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JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE & LITERACY EDUCATION

Editor's Introduction: Navigating Through the Challenges

Jennifer Ervin

I am so honored to write this introduction to our Fall 2022 issue, which continues to explore the theme of Volume 18 Issue 1: Language and literacy through intercultural citizenship, but also pushes us ahead into new topics related to how we might continue to work to affirm our students amidst challenging times in educational legislation. Producing this issue alongside our editorial team this fall has been an incredible opportunity for me. I have learned from the work of the scholars whose research is included in this issue, as well as from the editorial board members, who have been an inspiration as we forge ahead not only in spite of, but because of the challenging social and political context that is teaching and learning in our home state of Georgia today.

As in many states across the country, legislation passed in Georgia this past summer against the teaching of "divisive concepts," or the "indoctrination" of students by educators. This legislation has had wide-reaching impacts in our K-12 schools, and is a present concern for the preservice teachers that we work to support in the Mary Frances College of Education at the University of Georgia. This legislation does not deny the existence of race and racism in our society, nor does it deny educators the opportunity to bring attention to the structural forces that enable and encourage racism in our society. It does, however, provide the opportunity for parents and community members to complain about any instruction they believe may cause a student to feel "psychological distress." The impact of this legislation is immense, and many schools are responding by rewriting syllabi, reframing instruction, and removing books that provide our K-12 students with the essential mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990) that they deserve.

In this social and political context, the work we highlight in this issue encourages us to think beyond these challenges. It pushes us to consider what we can and must do to support all of our students, both in K-12 schools and in higher education, to forward critical conversations and intentionally work against attempts to deny the central importance that race and racial diversity have in our society and in the experience of individuals' lives. We hope you will find these articles as meaningful as we have as we work to forge ahead and defend educators' rights to bring attention to the importance of race and diversity in our schools.

Research Articles

The first article, "Applying an Intersectional Framework to the Literacy Worlds of Preservice Teachers," by Heather Dunham and Kerry Alexander, considers what the framework of intersectionality might

bring to preservice teacher preparation courses. They push readers to imagine how preservice teachers might be encouraged to learn from the intersections of their identities in productive ways as they develop critical reflective practices.

The next two articles center around students whose experiences with learning and living have been marginalized in both schooling and non-schooling spaces. The students in these studies work to create space for themselves in ways that do not fall neatly into dominant educational practices. In "Black girls and silence: 'They ain't doing too much'...learning, valuing, and understanding their use of silence through critical race theory and culturally sustaining pedagogy," Dr. Jason Mizell and N'Dyah McCoy illustrate how one student's silences were intentional acts of protection and negotiation, and they invite readers to reconceptualize silence as a means of empowerment. In "'Stories that are worth sharing': Insights from Middle Eastern Refugee Migration Stories through an Inquiry into Narrative," Jennifer C. Mann uses narrative inquiry and a critical literacy framework to consider how refugee students work to make sense of the new literacy spaces they inhabit. This article includes links to audio recordings and stories as a cultural data set, providing resources for other educators and researchers.

Benjamin Lathrop and Dr. Christy Wessel Powell also draw on the framework of critical literacy in their article, "'We Shall Take Their Children Away and Rear Them to the Fatherland': A Critical Discourse Analysis of a 'Parent Advocacy' Group." This article reports on findings from a discourse analysis of a parent advocacy group, Purple for Parents Indiana. In this study, they work to understand how this group's "cosmetic criticality" has created a unique challenge to public education that will be recognizable to educators in many states across the U.S. who face parent pushback on teaching and curricula.

We also feature, in this issue, two authors who engage with postqualitative and posthuman inquiry as they work to understand literacy narratives. Maverick Zhang, in their article "Neoliberalism, Critical Literacy, and the Everyday: A Post-Qual Informed Multi-Genre Inquiry," shares a series of personal stories to explore how critical literacy and neoliberalism are entangled within our everyday lived experiences. In "Considering Collective Motivation to Read: A Narrative, Inquiry," Dr. Mark D. McCarthy explores collective motivation as a feature of posthuman subjectivity, and engages in a process of evocative questioning that brings to light new possibilities for literacy learning. These articles push the boundaries of traditional qualitative research in productive ways, demonstrating that the dynamic processes of learning and knowing cannot, and should not, always be produced through static and predetermined methods and ways of knowing.

In the final article, "The Influences of Teacher Knowledge on Qualitative Writing Assessment," Drs. Heather Cato and Katie Walker bring attention to the contextual factors at work in teachers' scoring practices, by looking at the knowledge and experiences teachers draw on when scoring student writing assignments. Their work brings attention to the importance of ongoing professional development, and a deeper understanding of teachers' training, teaching and learning experiences, and mentorship as we work to develop new ways of assessing student understandings.

Scholars Speak Out

We are excited to announce that our Scholars Speak Out feature, previously published in our monthly newsletters, will now be published in our fall and spring issues. We believe this move will bring greater visibility to the important contributions of scholars, whose editorials provide unique perspectives on a broad spectrum of issues related to language and literacy education. In this issue, Scholars Speak Out editor Ashley Brumbelow includes articles on topics ranging from the recent legislation passed in Georgia, to digital literacies, to justice-oriented teaching pedagogies in literacy and language learning. These articles include "The Authoritarian Threat to Public Education: Attacks on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Undermine Teaching and Learning," by Joshua Cuevas, "A Critical Pedagogy for Love and Healing Toward Anti-Asian Racism and Xenophobia" by Ting Yuan, "Towards Linguistic and Disability Justice in Education" by Jennifer Phuong and Karla M. Venegas, and "Do You Want to Make a TikTok? Is It Time to BeReal?: Gen Z, Social Media, and Digital Literacies," by Trevor Boffone.

Academic Book Reviews

Our Academic Book Review editor, Naanhee Kim, has included two reviews of recently published academic litearature in our field that we hope readers will find helpful to their own research and study. The academic texts reviewed in this issue are *The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop: How to Decolonize the Creative Classroom* by Felicia Rose Chavez, reviewed by Honor McElroy; and *Educating Emergent Bilinguals: Policies, Programs, and Practices for English Learners* by Ofelia Garcia and Jo Anne Kleifgen, reviewed by Molly Buck.

Children's Literature and Young Adult Book Reviews

JoLLE continues to feature reviews of recently published literature for children and young adults, reviewed by both adult reviewers and younger readers. Our Children's Literature and Young Adult Book Review editor, Brittany Pope, has included reviews for the books *Better Than We Found It* by Frederick Joseph and Porsche Joseph, reviewed by Jennifer Garner and Emma Morrow; *Straw House, Wood House, Brick House, Blow* by Daniel Nayeri, reviewed by Antonia Alberga Parisi and Alexandra Green; Goodnight *Little Bookstore* by Amy Cherrix, reviewed by Jan, Kyle, and Jake Butterworth; *Granny and Bean* by Karen Hesse and Charlotte Voake, reviewed by Jessica and Sloane Tanner; *I Dream of Popo* by Livia Blackburne and Julia Kuo, reviewed by Yang Wang and CoCo Li; and *Smashie McPerter and the Shocking Rocket Robbery* by N. Griffin and Kate Hindley, reviewed by Shelby Gordon and Blakelee Evans.

Poetry, Fiction, and Visual Arts

The final section of this issue, curated by Poetry, Fiction, and Visual Arts editor Frankie Avalos, features artwork by Kelli Garguilo titled "Life Cycle of Language: From Child to Adult," and two poems by Jonathan Tunstall, titled "Master Teacher: American History X," and "I Don't Wanna Teach no More." We also want to express our gratitude to Cristina Valencia Mazzanti, whose submission titled, "I am (Not)" is featured as this issue's cover art. In the statement for this piece, the artist explains how this multilayered image presents a methodological statement about meaning and identity in education.

Thanks and Recognition

This issue would not exist without the inspiring work that our editorial board has done this fall, and I am incredibly grateful for their efforts. JoLLE is a student-run journal, and this year we welcomed in many new editorial board members. This new board invited us to work together to reimagine what JoLLE might be and how we might continue to be an outlet for critical scholarship, while also providing a space for students from different academic backgrounds to learn the ins and outs of academic publishing. I wish to thank John Williams, managing editor; Amanda Deaton, production editor; our conference team Haley Allen, Jisang Yoo, and Casey Boersma; digital content editors Adam Diaz and Lauren Corley, Pamela Kimario, our communications editor; Helena Karas, treasurer; Frankie Avalos, poetry, fiction, and visual arts editor; Brittany Pope, children's literature and young adult book review editor; Naanhee Kim, academic book review editor; Ashley Brumbelow, scholars speak out editor, and Shahrukh Jiwani, our editorial assistant. I would also like to give a special thanks to the support and guidance of our faculty advisor, Dr. Usree Bhattacharya.

In addition to the members of our editorial board, I would like to express deep gratitude for the work of our external review board. Their reviews have provided invaluable perspectives as we manage ongoing submissions to JoLLE and work to provide authors with meaningful and timely feedback on their writing. We truly would not be able to produce such wonderful scholarship without the time and careful attention our external reviewers provide.

Finally, I would like to thank the authors who have contributed to JoLLE and the readers who invest in the scholarship that we are fortunate enough to publish. If you are interested in submitting your writing to JoLLE or serving on our external review board, please refer to the submissions page on our website (jolle.coe.uga.edu) or contact our Managing Editor, John Williams (jolle.submissions@gmail.com). We hope you will consider submitting your writing, reviews, opinion pieces, and/or artwork to be considered in our upcoming issues. You can also follow JoLLE on social media, @JoLLE_UGA.
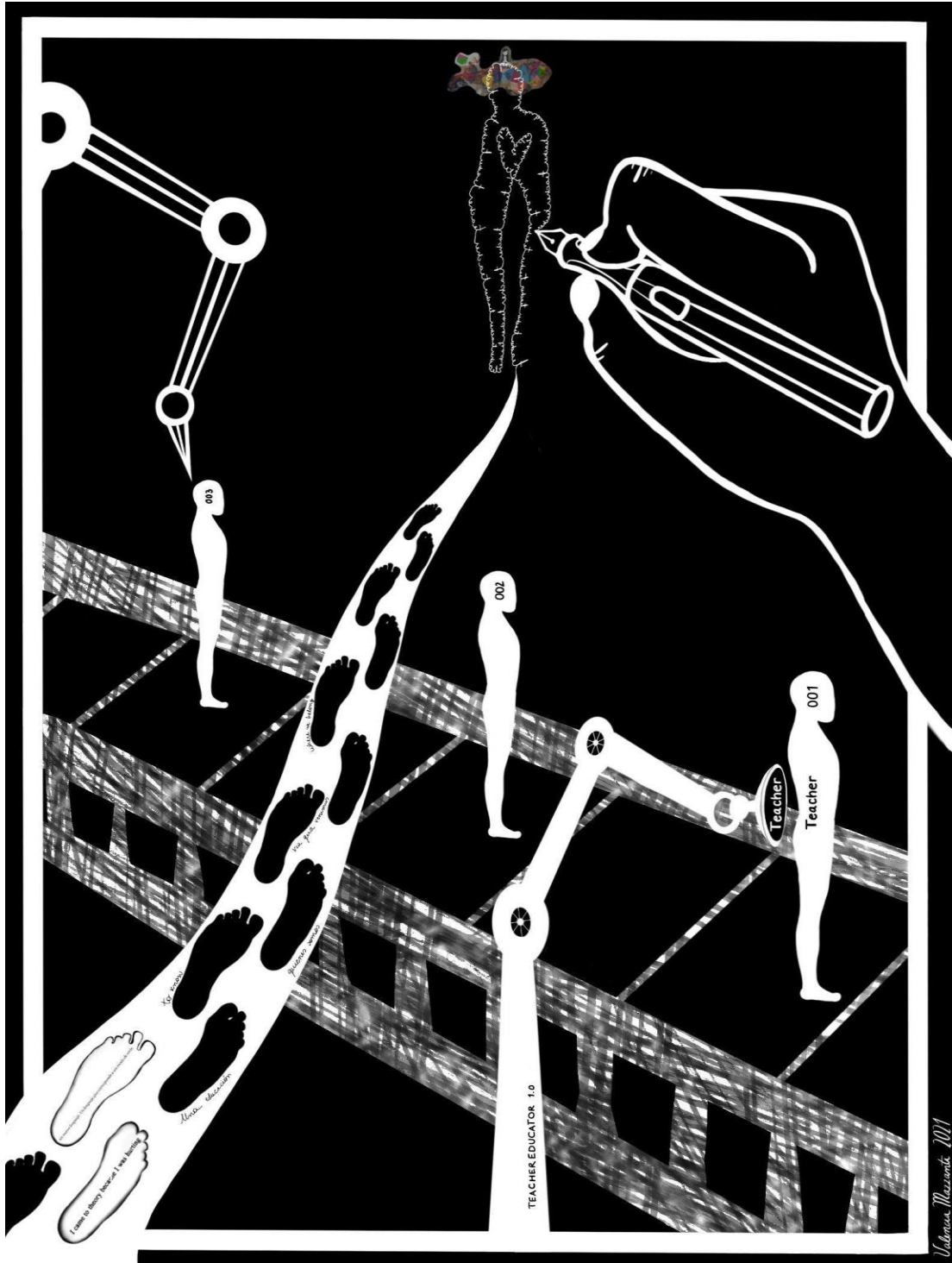
Sincerely,

Jennifer Ervin

Principal Editor, 2022-2023

"I am [Not]"

By Cristina Valencia Mazzanti

Description of the Artwork

The phrase "I am [not] a teacher factory" became meaningful to me as a statement I used over the years to refer to my own work as a teacher educator. In this manuscript, I develop the statement into a multilayered image of how I continue negotiating what it means to be a teacher and educator. I juxtapose images of how I experienced being an educator as an engagement that artfully ascribes identity, in contrast to images of education as a standardized or instrumentalized process. The multilayered image then creates a visual that frames and diffracts short fragments of written text to present a methodological statement and educator's reflection about the possibilities that language and artful engagements afford for meaning and identity in education.

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About Cristina Valencia Mazzanti

Cristina Valencia Mazzanti is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Education and Child Study at Smith College. She studies the social construction of languages as a multifaceted phenomenon that shapes children's experiences of learning as well as the work of educators and researchers. Currently, she is researching young children's experiences with multilingualism, multimodality, and learning through a series of interdisciplinary longitudinal studies involving kindergarten students, elementary school teachers, and Latine families. Cristina teaches classes in early childhood and elementary education, as well as educational research.

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Applying an Intersectional Framework to the Literacy Worlds of Preservice Teachers

Heather Dunham & Kerry Alexander

Abstract: Within social justice literacy teacher education, there has been a lack of attention to the framework of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) and how it can be used to prepare teachers to work in diverse settings. In this case study, we examine six multimodal literacy identity projects created by preservice teachers (PTs) as part of their required reading coursework. Using Boveda's (2016) notion of intersectional competence as an analytic frame, we found that PTs named sociocultural identities, such as race, gender, religion, and dis/ability, in connection to texts from their childhood and early experiences with reading motivation. Additionally, PTs exhibited an understanding of systems of oppression related to race, religion, and ability, but lacked an emphasis on the intersections of multiple markers of difference. These findings illuminate the process of identity fracturing as one way PTs disaggregate and reaggregate their own identities to deepen their understanding of interlocking systems that appear within literacy curriculum and instruction. Implications for future teacher preparation coursework are discussed.

Keywords: identity development, intersectionality, literacy education, preservice teachers

Heather Dunham is a doctoral candidate in Language and Literacy Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. She is a former elementary teacher of multilingual learners and now focuses her research, teaching, and coaching on preparing preservice teachers to enact culturally sustaining literacy practices.

Kerry Alexander is a doctoral candidate in Language and Literacy Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. She is an artist, writer, university instructor, and literacy researcher dedicated to community-centered inquiry and responsive pedagogical design in elementary literacy classrooms.

The goal of justice-oriented teacher education programs is to prepare preservice teachers (PTs) to address educational inequities in the classroom. However, this difficult task often leads to reinforcing normativity (Beneke & Cheatham, 2020) or reifying a hierarchy of marginality (Hyland, 2010) due to a lack of nuance around intersectional identities. This pattern hinders PTs' critical awareness of how privilege and oppression manifest in developing teacher practice. Our study on intersectional identity markers in preservice teacher literacy identity projects aims to address this problem. We believe it is imperative for teacher educators and researchers to push conversations forward by incorporating intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), or the study of intersecting social identities and how they relate to systems and structures of discrimination, as a framework to nuance the multiple levels of privilege and oppression that K-12 students experience inside and outside of classrooms. In this paper, we argue that using an intersectional framework in teacher education courses can guide PTs' insights towards recognizing the complexity and fluidity of cultural and systemic privilege and oppression (Leckie & Buser De, 2020) in personal and professional identity development.

As White women in the field of teacher education, we acknowledge the endurance of White epistemological presence and dominance. Indeed, in social justice teacher education in particular, we see significant missed opportunities to engage with multiple identity markers. For instance, in a review of the literature, Pugach et al. (2019) found that 73% of the 53 empirical research articles on social justice in teacher education had no mention of

"If teacher education programs are serious about implementing justice-centered pedagogies, they need to develop (and implement) a language of complexity around teacher identity."

intersectionality. Clearly, if teacher education programs are serious about implementing justice-centered pedagogies, they need to develop (and implement) a language of complexity around teacher identity (Pugach et al., 2019; Shelton & Barnes, 2016) to address multiple intersections of privilege and oppression in their classrooms and fieldwork, and, indeed, to engender broad transformative change.

Literacy classroom teachers and researchers who embody an intersectional approach to literacy instruction must "critically understand the deeper analyses of historical oppressions and social formations based on race, class, gender, and sexuality" (Brochin, 2018, p. 165) and move beyond sweeping notions of inclusivity or multiculturalism (Ahmed, 2012). Critical analysis and deeper understanding of historical oppressions, or *intersectional competence* (Boveda, 2016), begins by turning attention to our own experiences. In our reading methods course with PTs, we began here.

In this paper, we look closely at six multimodal literacy identity projects to see how our PTs were taking up their intersectional identities in relation to their experiences of becoming readers and writers, and how this relates to their professional teacher identity development. To guide our work, we ask the following research question: *To what extent do PTs notice and name their own intersectional identity markers (i.e., race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, language, dis/ability, socioeconomic status, and religion) within a literacy identity project in a reading methods course? What implications do these data provide for future course and field work experiences?*

Theoretical Framework

The paradoxes of identity permeate our current study. Identity is both unique to an individual and implies a relationship to others (Buckingham, 2008). It is both determined by one's self and also reinforced by others. It is both concrete and fluid. While the purpose of this article is to capture PTs' thinking of their identities within a specific moment of time, we recognize that identities change over time and shift depending on different discourse communities (Gee, 2012; Lewis et al., 2007). Our hope is to use these snapshots of identity, that at times may feel concrete and permanent, to further push our work in literacy teacher preparation by naming specific examples of identity work as related to PTs' literacy practices.

Our theoretical framework is grounded in Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1991) scholarship on intersectionality, a term generated from Crenshaw's work in the legal sector regarding violence against women of Color. Intersectionality highlights how the intersection(s) of multiple identity markers variably manifest into, onto, and out of an individual's lived experience. For instance, in the case of violence against women of Color, Crenshaw (1991) explains that intervention strategies based solely off the experiences of women who do not share similar class or race backgrounds will offer limited help because ultimately the oppression women of Color face is different. Thus, attention to the intersections of race, gender, class, sexuality, language, and ability is the starting point in understanding the necessary work towards social justice for marginalized communities. We also incorporate Crenshaw's historical analysis as channeled through critical race and feminist theories to further nuance the identity-based politics of teaching. Within this frame, we include the unceasing White discourse patterning embedded in the dominant cultural imagination (e.g., news media, movies, student experiences) of whom teachers are, what they do, and how this looks and sounds (Leonardo & Gamez-Djokic, 2019).

In schools, the privileging of the White, English-speaking, heterosexual teacher-body amidst an increasingly multiracial, multilingual U.S. demographic creates an educational conundrum that, despite increasing pedagogical initiatives towards social justice and equity, speaks to how deeply Eurocentric ideologies pervade notions of professional knowledge and practice (Compton-Lilly et al., 2017). The experiences of marginalization in teaching, therefore, where certain identity markers are privileged above others, is not a zero-sum game of who has power and who doesn't, but a complex interplay of systems designed to privilege dominant identities first, and manipulate, through language, ideology, assumption, and otherwise—all markers that do not match the status quo. Intersecting identities of race, sexuality, gender, and class, for example, each hold positionality in relation to this norm, which structurally and symbolically shape and contort participation for all subjects involved (Collins, 1991).

The theories presented above shape our teacher educator philosophy and guide our endeavor to center PTs' intersectional identities at the fore, and duration, of their tenure. As White, female instructors, we especially choose to engage this lens as an act of pedagogical disruption to "traditional" evaluative measures of professional discernment and expertise, and to monitor our own (White) "assessment" gaze (Inoue, 2015) when teaching. Additionally, we believe this work provides momentum to move past "doing diversity" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 16) into a deeper understanding of how one's personal identities impact and shape one's developing professional identity for and alongside the children in their care.

Literature Review

In response to the overwhelming presence of Whiteness in teacher education (Sleeter, 2001), scholars have sought out ways of bringing intersectional theories and frameworks into teacher preparation programs. Theories of intersectionality allow researchers to learn from both White preservice teachers and preservice teachers of Color about their experiences in teacher preparation programs. Often, the intersection of multiple identity markers, such as race, gender, class, and language, can result in structural barriers that threaten the retention of preservice teachers of Color in their teacher education programs (Bell & Busey, 2021). To disrupt this, teacher educators have created professional development workshops (Escalante, 2020) and redesigned teacher preparation courses (Bertrand & Porcher, 2020; Scrimgeour & Ovsienko, 2015) to center frameworks of intersectionality. A widely used application of intersectionality in the work of preparing teachers is Sealy-Ruiz's (2018) work on the archaeology of self. In her work, preservice teachers are pushed to "peel back the layers" of their identities to examine personal racial beliefs and practices and foster racial literacy. Scholars have found that incorporating Sealy-Ruiz's archaeology of self serves as a disruption in teacher preparation, pushing programs from naming words like *diversity, equity,* and *inclusion* to exploring them in practice (Bertrand & Porcher, 2020).

The most widely researched pedagogical approach to building PTs' intersectional competence is inviting PTs to self-reflect on their own intersectional identities. This has often taken the form of written assignments asking students to write a narrative or an autobiography about their sociocultural identities. In a teacher education course focused on cultural issues, Leckie & Buser De (2020) collected 31 multicultural autobiographies enrolled in the course. Upon careful analysis, the researchers found that PTs not only focused on their racial or ethnic identity, but also a large majority of them focused on gender as well. However, social class was more difficult to locate within the written autobiographies. The researchers also noted that PTs' "experiences of discrimination were more strongly expressed than those of privilege" (p. 121) throughout the autobiographies of students enrolled in the course. Similarly, Miller (2017) looked at 73 PTs' written narratives to analyze the complex nature of race, racism, and Whiteness as they intersect with other identity markers. Miller (2017) found that most insightful attention to the White PTs' racial identity occurred at the intersection of other identity factors, specifically when this happened in "abrupt and disjunctive ways" (p. 29) such as identifying outside of middle classness. Examining the intersections of multiple identity markers provides space for more nuanced and complex understanding of singular identity categorizations such as race. It is imperative in analyzing PT's self-reflections, however, to clarify the difference between grouping by identity marker (for processes of disaggregated data, for example) and the nuancing of identities as intersectional, fluid, and contextually flexible. We believe these distinctions are key to developing a complexity of language around intersectional identity with our students.

Researchers have also looked at PTs' reflections on their own intersectional identities during field-based practicum visits, student teaching experiences, and

> **"Theories of intersectionality allow researchers to learn from both White preservice teachers and preservice teachers of Color about their experiences in teacher preparation programs."**

across entire program experiences. Scholars have found that PTs' reflections on intersectional identities caused tensions and insights into the ways privilege and oppression co-exist, prompting PTs to find counter-narratives for themselves and their students (Maddamsetti, 2020) and empathizing with the challenges faced by students from historically marginalized backgrounds (Rivera Maulucci, 2008). One starting point for amplifying PTs' intersectional competence is to locate tensions caused by intersectional oppressions and privileges. Providing multiple opportunities for PTs to reflect on and discuss their intersectional identities across coursework and field experiences is an important foundation for in-service teachers' ability to enact critical and justice-oriented pedagogical practices (Skerrett et al., 2019).

In coursework that utilizes frameworks of intersectionality, scholars have examined specific classroom discussions where preservice teachers deepen their understandings of where, why, and how these identity markers shape and have been shaped by cultural practices and schooling experiences over time. In a foundations course for urban education, Hyland (2010) documented the fracture in the classroom community when weekly discussion topics transitioned from race to sexuality. Perouse-Harvey (2022) also noted White PTs' levels of both resistance to and adoption of theories of intersectionality and DisCrit during weekly discussions. Feelings of resistance and discomfort are not uncommon as PTs are asked to engage in group dialogue around topics of intersectionality (Escalante, 2020).

Specifically within literacy teacher education, frameworks of intersectionality have been applied to critical literacy approaches to analyzing texts (Matteson & Boyd, 2017). However, less is known about how intersectionality in the literacy teacher education classroom applies to preservice teachers' identity development as future literacy educators.

Developing a teacher identity is a complex and dynamic process. Through identity work in teacher education, scholars suggest that teachers will become "more aware of the identity issues of the students in their own classrooms and [be] willing and able to support them to cope with these issues" (Beijaard & Meijer, 2017). Looking specifically at the development of PTs' literacy teacher identities, scholars have found that learning about reading identities can help PTs view reading as an act that develops over time for both themselves and their students (Kerkhoff et al., 2020). What is missing from this work is the added connection to PTs' sociocultural identities within the reading and broader literacy processes. There continues to be a need for research that connects frameworks of intersectionality to PTs' literacy teacher identities.

In the present study, we focus on PTs' self-reflections on their intersectional identities through multimodal practices (Kress & Selander, 2012) as an initial step in building one's intersectional competence—a necessary component in teacher identity development. We build on research in the field that centers frameworks of intersectionality as necessary tools in justice-oriented teacher preparation. Through the following explanation of methods and analysis, we hope to illuminate patterns and themes of how we assessed intersectional competency and how these understandings impact PTs' development toward just and equitable literacy instruction.

Methods

To structure our investigation, we used an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) to discover how PTs conceptualize intersectionality when framing their literacy identities. The benefit of using a case study methodology is being able to closely study a phenomenon and gain a deep understanding of a particular case (Yin, 2018). This case study is bounded around PTs' coursework that engaged an intersectionality framework within two courses

(reading methods and applied learning theories) at a large research university in the Southwest.

Participants & Context

Using purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), we selected six participants from an undergraduate cohort (n=15) enrolled in an Early Childhood-6th grade teaching degree program based on their engagement with a framework of intersectionality across the two course assignments. First, in the applied learning theories course, PTs completed a brief writing assignment (primary data source #1) where they were asked to describe their intersectional identities prior to creating their literacy identity project. This writing assignment connected to our teacher preparation program's cross-cutting themes (Wetzel et al., 2020), a document that outlines our commitment to pursuing social justice through education. Specifically, this assignment connected to the theme of "continuously examining how our identities sometimes afford us privileges and other times, result in oppression" and how our personal identities are deeply connected to our professional identities (p. S321). After reading a mentor text (Asenuga, 2019) as a guide to reflecting on one's own intersectional identities, PTs were prompted to name their identities, reflect on the afforded privileges or oppressions, and share how these intersecting identities impact their experiences in the classroom as a student and as a teacher. From this assignment, we captured PTs' current sociocultural identity markers (see Table 1, all names pseudonyms). All categories and labels reported come from the PTs' language. The variance in language used by PTs to describe their own identities (e.g., heterosexual vs. straight) was interesting to us, and future work could look into the impact that PTs' language use has on their own identity formations.

Students completed the literacy identity project (primary data source #2) within the first month of the reading methods course. This assignment prompted students to create a multimodal presentation, reflecting on their multiple social identities (e.g., race, language, gender identity) and how these identities may have influenced their development as a reader and a writer (see Appendix). When we say "multimodal," we mean the multiple modes (or ways) people make meaning for themselves and others, which includes art, audio, image, digital storytelling, and modular remix (among other modes). The course assignment also asked PTs to examine their personal literacy histories to push them to see how beliefs and experiences may impact the decisions we make as teachers. We conceptualized this particular assignment alongside critical literacy scholars who argue multimodality as a vehicle for transcultural, identity-rich, design-based meaning-making (Kress & Selander, 2012; The New London Group, 1996; Wargo, 2017), and employed it as a tool for sense-making across different perspectives, languages, experiences, and intentions. In this way, we trouble the privileging of written composition as the primary vehicle for intersectional assessment.

After two weeks of preparation, PTs each spent 5-7 minutes sharing their presentations on Zoom to the entire cohort. Because the assignment took place within the first month of the first semester of the cohort's professional development sequence, this project also served as an opportunity for community building as the PTs learned about each other's personal literacy journeys. During the presentations, PTs made connections to familiar texts and literacy practices across the presentations using the chat function on Zoom. Students would often refer back to ideas gleaned from their own and other's multimodal literacy identity presentations throughout the semester. After completion of the course, we looked across all 15 identity projects and selected six projects where PTs explicitly engaged in the framework of intersectionality for further analysis.

Table 1

Participants' Self-Described Identity Markers

Participant	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Sexuality	Language	Dis/ability	SES	Religion
Aashna	Pakistani-American	female	NR	Urdu, Gujrati, English	NR	NR	Shia Muslim
Abigail	Black	female	straight	English	NR	NR	Christian
Ava	Asian (Filipino)-American	female	straight	English	NR	NR	Christian
Courtney	White	female	bisexual	English	ADHD, Depression, PTSD	NR	Christian
Natalia	White (Hispanic)	female	heterosexual	Bilingual (Spanish & English)	NR	Upper class	Christian
Sara	White	female	straight	Bilingual (English & Spanish)	NR	Middle class	Jewish

Data Collection

Our data collection focused primarily on the multimodal projects and presentations from within the reading methods course. The PTs created presentations using Microsoft Powerpoint, Google Slides, and Canva (https://www.canva.com/). Others chose to create their presentation using video platforms, such as Animoto (https://animoto.com/). We collected each PT's formal presentation of their projects, which averaged 5-7 minutes per participant. We also drew on participants' intersectionality reflections completed in the applied learning theories course to serve as a reference for the ways in which they discussed their identities within the literacy projects. Additionally, field notes and recorded small group discussions from the reading methods course were collected to triangulate the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data Analysis

We draw on Boveda's (2016) notion of *intersectional competence* as we focus our analysis on the importance of intersectionality work specifically within the field of teacher preparation. Similar to notions of cultural competence as a skill necessary for enacting culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2017), *intersectional competence* is a term used to describe preservice teachers' and practicing

teachers' understandings of intersectionality as it specifically applies to students, families, and themselves within the field of education (Boveda & Aronson, 2019). We took a critical sociocultural approach to our data analysis by drawing on three indicators of *intersectional competence* as indicated by Boveda (2016):

- the ability to clearly identify sociocultural groups and markers of difference
- an emphasis on the interlocking and simultaneous effects of multiple markers of difference
- an understanding of the systems of oppression and marginalization that occur at the intersection of multiple markers of difference (p.32)

Primary data, focused on the multimodal creations and recorded presentations, were coded by both authors in relation to each of the three indicators through multiple rounds of analysis. Our first round of coding began with an inductive approach where we derived patterns and themes from the data itself (Miles et al., 2014). Our second and third rounds of coding looked at the initial patterns in reference to the three indicators of intersectional competence, which were turned into codes such as *identifying sociocultural groups*, *naming intersectionality*, *understanding systems of oppression*, and *understanding systems of privilege*.

Positionality

We are both current doctoral candidates in language and literacy studies and take interest in equity-focused teacher education and culturally sustaining pedagogies. Kerry identifies as a White, cis-gender, middle-class woman who taught elementary language arts for 10 years. Heather also identifies as a White, cis-gender, able-bodied, monolingual woman

who has taught elementary multilingual students for five years. We recognize that many of our identities differ from our participants, which does not allow us to bring shared cultural or racial understandings to our analysis outside of what our participants chose to share with us. As doctoral students, we also have the privilege of serving as field supervisors and course instructors. It is important to note that we were both instructors of the required reading methods course and that Heather was an instructor in the applied learning theories course where this study took place. We recognize that power and differing levels of hierarchy may affect the ways in which the participants were willing to vulnerably discuss their identities. We therefore sought to learn from the PTs who stepped into this space of vulnerability willingly.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to determine how PTs notice and name their own intersectional identity markers within a literacy identity project. From our analysis of the six identity projects, three themes emerged: 1) naming sociocultural identities represented in texts and literacy worlds, 2) exhibiting an understanding of systems of oppression, and 3) a lack of emphasis on the intersections of multiple markers of difference. While these findings may come across as static moments in time, especially in relation to PTs' sociocultural identity markers, we recognize the fluidity in identities and identity development. Holding these moments still helps to illuminate the process of literacy teacher identity development.

Naming Sociocultural Identities Represented in Texts & Literacy Worlds

Focal student data reveals a spectrum of sociocultural identity awareness. In relation to formative literacy experiences in school, PTs specifically connected

Figure 1

Slide from Abigail's Literacy Identity Project
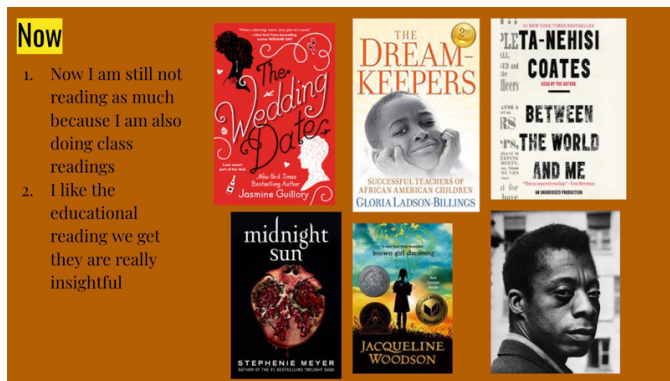
their identities to the texts they read. Identity markers that appeared throughout the projects included (in order of frequency): race, gender, and religion.

PTs' racial identities were referenced the most across the identity projects. This is not unusual as race is a hyper-visible (and politically motivating) social construct (Hyland, 2010). Drawing on their understanding of Bishop's (1990) concept of windows and mirrors, PTs reflected heavily on the texts they grew up reading and whether or not they felt their race or culture were represented within these texts. Abigail bemoaned early reading experiences being limited to books given in class, noting she could not "relate to any of the characters," and at one point, she "didn't think that there was [sic] books with a Black female lead—at least none that [she] could find easily." Reflecting on her current identity as a reader, she noted the positive impact the exposure to Black characters, authors, and scholars in college had on her teacher identity, and she included multiple examples of influential texts in her slide (see Figure 1). Abigail also noted contemporary and historical anti-Black violence and schooling oppressions that marked, for us, an intersectional awareness of her identity as an educator with a Black, female body. Similarly, Ava referenced her racial identity as an Asian-American in her project as she made note of

her delight in seeing more Asian-American representation in current YA novels (e.g., Jenny Han's *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* trilogy) and other pop culture outlets (e.g., the *Crazy Rich Asians* franchise). Courtney shared that one of her main takeaways from reflecting on her past literacy experiences was realizing she "gravitated towards books that had characters that look like me—young, White American girls." However, unlike Abigail, Ava and Courtney's comments did not extend to include political or historical commentary on the exclusions, misrepresentations, or overrepresentations of race and ethnicity within these selections, or in relation to their own developing intersectional awareness in relation to teaching.

Aashna attended primarily to her racial identity through the writing pieces she included in her project (see Figure 2). In a slide that reflected her elementary literacy memories, Aashna included a picture of a book she wrote and illustrated in the 4th grade. In discussing the book, she shared with the class that this was her attempt to write in cursive and then continued on to discuss her illustration:

> And the picture here of me and my mom I thought was interesting because I drew us as a really peach light, like white colored skin. I went to a predominantly White school and I always felt like I needed to fit in, so I drew my skin color like that, too.

Aashna continued sharing how the authoring of her racial identity, in juxtaposition to her school's demographic and material norms, shifted as she moved on to the second illustration on the slide (for more on self-authoring through multimodal design, see Wargo, 2017). The second picture (see Figure 2) is a shape poem she wrote and illustrated in the fifth grade. During the presentation, she noted the shift in the way she revised her racial presentation through the changes her illustrations:

Figure 2

Slide from Aashna's Literacy Identity Project

And then in this picture, this is fifth grade, and now I colored my skin a little bit darker which is more like my skin color. So I thought that was interesting how in fourth grade I did it like that and in fifth grade I did it like this.

As a student of Color growing up in a predominately White school, Aashna experienced the pressures of wanting to "fit in," racially-speaking, and reflected on the ways her self-representation shifted across her elementary years through careful attention to the illustrations in her written texts. She shows a collection of Junie B. Jones early readers on her slide as well, a favorite serial of Aashna's that prominently centers a White character––who, through narrative mishaps with "Mrs." the teacher, similarly struggles to "fit in" at school.

Ashna's project evokes a question of *intersectional belonging* in reflection on her own schooling. In this

specific case, her multiple use of the words "fitting in," both as a former elementary student *and* a future elementary teacher (as evidenced through her public presentation), is salient to her growing professional identity—darker skin and teaching, we hear from Aashna, can, and should, align purposefully in literacy work. We notice she does not include cultural or familial tensions in racial identity alongside her reading of these books. Aashna's recognitions, though pivotal, remain at skin level, and hover at the edge of a deeper inquiry into the historical and social discourses, or the material experiences, around schooling in a darker body than one's peers. Because we focus our analysis through coursework presentations, we also acknowledge we are not provided, nor would we expect, more story than the parameters of the assignment can provide. Though all our PTs' stories deserve to be told, not all stories will, or should, be told. In which case, we leave space for (and protect) what was also untold.

Sociocultural identity markers of gender and religion also appeared across the literacy identity projects, though not as frequently as race or skin color. Continuing with the example of Aashna's shape poem (Figure 2), Aashna transitioned from focusing solely on her racial identity to her expression of gender identity as she analyzed her illustration of her finger nails:

> I was constantly trying to figure out who I was, trying to fit in. If you can see, on the thumb and the pointer finger I colored my fingernail green and then I tried to erase it. Because I grew up around all boys and thought that nail polish was just too girly, so I tried to erase it. I'm like, no, no, no that's not me. And it really wasn't. I wanted to wear nail polish, but I never did.

Here, Aashna attended to her expression of dominant gender markers as was documented in her illustrations for a poem in the 5th grade. She speaks of both skin and nail color as multimodal entry points to self-authorship and self-definition, which, for Aashna, index her body as a salient presence in schooling spaces, as both student and teacher. It is interesting to note that in the sequence of her presentation, Aashna first attends to her racial identity (as skin tone) followed by her gender identity, but ends short of addressing the intersection of these two identities within her literacy project. This could be in part due to the nature of the assignment and how piecing apart these identities was most salient for the stories she wished to share through her presentation.

Sara included multiple examples of texts about her religion that she remembered reading as a young child, such as *Apples and Honey: A Rosh Hashanah Story* by Jonny Zucker. The text that was included in her literacy identity project showed up again in a lesson plan Sara created to teach her 4th graders about the Jewish holiday the following semester. Sara was one of only two PTs who identify as Jewish within this cohort and her literacy identity project was full of attention to her religious identity and the impact it had on her literacy development.

Despite PTs expressing a diverse array of racial, gendered, and religious backgrounds, their multimodal literacy identity presentations show nearly identical classroom book collections during elementary school; most of which centered White, cis-gender, able-bodied, English-speakers and/or animal characters. This theme is both striking and, at the same time, unremarkable. Striking in that such a homogeneous school-based literacy foundation could springboard such a variety of responses, but unremarkable in its endemic familiarity.

"Despite PTs expressing a diverse array of racial, gendered, and religious backgrounds, their multimodal literacy identity presentations show nearly identical classroom book collections during elementary school."

Exhibiting an Understanding of Systems of Oppression

Across the six focal participants, we saw different access points in noticing and naming levels of privilege and oppression in relation to identity. Rarely did PTs speak to any privileges they may have had in learning to read, but rather focused attention on oppressive practices they experienced. Specifically, three PTs name religion and dis/ability to recognize oppression(s) they experienced. Natalia, for example, shared that growing up in a strong

Christian household, she was prevented from reading texts with magic, such as the *Harry Potter* series. It wasn't until college where she read *Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone* for a children's literature course that she fell in love with the series. Sara also included her religious identity in her literacy project, citing Jewish children's books and religious texts her parents read to her as a young child. During her presentation, Sara pointed out Christianity's institutional privileges (religious holidays and values) as she compared her experiences to her peers. Again, in juxtaposing her childhood memories to dominant schooling practices, Sara began (re)imagining literacy learning in contrast to the commonplace, with and alongside her colleagues. In a small group discussion at the end of the semester, Sara noted, "Literacy just has so many different forms, and so, even if [students] go to religious events and they're listening to preachers that's literacy; going and reading comic books—that's literacy . . . you're sharing with them that there's no one path to literacy." Beginning with her multimodal literacy presentation and moving across the semester, Sara reimagined literacy learning by expanding her view on what counts as literacy to incorporate both religious identities and multimodal literacy practices.

Similar to naming religion as a prevalent identity marker, multiple students shared struggles with reading ability, motivation, or dis/abilities. During her literacy identity presentation, Abigail shared how her struggle to read in elementary school led to constantly trying to avoid the tests her mother and teacher wanted to schedule to check for dyslexia. Because of this experience, Abigail shared that she "didn't really read" in elementary school. Similarly, Courtney specifically named her dis/ability identity marker as a cause for her "I hate reading" phase in upper elementary school.

Courtney shared that her undiagnosed (at the time) ADHD caused her to struggle with the sustained

silent reading time in the classroom. During her literacy identity presentation, Courtney shared:

> I was undiagnosed ADHD when I was a kid. And when books started to have less pictures and more white space, I was really uninterested. And this is kind of a funny story, but I hated reading so much that every day, when it was reading time in my class I would pick my nose until my nose bled. Every single day. So that I could go to the nurse and get out of reading time. I probably did this for two months straight. And so my teacher told my mom and then my mom threatened to take me to the doctor and cauterize it. I was like okay. But yeah, I did not like reading at all. It's just really boring to me.

Courtney's experience is reflective of the ways in which her undiagnosed ADHD hindered her ability to engage and enjoy independent reading time during her upper elementary school years, an experience that is not uncommon. What is noteworthy about this attention to an oppressive experience actually comes from Courtney's reflection on this experience: "I honestly kind of wish that my teachers would have provided audio books so that I could walk around and listen to books. I think that would have been really great for me." In this moment, Courtney recognized the harm that came from her early experiences learning to read and began to consider a more culturally and socially responsive approach to reading instruction. In sharing with her peers, as well, the recognition of her differences contributed to pushing back on neurotypical literacy practices in the elementary classroom.

Courtney was also one of the only PTs to mention any privilege she had in relation to her literacy identity. While not directly connected to a specific identity marker such as race or class, Courtney did share during her presentation that she felt lucky to have

had access to a lot of diverse literature in her elementary classrooms. She included a specific example of *The Legend of the Bluebonnet: An Old Tale of Texas* retold and illustrated by Tomie dePaola as one her favorite books growing up. In sharing this example, Courtney names what she views as an element of privilege—her exposure to diverse texts. However, others might point out that citing this text as an example of diverse literature is problematic. Debbie Reese (2020), a Nambé Pueblo scholar and educator, has made several critiques of misinformation within the text as related to the Comanche People, including the fact that the story claims to be an "old tale of Texas" but the Comanche People predate the U.S. and its states.

This example that Courtney shared in her literacy identity presentation is important for multiple reasons. First, while her example of diverse literature could be considered problematic, she is demonstrating her knowledge of texts as windows into the lives of people and experiences outside of herself (Bishop, 1990). As a White woman in a cohort with PTs of Color, Courtney has continuously cited her desire to listen and learn from her peers of Color. Courtney is developing her future teacher identity by connecting her own experiences of growing up with "diverse" children's literature to how she envisions her future literacy teaching practices as grounded within diverse children's literature. The disconnect between her knowledge base of diverse children's literature and her desire to include it becomes the teaching moment that teacher educators lean into to help grow Courtney as a future social justice literacy educator.

> **"One of the most interesting juxtapositions within the presentations were the identities and intersections that were *not* included. The most prevalent lack of inclusion was the sociocultural identity marker of class or socioeconomic status."**

Lack of Emphasis on the Intersections of Multiple Markers of Difference

Through our analysis, one of the most interesting juxtapositions within the presentations were the identities and intersections that were *not* included. The most prevalent lack of inclusion was the sociocultural identity marker of class or socioeconomic status. Beginning with the PTs' self-reported identities in Table 1, only two PTs mentioned their socioeconomic status: Natalia identified as upper-class and Sara identified as middle-class. The remaining four did not disclose any information about their socioeconomic status. Additionally, across all six literacy presentations, not one PT mentioned class as it related to their literacy identity. This finding aligns with scholars who have noted the ways in which children's literature often ignores social class (Crisp et al., 2016; Jones, 2008). If the literature PTs engaged with at a young age did not explicitly address issues of socioeconomic status, how do teacher educators encourage reflection and engagement with this identity marker on its own and at the intersections of other social categories?

Furthermore, upon analysis, we recognized that many of the PTs were not attending to the "interlocking and simultaneous effects of multiple markers of difference" (Boveda, 2016, p.32). The only evidence of recognizing an intersection of multiple identities was when Abigail discussed the intersection of being a Black girl who could not see herself in the books she read growing up. When PTs did discuss multiple sociocultural markers, they were discussed as separate topics. For example, in Aashna's presentation, she discussed both her racial identity

and her gender identity in two separate stories. First, she shared the story about changing the way she colored her skin tone. Next, she shared the story about erasing the nail polish she drew on her hand to avoid being seen as too "girly." In sharing these identities, there was no dialogue, from Aashna, from us as the course instructors, or from other members of the class around the intersection of being a young girl of Color. In hindsight, we recognized this as a missed opportunity to generate important discussions around the interlocking systems that are present in schools and literacy curriculum.

While race was the most frequent identity marker included in the literacy identity presentations, it was not emphasized in every one. Both Sara, who identifies as White, and Natalia, who identifies as Hispanic, did not refer to their racial identities in relation to their early literacy experiences. Instead, these PTs focused on their religious identities and the ways these identities influenced the texts their parents did or did not allow them to read as a child (e.g., Sara reading *Apples and Honey: A Rosh Hashanah Story* and Natalia not being allowed to read about magic due to her family's Christian beliefs). Additionally, they separated their linguistic identities when they shared isolated stories related to their ability to speak and read in Spanish in relation to the texts they enjoyed as children. By taking an intersectional lens to these presentations, we notice that the intersection of race and religion as well as race and language are missing. This lack of emphasis could be caused by multiple factors, including the time constraint of the presentations or our lack of guidance on how to conceptualize and unpack these intersections within the scope of the literacy identity presentations. Alternatively, it could be a deliberate decision to focus on the identities most salient to the stories they wished to share about themselves as early literacy learners and future literacy instructors. While we do not have the authority to explain why, this finding illuminates the need for teacher educators to continue to bring specific, reflective prompts that encourage students to put their racial identities in conversation with other identity markers to deepen our understanding of interlocking systems and the impact they have on literacy curriculum and instruction.

