to create pathways for students to come back after they graduate to work with the project as staff and volunteers. As performances of possibility and spaces for learning and reflection proliferate among collaborators, the horizons of what can be done may continue to expand. The first year of English Amped will never be reproduced; however, if we continue to grow and learn, the models that we began to develop in that first year will continue to be used and adapted.

For rhizomatic networks to continue to grow from the work of Humanities Amped into the future, a few lessons from our first three years will need to be constantly calibrated. The first of those lessons stems from the labor of having to stick with one another through the challenges, even when it would have been easier to fall back to less messy, less humanized and collaborative ways of performing school. People join Humanities Amped voluntarily; yet, because the program is tied to the compulsory structures of public schooling, opting out can only happen after the cycle of an academic

year is complete. Each cohort of Humanities Amped students and teachers must discover ways to work together through highly collaborative processes that depend on interpersonal relationships and group cooperation. As such, Humanities Amped functions as a site of civic learning. In the era of school choice, it is precisely our lack of choice about whether we could show up day in and day out to this learning environment that taught us how to deal with our interpersonal and cultural differences, and to ultimately work through the challenges of group interaction. How can civility be learned in a world where people can choose to opt out when there is conflict, and to distance themselves from those who see the world differently than they do? The idealization of “choice,” driven by market values, undermines democratic pedagogies because it encourages people to abandon the difficulty of negotiating public spaces with one another. Though we have learned about some of the boundaries that need to be in place to provide adequate supports and safety for the kinds of risk-taking inherent in critical and humanized learning, the process of having to negotiate power with one another is part of what maintains the public nature of this work, which is precisely what qualifies it as a space for civic and democratic learning.

The rhizomatic growth of Humanities Amped may depend on an ongoing ability of its collaborators to allow new members, including new students and teachers, to learn how to do some of this civic learning themselves. This does not mean that lessons and strategies from the first few years do not get shared; it means that those of us who are gaining experience in this work will have to resist the urge to simplify conflict by codifying approaches as doctrine, or by consolidating power through hierarchal decision-making. Learning is messy and painful; it involves failure. Some of the freedom and space that the first collaborators of English Amped experienced through the process of trial and error will

need to be recreated for new collaborators as they enter this work. Reaching towards new, previously un-modeled possibilities may never be as dramatic as it was during our first few years, nor would anyone want it to be. Inasmuch as we hope to grow, we must make room for the failure and struggle that lead to learning and growth.

To safeguard the space for continuous learning, organizers will need to continue to create spaces for collaborative reflection, study, and planning. Time to learn and reflect in community with others is considered a luxury for many educators and organizers, often pushed to the side to make way for other, seemingly more pressing, work. The space and time that collaborators had to do this work during the first two years of the project were crucial. During the third year, time for reflection and study has been more difficult to secure, and the loss of this time presents a threat to teacher capacity, a reduced ability to build community among students and families through non-classroom gatherings, and a reduced ability to provide supports for students who are facing crisis or need additional academic help. Our staffing plan has shifted for the coming years to help offset some of this; we have requested a common planning period for all Humanities Amped staff, and two staff positions will be used for what we are calling “community-based faculty.” The people in these positions will teach electives, provide academic and social supports in core classes, and plan community and youth development programming that extends from the school day. Tenth grade integrated English and Civics classes will have two teachers, but other classes will have community-based staff available every other day rather than two teachers collaborating every day. Part of the intent of this division of labor is to free up resources to plan, reflect, and study with Humanities Amped collaborators, and alongside other colleagues from the school and district. A graduate student from South State will

coordinate the school and district-wide professional learning communities, thus taking some of that labor off the shoulders of Humanities Amped teachers.

The resources to provide this kind of staffing have thus far come from public sources: the school district has allowed additional teacher allotments, South State University has funded a graduate position through a special assistantship, and the school district has also contracted South State for an additional graduate assistantship. The engagement and support of Frazier High School's principal, who has been a thoughtful collaborator and champion of Humanities Amped, has been critical to securing these resources. A top administrator at the school district has also been key; her support for the program and leadership among other stakeholders in the district have not only helped us to grow at Frazier High School, but also to offer professional development with teachers throughout the district.

