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Artelia Green's & Olivia Williams' Legacy: A Study on the Pedagogical Practices that Improve Health for Black Children

By

Tiffani Marie Johnson

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Education

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

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Abstract

Artelia Green's & Olivia Williams' Legacy: A Study on the Pedagogical Practices that Improve Health for Black Children

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Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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Professor Daniel Perlstein, Chair

This dissertation examines the relationship between caring teaching practices and greater health outcomes for black children. Public health theory suggests that Black youth generally experienced greater levels of adversity compared to non-black youth (Schilling et al., 2007; Marie, 2016). Exposure to these frequent and/or sustained stressors without the buffering care of a supportive adult can change children's brains and bodies, including disrupting learning, behavior, immune systems, and even the way DNA is read and transcribed. My research examines the efficacy of critical classroom pedagogy (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008) and social design-based research (Gutierrez, 2016) as a framework to address and attenuate the impacts of toxic stressors that black youth embody.

This study honors research principles grounded in care (Angelou, 1979; Noddings, 1988; Duncan-Andrade, 2006), to generate grounded theory for social transformation. This dissertation anchors data (field notes, classroom video, in-depth interviews) in order to integrate the fields of education and public health to produce ecologically valid findings that: 1) highlight and reproduce that types of teaching practices and conditions that mediate healthier children and 2) reframe our understandings of the possibilities of education.

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"Bit by bit…she had claimed herself. Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another."
-Toni Morrison

pink on a succulent,
is different than pink
on a rose

pink on a succulent
can grow
toward life
or death

and for succulents
like me
succulents that were left
alone
because that is what people believed
should happen to succulents

Succulents like me
that were celebrated
for their colors,
their aesthetics
their presence
their strength
but abandoned
because people believed
that they would be just fine,
alone

succulents like me
reflected a pink
that grew
toward death
much like the leaves
that came before me

but when broken
these leaves were planted,
rooted even
and through propagation
grew themselves
they all learned to grow
on their own

and from their growth
succulents like me
grew
under green stars
within miracle gardens
with chrysanthemums
and butterflies
alongside Arkansas waters
where the trail returns

I grew
surrounded
by ecosystems
of sisterhood

no longer alone
surrounded
by other flowers and plants
that too understood
that they could water each other
that they could sun each other

and today my pink grows toward life
and life more abundantly
thank you to the flowers
to the plants
and the stars
and the gardens
and the mothering
and the sisterhood
that sustains me
this work is dedicated to you

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ancestors. Mentors. Family. Friends. Spirits. Thank you for getting me here. A host of community supported me throughout this project. Evidence of their impact are detailed within this study. Additionally, I must explicitly acknowledge and thank the children who shared their stories with us. It is their sacrifice, their offerings, that will ultimately lead to us to greater health.

Chapter One

"Man, who did that to you?": An Exploration of Butchered Tapers & Violence in Schools

Cameron was a new student to our school, but I had taught students like him before. His twisted upper lip, the way he looked beyond me when I called his name, even his staunch posture, all seemed to reflect a legacy, a history embedded within the curve of his spine, one that has systemically shattered the hope of black boys, leaving them pinned under debris misnamed delinquency, spelled in their names. His stance embodied its own hidden curriculum. It was one of promise, yet he wrestled to remain upright amidst years of back breaking policy and pedagogy.

Prior to Cameron's freshman year of high school where we first met, he had lost his mother in a sudden death, and within the same year his brother was a victim of homicide. As early as 11 years old, Cameron was experiencing the impacts of multiple social stressors, or Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), that medical practitioners call toxic stress. Research on adolescent development (Maslow, 1943; Garbarino, 1995; Perry. 2007; Adelman, 2008; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Perry, 2010; Brown, 2012) suggests that the best way to attenuate the harmful impacts of toxic stress is to ensure that youth are surrounded with caring and supportive adults. These adults may come from the child's biological family or from various other social settings, like schools. At the time Cameron seemed to be losing many of his familial support systems, he attended KIPP Bay Academy, a charter school well-known for its competitive test scores. Cameron and his peers often sat in our classroom at lunch to reminisce about their adolescent middle school experiences. They emphasized stories of teachers who made them stand in corners for talking without consent, one in particular, who cut the shirt of a peer who was caught with his school uniform untucked. Cameron's teachers, whether knowingly or unknowingly, responded to the toxic stress that he was experiencing outside of school with toxic pedagogical practices.

Public shaming was as much a part of his middle school experience as bells and uniforms. The school recruited predominately poor, black and brown youth, while over 90% of the teaching staff was white. The charter school recruited its teachers from a larger sister program, Teach for America, where they received only 5 weeks of training before working within many of the nation's most underserved schools. Cameron's middle school experiences were reflective of a larger neoliberal culture that reproduces community disenfranchisement; it engages the language of "hard work"and "delayed gratification" in order to explain away legacies of discriminatory and excluding legislation, gang-injunctions, poverty taxes and other forms of state sanctioned violence. Indeed, these schools work to norm the conditions by which Cameron operates within the world. The culture of will-breaking that exists within the school often goes unnoticed and understudied (Love, 2016; Marie, 2016). It is a violence, which eventually convinces us that our love of learning, or even commitment to progress, must operate in close proximity to harm.

While Cameron attended KIPP Bay Academy, I was teaching across town at KIPP Bayview Academy, where I would spend 11 years as a teacher witnessing the plundering of will and the destruction of self-determination, which for some time functioned as an anchor for students amidst low teacher expectations and subtractive pedagogies (Valenzuela, 1999). On a walk-through of my very first day teaching middle school, the sister school Cameron would attend years later, I observed a tall and imposing white man vehemently confronting a black child. The little boy was in the 6th grade, 12-years-old. The man's indicting tone and overbearing nature seemed to break the child. All the words, assumptions and racisms plummeting toward him seemed to rest heavily on his little shoulders, heavier than the weight of state-sanctioned violence; maybe even heavier than the consequences that awaited him if he did not consent to the violation of his body. It does not matter what the child had done prior to the reprimand. It may have been that his homework was not submitted in a timely manner or that he did not express the proper silent hand signal to request to use the restroom. What mattered in that moment was that at 12-years-old, this black boy was receiving a lesson far greater than the one he would have received if he had stayed in the classroom. This day, he learned, if he had not already, that he was not the master of his own body; his belittling, defilement and subjugation could come at any moment at the hands of a "teacher". Any wrong move, any unapproved posture would be corrected violently and instantly. The principal looked over and gave the teacher a smirk and approving nod, signifying that the violation of this little boy's body and the breaking of his will was not an aberration; it was an outcome of centuries of educational policy ensuring he lived the next years of his life expecting such a response any time he sought to straighten his back (Patterson, 1982; Cacho, 2012).

Schools within the United States have not always functioned in the aforementioned ways, but they have always responded to the societal Adverse Childhood Experiences imposed upon black youth with toxic pedagogies and school policies (Rist, 1973; Spring, 1989; Lee & Slaughter-Defoe, 2004; Dumas & Ross, 2016). Initially, enslaved Africans were not allowed to attend schools. The subjugation of their bodies was needed in the slave trade to develop the United States' economy. Schools were designated for wealthy, white, males (Ensign, 1969); the attempt to gain literacy or other means of education was punishable by death for enslaved persons in the United States (Woodson, 1933; BLY, 2008). During this time, educational models like Romanticism influenced educational policy (Richardson, 1994). However, the logic embedded within Romanticism had no regard for or understanding of the black child. The black child was and still is, an aberration. My great, great, great, great grandmother May Ellis was not allowed to engage the faculties of her mind, to take time off from fieldwork to make sense of her world and her conditions. Her mind was not useful to the project of schooling; rather, the excessive stressing of her body was most essential to developing the capitalist project. My great **grandmother's enslavement**—her manual labor and coerced sedentary lifestyle—were reflective of the violent outcomes of schools. It was the beginning, of some sorts, of a way of schooling that made concrete for black people their social status and positionality within the world.

Later, a new project of public schools would be introduced as a way to solidify a racial hierarchy (Spring, 2008). This first iteration of public schools created racist and racialized policies that were meant to substitute a new social order in place of legalized slavery (Darling-Hammond, 2005). Schools that housed descendants of enslaved Africans or black children were under constant attack from white vigilantes and other state sanctioned white violent organizations; black teachers and students sought to access education within dilapidated buildings and schooling resources that white Americans no longer found useful (Cecelski, 1994). My great grandmother Artelia Green sent my grandmother Dorothy Lee Wilson to schools with textbooks with missing pages. Despite the adversity, my grandmother loved her teachers and she loved math. Math was her favorite subject in school. However, she had to stop attending school in order to help my grandmother pay rent. My grandmother eventually became a sharecropper, working in the fields of Arkansas. She picked cotton and tended to other crops, earning $0.25 a day. The apparent violent conditions within school and the immediate need to acquire financial means mediated the conditions by which my grandmother would need to rely on field work as a way to simply stay afloat.

Soon, decades of resistance movements that sought for black communities to have access to better educational resources *and* sustainable living wages would emerge in new and novel ways. However, the United States Supreme Court interpreted these cries for the safety and sustainability of black bodies and equitable access to educational resource as a plea for black children to be in white spaces (Lee & Slaughter-Defoe, 2004; Dumas, 2011). The pivotal 1954 Brown v Board of Education ruling fostered integration within schools, which resulted in black children being in closer proximity to their oppressors. This next iteration of slavery involved black children entering white schools. When black children entered white spaces, they endured physical and psychic violence daily and many black teachers and principals lost their jobs to white people. White teachers responded to the toxic stress that black youth experienced outside of school with pedagogies of toxic stress in school.

Within many "black schools", districts had to implement special magnet programs or increase options for Advanced Placement courses as a recruitment process for white families. Michael Dumas (2011) warns against these approaches to desegregation. He argues:

We must critically reflect on the cultural political-economic significance of creating special educational programs to appeal to White students. In fact, the reality is even more problematic—the district not only intended these programs for White students, but they placed them in Black schools, thereby sending three ideologically loaded messages: first, that black students—absent the presence of Whites—do not deserve, or are not culturally or genetically fit for, specialized and advanced learning; second, that it is morally acceptable and necessary to "compensate"

White students for the "burden" of going to school with Black people; and third, that racially integrated education need not mean that White students actually interact with

> Black students as intellectual peers. None of these messages escaped the attention of Black educators, students, parents, and community members. (p. 715)

These times of desegregation were harmful for black youth. In fact, my mother was bused from one part of San Francisco to a more northern part of San Francisco to attend white schools. My mother recalls the violence that her friends experienced from awaiting white parents when they were bused across town to the Diamond Heights district of San Francisco. Before they could even enter the school building, they were reminded that school was not a welcoming place for them.

Following national efforts for civil rights in schools and society, neoliberal policies were introduced facilitating a shift of the national conversation from one that engaged a critique of race and black degradation, toward a rhetoric of equality that centered the political economy. This new approach presumed that racism was no longer a hindrance to equality—

> thus, those groups that do not experience upward mobility and greater civic (and buying) power are presumed to have failed on their own, as a result of their own choices in the marketplace and/or their own inability to internalize national values of competition, and individual determination and hard work. (Dumas & Ross, 2016, p. 16)

Consequently, neoliberal approaches to education disregarded the violence or toxic stressors that black children experienced because of their blackness, factors that have been proven to impair their learning (Jones & Nisbett, 1971; Mullings, 2005). Instead, this approach narrated the black child as uneducable in order to maintain its relevance within black communities (Dumas & Ross, 2016).

As neoliberal policies continued into the 1980's and 1990's and models of multicultural education were fought for and implemented in schools, the language of meritocracy and progressivism also permeated educational policy and schools as a way to maintain a racialized social order. Researchers argue that these models emphasize grit and delayed gratification as viable means of upward mobility for anyone who works hard enough (Baldridge, 2014; Dumas & Ross, 2016). Research suggests that these projects center myths of meritocracy, leaving unchallenged the need for failure, particularly black failure, within a demanding and awaiting capitalist market (Bowles & Gintis, 1971; Akom, 2003). These myths function as a way to overestimate the power of the individual, while underestimating the power of structural inequity (Jones & Nisbett, 1971). When I was accepted to UC Berkeley in my senior year of high school, I was paraded around the school as a sign of what could happen if other black students worked hard enough. I was nominated for the principal's leadership committee and was even selected to keynote my school's commencement ceremony. My final speech was subjected to hours of revision, with one of the most important edits coming from my principal, instructing me to omit the moment of silence I placed within my speech for our fallen classmate, Jarvis. I had witnessed Jarvis arguing on the phone with what would be his murderers, the morning he was shot. Days later, his mother re-

moved him from life support. My principal explained that Jarvis' death was not appropriate to mention at a commencement ceremony. She concluded by warning me of the consequences I would face if I resisted her authority. I was forced to negotiate between my intellectual and communal identities, placed within a binary to challenge institutional oppression and be reprimanded or settle for a complacent existence and be rewarded academically. I settled**.** My high school experiences reflected a schooling process very similar to Cameron's; it was a space that did not seek to respond to our toxic stress, but instead responded to the societal stressors that we experienced with pedagogies of violence.

Years later, a liberal rhetorical shift in educational theory and policy, however, would begin to engage the toxic stressors that my peers and I had experienced throughout our schooling and lived experiences (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Darder, 2003; Freire, 2005; Cammarota, 2014). The language of critical pedagogies—teaching frameworks that developed a critique of power and offered transformative approaches to education—were becoming well-known when I was training to become a teacher. The discourse of decolonization embedded within Ethnic Studies frameworks of schooling attempted to explain our lived experiences—engaging counter-stories that reexamined histories of the United States to include the language of theft, enslavement and genocide. Rhetorically, these pedagogical approaches were more concerned with what had *happened* to children, rather than what was *wrong* with them. These responses to toxic stress represent one of the latest iterations of schooling and arguably reflect one of the most paradoxical moments that the institution has experienced. Attempts to humanize the black body within schools exist(ed) alongside a very present and pervasive violent school culture that continues to evaluate black children as problems, well before they are regarded as people.

For example, when I was first hired at KIPP Bayview Academy, when theories of critical pedagogy and ethnic studies models were becoming prevalent, I was assigned to manage black bodies within the school's detention center—a position many white school leaders deem acceptable for black college graduates. Kevin, a beautiful black boy—we buried him just seven years later—would always enter my room full of energy, clinging to hope, regardless of how he was forced to spend his lunch time. I transformed the detention center into a critical race course where students and I questioned the racial makeup of the school. There, I engaged my understandings of ethnic studies and critical pedagogies, introducing students to concepts like hegemony; we engaged in critical dialogue surrounding the overseas production of Nike shoes and its impact on the political economics and homicide rates within their community. Kevin always shared his thoughts and led his peers in meaningful discussion. He reminded me how young people's very presence within the classroom, despite their violent schooling experiences, is representative of their largely untapped capacity to serve as transformative agents within their communities and academic lives. Kevin was a constant reminder of the resiliency of black children, of their ability to access life amidst social death (Ginwright, 2010).

Therefore, when I received Cameron into our classroom, I understood his twisted upper lip, the way he looked beyond me when I called his name, his staunch posture. I did not interpret his resistance from a perspective of deficit. I read his resistance as critical thinking. As a veteran

teacher who had been mentored by many other teachers that had been failed by the schooling system, I was responsible for creating an alternative space for Cameron, one that proved to him that I was different and that hopefully his experiences with me would be as well.

So, we bet. Yes, I made a bet with Cameron. I overheard him joking with his friends about his ability to outdo them in three-point shots, in getting girl's phone numbers, anything. Their conversation shifted to their haircuts and the boys began to bet each other on who could cut hair the best. Cameron immediately stood up, professing his barbering skills. I had never witnessed anyone that confident in a discipline that they had not engaged. Cameron's engagement of his thesis, his transitions between his arguments, his upright posture as he presented to his peers were many of the desirable course outcomes for the first semester of my class. They were also many of the attributes that I failed to get from Cameron in my class. So, I gambled. I interrupted his speech and shared that I could fade any of his peers better than him. In barbershop fashion, Cameron's peers "oooooh"ed my response, paused and turned to him for a comeback. Cameron said, "bet $100". I accepted.

Initially, I felt guilty for accepting the bet. How could I gamble in school? In time, however, I reflected on the ways that other teachers and I blindly believed that our work was enough to transform rigid models of schooling. When teachers cried at commencement exercises, I wondered at the nature of their tears. I believe that some teachers were optimistic about their students' futures, enthralled by the promises of upward mobility that accompanied college matriculation. However, I believe that others expressed grief-stricken tears. They reflected a fear of the unknown or even a fear of what we do know, that many us had brought more flowers to funerals than college graduations and that many of our students' outbursts in middle school were actually the biological expressions of their toxic stress—midlife crises even—manifesting in children. Yet, daily we came to school with a hope that urged us to cultivate lessons and relationships in students as an act of working toward what we desired, rather than what we saw. So, yes, teachers gamble.

I swiftly began to develop my barbering skills. I wanted to practice, but I could not find anyone willing to allow me to practice on their head. In my community, you don't just let anyone have access to your head. Consequently, I started to practice on myself. The skill was much harder to obtain because I used a mirror, which meant I not only had to learn the skill, but I had to learn it backward when I attempted my neck taper. Some weekends I could not believe that I was butchering my own head to engage a student. I messed up frequently and I had to wear the butchered style for at least two weeks until my hair grew back enough to practice again.

In time, I began to value the art of practicing on myself what I wanted for my students. The discipline required a certain commitment to vulnerability and reflexive growth that I had read about in the works of bell hooks (1994) and others who had written about grounded pedagogical approaches (Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987; hooks, 1994). I practiced on myself for a little under a year before I received my first "client". The student was desperate for a haircut and liked my tapers. Cameron was the student.

I butchered his hair. Yet, he would continue to come back for haircuts. He voiced that my horrible barbering skills were still far better than what his hair looked like between professional haircuts. Much like his middle school experiences, I was the best of the worst options around him. However, I did not want Cameron to settle for my mediocre practice. I committed to getting better, which was challenging because my growth was contingent on his investment in me. I knew that he deserved better, so I had to be better. And growing was challenging. When I would butcher Cameron's hair, I was accountable to Cameron and all his peers. And Cameron did not protect me. As soon as a peer would look at the crooked hair lining or subpar blend in his fade, they'd ask with judgment: "man who did that to you?" Cameron had no reservation about saying my name. In these moments, I realized that if Cameron was not well, I would be held accountable. His failure was intimately tied to my failure. I had to get better.

(Cameron: 14 years old)

Eventually, Cameron came to me weekly for haircuts and my skills improved. As I gained more of his approval, I was encouraged to practice, be more attentive to detail, perfect my craft and in return trust amongst us increased; he invested in my growth and trusted me with one of the most sacred facets of his being: his crown. As time progressed, our haircutting sessions shifted from me silently attempting to repair devastating attempts at bald fades, to me becoming more confident in my practice and opening the space for humanizing dialogue. Cameron talked to me about the death of his mother and the financial challenges his family faced as a result. It was here where he first talked about how it felt to get jumped and robbed. His descriptions of the toxic stress that he was experiencing provided a new lens for me. We were not like many of his other schools that responded to his toxic stress with explicit forms of violence. However, I was coming to understand that we were still responding to his stressors with violence; we failed to create space for him to express his experiences of toxic stress. Many of us disregarded those experiences within our lessons, failed to make sense of them or just simply had no idea of Cameron's experiences. Either way, we too were neglecting to respond to this toxic stress.

As time passed and Cameron became a regular in my chair, we actively and intentionally engaged his lived experiences. I engaged a pedagogy of active listening: one concerned with well-being. According to bell hooks (1994), this meant that practitioners must be "committed to process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students" (p. 15). We gained better understandings of each other and I was able to move past simply trying not to mess up, toward experimentation and eventually perfection. The haircutting process became a sacred space. It was a space that we both created, one in which trust, commitment, growth, vulnerability, critical thinking and dialogue emerged; it was a space of care. I became increasingly interested in what the space was providing for Cameron. I found that I felt healthier and motivated to be more vulnerable and reflective of my practice as both a

barber and educator. It seemed that Cameron felt safe. He shared sacred details of his life, but I was also interested in the relationship between the types of pedagogies that I was learning by caring for him and the ways it could mitigate the stressors that he and I had no control over. I became increasingly interested in what it could mean for all of Cameron's schooling experiences to mirror the times we shared together. That is, I began to think about how schools could be transformed to respond to the stressors that black youth experienced.

I began to study schooling models that attempted to supportively and effectively respond to the toxic stress that youth experienced. Kia Aroha (which means "through love" in Maori) College (Milne, 2013), a small school in Auckland, New Zealand turns away no students and emphasizes knowledge of self through an intergenerational learning model; students must first learn about their indigenous ways of being as a foundation to learning about state standards. In the school's early years, students who had graduated would cut their new schools to return to Kia Aroha. Their parents cosigned the resistance. They argued that students were better off sitting on the floor in the back of a classroom at Kia Aroha (because they didn't have space for the graduates to return) than attending their assigned schools that followed a British colonial model of schooling, where they were instructed to check their language and indigenous cultural ways of being at the door and learn European standards of knowledge production and culture. Their parents eventually engaged in a sit-in protest at Kia Aroha until the school expanded its reach and added a high school component.

Similarly, Professor Jeff Duncan-Andrade helped to open a school in deep East Oakland, California after parents and students argued that they needed more educational spaces that intentionally loved their children. He named the school Roses in Concrete after artist and activist Tupac Shakur's famous poem. When he was alive, Tupac argued that society often pays close attention to the damaged pedals on roses that grow from concrete, failing to examine the tremendous resiliency that helped them to survive. Roses in Concrete was developed as a commitment to students and community that they would cultivate a space that sought to value their tenacity and love students and communities enough to help remove the concrete that stifled their growth. These examples are reflective of the powerful agency of caring practitioners, rather than the nature of schools (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2009; Dumas, 2014).

Students and practitioners have continued to imagine and work toward transformative educational experiences despite being in schools (hooks, 1994; Akom, 2003; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Milne, 2013). As a result, I am particularly interested in what can happen to and for black students despite their enrollment within schools. I seek to center students' perceptions of violence within their schooling experiences as a way to develop disruptive educational practices that protect and improve the well-being of the black body. I also hope to engage black youth's narratives of pedagogical care to inform our imaginations about the possibilities of education. As it stands, schooling outcomes are merely concerned with grade point averages, tests scores and college matriculation rates. While it is important to identify the potential value of a college education and the monetary resources that it may bring for black youth and communities, I believe that it is imperative to examine the cost of schooling and at-

tempts at upward mobility for black people. A recent study by the New York Times (Bager et al, 2018) found that even the wealthiest black boys raised in the United States still earn less in adulthood than white children and families with similar backgrounds. The study reported that "the sons of black families from the top 1 percent had about the same chance of being incarcerated on a given day as the sons of white families earning $36,000". Additionally, within the U.S., educated and wealthy black women still experience poorer health relative to their white counterparts. These collective findings demonstrate that while education is a powerful indicator of health and sustainability, it does not benefit all groups equally (Satcher, 2000; Williams, 2005; Pearson, 2008). There is something happening to black youth in America that challenges our business as usual approaches to schooling. Research (Satcher, 2000; Williams, 2005; Pearson, 2008; Bager et al, 2018) seems to suggest that being wealthy and educated does guarantee protection for black people from the violence of toxic stressors.