In the following discussion, we examine how identity-fracturing, or how the PTs disaggregated their identity markers within their presentations, prepared the PTs for more complex dialogue around curricular discernment. Then, we consider the utility of fracturing the racialized and gendered status quo in response to the participants' literacy identity presentations. We will also put these notions into conversation with Boveda's (2016) use of intersectional competency and our work as teacher educators.

Discussion

In reflecting on intersectional identities and composing multimodal literacy identity presentations, PTs were able to name specific sociocultural identities, like race, connected to their early, informative literacy experiences and exhibit an understanding of systems of oppression. Individual PTs named systems of oppression related to dis/ability and religious identities as impacting both motivation to read at an early age and the texts to which they were exposed. However, this naming of identities and accompanying experiences of oppression in the literacy classroom lacked an emphasis on the *intersections* of multiple markers of difference. When multiple markers of difference in early literacy experiences were discussed, they appeared as separate topics (e.g.'s Aashna's inclusion of racial identity and gender identity in separate writing examples). The construct of intersectional competence (Boveda, 2016) helps to illuminate the areas within the PTs' developmental process of learning to teach and form a literacy teacher identity where a deeper understanding of how interlocking

systems of privilege and oppression are implicated in literacy curriculum and instruction.

When we asked PTs to engage in self-reflection around intersectional identities as a first step towards building intersectional competence, we drew on our pedagogical understandings of critical literacy (Vasquez et al., 2019) and multimodality (Kress & Selander, 2012) in the design of the project. We feel these choices supported our goal of fostering PTs' recognition of privilege and oppression in their schooling experiences by providing a visual landscape to the materials and patterns of their early literacy lives. For instance, by asking the PTs to engage their memories with imagery, many revisited elementary schoolwork and dug up old favorite paperback books. When we viewed the projects as a whole, from presentation to presentation, patterns began to emerge. Vulnerabilities around difference, or ability, when rehashed alongside course content, showed the PTs they were not alone in feeling like they didn't "fit in"—albeit, their entry point to "fitting in" showed up in different ways. We believe the visuals and stories of early schooling experiences helped stretch the container of what could be discussed in class around identity, inclusivity, and literacy teacher practice. And indeed, each entry point became a foothold to future shared discussions.

Identity Fracturing

As instructors, we were initially struck by the PTs' choices to disaggregate their identity markers for the sake of presentation, but we see this now as a preliminary (and valuable) step to bringing more

> **"Subtle changes in intersectional awareness were illuminated by the PTs ability to identify events in juxtaposition to dominant literacy practices, like light on a prism. And once recognition strikes, for both storyteller and listener, the practitioner's toolbox of discernment grows."**

nuance, or language of complexity, to intersectional marginalization in classroom spaces. Each story the PTs presented widened the dialogue around how teacher instruction shapes the lives of the children in their care. And for each PT, it seemed that in order to pull one's pieces (identities) back together, to realize one's own whole self as dynamic, complex, and whose voice is uniquely needed in the classroom, *each component deserved air-time*. This makes sense. Subtle changes in intersectional awareness were illuminated by the PTs ability to identify events in juxtaposition to dominant literacy practices, like light on a prism. And once recognition strikes, for both storyteller and listener, the practitioner's toolbox of discernment grows.

In sum, the sociocultural identity markers, when filtered through one's timeline of schooling and literacy acquisition, provided participants a chance to deconstruct experiences from their apprenticeship of observation (Lorti, 1975), or their own experiences with schooling and teaching, from years of being a student. It is here that we note the unbearable uniformity, and layers of embedded harm, in those early experiences for the PTs. We also believe that by presenting and discussing these projects, the PTs began to collectively (re)design what it means to become a literacy teacher by utilizing (and countering) the emerging "prism"—or, a gestalt representation—of the status quo. For instance, as seen in coursework that followed the literacy multimodal presentations, our PTs often puzzled over how to negotiate political binaries in their planning for working with children, and their developing intersectional competence helped illuminate and pixilate dominant discourses

for further interrogation. In this way, we could pinpoint commonplace patterning (or, dominant practices) showing up across PTs' lived experiences, such as the proliferation of White character leads in picturebooks. This pattern led us to consider materials (such as provided crayon colors), instructional decision-making (pace, topic, and mode), and measures of intellectual ability (by being compared to a "good" reader) that reflected dominant practices around teacher body and behavior, curricular discernment, and instruction. Next, by dialectically juxtaposing named instantiations of dominant practices alongside the stories and images our PTs shared, we began to see how directly naming Whiteness and White discourse patterning, such as worship-of-the-written-word or one-right-way (Jones & Okun, 2001; Yoon, 2012) supported a critical interrogation around who teachers are and what teachers can do to support their learners.

This intersectional fracturing, though complex, provides an entry point for White teachers and teachers embedded into systems of Whiteness to wrestle with the legacies and enactments of Whiteness through their interrogation of curriculum, instruction, pedagogy, and participation. Similarly, and per this study, we hypothesize that the development of intersectional competence in early teacher education may support teachers in reimagining how their developing teacher identity acts alongside, through, or upon teaching discourses in equitable and humanizing ways. For example, when Sara recognizes Christianity's institutional privileges, she parallels Anglo-normative assumptions of what are considered "essential" units by schooling standards. Indeed, for Sara, as for many White people, it is only in experiencing and feeling contrast to dominant norms that awareness and investment in these norms is shifted (Leonardo, 2009; Lipsitz, 1998).

These affective memories, we argue, contribute to the collective (re)designing of who a literacy teacher can and must be in today's pluralistic society. To compare one's professional identity development to one's experiences in early literacy and schooling discourses, in the act of envisioning a more inclusive literacy classroom, is to welcome dissonance, discomfort, and a fertile space for learning.
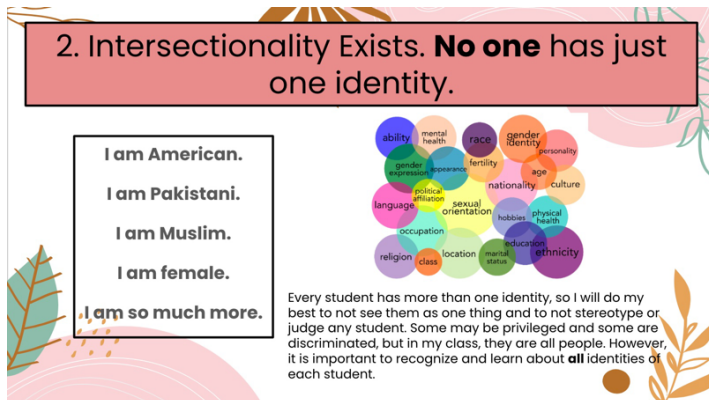
Hybrid Tensions

The literacy practices PTs experienced as learners through their childhood and adolescence speak to broad cultural frames around what behaviors constitute being a reader and writer (and a teacher of readers and writers) in contemporary U.S. society. For instance, for many women, the historical "feminization" of teaching (Leonardo & Gamez-Djokic, 2019) shapes conceptions of care, planning, and literacy enactment in classrooms. Additionally, because 80% of our teaching force identifies as White, one's racial positionality, especially as a White listening-subject, matters significantly to the curricular and instructional manifestations of linguistic appropriateness (Flores & Rosa, 2015) regarding literacy. This dominant intersectional identity, if not disrupted through explicit inquiry around the historical, institutionalized discourse patterning shaped by race and gender, will reify certain "best" practices that reproduce dominant evaluative interpretations of learner ability. This "status quo" must be acknowledged if preservice teachers are to resist, redesign, and cultivate their own professional identities in response. We emphasize that it is not the White woman under scrutiny, but the systems and practices that this intersectional identity has come to dominate that demand interrogation.

Courtney's reflection about using audiobooks in her future classroom, for instance, reflect what Wetzel et al. (2019) calls a *hybridity*, or a multiple-layered

Figure 3

Slide from Aashna's Teaching Philosophy Presentation

tension, in learning to teach. In Courtney's case, the hybridity of this statement included the personal tension she experienced related to her identity as a young reader plus her developing identity as a literacy instructor. We consider her negotiation of these dual identities around the problem of reading engagement as a form of intersectional competency. Although it is early in her teaching journey, she is recognizing there are multiple variables that constitute conceptual knowledge around learning to read. In addition, by shifting her notion of what "good" reading looks and sounds like, she is envisioning her future literacy instruction in deeply meaningful ways. In this way, we believe Courtney's fractured identity stories, much like those told by many of our PTs, helped to reimagine the possibilities for literacy teaching.

In drawing forth the status quo through counterstories, hybrid-tensions (personal and professional) were more likely to form and become footing for future comparative analysis. These conceptions contrast with schooling ideologies that champion measures of standardization, another notable component of a developing literacy teacher identity. We believe, in effect, that such standardized experiences in early schooling grounded how our PTs, individually and in various settings, began to

recognize and (re)consider intersections of their identity. By making these hybrid tensions visible through dialogic and expressive modalities such as the literacy identity project, we could support the development of an identity-rich language of complexity. We could foster social justice stances to speak back to essentializing school rhetoric and help teachers and teacher educators move away from reinforcing normativity (Beneke & Cheatham, 2020) in the literacy classroom. Furthermore, this language of complexity is something the cohort will co-create over time as they encounter a diversity of experiences, settings, and professional expectations in their student teaching placements, and then return to their cohort to discuss and share their stories.

In closing, we return to Aashna's story as a developing literacy teacher with intersectional competency. In a final project exploring her teaching philosophy (Figure 3), we see Aashna directly naming her own intersectional identities: "I am American. I am Pakistani. I am Muslim. I am Female," aligned and centered in a text box. The words are bolded and end with the phrase, "I am so much more." Similarly, her statement at the bottom of the page is confident and direct, and, as her instructors, we feel this change. Her use of language in this piece feels new and exciting, and the collision of perspectives (self, students, people) around her conception of intersectionality appears to be crystallizing.

Implications

If teacher educators implement the same literacy practices that already exist in schools, we risk perpetuating the same oppressive structures we claim we are trying to disrupt. Centering a framework of intersectionality within teacher preparation programs, specifically through critical, multimodal literacy identity projects, opens space for PTs to reflect and critically analyze the multiple layers of privilege and oppression that impact their literacy

worlds and foster a journey towards intersectional competency (Boveda, 2016), intersectional advocacy (Brochin, 2018) and intersectional justice (Annamma & Winn, 2019) within the literacy classroom. This competence thus becomes a driving factor in our instruction and research within teacher education, as it is simultaneously a prerequisite and a relevant skill that all teachers continue to expand through application and reflection. In this study, intersectional competence allows us to view our PTs' identity projects as a preliminary step towards expanding their competency as burgeoning social justice educators.

As we work towards building intersectional competence (Boveda & Aronson, 2019) in both ourselves as teacher educators and in our PTs, we recognize the necessity of drawing more emphasis to the "interlocking and simultaneous effects of multiple markers of difference" (Boveda, 2016, p. 32). While this study highlights the beginning of this intersectional identity work in our PTs, there is a dire need for more work to be done in this area. For example, teacher educators who include similar literacy identity projects in their courses can begin by making explicit expectations for PTs to attend to their intersectional identities within their presentations. Additionally, researchers can further this work by determining the ways in which PTs' intersectional awareness and competency impacts their instruction, especially as it relates to their ability to facilitate critical conversations around texts (Diaz et al., 2021; Nyachae, 2021). Momentum toward epistemological equity in schooling must begin with the recognition that, as Aashna so boldly wrote, all of us—as educators and students, and our ways of being and doing—"are so much more." Our students deserve more.

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Appendix

Literacy Identity Project Assignment Guidelines

To understand the experiences of young readers and writers, we must begin with reflection on our own journeys as readers and writers. This assignment asks you to explore your reading and writing life in the past and in the present. Examining our personal histories as readers and writers pushes us to see how what we believe and have experienced may impact the decisions we make as teachers. Part of this work is to critically examine how our multiple social identities (race, language, gender identity) and the broader sociocultural context in which we grew up in influenced our experiences with literacy and language learning, our biases regarding what it means to be "literate" or a "good reader and writer", and other (appreciative or deficit) views we may hold about ourselves or others. Reflecting on our current habits and practices as readers and writers gives us insight into what it means to build a meaningful reading and writing life. In unpacking our literate lives, we begin to see the ways in which we can understand our students as readers and writers and create learning environments that engage students in reading and writing.

Multimodal Guidelines

You will compose a "multimodal" presentation, meaning that what you design will include more than print text. You will choose 4-5 key events in your life (from childhood to the present) that provide insight into who you are as a reader and writer and 2-3 key takeaways from your work as a reader and writer this semester. A detailed assignment description will be given in class. Bring your multimodal presentation to class and be prepared to share a handful of key takeaways from this project and supporting quotes/artifacts on the due date. Have fun!

Helpful Platforms 🎥 💻 💯

- **Canva**   (https://www.canva.com/)
- **Biteable**   (https://biteable.com/)
- **Powtoon**   (https://www.powtoon.com/)
- **Animoto**   (https://animoto.com/go/home)
- **Slidesgo**   (https://slidesgo.com/)

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JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE & LITERACY EDUCATION

Black girls and silence: "They ain't doing too much"...learning, valuing, and understanding their use of silence through critical race theory and culturally sustaining pedagogy

Jason Mizell and N'Dyah McCoy

Abstract: This paper works to illustrate how silence, a powerful semiotic tool, was used by a Black[1] middle school girl, Cierra[1], to negotiate for additional processing time in challenging situations and as a form of protection, for herself and others. Critical race theory, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and social constructionist grounded theory are used to help frame and analyze the work that Cierra and Jason did together as part of a university local school district summer camp for middle school students. The data that was generated and examined in conjunction with Cierra may help teachers and researchers to reconceptualize silence as a powerful tool that students bring to school as an asset instead of as a deficit or something to be corrected or policed.

Keywords: critical race theory, culturally sustaining pedagogy, humanizing research, silence, social constructionist grounded theory

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N'Dyah McCoy is a Ph.D. student at the University of Miami. Her research focuses on examining the pedagogical choices of teachers in the U.S. who are effective at teaching Black and Brown students in anti-racist ways. Additionally, she is interested in working with racialized communities in the U.S. and abroad to understand their languaging and literacies as a form of emancipatory practice and to examine anti-Blackness as a global phenomenon.

Introduction

S ilence is not the absence of sound, it's the absence of noise or interference. It's a place, a feeling, or maybe even a shield that provides one with time to contemplate how and when to take action or protect oneself and others. It can even be an instrument that speaks volumes by not uttering a sound. Silence of this sort was needed throughout 2016 when the world witnessed one of the largest mass shootings perpetrated by a single individual in U.S. history against people of color, the death of multiple unarmed Black[1] people at the hands of the police, and a presidential candidate subsequently elected the 45th president of the United States (U.S.), who advocated for racial profiling and demonized Latiné immigrants as rapists and thieves (Maas, 2016). Against this traumatic backdrop, a group of mostly Black and Brown youth and I (Jason) took part in an Art!Youth Institute (AYI) that followed the principles of arts-based youth participatory action research (Harman and Burke, 2020; Harman and McClure, 2011; Wood, 2012). The purpose of the institute was to provide a space in which middle school youth could use various semiotic affordances (e.g., poetry, map making, drama, modeling, origami, spoken word) to let their voices and ideas be heard on how they defined a flourishing community and what they needed for their communities (classrooms, school(s), neighborhoods) to become places that sustained them (Paris and Alim, 2017).

The program was part of a summer camp initiative between a large southeastern university and a local school district. The initiative brought together middle school-aged youth (i.e., 11-14 years old), pre-service teachers working toward earning a master's degree in English education, doctoral candidates, and university professors interested in arts-based literacy practices. We spent our mornings engaged in activities that both explored and expanded our thinking about communities, schools, and families. The goal of the program as articulated through the course syllabus was multifold: helping multilingual[2] youth (1) examine and explore their communities multimodally (e.g. through modeling, drama, and poetry) and (2) develop ways of remixing youth-developed and school-sanctioned genres for their own purposes as they dialogued about their communities, and (3) provide preservice teachers with a meaningful clinical experience that would encourage them to explore and question their own understandings of teaching, teachers, students, and literacy development.

This paper explores how, throughout the course, Cierra[3], a young Black girl and rising 8th grader, used silence, an often dismissed and maligned semiotic affordance. We examine how Cierra employed silence as a tool to transform and contest the dominant spaces (a middle school building and an art museum) that we jointly inhabited, and to shield herself and others from perceived dangers. In addition, we reflect on how Jason and Cierra worked to humanize each other through a willingness to share bits of their lives throughout the summer of 2016 by listening to each other and valuing the silences. Lastly, we reflect on how coming to understand how silence can be used has the potential to help teachers and researchers to (re)evaluate their own assumptions regarding what it means when a Black girl decides not to "talk."

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[1] We have purposefully chosen to capitalize Black and not white as one small way of centering the lives and experiences of Black people and thus decentering whiteness.
[2] We use the term multilingual to refer to students who spoke different combinations of Black English, different varieties of Spanish, and Mandarin Chinese in addition to what Baker-Bell (2020) refers to as White Mainstream English.

[3] Pseudonyms have been used for all participants and locations except for the authors. Cierra's pseudonym was chosen by her.

Literature Review

The United States educational system and its methods of discipline have created a unique educational experience for Black students, in particular for Black girls (Morris, 2016). When one examines how being Black and female impacts education, it becomes apparent that Black girls experience higher rates of suspension and other disciplinary actions throughout their K-12 educational careers. In comparison to Latina and white girls, Black girls are more likely to be suspended from school (LePage, 2021; Paul & Araneo, 2019; Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002). In addition, Black girls are not able to enjoy their childhood because society labels them as being "too sassy", "too grown", and "too fast" or hypersexual (Husband & Bertand, 2021) when they engage in innocent activities like dance and play. For example, Morris (2016) reported that the behavior of many Black girls is perceived as disrespectful, violent, or sexual while the same behavior, when exhibited by white girls, is seen as a sign of immaturity. As a result of the hypersexualization and adultification of Black girls, the essence of childhood, in which children are allowed to make and learn from their mistakes as part of their overall development, is stolen (Blake & Epstein, 2019; Curtis et al., 2022, Epstein et al., 2017). Due to this adultification, they are frequently punished and criminalized (McArthur & Muhammad, 2022). Douglas (2014) reports that exceptionally harsh punishments are used as a means of deterrent for other students of color, especially other Black girls. This tradition or reasoning is not new. It is reminiscent of how those who were enslaved were publicly humiliated in front of their families and peers for insignificant actions in order to stand as a warning to others.

> **"When one examines how being Black and female impacts education, it becomes apparent that Black girls experience higher rates of suspension and other disciplinary actions throughout their K-12 educational careers."**

In schools, public humiliation currently involves having students arrested at school, suspended, or expelled. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), Black girls were more than three times more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than girls from any other racial or ethnic background. With that said, it is important to distinguish between Black girls' actual behavior and their teachers' and peers' biases (Morris, 2007). In a study by Blake and Epstein (2019), multiple Black women had the opportunity to share some of their earliest memories of elementary school, when they were between five and nine years old. One of them stated, "The teacher would say she felt threatened, you know, by me expressing myself in the classroom; like, I was like overpowering her when a - a white person would be [viewed as], 'Oh, they're intelligent; 'you know?" (p. 5). Another Black woman from this focus group went on to add:

[I]f a Black girl . . . raised a different perspective — like . . . I remember saying, 'I'm not sure that I agree with that,' or, 'That doesn't make sense to me because …' — then it's like, because it's a Black girl raising the idea, now it's perceived with a tinge of just challenging authority. (p.5)

These misinterpretations of behavior often lead to punishment and are a direct result of the mismatch between teacher demographics and the student population in the U.S. (Harper et al., 2019). Although racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse children are increasingly populating public schools (Wynter-Hoyte et al., 2020), white middle-class female teachers continue to be the majority of K-12 teachers

in the U.S. (U.S. DOE, 2016). Most white teachers do not have much experience interacting effectively or empathetically with Black students. Often, it is the teachers' implicit racial bias toward Black children, particularly Black girls, which leads them to misinterpret their behavior (Husband & Bertrand, 2021).

The viewing of Black girls' behaviors and bodies through a racialized and thus deficit lens also leads teachers to view their languaging practices as deficient. According to Morris (2007), many times school administrators state that Black girls are excessively loud, but what does it mean to be loud? How is this term constructed and by whom? Caraballo (2019) argues that being loud, or the construct of loudness, is a term that often carries a negative connotation because it also carries an underlying comparison between people or groups of people. Additionally, many scholars (Fordham, 1993; Rosenbloom and Way, 2004) claim that loudness is closely related to variations of excess, including an excess of loudness by volume, style, or behavior. This excess of volume, style, and behavior is often attributed to Black girls and is often reduced to the conclusion that "Black girls do too much." This is a phrase that Black girls hear frequently throughout their childhoods. Being positioned as "doing too much," a manifestation of adultification, sexualization, and racialization, is frequently seen even when Black girls are following the rules and participating in classroom discussions. Morris (2007) provides an example of this when they report on how one teacher in their study commented on the active participation of his Black girl students. Morris stated: "I ask[ed] him after class if it was just the topic today that encouraged more participation from the girls. He says no—that the class is always like that. He says that "the girls just talk a lot" (p. 498). As can be seen in this excerpt, Black girls were actively participating in the class discussion, doing exactly what the teacher wanted, and yet when the teacher was questioned about their participation, the teacher expressed his disapproval of them, because they were "just talk[ing] a lot" (p. 498) or in other words, "doing too much."

The other "extreme" of "doing too much" could be construed as doing nothing or being silent. Traditionally, silence has been defined as a lack of voice or presence. In many cases, this conceptualization of silence has led teachers and others to either ignore it, look down on it, or in some cases, punish students who use it because it is perceived as a form of being disrespectful. When Black students are in question, particularly Black girls, silence holds a negative connotation. In this context, silence is often translated as laziness, lack of engagement, or participation. Silence is often simplified, although it offers rich information about how and why racialized students choose to employ it as they navigate predominantly white spaces (Carter, 2007). Power-Carter (2020) posits that in white spaces, Black girls employ their silence to reclaim their authority by choosing when to speak, with whom to speak, and how to speak. This idea is crucial to understand in order for us to push back against the negative framing of how Black girls apply silence as a tool to navigate white spaces and contexts.

Over the next several sections, we discuss the events that allowed Jason to co-construct knowledge and a humanizing learning space with Cierra. In addition, silence, one of Cierra's most powerful semiotic tools, will be explored to demonstrate the various ways that she used it to negotiate for additional processing time in challenging group situations, and how it was used as a form of protection for herself and others. Additionally, we work to help teachers and others understand how they can view silence as they work to value, understand, and learn from the Black girls with whom they work.

Throughout the next section, we explain how we used critical race theory's tenet of whiteness as property in

order to understand why and how Cierra's use of silence could be negatively seen in school-sanctioned spaces. Afterwards, we then explore culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP), focusing on one component, humanizing relationships. Focusing on humanizing relationships helped us to examine Jason's and Cierra's relationship and how that impacted our ability to analyze and understand how Cierra employed silence as a semiotic tool.

Frameworks for Understanding Cierra's Silence and Humanizing Research

Critical Race Theory

We use two different lenses, critical race theory and culturally sustaining pedagogy, as we explored Cierra's use of silence. The first lens that we examine is critical race theory (CRT). In particular, we examine one of its tenets, whiteness as property. In what follows, we briefly provide an overview of the development of CRT and its use in education. We then focus on how we used the filter of "whiteness as property" to understand and situate Cierra's use of silence.

CRT developed as a contestation to frustrations with the limitations of critical legal studies (CLS), which were based on examining the intersectionalities of power and law (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Early CLS theorists and activists knew that in order to truly explain the many injustices witnessed in communities of color, CLS needed to be refined so that it would also include how perceptions of race and racism play a role in how laws impact the lives of those who are racialized (Taylor et al., 2009). Ladson-Billings (1998) went a step further in order to connect our educational system to the legal system and how

that relationship shapes possibilities and futures. She stated:

> The connections between law and education are relatively simple to establish. Since education in the USA is not outlined explicitly in the nation's constitution, it is one of the social functions relegated to individual states. Consequently, states generate legislation and enact laws designed to proscribe the contours of education. (p. 17)

As such, states and local school districts are able to decide which behaviors (e.g., languaging, literacies, knowledges, behaviors) they deem to be appropriate. This is evident when one examines the values that are inscribed in intelligence, languaging proficiency, and even socio-emotional intelligence tests. Au (2016) states, "Standardized testing fundamentally masks the structural nature of racial inequality within an ideology of individual meritocracy, an ideology that advances a racialized neoliberal project" (p. 40). Thus, as a filter, CRT allowed us to hone in on the racialized ways in which Cierra's silence(s) could be racialized in schooled spaces. We did this by focusing on one of CRT's tenets, whiteness as property (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Harris (1993) states, that "the origins of whiteness as property lie in the parallel systems of domination of Black and Native American peoples out of which were created racially contingent forms of property and property rights" (p. 1714). This parallel system of property rights did not entail just physical property but also linguistic, intellectual, and behavioral standards (i.e., different ways of "proving" the educational level of people). In other words, white ways of speaking or not (i.e., their use of or not of silence), has been

> **"As a filter, CRT allowed us to hone in on the racialized ways in which Cierra's silence(s) could be racialized in schooled spaces. We did this by focusing on one of CRT's tenets, whiteness as property."**

established as the norm. This idea of white ways of producing knowledge through their languaging and how it is held as more valuable than that of other groups is very much in line with Delgado-Bernal's and Villalpando's (2002) idea of apartheid of knowledge. They showed how, in educational spaces, white ways of knowing were held as valid, whereas those of racialized groups were held as inferior. Examining Cierra's use of silence through the tenet of whiteness as property helps us to see that it was not that her use of it as a semiotic tool was lacking, but that it was viewed as lacking by some because of the racialized identity of the user.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: Humanizing Work

Another filter that was used to examine and understand Cierra's use of silence was culturally sustaining pedagogy and its focus on developing humanizing relationships. Paris (2012), one of the principal founders of CSP, built on the work of Ladson-Billings (1995), who conceptualized and developed culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). CRP highlights the importance of preparing teachers who have a "willingness to nurture and support cultural competencies, and the development of sociopolitical or critical consciousness" (p. 483) among students of color. Paris (2012), although appreciative of what he understood to be Ladson-Billings's stance, stressed that pedagogy must go beyond just being culturally relevant; he suggests that it must become more *culturally sustaining* (p. 95). He posited that schools must become places that not only maintain heritage ways of being and value cultural and linguistic sharing across differences, but that they should also work "to sustain and support bi- and multilingualism and bi- and multiculturalism" (Paris, 2012, p. 95). He focused on developing a pedagogy that required schools to "support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to

dominant cultural competence" (p. 95). Thus, the lens of CSP allowed us to not only value Cierra's silence as a semiotic tool but also as part of her cultural and linguistic repertoire that we needed to not only accept but also sustain as she used it to navigate her world.

Throughout the following section, we work to provide the reader with an understanding of the context of situation (Halliday, 1978) in which Cierra and Jason found themselves in 2016. Situating the work allows us to share with the reader what Cierra found important.

Methodology

Art!Youth Institute

The setting for this work was a middle school in a U.S. Southeastern semi-urban school system that shares many of the complex and conflicting characteristics of what is generally considered an urban school system (Gadsden & Dixon-Román, 2017). Although the city houses the state's namesake university, it is the county seat of one of the nation's 10 most impoverished counties. According to census data, 62% of the population identifies as white, 27% as Black, and 10% as Latiné. The Art!Youth Institute designed and implemented a curriculum rooted in the multiple affordances of literacy and research with youth through a professional development partnership in the local school district (Burke et al., 2018). It was also created to introduce doctoral and masters level students to Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) (Mirra et al., 2016). In preparation for working with the middle schoolers, the graduate students and professors read about and discussed YPAR, photovoice, theater of the oppressed, and different artistic outlets, such as modeling, painting, and acting (Burke et al., 2018).

The summer camp hosted approximately 100 K-8 students and was hosted on the campus of a local

middle school. State University and the Lewis County School District invited students from the entire district to apply for a spot at the inaugural summer camp. Most of the students who applied were either Latiné or Black. There was a very small percentage of white students and students from Mainland China who participated in the program. The camp lasted the entire month of June. Students participated in various activities from 7:45 a.m. until 3:45 p.m., Monday through Friday.

The section of the camp that Cierra and Jason took part in, Art!Youth Institute, involved approximately 30 middle school and nine graduate students (5 masters and 4 doctoral). The group of youth participants was divided into two groups. Each youth group worked with the graduate students for 3 to 4 hours Monday through Thursday for two weeks. Generally, one or two youth worked collaboratively with one of the graduate students as they explored different books, built representations of their communities, and/or explored the local community. Although there were assigned partners, the arrangement was fluid. At times groups would join together or youth researchers would bond with a different adult and decide to change groups. Additionally, at times youth participants would decide to opt-out of activities. All of these variations were not just accepted but valued. We saw ourselves as guests in their space(s), and thus we worked to honor their needs.

Our Positionalities

> Weaving together [or explaining] the languaging of someone else . . . is more than just repeating words from one language or

mode to another; it is working to honestly express culturally specific nuances that are expressed *not just orally* [emphasis added] or bodily but, in many cases, multimodally. (Mizell, 2020, p. 45)

As researchers, we realize the importance of acknowledging how our positionalities play a role when working with co-research participants. Thus, we feel an obligation to share our positionalities and how they influence our work. Although Cierra was instrumental in helping to select what to share, in the end, we, Jason and N'Dyah, are the weavers, interpreting and showcasing her knowledges.

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Cierra. Cierra, a rising ninth grader, had attended Lewis Middle School since sixth grade. She and her family resided in a public housing community located near Lewis Middle School. Initially, Cierra didn't easily share information about herself or her family; small nuggets of information emerged as we engaged in various activities, such as reflective journaling. Over time, Cierra let Jason, and eventually the entire group, know that she lived with her mother and younger sister. In addition, she told him that she had been labeled with a learning disability and that she also stuttered.

Jason. As the adult paired to work with Cierra and thus a participant researcher, I openly share my positionalities. I grew up relatively close to State University. Just like Cierra, I grew up in public housing and attended public K-12 schools. As a young Black boy who grew up in the Southeast of the United States, I am intimately aware of how race, skin complexion, dis/ability, and socioeconomic status impact one's schooling experience. In addition, I also

knew that since my family was Black and poor, and I was labeled as dis/abled, I automatically had multiple strikes against me before I even started. Due to the factors that I had in common with Cierra, in addition to being the father of a 13-year-old Afro-Latino, I felt the need to look out for her and try to provide her with options to acquire the skills that she may want in order to critically understand, deconstruct, and when necessary, remix dominant and communal ways of languaging.

N'Dyah. The other voice that is woven throughout this piece is mine, N'Dyah, a Black woman, who attended public schools for the better part of my K-12 experience. My experiences resonated with those of Cierra. I was raised in the same county and matriculated through the same school district until upper elementary school. I also strategically employ[ed] silence to protect myself and those whom I identify with as I navigate[ed] predominantly white spaces. Sharing some commonalities with both Jason and Cierra pushed me to examine the data purposefully and critically (Charmaz, 2008) through a race-conscious lens. In other words, race and racism were not an afterthought as I interacted with the data generated from this study. I was invited to collaborate on this project because of my emic position and personal knowledge of the school system involved in this project.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through field notes, audio and video recordings, reflective journaling, and photovoice methods (Burke et al., 2016; Wang, 1999). Over 60 hours of participant observation, over 20 nightly reflection logs (written, video, and/or audio recordings) from adult researchers, hundreds of pictures of project activities, and collections of art and modeling projects produced by youth and adult researchers were collected. An additional component

included several unsolicited nightly reflections that Cierra contributed.

The nine graduate students and two professors were all active participant-observers, as we worked directly with the youth, while also observing and reflecting on how activities were carried out and what activities our youth co-researchers wanted to take in. We engaged in various literacy activities (ranging from reading stories to using our cell phones in order to research fashion design colleges and food banks). Adult and youth researchers also filmed and audio-recorded over 60 hours of conversations. Additionally, hundreds of pictures of artifacts were taken as we took part in field trips to a local state art museum, a nature center, and science and history museums in a nearby major city.

For the purposes of this study, we focus on Cierra's and Jason's nightly journaling, pictures, audio and video recordings of their conversations, and handicrafts that they made. This is done in order to center Cierra's use of silence and her interpretation of it.

Data Analysis and Discussion

A social constructionist approach to grounded theory (SCGT) (Charmaz, 2008) was used to explore, examine, review, organize, and critique the data in this study. As a methodology that allows for the collection of data with ongoing data analysis and creation of theory in process, a social constructionist grounded theory pushed us, Cierra, Jason, and N'Dyah, to own our positionalities and thus our ways of moving through the world. This acknowledgment meant that we had to admit, as three racialized individuals, that our past experiences with racism, being hypersexualized, and/or adultified impacted our noticing of themes. This is particularly salient because our work was also filtered through a CRT and CSP lens. CRT allowed us to openly acknowledge that

race and racism were driving components of our context, while CSP pushed us to humanize each other and to value and desire to sustain and nourish our cultural knowledges. Charmaz (2008) asserted that

> (1) Reality is multiple, processual, and constructed—but constructed under particular conditions; (2) the research process emerges from interaction; (3) it takes into account the *researcher's positionality, as well as that of the research participants* [emphasis added]; (4) the researcher and researched co-construct the data—data are a product of the research process, not simply observed objects of it. *Researchers are part of the research situation, and their positions, privileges, perspectives, and interactions affect it* [emphasis added]. (p. 402)

Thus, SCGT allowed and compelled us to be honest about how our lived experiences (as filtered through CRT and CSP) and knowledge(s) influenced how and why we noticed certain patterns as we coded. In addition, it permitted us to openly and intentionally center Cierra's voice. As we worked through the data, this approach pushed us to "pay particular attention to the ways in which language as a social and cultural construction shape[s], distort[es], and structure[s] [our] perceptions of reality" (Patton, 2015, p. 127).

Jason: As a critical scholar, I used a multistep process to sift through the data. I paid particular attention to themes that were related to how Cierra as a Black girl was positioned in hegemonic spaces and how she responded to that positioning. In addition, themes that dealt with how Cierra and I co-constructed knowledge and/or demonstrated solidarity were salient. I transcribed some of the videos and audio recordings manually and using Kaltura; then, I had a certified transcriptionist transcribe the same recordings, as well. This was done to ensure that I had recreated each episode with as much fidelity as possible. Part of my instruction to the certified transcriptionist was for her to make sure that she accurately recorded Cierra's intonation and silences. This allowed me to accurately recreate not only what she said, but also to analyze the purposes of her silences in relation to her overall participation. By comparing both transcriptions, I was able to group together segments across both transcripts that touched on the same themes. This allowed me to develop labels that summarized them succinctly (Charmaz, & Belgrave, 2012). Additionally, by comparing the transcripts, I was able to focus on Cierra's pauses or silences. Afterward, I discussed the transcripts with Cierra and solicited her opinion regarding my interpretation. N'Dyah then reexamined our themes and compared them against the existing literature, looking for similarities and differences.

Some of the early codes were: (a) building of trusting relationships between Jason, Cierra, and select other adults, (b) refusal to participate (e.g., not talking, standing outside the circle, repeated use of cell phone) (c) requests for space to not do traditional reading and writing activities. The initial codes led to the second stage of analysis, a discussion of initial codes with Cierra. Over the course of three different sessions that lasted about an hour each, Jason and Cierra discussed the initial codes. Cierra stated that she did not agree with the label of refusal to participate. She stated that it would be more accurate to state that because she did not feel safe, she decided to "hang back." This process of triangulation was carried out at three months, six months, and one year. Additionally, at 16 months, through a photo-elicitation interview (Epstein et al., 2006), Cierra and Jason discussed their time together, revisited their previous interpretation of conversations, and reflected on the projects that were co-constructed. In addition, they also expanded on their understanding of how they used various semiotic devices to construct meaning, especially silence. The initial

codes were eventually refined and became using (a) silence to protect self, (b) silence to protect others, and (c) silence as protection from the world to deflect emotional and physical exhaustion. These codes were established with Cierra's help as she felt that they most accurately represented her intentions. The following three themes are presented in the order that Cierra felt was most indicative of why and how she used silence. Additionally, as we, Jason and N'Dyah, examined the data and Cierra's responses to it, we, in conjunction with Cierra, selected examples that showed clear instances of each theme.

Silence to Protect Self

Jason: The morning of June 19 started just like the previous two weeks at the Art!Youth Institute. The adult researchers met at 9:00 a.m. to talk and plan for the day. We ran through a quick game of Zip, Zap, Zop (Badie, 2014; Leep, 2008) and discussed how to play the Name Game. Afterwards, since this was to be our first meeting with the youth co-researchers, Kurt informed us of the name(s) of the student(s) that we would work with during that two-week period.

Around 9:30 a.m., Kurt went to pick up our new group of youth co-researchers. We heard them before we saw them. As they came down the hall, we heard raised voices and the sound of running feet. Suddenly into the room burst a group of 15 boys and girls who ranged in age from 11 to 14. Most of them were either pushing or playfully hitting someone and talking enthusiastically. Four students, Stan (a rising 9th grader), twin sisters Zania and Zepra (rising 6th-grade students), and Cierra (a rising 9th-grade student), were not talking. They entered the room, looked around, and sat down at, under, or stood behind a desk. Once our youth co-researchers were in the room, the adult researchers walked around asking them their names, trying to determine who their partners were. I asked several of the girls if they were Cierra before one of them pointed her out to me. As I

approached, I could see her looking me over. Once I arrived by her side, I asked if she was Cierra. She just looked at me and took out her phone. I introduced myself and asked what school she attended and what grade she was in. *Her answer was no answer.* Soon thereafter, one of the university professors announced that we were going to play a theater name game. Everyone would say their name and match it with a movement. I cajoled a very reluctant Cierra to join the group and to stand next to me. As each person said their name and performed an action, she just stood there taking it all in, *silently*. When it was her turn to say her name, she just stood there, *pure silence*.

Lewis (2010, as cited in Spyrou, 2015, p. 9) states that "silence is not neutral or empty." Cierra's silence was definitely not neutral or empty. She was telling us loudly and clearly that she wasn't interested in interacting in this *sanctioned way*. Months later during a follow-up conversation, I asked Cierra why she did not want to say her name during the Name game. She stated:

> [Yeah, I didn't say anything] Because, I don't . . . I didn't want to get in it [the Name game] because I didn't know how to play . . . I needed more time with that game, and if I wanted to play it or not. Plus, I didn't know y'all.

This is very much in line with the observations of Blake et al. (2010). They found that the teacher-student relationship with Black girls was of paramount importance in order to provide a safe space for Black girls to share themselves and also as a way of making sure that teachers did not misinterpret their actions as ones of defiance.

Oftentimes, students who exercise silence remain unrecognized and invisible and the reasons behind their silence are unknown by others. However, this act of silence is used often to protect themselves from

Figure 1

Heart that Cierra made for Jason

peers and adults (Carter, 2007). This happens in large part because they do not fully trust that others are genuinely invested in who they are and their lived experiences. Silence can be used as protection in an attempt to avoid judgment based on what others may perceive to be their identities (Schultz, 2010). Thus, if Cierra had chosen to engage and share her name and a related motion, she could have possibly opened herself up to harm. She opted for silence instead. As she stated, "I didn't know y'all."

Her silence was her way of taking control of the situation and resisting. It wasn't a physical or even a verbal resistance, yet it was a tangible silence that "spoke" volumes. As Ephratt (2008) stated, "Silence . . . an indirect speech act is, in fact, a case of acting out . . . in that silence is used to activate the other" (p. 1922). Cierra definitely activated others in our group when she decided not to participate. Some of the adults in the group tried to encourage her to participate. Quite a few of the youth participants also tried to encourage her until someone else decided to say her name for her.

Due to Cierra's identity as a Black girl, her behavior, like that of many other Black girls, was heavily surveilled, especially within the context of schooling (Morris, 2016). Her feeling of initial discomfort with

the game made the choice of employing silence as a protective tool logical. In order to avoid the label of "doing too much" or being "unlady-like," Cierra chose to employ silence to protect herself from possible judgment from those around her. Often when Black girls actively engage in activities, their actions are not valued in the same ways as they are for white girls. CRT's tenet of whiteness as property helped us to understand why Black girls' actions are generally judged more harshly than that of white girls. Thus, Cierra chose to remain silent to protect herself.

As noted in the excerpt from her conversations, Cierra's silence was used to provide her with additional time to make an executive decision about her participation in the game and ultimately her interactions with her peers and the adults in the room. Cierra used her silence to create a third space, a place where she could go in order to disrupt an activity that she wasn't comfortable taking part in (Gutiérrez, 2008).

In a separate conversation, Cierra stated:

> I don't like to talk in front of people. I stutter, don't you understand. I stutter. I get nervous and I stutter. That's why I don't want to do any of those games. Why can't we have books read to us? Why can't we do something other than those games where you have to talk in front of everyone?

Once again, Cierra's comments demonstrate that her silence helped her to create a safe space. A third space that she could mentally and even emotionally inhabit until she was ready to directly interact with others. This third space became a place that she could inhabit to disrupt, (re)image, and (re)design how she would interact in different educational spaces.

Figure 2

Hearts that Cierra and Jason made for his spouse

Silence to Protect Others

In addition to using silence to protect herself, Cierra also used pauses, hesitations, or silences in conversations to protect others.

Jason: Soon after we started working together, Cierra made the connection between me, and another of the middle schoolers that she had met in a different group, Daniel. She asked if Daniel and I were related because we had the same last name. I told her that Daniel was my son. Cierra then proceeded to ask me about my wife and if she was a teacher also. I told her that I didn't have a wife, that I had a husband. She paused and looked at me and then said, "that's ok but I need some time to think about *that*, I don't know any gay people, just bi-people." Cierra's request provided her with time to think through how she was going to react to this new knowledge. It also provided time for her to decide how to react in such a way as not to offend me or possibly get herself into trouble. The following day, she told me that my husband was my business.

Toward the end of the sixth day, Cierra decided that she didn't want to take part in a reading activity and would rather design and make origami hearts. As we worked, she talked about her family, and I talked

about mine. This building of a humanizing relationship (Paris, 2011) is an essential part of CSP. CSP values the relationships that develop between co-participants. In fact, the building of relationships that are sustaining is an integral part of CSP.

As we created origami hearts, Cierra walked me step-by-step through the process. As I approached the last step, I couldn't remember what to do. I had to ask her to repeat herself.

> Cierra: Then you follow the other one (tuck in the last corner) and it's supposed to be a heart. And then you can write something for *your husband*.

After stating that, we continued making hearts until Kurt, one of the lead professors, came over to see what we were working on. He asked Cierra how she had learned to make origami hearts:

> Kurt: You just did that on the internet, like you just did that. Can I steal this one?
> Cierra: Ok, hmmm.
> Kurt: It's my niece's birthday.
> Cierra: You can write something on it for her [referring to Kurt's niece.]
> Cierra: And he [Jason] can write something on it for ……. [four-second pause] *whoever* he wants.

After Kurt left, we continued to work on our hearts. As we worked, Cierra mentioned again that I should write something for my husband on the hearts because that is what hearts are for. "They show people that you care about them." At first, I wasn't sure what to think. Then it slowly dawned on me that she was protecting me from what she perceived to be a dangerous situation. She had used her silence to protect me! During the photo-elicitation interview, I showed Cierra a picture of the hearts that we had

made months earlier and asked her if she remembered making them with me. She stated that she invented the game because

> When I designed the game, I wanted to end camp off with everybody feeling good about their self. And people who felt bad about their self, feel like their self-esteem [can go up] (personal communication, October 17, 2017).

As we continued to talk, I asked her if she remembered not repeating in front of Kurt that I had a husband. At first, she said that she did not remember but a few seconds later she stated:

> Oh, he should accept you how you is. It don't matter if you straight or gay. He should accept a person how they is, and who you are. They should accept you if you gay or not. Like, that was wrong. That's like, that's bad, what would you call that? (personal communication, October 17, 2017)

She continued by saying:

> It's not none of their business. That's between you and you husband. I mean, if they want to know then they've got to ask you and that's up to you. (personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Cierra's silence was intentional when she interacted with Kurt. It allowed her to push back against a perceived hegemonic norm that discriminates against non-heteronormative behavior. Her silence affirmed our humanizing relationship as she strategically used silence, choosing what (not) to speak on, how to speak, and with whom to speak as a means to protect me (Power-Carter, 2020). Cierra's use of silence demonstrated her agency; it allowed her to take control of different situations by providing or withholding information that she deemed could

maintain a space of safety for herself and those with whom she connected. In order to push back against the expectation of heteronormativity, Cierra paused and chose not to share the information she had about my family structure because she perceived that it could possibly endanger me.

Jason and N'Dyah: Blake et al. (2010) spoke to the importance of teacher-student relationships with Black girls, in particular as it relates to their experiences in schooled spaces. In multiple situations, Cierra was able to purposefully act to protect herself and others with whom she had built community. Her decision to use this form of protection was heavily linked to the relationship that she and Jason had built and continue to build.

Silence as Protection from the World

As a way of infusing explicit literacy practices into our space, we often read books that were related to the theme of community. During the third day of working together, we read the book *Tar Beach* by Ringgold (1991). Protagonist Cassie Longfoot dreamed that she was the owner of the Union building whose guild her father was not allowed to join because his father was not white. As Cierra and I, Jason, talked about the story, another student, Antiere, joined the group. He divulged that in his neighborhood, the police continuously harass his cousins because they are Black. As they spoke, Cierra started to physically distance herself from the conversation. When it was time for her group to depart, she asked if she could take home an audio recorder because she wanted to reflect on their time together. The following excerpt is taken from her recorded reflection:

> The book [*Tar Beach*; Ringgold, 1991], it was mostly about the projects and about racism. It was a good book and it relate to people that live in apartments and the projects. And

ummm……. [six-second silence] it was good, it was a…. [two-second silence] was a good book… [four-second silence] and you would have enjoyed it too…… […….] [eight-second silence] what I didn't like was, was the book talking about racism, I know that happened and back in the day but you still don't have to brang it back up!

She went on to say:

I didn't really think of racism like it was in the book, in that way. I just felt; I don't know. I mean, some teachers they act mean towards to you, to me, because of my color, but I don't know. It probably just me thinking like that. Sometimes if like I asked a teacher what the answer to something is like they are mean to me but help the white kids and they go like eh, you can go fin the answer. Or something like that. It bothers me to talk about it. Because I feel like they was treated, I mean, not trying to say this in any race, but I feel like back then white people treated Black people wrong so many times, in so many ways. I mean, everybody could have been treated equally and how people want to be treated, but it seems like they wanted to treat us like trash…… [five-second silence]. I don't like talking about it because I just feel bad about it.