In many senses, our reliance on people who are sympathetic to Humanities Amped in positions of power is a threat to the ongoing existence of the program. If not for these guardians and their excitement about Humanities Amped, we would not have the leeway to continue to grow this program. And yet, this contingency and reliance on relationship also allows for the space to grow with relative freedom. Moving forward, as in these past three years, Humanities Amped will have to remain attentive to kairotic opportunities and to the shifting ways that priorities are framed within these institutions and by their leaders. At present, the guarantee that the program may continue is a year-to-year proposition. In the same way that we have shifted to work with more students and teachers over the course of three years, the time frame for resources may at some point be extended to a multi-year contract. However, the risk of such growth is that it shifts the

project from the relatively free spaces at the margins and towards the center, where more disciplinary scrutiny is likely to exist. This has already been the case during the third year of the project with 100 students enrolled. Increased scrutiny, particularly from school managers such as assistant principals and department chairs, adds pressure and discourages the kinds of learning that takes place in the messy back and forth of experimentation and collaboration. The learning thresholds are high for students, teachers, and other collaborators in Humanities Amped, and the technocratic forms of surveillance that proliferate in bureaucracies are a threat to the commitment of teachers attempting to trust in the process of such messy learning. Having at least some of Humanities Amped staff positioned as non-school employees, whether as South State graduate assistants, or in the coming year as “community-based faculty” through a non-profit partner, helps to keep some of this hierarchical management structure at bay. The tradeoff for this liminality, as it has been throughout this project, is the illegibility of Humanities Amped’s goals to many within the institutions connected to the project, especially those goals that exceed the institutions’ goals: to humanize educational contexts, to unleash student agency, and to engage youth as critical citizens in the work of social justice.

Any movement from margin to center increases the surveillance of these goals and the methods to get there, and this will need to be carefully considered as Humanities Amped moves forward. The ban of ethnic studies in 2010 that targeted a thriving Mexican American Studies program in Tucson public high schools is one example of the kind of potential threat that Humanities Amped could face. The ludicrous Arizona House Bill 2281, which banned Arizona ethnic studies classes on the premise that the classes promote “racism, segregation, and the overthrow of the US government,” has been at least partially

overturned in court, while a trial to prove that the state's ban was racially motivated is still underway (Phippen, 2015, n.p.). The presence of White teachers at the core of Humanities Amped, and the powerful presence in the local community of South State University, most likely provide some shield from such political threats in our own context. Nevertheless, this may not always be so, as current goals include being more intentional about increasing teachers of color and creating a pipeline for former students and community residents to work with the program. The Arizona ethnic studies ban shows that the politics of schooling can overpower the incredible successes of programs like Tuscon's Raza Studies, which had proven to boost the achievement, graduation, and college enrollment of students (Rodriguez, 2016, n.p.). It is not hard to imagine that the growth of Humanities Amped could lead to similar confrontations with power, especially as the kinds of research in which Humanities Amped students engage confronts the inequity of resources distributed throughout the system – such as Jordan's project that I describe at the start of this chapter. Being mindful of how to navigate these threats without becoming co-opted by them will be one of the challenges that lies ahead.

Closing Thoughts

In the conclusion of his research paper, Jordan summed up the problem of unequal funding for facilities in the local school system. He writes, "Everyone should have a quality education because without it we are feeding into the same degrading cycles of the world that allow certain groups of people to be swept under the rug and discarded" (Wilkerson, p. 8, 2017). Jordan's analysis of this predicament was fostered in English Amped, where he had the opportunity to raise questions about why his school lacked the resources of neighboring magnet schools, and to confront the many ways that people are "swept under

the rug and discarded.” Jordan could also articulate a vision for what “should be” that contrasts with what is. He writes:

Instead of funneling all of the resources into one institution and making ‘super-students,’ we should be imagining what the world would look like if we were all presented the same intent and opportunity. . . . Nothing just is, everything is intentional, and it is our responsibility to be aware of that and know when it is appropriate to be resistant. . . . We must be active, then proactive, for the furthering of our history. (Wilkerson, 2017)

Jordan’s sense of efficacy and vision of school *as it could be* stem from his opportunities to ask questions that matter to his own life, and to then to analyze those questions systemically through research and dialogue. As he argues, the goal of schooling should not be to secure extra resources to build “super students” while tossing others to the wayside. The goal should be to provide a high-quality education for all, which means we must be both “active, then proactive.” In other words, we cannot just respond to the situation as it is, we must also imagine and create new models of possibility.

While Humanities Amped could be described as another program among the marketplace of programs offered in the landscape of contemporary schooling, it is also something else. As with Brown’s (2009) assertion that Black girls need “power, not programs” (ctd. in Meiners and Winn, 2012, p. 51), all the young people of Frazier High School, and all people everywhere, have a right to claim a quality education. If Humanities Amped is nothing more than a niche program that does just what Jordan warns against by building “super students” while others are dispossessed of their fundamental right to a quality education, we will have changed very little in the long run. We must therefore

envision growth as rhizomatic, dependent upon relationality and contingency, and pushing past the boundaries of legibility to challenge the containers that hold us. We can most effectively open the thresholds of institutions by connecting new people and ways of working together into the ongoing process of learning that constitutes Humanities Amped. As new performances of possibilities are created, new forms of legibility will continue to expand the imaginary of what school can be, and of what teachers, young people and their communities can do.

Nearing the end of our interview on March 10, 2015, BriHop asked me what my own research question was. I told her that it was similar to the question asked by her eleventh grade research group. The Educational Justice group asked, "Is critical pedagogy possible in school?" I asked BriHop what she thought the answer was, and she thought about it for a moment before answering, "I believe it is. We're possible. We're here, right?" Indeed, there we were, performing both questions and answers together in ways that took us deep inside and far beyond what we imagined school to be.

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APPENDIX A: IRB MATERIALS

ACTION ON PROTOCOL APPROVAL REQUEST



Institutional Review Board
Dr. Robert Mathews, Chair
130 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
P: 225.578.8692
F: 225.578.5983
irb@lsu.edu | lsu.edu/irb

TO: Susan Weinstein
English

FROM: Robert C. Mathews
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: April 23, 2014
RE: IRB# 3491

TITLE: English Amped: Expanding Space for Critical Literacy Education

New Protocol/Modification/Continuation: New Protocol

Review type: Full Expedited **Review date:** 4/23/2014

Risk Factor: Minimal Uncertain Greater Than Minimal

Approved **Disapproved**

Approval Date: 4/23/2014 **Approval Expiration Date:** 4/22/2015

Re-review frequency: (annual unless otherwise stated)

Number of subjects approved: 100

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable): _____

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable) _____

By: Robert C. Mathews, Chairman 

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –
Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:**

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.
8. SPECIAL NOTE:

**All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at <http://www.lsu.edu/irb>*

English Amped: Expanding Space for Critical Literacy Education

Parent/Guardian Permission Form

Project Title:	English Amped: Expanding Space for Critical Literacy Education
Performance Site:	Middle and high school campuses, college campuses, community youth organization program sites, and affiliated locations
Investigators:	The following investigator is available for questions, M-F, 8:30 am – 5:00 pm Anna West or Susan Weinstein English Department, LSU (225)368-7927 awest24@lsu.edu sweinst@lsu.edu
Purpose of the Study:	The purpose of the study is to understand the possibilities and restraints of fostering critical literacy education at the intersection of secondary public schools, higher education, and civil society.
Inclusion Criteria:	Middle and High School Students, Faculty and Staff at Middle and High Schools, College Students, Professors and Staff, Youth Participants in Community Programs, Alumni, Family Members, Staff and Volunteers at Community Youth Organizations
Exclusion Criteria:	Those who are not affiliated with youth literacy education activities
Description of the Study:	<p>The investigator will attend critical literacy education activities in order to observe and participate.</p> <p>The investigator will make copies of writing and other texts that participants feel comfortable sharing. The investigator will also record activities and presentations in which the participants are featured using either audio or video. The investigator will interview participants, using audio or video to record the interviews. The investigator may collect school performance and demographic data about youth participants through the school, pending approval from the school system and parental consent.</p>
Benefits:	There are no direct benefits for participants in the study. However, the research may prove beneficial to the fields of education and youth services.