This study centers the schooling experiences of black youth as a way to make space for different and deeper understandings of school violence and unique sites of care within schools. Essentially, I desire to listen to black youth and scholars who research care for black people as a way to better understand what is needed to secure safety and protection for black youth. Additionally, I hope that their narratives may provide a more robust understanding of what should happen in and to schools as a roadmap for the future of educational projects. Within my research, I seek to collaboratively develop the type of sacred space that was developed by Cameron and me. I hope that this project allows for critical listening, growth, discipline of my craft and transformative results.

(Cameron: 20 years old)

Chapter Two

A Review of Literature on Cases of and Responses to Societal and School Stress

This study began by documenting cases of state sanctioned violence that are extremely harmful to black youth (Patterson, 1982; Valenzuela, 1999; Cacho, 2012; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Marie, 2016). Numerous studies (Krieger, 2003; Dumas, 2014; Burke-Harris, 2015) suggest that instances of this kind of harm are consequential and have long-term, detrimental implications, particularly for youth. While the field of education is beginning to examine these consequences, public health studies (Bucci, Gutierrez Wang, Koita, Purewal, Marques, & Burke-Harris, 2015; Felitti et al., 1998) have extensively documented the impacts and outcomes of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and toxic stress as they relate to the experiences of black youth. As a result, this literature review will engage an interdisciplinary examination of these adversities to more accurately capture the complexities of harm imposed upon black youth. It will begin by naming and exploring the physiological impacts of harm. It will then examine how black youth are disproportionately impacted by societal stressors and the implications of that disproportionality. Finally, it will explore the role of schools as paradoxical sites that participate, norm *and* disrupt harms imposed on black youth.

Exposure and Embodiment

Public Health research (Shankoff et al, 2011) suggests that the harm that individuals experience as children can affect them into adulthood. Social issues that youth face in school, life and even with their health, are often the symptoms of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Childhood adversities, including ACEs, are stressful and potentially traumatic events that include abuse and neglect within their homes, as well as experiences outside of the home, such as police brutality, racism, bullying and community and peer violence (Felitti et al., 1998; Bucci, Gutierrez Wang, Koita, Purewal, Marques, & Burke-Harris, 2015). Up to 48% of youth in nationally representative studies are exposed to at least one adversity during childhood and 23% report two or more types of ACEs (Bethell, Newacheck, Hawes, & Halfon, 2014). In juvenile justice settings, the prevalence of an adverse experience is as high as 97%, with 50% of youth reporting four or more adversities (Baglivio, Eipps, Swartz, Huq, Sheer, & Hardt, 2014).

Additionally, literature on gender reports greater sexual abuse for girls, while boys were more likely to report being threatened with a weapon, held captive or kidnapped, physically assaulted and having witnessed injury/murder (Schilling, Aseltine, & Gore, 2007). Another study confirms the greater likelihood of sexual trauma for female adolescents and more physically types of trauma for males (Salazar, Keller, Gowen, & Courtney, 2013). Furthermore, in a large adult sample, a greater proportion of women recalled childhood sexual abuses than men, whereas reports of physical assault and witnessing violence were more prevalent among men (Tolin & Foa, 2006; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2016).

Literature on race and ethnicity generally support the notion that black and latinx youth experience a disproportionate number of early life stressors than their white counterparts. In a study of ten adversities assessed among high school youth, black and latinx youth surpassed White youth in eight of the ten adversities (Schilling et al., 2007). Research on adults similarly demonstrates greater accounts of childhood adversity for African Americans compared to their White counterparts (Slopen et al., 2010; Umberson, Williams, Thomas, Lio, & Thomeer, 2014).

Exposure to these intense, frequent, or sustained stressors without the buffering care of a supportive adult, can change children's brains and bodies, including disrupting learning, behavior, growth, hormonal systems, immune systems, and even the way DNA is read and transcribed. Exposure to these ongoing stressors, or toxic stressors, can dramatically increase the risk for 7 out of 10 of the leading causes of death in the United States (Burke-Harris, 2015). Toxic stress poses real threats to young people's health (Delaney-Black et al., 2002; Cook, et al., 2005).

While theories on exposure to toxic stress have gained traction, understandings of embodiment are not as widely understood or engaged within sociological and/or educational literature. An understanding of embodiment, however, is crucial as it may help to make sense of the physiological impacts of historical school violence. Within epidemiology, the field concerned with the distribution of disease/illness for the purposes of reducing/controlling it, the term embodiment is used to characterize the ways in which our environments and social experiences get under the skin—how we literally embody the material and social world in which we live.

Additionally, Arline Geronimus (2006) provides an analytic framework known as "weathering," which helps to explain how the body expresses consequences of, and responses to, cumulative social stress, particularly poor health outcomes among African-Americans. Geronimus (2006) examines allostatic load—commonly known as "wear and tear" on the body from repeated experiences of stress—as a measure of embodiment and finds that Black women have the highest probability of allostatic load regardless of income status. Black people suffer the highest rates of hypertension in the United States (Adelman, 2008; Mozzafarian et al., 2015). Black women are more likely to give birth to low birth-weight babies, while African-born immigrants experience better outcomes in this area, with their babies being of similar birth weight as those of white women. However, the U.S.-born daughters of these African immigrants give birth to low birth-weight babies at similar rates as black, American-born, women (Adelman, 2008). These studies suggest that there are biological pathways through which factors such as racial discrimination and poverty become embodied, and those can translate into low birthweight and higher rates of hypertension (Collins, et al., 1997).

Epidemiological research is no longer merely concerned with the association of inequality and inequitable health outcomes. Rather, emerging data reveals the causation between the two factors. Data exists showing how the perception of threat, such as self-reported racial discrimination or societal violence, causes biological changes. These stressful conditions result in the upregulation of stress hormones (i.e. inflammatory pathways, heart rate). Furthermore, research on

hypertension reveals a consistent gradient of hypertension prevalence, rising from 16% in West Africa to 26% in the Caribbean and 33% in the United States (Cooper et al., 1997). With prostate cancer rates, research suggests that black men in the Caribbean and in sub-Saharan Africa have lower rates of prostate cancer rates than all American men. The findings within these studies demonstrate the determining role of environment on one's health. Simply said, place matters. While these are just a few examples of biological mechanisms, they provide evidence of how social exposures literally get under the skin and impact real health outcomes. These studies show that these health outcomes are not the result of innate biological traits, but the experience of social factors and inequity. In sum, Black people experience reduced life expectancy, higher rates of infant mortality, greater susceptibility to certain forms of cancer, sexuality transmitted diseases and even higher rates of hypertension.

Explanations

Public Health research (Witek, et al., 2016) proposes that black youth are often more susceptible to exposure to toxic stress due to their exposure to multiple poverty-related risks. Furthering this argument, critical race theories argue that black youth's poverty-related risks are an outcome of their blackness. For example, Cedric Robinson (1983) argues that the capitalist system was created and is sustained through black exploitation and suffering. Furthermore, within *The Position of the Unthought*, critical race theorists Saidiya V. Hartman and Frank B. Wilderson (2003) argue that the sustaining of the national order relies upon black suffering. Other race theorists highlight the ways in which white humanity, particularly, relies upon the dehumanization of blackness and that there is no structure for blackness to exist outside of dehumanization (Spiller, 1987; Cacho, 2012). Blackness continues to not only occupy the position of the unthought but is in constant proximity to violence and stress. Blackness then becomes a precondition for harm.

Educational literature (Anyon, 1997; Baldridge, 2014; Wun, 2016) has extended these arguments as they relate to harm inflicted upon black youth within schools. To begin, Michael Dumas (2014) centers the regularity of school suffering as a consequence of blackness. He urges for the type of critical analysis of schooling that allows us to "consider more deeply how racialized bodies endure suffering in the spaces of schools, and how their suffering appears almost normal – unfortunate perhaps, but not fully realized" (p. 20). Additionally, Connie Wun (2016) highlights the multilayered disciplinary policies, surveillance mechanisms and harsh punitive practices that disproportionately impact black youth in U.S. schools. A host of other educational theorists (Woodson, 1933; Noguera, 2003; Morris, 2016; Love, 2019) have described the type of school violence that is particular to black youth. These theorists have shaped the type of discourse that advocates for researchers to normatively examine schools as sites of toxic stress for black youth.

Environment

While schools may be considered sites of toxic violence, educational researchers have also highlighted the types of practices that function to disrupt school and societal harm. The literature below highlights pedagogies that respond to youth who experience toxic stress.

Studies (Akom, 2003; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Tintiango-Cubales & Sacramento, 2009; Milne, 2013; Cammarota, 2014; Ginwright, 2015) suggest that the use of ethnic studies and Youth Participatory Action Research models in education provide youth with the tools to critically investigate the social toxins that impair their health. Youth who embody the harmful impacts of their lived experiences have a greater chance of positive health outcomes when immersed within environments that offer caring, loving adults; they can thrive when given the tools to access legitimate pathways toward positive self-esteem, hope and purpose (Perry & Szalavitz, 2007; Ginwright, 2015). These environments may arise when educators employ models of critical investigation within their practice (Noguera, 2003; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Love, 2012; Milne, 2013). Essentially, the following literature suggests that educational environments that engage critical pedagogies, care and transformative resistance function to both attenuate the harmful impacts of toxic stress and prepare youth to transform their adverse social conditions.

Critical Pedagogy

Often, young people who come from the most socially toxic environments (Garbarino, 1995), are blamed for their inability to grow amidst these realities (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2009; Love, 2014; Morris, 2016). Many zero tolerance and rigid behavioral policies within schools disregard the prevalence of racial and gender discrimination, poverty and other forms of state sanctioned violence that prevent youth from thriving, often reinforcing the very distress that sustains their poor health.

A school in Walla Walla, Washington traded its strict schooling regime for a simpler response to underachievement and high suspension rates. When students were ejected from class and sent to the counselor's office, school administration began to ask, "what happened *to* you?", rather than "what is wrong *with* you" (Walkley & Cox, 2013)? Instead of being sent home for their behavior, students were given the space to discuss their feelings, what they felt was happening to their bodies, and to be heard and acknowledged. After being kicked out of class for their inability to regulate their behavior, students would often report violence that they experienced or witnessed the night before. **Figure 2** reflects the school's data before and after their cultural shift:

Figure 2

Lincoln High School Data	2009-2010 (before new approach)	2010-2011(after new approach)
Suspension (days students were out of school)	798	135
Expulsions	50	30
Written Referrals	600	320

Educators within the school, as a well as a plethora of restorative justice theories would suggest that the school's cultural shift led to an 85% reduction in suspensions and overall increases in engagement and academic achievement within the school (Walkley & Cox, 2013; Milka & Zehr, 2017). Similarly, a pedagogy of critical interrogation functions as an investigation into the structures, systems and ways of thinking that characterize students' lived experiences; it is largely concerned with what has happened to youth and how these realities impact their health and abilities to self-actualize. A pedagogy of critical interrogation extends the work of teachers at Walla Walla High School by also teaching youth to examine who and what is largely responsible for their social inequity. These models are not lofty theoretical goals, but rather every day practices of effective educators.

In a math course that focused on the development of critical literacies, in response to the film *Stand and Deliver* and the readings, "Numbers of Ancient Egypt" and "The Amazing Achievements of the Maya" as foundational texts to analyze math concepts (Yang, 2009), teachers facilitated students through the development of math autobiographies. Students used their course content to analyze their lived experiences. Pedagogical decisions functioned in reshaping students' relationships to learning and cultivated high academic achievement. They taught predominately poor, black and latinx youth to both critically examine their ancestors' contributions to math and reexamine the ways in which their society often blatantly disregarded these contributions. This model of interrogation allowed students to locate themselves within a history of contribution and asset; students examined the structures, systems and ways of being that benefitted from their ignorance of these histories. It should be noted that these students were labeled low achievers prior to their exposure to these critical pedagogies of interrogation: "79 percent of these students scored far below basic and 19 percent below basic on state exams in mathematics" (Yang, 2009, p. 105). Through critical consumption of math texts and concepts, students' SAT

math scores improved an average of 34 points, ranging from 0 to 110 points (Yang, 2009). On state standardized tests, 20 percent of students tested at grade level compared to none the year before. At least 40 percent of students who engaged in these lessons moved up at least one level of proficiency. It is argued that these models of critical inquiry are effective because they both 1) produce higher academic achievement and 2) produce cultures that counter the self-blame and hopelessness that often accompany internalized oppression cultivating a critical consciousness in youth participants. Ginwright & James (2002) suggest these frameworks help young people navigate from feelings and places of self-blame to healing, rethinking and addressing the traumas that once seemed insurmountable.

Conducted alongside youth and communities, such pedagogies of critical interrogation are documented to foster high academic achievement as well as interdependence and healing amongst participants (Freire, 2000; Ginwright & James, 2002; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Yang, 2009).

Critical Connection (*Empathy)*

Studies suggest that a collective investigation of the factors that influence students' lived experiences lead to models of empathetic connection (Perry, 2007; Brown, 2009; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Tintiangco-Cubales, 2009; Camangian, 2010; Perry, 2010; Ginwright, 2015). Ginwright and James (2002) argue that the development of "critical consciousness allows young people who feel victimized to remove self-blame and heal from the trauma of poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression…the healing process also leads to a spiritual development that provides youth with a sense of life purpose, empathy for the suffering of others, and optimism about social change" (p. 27). Within psychology (Brown, 2009; Miller, 2016), healing occurs in connection to others. For students to cope with their lived experiences, they must feel a sense of relational efficacy—of having impacted others around them. The listening and connecting through students' stories of pain and resilience helps students recognize patterns within their traumas. According to psychologist Brené Brown (2009), the cultivation of empathy within classrooms, creates environments by which students are more readily able to learn and connect to a sense of individual and collective purpose. In an English course, a teacher found that the introduction and completion of autoethnographies evoked critical consciousness and collective empathy amongst his students (Camangian, 2010). As an extension of autobiographies that reflect a myopic individualistic view of one's lived experiences, autoethnographies "compel authors to foreground their experiences in relation to a larger social group" (Camangian, 2015, p. 183). In this process, students read their worlds in order to produce cultural narratives that build toward critical social analysis.

Moreover, students used their personal narratives as a social critique to better understand and explain the ways in which political decisions characterized their existence. Most notably, students' sharing of their autoethnographies was documented to establish compassionate classroom communities. In this sharing, space was created for students to positively redefine themselves amidst deficit and mainstream representations. They participated in "collective healing

processes whereby students learn from one another's lived experiences" (Camangian, 2010, p. 201). In addition to arousing student engagement and achievement, producing empathetic connections within the classroom is an important and disruptive response to toxic stress. These types of compassion-based meditation practices are found to have beneficial physiological impacts for students who experience cumulative adverse childhood experiences.

Collective Action *(Warrior Scholars)*

A component of Japanese culture centers the *Hagakure,* a practical and spiritual guide, as a way to develop the sensibilities of a warrior. The *Hagakure* provides anecdotes and pathways toward reflection, so that developing warriors may be intentional and effective in their quest for social transformation. The warrior is identified as a desirable social outcome for pupils, as the warrior model of learning embodies the critical consciousness to challenge orders and ways of being that may be counterintuitive to the humanization of themselves and others.

Some schools have incorporated a framework by which the desirable outcome for their students is for them to become warrior-scholars. Ann Milne (2013) identifies warrior scholars as: "young people, secure in their own identity, competent and confident in all aspects of their cultural world, critical agents for justice, equity and social change, with all the academic qualifications and cultural knowledge they need to go out and change the world" (p. 1). Warrior-scholars are students who recognize the interconnectedness of habits of the mind and habits of the heart. They embody what King (1963) calls "tough minds and tender hearts". These scholars attain academic achievement with commitments to transform the toxicities that may prevent them from thriving. They are part of a collective of warrior scholars who commit to transformative work within their communities and place an emphasis on altruism which is shown to improve health outcomes (Post, 2007; Brown et al, 2009).

Chapter Three

"Some of us did not die": A Theoretical Framing of how to Understand & Respond to Toxic Stress

There is a commonly held perception about why black children suffer; it is a myth about their inherent state of nothingness, their ability to embody more pain than others, which rarely has anything to do with the realities that black youth endure. There are specificities in responding to the toxic stress black youth endure that critical pedagogies and ethnic studies have been unable to address. Because care and blackness are often positioned against each other, antithetical even, educational frameworks of care have been unable to sufficiently respond to a global culture of anti-blackness. Models of schooling have been less attentive to black pain and often dismissive of black outrage to named pain (Dumas, 2014; Love, 2016; Marie, 2016). Notions of freedom within educational research can serve to reinforce the very project of harm they seek to fight against. Freedom, within the context of the United States, has always been based upon the harming of black bodies (Hartman & Wilderson, 2003; Cacho, 2012). Even the United States Constitution states a very clear exception[1] for the possibility of freedom when it comes to black bodies (DuVernay, 2016). Within this structure, the black body becomes the subjugated foundation by which we determine the social order (Hartman & Wilderson, 2003). These frameworks have also seeped their way into educational literature and policy almost creating and sustaining a type of hold, a binding if you will, that forces black youth to remain on their knees, to remain in a lowly posture and succumb to the stressors that will eventually kill them. In response, the following theoretical framework seeks to address a type of social death that critical pedagogies and youth participatory action research models have not sufficiently addressed. This theoretical framework seeks to disavow this reality by centering literature on black suffering and care in order to critically respond to the systematic forms of harm imposed upon black youth within society and ultimately perpetuated in schools. This framework engages black and native understandings of loss and healing, disruption and imagination as a way to make space for different and deeper understandings of healing and humanity for black people.

Understanding Schools as Sites of Loss (And Just That)

Various educational studies argue that the violence black youth experience within schools reflects a culture of loss. These forms of violence are often recorded as a loss of educational enrichment (Noguera, 2003; Mirza, 2005), a loss of culture (Ladson-Billings,1994; Akom; 2008; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008), and loss of a sense of belonging (Bennett et al., 1992; Skiba et al., 2002). Other research on the schooling experiences of black youth account for a loss of

[1] An 1865 ratified version of the constitution states: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." Scholars suggest that the exception correlates directly to the rise of a prison system, incarcerating black people at disproportionate rates compared to white people.

humanity in the form of disproportionate physical and ideological violence (Anyon, 1997; Ferguson, 2001; Kozol, 2012), ongoing bodily harassment (Anyon 1997; Wun, 2016), surveillance (Jones, 2010; Wun, 2016) and attacks on black children's psyches (Woodson, 1933; Fanon, 2008; Dumas, 2014). This theoretical framework seeks to extend these studies by highlighting the loss of life that occurs when schools willingly or unwillingly disregard the impacts of multiple adverse social stressors that black youth endure.

There is something dire about what is happening in schools that is worthy of disinvestment. Yet, models of schooling (Raymond, 2002; Woodworth, et. al, 2008) propose that black youth invest, even when studies show that black people, regardless of engagement and success within schools, still experience a lower quality of life than many others (Satcher, 2000; Williams, 2005; Bager et al, 2018; Pearson, 2008). Given these circumstances, one could argue that the propaganda embedded within schools, one that demands that black youth invest and find value within a framework that harms them, is reflective of a national culture that desires black youth succumb to abusive relationships. In 1933, Carter G. Woodson (1933) stated:

> As another has well said, to handicap a student by teaching him that his black face is a curse and that his struggle to change his condition is hopeless is the worst sort of lynching. It kills one's aspirations and dooms him to vagabondage and crime. Is it strange, then, that the friends of truth and the promoters of freedom have not risen up against the present propaganda in the schools and crushed it. This crusade is much more important than the anti-lynching movement, because there would be no lynching if it did not start in the schoolroom (p. 24).

Woodson's commentary foreshadows the culture of social death that is present within schools (Patterson, 1982; Cacho, 2012; Dumas, 2014; Love, 2016). Some could even argue that schools are sites of loss for culture, language, and humanity (Valenzuela, 2000); and for black people, there is overwhelming evidence that suggests that schools are just that (Woodson, 1933; Anyon, 1997; Love, 2016; Wun, 2016). Educational theorists (Akom, 2003; Ginwright, 2015) and educators such as myself, maybe out of some sense of hope, have sought to identify sites of humanity within schools, to chart and document the ways in which schools can work. Other scholars (hooks, 1994; Ginwright & James, 2002; Love, 2012) have documented the ways in which teachers can exist within schools as a way to resist the overwhelming culture of loss and harm occurring daily. Attempts at these processes are evident within models of critical pedagogy and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) (Akom, 2003; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Tintiangco-Cubales & Sacramento, 2009; Milne, 2013; Cammarota, 2014; Ginwright, 2015). While these responses to daily terror imposed upon black youth have attempted to respond to the social toxins outside of school, they may also leave unchecked the toxicity that is schooling. Models of critical pedagogies and YPAR still invest in schools; they still urge youth to seek validation from the very system that causes them harm. Evident within many findings of literature and practices of critical pedagogies and YPAR is the celebration of

increased engagement in schools, grade point averages and attendance. These findings still center the procedures and frameworks of schooling as redemptive. They embody beliefs that these measurements will secure black humanity and are worthy of investment; these measurements alone have reproduced toxicity for black youth. They disregard the tremendous toll that schooling takes on the body, on the types of weathering that takes place on these bodies as a result of the normative practices and procedures of schools.

The Interrelatedness of Black Care and School Destabilization

In order to disrupt the types of toxic stress that schools perpetuate, we must radically change what is happening in, and to, schools. There has always been a generation of young people who have thought differently and, in turn, forced our society to think and operate differently. Any change that we create has to be cultivated through a deep investment in young people. Whatever we produce here is what we will get for decades to come. And if schools continue to produce broken and passive youth, youth who are passive in their relationships with white people, with power, with their abusive relationships and with schools, then they will replicate this passivity for the next generation; thus, their children will come to schools with the same expectations (Woodson, 1933).

Rather than ally itself with a host of educational literature that calls for black youth to align their postures and perspectives with models of white, rugged individualism and subtractive cultural practices, this theoretical framework calls on public health frameworks that advocate for a restructuring of [schooling] environments that biologically impair the health of black youth (Garabarino, 1995; Syme, 2004; Ginwright, 2009). These models have begun to extend research on individual behavior to include the role of environment as an essential influence on health outcomes (Behringer & Friedell, 2006). These models suggest that the environments that youth are placed in play a fundamental role in responding to and, even attenuating, the harmful impacts of toxic stressors. Alternatively, this study does not seek to focus on policies and components of the school day that can be tweaked to better care for black youth. Rather, it seeks to inform the creation of pedagogical approaches and structures that are concerned with listening to and responding to the needs of the black body.

Schools as they exist, perpetuate a bankrupt structure that cannot yet profess to be concerned with the well-being of children. For example, within this structure, it is possible for a student to experience the type of poverty that compromises their ability to eat daily; they may experience state-sanctioned abuse on their way to school; they may not have an understanding of where they come from, of their cultural practices of healing and sustainability, and that same student, as long as they are able to recite information from their school's textbooks and comply with the policies of their schools' handbook, may graduate from their perspective institution with high marks. Likewise, it is possible for a student who is concerned with the well-being of their peers, who is relentless in their pursuit of knowledge, who is a critical thinker, an organic intellectual,

who exemplifies countless examples of social responsibility, to resist the violence of schooling and leave that school with low marks, and even worse, to internalize beliefs that their resistance to the violence of schools is maladaptive behavior.