Her thoughts reflected the climate of the summer of 2016. She acknowledged the racism that was prevalent that summer. It was emotionally and physically exhausting. In one of the follow-up conversations with me, she stated that she left the group when Antiere spoke about how his cousins were targeted because it was just too much. She chose to use her silence to protect herself from that conversation by physically moving. Also, her silences or pauses throughout her recording serve as a way to draw the listener's attention to either what she just stated, or to allow reflection time before she made her next point. Her silence provided her with a way to reflect on, and take respite from, the racism that she faced.

"If we truly want to create learning environments that value and sustain young Black girls, we must lean into CSP. This will help us to value all of who they are while we work to combat how they are judged against a white measuring stick or through the white gaze."

Conclusion

Black children historically have not been afforded a rich and long-lasting childhood (Boutte & Bryan, 2021). In particular, Black girls have their childhoods regularly cut short. By the time they are six years old, Black girls regularly experience adultification and hypersexualization (Epstein et al., 2017). As Morris (2016) posited, Black girls are not seen as innocent nor as worthy of having their mistakes seen as simply immature errors. If we truly want to create learning environments that value and sustain young Black girls, we must lean into CSP (Paris & Alim, 2017). This will help us to value all of who they are while we work to combat how they are judged against a white measuring stick or through the white gaze (Yancy, 2008). As we (Cierra, Jason and N'Dyah) reflected upon the purpose of this research project and the conversations that were had between Cierra and Jason, we discovered that only when Jason was willing to listen not only to Cierra's voice but also to her silences were they able to jointly develop a truly humanizing relationship. Through the development

of a humanizing relationship, Jason was able to see, hear, value, validate, and work to sustain the various ways in which Cierra employed silence as a tool to protect herself in schooled environments (e.g., by allowing for extra processing time), to protect those in her community from heteronormative expectations (e.g., by refusing to talk about Jason's husband), and to protect herself emotionally and physically from the stresses of daily racism (e.g., by physically distancing herself from a painful conversation). In addition, by filtering her silences through the lens of whiteness as property, we were able to purposively reject the deficient framing of Cierra's silences. This framing helped us to understand that often teachers are implicitly, and at times explicitly taught to view the silences of Black girls as either an act of rebellion, disrespect, or as a sign of ignorance.

As researchers and teachers, we must listen not only to the voices of young Black girls but also to their silences. Additionally, we must (re)evaluate our assumptions regarding what it means when Black girls, like Cierra, decide not to "talk." This (re)evaluation will help us to recognize silence as an intentional tool of power versus a behavior that requires correction or policing. When we recognize silence as an act of power or a tool that students use to negotiate their learning, this will aid teachers and students in the construction of humanizing interactions. We must come to value Black girls' silences as the rich and meaningful semiotic meaning-making tools that they are… because even no response is indeed a response.

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JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE & LITERACY EDUCATION

"Stories that are worth sharing": Insights from Middle Eastern Refugee Migration Stories through an Inquiry into Narrative

Jennifer C. Mann

Abstract: This inquiry into narrative explores the often-silenced migration narratives of three refugee students from Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq. It is centered around two particular wonderings based in a critical literacy framework. First, what tenets of critical literacy seem most prominent in the narratives of refugee students from the Middle East? Second, what critical understanding of their migration experience do refugee students bring to the classroom? The conceptualized framework is understood as *The Centrality of Experience in Critical Literacy*, wherein experience is central and valuable. This study applies the framework using stories as the source from which to better understand how individuals make sense of their worlds. Through a five-phase analysis, which included: free coding, literature derived coding, analysis of time and sequence, narrative pattern coding, and analysis of language, I find rich understandings of 1) the political, non-neutral nature of the world, 2) a fight for access to knowledge, and 3) a hope for envisioned future possibilities as the students seek belonging, refuge, and dreams, reclaiming the power of their own narratives. This inquiry into narrative additionally contributes the three stories and two audio recordings as a cultural data set, which can be used in the classroom.

Keywords: critical literacy, migration, narrative, storytelling, refugee

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Introduction

As a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions is unfolding within and around Afghanistan, it is ever more pertinent that educators properly attend to the unique needs of students from refugee backgrounds in their classrooms. Upward of 30 million Afghans experience widespread starvation, face tremendous oppression and brutality, and clamor for a mass exodus (United Nations News Global Perspective Human stories, 2022). The neighboring countries and developed nations around the world, including the United States, are seeing massive increases in refugee resettlement (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2021). Teachers who have not been accustomed to teaching refugee students are now having to figure out how best to do so (Newcomer et al., 2020).

Often in schools, the experiential knowledge of students from refugee backgrounds is overlooked and replaced with basic literacy concepts (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Lau, 2012; Locke & Cleary, 2011) that withhold opportunities to critically engage with texts (Morrell, 2007). Those from refugee backgrounds face ongoing discrimination, exclusion, and othering in schools and are silenced, and in turn, further silence themselves (Çelebi et al., 2017; Hoff & Armstrong, 2021; Sierk, 2016; Subedi & Maleku, 2021). Their educational experiences have been marred by these discriminatory actions and deficit perspectives (Daniel & Zybina, 2019; Mann & Lee, 2022; Roxas & Roy, 2012). And yet, students from refugee backgrounds have powerful experiential insight and deserve to have their words heard and amplified as they engage in meaningful reading, writing, and sharing.

The increase in students from refugee backgrounds in classrooms coupled with deficit perspectives that silence them makes research into their experiential

knowledge and assets of great importance. For these reasons, I engage in this inquiry into Middle Eastern refugee students' migration narratives. Personal and collective stories reveal people's understandings of the world and impact the way in which they create, interact with, and understand texts, thus playing a central role in critical literacy (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Janks, 2013, 2014; Luke, 2014). There is increasingly more research on the value and importance of enacting critical literacy with students from refugee backgrounds, but such research is largely theoretical in nature (Alford, 2014, 2021; Lau, 2015). This study seeks to contribute to two important aspects of scholarship—the personal and the practical. This study contributes personal insights into the critical perspectives already possessed by some Middle Eastern refugee students. It also provides practical applications for the enacting of critical literacy with refugee students via pedagogical implementation using the resources provided through this study.

In this study, I use the literacy methodology of *inquiry into narrative* to examine and interpret elements and insights within stories of lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1995). Inquiry into narrative concerns itself with research puzzles and wonderings rather than concrete research questions (Clandinin, 2013). This study is centered around two particular wonderings related to critical literacy:

Figure 1

Centrality of Experience in Critical Literacy

What tenets of critical literacy seem most prominent in the narratives of refugee students from the Middle East? And what critical understanding of their migration experience do they already bring to the classroom? This inquiry article illuminates the critical literacy concepts grappled with by Middle Eastern refugee students and challenges educators to enact critical literacy with refugee students in their classrooms.

Relevant Frameworks & Literature

I envision *critical literacy*, *storytelling*, and *experience* in a framework conceptualized by three concentric circles (see Figure 1). Critical literacy is the outer circle, providing the vessel for the enactment of critical pedagogies, which I argue in this paper is optimally expressed as stories. Thus, storytelling is a significant embodiment of critical literacy, where life experiences are permitted to count as valuable capital and reveals experience as wealth. Since lived experience is central and valuable to critical literacy, it is important to center experience, particularly as it is told in stories. Through the examination of experience, one can garner insight into the perspectives, values, and ideas that others hold. In the forthcoming sections, I will explore my understanding of *critical literacy as foundation, storytelling as revelation, and experience as wealth* as they relate to the conceptualized framework (The Centrality of Experience in Critical Literacy) and research wonderings.

Critical Literacy as Foundation

At the core of critical literacy is the acknowledgement that in order to read the word, one must also read the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Reading does not simply involve "decoding the written word or language; rather, it is preceded by and intertwined with knowledge of the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 29). Each person's individual and collective experiences impact their understanding of the world and by extension, their understanding of the word (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Janks, 2013, 2014; Luke, 2014). Thus, those from refugee backgrounds necessarily and inherently read the word and the world in a different manner than those who have not had such experiences. Critical literacy deals specifically with reading the word and world in relation to power, identity, difference, and access to knowledge, skills, tools and resources (Janks, 2013) through the recognition of the political, non-neutral nature of the world (Comber, 2015; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Janks, 2013, 2014). The political nature includes both the global, governmental politics and the "everyday life" micro-politics people encounter (Janks, 2014). Students whose lives have been greatly impacted by lack of access to resources and the repercussions of complex and fraught political decisions are going to read and interpret power differentials differently than their peers who have not experienced these occurrences. Furthermore, critical literacy involves seeing the patterns and complexities of the world, naming those structures and ideas, envisioning possibilities, and seeking to reshape the inequitable facets that negatively impact the communities which have been marginalized by these societal inequities (Comber, 2015; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Janks, 2013; Luke, 2014).

Due to the grave injustices of poverty, the acquisition of education is not sufficient to equalize educational opportunities for already marginalized students (Comber, 2015; Janks, 2014; McLaren, 2015). Inherent within critical literacy, however, is the possibility to empower people towards action for the sake of change (Comber, 2015; Janks, 2013). It is for this reason that those among us who have been so marginalized be offered an opportunity at education which has the potential to liberate and elevate (Freire & Macedo, 1987). It is through the pedagogical implementation of critical literacy that such

opportunity exists, particularly for those from refugee backgrounds.

The use of critical literacy with refugee and immigrant students has shifted over the decades. Critical literacy with English language learners, including refugees, initially came into use in the 1990s with a linguistic focus on the use of language as a tool to analyze power and resources (Wallace, 1992, 1995, 1999). The use of linguistics opened further to also include attention to grammar, thus employing grammar to critically analyze texts (Janks, 1999). The 2000s began a broader approach which explored the use of critical literacy within countercultural spaces with refugee and immigrant students (Lewison et al., 2002). Additionally, discerning the meaning of text developed into a focus on the deconstructions of texts (Janks, 2000; Luke 2000). The 2010s took deconstruction to the next level with an emphasis on text redesign (Janks, 2010; Lau, 2012). At the same time, multilingualism and translanguaging were being promoted as assets (Lau et al., 2016). The most recent focus of critical literacy with refugee and immigrant students highlights multimodality of text and critical digital literacy with a heavy emphasis on design and creation with critical digital literacy (Alford 2021; Pandya, 2019). There is increasingly more research being done on the value of critical literacy instruction and enactment with refugee and immigrant students (Alford, 2014, 2021; Lau, 2015), but far less research on the critical understandings they already possess.

In response to an influx of refugee students at one Quebec school, a study was conducted to explore a participatory action research project where the English Language Arts and Second Language teachers focused on refugee students' experiences in an effort to promote an understanding of personal and sociopolitical circumstances of forced migration through embodied critical literacy (Lau, 2020). The students engaged in a one-year study into issues that those from refugee backgrounds contend with, through discussing stories of migration while engaging in visual arts to enhance understanding through critical reflections. Students responded positively to the multisensory approaches to critical literacy, which provided an aesthetic experience that fostered reflexivity and civic empathy. The study highlights the affordances of critical literacy with and about refugee students, reinforcing how critical literacy engagement allows students to be affected and to affect others through the power of stories.

> **"The enactment of critical literacy, which invites the telling and listening of stories, has profound potential both individually and collectively. Narratives, testimonios, vignettes, naming, stories, and counterstories are all central to the work of critical literacy."**

Storytelling as Revelation

The enactment of critical literacy, which invites the telling and listening of stories, has profound potential both individually and collectively (Enciso, 2011; Lau, 2020). Narratives, testimonios, vignettes, naming, stories, and counterstories are all central to the work of critical literacy (Campano, 2007; Campano et al., 2016; Jimenez, 2020; Nieto, 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Storytelling uniquely positions students as co-constructors of knowledge and sense-makers of life (Campano, 2007; Jimenez, 2020). In her study, Jimenez (2020) found that through apprenticing students into a "language of validity, legitimacy, dignity, and value" (p. 801) around their personal narratives, they became empowered and took initiative in sharing stories which revealed deep understandings of themselves and the world.

Table 1

Foundational Tenets of Critical Literacy

Critical Literacy Tenet

Naming and renaming the world
Poverty as a result of injustice
Literacy as power
The political, non-neutral nature of the world
Inequality and differential access
Acting upon the world
Hope for the future
Conditions of possibility
Seeking to reshape inequitable facets
A fight for liberation

Similarly, Campano (2007) found that through providing students with multiple opportunities to share their experiences, they began to independently and collectively process what they learned, gaining some degree of control over their past as they made sense of their experiences. Their stories reflect "readings of the world that are embedded in collective history and group experience" (Campano, 2007, p. 60). As students from refugee backgrounds share their stories "their subjective experiences become a vehicle through which to better understand a shared world" (Campano, et al., 2016, p. 50). Thus, storytelling is a personal and powerful means of expressing one's reading of the world (critical literacy), as perceived through one's independent and collective experience.

Experience as Wealth

Through marginalization, oppression, and persecution, refugee communities have acquired unique insight into the world; they have paid a very steep price for the acquisition of such capital. Capital encompasses the social assets of a person, including cultural knowledge and how it translates to power

(McLaren, 2015). Although deficit perspectives of refugees exist in the media and public perception, those from refugee backgrounds possess multiple forms of capital, including aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, resistant, and migration capital, which together are considered community cultural wealth (Jimenez, 2020; Yosso, 2005). Cultural capital is "accumulated, like a deposit in the bank, but *cultural wealth* [emphasis added] is meant to be shared" (Yosso, 2006, p. 77), making an important distinction between the individual nature of capital and the communal nature of wealth. In Jimenez (2020), she found that incorporating community cultural wealth and family histories as counterstorytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) allowed migration experiences to become a form of capital, whereby communities countered deficit narratives and were enriched through the telling of their stories. Possessing community cultural wealth enriches the entirety of one's community. Wealth is gained through experiences of migration, and it is important that those from refugee backgrounds are given the time and space to share their experiences and for those who are not from refugee backgrounds to gain insight into the experiences of those who are.

Methodology

I used the methodology of inquiry into narrative in order to highlight stories as an enactment of critical literacy and a significant source from which to uncover the capital of experience. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) describe inquiry into narrative as a method for using stories as the data to derive theory similar to grounded theory analysis (Montero & Washington, 2021). Through studying personal stories, inquiry into narrative presents us with an opportunity to understand people's lived, told, and written experiences and to study "human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding" (Clandinin, 2016, p. 17). Inquiry into narrative

concerns itself with stories told and seeks to better understand how individuals understand their worlds (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Narrative research can offer voice to traditionally silenced perspectives and is therefore a "socially just research methodology" (Montero & Washington, 2021, p. 300). Inquiry into narrative, for numerous reasons, is therefore a fitting research methodology for this study into the experience and understandings of Middle Eastern refugee students as understood through their written stories.

Context and Data Collection

For this inquiry into narrative, I analyzed three written migration narratives. In 2021, I put out a call through a local nonprofit serving families from refugee backgrounds. The call asked for refugee migration narratives written by young adults; I did not ask for the stories to contain any specific topics. I engaged in purposeful sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and due to the rising instability in the Middle East and the influx of Middle Eastern refugees to the United States, I selected three stories written by students from Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq. Two of the narratives were composed in 2021, and the third was written four years prior. The three migration stories were written either during the high school or college years of each student, all of whom are current college students in the state of North Carolina. Additionally, the three students lived in the same urban apartment complex and were former high school students of mine. It is deeply personal and vulnerable to share one's story and doing so shows a great degree of trust. It takes even more trust when someone is asking to not just read or hear but analyze one's personal story. It is therefore not

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surprising that students with whom I have an established relationship are the ones who answered the call I issued for such personal stories. Their narratives all contain self-selected pseudonyms and are included with minor edits only to punctuation, verb use, and an occasional insertion of a preposition or an article for greater ease of readability. I have chosen to leave the content and word choice of the narratives in their beautiful, authentic forms. The narratives in their entirety are included in the appendix.

Analysis of the Data

The three narratives underwent a five-phase analysis, each conducted by hand using multiple printed copies of the narratives and several colors of highlighter and pen. The first phase of coding involved freely coding for general concepts of critical literacy. During the second phase, the concepts were developed and categorized based upon a literature review of foundational tenets of critical literacy (Miles et al., 2020) (See table 1.) At the end of the second phase of coding, I tabulated the instances of each critical literacy tenet in order to narrow my focus to the three most prevalent codes, which were found to be 1) the political, non-neutral nature of the world; 2) access to knowledge, and 3) hope for the future. I additionally revised the wording of the codes to more accurately reflect the ideas contained within the narratives. For example, I changed inequality and differential access to access to knowledge to more precisely name what I saw (See table 2). My third phase of coding concerned itself with the narrative elements of time and sequence (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Specifically, I analyzed the allocated time spent dealing with issues related to

Table 2

Coding Table: Most Prevalent Tenets of Critical Literacy

Narrative	Critical literacy tenets (codes) & example excerpts		
Pseudonym, Age & Countries of Migration	**The political, non-neutral nature of the world**	**Access to knowledge**	**Hope for the future**
Lale, age 26 (Afghanistan → Pakistan → Iran → Turkey → US)	"No matter how much I would force myself to fit in, at the end of the day I was still an immigrant in a foreign country who was forced out of her own country."	"In Iran, migrants were not welcomed and I was not accepted to school which made me want to go to school even more."	"I know that like many other immigrants who are forced to flee their country I had a rough beginning but those obstacles brought me to a country that allows me to turn my dreams into reality."
Hariri, age 21 (Syria→ Jordan→ US)	"My country's condition has been very dangerous. It killed demonstrators who demanded freedoms, there was no independence for the Syrian people."	"It was a difficult life for my family and my education, no food, and dangerous people around us."	"We were welcomed by the American government to seek refuge in the U.S."
Alex, age 22 (Iraq → US)	"When I asked my mom, 'Mom, where is my dad?' she told me, 'He went to our relatives' because she was very terrified to let anyone know he was working with the Americans."	"None of the kids knew English. My dad started to teach me English beginning in 2005. But it was a secret. We did not tell others we are learning English."	"I heard before that anyone who has a dream in America can make it come true. Now I live there, I live in that place. I live in the land of the dreams."

each of the three most prevalent critical literacy tenets, since significant time devoted to an issue indicates an importance attached to it. I also analyzed the order and placement of particular critical literacy tenets in the individual narratives. For example, I asked such questions as: How much of the narrative was spent addressing matters relating to each tenet? How did they begin and end their narratives? What did they mostly focus on? During this process, I engaged in pattern coding in order to gain a better understanding of the "bigger picture" (Miles et al., 2020). During this process, I drew a rough visual representation via multiple-colored lines to emphasize the length of the individual sentences,

Figure 2

Phases of Coding
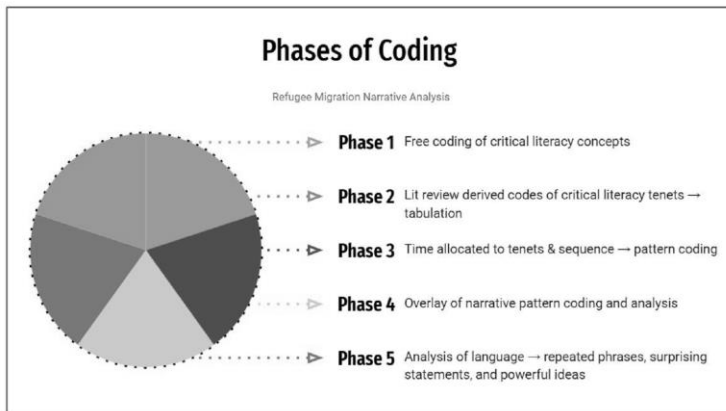
representing the order and amount of time in which they spent discussing each tenet. A fourth phase of analysis occurred in which I overlaid all of the visual representations of each individual narrative in order to look for overarching patterns across all three. I engaged in a fifth and final phase of inquiry into narrative analysis, which relied on dissecting the specific language within each narrative. During this phase I identified repeated phrases, surprising statements or words, and powerful ideas in order to help identify significant moments within the narratives (Montero & Washington, 2021). (See Figure 2 for an overview of the phases of coding.)

Positionality

This study is important to me because I have a deeply invested personal and professional commitment to the community from which the students in this study come. I know Lale, Hariri, Alex, and their families well because I was their English teacher during differing academic school years between 2013 and 2017. I was an English teacher for 14 years, during which time most of my students were newly arriving refugee and immigrant students in an urban public school in North Carolina. I not only taught these students during school, but also volunteered as a tutor for a community-based organization which served their community. I spent a significant amount of time outside of school investing in the lives of my students and their families. Despite my commitment to serving students from refugee backgrounds, I myself am not from a refugee background. I am a white, monolingual, English speaking American woman from rural Southern Virginia. I grew up in an impoverished community and am a first-generation college student who does not identify with many of these students' experiences, but I seek to understand them more fully.

A great degree of vulnerability and honesty is needed to both share and examine migration narratives. I understand the weighty responsibility and opportunity that my former students have entrusted to me by sharing their stories, and so it is with care that I approach their narratives and this study. I seek to embody a humanizing approach to research, which started first with the questions of *why me?* and *why this?* (Patel, 2016). In answering *why me*, I look at my own path. Although I left the K-12 classroom in the Fall of 2020 to begin my research journey as a PhD student, I made a genuine promise to my students to make education better for them and their families. I also promised to bring them along in whatever ways possible. In asking for narratives, I am able to bring their migration stories into a space in which they can be seen and meaningfully shared as a source of knowledge. I am currently the one who serves as the connection between these young people and a world of research, and I am strategically positioned to help shed light on issues that they contend with. Through ethical research practices which center student voices and involve a high degree of collaboration, I seek to uplift these students and also maintain their dignity and handle their "data" with care (Paris, 2011). I am therefore committed to not reducing these students' personal migration narratives down, but rather reading, rereading, and analyzing them in all their beauty and complexity and include them in the appendix for others to read, explore, analyze, and appreciate.

Individual Insights

Storytelling is a powerful means of conveying both experience and knowledge; critical literacy invites inquiry which is largely mediated by our own experiences. As such, I cannot simply read, analyze, and draw universal truths from these refugee migration narratives apart from an acknowledgement of my own biases and perceptions. Rather, I can share what it is I see based upon my analysis, using the conceptualized framework, as observed through the lens of my own understanding. Furthermore, inquiry into narrative as a methodology does not seek to provide answers in the form of findings, but rather integrates the contextualized stories as insights which provide nuanced understanding into lived experiences (Montero & Washington, 2021). Below, I organize the insights by first presenting aspects of each of the three narratives as they contend with the three prominent tenets of critical literacy 1) the political, non-neutral nature of the world; 2) access to knowledge, and 3) hope for the future. Then, I present my synthesis of collective insights through an application of the conceptualized framework of the centrality and power of experience in critical literacy.

> **"I cannot simply read, analyze, and draw universal truths from these refugee migration narratives apart from an acknowledgement of my own biases and perceptions. Rather, I can share what it is I see based upon my analysis, using the conceptualized framework, as observed through the lens of my own understanding."**

Lale: A Story of Seeking Belonging

Lale was born in Afghanistan in 1995, during the height of the Afghan civil war. In reflecting on her experience, Lale wrote:

> Ever since I was born I was forced to move multiple times due to safety reasons. My country has been in war since I was born, making it difficult for me to belong anywhere. Every time I was forced to move, I had to start everything over and learn a new language and adapt to a new culture.

Large portions of Lale's childhood and adolescence have been impacted by the political nature of life and her forced relocations propelled by the non-neutral nature of the world and a search for belonging. Her repetition of "since I was born" signals the tremendous magnitude to which war and forced relocation have impacted her life. Traveling first to Pakistan, then failing to find safety there, Lale's family was forced to seek new refuge. Attempting to make a life in Iran didn't work either, as the "discrimination and inequalities" forced her family to "take an unsafe path which included walking at nights and hiding during the days through mountains" in order to try again to find safety. They found some safety and acceptance, but still great hardship in Turkey. Lale wrote, "In Turkey I felt welcomed. Even though I had to sit and sleep on cardboard for a while, it still didn't bother me because I was happy for being treated equally and with respect." The financial hardships of forced migration weighed heavily upon Lale and her family, but she still found solace in not experiencing discrimination in this new country. Powerful politics drove them from one place to another, as they sought safety and belonging.

It was also a fight for access to knowledge that drove Lale and her family from one country to another. Corrupt politics fed widespread discrimination and

withholding of education. From the introduction to conclusion, her narrative spoke to the personal ways in which education was withheld from her and her subsequent fight to access it. While living in Iran, Lale longed for an education, but "migrants were not welcomed," and Lale was denied "basic human rights," including access to education. She wrote that this experience "made me want to go to school even more." She used the inequities she faced as catalysts in her pursuit for education. In the conclusion of her narrative, she wrote, "Knowing that I was denied education during my childhood motivated me to work hard." With determination, access to education, and teacher support, Lale seized and is still seizing the opportunities of higher education in the United States, which she feels "would have been denied" in her previous countries.

It is, therefore, with hope for envisioned future possibilities that Lale looks ahead. She concluded her migration narrative with these words:

> After eight years of living in the US, I am now a citizen who feels belonged and not like an outsider. Knowing that I have equal rights makes me feel encouraged. I know that like many other immigrants who are forced to flee their country I had a rough beginning but those obstacles brought me to a country that allows me to turn my dreams into reality.

That belonging which was absent since birth, came to be found in the freedom, opportunity, and education that she experiences in the United States.

Hariri: A Story of Seeking Refuge

Hariri's narrative similarly opens in a surprising and striking way which also speaks to his marking of time. Despite being born in 2001, he wrote, "My life story starts in 2011 as the civil war begins in my country." He feels his story only began once there was political upheaval, as though his story before that time lacked the level of significance it later gained through the civil war. Four times he labeled his country as "dangerous" in his opening lines, and he repeatedly wrote that the Syrian regime killed people, including people he knew and loved. His perspective in his narrative was driven by his family's need for refuge as a result of the implications of the political, non-neutral nature of his world. Nearly the entirety of his story detailed the corrupt politics of the Syrian regime and the personal impact it had on him and his family.

The influence of the Syrian regime impacted Hariri's access to education. His narrative is bookended with inequitable access to knowledge. In the beginning, he wrote that while in Syria, "It was a difficult life for my family and my education, no food, and dangerous people around us." When Hariri expounds upon "a difficult life," he mentions education ahead of food and safety, signifying the significance of the role it plays in his life. Later in his narrative, he directly ties education to life improvement. Once they made the life-threatening journey out of Syria, to a Jordanian refugee camp, and then into Jordan, he started "going to school and our lives are getting better" through the restoration of educational opportunities. Those opportunities, however, were met not with refuge, but with "bigotry from the people of Jordan." Hariri was treated like an outsider.

It wasn't until Hariri and his family arrived in the United States that they felt some level of acceptance. He closed his narrative with a bit of hope for the future. He wrote, "We were welcomed by the American government to seek refuge in the U.S." His use of "welcomed" and "refuge" speak to that which was lacking in both Syria and Jordan. but stress what he longed for: belonging and safety.

Alex: A Story of Seeking Dreams

Like Hariri's narrative, Alex's story begins also with the political and personal impact of terrorism. Dreaming of a better future for his children, Alex's father secretly supported the US Army, and subsequently put his family at great risk by doing so. Alex wrote, "Because of this [ISIS's pursuit of his father], we left our town [in Iraq], my family and my relatives, my school, everything." Nearly three fourths of Alex's story describes the political, non-neutral nature of the world in which he lived. Alex wrote, not only of the political events, but also of the deeply personal impact those events had on him. He wrote using intimate relational language [emphasis added in subsequent quotes]: "The situation was *dangerous* for *my mom* and *me*;" "a *crazy* story happened to *me*;" "In 2014, exactly on February 14, the day of love, there was *no love* because ISIS entered *my* city;" "*my father* was *very fearful.*" Politics and particularly terrorism, drove Alex and his family from their country and everyone and everything they knew and loved.

Due to extremist politics, Alex had to covertly access the knowledge he sought because it was a strictly prohibited type of knowledge—that of the English language. Alex wrote:

> My dad started to teach me English beginning in 2005. But it was a secret. We did not tell others we are learning English. Too many people hated Americans. But my dad, he loved America and he secretly wanted to help America.

Through an act of subversion to the Islamic State, Alex and his father fought for the knowledge they dreamt of obtaining. The potential power of literacy altered the course of life for Alex's family. His father sought to read, write, and speak English as a means to attempt to reclaim his country from the hands of terrorists.

When Alex and his family could no longer safely stay within Iraq, they were given refuge in the United States. It was here that Alex crafted new visions for his future. He concluded his narrative with hope in the envisioned possibilities the United States offered him through these words: "I heard before that anyone who has a dream in America can make it come true. Now I live there, I live in that place. I live in the land of the dreams."

Collective Insights

These experiences of seeking are, in the words of Lale, "stories that are worth sharing." They provide tremendous insight into their own lives. For these three Middle Eastern students from refugee backgrounds, an understanding of the world as political and non-neutral was inescapable. They all lived lives which were crafted by geopolitical occurrences and in which politics loomed large over their past and casts a shadow into their present. Critical literacy is "built on exploring personal, sociopolitical, economic and intellectual border identities" and "grounded in the ethical imperative to examine the contradictions in society between the meaning of *freedom*, the demands of social justice, the obligations of citizenship and the *structured silence* that permeates *incidences of suffering in everyday life*" (Bishop, 2014, p. 52, emphasis added). Accordingly, these students from refugee

> **"Critical literacy not only involves seeing the complexities of the world, naming structures and ideas, but also taking action towards envisioning possibilities, and seeking to reshape the inequitable facets."**

Figure 3

The Power of Experience in Critical Literacy
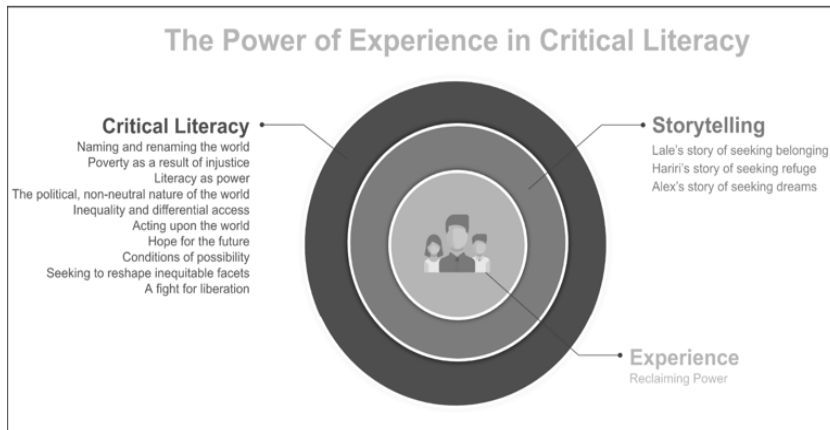
backgrounds contended with and examined the realities and implications which stem from the extensively political, non-neutral nature of their lived experiences. Furthermore, rather than yield to the "structured silence" (Bishop, 2014), they spoke out and told their stories, putting the onus where it belongs, thus pushing back against societal expectations of silence and seizing greater control over their own narratives (See Figure 3).

Collectively, their narratives speak to how their understanding of access to knowledge moved beyond mere understanding and into a *fight for* access to knowledge, bringing into play a vital component of critical literacy: action sought to rectify injustices (Bishop, 2014). Lale, Hariri, and Alex narrated an experience which resulted in a struggle to gain access to education as a basic human right which they and their families insisted upon and ultimately obtained.

The experiences of Lale, Hariri, and Alex in their fight for education directly impacts their individual perspectives on education and their personal participation in it. Critical literacy concerns itself with not only access but power (Janks, 2000). It is through domination that access can be denied and through which oppression and silencing occurs. As seen through the ways in which they each place responsibility and blame where it is due, all three of

these young people expressed a perceptive awareness of the role of power. It is, therefore, significant to note that in narrating their own story, they exercised power over what gets told and in which way, thereby reclaiming the power of their own narratives. Critical literacy not only involves seeing the complexities of the world, naming structures and ideas, but also taking action towards envisioning possibilities, and seeking to reshape the inequitable facets (Bishop, 2014; Comber, 2015; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Janks, 2013; Luke, 2014). All three students concluded their own narratives with a hope for envisioned future possibilities. They dared to seek despite the brokenness and inequity which shaped their experiences.

These envisioned possibilities were all rooted in their hope of the perceived equitable and equalizing education American schooling can provide. Critical literacy embodies a view of the future as holding great potential through reshaping in order to achieve greater equity and opportunity (Luke, 2014). If Lale, Hariri, and Alex believe that there is power for their future prospects via an education in the United States, then we as educators must commit to making these envisioned futures into realities through instruction that is in fact more equitable and potentially equalizing, despite the inadequacy of past reality. More equitable instruction is grounded in critical literacy pedagogies, rooted in students' capacity to act upon an unjust world, and built upon the bedrock of the critical literacy tenets with which these young people already possess (Alford, 2014, 2021; Comber, 2015; Janks, 2000).

Discussion

This inquiry into narrative provides not often explored, but significant insights into the criticality with which Middle Eastern refugee students see the

world through their rich understandings of 1) the political, non-neutral nature of the world, 2) a fight for access to knowledge, and 3) a hope for envisioned future possibilities as seekers of belonging, refuge, and dreams. The value of critical literacy enacted with refugee students is well established, as is the power of storytelling for marginalized students (Alford, 2021; Campano, 2007; Campano et al., 2016; Enciso, 2011; Jimenez, 2020; Lau et al., 2016; Lewison et al., 2002; Nieto, 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). It is important for educators moving forward to harness the power inherent within their refugee students' experiential insights through a multitude of opportunities to tell their stories, and to introduce students who are not from refugee backgrounds to the experiences of those who are.

To this effort of narrative exploration, creation, and inquiry, this study contributes the three written narratives (and two accompanying audio recordings) contained within the appendix as a cultural data set (Enciso, 2011; Lee, 2007). Cultural data sets, particularly those comprised of students' stories, can be used for academic literary study in both future research and the K-12 classroom (Enciso, 2011). My participants and I hope teachers will embrace and incorporate these narratives as a form of mentor texts and sources of rich experiential knowledge. Some suggestions for use are: supplemental texts to pair with other classroom literature (e.g. *Persepolis, Enrique's Journey, A Long Way Gone*), personal narrative inquiry projects, launching points for Youth Participatory Action Research, and source documents for global engagement projects.

These stories told personally, yet collectively become a critical literacy text from which educators can provide windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990) for their students. With more than 80 million people forcibly displaced, it is ever more important to highlight the experiences of those from refugee backgrounds (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Global Trends Report, 2020). Allowing students to be co-constructors of knowledge and sense-makers of life through writing themselves into the curriculum and making room for their stories and engagement of inquiries has a transformational and lasting impact (Campano, 2007; Enciso, 2011; Jimenez, 2020; Jocson & Cooks, 2011). Using students' stories helps to build an affirming, community cultural wealth mindset, and amplifies and honors, not silences, often marginalized and minimized voices (Mann & Lee, 2022).

As long as such grave disparities exist in this world, critical literacy will be essential, particularly for marginalized students, and especially refugees (Alford, 2021; Janks, 2013, 2014). As these students seek belonging, refuge, dreams, and reclamation of power, we as educators, have the opportunity to engage with our students in critical reading, writing, researching, and storytelling so that we might all participate in shaping a more just world.

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Appendix

"Coming to America"

By: Lale

Everyone's life is full of stories that are worth sharing. Everyone has a story to tell and no one can describe and tell it better than the person who experienced that life. Ever since I was born I was forced to move multiple times due to safety reasons. My country has been in war since I was born, making it difficult for me to belong anywhere. Every time I was forced to move, I had to start everything over and learn a new language and adapt to a new culture. I had not experienced stability and proper education until I moved to the United States.

I was born in Afghanistan in 1995, during a crucial wartime. My family migrated to Pakistan for a safe life. After living there for about 5 years, I had to move to Iran because Pakistan was not safe anymore. In Iran, migrants were not welcomed and I was not accepted to school which made me want to go to school even more. In Iran my family members and I could not walk freely due to the fear of deportation. Immigrants almost had no basic human rights in Iran. They were forced to work at jobs which Iranians themselves would be ashamed to do for a wage that was less than the minimum wage. These discrimination and inequalities made my family decide to move again to another country illegally and take an unsafe path which included walking at nights and hiding during the days through mountains.

After one week of walking, starvation and the fear of getting caught we arrived to a country that accepted immigrants which was Turkey. In Turkey I felt welcomed. Even though I had to sit and sleep on cardboard for a while it still didn't bother me because I was happy for being treated equally and with respect. I was enrolled to school by the government and we were treated like every other human being. It took me a while to get used to Turkey because I had left every one of my friends in Iran and I had to start over again. In school I struggled greatly because of the language barrier. Even though I learned the language and adapted to the culture I still felt left out. While everyone else looked similar I was the only one that looked different. No matter how much I would force myself to fit in, at the end of the day I was still an immigrant in a foreign country who was forced out of her own country.

After a while of living in Turkey my mom found out that qualified immigrants could get accepted to United States. We enrolled into United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which would allow us to move to the United States once we presented our family's situation and our purpose to go to the United States. It would take several years before we were sponsored to the United States.

After living in Turkey for seven years our case moved forward and we were sponsored to the United States. I was just beginning to get used to Turkey when we had to move again. Moving to America had the most impact on me because it happened during my teenage years. I had reset my life back to square one. But I knew this time it was going to be different because I knew I was here to stay and did not have to move again. Upon my arrival to US, I did not feel like I was the only one that appeared different which made me feel welcomed. I was immediately enrolled in school with very limited English. I felt like I was behind from other students but I knew that I had equal opportunities and rights as my classmates which was a relief. I had to translate my homework into either Turkish or Persian because I was struggling with English.

United States was a completely different country than the previous countries I had to immigrate. The lifestyle and the culture were very challenging but I was ready to overcome all the obstacles because I knew this was my life now. In school I met students who were in similar situation. All of my teachers were very encouraging. My teachers helped me throughout my high school years and even until now. One of my high school teachers is someone who I can turn to for help anytime, even now so many years later. Without her high school would have been very challenging for me.

I successfully graduated high school and am studying in college right now. Knowing that I was denied education during my childhood motivated me to work hard towards my degree. United States provided me opportunities that would have been denied to me if I was anywhere else. After eight years of living in the US, I am now a citizen who feels belonged and not like an outsider. Knowing that I have equal rights makes me feel encouraged. I know that like many other immigrants who are forced to flee their country I had a rough beginning but those obstacles brought me to a country that allows me to turn my dreams into reality.

<center>"Civil War"</center>

<center>By: Hariri</center>

My name is Hariri. I am 20 years old from Syria. My life story starts in 2011 as the civil war begins in my country. It was a difficult life for my family and my education, no food, and dangerous people around us There was a very dangerous Syrian regime. It killed ordinary people for no reason, Many Syrian people have been killed, and people I know, and love have been killed. My country's condition has been very dangerous. It killed demonstrators who demanded freedoms, there was no independence for the Syrian people. They were still persecuted by the government, and it was a criminal dictatorship.

The situation was very dangerous in Syria, so my father wanted to go to Jordan. At that time, my mom was pregnant and the border was closed, so we walked to Jordan. It was very terrifying to walk in the night and fear of the Syrian army, the crisis was dire, and my mother was pregnant. Thank God, we were able to cross the border without any problems. The Jordanian Army has received us. It was really cold, and my mother was pregnant, and we were put in camps.

We could not bear the camp, so we left and went to Amman, the capital. We rented an apartment and I had to work to support my dad and my mum, so I was 12 years old at the time.

I start going to school and our lives are getting better.

There was some sort of bigotry from the people of Jordan, but few of them they called me a refugee, which made me sad.

We were welcomed by the American government to seek refuge in the U.S.

This is my true story, and that is it.

"On the Border of Freedom"

By: Alex

My name is Alex. I'm from the Middle East, specifically Iraq. There is where my story starts. I was born in December 3 the year of 2000, in a village. After 6 years, I started my school in the primary school. I was very smart and got all As. When I was 6 years old I was the only one in my town who knew all the English alphabet. None of the kids knew English. My dad started to teach me English beginning in 2005. But it was a secret. We did not tell others we are learning English. Too many people hated Americans. But my dad, he loved America and he secretly wanted to help America.

In 2007 my dad went away and started to work with the U.S. Army. No one knew about my father and his work with the U.S. Army. The U.S. Army was in my country because they were trying to make Iraq free from the Baath regime and the situation was very wicked, too. There was a lot of killing and bombs which were dangerous for us. The situation was dangerous for my mom and me, but she didn't tell anyone about that because my country was unsafe. When I asked my mom, "Mom, where is my dad?" she told me, "He went to our relative" because she was very terrified to let anyone know he was working with the Americans.

Then when the U.S. Army went outside of Iraq, the Iraqi government started to fix everything that was wrong. They started to pay more money for the people, but Iraq was still dangerous until that moment. In 2011, the situation started to be better and more safe. In 2012, my father tried to apply to IOM. IOM means International Organization for Migration that helps the people who worked with the U.S. Army; it gave them a chance to come to the U.S. We applied to that in 2012. It took a few years before we came to the U.S., but before we came a crazy story happened to me.

In 2013 we heard about ISIS, or the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. ISIS is a group of people who they think the Islamic religion is killing the people who are from a different religion or the Shiite Muslims or th eSunni who were fighting them or who worked with the U.S. Army. In 2014, this terrorists came inside Iraq. They started in Al-Anbar then they expanded to Mosul, Deale, Salah-Alden. I was living in Salah-Alden. In 2014, exactly on February 14, the day of love, there was no love because ISIS entered my city. In that time my father was very fearful. The terrorist group started to fire all the government positions in my city. When they came in at first, they weren't looking for my father. But after a month, they started to look for him. Because of this, we left our town, my family and my relatives, my school, everything. We traveled by car to Erbil my relatives and I rented one very small house that held six families. There was one bathroom in the house. It was very hard for us. We stayed in Erbil about 3 months. The three-month physical conditions were extremely harsh.

After two days we arrived in Baghdad but these two days were the hardest moments in my life. We crossed rivers, lakes, and deserts. The army was in the area when we arrived in Baghdad. We waited a week over there and we moved to Basra, south Iraq, because we head over there is more safe and the people are so nice. In the past we had heard the people in Basra are the nicest people in Iraq. We went to Basra by the train. That was my first time I was inside a train. It was fun for me. We lived in Basra, home of the Shiite people for seven months. We were Sunni, but the people were very nice to us. They helped us with money and food.

After seven months in Basra, the IOM called us. They said "We are IOM. We are calling you to tell you that you have a Medical examination in September 2, 2015." My father cried from the happiness. We were very happy in that moment. We went to do the medical examination and two days after the medical examination, they called us and said " On September 29, 2015, you have a date of travel." We went to all our relatives to tell them we will go to U.S.A. on September 29!

We arrived at the airport at 5 o'clock. We flew from Iraq to Jordan, from Jordan to Germany then from Germany to the United States in New Jersey. From there we then flew to Raleigh, North Carolina.

And now I'm in U.S.A with my family. America the place of freedom, the place that everyone hopes to come study. I heard before that anyone who has a dream in America can make it come true. Now I live there, I live in that place. I live in the land of the dreams.

"We Shall Take Their Children Away and Rear Them to the Fatherland": A Critical Discourse Analysis of a "Parent Advocacy" Group

Benjamin Lathrop and Christy Wessel Powell

Abstract: The rise of right-wing populism, embodied in the figure of Donald Trump, has been characterized by conspiracy theories, "fake news," and other forms of mis- and disinformation in what has been described as a "post-truth" era. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this problem, and national conflicts around appropriate content, methods, and modes of schooling often involved disinformation circulated in school board meetings and other local contexts during the 2021-2022 school year. In this study, we adopt a critical literacy lens and take up the tools of discourse analysis to examine the rhetoric of post-truth, conspiracy-oriented groups opposed to public health mandates, critical race theory (CRT), and social emotional learning (SEL) in public schools. Our discourse analysis of Purple for Parents Indiana (P4PI), a local advocacy group, suggests that P4PI and similar groups are engaging in "cosmetic criticality," a project superficially resembling critical literacy that poses a unique challenge to public education—a challenge literacy scholars and teacher educators must confront.

Keywords: discourse analysis, mis- and disinformation, critical literacy, post-truth

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Conspiracy theories, "fake news," and other forms of mis- and disinformation have exploded in the years following the U.S. presidential election of 2016, leading some to suggest that we have entered a "post-truth" era in which appeals to emotion and belief are more influential than objective facts (Sismondo, 2017). In this context, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2021-2022 school year brought a renewed sense of danger, urgency, and conflict to decisions around content, methods, and modes of schooling. Parent frustration erupted into name-calling, shouting, and threats during local school board meetings, prompting the National School Board group to request federal intervention and local school boards to limit public comment and in-person meeting contact (Thompson, 2021). In this study, we investigate these divisions through a critical literacy lens (Lewison, et al., 2002; Luke, 2012; McDaniel, 2004), using tools of discourse analysis (Gee, 2011b) to examine the rhetoric of post-truth, conspiracy-oriented groups opposed to public health mandates, critical race theory (CRT), and social emotional learning (SEL) in public schools. Specifically, we focus our analysis on the parent advocacy organization Purple for Parents Indiana (P4PI), using data derived from its website, local school board meetings, social media interactions, and local news accounts in the suburbs surrounding urban centers of Indiana where P4PI is most active. We argue that P4PI and similar groups are engaged in "cosmetic criticality" (Bacon, 2018, p. 4), a project superficially resembling critical literacy that takes advantage of the "popularization of critical literacies" (p. 6) and the democratization of knowledge to advance disinformation through alternative sources, crowdsourced texts, and curated social networks, resulting in an unprecedented challenge to public education that literacy scholars and teacher educators have an obligation to address.

Although both authors work in a field centered on teacher education and PK-12 literacy development, we see an urgent need for literacy work in educational spaces involving adults, particularly caretakers and decision-makers participating in public schools. We argue that conspiracy-oriented groups engaged in post-truth discourse are co-opting some of the methods and language of critical literacy while opposing its goal, the liberation of marginalized populations (Luke, 2012; Freire, 1970/2000; Shor & Freire, 1987). By positioning themselves as oppressed, these groups appear to challenge institutional power, even as their policies champion the re-ascendancy of historically dominant groups. Scholars and teachers engaged in critical literacy work must be able to identify and respond effectively to this challenge. Understanding post-truth discourse, particularly around local educational policy, is foundational to a critical analysis of these parent advocacy groups and organizations. Our analysis of these D/discourses, then, sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What does an analysis of the D/discourse of P4PI around COVID-19 precautions, CRT, and SEL reveal about the values, goals, methods, and power dynamics of P4PI and similar groups engaged in "post-truth" D/discourses on education?

2. What does an analysis of the D/discourse of P4PI around COVID-19 precautions, CRT, and SEL reveal about the epistemic beliefs (beliefs about knowledge and knowing) of P4PI and similar groups engaged in "post-truth" D/discourses on education?

First, therefore, we review some of the emerging educational literature on the post-truth phenomenon and provide an overview of our theoretical framework. We then describe our research method, rooted in theoretical tools outlined in Gee's (2011b) discourse analysis framework. Next, we present our findings as they pertain to post-truth discourses around school-based COVID-19 precautions, CRT controversies, and SEL concerns. Finally, we discuss the implications of our findings for literacy scholars, teacher educators, and those concerned about the future of public education and discourse.