Risks: The participants may risk feeling embarrassed by something they say or share in their writing, presentations, or during an interview or activity. However, participants will be regularly encouraged to only share what they feel comfortable sharing. Participants have the option of being identified by pseudonym in any publications or presentations resulting from this research, so they have the choice to not be publicly identified with their texts, academic performance, or demographic data.

Right to Refuse: Participation is voluntary. Youth will be involved in the study only if youth and parent agree to the youth's participation. At any time, either the subject may withdraw from the study or the subject's parent may withdraw the youth from the study without penalty.

Privacy: Results of the study may be published. For youth under the age of 18, first names only will be used; participants have the option to use pseudonyms in place of real names. For subjects who choose to use pseudonyms, identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

Financial Information: There is no cost for participation in the study, nor is there any compensation to the subjects for participation.

Signatures:

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may regard additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigator. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Dennis Landin, Chairman, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. I will allow my child to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Parent's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Participant Name: _____

Please check one:

_____ Yes, you may use my child's real first name in this study.

_____ No, please use a pseudonym (another name used to conceal the participant's identity).

Your child may select a pseudonym to be used in any publications resulting from this study. The pseudonym that he or she would like to use is:_____.

The parent/guardian has indicated to me that he/she is unable to read. I certify that I have read this consent form to the parent/guardian and explained that by completing the signature line above he/she has given permission for the child to participate in the study.

Signature of Reader:_____

Date:_____

English Amped: Expanding Space for Critical Literacy Education

Youth Assent Form

I, _____, agree to be in a study about critical literacy education. I will share samples of my writing and other texts with the investigator and talk with the investigator about my experiences participating in literacy education activities. I can decide what I do and don't want to share with the investigator. I also retain the right to stop being in the study at any time I chose to do so.

Youth's Signature:_____ Age:_____

Date:_____

Witness*:_____

Date:_____

* (N.B. Witness must be present for the assent process, not just the signature of the minor)

English Amped: Expanding Space for Critical Literacy Education

Consent Form

Project Title:	English Amped: Expanding Space for Critical Literacy Education
Performance Site:	Middle and high school campuses, college campuses, community youth organization program sites, and affiliated locations
Investigators:	The following investigator is available for questions, M-F, 8:30 am – 5:00 pm Anna West or Susan Weinstein English Department, LSU (225)368-7927 awest24@lsu.edu sweinst@lsu.edu
Purpose of the Study:	The purpose of the study is to understand the possibilities and restraints of fostering critical literacy education at the intersection of secondary public schools, higher education, and civil society.
Inclusion Criteria:	Middle and High School Students, Faculty and Staff at Middle and High Schools, College Students, Professors and Staff, Youth Participants in Community Programs, Alumni, Family Members, Staff and Volunteers at Community Youth Organizations
Exclusion Criteria:	Those who are not affiliated with youth literacy education activities
Description of the Study:	<p>The investigator will attend critical literacy education activities in order to observe and participate.</p> <p>The investigator will make copies of writing and other texts that participants feel comfortable sharing. The investigator will also record activities and presentations in which the participants are featured using either audio or video. The investigator will interview participants, using audio or video to record the interviews. The investigator may collect school performance and demographic data about youth participants through the school, pending approval from the school system and parental consent.</p>
Benefits:	There are no direct benefits for participants in the study. However, the research may prove beneficial to the fields of education and youth services.