Connie Wun (2006), highlights the ways in which schools function to disregard the realities of black girls. She finds that they "were prohibited from articulating their struggles, disagreements, or injuries" (p. 191). Black girls within her study experienced harsh punishment for attempting to articulate the toxic stressors that they were experiencing. There was not language within the school's policy to recognize what these black girls were experiencing as stress. Instead, they were labeled as "defiant" or "disobedient" (p. 192). Wun's study (2016) suggests that the resilience that black girls exercised amidst schooling should have been championed but was instead punished. Additionally, Michael Dumas (2014) speaks to the imminent loss of black children's humanity as a component of their schooling experiences. Both studies highlight that ways in which anti-blackness, particularly the explicit disregard for the vitality of black bodies, is a part of the larger culture of schools. Therefore, what it means to center black youth—their needs, voices, protection of their bodies—is an investment in the destabilization of schools as we know them toward models that center the health and vitality of black youth.

(Race)ing Forward: A Case for Education for Black Youth

One of the greatest acts of health for black youth seems to be divestment from normative schooling practices. Emerging health literature has begun to rethink schools and even the scope and reach of educational projects. These models range from trauma-informed approaches (Carello & Butler, 2014) to education that equips teachers with the tools to address what has adversely happened to youth (Stevens, 2012), toward offerings of school abolition that (re)imagines educational spaces and learning (Love, 2019). All of these models attempt to secure and protect an essential facet of one's being: humanity. All are also critical responses to the overwhelming loss of humanity that has taken place in schools for children (Dumas, 2014).

In response to specific assaults on black children's humanity, research argues (Akom, 2003; Love, 2014; Ginwright, 2015) that healing interventions for black youth must engage the types of intellectual and creative freedom needed to protect and foster pathways for black children. To be clear, these models do not merely desire for black children to experience increased representation in more elite or advanced models of schooling, nor do they chase after glimpses of wealthy, white models of schooling. Rather, these models of education are interested in the practices and procedures that will lead to black children living longer and more abundant lives.

Similarly, I propose an educational model that highlights the specificity of black humanity. Any theoretical framing of black humanity must promote:

1. **protection of black bodies:** In his study on suffering in schools, Dumas (2014) underscores the challenges of protecting black children from their schools' "assault on their humanity" (p. 21). In response, Dumas and other critical black scholars call for a pedagogical barricade, a communal protection of black children's bodies. Dumas (2014) suggests that "a black *we* must mobilize against cultural misrecognition and unfair distribution of educational resources. This black *we*, as imagined here, stands in opposition to a white *them* on the other side of suffering" (p. 21). In an era when black children's safety is the last on school agendas—when suspension and expulsion rates reflect these daily assaults, when the larger hidden curriculum of schools still suggest that success for black children is synonymous with leaving behind the cultural attributes of their families and communities for upward mobility—this form of education functions to protect black bodies and humanity as a way for youth to engage in the types of critical education that will lead to more abundant life for black children.
2. **black healing:** Cynthia Dillard (2006) suggests that healing resides within the souls of black people, but within a schooling framework, these souls are often subjected to torture. Dillard raises important imaginations for the possibilities of education when the souls of black children are valued, when the types of literature, language, frameworks and assessments are centered in learning and health models that care for black children. These models require educators and school leaders who are knowledgeable of the African diaspora, who see black children beyond deficit, and others who are willing to learn about the vast cultural knowledges of black people to care for black children in a transformative way. Public health theory (Perry, 2007; Perry, 2010) and social science concerned with the healing of black youth (Ginwright, 2015) suggests that only when black children are cared for by adults that truly understand the profundity of the black child's existence, can real healing occur. These adults must be invested in the types of daily activities that improve health and increase black well-being. This type of caring adult must be invested in the cultivation and sustenance of black joy (Dillard, 2012; Cruz, 2017). Kleaver Cruz (2017), identifies that "centering on black joy is not about dismissing or creating an "alternative" black narrative that ignores the realities of our collective pain; rather, it is about holding the pain and injustice we experience as black folks around the world in tension with the joy we experience in the pain's midst. Black joy is healing, resistance and regeneration. The two, joy and pain, are not mutually exclusive, and often we need the latter to get through the former" (p. 2). Indeed, an investment in black healing extends beyond frameworks of mere survival; instead, they function to create educational spaces in which black children leave better and healthier than when they arrived.
3. **black experiential counter-stories**: Black people (Woodson, 1933; Jordan 2002) have always found creative ways to anchor understandable black rage and use it as a tool to (re)tell our stories as an act of health. These stories (Morrison, 2004; Hurston, 2006; Imarisha, 2015) have always functioned to organize and make plain complex forms of injustice through the narration of our lived experiences. They have countered deficit-ori-

entated narratives about how we got here, why our communities look and function the ways they do. These counter-stories have enraged and fueled our imaginations for a better world. Educational frameworks that center the protection and healing of black bodies must be invested in counter storytelling that generates imagination. It must be affixed to the hope (West, 2008) that encouraged enslaved Africans to desire learning even when it was punishable by death; the hope that inspired Harriet Tubman to understand that her freedom was inextricably tied to others, even before her first escape. These educational frameworks must be intertwined with young people's connection to their ancestors and desire for a better world within a seemingly doomed existence. It must be black. What it means to be black has always meant to desire good health, freedom and abundance of life within a society that is dependent on your subordination. June Jordan's (2002) work epitomizes what it means to cultivate a space for learning and the (re)telling of our own healing narratives. She states:

Some of us did not die.
We're still here
I guess it was our destiny to live
So let's get on with it

June Jordan's (2002) work highlights an importance of assessment, particularly in what we choose to acknowledge and value. An institution's value system is always based within what they assess. Assessments reflect and disseminate particular narratives about the people within those institutions. June Jordan's (2002) theoretical framework within the excerpt above values connection to ancestral knowledge, connection to others, perseverance, and imagination. Conversely, schools, based on their assessments, value individualism, competition, and conformity. These are the value systems that come from grade point averages, testing and strict regimes of schooling. These are the value systems that have (re)produced the society that we live in; conveniently our society also centers rugged individualism, competition and conformity. These values have worked against black children. They have affirmed, justified and reproduced toxic stressors in their lives. In many ways, black children have failed in schools because they have not adhered to these value systems. However, black children have been successful in many other ways. Black children's acts of refusal have produced a critical resistance to violence. However, black children's existence, within school especially, should not be contingent upon their ability to fight. Imagine what could become of black children if their engagement in schools was not always a battle to maintain their humanity.

If educational spaces engaged more critical, life-giving values (integrity, social responsibility, accountability, empathy, hope) and more meaningful assessment, then black children would experience life more abundantly. These counter-stories are essential to black healing and sustainability. We do not just need to change the narratives of what black children are hearing within classrooms, we need to change the narratives of what black children are experiencing

within educational spaces. If educational spaces valued and measured the impacts of social responsibility, empathic connection, knowledge of self, and other life-giving values, then these mechanisms would fundamentally influence the health and well-being of black children. This research study is invested in learning about the types of approaches that mediated health and well-being for black children. As a result, it asks:

Research Question(s):

1. What are the pedagogical strategies that improve the health of black children?
    a. How can observing the experiences of black high school students inform teacher-researchers' understanding of pedagogical practices that improve their students' health?
    b. How do black youth describe experiences of toxic stress that impact their experience in schools?
    c. How do black youth describe attached and caring relationships with adults in schools?
    d. How do black youth understand the relationship between teacher pedagogy and toxic stress?

Chapter Four

On the Resemblance of an Ethnography: A Description of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore pedagogical practices that improve the health of black children. The study centers the specific intervention of a school-based program designed from students' perspectives on attached and caring relationships as a precursor for healthier, more sustainable lives. The intervention emphasizes the development of students' critical consciousness and [socio-emotional & physical] health. Following a history of life-sustaining research practices (Ransby, 2003; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Smith, 2013), this study is interested in using research as a tool to disrupt structural harm and improve the health of black children. It will be conducted alongside communities for the specific goal of improving black children's health and producing knowledge that will transform social, physiological and material conditions of black people.

The specific goal of this inquiry is to investigate the relationship between care and stress within schools for black children. As a result, I hope to learn more about the ways in which students find this type of approach to be impactful, particularly as it relates to their overall health. Lastly, this research leads to implications for a number of issues within the fields of education, public health, specifically social epidemiology, notions of "highly qualified" teaching, culturally responsive curricular designs, assessment, and educational facility design.

In the preceding sections, I discussed the normed violence within schools that produce unhealthy people, often regardless of their social status. These outcomes are challenging to understand within a political climate that relies upon narratives of meritocracy in order to explain away health disparities and suffering within a society plagued by limited resources and scarce opportunity for black people (Jones & Nisbett, 1971; Dumas; 2014; Dumas & Ross, 2016). To address these outcomes, I examined who and what is responsible for health disparities within our society. I identified schools as paradoxical sites: spaces that are responsible for the reproduction of adverse health outcomes and as spaces that possess the potential to buffer the harmful impacts of social stressors. This study will engage a hybrid of methodological practices to better understand the ways in which pedagogical practices in schools, such as caring pedagogical approaches to learning and living, may reduce the harmful impacts of social stressors and improve the health of black children.

Study Design: Toward An Agape Methodology

This research project was designed as an intervention that merges students' experiences and knowledges, cutting-edge public health approaches (Kreiger, 2010) and caring pedagogies (Duncan-Andrade, 2009) as tools to respond to toxic stress and to improve student health. It combines a plethora of methodological approaches to gather interpretive data often understood as a mixed methods approach (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, 2010; Greene, 2017). The study relies

heavily upon qualitative data (student interviews, footage of classroom practice, field notes, students' work and other artifacts). I find this approach to be extremely helpful and necessary for three major purposes: 1) **validity** or as some have identified, *triangulation* (Fielding & Fielding, 1986): this approach allows me to gain more valid and secure understandings of the factors that lead to student well-being. 2) **variety** or as others have come to define it, *complementarity and expansion* (Greene, 2007): different methods of data gathering allow for a broader understanding of the named social phenomenon rather than extensive data to prove my hypothesis 3) **vulnerability** or as Greene (2007) identifies, *dialectic stance*: this approach allows me to place different data sources in conversation with each other, often forcing me to (re)examine study conclusions. In summary, such a mixed method approach allows me to better capture the complex subtleties of classroom and interpersonal student dynamics that help to draw innovative links between critical theory and grounded social phenomenon.

My hope is that the methods and grounded research that I will employ within this study will foreground the humility necessary to conduct transformative research: transformative in its acknowledgement of the legacies that shape such an approach, transformative in the questions it asks, transformative in the ways in which it interprets social phenomenon, and most importantly, transformative in the ways in which it seeks to improve the well-being of black children. To achieve these desired study outcomes, this approach acknowledges the legacies of harm produced by qualitative research, in attempts to avoid replicating the types of studies and study findings that solely meet the researchers needs, while disregarding the participating community's needs. As a result, this study is committed to the frameworks necessary to develop solidarity to engage in research *with* communities, to gather knowledge rather than collect data, with a specific purpose of self-determination for black people (Chase, 2019). Essentially, this research may become a tool within this study to intervene within Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and toxic stressors that black youth experience. The value of any tool is revealed in the hands of those who hold it. As a researcher who seeks to study social phenomenon within my own community, this study uses research as a tool to study the types of educational environments and practices necessary to promote the well-being of black children. To achieve these ends, I will focus on the ways in which attached and caring relationships and pedagogies can attenuate the harmful impacts of toxic stress.

This research focuses primarily on the incorporation and documentation of a caring pedagogy for intervention group. It was important for me to document the experiences of black youth as a fundamental way to transform society. This study follows a listening methodological framework, one that turns an ear toward harm and suffering. It follows the belief that suffering communities should play an integral role within their own healing processes. Additionally, this study is centered in the belief that society cannot move toward social transformation until black people are free. As a result, this study engages a Black Youth Pedagogy of Care (BYPC) as an attempt to listen to black youth. A BYPC recognizes the constraints of schooling in attempts to care for black students. Care, as explained by black youth focal informants, is actualized first through a recognition of the social and political factors that characterize students' well-being, a need for

teachers "who got understanding of why we are the way we are". It then functions to fight the social structures that impose adversity. Such a critical consciousness in teachers informs a pedagogy that intervenes within toxic stress and protects students. Within our intervention model, the BYPC focuses on:

a. **The Development of Memoirs**: students produce a body of writing that engages a history of colonization as way to understand and explain their adverse social and health conditions and connect learning to various cultural understandings of health and well-being as a model for social transformation; cultivates space for youth to articulate and understand their experiences of historical and contemporary toxic stress
b. **Youth Participatory Action Research Projects & Presentations**: students engage socio-historical critiques of society to engage in research projects that promote social transformation, specifically change that improves their material conditions.
c. **Rites of Passage Ceremonies**: within intentional acts of social belonging, students are celebrated by their communities for their dedication to learning about their histories and cultures and promoted to new levels of social responsibility
d. **Normed Cultural Practices**: activities ranging from the learning of their indigenous mother languages and travel to their ancestors' homelands to weekly check-ins and family dinners that youth call for in order to secure their sense of safety and belongingness.

Measurements

Interview Protocol: This study engages interviews as a rich source of data. It is suggested that "interviewing gives us access to the observations of others. Through interviewing we can learn about places we have not been and ought not go and about settings in which we have not lived" (Weiss, 1994, p. 1). Focal students were interviewed as a way to gain qualitative data. This study engages interviews to add nuance to the researcher's observations, to add complexity to the everyday experiences of high school youth and to ensure that their voices emerge within the study. Interviews were audio and/or video recorded. The interviews asked questions about students experiences with stress and how they handle stress. The questions also asked students about experiences with care in schools to explore relationships between caring pedagogies and stress reduction.

Interview Questions:

1. When you think about your schooling experiences before you got to high school, how would you describe them?
2. You just finished your first year of high school. How would you describe it?
3. How would you describe your experiences with other students at your school?
4. What was your most memorable experience this year with other students at your school?
5. How would you describe your experiences with your teachers at your school?
6. What was your most memorable experience with a teacher this year at your school?
7. Does the teaching in the school ever make you feel ever make you feel stressed? If so, how?
8. Are there things that teachers teach that make you feel cared for? If so how?
9. What do you like least about the teaching in your school?
10. What do you like best about the teaching in your school?
11. Is school stressful to you? If so, how?
12. What do you like least about the rules/policies of your school?
13. What do you like best about the rules/politics of your school?
14. What do you like least about your school overall? Why? What does that look and feel like to you?
15. What do you like best about your school overall? Why? What does that look and feel like to you?

Classroom Observations: Observation data is derived from various sources of data. The story of Cameron is reflective of my first cohort, the cohort that contributed to the BYPC framework; Observations are also derived from the current cohort of students, the interventions group. For both groups, I observed students on average, once a week, for at least one hour, for the duration of the year-long study. During this time, I documented the classroom experiences of black study participants within field notes. Such documentation included reflections related to individual and whole class instruction, culminating projects, small and whole group dialogue, community events, travel, and informal discussions with students. Throughout the study, I was particularly interested in the way students rejected or internalized course content, made sense of the adverse experiences, and responded to different pedagogical styles. I made it a point to document students' feelings about what they learned and its perceived relevance to their lives. To do this, I had to pay close attention to the way students actualized course content and made connections between named content and the day-to-day decisions made within their lived experiences. In attempts to capture these dynamics, essentially balancing the task of teacher and researcher, I engaged various forms of notes and note-taking. Many days, I had to reflect and write about classrooms dynamics after I finished teaching. These notes are documented in various notebooks, computer files and loose sheets of paper. During research travels, I documented my thoughts on student interactions and experiences via voice memos. These notes functioned as a decentralized

field journal. They engaged serious reflection, analysis and self-critique. While these notes were taken randomly, often through various mediums, they were also later organized on my computer in a systematic and retrievable way. Throughout the study, I have collected extensive field notes, through various meetings to capture dynamic social occurrences. I did my best to capture the authenticity and integrity of these moments to document the richness that emerged in seemingly everyday occurrences. Overall, a substantial amount of data from my teaching experiences were engaged and analyzed within this study.

Analysis

For both interview protocol and classroom observations, I wanted to remain a reflexive researcher and pay close attention to the way in which bias could impact the study findings. As a result, I developed a research lab that would help me to analyze the qualitative data. With a group of 20 research assistants, we extensively read through interview transcripts and examined classroom footage by creating memos and codes that documented emerging themes and phenomenon. Memos are argued to be an essential technique used within qualitative analysis (Straus, 1987; Groenewald, 2008). These memos have become an essential component of developing coding categories to be used for my data analysis. They were helpful in the developing of narrative structures and relationships to also be used within the study's data analysis.

These memos were also helpful for categorizing analysis, which commences with identifying units of data that are seemingly relevant to this research study. This is a process of what Seidman (1998) identifies as "marking what is of interest in the text" (p. 100). In these efforts, I used a process of *open coding* (Corbin & Strauss, 2007) that reflects an inductive attempt to capture emerging ideas. This process required us to read, code and sort descriptive data so as to separate it from other data. We use Dedoose software as a way to organize the coding and data analysis process, focusing first on three main coding categories: *organizational* (data that is collected for its relevance, but sorted for further analysis), *substantive* (descriptive data that explains student experiences and beliefs), and *theoretical* (data that more readily reflects our concepts and can be used in more abstract ways to convey meaning or relevance). From these three main coding categories, we developed a series of codes that signify meaning of study data and assisted in the organizing of a plethora of qualitative research data. Qualitative data was analyzed alongside 20 other researchers as a way to gain research validity. Collectively, we gained consensus building, as a way to develop a code book for research data analysis. Multiple people were a part of the coding and analysis process as a way to gain greater validity within analysis of interview transcripts, memos, coding and the creation of themes, theory and research findings. We used the software Dedoose to perform reliability checks. Generated codes included: *anger, balance school work, captivity, care (learn about self), care (teacher) care (through learning new concepts), care (from being pushed from teacher), challenged (by school work), challenged (by teachers), chaos in the classroom, close relationships with teachers, commitment, connection (peer), course relevance, disrespect, fun, joy, home responsibilities, isolation, lack of support (from teachers), lack of validation (from teachers), learning style, peer drama, care (peer to peer), physical violence,*

racism, reciprocity (negative), reciprocity (positive), representation, resilience, stress (over grades), trust, verbal violence. We then took the codes that were the most prevalent within Dedoose and our field notes and re-examined our data to inform our intervention and case study analysis. The selected codes informed what we focused on within the analysis and descriptions within the case studies. We developed our current intervention (BYPC mentioned above) from extensive coding of classroom field notes, triangulation and analysis of 4-years of classroom observations, student and teacher interviews, student academic work, researcher memos and personal relationships with youth. Descriptions of these specific codes codes are listed below*:*

- **Commitment** is described as the investment of energy, time, and emotions to push through something while, overcoming hardships in the process. Students describe multiple types of commitment, including commitment towards people and commitment towards goals. Students experience and react to commitment from their teachers and peers, but also feel commitment towards improving themselves. These forms of commitment intertwine and feed into each other, as described by many of the students when they felt more motivated to improve themselves after seeing the time and energy their teachers had invested into them. Commitment towards goals involves being able to invest in a goal beyond simply going through the motions to accomplish it. Students described struggling in classes and certain subjects but finding the motivation to persevere and continue to learn, especially with the support of a good teacher. Commitment encourages one to expand and push themselves even when the end of the tunnel is not visible.
- **Relevance** is described as a measurement of identity. Students identified the importance of seeing themselves both internally and through the lens of others. This starts with the acknowledgement of shared histories across and within groups. Students are held accountable to the strengths of their own histories and are aware of their inner transformative power passed down to them by the knowledge of their ancestors. Students identified an interconnectedness of knowledge of self, ancestry and others as a foundation toward academic and social success.
- **Close Relationships with Teachers** is described as a quality that people share with one another. It takes the form of being understood, as well as it's reciprocal—being understanding. Students shared that by being vulnerable, they were able to feel connected to someone else by sharing stories/experiences and a common understanding of their lived experiences. Students felt that others cared and concerned themselves with their emotions, struggles, desires and need; therefore, they felt more connected to these people.
- **Caring Support** is described as demonstrating thoughtfulness by devoting time and energy to others, without an expectation of something in return. This can happen between teacher and student, and also between students. By encouraging one another's respective goals, everyone feels more support. Students shared that, high expectations, attention from teachers, and personalized pedagogy led to students feeling empowered. Caring

support can look like emotional comfort, accountability, providing space for success, or taking risks for the person you love.

Finally, to avoid the limitations of the analytic strategies mentioned above (creating analytical blinders from categorical structures), we spent countless hours reflecting on connections between data. Some researchers have come to call this process *connecting strategies*. For many, connecting strategies avoid the fracturing or segmenting of initial data by contextually engaging a plethora of approaches to identity relationships amongst data (Mishler, 1986; Atkinson, 1992). Our analytical approach has also been associated with analytical processes like discourse analysis (Gee, 2005), narrative analysis (Josselson, Lieblick, & McAdams, 2007) and ethnographic microanalysis of interaction (Erickson, 1992). The identification of connection amongst several data points both serves as a crucial step for building theory and provides greater validity within this study.

Research Context and Site[2]

History of San Francisco (Onondaga Community)

University High School sits upon native land and is surrounded by streets named after Native tribes that banded together to resist colonial domination. These tribes were eventually forced to become allies with the Spanish and cede much of their land. University High School's history is more specific to the Ohlone people who are believed to have inhabited what is now known as the San Francisco Peninsula for at least 10,000 years (Bernal History Project, 2007). Ohlone culture and ways of being—often emphasized through plant and fish-based diets, normed and organic healing practices, and the telling of sacred narratives—were compromised from the genocidal attacks from the Spanish between 1769 and 1776. What followed were the establishments of Missions where violent colonial ways of living and learning were forced upon the Ohlone. The Ohlone resisted their colonization through acts of solidarity amidst the ever-so-present and developing Western colonization process. It is believed that the Ohlone people developed diverse communities of resistance and practice with other native people from the Bay Area, regardless of the differences in their languages and cultural backgrounds.

The attacks against their culture took new form when Mexico gained control of California in 1821. They began to desecrate the Missions, forcing Ohlone people to leave one form of control toward another. In the process of resisting European disease and toxic ways of existing, the Ohlone struggled to maintain their cultural emphasis on collective healing and storytelling, amidst the developing Western world that emphasized rugged individualism in hopes of developing and sustaining a violent capitalist market.

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[2] All characters and locations named here are pseudonyms, besides San Francisco.

In the 1850's, European immigrants appeared in abundant numbers to pursue the wealth that rested on Native hills, particularly in San Francisco. The impacts of the Gold Rush was monumental for San Francisco particularly. San Francisco is said to have grown from a small village consisting of about 200 residents in 1846 to a booming city populated roughly at 36,000 people by 1852 (Bernal History Project, 2007). The usurping of Native land was motivated by economic interests, ultimately prioritizing the development of a market over the value of Native lives. The Ohlone were not the only people whose lives were disregarded for the developing Western political economy. Chinese immigrants were killed daily within mines and their labor exploited to develop railroads throughout the West. Mexican and Black populations were targeted in efforts to succumb to the establishing government. And in the midst of such degradation, the Onondaga community[3] of San Francisco was developed in 1869. National policy proposed to "kill the Indian, in order to save the man" coincided with other national policies that normed the suffering of Native peoples under the guise of progress. During this process, the Irish, Italian and Swiss populated the Onondaga district in their processes of becoming more fully human, or white.