Background and Relevant Literature

Educational Discourse on the Post-Truth Condition

The Oxford Dictionaries chose "post-truth" as 2016's word of the year (Oxford Languages, 2021). The post-truth phenomenon is characterized by "mistrust in established institutions, including government, academia, and scientific consensus" (Bacon, 2018, p. 3). A growing body of educational research grapples with this phenomenon. In 2018, a search of three popular online periodicals (*Education Week*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and *Edutopia*) and two literacy practitioner websites (the *National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE]* and the *International Literacy Association [ILA]*) for "post-truth," "fake news," and "alternative facts," narrowed down to articles published between 2015 and 2018 that focused on how the literacy community should address post-truth problems, yielded 73 results (Bacon, 2018). More writing on the issue has emerged since then; for example, our search for the same three terms in just one literacy journal (*Journal of Adult and Adolescent Literacy*) elicited 12 articles written between 2018 and 2021.

Discussing the importance of identity to the practice of critical literacy in a post-truth world, Janks (2018) cites Foucault, who believed "discourses are regimes of truth, and texts are instantiations of discourse(s)," adding that "our identities are formed by the communities we inhabit and the discourses they use;" therefore, "the discourses we inhabit affect what we do (what texts we choose to read) and how our beliefs and values affect what positions we take up in the texts we encounter" (p. 96). Combining these ideas with Bacon's (2018) observation that post-truth is characterized by "mistrust in established

> **"We see an urgent need for literacy work in educational spaces involving adults, particularly caretakers and decision-makers participating in public schools."**

institutions" (p. 3) and the Oxford Dictionary's definition of post-truth as "denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Oxford Languages, 2021), we define "post-truth D/discourse(s)" as language enacted in the service of beliefs, attitudes, and social identities that seeks to maintain or reassert power by obscuring fact through appeals to emotion, personal belief, and mistrust in institutions.

One important framework in considering post-truth discourses relates to epistemic beliefs, or "ways of knowing." Introducing a special issue of *Educational Psychologist* addressing post-truth, Barzilai and Chinn (2020) define the post-truth condition as "a range of current threats to people's abilities to know what is true or most accurate in media- and information-rich societies" (p. 107). They offer a "roadmap of educational discourse about post-truth problems" that includes four lenses: "not knowing how to know, fallible ways of knowing, not caring about truth (enough), and disagreeing about how to know" (p. 108). These four lenses represent different ways educational researchers have framed the post-truth problem and ways educators might both aggravate and mitigate the problem. In a similar vein, Bacon (2018) analyzes educational discourse on post-truth among literacy scholars and identifies three broad categories of "first wave" responses to the post-truth problem, each of which constructs the problem differently and proposes different kinds of solutions and implications for policy and methodology: "critical reading" (evaluation of content or author credibility), "critical consumerism" (evaluation of source validity), and "critical empathy" (engagement with opposing ideas to understand both sides) (p. 6). He argues that while these responses

have strengths, they insufficiently recognize the power dynamics of the post-truth condition, and he suggests that because literacy is political, "a renewed emphasis on power, dominance, and liberation is imperative to 'reading' post-truth, and necessary for any methodology that seeks to address it" (Bacon, 2018, p. 10).

Indeed, the exercise of political power is a major factor contributing to the post-truth phenomenon. As Barzilai and Chinn (2020) note, "The information landscape is increasingly dominated by politically partisan websites that cater to political agendas and identities and provide content that confirms these identities" (p. 109). In discussing the importance of truth, they point out that "people's capabilities to find out the truth underlie the capacity for social critique and the ability to stand up to ideas" (p. 109), adding that for many people, accuracy is a less important goal than approval, belonging, or partisanship. Any analysis of post-truth texts and discourses, then, must move beyond an evaluation of the accuracy of factual statements and of source credibility, and beyond an attempt to understand different points of view; it must also interrogate the power dynamics inherent in texts and discourses. As Janks (2018) argues, texts are never neutral but rather work to position their consumers; therefore, considering "underlying discourses, assumptions, and omissions" is important for a critical analysis, which "combines text analysis with an analysis of power" (p. 96). An analysis of post-truth texts and discourses, therefore, must interrogate underlying power dynamics. In the next section, we provide a broad overview of the theoretical framework through which we are considering these dynamics, critical literacy.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on critical literacy as a theoretical lens through which to approach these conflicts and discourses. Critical literacy framing demands that we adopt a "questioning stance" (McDaniel, 2004) that disrupts the status quo, focuses on sociopolitical issues, interrogates multiple viewpoints, and encourages action to promote social justice (Lewison et al., 2002). Importantly, critical literacy centers justice by offering questions like, "What is 'truth'? How is it presented and represented, by whom, and in whose interests? . . . For what purposes?" (Luke, 2012, p. 4). Rooted in a tradition with an "explicit aim of the critique and transformation of dominant ideologies, cultures and economies, and institutions and political systems" (Luke, 2012, p. 5), critical literacy is an appropriate theoretical lens through which to read and interrogate power dynamics inherent in post-truth discourses.

We acknowledge that post-truth discourses appear to share some features with the practice of critical literacy (Bacon, 2018). One could argue, for example, that P4PI activists engage in a form of critical literacy when they critique scientific consensus regarding mask mandates and vaccines, or when they challenge CRT or SEL in spaces where educators influenced by these approaches maintain power. This is an issue with which scholars and teachers who embrace critical literacy must grapple. We agree with Bacon (2018) that post-truth discourses employ "cosmetic criticality" (p. 4), a reactionary skepticism toward institutions that is "unmoored from explicit discussions of power, domination, and liberation" and therefore "easily appropriated by post-truth discourses to maintain rather than to disrupt existing power hierarchies" (p. 4). However, while our analysis offers one possible approach for responding to this issue, we recognize the need for further work on the problem, especially when it comes to addressing the epistemic foundations of critical literacy that present obstacles to an epistemological critique of post-truth discourses.

We now turn to our methodology, discourse analysis (DA). After providing an overview of DA and identifying our positionality, we introduce the focal parent group Purple for Parents Indiana (P4PI). Then, we describe our procedures, which include the use of five specific DA tools (Gee 2011b) to closely analyze three discursively representative "texts" produced by P4PI.

Method: Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis (DA) is a broad field born out of linguistics, primarily focused on analyzing spoken language in units larger than words or sentences (Harris, 1952), but it has grown and been taken up by other fields to analyze language-based social practices (Bloome et al., 2005; Johnstone, 2008; Schiffrin, et al., 2001) and critical inquiry (Blommaert, 2009; Fairclough, 2010; Wodak and Meyer, 2001). Here we follow James Gee's (2011a, 2011b) approach to DA because our data reflects his conceptualization of D/discourse as an identity kit, described below.

DA may be seen as both a method and a theory, which are, as Gee (1999) points out, inseparable. Gee's method is rooted in a theory of language that sees language as having "*meaning only in and through social practices*, practices which often leave us morally complicit with harm and injustice unless we attempt to transform them" and adapts "tools of inquiry" in service of methods whose goals are elucidating the theory and contributing to solving important problems (Gee, 2011a, p. 12). While this underlying theory of language informs our DA and aligns philosophically with the theoretical framework we have chosen, a critical literacy lens enables us to apply the tools of DA with a special focus on the literacy problem at the heart of the discourse we examine. Indeed, as Luke (2012)

> **"A critical literacy lens enables us to apply the tools of DA with a special focus on the literacy problem at the heart of the discourse we examine."**

points out in an article tracing critical literacy's lineage, DA has arisen as one of several broad approaches among literacy scholars and teachers with a critical orientation. Within a critical literacy framework, DA facilitates focus on words and syntax—on how these and other communication choices influence communities, power dynamics and the use of texts (Luke, 2012; Janks, 2009). This makes DA a fitting method for an analysis of a movement that is using a wide variety of texts and discourses to attempt to influence power dynamics in school communities.

Positionality

It is important to identify our positionality, or who we are in relation to the texts we analyze here (Preissle, 2008). Ben's (first author) two decades of experience as a literacy educator and his background in and current (uneasy) relationship with White evangelical Christianity give him both an insider's and an outsider's perspective on groups engaged in post-truth discourse on education, particular insofar as those groups adopt a Discourse we have identified with contemporary White Christian nationalism (Gorski & Perry, 2022), a sociopolitical movement within segments of White American evangelicalism. Ben's orientation toward such groups is neither objective nor neutral, but rather subjective and critical, rooted in a concern not only for literacy education but also for theological and personal integrity. Christy (second author), similarly, grew up in a rural, conservative community, and her upbringing was shaped by her family's Catholic faith. Her interest in groups such as the one we analyze here is both professional and personal, as she is a former elementary school teacher, and these groups

have been active at school board meetings in her own children's school district.

Both of us are White and recognize that in focusing on the discourse of these (predominantly White) groups, we may be amplifying voices that are harmful to marginalized communities; however, if we are doing so, it is with a view toward both understanding and critiquing those voices. We also acknowledge that our analysis comes from a position of privilege, and that while we care deeply about addressing these issues, their implications are far less serious for those of us with privilege than they are for others; we admit that our academic, tempered approach is itself a matter of privilege.

Focal Parent Group: Purple for Parents of Indiana

Purple for Parents of Indiana (P4PI) is one of several local parent advocacy groups in our state that have used social media and disrupted school board meetings to protest COVID-19 safety measures along with the integration of CRT and SEL in public schools. Of these groups, we chose P4PI as the focus of analysis because it enjoyed mainstream media coverage, boasted a robust social media following compared with other nearby groups, and dialogued publicly with legislators during the legislative session (DeMentri, 2022). While the group is not explicitly religious, one of its core beliefs is that "the responsibility of teaching morals and values to children are the parents/caregivers and NOT a government institution" (P4PI, n.d.-b.). The organization's Facebook page says it is "dedicated to exposing the indoctrination & Sexualization of children in the public education system" (P4PI, n.d.-a), and its website identifies SEL and CRT as two of its major issues and offers tools for parents who wish to challenge mask mandates.

P4PI is connected with a national politicized movement. In 2018, Forest Moriarty founded Purple for Parents in Arizona in response to the pro-teachers' union "Red for Ed" movement, which he saw as promoting "anti-capitalist, anti-American" ideas such as diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies (Herold, 2021, para. 4). According to reporting by *AZ Central*, Moriarty, who made an unsuccessful bid for the Arizona state legislature in 2020, had been active in a closed Facebook group called Patriot Movement AZ, where "posts contained Islamophobic and racist rhetoric, and followers traded in conspiracies and false information"—including a supposed liberal, LGBTQ-aided plot to normalize pedophilia (O'Dell & Ruelas, 2020, para. 10). The rhetoric of Patriot Movement AZ and its successors, including Purple for Parents, now active in multiple states, exemplifies "post-truth" Discourses because, as we show, these Discourses employ some of the language of criticality to maintain or regain power by obscuring facts—facts based in established scientific consensus about masks and vaccines, facts about the influence and goals of CRT and SEL in public schools—through appeals to fear (conspiracy-oriented Discourses), personal belief (Christian nationalist Discourses), and skepticism of institutions (cosmetically critical Discourses).

Focal Text Selection

For our critical literacy-informed analysis of post-truth discourse around education, we chose, through an iterative process, three "texts" produced by P4PI, as robust and discursively representative of the group's public engagement with their self-proclaimed prioritized educational issues during the 2021-22 school year, specifically: (1) a short video documentary about the dangers of SEL, (2) a parent testimony against mask mandates at a school board meeting, and (3) a set of social media posts about "CRT" in K-12 schools. Our selection of each text as representative of typical P4PI discourse is rooted in our lives as educators and parents engaging with

educational topics and policy news via journalistic reports, personal and public Facebook and Twitter feeds, discussion with peers, and activity at school board meetings for our children's school districts and in nearby districts. We were ethnographically embedded in the context of P4PI public discourse over 12 months, from June 2021-May 2022, gathering field notes, collecting and comparing digital artifacts, and monitoring public comments at monthly school board meetings. Although we do not present an ethnographic analysis here, we pull from that ethnographic understanding to warrant claims of each text's discursive representationality.

Much of the discourse informing our analysis has occurred on social media, a platform notorious for proliferating fake news and creating echo chambers that shape worldviews through algorithms that may further divide us (Spohr, 2017; Sumpter, 2018; Zimmer et al., 2019). Literacy education scholars have advocated that new literacies in schools and beyond include a critical interrogation of digital texts in our rapidly changing world (Crockett, et al., 2011; Lankshear & Knobel, 2008; Thomas, 2018) to help readers identify and critically engage with disinformation (Farmer, 2019; Greenhow & Lewin, 2015; Passe, et al., 2018; Smith & Parker, 2021). Similarly, Alvermann and Harrison (2017) argue for the importance of "critical inquiry" in a "post-factual era," defining critical inquiry as:

> [I]nstruction aimed at disrupting myths and distortions in social media texts by accounting for the intersection of politically infused cultural practices (e.g., online networking) with the social and economic realities that regulate flows of information on the internet. (p. 335)

"Disinformation in the service of political agendas is nothing new; what is relatively new is the amplification of disinformation through the technology of social media ."

Disinformation in the service of political agendas is nothing new; what is relatively new is the amplification of disinformation through the technology of social media (Barton, 2019). The texts we have chosen, therefore, exist in or have some relationship to social media platforms. Additionally, the discourse we analyze centers on issues at least partly within the purview of school boards, bodies of locally elected officials empowered by the public to make decisions about education. As *Education Week* points out, conflict surrounding school boards is hardly a new phenomenon:

> School board meetings have historically been the locus of intense cultural debates, like the teaching of evolution, the removal of offensive sports mascots, or the requirement, in the 1950s, for educators to take 'loyalty oaths.' The difference is that . . . the issues the public brings to school boards are increasingly refracted through the lens of national political discourse—especially for issues like masking, school reopening, and race that are now as much about political identity as they are about keeping students safe and engaged. (Sawchuk, 2021)

Discourse Analysis Procedures

After choosing the three representative texts, Ben (first author) transcribed each text. Then, both authors analyzed the texts independently by grouping and categorizing language phrase-by-phrase in each text, using five guiding questions as analytical tools (outlined in detail below), labeling and describing situated meanings, social languages, intertextuality, figured worlds, and "big D" Discourses" (Gee, 2011b, pp. 150-151). Gee suggests these five "big picture" tools, which draw on theories

about the relationship between language and culture, as a good starting place for a DA (2011b, p. x). Since critical literacy focuses on the interplay between texts and "the norms, rule systems, and practices governing the social fields of everyday life" (Luke, 2012, p. 5), this set of tools fits well within a critical literacy framework. Moreover, the discourses we analyze use language to engage in what are frequently called "culture wars" (Hunter, 1991) over issues such as personal freedom, race, and sexuality, making a focus on the language-culture relationship especially relevant. The five tools prompt us to ask the following questions of each text we analyze (Gee, 2011b):

1. What specific meanings do words and phrases have in this context (*situated meaning*)?
2. How does the text use language and syntax to enact a *social language*?
3. How does the text use language and syntax to position itself in relation to other "texts" (*intertextuality*)?
4. What are the text's underlying narratives *(figured worlds)*—the stories the text constructs—and what do they reveal?
5. How do the "speakers" in the text use language along with "ways of acting, interacting, believing, valuing, dressing, and using various objects, tools, and technologies . . to enact a specific socially recognizable identity" *(Big "D" Discourse)*? (Gee, 2011b, p. 181)

After labeling, describing, and categorizing phrases using these guiding questions, we met to discuss, compare notes, and integrate our analyses before proceeding to the next text.

Once categorized, phrases hung together to suggest broader Discourses that reveal how P4PI members construct their advocate identity in terms of values, goals, methods, and power dynamics. Following Gee (1989), we define "Discourse" with a big 'D' as distinct

"ways of being in the world [that] integrat[e] words, acts, beliefs, attitudes and social identities" (pp. 6-7). Big-D Discourses can be thought of as overarching "identity kits" (p. 7) instructing people how to act, talk, and write in ways that are socially and historically recognizable as a 'type of person' (like a teacher, mother, politician, activist, or psychologist). D̲iscourses are comprised of and enacted through "little d" d̲iscourses, defined as everyday language used among people (Gee, 2015).

Now we turn to the texts themselves. Following a summary of our findings (Table 1), we present the analysis of each text separately before discussing themes that emerged from all three.

Findings

Text 1 (Video): Dangers of Social Emotional Learning

The first text we chose to analyze, "Dangers of Social Emotional Learning" (P4PI, 2021) is a six-minute amateur documentary featured on P4PI's home page. It consists of clips from multiple unidentified "talking heads" interspersed with images of the brain, photos of SEL-related documents, bits of what appear to be SEL webinars, and audio clips of Hitler speeches, with ominous music playing in the background throughout. Based on these features, the video seemingly aims to evoke fear in viewers, especially parents of children in public schools, about schools' use of SEL to purportedly "indoctrinate" children. Because of this apparent appeal to fear, of the three Discourses we identified as characteristic of the post-truth orientation (conspiratorial, Christian conspiratorial Discourse: a psychoeducational discourse, an "expert" discourse, an authoritarian discourse, and a discourse of resistance. The psychoeducational discourse is enacted in clips from teachers and other professional educators who use *social languages* that could be characterized as "eduspeak" and "psychobabble" and whose voices are

Table 1

Summary of Findings

	Text 1, Video: Dangers of Social Emotional Learning	Text 2, Speech: School Board Parent Testimony Against Masking	Text 3, Connected Facebook Posts: Criticism of Government for CRT
Key Situated Meanings	Various speakers' voices are contextualized to convey specific *situated meanings* that are likely different from the speakers' original intent.	The children the speaker purports to represent are suffering victims of an oppressive government body (i.e., the school board and the larger forces of government it represents).	"Marxist ideology" means any "divisive concept" the group opposes; "CRT" means any DEI-related theories or initiatives the group opposes.
Key Social Languages	Eduspeak, psychobabble	Civil rights activism, pseudo-legal social language	Political punditry
Key Uses of Intertextuality	Five Hitler quotations	References to "Parents' Bill of Rights," U.S. Constitution, MLK and other speeches	References to writings of Karl Marx, Indiana H.B. 1134
Key Figured World	A hostile, intrusive state is using SEL as a cover for indoctrination of children with the goal of separating them from their families.	A hostile, intrusive state is using its money and power to control citizens through mask mandates.	The hostile state is a ship whose captain has been leading the crew into dangerous waters, and who cannot be trusted to turn the ship around. Conditions are ripe for mutiny.

contextualized to convey specific *situated meanings* that are likely different from the speakers' original intent—meanings about the scope of SEL, its relationship to gender inclusivity, and its overarching goals and purposes. For example, one speaker featured early in the video, an unidentified Black woman (a cut-in of a local school district's web page seems to imply she is a district employee), asks, "How does LGBTQ advocacy, and allyship, and awareness, how does that overlap with social emotional learning and equity?" The words "advocacy," "allyship," and "equity" are all buzzwords associated with modern psychoeducational discourse (Case & Meier, 2014). The clip is thus given a situated meaning that reinforces a connection among SEL, equity, and LGBTQ issues—a pervasive theme throughout the

video and P4PI's materials generally. Another such clip features a White woman declaring that "we can't be silent bystanders, we have to be vocal upstanders." The words "bystander" and "upstander" are also associated with modern psychoeducational discourse (Sugimoto & Carter, 2021). The inclusion of this video here gives it a situated meaning intended to emphasize the idea that public school employees are not "neutral" in the culture wars—that they are, in fact, complicit in the movement to indoctrinate children.

The voices enacting this psychoeducational discourse are interspersed with voices and images enacting an "expert" discourse. These "experts," whose credentials are not provided and who do not cite any academic or scientific studies, use pseudo-academic and pseudo-scientific social languages, along with images of the brain, to promote a counternarrative to the psychoeducational discourse around SEL. For example, immediately after another unidentified educator suggests favorably that the use of the non-binary, gender-inclusive language associated throughout the video with SEL "starts to rewire" the brain, the video cuts to a White woman sitting in front of an official-looking backdrop with images of a Capitol building (zooming in reveals this to be the logo of the Family Research Council, a conservative Christian research organization). This woman speaks of the "destabilization of the entire structure of our means of communicating with each other," using a pseudo-academic social language to introduce an analogy comparing communication to an edifice whose foundations are being destabilized by the use of gender-inclusive language. A segment featuring clips from an instructional video about an SEL assessment website is interrupted by a clip featuring a White woman explaining that "these amateur evaluations will presumably be included in the student's school data file." Her use of words like "amateur," "presumably," and "data file" signal an "expert" discourse in which she positions herself in

contrast to "amateurs" evaluating students' social emotional learning.

All of these clips are interspersed with an authoritarian discourse, enacted through five Hitler quotations in the form of all-caps writing and audio featuring the voice of Hitler. Through these quotations, the video's creators use the tool of *intertextuality* to create a link for viewers between the authoritarian and psychoeducational discourses. For example, the video opens with this quotation, as ominous music plays in the background: "IF THE OLDER GENERATION CANNOT GET ACCUSTOMED TO US, WE SHALL TAKE THEIR CHILDREN AWAY AND REAR THEM TO THE FATHERLAND." This phrase evokes images of Nazis storming homes and separating children from parents, suggesting the threat of a big, all-powerful government acting *in loco parentis*. The video immediately cuts to two clips of speakers (presumably educators), the first discussing "children as young as five or six" who "notice that they feel different," and the second discussing how "taking out that binary [gender language]" starts to "rewire" the brain. A second Hitler quotation, "HOW FORTUNATE FOR GOVERNMENTS THAT PEOPLE THEY ADMINISTER DON'T THINK," which immediately follows the discussion and images of brain rewiring, implies that this "brainwashing" empowers an already powerful government, suggesting that those who buy into SEL are doing so mindlessly. It also echoes an earlier clip of an educator talking about children "parroting" their teacher.

This use of intertextuality, together with the social languages employed by the "experts," contributes to the *figured world*, or overarching narrative, the video's creators are building, a story about state intrusion into the family, in which SEL is a covert means by which an authoritarian government seeks to separate children from their parents by

indoctrinating them with propaganda about gender identity and social justice and gathering personal data about them, thereby rewiring their brains and enlisting them into the service of the state, which can track and control them for life. This sets the stage for a discourse of resistance, in which viewers are called to reject the psychoeducational discourse surrounding SEL and join a movement to preserve morality and save families. For example, the (now former) "CEO" of P4PI argues in the video that there is a "push to change school culture through social emotional learning programs . . . It is used to educate what they call 'the whole child' through language manipulation, role playing, and influence of morals and values." Her use of the word "push" assumes a figured world in which SEL represents state intrusion. Her use of "they" positions advocates of SEL as "other," and along with her air quotes around "the whole child" and her use of the word "manipulation," also contributes to the figured world about SEL representing state intrusion. At the end of the video, this speaker returns to call viewers to action: "Please share this video, and hopefully we can bring some much-needed light to the attention of the indoctrination going on in our school system." The use of the word "indoctrination" underscores the figured world the video has been building, and the call to action enacts the discourse of resistance.

Text 2 (Speech): School Board Parent Testimony

The second text we analyzed is a parent testimony at a school board meeting held in a suburb of Fort Wayne, Indiana, on Feb. 21, 2022, and livestreamed on P4PI's Facebook page (P4PI, 2022a). After the school board invites public comment, the parent, a White woman, reads from her phone. She begins with a phrase whose *intertextuality* evokes many political speeches: "I stand before you today." She then depicts the children of the school district as "suffering" because of mandates that require "wearing a mask for eight hours per day while trying to concentrate and

get an education." She accuses the school board of lying and hypocrisy, observing that mask mandates were not enforced during sports activities and blaming the board for the "mental, social, and psychological damage [that] has been caused for years" by the mandates. In context, her words carry a *situated meaning* whereby, it seems, listeners are meant to construe the children she purports to represent as suffering victims of an oppressive government body (i.e., the school board and the larger forces of government it represents).

This sets the stage for the main *social language* the speaker adopts, that of civil rights activism. "We've sat back for two years while you have put unauthorized masks on our children," she alleges, "and deprived them of their civil liberties, to free them of such devices." Her use of "unauthorized," "civil liberties," and "free them" all suggest this civil rights social language, as does her assertion that "this whole *illegal mask mandate* has been a complete false narrative since day one," a phrase with an intertextual echo of King's (1968) declaration that "we're going into court tomorrow morning to fight this *illegal, unconstitutional injunction*." She also uses pseudoscientific social language when she claims, contrary to overwhelming scientific evidence (CDC, 2021) that "none of these mandates or quarantine measures have ever had scientific backing."

Framing her cause as a civil rights issue and the school board as an oppressive regime enables the speaker to begin building a *figured world* about, as in the video, state intrusion. She tells the school board, "You've allowed our school to push your COVID ideologies on our kids and collect money from the state and other funding to restrain our kids." The phrase "our kids" ("our kids" or "our children" is used 12 times in this short speech) is repeated two more times in the next sentence: "This was not about safety for our kids, a decision you do not have a right to make about our kids." This contributes to the figured

Figure 1

Historical Events Promoting Assimilation
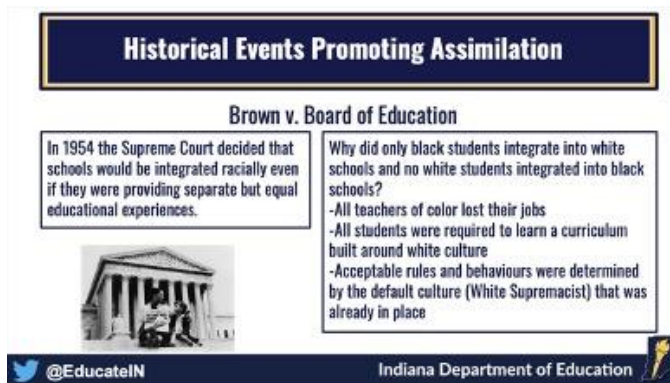
world about state intrusion, emphasizing that the kids belong to "us," not to the state that wishes to co-opt them. The speaker also repeatedly comes back to the role of money in the story she is telling. "This was about money and power over us," she alleges. The school board members she is addressing, in this story, are agents in the government's service, imposing the government's ideology in exchange for money and power over "us," the victims of an intrusive state that wants to "push a narrative." She contrasts this school board with those that supposedly stood up to state intrusion: "Other school boards and administrators did not accept this, and they did not put these tactics on our children."

In this figured world, the state is not, however, just intruding on personal liberty. It has a much more sinister agenda. The parent addressing the school board continues:

> Those of you who do not understand where we're coming from, let me express to you what we've seen and heard happening in our very own school. Hundreds of cases of bullying, from verbal to physical abuse. We've been told to move on, that these were made-up accusations. Do you think that child that is being tormented day after day feels like this

is made up? Also, your children are being taught pornography, sexually graphic content, and [that] they are privileged. That is your right as a parent to decide if you want to teach those types of topics to your kids. CRT and SEL and other pornographic material are being taught in this school, and I have the proof.

Not only is the state intruding to push ideologies about mask mandates; it is also letting "verbal [and] physical abuse" go unchecked, allowing children to be "tormented," and promoting "pornography, sexually graphic content" and theories acknowledging White privilege, such as "CRT and SEL and other pornographic material" (a false equivalence). Addressing these topics, the speaker suggests, is up to parents, but the government has intruded. Here the speaker, in a talk focused mainly on mask mandates, raises the issue of CRT and connects it with the topic of the previous text, SEL.

In connecting SEL, CRT, and mask mandates through a figured world about state intrusion into the most intimate details of individual and family life, P4PI, embodied here by one parent, again enacts a conspiratorial Discourse that seeks to be recognized as a discourse of resistance. With its moralistic and religious overtones (later, the parent refers to "God-given rights"), the language also takes on elements of White Christian nationalist Discourse (Gorski & Perry, 2022). Like the anti-SEL video, the speech ends with a call to action, addressed first to the school board, and then to parents in the audience:

> Action must be taken immediately, or we will take additional steps to request more information, to get all of the curriculum . . . We the people have the power to be heard . . . These rights are also laid out in the Indiana Parenting Bill of Rights, and if you haven't read them, I would encourage you to do so, as

Figure 2

Assimilation in Societal Norms
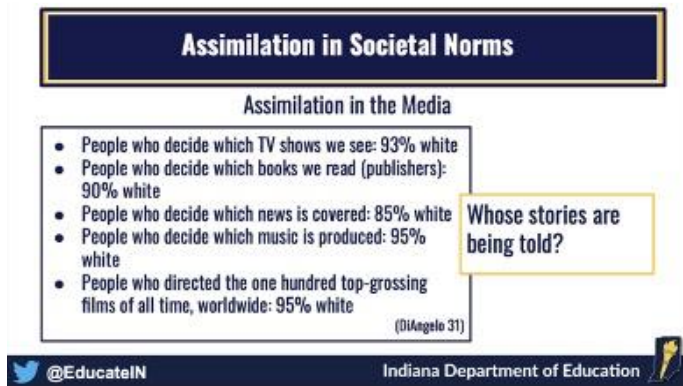
well as the Constitution. And these rights have been violated illegally. Our founding fathers put certain things in place so that elected officials could never overstep their oath and take away our rights as citizens of the United States. It's time as a parent, a citizen of the United States, to stand up for our freedoms and our God-given rights. You now have all been served the federal letters of intent, and you have 72 hours to meet our demands. [This school] belongs to this community, and we're taking it back.

Building on the social language of civil rights activism (and adding a pseudo-legal social language with the redundant allegation of rights "violated illegally"), the speaker here concludes the talk by reasserting parents' rights, claiming a violation of those rights, and demanding redress of those violations with reference to the U.S. Constitution ("We the people have the power to be heard"), the "Parent's Bill of Rights" (a 2021 document created by Republican Indiana Attorney General Todd Rokita), the Constitution, and possible court action ("You now have all been served the federal letters of intent"). These are all further examples of intertextuality that contribute to the figured world the speaker is building. In short, these conspiratorial and White

Christian nationalist Discourses seek to be recognized as discourses of resistance in the tradition of civil rights activists.

Text 3 (Facebook Posts): Government Criticism

The third text we analyzed is a set of P4PI Facebook posts from Feb. 28, 2022, the day that the Indiana Senate killed H.B. 1134, one of various CRT-inspired bills nationwide. The first reposts an unsourced infographic (Figure 1) credited to the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE).

Commenting on the infographic, the P4PI poster writes:

> The Indiana Department of Education, controlled by Governor Eric Holcomb, promotes divisive concepts into [sic] our state's classrooms. Hoosier children deserve better than Marxist ideologies backed by a Communist ideologue at the helm.
>
> Was there ever really going to be any serious effort to stop Marxism in our classrooms this legislative session? Not likely! (P4PI, 2022b)

The "divisive concept" (a phrase borrowed from H.B. 1134) here refers to the idea that Brown v. Board worked more to promote the assimilation of Black students into majority-White culture than to benefit those students. In the next sentence, this "divisive concept" becomes a "Marxist ideology" backed by a "Communist ideologue" (Eric Holcomb, the Republican governor of Indiana), giving the phrase a new *situated meaning*.

The second post, timestamped 15 minutes after the first, shares another unsourced infographic (Figure 2) attributed to the IDOE.

Commenting on this post, the P4PI poster writes:

> The Marxist ideology playing out in Indiana schools comes right from the Indiana Department of Education. Hoosiers no longer have a say at the helm of the IDOE as the Governor now controls this appointed position.

> There was no serious attempt at eliminating the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) being taught in our schools. Nor will there be with these individuals leading at the helm. (P4PI, 2022c)

How these infographics promote "Marxist ideology" is not explained, but the audience is primed to understand the phrase negatively. In this second infographic, in a clear reference to the defeat of H.B. 1134, "CRT" is identified as "Culturally Responsive Teaching," a teaching framework that shares some principles with, but is different from, critical race theory, giving the term "CRT" a new situated meaning. The conflation of various theories related to DEI is not unprecedented: according to the Indianapolis Star, "[H.B. 1134] was inspired by the opposition nationwide of primarily [W]hite, suburban parents to what was called 'critical race theory' but was more often about social emotional learning and diversity, equity and inclusion work" (Herron, 2022).

In both these posts, phrases such as "divisive concepts," "Marxist ideology," and "Communist ideologue" signal a *social language* of political punditry, characterized by outrage (Henry, 2021). The situated meaning given to these phrases work together with the posts' use of that social language and of *intertextuality* (in their allusions to H.B. 1134 and the writings of Karl Marx) to build a *figured world* about the leadership of the IDOE, a stand-in here for the hostile, intrusive government that emerges in the previous texts. The metaphorical phrase "at the helm"

is used three times across the two posts to refer to that leadership; this phrase suggests a figured world in which the hostile state is a ship whose captain has been leading the crew into dangerous waters, and who cannot be trusted to turn the ship around. Conditions are ripe for mutiny. As with the previous texts, the idea that the Republican governor of Indiana is a "Marxist ideologue," with its implication that he is part of a secret liberal plot, exemplifies conspiratorial Discourse. In addition, the "critical" reading of the two state infographics, with its reactionary skepticism of claims that seek to amplify the voices of the marginalized and the absence of evidence challenging those claims, suggests a cosmetically critical Discourse, while the figured world about a ship, with its implicit call for mutiny, seeks to be recognized as a discourse of resistance.

Three Texts, One Figured World

The set of Facebook posts we analyzed above are two of many—P4PI often posts multiple times daily—and scrolling through these posts provides helpful context. Issues related to SEL, and to a lesser extent CRT and public health mandates, arise frequently in the feed, and the poster(s) and commenters clearly see a connection among these issues, as illustrated by the following infographic (Figure 3), posted on April 21, 2022. The infographic suggests that the organization behind CRT, SEL, and CSE (comprehensive sex education) is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the main institution also responsible for mask mandates. The infographic is instructive because it demonstrates the conspiratorial thinking and Discourse at the heart of P4PI and similar organizations. While the CDC is hardly a secret organization, its alleged mission to indoctrinate public school children through SEL, CRT, and CSE (an allegation for which no credible evidence is provided) is not widely acknowledged and therefore suggests a covert operation. One of the key findings that emerged from our DA of the video,

Figure 3

The Triangle of SEL, CSE, and CRT
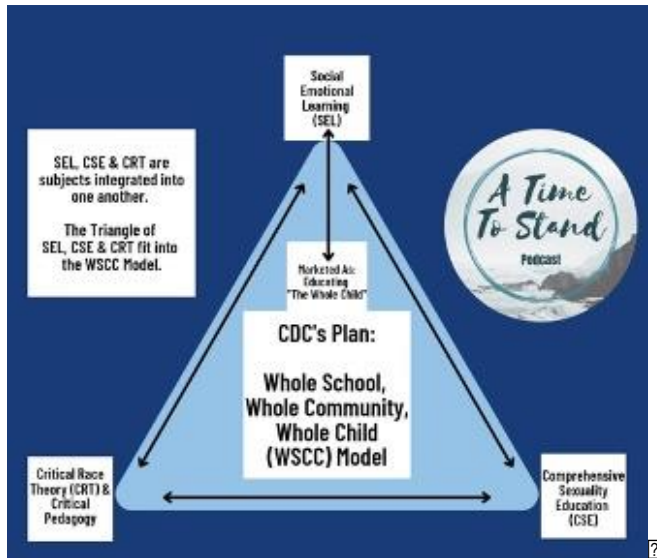
speech, and Facebook posts is a compelling master narrative, a *figured world* about state intrusion in which SEL, CRT, and mask mandates represent strands of a web woven by a powerful government that has gained control of public schooling, a web of ideologies related to race, gender/sexuality, and mind/body control that threatens to endanger, entrap and even "groom" (to use a term that occurs frequently throughout P4PI's Facebook posts) "our children." This figured world reveals much about the values, goals, methods, and power dynamics of P4PI and similar groups. In the next section, we discuss common themes that emerged from all three texts in our second pass-through of the data.

Discussion

Given the conspiratorial, Christian nationalist, and cosmetically critical Discourses connecting SEL, CRT, and public health mandates within the figured world P4PI has constructed, here we revisit our research questions to identify what our critical analysis of P4PI discourse in all three texts reveals about the group's values, goals, methods, and power dynamics (RQ1). Then we consider the epistemic beliefs of P4PI and

similar groups engaged in "post-truth" discourse on education (RQ2).

P4PI's Values

The discourse seeking to be recognized as a discourse of resistance in these texts (which emerges from the figured world about a hostile, powerful state) reveals, through what it opposes, many of the group's values. Its opposition to SEL, which it sees as pushing a dangerous gender ideology and acting *in loco parentis* to indoctrinate children about sex, suggests a commitment to the "family values" long associated with traditional religious expression and, more recently, with the religious right: heteronormativity, gender binarism, abstinence outside of marriage, and the importance of the traditional nuclear family as a fundamental building block of society. Its anti-mask stance implies a strong belief in the value of personal liberty over and above collective cooperation, another value associated with the political (and, more recently, religious) right (Gorski & Perry, 2022). Finally, the group's rejection of CRT as a "Marxist ideology" reveals a value system that dismisses notions of systemic racism and White power and privilege as anti-capitalist and therefore anti-American. This value system, too, is associated with the political and, increasingly, religious right (Gorski & Perry, 2022).

P4PI's Goals

While P4PI and groups like it may have broader goals not explicitly identified in their materials (including, perhaps, weakening or abolishing public education, or establishing a religious state), certain goals are explicitly stated or implied in the calls to action emerging from their discourse. According to its stated mission, the group "informs, advocates, and engages Hoosiers to protect children from harmful agendas saturating the education system" (P4PI, n.d.-a). Its stated goals also include "work[ing] to bring awareness of and stop the conditioning/grooming of

vulnerable children from all programs including Comprehensive Sexual Education and Social Emotional Learning," and "stand[ing] up against the overwhelming leverage the teacher's unions have over policies and procedures in the schools" (P4PI, n.d.-b). Our DA suggests that additional goals, implied in the calls to action in each text and rooted in the figured world of state intrusion, include ending now relatively commonplace public school practices such as (1) giving SEL surveys, (2) providing instruction on gender and sexuality, (3) critically examining issues of race and White privilege in the curriculum, and (4) requiring students to wear masks to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

P4PI's Methods

Our analysis reveals various methods P4PI uses to accomplish these goals. Clearly, the group uses a variety of media, including video, social media, infographics, and public forums. The group also shows an ability to adopt various social languages—eduspeak, pseudo-academic language, pseudo-scientific language, the language of civil rights activism, and the language of political punditry—and adapt them to their purposes. The group's use of these social languages, along with its explicit and implicit intertextual references to Hitler, Marx, King Jr., the Constitution, and various legal documents, contributes to what is arguably its most successful strategy: the creation of a figured world of state intrusion, a compelling master narrative. It is a story that offers its listeners a sense of purpose: their history, culture, values, beliefs, and children are under attack by a hostile, godless state, whose agents are everywhere from the CDC to the school board, from the state DOE to the neighborhood school. The government's goal, in this narrative, is separation through indoctrination: it seeks to control children through data collection and propaganda disguised as benevolent educational theory, through "grooming" (using sexual and even "pornographic" material to

make children vulnerable to transgressive sexual behavior and predation), and through the kind of social control exemplified by mask mandates. By controlling children in these ways, the state can separate them from their parents in order to enlist them in its services and win the culture war. Those who hear this story are challenged to stand up against the oppressive state, to fight for their children and their country before both are taken away from them.

P4PI's Power Dynamics

Undoubtedly, part of what makes this narrative compelling to its listeners is its positioning of them in opposition to "power": in this case, the alleged power of the intrusive state. It does this, as our analysis shows, by adopting a civil rights social language—the organization explicitly identifies itself as engaging "the civil rights issue of our time" (P4PI, n.d.-b)—and a discourse of resistance. The group's "cosmetic criticality" (Bacon, 2018, p. 4) also emerges here: it uses the language of criticality, urging its listeners to challenge the perceived power of the state embodied in school programs, officials, and teachers. Our analysis has focused on the group's appeals to fear (conspiratorial Discourses), but P4PI also appeals to its listeners' skepticism of institutions and their personal beliefs, appeals that echo cosmetically critical Discourses and Christian nationalist Discourses. A cosmetically critical Discourse emerges, for example, in the set of Facebook posts that provide a "critical" reading of the IDOE infographics—a sort of "reading against the text" (Janks, 2019, p. 561)—partly by calling attention to the power of the institution (the IDOE) purportedly responsible for the text and raising skepticism about that institution (suggesting it is under the control of a "communist ideologue"). A Discourse of White Christian Nationalism—defined by Gorski and Perry (2022) as a "constellation of beliefs" that "reflect a desire to restore and privilege the mythos, values, identity, and authority of a particular ethnocentric

tribe [of White Christians]" (p. 14)—emerges implicitly throughout the texts we analyzed: for example, in the video clip of the woman from the conservative Christian Family Research Council discussing the destabilization of language, in the call to parents at a school board meeting to "stand up for our freedoms and our God-given rights," and in the accusations of "Marxism"—code for "Godlessness" (Aiello, 2005)—in the Facebook posts. A key belief of White Christian nationalism is that "[W]hites and Christians are the most persecuted groups in America" (Gorski & Perry, 2022, p.8). This "siege mentality" is reflected in the way P4PI positions itself and its audience in relationship to power through its use of a civil rights social language and a discourse of resistance.

P4PI's Epistemic Beliefs

One framing of "post-truth" defines the phenomenon as "the popular and often right-wing embracing of (and misunderstanding [of]) post-modernism's challenge to the objective nature of truth/Truth" (Thomas, 2018, p. 7). In this framing, post-truth "is more akin to 'the truth is whatever I say it is regardless of any evidence or the credibility of evidence'" (Thomas, 2018, p. 8). While this may be an oversimplification, the absence of credible evidence supporting the claims made in the P4PI texts we analyzed does offer insight into the group's epistemic beliefs. These claims, as our analysis has shown, include the following: (1) SEL is a covert tool of the state designed to "groom," collect data on, and indoctrinate children with the goal of separating them from their parents; (2) mask mandates have no scientific value but rather represent a deliberate government effort to control and oppress ordinary people, including children; (3) "CRT"—used by the group to refer to critical race theory, culturally responsive teaching, and other DEI efforts—is a Marxist ideology that has infiltrated public schools with the goal of undermining capitalism and patriotism; and (4) SEL, mask mandates, and CRT are all integral components of the CDC's "Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child" (WSCC) model, which actually represents a covert, coordinated effort to separate children from their parents by indoctrinating them into liberal ideologies. In the texts we examined, no credible evidence or logical arguments are offered to support any of these claims. Instead, the claims emerge in figured worlds built through the association of words, images, and ideas.

> **"Many of these groups are well-funded and politically influential and have sought, with varying levels of success, to shape the agendas of representative bodies from school boards to state and even federal legislatures."**

The absence of evidence and logical argumentation suggests that the epistemic beliefs of P4PI, groups like it, and adherents of these groups have little in common with empiricism or rationalism, the ways of knowing underlying western science and philosophy throughout the modern era. Indeed, with its skepticism of institutions and its challenge of the perceived power of the intrusive state, the group seems, on the surface, to share more with postmodern and critical epistemologies than it does with modern ones. The general consensus of educators and psychologists on the value of SEL (Durlak et al., 2011), the broad consensus of scientists on the efficacy of masks in slowing the spread of COVID-19 (Feng et al., 2020), the growing consensus of many sociologists and historians on the central role of systemic racism in America's history and contemporary culture (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Feagin, 2013)—all are rejected, not on the basis of evidence or argumentation, but on the basis of power and group identity. These consensus views are held by the "elite," those perceived by P4PI and other groups like it to have ascended to cultural and

institutional power in the academy, the media, and government. And like teachers and scholars trained in critical literacy, P4PI asks its audience—its students, so to speak—to adopt a highly skeptical stance toward these views and those who hold them, to challenge their authority, and to work to return power—and truth—to "ordinary people," i.e., to the White, culturally Christian men and their families who see cultural and institutional power as a God-given right that has been taken from them.

In the final section, we discuss the implications of our analysis for critical scholars, teacher educators, and those concerned about the future of public education and discourse, while exploring this cosmetic affinity between post-truth and critical epistemologies in a little more detail.

Implications and Conclusions

Implications for Critical Scholars

Given the challenge these post-truth discourses pose to institutions such as academia and public education, it is enormously important for scholars, particularly those in the critical literacy community, to be aware of the values, goals, methods, power dynamics, and epistemic beliefs of P4PI and the many like-minded post-truth groups currently active in communities across the United States. Many of these groups are well-funded and politically influential and have sought, with varying levels of success, to shape the agendas of representative bodies from school boards to state and even federal legislatures (Oliphant, 2022). Since "critical literacies are acts of political praxis that lead to material improvements among those marginalized by systems of dominance" (Bacon, 2018, p. 12), scholars and practitioners of critical literacy must take note of and formulate a response to groups like P4PI whose agendas threaten to further marginalize the historically marginalized—students of color, gay and transgender students, immunocompromised students, etc.

However, as Bacon's (2018) analysis shows, it is not enough for the critical literacy community to critique groups like P4PI. Critical scholars must also "critique the field of critical literacies, the ends it aims to achieve, and the goals it has achieved through its popularization" (p. 13). In other words, the post-truth challenge presents an opportunity for the field of critical literacy to adopt a critical stance toward itself. Bacon (2018) suggests several starting places for this self-critique, including what he sees as the movement's loss of focus on the liberatory goals of critical literacy, its absence of nuance in the framing of oppressor-oppressed dichotomies, its tendency to inadvertently promote deficit narratives through an excessive focus on oppression, and its insufficient attention to systems and institutions. We would add to these the need for a re-examination and clarification of the postmodern epistemologies that inform much of contemporary critical literacy, which render a philosophical critique of post-truth epistemic beliefs difficult at best and hypocritical or incoherent at worst. Freire (1970/2000), to whom many critical scholars trace their academic lineage, called for "the objective transformation of reality," warning of the danger of "subjective immobility" and arguing that "the denial of objectivity in analysis or action, resulting in a subjectivism which leads to solipsistic positions, denies action itself by denying objective reality" (p. 50). While critical scholars may be loath to speak in terms of "objectivity," the question of a shared understanding of reality and its relationship to epistemology must be grappled with in an effort to meet the post-truth challenge.

Implications for Teacher Educators

We are both literacy educators who are preparing future literacy educators to work with students in PK-12 public schools. We have witnessed the impact of the discourse of groups like P4PI on our students. For example, while P4PI was testifying on H.B. 1134 at the

Indiana legislature about the dangers of SEL and CRT, one of the student teachers under Ben's (first author) supervision was pressured to write an apologetic email to a parent for daring to have students read a short story narrated by a possibly gay character, while another hesitated to implement a unit critically examining race because of all the parents who have demanded that teachers at the school "will not teach CRT." Two student teachers from that program quit during the course of the semester, and others started rethinking their future professions. Still others are proceeding with caution. New teachers are entering an environment that is often fraught with political and even sometimes physical peril. Teacher educators must find ways to address the post-truth challenge and prepare preservice teachers to meet it.