Risks: The participants may risk feeling embarrassed by something they say or share in their writing, presentations, or during an interview or activity. However, participants will be regularly encouraged to only share what they feel comfortable sharing. Participants have the option of being identified by pseudonym in any publications or presentations resulting from this research, so they have the choice to not be publicly identified with their texts, academic performance, or demographic data.

Right to Refuse: Participation is voluntary. Youth will be involved in the study only if youth and parent agree to the youth's participation. At any time, either the subject may withdraw from the study or the subject's parent may withdraw the youth from the study without penalty.

Privacy: Results of the study may be published. Participants have the option to use pseudonyms in place of real names. For subjects who choose to use pseudonyms, identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

Financial Information: There is no cost for participation in the study, nor is there any compensation to the subjects for participation.

Signatures:

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may regard additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigator. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Dennis Landin, Chairman, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Printed Name: _____

Please check one:

_____ Yes, use my real name in this study.

_____ No, please use a pseudonym (another name used to conceal the participant's identity).

The pseudonym that I would like to use is: _____.

Subject Signature: _____

Date: _____

The study subject has indicated to me that he/she is unable to read. I certify that I have read this consent form to the subject and explained that by completing the signature line above, the subject has agreed to participate in the study.

Signature of Reader: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B: DRAFT OF ENGLISH AMPED GOALS

English Amped: Critical Literacy in Action

Building power, reciprocity & democratic praxis among students, teachers & communities

In the 2014-2015 year, we will accomplish and impact the following.

Students at McKinley High School will develop, and continue to develop, a love for literacy and for one another. They will experience literacy as a means to think, imagine, and take action informed by critical insight. They will have gained intellectual and social tools that are transferable to multiple contexts in their present and future lives. Lastly, they will demonstrate some aspects of what they learn and achieve using multiple methods of documentation, including academic measurements.

Parents of McKinley students will be welcomed as integral contributors to building and sustaining structures for their personal, familial, and community literacy and agency. They will inform future strategies and plans by identifying existing resources and immediate needs with regard to building literacy and agency. Parents will experience open communication between teachers, students, McKinley, and LSU in order to contribute to, build and sustain these structures.

Students in the Geaux Teach program at LSU will connect theory to practice, gaining a strong and flexible understanding of critical literacy in action. They will do this by *experiencing* themselves as collaborative teachers and learners in a critical literacy classroom. They will also read, plan, act, and reflect on the connections between their experiences and other forms of knowledge. By doing so, they will gain insight into the structures, discourses and institutions structuring education while also forming a hopeful and critically informed vision for their futures in the field of secondary English education.

Teachers at McKinley High School will experience the power of organizing and contributing to meaningful professional development opportunities. By having access to meaningful and valuable professional development, teachers will increase their personal agency and inspire their students' agency. Teachers will also have access to LSU's material and human resources. This access will create spaces and opportunities for mutually beneficial relationships and activities.

Louisiana State University will have increased its capacity to build and sustain collaborative relationships with McKinley High School. By doing so, relationships and projects will have begun to take root among multiple stakeholders at each site, in some cases independent of the direct coordination of English Amped. We want LSU and McKinley to tap into each other in ways that systemically improve teacher development (for pre-service and current teachers) and in ways that open the possibility of relationships and knowledge between faculty, students and community on both campuses. We want LSU to embrace and make visible the praxis that results from forming and sustaining such relationships, recognizing this work as vital to LSU's own mission and viability.

McKinley High School will create spaces for meaningful engagement between McKinley's parents, students and teachers and LSU's students, faculty, and support staff. McKinley High will support teachers' professional developments needs as these will most benefit students. McKinley will also recognize and support our work as it yields students', parents', teachers', and the community's literacy and agency. McKinley will experience innovation in public schools and has the potential to contribute to, develop and sustain this innovative program.