Originally purchased through the Rancho Rincon de Las Salinas y Potrero Viejo land grant, the Onondaga district quickly developed as a real estate venture. The history of the district documents the government's issuing of the land grant to Jose Cornelio Bernal. Historical documents acknowledge that the "4,446 acres" were "open, rolling pasture, good for cattle and sheep" (Bernal History Project, 2007, p. 7) The pervasiveness of these government backed land grants are representative of a common disregard for Native people's inhabitance on land and ultimately function to shift control of Native land to settlers. This process reflects the ongoing erasure of indigenous presence. Despite the longstanding and well-known history of Ohlone people on the land, Emmanuel Lewis and his daughter Jeanette are known to have led crusades to develop real estate on Ohlone land, or what they call, the Onondaga district. Together they are known for selling over 200 homes within the District. By 1906, what remained largely within the emerging OnondagaDistrict were European immigrants living on streets named after Native tribes.

The demographics of the Onondaga community shifted drastically in the 1980's as hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Nicaraguans fled to San Francisco as a response to repression, war, and socio-economic adversity. These demographics more closely align with the Onondaga district's current population: primarily latinx and asian populations, with semblances of white residents. The black population has dwindled drastically as a result of gentrification.

History of University High School

As the second state in the country to pass a charter school law, California is very familiar with charter school culture. As early as 1992, charter schools emerged within the state, emphasizing operational autonomy and accountability for student achievement. I chose to conduct this re-

[3] pseudonym for a San Francisco community

search study at University High School, California's first startup chapter school. Critics (Goldberg, 2000; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Scott, 2016) argue that as a charter school, University High's schooling processes reflect a larger neoliberal culture that reproduces community disenfranchisement; it engages the language of "hard work", "grit" and "delayed gratification" in order to explain away legacies of discriminatory and excluding legislation, gang-injunctions, poverty taxes, and other forms of state sanctioned violence.

University High School (UHS) houses bodies whose histories within the United States are closely aligned with narratives of suffering: latinx (65%) and black (12%) populations. UHS' black students population represents a declining population of the city's black residents who are unable to afford to live in the city as a result of increasingly violent gentrification efforts. Over 80% of UHS students are from families with incomes at or below 130% of the poverty level, qualifying them for free or reduced lunch. 96% of UHS students identify as first-generation college students. University High has a diverse teacher population, but white, female teachers constitute the largest demographic (37%). The school is also located within the city's Onondaga District. The Onondaga District is amongst many districts within the city to have a steadily increasing market rate for housing that prevents students from living in close proximity to their schools. Students often commute to UHS from cities as far as 45 minutes away. From 8:30am-3:30pm, UHS students are invited to view the developing city, but they must return to their worlds when the bell rings. Daily UHS students must navigate through a plethora of social stressors in order to learn.

Per IRB approval, in a previous study that I conducted with youth researchers at UHS, of the 100 students who were surveyed, approximately 92% of students reported experiencing at least 1 of 10 Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) (Marie, 2017). On average, students reported experiencing 3.89 ACEs [SD=2.58]. Compared to ACE data on adults and national ACEs data among youth, study participants reported a greater proportion of adversities. Leading adversities (≥50%) included: peer incarceration (85%), peer substance abuse (84%), family member death (76%), community violence (74%), peer mental illness (68%), domestic violence (59%), parent separation/divorce (57%), and school violence (50%). In many ways, University High School is an important site to examine the possibilities of disruptive pedagogy amidst alarming rates of Adverse Childhood Experiences and toxic stress.

UHS' advisory model attempts to create supportive academic spaces, also called Advisories. In the 9th grade, students are assigned to an Advisory class and Advisor when they enter the school. The group of students in the class and the Advisor work together throughout the four years of high school. Advisory classes, which meet three times each week for an hour and a half, earn full course credits and are graded. Advisory classes support students to meet the UHS' expectations of each child to "grow as healthy, self-sufficient, and empowered young adults". At the ninth and tenth grade levels, Advisors teach their Advisees the habits of mind of successful students and provide essential health education. In the upper grades, much of the Advisory class is focused on preparing students for life after high school, including support with the college application process.

Participant Selection

This study centers the experiences of nine black, high school freshman. Black study participants are together in their school's English course and advisory. In total, there are four freshman advisories at University High School. All freshman students were invited to participate in the intervention group at a freshman orientation. The intervention group was announced as a program that supported students academically and socio-emotionally. I had no prior knowledge of student's middle school experiences. I accepted the first 25 students/families to sign up for the intervention group as a way to both serve more students than most UHS advisories and be accountable to the time and resources needed to respectfully serve those students and families. Eight of the nine participating black students are in the intervention group.

Validity Check and Limitations

Introduction

To interpret data, I used a myriad of analysis strategies, including categorizing and connection strategies in order to reach greater validity within my data analysis. One essential strategy and goal within this study is to develop conclusions based on the study triangulation. Triangulation is useful to reduce the risk of chance associations and systemic bias, based on using only one method of data to reach a conclusion (Fielding & Fielding, 1996). And while interviews are susceptible to self-report bias, I find the engagement of multiple forms of data a greater means of reducing the negative impacts of bias and increasing the study's validity.

Before I distinctly address measures to ensure qualitative validity, I want to address researcher bias and reactivity. To start, I am aware that common threats to validity within qualitative research conclusions are the selection of data that align with the researcher's preexisting assumptions and goals of the study and the prioritizing of data that "stands out" to the researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As a teacher-researcher, I am aware of my own positionality and political interests. I am a teacher within what I believed to be an underserved school; as a result, I am more inclined to approach this study with an asset-based approach and eye on a particular phenomenon. I have a vested interest in protecting the nation's most vulnerable youth and producing the type of research that illuminates their strengths in order to change social reform that explains away inequality and essential pathologizes named youth. I am interested in finding solutions to problems that provide underserved students of color with better achievement and health outcomes. I also aware that I am so closely tied to the study, that I will not be able to eliminate bias. I firmly believe that there is no such thing as researcher objectivity. As previously mentioned, I believe that research objectivity is a fallacy. I find certain strengths within my bias, particularly in the ways in which my role as a classroom teacher will help to me gain access and greater depth of interrogation of the study. For the facets of my bias that may prevent me from

producing robust analytical frameworks, I have created pathways for accountability to community and larger groups of people through the development of this study's research group and my commitment to reporting the study results to community. Overall, I believe that my integrity will provide greater validity than my indifference.

Qualitative Data

I included certain validity checks to rule out validity threats and increase levels of credibility within this study. To start, I collected extensive participant data, which provides for what Becker and Geer (1957) identify as *long-term participant observation*. The gathering of such immense data provides opportunities for repeated observations, multiple perspectives to be collected within interviews and ultimately helps to parse out premature theories and assumptions. Interview data provides rich data for this study. *Rich data* is identified as detailed data that extends notes and memos in order to provide significant insight of the study phenomenon (Becker, 1970).

Through data analysis, I sought to gain validation from the study participants, a means of verifying participants' experiences, by sharing my interview transcripts and analysis with study participants for clarification purposes prior to finalizing the study. I find their validity to be the most important validation of a study because it is the most political. As a person who comes from communities whose sociopolitical and economic adversity is the result of racist and deficit-oriented research findings, I am very concerned with the representation of study participants' voices and experiences. I understand that the ways in which I characterize their experiences will only either sustain or disrupt suffering. I seek the latter. I also understand that the disruption of suffering is produced when subaltern voices emerge. Ultimately, I am most concerned with providing transformative practitioner insights to the process of creating and implementing the type of critical pedagogies that lead to sustained academic achievement and improved health for my students and their communities.

Textual Analysis

This study engages textual analysis through the engagement of Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* as a way to highlight cues through which specific textual events may reflect and/or challenge historical, cultural, and political contexts in education. Angelou's text provides meaning by which we may better understand the broader structures and/or frameworks that influence pedagogical practices within the field of education and discourses of care.

Chapter Five

An Agape Methodology

Introduction

Within this study, I heavily document my perceptions of black youths' lived experiences and engage a specific type of reflexive vulnerability in my documentation of their experiences. This process is consistent with the methodological practice of portraiture which suggests that the portraitist, "blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, xv). Also, this study's engagement of qualitative inquiry, fieldwork, and even case studies resemble many ethnographic approaches to research. On its surface, the study's approaches may look like portraiture and ethnography and indeed there are elements of those methodological approaches immersed within this study. However, the ways in which these methodologies have been used within the academy have been very damaging to the very communities which I seek to support (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Smith, 2013). As a result, I am not attaching myself or this study to those traditions. Alternatively, this study follows a history and tradition of loving and caring methodological practices that have existed well before portraiture and even ethnography. Instead, this study consists of a hybrid of methodological frameworks that come from African, Black, Native and Japanese communities. The passages below attempt to rationalize my refusal to engage particular methods of the academic and align myself with the practices of my people and those who have cared for me throughout my time in the academy. They are the beginnings of what I call an Agape Methodology.

Rationale

At POWER middle school, my classroom was located directly across the street from a funeral home. Daily, we watched the coffins of other youth being ushered in and out of the mortuary—a sign of what was to come, if they did, or did not, consent to the violence that was inflicted upon them in schools. One day, a grieving mother's wailing drowned out my lesson. I decided that I would not attempt to continue with a business-as-usual pedagogy amidst the grief. We needed to tend to the societal pain that was bleeding into our schooling environment. That day, my students and I gathered near the window sill and grieved with the wailing mother.

This study's methodological framework stops to grieve the harm that has been imposed upon youth within schools. It centers frameworks of care (Noddings, 1985; Valenzuela, 1999; Howard, 2002; Duncan-Andrade, 2006) offering an intervention to the toxic stressors that have characterized many of my young people's schooling experiences. To achieve these ends, I first propose a methodology that reflects my lived experiences. When I was younger, we were always encouraged to respond to the pain that our neighbors experienced with acts of care. The women in my family and my pastor always spoke of an agape care. Agape is a Greek word that is often associated with the unconditional protection of God's love. Unlike Western forms of care that prioritize sentiment and hedonism over transformation—most notably eros (a romantic care) and

philea (a brotherly care)—agape is a nonreciprocal commitment to service that protects the most vulnerable; it is a type of care that promotes the liberation of truth from the snares of dominant narratives. Agape intervenes for suffering to speak. Martin Luther King, Jr. is notably associated with such a care. Often, King is narrated as a convenient hero, a pacifist whose tenets promoted a care that was accepting of oppressive conditions. Missing from this characterization of King's embodiment of agape is a confrontation of turbulent days of uncertainty charged by a crusade against militarization, and economic and racial injustice. He recognized that care for a people was a care that was committed to ending the conditions that caused and sustained suffering. It is from this center that agape makes priorities and intervenes.

This practice, this framework, is therefore challenging to practice within the field of research. Antithetical to agape are many longstanding research methodologies, namely researcher objectivity, which is agape's greatest enemy. Agape methodology opposes technocratic approaches to research that encourage distant language and relationships to characterize social outcry. This discourse is shaped largely by agendas that view research as an objective task. While researcher objectivity has become a widely hegemonic and acceptable methodology, the approach is problematic for a number of reasons, namely because it is unattainable. The concept of the objective, neutral researcher is a fallacy. Researchers embody a set of pre-determined ideologies that influence their practice. And since the field of research has been historically dominated by white, European men, research findings have often correlated with the interests of said demographic. Researcher objectivity has then served as a model to support and maintain the reproduction of dominant *truths*; truths that reinforce the supremacy of whiteness and subordination of indigenous, dark and poor bodies and their systems of knowledge.

At their worst, these agendas disregard pursuits of knowledge that are "deeply embedded in layers of imperial and colonial practices" (Smith, 2012, p. 2). Contemporary anthropologists (Bogden & Biklen, 1998) have perpetuated a legacy of colonial research practice through their emphasis on researcher objectivity, as marked by one's distance from their *subjects*. Such practices encourage researchers to interact with the researched, "not as a person who wants to be like them, but as a person who wants to know what it is like to be them" (73). Under these practices, researchers are encouraged to "work toward winning subjects' acceptance, not as an end, but because it allows [researchers] to pursue [*their own]* research interests" (73). These approaches are very concerned with suffering insofar as its perpetuity sustains their research careers.

Alternatively, my great grandmothers Artelia Green and Olivia Williams embodied a care that was not about individual but rather, collective sustainability. As an ongoing spiritual practice, they referenced God's care as their source of strength. When they would sing old gospel songs, they argued that God's care addressed our struggles by intervening as rock, sword and shield. As a *rock*, care anchored our spirits amidst turbulent social conditions. As a *sword*, care fought our battles when fatigued by life. And as *shield*, care protected us from unforeseen enemies and attack. I learned this agape methodology from them at a very young age. My great grandmothers engaged their own spiritual practices that resembled Christian practices, but they did not always associate themselves with European, Protestant notions of freedom. I am aware of

the many challenges of discussing the notion of healing through a Christian religion framework. Yet, when my great grandmothers read the same Bibles as their oppressors, their interpretation of the scriptures differed greatly. I believe that it is possible for methods to work as a double-edged sword: justify the oppression of the masses, or as a practice of freedom (Freire, 1970). Likewise, my great grandmothers found utility and freedom for both themselves and their communities within a religion used to justify their oppression. My aim is to utilize research in similar ways. There is a tension between my use of the academy's tools and my attempts to separate myself from the oppressive traditions of the academy that must be confronted. I am not completely devoid of those oppressive histories—as a researcher with institutional legitimacy to name truth and earn a living from my findings—yet I refuse to blindly align myself with these oppressive histories. As a result, I propose an agape methodology. It is reflective of my great grandmothers' interpretation of their practices of freedom; it acknowledges my ties to privilege and legitimization from a larger structure that continues to oppress and delegitimize knowledges from my people. My hope is that an agape methodology generates pathways for future generations to continue to distance themselves from the institutional practices that compromise our organic processes of life-giving and meaning making.

Rock.

Agape methodology is informed by theories that center the unique stories and experiences of black, brown, queer, indigenous, poor, disenfranchised folk (Crenshaw, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Smith, 2012; MacKinnon, 2013). The approach is a response to research practices that oversimplify our lived experiences and methodological frameworks that seek to find easy answers to deep-rooted, structural issues. These practices often result in the reinforcement of racial prejudice, deficit-oriented approaches and disenfranchisement. Oddly, even the caring researcher finds herself within close proximity to such violence. It is a challenging discourse to resist when the culture of academia overvalues quantity of publication rather than quality of service [research] to others. Often our credibility within the academy comes at the cost of producing transformative work.

Agape engages counter-storytelling as a primary means of refuting research agendas and findings that have contributed to the misinterpretation and misnaming of our social conditions. Our efforts to tell our own stories have not been unencumbered. Within the academy, we tread upon masochist waters. As griots, we risk the cooption and consumption of our painful narratives by the very systems we write against. However, our writing, the telling of our unique lived experiences, has also been our source of strength, a means by which we buck against the system.

As a result, agape engages what Martin Luther King, Jr. (1965) calls a tough mind. It is a thinking that is committed to uncovering painful truths and critical evaluative praxis. King (1965) warns us however, that the engagement of a tough mind absent of a tender heart is an assured pathway toward dereliction. The tough-minded researcher who lacks a tender heart is incapable of loving in a way that produces transformative work. Her writing captures the pain of her people, but much like the objective researcher, does not seek to disrupt it: it depends upon the

suffering of others to serve and maintain her research interests. When she writes, she does not speak the language of her people, but instead writes to those within the academy. She writes *about* her people, rather than writing with them. She writes of the cultures of her people in many of the ways in which Clifford Geertz wrote of the Balinese: distant, objective, cold. He could not turn the lens upon himself to understand the parallels between his role as an objective researcher and the dominant group controlling the "deep fights." Research that lacks the tenderness of care becomes solely a high-risk means of status development that comes at an ultimate cost: the suppression of the researched.

It is a tough mind and a tender heart that allows her to recognize how critical pedagogy is not confined to the classroom; it is also lived in black barbershops and tucked within the raise of Ella Baker's eyebrow. Through this relationship to research, she identifies fundamental origins of intersectionality within Truth's *Ain't I A Woman*. She recognizes the bittersweet usage of resiliency associated with black mothers; there is a harsh and thin line between the strength that they embody while burying their sons and the sickening reliance upon their suffering for the nation's coherence. Resiliency must become about more. The researchers' tough mind and tender heart urges black people to care for their native brothers and sisters by (re)conceptualizing our freedom outside a binary of settler colonialism. She writes to "familiarize the strange and mystify the familiar" (Morrison, 1993, p.6), a process that engages the lived experiences of our people in ways that push us to reimagine pathways toward justice.

And only when she engages such a tough mind *and* a tender heart can she write in a way that strengthens both the spiritual and material conditions of herself and her people.

Sword.

Fighting to matter within the academy is tricky—maybe it should not be our goal at all. But I am confident that within the academy we must fight. What exactly we fight for varies, it seems, almost daily. Regardless of the semblance of emerging battles, agape centers researchers to focus on the war ahead. The first war has always been internal, which has led to the outer terrains, a fight to end the conditions that prevent us from being fully human (Anzaldua,1987). The esteemed researcher may experience the most hardship fighting *this* war. She must fight within the academy: a discourse that manufactures the other and strips us of our hypersensitivity to suffering. Through ideologies of meritocracy, hard work and smartness, academia functions by legitimizing the suffering of some in order to sustain the well-being of others. In pursuit of our degrees, some of us have lost the ability to communicate with our mothers. The academy mandates a language that she refuses to speak (Fanon, 2008; Smith, 2012). From the demands of the academy, some of us have had to mentor less, wipe away less tears, tend to less broken spirits, write less letters of recommendations, for students who—much like we once did—struggle to find the least violent pathway toward stability. It is we who are most "successful" that often must endure and enact violence upon others to gain and seemingly secure institutional legitimacy.

It is us numb folk who then become those responsible for diagnosing suffering, for advancing the discourse on healing and transformation, for helping the downtrodden to reach

heightened levels of humanization. Agape methodologies respond to this paradox demanding reflexivity and humility from the researcher. This approach recognizes that we too must heal in order to fight effectively. To fight lovingly, we must acknowledge these shortcomings as a prerequisite to transformation. We must acknowledge that we are not strong enough to fight for our people. Instead, we must use our swords to fight with our people.

In ancient Japanese culture, the warrior may spend an entire lifetime crafting their sword. They may never actually use it in battle. In this way, they honor the power of the sword and the vital implications of its use, especially if used ineffectively. It is an important loving process of self-reflection. Similarly, the researcher—before she writes, before she sits down to develop research questions—must be conscious of the power that is within her hand. She has the power to research, narrate and essentially produce knowledge in ways that either norm or disrupt power relations. She must question if her time within the academy has weakened her so that she no longer recognizes the beauty of her people, while writing in a way that honestly studies their social conditions. For if this sword, her research, however you understand it, is used ineffectively, it could harm many people; even worse, it may cut her off from her people.

Shield.

Before many academic research studies begin, they must be approved by a committee for the protection of human subjects. The agency operates in an effort to protect vulnerable populations from harm. It is the principal investigator who holds the ultimate responsibility for protecting the safety, rights and welfare of research participants. Rightfully, they must ensure the safety of the research participants. While there is a protocol in place to protect the study participants, there is none for the researcher herself.

Agape recognizes the risks of harm that researchers may encounter navigating multiple worlds, namely their communities and academia. Most graduate students and professors have experienced the violence that accompanies the navigation between these two worlds. It is a process that makes us physically ill, disconnects us from our sources of strength and even places us at odds with ourselves. In one world, we fight in solidarity with our people in order to create the conditions by which we can all be healthy; in another world, we question our qualifications for such a responsibility. Agape recognizes that we cannot fight alone because our community is both our source of strength and our protection. To be clear, I do not want to romanticize our communities or vilify the academy; often our communities have been ravaged by the findings of historical research projects that used research as a means to enact and justify our colonization. The result, however, is that we look to research and the academy as a means to restore. It is odd to expect restoration from the very systems that brought about one's demise. Therefore, we must not stay sedentary within the academy. These are the spaces, absent of our cultural remedies, that will make us sick.

The researcher needs protection from the constant navigation between two worlds; such traveling both enlightens and infects. Traveling is rewarding because it helps you to access different vantage points. Literally, when you are elevated on a plane, you are able to see the ways in

which the land masses—the same ones that seemed so messy and nonsensical when you were on the ground—seem to fit perfectly; you better understand the larger frameworks that hold them together. The researcher uses her time in the academy in similar ways. What we also know about traveling is that it will make you sick. The more you travel, the more susceptible you are to all kinds of adverse conditions. Likewise, traveling between multiple worlds may sicken the researcher in that she must become acclimated to a newer, harsher environment that we call the academy *and* because she may internalize ideals and beliefs that are harmful to her understanding of self.

The Maori warn against these side effects of mixing medicines. They believe in the reciprocal nature of shared experiences but are also weary of what happens when the researcher takes on too much of one medicine. They argue that you must be acclimated with your people and your community, so that you know just how much medicine to intake. Otherwise, you can sicken yourself. Often, researchers feel obligated to leave behind their cultures and experiences to take on the demands of academia. Within this process, they are more likely to become weakened and sick from internalizing very Western notions of success, self-care and sustainability.

Our time within the academy will inevitably bring upon sickness. However, agape recognizes our communities, our indigenous ways of being and healing as the means by which we continue to fight with them. They are our shields against the wear and tear that accompanies research within the academy.

Chapter Six

Artelia Green's & Olivia Williams' Legacy: Our Findings

Introduction

I still wore barrettes in my hair, placed gently to secure my braids while she groomed me, so it must have been the late 80's when my mother was fatigued by influenza. I imagine that my braids were still neat and secured by both the barrettes and my mother's caring hands, even while illness weakened her body. She recalls experiencing common flu-like symptoms—head cold, body aches, fever, but she also had an unfamiliar symptom: extreme neck pain. She treated the known with common over the counter medication but could not seem to make sense of the blistering pain in her neck. Artelia Green, my great-grandmother and mother's confidant, side-eyed my mother and told her, "that sickness done crept in yo neck". My mother laughed. And as time progressed, so did the pain. So, my mother visited her physician. The medical practitioners used shiny objects to probe her. They placed her inside a machine that shot toxic energy through her body, scanning her neck to better understand her ailment. The findings of their extensive research concluded that the virus that caused the head cold, body aches and fever had spread to her neck. Somewhere between the hugging, bathing, feeding—the caring hands of my great grandmother and my mother's immersion into the myths of superiority, hidden laws, and smashing taboos that is American life—she learned to disregard my great grandmother's diagnoses. No one is born distrustful of their caretakers. Nor do we naturally scoff at the wisdom of our elders; it is a learned behavior.

In Arkansas, my great grandmother's grandmother used local plants and tree leaves, like sassafras, to curate teas for medication. My mother's mother Dorothy, Artelia's daughter, speaks of her elder's abilities to even take hog hooves, essentially anything they could find, and ground them into ointments and other healing agents. My Arkansas family's diagnoses and healing practices reflect the remnants of our African lineage; they are consistent with many of the healing practices of our ancestral kin, the Akan people of Ghana. In Ghanian traditions, *Adunsifor* or community healers, were knowledgeable of their environments and incorporated leaf and plant life within their healing processes. The *Odunsini* were selected people who were informed and granted legitimacy by elders and ancestors to diagnose and heal others. Many of their healing practices however were compromised as a result of European conquest. As an outcome of global colonization, indigenous peoples were prohibited from access to land, elder care, wisdom and communal legitimacy necessary to maintain the health and wellness that would allow them to heal and sustain themselves (Some, 1998; Smith, 2012).