In literacy education, preparing preservice teachers might mean a greater focus on critical media literacy and digital literacies, perhaps even the creation of new courses that deal specifically with issues related to the post-truth condition, epistemology, social media, disinformation, and political polarization in their future classrooms (Crockett, et al., 2011; Lankshear & Knobel, 2008; Passe, et al., 2018; Smith & Parker, 2021; Thomas, 2018). The problem is so complex that it will require a multidisciplinary approach involving teacher educators and researchers across subject areas, as well as other stakeholders such journalists, community activists, medical professionals, and religious leaders concerned about the issue. An approach involving such a broad coalition will require a stance of epistemic humility. In critical theory, this usually refers to the acknowledgement that our ways of knowing are not universally normative (Allen, 2017). It may even require, as Haidt (2022) suggests, "building trust and friendship across the political divide" (para. 86)—reaching out to work with people, especially in our own communities, with whom we have deep political, philosophical, and moral disagreements but who share a concern for equity, truth, and freedom. More immediately, teacher educators across disciplines should work together to design lessons that engage students with these issues.

Concluding Thoughts

A growing number of Americans have lost trust in the stories told by the academy and the American public education system and are placing their trust in a competing story, a dark tale about the intrusion of a powerful and hostile state, its grooming and sexualization of children, its oppression of ordinary people, its destabilization of language, and the resulting decline of freedom. Educators, including literacy scholars and teachers, must work with a broad coalition of stakeholders to shape a narrative that is more compelling and more hopeful. The future of public education depends upon it.

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Neoliberalism, Critical Literacy, and the Everyday: A Post-Qual Informed Multi-Genre Inquiry

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Abstract: Weaving together post-qualitative theories, critical scholarship, and my own lived experiences spanning over 30 years in Mainland China, Hong Kong SAR, and the U.S., this multi-genre inquiry explores how critical literacy practices and what has come to be known as neoliberalism are entangled in what we do, how we get to know, and who we become in our everyday lives. Thinking with Barad and St. Pierre, I write this inquiry as a way of mapping, moving, and becoming, with which I hope to create entry points to (1) engaging with the barely intelligible and the *everyday* and (2) considering what some of the hegemonic discourses *do* to us and what we can *do* with them.

Keywords: critical literacy, discourse studies, multi-genre inquiry, neoliberalism, post-qualitative study

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I dedicate this article to my brother Leo
and billions of brilliant youth in this world
仍然自由自我
永遠高唱我歌
走遍千里

Introduction

Why Does It Matter?

Many writers who tried to detail what is detailed in this paper were either imprisoned or gone. The definite majority of those who have experienced what is written in this paper were never given a chance to go to college or even high school, let alone have the privilege of telling their stories. And these untold stories from the past are still happening around the world in billions of human beings' lives.

Neoliberalism and Critical Literacy

Over the past three decades, what has been known as neoliberal discourse has become an "everyday discourse" (Leitner et al., 2007) circulating not only in political economic practices and mainstream corporate media but also in various education systems across the world (e.g., Bhattacharya, 2013; Chang & McLaren, 2018; Chun, 2015, 2017; Coles, 2019; Flores, 2013; Harklau & Coda, 2019; Kubota, 2011, 2016). With an increasingly commodified and privatized education model, neoliberal practices such as high-stakes testing, ranking and elite schooling, value-added measures in teacher evaluation, and the search for the "best practices" have shaped and will continue shaping what we do, how we get to know, and who we become in detrimental ways. Behind these practices are the diminished focus on our social-emotional and physical well-being (Jones, 2014), the reduction of active political citizenship to extreme passivity and political complacency (Brown, 2005), and the construction of the entrepreneurial self that renders all individuals as competitive capitals and reduces human capacities to commercial

algorithms (Chang & McLaren, 2018; Foucault, 2008). As Jones (2014) noted, one of the things neoliberalism has brought to us is the "one-size-fits-all curriculum and accountability system that wraps its tentacles around expectations, values, language, practices, and what used to be called 'education'" (p. 124).

To address these inherently complex issues, scholars in the field of language and literacy education took up various forms of critical literacy pedagogies/practices (CLP) to create a venue for students and educators to engage with and contest the neoliberal discourse in school contexts and beyond (e.g., Block et al., 2012; Chang, 2021; Chun, 2013, 2015; Clarke & Morgan, 2011; McLaren, 2005; Jones, 2014, 2020). As a critical approach towards both our everyday and disciplinary literacy practices, CLP comes with a strong critical self-reflexive stance and is often used to (1) draw upon teachers and students' shared and distinct lived experiences, identifications, and cultural epistemologies in dialogical responses to textual/visual/material resources; (2) interrogate multiple viewpoints and address assumptions and views toward taken-for-granted textual/visual representations, materiality, and larger discourses in specific sociocultural and situational contexts; and (3) address issues around power/power relations in both classroom contexts and our society at large.[1]

When it comes to neoliberal discourses⟷practices, for example, Chun's (e.g., 2013, 2015) ethnographic study examines how CLP supported students and their teacher in addressing discourses of neoliberal identities, globalization, and consumerism in an English language classroom in Canada. Coming from both critical (e.g., Freire, 1970; Gramsci, 1971;

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[1] The definition of what's been called "critical literacy" varies. Lewison et al.'s (2002) provided a good overview of some of the early CLP works. What I provide here are some key CLP components that are relevant to this inquiry, rather than a working definition of what "critical literacy" *is*. Heeding posthuman onto-epistemologies, this inquiry looks at what CLP *does*.

Halliday, 1978, 1994) and poststructural (e.g., Foucault, 1979, 1980) perspectives, CLP in Chun's work focused on the interrogation of multi-semiotic meaning-making processes and how certain neoliberal textual/visual representations achieved a taken-for-granted status in local←→global contexts. Situated in the field of literacy education and teacher education, Jones (2014) brought together voices from researchers and teaching practitioners in the U.S., showing possible ways in which students' lives, interests, and critical events in our world can be brought into classroom contexts to enact CLP. Thinking with posthuman and new material theories (e.g., Barad, 2007; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), Jones (2014, 2020) shed light on teaching toward openness and solidarity—toward cultivating a critical way of being that stands in opposition to the neoliberal push in education. With a rare, close look at the sociopolitical and historical contexts of Mainland China and Hong Kong SAR,[2] Chang and McLaren (2018; Chang, 2021) discussed the development and potential of critical literacy theories and methodologies in relation to classroom pedagogies, ongoing sociopolitical movements, and junctures and ruptures of neoliberal education in these contexts.

This Inquiry

Weaving together theories from post-qualitative (post-qual) traditions (e.g., Barad, 1999, 2007, 2017; Foucault, 1970, 1987; St. Pierre, 2011, 2018, 2019), critical scholarship (e.g., Brown, 2005, 2015; Janks, 2010; Jones, 2014; Lefebvre, 1987), and my own lived experiences spanning over 30 years in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and the U.S., this multi-genre inquiry explores how CLP and some of the dominant hegemonic practices of neoliberalism, both discursive and material, are entangled in the nexus of doing, knowing, and be(com)ing in our *everyday*

(Lefebvre, 1987, 1988). In the pages that follow, I first introduce a *post-qual informed multi-genre approach* towards the inquiry and the *everyday*. I then lay out the nonlinear "structure" of the inquiry through an arts-based mapping (Zhang, 2020) of its trajectories and unbounded timeframe. Following inquiry sections, a brief reflective and call-for-action section is provided as both the coda of the inquiry and the overture for the risky, surprising, and much-needed work that is yet to (be)come.

Post-Qual Informed Multi-Genre Inquiry and the Everyday

A major challenge in addressing neoliberal rationality and practices is that, often viewed as the defining political and economic order of our time, the construct neoliberalism itself is rhizomatic and fluid. It travels across time, space, and sector; it transforms and adapts to specific sociocultural and situational contexts (Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017; Chun, 2017); and even its very existence is at times questionable (e.g., Brown, 2015; Clarke, 2008; Peck, 2010). As Brown (2015) pointed out, it is almost a scholarly commonplace that "there is temporal and geographical variety in [neoliberalism's] discursive formulations . . . and material practices," which "exceeds the recognition of neoliberalism's multiple and diverse origins or the recognition that neoliberalism is a term mainly deployed by its critics" (p. 20).

In this paper, it is the questioning of neoliberalism's intelligibility and materiality that calls into being what I term *post-qual informed multi-genre inquiry*, an inquiry approach that refuses "methodologies;" an approach that supports my ongoing, multi-layered engagements with neoliberalism as *a loose and shifting signifier* (Brown, 2015); an approach that

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[2] After the "handover" from the U.K. to China in 1997, what was known as British-Hong Kong became what is now called Hong Kong SAR (Special Administrative Region). Hereafter I use the term "Hong Kong" to refer to Hong Kong SAR.

might move both the readers and myself towards the barely intelligible.

Post-Qualitative Inquiry

An introduction to a post-qual informed multi-genre approach is perhaps best begun with the explanation of what has come to be known as *post-qualitative inquiry* (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; St. Pierre, 2011, 2018, 2021). Since post-qual scholarship itself refuses categories and underlying structures, the term *post qualitative*/*post-qual* in this paper refers to a body of literature loosely situated in/around poststructuralism, posthumanism, new materialism, and other un-categorized onto-epistemological orientations. A post-qual inquiry, thus, should not be thought of as a certain kind of methodology nor analytical tools (e.g., St. Pierre, 2018, 2021). Rather, it is a way to write and think with theories while engaging with, but not trying to (re)present, complex things in life (e.g., Jackson, 2017; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Kuby, 2019). Drawing primarily upon poststructural scholarship (e.g., Foucault, 1970, 1987; Derrida, 1972; Deleuze, 1968; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), post-qualitative inquiry deals with a variety of issues such as those around language, power, discourse, and agency. It supports writers in resisting/interrogating taken-for-granted onto-epistemological arrangements and producing openings for thinking the un-thinkable, facing the incalculable, and "responsibly [re]imagining and intervening in the configurations of power" (Barad, 2007, p. 246).

What post-qual inquiry does and its onto-epistemologies are the major sources of inspiration, strengths, and thinking that support the coming-

> **"What post-qual inquiry does and its onto-epistemologies are the major sources of inspiration, strengths, and thinking that support the coming-together of different genres and theories in this paper as a way to engage with the "unintelligible:" things in life that kick back."**

together of different genres and theories in this paper as a way to engage with the "unintelligible:" things in life that kick back (Barad, 1999), theories and constructs that are still in-the-making (St. Pierre, 2018), and the messy, perplexing trajectories and points in the *everyday* (Lefebvre, 1987, 1988) that reject any pre-existing analytical frameworks or genres of inquiry. Those aforementioned issues that post-qual inquiry deals with (e.g., language, power, discourse, and agency) are at stake, in one way or another, throughout this inquiry.

The Everyday, the Material←→Discursive, and the Coming-together

Informed by Lefebvre's (e.g., 1987, 1988) critique on the *everyday* and *everydayness*, this inquiry situates every homogenous, repetitive, and fragmentary moment in our everyday lives as a nodal point of a dynamic, un-finalizable network of our embodied cultural, historical experiences at different times and places— where we lived and were (re)produced by the larger neoliberal discourse in ways that we might not be aware of. Lefebvre (1988) underscores that in what he called the "modern world," the *everyday* has been transformed from a "subject" with possible subjectivity to an "object" of social organization. As an effort to (un)make sense of, or at least engage with this *everyday*—this complex network of our embodied cultural and historical experiences, I view my writing/doing of the inquiry not so much as certain type of analysis or argumentation. Instead, it is more of a *material*←→*discursive* (Barad, 2003, 2007) practice, happening at the intersection of our nonlinear trajectories of discourse and actions across time,
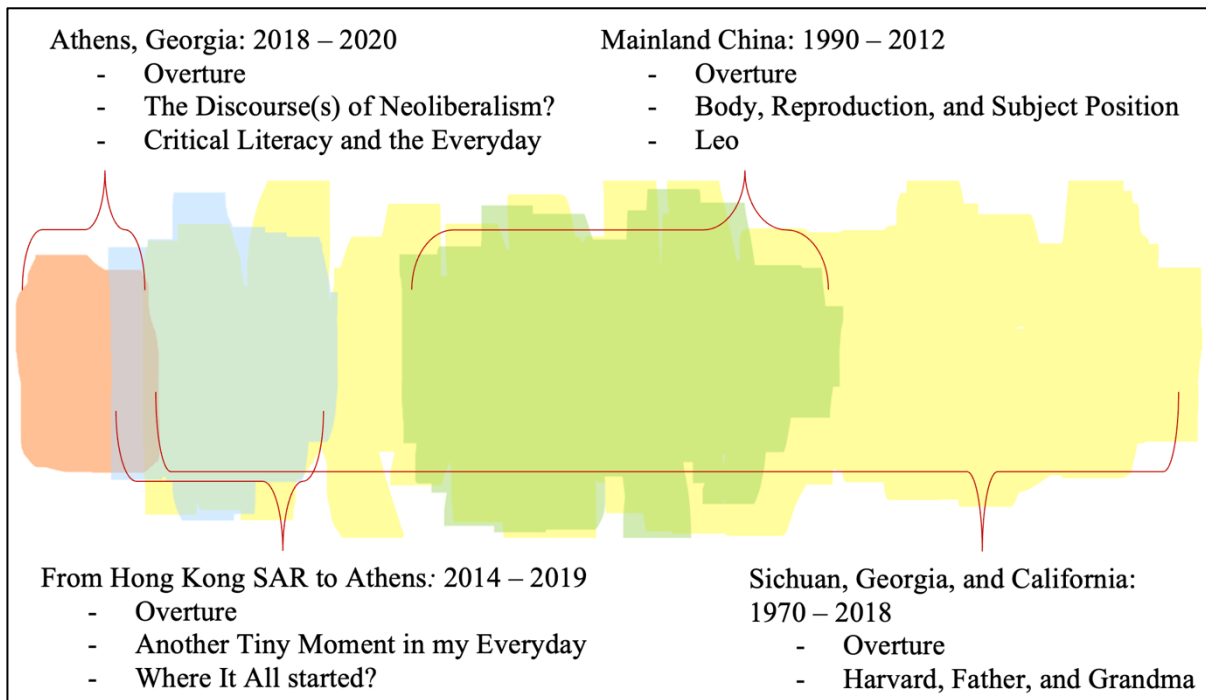
place, and media (Zhang, 2022). The inquiry is therefore written in a nonlinear manner with constant shift of story timelines, sites, and genres and theories involved in different sections. I see this form of inquiry as a way of mapping, moving, and becoming—rather than arriving or delivering. I hope to create entry points for both the readers and my *self* to (1) engage with the barely intelligible and the *everyday* and (2) reflect on what some of the hegemonic discourses *do* to us and what we can *do* with them.

The construct material←→discursive (Barad, 2003, 2007) discussed above conceptualizes the discourse(s) and the materiality as always already *entangled* with each other. Inasmuch as this *entanglement* (Barad, 2007) emphasizes the lack of "an independent, self-contained existence" (p. ix) rather than the connectedness of two independent entities, neither discourse(s) nor materiality can pre-

exist their interactions: they only "emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating" (p. ix). It is therefore always the material←→discursive, not material *and* discursive. And thus, in this inquiry, I look at not just how neoliberal discourses function, but how they materialize. I ask what do things *do*, rather than what do they mean. These questions shift our lines of thought to "not only how discursive performative speech acts or repetitive bodily actions produce subjectivity, but also how subjectivity can be understood as a set of linkages and connections with other things and other bodies" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 113). Therefore, I see what we do, who we are/become, and "our" agency as always produced, contested, and reproduced as we *intra-act* with the *human and nonhuman others* (Barad, 1999, 2003, 2007), be they people we ran into on a university campus, names and test scores displayed in a public space, or various forms of material objects we grew

Figure 1

Nonlinear mapping of the inquiry

Athens, Georgia: 2018 – 2020
- Overture
- The Discourse(s) of Neoliberalism?
- Critical Literacy and the Everyday

Mainland China: 1990 – 2012
- Overture
- Body, Reproduction, and Subject Position
- Leo

From Hong Kong SAR to Athens: 2014 – 2019
- Overture
- Another Tiny Moment in my Everyday
- Where It All started?

Sichuan, Georgia, and California: 1970 – 2018
- Overture
- Harvard, Father, and Grandma

up with. All these real-life examples/experiences are detailed in this inquiry.

Mapping the Inquiry

The inquiry is composed of four interconnected sections and employs various forms of dialogues, narratives, poems, images, and analytical summaries. Due to the unique genre(s) of the inquiry, many key analytical/theoretical explanations are included as footnotes. The four sections are interconnected in the sense that both their storylines and textual/visual content are always already entangled with one another. For example, people and things involved in the first section can only exist in their intra-activity[3] (Barad, 2003, 2007) with my lived experiences in Hong Kong discussed in the third section. That is, none of these things would have happened without my experiences in Hong Kong, and what I have done and seen in Hong Kong can never be re-membered or re-turned to (Barad, 2017) without what came after my time in Hong Kong. To create multiple entry points to these sections, these material⟵⟶discursive trajectories of my/our everyday, each inquiry section starts with an overture that functions as a transition and rhymes with the flow of the section.

As shown in Figure 1, with the digital oil pastel drawing of different colors merging into/intra-acting with each other, the image visually foregrounds the entangled nature of people, times, places, and objects involved in the inquiry. Moving toward various directions, the lines and shapes of these colors[4] indicate the unbounded, nonlinear timeframe of mapping. Things and matter(ing)s discussed in the

inquiry are therefore still moving, growing, and in-the-making—toward the past, the future, and the unknown.

Athens, Georgia: 2018 – 2020

Overture

". . . those tiny understandings
that take place between two or more bodies
in a moment in time
—or across time—
hold the very wisdom we may need . . . in education"
(Jones, 2014, p. 2).

The Discourse(s) of Neoliberalism

"Yo whatup? Wanna play together?"
"Sure. You got other people coming?"
"Naaa just me kicking around."

In the summer of 2018, I ran into David and Raul[5] at the university soccer field and started playing soccer with them. We became good friends. Both David and Raul grew up in Athens and graduated from a local high school in 2019. Soon after David went to university, he started picking up voices from both sides—peers supporting Bernie and peers rooting for Trump. In the fall semester break of 2020, I had dinner with David and Raul at a local Asian buffet restaurant, during which David asked me about my thoughts on Bernie and socialism. He told me that at the university, he met a lot of people who support Bernie without knowing what socialism is or what Bernie has proposed, which "kind of pissed him off."

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[3] The term intra-act/intra-action/intra-activity (Barad, 2003, 2007) is different from interact/interaction because, from a posthuman perspective, things do not pre-exist their "interactions," rather, they only exist in their intra-activities and are always (re)produced differently as they intra-act with one another.

[4] These "lines and shapes" were never there to represent things/times: they are only (re)produced as different

colors *intra-act* with one another, with the "white" background. That is, I did not draw lines/shapes, we see lines/shapes only because there are different colors intra-acting with one another. The use of colors is thus not for the representation of meanings or esthetic purposes.

[5] All names, aside from the author's, are pseudonyms.

> *"Socialism is communism right? Like in China?"*

David brought up this question at the beginning of our conversation, expecting me to "say something." I then went on to explain "well not necessarily. . . " Drawing upon scholarly work I have read on capitalism and neoliberalism (e.g., Brown, 2005, 2015; Chang & McLaren, 2018; Chun, 2017) and my own lived experiences back in Mainland China and Hong Kong, I tried to explain that socialism does not "equate" to the concept known as "communism," and what has been going on in Mainland China over the past three decades is absolutely not the socialism that has long been in conversation here in the U.S..

> *Maverick (Mav): "You know, in capitalism you work for eight hours per day, five days a week, you feel like you got paid for eight hours, but maybe you just got paid for four hours—whatever you've produced in the other four hours were taken away by people like the company owners or capitalists."*
> *David: "So do you think this is good or not?"*
> *Mav: "Well you know, there are problems. For example, do everyday people have a say in terms of how much being taken away? Is it just a couple of company owners making decisions on their own? Or maybe a lot of us are not even aware of this? Like in China I felt like my parents only got paid for ONE hour out of what they've produced in eight hours—the government is super rich but everyday people are like earning nothing."*

Both David and Raul knew that my father is one of the best mechanical engineers in a huge government-owned company but has been earning around 1000USD per month over the past ten years (2010-2020)—it looked like my explanation made some sense. I then briefly mentioned the "abandonment of any socialist aims by the Communist Party in China"

(Chun, 2017, p. 43) and the transition from "private-owned capitalism" to "state-owned capitalism" in the Soviet Union (Chun, 2017, p. 12).
David looked very satisfied.

I thought we might then switch to other topics such as the NBA playoff-bubble and our upcoming pool-hangout. However, David moved on with other questions:

> *"Why do you think people support Bernie?*
> *Look at Sweden, do you want Bernie to tax us 60% on what we earn?*
> *. . .*
> *"Sweden has ZERO class mobility right?*
> *Look, we have high class mobility here and our economy is good. All-time high.*
> *So capitalism is good, right?"*
> *. . .*
> *"With socialism, you work hard, work your butt off and earn the money,*
> *become a billionaire,*
> *but then they are gonna tax you 60%?*
> *They wanna take away your money.*
> *Do you like that?"*
> *. . .*

I tried to address some of his questions:

> *"well, I wouldn't say capitalism is good or bad, I think it works for some but not the others"*
> *. . .*
> *"Well...I don't know much about Sweden, but Bernie's not gonna be taxing all of us 60% right? Maybe just some of us, and maybe 40% or less?"*
> *. . .*
> *"Well, I'm not an expert of all of this, I agree with you. Like I wouldn't say 'capitalism' is a 'dirty' word, but I think there are always things to improve you know. . ."*

I became less and less talkative.

Maybe I was getting sleepy. Or maybe it was the food coma, which happens a lot when I have access to an all-you-can-eat meal. At that moment, I felt that it was just a bunch of random things quickly going through my mind: Those ideas that David picked up from his peers—are they drawing upon the so-called "American Dream" and seeing the government/tax as a threat/problem? So government should stay out of the "free market?" I certainly don't want "them" (who? the government?) to take away my money— but am I positioned as a potential "billionaire?" Are we rooting for my 1000USD monthly stipend? Or for those who managed to become billionaires? How many people will get taxed 60% or even 40%? Are we talking about the everyday people, working or middle class families, or the 1%?

I did not bring up any of these thoughts. At the end of the dinner, I asked David if he had voted yet:

> Mav: *"oh by the way, did you vote?"*
> David: *"Yes of course."*
> Mav: *"good good! Always important to go out there and vote!"*
> David: *"Yeah sirrrrr!"*

Critical Literacy and the Everyday

Maybe it was not the food coma.

That day, I was perhaps just unsure what to say or how to say what I wanted to say—it was a buffet restaurant, and we were just friends hanging out. The entanglements of space, place, body, and discourse, at that very moment, made it challenging for me to keep the conversation going. Thinking with Barad (2003, 2007), I see intra-actions like these I had with David and the material surroundings in my *everyday* (Lefebvre, 1987, 1988) as part of our shared

material←→discursive trajectories, along which what we do (social actions) and who we become (social identities/relations) are produced, contested, and reproduced.

> Reflecting on the *intra-activity* and the *everyday*,
> I wondered
> if I, as a classroom teacher and researcher,
> would be able to address what was called into being that night?
> Are there ways in which I could open up the floor for my students
> and bring in these critical/teachable moments?
> Will some of my students just "get pissed off" and walk out of my classroom?
> Will they ever come back?

And from the perspective of critical literacy as a collaborative (be)coming together (Chun, 2015; Jones, 2014), one could ask: what kinds of social identities and social relations (ways of becoming) are (re)produced/contested if my students never come back?

I am fortunate to have David and Raul as friends, and I appreciate those tiny but intimate moments we had. As Janks (2010) noted, there is a need for teachers to take and explain their critical stances on certain texts and discourses erupting in classroom contexts, which also ties into Freire and Macedo's (1987) work on reading the word and the world in ways that are interconnected with one another.

> I have always known that
> when I walk into a classroom,
> there could be David, Raul,
> and many others,
> asking me questions and wanting me to talk about it:
> "Maverick you are the teacher,

tell us what's going on out there!?
Tell us why is this happening!?"

From Hong Kong SAR to Athens: 2014 – 2019

Overture

*"Looking,
like writing,
is shaped by social and political contexts in which we live
and crafted through our habits of attention and inattention—
habits formed through power relations
circulating in the material conditions of our lives
and discourses in our society."*
(Jones, 2014, p. 126)

Another Tiny Moment in my *Everyday*

Wait isn't Maverick from China?
When did he move to the States?
He's just teaching English grammar to ESL students right?
Wait he knows American politics?
Why is he interested in neoliberalism and critical literacy?[6]

I am not sure what people would think if they overheard my conversation with David and Raul, or if they saw me going door to door canvassing with local county commissioners for the Georgia senate runoff. I did, though, meet and chat with many people who were surprised and/or confused by the ways in which I talk, my social media posts, and basically—my ways of doing and be(com)ing.

For example, a few months after the start of my Ph.D. program, I ran into a new acquaintance, Sarah, at the university parking lot and had a quick conversation with her. Sarah has been working closely with students from Mainland China since early 2000s.

While we were chatting, she asked me if I grew up in China and told me that

> *"Your social media posts are so liberal.
> I've never met anyone from China who is so liberal."*

She meant it as a compliment, and I took it as such. Her then nine-year-old was standing right next to us and asked

> *"Mom, what does liberal mean?"*

Both Sarah and I laughed. I said: "Wow, that's a big question."[7]

Where It All Started

As I discussed in a recent publication (Zhang, 2022), my experience at City University of Hong Kong (CityU) and subsequent engagements with critical scholarship such as Freire (1970), Gramsci (1971), and Janks (2010) as well as a number of sociopolitical movements (e.g., Chun, 2019; Flowerdew, 2016; Lou & Jaworski, 2016) added a layer of fluidity and complexity to my *self* and my doing in the *everyday*. Looking back at those moments in time and points in space, I would not say that it just all started in Hong Kong. Since our material⟷discursive itineraries are forever on the move (Zhang, 2022), much like the rhizomatic mapping (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), it

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[6] These questions that I encountered frequently in the *everydayness* of my life are viewed by many critical literacy scholars (e.g., Chun, 2015; Kubota, 2004, 2016) as part of the larger liberal *and* neoliberal multicultural discourses.

[7] It was perhaps another tiny moment at which our everyday CLP was called into being. And it certainly became part of the material⟷discursive trajectories shared by Sarah, her daughter, and myself.

refuses to have one single "starting point." But I do believe that my experience in Hong Kong could serve as a good entry point to segments of my trajectories of doing and be(com)ing.

Figure 2

A research seminar at CityU (April, 2015)
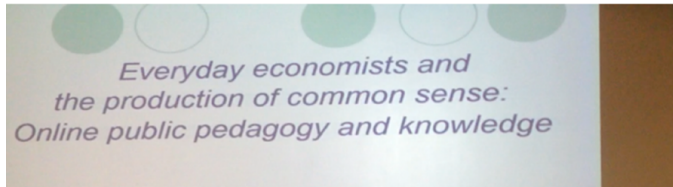
The photo in Figure 2 was taken by myself as one of the audiences at the beginning of a research seminar in which my professor talked about his ongoing research. It was my first encounter with the term "neoliberalism" and scholarly work on the discourses of capitalism.

Yes, it was the first time in my life. I was born and raised in a small town in Sichuan, China and had never been to anywhere outside of Mainland China until my experience at CityU. And what does that mean?

In a book chapter on critical literacy in Hong Kong, Chang (2021) discussed "the very different histories of Hong Kong versus mainland China, and their disparities in critical literacy scholarship" (p. 262). He indicated that the absence of critical literacy scholarship "can be partly attributed to research paradigms that mainland professors often have to operate under, and the restricted bandwidth they have to critique PRC [People's Republic of China] educational and political systems" (p. 262). In alignment with Chang and McLaren's (2018; Chang, 2021) work, a conference talk of mine might provide more concrete examples. Referring to the larger sociopolitical context of a classroom ethnographic-case study conducted years ago, I explained:

Chinese central government has its hegemonic power over all media and educational resources. So [when] my students turn on TV—they can only watch what the government allows them to watch. And they don't have "legal" access to Facebook, Instagram, or whatever related to Google. Even textbooks are censored. Some of my high school students were taking AP history courses, . . . pages of these textbooks were ripped off before they were delivered to my students . . . Within this context, a lot of my students don't talk about politics, or power relations, outside forces. Here I'd like to bring up the concept from Hilary Janks [2010]. . . So here's the capitalized 'P' Politics, which is about government, decision-making, policies. But also here's the lower-case 'p' which is the politics in our everyday lives, weather we are going to school or in a professional setting. . . there are always power-relations circulating. . . . But these are not part of my students' everyday life conversation. (Zhang, 2019)

My contextualization of the study was in line with relevant scholarly works written both before and after the presentation (e.g., Chang, 2021; Chun, 2019; Flowerdew, 2016; Lou & Jaworski, 2016). As Flowerdew (2016) stated:

> Patten promoted a discourse concerning the British legacy to Hong Kong, consisting of four elements: a free market economy, freedom of the individual, rule of law, and democratic institutions. These four elements are very important, because they, arguably, represent what makes Hong Kong different to Mainland China and they are at stake in one way or another with the Occupy movement. (p. 528)

I agree with Flowerdew. Not because he was one of my professors, but because I lived in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and I was there, in one way or another, as part of that Occupy Movement.

Figure 3

CityU AC1 lobby (September, 2014)

Figure 3 shows one of the many photos I took in a variety of locations during the movement, including Central, Admiralty, Kowloon Tong, and Hong Kong University. The photo features a slogan written in traditional Chinese characters "風雨中抱緊自由," displayed in front of the main library of CityU. It was also the lobby of what was then called building Academic 1 and often functioned as the main entrance to the university. These Chinese characters can be translated as "*Holding Tight To Freedom In The Storms*" and were used in multiple public spaces where social actions were produced, contested, and reproduced in the year of 2014 and onward. The slogan was originally part of the lyrics from the song *Glorious Years* by legendary British-Hong Kong band *Beyond*. The song was written in 1990 as a tribute to Nelson Mandela and many freedom fighters around the world. It later became an iconic cultural symbol of Hong Kong society and thus also part of the material⟷discursive itineraries shared by millions of social individuals both in Hong Kong and overseas.[8]

Although "Hong Kong has endured numerous societal problems from British rule to the present" (Chang, 2021, p. 263), it was at CityU where I started engaging with a number of sociopolitical movements and was introduced to critical literacy, discourse analysis (e.g., Flowerdew, 2013; Scollon, 2001), and ways of doing and knowing (e.g., Gramsci, 1971; Halliday, 1978, 1994) that later became part of my teaching, researching, and everyday life. It was some of these critical moments and scholarship that supported me in rejecting neoliberalized subject positions and extreme political complacency (Brown, 2005), so that I had a chance to (un)make sense of my own lived experiences, identifications (Hall, 1996), and the pain and struggle I had while growing up in Mainland China.

Mainland China: 1990 – 2012

Overture

> *Theories are powerful*
> *but also have their limits.*

Body, Reproduction, and Subject Position

> *Question (Q): Mav, does gender or sexuality matter in neoliberalism?*
> *Answer (A): I guess so.*
> *Q: How?*
> *A: They target sexuality so that our "bodies" will stay in their own little box, quietly doing what they should be doing—and the society will just keep running[9], everything will "just be fine."*
> *Q: What do you mean by "keep the society running" and "everything will be fine"?*
> *A: Well you know, in order to ensure the smooth operation of a neoliberal society, they need people to fall in line according to certain*

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[8] Another example of the critical (be)coming together and CLP in the everyday discussed previously in this paper.

[9] See Foucault (1979, 1987) on body, discipline, and power relations and Brown (2005) on "the neoliberal citizen."

gender and sexual norms. They need some type of stable order of heterosexual reproductive social groups in order to progress.

Q: So they need to make sure that men and women are getting married and having kids?

A: Um…well I think they might focus more on the "some type of stable order" thing. So yeah probably not just about having kids…[10]

Figures 4-1 and 4-2 feature the One-Child Glory (Honorary) Certificate issued to my parents on September the 28th, 1990, 15 days after my birth. As it is rightly named, this "Honorary Certificate" was designed just like many other certificates[11] that "represent" certain kind of honor or esteem in Chinese society over the past many decades: shining red cover with nicely printed golden characters. The certificate was issued by the *"*** (name of a huge government-owned) corporation Family Planning Committee,"* as printed at the bottom of the cover. Some of the texts on the other two pages shown above can be translated as:

- *Comrade *** (name of my mother), *** (name of my father)—in response to the One-Child Policy, are* **willing to** *have only one child…*
- *In response to #[79]14 provincial policy.*
- *This certificate is issued to the person who is* **willing to** *have only one child…*
- *This certificate* **grants** *corporation-provided free medical treatment, Kindergarten education, and health care.*

Figure 4-2 is the page that features my name, gender, date-of-birth, and other information. The profile picture needs to be renewed every few years, until the end of my annual *"health care bonus,"* which, as shown on the right side of the photo, is *"2004/8."*

The government-owned corporation mentioned above had around 30 thousand employees at its peak. Prior to the Chinese economic reform that took place in my hometown in late 1990s, the corporation had its own "community," including K-16 schools, hospitals, prisons, and police stations.

Figure 4-1

One-Child Glory (Honorary) Certificate I

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[10] I use the genre of an everyday conversation to explain complex things. The conversation itself is not "real."

[11] Such as a college degree, veteran certificate, and player of the year in local soccer leagues.

Figure 4-2

One-Child Glory (Honorary) Certificate II

Q: *"Mav, what do you see in these photos?"*
A: *"A fancy cover, **benefits**, **willingness**, and **institutional forces**."*
"Oh and I myself, a little me, my grandpa took that photo for me. I was not happy that day, got too much homework I guess."

In a theory-based art piece, I indicated—and showed—that there is no way to interpret or even look at what has been called "representations" without considering what we *do* with them (Zhang, 2020). Inasmuch as the *self* is always already entangled with the materiality (Barad, 1999, 2007), I would say that here in this case, I am not just looking at a Glory Certificate, I am looking at particular ways of doing and knowing, a peculiar set of onto-epistemologies in my/our *everyday*. Growing up in the 1990s and 2000s, like most of my peers, I had never even thought of having a brother or sister—just like the Glory (Honorary) Certificate quietly lying somewhere back at home—it was one of the things that did not matter at all. Over the past three decades, we saw having one or both of our parents

going through sterilization surgeries willingly and having tens of thousands of moms going through abortion unwillingly as "how things work in this world," or what is now called "it is what it is." As part of the larger health/medical discourse that came into social circulation in Mainland China decades ago, "taking pills" has long been framed as "unhealthy" or "extremely bad for female's health." Sterilization surgeries that had to be done in institutionalized spaces such as government-owned hospitals/clinics, however, were strongly recommended.

From a Foucauldian perspective, we see our body as always "directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (Foucault, 1979, p. 25). When it comes to dominant neoliberal discourses coupled with the sociopolitical hegemony (Gramsci, 1971) behind it, I think there is more to it. For example, what does it mean when the material⟷discursive practices of "going through sterilization surgeries happily, or at least willingly" becomes part of the *everydayness* (Lefebvre, 1987, 1988) of life? And what does it mean when mainstream media and school textbook representations of

"a family = a father, a mother, and a child"[12]

becomes the common-sense beliefs (Gramsci, 1971) shared by millions, if not billions, of social individuals?

It could go back to the "some kind of stable order" that ensures "the smooth operation a neoliberal society" which I brought up earlier; it might require our thinking toward the active critique of normativity and meanings (Deleuze, 1968; Derrida, 1972); and it

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[12] It has been gradually shifted to "a family = a father, a mother, and two–three children" in recent years due to particular sociopolitical and economic reasons.

certainly ties into the question that many current critical literacy scholars may ask: how have certain material←→discursive practices, but not the others, achieved a taken-for-granted status in a society?[13]

There is more to it.

Leo

To write about my brother Leo, I would like to start with a quote from Jones (2014) on neoliberalism and education:

> The intensity of testing and measuring and concepts such as time-on-task, coupled with the diminished goals of social-emotional and physical well-being for children and youth, would drive even the best intentioned teacher to do things she would not have done under different policy directives. (p. 124)

When neoliberal rationality and practices are upgraded to an extreme level with the material forces of the sociopolitical hegemony, I believe that even the best-intentioned parents would do things they would not have done if they could have started imagining a slightly different system/world (e.g., St. Pierre, 2021).

Given that being the only child at home was the "norm" in Mainland China for more than three decades, a lot of peers in my generation ended up hanging out with cousins, especially cousins who were of similar ages. My cousin Leo and I lived right next to each other. It was around a one-minute walk from my front door to his. We grew up just like brothers. We hated each other because one of us might get more attention from our parents at one particular moment, also because we would sometimes destroy each other's toys and fight for

video games. Of course, we also had fun doing sports, playing card games, and hanging out together. Like most of our peers, Leo and I did not even use the word "cousin," inasmuch as it did not make much sense to us. We were just brothers.

> Cousins? What's the difference?
> Why do we even need that word?
> If we are cousins then who has brothers?
> Why do we need the word "brother" then?

The use of these words as well as their meaning-making (Halliday, 1978, 1994) are inherently material←→discursive (Barad, 2003, 2007) and tied into our everyday CLP. Since what is "normally" viewed as "brother" was never part of our materiality in that particular socio-historical context, both the meaning- and sense- making of these words were (re)produced differently in our *everyday*.

Leo and I started hanging out less and less since grade-nine, as we both needed to "study hard" in order to get into college. And what does that mean in Mainland China? Throughout our high school years, both Leo and I had to be physically in our classrooms either taking classes or studying for tests/exams from 7:30am to 9 or 10pm, Monday through Saturday. After we went home at around 10pm, we had to keep working on our homework till midnight. Both of us were trained as soccer players, so sometimes we would spend our Sunday morning playing soccer, then go back to school in the afternoon.

I remember back in 2019, one of my co-workers here in the U.S. asked me if we actually had a "life" as teenagers or if some of us felt depressed and went to see a doctor. I said, "Well you know, it's like we didn't even have time to get depressed."

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[13] I see the writing/doing of inquiry in this section as a way of doing CLP in my everyday.

I was not joking.

If we are just (re)producing highly-functional machines that can "stay quietly"[14] in their designated subject positions (Brown, 2005, 2015; Foucault, 1979) and keep the larger state-owned capitalism system running, "being depressed" and "having a life" are probably not part of the conversation.

Like most of my soccer teammates, neither Leo nor I liked many things we were forced to learn back in middle school and high school, especially the ways in which we were positioned as subjects who needed to "obey" all orders/rules (Brown, 2005; Freire, 1970) with almost no agency. I use the word "almost" because, from a post-qual point of view (Barad, 1999, 2003; Foucault, 1987), one could argue that there is always agency as we intra-act with the human and nonhuman others. For example, in an extreme situation, when power relations get stuck somewhere, one can still kill themselves to refuse being part of the system,

> **"These numbers, together with our names, were often printed out and put up on walls either inside or outside of our classrooms. They became part of the *everydayness* in life, part of our material⟷discursive trajectories, and part of the larger neoliberal discourse in public spaces that (re)produce who we are/become and what we do in detrimental ways."**

just like what two of my classmates did.

One of them was my neighbour and, of course, was the only child in his family. After all these years, I still run into his parents when I visit my parents back in where I was born and raised. It is one of the things in

life that still and perhaps forever kicks back (Barad, 1999).[15]

Again, like most of my soccer teammates, both Leo and I were labeled as "bad students" and "not qualified for college education" throughout our high school years. These labels were based on "science" and numbers. For example, in all kinds of exams designed to prepare us for the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE), Leo and I could only score around 350 out of 750, much lower than our peers labeled as "almost qualified." These numbers, together with our names, were often printed out and put up on walls either inside or outside of our classrooms. They became part of the *everydayness* in life, part of our material⟷discursive trajectories, and part of the larger neoliberal discourse in public spaces that (re)produce who we are/become and what we do in detrimental ways.

After high school, it took both Leo and me one extra year to get into colleges. Leo went to a local community college and was planning on transferring to a local public university. He told me about his plan in early 2012. I did not show any kind of support—we grew up being taught to compete with each other rather than to hang out with or support each other. It was perhaps one of the ways in which the shift from exchange to competition as the core of the market (Brown, 2015; Foucault, 2008) extended to my *everyday*, to Leo's *everyday*, to what

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[14] As part of the reduction of active political citizenship to the extreme passivity and political complacency (Brown, 2005) mentioned at the beginning of this paper.
[15] It kicks back in the sense that it goes beyond the limits of theories, be it on the entanglements of space, place,

memory, the critique of the everydayness, or the material consequences of certain hegemonic discourses. More importantly, what happened to my classmates was not rare—it was, and still is, an everyday thing.

Cannella and Koro-Ljungberg (2017) called "all aspects of being" (p. 155). And it hurts.

On June 20, 2012, Leo passed away. He was 20, and I was 21.

I was preparing for my finals. My family only had a limited amount of money that could support my travels, which meant I could only have one, not two, round-trip ticket to home—either for Leo's funeral, or when he still had some time left. Dad asked me to "come home" as soon as possible, so that Leo and I could see each other, chat, and hang out for the last time. Leo struggled for around three weeks. I watched him dying in the hospital.

Dad made the right call. Attending a funeral would have meant Nothing to me, nor to Leo.

When we were kids, our parents did not allow us to hang out very often, since we had to focus our time and energy on schoolwork, like most of our peers. Our parents did want us to compete with each other, so that we could push each other to be "better." For example, Leo and I were often encouraged to eat more food to be stronger, and to eat faster to save time:

> *"Look Mav's eating more!"*
> *"Mav, see Leo can finish eating quickly! Why are you so slow!?"*

I remember once Leo was pissed off, and questioned his parents:

> *"Yes Mav's eating more.*
> *So what? Why does it matter at all?*

I am not sure if these things that we do and say (material←→discursive) in our *everyday* are part of the neoliberal push for maximized efficiency and competitive positioning when it comes to education (Brown, 2015; Jones, 2014). I think they are. And I do wish that I could let Leo know that both him and I, and many of our soccer teammates, were, and still are, qualified for college education. I wish that I could tell him that I got into Harvard—it's not our problem Leo, it's theirs![12] And eventually, I wish that Leo and I could have the luxury to just grab a drink and chill.

> I worked hard over the past many years and
> had never taken anything for granted.
> Because in all these years,
> I felt that I was not just living my life,
> I was also living his.

Sichuan, Georgia, and California: 1970 – 2018

Overture

> *"What makes us human*
> *is our relationship with and responsibility to the dead,*
> *to the ghosts of the past and the future"*
> *(Barad, 2017, p. 87).*

Harvard

It was in early 2018; I was admitted to a Ph.D. program at the University of Georgia and an M.Ed. program at Harvard.

> I went back to my hometown.

> My father and my grandfather
> looked at me as if I was an alien –
> as if they did not know this kid anymore.

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[12] As a response to dominant discourses (e.g., anyone can pull themselves up by their bootstraps; if you can't "make it," then it's your problem!) that shift the blame from sociopolitical and economic systems to social individuals—particularly those in the group that has been called the "99%" and those from certain racial/ethnical backgrounds (e.g., Chun, 2015, 2017; Coles, 2019; Jones, 2014).

Because to them,
I was still the "bad student,"
Not qualified for Any college education.

I was happy,
because I made them proud.
My parents were thrilled.
They had a hard time falling asleep.
My dad became a "superstar."
Many of his co-workers,
high school classmates,
and random acquaintances
came up to him,
asking for the "secret" of getting into
Harvard.[13]

I was sad,
because all my soccer teammates,
including Leo,
are brilliant youth,
and they worked harder than I did.
A lot of them were never given a chance to
attend college.
The offer package from Harvard
means
there were, are, and will be
millions, if not billions, of kids
out there in this world,
who might be "qualified" for Harvard
but were, are, and will be
destroyed by those labels
coupled with the neoliberal push
and the institutional forces behind it.

I took the Ph.D. offer,
because I knew that
power relations are everywhere,

and the only way to "fight" power,
is with my own "power" of knowledge,
literacy,[18]
of being able to speak back.

Wendy Brown (2016) shared some of her thoughts on how neoliberalism has transformed the nature of education during an interview on her book *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (2015). Referring to a specific time period in U.S. history, she said:

> *When I went to the University of California in the early 1970s, the cost was about 600[USD] a year, that was tuition and fees. . . I was able, as a student who did not get support from my family, to be able to take a part time job and thrive at the University of California. That's no longer possible, for a variety of reasons.*

She then discussed the neoliberal push in our education reform and pointed out that nowadays,

> *very few students of working class or. . . even middle class can look at our college education, as we did in my time or your time, as something that has to do with expanding your capacities as a human being, and your capacity as a citizen. Instead, the question is how much money do you put in, for how much you will get out as a potential hire at the other end.*

Father, Grandma, and Grandpa

> When it comes to decision-making,
> Dad asked me:
> *"how much scholarship you got from Harvard?*

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[13] The doing (changing social actions) and becoming (changing social relations) here tie back to the "ranking and elite schooling" mentioned at the beginning of this paper as part of the everyday neoliberal discourses⇐⇒practices. It also connects to how both Leo

and I grew up being constantly compared with other kids in terms of our "achievement."

[18] "Power" as power relations circulating in the *everyday* and existing in our intra-activity with the human and nonhuman others.

How much you got from UGA?
Is it secured?
What kind of job will you get after a Ph.D.?
What kind of job will you get after Harvard?
How much will you be earning?" [19]

I was not surprised, not at all.
He's my dad,
and I knew him.

It was an afternoon in my junior year.
After a phone call with my dad,
I stood in the lobby of my university academic building,
crying,
for 20 minutes. [20]

I needed 200 bucks [21] for my GRE test.
Dad refused to support me.
Because to him,
I was still that "bad student,"
Not qualified for Any college education.

He believed that it was a waste of money:
"English is not even your native language"
"you can't compete with Americans"
"you can't get a high score anyway"
"then why you take that test?" [22]

How did I eventually convince my dad?
I did not.
Not until I got into Harvard.

My grandma paid for that GRE test.

She did not know what it was,
just saying:
"well,
maybe my son has a tight budget these days,
let me support my grandson then.
He just wants to study right?
To take a test,
it doesn't sound bad."

Grandma passed away in late 2015.
I wish she could know that I got this far.
I wish I could tell her
how much that 200 bucks meant to my life,
and to many others'.

Figure 5

Grandma and grandpa

Figure 5 is the last picture I took for Grandma. The man standing next to her was my grandpa. After taking the picture, I went back to Hong Kong for my graduation. She passed away few days after I received my M.A. degree.

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[19] My father asking these questions can never be interpreted as an isolated action emerging from nowhere. It took place at the intersection of multiple material←→discursive itineraries with my father and many others' lived experiences, as shown above in Wendy Brown's talk as well as the continued storyline in the texts that follow.

[20] The embodied ways of knowing enacted in that 20 minutes in a public space has always stayed and might forever stay with me, along with the pain and struggle that exceed the limits of theories.

[21] It was a lot of money to me, as I struggled to keep my monthly living expense below 200 USD during my college years.

[22] It was not my dad. It was the neoliberal push for competition and economical, the institutionalized subject positions, and assumptions associated my sociolinguistic identities that I have long been struggling with.