APPENDIX C: ART OF CRITICAL LITERACY 2014 SYLLABUS

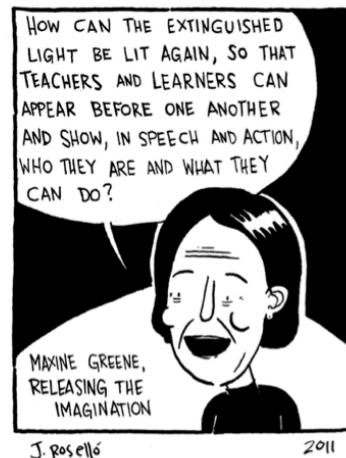
<p>English 4302</p> <p>The Art of Critical Literacy</p>	<p>Instructors Destiny Adams Cooper, dadams@ebrschools.org Susan Weinstein, sweinst@lsu.edu (supervising) Anna West, awest24@lsu.edu</p> <p>Class Meetings Tues, 4:00-6:00 pm, McKinley High School</p> <p>Office hours: By appointment</p>
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

The focus of this small group independent study is the art of critical literacy. We will read about, reflect upon, and practice literacy learning (reading and writing in multiple mediums) as a means to critically analyze, represent, and affect the social worlds in which we live. Together, we will imagine and enact possibilities for critical literacy in a local, public ELA classroom. We will read extensively and sometimes also practice the art of critical literacy ourselves through hands-on, project-based methods such as writing workshops, story circles, critical dialogue, creative writing, media publication, oral histories, performance pedagogies, youth participatory action research, etc.

As a community concerned with pedagogical issues, we will continuously interrogate commonsense notions of what it means to teach and to learn. Shari J. Stenberg (2005) offers a definition of pedagogy that we may take as a starting point:

- (1) Pedagogy is a knowledge-making activity that involves the interplay of visions and practices, both of which require reflection;
- (2) pedagogy is dependent on learners and is remade with each encounter, as the students and the teacher change;
- (3) pedagogy cannot be finished; we cannot “finally” learn to teach. (xviii)



Following Stenberg’s understanding of pedagogy as emergent and dependent upon the encounter among changing people, visions, and practices, we offer this as an exploratory course in which teachers and students will learn alongside one another. We hope that this learning community becomes one in which we may follow our own inquiries and generate new visions, practices, and relationships through which our work as teachers and learners may continue to unfold in meaningful dialogue with one another.

FIELD EXPERIENCE OVERLAP

This course is designed to maximize overlap between field experiences, reading, and discussions. Therefore, students will complete their 40 hours of field experience observations (a requirement for Geaux Teach) in an 11th grade English class at McKinley High School taught by Destiny Cooper and Anna West. The McKinley class meets on Monday-Friday from 12:30-2:30 pm. Participating students must be able to attend the FEX classroom at least one afternoon each week.

ASSIGNMENTS

- You will complete approximately 30-50 pages of **assigned readings** each week. Bring the reading to class and be prepared to participate in weekly discussions and activities based on what we have read. The reading load will be heavier towards the start of the semester. (25 pts.)
- Write five short **response papers** that connect ideas from readings and course discussion to implementation in the field experience classroom. Response papers should be approx. 500 words, and posted on Moodle no later than 5 pm on the Monday before class. You may choose which five readings you will write responses to. Each response should briefly summarize the reading, respond to some concept within the reading that stood out to you, and pose questions that are generative for further discussion. (25 pts.)
- Each student will **select a reading** or several shorter readings for the rest of our class to read and discuss. A bibliography has been provided, or you may do research on your own to identify a relevant reading. You will **lead the class** in one hour of discussion and/or activities on the day that the reading you have assigned is due. (15 pts.)
- Plan and implement an **action research project** to take place through the field experience classroom. You may collaborate with other students on this project. The project may involve directly leading a single activity or a linked series of activities in class, or perhaps working closely with a few students, or taking on a support role in some other way. Whatever you decide to do should fit into the eco-system of the classroom. Coordinating ahead of time with instructors is a must. Time will be reserved during the second hour of class meetings for students to meet individually or in small groups with instructors to plan for these projects. We will establish a timeline together in class. (25 pts.)
- Create a **conference presentation** (8-10 pages written, visual materials as relevant) that communicates the findings of your action research project. The presentations should be suitable for presentation at a scholarly, professional, or activist conference of your choosing. You will need to research the conference where you envision presenting your work, and provide a cover sheet with specific information about the conference. More information on what information to include is forthcoming. We will have a mock conference on the last day of class in which each student will present her work. (25 pts.)