Alongside the ravaging of land, which included the plants once used to heal ourselves, came forth a fundamental shift in legitimacy. The establishment of fields like science, health, medicine and research for that matter, in their origin, were concerned with disproving and disregarding the validity of indigenous knowledges, often naming our healing processes as uncivi-

lized, savage-like and even witchcraft (Somé, 1998, Smith, 2012). An essential function of coloniality was and still is the power to determine who and what is significant, to shape which knowledges and ways of being are made valid. Somé (1998) adds that the teachings of his colonial schooling emphasized that the rituals of his people were "devilish and inspired by Satan" (p. 7). He states, "I discovered that there were countless illnesses that could not be healed at the local infirmary which were perfectly curable at the hands of the Dagara healers" (Somé, 1998, p. 7). Colonization impaired our access to land and its fecundity—compromised then was the livelihood, health and ideas that came from the land. Essentially, indigenous peoples were subjected to that which often accompanies colonial domination: scarcity, economic instability, and likely the most toxic consequence: illegitimacy.

Take the case of Eugenics, which was fundamental to the origins of U.S. science. The movement focused on human skull shape as a way to determine cognitive abilities. It was first at Harvard University, one of the nation's premiere sites of intellectual acuity, where researchers sought to determine the legitimacy *and* superiority of European intellectual thought. In a country founded on domination, you cannot prove the intellectual superiority of one group without a downtrodden reference point. Harvard University's Eugenics project also purportedly *proved* the intellectual inferiority of darker, colonized subjects. Similarly, the origins of health and medical fields are also affixed to these violent histories. Couched in rhetoric of health and national advancement, researchers, scientists and doctors alike probed, tested, manipulated and even infected darker bodies all in the name of progress (Brandt, 1978; Black, 2003; Skloot, 2017). It is no wonder that through "advancements" in these fields, we have become sicker.

Consequently, I am compelled to integrate my understandings of ancestral healing and health research in an attempt to make sense of the cumulative impacts that centuries of colonial rule, conquest and exploitation have had on the black body. Centuries ago, my ancestors professed that their indigenous knowledges centered the buffering of potential community dangers early, rather than an economic investment in the beliefs and practices that encourage them to intensify: *Dua a enya wo a ebewo w'ani no, yetu asee; yensensene ano*. Today I am engaging the language of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and toxic stress as a way to explain similar ideas. Likewise, Akan proverbs suggest an emphasis on the significance of community and empathic connection: *Etua wo yonko ho a etua dua mu*. For the sake of institutional legitimacy, I engage the language of caring and attached relationships (Perry, 2000; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Brown, 2015) to elucidate the practices necessary to mitigate and reverse the aging of young people's bodies brought about by their embodiment of multiple social stressors. And while the language and even epistemological frameworks of the academy can be useful, especially for those of us who have been disconnected from our indigenous knowledges, they seem to only get us so far. Somewhere between the navigating of our two worlds, between our attempts to prevent death within our communities and gain the resources necessary to respond to our people's death within the academy, some things have been lost; we have sought to gain validation and legitimization from the very systems that continually disregard our knowledge and contributions. We have once again been positioned to acquire resource and validity from the very systems, beliefs

and protocols that prescribed our social deaths. Submerged within these contradictions and paradoxes, I seek to make sense of the findings of my research.

This study sought to understand the relationships between caring and attached school-based relationships and a reduction in toxic stress for black youth. To reach these ends, I engaged in critical classroom (Mertler, 2006; Author, 2006) and social design-based research (Gutierrez, 2016) while teaching at a predominantly latinx (65%) and black (12%) San Francisco high school. We investigated a school-based intervention model to interrogate the efficacy of caring and attached teacher-student relationships on black children. Overall, I used these measurements as a way to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the pedagogical strategies that improve the health of black children?
    a. How can observing the experiences of black high school students inform teacher-researchers' understanding of pedagogical practices that improve their students' health?
    b. How do black youth describe experiences of toxic stress that impact their experience in schools?
    c. How do black youth describe attached and caring relationships with adults in schools?
    d. How do black youth understand the relationship between teacher pedagogy and toxic stress?

To explore these questions, I collected qualitative (field notes, student work and other artifacts, classroom video, in-depth interviews) in order to produce ecologically valid findings.

Intervention

Our intervention was not simple, and it was not conceived from distant or mere theoretical understandings of effective pedagogy. Rather, our intervention was informed by my 13 years of experience as a classroom educator and most recently a 4-year longitudinal study to understand the types of teaching practices that promote increased school engagement and academic achievement. In 2012, a previous longitudinal study commenced with a group of 18 youth, along with two other advisors/advisories courses (one with 15 youth, another with 14 youth) that operated as a control group. Three times a week, students met with an academic advisor and their peers that made up an advisory. All advisories were responsible for ensuring the academic achievement of their respective cohorts. In the fourth year of the study, our cohort graduated from high school with the highest grade point average and college matriculation rates compared to the three other advisories in their grade level, who did not receive the intervention. Our research findings challenged us, however, to consider the blind spots of our intervention. While our students were doing well by all standard means of success within an educational framework, several black students identified specific costs to their academic achievement. The costs included the compromising of their mental and physical health, peer group strength and emotional intelli-

gence. Conversely, all black students identified the need for caring and attached relationships as a way to navigate what they called the violent terrains of schooling. In partnership with these black youth, we worked to develop a type of in-school program and support system that prioritized and centered the health and well-being of black youth.

We developed our current intervention from extensive coding of classroom field notes, triangulation and analysis of 4-years of classroom observations, student and teacher interviews, student academic work, researcher memos and personal relationships with youth. The generated codes inform our intervention plan and data analysis on the efficacy of the intervention. We chose to engage only black study participants as a way to address the well-being of the population whose pre study data suggested the most need for an intervention. Additionally, the philosophy behind the study centers the belief that ending adverse health conditions for all children must first start with the vitality and health of black children. As a result, our study intervention was a measurement of student based-pedagogies informed by the four components listed below:

- **Normed Cultural Practice**: activities ranging from weekly check-ins and restorative circles to family dinners in order to secure young people's sense of safety and belongingness.
- **The Development of Memoirs**: students produced a body of writing that engaged a history of colonization as way to understand and explain their adverse social and health conditions and connect learning to indigenous understandings of health and well-being as a model for social transformation.
- **Youth Participatory Action Research Projects & Presentations**: students engaged socio-historical critiques of society to develop research projects that promoted social transformation, specifically change that improves the material conditions of their lives.
- **Rites of Passage Ceremonies**: within intentional acts of social belonging, students were celebrated by their communities for their dedication to learning about their histories and cultures and promoted to new levels of social responsibility.

Discussion

Their once carefree stride
was weighed with exhaustion
Social exclusion is as heavy
as it is lethal.

But even the pendulum,
that is greatly moved
by the force that is enacted
upon it,
in its displacement,
must experience
a restoring force.

Southern women swayed
with the same consistency,
often nurturing
the white child
who'd return
to enact force
upon them.

There is a history
that returns to us
it lives within us
immersed with flesh and bone

The treatment of black children,
the constant force
that is enacted
upon them,
much like the pendulum
is a reflection
of the time.

They too,
even in their displacement
must experience
a restoring force.

My research has reminded me that there will always be more to prove; if our validation only comes from the academy, we will be prevented from doing our work. I have come to understand that as a descendant of the Odunsini and a descendant of my great grandmother Artelia Green, that my work is and should stay grounded in holistic ways of healing. These practices may be found somewhere immersed between our reflexive methodological processes and the forms of knowledge and stories that we choose to center in this study.

Regardless of the number of black children who participated in this study, their stories and pathways toward healing and health are significant. The results of this study are profound, and their individual lived experiences provide anecdotes for what we already know: when you center the well-being of black children, we all benefit. Additionally, their stories and the unique ways in which their bodies healed themselves provides new ways of understanding healing and health. If we listen closely, their stories, the offerings of their bodies, provide us with important and innovative ways to care for and educate youth. I believe that the three case studies that follow highlight significant issues in education, as they related to the health and well-being of black youth (i.e. toxic stress outside of school, subtractive schooling practices, health-based pedagogical interventions, critical pedagogies, student growth, and engagement). These case studies are constructed in a way to draw attention to larger, more robust mixed methods approaches to youth youth wellness.

I dedicate my life's work to centering, listening to, analyzing and studying their stories. As such, the framework of this dissertation will not fully allow me to holistically tell these stories. Yet, I will attempt to robustly and responsibly engage a few. There is unique social phenomenon that emerges from the two case studies that will follow. Their individual stories provide innovative ways of thinking about educational practices and their relationship to healing and health for black children.

Janie

"I am a dark rock surged upon, and overswept, but through it all, I remain myself."
-Zora Neale Hurston

An array of youthful black and brown faces colored the clinical glow of University High School's Room 116. It was the first day of orientation for our program and a harrowing silence was more revelatory of students' nervousness than their creased brows or jittery fingers glued to cellphones. Also telling of their diverse schooling experiences: their shoes. The public-school kids always wore the dopest ones—blinding fresh Nike Air Force Ones, Adidas shell toes, cleaned nightly, Retro Air Jordans and Vans (now making a comeback). With seemingly less to care about, the fraction of private school kids wore dilapidated Converse Allstars and work boots that could have been gifted from a grandfather. Their confidence did not often come from their fashion but sat nestled between neoliberal understandings of success and the adjacent pride of their families.

Janie entered the room with a crisp, new sweatsuit—grey, pink and black, her favorite colors—and matching Nike Air Force Ones. When I greeted her, there was a profound contrast between the complete white of her eyes—revealed when she rolled them—and her deep, sun-kissed chocolate skin. Janie did not want to be in the room; she was instructed to join the program by her godmother Yvette, my close friend of 15 years. As other new students began to gravitate toward each other, Janie sat alone. And there the facade of her clothing could not mask the lack of covering and nurturing that Janie so desperately needed.

Prior to joining our program, Janie attended KIPP Bayview Academy (KBA), a neighborhood middle school that emphasizes tenets of "hard work" and "grit". As a former employee of KIPP Bayview Academy, I knew all too well the school's rhetoric and the oft contrasting reality of the students' experience. Alongside promises of care and college for poor black youth, KIPP schools are also known for zero-tolerance policies that enforce captivity, submission, and social isolation. On one hand, KIPP students outperform failing neighborhood schools on standardized tests and can recite the year that they could attend college. Even as young as 10 years old, they can recall the components of an expository essay and are keen to the scientific method. A visit to any KBA math class and visitors may witness students reciting multiplication tables, seemingly cheerful black babies singing their 3s, 6s, or 9s in time with creative melodies.

However, when KBA students are "out of uniform", disagree with a teacher's curriculum, or turn to talk to their peers for that matter, they may be ostracized and sent to In School Suspension (ISS). ISS resides in the school's basement, far removed from peers and other social worlds. Students sent to ISS are directed to sit alone, shift their posture and re-write the school's policy on thin blue sheets, all tactics meant to monitor their behavior. Solitary confinement breaks young people into submission; it systematically shatters the hope of black children. There is a legacy in the hunch of their backs, a history in the curves of their spine, one that leaves them pinned under debris misnamed delinquency.

Janie had both served time in ISS and witnessed her peers go down as well. In fact, she spent years within KBA's rigid structure, learning her content standards at a particular cost. While KBA teachers and administration were concerned with the control of students' bodies, how neatly their lines were, when and for how long they could frequent the restroom, they disregarded the health and vitality of those same bodies. They failed to respond to the multiple social stressors that constrained their students' health well before they entered their classrooms. Within her community, Janie embodies toxic stress daily. We know that poverty mediates scarcity and scarcity mediates toxic interpersonal community dynamics (Somé, 1998). So, what it means to grow up in her community is to learn the art of survival while dying. Young people embody legacies of colonization and captivity as easily and as frequently as they chase the ice cream truck; it is to grow up amongst gang-injunctions, harsh gentrification projects and poverty taxes. These lived experiences are consumed: they go down sour and come out lethal. Essentially, long term exposure to conditions of concentrated poverty "can undermine a strong work ethic, devalue academic success, and remove the social stigma of imprisonment as well as of educational and economic failure" (Williams & Collins, 2005).

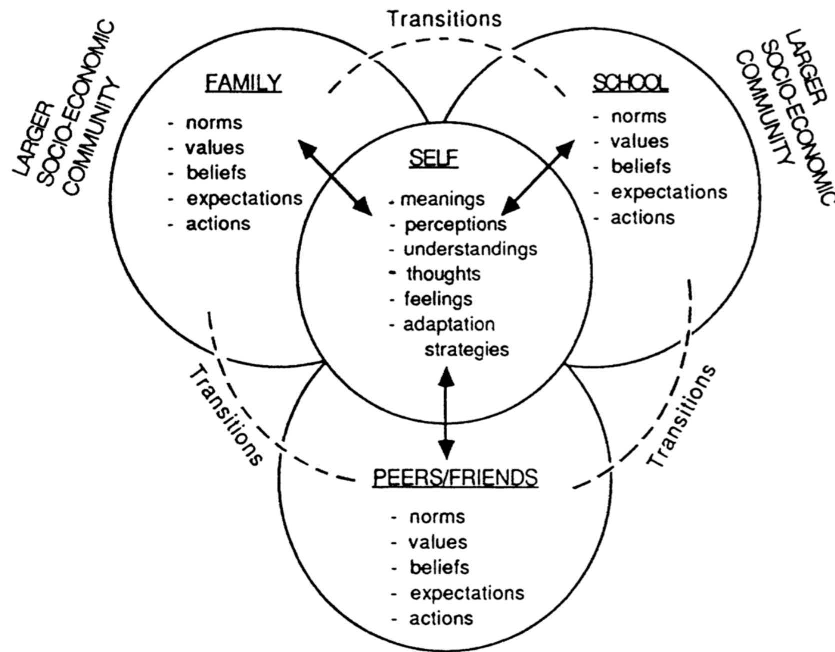
As a result, kids play tag in blood stained streets, dodging bullets intended for their older cousins. Little boys shoot in Bayview, both basketballs *and* guns. And when they shoot guns, they close their eyes and squeeze the trigger; it is what some believe to be a rite of passage, their version of Blind Man's Bluff. When midlife crisis hits at 12 years old, we experience far too many days in which the angels arrived before the ambulance.

Little black girls like Janie are hunted in Bayview. The predator's anthem: "You cute for a dark girl", followed by "ey, come here"; they are grabbed. Targeted. Preyed on by men, much older than them, on their way to school and on their way home. Peer groups in Bayview serve a far greater purpose than mere girl talk; they are a means of survival. Janie knows that she must travel with at least one other person to feel a sense of safety. For Janie, peer groups are essential to her well-being.

Janie's mother instructs her to stay in groups and not to be caught alone. There is preparation for *when* she is caught; that even if she must be caught, at least she will not be caught alone. Janie's peers are an informative and supportive component of her life. They tell her when the police are harassing folks on Palou Ave, so that they can get home another way; they share the cost of a Lyft ride, when it's too hostile on the 29 bus. Janie's peers even allow her to spend the night at their houses, when her mother is "trippin". Her bond with her peers is essential to her well-being and supported within adolescent and health literature (Phelan & Davidson, 1991; Hargreaves, 1996; Adelman, 2000; Perry, 2006), where peer group membership "is one of the central preoccupations of early adolescence. All other issues become secondary to the adolescent's search for belonging and acceptance" (Hargreaves, 1996, p 10). Health literature (Adelman, 2000; Perry, 2006) suggests that peer groups improve health because they prevent social isolation and social isolation kills.

However, KBAs beliefs and expectations of peer groups were incongruent with the norms of Janie's other social worlds (Phelan & Davidson, 1991). The school provided very little oppor-

tunity for Janie, or her friends, to engage their peer group model, “to move intellectually or physically outside of their bounded” school world (Phelan & Davidson, 1991, p. 23). Phelan & Davidson (1991) provide a useful model to think about the interrelatedness and constraints of students’ family, peer and school worlds. The model below (Phelan & Davidson, 1991) represents the ways in which the incongruence of students’ multiple worlds can play a tremendous role in their vitality.



Phelan & Davidson, 1991: Figure 1

Phelan & Davidson (1991) suggest that “for youth whose family and peer worlds stand in contrast to that of the school, academic success occurs sporadically" (Phelan & Davidson, 1991, p. 245). I would like to extend this model **(Figure 2)** to think about what happens when a school’s ideals, beliefs and norms mirror the toxicity from which students’ peer groups seek to protect them. Essentially, Janie leaves the toxicity of the streets of Bayview, only to receive more toxicity within school policy and practice at KBA. There, and in many other schools, students are intentionally separated from their peers and support networks. This is often done out of fear that they may be distracted by their friends or sometimes from naive understandings of how learning is facilitated. However, many of these classroom strategies are more central to adults’ comfort rather than effective practices that cultivate literacy and learning for students. Even the architects

of theory on child learning (Piaget, 1936; Vygotsky, 1987) that teachers at KBA follow advocate for the importance of peer interaction in learning spaces. And when students like Janie are separated from supportive peer groups, and even punished for attempting to re-forge those relationships within the classroom, the outcomes always disadvantage the child.

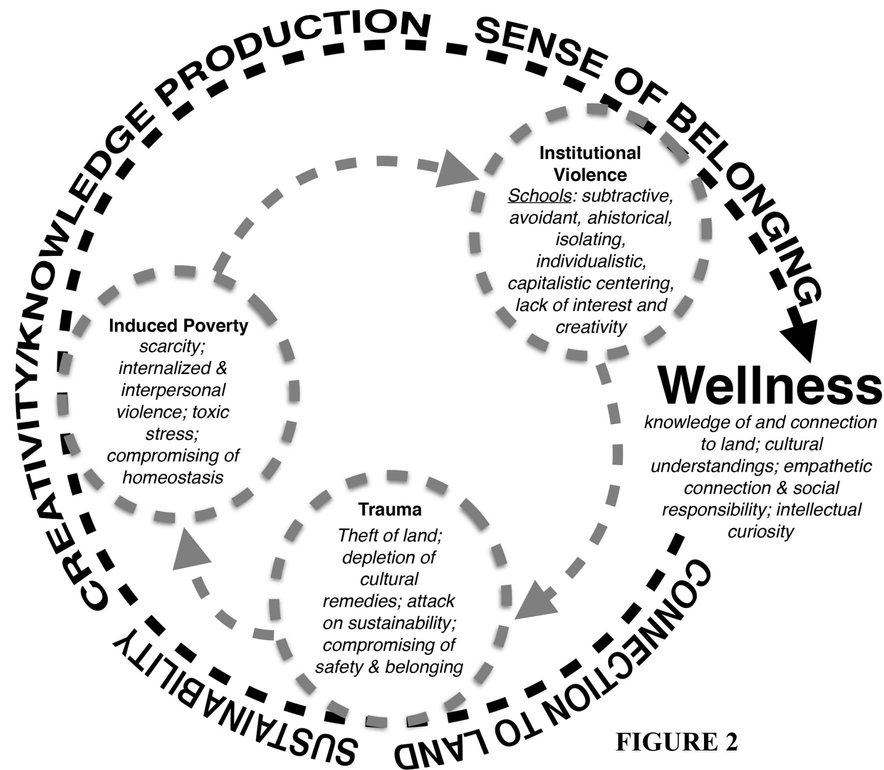


FIGURE 2

The development and attempts to sustain student peer groups are often critical responses to the traumas that young people experience in their social worlds. And when KBA teachers separate young people from their support systems *and* are unwilling to confront the ongoing legacies of colonial violence and anti-blackness that their peer groups function to care for them through, the results are toxic. Much like the images of late19th-century lynchings, students like Janie are literally and figuratively left hanging. Like many slaves, Janie was born with a noose around her neck. Her formative years reflected a process of the tightening of that noose. In school, her teachers punish her for kicking and screaming, the response to her societal nooses tightening. Her teachers fail to understand that kicks and screams are organic responses to strangulation. Historically, onlookers would pose, sometimes smiling, in front of dangling black bodies. Within schools, educators evoke this same practice when they fail to engage and confront the devastating impacts of racism, poverty and neo-colonialism within their classrooms. KBA teachers' practices represent the everyday structural and interpersonal violence that sustains poor health for

black children. And often, teachers are unable to recognize these forms of trauma within their classrooms simply because students are not hanging from trees. Their assessments and overall school culture fall short of any clear read on what is most important: the health and well-being of the black child. Despite their extended school hours, strict uniform policies, mandatory professional development, emphasis on grade and test scores, Janie left KBA worse than she came.

Janie came to us kicking and screaming. Her peer group from Bayview had attended the local KIPP High School and she was alone. Preliminary classroom observation data seem to suggest that the ongoing embodiment of toxic stressors that Janie experienced throughout her formative years, coupled with institutional decisions to separate Janie from her communal networks were killing her; When she heard our program's promises of care and college, she thought of her teachers at KIPP. When we asked Janie why she initially resisted our program, she shared:

1:48: ((Looks down, slight grin)) I didn't like school-
1:51 BECAUSE I WENT TO KIPP
1:52: ((rolls eyes and looks up)) °and they got on my nerves at KIPP°
1:54: ((head turns left)) °they always over did stuff so°-
1:57: I DIDN'T LIKE SCHOOL
1:58: ((looks down)) and then, I thought it was going to be the same way-
2:00: when I got here

We believed that we were different. Our program professed a model that centered the well-being of children; we were experienced educators, averaging 12 years of teaching between us. We were well versed in cutting edge theories on teaching and learning. However, we soon learned of the abyss between theory and practice. Despite our expertise, Janie resisted us. I had written a handful of papers on embracing the resistance of young people. I engaged Solorzano and Delgado-Bernal's (2001) resistance quadrant in many of my talks. I had countless experiences with children who came to us with folded arms, and after a class or two, eventually open themselves to the world that we sought to engage together.

Janie was different. She was that student, the one we all encounter in time, that challenges the core of what we believe about teaching, learning and most importantly, that reflects who we have truly become as educators. Her resistance revealed a pivotal blind spot in our pedagogy. In time, I found it too easy to assess my efficacy as an educator on my ability to reach the 99% of children in the classroom and just as easily label Janie as the problem. As much as I was interested in teaching about colonization and ancestral healing, Janie did not show interest in learning about it from me. She did not want to attend tutorials. She did not seem to want to associate with other students in the program. Janie kept to herself and resisted me as much as she could. And as experienced as my awards around the classroom named me, I sunk low enough to repeat many of the practices of KBA teachers and sent Janie away in response to her resistance.

Oddly, sending Janie away was one of the greatest decisions I could have made as an educator. I sent her to her godmother, who also worked next door in the school's library. Initially, I

was most concerned with Yvette *fixing* Janie, hoping that she'd work magic, essentially helping to coax her into submission, for her to be complacent enough to come back to my class and learn about resistance movements. And Yvette would work some kind of magic, because Janie would come back, wrapped in her blanket she brought from home, and engage in our coursework. Within days however, she would ask to return to Yvette.

I grew jealous. How could Yvette get her to complete her school work when I could not even get her to come to class on time? What was so special about what Yvette was doing that I had not learned in my teacher education courses? Bitterly, I told Yvette that if Janie went to her each time she did not like something about my course, she would not be prepared for the "real world". I could not believe how much my rhetoric mirrored my former colleagues at KBA. We all needed a break from the norm of schooling that was gradually consuming our lives.

Yvette suggested that Janie attend our program's excursion to New Zealand; she shared that even though Janie did not properly complete the application to attend, that Janie needed to get away from Bayview. She needed to learn to forge new relationships with herself and her peers from our program. I was reluctant to allow Janie to attend but took the risk. I feared that she would disregard my instruction in the ways that she did when we were at school. Where would I send her when she was resistant? I agreed to Janie attending the trip only if Yvette would accompany us. Yvette agreed.