In the last few days of her life,
she was not in a good mood.
She kept complaining,
about Grandpa,
about her marriage,
about life.

Grandpa just stood there,
listening.
He's a good listener,
and more importantly,
he knew that
Everything Grandma complained about
was true.

Dad once told me
when he and my two uncles were kids
back in late 60s and early 70s,
at the end of every single month,
Grandma had to take them to one of her relatives',
asking if she could borrow some money.

Dad did not lie.
I know him.
When it comes to food,
he does not have ANY preference,
and he never will.
Because to him,
having food is luxury.[23]

When Grandma retired in early 1990s,
her salary was around 20 USD/month.
I did not take that 200 bucks for granted,
and I never will.

The Coda⬅➡Overture

In alignment with post-qual inquiry's ontology of immanence (Deleuze, 1995; St. Pierre, 2019) and the entangled nature of the self and the others (Barad, 2003, 2007), this multi-genre inquiry is neither a delivery of objective thoughts/arguments nor the arrival of certain types of conclusions/solutions. It is a way of moving and becoming, through which I submitted my *self* as a writer "to be summoned by different people and things at different places and times" (Jones, 2014, p. 126), be they my soccer teammates with whom I grew up, my family members who struggled to make ends meet in the 60s and 70s, those who went canvassing with me in freezing cold wind for the 2020 election, or the billions of brilliant youth that are yet to come into this world. It is also a way of moving and mapping that supported me to pinpoint the pain and struggle, making them the location for theorizing (hooks, 1994), and to engage with ways of doing and knowing that do not fit into pre-existing, formalized categories—those that are barely intelligible and perhaps forever in-the-making along with changing situational or sociopolitical contexts.

As the texts pull us towards the barely intelligible, it might seem that with every question we ask, many more follow. And as social individuals, we may still feel hopeless in changing or even challenging the hegemonic material⬅➡discursive practices that contour the projects of not only neoliberalized states and corporations but also nonprofits, schools, scholars, students, graduate programs, and more (e.g., Brown, 2015; Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017). Therefore, I see the *doing* of this inquiry as an effort to create some openings where we get to lean over the edge of predictability and responsibly (re)imagine slightly different ways of living that are yet to

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[23] It is one of my father's embodied ways of *re-membering* and *re-turning* (Barad, 2017) to the poverty, the hopeless, and the larger sociopolitical and economic discourses that became part of his *everyday*.

(be)come. The openness and uncertainty here are important in that they echo the active critique of the normativity (Deleuze, 1968; Derrida, 1972; St. Pierre, 2021) and the *everyday* (Lefebvre, 1987, 1988), and thus make it possible for us to question and act against the (re)production of damaging practices so that more people might thrive. We might ask, for example: how can we handle a random conversation at a restaurant so that the everyday CLP and the collaborative (be)coming-together can be possible? What do some of the certificates, awards, and visual-textual representations in a public space *do* to our body, actions, and ways of knowing? What can we *do* with them?

Last, I would like to note that although this paper addresses a wide range of sociopolitical issues with a strong critical stance, it is written from a place of love rather than hate. It is the love we all have for the place where we were born and raised, the people we grew up with, the caring, comforting hands that once reached out to us, and the strangers we walked past in our everyday. With this form of love, I believe that all forms of justice-oriented works can go beyond the classroom context, extending to our everyday lives, everyday social practices, in the past, at the present, and in the future.

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JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE & LITERACY EDUCATION

Considering Collective Motivation to Read: A Narrative, Inquiry

Mark D. McCarthy

Abstract: Research into literacy education often explores cognitive or sociocultural understandings, with the former shaping how curricula and assessments understand readers. This focus on cognitive processes is one of many ways that reading is imagined as an individual pursuit. Through a lens of posthuman subjectivity, I consider a narrative of a key moment of collective motivation in the classroom as situated in a larger context. While I draw upon empirical evidence in the form of interviews, narrative inquiry takes me toward questions that evoke. Notably, I find that the ubiquity of collective endeavors appears as solo achievements. As a result of my narrative-inspired thinking-through-theory, I argue that collective motivation is a feature of posthuman subjectivity, and that we might generate new possibilities for learning as assemblage in our teaching. To elaborate, I weave together narrative and diagrammatical modes of thinking, storytelling and description of my analytical process, to evoke questioning.

Keywords: narrative inquiry, posthumanism, reader motivation

Dr. McCarthy is Assistant Professor of Literacy Education at Springfield College. His research draws from poststructuralist approaches and qualitative methodologies to investigate teacher preparation for literacy instruction, including the teaching of children's literature. He has recently explored narrative inquiry, fiction in research, and conversation analysis. Interests bridging his research and teaching include language and discourse, complexity, and critical multicultural education.

B etty's[1] student John announced that he was taking a family trip to Pigeon Forge, TN, the home of Dollywood and the NASCAR Speedpark. However, John's family was headed there to experience a curiously-located replica of the *Titanic*, moored alongside a brick building emblazoned with the White Star Line logo serving as the threshold to this life-sized monument and museum. The destination was just enough out of the ordinary for Georgians to pique Betty's interest, and given John's buzz about the trip, she offered him funds to buy a book for the class. It was unlikely that Betty would have known the series of events that would unfold. But, as is often the case, one's fortunes are realized due in no small part to the accumulation of tiny actions—very much a theme of the cinematic representation of the ill-fated passengers aboard the maiden voyage of the *Titanic*.

When John returned to his second-grade classroom with the text—an informational, *Titanic*-themed alphabet book—Betty happily read aloud an entry during the literacy period each day. The introduction of this text marks the beginning of my "noticing what is set in motion" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2016, p. 104), understanding the events and bodies involved as assemblage, which I will elaborate more fully in the sections that follow. John's enthusiasm for the topic was infectious, yet he was never a social leader or trend-setter up until this point. Betty thought of him as more of an "outlier," an unfortunate yet unsurprising status given that he carried the label of ELL and spoke Spanish at home.

Betty's characterization of John may be indicative of the widespread deficit framing of ELL students, but when I asked her more about it, she said, "He's able. He wasn't a low student to begin with, but his language definitely impacted his academics."

Labeling students as low or high is too common a practice in elementary schools, and her stance suggests the insidious neutrality of language dominance: *John struggles because he isn't good at English*, with no critique of language policies that systemically position him to struggle. A greater elaboration of these problems with schooling is outside the scope of this paper. In any case, John was not the most popular student. That is, until he engaged everyone.

Each student found an entry point via the text, topic, and themes based on their own learning preferences: measurements and figures for the mathematical; dress up and storytelling about the lives of real passengers for the theatrical. These second graders and their teacher were likely unaware that some evidence suggests motivation to read influences reading fluency skills (Quirk, 2005, p. 90). Regardless, the students' engagement never quite ended, and Betty excitedly rode the wave of enthusiasm into the content units that followed. She described the whole class's experience with joy:

> Because one student fell in love with Titanic, the rest of the class fell in love with it. And I just poured everything into that because, first of all, it was nonfiction. I was super hyped that they chose a nonfiction...I just poured all my energy into...I mean, we redid the doors, Titanic-style. We studied nonfiction text features with Titanic books. I mean, anything I could pull Titanic into...we even had our Titanic party for celebrating our Titanic unit. I gave them a real passenger on the ship, they had to go research it and write a paper about their person and if they lived or died and what their family was like. And it was just, it was very in depth for a second grade. But they

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[1] Pseudonyms are used for all characters.

were right with it. Because even my lower students were able to hang with it because I just did it to what they needed. And they loved every minute. They were so engaged.

Her account tells of standards met and exceeded expectations (with the familiar hierarchy of high and low students), and perhaps more importantly, students interested, engaged, and motivated.

Literacy educators are often concerned about reader motivation because, as simple as it sounds, motivation correlates with more reading, and the more one reads, the better they get at it (for an early example, see Stanovich, 1986; Rayner, et al., 2001, elaborate on developmental theories of reading in support of this notion, such as *emergent literacy*, Clay, 1991; see De Naeghel, et al., 2012, for more specifically on motivation). Motivation itself is often assumed to be located within the individual, perhaps due to the cultural lens and logic many US educators bring to their teaching: the individual is the primary, if not exclusive, subject position. As such, Betty elaborated John's individual academic gains:

> What was great about the whole situation is the student who got everybody roped into it was the very student who said how much he hated reading, how much he hated writing. And yesterday, he was the first one to finish his opinion writing. Everybody else in the class wrote about what their favorite holiday was. And he said, "Can I write about the Titanic?" I said, "If you can come up with an opinion for the Titanic, then yes." So, he wrote about, and these are his words, "Titanic is the neatest ship to cross the ocean." He used "luxurious," and he's an ELL. So, I mean, I was really excited.

Again, noting a deficit framing, individual motivation is an effective way to understand John's move from

disengaged and disconnected to writing opinion essays with Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary. But how can we account for the group-level motivation? Was it simply that each student had the opportunity to become individually motivated? This enactment of collective motivation matters, and whether or not it's beyond the aggregate of individual motivation, I've enjoyed thinking about it.

Here, I consider this key moment (Reitz, 2017) of collective motivation in the classroom as situated in a larger context through a lens of posthuman knowledge (Braidotti, 2019). As a result of my narrative-inspired thinking-through-theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013; Mazzei, 2014), I argue that collective motivation is a feature of posthuman subjectivity, and that we might generate new possibilities in our teaching by learning as assemblage (i.e., reimagining subjectivity). To elaborate, I weave together narrative and diagrammatical modes of thinking (Freeman, 2017), storytelling and description of my analytical process, to evoke questioning, namely using research to promote curiosity and inquiry, not simply to provide answers. Freeman (2017) outlines five different modes of thinking, of which categorical thinking—with its grounding in identification and grouping—might commonly be found structuring how knowledge is produced and disseminated; diagrammatical thinking, the realm of critical materialism and posthumanism, moves toward experimentation, materializing, and actualizing. I'm learning as I write and question, creating space for that learning to be shared, "where the riddles and problems posed as theoretical questions demand not answers but the modulation of new problems and new questions" (Mikulan, 2018, p. 98). I invite you to question with me.

Theoretical Perspectives

Literacy is generally framed within the research literature as being influenced by cognitive processes

and sociocultural factors. The highly influential National Reading Panel (NRP) Report (2000) has led to "science-based reading instruction" following what has come to be known as the big five: phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. The big five have been adopted as the target development areas across many schools' reading curricula, despite the report's Minority View offering valuable insight as to why the big five should be part of but not all of the curriculum. Those in the skills camp bring a positivist sensibility to tracing teacher efficacy, grading schools, and focusing on individual achievement at scale. Proponents of social approaches tend to associate with critical sociocultural research paradigms that call into question the "objective" research that determines funding and futures.

The omission of qualitative research set the stage for research/science/evidence-based literacy education to ignore sociocultural instructional strategies—including, perhaps, social constructs of motivation, as I elaborate in the next section. Unfortunately, this dominance is just one example of cognitive capitalism (Braidotti, 2019), wherein an approach or discipline draws more funding and is therefore positioned as being more important, or truer even. Further, the data-driven decision-making, used by governments and corporations alike, is part of contemporary human society. Denzin (2016) says of the current state of the world: "We live in the audit cultures of global neoliberalism" (p. 8). This audit culture shapes research (St. Pierre, 2011) and how it is enacted within the field of literacy education (Pressley, 2002). As a result, reading education and assessment are largely focused on the individual pursuit of skill development. However, the individual

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Posthumanism provides an opportunity to think about motivation outside the social/cognitive binary in literacy to suggest a new perspective on what occurred. Central to Braidotti's (2019) framing of posthuman knowledge is the *posthuman subject*. The posthuman subject is a dynamic assemblage of human and non-human actors, technologies, texts, etc. with "the power to affect and be affected" (p. 54). *Thinking* is not solely undertaken by an individual human, but instead by the assemblage. In other words, what thinks and learns is a subject consisting of a temporary collectivity that includes more than humans. Assemblage has similarly been defined specifically in literacy research: "the grouping of bodies (non-human and human) affecting and being affected in fluid composition" (Franklin-Phipps & Rath, 2018, p. 146). The concept of assemblage is central to how I am thinking and questioning.

Many researchers (Braidotti included) trace assemblage back to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), who reframed, among other things, how we might envision literacy with this concept:

> We will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier; we will not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities, in which other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed. (p. 4)

Here we begin to see the reader-text-assemblage (for example, Hargraves, 2018) not as close reading to search for essential meaning, but as experience.

Nail (2017) elaborates Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblage. All assemblages include the abstract machine—"the network of specific external relations that holds the elements together" (p. 24), "a kind of local condition of possibility" (p. 25); the concrete assemblage—"the existing embodiment of the assemblage" (p. 26), or human and non-human actors "becoming capable of different things" (p. 27); and their personae—"the mobile operators that connect the concrete elements together according to their abstract relations" that "are third-person (he, she, they) collective subjects of an indefinite event (one, everyone, anyone)" (p. 27). This fluid concept is taken up in literacy research as inviting expressions-to-come and a focus on futurity (Mazzei & Jackson, 2018) and for exploring racializing assemblages (Franklin-Phipps & Rath, 2018), among others. Nail (2017) makes the point that assemblage is about events, not essences: "if we want to know what something is, we cannot presume that what we see is the final product nor that this product is somehow independent of the network of social and historical processes to which it is connected" (p. 24). We therefore might think of research into these practices as being based on intuition, "understood as a mode of inquiry whereby problems are created and not repeated or 'ready-made'" (Mikulan, 2018, p. 97):

> It is not until a certain interaction or exchange among forces "interrupts," "gathers," or "invites" literacy to emerge that certain questions can be posed. The question of posthuman literacy should then not be the answer to an already posed problem. (Mikulan, 2018, p. 96)

Betty's account remained on my mind—an interruption that invited further thought. Recasting the story around an assemblage of students, texts, teacher, and places posed a new problem: motivation. Perhaps this was an instance of collective motivation toward expression beyond the limits of the curriculum. In any case, motivation tends to be part of the organized collective, or at least in how we retrospectively narrate its story.

While distinct from posthuman thinking, I am inclined toward narrative and storytelling as a vital way to understand the world because people story their world. Freeman (2017) writes, "It is this human capacity as narrators, and consumers, of stories that results in narrative thinking being so compelling an object of inquiry" (pp. 31-32). This key moment of storytelling lingered with me. Now I have retold it to you, and added (myself) to it: this story, this assemblage. Your entry now reconfigures the assemblage, now engaging in thinking about motivating readers.

A Little About Motivation

"Motivation" is "the reason or reasons one has for acting or behaving in a particular way"; or "the general desire or willingness of someone to do something" (Oxford Languages, 2022). Central to these definitions are the subjects "one" and "someone," suggesting that motivation is individually manifested and acted upon. Delving further into the literature on reader motivation, I found terms like "self-efficacy," and dichotomies like intrinsic/extrinsic or goal/process or emotion/cognition. Each of these has its roots in individuals. Some strands of research build on Bandura's (1977) work on self-efficacy and later Eccles' (1983) expectancy-value theory of motivation, which center perceptions of the self. Quirk (2005) provides a thorough overview of different models that emerged more recently, which suggest different lines of causality between skill development and motivation, but still center on the individual.

In an elaboration of an assessment of motivation to read, Malloy and colleagues (2013) describe motivation thusly:

> Students who are engaged have their eyes on what they are doing, are ardently attending to the teacher's read-aloud, or are in reflective repose as they read independently. Going deeper beneath these behavioral manifestations of their literacy engagement, students who are motivated to participate in literacy instruction are on task, cognitively and strategically engaged with the material, and perhaps affectively responding to the activity as well, enthusiastically sharing what they've read with their peers. (p. 273)

This social element is positioned following the uncertainty of a "perhaps," but we see layers of what might be impacting or emerging as signs of motivation. Looking to psychology, Urdan and Schoenfelder (2006) noted: "motivated behavior in school results from a combination of student and situational characteristics" (p. 345). Likewise, from the journal *Child Development Perspectives*: "although motivation often is considered an individual variable or characteristic, social context and social relations affect students' motivation as well" (Wigfield et al., 2016, p. 191). Guthrie and Alao (1997) studied the principles of Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction: (a) conceptual themes, (b) real-world interactions, (c) self-direction, (d) interesting texts, (e) social collaboration, (f) self-expression, (g) cognitive strategy instruction, and (h) curricular coherence. Social collaboration is present, yet the social construct also includes independent work as one of the structures and multiple other principles center the self. Across the research literature, the social connection to motivation is known, yet it seems understated. Interestingly, "In a path analysis, this social construct predicted reading motivation

more highly than did home literacy, cognitive strategies, and instructional variables" (Guthrie & Alao, 1997, p. 100). A safe conclusion is that motivation is complex and contains multiple constructs (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997), though that may not be very helpful to the teacher seeking a means to improve motivation among her students.

Not all teachers read academic articles pertaining to motivation, so I wanted to see what information might be easily obtained. A popular site on teaching reading, Reading Rockets (WETA, 2022), has accessible information for teachers about reading motivation. Examples of what might drive motivation include curiosity, enjoyment, and challenge, among others (and a quote along the bottom of the page from Emily Dickinson that compares a book to a frigate no less!). Elsewhere, the site also mentions self-efficacy and self-concept as part of reading motivation (Gambrell & Marinak, 2009). Regarding discussion of social factors in motivation, Guthrie, Bennett, and McGough (1994) contribute:

> With the exception of Wentzel's (1989) work in the general motivation literature and in-depth case studies of adults' purposes and interests in reading (Gray & Rogers, 1956), the social goals for reading have been infrequently discussed. But social motivations seem essential for reading since students read in groups during instruction and share texts in many social situations. (Reading Rockets, n.p.)

I cautiously considered the date of publication here in light of decades of more literacy education research, but these references remain relevant enough for a popular literacy website. In any case, what I gathered from the research was also clear here: social factors, while essential, tend to be overlooked in favor of individual sources of motivation.

I speculate that this gap results from the complexity of measuring social factors involved in reading motivation: you can't easily research what you can't measure (a dark matter, of sorts). I can easily imagine asking a child if they think they are good readers and comparing it to one of the many reading assessments they take in school; however, identifying the extent to which group coherence drives their interest is a bit more challenging. I might comfortably conclude that motivation is complex, and it doesn't completely reside in the individual, as it would be a challenge to trace causality. Research suggests that high achievement on assessments can support motivation, but declining motivation is also tied to assessment results (Wigfield et al., 2016), so teachers will need to consider risk-reward when relying on assessments to drive motivation. Text choice and relevance; student goals and values; instructional activities; and many other factors can build motivation, but ultimately there isn't a universal answer for teachers.

From another perspective, I suggest that motivation is a feature of the collective. In other words, a collective will not form without a shared motivation or purpose. Thus, practically speaking, as a teacher, I may not be able to know how to increase motivation for each student, but what if I might inspire the formation of a collective, which will inherently be motivated? I will elaborate this more, but would first like to provide a bit more context for the story.

Local Context

Betty was a White, early career elementary teacher in A County, Georgia, working on her MA in Education and pursuing the Reading Endorsement. With a population of just over 100,000, A County had a 5.2% unemployment rate and 12.7% of the population lived

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in poverty, according to Betty's research into her teaching context. The 22-school district served 13,000 students and had risen from 70% to 80% graduation rate in the five years preceding. Significantly to Betty, the student population was 51% White and 43% Hispanic, and this suggests the regularity with which Betty would encounter ELL students. Students expected to learn real-world content from teachers who love to teach and wanted their school experience to be fun and filled with sports, clubs, and activities (perhaps a glimpse into their desires). Their parents expected that their children would be safe, and they wanted teachers who would communicate openly. Parents also expressed to Betty a desire for children to learn more than just academics—life and social skills as well—and they shared the kids' desire to have learning include real-world content, including for life-paths that didn't include college. I had asked Betty to seek out the opinions of families and the community as part of a course assignment because I believe schooling should be contextualized within these larger social webs.

Betty expressed a feeling that teaching was fundamentally driven by one's heart. Like many teachers, she described her work as a calling: "Teaching is part of my purpose. When I am in the classroom with my students, everything feels right in the world." This position aligns with Hartwick's (2015) finding that "for many, teaching is a way they fulfill a sense of Divinely-inspired mission for their life" (p. 130), which as we'll see, fits with Betty's theological stance. This calling parallels the White savior narrative present in many stories about teaching, yet as with its application historically around the world, saviorism can be truly problematic despite folks' best intentions. In line with the community expectations of a teacher, Betty noted

that, "Being able to be a positive role model to my students is one of my greatest honors. I am an elementary school teacher, so I get to help my students learn how to love and care about each other." To underscore these points, she described teaching as "one of my greatest joys in life." In the time that I knew Betty, her stance never changed, and the stories she told of her vocation confirmed these claims.

Outside of teaching, Betty was a woman of faith. She described a "relationship and connection to Jesus [that] helps me daily to find joy and peace when everything around me is trying to pull me down." She also relied on music as her "therapy," and found connection to family through a shared passion for baseball—specifically, the Atlanta Braves. She found these outlets as a means to counter the negativity that surrounded her: "like almost everyone else in the world I have low self-confidence." Those lingering feelings of self-doubt and negativity were declining, no doubt due in part to her growth in her career. She was entering her second year of teaching and had shifted from third grade to second grade, and she wrote of her identity exploration:

> I have learned how well I know myself. I know that sounds ridiculous, but even up to last year...I did not know myself...How I view my identity now is as someone who can provide self-help and not need someone to figure out what I need. I am proud of the person I have become in the past year.

Her confidence coincided with her entry into the profession, and from all evidence there was a correlation between beginning a job she loved and knowing herself better. The centering of self throughout her rhetoric fits with a cultural construction of subjectivity—how we story our worlds—but throughout there are indicators of social connection, community, and activities that incorporate tangible physical elements.

At the end of her first year of teaching third grade, Betty "truly believe[d] most of the students left my classroom loving books...Literacy is my favorite part of the day in my classroom!" She had many tools available to her to help her students. She mentioned learning about "their literacy strengths and weaknesses through daily small groups, reading instruction, MAP scores, DIBELS reports, and by talking to the paraprofessionals that came in my room." This repertoire of pedagogical resources tends to be vital to developing a positive literacy environment: explicit instruction, varied group sizes, multiple assessment data points, and the support of multiple adults. Drawing upon the expertise of the paraprofessionals in the classroom was a great collaborative approach to her first year of teaching, and also an indicator of how little is undertaken on one's own.

At first, this context was intended to help elaborate Betty's instructional situation and better position me and any readers to understand what had occurred. Reading through theory, however, positioned me to see the multiple ways in which one might construct a story of individuality despite the social features.

Methodological Notes

At the center of this project was a distinction Freeman (2017) made regarding poetical and diagrammatical modes of thinking: the resulting research is motivated by a desire to evoke, or even to provoke, not to describe and explain. Ultimately, I engaged in description here to trace the unfolding of my analysis, but at its heart, my project intended to inspire questioning more than to provide answers or understanding of a phenomenon. As Grumet (1981) noted of the problem of curriculum, I find parallels with a problem of research: "It is we who have learned

to offer answers rather than questions" (p. 122). I therefore hope to balance description of my thought process with room for a reader to engage in their own interpretation and application to their own context. I presented it somewhat narratively because I was storying the process: the becoming of my thinking, the lines of flight, the rhizomatic experiencing of learning as assemblage.

The process might be said to have begun when I conducted interviews in the Fall 2020 semester and collected coursework from across the 2020 academic semesters. Two important sources were Betty's introduction to her teaching context and her literacy autobiography. Per my IRB-approved design, participants were recruited by a third party. I then scheduled virtual interviews using Google Meet. The content of these reflective interviews (Roulston, 2010) formed the foundation of the research project. Betty continued in other courses with me the following semesters, so I made clear to her that her participation was voluntary and did not influence her standing in any courses. At this stage, we had developed good rapport and I am confident that I upheld my commitment to ethically navigate our situation—she continued to remain in contact with me over the next couple of years and never communicated otherwise.

Through interviews, I aimed to understand how educators perceive cognitive and sociocultural approaches to literacy education, and how that perception might impact their pedagogies— problems posed in advance that are not answered here, but led to the creation of new problems (Mikulan, 2018). Betty was participating in graduate

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coursework with me as an instructor, which at the time of the study took place in a virtual setting—as did the interviews. However, in my (re)thinking and analysis here, these interviews were not the exclusive domain of our interactions. More accurately, I might describe these as intra-actions (Barad, 2007). Our engagements cut across domains and identities, and in many ways the binary of interviewer/interviewee is insufficient for understanding how we came together to co-produce knowledge, engage in learning, and otherwise interact with a variety of other human and non-human agents both geographically and temporally present and distant. Throughout her participation across three semesters and through our conversations specifically related to this research, I gained a fairly good understanding of Betty through multiple perspectives.

I explored the data using inductive and deductive coding using Reitz's (2017) five-column coding of a key moment, narrative analysis (Kim, 2016; Polkinghorne, 1995) to compose a story, and finally a diffractive analysis (Barad, 2014; Jackson & Mazzei, 2013; Taguchi, 2012). Mazzei (2014) described the process of diffractive analysis as one in which we "read...texts through, with, and in relation to each other to construct a process of thinking with the data and with the theory" (p. 744). This practice of thinking with theory blurred and reconfigured the binaries of a Western humanism, resulting in "multiplicity, ambiguity, and incoherent subjectivity" (Mazzei, 2014, p. 743). Namely, individual subjectivity emerged as a questionable assumption.

Subjectivity became complicated in my narrative, too. I wrote about Betty, who, in fact, took on the role of narrator and storyteller, creating a heteroglossic

story (Rosiek & Snyder, 2020) inclusive of a "constellation of voices" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 84): Betty's, her students, a disembodied administrative authority, mine. Of narrative research, Rosiek and Snyder (2020) suggest, "Agency instead emerges within the research process" (p. 1152). For example, the students were not part of my study, yet they became central to it, and my thinking revolved around what might be the best experience for young learners. The voice of the students shaped their learning, the teacher was fully engaged, and I heard and retold some of that story. Betty directly told me about the events that occurred, and then as our second interview continued, we kept returning to the Titanic references that dominated her classroom for the entire fall. From the various parts she told, I processed the story and thought about it, finally writing and revising it in this form here. I shared each of the narrative pieces—John's story and my description of Betty—with Betty for her feedback as I crafted them.

The assemblage shifts as I am taken in, at first a listener, then a re-composer and enunciator. As Nail (2017) describes, "an assemblage is a multiplicity, neither a part nor a whole. If the elements of an assemblage are defined only by their external relations, then it is possible that they can be added, subtracted, and recombined with one another ad infinitum without ever creating or destroying an organic unity" (p. 23). My enunciation then subtracts some elements while inviting new ones in. Like Burke (2011), quite literally, this project is "a practice in elaborated/elaborate fiction" (p. 47). I don't understand fiction as untrue, as it quite often brings readers in contact with questions about the human condition despite being fabricated. Fiction grants me access to new ways of thinking about the world. As Freeman (2017) writes:

Without exposure to diverse conceptions of knowledge and truth, researchers run the risk of becoming deluded by their own worldview; believing it to be the one, and only, way to truth. To deepen our understanding of our own beliefs requires an awareness of those others. (p. 4)

Therefore, part of my process is the plugging in of an array of concepts. Each of these creates a new possible entry into the assemblage as I/you read, think, and question. I cannot trace all the influences: if this is a cartographic representation, I may omit the blades of grass to better represent the contours of the landscape. Or perhaps I cannot map the locations of dynamic components of the landscape, such as icebergs and glaciers.

Thinking and Questioning

Throughout this telling, I have drawn your attention to moments where individual motivation may not fully account for what occurred. I would like to elaborate a bit upon that here, and also consider what that might mean for teachers hoping to motivate students to read or engage in other ways. As Betty said:

Last year, I looked solely at each individual student, I'd never looked collectively last year, I looked at each student individually... so collectively, looking at them this year also has been huge, and I know has changed my teaching, and has definitely changed their learning... [Last year] it was all individual, which is powerful. I mean, you need to differentiate, definitely. But you can get too much into individualization if you aren't careful. I don't think my kids suffered last year, I think I was an okay teacher, but I think looking collectively is very important. And this year, just knowing that I'm doing that more, it makes me feel better as a teacher.

> And I think it promotes more classroom community too... it's like a true family in here.

While she is not here to elaborate the ways in which her teaching has changed, I can pose some possibilities for further consideration.

Where do we get this idea that the individual is so powerful? I might start with narrative since I have made the point that I believe people story their world and thus are likely to borrow from familiar narrative structures. For example, the hero's journey primes us for understanding the world through the individual. We saw this in the way that I presented Betty's story about her calling to teach. In the hero's tale, the chosen one overcomes their trials and defeats the darkness. These heroes are preselected by birthright. We know now that preselection and destiny are not attributes of the assemblage.

But Betty isn't necessarily the hero of this story. Neither is John. This isn't to say both haven't been heroic (though I am still skeptical about the teacher-as-hero/savior narratives that are gifted to student teachers as they transition into a classroom of their own). The hero's journey offers a simplistic understanding of how events unfold and who played a role in them. It's easier casting for the screen, and perhaps a hero is easier for an audience to follow. One might argue that Han, Leia, and the Rebel Alliance had as much to do with it as Luke; Hermoine, Ron, a wand, and an owl as much as Harry; Morpheus, Trinity, Zion, and the matrix-of-things as much as Neo. Perhaps to better understand these collectivities, we need to reconstruct their motivations; for instance, Luke's motive was to defeat the darkness and free himself from his potential to fall, but the motive of the group was to defeat an oppressive fascist galactic state.

> **"One might argue that Han, Leia, and the Rebel Alliance had as much to do with it as Luke; Hermoine, Ron, a wand, and an owl as much as Harry; Morpheus, Trinity, Zion, and the matrix-of-things as much as Neo."**

What becomes possible when we reframe motivations toward those of collectivities?

Posthuman knowledge (Braidotti, 2019) offers an additional layer of understanding because collective motivation just might be a feature of posthuman subjectivity. In other words, the assemblage acts together for a reason, thus inherently has a purpose. I cannot think of a collectivity without a purpose, but that's not to say a purpose is static and universal among participants. While not an ideal example, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, one contemporary example of a collective, requires a purpose and they shall only pursue actions in furtherance of that purpose (IRS, 2022). A perhaps lesser known example of an organization—but one that strikes me as more posthuman—is the decentralized autonomous organization (DAO), which is also organized around a purpose outlined in the rules of an Ethereum-based smart contract (Ethereum, 2022). A purpose is a starting point, bringing the collective together and driving its actions, but it is fluid; the rhizome is not reliant on the initial point of entry to continue. For me, the concept of the assemblage reconfigures the idea of collective motivation around a new, inclusive subjectivity, resulting in my rethinking of motivation as an integral part of posthuman subjectivity. Motivation is not necessarily something to be taught or fostered or provided. Rather, it is inherent. Maybe then, the question is not *how do I motivate my students?* but *how can my classroom inspire self-organization into a collective?*

Looking at Betty's account of the events that followed, perhaps the teacher isn't always meant to be the catalyst: "[John] pulled everybody in. And then once they were pulled in, all their personalities came

out... I've never seen a group of students so engaged in something, and they're still hung up on it." Betty described the students bringing their strengths to learning about different features of the Titanic, then being quizzed by the principal and putting their knowledge on display. Was John the catalyst then? Or the content? Does it matter? For teachers who might want to replicate these outcomes, it does. The collective engaged in the event of learning in multiple ways.

For me, this insight that the assemblage could be the learning subject was an epiphany. It leads to questions like, *how do we shape our curriculum around organic emergence?* or *what does assessment look like when learning is the assemblage?* Striving to cultivate learning-as-collectives in our instructional spaces might generate new possibilities.

Another part of this story is the context of schooling in the US. As I mentioned, the NRP Report had shaped policy even though it problematically "limited its focus to true experiments...and quasi-experiments" (Pressley, 2002, p. 166). The current state of schools is shaped by policy, and policy is entangled with data produced from large-scale, standardized assessments of individuals and software designed by for-profit education companies. The positivist inclinations of both policymakers and the cognitivist camp of literacy education align with the individual as the assessable subject position. On the other hand, the social approaches to pedagogy that value students and their communities also ask educators to adapt to the context of the students' lives, providing an appealing axiological position by comparison, but not one that can be easily measured and thus it remains the minor paradigm. Therefore, reading development and the many factors that produce motivated, engaged, enthusiastic readers (and learners for that matter) are manifested in the curriculum (both in K-12 education and teacher

preparation) as residing within the cognitive processes of the individual learner—a reified subject position so dominant as to obscure others, much like the surface of the ocean conceals most of an iceberg.

Contrarily, the questions I am asking seem to point away from skills-based literacy instruction and large-scale assessment based solely on cognitive skills. Working on specific skills, like phonics development, can certainly help some learners, but is predicated by an assumed pathway through reading development. It is certain and deterministic—antithetical to posthuman thinking—which means it excludes and pushes some students to the margins. These very students are the ones who flourished in the context of the learning assemblage in my story about Betty and John's experience.

Braidotti (2019) leads me to reconsider the standard framework of education in which all students are measured individually for their competence. The students in Betty's class engaged in different ways. The student who "roped them into it"—Betty's words—isn't getting a better grade for motivating everyone. None of what happened is measurable in any traditional way; this whole situation doesn't meet a standard, and the students didn't necessarily do better on state tests because of it. But they all loved getting roped into it. One of Betty's reflections provides some insight here:

> Last year, they were too dependent on me, they would look to me, but now, like, if they're having trouble logging on to a website, they ask someone next to them first, which I love, because they have to learn to be problem solvers. And that's the collective right there.

Individual-based learning may continue to situate the teacher-as-authority, whereas a collective approach may better promote peers as knowledgeable. They

became a rope, perhaps stronger in their entangled state than on their own.

Shifting course a bit, I'd like to share another thought about text selection as a means to motivate readers. A wider move toward inclusion and representation has led many educators to select texts that are culturally relevant, an act that I support. But I also critique the practice as potentially one that reaffirms dominant narratives from the perspective of someone "inside" an Othered culture (McCarthy, 2020). Jarvie (2021), similarly cautious, offers an alternative to relevance, which I find intriguing and promising: resonance. He argues that "identifying a text as relevant often works from a place of assumption, made by both teachers and students" (Jarvie, 2021, p. 13) and hopes to challenge this practice, not to end it. I wonder if resonance is something that can be predicted: he describes his experience as one in which resonance recurred after the reading. Resonance certainly is another way to understand how the group of students became so engaged. That a single text could resonate with the whole class—which is how Betty described it—seems fortunate, maybe even unlikely. I am not discounting the concept of resonance. In fact, I really love it, but it does not sufficiently explain how so many students were engaged. *Is resonance an outcome of engagement rather than a predictor? Therefore, can collective engagement create resonance?* Looking again to Deleuze (1994), "that which can only be sensed… moves the soul, 'perplexes it'—in other words, forces it to pose a problem" (p. 140). This posing of problems can drive inquiry, and perhaps engagement, resonance. Schooling often seems like it prefers students demonstrate mastery rather than being perplexed.

> **"Schooling often seems like it prefers students demonstrate mastery rather than being perplexed… Reimagining our work outside the normative evaluation of all humans as individuals meant to meet that same standards allows us to open possibilities."**

In terms of educational significance, I hope for this analysis to provide other teachers with insight into their own practice, using story to "theorize an interdependent relation between the particularities of human existence and the general condition of being human" (Freeman, 2017, p. 37)—or the general condition of being a teacher. Until we encounter different ideas, we are unlikely to understand them as possible. In this case, I hope to introduce the idea of collective motivation as an example of learning undertaken by a complex assemblage, a collectivity. The question that lingers with me still: *is an authentic emergence of a collectivity replicable?* I want to believe it is, and I'll keep trying. Also, I suggest here that this learning cannot and should not be assessed individually. Perhaps Gottlieb's (2016) distinction between assessments *as*, *for*, and *of* learning can help: I might strive to learn about my students and their learning, not evaluate their performance of a standard.

How and what we teach and assess creates and excludes possibility. In *Teaching Against the Grain*, in which Simon (1992) explains, "forms of power and legitimation in schools structure a field of possibilities and regulate actual behaviors" (p. 10). Reimagining our work outside the normative evaluation of all humans as individuals meant to meet that same standards allows us to open possibilities. Simon (1992) later asks, "what are the desired versions of a future human community implied in the pedagogy in which one is implicated?" (p. 15). I am thinking through this question and I intend this project as an entry point for other educators to do the same. Perhaps the ideas I've considered here—that individual motivation is insufficient to explain what occurred in the story; inherent motivation belongs to collective

subjectivities like assemblages; deterministic curriculum and individual assessment do not support learning as collective; students viewing one another as knowledgeable is vital; and that striving for resonance may mean looking for questions, not answers—can help new puzzles emerge that perplex us and motivate us to collectively reconfigure the experience of learning.

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The Authoritarian Threat to Public Education: Attacks on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Undermine Teaching and Learning

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Many of us in the field of education watched with bewilderment around the time of the 2020 presidential campaign as Critical Race Theory (CRT) became a source of heated conversation in right-wing media and vitriol was increasingly directed at both K-12 and higher education over the issue. Most recognized the tactic as part of a larger culture war meant to inflame the sentiments of voters and rouse opposition to those segments of society that embrace diversity. But when substantial portions of the general populace came to accept the inflamed rhetoric regarding CRT, real-world consequences were inevitably the result. Citizens protested and lobbied local school boards for action (Legal Defense Fund, 2022). State politicians took up the cause to enact legislation with the purpose of clamping down on teachers and professors whom they suspected may be responsible for pushing the tenets of CRT on vulnerable students. This has had an especially detrimental impact on educators in the field of language arts, an area that is by nature steeped in culture and diversity. How could a teacher successfully teach language arts without offering students a range of literature written by authors from a variety of backgrounds and without taking into account the language and culture of the readers?

Recently laws have been passed around the country, including here in the state of Georgia, that limit teachers' ability to choose reading selections and which ultimately narrow the topics they may incorporate into their lessons (Ray & Gibbons, 2021; Sawchuk, 2021). These laws also give parents and community members who have no training or formal education in language arts or the field of education the ability to dictate what students will read for class and limit what is covered within the curriculum. The hysteria over CRT misinformation which has started to become ingrained in policy and laws infringes on academic freedom and may have profound negative consequences on education at several levels. Here I will argue that these actions by state legislatures, particularly in the state of Georgia, come at the nadir of decades of mismanagement of education by politicians and state legislators and have left the field of education on a precipice, pushing society into a historic crisis.

We must first establish why I feel confident in labeling the rhetoric fueling CRT opposition as misinformation. The most obvious indication that CRT rhetoric is misinformation is that CRT is *not actually taught* in K-12 schools or in teacher education programs. I challenge anyone to find reference to CRT in any state curricular standards or in the standards or objectives in teacher education programs (CCSSO, 2013; Georgia Department of Education, 2022; NCTE, 2009). You will not find it

because it is not there. It does not exist. CRT is a theory that is taught predominantly in law school and applies to graduate-level legal scholarship (American Bar Association, 2022). To be clear, K-12 students and undergraduate teaching majors are not taking graduate-level classes in law school. So what exactly do pundits, "concerned" citizens, and politicians mean when they object to CRT being taught in public schools? I contend, and will provide evidence here, that they mean they object to a commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and to social justice in general.

In February of 2022, David Knight, a State Representative on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Higher Education in the Georgia legislature, sent a request to the acting chancellor meant to be forwarded to each public college and university in the state. In that letter Mr. Knight requested that the schools furnish him with information regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts, not with the intention of promoting those efforts, but to monitor and limit them. The implication was that the Appropriation Committee may use a school's involvement with DEI as a reason to withdraw funding for those schools, an overt attempt to stifle DEI in higher education.

In his letter, Mr. Knight asked the universities to identify any faculty or staff who were involved in DEI efforts and their salary information. He requested information regarding individuals who "advance, advocate, or support" issues of racial identity, anti-racism, gender, ethnicity, social justice, DEI, or bias. Among other information, the letter demanded details on scholarship funds, campus initiatives, offices and positions, speakers and book studies dealing with those areas, and whether faculty are permitted to do research and scholarship in any of those areas towards their job responsibilities. It additionally asked about programs that serve students in any of those areas, publications and materials that include the terms "equity" or "anti-racism", or publications produced at the university that reference the authors Dr. Ibram Kendi, Dr. Beverly DiAngelo, or Dr. Carol Anderson. Such requests not only infringe on academic freedom but arguably tread on 1st Amendment rights and reflect

an authoritarian, almost dystopian level of control over the types of thought and discussion that may take place in the learning environment. (In fact, this policy paper would violate most of the restrictions that Mr. Knight would like to see in place.)

The clear implication was that issues of anti-racism, social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion are not topics to be discussed and promoted, but topics that should be prohibited and must be censured. But if anti-racism is a bad thing, does that mean that racism is the goal? If social justice is problematic, does that mean we should strive for injustice? Should *in*equity and *ex*clusion be ideals for places of higher education? As one might expect, such requests by the state government caused grave concerns among faculty, whether those issues were central to their expertise and course topics or not.

In tandem with Mr. Knight's intrusive "oversight" into higher education, state legislators passed Georgia House Bill 1084 (2022), which was signed by the governor into law and is directed at K-12 teachers in the state. Like Knight's letter, House Bill 1084 does not mention CRT directly, but CRT hysteria clearly fueled the premise for the bill. Instead of referencing CRT, Bill 1084 uses the term "divisive concepts". The bill is written in such a way that it is cloaked in language meant to sound as if the bill prohibits racial discrimination. However, a close reading of the bill reveals it was actually designed to limit discussion of issues related to DEI. The bill establishes a system for complaints against teachers who may touch upon these "divisive concepts" and bans the use of "curricula or training programs which act upon, promote, or encourage certain concepts". It also forbids training programs or requirements toward certification that involve DEI principles. Chillingly, it provides procedures for complaints and discipline of teachers who are found in violation, including suspending and revoking their certification.

House Bill 1084 (2022) actually seeks to keep teachers from including reference to DEI in their classrooms. In the language that appears to protect against racial discrimination, the practical effect would be to allow White students and parents to have

a teacher disciplined if, for instance, the teacher's lesson dealt with issues of race in the Old South or during the Harlem Renaissance and the student or parent felt that such topics negatively portrayed White citizens from the time period. The parent could claim that the topic was a divisive concept and that they believed their child was being attacked, and it is possible that the teacher could face punitive measures if administrators agreed the lesson qualified as a divisive concept. There is language in the bill that allows for discussion of race and equity if it is deemed to be within the proper academic context and germane to the field; but, the ambiguity regarding what actually qualifies as a divisive concept and the broad nature for allowable complaints against teachers serves to limit the speech and content that teachers may include in their lessons. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) describes such bills as educational gag orders and characterizes them as infringing on academic freedom (2022). While the AAUP is a national organization that can represent and defend professors in higher education, K-12 teachers in Georgia do not have even the limited protections of a similar organization.

This overreach on the part of the state legislature comes on the heels of decades of mismanagement of education at both the K-12 and university levels. For years public school teachers have been maligned as inadequate, and bureaucratic hurdles were put in place for those entering public education. This was done under the auspices of "raising standards and rigor" in teacher preparation. As any of the hundreds of teachers I have trained in the past decade would attest, I believe that improving the quality and rigor of teacher education is important, as is improving the effectiveness of teachers; but, in order to make that work, the profession must be more attractive to potential teachers, and one essential way to do that is by raising teacher salaries. However, that has not been the case. The state legislature has made it more cumbersome for candidates to become teachers, with additional requirements and assessments, some of which have questionable validity (Cuevas, 2018).

The legislature made it more difficult for candidates to become teachers without increasing compensation in a meaningful way, which, when adjusting for inflation over time, has the effect of actually lowering real-life buying power of teachers. This has made the field less attractive to those considering becoming teachers, and states across the country are facing massive teacher shortages (Natanson, 2022). Florida now has plans to allow veterans and their spouses to become full-time K-12 teachers without any university-level training in education or the content area they will be teaching (Ali, 2022). They will not even be required to have a college degree. One of the reasons that teachers have left the profession in Florida is the state's efforts to limit diversity, equity, and inclusion (Nittle, 2022). In the north Georgia and Atlanta suburbs served by my university, counties have begun allowing college seniors to teach full-time, without the presence of a mentor teacher. This may have a detrimental impact on those teaching candidates, who are not prepared to be full-time teachers, and those K-12 students they serve. The push to raise teaching standards, but doing so in an illogical and counterproductive fashion, has essentially led to a situation where there are no longer any standards.

These are just limited examples of how education has been mismanaged over the last two decades. Now the legislature has further damaged the teaching profession and made the job even less palatable with its authoritarian policies based on CRT misinformation. With teachers already leaving the profession due to the Covid pandemic and low pay and fewer prospective teachers entering the field, the state government now mandates what teachers can discuss and what readings they can assign. This is not just irresponsible; it's destructive. Diversity, equity, and inclusion, which as I have shown, are what the state legislature is really attempting to limit–, are essential to education and the educational environment, and they benefit *all* students (Dawson & Cuevas, 2019). These principles are particularly important to language arts. How can a teacher cover the Harlem Renaissance without discussing issues of race and equity? Will teachers be prohibited from assigning works of authors like Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, or Judith Ortiz Cofer because their

writing deals with "divisive concepts"? This can only serve to further deteriorate the profession and drive quality teachers from the field when they feel they do not have academic freedom and cannot adequately teach their subject without fear of reprisal.

Several of my recent studies and papers have examined the psychological processes related to misinformation and authoritarianism of this nature, including the prejudices associated with it (Cuevas, 2015; Cuevas & Dawson, 2020; Cuevas & Dawson, 2021; Cuevas, et al., 2022). At this point, while the reasons for the spread of misinformation and proliferation of authoritarianism are worth investigating, the real-life consequences should concern every rational citizen. This comes as the lowest point of decades of poor stewardship by the state, and I believe it may be a tipping point for K-12 and higher education. Those of us who value education and who recognize the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion, and more broadly, social justice, cannot allow state politicians to continue to degrade public education for partisan purposes. The health of our society is dependent on the quality of the education system, and good citizens must not be blind to the damage being done to education. Teachers, administrators, and citizens must act collectively to repel such efforts and reject and replace those authoritarian lawmakers who would seek to undermine public education.

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A Critical Pedagogy for Love and Healing Toward Anti-Asian Racism and Xenophobia

by Ting Yuan, CUNY College of Staten Island

Several days after the 45th president of the United States (U.S.) referred to COVID-19 as "the Chinese virus" in March 2020, my daughter Letao, a 6-year-old first grader, came to me after her online schooling in a New York City public school. She looked perplexed and asked if I knew why one of her classmates in Zoom called the Coronavirus a "Chinese virus." I was concerned that the racialized labeling made by the former president would begin to hit the daily lives of Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) in this country. However, I didn't predict that it could spread to my daughter's school life at such a speed. Without any hesitation, I explained to Letao how the former president and some government officials coined and criticized "the Chinese virus" and "Kung Flu" in public (Chen, 2020). The little girl was furious. One of her beloved stories was *I Dissent*, a picture book featuring the life story of the late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg (RBG). Being brave to show her dissent to anything unfair, just like RBG, became her "thing." She asked, "Mom, I want to send my dissent to the president. Would you help me make a video and post it on your Facebook? So your friends and everyone can see it!" This request drove me to assist Letao in producing her video dissent toward the former president. In the Facebook video posted on March 21, 2020, she chose to stand in front of her upright piano, her favorite space at home, and shouted out the following:

"I dissent with President Donald Trump. Because the Coronavirus started in China, it does not mean he needed to call it the Chinese virus. And he is being mean to the Chinese people. And he is hurting their feelings. And the name of the virus is actually the Coronavirus!"