SCHEDULE OVERVIEW (subject to change)

Class Period	In Class	Due by Next Class Period
8/26	Welcome, overview plan, sign up for stuff, discuss <i>To Teach</i> (Ayers and Alexander-Tanner)	Kalantzis, M., & Cope, B. (2012). <i>Literacies</i> . Port Melbourne, Vic.: Cambridge University Press. (Approx. 100 pages, posted on Moodle)
9/2	Discuss readings, unpack classroom experiences, collaborative planning	Freire, P. & Macedo, D. (1987). <i>Literacy: reading the word & the world</i> . South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin & Garvey Publishers. (Introduction, Chapters 1 & 7)

9/9	Discuss readings, unpack classroom experiences, collaborative planning	<p>Reilley, M.R. (1993). <i>The peaceable classroom</i>. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers. (Preface, Prologue, Chapter 2)</p> <p>Ayers, W., Kumashiro, K., Meiners, E., Quinn, T., & Stovall, D. (2010). <i>Teaching toward democracy: educators as agents of change</i>. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers. (Introduction, Chapter 4, and Afterward)</p>
9/16	<p>Discuss readings, unpack classroom experiences, collaborative planning.</p> <p>NOTE: On Thursday, 9/18, our English Amped class will attend the La. Summit on African American Male Success at LSU. You need to register if you are planning to attend at: http://chse.lsu.edu/sponsored_programs/-LSUAAMaleSummit.shtml</p> <p>On Friday, 9/19, Dave Stovall will come to McKinley to spend time with our class in the morning. Exact time TBD.</p>	<p>Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools. <i>Educational Researcher</i>, 35:7, 3-12.</p> <p>Duncan-Andrade, J. & Morrell, E. (2008) <i>The art of critical pedagogy: Possibilities for moving from theory to practice in urban schools</i>. New York: Peter Lang. (Chapters 1 & 3)</p> <p>Scorza, D, Mirra, N & Morrell, E. (2013). It should just be education: Critical pedagogy normalized as academic excellence. <i>International Journal of Critical Pedagogy</i>, 4:2, 15-34.</p>
9/23	Discuss readings, unpack classroom experiences, collaborative planning	<p>Kohl, H. (1992). I won't learn from you: Thoughts on the role of assent in learning. <i>Rethinking Schools</i>. 7:1, 1-32.</p> <p>Delpit, L. D. (2012). "Multiplication is for white people": raising expectations for other people's children. New York: New Press. (Chapters to be determined)</p>
9/30	Discuss readings, unpack classroom experiences, collaborative planning	<p>Morrell, E. (2004). <i>Becoming critical researchers: literacy and empowerment for urban youth</i>. New York: P. Lang. (Chapter 2)</p> <p>Torre, M.A., Fine, M., (2008) Participatory action research in the contact zone, In Cammarota, J., & Fine, M. (Eds.), <i>Revolutionizing education: youth participatory action research in motion</i>. New York, NY: Routledge. (Chapter 3)</p> <p>Boomer, Garth (1992). Addressing the problem of elsewhere: A case for action research in schools. In Goswami, D., & Stillman, P. (1987). <i>Reclaiming the classroom: teacher research as an agency for change</i>. Upper Montclair, N.J.:</p>

		Boynton/Cook. See Michelle Fine talk, in class.
10/7	Discuss readings, unpack classroom experiences, collaborative planning	Student Assigned Reading
10/14	Class led by:	Student Assigned
10/21	Class led by:	Student Assigned
10/28	Class led by:	Student Assigned
11/4	Class led by:	Student Assigned
11/11	Class led by:	TBD
11/18	TBD	Work on conference papers
11/25	No Class- Thanksgiving Break	
12/02	Present papers; celebrate!	