Janie did well on the 12-hour flight; it was her first. Our group of 11 students and 10 adult chaperones were to spend a week exchanging culture and stories with Maori, Tongan and Samoan students at an Aotearoa High School, Kia Aroha College. Before entering the school, we were invited to participate in a Powhiri, a ceremony that obliges visitors to declare if they are enemy or friend. Once we shared our intentions, as friends, we were escorted to where our youth would sleep, which was on the school's premises. Specifically, they slept in the Wharenui, or ancestral house. It is likened to the body of an ancestor and houses the stories of tribal lore, carvings, tukutuku and paintings, as a reminder of the strength and determination of Maori ancestors. When visitors are welcomed inside of the Wharenui, they are considered friends, as they have been welcomed into a realm that is watched by the god of peace, Rongomatane.

Inside the Wherenui, Janie did not initially feel a sense of belonging**.** It seems that just because a building professes a certain philosophy, young people do not immediately open themselves to the possibility of its promises. And the night before our students were to meet the students of Kia Aroha College, Janie gave us a list of things that she would not do. She would not: 1) talk to "those kids"; 2) share any of her work; and 3) she would, by no means, speak publicly. The day arrived and Janie sat by the door of a classroom with her arms folded, much like our first day of orientation together. As class began, several Kia Aroha students huddled around Janie and asked her to share about her experiences growing up in America. They asked to take pictures with her and within an hour Janie had moved from the door, unfolded her arms and was immersed in classroom practice. That day Janie shared a letter she had written to Sojourner Truth, honoring her for her resistance and sacrifice. Kia Aroha students sat around Janie, elbows

propped on thighs, leaning in and listening to her reading of her letter. When Janie finished reading her letter, laugh lines pierced through her cocoa skin. I had never seen that smile.

That night, Janie sat close to me, bundled in her blanket, showing me pictures of her day with students from our program and Kia Aroha College students. And though I needed to help prepare dinner, I stayed and listened to her spritely recollection. Janie cuddled with Yvette, close to her peers, maybe for the first time that semester, and they collectively recalled how enamored they felt in their newfound celebrity. Even through all of the profound experiences we shared in New Zealand-from the opening Powhiri ceremony to their attending PolyFest, the world's largest Pacific Islander festival—Janie's most transformative experience was simple: her time bonding with her peers. At the end of her freshman year of high school, she shared that the most memorable experience of her freshman year was:

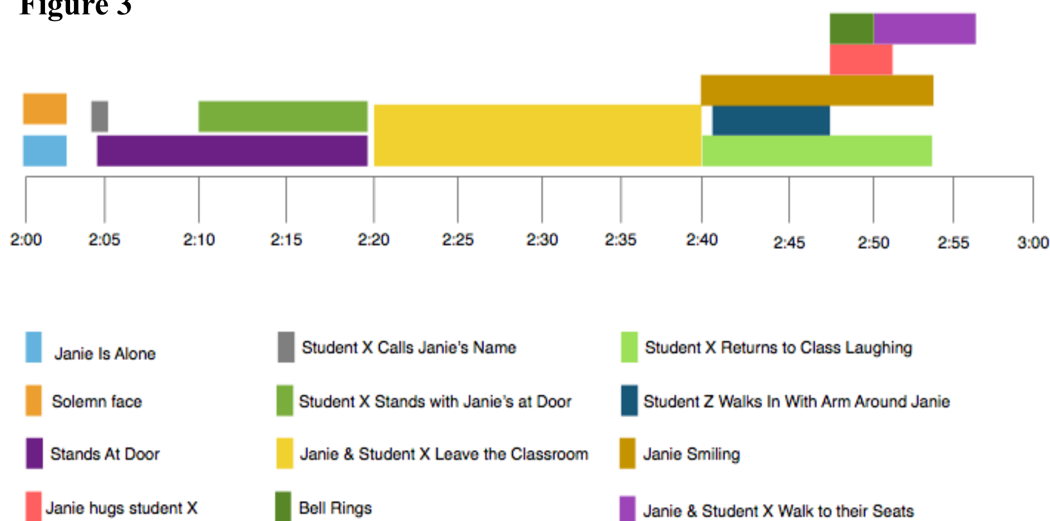
> *when we went to New Zealand, and we all went on that like—we all went on a walk, and we were just talking, and we got closer over time, and I feel like anybody that went to New Zealand, um, we kinda have a bond together cause we all experienced different things together.*

Janie's return to the states was a smooth transition. For weeks, her peer groups strengthened and she more intentionally engaged in our course work. The content was relevant, as she had just recently learned of her Nigerian roots and was excited about incorporating the new Yoruba words she was learning into the course. We experienced a lot of success with Janie as we learned to embrace her social worlds and allow her space to work through them.

I used a methodology of landscape analysis (See **Figure 3**) as a way to demonstrate a fundamental and much needed shift in Janie's peer group membership. Landscape diagrams function as a methodological tool that locate, pause and magnify critical social phenomenon that occur within small increments of time. They become extremely useful to examine classroom dynamics that may be overlooked in real time. This particular landscape diagram shows an inverse to Janie's social experiences at the beginning of the year at our program's orientation. Here she is immersed within peer groups that recognize her as a fundamental component of their community. As soon as Janie enters the room, she is called upon, greeted. When she spends an ample amount of time at the door reflecting on where she should be for class, her peers go to her and embrace her. She returns the embrace and decides, that day anyway, that our space was safe enough for her.

Janie Social Worlds Landscape
1 min.

Figure 3



Similarly, Janie's experiences with students at Kia Aroha College mirrored, in many ways, the safe and caring pedagogical practices of Yvette. Before Janie was required to do any work, to speak in front of any of the students of Kia Aroha, they performed their own Pohwiri with Janie, revealing that they were first her friend. The students asked questions about her lived experiences well before they required her to engage distant course content. They showed an interest in her social worlds and a type of vulnerability that aligned with her values. In turn, Janie unfolded her arms, an act of inviting them into her social world, to engage in learning together.

So much of Kia Aroha students' embracing of Janie reflect their school's investment in whānau, a Maori word that literally means family or "people linked by blood to a common ancestor" (Milne, 2015, p. 58). Within this model, knowledge is believed to belong to an entire group, making learning a collective process (Milne, 2015). Former principal of Kia Aroha college Ann Milne (2015) writes that the implementation of a model of whānau, one that emphasizes a celebration of peer group relationships and centers the child's multiple worlds, is counter cultural and antithetical to New Zealand's investment in a British schooling model. She adds that "to achieve authenticity in this culturally located learning model however, Kura Kaupapa Māori (Māori-language immersion schools) had to withdraw from the state education (Whitestream) system" (Milne, 2015, p. 58). It is unlikely for students like Janie to find models of education that support the type healing mechanisms she needs in traditional schools. What Janie experienced was rare. Both students of Kia Aroha and Yvette spoke Janie's language. Their approaches

to learning aligned with Janie's notion of effective pedagogy, which according to her interview transcripts, is when teachers *"basically try to kind of build bonds with you so that they could understand where you're coming from and like you can feel comfortable enough to go talk to them if you need to."*

Medical research (Carter, 1998; Carsten, 2010) suggests that what made Janie's interactions with Yvette, the students of Kia Aroha and her peers at University High so transformative was that they functioned to produce a release of oxytocin in Janie, solidifying a type of social bond that was truly healing. Oxytocin is a chemical that supports attachment, loyalty, and protection. It is argued that the "administration of Oxytocin in humans promotes trust and cooperation" (Carsten et al., 2010, p.1262). The types of social attachments that Carsten and others (Carter, 1998) speak of facilitate a sense of security and a reduction in feelings of stress and anxiety. The cultivation of spaces of belonging and its consequential production of oxytocin is part of an endogenous homeostatic: spaces which help to function as anti-stress systems (Carter, 1998). These systems have the "concurrent capacity to increase social attachment and other positive social behaviors, providing the additional indirect benefits of sociality" (Carter, 1998, p. 808).

Child psychologist Bruce Perry (2006) suggests that:

> recovery from trauma and neglect is also all about relationships—rebuilding trust, regaining confidence, returning to a sense of security and reconnecting to love…healing and recovery are impossible—even with the best medications and therapy in the world—without lasting, caring connections to others (p. 121)

Experts in adolescent development, public health, and child psychology all echo the advice of Janie's mother and many of our elders: it is better to go together than alone (Hargreaves, 1996; Adelman, 2000; Perry, 2006; Ben-Ari, 2007). If these experts can find value in Janie's connection to her social worlds, anyone invested in the well-being of children must also create the types of structures and systems that support Janie when those worlds are compromised. Throughout the year, Janie needed space outside of her classes to make sense of her crumbling social ties. Janie explains these experiences:

One,
I gotta get up early in the morning
and then get ready
and make sure I'm on time
and make sure I did my homework
and other people like…
I have friends

so then maybe they went through something the night before
and then they'll come to me
and talk to me about their problems
when I'm sitting there trying to figure out
if I'm passing my class or not
and it's just stuff piling on top of each other
..its annoying.
And sometimes I just wanna not come to school…
so then I just take my attitude out on other people sometimes.

Learning from Yvette's pedagogical model, we began to listen to Janie and developed a structure that supported her and her unique needs. The more we listened to her, the more she asked for hugs. The more we hugged her, the more she voluntarily showed up to our classes. The more she voluntarily showed up to our classes, the more she sought to interact with her peers. And the more she interacted with her peers, the more she authentically desired to learn from them. Janie began to seek attention from us in similar ways that she initially sought from Yvette. She now had two safe spaces within the school. She would leave other classes to come to us for support and we had to unlearn our stimuli to immediately coax her into returning to those spaces. We had to truly reflect on what it meant to use our agency to prepare to a child to return to the spaces they were fleeing. So, some days Janie did not return to class. Some days she sat with us to discuss the fight she had with her mother, to strategize where she would live for the week. She sat with us to discuss her fears, her frustrations with her friends and at sacred times, she shared her goals. The time we shared with Janie, however, was at odds with prerequisites to pass her other classes; what it meant to nurture Janie meant to challenge the structure of the school.

Currently, there is not a facet of the school structure that values empathetic connection, simply because there are no formal measurements of it. Janie's story reveals how we may collude in the killing of children when we fail to prioritize sociality and spaces of belonging in our school structure. To be clear, this is not just a call for engaging relationships in schools. Many others (Cronsnoe & Johnson, 2004; Klem & Connell, 2004; Lee, 2012) have written about the importance of relationships in the classroom. However, these texts use relationships as a means to a rigid end. These approaches still center increased grade point averages, attendance in core classes and complacency in schooling as desirable outcomes of teacher-student and peer-peer relationships. Janie's story reveals the violence in such a practice and helps us to understand that empathic students who are deeply impacted by their relationships with others should be an essential and desirable outcome of schools. A school's emphasis on empathetic connection does not necessarily need to be mutually exclusive from existing aspects of schooling such as A-G requirements. However, school success can no longer ignore the wellness of black children in exchange for prioritizing so-called academic rigor. It is unacceptable to have children meet A-G requirements but be disconnected from others. This can no longer function as criterion for success.

Currently, we value a type of resilience in schools that translates into students disregarding—often labeled as overcoming—the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and even the conflict that arises within their social worlds in order to pay attention in our courses. It signals children to "press on" and engage in course content despite the stressors surrounding them. This framework cultivates and perpetuates a type of rugged individualism that merely seeks to sustain a capitalist market, not the health and well-being of children. Janie's narrative exposes an essential blind spot of our school's structure. It forces us to think about the type of children that our assessments and structures produce. Her narrative indicts us to think about the implications of children who learn to just simply press through, regardless of the sufferings and toxicity that so rampantly encompass them. Within this structure, it is no wonder why we have a society in which a small percentage of citizens, namely the successful, have the wealth and capacity to feed, house and sustain others, but chose to do otherwise. It is this current structure of schools that has not only cemented such a selfish individualism to notions of success, but it has also provided us the language to explain away the suffering of others.

The current model of schooling does not have an urgency to know Janie. From my time spent with her I know that she is a black girl who has survived a world invested in her undoing. Janie is a mountainous soliloquy; she is research methodology, theory and findings. She models what it means to listen with one's body and to live out how one listens. She is not absent of error; rather, her error functions as a mirror, fragmented, yet mosaic. Within each broken piece is the beauty of possibility if we are able to look into it and see ourselves, trace our fingers along its sharp and jagged edges, not enough to cut deep but allow ourselves to feel the immense possibility within brokenness.

Named within this dissertation after Zora Neale Hurston's protagonists in *Their Eye Watching God*, Janie is "a dark rock surged upon, and overswept", but through it all, she has remained. Much like the novel's main character, Janie's defiance is misread as delinquency. In reality, her defiance is an important wake up call for us all to engage in acts of refusal. She challenges us to question how much more are we willing to refuse for the sake and well-being of black children? She embodies a curiosity and confidence that emboldens her to believe in the power of relationships even when they have harmed her so deeply—a rare hope that is needed to turn the tides of our society.

And here we have Janie who survives the world and comes to schools that are structured to reinforce her isolation, a lethal solitude that Hortense Spillers (1985) suggests only black women can write about. Janie has been socialized to be alone, according to Spillers, because of her body and alone because we as black women and black girls have no one to tell us stories about ourselves. Thus, I must speak to the urgency of Yvette's care for Janie, a special type of care that cannot be found in most schools; Yvette represents the type of support that Hurston's Janie finds in her sister friend Pheoby. She is the audience for Janie's story; she functions as Janie's blanket.

As a black woman who has also survived a world invested in her undoing, Yvette knows that Janie is not a quick read. Yvette recognizes the layers of Janie's complexity. She sees tri-

umph when others only see trauma; she identifies Janie as dreamer when most have labeled her deficit. Yvette's pedagogical practices engage a type of care that has a familiarity and proximity to death yet has come so close to it that she no longer fears it herself; it is the ability to care when the world has given you countless reasons to stop. It is what it means to be a black woman.

Not everyone can do this work. Most cannot see beyond their own anti-blackness to see Janie as child. Thus, I do not want to romanticize or simplify the disruptive pedagogies that healed Janie. Yvette's pedagogy and investment in Janie is reflective of the type of care that recognizes that the answers to our most complex issues will come from our care of black children. Yvette cared for Janie as if she knew that her own redemption came from Janie's well-being. When Yvette centered Janie's well-being, Janie told us what it would take: deep and meaningful relationships with children. I wonder what it will take, the type of programs and mandates necessary, to continue listening to the bodies of black girls.

Bryce

He did not want to hit him. His fist balled tightly, a sign of frustration or maybe even fear. Throngs of grizzly bearded men and admiring teens decorated the street corner, anticipating the battle royal. His opponent gestured toward Bryce, hinting that he would swing soon to break the monotony of bluffs. Bryce did not want to fight, let alone defend himself from his family. What started on a humid September day as a father-son outing became a distorted rites of passage ceremony. Bryce's father swung at him, he ducked and finished strong with a right hook to his father's jaw. With the palm of his hand securing his mandible, Bryce's father eyed his son with scorn, and namely because of the onlookers, embarrassment too. He realized that his dignity was beyond hope of restoration; so, with responsibility tucked deeply in his back pocket, he signaled Bryce's peers to harm his son as one last attempt to gain a semblance of respect. No one would step up to fight Bryce. He had won, while losing his father.

Bryce left one fight only to enter a much larger ring. Much like Ralph Ellison's (1952) timeless allegory, Bryce's young life narrated the outcomes of centuries of historical trauma, his own people being placed within endless rings of poverty and forced to fight over resource, space, dignity. They swing at each other, as the promoters of destruction, those who design the rings, those responsible for the scarcity within their communities, the separation of their families, essentially, those who mandate their disenfranchisement, watch on cheering their demise. This is no life for a child; anyone for that matter. Many have given up. Propped up against cornerstones of black nihilism—some call them liquor stores—our cousins, brothers, uncles, have experienced blows so consequential that they stand in a daze. What it must be like to be a child thrown into this fight.

Bryce seemed so defeated in our first experience with him. In his interview for our program, he sat distant from Aaron, my comrade and the co-facilitator of our program. He mumbled answers to our questions. I watched on from a computer screen, as I was on assignment in another state. When Aaron asked Bryce why he wanted to be a part of our program, he lowered his head and wept. The remainder of our meeting with Bryce would consist of Aaron comforting him through his sadness. Bryce answered very few questions. He was a child of very few words. He wept instead.

Toward the end of his interview, Bryce acquired the energy to share with Aaron that which saddened him. In the previous week, Bryce was suspended from middle school for an incident that he felt should not be shared at the time. It was his last week of school and he was not allowed on campus; he was even prohibited from attending his middle school graduation ceremony as a consequence of his actions. Bryce's teachers made a common and detrimental decision: the assumption that wrongdoing should be met with punishment; it is an attempt to cultivate reflection and moral connection to what has happened. However, child psychologist Bruce Perry (2010) suggests that "although many people think that giving bullies a taste of their own medicine will create empathy, if there is no connection to begin with or no ability to make one, none will be formed by being unkind back...being further victimized and punished makes them angrier, not kinder" (p. 159). Bryce's tears did not fall toward a remorseful journey's end or seem

to affix themselves to those he harmed; rather they resembled an immense sadness, a familiar grief, the result of neglect for some, a consequence of black adolescence for most.

Still to us, we saw a child. Watching the tears fall from Bryce's face reminded me of the openness of children, their gifts of vulnerability. He had known us for less than one hour and he exposed himself, to our judgement potentially, seemingly awaiting nurture. As I reflect on this experience with Bryce, I am puzzled by the tremendous barriers that he walked through daily as a child. Maybe it was because the world did not see him as a child. There is evidence, particularly for black children, that our society is not able to recognize innocence in certain children. Like many other black boys, Bryce was being forced to grow up too soon. He was forced to fight grown men on his weekends and during the week his teachers were unable or unwilling to recognize the essence of his adolescence. Bryce's experiences are consistent with what Ferguson (2001) identifies as adultification, where young people's "transgressions are made to take on a sinister, intentional, fully conscious tone that is stripped of any element of childish naïveté" (p. 83).

The adultification of Bryce is best articulated when placed within a historical context. Historically, black children were primarily seen, gazed upon even, through a lens of profit. Enslaved black children were overworked, whipped and sexualized much like their parents. There was no exception made for their childhood. The black child's closest proximity to innocence came through the Sambo representation. The Sambo, assigned as a representation to black men, was carefree, reckless and ignorant. Sylvia Wynter (1979) suggests that "by constructing Sambo as the negation of responsibility, the slave master legitimated his own role as the responsible agent acting on behalf of the irresponsible minstrel" (p. 151). Essentially, "by representing the identity of the Sambo as childlike, by instituting processes of infantilization, the slave master constituted himself as Paternal Father" (Wynter, 1979, p. 151). And in a country in which black boys are socialized as men, and black men are socialized as boys, one must seemingly engage in bare-knuckle combat, with self at times, to avoid the inevitability of a prescribed psychosis.

On Bryce's first day at our school, he looked like a seasoned fighter. He rocked back and forth, as fighters do before they enter the ring. And much like boxers, his hood rested right below his forehead. I could barely see his eyes, but I know that he could see me. He preferred it that way. I have taught countless black boys who navigate the world in this way. The hood functions as such an important protective factor. In Bryce's case, I imagine that the hood was a shielding from the pressures of his experiences on the streets and his corresponding experiences in schools. The hood both hides and protects him. And he needed it more than ever as he entered a new battle: high school.

Years before in elementary school, Bryce was diagnosed with a learning difference. All students who receive such a diagnosis are by law designated an Individual Education Plan (IEP), a document that provides opportunities for teachers, parents, school administrators and students to work together to improve educational opportunities for the child. The IEP is drafted through a communal effort and reviewed periodically throughout the child's schooling experiences. Bryce's IEP team determined that the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for his learning would be in a

Special Day Class (SDC). He spent the majority of his elementary school experiences receiving one-on-one instruction in a classroom capped at three students.

Many (Grant, 1992; Noguera, 2003; Kunjufu, 2005; O'Connor & Fernandez, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2011) have critiqued the over-representation of black boys in special education programs. Some have suggested that the alarming numbers of black boys referred to special education are more reflective of deficit understandings of their cognitive abilities rather than sincere concern for their well-being. Other studies (Harry & Anderson, 1994; O'Connor & Fernandez, 2006) highlight the conditions of special education programs as a holding ground for behavioral issues that inadvertently prevent black boys from participating in the general education classes that will prepare them to lead purposeful and deliberate lives. In the United States, black boys comprise only 17% of the public-school population, while making up 41% of students in special education (Kunjufu, 2005). In a country in which black boys are disproportionately represented in special education and referred by predominately white educators (Skiba, et al, 2006; Bradshaw & Mitchell, 2010), there are reasonable grounds to challenge the aesthetics and even white paternalistic structure of special education programs.

While these critiques are essential, Bryce and his resource specialist team argue that his experiences in special education may have been less centered in racist tactics and in closer proximity to the cultivation of his well-being. Bryce's elementary school IEP team was experienced in methods of social emotional pedagogical practices. For 5 years, Bryce recounts being cared for in deep and meaningful ways. He shares that elementary school was the last time that he enjoyed being at school. He writes about his love for art, movement and peer connection that was cultivated and normalized in elementary school.

Generally, I believe that elementary school practices function as such an important component of children's social emotionality. I know countless elementary school educators whose foundational course tenets are grounded in practices that encourage empathetic connection to others, creativity and freedom of students' bodies. Elementary school can be one of the last times in one's schooling experiences in which grades come secondary to their social-emotional development. I have witnessed elementary school children who more versed in sharing their hurt and emotional needs than many adults I know. If the leadership of our country truly valued sharing and vulnerability in the ways in which I have witnessed 7-year-olds embody, the possibilities of our society would be endless. I can only imagine the extent of Bryce's elementary school experiences when he was immersed in a space that already valued connection to others, growth and kinesthetic freedom, while also receiving intentional, one-on-one support from caring practitioners.

Given the tremendous value in relationships and empathy that is nurtured at the elementary school level, I am not sure why many of those tenets seem to vanish the more schooled we become. It is almost as if the more successful one becomes in this society, the less they are socialized to care about others. When Bryce entered middle school, he was placed in general education classes. He no longer received direct instruction from a RSP specialist; rather, in place of special day classes, Bryce was assigned a RSP educator, called a case manager. Bryce received a

lot less personalized and consistent care from adults and instead was thrown in larger, general education courses.

Bryce shares that the last week of his middle school experience was one of his greatest challenges in schools. In confidence, he eventually shared with us why he was not allowed to participate in his 8th grade graduation. During the last week of his 8th grade year, Bryce was found in a classroom with a young girl, performing fellatio on him. After being reprimanded by school officials, the young girl recounts that she was forced by Bryce, while he argues that their relations were consensual. School representatives immediately called the police and Bryce was detained for hours until police concluded their investigation. Prior to his interview for our program, Bryce's concluding middle school experiences reflected what James Garabino (1998) would identify as a socially toxic environment, where the social context where Bryce was growing up was becoming poisonous to his development. He concluded middle school in one week with acts of oral sex on campus, detainment by police, sexual assault charges and prohibition from his middle school commencement. He was 13 years old and trapped in a reality that many adults themselves fear. Bryce recounts his experiences:

Uh…it went...pretty good…
like at first
it started bad,
then it went to good.
Cause like in middle school,
like my first year, I was like mad too much…
I would just be punching the lockers
and then like when people started talking to me
like about how,
but like when people would wanna deal with stuff,
that's when I started changing my stuff around.
Because like ever since I got detained
I saw my mom and I was like
and when my mom picked me up,
I saw her face and I…
I didn't want her to go through that.