Critical Pedagogies during Difficult Times

In the two years since the former president used a racist term to describe COVID-19, there has been a terrifying surge in Sinophobia and anti-Asian racism across the country. History repeats itself on how phenomena of infectious diseases are used to produce racist stigma toward particular racial groups (Markel & Stern, 2002). Today, fueled by the pandemic-related "rhetoric of blame," the Sinophobic stigma "was in tune with a long history of state-sanctioned racial bias against Asian communities from the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 to Japanese American wartime incarceration and, more recently, the immigrant bans" (Viladrich, 2021, p. 878). The Center for Study of Hate and Extremism (2021) found that anti-Asian hate crimes increased by 339 percent last year compared to the year before, mostly against Asian women. Until December 2021, there were 10,905 hate incidents reported from around the country, which included a variety of physical, verbal, and online assaults (AAPI Equity Alliance, 2022). AAPI families in this country have developed a new routine (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2022), walking daily

in caution, fear, and trauma. In particular, hate violence targeted at Asian elders still happens in subways and local Chinatowns today (Shanahan, 2022). As a transnational Chinese educator and motherscholar teaching in an early childhood education program at an urban public university, I sorrowed, resisted, and reflected on Freire's critical pedagogies to guide my childcare and teaching practices during the depressing time.

In Freire's (2004) writing, he delved into the profound role of education in individual development and insisted on the use of love as a "radical" act of freedom to resist oppression:

> I have the right to be angry and to express that anger, to hold it as my motivation to fight; just I have the right to love and to express my love for the world, to hold it as my motivation to fight, because while a historical being, I live history as time of possibility, not of predetermination. (...) My right, my justice is based on my disgust towards the denial of the right to "be more", which is etched in the nature of human beings (Freire, 2004, p. 58-59).

Freire's "radical" love served as the foundation to guide my childcare practices at home and my online teaching of undergraduate preservice teachers in understanding and enacting critical literacy. Three days after the massacre in Atlanta, Georgia on March 16, 2021 that killed eight people, including six Asian women, Haeny Yoon and Tran Templeton, representing the AERA SIG Critical Perspectives on Early Childhood Education made their statement on anti-Asian racism and terrorism (2021). Their timely statement critiques "school curriculum and policies that invoke white nationalism and supremacy," calling for every teacher, researcher, and educator to take responsibility for making people of Color visible through anti-racist work in different sectors. I shared Haeny and Tran's statement with my students, who are preservice teachers. Embedding in Freire's critical pedagogies, my students and I discussed the racialized discourses on COVID-19, then we reflected on how to include and sustain the linguistic and cultural repertoires of students of Color and their

families in classroom curriculum. I further shared the story of a #StopAsianHate rally in which my daughter and I participated. In spring 2021, Letao and I joined our AAPI friends in the rally, which was held on a Sunday morning right after the massacre in Atlanta, Georgia. As shown by Figure 1, Letao was holding a sign with a handwritten message: "#StopAsianHate: Stop killing and bullying Asian!" She volunteered to stand at the spot shown in the photo, hoping more people could see her sign. She was seriously "on duty" for one hour and a half. In the process, we were angry but calm, serious but (still) loving, proud (to be Asian) but heartbroken for all the racism and crime incidents toward AAPIs. We came across many rally attendants and journalists who showed Letao their warmth and affirmation.

Figure 1. Letao was "on duty" in the #StopAsianHate Manhattan Rally on March 21, 2021 (Photo by Ting Yuan)

Critical Literacy Through Children's Literature

Freire's conceptualization of critical literacy, with the pretext of radical love, challenges individuals to examine power relations and inequalities in real life (1970, 2004). Critical literacy can be enacted in both daily life and with the everyday literature used

in the classroom. Having a diverse classroom library that includes the authentic stories of children of Color is a stepping stone for enacting critical literacy and cultivating self-affirmation (Bishop, 1990). Children's picture book author and illustrator Grace Lin (2016), who continues to use Bishop's analogy on using books as "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors" for children, elaborates her own childhood experience of feeling invisible in a classroom that lacked books on AAPI children's authentic life stories. Nowadays, there are children's book authors, such as Livia Blackburne, Andrea Cheng, Yumi Heo, Joanna Ho, Sanae Ishida, Aram Kim, Lenore Look, Bao Phi, and Janet Wong, who have written prolifically to feature AAPI children and families. In August 2020, Joyce Lee, Emily Ku, and Maggie Chen published *Young, Proud, and Sung-jee* online (http://www.youngproudsungjee.com/). It was the first children's picture book written on fighting anti-Asian racism during the pandemic. The book has been translated into more than 10 languages. My students and I read the book synchronously in class. We discussed our individual experiences during the pandemic in local neighborhoods and shared moments of anxiety, fear, and isolation. One Chinese preservice teacher sent an emotional message after class:

> ...reading this book [Young, Proud, and Sung-jee] made me teary and I'm still currently crying. I didn't even know that it will affect me this much. I have been seeing these hate crimes happening on social media but this book made me feel really upset. I haven't thought the book would [have] made me feel so emotional but I'm glad to have read it. I really like this message from the book, "it's not your fault." (Email Correspondence, March 22, 2021)

I could feel the trauma experienced by the Chinese student, because I was part of the traumatized anti-Asian phenomena. I believe that critical literacy through children's literature should start with "an archaeology of self" (Sealey-Ruiz, 2022), with the following questions: Who am I? Where am I from? Who are/were my families? Where are/were

they from? And what were their experiences? The self-awareness leads to the sustenance and affirmation of every student's racial, cultural, and linguistic identities in a culturally sustaining classroom (Paris & Alim, 2014). In November 2021, to honor and bring visibility of Chinese American history to children's literature, Martha Brockenbrough, Grace Lin, and Julia Kuo authored/illustrated *I Am an American. The Wong Kim Ark Story*. The picture book documents Wong Kim Ark and his battle with the U.S. Supreme Court for birthright citizenship. During the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882-1943) that barred immigration of Chinese laborers, Wong, who was born in the U.S., was detained after re-entering the U.S. from his trip to China. Wong's triumph over his case in the Supreme Court in 1898 made history for all people of Color to have their legal right as birthright citizens. Wong's individual story of fighting for social justice, which is invisible in the White, mainstream school curricula, adds significantly to U.S. history and needs to be addressed in today's K-12 school curricula. Witnessing the pioneer work of Illinois, the first state to require the teaching of Asian American history in U.S. public schools (Illinois Board of Education, 2022), teacher educators across the country can make the first step of change by explicitly including the text in the college classroom.

Lighting the Fire for Social Justice

Following Freire's notion, one vital way to fight against racism is through the unity of love and critical pedagogies in education. In the current post-pandemic era, for APPI communities, it is a time to continue to fight and heal. As a teacher educator and motherscholar, teaching my daughter at home and my preservice teachers in the college classroom has been my critical literacy practices for love and healing. As reminded by an old Chinese saying, only when all contribute their firewood can they build up a strong fire (众人拾柴火焰高).|The " fire" for social justice needs to be lit up by all and persistently maintained. It cannot happen without the active actions made by everyone in all the fields of education.

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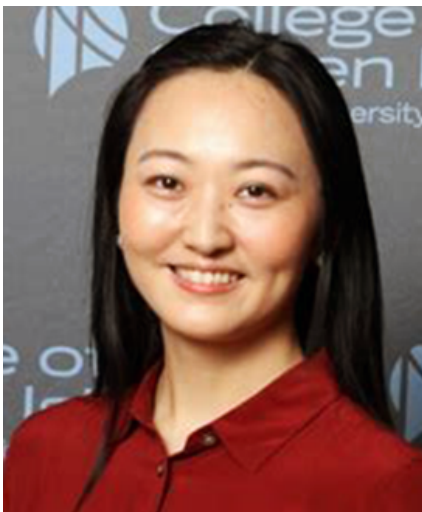
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Towards Linguistic and Disability Justice in Education

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&

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The use of terms like social justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion have exploded in recent years within the field of education, highlighting the increased attention to issues of power and social change. However, scholars have shown the vague and nebulous ways in which such terms and concepts are deployed in ways that ultimately serve to uphold systems of oppression (Ahmed, 2012; Urciuoli, 2010). Thus, it is imperative to attend to how different stakeholders, communities, and groups conceive of such work. In this essay, we offer a starting point for examining the intersection of linguistic and disability justice as a way for us, as language education scholars concerned with social justice, to unpack and trouble how notions of justice are conceptualized and operationalized in education. Disability justice affords us a framework through which to attend to students who are multiply marginalized in language education.

We follow Tuck and Yang's (2018) lead in *Toward What Justice?*— rather than delineating specific goals of social movements or proffering a unified or normative conceptualization of justice, we examine justice as *projects* that are developed in specific contexts and communities, and with specific purposes. For Tuck and Yang, justice is not a framework, epistemological stance, or axiology, but rather, the *practice* of justice. They state, "we use

project as a way to refer to the worldview combined with strategy combined with motive combined with practices and habits" (p. 7, emphasis added). Thus, this essay explores how linguistic and disability justice have been practiced in order to bring together different justice projects and how they comprise "serious work at the nexus of staunch tension" (Tuck & Yang, 2018, p. 8) that can allow for seemingly incommensurate justice projects (e.g., Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Therefore, instead of assuming that all justice projects have the same means and goals, it is imperative to highlight the contradictions and inconsistencies evident in competing justice projects. For example, within both language education and education pertaining to students with disabilities, many activists and educators advocate for ensuring disability rights or linguistic human rights (LHR) (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000), asking for protections and rights for disabled students and for students to have rights to a language-related identity and access to their mother tongue. However, scholars studying both language and disability have challenged the affordances of a rights-based framework; considering LHR, Makoni (2013) also questions the ways that a rights-based framework does or doesn't account for those who are marginalized within each group or straddle both identities. Similarly, coming from a

feminist crip-of-color perspective, Jina Kim (2017) argues that a rights-based framework assumes that justice practitioners seek salvation from the state, pointing to differences in theories and practices of social change among different groups and constituencies.

In fact, many education scholars who study justice, language, and/or disability in and out of education have moved away from focusing on rights, troubling the notion that policy changes are the sole way for social change to occur. Flores and Chaparro (2018), for example, point to the importance of attending to the material dimensions of policy, while others have pointed to the interest convergence that occur when organizing and activist efforts become institutionalized (e.g., inclusion efforts for students with disabilities and the ways that special education legislation reifies ableism and racism, Beratan, 2006; Latinx activists and the Bilingual Education Act, Sung, 2017). Also imperative is the understanding that legislation pertaining to language and disability are often race-evasive, entrenching rather than weakening the ways that students of color are disproportionately classified as in need of remediation because of language or disability (Phuong, 2021). This demonstrates the complexity of social justice, particularly in considering who is struggling for what purposes and for what ends, as well as who and what gets erased. The multiplicity and complexity of the category of disability also mediates the ways that language education often marginalizes, erases, and/or invisibilizes students, teachers, and other stakeholders with disabilities.

While many other conceptualizations of social justice exist, we pay particular attention to the ways that disability justice and linguistic justice efforts coincide. The importance of considering both lies in Lorde's (1982) insistence that we do not live single-issue lives. Students who are classified as having a disability and as an English Learner, for example, often receive fewer resources and lower expectations in both bilingual and monolingual education settings, as well as both general education and special education settings due to their multiple marginalization (Ehlers-Zavala, 2011). Cioè-Peña (2017) points to an *intersectional gap* for such students, especially pointing to the ways that policy does *not* allow for intersectionally addressing the needs of students who are both language-minoritized and classified as disabled.

Thus, it is important to consider how ableism, racism, and linguicism converge and diverge. What would it look like to center the needs of a Latinx student with a speech impairment? An autistic linguistically-minoritized Black student? A deaf Asian American student? An Indigenous student with a learning disability who wants to learn the language of their community? What does it mean to specifically attend to linguistic minoritization not only as a euphemism for racism that is tied to language, but also to consider how students with disabilities are linguistically minoritized and positioned as languageless all together? What might it afford us to explicitly foreground ableism in the construction of standardizing and normalizing language practices and policies that construct language minoritization to assumptions undergirding the ways that problems are framed and addressed?

To that end, we return to Tuck and Yang's (2018) notion of justice *projects*, beginning specifically with the project of disability justice, which emerged in the 2000s. The principles of disability justice include emphasizing the wholeness of individuals regardless of pathologization, the importance of interdependence, and leadership of the most impacted, among others (Sins Invalid, 2019). Rather than provide specific, operative definitions of disability justice, Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) emphasizes the indeterminate nature of what counts as disability justice. They highlight the ways that disability justice requires relationship-building and constant reflexivity, exploring the ways that generative conflicts can and will arise in organizing spaces. Their tome on disability justice offers narratives of historical and contemporary disability justice practices, underscoring the local and context-dependent nature of organizing. Similarly, some sociolinguistic justice work, such Bucholtz et al.'s (2014), is also more concerned with creating ethical partnerships with community members and doing research that emerges from the needs and inquiries

of the communities that researchers work with. They argue for the importance of sociolinguistic justice being "rooted in practice rather than policy" (p. 146), similar to the arguments laid out above.

One of the core principles of disability justice as outlined by Sins Invalid (2019) is the importance of "leadership of those most impacted" (p. 23). This means that when approaching the intersection of disability and language, we have to center the needs of and look to the leadership and guidance of those who are marginalized by ableism and linguistic discrimination. This includes considering the theoretical ways we make sense of language, such as presuming competence (Biklen & Burke, 2005) and changing our practices as we inhabit white normative perceiving positions to assess the language practices of others (e.g., Cioè-Peña, 2020; Rosa & Flores, 2017). Henner (2021) powerfully offers a framework of crip linguistics to decenter normativity in language, which includes considering multimodality and expanding understandings of culture to include disability. Rather than introducing this concept in print, Henner filmed a video in which he uses American Sign Language intead, again countering hegemonic norms of knowledge production and dissemination in academia.

Disability justice also has implications for pedagogical practices and teaching philosophies. Cioè-Peña's TrUDL (2021) framework that examines the overlaps between translanguaging and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) or Waitoller and Thorius' (2016) exploration of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies and UDL highlight the fruitful ways in which pedagogical practices and philosophies that emerge to specifically address the needs of multiply marginalized students can afford more equitable practices in the classroom. Continuing to practice and refine these frameworks and pedagogical tools, considering the local contexts and communities, would be crucial for practicing justice in the classroom.

In addition to teaching, it is also imperative to consider our responsibility as scholars and educators, as well as the limits of scholarship. For example, Angela Reyes (2010) reminds us that the speech practices of Black communities in the United States have been widely analyzed and valorized as legitimate within the field of sociolinguistics. However, as Baker-Bell (2020) points out, "Black people and Black language scholars keep having to remind y'all that it is a legit language" (p.13). This points to the constraints of solely disseminating scholarship as part of the sociolinguistic justice project of the Principle of Error Correction (Lewis, 2018), highlighting the importance of researcher reflexivity and centering the needs of linguistically-minoritized communities and disabled communities (e.g., Zavala, 2018).

We end this essay not with a straightforward definition of justice, since that would be counterintuitive to the vision of educational justice to settle on one definition or one approach. Living under the sign of justice (Tuck and Yang, 2018) means continuously challenging everything we think we know about language, disability, and its intersections in language education, aligned with disability justice's focus on relationality, reflexivity, and care. In this way, we can work towards confronting the pillars of white supremacy and ableism (Bucholtz et al., 2014), and as Baker-Bell (2020) concludes, "to create something we ain't never seen before!" (p. 101).

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Do You Want to Make a TikTok? Is It Time to BeReal?: Gen Z, Social Media, and Digital Literacies

by Trevor Boffone, University of Houston

Ask any random teenager in the United States what their favorite social media apps are and you will inevitably hear the same answers: TikTok, Snapchat, and BeReal. While platforms like Instagram, Triller, Tumblr, and Dubsmash have been popular before, today's Zoomers (so-called members of Generation Z) flock to social media platforms that give the allure of authenticity and a sense of community that they can't get in "real" life or in other spaces. Whether it's TikTok videos or BeReal pictures, Zoomers use these apps as spaces to both document their lives and take a glimpse into the lives of their friends. Leaning into the "social" of social media, they view TikTok and BeReal in much of the same way that previous generations might have approached sociality at school, on sports teams, at church, or in clubs. As these social practices disseminate on social media, youth begin to establish complex systems of culture, aesthetics, ethics, and social norms that spill into offline spaces and, in the process, distill and establish generational culture. It should be no surprise that digital literacies are at the heart of this work considering how digital literacies include social interactions via a myriad of digital tools (Ito et al., 2013; Garcia, 2020).

TikTok and BeReal feature many hallmarks of digital literacies. TikTokers and those trying to BeReal navigate these spaces, create and consume digitized content, communicate with fellow app users and share media in other online and offline places.

The result is an interactive learning experience in which young people write—they create, collaborate, experiment, and take risks to forge self-reflective narratives as well as collective stories that contribute to platformic and generational cultures. In many ways, these apps promote communication. Although social media critics may claim that digital spaces only have negative effects (and, of course, negative effects do exist), social media is not an isolated act. It is an inherently social activity. These apps are participatory. They are collaborative. They are about networking. They are about expanding one's community.

Young people are already using these spaces with youth in the United States using TikTok around 82 minutes per day (Iqbal, 2022), and BeReal accumulating over 21 million downloads in 2022 alone. Given these numbers, as educators, we must consider the educational value of social media sites like TikTok and BeReal (Jerasa & Boffone, 2021). Rather than view them pessimistically, we should instead try to find the potential benefits. We should meet students where they are and embrace the platforms that they use. This collective project is two-fold. On the one hand, we must explore how these sites already operate as legitimate literacy platforms. On the other hand, we should find ways to connect these extant digital spaces into classrooms and, in doing so, acknowledge the cultural power that young people hold to collaboratively forge sophisticated

forms of digital communication.

In what follows, I argue that important literacy practices take place on TikTok and BeReal. Critics will say that these spaces are "child's play" and, as such, that they don't matter. And regarding them as important spaces for literacies? Forget about it! In spite of these critiques, digital technologies are constantly shifting, and with these shifts, new ways of communication, creating, and finding information emerge. For those who came-of-age before the Web 2.0 era, digital platforms may be daunting and downright confusing. But for youth today—so-called digital natives—social media platforms are critical spaces on which a wealth of digital literacy practices emerge, flourish, and penetrate into offline lives. To understand Gen Z, we must understand platforms like TikTok and BeReal. And to understand TikTok and BeReal, we must begin to explore how these platforms function as digital literacies themselves.

TikTok Literacies

TikTok is the international sister-app to Douyin, the immensely popular social media app that has dominated China's social media market since its 2016 debut. Owned by Chinese tech company ByteDance, TikTok became available internationally in 2017 and in North America in 2018 (For more on TikTok, see Kaye et al., 2022). The app features short videos up to 3-minutes long, but often much shorter. TikTok content is incredibly varied ranging from dancing videos and #BookTok reviews to cooking tutorials and chronicles of cute, silly animals. TikTok features a notoriously mysterious algorithm that gives each user a personally-curated and infinitely scrollable stream of content designed to entertain, provoke, and encourage more time on the app. Indeed, TikTok is one of the most addicting digital platforms today (Zeng et al., 2021).

Since its beginnings in the United States, TikTok has had a primarily young user-base, often credited to the fact that ByteDance acquired the video app Musical.ly and merged it with TikTok, folding Musical.ly creators into the newfound TikTok community. This phenomenon only continued, with TikTok quickly becoming a virtual playground for

teenagers and other members of Generation Z "to self-fashion identity, form supportive digital communities, and exert agency" (Boffone, 2021, p. 6). From August 2018 to March 2020, TikTok in the United States became the most important social media platform for Gen Z, beating out other popular apps like Instagram and Snapchat. During this time, Zoomers established the cultural norms and aesthetics of TikTok, which continue today even as the app continues to foster a user-base that spans all generations. Teenagers created the culture that continues today. TikTok experienced tremendous growth in 2020 (as the COVID-19 pandemic forced many folks in the US into lockdown and social distancing. Longing for entertainment and community, people downloaded TikTok en masse, making the platform one of the most downloaded social media apps in recent years, its popularity still increasing in 2022.

TikTok literacies can materialize in different ways. As "complex, cultural artifacts" (Schellewald, 2021, p. 1439), TikTok videos are not merely silly creations that lack meaning (in any definition of the word). Rather, these videos can tell us much about a specific person or group of people. By focusing on aesthetic trends, the choice of audio, the use of text, filming locations, style of dress, use of voiceover, etc., casual observers and researchers alike can begin to see how digital literacies function on the app. TikTok videos and trends function as "identity blueprints" (Boffone, 2022, p. 5-6). That is, by mimicking an existing TikTok trend (Zulli & Zulli, 2020), content creators quite literally try on an existing identity blueprint that becomes part of their digital and offline personalities. Whether it is recreating a dance challenge to a new song by Lizzo or Megan Thee Stallion or doing a taste test video of the weekly Crumbl cookie haul, emulating these trends is a public-facing expression of one's identity that aligns the specific TikToker to the larger group identity.

The intersections between TikTokian identity blueprints and digital literacies also materialize via TikTok subcultures. The platform notoriously features thriving sub-communities, each with their own aesthetics, set of codes, social mores, trends, and literacy practices (Boffone, 2022). While #BookTok

might promote formal reading and readerly identities (Boffone & Jerasa, 2021; Jerasa & Boffone, 2021), other communities such as #WitchTok (Barnette, 2022) and #JewTok (Divon & Ebbrecht-Hartmann, 2022) feature identities connected to witchcraft and Jewishness, respectively. These represent just a few of the many subcultures on TikTok through which digital literacy practices materialize. The literacy approaches that work on #BookTok might not make sense on #WitchTok or #JewTok. #BookTok reviews staging conversations about trending books are distinct from the ways that baby witches try to hex the moon on #WitchTok and the ways that #JewTok creators flip antisemitic content on its head to recenter the identities of Jewish TikTokers. Indeed, although there are widespread digital literacy practices on TikTok, to generalize the app would be a mistake. TikTok cultures vary by community, geographic region, and user demographics, among other factors. As such, the literacies found in this digital space are incredibly robust and multi-faceted.

BeReal Literacies

Although BeReal first debuted in December 2019, the platform didn't catch fire within the popular culture zeitgeist until spring 2022. BeReal has a robust community of active users despite its 21 million paling in comparison to legacy platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. BeReal has become incredibly popular with Gen Z, and accordingly, this rapid growth among youth should give us pause to consider how the platform connects to larger conversations on digital literacies.

Although social media sites like TikTok are rooted in abundance and expansiveness, BeReal is all about scarcity. Users can only post once per day during a 2-minute window. The post features two pictures: one simultaneous picture from the phone's front-facing and back-facing cameras. Users can also add a caption to their post. Users can't see posts—or really engage with the platform—until they have posted themselves. Much like Snapchat, posts disappear after 24 hours, lending a certain ephemerality to the platform. Users do have a private calendar archive of their own photos (while there's a record, no one else can see it). The platform is easy to use with no bells and whistles. Just download the app, turn on notifications, and capture your BeReal during the random two-minute window.

According to BeReal, the app "is your chance to show your friends who you really are, for once" (BeReal, 2022). Given the brief window, to BeReal is to post what you look like in the moment, what you are doing, and where you are. There's no time to plan ahead. Therefore, BeReal is supposedly caked in authenticity, something Wade (2022) sees as BeReal's biggest selling point: "In an age when the Instagram algorithm requires some serious strategy to navigate, and influencer culture is dominant, some young people are searching for a different and more authentic online experience. Tired of finding the perfect light or event for an Instagram post, sharing random daily moments on BeReal can be liberating." Duffy and Gerrard (2022) question if social media users "have outgrown the culture of likes-tallying perfectionism associated with mainstream social networks." In this way, Zoomers regard BeReal as a way to (re)write and (re)inscribe authenticity as a core generational value. Lying in bed, watching television, playing video games, doing absolutely nothing at all—it's not exactly exciting, but it's authentic af. It's everyday life.

The charm of BeReal lies precisely in the mundanity of everyday life. While Zoomers may use platforms like TikTok and Instagram in far more nuanced ways, thus depicting a more complex portrait of identity and generational culture, on BeReal it's nearly impossible to approach the space with such calculation. The affordances and limitations of time and frequency make the space and use of the space particularly unique. Because BeReal only grants users a random two-minute window once per day, to BeReal is to capture life in the moment. If the notification goes off during the school day, then users' feeds will be filled with pictures of their friends (and teachers) at school. If BeReal decides that 9:30pm is indeed the time to be real then users' can see friends in their bedrooms watching tv, playing video games, or doing homework all set against the LED light backdrop that has become standard Gen Z culture.

Although casual observers may dismiss BeReal's window into reality as a digital literacy practice, a deeper look into the platform reveals how Zoomers write BeingReal into popular culture. BeReal literacies are rooted in posting a candid "status update" that shows life as it truly is, where it actually takes place. While Millennials may still use social media platforms as critical sites to post picture-perfect portrayals of a filtered reality, Gen Z values the authenticity that spaces like BeReal promotes. As such, the app demonstrates a resurgence of borderline boring content. Take, for instance, the high volume of bedroom selfies forging an archive of "girls bedroom culture" (Kennedy, 2020). These portraits transform a typically private space into something public-facing that tells us much about generational trends in fashion, interior decorating, and photography. In the case of photography, the Millennial high selfie aka the "Facebook mom selfie" is out, 0.5x pics aka "a point five" are in. Zoomers' beloved 0.5x pic distorts reality, creating a parody of the teenage experience. These pictures are funny, silly, and baked in self-deprecating humor. These pictures are less serious and, accordingly, there is less pressure on the subject of the photograph. They don't need to worry about slaying (re: perfecting their look). It's a stress-free social media alternative that lets teenagers feel comfortable in their own skin in a digital space that is home to them.

BeRe.al/jadyn_ur_fav

BeRe.al/dr_boffone
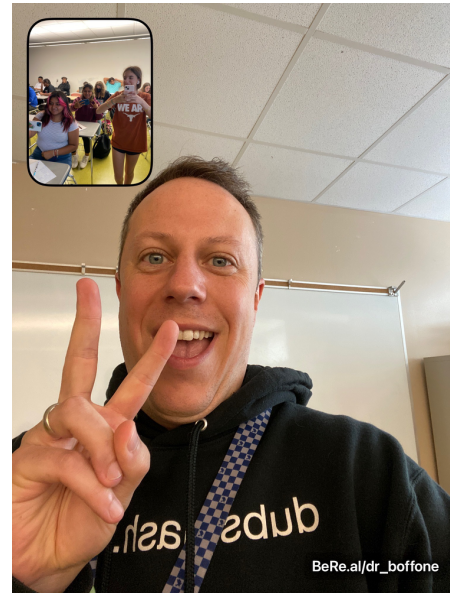
Ok, Let's BeReal and TikTalk Literacy Instruction

Aside from the value that TikTok and BeReal have as creative spaces for young people to experiment with storytelling, these platforms—especially TikTok—can be used in the classroom in formal ways, as well. In my high school and university courses, students use TikTok as a form of creative expression that intersects with the curriculum. For example, in my high school Spanish classes, my students write micro stories in Spanish. After workshopping their writing in small groups and getting feedback from me, students then create video versions of their stories complete with voice over, on-screen text, and greenscreen images on TikTok. In my university-level Intro to LGBTQ+ Studies course, students use the same resources to create videos that explain key principles and figures in queer history. These videos make use of trending sound bites and video effects to enhance the viewer's experience and to teach queer studies to TikTok's potentially viral audience. In both instances, students use traditional writing and the multimodal composition that TikTok allows to create multimodal stories with multiple layers of engagement.

I'm not going to lie; the students love making TikToks as part of the curriculum. Not only is it fun, but it also forces students to learn how to engage with TikTok in a more advanced way. It also reframes

content and multimodal tools that students are accustomed to using in their everyday lives as valid literacy practices worthy of a place in the context of school curriculum. Even the most addicted TikTokers in my classes will inevitably have to learn more about the platform: how to effectively include text and audio, how to manipulate lighting, how to enhance the story via images, how to fill in gaps and help the viewer better understand what they are viewing through explanatory captions, etc. Accordingly, the TikTok projects are not simply silly activities we do in class. Rather, I have my students create TikToks to engage with the course content (be it Spanish or LGBTQ+ Studies) in a more nuanced way, a way that transpires in a space that students already feel comfortable with and one that can indeed be an important space for digital literacies.

Incorporating BeReal into the curriculum poses more challenges than TikTok. But, as I have experienced this school year with my high school students, BeReal engenders conversations and community-building. BeReal is not part of my teaching toolbox; rather, I allow it to co-exist within my classroom. Pausing class for two-minutes when the notification goes off so that students can BeReal in the classroom may seem far-removed from learning Spanish (or any school subject for that matter), but giving students space to be creative, write themselves into a digital space, and engage with their in-class and online friends can completely shift a classroom community. This simple brain break can be a much-needed reset before diving back into the curriculum. In any case, it can give a teacher and their

students a commonality that unites them and forges a stronger classroom community.

Indeed, TikTok and BeReal offer a wealth of opportunities for digital literacy engagement. Whether through out-of-school or in-school practices, these social media sites—in addition to any number of platforms that are popular with Zoomers—speak to nuanced ways that young people write themselves into the narrative via a host of literacy practices. While some of these approaches may be confusing to us folks who were "born in the 1900s," this doesn't negate the power that these social media sites hold to produce culture. As educators, we should be encouraged to embrace the transformative potential of social media in formal and informal ways to engage our students in digital spaces that feel native to them. Of course, this work doesn't replace extant curricula. Rather, by bringing social media platforms like TikTok and BeReal into the classroom—even through fostering more cultural competency that allows us to have more authentic conversations with students—we can meet diverse students' learning needs, including the social and emotional. We can expand our classrooms to be more culturally relevant and at the forefront of social change. Zoomers are already doing this work, and we have as much to learn from them as they do from our classes. Why shouldn't we join them?

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Review of *The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop: How to Decolonize the Creative Classroom*

By Felicia Rose Chavez

Reviewer: Honor McElroy, Salisbury University, Salisbury, MD
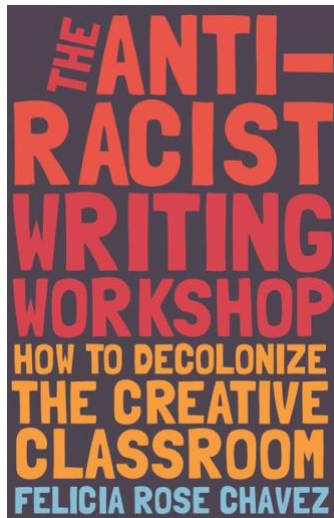
Chavez, F. R. (2021). The anti-racist writing workshop: How to decolonize the creative classroom. Haymarket Books.

ISBN: 978-1642592672

Overview

I have been a poet for most of my life. I have read my work at round tables in college workshops, on stages during poetry readings, and before small gatherings in libraries. My own life as a poet deeply informed my work as a high school writing teacher, making me turn to workshop again and again in response to the troubling privileging of five paragraph essays and the words theme, argumentation, and test.

In her book, The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop: How to Decolonize the Creative Classroom, Chavez (2021) engaged me first as a writer. Part memoir of an artist, part nuts-and- bolts manual, part sociopolitical commentary-- Chavez pulled me in with her stories, made me draw a sharp breath at the beauty and the brutal truth of her words, had me shaking my head or smiling at her nuanced discussion of the political and economic landscape of education, and made me trust her when she called herself out. Chavez plants us in her world: a world of white supremacy and white privilege, a world in which authors of color do not make it onto the pages of required reading, and a world in which authors of color do not command the writing workshop table. Chavez's book offers a new model— to replace the old lumbering beast bent on silence.

Then Chavez engaged me as a teacher. While her focus is on redefining creative writing workshop spaces in post-secondary contexts, the power of the antiracist writing workshop is that it radically challenges the pedagogical and assessment paradigms of secondary ELA classrooms as well as postsecondary contexts. Chavez dovetails the hard work of writing and the hard work of creating antiracist communities. This blended purpose adds a critical lens oriented towards equity and justice which is absent from the ELA models of writing workshop that are advanced in foundational texts

like Kittle's (2008) Write beside them. In doing so, Chavez offers a new model for writing in educational spaces that blends theory, history, and the concrete details needed to engage in this sort of transformation.

Her book centers on three transformational concepts: the process of writers as artists; the quest for voice and authenticity in resistance to patriarchal, white conceptions of literary merit; and the careful, intentional creation of anti-racist writing communities.

Writers as Authors

Chavez is relentless in her rejection of the high stakes, traditional writing workshop in which final pieces are brutally subjected to criticism as the writer sits in silence. Instead, Chavez crystalizes her experiences in studio arts by reclaiming the process of writing from the stasis of finalized perfection. In her model, writing goes beyond the silent solitude of screens. Writing requires experimentation, tinkering, playing, and speaking. Chavez draws upon Peter Elbow's use of freewriting, of moving the hand across the page without stopping, of silencing the editor's voice as the page fills.

She calls for the separation of writing phases—teach students to write, then revise, then edit. Give them the tools to make their own choices when editing. Help them control the process and the emotion embedded in that process. Elicit and give feedback that is divorced from ego and bias. While I understand the danger of creative paralysis if writers do not separate getting words on the page from editing those words, I also see writing as recursive and iterative by nature. We write, tinker, write more, scratch out, return, tinker, write, strip, erase, write, polish, and even perhaps burn. Chavez's separation of writing into phases may not attend to a less linear conception of writing. But her main

argument, which positions writers are artists, is not at odds with the iterative and recursive nature of writing. Additionally, she highlights that artists must feed themselves in order to create. Chavez gives tips for inspiring writers as artists-- like a weekend assignment which entails an art gallery visit, an hour-long walk, a documentary, and drawing as a way to feed inspiration. They must also approach their work as a process and a sacred daily ritual—not a high stakes product. Chavez highlights the paradigm shift of focusing on a messy artistic process, whereby "to resuscitate their practice, participants must break free from their heads and reengage with their bodies as creative instruments" (p. 76).

The Quest for Voice

In the anti-racist workshop, the core of the writer's work is to find voice and thus authenticity. That authenticity is an act of resistance to the sanctioned voice in the traditions of western literature. This resistance becomes critical consciousness. Chavez requires teachers of writing to turn away from the traditional imitation of mentor texts, so students may explore their own voices. The assumption of voice is the refusal to imitate white authors, to locate the writer's identity in their own lived experience and talent, instead of mimicry. This critical consciousness is the power of immersing in language and crafting that language in resistance, in rebellion, in a breaking of rules that is antithetical to the stasis of technical perfection or filling pages with the voices of others.

As a reader, Chavez prompted me to consider this act of critical consciousness: what do we read—and by reading affirm—and how do we construct knowledge in classrooms? Chavez's discussion of the canon echoes so much work happening right now in secondary ELA classrooms that attempts to resist corporate neoliberal packages. But while teachers

might do this as a means of reclaiming their own agency, Chavez calls on us to take the risk of curating classroom anthologies and making curricular decisions for the purposes of refusing to erase the voices of people of color. Chavez traces the evolution of her own conception of completing the canon. This evolution started with moving away from anthologies, which erroneously define what counts as literature in Western Civilization. These anthologies are great big tomes filled with the writing of white men and a few women. This movement entailed curating binder-clipped, Xeroxed collections of diverse voices throughout literature. In her recent work completing the canon, she co-constructs digital collections with her students. These digital collections focus on living artists who give voice to the marginalized.

Chavez also focuses on the collaborative building of shared knowledge. The writing workshop leader, ELA teacher, or first year composition instructor loosens the authoritative grip on their power over definitions and interpretations to allow for the organic co-creation of knowledge. What does that look like? An example of building shared knowledge is asking writers to articulate their own understanding of voice and then using their writing to trace what that looks like on the page. The work of shared knowledge entails exploring what crafting language means to writers of different races, genders, sexualities, and ethnicities.

Chavez's focus on teaching craft attends mainly to narrative writing. But my teacher mind envisions how powerful it would be to approach craft techniques as fluid and traversing the boundaries of genres. I want to feel the joy of watching writers wield craft as a tool for awakening revelations in themselves and their audiences as opposed to a straitjacket of rules and regulations. My teacher mind wants to invite writers to consider the constraints, affordances, and sometimes blurry

boundaries of genres. What does building an extended metaphor look like when working in lyric poetry, prose poetry, and flash nonfiction? Playing with a craft technique across two (and a half?) genres—poetry and prose as well as the blurry in-between of prose poetry-- helps writers develop control of structure and space on the page. Additionally, instead of highly controlled and formulaic research and informational writing, Chavez's workshop model could help students experiment with writing research and informational texts that actually resemble the writing we find in the world, which fuses craft moves from genres together-- like Adichie's (2015) We should all be feminists.

Anti-Racist Writing Communities

Chavez's workshop model centers on the careful, intentional creation of anti-racist writing communities. Members of these communities share a commitment to writing, goodness, and creative power. This commitment is enacted by fostering engagement via deep listening, nurture, and mindfulness. Chavez has a number of tips for supporting students in the act of listening. Some tips are concrete: advice that helps workshop leaders in facilitating an awareness of body language during workshop time or daily check ins to begin workshop sessions. Other tips speak to the need for writers to engage in frequent self-care, so they can commit to the hard emotional work of living in a writing community. This work that Chavez calls for is work that requires extreme vulnerability. From that vulnerability and commitment comes community.

In response to traditional workshop communities that center on white, supremacist cultural knowledge as the accepted standard, the anti-racist writing workshop uses food, language, and collaborative engagement to build conceptions of creative culture from the ground up. This work builds writing communities that honor, support, and subvert the institutionalized white, patriarchal power structure that is deeply embedded into our daily experiences.

One snag does linger in my mind as I consider the feasibility of transferring the anti-racist workshop model beyond the walls of post-secondary creative writing classrooms. Chavez's model relies on the concept of choice. The brutal vulnerability, the relentless pursuit of voice, and the risk taking of experimental craft and pedagogy are possible because each student chooses to take the class. English classes in high school are not choices; they are requirements. First year composition classes are not much more. Is it possible to require so much of young writers if they are not willing? That remains to be seen.

In conclusion, when I first heard the title, The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop, I was intrigued, but also a little afraid. Reading Chavez meant facing my own complicity in a system of white supremacy. Would I leave the reading of this book shaken and annihilated, unable to face my own career as an educator? Or would I leave the reading of this book feeling the urgent need to engage in equity work, but with no real plan for how to achieve that work? Trust that Chavez will give you a path. The anti-racist writing workshop model does not require that we annihilate ourselves and start again as educators: it requires that we revise the traditions of writing workshop in ELA classrooms or first year composition or creative writing classrooms. When we worry about what that revision looks like, Chavez gives us a detailed blueprint and encourages us to adapt this plan to our own context.

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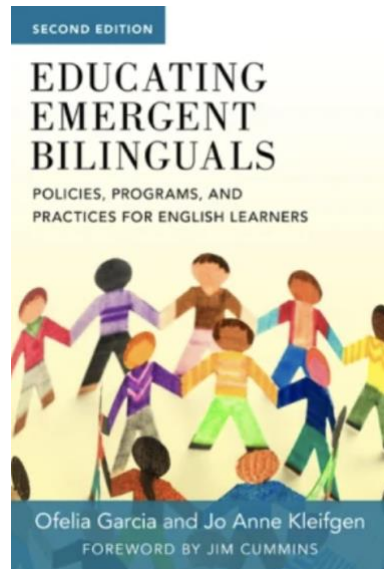
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Review of *Educating Emergent Bilinguals: Policies, Programs, and Practices for English Learners* (2nd ed.)

By Ofelia Garcia and Jo Anne Kleifgen

Reviewer: Molly Buck, University at Albany-State University of New York, Albany, NY

Abstract

This review of *Educating Emergent Bilinguals: Policies, Programs, and Practices for English Learners* (2nd edition) by Ofelia García and Jo Anne Kleifgen (2018) highlights the key themes of the benefits of bilingual education, instruction that leverages family language practices, and the disconnect between research and practice in the education of emergent bilinguals in U.S. schools. The book chapters follow a framework that covers important issues that impact emergent bilinguals, investigates current inequitable practices, and advocates for alternative practices that better serve emergent bilinguals, citing evidence to show how these practices are beneficial. Examples of these alternative practices for emergent bilinguals include support of translanguaging in the classroom, the use of performance-based assessments that distinguish between language and content proficiency, and more access to advanced academic classes. The review links these key themes to important current educational issues, including interrupted instruction from the Covid-19 pandemic and the rapid increase in early literacy screening throughout the U.S. The review concludes by highlighting a bilingual Pre-K program in Syracuse, NY, that supports linguistically diverse students through equitable teaching practices and family engagement.

Key words: emergent bilingual, bilingual education, multilingualism, English learner, translanguaging

Book Overview

Educating Emergent Bilinguals: Policies, Programs, and Practices for English Learners (2nd edition) by Ofelia García and Jo Anne Kleifgen (2018) is a book for educators, researchers, linguists, policymakers, parents, and advocates who are interested in learning about the state of bilingual education in the United States. García and Kleifgen present and discuss many convincing studies showing the benefits of bilingual education, the challenges facing bilingual programs and emergent bilinguals in U.S. schools, and alternative practices and policies that would help connect research to practice. A recurring theme in the book is that despite research showing the effectiveness of leveraging student's home languages as a resource for instruction, little has changed in teaching practices for emergent bilinguals in the United States, and in fact policy is moving more toward English-only education. Throughout the book, the authors highlight inequities in educating emergent bilinguals and present alternative practices that would address these inequities. García and Kleifgen focus on minoritized students who are often excluded from social and educational opportunities, as well as from language-rich instruction. The authors continually emphasize the linguistic resources emergent bilinguals bring to school from their home language practices, which educators should leverage to help students build both their language proficiency and academic knowledge. This second edition was published in 2018 and its message is even more urgent today as educators work to support students, including emergent bilinguals, whose learning has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Summaries of Chapters

Chapter one (Introduction) discusses the many labels used to categorize students in the U.S. who are learning English and provides an overview of the book. García and Kleifgen note that categories such as ESL and LEP reflect how the term *bilingual* has been silenced more and more in the United States since the late 1990s. As Jim Cummins states in the Foreword: "when students see themselves (and know their teachers see them) as emergent bilinguals rather than as English language learners (or some other label that defines students by what they lack), they are much more likely to take pride

in their linguistic abilities and talents than if they are defined in deficit terms" (García & Kleifgen, 2018, p. x). García and Kleifgen chose to use the term *emergent bilingual* because it emphasizes that the students are not only becoming proficient in English but will eventually become multilingual students and adults. The term also raises academic expectations, acknowledges that language acquisition takes time (research shows it takes five to seven years to acquire an additional language), and that "our linguistic performances are never done" (p. 5).

Chapter two provides a vivid portrait of emergent bilinguals in the United States, including how students are classified and reclassified as English learners. The authors highlight that reclassification criteria lacks consistency across states due to different types of assessment practices and varied home language surveys, though the emergence of English language proficiency standards have helped improve reclassification assessments, such as WIDA, which is used by a consortium of states. This chapter also describes where emergent bilinguals live and go to school (California, New Mexico, and Nevada have the highest proportion of emergent bilinguals), the languages spoken by emergent bilinguals in the United States (70 – 76% speak Spanish, followed by Arabic and Chinese), as well as differences and commonalities between emergent bilinguals living in the United States, noting that 77% of emergent bilinguals are U.S. citizens (García & Kleifgen, 2018, pp. 15, 17, 22).

Chapter three describes the U.S. education policy landscape and legislation that has impacted emergent bilinguals, from the establishment of Title VII: The Bilingual Education Act in 1968 to the slow eroding of support for instruction in students' home languages in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. The Bilingual Education Act is also known as Title VII of the 1968 reauthorization of the Elementary

and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Title VII set aside funding to be allocated to school districts that had large numbers of students with limited English proficiency for the purpose of designing bilingual programs and/or instructional materials to meet these students' educational needs. The No Child Behind Act is the name of the 2002 reauthorization of the ESEA, which shifted away from support of student's home languages and bilingual education programs to a narrower focus on English proficiency as measured by standardized tests. The authors note that the 2009 Common Core State Standards emphasize language, particularly academic language, which increased the need to support emergent bilinguals in both language acquisition and in achievement of academic goals. English language proficiency standards, developed by consortia such as WIDA and ELPA21, aim to provide this support. Overall, bilingualism has been silenced in U.S. education, though there are efforts to revive bilingualism through such state initiatives as the Seal of Biliteracy. However, the authors express concern "that these awards would just become affirmations of 'foreign language' ability for language-majority students" (p. 46).

Chapter four provides a review of the various theories related to bilingualism, highlighting the cognitive, metacognitive, interpersonal, and social-emotional benefits of bilingualism, and solid research showing the advantages of acquiring a second language while receiving literacy instruction in one's first language. Regarding cognitive benefits, because bilingual speakers rely on the executive function of their brains to constantly manage the different features of different language systems, they have strong cognitive plasticity and inhibitory control. The authors cite research conducted by Bialystok and her colleagues over the past decade showing that due to these cognitive benefits, bilinguals performed better than monolinguals on tasks requiring executive control (p. 51). The chapter

discusses *linguistic interdependence*, a concept pioneered by Jim Cummins, which describes how knowledge and skills in one language serve to support development in another language. This chapter also discusses the concept of *dynamic bilingualism*, which focuses on language practices bilinguals use to navigate increasingly multilingual communities, viewing languages as ways of multimodal meaning-making rather than as separate and autonomous systems. This concept underpins the pedagogical practice of translanguaging, in which students are encouraged to freely access their entire range of linguistic knowledge for academic and communicative purposes. The chapter highlights compelling empirical evidence, such as from a 2002 study by Wayne Thomas and Virginia Collier, showing that bilingually-schooled students exhibit higher academic performance and fewer dropout rates than students enrolled in English-only programs (p. 65).

Chapters five through eight cover important issues that impact emergent bilinguals, using a structure in each chapter that outlines theoretical frameworks, investigates current inequitable practices, and then describes and advocates for alternative practices that better serve emergent bilinguals. Chapter five discusses instructional practices that often isolate emergent bilinguals from interactions with language-majority students and also discourage use of their home language, based on the prevailing view of languages as separate and isolated systems. Even though the emergent bilingual population in U.S. schools continues to grow, these students are increasingly educated in English-only programs. The authors point out that schools often focus on English acquisition because this is what is measured on standardized tests—home language proficiency is not prioritized but is seen as a bridge to acquiring English. In contrast, *heteroglossic* instructional practices that support emergent bilinguals include exercises in which students write in both their home

language and English, as well as translanguaging pedagogy that encourages students to use all their linguistic resources to "extend their semiotic meaning-making repertoire" (p. 83). These approaches support students' understanding of complex content as well as their social-emotional development as they build their bilingual identities. Teachers who engage in these practices provide students with opportunities to engage in language practices for authentic purposes—not simplifying English but rather helping students delve into complex language use through critical investigations into issues that are important to them.