Art of Critical Literacies Reading List

The politics of education & literacies:

Anyon, J. (1997). *Ghetto schooling: a political economy of urban educational reform*. New York: Teachers College Press, Teachers College, Columbia University.

Bourdieu, P. (2006). Chapter 18: Cultural reproduction and social reproduction. In *Inequality: Classic Readings in Race, Class, & Gender* (pp. 257-271). Perseus Books Group.

Delpit, L. D. (2012). *"Multiplication is for white people": raising expectations for other people's children*. New York: New Press

Giroux, H. A. (2005). *Schooling and the struggle for public life: democracy's promise and education's challenge* (Updated ed., [2nd ed.]). Boulder, Colo.: Paradigm Publishers.

Ravitch, D. (2010). *The death and life of the great American school system: how testing and choice are undermining education*. New York: Basic Books.

Buras, K. L., Randels, J., & Salaam, K. (2010). *Pedagogy, policy, and the privatized city: stories of dispossession and defiance from New Orleans*. New York: Teachers College Press

Meier, D. (2002). *In schools we trust: creating communities of learning in an era of testing and standardization*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Fabricant, M., & Fine, M. (2012). *Charter schools and the corporate makeover of public education: what's at stake?*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Males, M. (2006). Youth policy and institutional change. In Ginwright, S., P. Noguera, & J.

Cammarota, *Beyond Resistance!: youth activism and community change : new democratic possibilities for practice and policy for America's youth* (pp. 301-318). New York: Routledge.

Ladson Billings, G. (1998) Just what is critical race theory and what is it doing in a nice field like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1).

- Brandt, D. (2001) Sponsors of literacy. In E. Cushman, E.R. Kintgen, B.R. Kroll & M. Rose (Eds.) *Literacy: a critical sourcebook* (pp. 555-571). Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Kohl, H. (1992). I won't learn from you: Thoughts on the role of assent in learning. *Rethinking Schools*. 7:1, 1-5.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools. *Educational Researcher*, 35:7, 3-12.
- Scorza, D, Mirra, N & Morrell, E. (2013). It should just be education: Critical pedagogy normalized as academic excellence. *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, 4:2, 15-34.
- Thomas, P. (2011). Orwellian educational change under Obama: Crisis discourse, Utopian expectations, and accountability failures. *Journal of Inquiry & Action in Education*, 4:1, 69-92.
- Graff, H. (2001). The nineteenth century origins of our times. In *Literacy: A critical sourcebook*. p. 211-233.
- What's "New" in New Literacy Studies (Brian Street) Available at http://people.ufpr.br/~clarissa/pdfs/NewInLiteracy_Street.pdf
- Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms (Ann Ruggles Gere) Available through LSU libraries JSTOR database
- Ethnographies and PAR examples:***
- Fine, M., Roberts, R. A., Torre, M. E., & Bloom, J. (2004). *Echoes of Brown: youth documenting and performing the legacy of Brown v. Board of Education*. New York: The Graduate Center, City University of New York.
- González, N., L. C. Moll & C. Amanti (Eds), *Funds of knowledge: Theorizing practice in households, communities, and classrooms*. (pp. 29-45). Mahwah, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Rose, M. (1995). *Possible lives: the promise of public education in America*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co..
- Morrell, E. (2004). *Becoming critical researchers: literacy and empowerment for urban youth*. New York: P. Lang.
- Duncan-Andrade, J. & Morrell, E. (2008) *The art of critical pedagogy: Possibilities for moving from theory to practice in urban schools*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Gustavson, L. (2007). *Youth learning on their own terms: creative practices and classroom teaching*. New York: Routledge.
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- Winn, M. (2011) *Girl time: Literacy, justice, and the school-to-prison pipeline*. New York: Teachers College Press.
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