Once in high school, Bryce hid a lot. I would imagine remnants of middle school haunted him. He hid in small spaces around the school. He hid under his hoodie in classes. He did not hide, however, when he was with his new RSP team. Many times that I was searching for him, I would find him with his RSP coordinator, Mrs. Curtis. There I'd find Bryce, vulnerable, hoodie down, expressive and in what seemed to be his best element. Mrs. Curtis reminded me of my kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Mims. She has an infectious smile and makes delectable Oreo cheese-

cake cookies. Aside from her baking, I believe that her program functioned as a welcoming space for Bryce and other RSP students because in her words, she “celebrates, strengthens and grows”. Curtis argues that her RSP department is a space where the larger goal is to be academically centered, but when other students’ needs are at odds with their academic due dates, her program centers those needs. Their department has a coaching model. She excitedly shares stories about coaching Bryce through his assessments. She says that she can identify his academic triggers, simply by looking at him. She knows the triggers that will eventually lead to larger frustrations, and she and her team gather around Bryce, literally cheering him as he takes on some of the most challenging questions on his assessment.

Curtis receives critique from other teachers at University High School. She states that they challenge her model because students “spend too much time in the RSP room”, rather than in their academic classes. Curtis responds that for students like Bryce, that if their “entire being isn’t there”, then Curtis and her team must identify what is missing for the child and target those aspects. Another critique is that Curtis’ approach does not prepare students for the “real world”, while she argues that her model invests in the whole child, rather than mere school standards. Within this model, it is no wonder why Bryce would open himself to their pedagogies. In Mrs. Curtis’ room, he no longer has to fight; he has a team willing to fight for him.

I was conflicted on my feelings toward Bryce's involvement in our school’s RSP. While I valued the support that he received, I did not want him to rely upon their program as his only caring outlet. My goal as an educator is to create ample spaces for Bryce to connect with caring adults and thrive. Yet with us he wore his hood. He covered himself from us. And he had reason to protect himself. Too often educators are concerned with ridding students of their protective mechanisms without truly appreciating why young people are guarding themselves in the first place. I have heard educators mention how they want to tear down the walls that their students enter with into their classrooms, proclaiming that those walls prevent real connection and engagement into course content. While certain aspects of their critique may be valid, what educators consistently fail to understand is that when we choose to take away students’ safety nets, when we demand that they take off their hoods, without a supportive alternative, we are asking them to expose themselves to other forms of violence. We did not want to perpetuate these tactics. So instead, I sought to understand the conditions that could both influence Bryce to pull his hood back enough so that we could begin to truly see each other, while cultivating safe enough space so that he did not need the hood, at least while he was with us.

So, I addressed the literal. I used a tactic that had worked with other black boys. I offered Bryce a haircut. I said, “let me line you up, dude”. He smiled and declined my offer. Bryce retreated to his corner in our room, hoodie covering face and distant from our class’ activities. He only agreed to complete work if Mrs. Curtis would pull him from our class and frequently requested to leave. I remember the type of attention I desired as a 14-year old. I often disregarded my teachers as a way to test them. A crucial component of adolescent development is testing adults (Hargreaves, 1996). So often, we acknowledge that children test us, but rarely do we assess how we perform on their tests. I committed to developing relationship with Bryce. I showed

up on the basketball court at lunch. I would check up Bryce, urging him to guard me. And when I would score, I saw a slight grin emerge. When I saw Bryce in the hallways, I would greet him. Most days he would just look at me; and on rare occasions he would show that grin and begrudgingly say, "hi Tiff'.

Our relationship reached a major turning point when I was giving Zap, another student, a touch up haircut. Essentially, I was lining up his edges; my work was flawless, which influenced Bryce to come over to my chair. He looked on as I carefully connected the blade to Zap's temple. Each movement of the clipper was calculated, as any misstep could result in a week of astonishment and insult from Zap's peers. So I always took my time on the lining. Black boys also know the significance of a good lining. They may talk and gesture the entire haircut, but when it comes to the lining, they sit still, so as to not interrupt the practitioner. Though we were all silent, Bryce's engagement in the haircut spoke wonders. I proudly handed Zap the mirror as a way to investigate my work. I knew it was perfect and so did Bryce, though he walked away with no words.

When Bryce peeped his head into our door the following week I asked, "you ready for that haircut?" With his shining smile, he responded "you gotta ask my mom." He walked away just as easily as he came and though our interaction were succinct, it hinted of possibility. Upon his mother's consent, I began to give Bryce weekly haircuts. We started with just a taper and lining. We then transitioned to a short afro with a bald taper. He came back another week and we cut off the afro; he wanted waves. During these sessions, I would ask Bryce questions and he would respond with one-word answers.

"How was your day, Bryce?"

"Good".

"What are you doing this weekend?"

"Nothing."

In time, I learned that relationship development did not have to consist of garrulous dialogue. Rather, Bryce taught me that relationship was about consistency, support, and caring presence. Bryce became a regular in my chair and so did his compliments from his classmates. "Dude, yo lining is crispy." They'd ask him, "who cut yo hair?. Again, Bryce would reply would one word: "Tiff". It was satisfying, I'm hoping for both him and me, to see Bryce have another consistent space to come. And when he left my chair, he had less reason to wear his hood.

In time, Bryce became the first to give me his eyes when I called the class' attention in our English course. He would take risks and attempt to pronounce words when we read aloud. And while he struggled tremendously with his algebraic expressions during our tutorials, he allowed me to work with him for almost an hour each week, a feat I would later learn was granted to very few educators. Bryce's overall engagement in class was hard to assess at times. His demure presence rarely afforded us an honest read. So, we asked Bryce about the teaching in the school and if any of it made him feel cared for. He responded:

3:06: Uh (1.7) ((looks down)) that (3)

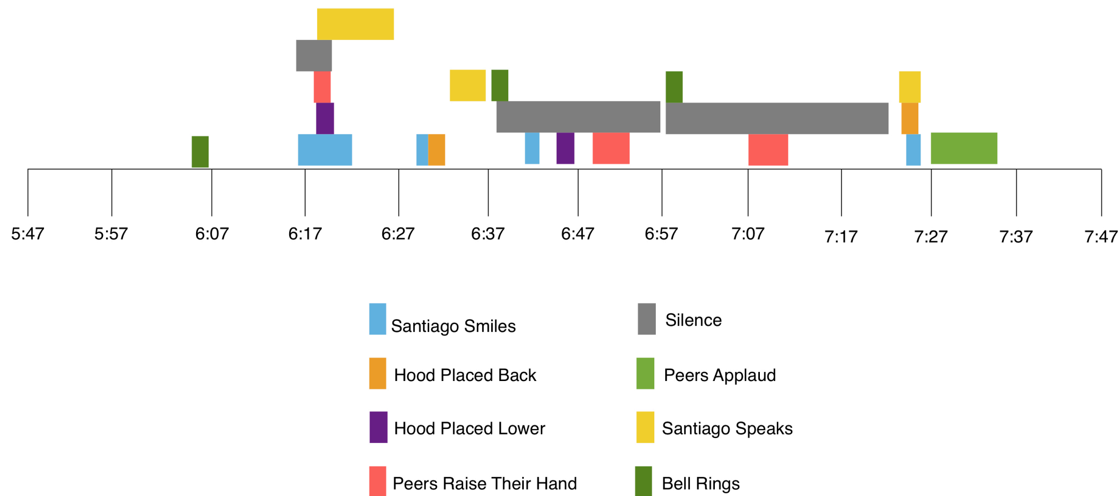
3:11: we could learn about (0.4) stuff ((looks up toward ceiling)), and like what's going on <u>now</u> and stuff ((looks back down toward floor)) that was going on back in the day °before everything changed ((looks at me, interviewer))
3:20 I: Hmmm
3:32 I: Tell me more about that. Why do you like that?
3:26: (0.1) Uhhh, because like ((leans back, looks toward ceiling and places hand on table))
3:28 <u>because</u> that can kinda help you ((leans forward and makes eye contact with me)). Like (.5) the (1.2)
3:22: like °put you onto something ((looks away, out window)) more but like ((returns to look straight ahead)) learning about people. Like how we <u>were learning about our ancestors</u> (1) and like <u>wa-what they had to go through</u> ((looks down at table)) <u>back then</u> ((looks to his left)).

Here, Bryce shows appreciation for his teacher's engagement of his ancestors and cultural heritage. He recognized such a pedagogy as caring. While Bryce expressed difficulty with articulating his intellectual prowess in written assignments, he grew to take on more challenging, classroom cultural practices.

Below, I use a methodology of landscape analysis (See **Figure 4**) as a way to demonstrate Bryce's growth in trust and risk taking within our small community. Landscape diagrams function as a methodological tool that locate, pause and magnify critical social phenomenon that occur within small increments of time. They become extremely useful to examine classroom dynamics that may be overlooked in real time. This particular landscape diagram shows an inverse to Bryce's social experiences at the beginning of the year at our program's orientation. On this school-day afternoon, we solicited the class for volunteers to lead our meditation. As always, there was a resounding silence, one that reflected our teenagers' understandable fear of the unknown. In the silence, I located Bryce, who had already been staring at me. With raised eyebrow, I called his bluff. He turned away slightly yet remained adjacent to my challenge. It was not that I desired him to surrender, but I did hope that he would trust in himself, the way that I did, to lead our meditation. When I saw the beginnings of his familiar grin, I knew that he was willing to try. Bryce lowered his head, sighed, and with great trepidation, raised his hand to lead the class that week.

Bryce's Hoodie Landscape
2 mins.

Figure 4



With hood rested on the middle of Bryce's head, he gestures to his classmate Lee to helped him get the attention of his peers. The class was made up of twenty-four teenagers heavily immersed in their own bouts of "what you eating for lunch?" and "naw, I didn't start on that paper yet". Lee, experiencing his own difficulty in gathering their attention, gestured back to Bryce to simply strike the cymbals. So, Bryce causes the tingshas to collide. Bryce thrusts his head forward causing his hood to lower, covering his eyebrows. He looks from left to right, eyeing the terrain of the classroom. Finally, the ring of the Tibetan cymbals began to break the roar of high school banter. Some students end their conversations, while others continue. Bryce waits. And just as the sound of the cymbal dissipates, so do the lingering conversations.

Already sitting on a grey bean bag chair on the floor, below all of his peers who were seated in chairs above him, Bryce commences our class. The sound of the bell fades slowly, and one by one, his peers raise their hands - an indication that they can no longer hear the lingering sound of the cymbals' piercing ring. It is a meditative practice to transition students from chaos to unity. Bryce looks up and around at the very peers that he has bonded with over the course of his first year in high school. They adjust themselves, both their chairs and attitudes, to sit with Bryce in unity.

Bryce shakes his head once again, causing his hood to fall even lower. With grin in tow, he shares: *"Uhhh, I am going to lead meditation. You can join in if you can or if you want to"*

As students readjust their chairs to face Bryce, he removes his hood from his eyes and mockingly shares, "when you hear the bell, raise your hand". Bryce rings the cymbals a second time. The sound is now louder and clearer, as his peers can see him. Piercing the momentary silence that had been left by the bell just moments ago, the silence is an uncomfortable time for Bryce, for many of us for that matter. In this silence, he waits to see how many of his peers will participate in the meditation. The anticipation haunts him, causing him to lower his head, consequentially causing his hoodie to fall back over his eyes.

When the noise ceases entirely, Bryce looks through his hoodie to see that all of his peers have their hands raised. He rings the bell one last time, peaking through to see his peers' response to his prompting. Again, they all raise their hands. He gestures right, turning his body to finally place the cymbals in resting position on an adjacent table. Bryce smiles and gestures his left hand toward me, indicating that he is ready to transition the class to me. He pulls his hoodie back one last time as a peer of his says, "Ase", a Yoruba phrase that connotes the power one has to make meaning and change in their lives through their words. Throngs of admiring teens decorate the classroom. I break the silence, commending Bryce for leading the class in meditation. His peers join in, almost as a cheering crowd might when their heavyweight champ has been crowned. And while the hood is on halfway today, we celebrate that it comes off others. And while teens still gather around watching Bryce engaged in battle, we celebrate today that its a battle to sustain his own life.

When I learned of the challenges that Bryce experienced prior to joining our program, I assumed that he would be the child with the worst health. Bryce has buried peers, experienced neglect from a parent, been detained at the hands of school officials, all before he entered high school. We were contending with "a constant stream of messages" that were functioning to undermine Bryce's "sense of security" (Garabino, 1998, p 54). Literature on childhood trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (Krieger, 2004) suggests the that embodiment of multiple stressors have detrimental impacts on children's health.

Despite his adverse childhood experiences, Bryce may have had more protection on his body than any other black child in our program. Literature on children's health (Adelman, 2008; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Perry & Szalavitz, 2017) also suggests that the best way to attenuate the impacts of toxic stressors is for children to have consistent, caring adults in their corners. Given the known stressors outside of school, Bryce's narrative reminds us of the significance that school environments may have on improving children's health. Essentially, "the relationships a child develops in schools become critical to his or her positive development. Because of the amount of time children spend in school, the relationships fostered there carry real weight" (Brofenbrenner, p. 25). Bryce shares that ways that teachers helped him to feel cared for are by them investing in his stability:

Because like I could be down, I could be having something and y'all could come check up on me. They… try to help me with my classwork and like try to help me have a better way to communicate with my teachers, so I could learn it better and get the work done.

From the beginning of his schooling experiences, Bryce received triple the amount of supportive adults than other children. His elementary school experiences are accounted for within his own reflections as a defining time in his development. And even with the toxicity of middle school, Bryce went right back into a supportive high school environment. His narrative pushes me to think about what it would mean for all children to receive the type of care and support that Bryce received through special education, what it means even for every child to receive individualized education plans that are invested in their growth as human beings first and measure their socio-emotional growth. Even some of the support in Bryce's schooling experiences came with exceptions. His IEP afforded him a special type of education, yet when he engaged in activity that made the adults within his middle school uncomfortable, behavior that he was likely mimicking, his special education was comprised. We must work to norm the type of care that students receive in schools, in which "the child must have on-going, long-term mutual interaction with an adult (or adults) who have a stake in the development of the child." Health theory suggests that these types of "interactions should be accompanied by a strong tie to the child that ideally is meant to last a lifetime. It is important for this attachment to be one of unconditional love and support. This person must believe the child is "the best," and the child must know that the adult has this belief" (Brofenbrenner, p. 25).

In a capitalist system, we have been bogged down by nay-sayers who suggest that schools, as they exist, do not have the capacity to provide the type of nurture and attention from which Bryce thrives. Critics argue that we do not have the time or capacity to provide children with one-on-one support, let alone focus on their health and well-being alongside A-G requirements, Advanced Placement assessments and preliminary college admissions requirements. Bryce's story reveals a larger flaw in the structure of schools, when students' well-being comes secondary to their preparation for test and deadlines. We must ask ourselves, what is the value of a model of upward mobility when our students may not live, or even live well-enough, to experience the results of their labor. What have we become as a society when the solidification of students' health and well-being is seen as special, rather than the norm?

Chapter Seven

A Close Read of Mrs. Flowers & Maya Angelou

"Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with shades of deeper meaning."

For nearly a year, I sopped around the house, the Store, the school, and the church, like an old biscuit, dirty and inedible. Then I met, or rather got to know, the lady who threw me my first lifeline.

Mrs. Bertha Flowers was the aristocrat of Black Stamps. She had the grace of control to appear warm in the coldest weather, and on the Arkansas summer days it seemed she had a private breeze which swirled around, cooling her. She was thin without the taut look of wiry people, and her printed voile dresses and flowered hats were as right for her as denim overalls for a farmer. She was our side's answer to the richest white woman in town.

Her skin was a rich black that would have peeled like a plum if snagged, but then no one would have thought of getting close enough to Mrs. Flowers to ruffle her dress, let alone snag her skin. She didn't encourage familiarity. She wore gloves, too.

I don't think I ever saw Mrs. Flowers laugh, but she smiled often. A slow widening of her thin black lips to show even, small white teeth, then the slow effortless closing. When she chose to smile on me, I always wanted to thank her. The action was so graceful and inclusively benign.

She was one of the few gentlewomen I have ever known, and has remained throughout my life the measure of what a human being can be.

One summer afternoon, sweet-milk fresh in my memory, she stopped at the Store to buy provisions. Another Negro woman of her health and age would have been expected to carry the paper sacks home in one hand, but Momma said, "Sister Flowers, I'll send Bailey up to your house with these things."

She smiled that slow dragging smile, "Thank you, Mrs. Henderson. I'd prefer Marguerite, though." My name was beautiful when she said it. "I've been meaning to talk to her, anyway." They gave each other age-group looks.

There was a little path beside the rocky road, and Mrs. Flowers walked in front swinging her arms and picking her way over the stones.

She said, without turning her head, to me, "I hear you're doing very good schoolwork, Marguerite, but that it's all written. The teachers report that they have trouble getting you to talk in class." We passed the triangular farm on our left and the path widened to allow us to walk together. I hung back in the separate unasked and unanswerable questions.

Excerpt from *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings,* Maya Angelou

I experienced, during the summer I became sixteen or maybe even seventeen, a profound sense of fulfillment. I read Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.* It may, in fact, have been the first book I read thoroughly, from cover to cover. After hours spent nestled underneath my bedroom covers—prose secured tightly between my adolescent fingers—there remained countless adages and riveting quotes from Angelou's memoir. Very little within the book, for me anyway, was more impactful than Angelou's relationship with her teacher, Mrs. Bertha Flowers. Young Maya Angelou meets Mrs. Flowers at a fundamental time in her childhood: after being raped by her mother's boyfriend. She is forced to testify in court against him and before the night ends, he is found murdered. Readers learn that Angelou silences herself, believing her words killed her attacker. Soon after, she returns to Stamps, Arkansas to live with her grandmother, an attempt to piece her back together after an unraveling that no child, let alone any adult, should experience. It is in Stamps where she meets Mrs. Flowers who ultimately engages a type pedagogy that intervenes with the toxic stressors in Maya Angelou's life.

It was not until I finished this study that I began to revisit Mrs. Flowers' pedagogy. As a black teacher whose own pedagogical practices reflect the legacy of my great grandmothers Artelia Green and Olivia Williams, essentially a long line of Arkansas educators, I feel a strong sense of connection to Mrs. Flowers and her practice. This connection, in part, stems from nostalgia; my childhood was curated by a legacy of Southern love, the type of multilayered pedagogy that paused time long enough to holistically care for my unique needs, undergirded by an urgency to ensure that I lived—and not just survived—an abundant life. I bring Mrs. Flowers and my great grandmothers into this conversation not simply because they were all black women, not just because they were all educators in their own right, and not even because they are all from Arkansas. I call attention to their seemingly rare pedagogical practices because, through reflection, I realize that those practices were not very rare. In fact, their approaches are consistent with what I now know helps black youth to thrive. Largely responsible for the healing of Maya Angelou and children within this study, Janie and Bryce, particularly, were caring educators that engaged a plethora of approaches toward their healing.

Often, within the academy, we look to isolate variables that explain particular social phenomenon, *the singular* approach that facilitates healing for children. I would suggest that the healing of young Maya Angelou and of Janie and Bryce are not the result of one variable or one practice; rather, their healing is the result of a praxis of dependent variables—always about the right factors, functioning at the right time, facilitated by the right people. I chose to initially focus on the pedagogical praxis of Mrs. Flowers as an important way to think about healing and health for black children because her approach forces us to think outside of Western understandings of well-being.

Mrs. Flowers did not have access to Maya Angelou's Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) survey to gauge her trauma; yet she recognized that the young child needed intervention, engaged critical practices of healing for her, and more importantly, she knew how to recognize

patterns of healing in the young child's body. Similarly, most teachers will not have access to the types of sciences that public health practitioners can access, and I am not convinced that these forms of science can holistically document our healing practices, anyway. For many caring practitioners who do this work, the signs of needed intervention, the practices that facilitate greater health and the signs of healthier children can be apparent to us, often without Western methods of investigating the human body/human condition. I would even raise that our reliance upon such measurements for the validity of our work will eventually be cause for concern.

In the pages that follow I choose to focus on Mrs. Flowers' pedagogical praxis because I believe that it embodies important implications to replicate the approaches necessary to mediate healing and sustained health for black children. Her practice engages many of the components of an agape methodology and is consistent with the types of pedagogies that also facilitated healing and better health for both Janie and Bryce.

Rock: Counter-Narratives

Perhaps it was a prompting by Annie Henderson, Maya Angelou's grandmother, that influenced Mrs. Flowers to intervene. It could have been that Mrs. Flowers was organically drawn to the "sopping" child. Whatever the motivation, Mrs. Flowers took notice of the child because of a particular narrative operating through her mind. We all have stories about black children. They influence our perceptions and thus our actions. I want to suggest that these narratives—stories, images, experiences, tropes—not only become the lenses through which we see the world, but that each one is made real, believable, concretized even, by our employment of or resistance to prescribed understandings of the black child. These historically prescribed narratives provided basis for the nation's humanity. From this scope, blackness lives far from innocence, takes on more pain than others, is simultaneously invisible and always seen. Black childhood is confined to an aberrant state of being, one that is mutually exclusive—that is to say, it is inconceivable to have both the "black" and the "child" functioning simultaneously. Therefore, a counter narrative is necessary to even recognize Maya Angelou's childhood experience as one needing intervention; to see it outside of a normed and prescribed existence for black people. Mrs. Flowers had to be familiar with a particular counter-narrative in order to: 1) recognize Maya Angelou as hurting and as child, 2) understand her silence as self-inflicted and as shortcoming, and 3) to envision, and even desire a life more abundant for her. And while we may not know the intimate details of Mrs. Flowers' counter-narrative, we know that she imagined more for Maya Angelou, that she saw beyond her mandated existence and acted on the images of black health permeating her mind.

Janie's body spelled out its own narrative; her back slumped. I remember how overwhelming her solitude felt. When I first saw Janie, sitting alone, I grieved, knowing the abundance, the profundity of life that I believe existed just outside her purview. When she attended KIPP Bayview Academy, her teachers believed and reinforced a narrative that black children should be isolated, that their confinement, their silence was reflective of a type of seriousness and commitment to their education. In fact, many of Janie's middle school teachers colluded with

a narrative that explained the concentration of poverty within Janie's community as a result of their educational shortcomings, their inability to discipline their mouths, their bodies, rather than generations of legislation that would ensure their disenfranchisement. As a result of her teachers alignment with such a narrative, their pedagogical practices sought to covertly blame the child for the realities within their communities; they redirected their little bodies any chance they could get, even to control their clothing, because according to KIPP teachers, if students continued to pay attention to brand names, it would serve as distraction from their education. These are the narratives and corresponding practices that have driven and justified colonization, genocide and enslavement. They designate schools as fundamental sites to cure black children, essentially, of their blackness. They believe that little black children need to sit in silence and military style rows to learn course content. Their teachers seem to believe that what we have been told about how children learn—the significance of sociality as essential factors in knowledge production (Piaget, 1936)—does not apply to the black children who sit in front of them, maybe because they cannot read them as children. Their pedagogical approaches mandate a social isolation that we know, particularly in public health and medical fields, kills children (House, 2001; Adelman, 2008; Umberson, et al, 2010).