Chapter six discusses the ways in which digital technologies enhance learning for emergent bilinguals and points out the persistent issues of limited technology access for many emergent bilinguals, both in and outside of school. Referring to the pedagogy of multiliteracies as put forth by the New London Group in 1996, García and Kleifgen highlight the importance of multimodal communication in a world with increasing linguistic diversity and new digital resources for learning. Students make meaning through digital technologies in ways that go beyond language—leveraging their full semiotic repertoire (akin to translanguaging)—by incorporating images, sounds, and music into digital resources that heighten interactivity and social learning. Digital resources provide students with the ability to conduct web-based research, access multimedia writing instruction, use collaborative discussion and note-taking software, and creative content and stories using new media, returning to educational materials as many times as needed. As a component of project-based learning, educators can leverage digital resources to increase collaboration, authentic audiences, and differentiated instruction for all students.

Chapter seven focuses on the evidence-based educational practices that best serve emergent bilinguals, using a social justice framework to analyze the discriminatory practices and structures in schools that persist despite research showing their negative impact. Curricula serving emergent bilinguals should elicit higher-order thinking skills, incorporate collaborative social practices, and be taught by high-quality teachers with expertise in language and bilingual education. Early childhood education is also an essential way to narrow gaps prior to elementary school, though emergent bilinguals are less likely to attend early childhood education programs than their monolingual peers. Emergent bilinguals are often enrolled in pull-out ESL courses that are remedial and isolate them from their peers (and are also the costliest type of program for emergent bilinguals), they are significantly underrepresented in advanced classes, and are significantly overrepresented in remedial courses and special education. Overall, U.S. schools with high populations of emergent bilinguals typically lack appropriate instructional materials, have more decrepit facilities, and lack educators who are certified in bilingual education.

Chapter eight discusses family and community engagement, emphasizing the importance of using a *funds of knowledge* approach to leverage home language practices and engage parents in the education of emergent bilinguals and their classmates. The concept of *funds of knowledge* refers to the knowledge and skills developed and employed in households by individuals as they navigate social networks and relationships (Kinney, 2015). The premise underlying *funds of knowledge* in relation to teaching is that students bring competencies and life experiences with them to school, and educators can leverage these *funds* to improve these students' educational experiences and outcomes. This challenges the deficit view often taken toward minoritized families, which fails to recognize

parents' aspirations for and contributions to their children's education. García and Kleifgen point to studies showing that parent engagement has the most benefits for students who are minoritized and from low-income families. The authors also cite studies from the 1980s by Susan Philips in Oregon and Shirley Brice Heath in the Carolinas, as well as studies by Katherine H. Au in Hawaii in the 1990s, to show how home participation structures often differ from school participation structures. It is up to schools and educators to recognize the literacy practices students bring with them from their communities in order to draw on this knowledge to help students achieve academically.

Chapter nine discusses assessment and poses a key question: "Given what we know theoretically and research-wise about assessment of emergent bilinguals, are these students being assessed according to accepted theories and research evidence about language and bilingualism?" (p. 145). The authors respond with an "emphatic *no*" and discuss how inadequate assessment leads to inequitable outcomes (thus lacking consequential validity) including an emphasis on remedial instruction and higher drop-out rates for emergent bilinguals (p. 145). One major concern is the validity of tests that claim to assess content proficiency, but because the tests are given in English, also assess language proficiency. García and Kleifgen state, "In fact, much educational time is taken up testing with invalid instruments" (p. 150). Assessments must be designed to differentiate between these two dimensions, and norming needs to include diverse samples of students. Also, performance-based assessments that incorporate multiple modalities best serve emergent bilinguals.

Chapter ten provides a summary of the concepts covered throughout the book and ends with "signposts"—a number of recommendations for various stakeholders to support movement toward

more equitable education for emergent bilinguals. These recommendations include a call for policymakers to support bilingual early childhood programs and to agree upon a definition of *English learner* that can be used consistently throughout the United States. This definition should acknowledge students' home languages and their emergent bilingualism, viewing students' linguistic journeys as a continuum along which different types of academic programs and supports are needed. The authors call on educators to learn about their students' home languages and practices, develop strong relationships with students' families, and use bilingual instructional practices including translanguaging in their classrooms. Researchers are called upon to study the cognitive advantages of bilingualism, which is still an emerging field of research. Additionally, researchers should develop assessments that can distinguish between language and content knowledge and that can take into account emerging bilinguals' language practices, including translanguaging.

Reflection and Critique

In *Educating Emergent Bilinguals: Policies, Programs, and Practices for English Learners* (second edition), Ofelia García and Jo Anne Kleifgen present undeniable evidence showing the benefits of bilingual instruction, which is so important as emergent bilinguals' enrollment continues to grow in U.S. schools. As the authors note, enrollment of emergent bilingual students increased by 56% between 1995 and 2005 while the overall enrollment of students grew by only 2.6% (p. 9). After approximately two years of interrupted instruction during the Covid-19 pandemic, the need to support emergent bilinguals' educational needs with a focus on leveraging their home languages is more urgent than ever. School closings, remote instruction, and disconnection from social engagements have limited the opportunities for students to participate in

academic conversations and activities at school. Given the increased amount of time students spent at home during the pandemic, their home language practices have likely intersected with schooling more than in the past. This is a pivotal time for educators to build from the linguistic resources their students bring to the classroom. García and Kleifgen recognize the challenges of supporting students' home language use and building bilingual programs that will serve the many various home languages students speak, and acknowledge it is easier to build bilingual programs for large language groups such as Spanish. The authors state that educators can still draw on student's home language practices even if they are not fluent in the students' home languages themselves. More tangible daily procedures, methods, and approaches for educators would make this book more useful for practice. A helpful follow-up to this publication would be a companion workbook with specific classroom approaches and activities for educators to employ.

This edition's publication date is also convergent with a rapid increase in state legislation throughout the United States mandating early literacy and dyslexia screening (Dyslegia, 2022). As García and Kleifgen (2018) discuss, assessments must be valid measures of students' linguistic and academic abilities. Any early literacy screener that is valid for emergent bilinguals must be able to distinguish between those students whose English proficiency is still developing, those who exhibit reading difficulties related to such factors as phonological processing issues, and those who may require support in both areas. This distinction will help to avoid an overrepresentation of emergent bilinguals in the identification of students with dyslexia risk and/or special education while also ensuring they receive the support they need. Amid the growing emphasis on phonics-based instruction to meet the needs of students with reading difficulties, an equal emphasis must be placed on those students who

require more focused support in language development, oral vocabulary, knowledge building, listening comprehension, and reading comprehension (Dickinson, et al., 2010). Using guidance from García and Kleifgen, educators and researchers can help to ensure students are assessed with valid, reliable, and developmentally-appropriate instruments at the appropriate times, making more time for instruction. When selecting a literacy screener, administrators and educators need to evaluate how the screener distinguishes between different root causes of reading difficulties (e.g., phonological processing, linguistic comprehension, fluency), which constructs are measured by the screener at different developmental stages of literacy acquisition, and what the makeup of the sample sizes were in validity and reliability field testing. Educators also need support in interpreting the results of these screeners so the instruction students receive builds from what they know and meets their specific needs.

García and Kleifgen emphasize that half to two-thirds of all emergent bilinguals are U.S. citizens. One significant group of emergent bilinguals the authors do not address in detail, which has become even more important today, is the increase in immigrants, refugees, and unaccompanied minors enrolled in U.S. schools in the past decade. Given that the average number of unaccompanied minors in the United States has increased from under 2,000 in 2010 to over 12,000 in 2019 (Chishti et al., 2019), this group of emergent bilinguals requires particular linguistic and academic support through trauma-informed practices (TIP). Educators trained in TIP learn to foster a school and classroom environment that is responsive to students' needs and mindful of the impact of traumatic experiences on students' social-emotional health and academic development (Kostouros et al., 2022; Sweetman, 2022). For example, a student who appears to be unmotivated and resistant in the classroom may be feeling

overwhelmed by their new environment and mistrustful due to past actions of others (Sweetman, 2022). At the same time, TIP incorporates findings from resilience research, which focuses on students' intersectionality, strengths (such as bilingualism), and family connections. Through TIP, students receive support in areas that are most efficacious for their immediate needs, often including a focus on language proficiency and digital literacy. Schools incorporating TIP seek to avoid the possibility of retraumatizing students, which can happen when school practices are based on deficit models or in which peer connections are not nurtured and encouraged (Kostouros et al., 2022).

One recommendation García and Kleifgen (2018) give in chapter ten is for advocates to publicize dual language programs that are serving emergent bilinguals with equitable practices. The MANOS dual language early education program in Syracuse, NY, which is part of Partners in Learning, Inc., is one such program, which offers dual language preschool education in English and Spanish (Partners in Learning, Inc., n.d.). I had an opportunity to speak with the Director of the program, Linda Facciponte. Ms. Facciponte explained there are distinct parts of the preschool day when English or Spanish is spoken, but any small group time encourages students to use whichever language they are most comfortable with. Ms. Facciponte stated this is a fundamental need, particularly to support students' social-emotional development. Teachers often read books to students that include both English and Spanish, reading in one language and then reading again and discussing in the other language to help students utilize their full linguistic repertoires. Ms. Facciponte noted that families are an essential part of their community. Parents are invited into the classroom to work with the students and to share information about their careers, home countries, or other topics. The MANOS program also holds events in the classroom during which parents meet other

parents and engage in activities such as reading, dancing, and singing. The mission of Partners in Learning, Inc. reflects the principles discussed by García and Kleifgen: "Partners in Learning, Inc. (PIL) supports adults, children, and families of diverse cultures in their efforts to learn, earn, and live well in Syracuse and Onondaga County" (Partners in Learning, Inc., n.d.). Educators, policymakers, and researchers who take action based on the research and recommendations provided in García and Kleifgen's book can help to make more programs such as MANOS possible.

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Review of *Better Than We Found It*
Written by Frederick Joseph & Porsche Joseph

Adult/Educator Reviewer: Jennifer Garner
Student Reviewers: Emma Morrow

Adult Review:

Better Than We Found It: Conversations to Help Save the World by Frederick and Porsche Joseph is a book written in the right time for the right audience. The issues facing our young people today are varied and complex as well as difficult for many to fully understand. The Josephs' personal narrative and interview format is engaging for students, giving them opportunities to read and process information with supporting data to learn about issues with which many have little personal experience. For example, if a reader has not had the experience of a sibling being incarcerated, reading about Porsche Joseph's experience with her brother in Chapter 14 American's Modern Slavery, the reader can begin to have empathy for Porsche, her brother and her family. Having empathy is the first step in taking action. The true events related throughout the book will speak to students and prompt them to question the status quo, as well as look for solutions to help solve their generation's inherited problems.

The inclusion of voices beyond those of the authors, from actors to entrepreneurs to political figures, further illustrates the importance of these issues at a national and global scale. In the introduction, the authors acknowledge they are writing about "communities we don't belong to and experiences we don't share – but at the center of progress is the ability to make space to learn from and be better for those unlike ourselves". This is the beauty of the students sitting in our classrooms now. They are open to learning about climate change, gun violence, respecting gender identities, health care reform and doing something to better their generation. They are willing to ask the questions and solve the problems and sharing with them this book is a first step to activism that really does have a chance to help save the world.

Student Review:

Better Than We Found It by Fredrick Joseph and Porsche Joseph is a beautiful book with robust and distinguished writing. If I were to describe this book in one word it would be empowering. *Better Than We Found it* talks about global warming, LGBTQ+ rights, POC rights, poverty, misogyny, and other concerning topics. The authors share their own stories that give insight into their life as part of a minority. It helped me to walk the world in their shoes. As a cis white female, I don't understand many struggles, so the least I can do is listen to their stories so I can better understand them. If you are interested in making a change, educating yourself is the first step, and this book does just that. It not only educates you but also gives you tips to be a proactive citizen. If you want to learn more, read B*etter Than We Found It*, and *yo*u won't regret it!
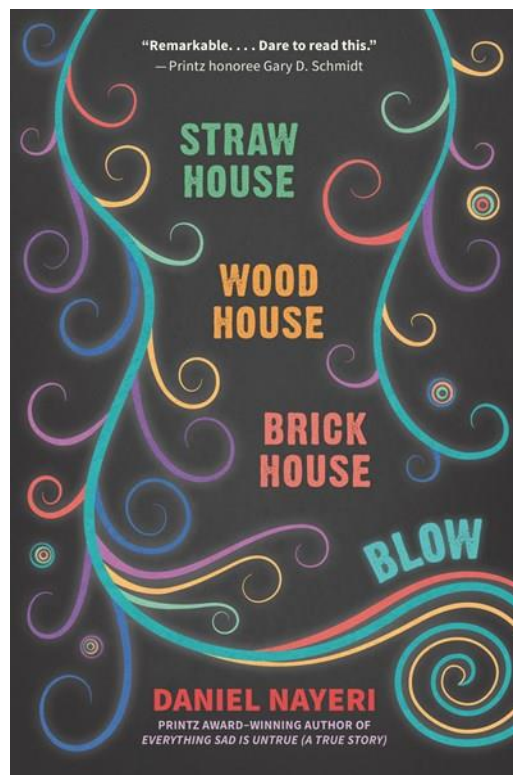
Also, see illustration below:

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Review of *Straw House, Wood House, Brick House, Blow*
Written by Daniel Nayeri

Adult/Educator Reviewer: Antonia Alberga Parisi, Assistant
Administrator
Student Reviewer: Alexandra Green, 9th grade

Adult Review:
The dystopian YA universe is a much-chartered territory and finding a piece of space on which to plant one's flag, a bit of land that has not been touched, is veritably impossible. Because of this, I have often wondered if dystopian YA has had its day, if it has- to use the phrase associated with worn-out TV programming- "jumped the shark." But I battled through dreary visions of sameness and began my read- and to my delight, I was actually surprised. *Straw House, Wood House, Brick House and Blow,* are a collection of four novellas whose language and stories unfold rich and unique experiences certain to intrigue even the most jaded of readers (myself included).

I suppose it is Daniel Nayeri's choice to craft the bleak in different landscapes that makes this text so compelling, although *Staw House*- a western- caught me off guard. My notion of that genre maintains strong ties with old films featuring Clint Eastwood and music by Ennio Morricone, but the whine of the famous The Good, The Bad and The Ugly was drowned out by the quiet beauty of the writing in this tale. Lines like, "The creaking of Sunny's chair seemed too loud in the new dark hour. The silence was a language of the trees. They had waited all day for everyone else to shut up," help the reader to settle into this odd ride. Think Steinbeck but with an odd twist- the characters are not migrant farmers in the Salinas Valley, but toys and the tension delicately builds when a mysterious visitor appears on the farm.

Wood House whirls us off the farm and into a place that is frighteningly familiar. A critique of the commercial world of corporations and unoriginal music come together in this piece with writing that would make Ray Bradbury proud, but make us shiver. "These poor disconsolate customers. These poor people who are crafting their own stories out of self-love and the desire to be better, and best. I ask you, brother, are these heroes heroes?" The construction of this tale is different from the rest- we are given privy to letters and journal entries which support a sense of urgency, appropriate considering the plot. As with many tales of this genre, the intent is a forced self-reflection and societal scrutiny. Although this mirror is almost always before us, Nayeri forces us to stare into that uncomfortable darkness while also looking around at the house that holds it- a house that may so easily burn.

Brick House brings us to the mean streets of New York City with a bunch of detectives whose primary job is to monitor wishes. I am not one for detective tales, but this one once again caught my attention and respect with its alternative premise and descriptions like, "The man seemed like nothing more than a barrel of green chemical guilt, eating holes in itself somewhere on the dark floor of the ocean." I tried to determine why this story of the three was The Brick House. Perhaps it is the steadfast presence of wishes in the hearts of humans and the reality of the havoc that they may cause- the other two stories seemed to concern elements of life which are a bit more fragile or ephemeral. Maybe my analysis is reaching; however, it is Nayeri's writing that prompts such consideration.

Blow, the final novella in Nayeri's series is told from the perspective of Death and is meant to be a humorous love story. In comparison to the other three pieces, this one fell flat for me. Yes, the unconventional narrator should have made the story's trajectory a bit more provocative; instead, I could not get away from the similarities between this narrator and Marcus Zusak's *The Book Thief*. Zusak's whole novel is told through the voice of Death, who is comparably charming. Was this purposeful on Nayeri's part?

Ultimately, Daniel Nayeri's compilation is a worthwhile read. His poetic style enhanced his often strange plot choices- but, for the most part, I enjoyed the short ride into these odd worlds of pretty mayhem and forced introspection/

Student Review:
The prospect of four charming, bite-size narratives intrigued me from the beginning, but my experience with this book quickly became infinitely compelling. Framed with modern and imaginative adaptations of the world we know, abundant nostalgia swept me up in a rich emotional journey and clearly applicable societal themes provide a fresh perspective undertoned by a restoration of faith in humanity amidst staggering majorital odds. The magnitude these illustrations of unity provide serves as a gentle reminder of what humankind normatively aspires to be.

Toy Farm embodies the splendor and security of youth, but more so establishes the 'grow up' mentality taken on by the world. The soulless homunculus species and their leader present harsh realities of death and destruction, but they also manage to maintain condescension towards youth in the sense that capability and power only go to those who strip themselves of innocence and good. Our fearless sheriff Sunny disputes this - and with his charming assortment of vivacious toys and fantastic creatures by his side - he reminds us that courage and persistence are strength, but unity in righteous pursuits earns victory over oppression.

Immediately following after, *Our Lady of Villains* flips society on its head. A new world where nanotechnology has literally and metaphorically poisoned the populace, a rebellion of villains - the true heroes - has formed to combat the censorship and isolation created by the government. In this world the unnoticed lack of free will is alarming, and one of the only men who is capable of seeing it is framed as a lunatic. Clearly, nothing is ever as it seems due to

disinformation and manipulation, and as we follow Janey via her blog, we begin to discover that this tactic can be used to the advantage of the villains. The end of this novella made my jaw drop to the floor as my mind ran rampant exploring the connectivity between this novella and its predecessor. My focal ponderance was based upon the factors that truly shape an independent human being, and the values that opposing societies must consider when answering this query.

My favorite in the collection was *Wish Police*, in which a force of fantasy misfits race about the city with the intent of preventing imaginary crime. Certain wishes deemed unfit to come true appear in the forms of Wicked Ideas Made Human, and the job of the detectives - including a former genie and a talking fish - is to stop their destructive routes. A line Nayeri wrote states that the problem with, "... digging dirt is that it has a way of turning into a grave." This ingenious concept begs the question of how these powerful beings choose what wishes and human desires are accepted and prevented in society. Wish makers have no idea that the Wish Police or imaginative boundaries exist - and yet they are still expected to remain in the confines of unknown laws in their subconscious. This concept, though never directly stated, is cleverly off-putting and vital to my intrigue in the book.

As I moved on to the last novella, *Doom With A View*, it began to change my perspective on the value of love. With the help of Death, who happened to be a charming bunny owner inches away from a midlife crisis, I found that hate and love are not opposites. Contrary to that belief, there is a very fine line between the two. The true opposition of both is indifference. Passionate love and hate was what the people of this Old English society thrived off of, bringing genius creations of art and fellowship in the mix. Watching from the sidelines, Death longed for that zeal, and his humane desires created a level of comfort

between him and the reader. This bizarre connection was disquieting, but as I read I discovered the subtle connectivity branched between the stories brought to life in this text, and the sympathy towards the narrator began to make a sort of nostalgic sense. The closure it provided showcased the true importance of these stories. While it is not necessarily stated outright, the themes presented within serve as a refreshing iteration of the passion and relationship between people that truly makes them human. I found great joy in the answer to the question of humanity I had been puzzling over through each of these riveting tales. Nayeri performed wonderfully at developing educational, hilarious, and heartwarmingly inspirational stories with a limited page number that left me yearning for more. Much like the end of any great era, it was difficult for me to leave the solace and engrossment provided by these pages.

Review of: *Goodnight Little Bookstore*
Written by Amy Cherrix

AdultReviewer: Jan Butterworth
Student Reviewers: Kyle Butterworth, Kindergarten
Jake Butterworth, 2nd Grade
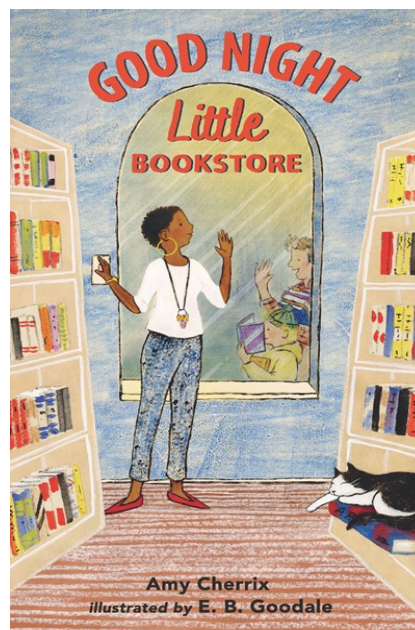
Adult Review:

This book did not have a traditional plot and instead conveyed the ins and outs of running and closing a bookstore for the night. The book also doesn't focus on specific, named characters and instead features a diverse cast of human and animal patrons and employees of the bookstore. While the first part of the book focuses on one bookstore, the story ends by showing bookstores all over the world, implying a common experience for those who frequent these spaces. This concept may be hard for young readers to grasp; however, they will enjoy meeting the various characters and viewing the beautiful illustrations throughout the book.

This book was reviewed at the request of JoLLE. It would appeal to educators who are interested in stories that feature diverse characters and those emphasizing the shared human experiences. The book would appeal to children who enjoy studying the illustrations, as there is much to be observed in each picture.

As stated in the earlier section, the ending of this book (connecting it to bookstores everywhere) may go over young readers' heads and require additional explanation. Also, the illustrations include many unique details, so it is worth taking the time to pause and allow readers to examine all the "Easter eggs" in each image.

Student Review:

Kyle Butterworth: I liked all the pictures. Other kids will like this book because it is pretty and they might think it's funny.
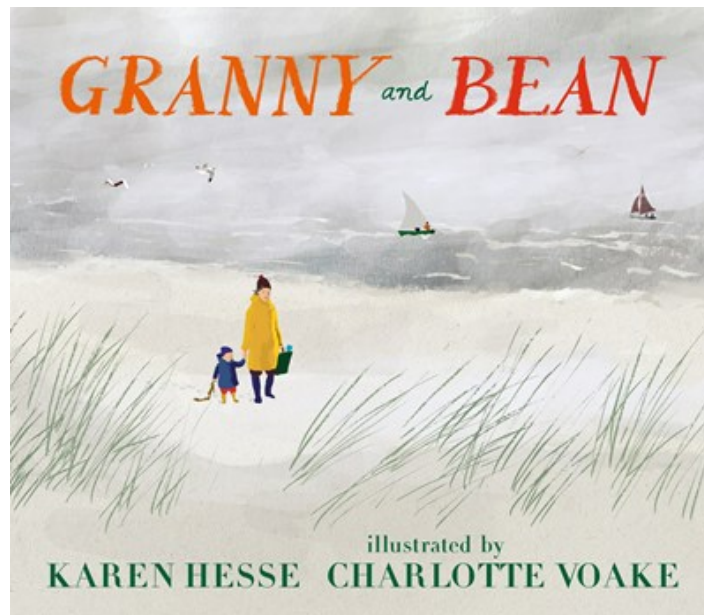
Jake Butterworth: I didn't like this book because it was too short and there was barely even detail. Little kids might like the pictures. Maybe Pre-K kids or Kindergarteners.

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Review of *Granny and Bean*
Written by Karen Hesse

Adult Reviewer: Jessica Tanner
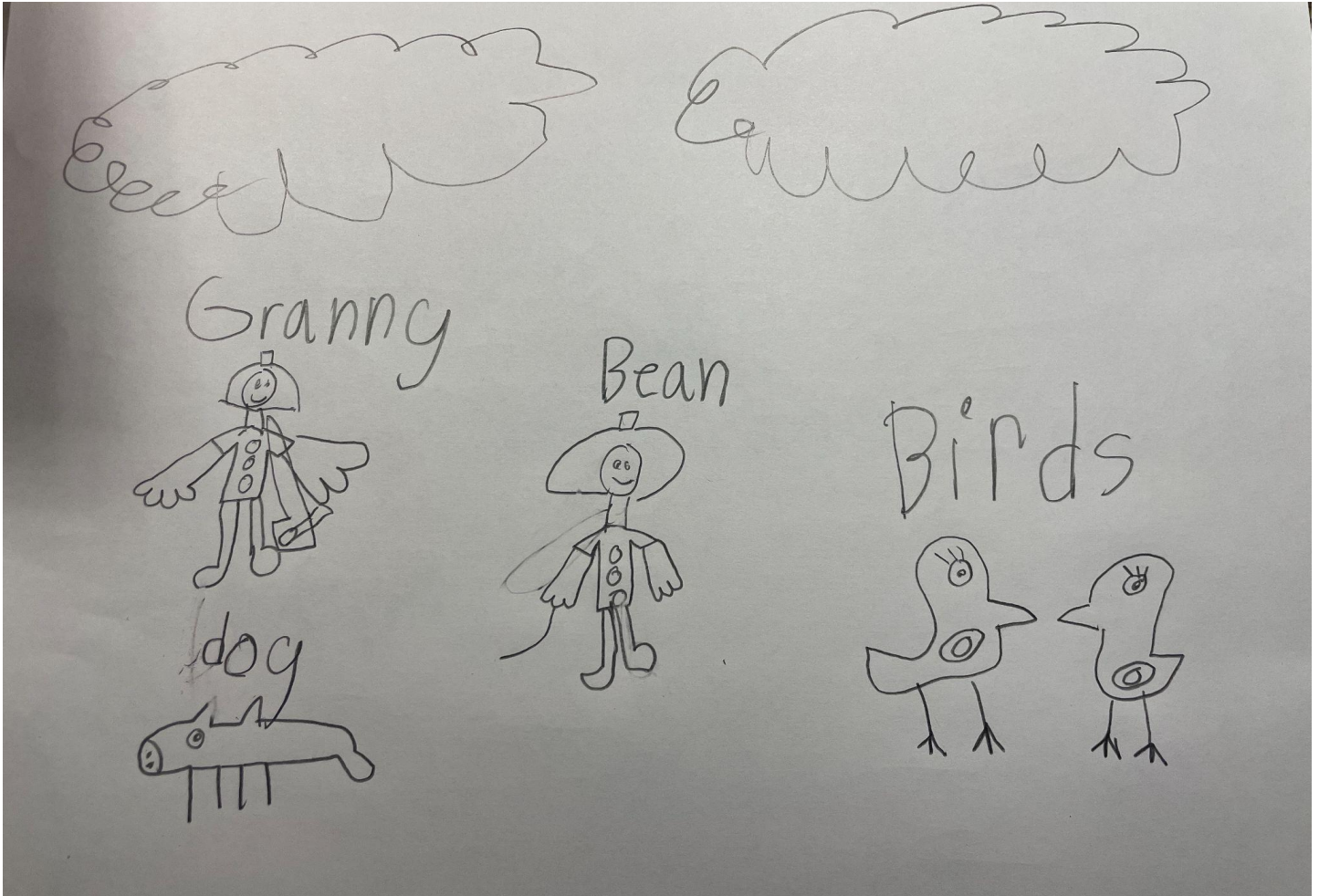**Student Reviewers**: Sloane Tanner, 2nd Grade

Adult Review:

The story of Granny and Bean and their day at the beach was a sweet tale of a dreary day at the beach. It reminded my daughter and me of the long days we spend at the beach - rain or shine. The reading level was perfect for my 2nd grader wit a handful of new vocabulary words present.

Student Review:

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Review of *I Dream of Popo*
Written by Livia Blackburne
Illustrated by Julia Kuo

Adult/Educator Reviewer: Yang Wang, University of South Carolina
Student Reviewers: CoCo Li 李师杨, 3rd Grade
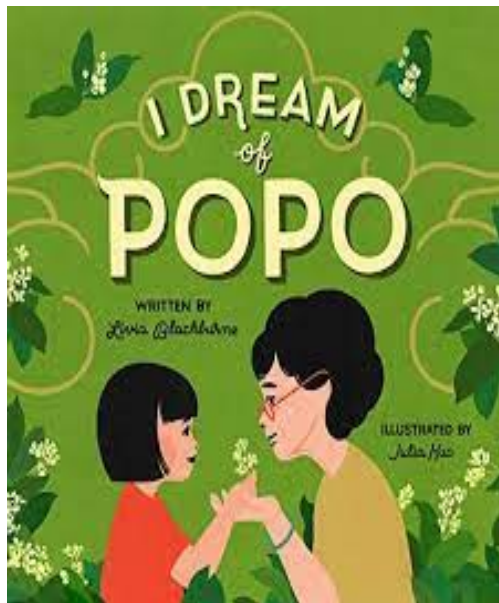
Adult Review:

This book is a fictional story about a Taiwanese girl's relationship with her Popo (grandma) before and after the girl's family moved to the U.S. The girl experienced cultural shock when they just moved to San Diego, as she struggled with the new food, English language, and school. She talked to her Popo via a video conferencing app and shared her new life in America. When she finally had a chance to visit her Popo in Taiwan, she experienced another cultural shock as she could not speak much Chinese language to her Popo; however, she still loved Popo and her dumplings. After the girl returned to America, she continued to video chat with her Popo even when her Popo was really sick. The girl dreamed of hugging her Popo and her Popo talking in English to her.

My family relates to this story, as my daughter, who was born in the U.S. talks to her grandma (my mother) living in Mainland China through a video conferencing app almost every day. My family visited our relatives in Mainland China three times after my daughter was born. The main character's experience of visiting Taiwan and her close relationship with her Popo is relatable to my daughter.

The author and the illustrators are both Taiwanese Americans and they embedded their real-life experiences in this book. The readers can visit the author's webpage and the illustrator's site to learn more about how they created this book, their interviews, activity kits, and other resources. This book won the 2022 American Library Association Notable Children's Books.

This book provides a voice for the marginalized group of first-generation and second-generation immigrants, especially Asian. It will foster discussion among students about their connection with their homelands, adjustment to new life in a new place, and their transgenerational relationships. This book would appeal to many first-generation immigrants, second-generation Chinese Americans, and other immigrants who share similar experiences of moving to America and connecting to their relatives in their homelands. The bilingual glossary in the illustration and at the end would encourage the reader to learn Chinese as a heritage language or an additional language.

However, not all Chinese American children or immigrant children share the same experiences and family relationships so they may respond differently to the book. Popo is used for grandma from the mother's side in Taiwan and some southern areas in Mainland China. Waipo and Laolao are widely used in Mainland China and Nainai is used for grandma from the father's side. Additionally, complex Chinese is used in this book and in Taiwan, while simplified Chinese is used in Mainland China. This book is a good read featuring the transgenerational and transnational relationship.

Student Review:

I Dream of Popo is written by Livia Blackburne and illustrated by Julia Kuo. It is about a girl living with her family (including Popo) in Taiwan. But then the girl and her parents move to San Diego, in the U.S., far away from Taiwan. It feels like a new world. She meets new friends there, learns new words in English, and calls her Popo every week. When she flies back to Taiwan, her Popo makes her favorite food, dumplings! Soon Popo packs some dumplings for the girl, and she goes back to her American home. The girl dreams about Popo, and never forgets about her. My favorite part is the video chat pictures because I video chat with my grandma almost every day. I would recommend this book to people who speak Mandarin so they would understand the language that she and her Popo use to communicate with each other. For those who do not know Mandarin, there is a glossary at the end. I would also recommend this book to children who live far apart from their grandparents and still keep in touch with them.
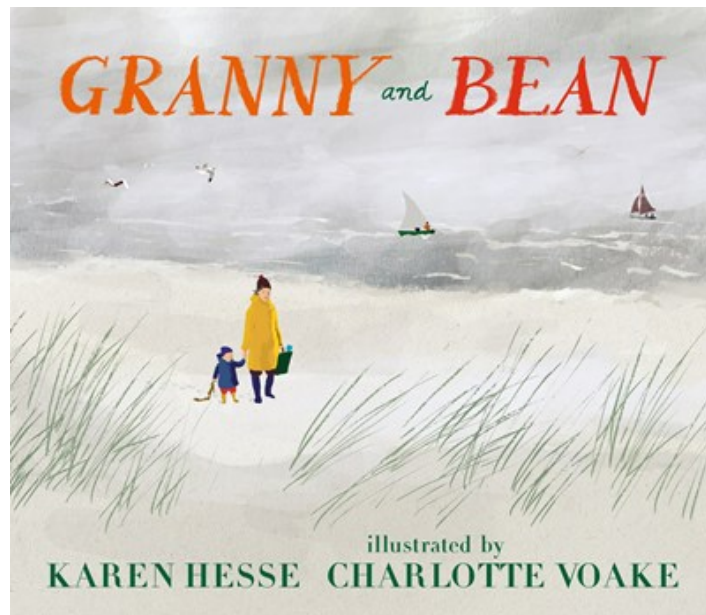
Also, see illustration below:

Food:

Video chat:

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Adult Reviewer: Jessica Tanner
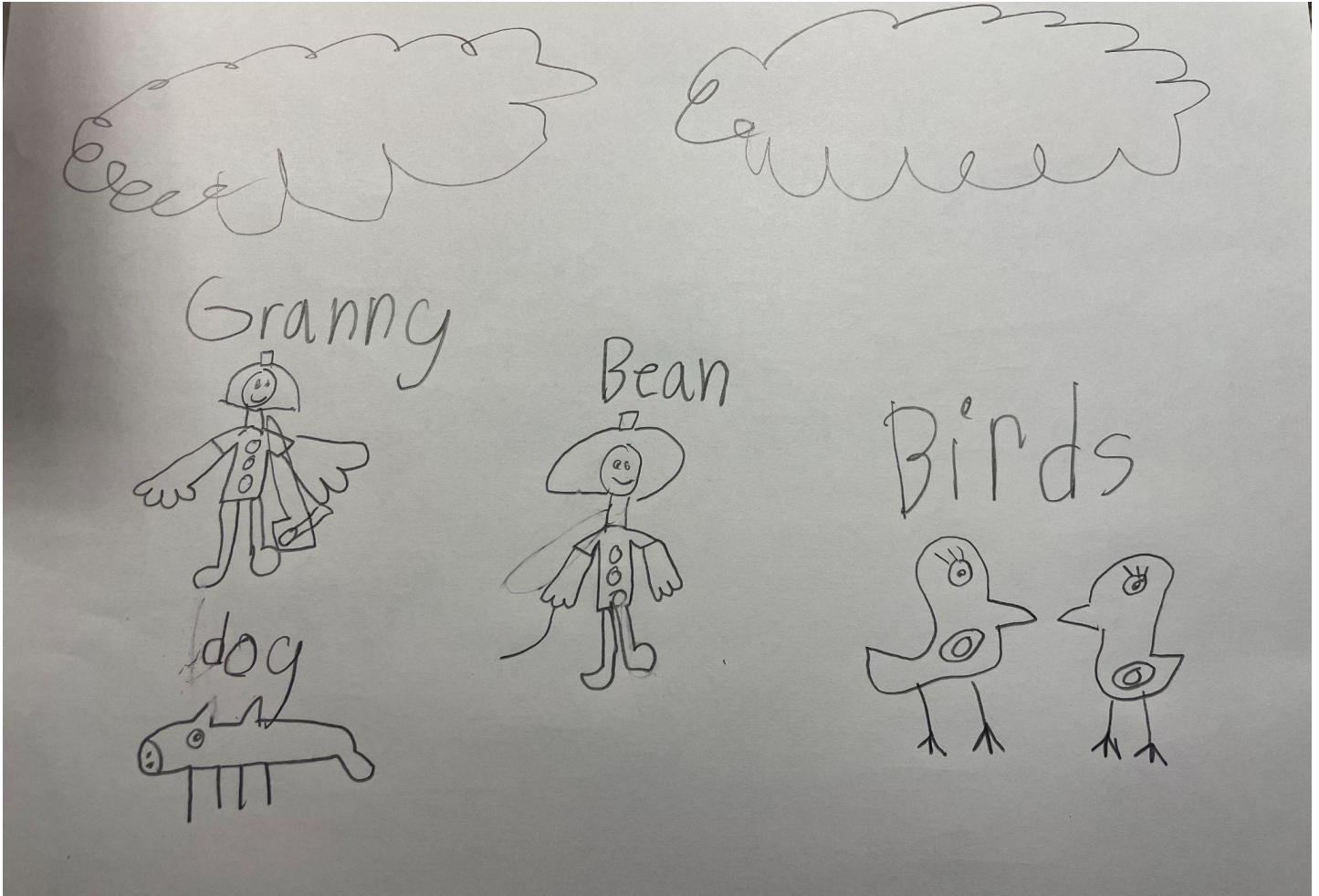**Student Reviewers**: Sloane Tanner, 2nd Grade

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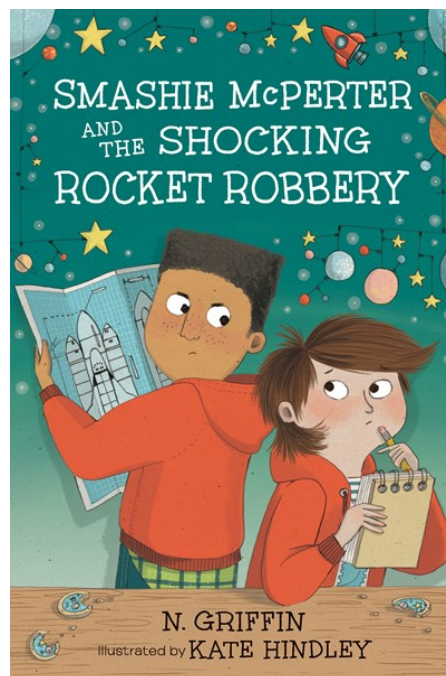
Student Review:

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Review of: *Smashie McPerter and the Shocking Rocket Robbery*
Written by N. Griffin

Adult/Educator Reviewer: Shelby Gordon, Gifted Coordinator
Student Reviewers: Blakelee Evans, 4th Grade

Adult Review:

Smashie and Dontel are the dream investigation team. With Smashie's wit and creativity and Dontel's determination and drive, they can solve any mystery that comes their way. In this edition, Smashie and Dontel work to solve the mystery of Dontel's missing rocket plans. Throughout the story, Smashie and Dontel travel to a planetarium on a class field trip and use clues along the way to determine the culprit… maybe.

I reviewed this book as an elementary gifted teacher. The book will greatly appeal to fourth grade students and teachers in Georgia. The book incorporates many story elements from ELA, as well as science concepts from Earth and space units. It will be a great cross-curricular read aloud for science teachers during their units to incorporate fiction with science vocabulary. The book is exciting, while educational, and leaves students wanting to read more.

As an educator, I have no concerns for implementing this book in the elementary classroom. Grab a copy of this book to bring your science and reading classroom to life.

Student Review:

This book interested me because it is about space. I usually don't read mystery books, however, this one entertained me. I would recommend this novel because it has elaborate details throughout it. Kids who like mysteries would enjoy Smashie McPerter and the Shocking Rocket Robbery because there were multiple mysteries about cookies, a hat, and a rocket blueprint that had to be solved by Smashie McPerter and Dontel Marquise. The best part of the Smashie McPerter and the Shocking Rocket Robbery is when Smashie and Dontel start telling the chaperones everything they know about the stolen cookies and Dontel's missing drawing. I did not like how the book ended because I do not know if Dontel built his rocket and ate lunch with his role model's best friend. In conclusion, I would enjoy reading the rest of this series.

Master Teacher: American History X

By Jonathan Tunstall

What if there was no niggas only master teachers
What if there was no niggas only master teachers

I was with Imhotep when he built the pyramids
Created medicine architecture all the things you think Europeans did
Cus artifacts were defaced by Alexander the Great
To convince creators of civilization have the same phenotypical traits
Slender noses white skin straight hair
But Ozymandias tagged up structures, so they know that niggas was there
But what if there was no niggas only master teachers
Connecting the pharaoh to the gods to the people to the preachers
Organizing millions of civilians empire keep getting bigger
So tell me who's the teacher tell me who's the nigga
I was there when The Moors of North Africa
Marched into Andalusia Spain creating massacres
Using advanced military strategy and courage that never faltered
Tariq Ibn Ziyad under landed on the rock of Gibraltar
And black people ruled southern Europe for 700 years
Altering civilizations thru polymerization of cultures colliding and 7 centuries of makeshift
Modifications with Jews, Christians and Muslims living as relatively peaceful populations
Until Cardinal Ximenes under orders from the Pope of Rome commissioned Spanish soldiers to
Murder every Black who resisted Christianity
Called it a holy jihad under orders from God to wipe out dark skinned portion of humanity
But what if there was no niggas only master teachers
Would they still beat us numb the masses and assassinate the leaders
Would Spain and Portugal still divide the world with the treaty of Tordesillas
Bringing guns germs and steel to the new world under auspices of Jesus
Would Christopher Columbus still sail the ocean blue…. in 1492
Murdering men women and children with his barbarous crew
Set up a system of slavery for men and women of the Arawak nations
Rape the women steal their language culture religion to complete the invasion
Convince them they were they were savages and needed salvation
Massive acts of genocide called it ethnic purification…
Fresh memories of the moors in their minds Europe began using blacks as slave labor
Had old Willie Lycnher writing letters to maintain their docile behavior
I was there when a slave owning hypocrite wrote all men were created equal
Unless their skin is brown then are 3/5 of people
Introduced the idea of race created the word nigger

To mean inferior humans armed with this explanation begin kidnapping my people quicker
Raped the women wiped out their language culture religion so they'd feel peculiar
See there's a strategy they used to rule ya
I was there when Gabriel Prosser started his freedom revolution
When Nat Turner murdered his master's entire family in retribution
He said I'm not a nigga I'm a gifted master teacher
Tried to brainwash me but I resisted the procedure
I was there when MA 'Bette escaped slavery and took the government of Massachusetts to court
Setting off a chain of events that led to slavery being outlawed in the north
I was with Ella Baker when she told the young people to rise
Stage sit ins nonviolent civil disobedience for the rights that were denied
I was there when that old Negro woman told Rosa Parks said my feets a weary but my soul's a rested
Because I'm physically mentally spiritually invested
Into the end of this system of racial subjugation so yes I protested
Risking life limb and freedom allowing myself to be arrested
For the cause of equality
Forcing a bigoted government to end 400 plus years of genocidal racist policy
But what if there was no niggas only master teachers
What if there was no niggas only master teachers
But THERE ARE NO NIGGAS......................only master teachers

I Don't Wanna Teach no More

By Jonathan Tunstall

I don't wanna teach no more
My feet are tired my voice i sore
I find myself wondering what I'm doing this for
My passion is stifled by poor attitudes
As I fill young minds with useless platitudes
You can be somebody the future is yours
Fighting tooth and nail through systematic oppression.... subconsciously infecting the minds of the
youth I serve and I fight it in every lesson
But it is such a chore
I'm talking hours after work giving feedback they don't even read
Finding creative ways to blend the bullshit curriculum with what they actually need
Cus being docile and quiet is built into the system
That silences their voices and funnels their bodies into prisons
I don't wanna teach no more
Working 10 hours a day and going back to that fuck shit apartment where I'm staying
With my city job and lawyer like loans I'll never be done paying
My slumlord won't fix the leaky sink and got holes in the walls
Scared to cook at night cus mice will `get involved
I don't wanna teach no more
But I push through to find creative ways to tell brown skin kids they free
Know they are being screwed by the system but the only representative of it they see is me
So I'm the scapegoat and the liberator
The sacrificial lamb and the deliberator of the insurrection
Trying to lead young minds in the right direction but what is right
Cus Black excellence still seems to lose to mediocre white
Most of em' can't put it into words but they know something is amiss
Looking to their history teacher to explain why injustice exist
It's like you have to inject unconditional love into anger and frustration and it takes a toll
This work that I do it drains my soul
I don't wanna teach no more
But damnit I have to
Imma sing song breakdance and rap to
Say...the countries run by neo Nazi white supremacist
Why they killed hip hop to stop the conscious lyricist
People come together than our power could be limitless
Babylon gon fall from all the baldhead wickedness
I have to say so I can say fuck the founding fathers who other teachers tell them to worship
Their wealth and influence was bought by my ancestors forced onto cursed ships
Chained shackled brought through middle passages
Stacked in the bottom of the transport like we some mother fuckin packages

Washington had slaves and even Jefferson with his created equal philosophy
So what does it do to the minds of little black boys and girls to hear these men celebrated as freedom fighters and not called out for their hypocrisy
I teach rainbow coalitions and improving working class conditions
And 400 plus years of easily corruptible politicians/
I teach Douglass, Davis, Tubman, Assata
I don't wanna teach no more but damnit I gotta

( )

About Jonathan Tunstall

Jonathan Tunstall is a hip-hop educator and researcher. Jonathan develops critical hip-hop learning models for both in-school and out-of-school learning environments. He is a full-time Ph.D. student with a focus on equity-oriented pedagogy, arts-based education, and Black joy. Jonathan works with nonprofits, public school teachers, and other arts researchers to foster conscious elevating learning.

His email is jtunstall@wisc.edu, and he attends the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

"Life Cycle of Language: From Child to Adult"

By Kelli Garguilo

Description of the Artwork:

Black, gray, and white: These colors represent the feeling of being shy and blending in with the background. Nikki, the woman from the story I read about, said she was hesitant to speak Spanish when she was younger. A butterfly cocoon represents timidness or being withdrawn, and human lips represent keeping quiet and not speaking. Lastly, the first part of my Haiku is: "Taking it all in."

The background of the middle section is made up of magazine pictures of the ocean, mountains, and trees. Nikki would travel every year with her family to Costa Rica. I wanted to include elements in nature that one would find in Costa Rica. Also, Nikki talked about how she started to see the value in knowing a second language. Therefore, I incorporated a picture of a head in this section to represent the gears turning in Nikki's head and a caterpillar to represent Nikki starting to come out of her shell. The second part of my Haiku is: "It finally clicked with me."

The bottom portion has vibrant colors to represent the freedom to be yourself. The butterfly I drew is an indigenous butterfly to Costa Rica and signifies Nikki opening up and finally finding happiness in her freedom to speak Spanish. The heart with an open mouth on it shows that Nikki now loves to speak Spanish. As Nikki grew older, she started taking Spanish in high school and loved it. She developed a passion for speaking Spanish and became a Spanish teacher. The third part of my Haiku poem is: "Now I love to speak!"

About Kelli Garguilo

Kelli Garguilo is from upstate New York. She graduated from The State University of New York (SUNY) at Plattsburgh with a B.F.A. in Childhood Education. She then graduated from SUNY at Albany with an M.S. in Literacy. She has been teaching 6th-grade mathematics in the Horry County School District, and she loves it. She is also continuing her education at Coastal Carolina University in their ESOL program.

Her email address is kcgarguilo@gmail.com.