I read Janie's silence and social isolation as captivity. I knew that she needed intervention because I, too, sat alone in school. I sat alone in the second grade, when my only friend, Day Davidson, left for the Philippines for two weeks. And, as one of only four black children in a predominately white school, I was terrified when the only friend I had would be leaving. Desperately, I sought to make friends and decided to share my Lisa Frank stickers with my peers while they were out at recess one day. It was a critical decision, given my mother's financial challenges and the exorbitant cost of the metallic stickers. I passionately rubbed each sticker on my peers' desks, excited that they would find my gifts and befriend me, at least until Day returned. Upon their return from recess, however, instead of receiving new friends, I was berated with insults from my teacher who screamed that I'd "ruined *her* desks" with my stickers.

I sat alone in the third grade, as well. Travis, a little white boy whose Reebok Pumps impressed me, asked me to marry him in the tanbark at lunch; upon time to participate in our third grade wedding ceremony, he shared that he could not marry me because I was Black. Soon after, I *chose* to sit alone, distancing myself from the constant turmoil that seemed to become synonymous with my name. My teachers looked toward, maybe near, never actually *seeing me*, and echoed semblances of a familiar narrative. Apparently, one can look, indeed one can face its subject, trace its movements with one's eyes, yet never really recognize that which stands before them. This gaze, this misreading of my being, so to speak, was part of a trajectory for me as early as the second and third grade. My teachers looked toward a hurting child and, instead, saw deficit. That year, I was recommended for placement in the Special Education program.

So, Janie's isolation was my reflection. I saw a young child who needed intervention, because from my experiences, I knew what it meant when children sat alone. After being reprimanded and exiled by the adults responsible for my well-being, often for factors that had very little to do with ill-behavior, I spent years rolling my eyes, distancing myself from perceived at-

tack. When Janie exhibited similar traits, I remembered the socially prescribed narrative that had been imposed upon us. I did not align myself with this narrative—that black girls simply have attitude problems which prevent healthy attachment and achievement in schools. Much like Mrs. Flowers, when she saw young Maya Angelou, playing through my mind was a counter narrative that recognized Janie's isolation and distance as imposed—a desirable outcome of centuries of oversexualization, adultification and assignment to social death. It was this counter narrative that informed my intervention. We interceded with the most heavily documented cure for social isolation: increase Janie's access to spaces of belonging.

Bryce hid and isolated himself because his social ties were also crumbling. His final middle school days consisted of detainment and eventually dismissal from his school community. His teachers read the 13-year-old as a predatory, violent man; our community was driven by a counter-narrative that read Bryce as a boy, one who covered his eyes to shield himself from the socially prescribed oversexualization, adultification and criminalization that often accompanies black boy adolescence. And like Janie, he distanced himself. Yet as a result of the counter-narrative that informed our practice, we pursued Bryce, much like any adult must for a hurting child. The previous chapters detailed an intervention that prioritized his health and worked tirelessly to facilitate spaces for Bryce to be seen and to feel a sense of safety in school. He, too, needed to believe the counter-narrative that informed our work. He needed to believe that as a child, he had a right to his childhood. Our intervention functioned to remind Bryce that the movement of his body was essential for his health and that his connection to his peers would not result in punishment.

For Maya Angelou, Janie and Bryce, there were adults who believed a certain counter-narrative about black children that facilitated healing through their interactions with them. And while Maya Angelou, Janie and Bryce eventually engaged in course content and even increased their literacy rates, I would raise that these outcomes are not the most important signs of greater health; the signs of healthier children can and should look very different. For Maya Angelou, Janie and Bryce, some of these signs include(d): an increased sense of belonging, healthy attachment to others and the ability to speak one's truth. The engagement of these types of counter-narratives highlight important strategies for adults who work with children. These stories invite us to (re)examine the narratives that we have been given about black children. They raise questions about how we read into their lives. Are they compelling texts to read? Are they challenging texts? And if we see black children as difficult texts to read, we must ask ourselves why we do not embrace the difficulty of their narratives? Why do we embrace the complexities of Jane Austen and E.E. Cummings, yet refuse to engage the complexities of black children's lived experiences? Their narratives invite us to think critically and vulnerably about the origins of these stories, their utility in our lives, and their ability to encourage or prevent intervention. Additionally, these narratives encourage us to think differently about school success and desirable school outcomes for black children. They challenge us to question the priority that schools place on health, given their current mandated school outcomes.

Sword: Agency

Let me call attention to the intricate balance of push and pull via Mrs. Flowers' rearing of Angelou's agency. First, Angelou's agency was compromised as a result of her abuse from an adult. It is what I believe to be one of the most detrimental Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). I raise that this ACE is notably harmful because it is both painful and confusing for children. At the time that Mrs. Flowers met Maya Angelou, she had just been harmed by an adult who was responsible for her well-being. Second, Mrs. Flowers' pedagogical intervention becomes complicated as she must initially gain trust in order to protect and serve the child. Often educators desire relationship with children, blindly assuming that they will trust them simply because they are an adult. We sometimes fail to understand that children may be distrustful and even fearful of us as a result of previous experiences with adults. Consequently, Flowers must first cultivate trust with young Maya Angelou in order for the child to fully participate in any intervention. Flowers must convince Maya Angelou that she cares for her, assure her of her dissimilarity to her attacker; a daunting task, because Angelou's attacker also presented himself as caring and supportive. Likewise, educators who hope to curate transformative educational spaces must not solely rely upon on a rhetoric of care; they must remember that those who have harmed children may also access the rhetoric. Alternatively, children are seeking adults who actualize their promises.

I take Flowers' approach to be a succinct actualization of what some might call a trauma informed pedagogy (Carello & Butler, 2014; Brunzell, et al, 2016). "She said, without turning her head, to me, "I hear you're doing very good schoolwork, Marguerite, but that it's all written. The teachers report that they have trouble getting you to talk in class" (Angelou, 1979, p. 96). Mrs. Flowers' discerning pedagogy refuses the privilege of her unearned legitimacy as an adult. She does not force relationship. Instead, without making eye contact, she speaks a word into the environment, inviting Angelou to grab ahold, if or when she feels ready.

Flowers pedagogy functions to engage the child without isolating her or making her feel uncomfortable. The prompting constructs its own space for Angelou to join Flowers alone at her home, a sign of trust from consenting Angelou and her grandmother. A risky endeavor, especially when the experiences of being alone with an adult may be triggering for Maya Angelou. The consensual nature of Flowers' engagement with Angelou, however, and her invitation for the child to step into relationship with her, allows for critical and hopeful next steps. Essentially, Flowers' pedagogical approach allows for "paths to widen" in their relationship, prompting Angelou and Flowers "to walk together". It creates a space of safety for Angelou to safely reside "in the separate unasked and unanswerable questions." Flowers' approach allows Angelou to safely enter new terrain with her, even when she is uncertain about the nature of those landscapes. A tremendous stride, indeed, when Angelou's previous endeavor with a particular adult resulted in rape, murder and isolation.

Upon arriving to her home, Flowers nurtures space to develop a deeper relationship with young Maya Angelou. She feeds her and concerns herself with Angelou's likings. Flowers' approach, however, is not absent of the engagement of coursework. She first acknowledges the

child's coping mechanism from her trauma: "no one is going to make you talk—possibly no one can"; then suggests the need for Angelou to advocate for herself, highlighting the ways in which her coping mechanism may compromise her agency, even prevent her healing. She shares, "Your grandmother says you read a lot. Every chance you get. That's good, but not good enough. Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with the shades of deeper meaning" (Angelou, 1979, p. 96). She advocates for Angelou to be able to speak her truth, to fight for herself.

Often in conversations about responding to young people who experience toxic stress, educators situate themselves on one side of a false binary. Some educators, in an attempt to alleviate stressors for children who are experiencing toxic stress, excuse students from their course content altogether. Other educators focus too heavily on traditional course outcomes, disregarding the needs that students may have outside of the mandated curriculum. Flowers' approach however, does not recognize healing and the acquisition of course content as mutually exclusive. In fact, Flowers' ability to show up for young Angelou functions as a way for her to fight for her. Yet her emphasis on Angelou to read, write and recite under her care is an attempt for Angelou to fight for herself. Flowers' pedagogical approach teaches us that cultivating spaces of healing for children is fundamentally about the ability to show up and fight for them, while helping them to access the tools necessary to also show up and fight for themselves.

Janie came to us fighting. She kicked and screamed because we were using the rhetoric of her attackers. Her KIPP Bayview Academy teachers told her that they cared about her; they shared that they sought the best for her. Yet, their practices blamed her for her academic challenges and isolated her when she sought her own remedies to the toxic stressors that compromised her lived experience. Consequently, when we shared that we cared for her, that we wanted the best for her, she was triggered, not because she did not want to be cared for, but because even our rhetoric did not initially match her reality. In describing her initial feelings about our program, she shared:

> *I didn't like school…Because I went to KIPP and they got on my nerves at KIPP. They always over did stuff, so I didn't like school. And then, I thought it was going to be the same way-when I got here.*

When we triggered her, she resisted us. And when she resisted us, we unknowingly bombarded her with empty warnings and increased workload. We initially warned her about the potential consequences of her "attitude", how her resistance to her school work could prevent her from living more freely and abundantly. And while our warnings may have embodied valid fears, they did not ensure Janie that we were fighting for her; therefore, she refused to fight with us or maybe even for herself.

It was not until our approaches changed that her responses to us differed. Children need to experience innovation in schools. For far too long we've used the same curriculum, the same equipment, the same rhetoric, the same discipline policies to try to convince children that they

should care, that their engagement with schools will provide them with something different than what their parents and grandparents received. Yet, when we look into our communities, the opportunities afforded to us as a result of our schooling are far and few. We know that school still works for very few, and when it does work, is mostly beneficial for those who do not reside in our communities. Yet, teachers deliver an antiquated homily on what schooling can offer children, often with very familiar, and rightfully in their eyes, false hope (Duncan-Andrade, 2008). So, my colleagues and I attempted to be different with Janie, to gain her trust so that she believed that we could be different. The previous chapters detail how challenging our approaches were to reflect less of the normative practices of school and more of the educational practices of Mrs. Flowers, even going as far as disowning certain school policies that were antithetical to the practices necessary to sustain her health.

Similarly, once we were able to gain trust from Bryce, we created alternative spaces that challenged capitalist understandings of how and when learning must take place. We challenged common perceptions that schools, as they exist, do not have the capacity to provide the type of nurture and attention from which Bryce thrives. When needed, Bryce received one-on-one support and other times he learned in classes with his peers. We sought to ensure that his well-being did not come secondary to his preparation for tests and deadlines. The balance of prioritizing Bryce's well-being and the completion of his school work was a challenging dance. At times, we worried that we could be spending too much time caring for him outside of his classes; looming deadlines often compromised the richness of our interactions. Other times, we feared that our requests for him to complete school work would seem too foreign to re-engage. Additionally, he resisted us when he felt that our focus on the completion of school work was overwhelming. He voiced that, at times, our urgency on pressing deadlines felt as if it comprised our care for him. As a result, in our courses, anyway, we sought to engage caring approaches—that is to say, show concern for his lived experiences, engage joy, celebrate his cultural heritages—through our assignments. Too often the normative curricula and practices of schooling compete with the well-being of students. We never believed that prioritizing our students' health would be at odds with their schooling requirements.

For both children, creating spaces of belonging were more important for us than following school policy, especially when they were at odds with their healing. The more they felt safe, the more they engaged with us, and the more they allowed us to care for them. And in these moments, we invited them to engage in course content. Janie and Bryce were required to complete the same course outcomes as other students. How, where and when they completed those assignments sometimes varied, as they do with all of our children. To be clear, our expectations for Janie and Bryce to engage their school work while caring for them through their toxic stressors were not because we saw the essays or class presentations as the most important course outcomes. Rather, we saw the embodiment of the content of those assignments as critical factors that would help them to advocate for themselves when we could not. Learning and writing about their ancestors and understanding the colonial texts that compromised their health provided them the tools to resist the internalization of deficit-oriented narratives about their lived experiences.

We equipped them with the tools to fight for themselves. We understood those assignments as a means of reaching our course goals. So if Janie, Bryce and even other students could not submit those assignments, we did not believe that they had failed. When we had identified what was most important—and in Janie and Bryce's cases, to use their agency to resist oppressive narratives about themselves and their communities—then we could curate other means of reaching our course outcomes, spaces that are mindful of their lived experiences and unique needs.

Our experience with this dance, this balance of socio-emotional well-being and normative schooling policies, provoked us to think about the immense challenge that caring teachers face in an attempt to transform schools. The task seems daunting and insulting, to say the least. Caring teachers are required to convince school leaders and policy makers of the need to pause time and (re)consider the detrimental impacts that schooling has on our students' health. I would think that the predictable and correlative data between failure rates and race would be sufficient for leaders within school policy to reconsider the impacts of schooling on youth. I would imagine that the diminishing numbers of black youth in colleges and universities and the very consistent numbers of white youth matriculating into these spaces would be cause to (re)examine the efficacy of such a structure. Yet we continue on, daily, within schools, participating in the social reproduction of predictable failure and social norms. Even with the small percentages of black youth who matriculate into higher education, we know that their experiences will likely be unhealthy. We must prepare them to enter those spaces, not with a celebratory nod at commencement ceremonies, but with raised eyebrows and reliance upon the warnings of navigating white spaces.

Shield: Empathetic Connection to Others

Maya Angelou identifies Mrs. Flowers as the "aristocrat of Black Stamps", Arkansas. She is revered by her community and, most importantly, by young Maya Angelou: "She had the grace of control to appear warm in the coldest weather, and on the Arkansas summer days it seemed she had a private breeze which swirled around, cooling her" (Angelou, 1979, p. 91). Maya Angelou refers to her as her community's "answer to the richest white woman in town." Flowers is notably revered for her swagger and extensive educational background. Regardless of her stature and glamorous reputation in her community, Flowers' pedagogical practices function in a way to warn young Maya Angelou against the dangers of educational attainment outside of beloved community. Flowers not only encourages Angelou to acknowledge the ways in which her coping mechanisms may prevent healing and compromise her agency, she also teaches Angelou an important lesson about the sustainability of her health, what Angelou calls her "lessons in living". Flowers shares with Angelou, that she:

> must always been intolerant of ignorance but understanding of illiteracy. That some people, unable to go to school, were more educated and even more intelligent than college professors. She encouraged me to listen carefully to what country people called mother wit. That in those homely sayings was couched the collective wisdom of generations.

Flowers imparts wisdom to Angelou that recognizes the risks of harm those deemed educated may encounter navigating multiple worlds, particularly their communities and academia. Mrs. Flowers, through her educational attainment, navigates the world, much like many of us who have been a part of the academy too long. She warns younger generations, like Maya Angelou, of the dangers of navigating between those two worlds. Public Health and medical data (Adelman, 2000) suggests that this undertaking, this negotiation, is a process that makes us physically ill, and even worse, separates us from our communities. Here, Flowers prepares Angelou to recognize both where important sites of knowledge production lie and essentially where her source of strength will continue to stem: her community. Her pedagogy functions to construct empathetic connection to her people and to embrace their generational wisdom. Her approach recognizes that we cannot fight alone because our community is both our source of strength and our protection.

Flowers' time within the academy was sure to place her within spaces of social isolation, self-hate and systemic violence. Within her home, however, she offers Angelou the education that many of us rarely ever received in schools, one that teaches children to find wisdom within themselves and their people, one that does not seek to separate children from their communities, but uses their education as a means for them to embrace and restore those communities. Within this pedagogical model, Flowers does not need to fear Angelou engaging multiple worlds, for she is preparing her to confront whiteness, in its most overt and covert forms. So when she is called to read *The Classics*, she will have developed the agency in young Maya Angelou, the critical consciousness and voice necessary to pronounce the text with purpose. Angelou watches Flowers reading "A Tale of Two Cities"

> It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. . . ." Her voice slid in and curved down through and over the words. She was nearly singing. I wanted to look at the pages. Were they the same that I had read? Or were there notes, music, lined on the pages, as in a hymn book? Her sounds began cascading gently. I knew from listening to a thousand preachers that she was nearing the end of her reading, and I hadn't really heard, heard to understand, a single word. (pp 98)

Even when Angelou hears the prose of Dickens, she envisions a rich, black Pentecostal history of swaying multi-colored hats and black wailing mothers that raise both their hands—creased from reconstruction, segregation and a rhetoric of progress—and their hopes for a better world. Essentially, she engages a type of literacy that sustains her within a society invested in her undoing—with countless stories that she will be required to read in school that disregard her history, her experience, her beauty—and still envisions her people and their beauty within its prose. Flowers teaches her to explore social contexts and see beyond the confines of whiteness, beyond what has been done to us, how it has narrated us—and speak a counter-narrative into existence. What a critical literacy.

Mrs. Flowers teaches her to find beauty in those whom the world deems disposable. Maya Angelou will use this *living lesson* to intervene within the lives of so many others, in the

same way Flowers intervened in her life. Angelou will use these lessons to intervene for Tupac Shakur, and with the purpose and power of her ancestors, look into his eyes to remind him of the beauty and sustenance of his people when he has internalized the detrimental narratives of society. And when he feels the integrity of her words, he will weep. She will wipe his tears, the tears from a young man who was forced to grow up too soon, to grow up much like Angelou did, much like Janie did, much like Bryce did. She will remind him of his importance, so that he, too, may change the world. Flowers, in this moment, prepares Angelou to not only heal herself, but to use her agency to heal others. Flowers mediates a certain type of agape pedagogy, in the midst of a white backdrop.

It is here that Flowers models our desirable outcomes of critical pedagogies: children who are healthy, self-aware and empathetic scholars. These pedagogies ask and measure: does she (desire to) invest in the well-being of others? Does she recognize her community, her culture, her indigenous ways of being as valuable? Does she use her voice and her body to advocate for the well-being of herself and others?

It is our hope that in the following years of their high school experience that our investment in Janie and Bryce will produce the type of critically caring scholarship that Angelou argues that Mrs. Flowers developed in her. While the stories of Janie and Bryce may suggest that they are healthier today than when they arrived to us, we believe that the substantive data about children's health must not stop there—for that data is just one source telling one story. What I believe will be more telling are the types of connections that the two will make, the desires that they articulate for themselves and their communities and the ways in which they speak their truths to power in the years that follow. One year of data is not substantive enough to suggest that our approaches will help develop critically caring people such as Maya Angelou. They do, however, "widen the pathway" toward these outcomes, allowing many more of us to walk together in attempts to engage the "unasked" and seemingly "unanswerable questions" about black children's health.

In the process, it is important to share, however, that these approaches we consider as transformative happened outside of the normative practices of schooling. Many times attendance protocol, strict deadlines, and even school codes regarding relationship with students were antithetical to the practices necessary to facilitate healing and health for our students. Flowers cared for Angelou in her home outside the rigid structure of schools, which challenges us to think about the feasibility of these approaches within schools.

Chapter Eight

Toward an Apocalyptic Education: Implications

Within her novel *Krik Krak*, Haitian writer Edwidge Danticat shares the story of a young, pregnant woman, Celianne, who travels the Caribbean seas. Within one of the novel's short stories, "Children of the Sea", Celianne, though pregnant, remains stoic and immune to nausea caused by the odorous smells and the boat's rocking. Onlookers exchange stories about the baby's assumed violent conception as a way to distract themselves from the noxious odors of the sea and beginnings of sickness. Eventually, the baby is born and named Swiss, after the knife used to cut its umbilical cord. As time on the boat progresses, the baby has yet to cry; still, Celianne remains intoxicated with the smell, beauty and possibilities of her new baby. Alarmingly, the young mother constantly washes the new baby. Boat dwellers even observe Celianne spraying the child with perfume at one point. And as the story develops, readers learn that Celianne has been consumed by a now horrid smell emanating from her baby. Her days on the boat no longer consist of caring for her child; instead they are consumed by aesthetic, time consuming labor simply to cover up the stench emerging from the infant. The baby has died. And instead of confronting the death that is ever-so-present, Celianne dedicates her time to covering up the smell of death.

As an educator of thirteen years, I fear that we have engaged at some point, if not consistently these days, in similar institutional and pedagogical practices. While I do suggest that children are dying on our watch, the baby that I speak to, the one that has been dead for some time now, the one whose smell can no longer be ignored, is schools. The findings of this study suggest that many of the normative practices of schooling are strikingly similar to the infant child in Celianne's arms: lifeless, numb, extinct. This is not to suggest that the possibility of life is not present in schools. Rather, Celianne's story reminds us of what happens when we are so consumed by practices that are solely invested in suppressing death: we ignore the life around us.

I did not initially recognize the smell or even see the project of schools as a dying one. In 2008, I wrote my master's thesis on the pedagogical practices necessary to fix the schooling system. Its introduction compared schooling to a malfunctioning washing machine. I shared that during my childhood, when my family's washing machine would malfunction, it would create a monstrous noise, shaking so violently as to disengage its hose from the drain. My mother would always insist that my brother and I rearrange the clothes until the machine quieted and operated properly. My mother's attempts to pacify the noises did not fix the machine; they merely placated the signs that it was time to invest in something new.

I spent years between being awarded my master's degree—attending students' graduations and funerals, seeing some leave school altogether and entering my doctoral program—seeking to fix schools, to no longer pacify the noises that it was making and to engage in the types of practices that would transform the system. I worked hours on end to improve my pedagogical practices as a middle and high school teacher. I attended and spoke at educational con-

ferences. I taught undergraduate and graduate courses, attempting to influence teacher philosophy and purpose. I saw these processes as important measures to influence the efficacy of schools. I labored as an instructional coach and Director of Student Life. And the noises that schools were making began to silence; I did not know to be afraid of the silence.

Much like in the death of a body, in time the silence transitioned to a smell. As the smell intensified, I took on more work, looking to other aspects of schools that I had not yet uncovered. During this time, I was awarded and honored for my work; yet the smell intensified. At this point, I have spent 1/3 of my life seeking to sustain life and identify pockets of livelihood, within what I now understand as a fundamental site of death. And here I am, fourteen years later, surrendering to what seems to be the stench of death emanating from schools. I can no longer run from it, nor do I seek to suppress it; what I can show from my labor is the understanding that there is so much more that we can do with and for children, but we must first allow this space, these ways of socializing children, guised as educational practice, to respectfully die.

When we think about death, or even the destruction of anything on a catastrophic scale, we often run back to the very systems we've run away from out of fear of the unknown. I once watched a video of a monkey who stayed caged for weeks, even after its owners opened the cage. I believe that much like us, the monkey became too familiar with caged life, so the possibility of freedom was a site of complete paralysis. I believe this fear is prevalent, in part, because of our engagement in and with white works of art and literature. White movies and works of art often identify the destruction of our worlds in a negative light. Perhaps because those worlds have only aesthetically benefitted white people; it is logical to hold on to such a world. However, a colleague, Kenly Brown, recently reminded me that black literature has consistently painted apocalypse with bright colors. Because through the destruction of the systems and ways of being that compromise our health, we have the possibility of life more abundantly. Some may still ask: what's next? Where do we go from here? And while I may be wedging myself into some trope to have these answers, I would suggest that the answer is in Mrs. Flowers' pedagogy—the practices that mediated greater health for Janie and Bryce; the answer to how we move forward is in looking back. This has always been the answer. Colonization robbed many of us of our own indigenous practices that sustained our health for some time. Schools became a means by which we were separated further and further from these practices. It is time to return to these practices, the ones that will continue to highlight the blind spots of schools, the ones that will continue to put dents within the structure. Maybe instead of running from them, we should be moving toward apocalyptic educational models.

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